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**Development And Anti-Development Messages
In Film, Television And Advertising**

By

Mohd Hamdan bin Haji Adnan

DEVELOPMENT AND ANTI-DEVELOPMENT MESSAGES IN FILM, TELEVISION AND ADVERTISING ¹

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In discussing "Development and Anti-Development Messages in Film, Television and Advertising" it would be helpful to begin by defining the major concepts involved in the context of the society concerned. Also, the messages impact on viewers.

Moreover, in discussing this topic, we must be of an agreement that mass communication content or messages do have an impact on our behaviour and hence its usage for development. Their positive or negative influence and the intensity of the effect in many ways would be determined by the content or messages plus other variables like how they are presented, the credibility of the media and the source(s), the level of audiences education and their exposure to other messages or sources, etc.

Hence, the effect of mass communication messages or content on our behaviour will always be a controversial issue. New ways of researching it more accurately must continue. This is rightly so as today's society is fast changing, accelerated by rapid technological advancement and complexity (especially communication technologies), the concurrent internationalisation, and the growing public's outcry to participate in decision making, just to name a few of the most important ones.

As such, until 1960s what little was known about the effects of mass media, irrespective of content, had come from anthropologists, who recorded the reactions of primitive cultures to new communication technologies. For example, Edmund Carpenter (1960), describing his experiences in the village of Sio in New Guinea, suggests that the introduction of photography and then, the motion pictures rapidly changed the village. Within a short time, several houses had been remodeled into a new style and men wore European-style clothes. They carried themselves differently and acted differently as a result of polaroid pictures and home movies taken of them.

Not surprisingly, the electronic media, particularly television, is increasingly being accused of being the most graphic and beguiling promoter of the values and lifestyle of the "affluent society". It is being considered as the chief agent in the manufacture of a mass or popular culture. As such, in many advanced nations like the United States, with the monopoly control of the television networks, the information systems, the record industries, video recorders, etc., culture itself has become a commodity. This 'culture' as created by the mass media industry of advanced nations for their own public in turn is successfully exported to developing countries, especially of the 'free world' or the ones professing a liberal market economy system through films, television and advertisements.

As expected, television programmes and cinema screenings in developing nations are dominated by foreign serials and imported films. According to Hidetoshi Kato (1976) a UNESCO survey found that imported television programmes in Guatemala occupy 84 percent of total broadcast time, in Singapore 78 percent, Malaysia 71 percent, Zambia 64 percent and Hong Kong 40 percent.

Things are not expected to change much in the 1990s. Malaysia can be a case in point. In 1990, for the two government's television stations the imported programmes are above 60 percent while the foreign content of the sole private television station is about 70 percent. However, all three stations are making efforts to increase their local content so as to ensure that developmental messages can be integrated into appropriate programmes as desired by the government.

Further, some communication scholars feel that the rapid development of communication technologies, especially with regard to electronic media has led in the erosion of individual opportunity to arrive independently at an awareness of their environment. Television, emphatically, provides us with a mediated or synthetic environment which takes the place of personal sensory experience of the world we live in.

We as viewers are bombarded with a reconstructed world. Our perceptions of the real world are very soon defined and delimited by the image or message we see on television. Consequently, we as viewers may become mere receivers, not only of the facts of the event but also of the value judgements implicit in the telling, in what was included and what was omitted, in what was highlighted and what was downgraded in the apparently factual account. With information and opinion neatly packaged and relentlessly barraging us every waking hour, we would hardly have the time to sort it all out and

competently form our own opinion. This could easily result in us becoming a passive consumer of information and ideas or even 'zombies' in an environment recreated or even manufactured by the communication industry of advanced nations, especially of the United States.

As it is, our society is fast becoming a media and an information environment. An environment partially or even fully shaped by opinions, sights, sounds and values presented by mass media. This is despite the fact that even today very few of us live our lives entirely in the mass media!

However, more and more of our time, especially leisure time, is devoted to the pseudo-reality of the media instead of the genuine reality all around us. Inevitably, what really moulds our opinion is what we do in our leisure time, when our mind is most free, namely what we read, hear and see in the mass media.

Furthermore, think about watching television for four hours a night - just sitting there, eyes wide and glued to the TV screen, body still and sometimes the room dark, other people reduced to vague shadows, images pouring into the brain. Regardless of what's on TV, all those hours spent in front of it must have some kind of impact on an individual, if for no other reason than that person's exposure to other activities is drastically reduced. Canadian media visionary and controversial communication researcher, the late Marshall McLuhan (1967) reminded us that the world has changed rapidly in the last several decades. Increasingly, more nations have gone from a developing society to an industrial society and the industrial society to an information society. Some developing countries might even leap frog into an information society. As such, we have witnessed the creation of a worldwide information environment. Information itself has become by far our largest business and commodity.

Consequence of information environment or media environment is strengthening the mass culture. The term mass culture refers to the effects of mass media. It involves a body of knowledge that we share with others in our environment. Mass culture, made possible by mass communication carrying more or less the same messages, is shared by virtually everyone exposed to it.

This sharing process opens up many possibilities, notably in respect to nation building and development. Unfortunately, not all of them are positive.

Thus, we worry about the possible negative and other side effects of the mass media. For example, we worry about the possible adverse effects of TV violence on children. Will children's beliefs and attitudes about violence be affected by their endless diet of cops and robbers? Are we becoming so mesmerized by the mass communication world of commercial products that we forget that material goods are not everyday thing in life? Have we forgotten "quality art" and its importance in a world filled with the popular art found in mass media?

Also, we worry that popular culture as dispensed by television, film, video or advertisement is generally consumed in isolation and can produce a fragmented, escapist, pliable, largely unthinking audiences. The isolated individual who lives within the recreated environment is ready for mental colonization. Communication scholars like Renato Constantino (1986) fears that new needs are implanted through the medium of advertising which is an important means for homogenizing people. It trains them to regard commodities as the be-all and end-all of life. Possessing or enjoying them becomes life's sole meaning.

Ergo, we are concerned that the mass audience is too easily influenced, particularly by messages or content of TV, film, video and advertisement. The young mind is especially more vulnerable to the content or messages of these mass media.

Therefore, we worry a lot about the negative effects of advertisements upon our children, specifically those shown through TV. In almost all talks given by consumer associations in Malaysia whether to school children, women groups, youth clubs, unions, parents and even professionals groups one of the inevitable question is why the Government still allow advertisements that are directed at children or which uses them. This question is usually preceded or followed by complaints about the number of such advertisements on TV and how it have badly affected the eating and buying habit of their children, among other things.

Consumer movement, therefore, tend to be sceptical of studies that come out with conclusion that children are not influenced by advertisements, pointedly advertisements through TV.

Furthermore, we worry that the world is fast becoming homogenized and that developed nations are inflicting cultural imperialism through their advanced communication technologies. Here, McLuhan contended that we now live in a "global village" where we share our hopes, dreams, and fears in a "worldpool" of information. He predicted that in the global village, the old social, racial, and ethnic barriers of the past will break. Nevertheless, we have seen that each country has developed its own media system in response to its own political, cultural, and sociological needs.

However, concurrently, we readily see numerous similarities in the approaches taken by most nations. We hope the new information technologies will lead us to a common understanding and appreciation for the unique aspects comprising the global village. This could mean a common set of experiences for all of the world's people who would be exposed to the same set of messages through the new information technologies which would be very pervasive. These new developments it is hoped will lead us to a better understanding of one another in the years ahead. On the other hand, it is also feared that these could lead to further economic and cultural domination of the developing countries by the advanced nations. This is not only because the new information technologies can be very costly and nations wanting it must have the money or borrow heavily but also because the messages will dominantly flow from the advanced nations to the developing countries and not the other way around.

MESSAGES

In this regard it would be wise to give due consideration to McLuhan (1967) favourite slogan "The medium is the message" even though many communication scholars consider this concept as questionable. McLuhan believed that since all mass messages pass through a technological device, they are no longer the same message at all but have been radically changed. According to him the medium is the message because our technological and social progress has always been affected more by the nature of what we communicate with than by individual messages contained in the communication.

McLuhan (1967) also said that the medium is the message. This is because it "massages" us thousands of times each day. We are virtual prisoners in an infinite collection of unrelenting media form and content. These media, according to him, have a profound effect on the way we think and behave toward one another.

Message in this context is the content of a communication that is conveyed or mediated through a medium or mass media. The media are technological devices use to transfer or convey messages. They are communication channels, each having its own capacity to transmit a message successfully. In this case, television and film are considered as very powerful and influential mass media in sowing development or anti-development messages to public that are exposed to them. Here, it must be reminded that content or messages in mass media, particularly in television, film and advertisements in any country will inevitably be determined by its national ideology, media laws as well as ownerships, professional, social and religious constraints. These controls and constraints may be safeguards against cultural imperialism or negative impact of the mass media though not its economic outcomes.

Developing nations especially do not take very kindly towards any messages that can contradict their national ideologies. As an example, in Malaysia even the Advertising Code provides guidelines which advertising agencies must abide to, expressly for commercials in the electronic media to ensure that the national ideology and culture are not unduly eroded, but instead to strengthen it. The Code preamble stipulates that "Advertisements must project the Malaysian culture, national ideology or "Rukunegara" (Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, Upholding the Constitution, Rule of Law, Good Behavior and Morality). It further requires advertisements to be "legal, decent, honest and truthful". In Indonesia, the content of the mass media, including film, television and advertisements are very much guided by the "Pancasila".

Media laws are especially potent in ensuring that messages in mass media do not injure national security. In many developing countries numerous media laws guarantee that national security, ideology and culture are not threatened by content or messages of mass media. In Malaysia, for instance, about 47 media laws ensure that mass media stay in the right path.

Apart from media laws many developing and some developed countries have established censorboards. Guidelines for film censors can be most explicit and more so for those destined for television. In Malaysia for example, they are meant to control the screening of films dealing with sex, violence, crime, politics, religion, bigotry, horror and 'yellow culture'. The last generally referring to the decadent or negative parts of Western culture.

Hence, films that could be censored or even banned in Malaysia include:

1. Films opposing government policy;
2. Film encouraging anti-government feelings;
3. Films incongruent to national ideology;
4. Films glorifying communism and socialism;
5. Films glorifying any particular race while degrading others;
6. Films glorifying criminal or "crimes do pay".
7. Films glorifying immorality, such as an explicit sex scene;

8. Films dealing with sadism, cruelty, excessive violence, etc;
9. Films considered as insulting "public dignity"; and,
10. Films showing an irresponsible way of life and behavior not acceptable to Malaysian society.

Other countries wanting to protect their national ideology and way of life would probably have similar censorship guidelines.

Ownerships as noted, also have a definite role in the content and messages in the mass media. Diverse ownerships generally lead to more competition. The more competitions exist, the stiffer the competition for readers and audiences. In a war to win viewers, the most important considerations will inevitably be to screen programmes that could capture the most audiences. Also, a great tendency to have a philosophy that are meant to meet the demand of advertisers. This could mean appealing to the strongest and most basic human interest. Sex and violence are proving to be the most magnetic and additive ingredients for most viewers. Predictably, audiences are shown what they desire to see as they must not only be attracted to watch but also to remain tuned in and be a loyal viewers of the station. Ergo, films and television programmes expectedly are filled with sex and violence scenes as they are believed to be the most reliable mass audience grabbers. In this regard, it was reported that films filled with violence produced in the United States rejected by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) found air time in Malaysian television (Mingguan Malaysia, 6/1/91, p. 8).

The loser in the battle for viewers could be the national culture and development messages. According to Gale and Adkins (1985) "Imported entertainment series from the United States have great popular appeal, often greater than most domestic productions. When income depends on audience size, the American series is the logical choice. Moreover, the expertly-produced American series is available at a price well below what a similar original production would cost. As new programme channels are activated much air-time may be filled with the readily available, widely popular, low-priced TV series. The problem of cultural influence from great quantities of imported media content is often of much concern, particularly in Third World countries."

As an example, Awang Selamat, a columnist in the Malay weekly (Mingguan Malaysia: 6/1/91, p. 8) boldly concludes that in many ways Malaysia's value towards permissiveness might even surpass the West itself. According to him, what was before extraordinary in terms of excessive violence and exposure have now become all too familiar with Malaysian audiences. This he said began when the two government TV stations started to compete with the sole private TV station to be the No. 1.

He also said that giant multi-national companies took advantage of the intense commercial competition to insert negative foreign influences by offering rock concert programmes and other shows that are considered "hot". Accordingly, countries starting to allow private television stations or permitting additional stations must pay careful attention to the content of their programmes so that development messages are not neglected or conveniently forgotten in their efforts to capture audiences and advertisers. Also, to ensure that imported programmes are not perpetually overshadowing local productions. Further, to ensure that competitions among local TV stations do not compromise their own integrity and gamble the moral of the people or their aspirations by flooding the air with counter-productive messages.

The background of people managing the TV stations is also an important determinants in the types of programmes or content offered. In Malaysia, for instance, the very westernised television programmes of the sole private station has been attributed to the fact that at its infancy it was mainly manned by "WOG" (Western Oriented Gentlemen). The extremism of their westernisation it was said went to such an extent that the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad was obliged to criticise their choice of programmes.

Religion can impose severe constraints in the messages or content of films, advertisements and television. For example, in Malaysia, certain products are not advertised on television because of religious prohibitions. Hence, products from pigs and alcohol are banned from television advertising. There are also cases where advertisements were withdrawn because of religious sensitivities. As an example, the Seiko watch company which was running a worldwide campaign using the theme "Man Invented Time, Seiko Perfected It", had to alter the slogan because Muslims were offended. The Muslims felt that this commercial should be withdrawn or reworded because God, not man, invented time.

Social constraints are also effective in determining content of mass media. With social movement and lobby groups becoming more influential, advertisements or films that project negative image of women or exploit children will surely trigger public protests. A number of advertisements on television in Malaysia for example have been withdrawn or redone because social groups objected that it have portrayed certain sector of society negatively. For instance, a four wheel drive vehicle

advertisement on television was suddenly withdrawn from air when the public and the Federation of Malaysia Consumers Association (FOMCA) protested because it portrayed Malaysians as backward or uncivilised and hence insulting to the people.

Further, professional bodies in the communication profession have come up with code of conduct to minimise undesirable appeals or messages in film, television and advertising. In Malaysia, for example, its advertising industry had established the Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia (ASAM) to prevent malpractices through a 'Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice'. However, the voluntary adherences of the Code lends itself to being labelled as a 'toothless tiger'.

Despite the controls and constraints impose on the mass media, particularly television, film and advertising the fear towards its negative impact remains. Somehow, many social activists, political leaders and even communication scholars and practitioners feel that a number of the messages emanating from television, film and advertising are anti-development or are at the very least counter-productive to development efforts.

DEVELOPMENT

Anyway, in discussing development or anti-development messages it would be more meaningful to first define development. Only by having a definite and clear definition of development can one decide whether a message is pro-development or anti-development. The trouble is even though much discussion has revolved around the definition and precise meaning of development nobody has come out with anything acceptable to everyone.

Probably, this state of affair should be expected and should be accepted. As it is, a country's concept of development may be different from other country's concept of development. Also, the concept of development in any country can change over time due to changes to political ideology, government or a matter of practicality or even a matter of survival.

However, it would be useful to have a very broad definition of development as well as a specific definition to make it useful when it comes to formulating development strategies and development communication strategies.

A very general definition of development could be: "any effort to enhance the life of everyone". For a specific definition it has to depend on the goals and strategies used to achieve it.

As to development strategies, the general debate about it is wide-ranging and inconclusive. The best path to development or development strategy is yet to come. Each strategy will have its strengths and weaknesses. Individual nation must seek its own strategy: a strategy that suits its own requirements, evolving from its own history, responding to its own peculiar socioeconomic needs and effectively addressing problems which require solution.

Generally, a near universal theme about development strategies is the role of income and asset distribution between individuals and groups as against overall growth and modernisation as the major and direct thrust of policy.

For developing countries, a number of alternative development strategies may usefully be distinguished: monetarism and laissez-faire versus socialism; the open economy versus import substitution and protectionism; industrialisation versus agricultural development; distribution and basic needs versus growth. It is known that while the thrusts of policy may differ, depending on the strategy chosen, in practice the approaches taken have tended to overlap and combine, having a mixture of elements from two or more of the strategies mentioned. Indeed, certain developing countries do not even have a consistent and comprehensive development strategy.

Furthermore, as the world environment is increasingly being threatened and it is fast becoming a hot issue, the sustainable development approach is being accepted by more and more nations, including those of the developing countries. The Brundtland Commission Report states that "Sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as present needs". Two of its important component include: (1) the concept of needs, in particular, the essential needs of the world's poor, and (2) the idea of limitations that are imposed by technology and society on the ability of the environment to meet those needs.

Further, the sustainable development approach incorporated four vital principles, each of which is applicable in one way or another to all development activities being planned. There are:

1. Ecological sustainability - it requires that development be compatible with the maintenance of ecological processes, biological diversity, and biological resources.

2. Social sustainability - it requires that development increase people's control over their lives, and maintain and strengthen community identity.
3. Cultural sustainability - it requires that development be compatible with the culture and values of the people affected by it.
4. Economic sustainability - it requires that development be economically efficient and then it be equitable within and between generations.

In formulating development communication and also development messages, it would be helpful to determine the criteria for the review or the effectiveness or otherwise of the development strategies practiced. Assessment of development strategies usually depend on the specific circumstances of each countries at particular points of time in their development plus other selected criteria for judgements, such as impacts on efficiency of resource utilisation; on savings, investment and growth; on human capital formation; on poverty and inequality; on the role of the State; and even on such basic aspects as participation, democracy and freedom. Now, also, its impact on the environment.

Hence, for development communication to be effective it must be fully supportive of the development strategy that is adopted by each country concerned. Further, development communication and development support communication must be treated as multi-dimensional concepts that deal with multiple objectives in multiple contexts. Ergo, development messages to be effective must not only be fully supportive of the development strategy that is adopted but also treat development communication and development support communication as multi-dimensional concepts with multiple objectives in multiple contexts. By fully understanding the potentials of all the factors involved in a development strategy a development communicator might be able to come up with development messages that would bring about the desired result. We can now defined development messages as those that contribute to the development efforts and goals as well as the development strategy that is adopted by the country concerned. This could include messages that create awareness and understanding of development projects; encouraging healthy habits and positive attitudes towards development like hard-working, resourcefulness, thriftiness, cooperativeness, law abiding, etc.; helped citizens to participate or be more involved in the development effort of their country; to love and protect the environment, etc. Development messages can also include specific campaigns that contribute towards nation building as well as trying to eliminate bad and destructive or counter-productive values and behavior among the people. For example, like anti-drug campaign, discouraging dangerous driving campaign or road safety campaign, encouraging breast-feeding, etc.

Anti-development messages refer to all those negating or neutralising positive values that are essential for development, encouraging bad attitudes and counter-productive behavior, etc.

The definition of development messages and anti-development messages have to be flexible to accommodated the needs of any particular country. This is congruent with the fact that the concept of development and development strategies can be differently defined depending on a given environment.

As such, a television programme, a film or an advertisement as communication channels or forms can present development or anti-development messages as desired by their sponsors, producers or owners as long as it do not break the laws of the country as well as the social and religious constraints or professional ethics. Thus, any country wanting to use these mass media as mobiliser of their development must enhance its capabilities and their ability in using them to this end.

Also, they must be very mindful of the messages they are allowing these media to promote. Preferably, they should ensure that all the messages are helping them in their development effort. Anti-development messages should be minimised and if possible totally eliminated. A government of any country could do this by having a comprehensive guidelines or laws plus an effective censorboard stating the types of TV programmes, films or advertisements that are encouraged or discouraged, and even banned. As mentioned, many nations already possess it. However, in scrutinising the content and messages of these media we will very quickly discover that in most countries their enforcement all too often are lax and even religious and social constraints have its limitation.

TELEVISION

For development messages to be successfully aired over television this media must first be able to attract viewers. In order to attract viewers, television stations as mentioned resort to having programmes that have high entertainment values, despite of any negative consequence it may bring. This is especially so for private stations, for they must have high audience ratings in order to attract advertisements and sponsors as TV stations are costly to run.

Furthermore, if television stations programmes have low entertainment value viewers will seek other forms of diversions. At one time, television audiences in large numbers were flocking to video parlours to hire videos of their favourite series or any films that caught their fancies. The main reason being their daily diet from TV were not to their desire. This, basically in term of entertaining them rather than its informative or educational values. Soon, many became addicted to this media. The sequel - TV viewings dropped.

Declining TV viewers and the rapid increase of video addicts quickly pose problems to not only TV station owners and managers but also for governments who use television to convey development messages. Almost all developing nations use television to convey development messages since TV are believed to be very effective and that nearly all of them also owned the electronic media. The most obvious impact being government development messages reach less people. As it is, TV broadcasts reached only those who can afford to buy the receivers. In many developing countries this could mean less than half of their population.

Next, it is much harder to control video parlours than TV stations. After all, even a small town in many developing countries can have more than 30 video parlours while for most nations, having more than two TV stations is considered a luxury.

Also, it would be very much harder to control what is in a video as oppose to TV programmes. After all, one video parlour could easily have more than a thousand titles. One could imagine the herculean efforts and the time required to check as to whether their contents have infringed the censor guidelines.

Furthermore, in developing countries which do not have a active film industry nearly all the video titles are imported. Worse, probably all the video titles, imported or local, have no relevant whatsoever to development as it would be commercially oriented and pandering to the basic desires of their consumers. In fact, many could easily be counter-productive to nation building. This do not include the amount of time and money squandered by video addicts to indulge in their craving.

Television stations affected by the video invasion began to fight back by more aggressive programming that usually contain highly rated series from USA or other advanced countries and films which have been box office. Consequently, television in developing countries has the highest foreign content compared to other mass media, with the exception of video.

Somehow, TV stations aggressive programming do help win back viewers. It looks like the aggressive programming will stay. This is especially so with the trend that governments in most developing nations are becoming more liberal and tolerant towards television.

Many reasons can be offered as to why many governments are increasingly tolerant and liberal towards television. Firstly, it is in line with many developing countries current penchant towards privatisation.

Secondly, it seems to help increase viewers. For example, in Malaysia it was reported that in terms of penetration, TV has increased from 46 per cent in 1980 to 76 per cent in 1990 (The Star: 5/1/91, p. 2). Also, the sales of TV sets have increased. Of course, this could also be because more Malaysians can afford to buy television. But then, if the programmes are not worthwhile seeing they would spend their money on something else.

Thirdly, strange enough, by being liberal the credibility of TV is seen to be enhanced. By being credible, TV can be more effective to disseminate development messages. In Malaysia, for example, public confidence towards the integrity and credibility of the electronic media, which with the exception of TV3 are government owned are manifested by the victory of the ruling parties in the 1990 election. Also, for Malaysia's 1986 general election the electronic media, especially TV, played an important role in ensuring victory for the ruling parties. This is because viewers, particularly rural folks continued to regard this media as credible despite the fact months before the general election it already have began to heavily broadcast on government development efforts. The development messages that were geared towards winning elections were cleverly integrated in news and documentary programmes.

Fourthly, by being liberal and tolerant, TV programmes somehow have become more entertaining. This could greatly assist in maintaining faithful viewers and winning new audiences. Otherwise, TV development messages will be perpetually talking to old converts.

Let us remember that entertainment is not all bad. In fact, entertainment play a vital role in providing relaxation in a rapidly developing society which can cause tension among the people. Anyway, TV has proven to be a very entertaining medium and because of it has been effective in attracting viewers. The responsibility of the TV managers and governments are to select TV series or

films that not only have high entertainment values but also educational and/or informational as well as encouraging positive values.

Currently, local entertainment programmes have been produced by television with the objectives of promoting national culture, national unity and even encouraging participation in development.

The local entertainment programmes have been known to attract more viewers than imported ones. However, imported entertainment programmes continues to be popular especially among youngsters and the western educated audiences. Here is where the concerns of most public interest groups focus. This is because some of the values promoted by the imported entertainment programmes are apparently incongruent with the positive values that should be encouraged to our youths.

However, it must be said that not all imported programmes carry anti-development messages. In fact, some imported series or films do have many elements of development messages and carry such messages more effectively than local productions. For example a number of western "family series" have very successful in promoting positive values like the importance of having a close family, cooperation, friendship, honesty, hardwork, thrifty, resourcefulness, etc. that could contribute to the well being of a society inspite of facing rapid development or living in an advanced states.

It can also be noted that television stations, governments or private, are using very popular imported television series or films as "baits" to attract and maintain viewers so that development messages whether documentaries, news or public service announcements or ads can be aired in between them.

Furthermore, it would be easy to have sponsors for the very popular TV series or films. Funds from such sponsors have been used to produce quality local programmes with the appropriate development messages. As a government broadcasting director-general of a developing country put it "selling the rubbish to buy the gems". According to him this is one way of improving the overall quality of TV programmes. As such, some developing countries are already adapting some of their popular traditional media for TV presentations. Usually, they carry development messages. In Malaysia, a traditional media called "Bangsawan" have been adapted very successful to convey development messages. Their target are the rural but it also have found popularity among urban audiences.

It is expected that TV in developing nations, particularly will be increasingly used to disseminate development messages. Also, it is expected that the quality of production and the entertaining value of such effort will continuously be improved to meet the expectations of the viewers who are becoming sophisticated in their taste with constant exposure to this media.

FILM

Films bearing development messages have existed since it advent. It could be both in fictional or nonfictional forms. Both these genre have proven to be effective in delivering development messages to target audiences. The immense popularity of film has made it a powerful disseminator of values and ideas. This capability has made governments and film makers to harness it as an important agent for social change and national development.

Usually, films bearing development messages are associated with governments productions. The forms could be newsreels, instructional films industrial films, promotional films and documentaries. There could be films on how to read books (educational), films on manufacturing plants (industrial), recruitments for military (promotional), films on environment (documentary). Governments all over the world spends million of dollars yearly to produce films with development messages. For example, it is reported in the United States that government productions alone are worth over a billion dollar annually, making it one of the major film producers in the world.

Hence, expectedly, nearly all governments have their own film production house or national film centre. The main task of national film centres are to produce documentary and promotional films and filmlets that would help promote the government of the day, particularly their various development efforts. Films or filmlets produced by national film centres are normally distributed to cinema theatres to be screened before the film of the day is shown (some countries have made this screening as compulsory), government information mobile units that are equiped with movie projectors, television stations, etc.

Also, national film centres are often assigned to produce films for special occasions. It could be to commemorate the nation's birthday, in remembrance to a national hero, arm forces day, etc. Further, to support special campaigns like "road safety, save water, cleanliness week, no smoking week, eat less sugar, save electricity, fulfill your responsibility as a voter, take care of your teeth, balanced nutrition," etc.

Occasionally, national films are assigned to produce full length feature or theatrical films. Naturally, these films will have an overt or covert development messages integrated in their story line. These films are usually shown in the commercial cinema hall first and later through television. The motive of producing such films are to get to a wider segment of audience who are difficult to reach via television or other means of government communication.

Government sometimes resort to producing theatrical films because it remains to be a popular form of entertainment and would attract more viewers. It is felt that certain development messages could best be conveyed through feature films. Development messages that are observed to be best imparted via feature films are usually the ones that involved life dramas like efforts of a person or individuals to improve his or their lots as related to the development of a nation; the birth of a nation; fighting all odds to overcome obstacle to development; etc.

Also, government occasionally turn to making feature films because films produce by private sectors rarely produce films that have social themes or appropriate development messages that help citizens to play their parts in nation building. In fact one of the commonest complaint against commercial features films by many governments, particularly in developing countries is that it is purely commercial in nature and totally disregarding any form of social responsibility like producing films that can contribute towards an effective development of a nation.

On the other hand, films produce by governments tend to be very serious and frequently neglect the importance of entertainment value to ensure large viewerships. Hence, documentaries, especially by governments, rarely have strong entertainment appeal. Also, most of the time they do not have mass appeal. When governments want to produce documentaries or even feature films they must take some pointers from box office films to ensure that people are motivated to see it.

However, this does not mean governments should copy whole sale the formula of box office films. As it is, top grossing films remain to be light entertainment, fantasy, or adventure. They are not necessarily high quality. But their basic main ingredients would be entertaining or sensational being laced with sex and violence plus now more than ever before, heavy advertising, promotion and publicity. Governments must continue to seek ways to improve their development messages through films.

To make their films more effective and less stereotypes many governments have began to privatise some of their films production. Generally, films with development messages that are privatised are one that have specific themes. For examples, in Malaysia filmlets like public service ads to discourage people from taking drugs, encouraging neighbourliness, love your parents, respect your teachers, be courteous, etc. are produced by commercial film companies. These filmlets or public service announcements are usually financed by commercial sponsors. Somehow, these filmlets are generally better produced or more slick than the ones by the national film centre.

Many governments in trying to make their development messages and messages instilling love for the country more effective have begin to use jingles and songs. In Malaysia some of these jingles and songs have become very popular. In many cases it even utilise the video clips techniques with fast and varied actions or scenery to attract a large following. These filmlets are screened regularly in between or in the middle of programmes like commercial ads. Thus, these filmlets have become a permanent feature just like commercial ads.

Certain countries have also use traditional characters or folklore heroes to convey development messages through films. Furthermore, there are countries that have used these characters in cartoon films to disseminate development messages. For example, in Malaysia the national film board have produced a number of filmlets using the traditional folklore heroes, Sang Kancil (Mousedeer) in cartoon forms to inculcate certain positive attitudes among Malaysians that would be appropriate for development. As cartoons greatly attract children, these films are especially meant for them. Thus, these cartoon films have a simple straight forward message and very entertaining, especially to children and maybe even to youths and some adults.

As another example to enhance development messages, governments can choose a specific theme that can be concentrated upon the people. For instance, the year 1990 is the "Visit Malaysia Year" and taking advantage of this, the Malaysian government has produced numerous films may it be by the National Film Board or private film companies requesting Malaysians to be a good host or hostess. Also, inviting Malaysians to see their own countries. These filmlets are screened in movie theatres, TV, mobile units, etc.

In this regard, private sectors, particularly travel agencies and hotels plus eating places were also requested to produce films and ads that could attract and welcome visitors to Malaysia. As such, many films including a controversial food additive advertisement were seen advertising more about Malaysia

than its products. Usually, included are the development achieved by the country and the beautiful scenery that still exists in the country. The development messages contain in such advertisements probably is to promote sustainable development even though its direct intention is to sell the product advertised.

ADVERTISEMENTS

It is noted that governments are increasingly turning to advertising to ensure that their development messages reach its intended audiences successfully. In many countries advertising has become the life-blood of nearly all mass media. It is now almost impossible to escape its presence.

This omnipresence makes advertising so commonplace that it is all too easy to take it for granted and to grossly underestimate its effect. Most of us have begun accepting advertising as part of our daily diet. We may at first complain about the intrusion of advertising in our favourite TV programme but sooner or later most of us will come to term with the presence of advertisements in every corridor of life.

We are often led to believe that we are immune to advertising simply because we are aware of its motives and it has become part of our life. Actually, it serves the industry well to let us think that our awareness of advertising motive is adequate immunization against the influence of advertising. By believing that we are immune to advertising the majority of us more easily influenced.

As such, one of the most popular definition of advertising is:

"any messages that disseminated, particularly through mass media, paid for by businesses or any other institutions that wish to increase the probability that those reached by these messages will behave or believe as the advertisers desire them to behave or to believe."

Furthermore, as more governments and social groups increasingly use ads to put their message across, advertising has also been defined as "social tool that encourages public support of government and public interest organisation by conveying accurate and compelling information to the intended public(s) about their needs and goals plus its benefits to the people."

To ensure that advertisements are honest and do not offend the sensibilities of their public as well as contribute their expertise to the well being of their society most countries have established an advertising code of practice plus pertinent laws to guarantee their compliance. Nevertheless, cases of misleading and unethical advertisements are legend. Consequently, it is impossible to give an exhaustive descriptions of all the charges and criticisms levelled against advertising.

The following are some of the charges and criticisms as voiced by public interest groups such as the consumer associations that are considered anti-development:

1. Encouraging "wastefulness".
2. Encouraging "simplemindedness".
3. Encouraging "wrong priorities in life".
4. Encouraging "unproductive activities".
5. Encouraging "dangerous behaviour".
6. Encouraging "bad habit".
7. Encouraging the production and sales promotion of luxurious, superfluous and harmful products while the basic needs of the poor remain unfulfilled.
8. Encouraging the rapid erosion of the positive aspects of indigenous culture and products.
9. Encouraging stereotyping of women.
10. Encouraging "materialism" while neglecting "spiritualism".

Advertising has also been charged for:

11. Imposing uniformity and homogeneity on the people.
12. Forcing higher prices for goods and services advertised.
13. Making false and misleading claims.
14. Exhibiting bad taste.
15. Regulating discussion of public issues through its control of the mass media.

These charges and criticisms against advertising could lessened its effectiveness as a tool of persuasion and marketing. As it is, advertising people tend to ignore these criticisms or make counter-charges. This is not a positive attitude to take. The advertising people do have the resourcefulness and creativity to make their advertisements less anti-development and instead make them supportive of development messages. As a start, ads agencies should consciously ensure that their advertisements encourage positive behavior and build useful skill whenever possible as appropriate to the products or services being advertised among the public as a sort of a second message. For example, bank ads should encourage savings and good investments; a toothbrush ads should show a correct way of

brushing and not any other way; a car ads must try to include a road safety element; etc. I am sure these sorts of ads can be very very effective plus getting the credit for public service.

To make advertisements supportive of development, there must be a working relationships between the advertising industry and the government. Also, the government could make it mandatory for the advertising industry to put aside a certain portion of their income to produce ads with development message. Furthermore, ads agencies can provide their services in kind to the government for a specific campaign.

Advertisements can and will definitely play a vital role in conveying development messages. However, all parties involved must ensure that it is not abused.

CONCLUSION

Communication experts, may it be practitioners or scholars must play a central role to ensure that TV, film and advertising are doing their part to convey development messages and minimising any anti-development messages. This is especially vital in developing because they cannot afford to waste funds to remedy any problems created by anti-development messages.

New strategies must be formulated to enhance the capability of these media to disseminate development messages more effectively. Ways must also be researched to up-grade the quality of these development messages as well as reducing the cost of production. As it is, films may make way for video as this media is improving in term of production quality as well as easier to produce and costing much less.

NOTES

- (1) Paper presented at a Seminar-Workshop On Using Entertainment and Advertising for Development Communication, Singapore, 21-24 January 1991.
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