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1991

Rajan, R. V. (1991). The use of folk media in advertising and developmental communication. In AMIC Seminar-Workshop on Using Entertainment and Advertising for Development Communication : Singapore, Jan 21-24, 1991. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research & Information Centre.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/93150>

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By

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THE USE OF FOLK MEDIA IN ADVERTISING AND DEVELOPMENTAL COMMUNICATION

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Any effort to develop communication strategies for Developmental communication, especially in the Indian context, must keep in mind the fact that bringing attitudinal and behavioural change in a traditional society, is a very difficult task. Though a number of Government and non Government agencies, have been involved in the task for the last four decades, they are still experiencing difficulties in establishing proper communication with the target audience because of the lack of data about the Media habits and Media reach among the target audience.

Though Television, in recent years, is creating a revolution in the perception and aspirations of people in the rural areas, the communication networks based on the two-stop flow of communication, which again is based on the tradition of the village, continues to exist.

Folk Arts and Folk Media have played an important role in the communication network in the past and are continuing to play a role even now. However growing urbanisation and lack of opportunity in villages, are making a number of practitioners of folk art to give up their vocations and seek occupations in towns.

On the other hand, the growing influence of Electronics Media and its efforts to popularise some of the folk arts, is giving a new lease of life to some of the folk artists. In Tamilnadu, for instance, extensive reach of the TV medium in the remote villages has helped a few folk artists become household names. 'Subbu' Arumugam on villupattu, and 'Muthukootan' on puppetry have become famous with their talents mainly because of Doordarshan (TV).

Another interesting aspect is the use of traditional media in selling even agri inputs like fertilisers, Agro chemicals and other products aimed at the rural segment. A number of companies are giving a new lease of life to some of the traditional artists by giving them contracts to popularise their products, with interesting results.

The writer was involved in an interesting experience in the use of Magic Shows for promoting a brand of fertilisers among farmers. Given below is a report on the experience.

Magic of Magic Shows

Use of Magic Shows for propagating family planning or consumer products is not unknown in India. However it was only very recently that Magic Show was used as a vehicle for promoting branded agricultural inputs - with a subtle tie-up between the products and the items of the show. This exercise, in a pilot project form, was undertaken on behalf of Shaw Wallace & Co. Ltd. in 15 villages of Hubli/Dharwar area in Karnataka in India. The programme was recommended, designed and implemented by the Madras office of an advertising agency.

The basic objective of the Magic Show was to promote the Star brand and other products marketed by Shaw Wallace particularly emphasising the following:

a) Fertiliser Mixture (Star-top), b) A sophisticated agro-chemical (Bavistin fungicide), c) Sprayers (Starmist and Shakthi).

MODUS OPERANDI

The first step was to arrange for the Magician to present an informal magic performance to the agency staff. The various items and "tricks" were noted down and studied-for their adaptability in relation to the objective.

The next step was to match selected magic items with the brand image and the specific products to be promoted. That is, the agency prepared a format which tied up individual magic show items or sleight-of-hand tricks with the most appropriate concepts and products that the client wished to propagate through the magic show.

Next, the agency prepared a script which allowed flexibility for Magician's own extempore comments. This enabled the magician to combine pure magic with functional magic, humour and hard facts, entertainment and knowledge for the benefit of the farmer audience.

Then the magician presented his show according to the script, first to the agency and later to the client. After many revisions and refinements the final script was readied, the magician was allowed time to master the script and format and asked to present "mock" shows to the agency before leaving for the selected locations. The magician was also equipped with special dress and a headgear carrying the Star emblem. He was called the Star Magician (Star is the brand name of the products) and the show itself was called the "Star Magic Show". A special backdrop and a table cloth featuring the name of the show and the star emblem were used by the Magician in all the performances - each of which lasted for about 2 hours.

The script and format were so prepared as to present both direct or straight tie-ups as well as indirect tie-ups through analogies.

Incidentally, for the Star Magic Show, the agency modified the role of the customary magician's assistant to one of a simple likeable and humorous character with whom farmers could readily identify themselves. As a part of the magic show he was trained to ask such questions as the farmers in the audience were likely to ask.

EXAMPLES OF TIE-UPS

1. The show opened with the magician saying that while he could not perform the farmer's miracle of converting "bare" land into crop-rich fields, he would try to do something less spectacular. Where upon he showed two blank slates and within seconds one of the slates turned up with a "Welcome" greeting on it.
2. At various stages of the show, items akin to "Pulling Rabbits out of Empty Hats", miniatures of each of the products were pulled out of empty chests and boxes to promote brand/pack identifications.
3. While closing his talk about Startop fertiliser, the magician did a "Money Multiplication" trick, in which a 1 rupee note put inside a box successfully reappeared as 5, 10 and 20 rupee notes. Which lead the assistant to comment: "So it is with Startop - your investment in it is returned multiplied manifold".
4. Again, at the end of his talk on Bavistin (a chemical against plant diseases), the magician performed the "Indestructible Magic Currency" item: a marked 1 rupee note is burnt to ashes, yet soon reappears whole inside a loaf of bread. At which the assistant exclaims, "when you use Bavistin, your interest is safe and protected against damage".
5. Finally, while the magician concludes his commentary about how Shaw Wallace/Star Brand helps farmers at every stage of their profession, he performs a surprising trick of pulling out a "Magic Ladder", from inside an ordinary bundle of newspapers rolled into a cylinder. Each rung of the ladder carries the "Star" emblem, reflecting the Star Brand image of a helping hand at every step in farmers' progress.

A detailed programme was drawn up for the magician's visit to about 15 villages. The performances were invariably held in the village square, where farmers normally get together after their day's work. Adequate publicity was given to the Magic Show by a company supervisor through leaflets and traditional

announcements. The supervisor also helped the magician in organising the programmes in coordination with the village elders.

Before the programme of Magic Show was launched, the Company carried out a Bench-Mark study to assess the awareness of various agricultural products.

A post-test was conducted about 20 days after the Magic Show to determine its effectiveness as a medium of communication in creating awareness and knowledge of products, and usage intent of the farmers.

150 interviews were conducted in 5 villages of a District area during the pre-test:

These interviews were conducted about a week before the start of the Magic Show. The respondents were agriculturists chosen randomly. This pre-test, showed virtually no awareness of branded products. During the second stage, 138 interviews were conducted in the same villages with the following results:

- Category A : interviewed earlier and magic shows seen
- 48
- Category B : not interviewed earlier and magic shows seen
- 42
- Category C : interviewed earlier and magic show not seen
- 48

The effectiveness of the Magic Show as a communication medium was evaluated in terms of gain in awareness, knowledge and adoption. For evaluation purposes, awareness was taken to be the stage when an individual learns of the existence of a new idea/product but does not know the details. Knowledge is the stage where the individual possesses information about the product, its usage and its benefits. Adoption refers to the decision to make purchases of the new products.

Interpreting the findings of the survey on the basis of the above criteria, the following conclusions can be drawn:

AWARENESS

The (pre-test) Bench-Mark survey and the survey among respondents who had not seen the Magic Show clearly showed that there was virtually no awareness of Shaw Wallace and its products even though respondents were using competitive products extensively and were even exposed to a limited extent Shaw Wallace's advertising through posters and audio-visual vans. It would therefore, be reasonable to attribute to the Magic Show any awareness of the Company and its products generated after the farmers had seen it. In fact, respondents who had seen the Show and recalled the products, made it clear that their source of information had been the Magic Show.

The "Star Magic Show" clearly appears to have helped in creating awareness of the existence of the products where none existed before. (Tables I & II)

KNOWLEDGE

While the Magic Show created awareness of the products, their benefits, usage and other characteristics were not clearly brought out by those who attended the show. The following might be some of the reasons for the poor knowledge of the products:

- a) Too many products exposed within a short time leading to poor comprehension.
- b) The sophisticated nature of some of the products making them unsuitable for introduction through a magic show.
- c) Possible domination of the entertainment aspect of the Show.
- d) The magician was not fully equipped to answer specific questions on products.
- e) Lack of follow-up action by the sponsors.

ADOPTION

The symbolic adoption, in terms of future purchasing intention was very much prevalent with a number of respondents expressing their desire to try Startop and Bavistin as can be seen from the table III. Out of the 48 who had not seen the Magic Show 18 (i.e) about 37% had heard about the Show from relatives and farmers who had seen it. But only 2 out of 18 associated the Magic Show with specific products like Bavistin and Starmist/Shakthi Sprayers. Though the spillover awareness of the Magic Show itself is very high, the products covered have received much less attention.

From the above we can conclude that the medium has been able to make a significant contribution in-as-much as it has created significant awareness among those who have been exposed to the medium. Also there is a genuine desire to try products talked about.

While the Magic Show as a communication medium has a novelty value which helps to create enhanced awareness for the products promoted, especially in areas where the reach of other media is very poor, the high cost of per contact discourages its use as a regular medium. However, Magic Shows can be performed throughout the day and as such, on special occasions and in places where large number of farmers get together, such as village melas and shandies, several shows could be held in a single day and wide coverage achieved. This would bring down the cost per contact. Thus, Magic Shows can be effectively used to promote special messages, special promotions or a new product.

Ideally, only one product or a single basic message should be communicated through the show. Too many messages adversely affect the knowledge aspect of communication.

A trained salesman or a company representative should accompany the Magician to provide clarifications and answer any questions which come up after the Magic Show. Vigorous follow-up by the sales force after the Magic Show will ensure good results.

AGENDA

TABLE 1
AWARENESS OF PRODUCTS

	Yes		No		Total	
	Startop	Bavistin	Startop	Bavistin	Startop	Bavistin
Cat.A	40	26	8	14	48	40
Cat.B	33	30	7	11	40	41
Cat.C	5	3	42	40	47	43
	78	59	57	65	135	124

TABLE 2
SOURCES OF AWARENESS
Magic Show

	Startop	Bavistin
Cat.A	33	23
Cat.B	34	25
Cat.C	1	1

TABLE 3
INTENTION TO BUY

	Certainly buy		Probably buy		Not sure		Certainly not buy	
	St.	Bv.	St.	Bv.	St.	Bv.	St.	Bv.
Cat.A	16	18	14	13	7	2	3	1
Cat.B	20	19	4	2	3	10	1	1
Cat.C	2	4	1	2	1	2	1	0
St. - Startop Bv. - Bavistin								

SELLING A POLITICAL PARTY THROUGH MAGIC SHOWS

It is interesting to note that Magic Show, as a medium, was very extensively used by a Political Party in Andhra Pradesh, South India and win an election (under the leadership of the Chief Minister N T Rama Rao).

Hundreds of youngsters were trained as magicians, in a specially established Institution for this purpose in Hyderabad. After extensive practical session, they were sent to the districts, to spread the message of the Political party, through magic items, which combined entertainment with delivering serious messages to the rural folks.

Lessons learnt from the Magic Show experiment are very much relevant to other forms of Folk arts as can be seen by the experience of an organisation called Centre for Development Research & Training based in Madras, Tamil Nadu.

CFDRT Experiment

CFDRT conducted a special experiment using 'Villupattu' (song/play acting using string/percussion instruments) for promoting:

- a. Rural sanitation
- b. Leprosy control
- c. Primary Health care

Villupattu has a tradition extending over a period of 2,000 years. It is a versatile medium which uses singing, acting and dialogue running through a very solid base of humour and wit. It also lends itself for a very good audience participation and extempore innovations. This facilitates putting of questions by audience regarding their doubts and getting answers from the performing troupe.

We will now take the example of the sanitation project. This was a project which was implemented in 4 villages in Tamil Nadu and was sponsored by the UNDP. The objective of this project was to involve the rural women in health and sanitation projects. Initially, the programme started with a perception study, with investigators living in the village and talking to the people on a free-format dialogue basis. This was followed by detailed KAP studies with regard to specific messages of the project. With this information in hand, CFDRT sat with the villupattu troupe and developed the skit which followed the traditional rendering of stories with the new sanitation messages suitably interspersed. This was done in such a way as to keep up the tempo of the narration throughout. After the performances were over, CFDRT did, another KAP study with the same target audience with a view to measuring the audience responses. CFDRT was able to precisely quantify the extent to which changes in KAP had taken place. It was about 90-95% compared to about 10-15% at the baseline study.

Increased demand for sanitation facilities

As a result of this communication campaign, CFDRT found that the demand for sanitary latrines came upto anything between 90-95% of the total population in the different villages. This was an indication of the extent to which behaviour changes had taken place among the villages.

Cost Benefit Ratio

For the entire programme of Villupattu communication, the budget was only about Rs.5,000/- which incidentally brought about the necessary changes in behaviour in about 3,000 population. Cost per effective contact worked out to about Rs.1.67, which is quite reasonable.

CFDRT - A new experiment

As a part of a project sponsored by Amic, CFDRT has been recently involved with an experiment in the development of Communication Strategy for spreading environment messages through folk arts.

CFDRT invited leading experts of different types of Folk arts (Villupattu, Therukoothu - Street Play & Puppetry) in Tamilnadu to a Seminar, where this idea was discussed in detail. Some of the observations made at the Seminar by these experts, make very interesting reading:

1. Before starting any campaign, there is a need to undertake field studies to know the requirements of the target audience, which are different from place to place even within a district.
2. It will be advisable to leave out ritualistic performances and select media which are flexible and would absorb messages to reflect the same without hurting the credibility.
3. Maintaining the credibility of the messages from the angle of the rural audience is very important. Loading too much of modern messages in traditional art, rendered the art to lose much of its form, beauty and appeal, resulting in the target audience unable to participate in any of the process of planning and implementation of the development project.
4. Any development message must be first internalised by the performing troupe and thereafter the message should travel to areas where the art form itself travels
5. In any efforts to communicate with the villagers, it is essential to identify oneself with the rural audience concerned. One should understand and apply the local dialect and idiom's and use the same in one's communication to the target audience. It is equally important to have prior knowledge for the perceptions of the rural audience regarding the subject matter of the messages.
6. There is a need to properly integrate the storyline with the development messages, by a careful analogies of the storyline to identify areas which might lend themselves to the proposed integration of the new messages.

7. Use of Humour and wit in narration is very important as this would not only make people enjoy the narration but also help the audience think over the message.

8. It is very important that there should not be any contradictions in the messages being communicated by different development agencies.

To sum up, in any attempt to use traditional media for developmental messages, one has to be careful in identifying the medium, in selecting the messages and ensuring that the message was absorbed by the medium and reflected it truly and wholly without in anyway hurting the medium itself.

The traditional media artists are best equipped to handle the messages in the context of the medium and it is only necessary for the urban based sophisticated communicator to brief the traditional media artists about the messages and leave the rest to them.

BLENDING OF ELECTRONICS & TRADITIONAL MEDIA

As already stated, while the Electronics Mass Media like Television, offers an excellent opportunity to popularise a message through Folk Art to a much wider audience, experiences show that most of the time TV Media tries to straitjacket the traditional form into its structural forms and time frames, in the process hurting the traditional forms considerably. There is a need to work more closely with the traditional media artists on these aspects such that a better integration of these media with the electronic media is achieved. A lot of imagination and balancing is also required to get the maximum impact for a traditional art performer performing in a studio as against his performance in front of a live audience. While attempting to integrate traditional media with Electronic Medium, it is important to ensure that the culture never gets hurt.

21.01.91