The Entertainment-Education Strategy in Communication Campaigns

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This chapter summarizes lessons learned about the use of entertainment-education in communication campaigns dealing with family planning, gender equality, HIV prevention, and environmental conservation. A communication campaign (a) intends to achieve specific effects, (b) in a relatively large number of individuals, (c) within a specified period of time, and (d) through an organized set of communication activities (Rogers & Storey, 1987).

THE ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION STRATEGY

The entertainment-education strategy abrogates the needless dichotomy in almost all mass media content—that mass media programs must either be entertaining or educational (Fischer & Melnik, 1979; Singhal & Rogers, 1989). Entertainment-education is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Entertainment-education seeks to capitalize on the popular appeal of entertainment media to show individuals how they can live safer, healthier, and happier lives (Piotrow, Kincaid, Rimon, & Rinehart, 1997; Singhal & Brown, 1996).
If implemented correctly, the entertainment-education strategy can offer important advantages to development officials of national governments, broadcasting networks, educators, commercial sponsors, and audiences. The entertainment-education strategy often provides an opportunity for an educational message to pay for itself. Thus, commercial and social interests can both be met.

THE RISE OF ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION

The idea of combining entertainment with education goes as far back in human history as the timeless art of storytelling. For thousands of years, music, drama, dance, and various folk media have been used in many countries for recreation, devotion, reformation, and instructional purposes. “Entertainment-education,” however, is a relatively new concept in that its conscious use in radio, television, comic books, and popular music has received attention only in the past few decades (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Valente, Kim, Lettenmaier, Glass, & Dibba, 1994).

In radio, the earliest well-known illustration of the entertainment-education strategy occurred in 1951 when the British Broadcasting Corporation began broadcasting The Archers, a radio soap opera that carried educational messages about agricultural development (The Archers is still broadcast and addresses contemporary educational issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and environmental conservation). The entertainment-education strategy in television was discovered more or less by accident in Peru in 1969 when the television soap opera Simplemente María was broadcast (Singhal, Obregon, & Rogers, 1994). The main character, María, a migrant to the capital city, worked during the day and was enrolled in adult literacy classes in the evening. She then climbed the socioeconomic ladder of success through her hard work, strong motivation, and skills with a Singer sewing machine. Simplemente María attracted very high audience ratings, and the sale of Singer sewing machines boomed in Peru. So did the number of young girls enrolling in adult literacy and sewing classes. When Simplemente María was broadcast in other Latin American nations, similar effects occurred. Audience identification with María was very strong, especially among poor, working-class women: She represented a Cinderella role model for upward social mobility.

Inspired by the audience success and the unintentional educational effects of Simplemente María, Miguel Sabido, a television writer-producer-director in Mexico, developed a methodology for entertainment-education soap operas. Between 1975 and 1982, Sabido produced seven entertainment education television soap operas that helped motivate enrollment in adult literacy classes, encourage the adoption of family planning, and promote gender equality (Nariman, 1993). Sabido’s entertainment-education soap operas were also commercial hits for Televisa, the Mexican television network, earning audience ratings equivalent to those of Televisa’s other soap operas.
The idea of combining education with entertainment in the mass media has since resulted in more than 100 projects in 50 countries, spurred by the efforts of institutions such as Population Communications International, a nongovernmental organization headquartered in New York City, and Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services. The entertainment-education strategy has been widely re-created by creative media professionals in television, radio, film, print, and theater. For example, Dr. Garth Napheth in South Africa developed the long-running "Soul City" mass media campaign, providing an entertainment-education model for health promotion that is advocated by the European Union and United Nations agencies such as UNICEF and UNAIDS.

KEY ELEMENTS IN AN ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

An entertainment-education campaign includes several integrated sets of activities.

Creating a Moral Framework and Values Grid

Prior to launching an entertainment-education intervention, a "moral framework" of the specific educational issues to be emphasized in an entertainment-education intervention and a values grid for the educational messages are created. The moral framework is usually derived from a nation's constitution, its legal statutes, or documents such as the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights, to which the country is a signatory. For instance, a constitutional right expressed as "All citizens will have an equal opportunity for personal and professional development" provides the moral basis to produce media messages about gender equality. The values grid, in turn, is derived from the moral framework and contains various positive and negative statements, such as "It is good to send a girl child to school" and "It is bad to not send a girl child to school." The values grid specifies the exact behavior changes that are to be encouraged or discouraged in the entertainment-education project such as a soap opera. It also constitutes a formal statement signed by government, religious, and media officials pledging their support of the educational values promoted in the intervention. For example, Sabido asked Catholic Church leaders in Mexico to help develop the values grid for his telenovela about family planning.

Formative Evaluation Research

Formative evaluation is a type of research that is conducted while an activity, process, or system is being developed or is ongoing to improve its effectiveness (Rogers, 1986, p. 193; see Chapters 6-8, this volume). Re-
**sustainability**, the degree to which the effects of a program continue after the intervention ends. Research did not play an important role in health promotion. Although South Africa had a robust advertising industry, lessons from advertising and social marketing were not being applied in health communication campaigns. Furthermore, institutional partnerships between the media, the government, and the private sector did not exist for health promotion; the health ministry usually implemented programs in a top-down manner. Japhet also realized that despite a wealth of mass media talent and resources, there was little indigenous drama on South African television or radio.

In 1992, Japhet established Soul City, a nongovernmental organization whose mission was to harness the mass media for promoting good health. Initially, he realized that for media-based health promotion interventions to be sustainable, they had to be popular, attract the highest possible prime-time audience, and be of top-notch quality. He also realized that the institutional partnerships between government, media, private corporations, and donor agencies had to be designed so as to be “win-win”—that is, commercial and social interests could both be honored. Therefore, entertainment-education was placed at the core of Soul City’s health promotion strategy. Research, both formative and summative, was to undergird this entertainment-education focus: “It is research that distinguishes ‘edu-tainment’ from pure entertainment” (Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b).

Soul City is a unique example of entertainment-education in that it represents a series of integrated, ongoing mass media activities, year after year. Each year, a series of mass media interventions is implemented, including the flagship Soul City, a 13-part prime-time television drama series that runs for 3 months and promotes specific health education issues. Simultaneously, a 60-episode radio drama series is broadcast daily (Monday through Friday) during prime time in eight South African languages. Although the story in the radio drama is different from that of the television program, the health issues and topics addressed in it are the same. Once the television and radio series are broadcast, 2.25 million health education booklets, designed around the popular TV series’ characters, are distributed free of cost to select target audience groups. The booklets are serialized by 12 major newspapers.

The first Soul City television series, broadcast in 1994, focused on maternal and child health and on HIV prevention and control. The second series, broadcast in 1996, focused on HIV and tuberculosis prevention, housing and urban reform, alcohol abuse, and domestic violence. The third series, broadcast in 1997, dealt with HIV prevention and control, alcohol and tobacco abuse, and domestic violence. Finally, the fourth series, broadcast in 1999, focused on violence against women, AIDS and youth sexuality, hypertension, and personal finance and small business management. Issues of national priority other than health (e.g., housing reform and entrepreneurship) are also woven into the Soul City storyline.
Audience Popularity

How popular are the Soul City mass media interventions? The *Soul City* television series emerged as the number one rated television drama series in South Africa (Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b). The prime-time radio series in eight languages also earned very high audience ratings. The Soul City year-long health campaign reaches an estimated half (more than 20 million) of South Africa's population, including 8 million adults.

By using a multimedia approach, Soul City helps build a campaign atmosphere that is sustained throughout the year. Each medium reinforces the popularity of the *Soul City* television series while appealing to a somewhat different target audience. For instance, television reaches urban viewers, whereas radio broadcasts reach rural listeners. Furthermore, each medium reinforces the health education messages of the others in a synergistic process. For instance, booklets and newspapers provide more detailed information on a health topic than is possible on television or on radio. Such a multimedia strategy helps facilitate the brokering of media partnerships: "Print wants to be involved because television is involved; radio wants to come aboard because print is on board" (Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b).

Soul City recognizes that overt behavior change is facilitated when audience members talk to one another, as has been found for other entertainment-education interventions (Rogers et al., 1999). Therefore, after the television and radio series are broadcast, several campaign activities are implemented to keep people talking. High-quality education packets, produced cooperatively by curriculum specialists and creative designers, are targeted to adult and youth populations nationwide. The adult packet includes the health education booklet (mentioned previously), comic books that are based on the story of the television series, audiotapes of the comic books, *Soul City* posters, and a facilitator's guide to maximize impact. The youth packets, in keeping with audience needs, are geared toward building life skills competencies and consist of a comic book based on the television series and also four workbooks that address issues of personal responsibility, self-identity, personal relationships, and so on. They also include a facilitator's guide for use in high schools. The credibility of the Soul City "brand name," and the popularity of its media programs, is harnessed in additional initiatives such as the "Soul City Search for Stars" (to recruit talent for the next year's television and radio series), the "Soul City Health Care Worker of the Year" (to recognize outstanding outreach workers), and "Soul Citizens" (recognizing outstanding youth who engage in community development activities). In addition, Soul City has struck a partner relationship with 12 journalists, representing the most influential South African newspapers, who regularly publish health education features derived from Soul City's activities. By carrying out these multiple health promotion activities, Soul City has emerged as a highly credible brand name in South Africa, a reputation it uses to its advantage (Japhet, 1999).
The Soul City health promotion strategy rests on producing high-quality media materials. The best scriptwriters, actors, cartoonists, and producers are hired and paid at market rate or better. The Soul City television series is broadcast at 8 p.m., a prime-time slot during which one third of South Africa’s population is tuned in (in contrast, the non-prime-time educational slots on South African television earn ratings of only 2% or 3%). Japhet (as quoted in Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b) explained, “So our media materials have to not just compete with the best... They have to be the best.”

The ongoing, year-by-year nature of Soul City’s health promotion activities provides several advantages. Soul City’s media interventions serve as a resource for various health and development groups in South Africa to piggyback issues of national priority without reinventing the research-production-partnership wheel, as happens when each new health or development initiative is launched. More important, by broadcasting a recurrent television and radio series, Soul City avoids the problem of audience lag, the time taken to build a sizable and dedicated audience for a new media program. A highly watched Soul City television series in a previous year ensures a large audience at the beginning of the following season. The second, third, and fourth Soul City series (broadcast in 1996, 1997, and 1999, respectively) earned high audience ratings from the beginning (Japhet, 1999).

Evaluation Research

Formative and summative research are key to designing and evaluating Soul City’s mass media interventions. Formative research is conducted to identify health issues of national priority and to ensure that the mass media interventions can be backed up at the ground level by the needed infrastructure. Summative research procedures include gathering ratings and viewership data and conducting before and after national and regional sample surveys to determine the effects of the television, radio, and print interventions. Summative research evaluation reports show that the Soul City mass media interventions spur high levels of interpersonal communication among audience members, increasing knowledge about health issues, promoting more positive attitudes toward them, and contributing to behavior change on the part of audience members (CASE, 1995; Japhet & Goldstein, 1997a). For instance, in 1994, during the first year of the Soul City campaign, more than 1 million black South African adults reported changing their high-risk behavior, inspired by the media role models (CASE, 1995).

The total cost incurred by Soul City for 1 year of multimedia materials, including the 13-episode Soul City television series, the 60-episode radio series in eight local South African languages, 2.25 million booklets, plus marketing, advertising, and public relations activities, is $3.5 million. How is this money raised? Approximately 25% is provided by the South African government, 25% by international donor agencies such as the European Union and
producing high quality television series in South Africa. National slots on television are sold to corporations, such as British Petroleum and Old Mutual, and remaining 25% by the broadcast media. The key reason for Soul City's effectiveness is these partnerships with government, media, corporate, and donor agencies: "Partnerships make this intervention possible... The more you work together, the more people understand the intervention, and the stronger the partnership gets... Also, the expertise of the technical production staff improves" (Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b). Japhet aptly calls this process "the process of positive reinforcement" (Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b).

Soul City is mostly a research and management organization. It coordinates the activities of its various corporate, government, media, and donor partners. Employees do not directly produce, direct, or publish its health communication materials. They commission them from professionals, and through research and surveys they ensure high quality. Soul City owns the media messages that are produced (and thus any aftermarket and syndication sales), and it pays the fees. This role gives it the power to "veto" a product if it does not meet high standards.

The reach of Soul City extends beyond South Africa. In partnership with NICEF, which considers the Soul City experience as a "best practice," Soul City materials are distributed in neighboring Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, and Zambia. Research evaluations show that the Soul City materials are highly popular in these countries, and audiences find them to be culturally shareable (Japhet & Goldstein, 1997b; Singhal & Svenkerud, 1994). African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi have also requested Soul City materials for local use.

THE ETHICS OF ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION

The entertainment-education strategy involves several ethical dilemmas (Brown & Singhal, 1990, 1998; Cambridge, McLaughlin, & Rota, 1995). Ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with the principles of right or wrong in human conduct. Entertainment-education implementers are somewhat unique in the development community in that they question whether or not what they are doing is ethical (see Chapter 2, this volume). Rarely do agricultural extension agents worry about the ethics of introducing a new breed of rice. Equally rare is for health workers to worry about the ethics of promoting immunization of children. Most implementers of development projects assume their work is good; the ethical criticisms typically come from outsiders.

Entertainment-education implementers have taken several proactive steps regarding ethics. For instance, Miguel Sabido establishes a moral framework for an entertainment-education program to ensure that the values it promotes are enshrined in the country's constitution and its legal statutes. A program's values grid, signed by various stakeholders (government officials, commercial sponsors, religious leaders, and broadcast media officials), provides support for the scriptwriters concerning the program's educational content. The use of
local writers and creative teams helps to ensure that the program is culturally sensitive and incorporates local language. The use of subject matter specialists to review program scripts ensures that the technical information provided in the program is accurate. The depiction of positive and negative role models, and realistic consequences of their behaviors, allows the audience to draw its own conclusions rather than being preached to in a didactic manner. Furthermore, the conduct of formative and summative evaluation research helps practitioners (a) analyze the target audiences’ needs and aspirations, (b) produce relevant and user-friendly media materials, and (c) understand the intended and unintended effects of the entertainment-education intervention. Entertainment-education practitioners, however, must be mindful of important ethical dilemmas (Brown & Singhal, 1990, 1998).

The Prosocial Development Dilemma

The foremost ethical problem concerning the entertainment-education strategy centers around a fundamental question: Is it right to use the mass media as a persuasive tool to foster social change? It is virtually impossible to produce “value-free” entertainment messages. Whether or not it is ethical to produce an entertainment-education message depends on the nature of the behavior being promoted, who decides that a certain behavior is prosocial or not, and what effects the promotion of a certain behavior is likely to have on an audience. The educational issues promoted by past entertainment-education have mostly been of unquestionable value, such as HIV prevention. Who would want individuals to contract HIV/AIDS? The prosocial content is constructed in line with the moral and values guidelines, so this ethical question is much ameliorated.

The Prosocial Content Dilemma

The prosocial content dilemma centers around the problems of distinguishing between prosocial and antisocial content. What may be construed as “prosocial” by certain audience members might be perceived as “antisocial” by other audience individuals. For example, proabortion groups, which support a woman’s choice in controlling her reproductive behavior, consider a media message about abortion to be prosocial. Antiabortion groups, which support the rights of the unborn fetus, consider such messages to be antisocial. In fact, just such a conflict erupted in 1972 when Norman Lear’s “Maude” chose to have an abortion instead of bearing an unwanted birth (Montgomery, 1989). Labeling an issue as prosocial versus antisocial obviously involves a value judgment on the part of the message source. By conducting audience needs assessment and designing messages in line with the moral framework, this ethical question is appropriately addressed.
Audience Segmentation Dilemma

Another ethical issue concerning the use of entertainment-education programs is associated with targeting educational messages to a particular audience segment or geographical area (Brown & Singhal, 1998). Audience segmentation fine-tunes messages to fit the needs of the targeted audience (see Chapter 7, this volume). For instance, media messages about family planning in developing countries are usually targeted to fertile-aged couples. Such segmentation, however, may alienate other important audience segments, such as adolescents, sexually active singles, and others who believe that they too could benefit from contraceptive messages.

Using treatment and control areas in the field experiment to evaluate the effect of Twende na Wakati in Tanzania led to blocking radio broadcasts for 2 years (1993 to 1995) in the Dodoma control region (comprising 3 million people). Individuals living in this control area may have had unwanted pregnancies and may have contracted HIV during this 2-year period—events that otherwise could have been prevented (Rogers et al., 1999). The ethical problems that occur in field experiments need to be recognized and dealt with. For instance, an interrupted time-series design, which does not have a control, might be preferable to a field experiment. In Tanzania, Twende na Wakati was broadcast for 2 years (1995-1997) in the Dodoma region, where it had strong effects that were similar to those that occurred previously in the treatment area.

The Oblique Persuasion Dilemma

The entertainment-education strategy takes a somewhat oblique route to audience persuasion in that education is “sugarcoated” with entertainment, in part to break down individuals’ learning defenses to the educational message. Audiences might think that they are being entertained, whereas they are being educated subtly about a prosocial issue. Most audiences, however, realize that entertainment-education messages are just that—both educational and entertaining (Rogers et al., 1999; see Chapter 2, this volume, in which it is argued that putting educational messages within a program is probably much more effective than placing them in ads or public service announcements).

The Sociocultural Equality Dilemma

How can one provide equal educational treatment to various audience segments that differ in socioeconomic status? Equality means regarding each social and cultural group with the same importance (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 5). Achieving sociocultural equality through entertainment-education is especially important in a socioculturally diverse country such as India. The Hum Log (We People) television soap opera, within the limits of the patriarchal
social system of India, confronted viewers' traditional beliefs about women's status in Indian society. The viewers' ethnicity, linguistic background, and gender, however, were found to be important determinants of beliefs about gender equality (Singhal & Rogers, 1989). Subservience of women is still considered to be acceptable in many Indian households. Such is not the case throughout all parts of India, however. When an entertainment-education message does not give equal play to different voices, it presents an ethical dilemma for certain groups that believe that their views are not represented.

The Unintended Effects Dilemma

Another ethical dilemma of entertainment-education is unintended effects. Audience members actively negotiate the meanings that they perceive when processing an entertainment-education text. Entertainment-education program designers cannot ensure that all audience members will read the text exactly the way that was intended (Sherry, 1997). The "Archie Bunker" effect is an example of such an oppositional reading of negative role models. Usually, only a small portion of the audience members display the Archie Bunker effect (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). For example, 1% of the male audience of Twende na Wakati in Tanzania perceived Mkwaju, the promiscuous truck driver, as a positive role model for their behavior, contrary to the intent of the program designers (see also Chapter 9, this volume).

CONCLUSIONS

The entertainment-education approach may be a promising communication strategy for behavior change because much evaluation research has reported strong effects (Nariman, 1993; Piotrow et al., 1997; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Many interventions use the entertainment-education strategy as one part (usually the centerpiece) of a communication campaign. This approach has been widely used in the nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Evidence that entertainment-education can be effective in an industrialized nation is provided by Soul City in South Africa. To date, however, applications of the entertainment-education strategy in the United States have been few. This strategy can be used flexibly, on a local level (rather than in a nationwide intervention) or as one component in a multimedia campaign.

Most entertainment-education projects to date have concerned health-related education issues such as family planning or HIV/AIDS prevention. Less frequently, the entertainment-education strategy has been used to encourage enrollment in adult literacy programs, environmental protection, and gender equality, suggesting that this communication strategy can be used for an even wider range of educational issues. MTV's "Rock the Vote" campaign is an example.
Entertainment-Education Strategy

Here, we argued for the potential of the entertainment-education strategy and discussed ethical aspects concerning its use. We suggest that entertainment-education can be a useful component of communication campaigns.

NOTES
1. This chapter is based on Singhal and Rogers (1999).
2. This case draws on an audiotape recording of a presentation given by Japhet and Goldstein (1997b) on Soul City at the Second International Conference on Entertainment-Education and Social Change in Athens, Ohio, on May 7, 1997. This audiotape was produced and distributed by RoSu Productions, Inc. (Columbus, OH). We thank Ms. Sue Goldstein (personal communication, September 3, 1998) for clarifying various aspects of Soul City.

REFERENCES


