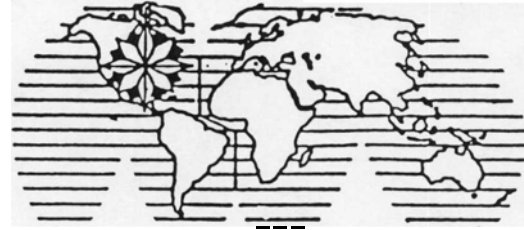


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Entertainment- Education: Looking Backward and Forward

by

Arvind Singhal, Ph.D.
School of Interpersonal Communication
Ohio University, Athens Ohio
and
William J. Brown, Ph.D.
College of Communication and the Arts
Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA

One specific trend in the use of media for development shows initial promise. This trend is the growing production of entertainment-education programs. The entertainment-education strategy includes an educational message, which is transmitted by an entertaining communication channel, with the purpose of fostering pro-social

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change (Singhal & Rogers, 1988; Brown, 1992~; 1992b; Coleman & Meyer, 1990; Church & GeUei, 1989). The promise of entertainment-education programs centers around the opportunity to balance commercial interests of entertainment producers with social interests of the audience members, while serving national development goals (Singhal & Rogers, 1989a; 1989b; 1989c).

The present paper takes stock of the entertainment-education strategy as a development communication tool. We look back and into the future of the entertainment education strategy, highlighting its promises and problems.

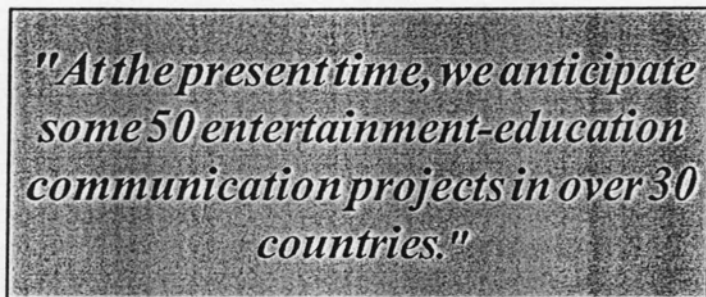
Looking Back

The idea of combining entertainment and education to produce social change is not new: It goes as far back in human history as the timeless art of storytelling. In countries where a rich oral tradition still persists, folktales with moral messages are an integral part of people's non-formal education. Folk theater, dance drama, fables, morality plays, religious music, and other art forms display many elements of the entertainment-education strategy (Valbuena, 1987; 1988).

However, the idea of purposely combining entertainment with education in the modern mass media channels - in radio, television, film, video, rock music, and others - is a relatively new concept. The entertainment-education strategy in radio was institutionalized in 1951 with the broadcast of the popular British radio soap opera, "The Archers" (which continues to be broadcast in Britain in 1995). Since the late 1950s a highly skilled radio scriptwriter in Jamaica, Elaine Perkins, has produced several series

of soap operas, each designed to promote an educational-development issue (Cambridge, 1992; Hazzard & Cambridge, 1988). The conscious use of the entertainment-education strategy in television

and rock music are relatively more recent, and owe their inspiration to the work of a creative writer-producer-director of television in Mexico, Miguel Sabido. Sabido, who was inspired by the educational effects of a



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Peruvian soap opera, "Simplemente Maria" in Latin America, pioneered the entertainment education strategy in television by proposing a theoretic framework for designing entertainment education telenovelas ("television novels") (Nariman, 1993; Singhal, Rogers, & Brown, 1993; Singhal, Obregon, & Rogers, 1994). His message design framework for entertainment-education telenovelas included the incorporation of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977); dramatic theory (Bentley, 1967); and archetypal theory (Jung, 1970). Research indicated that Sabido's 11 telenovelas in Mexico achieved high audience ratings and met most of their educational-development objectives (Nariman, 1993). Learning from Mexico's entertainment-education telenovelas, both India and Kenya produced similar types of dramatic television serials (Singhal & Rogers, 1989a; Brown & Cody, 1991).

The audience success of Sabido's telenovelas in Mexico, inspired Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services to launch rock music campaigns in Latin America, the Philippines, and West Africa, and also to experiment with the strategy (in most cases with positive outcomes) with other media formats in radio, television, print, and theater (Kincaid & others, 1988; 1992; 1993; Piotrow, 1990; 1994; Rimón, 1989). Their rock music campaign in Mexico involving two young rock

singers, Tatiana and Johnny, is well known. The two singers performed a song called 'Cuando Estemos Juntos' ("When We Are Together"), whose words encouraged teenagers to be sexually responsible. Played an average of 14 times per day over a three month period by the average Mexican radio station, the song raises consciousness among Mexican young people about the issue, leading to more responsible sexual behaviors among teenagers (Kincaid, Jara, Coleman, & Segura, 1988).

At the present time, some 50 entertainment-education communication projects in over 30 countries are presently underway. Interest in the entertainment-education communication strategy is clearly on the rise. The 1994 United Nations Population Conference in Cairo recognized it as a viable

communication strategy for population communication, and in recent years, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has considered the adoption of this strategy to target adolescents at high risk for drug abuse and HIV/ AIDS (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994). However, for most policy-makers in many countries, the entertainment-education communication strategy is still an enigma.

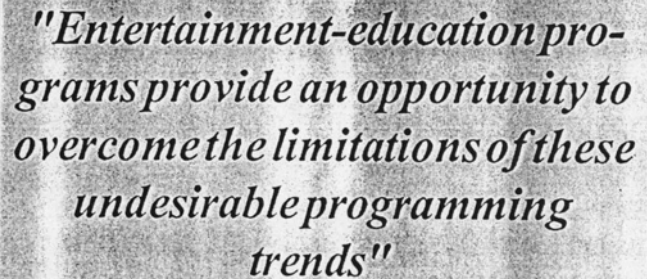
Promises and Problems

The promise of the entertainment-education strategy is a direct result of at least two undesirable trends in contemporary mass media programming: (1) entertainment-degradation programs, and (2) boredom-education programs (Singhal, in preparation).

Entertainment-degradation programs represent a growing trend in modern popular culture of "degrading" a message to increase its entertainment value in order to achieve a larger audience. Howard Stern's "shock radio", perceived by many viewers as lewd and repulsive, is an example of this undesirable trend. The increasing depiction of explicit sexual content and graphic violence in entertainment television and videos are also examples of this negative societal trend.

Boredom-education programs represent a type of educational programming which, despite good inten-

tions and heavy investments, are perceived as dull and didactic by audiences. The prosocial educational content is overtly emphasized to the point that the audience members are annoyed. Audience



"Entertainment-education programs provide an opportunity to overcome the limitations of these undesirable programming trends"

members also lose interest because of the slow-paced non-engaging presentation style of many educational programs.

Entertainment-education programs provide an opportunity to overcome the limitations of these undesirable programming trends. They provide an opportunity to be socially responsible, commercially profitable; further they can make education engaging and rewarding for audience members.

However, entertainment-education programs are not free from limitation. They generally need higher start-up costs, more investments in formative research, and more skilled production personnel to produce the entertainment-education mix.

Then there are ethical problems too. The key ethical question is: Who is to determine what is right for whom (Brown & Singhal, 1990; Brown & Singhal, 1994)? What constitutes pro-social for the message production team might not be considered so by the audiences. Also, audience members process messages selectively, and might read multiple interpretations of the intended educational message (Ram, 1993; Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992).

Looking Forward

Where might the field of entertainment-education:-

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tion be headed? 1. Moving from a "production-centered" approach to a more 'audience-centered' approach in designing entertainment-education programs.

Entertainment-education programs have often come under criticism for their seemingly oneway, non-participatory quality. They have also been criticized for allowing commercial (production-centered) interests to override social (audience-centered) interests.

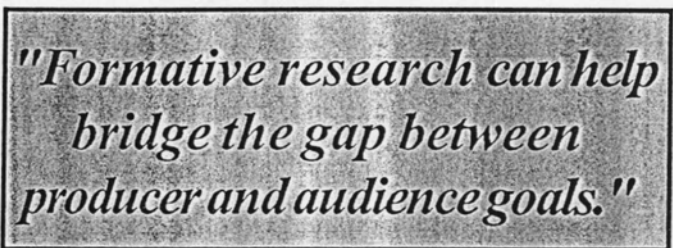
Formative research can help bridge the gap between producer and audience goals. However, by itself formative research is not enough. Producers of entertainment-education programs should try to more actively involve the target audiences in the actual production of media messages. In Washington D.C., the Office of Latino Affairs utilizes such a participatory form of message design approach in their entertainment-education television series, Linea Directa ('Direct Line'), which is broadcast on Spanish language channels in the U.S.

2. Incorporation of more cultural, humanistic, and literary traditions in both designing and researching entertainment-education programs. To date most entertainment-education programs have been designed and/or researched utilizing primarily social scientific theories (social learning theory, diffusion of innovations theory, para-social interaction theory, etc.) and methods (survey research methods, audience ratings, etc.). While useful, these social-scientific theories and methods have their limitations (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994).

In recent years, several additional insights about the nature of entertainment-education programs have been gleaned by designing and researching them from the theoretical viewpoints from the cultural, humanistic, and literary traditions (Lozano, 1992; Lozano & Singhal, 1993; Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992; Ram, 1993; Singhal, Obregon, & Rogers, 1994; Svenkerud, Rahoi, & Singhal, 1995; Storey, 1995). In the future, we are more likely to see a further integration of cross-disciplinary theoretical viewpoints in

designing and researching entertainment-education programs.

3. Incorporation of more rigorous research designs to evaluate the educational effects of entertainment-education programs. A field experiment design with pre-post and experimental/control data is best able to isolate audience effects as a result of exposure to entertainment-education messages. Few field experiments have been conducted to date because of the practical and ethical difficulties in having a control group that is not



"Formative research can help bridge the gap between producer and audience goals."

exposed to the entertainment-education messages (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994).

A field experiment with a multi-method data-collection strategy is presently underway to evaluate the effects of "Twende na Wakati" ("Lets Go With the Times"), a radio soap opera in Tanzania promoting family planning and HIV/ AIDS prevention messages (Rogers, Vaughan, & Shefner-Rogers, 1995). Another field experiment research design is in place to evaluate the effects of "ZhongouBaixing" ("Ordinary People"), a Chinese television soap opera presently in production (in 1995), which will promote the status of women, family planning, and HIV/AIDS prevention (Singhal, Rogers, Vaughan, & others, 1995).

Research evidence generated from rigorous research designs (as field experiments) are more likely to convince policy-makers about the extent to which the entertainment-education strategy is able to meet its educational goals.

4. The entertainment-education strategy is likely to go beyond its uses in mass communication to infect other areas such as classroom instruction, distance learning, and others. In recent years, a growing trend in instructional settings is for teach-

ers to supplement straight lectures with audio-visual aids classroom activities, and participatory games to enhance student involvement and learning. Such entertainment-education approaches to formal instructional practices are likely to grow in the future, especially with the arrival of multi-media technology in classrooms.

Conclusions

We are much wiser in the 1990s about the entertainment-education communication strategy than we were a few years ago. We believe this development communication strategy deserves more attention by policy-makers as well as communication scholars.

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