Highlights of the discussion

Using Entertainment Education for Projects
12 October 2016

This brown bag is part of a knowledge-sharing series that the DER Project Communication group regularly conducts for operations staff. Project leaders share practical strategies on how communication strategies can be effectively designed and used to engage stakeholders, change behavior, and mitigate risks - for better project results.

Speakers:
- Fernando Austria, Professor, College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines, former advertising professional
- Donald Sinclair, Associate Project Officer, SLRM

Entertainment education as a development communication approach
- Entertainment education (also called "edutainment" or "enter-educate") is the use of entertainment genres to communicate development messages
  - Some development organizations have used narratives or story formats to help guide audiences through a change process though association or disassociation with characters

- o Entertainment genres can include radio and television dramas, street and stage plays, music videos, transmedia narratives, video games, comics, romance novels, folk media, etc. (*see attached presentation for actual examples*).

- Communicators use edutainment to maximize the element of spectacle to attract audiences and sustain their attention.
- Edutainment is rooted in the concept of pleasure as a social and cultural phenomenon. Psychology theories note that when audiences receive pleasure, parts of the brain open up giving way to receptivity and acceptance of new ideas and new ways of being.
- Narratives in edutainment hook audiences to emotionally invest in the stories. In so doing, they identify and build attachments with the characters and the circumstances they find themselves in, and become concerned about their fates. Emotion influences behavior more than purely cognitive information.
- Edutainment planners emphasize the creation of characters who model certain behaviors, the consequences and benefits of which are also shown so that audiences can use the lessons for their own and their community's welfare.
- Communication materials produced by development organizations tend to present macro issues (i.e., alleviating poverty, mitigating climate change impacts, promoting gender equality, etc.). Edutainment approaches are effective because social messages are set in more practical, day-to-day situations from which audiences can find meaning for everyday life.

Classic examples: What makes edutainment work?

1. *The Mexican experience: Acompañame*

    - o *Acompañame* ("Accompany Me") was the first *telenovela* (television novel) focusing on the personal benefits of family planning
        - Shown primetime on weekdays for nine months
        - Used melodrama and designed like a novel, which ends after a few hundred episodes
        - Success spawned four (4) more family-planning-oriented soaps: *Vamos Juntos* ("We Go Together"), *Caminemos* ("Let's Walk"), *Nosotros las Mujeres* ("We, the Women") and *Por Amor* ("For Love")
        - All the *telenovela* were produced by Miguel Sabido, then Vice President of *Televisa*, a big commercial Mexican network. The "Sabido Methodology" which draws from theories of communication and behavior change was named after him. Sabido understood that mass media entertainment channels will provide the appeal but audiences also had to be led to conduct discussions about important (often sensitive and even taboo) social issues with their peers to indicate social acceptance and start the behavior change process.
        - The methodology requires the use of the following elements:
            - Long-running serial -- allows characters to evolve in their thinking and behavior, and lets audiences to build loyalty and form bonds with the characters
            - Melodrama – uses full range of human emotions in an entertainment format
            - Real people, real lives

- The plot revolved around three happy-go-lucky sisters, Amanda, Raquel and Esperanza and how their lives changed since marrying and forming their own families. Amanda is a middle-income professional who has three children, all planned, whose family life is shattered when she learns her husband has terminal cancer. Raquel is a spoiled rich woman who only has one son because she fears that more children will destroy her body. Her only child grows up unloved and neglected. Esperanza did not believe in contraceptives and had a large family whom she and her husband couldn't support. They end up living in a rundown shack with the kids turning into criminals.

- After the series run of *Acompañame,* the Mexican government's National Population Council (CONAPO) reported that:
  - Phone calls to the CONAPO requesting for family planning information increased from zero to an average of 500 a month. The callers mentioned that they were encouraged to do so by the *telenovela*.
  - More than 2,000 women registered as volunteers in the national family planning program – a behavior suggested in the *telenovela*.
  - Contraceptive sales increased by 23 percent in one year, compared to a seven percent increase in the preceding year.
  - More than 560,000 women enrolled in family planning clinics (33 percent increase)

2. *Hum Log*

- Inspired by the success of the Mexican *telenovela, Hum Log* ("People Like Us" / "We, the People") was produced as the first "social soap opera" in India promoting equal status for women, family harmony and smaller family size norms
  - The series ran for 17 months and reached an average audience of 50 million people
  - At the end of every episode, an actor discussed the story content and the lives of viewers using Hindi couplets and limericks

- The plot of Hum Log revolved around the story of Basesar Ram and his lower middle class traditional family. Basesar, an alcoholic, constantly cursed his wife for having three daughters and only two sons. The female characters, Bhagwanti, the mother and her daughters, Badki, Manjhli and Chutki, were in a constant struggle with their status and identity. Badki, a social worker, tried to break free from the dowry system after suitors rejected her for the family's inability to pay dowry. Manjhli wanted to be an actress and ran away to fulfill her dream but comes back after being exploited. Chukti, the youngest, aspired to be a doctor and represented hope.

- *Hum Log*, while popular, only had moderate success. A post-series survey showed:
  - Strong identification of the viewers with the characters and the social issues they faced but 53 percent believed in copying the positive role models while 23% still believed in modeling after the negative characters. While 70% believed that women should have equal

opportunities and 71% said that family size should be limited – only 7% showed actual behavioral change as a result of the show.

- o Learnings from *Hum Log* revealed that:
    - It did not undergo formative research to determine the audience's behavioral barriers and current behavior, interests and motivations, and preferences
    - As a result, the program was seen as a "hard sell" focusing more on emphasizing the social messages without fully using the elements of entertainment, melodrama and emotion, and presented unrealistic situations
    - Messaging lacked focus and presented ambiguous messages particularly on women's empowerment

There was no coordination among institutions (i.e., family planning clinics and public health agencies, women's crisis groups, etc.) to support the behavioral changes. The women, for instance, did not know where to get contraceptive supplies or where to reach support groups

3. *SRI LANKA: Greater Colombo Wastewater Management Project*

- o The Project Management Unit (PMU) used the Forum Theatre concept to conduct 30 street dramas in Colombo. Forum Theatre was creative by Augusto Boal as part of his "Theatre of the Oppressed" where theatre is used as a teaching platform for people to change their world.
    - US$8,000 used for drama production (30 dramas) including exhibits
    - PMU may distribute light snacks to attract more people

- o Street dramas were used because of its potential to mirror people's daily lives particularly in their hygiene practices, use of water, and managing sewer assets – behaviors which the project wanted to influence.
    - Effective to increase awareness in the short term but behavior changes may take longer

- o Only a very basic script was used which was modified depending on who the audiences were. Dialogues and two-way interactions with audiences were incorporated in the script structure to find solutions for common problems.
    - Audiences included people in under-served settlements, government staff (i.e., midwives, public health inspectors, police), school kids.
    - Different waste and water-related issues were discussed for each audience depending on their interests and behavior

Lessons on using entertainment education approaches
- Not all projects can use edutainment. The key is finding a fit in terms of communication objective and audience
- Formative, audience and behavioral research are critical to determine whether edutainment is the appropriate vehicle for social messages. Research results should identify current behaviors and behavioral barriers that the plot and messaging can focus

4

on, and determine whether specific audiences prefer entertainment approaches more than direct information dissemination.

- Implicit messaging is more likely to impact audiences than hard-sells. Audiences are more likely to trust edutainment sources that are "anonymous" rather than directly connected to government or advocacy groups.
- Edutainment approaches that encourage interaction and participatory discussions work better than communication styles that talk down, lecture or sermonize
- In the short term, edutainment can increase awareness and shift mindsets but reinforcing systems (i.e., services, support systems, etc.) and supplies (i.e., hardware, books, contraceptives, clean and potable water, seeds, etc.) have to be present to promote actual behavior changes on the long term