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Entertainment Education In Asian Nations

"For the past ten years I had lost my way but Tinka Tinka Sukh showed me a new path of life....I used to be delinquent, aimless, and a bully. I harassed girls...one girl reported me to the police and I was sent to prison. I came home unreformed. One day I heard a program on radio....After listening to the drama, my life underwent a change....I started to listen regularly....Once I started listening to the radio program, all my other drawbacks and negative values were transformed." (Birendra Singh Kushwaha, a tailor in the Indian village of Lutsaan). The purpose of the present paper is to summarize the main lessons learned from various entertainment-education projects conducted in Asian nations in recent years. We seek to draw understandings about the basic process of social change and development that result from the entertainment-education strategy.

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Entertainment-education is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior (Singhal & Rogers, 1999, p. xii). The entertainment-education strategy uses the entertainment aspect of the media to attract a large-sized audience. The educational content of the media program features positive and negative role-models to depict the educational values that are being intentionally promoted. One reason for the generally effective impacts of entertainment-education is because entertainment-education uses communication and social psychological theories, especially Albert Bandura's (1997; 1998) social cognitive theory (previously called social learning theory), as a basis for changing human behavior. Entertainment-education questions the needless dichotomy in most media content between entertainment versus education.

The purpose of entertainment-education is to facilitate social change, defined as the process in which an alternation occurs in the structure and function of a social system. Social change can

occur at the level of the individual, community or organization, or a society. For example, the quotation at the top of the present paper concerns individual-level change. But the tailor in the Indian village of Lutsaan also played a key role in organizing listening groups of audience members in his village, and to lead the way in the village's rejection of dowry, a system-level change instigated by the entertainment-education radio soap opera *Tinka Tinka Sukh* (Pappa et al, in press).

The educational issues frequently promoted by entertainment-education media programs have included female equality, family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, adult literacy, and environmental conservation (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Most such educational issues are of unquestioned good.

How did the strategy of entertainment-education come about? The idea of combining entertainment with education is not new: It 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. So while the concept of combining entertainment with education is not new, "entertainment-education" is a relatively new concept. The use of this communication strategy in radio, television, comic books, and popular music, at least when designed according to communication and social psychological theories, is a matter of the past three decades (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Valente et al., 1994). More than 100 entertainment-education projects of various kinds have been implemented, mainly in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. At least one-third of these projects were in Asian nations.

In radio, the earliest well-known illustration of the entertainment-education strategy began in 1951, when the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) began broadcasting "The Archers", a radio soap opera which carried educational messages about agricultural development ("The Archers" continues to be broadcast in 2000, addressing contemporary educational issues like HIV/AIDS prevention, environmental conservation, and the like).

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, faced tragic setbacks, like becoming a single mother. María worked during the day, and enrolled in adult literacy classes in the evening. She then climbed the socio-economic ladder of success through her hard work, strong

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motivation, and through her 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 happened. 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 unintended 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 (one each year), which helped motivate enrollment in adult literacy classes, encourage the adoption of family planning, promote gender equality, and so forth (Nariman, 1993). Sabido’s entertainment-education soap operas were also commercial hits for Televisa, the Mexican television network, demonstrating that educational messages do not limit the popularity of entertainment programs.

Through these accidental and planned events of the past several decades, the idea of combining education with entertainment in the mass media was born and has since spread to over 100 projects in 50 countries, spurred by the efforts of institutions like Population Communications International (PCI), a non-governmental organization headquartered in New York City, and Johns Hopkins University’s Population Communication Services. The entertainment-education strategy has been widely invented and recreated by pioneering and creative media professionals in television, radio, film, print, and theater.

The entertainment-education strategy can be applied in a wide variety of ways, but the essence of this strategy is to teach behavior change through providing positive and negative role-models for the educational behavior changes being promoted. The positive role-models are rewarded in the story line of the media program, and the negative role-models are punished. For example, in an entertainment-education radio soap opera promoting HIV/AIDS prevention, a promiscuous male truck driver does not practice safe sex, contracts HIV, and eventually dies from AIDS (Rogers et al, 1999). In addition to the positive and negative role-models, entertainment-education interventions typically also feature transitional role-models, characters who initially are negative models but then change to become positive role-models. When they switch, some audience members who identify with them also experience behavior change. The methodology for

designing entertainment-education programs is based on Bandura's social psychological theory, as applied by Miguel Sabido to television soap operas, and then modified and adapted by various media scholars and practitioners.

Most evaluations of entertainment-education interventions show that they are relatively effective in bringing about behavior changes (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). However, some critics (for example, Sherry, 1997) have questioned the strength of the evaluation research designs used in these evaluations. Certainly, stronger designs are needed, and the general trend has been toward stronger designs, such as field experiments.

Here we review some of the most-widely studied applications of entertainment-education to radio and television soap operas in Asia.

Hum Log” in India

“*Hum Log*” was an attempt to blend Indian national television's (Doordarshan's) stated objectives of providing entertainment to its audience, while promoting, within the limits of a dominant patriarchal system, such educational issues as family planning, a more equal status for women, and family harmony. “*Hum Log*” was broadcast in 156 episodes, each lasting for 22 minutes, by Doordarshan for 17 months in 1984-1985. The episodes were in Hindi, the language of North India (in which most of Doordarshan's programs are broadcast). At the end of each episode, a famous Hindi film actor, Ashok Kumar, summarized the episode in an epilogue of about 60 seconds, which provided viewers with appropriate guides to action in their lives (Singhal & Rogers, 1988).

“*Hum Log*” was of historic importance in the evolution of Miguel Sabido's methodology for creating entertainment-education soap operas. This television program was the first entertainment-education intervention outside of Latin America. It was also historically important in terms of independent, theory-based evaluation research on entertainment-education programs. Multiple research methods represented a triangulation strategy in assessing the effects of “*Hum Log*”. “*Hum Log*” promoted an average of 3.2 pro-social sub-themes during each minute of its broadcasts. However, this pro-social content of “*Hum Log*” was subjected to varied interpretations by its viewers. Audience members used their personal experiences and beliefs to interpret the “pro-social” messages of “*Hum Log*”.

“*Hum Log*” was highly popular with its viewers, so that a

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high degree of exposure to the educational issues was achieved. Why was “*Hum Log*” so popular? The soap opera was broadcast at a time when the Indian national television network was experiencing a very rapid expansion. “*Hum Log*” was also the first long-running soap opera on Indian television, with little competition from other television programs. It attracted high levels of viewers’ identification and involvement with the soap operas characters.

A high degree of parasocial interaction, defined as the degree to which audience individuals perceive a seemingly face-to-face relationship with a mass media personality, occurred between viewers and the “*Hum Log*” characters. Many viewers perceived their relationship with the television characters as real, as if they were in face-to-face contact. The viewer outpouring of 400,000 letters in response to “*Hum Log*” was unprecedented (Sood & Rogers, 2000). The letter-writers liked the television series, expressed personal opinions about the behaviors of “*Hum Log*” characters, identified with them, responded to Ashok Kumar’s epilogues, and suggested new twists to the plot.

Although incorporation of Albert Bandura’s (1997) social learning theory in “*Hum Log*” was somewhat incidental, certain modeling effects of viewers with role-models were observed. Our survey respondents reported learning pro-social behaviors from positive role-models depicted in the television series, and expressed a desire to emulate them in their daily lives. The evaluation research on the impacts of “*Hum Log*,” while a less-than-perfect research design (in that after-only data from respondents was gathered), documented the popularity of entertainment-education with audience individuals, and suggested the ability of this strategy in changing behavior.

“Tinka Tinka Sukh” in India

“*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” (*Happiness Lies in Small Things*) was a 104-episode entertainment-education radio soap opera that was broadcast in India from February, 1996 to February, 1997. It promoted gender equality, women’s empowerment, small family size, family harmony, environmental conservation, and HIV prevention.

The idea for “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” was mooted in a 1994 meeting by David Poindexter, then President of Population Communications International, and Shashi Kapoor, Director-General of All India Radio (AIR) in New Delhi. Poindexter’s organization had previously helped launch the entertainment-education television serial “*Hum Log*” in India in 1984-1985. Kapoor entrusted the task of producing “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” to Mrs.

Usha Bhasin, then Director of Programmes at All India Radio, who had previously produced three highly popular and provocative radio serials at AIR dealing with such issues as adolescence (“*Jeevan Saurabh*” in 1988), marriage incompatibility (“*Jeevan Saurabh II*” in 1989), and teenage sexuality (“*Dehleez*” in 1994-1995) (Bhasin & Singhal, 1998).

A great deal of pre-program publicity over six months preceded the first broadcast of “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*”. This pre-program publicity was carried out via radio, television, and the national, regional, and vernacular press. Promotional spots of “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” with its catchy theme song, character voices, jingles, and narration were broadcast on all of the 27 radio stations where the radio series would be broadcast. In addition, these spots were also broadcast on the commercial channels of All India Radio, the youth channel, and the national network radio channel. Similar spots were broadcast on Doordarshan, the Indian national television network, emphasizing the family-orientation of the forthcoming radio serial and its long duration (by Indian standards) of 12 months. Once the broadcast dates and times of “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” were finalized, these were publicized on radio, and TV, and in press publicity materials.

“*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” was broadcast from February 19, 1996 for one year, over 27 radio stations of All India Radio, covering seven Indian states in the population-rich Hindi-speaking area of northern India: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi. Some 600 million people comprising 100 million households live in these seven Indian states. Based on our 1997 survey, we estimated the regular listenership of “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” to be about 6 percent, which translates to an audience of 36 to 40 million people, the largest audience for a radio soap opera broadcast by All India Radio, and perhaps worldwide.

In summary, “*Tinka Tinka Sukh*” was highly popular with its listeners in the Hindi-speaking, high-fertility area of North India. Among the educational themes promoted by the radio program, gender equality, women’s empowerment, and harmonious community living were especially salient. Letters written by listeners indicated a high level of involvement with the storyline and its characters. Our post-broadcast survey revealed differences between listeners and non-listeners in educating a daughter, seeking advice on family planning, and visiting a health clinic.

In December, 1996, a colorful 21 X 27 inch poster-letter-manifesto, initiated by the village tailor quoted at the top of the present paper, was mailed to All India Radio in New Delhi. The poster-letter from Lutsaan, a village in north-central India, stated:

“Listening to *“Tinka Tinka Sukh”* has benefited all listeners in our village, especially the women....Listeners of our village now actively oppose the practice of dowry - they neither give nor receive dowry.” When we visited Lutsaan, we learned that a particular episode of the entertainment-education radio soap opera had triggered the petition. A young bride in the radio program, Poonam, is beaten and verbally abused by her husband and in-laws for not providing an adequate dowry. Poonam was humiliated and sent back to her parents after being incorrectly accused by her in-laws of infidelity to her husband. In desperation, she commits suicide.

Listeners to the radio soap opera in Lutsaan launched not only the anti-dowry movement, but also opposed child marriage and promoted equal education for girl and boy children. Impressive social changes occurred in village Lutsaan, initiated by the entertainment-education radio soap opera, and implemented as a result of interpersonal discussions among the villagers, who thus gave meaning to the media messages and applied them to their system (Pappa et al, in press).

“Baixing” in China

“Baixing”, an 18-episode entertainment-education television serial, was consciously designed to address a variety of social issues in China: Gender equality, small family size, freedom to choose one’s marriage partner, abrogating traditional and fatalistic thinking, and others. The program was produced in China with technical assistance from Population Communications International (PCI), New York, an organization specializing in launching entertainment-education serials, both on television and radio, in such countries as India, Kenya, Tanzania, St. Lucia, and Madagascar. The production process for *“Baixing”*, managed locally by its Executive Producer, Mr. Yan Jiande, a former official of the State Family Planning Commission, in cooperation with technical advisors of PCI, included various components: Audience needs assessment through formative research protocols, delineation of educational values promoted in the television serial, message design workshops, pre-testing of storyline and key episodes, and subsequent finalization of episodes. *“Baixing”* was broadcast on Channel 8 of CCTV from June 21 to July 1, 1999 (Monday through Friday); two episodes were broadcast each night, and repeated the next morning.

Our findings show that *“Baixing’s”* narrative, with its various twists and turns, raised consciousness among its highly-involved viewers about the importance of (1) raising gender equality, (2) abrogating harmful social practices, (3) boosting self-

efficacy, and (4) implementing a family planning policy (Singhal, Ren, & Zhang, 1999). The main characters of “*Baixing*” were perceived as being predominantly (1) positive — such as Greenleaf, Autumn, and Autumn’s mother, (2) negative — such as Ershui, Ershui’s mother, Greenbud’s husband, and Yuanyuan, and (3) complex — such as Li Laowan and Greenleaf’s grandmother.

Our analysis suggests that viewers’ perceptions about “*Baixing’s*” characters were influenced by their own personal backgrounds, past experiences, and contextualized viewpoints. A similar finding in other entertainment-education projects suggests that the media messages interact with the values, beliefs, and experiences of audience individuals, as they seek to give meaning to the media stimulus. For example, we have found that a relatively small number of audience individuals may perceive a negative role-model as a positive influence, representing a backfiring of the entertainment-education approach.

For example, the present authors encountered one respondent, a middle-aged housewife in India, in our evaluation of the effects of “*Hum Log*.” She identified with Bhagwanti, the housewife/mother in “*Hum Log*,” who was a negative role-model for female equality in that Bhagwanti acted like a slave to her husband and children. However, our Indian respondent perceived of the Bhagwanti character as someone to emulate, telling us that she was looking for a future wife for her son who was like Bhagwanti! This phenomena of identifying with negative role-models is called the “Archie Bunker effect,” after the main (negative) character in the popular U.S. television program, “*All in the Family*” (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974).

Many other entertainment-education radio and television soap opera projects have been implemented in such Asian nations as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Thailand, but space does not allow us to review each of them here.

Building on a previous project featuring two teenage singers, Tatiana and Johnny, experience in Latin America, Johns Hopkins University’s Population Communication Services, jointly with the Philippine’s Population Center Foundation (PCF), launched a music campaign in the Philippines to promote sexual responsibility among youth in 1987. The purpose of this entertainment-education project was to decrease the high rate of teenage child birth.

The first song, “*That Situation*”, was sung by a 16-year old Filipino artist, Lea Salonga, and the well-known (in the Philippines) rock group, *Menudo*. The song was launched via a live *Menudo* concert in December, 1987. Within a month, “*That*

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Situation” was number one on the popular music charts of the Manila and Cebu City radio stations in the Philippines (Piotrow et al., 1997; Rimon II, 1990). “*That Situation*” promoted sexually responsible behavior among teenagers: “It’s up to us not to jump into that situation, I’m too young, not ready yet”.

In May, 1988, a second song, “*I Still Believe*”, was sung by Lea Salonga and ex-Menudo singer Charlie Masso. It instantly became the number one song on the popular music stations of Manila and Cebu City (Rimon II, 1989). A survey of youths in Manila revealed that “*I Still Believe*” was the only Filipino music video among the top 10 most-recalled music videos in 1988. Its lyrics included such lines as “I still believe in love at first sight, I don’t think it’s right to need me just for a lonely night”. The message to young adults was: “Be sexually responsible. Sex can wait!”

The PCS multi-media campaign attempted to establish each song as a commercial hit with an educational message, and to link the song and its message to a telephone hotline, which provided information, counseling, and referrals for sexual/pregnancy problems. The hotline, *Dial-A-Friend*, was an improvement over the Mexican “*Cuando Estemos Juntos*” project in that it (1) yielded data on the song’s effects, measured by the number of telephone calls received, and (2) provided a route to behavior change for individual callers.

The PCS project in the Philippines received support from multinational corporations like Pepsi Cola, Nestle, and Close-Up, and from several Filipino companies including the Philippines Long Distance and Telegraph Company (PLDT), which donated broadcast time and underwrote certain project costs (Rimon II, 1989). Companies like Nike, AGFA, Close-Up, and Johnson & Johnson donated products which were given away during the song’s promotion. An estimated \$1.2 million were provided in free broadcasting time and in donated materials like posters, cards, calendars, T-shirts, and discounted telephone charges (for the telephone hotline) (Kincaid, Coleman, Rimon II, & Silayan-Go, 1991; Kincaid, Rimon II, Piotrow, & Coleman, 1992; Rimon II, 1989).

The Filipino media provided free broadcast time for these songs on radio, and for the two music videos on Filipino television. Lea Salonga visited high schools in Manila to promote the songs and to discuss their messages with teenagers (Rimon II, 1990). These high schools held an essay-writing contest in which students discussed the social message in “*That Situation*”, and how this message affected their lives. The winning essays received awards from prominent personalities.

Television advertisements used clips from the music video, and radio advertisements used audio clips from the songs, to

introduce the telephone hotline in Manila which provided counseling for troubled adolescents. The telephone hotlines were also promoted by “*Dial-a-Friend*” advertisements, which featured Lea Salonga. These television spots showed teenage crisis situations associated with premarital sex and unwanted pregnancy, encouraging the teenagers to “*Dial-a-Friend*” for counseling. Trained professional counselors maintained four telephone hotlines, which averaged over 1,000 telephone calls a week. The hotlines were so popular that the Philippines Long Distance and Telegraph Company agreed (1) to continue funding the telephone hotlines when PCS’s Philippines project ended in May, 1989, and (2) to donate prime-time television spots for continuing the “*Dial-a-Friend*” campaign on Filipino television (Rimon II, 1989).

A research evaluation of the effects of “*That Situation*” and “*I Still Believe*” showed that these songs positively influenced knowledge, attitude, and behaviors related to sexual responsibility among Filipino teenagers (Kincaid et al., 1991). The Filipino music campaign resulted in an expected hierarchy-of-effects: Some 92 percent of youth (aged 13 to 24) in Manila recalled the songs, 90 percent said they liked the songs, 70 percent interpreted the sexual responsibility messages correctly, 51 percent said that they were influenced in some way by the songs, 44 percent talked to friends and/or parents about the songs, and about 25 percent said they sought information about contraceptives as a result of hearing the songs (Kincaid et al., 1991).

Some 11 percent of the respondents, an estimated 150,000 youth in Manila, tried to call the “*Dial-A-Friend*” telephone hotlines! This widespread response was unexpected: Less than 1 percent of the callers (13,000 youth) succeeded in getting through, as only four telephone hotlines were available. The importance of providing adequate infrastructural services to support entertainment-education was again emphasized.

Lea Salonga appeared live on television 22 times, and the music video of “*I Still Believe*” was broadcast 126 times on television (Rimon II, 1989). Undoubtedly, the massive, repeated exposure of Filipino adolescents to this song was one reason for its strong educational effects. Lea Salonga and members of the *Menudo* group received thousands of letters from Filipino teenagers about the educational message in the two songs. Salonga was to go on from the entertainment-education project in the Philippines to stardom as a singer/actress in the theater play “*Saigon Girl*.”

What general lessons about human behavior change can be learned about from the selected entertainment-education

Lessons Learned

projects reviewed here?

1. Most entertainment-education interventions have been found to be effective in facilitating human behavior change.

2. These behavior changes include not only knowledge and attitude change, but also (and often especially) overt behavior change, such as the adoption of a new idea.

3. The impacts of entertainment-education programs occur mainly through audience individuals talking to each other about the educational issue that is featured. Epilogues at the end of soap opera episodes seem to be especially important in facilitating peer communication.

4. Entertainment-education can stimulate individual-level change, as well as system-level change (Pappa et al, in press). Perhaps group-level change is particularly important in Asia, whose cultures are relatively more collectivistic (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981).

We conclude that the entertainment-education strategy has considerable potential for bringing about development and social change in Asian nations.

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