How Do Entertainment-Education Effects Occur? Insights from Investigating a Radio
Soap Opera that Promoted Women's Status and Family Planning in India*.

by

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September, 1998

An ICPD+5 (International Conference on Population and Development + 5 years)
Document of Research Findings

*The present research was supported in various ways by the David and Lucile Packard
Foundation, the Helen Lang Charitable Trust, and Population Communications
International. We thank officials of All India Radio and the Center for Media Studies, New
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Abstract

Determining "how" entertainment-education programs have their effects is a complicated research process. Here we investigate how the entertainment-education radio soap opera, "Tinka Tinka Sukh" (Happiness Lies in Small Things), affected its audience in India. Effects occur through the social-psychological processes of parasocial interaction, social learning, and efficacy, which takes place particularly when audience individuals discuss the content of an entertainment-education message in peer communication.
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Most past studies of entertainment-education programs, with a few exceptions (Brown & Cody, 1991; Lozano, 1992; Lozano & Singhal, 1993; Svenkerud, Rahoi, & Singhal, 1995; Singhal & Udornpim, 1997; Storey, 1988; and perhaps some others) concentrated on determining whether effects occurred, rather than providing theoretical explanations of how audience members change their perceptions, attitudes, and/or behaviors as a result of exposure to entertainment-education programs. These past E-E studies report aggregate changes in audience members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, but do not explain exactly how such changes in audience behaviors occur. In fact, determining the “how” of entertainment-education effects is a complicated research process.

Here we investigate how the entertainment-education radio soap opera, "Tinka Tinka Sukh" (Happiness Lies in Small Things), affected its audience in India.

An entertainment-education program can spark the process of social change by drawing listeners' attention to socially desirable behaviors (Figure 1). When listeners develop parasocial relationships with the characters of an E-E program, they may be motivated to consider changes in their own behavior. The mass media alone seldom effect social change, but media programs can stimulate conversations among listeners which then lead
Figure 1. How entertainment-education effects may occur.

Source: Singhal and Rogers (in press).
to change. These conversations can create opportunities for social learning as people consider new patterns of thought and behavior.

The Radio Soap Opera in India

We collected various types of data in a multi-method triangulation to understand the processes through which the Indian radio soap opera, influenced certain audience effects. Our data-set was based on: (1) personal interviews with key officials involved in the production of "Tinka Tinka Sukh", including its executive producer-director, scriptwriters, and actors, (2) a content analysis of the educational themes and character portrayals in the 104 episodes of "Tinka Tinka Sukh", (3) a before/after sample survey in Gonda District (treatment area), which yielded 88 listeners (representing a listenership of 6 percent) and Allahabad District (control area) in the State of Uttar Pradesh in India, (4) a content analysis of a sample of 237 listeners' letters written in response to "Tinka Tinka Sukh", and (5) an in-depth case study in Village Lutsaan, where the radio program was especially influential. In the following section, we focus mostly on qualitative insights gleaned from highly-involved listeners to "Tinka Tinka Sukh" in order to understand how entertainment-education has its effects.

The Storyline of "Tinka Tinka Sukh"

Our analysis of the scripts showed that "Tinka Tinka Sukh" (Happiness Lies in Small Things) tells the story of how everyday, ordinary acts of human interaction are what happiness is all about. Navgaon is a farming community struggling to understand the value of modern traditions, and moving in progressive directions. Suraj, his father Chaudhri, and mother Chaudhrian, represent an ideal family (Table 1). Chaudhri and his wife understand, on one hand, the role of tradition, and, on the other, the progressive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaudhri</td>
<td>Head of village Navgaon, an ideal husband, a model father and community elder, who upholds pro-social values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaudhrian</td>
<td>Chadhari’s wife, a model mother and female elder, who upholds pro-social values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suraj</td>
<td>Son of Chadhari and Chaudhrian and a model youth who upholds pro-social values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chacha</td>
<td>A cuckolded husband and negligent father of a large family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chachi</td>
<td>Chacha’s wife who is coquette, a village gossip, and blindly partial to her sons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramlal</td>
<td>Chacha and Chachi’s eldest son, a village delinquent who troubles everyone, is pampered by his mother, and is ultimately reformed by Nandini’s love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champa</td>
<td>Chacha and Chachi’s daughter and a positive role-model who overcomes her parents’ neglect, her elder brother’s abuse, and the burdens of tradition to become a famous singer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundar</td>
<td>Champa’s younger brother who is neglected by his parents. He tries to be self-dependent, fails and resorts to drugs; and is finally rehabilitated by his community’s support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suman</td>
<td>Sundar’s younger sister who is a confused witness to her parents’ neglect but understands Sundar’s affection and his caring for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumman</td>
<td>A poor farmhand in Chaudhri’s fields who wishes to be rich and change his family’s lot. He is addicted to tobacco and alcohol and contracts HIV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukhsana</td>
<td>Jumman’s wife who works very hard to make ends meet for large family. Is sometimes assertive but mostly puts up with her husband’s alcoholism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gareebo</td>
<td>A poor widow in Navgaon who tries to be traditional yet open-minded in raising her three daughters – Nandini, Kusum, and Lali.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandini</td>
<td>A positive role-model for gender equality who overcomes hardships of an all-women family through her determination, courage, and perseverance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kusum</td>
<td>Nandini’s sister who dislikes school and dreams of a leisurely life. She marries young and dies in childbirth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lali</td>
<td>Follows eldest sister Nandini’s footsteps and becomes the village’s first trained medical doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poonam</td>
<td>Tries to save herself from torture by her husband and his parents over dowry by returning to her parents home. She succumbs to pressures by committing suicide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sushma</td>
<td>Kusum’s sister-in-law who is tortured by her husband and his parents for insufficient dowry. She returns home with her son and takes charge of her life with the help of her parents, brother, and other community members. She establishes a flourishing sewing school in Navgaon, where other women gain personal efficacy.</td>
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Source: Singhal and Rogers (in press).
ways that are of growing importance. The couple represent pro-women’s causes -- anti-
dowry, marriage and divorce, women’s empowerment -- and the importance of creating
an integrated harmonious community based on cooperation and self-sufficiency. They
raised their son Suraj to appreciate the importance of agriculture and individuals’
relationship with their environment, particularly the community. This family’s virtuous
ways earn the loyal support of their workers Jumman and his wife Rukhsana. A poor
couple, Jumman is a farmhand in the Chaudhri’s fields, while Rukhsana does household
work.

Chacha, his wife Chachi, and their children Ramlal, Nandini, Sundar, Suman, and
Pappu, are the antithesis of the Chaudhri’s family. Chacha believes he is absolved of all
parental responsibilities since he is the breadwinner. Chachi is domineering, blindly
traditional, and very vocal. She is the village gossip of Navgaon. She is indulgent of her
eldest son Ramlal, a delinquent, and critical of her daughters. Her eldest daughter
Champa quietly grows out of the family’s shadows to become a famous singer, with the
help of her friends.

The lives of Gareebo (a widow) and her daughters Nandini, Kusum, and Lali show
the trials of being a woman in a patriarchal society. Gareebo feels societal pressure to get
her daughters married since they have come of age. Nandini, the eldest, will not marry
until she becomes self-dependent as a teacher. Kusum gets married early and dies in
childbirth. Lali becomes a medical doctor, the first in Navgaon.

A tragedy occurs in Navgaon when Poonam is abused by her husband and his
parents because her family does not pay an adequate dowry. She commits suicide.
Sushma, sister-in-law of Kusum, finds herself abandoned by her husband, also for dowry.
Encouraged by Nandini, Champa, and Suraj and supported by her parents, Sushma overcomes her trials and establishes a sewing school, which provides her with economic independence.

Ramlal is transformed by the quiet determination of Nandini, and realizes how his delinquent acts upset the peace of the community. He becomes a Block Development Officer in Navgaon so that he can contribute to his village. Champa starts an adult night-school, while Sushma’s school expands and creates economic opportunities for more women. Jumman is momentarily swayed by urban glamour, contracts AIDS, and disrupts his family’s harmony, but he finally accepts his wife’s view that life’s happiness lies in small things.

Parasocial Interaction With “Tinka Tinka Sukh”

Parasocial interaction refers to the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships which can develop between a viewer and a mass media personality (Horton & Wohl, 1956). More specifically, the media consumer forms a relationship with a performer that is analogous to the real interpersonal relationships that people have in a primary group. The existence of parasocial relationships between media consumers and different types of performers (for example, newscasters or actors) has been described in a number of research studies over the past 20 years (Auter, 1992; Avery & Ellis, 1979; Babrow, 1987; Conway & Rubin, 1991; Gans, 1977; Grant, Guthrie, & Ball-Rokeach, 1991; Levy, 1979; Houlberg, 1984; McGuire & LeRoy, 1977; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Sood & Rogers, 1996; Turner, 1992, 1993).
What is the role of parasocial interaction in bringing about the effects of
entertainment-education? Horton and Wohl (1956), in their initial description of
parasocial interaction, argued that this type of relationship can be extremely influential for
the media consumer. Once a parasocial relationship is established, the media consumer
comes to appreciate the values and motives of the media character, often viewing him or
her as a counselor, comforter, and model. Rubin and Perse (1987) argued that parasocial
interaction consists of three audience dimensions: Cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

1. Cognitively-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which audience
members pay careful attention to the characters in a media message and think about its
educational content after their exposure (Papa et al., 1988; Sood & Rogers, 1996).
Reflecting on the educational themes present in a message can help viewers recognize that
they could make different behavioral choices in their personal lives. There is little evidence
to date, however, that cognitively-oriented interaction within a parasocial context can
initiate a process of social change.

Despite the lack of research evidence that cognitively-oriented parasocial
interaction is part of the social change process, theoretical arguments and other research
findings shed light on this issue. For example, the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988,
1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1995, 1997; Gecas, 1989; Schwarzer, 1992) is linked to behavior
change that a person considers and/or enacts. Self-efficacy is an individual's perceptions of
his/her capacity to deal effectively with a situation, and to control this situation. Efficacy
beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act" (Bandura, 1995, p.
2). For example, after receiving messages from an entertainment-education program, is a
person persuaded that they have the ability to change their behavior in a socially-desirable
way? Bandura (1995) views cognitively-oriented parasocial as leading to perceptions of self-efficacy, which then influences behavioral change. We expect that the effects of an entertainment-education program are linked to its ability (through character portrayals) to promote perceptions of self-efficacy among its audience members.

2. Affectively-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which audience members identify with a particular media character (Papa et al., 1998; Sood & Rogers, 1996). When an audience member feels close to a character, he or she believes that their interests are joined (Burke, 1950). The stronger the level of identification, the more likely that the character's behavior will impact the audience member's thinking and behavior.

3. Behaviorally-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which individuals talk with other audience members and/or with the media characters (Papa et al., 1998; Sood & Rogers, 1996). Such conversations may influence audience members' thinking about an issue and motivate them to change their behavior accordingly. Katz, Liebes, and Berko (1992) argued that parasocial interaction can prompt referential involvement on the part of audience members. Referential involvement is the degree to which an individual relates a media message to his/her personal experiences (Papa et al., 1998; Sood & Rogers, 1996). Before audience members consider behavior change as a result of observing or listening to a media character, they must be able to relate the experiences of the character to their own personal lives. If a connection can not be made between the lives of a character and the experiences of an audience member, behavior change would certainly seem less likely for that individual.

Cognitively-oriented parasocial interaction was measured by one survey question in India. Fifty-nine percent of the 88 listeners said that they felt like giving advice to
particular characters in "Tinka Tinka Sukh" about the major educational themes of the radio program. These listeners critically thought about the contents of the radio program.

Affectively-oriented parasocial interaction was displayed by three distinct responses in our survey interviewees. Some 49 percent of the listeners of "Tinka Tinka Sukh" reported that they adjusted their daily schedules to listen to the radio program and maintain an ongoing relationship with their favorite characters. Eighty-one percent felt they knew these characters as close personal friends. The same percent reported that they became emotionally upset when certain characters faced difficult personal situations. These responses reflect close identification between the listeners and the media characters of this radio soap opera, an indicator of affectively-oriented parasocial interaction.

Behaviorally-oriented parasocial interaction was indexed by two survey questions. Fifty percent of the listeners reported talking back to the characters while the radio program was being broadcast, and 9 percent wrote letters to these characters at All India Radio expressing their ideas about the program.

The 237 listener-letters that we examined also offered evidence of different dimensions of parasocial interaction. Our content analysis of these letters yielded eleven indicators of parasocial interaction between the letter writers and the soap opera's characters (Table 2), which we classified as cognitively-oriented, affectively-oriented, and or referential parasocial interaction. Item 4 is an example of referential parasocial interaction. A close reading of the 237 letters also provided examples of how listeners display cognitive, affective, behavioral, and referential parasocial relationships with the characters of "Tinka Tinka Sukh." Here are four letters:
Table 2. The Degree of Letter-Writers’ Parasocial Interaction with “Tinka Tinka Sukh” and Its Characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of Parasocial Interaction</th>
<th>Percent of Letter-Writers (N = 237)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Cognitively-oriented parasocial interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Letter-writer compares his/her ideas with “Tinka Tinka Sukh” and its characters when listening.</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Character’s opinion helps letter-writer make up his/her mind.</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Affectively-oriented parasocial interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Letter-writer looks forward to listening to “Tinka Tinka Sukh” when the program is broadcast.</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Letter-writer rearranges his/her schedule to develop a regular relationship with “Tinka Tinka Sukh”.</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Tinka Tinka Sukh”’s character keeps the letter-writer company when the program is broadcast.</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Writer feels sorry for the characters when something bad happens to them.</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Letter-writer likes listening to the voices of the characters at home.</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Writer feels comfortable when listening to “Tinka Tinka Sukh” as if he/she is with friends.</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The letter-writer’s favorite character is a natural and down-to-earth person.</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Letter-writer feels like he/she is part of a group when listening to “Tinka Tinka Sukh”.</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Referential-oriented parasocial interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. “Tinka Tinka Sukh” understands and covers issues the letter-writer wants to know about.</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Singhal and Rogers (in press).
Poonam's suicide, Kusum's death at child-birth, Sushma's struggle to stand on her own two feet, and Rukhsana's life and problems have shaken up my world and filled my heart with emotions. Nandini has taught me to stick to my ideals and fight against injustice, Champa has inspired me to realize my inner potential, and Suraj has taught me to be proud of my heritage and culture.

Nandini and Sushma are ideal role models for women. In this day and age it is necessary for women to stand on their feet. I feel you should not have shown Poonam commit suicide. Instead, she should have empowered herself like Sushma and thus provided inspiration for other young women to do the same.

I can relate completely to Champa since my family life is very similar to hers. I had decided to quit school, but after listening to the soap opera, I have started school again.

Nandini is my favorite character. She is my role model and my inspiration. The women of the world should unite with the motto that we will not tolerate abuse nor will we be abusive towards other women. Once we women take this stand, men will have to tow the line.

These four quotations show each letter-writer identified with one or more characters in the radio soap opera. Referential parasocial interaction is suggested by the degree to which the letter-writers relate the experiences of "Tinka Tinka Sukh's" characters to their own personal lives, as in the third quotation above.

Exposure to "Tinka Tinka Sukh" led to parasocial interaction between audience members and characters in the soap opera. How did these parasocial relationships prompt conversations among listeners?

Social Learning Through Peer Conversations

Social learning is particularly important in entertainment-education because the intention of E-E message designers is to change audience members' perceptions and behaviors by providing audience members with examples of behaviors that are socially-desirable or undesirable (Bandura, 1973; 1974; 1977; 1997). The characters are designed
to be appealing or unappealing to audience members. Entertainment-education often prompts discussions among audience members concerning the socially-desirable behaviors promoted by an entertainment-education program. These conversations can produce a social learning environment in which participants consider options for behavior change.

Audience members can share their similar and different perceptions of the information presented in the media program. They can talk about considering or adopting the socially desirable behaviors that are highlighted in the media program. These interpersonal discussions create a social learning environment in which people learn from one another. Collective efficacy emerges when people share ideas about the social problems facing their system, and discuss ways of confronting resistance to their plans for social change.

Some 49 percent of the 88 listeners reported that they listened to “Tinka Tinka Sukh” with other household members or friends. Some 40 percent of the respondents actively discussed aspects of the radio program with others, especially with their spouses and same-sex friends. These survey responses provide evidence that "Tinka Tinka Sukh" promoted conversations that initiated a process of social learning for some listeners. For example, 50 percent of the listeners said that they talked to their spouse about family planning after listening to the radio soap opera. In addition, 58 percent of the respondents reported talking to a same-sex friend about issues of gender equality.

Our interviews in Village Lutsaan show how social learning occurs in conversations among listeners to a radio soap opera:

Kusum dies at childbirth and we discussed that incident. We work together in the fields, and when we took a break we discussed if we marry off our young daughters we might lose them.
We had all listened to the [radio] serial and we would hold discussions afterwards. For example, when we listened in the afternoon in the evening when we returned home we would talk about it with others. They would also say that they would not give dowry and tell me that I would not have to give dowry. We would advise each other how we should counsel others not to give or take dowry.

Of course, I will not marry my daughter before she turns eighteen years. Prior to listening to "Tinka Tinka Sukh," I had it in my mind that I need to marry off my daughter soon. Now I won't at all and I tell others as well that they should not marry their daughters before the age of eighteen or the girl is ruined. If she marries early, she is bound to get pregnant early and that is ruinous for her. They understand and accept my advice.

Efficacy Stimulated by “Tinka Tinka Sukh”

Our data provided numerous examples of how "Tinka Tinka Sukh" inspired collective efficacy and community action to solve social problems. Consider the following two comments by individuals in in-depth interviews conducted in Village Lutsaan:

Poonam's suicide in the soap opera resounded with us because we also practice dowry. Now after listening to "Tinka Tinka Sukh", and after we took the vow that we will not give or take dowry, we have formed a group to end dowry in this village. In this way our sisters and daughters will not suffer.

In the radio program Chaudhri starts a school. We started a Montessori school because we do not have that much money. We spoke to "Masterji" (village school teacher) and invited him to teach here so that our children might be educated. Chaudhri started a school in the radio program because he had the funds. All of us here cooperated to start this Montessori school and our children are now being educated.

These examples show how “Tinka Tinka Sukh” inspired people to engage in collective action to address social problems. Importantly, the listeners recognized the role of radio soap opera in motivating collective action. The letters written by radio listeners also provides evidence of collective efficacy:
Inspired by "Tinka Tinka Sukh", we have established a youth self-help association for the sole purpose of tackling and eradicating social evils. Superstition and dowry are some of the problems we aim to tackle. We have also started to educate all children in our village about these social evils.

My brother got married recently and we did not even bring up dowry. Our entire village has collectively decided to neither take nor give dowry. In fact, there have been three weddings in our village in recent months where the issue of dowry never came up. There were some people who previously wanted to take dowry but based on the education we received from the radio program, the discussion on dowry has now ceased.

The evidence presented here shows that exposure to "Tinka Tinka Sukh" stimulated interpersonal discussions about educational issues, and motivated some listeners to engage in collective action to solve community problems. However, social change does not always flow directly from exposure to an entertainment-education program in which audience members: (1) engage in parasocial interaction with media characters, and (2) create a social learning environment in which behavioral options are considered. Our case study of Village Lutsaan (see Singhal & Rogers, in press) showed that social change may proceed in a circuitous manner. What works for a media character does not work so easily in an audience individual's real-life situations where there may be community resistance to the new behavior.

Paradoxes and Contradictions

Paradox and contradiction are part of the process of social change. Since established patterns of thought and behavior are difficult to change, people often engage in an adjustment process until the new behavior patterns are fully internalized. The lessons to be learned from "Tinka Tinka Sukh" are that there is happiness in small families and that married couples should practice family planning. Gender equality is also a prominent
theme throughout the episodes. Mukesh, a young male villager in Lutsaan, talked about the importance of small family size and gender equality. He also stated that abortion for sex selection was an acceptable means of limiting the population. Although Mukesh had internalized perceptions about the importance of small family size, he did not recognize that his views on abortion for son preference contradicted his professed support for gender equality.

Gender equality occurred in Village Lutsaan as the result of "Tinka Tinka Sukh". Dowry was not given or accepted in most marriages. Yet gender equality did not yet exist in many instances. For example, at a musical performance in the village, approximately 200 men who played instruments and sang songs. The women of the village were at the periphery of the crowd. After singing several songs, a woman from the village performed a dance while remaining veiled. One male villager noted that although this woman was veiled, the fact that she danced was one sign of progress. Finally, as the entertainment continued, not a single man left the gathering. Most of the women departed to prepare the evening meal. Also, the percentage of girls who attend school in Lutsaan has increased recently from 10 percent to 50 percent. But Chav, a male villager argued that education was important for girls because it made them more highly "qualified" for marriage.

So paradoxes and contradictions occurred in Lutsaan as people struggle with social change. "Tinka Tinka Sukh" played an important role in stimulating these effects. Conversations that supports behavior change is important, even if that talk is not always supported by subsequent action. As Rushton (1975, 1976) observed, words alone can exert influence on the behavior of others. Thus, a mother who talks to her daughter about
gender equality may influence her daughter to further her formal education, even though the mother still acts under the dominance of her husband.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explored the process through which entertainment-education has effects. An initial priority for scholars of entertainment-education was to determine what effects entertainment-education interventions brings about. By the 1990s this question was largely laid to rest. If an entertainment-education intervention is carried out effectively, it is usually able to attract a large audience of the intended individuals, and to motivate, at least some of them, to adopt new behaviors.

Then communication scholars set out to better understand how entertainment-education has its effects. This research question is a different and more complicated research problem. The concepts of para-social interaction, social learning, self and collective efficacy, and media-stimulated peer communication have guided this recent research. The evidence from the India radio soap opera project suggests that effects occur through the social-psychological processes of parasocial interaction, social learning, and efficacy, which takes place particularly when audience individuals discuss the content of an entertainment-education message in peer communication.
Notes

1 The present case study draws upon Papa et al., 1998 and Singhal and Rogers (in press).

2 Entertainment-education is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior.

3 Abortion as a means of son preference, although illegal, has become widespread in the past decade as the equipment needed to perform amniocentesis and ultrasound tests have diffused widely in India (Parikh, 1990; Luthra, 1993).

4 Weick (1979) argued that this type of paradox emerges when a person does not recognize that their ideas within one system (for example, family planning) contradict his/her ideas within another system, such as gender equality.
References


