

Entertainment-education and social change: History, research, and practice

Arvind Singhal, Michael Cody, Everett Rogers, & Miguel Sabido, Eds.

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Dagron (2001) argues that many development projects of the past failed to see the importance of communication to their success and, in fact, neglected long-term dialogues with local stakeholders of development initiatives. Others, he asserts, have confused communication programs for propaganda, instead of the interactive dialogue they should be, and have focused their attention on mass media campaigns in urban settings, at the exclusion of rural populations. As a field of development communication, entertainment education (E-E) has struggled through its own foggy beginnings to establish itself as a relevant and valid form of communication for social change in both rural and urban communities. Many will surely associate their own exposure to apparent attempts at education–entertainment programming with emotionally void and culturally inappropriate nature documentaries on public television channels. Others may bring to mind the barrage of public service announcements that have infiltrated our homes under the guise of entertainment. The book *Entertainment-Education and Social Change* (2004) is an

excellent new resource on this ever-changing field and will appeal to both new and well-versed communication scholars. With its thorough focus on history, research, and practice, it could well in fact be considered a handbook for the field of E-E communication. Through a varied collection of articles and authors, the book makes it clear that the many different types of E-E initiatives taking place around the world are only finding success when the following are considered: thorough and participatory formative research, solid and respectful collaborations between media and research professionals, careful balances between entertainment and education value, and an understanding of relevant scholarly theory. Effective E-E campaigns are not randomly thrown together but are instead carefully premeditated and cooperative programs with a very focused and important purpose in mind.

If communication for social change had an all-star team, the editors of this collection would be it. As practitioners, researchers, and theorists in E-E and communication as a whole, Singhal, Cody, Rogers, and Sabido are the true pioneers and experts in this field. Arvind Singhal is a professor of communication studies at Ohio University, a well-known communications author and speaker and has worked extensively as a consultant for the World Bank, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and many others. Michael Cody is a professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California and is on the editorial board for several major communication journals. Everett Rogers, distinguished (and newly retired) professor at the University of New Mexico, is most noted for his Diffusion of Innovations Theory and has worked extensively in the field of E-E. Miguel Sabido was a producer with Mexico's *Televisa* and is credited with developing what we now know as E-E. Together, they have collaborated and assembled a collection of articles, summaries, and case studies from all over the globe; some relating specifically to their own work, others from landmark contribu-

tors in their own right (see Bandura, 75–95). This publication is their effort to “tell the story of entertainment-education” (xv) and to provide a comprehensive synthesis of current E-E knowledge (xvi). Rogers and Singhal's previous work (1999), *Entertainment-Education: A Communication Strategy*, focused primarily on theory, history, and strategy. This current edition seeks to add to this body of knowledge while discussing and evaluating innovative and contemporary strategies for E-E from around the world.

The book is organized into three major sections: “history and theory,” “research and implementation,” and “entertainment-education interventions and their outcomes.” Much value is given to the organization of the book in this way as it reads easily and logically from one major theme to the next, but several of the articles are relevant to more than one section of the book and are therefore somewhat misleading in their placement.

Section 1 begins with an overview of worldwide E-E from the perspective of Singhal and Rogers. *Jasoos Vijay* is introduced (complete with an alluring photograph of the famous Indian actor in the role) (4) as an important icon and protagonist in Indian culture and as a unique vehicle for social change through education-entertainment. As the main character of a 10-episode television detective series, *Vijay* solves local mysteries while his program tries to reduce the stigma of HIV/AIDS and provide information and awareness about the disease. A cliff-hanger at the end of each episode “catches” viewers while an epilogue by another famous Indian film actor is given. Evaluations suggest that nearly 16% of the viewing population changed their sexual behaviors in the few months following *Vijay* and developers credit the interactive nature of the program (viewers are encouraged to respond to each postepisode epilogue) as key to its success. This is the first of many examples of quality E-E described in this book and is a great introduction to the topic as a whole and the requirements needed for success. Singhal and Rogers

then go on to discuss the growing and expanding nature of E-E across the world by identifying many of the organizations involved in E-E and acknowledging the role that technology will play in the development of “multiple forms” of E-E (8).

The remaining chapters of section 1 are much heavier reading than the collection of case studies that follow but provide important insight into the history and theory behind E-E. In his discussion of the history of E-E, Poindexter (22) recounts the early development of E-E in the 1960s–1970s with concerns about overpopulation. After frustration in developing partnerships with networks in the United States, the population control messages were eventually seen on American television through mainstream programs like *Maude* but obviously needed to reach the more populous areas of the world. Miguel Sabido (from Mexico’s *Televisa*) had developed social content communication methodology (61–74) in line with Alberta Bandura’s social learning (75–95), and Eric Bentley’s dramatic theory and his work in Mexican soap opera had already shown great reductions in population growth (28). Because Sabido’s methodology relied on appropriate social science theory, cultural values, and the stimulation of interpersonal communication (not just exposure to information), it was transferable (a key theme in the book) and showed success in India (29), Kenya (30), Brazil (31), and many other countries (32–35). The strength and power of Sabido’s methodology can be seen further when these international campaigns are closely examined—not all were television messages and many dealt with issues beyond population, tackling other culturally challenging problems like the status of women and the role of the girl child in society.

Brown and Fraser continue with the development of E-E strategies by discussing the theories behind celebrity identification, the strategies used by productions to capitalize on this parasocial relationship (105) between viewer and star, and the roles that celebrities can play in E-E. The use of positive

celebrity role models in true E-E theory communication campaigns leads to stronger audience response, especially in media-heavy countries like the United States, but there are certainly economic (celebrities cost money) and real-life (celebrities can make mistakes in their own lives that can negate the messages they deliver on air) challenges associated with this (110). This chapter of the book focuses mainly (but not exclusively) on North American culture and celebrity, and although this should be discouraged in a book that deals with social change across the world, the emotional ties between celebrity and viewer are universal and can be exploited in E-E programs for any setting. Other submissions in the book certainly discuss (although indirectly) the celebrity phenomenon in other cultures (see 227 for the Netherlands, 305 for Egypt).

The second section of the book, research and implementation, is full of E-E case studies from around the world and specifically focuses on the precise preparation and research required for successful and effective E-E. Beginning with Soul City’s extremely successful domestic violence campaign in South Africa (153–175) and ending with Internet use for delivering E-E health messages to low-income minorities in the Southwestern United States (281–298), these chapters are packed with much insight into the cultural sensitivity and development of relationships and partnerships necessary for quality E-E.

Soul City is a classic example of a highly successful multimedia intervention and it is very appropriate, and necessary, to include it here. Soul City relies heavily on local participation and on extensive research (156) for the design, development, and implementation of its programming. After 18 months of stakeholder interviews, target audience research, studying real abuse cases, and through careful consideration of culturally appropriate symbols, racial stereotypes, rural communication, family dynamics, viewers needs, gender socialization, community power struggles, and the

development of trustworthy, believable characters, Soul City was able to introduce a highly effective, as shown through several studies (171), antiviolence campaign that led to public advocacy and social mobilization. For Soul City, the hours of research and preparation culminated in the simple act of pot banging during its series as a community's means of coming together and protesting domestic violence. In the real world of South Africa, this pot banging has now become a signal that violence is taking place, identifying abusers and letting victims know they have support (172). Similar examples of programming to reflect real cultural needs can be read about in Greenberg et al. and their discussion of E-E in Ethiopia (177), the highly successful oral rehydration therapy campaign (what some people deem as the world's most successful health education program) in Egypt (301) and the very popular animated character *Meena* in South Asia (331).

Many of the case studies discussed in the book deal with non-North American campaigns. An interesting addition to the story of E-E comes in Chapter 11 where Beck discusses the promotion of health messages through daytime and prime-time television shows in the United States. Upon first consideration of daytime drama, one might think these health issues are simply included for ratings or viewer loyalty. In consideration of the framework for E-E presented in this book and through evidence given in this chapter, it becomes obvious that many of these messages were supported by and campaigned for by major health organizations and that many producers and writers followed Sabido's methodology in developing E-E for the U.S. audiences (and are also formally awarded by some agencies). It is also interesting to consider the unique challenges facing E-E in North America (also discussed in Chapter 10), with its increasing reliance on nonreading media, commercial infiltration, conflicting messages, and the media-savviness attitudes of typical viewers. In a country as multicultural as the United States, there are also "recog-

nized health disparities associated with minorities" (222) and E-E initiatives are facing the challenges of targeting strategic audiences through strategic means. Including North American development communication is an important one as the new scholar is given a chance to compare E-E strategies across the globe and between countries of varying wealth. In addition, the absolute power of the E-E framework discussed in earlier chapters is reinforced by its transferable, yet culturally modifiable, nature.

It is important to know that not all education-entertainment strategies are successful, and it is good to see some have been included in this collection. *Villa Borghese*, a Dutch serial based on a fictitious health farm, was created to promote healthy life choices but showed little success and was canceled after only 13 episodes. Many obstacles hindered *Villa Borghese's* success and include overly blatant educational messages with lack of character development, inappropriate balances between education and entertainment, and poor collaborative relationships between writers and funders (225-242). These findings reinforce the underlying theme of this compilation and emphasize the need for cooperation, collaboration, and planning in successful E-E strategies.

Generally, the book is a straightforward read, although with so many contributing authors, the ease of reading changes somewhat with each section. For the student reader, the chapters on theory alone are rather thick with jargon and may require several readings to fully grasp. Although the editors certainly make their points about the recipe required for successful E-E, many of the case studies, while varied in context and language, were somewhat repetitive and came to the same conclusions. The publication would probably be quite useful therefore as a reference where periodic referrals would take away from the repetition of ideas. Further, the editors may wish to reconsider the requirements for each submission and seek to eliminate overlapping material.

The book is supplemented with many pictures and graphics. It is especially enjoyable to see the participation from across South Asia in conceptualizing the cartoon character *Meena* (338), and the book could probably benefit from more of these crude examples of early creativity in the E-E process. The pictures help to keep the text readable and available for the new scholar of E-E (but may also be an entertaining distracter during the heavy reading in some chapters and may entice the reader to jump ahead). Throughout the case studies, there are also captions and excerpts from E-E programs that show real dialogue between characters. This is a great addition to the flow of the book and helps to bridge the gap between research and practice while extending the book's appeal to different types of readers.

Overall, it can be said with confidence that Singhal, Cody, Rogers, and Sabido have truly succeeded in telling the story of E-E. Partially written for colleagues in the field of development communication and partially written for those new to the field, *Entertainment-Education and Social Change* is truly

a handbook for all aspects of E-E, from history to theory to practice. Drawing on experts and resources from around the world, the changing story of E-E is told in the face of new technologies and new needs for social change. They have given us first-hand accounts of successes and failures and have provided a consistent and transferable framework for effective E-E programming. This collection is a great reference for any E-E initiative and provides much evidence that effective E-E strategies must come from formative research, careful collaborations, a sound understanding of social theory, and a careful balance between education and entertainment.

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Reference

- Dagron, A. G. (2001). *Making waves: Stories of participatory communication for social change*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.