

## Entertainment education

Can exposure to media provide a source of sustained change and a means of promoting development? The evidence to date is limited but encouraging. The use of mass media for entertainment education creates an opportunity to affect not only the mental models of individual viewers but also the mental models accepted by the wider society that create the context for collective action. The links below provide examples of how entertainment education works:

- *Scandal!*, a South African soap opera with financial messages, including ones related to gambling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys5eSxTetF4&noredirect=1>
- *16 and Pregnant*, a U.S. reality TV show on teen pregnancy: [http://www.mtv.com/shows/16\\_and\\_pregnant/](http://www.mtv.com/shows/16_and_pregnant/)
- *Shuga*, an African drama on HIV/AIDS and gender violence: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pI8\\_P\\_h89R8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pI8_P_h89R8)

### The theory behind entertainment education

The term *entertainment education* (EE) refers to entertainment media that incorporate an educational message or information of value to the audience to increase audience members' knowledge about an issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior (Singhal and Rogers 2002; Moyer-Gusé 2008). The theoretical underpinnings for entertainment education are usually traced to the psychologist Albert Bandura, a pioneer in social cognitive theory (Bandura 1977, 1986). Bandura showed that children who viewed violent images on television demonstrated more aggressive behavior than those who viewed neutral content (Bandura, Ross, and Ross 1963). Observing the performance of others, people acquire not only patterns of behavior but also a cognitive framework about what the behaviors mean, according to Bandura's research.

Most of the research on entertainment education has focused on narratives such as dramas and soap operas. A narrative or story format can help motivate change in the audience by showing positive role models who experience "rewards" and negative role models who are "punished" (Slater and Rouner 2002; Bandura 2004). A third type of role model—the transitional character—who gradually moves from negative to positive behaviors during the story—may also be important (Sabido 2002).<sup>1</sup> Narratives using these constructs from EE can help guide audience members through a change process, including developing confidence in their own abilities (self-efficacy) through association with desirable characters, and can facilitate behavior change.

Entertainment education may be especially effective when people are swept up in a narrative, or experience

the story as though they were one of the characters. There is evidence that when individuals are absorbed in a narrative, they become less critical and defensive and are more open to persuasion (Green and Brock 2000; Slater and Rouner 2002). Identification with a specific character works in a similar way; it involves a temporary loss of self and adoption of the character's perspective. Because identification is not compatible with counter-arguing, persuasive messages are more easily accepted (Cohen 2001; Moyer-Gusé 2008). Evidence also suggests that people find entertainment more enjoyable when they can be transported beyond themselves and identify with the situation of the character (de Wied, Zillmann, and Ordman 1994; Hall and Bracken 2011).

A media program's ability to persuade may also be affected by the social context in which it is consumed. Aspirational videos shown in rural Ethiopia were more effective when more people in the community were exposed to the content (Bernard and others 2014). In the United States, teens who watched, with a parent or other trusted adult, a comedy that included information on contraception reported greater gains in knowledge (Collins and others 2003) because the program stimulated a discussion, which provided further information.

### Evidence of impact

While there are many studies of entertainment education, only a relatively small number employ rigorous quantitative methods, such as randomized controlled trials (RCTs).<sup>2</sup> Among recent studies using RCTs, positive impacts were found from an in-script partnership with a South African soap opera relating to financial attitudes and behaviors, from videos shown in Ethiopia to induce future-oriented investments such as education for children, and from a radio drama in Rwanda that improved perceptions of social norms such as cooperation and willingness to engage in dialogue, even on sensitive topics. Other RCTs, however, have not provided significant evidence of impact, including a film shown in Nigeria and a comic book in Kenya, both featuring financial messages.

Some of the most compelling evidence for EE comes from studies that use quasi-experimental methods to evaluate the impact of entertainment education across a society. For example, in Brazil, access to the TV Globo network—which was dominated by soap operas with independent female characters with few, or even no children—has been linked to the country's rapid drop in fertility. Viewing the soap operas had an effect equal to 1.6 years of additional education (La Ferrara, Chong, and Duryea 2012). In India, access to cable television reduced fertility and son preference and increased women's autonomy (Jensen and Oster 2009). A radio program in Tanzania was linked to a significant increase in condom

use and a reduction in the number of sexual partners (Vaughan and others 2000). And in the United States, a reality TV show was linked to a significant drop in teen pregnancy (Kearney and Levine 2014).

### Business models for entertainment education

In Latin America, private television channels have been producing a number of commercially successful *telenovelas* with social content since the 1970s. In most other developing country markets, the main approach to entertainment education has been through the public sector or donor-funded productions. Many successful examples of entertainment education have been produced in this way: *Hum Log*, *Kalyani*, and *Taru* in India; *Meena* in South Asia; and *Twende na Wakati* in Tanzania, to name a few.

However, with many markets now saturated with media, it is more challenging to break through and create impact with a single show. New approaches to entertainment education focus on partnerships between the public and private sectors and civil society to increase audience size, overcome the high cost of media production, and strengthen social impact (Miller 2011). In some cases, this is happening at the firm level in media companies committed to social action, such as Well Told Story in Kenya and Participant Media in the United States. Organizations that seek to increase the systematic use of EE in the commercial entertainment industry have also been formed in the United States, Europe, and recently in India. These nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) seek to bridge the gap that typically exists between content experts in academia or government and media producers (Bouman 1999) through a variety of methods, from intensive collaboration on scripts to soft-touch approaches such as after-hours “salons.”

### Notes

1. Miguel Sabido is a Mexican playwright and television producer who was the first to take Bandura's social learning theory and apply it to mass entertainment media in the 1970s and 1980s in Mexico. The resulting *telenovelas* (*Ven Conmigo*, *Acompañame*, and others) were both extremely popular and credited with having an impact on key social issues such as adult literacy and family planning (Nariman and Rogers 1993).
2. A *World Development Report 2015* background paper, “The Impact of Entertainment Education,” provides more detailed analysis of the entertainment education literature, including evidence of results.

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