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Managing Television Production and transmission schedules
[programming motivation]
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Overview

Broadcasting Phases and Structural Changes
Broadcasting in Singapore can be characterized as having evolved through four major
periods of operation since its inception in 1963.

• 1960 to 1979:
  Radio Television Singapore [RTS]
• 1980 to 1994:
  Singapore Broadcasting Corporation [SBC]
• 1994 to August 1999:
  Television Corporation of Singapore [TCS]
• August 1999 to 2000:
  Media Corporation of Singapore [MCS]

While Singapore television broadcasting remains the domain of predominantly
government-owned and controlled systems, new pressures – development of new
technology such as the Internet, increase sophistication in audience’s demands,
competition from within and without Singapore, have brought about inevitable structural
changes.

Radio Television Singapore
Radio Television Singapore [RTS]: came about in 1966.
- State-run operations: RTS also known as the Singapore Department of Broadcasting
  was under the Ministry of Culture.
- Initial Telecast hours over 2 channels: 6pm to 10pm; mainly local news broadcasts &
  foreign news reels & imported programs
- 1967: Educational service added [ETV was produced by the Singapore Educational
  Media Service]; transmission time was extended to 6 hours on week days & 11 hours on
  weekends
- 1971: Reception of satellite broadcasts [Intelsat A, Singapore’s first satellite earth
  station installed on Sentosa Island] & retransmitted through RTS
- 1976: Full colour transmission on both broadcast channels
Singapore Broadcasting Corporation
1980: RTS became Singapore Broadcasting Corporation [SBC]
- A statutory board, semi-autonomous body under the purview of the Ministry of Communication and Information
- Aims to improve quality of its services through the use of the latest broadcast technology: ENG [electronic news gathering], Voice Dubbing & Subtitling were introduced
- 1983: Birth of SBC Text [changed to InTV in 1992]
- 1984: Third channel [Channel 12]; commercial breaks in News
- 1986: A business arm, SBC Enterprises was formed
- 1988 & 1990: Two TVRO satellite dishes at broadcast compound increased reception of international news agencies
- 1990: Stereo Television [NICAM] was introduced; Caldecott Productions was set up to produce commercials
- 1992: transmission increased to 200 hours a week [local programs formed 36% of broadcast], up from 115 in 1981 [local programs formed 2% of broadcast]

Television Corporation of Singapore
October 1st, 1994: SBC became TCS, a series of companies under one govt. owned holding company, Temasek Holding Company; first step to complete privatization although still under the purview of Ministry of Information & the Arts
- SBA [Singapore Broadcasting Authority]: promote & regulate the broadcasting industry & take over licensing functions
- SIM [Singapore International Media]: the parent organization for TCS, TV12, RCS, SIM communications & other subsidiaries
- 1995: 24 hours transmission; emphasis on local programming
- TCS Channel 5: exclusively for English entertainment programs; prime time has 50% local programs [mainly sitcoms & dramas]
- TCS Channel 8: exclusively for Chinese entertainment programs; prime time has 100% local programs [dramas & sitcoms]
- TV 12 has 2 channels: Premier 12 for English arts, culture & sports programs; Prime 12 for Malay & Tamil programs

Media Corporation of Singapore
In August 1999, TCS became Media Corporation of Singapore, a entity of 8 companies each responsible for its own finances and manpower needs; MCS is structured to run like a private organization, with plans for IPO, although it is still within the govt.owned holding company, Temasek Holdings; MCS is the parent company which replaces SIM and under its umbrella are:
- Media Corp Studios: Production 5 & Production 8 entertainment programs: Caldecott Productions
- TCS: Programming, Sales & Promotion, SportsCity, TV Mobile
- Media Corp News: Channel News Asia [English], Chinese, Malay & Tamil News and Current Affairs programs
• Central Set & Staging Unit

TCS:
• Separate facilities [studios, editing, post-production, ENG crews] for News, Current Affairs, Drama, Sitcoms, & Vision Productions [variety]

MCS:
• Centralised bookings for Entertainment Productions, Drama & Sitcom
• Centralised bookings for Channel News Asia & other language News & Current Affairs programs
• Outsource post-production facilities, set design, props, staging, wardrobe & make-up
Visions Productions is now an events company

Production Format, Origin of Content and Process of Approval

SBC:
• Trend towards “live” format – from Chinese & English variety shows to news & current affairs programs
• Pre-recorded programs: Chinese dramas, children’s programs, English magazines
• Program ideas from individual producers; fate of series is decided by controllers & Executive Producers of individual units
• Unrealistic Budgeting
• Review Committee approval headed by the General manager, DPTV, respective Controllers & Finance Director

TCS & MCS:
• “Live” programs limited to big, sponsored specials; trend towards pre-recorded programs with emphasis on local sitcoms and dramas
• Programming Unit decides on types of programs to be produced based on lifestyle research
• TV Ratings dictates the fate of the series
• Very cost conscious; need for detailed budgeting
• Programming Unit treats Production Unit as clients
• Common to outsource programs

Motivation for TV Programming

SBC period was an experimentation era:
- Acquisition of new technology & Production of varied program ideas; motivation for TV Programming was self centered
- A lot of creativity but also a lot of “wastage” as there was little concern for economic viability in program making
Increase in viewers’ demands for more sophistication in production standards, competition from neighboring private broadcasters & the government’s push to privatize corporate organizations for greater efficiency to meet the challenges of globalization, resulted in the creation of TCS
- With the introduction of TV ratings, TCS was a more cost conscious era, with the view to make & buy programs to suit audience’s tastes & gain the advertiser’s dollar; although it was hard pressed to shake the excesses created by the SBC days
- TCS days were also days of co-productions with other broadcasters with the increased awareness of a globalized marketplace

Motivation for TV Programming
Media Corporation came about as a result of media liberalization by the government
The era of monopoly, of having only one national broadcaster is over, Media Corporation faces direct competition from Media Works, a private broadcaster set up by Singapore Press Holdings
Economic motivation in programming, to compete for the limited advertisers’ dollar is never more obvious
The challenge is also to produce quality programs that are palatable for an overseas market hungry for content to fill its airwaves and networks
The buzz words today at Media Corp Studios, are “profit margins” and “the multi-skilled worker”, as “fat” is trimmed & hiring free lancers is the norm

Motivation for TV Programming
However, there is no denying there is still political control in these days of economic commercialization of television programming in Singapore; government-owned Temasek Holdings is the holding company for both Media Corporation & Media Works
SBA stipulates that no more than 12 minutes of each hour of TV air-time can be given to advertisements; there is also a mechanism for public feedback to SBA: Program Advisory Committees which advise on program standards & content
Local television broadcast news content is monitored by government officials; TV news remain the government “strategic partner”; newsreaders rather than broadcast journalists are the mainstay of local TV news
Journalistic self-censorship creates a credibility problem as a result of direct & largely unchallenged dissemination of government pronouncements, although Channel News Asia is working hard to change its image with programs like “Talking Point & “Front Line”

Motivation for TV Programming
While there is no direct censorship of TV programming in Singapore, a set of vague “out of bounds” markers have been established that promotes a high degree of self-censorship that keeps program acquisition & production within “safe areas”.

TV in Singapore is mandated to respect the cultural differences amongst the four ethnic/racial groups, namely Chinese, Malay, Indian & Eurasian; great care must be taken not to upset the official promotion of racial harmony in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society.

TV programming will also always include non-profit making programs; these are the PSB or Public Service Broadcasts which are funded by SBA from its collection of broadcast license fees; PSB include imported documentaries, local children’s programs and Channel News Asia productions.

**Conclusion**

Managing television production in Singapore today, demands a knack for efficiency, an appreciation of TV’s audience’s likes and dislikes and a shrewd sense for profit making. TV Programming on the other hand, demands a fine balance between satisfying economic commercialization and imperatives of political control.