

# Edutainment

Leveraging popular entertainment for a cause

## Introduction and definition

Perhaps it was Meena and Raju promoting the rights of girls through animation in South Asia, or maybe Sara and her pet monkey Zingo inspiring young girls in east and central Africa to stay safe and free of HIV and AIDS.

Maybe you've grown up loving Big Bird, singing along with Elmo and laughing at Oscar the Grouch. Whatever the memory, chances are good you grew up with and continue to be influenced by entertainment-education.

Entertainment for positive change harnesses the power of communication channels as a catalyst and an effective strategy to convey messages, create social cohesion

and promote social change. Research shows that children who watch Sesame Street, for example, improve their school performance. An independent, mid-term evaluation of the Sara project (which included animated videos, comic books and a radio series) provided evidence that girls were positively influenced by Sara to delay sex and avoid situations of sexual abuse and exploitation.

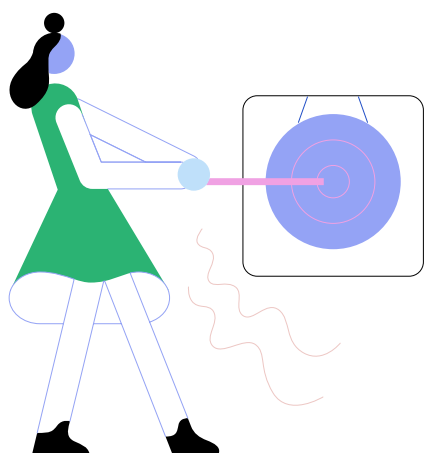
Initially dubbed 'education with a proven social benefit' by Mexican TV producer Miguel Sabido in the 1960s, edutainment, or entertainment-education as it is often called, "is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favourable

attitudes, and change overt behaviour" (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Whether through music, heroic mythology, folktales or family history, human beings have always used the power of storytelling to help people learn and pass on life-saving knowledge, and to make these lessons relatable and memorable.

Entertainment-education is underpinned by the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971), which posits that people learn not only from their own behaviour, but through the observation and modelling of the behaviour of others. The observation of and empathy with characters in entertainment-education programmes is a key trigger that stimulates deliberation and behaviour change among audiences. Entertainment-education can also make the behaviours seem achievable, stimulating feelings of self-efficacy by observing others overcome obstacles to perform the desired actions.

Often, the goal of these programmes is to allow people to learn from the mistakes and the success stories of characters with whom they have established an emotional link, rather than having to learn from their own experience. Popular culture can also be harnessed for social change, combining entertainment, journalism and talk shows with social media, social mobilization and policy advocacy. As part of an ecosystem, entertainment-education can be a powerful vehicle not only for individual change but to build social movements for large-scale change.

→ *Regardless of the scale of ambition, effective entertainment-education programmes are designed and developed from a rigorous evidence base. This could include desk and literature reviews, interviews with target audiences, focus groups, and regular engagement with audiences to measure message retention, behavioural impact and overall effectiveness of the effort. In practice, entertainment-education is most concerned with how resonant, relevant and motivating the work is to the audience. In other words, we are measuring not the entertainment value but whether the entertainment and the research-informed creative decisions are appropriate to our overall development goals.*



Today, media channels are ubiquitous and more available than ever. People consume and produce their own content far beyond television, radio and other tightly controlled channels. Social media, closed chat groups, podcasts and increasingly democratized and accessible means of entertainment production are the new norm. Entertainment-education is evolving alongside this, ensuring that multi-platform, multi-channel, user-generated content is considered in any strategy.

## Benefits and social/behavioural objectives

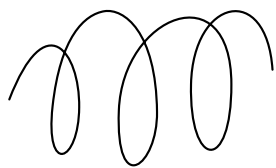
Entertainment-education has been used to achieve both social and behavioural outcomes, including:

- Encouraging national and local dialogue and community action for human rights (e.g., the Bell Bajao campaign encouraged local residents to ring the doorbell to interrupt domestic violence when they heard it. In one year, 160,000 men pledged to take action to end violence against women.)
- Direct changes in knowledge and cognitive development for children (e.g., improved literacy skills for children who watch Sesame Street)
- Changes in attitudes and norms related to harmful behaviours (e.g., changing perceptions around risky sex)
- Supporting social cohesion and community dialogue (e.g., La Pe' Ye Ta Kwe Ye Diari uses radio drama to increase tolerance between ethnic and religious communities in Myanmar.)
- Changes in social norms – both descriptive and injunctive – among the group exposed to the programme
- Behavioural changes which lead to long-term development and health outcomes (e.g., improved partner communication leading to reductions in intimate partner violence)

## Case studies/examples

### TV

- **INDIA** A TV drama tackles sanitation behaviours
- **NIGERIA** An MTV programme combats HIV-related risk behaviours
- **GLOBAL** Sesame Street improved children's learning around the world



- **INDIA** A long-running e-e TV show Kyunki was produced by UNICEF India between 2008 and 2011, covering different 'Facts for Life' areas
- **BANGLADESH** The Simsipur comedy series has increased literacy scores among those who watch by 67%

## Radio

- **RWANDA** This interactive game is used to teach conflict resolution skills in youth
- **MALAWI** An interactive radio show opens communication about sexual health and prevents HIV/AIDS
- **MOZAMBIQUE** A long running e-e radio drama has been sparking change across different programme areas since 2015
- **BOTSWANA** A UNICEF Botswana adaptation of MTV Shuga addressed HIV- and SRH-related behaviours
- **PERU** The La Sangre Llama (Blood Relations) radio soap opera mobilizes communities to fight anaemia

## Multichannel efforts

- **SOUTH AFRICA** A multimedia campaign encourages HIV prevention
- **SOUTH ASIA** The Meena Communication Initiative addresses common perceptions and behaviours that inhibit the ability of young girls to survive and thrive
- **SENEGAL** A serial story about birth spacing encourages uptake of postpartum family planning counselling

## Implementation steps and checklist

### How do you implement an entertainment-education initiative?

#### Research and planning

1. **Define your intended audience and the social and behavioural change** you are seeking. Messages and stories should be well targeted, relevant and inspirational to meet your specific audience's needs, desires and fears.
2. Conduct formative research to **understand baseline descriptive and injunctive norms** and relevant reference groups within a given community. Consider possible communication barriers and potential counter-arguments against key messages.
  - a. Suggested research methods: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, literature review



#### Things to keep in mind

- **Content should be based on thorough research** and understanding of the local context and relevant challenges.
- **Content should be the right mix of educational and entertaining, but always led by evidence.** TV and radio shows or mobile messaging should contain realistic and interesting plotlines. Stories with multiple episodes should end on cliffhangers to keep audiences coming back. Using humour and comedy can help to engage audiences and ensure information is remembered.

3. **Select the channel(s) that will most effectively reach your intended audience.** Remember to collect quantitative and qualitative information on which channels your audiences regularly engage with. For example, a social media intervention will be ineffective among populations with low mobile phone penetration. A radio show intended for young men

will be ineffective if radio use is concentrated among older people and women.

- a. Where possible, move beyond single-channel messaging. Consider both online (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) and offline (e.g., facilitated conversations) engagement strategies.



### Things to keep in mind

- **Consider gamification** (creating games or quizzes) to both engage audiences and help them to retain information.
- **Use a gender-transformative approach where possible.** Content should not propagate harmful gender norms or stereotypes.
- **Consider using different channels** to engage different audiences and ensure maximum impact and social change. Engage the community through local discussion groups, using plotlines to facilitate discussion and debate.
- **Pre-test content** before disseminating it to wider audiences.
- **Do not overwhelm the audience with too many key messages:** aim for 5-6 in total.
- **Consider partnering with pre-existing characters or local series** to tap into their influence and network.
- **Harmonize messages across channels** so as not to create confusion or contradiction, which damage message credibility and coherence.

## Development

1. **Formulate key messages.** What do you want your audience to learn from this initiative? What do you want them to *know, feel and do*? Pre-test different ways of framing key messages to see what resonates most with your intended audience.
  - a. Suggested activities: message design workshop, creating a message brief
2. **Generate a culturally relevant narrative** in which realistic characters encounter common challenges or situations regularly faced by your intended audience. It can be helpful to showcase positive deviants and role models who give advice to friends

or family members and help them to navigate difficult decisions.

- a. Suggested activities: co-creation workshop, creating a series outline with key messages included
3. **Pre-test content, storylines and character appeal** to ensure that characters and situations resonate with your intended audience.

## Production, implementation and promotion

1. **Partner with established production houses with a proven track record in producing high-quality media content.** UNICEF is rarely going to lead production or creative execution. Support them with technical guidance, but creative execution is best done with experts in storytelling, audio and video production and distribution. Your priority audience, influencers and community members can be invaluable advisors.
2. **Consider distribution early.** Where will your entertainment-education product be broadcast, shown and/or heard? Here again, working with professionals on segmenting your audience and targeting the channels and timings most effective for your target group is essential.
3. **Market and publicize content** early on to generate interest and increase viewership. Consider holding an official launch event to cement partnerships and generate media coverage. Again, local influencers and stakeholders can provide invaluable support for publicity and marketing efforts.

## Evaluation

1. **Monitor day-to-day implementation of activities** to compare actual implementation of activities with planned implementation.
2. **Test the reach, engagement and impact** of your intervention (see below).

## Measurement

Many edutainment-education initiatives have been rigorously evaluated to demonstrate evidence of impact. Evaluation of education-entertainment initiatives may focus on both *the effectiveness of specific delivery*

*channels in delivering intended messages and the impact of communications on downstream social change.* Illustrative indicators include:

Indicator	Description	Measurement techniques
<b>Delivery mechanisms</b>		
<b>Reach and recall</b>	How many people in your intended audience are receiving your content through each channel?	Quantitative surveys; DHS data (to measure potential reach); audience ratings (ARs); omnibus surveys with modules to track reach and recall
<b>Engagement</b>	To what extent is your intended audience meaningfully engaging with your content?	Collection of metadata including listen rates and watch rates, and clicks, likes, comments and shares (for social media)
<b>Impact</b>	<p>What social and behavioural changes exist among those who engage with edutainment-entertainment content, compared to those who do not (e.g., changes in 'know, feel, do')? Consider measuring changes (from baseline to endline) in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individual beliefs</li> <li>▪ Normative expectations</li> <li>▪ Perceived sanctions</li> <li>▪ Readiness to act on beliefs</li> <li>▪ Self-reported behaviours</li> </ul>	Randomized controlled trials; service data; structured questionnaires; qualitative interviews; focus group discussions; vignettes

## Partnerships

If you are thinking about implementing an entertainment-education approach, it is important to engage with the following partners and local stakeholders.

- **Production agencies:** As you are unlikely to have the capacity to produce high-quality media content in house, consider who will produce the material. Ensure that your budget supports hiring local actors/voice actors, illustrators, videographers and other artists who might be needed. Establishing the right partnerships with established production and creative agencies is critical to developing high-quality content.
- **Edutainment-focused organizations:** There are numerous NGOs and agencies with vast experience in producing education-entertainment.
- **Media gatekeepers:** Depending on the media channel you select, you will need to establish partnerships with local television stations, national or community radio stations, musical groups, etc. Finding the right media partner is essential to reaching your target audience. Working with companies experienced in media buying, audience research, and segmentation and placement can be a valuable support where budget allows.
- **Local community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and government partners:** These organizations will be able to facilitate formative research, review content to ensure it is culturally relevant, and disseminate media to local audiences.

## Key resources

### Moving from theory to application

- [Bridging Theory and Practice in Entertainment Education: An Assessment of the Conceptualization and Design of Tsha Tsha in South Africa](#)
- [Entertainment-Education Behind the Scenes: Case Studies for Theory and Practice](#)

### How-to guides

- [Soul City's Guide to Edutainment: Using Stories and Media for Social Action and Behaviour Change](#)

### Measurement

- [Strengthening the Evidence to Scale up Entertainment Media in Development](#)

### Reference organizations

- [Population Media Center](#)
- [BBC Media Action](#)
- [Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs](#)
- [Soul City](#)
- [Development Media International](#)
- [PCI Media Impact](#)
- [Sesame Workshop](#)

