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TV ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAM: OPPORTUNITIES & LIMITATIONS

1. ORGANISATION BACKGROUND

The main objective of Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) is to help the formation of a harmonious and united Malaysians so as to move the country towards Vision 2020. Television Malaysia comprises of two channels, namely TV1 the "Prime Channel" and TV2, "the Golden Channel". The vision of the Prime Channel is to be competitive with the best in the Asia Pacific region whilst the Golden Channel is to create programs to cater for audience taste with a progressive and contemporary concept. RTM share of ownership in 1997 for terrestrial TV.

Both channels are responsible to inform, educate and entertain the audience. Let us look at the percentages of each category of program contents of TV Malaysia for the year 1997. Information and education make up 37.5 % in TV1 and 19 % in TV2 compared to 7.8 % (TV1) and 12.8 % (TV2) for entertainment (refer to the chart).

The total entertainment hour for TV1 is 543 hours whilst 705 hours on TV2 in 1997. TV1 produces 542 hours of its entertainment programs whilst TV2 produces only 431 hours. Like counterparts in South East Asia, Malaysian TV front was once dominated by foreign programming. By the year 2000, RTM must increase local program and national language by 80:20. It has taken a
good 2 decades for the situation to turn around. This is due to the success of locally produced program commissioned from Independent Production Houses. RTM being the leading government channel tends to be more prudent in its program selection. Essentially the program it broadcasts adheres closely to no sex, no violence, no counter culture, in line with the government guidelines.

2. RTM ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAM

For the purpose of this paper I would focus on the main entertainment program produced by RTM which has been our flagship program. Although local dramas uniformly attract the highest rating on terrestrial channels, light variety entertainment a close to second.

2.1 Variety Show

A popular variety musical show aired over TV1 is known as Hiburan Minggu Ini (HMI). The program is aired for more than ten years and enjoys the privilege as the longest musical show over any TV stations in Malaysia. It is a program suitable for family viewing.

HMI became a popular, highly rated one-hour variety show especially after a face-lift of its format, live telecast with audience. In order to match audience’s tastes and wants, the format is also improvised from time to time in line with the needs of the station. Foreign faces are always given the chance to appear in the effort to create the difference in the program.
2.2 Singing Competition

Being the pioneer in the industry, RTM was responsible to search for new talents and entertainers to help the local music industry. Singing competitions were launched to serve the purpose. Despite similar effort taken by private station, singing competition held by RTM is more spectacular, with new talents for the industry introduced into the market. Entertainers like the late Sudirman the winner for Best Asian Performance, Jamal Abdillah, Nora, Liza Hanim and Siti Nurhaliza, to name a few, were among popular local entertainers who reached fame, made household names, after winning the singing competition held by RTM. If enough promotions were given throughout the region, these faces would be able to create Asianess in the countries' stations.

2.3 Game and Quiz Show

This program is popular for family viewing focussing more on young audience. This type of show is gaining popularity in most of the local TV stations. Participation of home viewers with attractive prizes is the main attraction of the program. For the in-house production, normally it has more local flavour and content. Whereas programs produced by independent production houses, they are mostly adapted from the West like Lingo and Wheel of Fortune

2.4 Light Entertainment Magazine

This type of program is another way of promoting the idea of blending Asianess on the networks. Chart musical show like “MTV Syok” and “Muzik TV” are examples of the program. Songs, video clips and singers appearing on the show are attractions of the program. Exchange of the programs in each other’s network will be more appropriate in introducing each others’ talents the way they watch and listen to tunes rendered by Mariah Carey, Backstreet Boys, Celine Dion, Spice Girls and etc.
2.5 Co-Production Programs

From the concept of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in the establishment of ASEAN, RTM has come up with an idea to incorporate Asian cultures and to promote "Asianess" in the TV programs. The very fact that music is universal, has no barriers in language or political differences, culture or religious beliefs, RTM has so far started to carry live musical shows. "Rampaisari", a co-production musical show between RTM (Malaysia) and TCS (Singapore) portrayed Malaysian and Singapore faces singing or tuning musical instruments belonging to each other's country. "Senandung Serumpun" is a co-production between Malaysia and Indonesia. Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia have joined to perform the show named "Senandung Muhibbah", a yearly event and each country took turn to host the show.

We have also made an attempt to team up with Vietnam in 1996 (Musical Rendezvous) and it seemed to be very successful. As for Asia Live, RTM and NHK have cooperated in a musical show since the year 1996. The projects have gained momentum and those involved have experienced working with much more advanced broadcast technology, well-trained technical crews and creative set makers such as in Singapore or Japan.
3. STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAMME

3.1 Greater appeal to local live program (local flavour and contents), production standard is not the issue to be discussed in this context.

3.2 Established program as well as established time slot especially during the weekends;
   i) Prime time (8.30 – 9.30 pm) or evening showtime
   ii) 10.30 – 12.00 am (light entertainment).
   iii) 6.00 – 7.00 pm. (game/quiz show)

Being a terrestrial station with a wide coverage, programs aired on prime time are watched by more than 8 to 10 million audiences.

3.3 Manage to attract sponsorships and advertisers to prolong and enhance the life of the program.

3.4 Producing singing talent help to enrich the music industry and in return getting their fullest cooperation and support on our activities.

3.5 Co-production
   i) Enable exchange of ideas, creativity and technical know-how.
   ii) Establish close relationship, better understanding of partners culture and religious beliefs.

It is not monetary gains but at the end of the day, we felt the challenge for both parties to come to a common objective, that is, unity in the region.

One question stuck to my mind, only these three countries among the Asean nation, besides Japan’s TV station.
4. LIMITATIONS OF THE PROGRAMS

4.1 Budget constraints
Keeping up with high quality production is not easy. In co-production, cost burdening and cost sharing is always the issue. Though economic turmoil within the region has seen budget cut and slashing of programs, either slow down strategy or a break to the project, we are looking forward for the continuation of the project immediately after the turmoil subsides.

4.2 Censorship and guidelines set up by individual stations.
The standards are set based on social, culture and norms of each country. Normally, we look for the resolution or the best alternatives without affecting production qualities.

4.3 Always thinking about local tastes
During pre-production, the mindset of the director is local content and local tastes, hardly regional criteria. As a result, programs produced never had the chance to be enjoyed by regional audience.

4.4 Lack of regional promotions
Regional promotions by music companies based in Asian countries in order to counter western or Hong Kong artists from flooding Asian countries are lacking. By promoting their appearance in the region, we are also encouraging the audience to be more familiar with regional artists or singers and hence attract more sponsors and advertisers.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of co-production should be enlarged, not as one yearly project as it is considered hardly sufficient for meeting the needs of viewers. There must be Asian slot (airtime) in all the region’s TV station. The Slot can be filled with program like regional Musical Chart Show, light entertainment magazine depicting screen activities or performances around the region, game show or quiz. We should utilize the network for normal programming like exchanging regular musical programs promoting videos of each country.

Besides programs, we should be spear heading a move to create Asian body as a foundation in providing support, networking and educational training assistance. This would in turn become a platform on which new projects could be vetted for funding.

New entertainment programs for young viewers must be formulated, giving special thought to new wave of music, mood, talents and technology.

In the era of information technology, programs have to be tailored to the needs of latest technology for instance usage of homepage, internet and interactive audience participation.

1. CONCLUSIONS

Ideally Asianess should be the philosophy behind every entertainment programs aired on television screens in the region. We must change to adapt to something comfortable, easy and proud to see our culture, our values, our face and ourselves in this region.
AVERAGE WEEKLY TELECAST OF TV2
BY PROGRAMME CATEGORY
AVERAGE WEEKLY TELECAST OF TV1

BY PROGRAMME CATEGORY

- Info & Education 37%
- News 12%
- Children 5%
- Entertainment 8%
- Commercials 6%
- Sports 8%
- Religion 6%
- Drama 18%