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The Use Of TV And Radio Entertainment
For Development Communication: The Malaysian Experience

By

Salleh Hassan,
Narimah Ismail
The Use of TV and Radio Entertainment For Development Communication: The Malaysian Experience

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Narimah Ismail

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Mass media perform various functions in society. Generally they provide information, education and entertainment to society. The broadcasting media are more dominant and pervasive because of their ability to reach the masses, especially the remote and the illiterate population. The strength of the broadcasting media, as noted by Scupham (1967), "... lies first of all in the simple fact that they can jump the barriers of illiteracy. To people in isolated regions, islands and mountainous areas, broadcasting is their means of access to modern life, modern ideas and modern technology (Rajasundaram, 1981). The desirable effects of broadcasting media for national development however depend on the content and treatment of the messages being broadcasted. The question is how far do the media succeed in getting new information across in bringing about attitudinal changes, in disseminating new technologies and innovations. The functions of media to inform, educate and entertain need to be blended in order to achieve the desired goals. The entertainment function of broadcasting media, therefore, if creatively used can be a conduit to disseminate development messages.
In Malaysia the broadcasting media, especially the government owned Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) operate based on the following guiding aims:

1. to explain in detail and in a comprehensive manner, government policies and programmes to enable the people to accurately and fully understand these policies and programmes.

2. to encourage attention and way of thinking to induce changes in attitudes in line with government needs and policies.

3. to assist in the creation of national unity through the use of Bahasa Malaysia in a multiracial society.

4. to assist in the creation of awareness of civic responsibilities and encourage the arts and culture of Malaysia.

5. to provide suitable materials for the purpose of knowledge, information and entertainment.

(Ghazali, 1983, p. 114-115)

In all these aims, the most important in terms of communication is the role of RTM in creating new thought and to bring about changes in attitudes of the audience. These changes are in accordance with the aspirations of people and
country (Kamin, 1982). These aims demand the producers of TV and radio programmes to be creative so that the development messages are presented in an appealing manner. This task was outlined by the Minister of Information of Malaysia in 1977, as follows:

The challenge of passing development messages and to reiterate the call for participation of the people in the development process is therefore as great to the artist as to the development implementors, because it will test their ingenuity in devising different forms of presentations, their creativity in humanizing messages they have conveyed in the complicated settings of dramas, and most importantly, their finer skills in rousing and sustaining interest of the target audience. (p.5)

Besides RTM, Malaysia has a private television station known as TV3 which was established in 1984. Comparing the content of TV3 and RTM Karthegesu (1990) notes that:

Its programmes were designed to satisfy the demands of an urban audience, which had remained somewhat displeased with TV Malaysia's concerns with conservative values that avoided the new and bold programmes that appeared in the West, of which the urban viewers read in their English newspapers and kept hearing from their friends who visited overseas countries.

The programmes of TV3 are full of entertainment fares such as films and musical shows from United States, Hong Kong, Taiwan and other production house overseas.
The programme categories of Television Malaysia (Network 1 and Network 2) for 1989 were reported as the following:

**BROADCASTING TIME BY TYPE OF PROGRAMMES**
- 1989 (average per month)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NETWORK 1</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Information &amp; Education</td>
<td>184:39'</td>
<td>(45.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>74:57'</td>
<td>(18.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>44:27'</td>
<td>(11.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>91:35'</td>
<td>(22.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>7:25'</td>
<td>(1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>403:04'</strong></td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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<th>NETWORK II</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Information &amp; Education</td>
<td>83:54'</td>
<td>(29.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>85:35'</td>
<td>(29.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>5:26'</td>
<td>(1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>96:59'</td>
<td>(33.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>16:9'</td>
<td>(5.7)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Source: Information Year Book, 1990-91
Types of Entertainment Programmes
Used for Development Communication

Generally there are two methods of using entertainment for development communication. One strategy is to present informational and educational programmes in an entertaining manner. Another approach is to insert development messages in popular entertainment programmes. In this paper both strategies will be presented and discussed.

1. Development communication programmes with elements of entertainment.

RTM has a division known as the Development and Agriculture Service (DAS) which is responsible to systematically use the broadcasting for national development. Various programmes are produced by both the television and radio section of DAS. The following are examples radio programmes which are produced by using entertainment strategies to inform, educate or motivate the audience, particularly the rural audience.

Warung Peteri (Peteri's Store)

It is a dramatized or informal discussion program dealing with current issues of national interest faced by the rural people. The programme is broadcast every Tuesday from 11:00 - 11:15 a.m.
Fajar Dibumi Permata (Dawn in the Bejeweled Land)

It is a dramatized series targeted to the land settlers of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) schemes. It portrays the life in a land scheme with all the problems and intrigues among the settlers but at the same time showing the progress and the ultimate prevalence of unity and peace. This programme is broadcast every Thursday from 11:40 to 12:10 noon.

Bakti Disemai Bukti Dituai (Good Deeds, Ample Harvests)

An innovative programme which encourages direct audience participation by using the telephone. This program runs for 50 minutes from 12:10 to 1:00 p.m. four days a week from Monday to Thursday. It consists of two sections. During the first section a guest for the day is interviewed on his/her activities. The guest can either be officers from development agencies, successful farmers or business entrepreneurs. The interview runs for 20 minutes with music intercessions in between. The second section is the phone-in program in which the public can ask the guest any question related to his/her presentation. The questions are directly answered over the air. Between the questions and answer session popular songs are played.
The topics for the programmes are determined according to the following set up.

Monday - Agriculture  
Tuesday - Animal husbandry  
Wednesday - Fishery  
Thursday - Other related aspects

II. Entertainment Programmes with Development Messages

Entertainment programmes can be evaluated in terms of the uses and gratification approach i.e. based on audience/viewers needs. A general classification of audience need used by most researchers include to:

1. increase aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience.

2. to gain information, knowledge and understanding

3. to decrease the pressure of personal, professional or social problems.

4. to strengthen contacts with family and friends.  
   (Armer, 1990)

Those needs can be grouped as seeking pleasure, information, escape and companionship, which can usually be fulfilled by entertainment programmes such as music, drama,
variety or festival shows, literary programmes, quizes and games, campaigns among others.

Music Programme

Audience of different age groups and backgrounds are attracted to music because of its universal qualities of entertainment. As such different types of music has been used in different program format for conveying development messages.

Traditional and folk music with lyrics encouraging people to participate in development efforts are commonly aired over TV and radio. Boria and Dikir Barat are the two more popular folk songs frequently used. Development messages are contained in the lyrics as well as in the short sketches performed before the song are sung. Themes of folk music revolve around everyday issues such as importance of saving and investment, importance of education, loyalty to the nation and the ruler, new government programmes etc.

Patriotic songs aired by Radio and TV is another form of music that help to stimulate the feeling of national consciousness, love for peace and solidarity and prosperity among the population.
Song writing competition are often held to select winning entries and songs that won the competition will be awarded prizes as well as having the chance to be shown on TV and aired over radio. Sometimes the finalists to the competition will get a chance to perform live on TV.

Music video is quite a recent invention appeared in the US scene in 1984. Rock, country and soul music with visual presentation of imagery computer graphics, singing, dramatic action and other special effect relate to the theme or flavour of music and lyric (Armer, 1990). This concept is adapted in many music video presentation that encourages development. Examples are songs such as 'setia' (loyalty) kejiranan (neighbourhood) kebersihan (cleanliness). Both visuals and lyrics of songs encouraged involvement in development efforts of the government. Music of popular songs or at times religious music (nasyid) are used. e.g. Nasyid names of Allah.

Drama

Drama which are stories acted out in words shows how people react when caught in conflict. It is a powerful tool for educating the audiences for development. Drama takes the audience into the lives and thought of people, shows their character and how their characters change and take new
directions as a result of conflicts which face them and usually how they win despite the hazards they faced (Aspinall, 1971).

Both radio and TV drama have large audiences and as such is useful for disseminating development information in an indirect and subtle way. It is useful for channeling government messages to people of all walks of life.

Radio drama such as Kebun Pak Awang (Pak Awang's Farm,) Keluarga Pak Awang (Pak Awang's Family) highlighted problems faced by farmers, how they try to overcome them, encourage them to be independent and self-reliant, to adopt new techniques in agriculture, and to develop group spirit among farmers. This program appeal to the rural people since it depicts the live of the rural folks which most of them can associate with. The voice of the actors plays an important role in persuading the listeners to listen to the messages presented in the drama - e.g. protection of wild life where people who catch birds protected by law (burung wak-wak) will be fined. Direct message will not be taken heed but when presented in the drama it give a more persuasive and meaningful message.

The drama is mostly based on real events or happenings. Though the main objective of TV drama is entertainment elements of information and education are always
incorporated into most drama. The trend in messages presented in the drama changes according to socio-political situation of the country but the emphasis revolve around everyday issues such as moral education, social education, national solidarity and feelings of nationalism (Said Halim, 1988). These findings were based on content analysis of TV drama from 1964-83.

Moral education messages in TV drama aimed at inculcating good behaviour of the individual, his relationship with family members and spiritual relationship with religion and God.

Social education messages concentrated on community problems such as attitude change among the different ethnic groups as well as adapting to the social and economic changes. e.g. Adapting to the life in the urban, becoming more enterprising or business oriented, emphasis on education, encouragement to save and invest as well as inculcating such values as honesty, bravery and responsibility are common messages in TV drama. Besides the audience are reminded to be aware of community problems such as bribery, robbery, drug addiction and crime in general. (e.g. Sandiwara Semasa).
Solidarity among the various ethnic groups, feeling of nationalism, love for the nation are presented in drama revolving around patriotic figures of the past such as Mat Kilau, those who fight for Malaysia independence. e.g. Anak Sarawak.

Comedy. Besides the serious drama there are situation comedies (sitcom) that usually highlight current issues.

Modern sitcom like 'Minah and Company' depicts the live in the urban, highlighting problems such as unemployment and teenagers problems. The more traditional sitcom like Jenaka Hang Setia, even though the theme revolve around current issues, the setting is more traditional, involves figures of the past discussed current topics like hoarding of foodstuff, increasing price of foodstuff, increase oil prices.

Variety shows/Festival Shows/Festivals in Conjunction with the Launching of Government Programmes

Variety shows whether in the studio or outdoor, on stage at the site of festival or exposition (broadcast live or recorded) are common arena for delivering development messages. For example programme 'Kampungku' - My Village launched by the Ministry of Broadcasting is a combination of entertainment using a more innovative approach.
Variety shows is usually a combination of various entertainment formats such as singing, comic or sketches, quizzes with prizes given away and involve audience participation.

'Teleton Jantung Hatiku 1990' is a special weeklong programme over RTM I to collect donation for the heart and kidney patient consists of programs produced by local TV station from the different regions of Malaysia. Songs, dances, comic presented by local artists received attention from audiences and was able to collect more than 4 million ringgit.

Quizes and Games

This programmes involved audience participation. Different groups studio audience were asked questions and participate in games usually related to development issues. Winner are given prizes by the sponsors. e.g. Kuiz Keluarga Bahagia Singer. Participants consisted of a group of three persons who must be related e.g. parents-child groups brothers-sisters group and other similar ambination.

This programme help to promote the closeness among family members.
Literary Programmes

This consists of poetry recitation, extemporaneous exchange of 'pantun' or 'berbalas pantun' (poetry). Sometimes competition of 'berbalas pantun' is held. Messages in the poem (pantun) relates to development issues.

Campaigns

These are more specific programs either sketches or music videos with special theme. It is usually related to the introduction of new projects or programme by the government e.g. Eat local fruits, antidrug campaign, health measures and immunization of children.

Conclusion

Popular entertainment has been used in delivering development messages to radio and TV audiences. The concern now is whether the messages have been understood by the audience and the effect of such messages on audience knowledge, attitude and behaviour as desired by the messages. More indepth researches are required to determine such effects. Another concern is on producing more creative entertainment and development programmes of radio and TV which use the soft-sell approach to impart new ideas and innovations. Collaboration of entertainers, producers and policy makers are needed toward this end.
Bibliography


