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BLACK GOLD OR WHITE ELEPHANT? : A Marketing Conference on TV2/3

In this conference report John van Zyl critically reviews a marketing congress where the merits of TV2 and TV 3 for advertising in the so-called black market were aired. This resume is taken from Van Zyl's summing up at the Congress.

Rather than recapitulating the arguments presented, this report will commence with a personal impression of some of the major issues that were not raised.

We are faced with a very complicated social, political and economic situation in South Africa, although by no means a unique one. The situation in Nigeria or India, eg., parallels the local one of many languages competing for media time, of a disparity between urban and rural literacy, and of friction between government controlled and private-enterprise activity in media dissemination.

In 1980 the World Communications: Decisions for the Eightees Conference, held in Philadelphia, raised several issues which might have provided the congress with some sort of background for seeing why we are so frustrated at not being able to name our media problems, never mind find solutions for them.

One of the main issues at the world conference was the clash between the First World and Third World attitudes to mass media. At the local congress these conflicts were not even mentioned, hidden behind an agenda where marketers assume that South Africa operates within a First World context: an industrialised, capitalist, largely urban society with a high degree of technological sophistication. Their model is obviously the United States.

Within this society the "Free Flow of Information" was of the greatest significance, and its aim was the transfer of technology from those countries that had the means to those countries that needed it. Information was seen as the universal panacea and much of the complexity of problems of innovation, diffusion of information, and the attendant "Revolution of Rising Expectations" was glossed over.

The Third World, characterised by its low per capita income, its rural base, its poorly developed communications systems, and its dependency on the First World for consumer goods and high technology, adopted a different stance. It formulated the New International Information Order which calls for less vertical and more horizontal world communications. The First World monopoly over news gathering and news distribution must be countered. Third World communities must be allowed to develop efficient communications performance at their own level of competency, relative to and related to the needs of individual communities.

The main problems are those from the interface between traditional modes of communication and technology, and the conflicts between assimilated urban values and the needs of rural, illiterate and otherwise undeveloped communities and cultures and whether traditional legal, medical and religious systems could be maintained through technology as part of being developed. The fact that the broadcast media were generally used to fuse tribal loyalties into national loyalties, that even in developing countries the point of information generation and dissemination was usually metropolitan rather than regional, and that entertainment was a criminal waste of resources in a developing situation, are all items of greatest relevance to TV2 and TV 3.

Of even greater relevance is the argument that in a situation such as ours not more technology is needed, but a more rationalised use of existing communication channels. The problem does not lie in the supply of information but in the distribution of information. This was unevenly distributed within society and "gaps of knowledge" were consistently being created. This is particularly true in South Africa, with its lack of electrification in rural areas.
We should ask ourselves in South Africa whether the accessibility of information provided by TV2 and TV3 is not too restricted, considering the number of receivers in rural areas. Also whether the information is going to be relevant, not only to the needs but simply to the wants of the community. What will the role of the government be in controlling, censoring or gate-keeping the information that will be broadcast? And finally, how integrated will be the television service with other government departments concerned with health, agriculture and education? If we look at TV2 and TV3 it appears that it is doing what America did to Latin America in the 1960s. It is trying to move a great number of consumer goods from one part of the developed community to another part of the underdeveloped community, with education and development playing little part in the process.

Perhaps we keep looking for our models of media communications to the U.K. and the U.S.A. where most of us have been trained, rather than to countries like Brazil, India and Nigeria, where conditions might be closer to our own. They have all debated the problems of "Media American" imperialism and can provide some clues as to the merit of broadcasting 20 year old programmes like High Chaparral simply because they are so cheap. I am suggesting that it is a mistake to assume that First World media models are going to work, or keep working, in the South African context, that vertical rather than horizontal channels of information are efficient; that the "revolution of rising expectations" can be avoided, and that the introduction of TV2 and TV3 is not intimately bound into the political ideology of the State-controlled SABC.

In his opening address, Percy Qoboza (formerly editor of World and Post - both now banned) argued that the new channels will probably follow the pattern of TV1. The selective morality and not so subtle propaganda will continue to take the place of education, training and the investigation of vital issues. TV should provide 3 basic functions - news, entertainment, and a sense of social responsibility, but it was doubtful whether this would happen. The Black press would always be able to compete with TV in being investigative and maintaining an aura of credibility. In fact, stated Qoboza, if TV did not gain credibility it would fail as a shop-window as well. He ended by emphasising that blacks should be imaged in commercials as they really are, not as convention and prejudice imagine them to be. Manufacturers and advertisers are inclined to picture Blacks only in inferior positions - a counterproductive attitude. Also, what would be the effect of juxtaposing commercials with the appearance of homeland leaders or someone associated with government policy.

Mohale Hohanyele, managing director of MM Personnel, looked at the marketing forces that will influence black consumers into accepting or rejecting TV2/3. He used the example of Radio Bantu which, initially, turned off many listeners since the white programme organizers were using it to construct new phrases and to generally impose their ideology upon the entertainment. He went on to list some of the factors that would influence TV2/3 as a viable marketing tool. The most important of these were the use and placement of blacks in more significant decision-making roles within the economy and the media especially. This would help in the selection of suitable programmes and in the formulation of language policies. Hohanyele touched on the important point of mistakenly associating geographical areas with cultural communities, and pointed out the problems of trying to reconcile rural and urban tastes when such a wide disparity existed. In conclusion, he hoped that the staff appointed to the SABC would be allowed independence in creative and administrative roles, and would not simply be regarded as Uncle Toms.

Joe Latakgomo, editor of the Sowetan, raised the point of the credibility of a black service run by the SABC, and thus reminded us of the total communication framework of any medium. The black viewer will still be a black reader, especially if he realises that the news he gets from television is slanted or biased. The lack of credibility of the news could rub off onto commercials. Newspapers
would probably lose some advertising revenue but it was highly problematic
whether they would lose readers. He expressed doubt about the SABC's estimate
of a 4 million viewship in January 1982, since AMPS 1980 only estimates a
total of 89 000 sets owned. He also questioned the equation of number of radio
listeners with number of potential television viewers. Latakgomo argued that
blacks will buy sets, not because of the language, but because of the sports
value etc. The electrification of Soweto will be an incentive for the purchase
of TV sets as well as extending the reading hours available to residents.

Theo Kritzinger, manager of TV2/3 advertising, provided basic technical infor-
mation on the two channels. He estimated a potential audience of 2.2 million
at switenon on 1 January and 2.7 by July coinciding with the installation of 6
new transmitters. TV2/3 will carry 8; commercial (in contrast to 6.755; for TV1).
Commercials will also be broadcast on Sundays during the mid-day 3 hour slot.
The electrification of Soweto would create marketing opportunities for appliances,
which would include TV sets, to take advantage of the increased spending power
of the black consumer. However, he said that the black consumer was subject to
complex pressures like tradition and Kritzinger emphasised strongly that black
and white consumers should not be treated equally. He mentioned that black and
white models could be used in the same commercial, although there was evidence
that black viewers did not favour this. He gave a list of do's and don'ts
which included the following: adjectives tend to confuse the average black; con-
cepts like hunger, strength and humour must be used within the black's own frame
of reference; material possessions as a reflection of social esteem are important,
however show blacks driving large rather than small cars; however, bear in mind
that the black consumer have become completely Westernised. The SABC had appointed
an Advisory Unit to assist advertisers with copy, translation and pronunciation
problems. Finally, certain techniques like time-lapse photography should be
avoided until tested.

Eric Hafuna of J Walter Thompson, complained that initial TVI commercials tended
to be radio-with-pictures and that visual messages were simplistic. The same
mistakes might be made with TV2/3 since advertisers might forget that TV1 was
white in name only. It would be foolist to under-estimate the black consumer's
level of visual literacy. Even if unsophisticated (doubtful), he would acquire
visual literacy very quickly. Black culture was very visual and would tie in
with the way TV works. Thus, mistakes need not be repeated. He suspected that
the initial commercials on TV2/3 would be very poor. Advertisers dislike
having to make commercials too long in advance, therefore there has been a rush
to complete the spots. The black market was not quite homogenous since black
consumers might have the same aspirations but certainly have different backgrounds.
Therefore commercials must be tailored to fit the end product and the same cri-
teria used to segment the white consumer market should be used to segment the
black. One of the major problems was the use of borrowed conventions suggested
or enforced by white advertisers, which black copywriters accept meekly. It will
only be in Phase 2 of TV2/3 that black commercials will start to feature the
sort of colloquial slang and behaviour that is natural and part of the black en-
vironment. He used the example of the 'cats' and the 'pantsulas' as being an
example of current behaviour not yet reflected in advertising. What was needed
was the simplicity of the observed life, not translated concepts.

Mike Maisela of Co-ordinated Marketing explored the myths that operate in terms
of the black consumer, and provided some much needed context to understand the
communication process involving TV. He showed that the profile of the urban con-
sumer is that of a young, mobile, growing, enlightened and very different to
rural type of person. Black people already watching TV have certain standards
against which they will judge the TV2/3 programmes. Basic necessities will be
bought first when Soweto is fully electrified not TV sets. 45-7% of electrified
homes owned refrigerators as against 9.2% owning TV sets. Black income was not
rising as rapidly as thought. The 7.1% average rise in wages was negated by the
168 rise in inflation. Besides, the increased cost of housing would prevent many
blacks from acquiring a luxury item like a set. The fact that blacks read white newspapers calls into question the assertion that they will switch on to TV2/3 because it is in one of the vernaculars. English is the lingua franca of the urban market. Censorship was being applied by the ASA and the SABC-TV panel of 'advisors' which might prolong the superstitions that the different cultures have about the other's behaviour.

The most important question to ask is "Which urban black will be watching the programmes?" Advertisers will have to segment their audience using both demographic and psychographic factors. So the question to ask is not who TV2/3 is meant for, but rather what type of black person would watch TV2/3?

KUNAPIPI

Editor Anna Rutherford

Kunapipi is a bi-annual magazine devoted to the new literatures written in English. It publishes creative material as well as criticism and aims to fulfil the requirements T. S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors both famous and unknown, and to be truly international.

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