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# Isidingo as entertainment-education[1]: female viewers' perceptions

ABSTRACT

In developing countries, the popular media can be used effectively to address social problems (Vaughan, Rogers, Singhal & Swalehe, 2000:82). In recent decades, various developmental, educational and other socially useful messages have often been included in the content of soap operas (Mody, 1991).

The producers of South African soap opera Isidingo are acutely aware of their social responsibility and therefore attempt to make a contribution towards social change and nation building. As such, Isidingo employs positive role models to transmit pro-social messages to its viewers. This paper will report on a study that explored the application of the entertainment-education (E-E) strategy in the local soap opera Isidingo by investigating the perceptions of female viewers in respect of self-reported knowledge acquisition, attitudes and behavioural changes due to watching this programme.

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[1] Also referred to as edutainment.

## 1.  INTRODUCTION & ORIENTATION

In developing countries, which are beset with social problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, alcohol abuse, drug and gambling addiction, and violence, a key function of entertainment television programmes is to address such social problems (Vaughan, Rogers & Singhal, Swalehe, 2000:82). Communication theory and research of the past 50 years have revealed that entertainment media have a significant and measurable influence on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of media consumers (Brown & Singhal, 1993: 94). Mass media communication can thus be seen as an agency of national development in both developed and developing countries.

In recent decades, various developmental, educational and other socially useful messages have often been included in the content of soap operas (Mody, 1991). According to Philo (1999: 62), the portrayal of "hard" subject matters in prime-time soaps has sparked repeated discussion about the cultural role of the soap opera form. Indeed, the impact on the audiences of this increased blurring of reality and fiction is a frequent topic of academic and media interest.

According to Brown (1992), soap operas produced in the Third World have several unique characteristics. The content allows high character identification by the viewers and is based on values that are considered important by the viewing community. The content is also educational and relevant to important social problems.  Although American and British soap operas include certain social issues in their content, they will be included only if they are not too controversial and if they can be dealt with on a personal basis (Cantor & Pingree, 1983: 83).

The inclusion of educational-development messages in Third World soap operas also distinguishes them from their Western counterparts. Miguel Sabido introduced the concept of "prodevelopment" soap operas in the 1970s and 1980s in Mexico. These programmes were directed at social change and encouraged the adoption of prosocial beliefs and behaviour. Sabido's idea to include prosocial educational messages in entertainment education was sparked by a Peruvian telenova, Simplemente Maria [Just Simple Mary] (Brown, 1992).

Brown (1992) identifies five possible sociocultural influences of prodevelopment soap operas. The primary goal of predevelopment soap operas is to establish a high degree of identification with the characters. A second influence refers to parasocial interaction. According to Rubin and McHugh (1987: 279) parasocial interaction refers to a one-sided interpersonal relationship that television viewers establish with media characters. A third sociocultural influence relates to the reinforcement and change of viewers' values and beliefs. The incorporation of one or more educational issues in an entertainment format in order to influence audience members' knowledge, attitudes, and overt behaviour regarding an educational issue is termed entertainment-education (edutainment) (Singhal & Rogers, 1999: xii). Its focus is on how entertainment media is used to transmit information that can result in prosocial behaviour (Waisbord, 2001: 10).

Brown (1992) also identifies the viewers' degree of dependency on television as a sociocultural influence. People tend to become dependent on television for information about their physical or social environment. Predevelopment soap operas might even lead to people becoming dependent on indigenously produced programmes rather than imported programmes. The last sociocultural influence refers to the process of social teaming through television role models.

A South African soap opera that can be classified as a prodevelopment soap opera is Isidingo, The Need. This soap opera attempts to make a contribution towards social change and nation building by employing positive role models to transmit prosocial messages to its viewers. These prosocial messages can influence audience members' knowledge, attitudes, and overt behaviour regarding an educational or social issue.

## 1.1 Contextualising Isidingo

In 1998 Gray Hofmeyr was commissioned to create a local soap opera for SABC 3. The programme proposed to reflect the needs, aspirations, conflicts and loves of all the people who lived and worked in Horizon Deep. To include readers from the start, SABC 3 ran a Claim the Name Competition in the Sunday Times. The judges selected Isidingo as the wining title (ITV programmes, 1998). Initially focused on the Horizon Deep Gold Mine community, it now revolves around On!TV, a TV station in Johannesburg.

Isidingo aims to reflect everyday South Africa. According to a communication by Ilse van Hemert (2002), the executive producer of Isidingo, social responsibility and the transfer of socially useful information is the second most important function of the soap opera next to entertainment. Realisation through an educational and developmental content is secondary to entertainment.

Gray Hofmeyr, the creator of Isidingo, says that this soap opera creates a realistic world with which the South African viewer can identify. "Our stories and situations are socially relevant. We never moralise or judge, though we do demonstrate the results of behaviour or decisions. We show: if this happens, then that will probably follow" (Retief, 2003: 21).

## 2.  PROBLEM STATEMENT

Can the mass media experience, such as watching television, be socially persuasive? The question arises as to whether it really is possible for television soap operas to save lives, promote social change and lead the fight against social and health problems such as HIV and AIDS. In reality, however, many media sources promote unhealthy behaviour and the messages are rarely positive. Advocates of the entertainment-education strategy see it as a very effective tool. E-E believes in the power of the media, especially in the power of entertainment media content. This strategy is applied in 75 countries and has promoted family planning, adult literacy, HIV/AIDS prevention, sexual abstinence for adolescents, gender equality, the preservation of the environment and responsible parenthood (Singhal & Rogers, 1999: xii).

## 2.1 Research problem

The purpose of this study is to determine whether selected female viewers, between the ages of 18-24, acquire knowledge regarding portrayed social issues and change their opinion and/or their behaviour positively towards these social issues by watching the South African soap opera, Isidingo, in order to explain the application of E-E in this soap opera.

## 2.2 Subproblems

- To determine whether selected female viewers, between the ages of 18-24, acquire knowledge regarding portrayed social issues by watching the South African soap opera, Isidingo
- To determine whether selected female viewers, between the ages of 18-24, change their opinion positively towards these social issues by watching the South African soap opera, Isidingo
- To determine whether selected female viewers, between the ages of 18-24, change behaviour positively towards these social issues by watching the South African soap opera, Isidingo
- To explain the application of E-E in Isidingo

## 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Questionnaire design

In the study, structured self-administered questionnaires were used to gather the information. The questionnaire contained 24 open- and closed-ended questions.

### 3.2 Sampling design and data collection

The population from which the sample was selected consisted of female university students of the University of the Free State between the ages of 18-24 residing on the campus. Two predominantly white and two predominantly black residences were selected. A non-probability sample design (convenience sample) was used to draw the sample. A fieldworker was present to explain the objective of the study and to clarify any misunderstandings. A total of 140 questionnaires were distributed and collected.

### 3.3 Data processing

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), cross-tabulation, and reliability and inferential statistics were executed by using the CSS Statistica computer software.

### 3.4 Limitations of the study

Due to the lack of resources, the sample size is quite small. The study can thus not be generalised to the population. This exploratory study does however provide insight into the viewers' perceptions regarding E-E interventions.

## 4.  THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

### 4.1 Entertainment-education

According to Singhal and Rogers (2002: 117) and Waisbord (2001: 10) entertainment-education (E-E) is not a theory of communication, but can be seen as a strategy. The strategy is used to disseminate ideas through the media to bring about behavioural and social change. It subscribes to the Shannon-Weaver model of communication: sender-channel-message-receiver (Waisbord, 2001: 10) and is based on Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Other theories to consider include the elaboration likelihood model[2], audience involvement (hierarchy of effects), dramatic theories[3], social constructivism[4], uses and gratifications, agenda setting[5], knowledge-gap[6], cultivation[7], and the diffusion of innovation[8].

For the purposes of this study, the following theories were considered: social learning theory (social cognitive theory), the hierarchy of effects and the uses and gratification theory.

E-E is based on the premise that the viewer learns as the characters learns. The programme content is so closely akin to the real lives of the viewers that they are able to identify with these easily (Fox, 1999:1). The process depends on the provision of role models: good models, bad models, and those who go from bad to good (Waisbord, 2001: 10). Positive characters (role models) are allowed to make mistakes but they do not do so deliberately. They are neither evil, nor malignant; they always learn from their mistakes and continually attempt to mend their ways. Viewers are thus able to identify with the characters and are sympathetic and compassionate towards them, fully realising that they are only human (United Nations Radio, 2002).

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[2] Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion proposes two basic routes to persuasion, namely the central and peripheral routes. The central route involves cognitive elaboration. The peripheral route involves focusing on cues not directly related to the substance of the message (Gass & Seiter, 2003: 37-38).

[3] This theory describes how storytelling and drama can effectively increase audience involvement with a message (Brown, 1992).

[4] This theory states that individuals interpret and act according to conceptual categories of the mind. Reality is thus filtered through the person's own way of seeing things (Littlejohn, 1999: 113).

[5] According to the agenda setting theory the media does not tell us what to think, but what to think about.

[6] The knowledge gap theory identifies two groups of people: a group of better-educated people who know more about most things, and those with low education who know less.

[7] Television viewing is a commonly shared experienced. Television provides information, socialises and provides a shared way of viewing the world (Littlejohn, 1999: 344).

[8] Roger identified phase stages through which an individual passes in the adoption of innovation: awareness, knowledge and interest, decision, trial and adoption/rejection (Waisbord, 2001: 3).

Galavotti, Pappas-Deluca and Lansky (2001: 1603) identify the following uses of role models: They can educate by providing basic information on how to change and by modelling the steps. They can persuade and motivate by altering people's perceptions of the costs and benefits of a behaviour. They also demonstrate consequences of behaviour.

The following features of edutainment have been identified:
- Social issues and prosocial messages are not transmitted by means of moralisation, but through entertainment. Thus, a subtle merging of information with mass media entertainment occurs.
- According to Martin (2002: 2) the programme content poses certain important questions that strengthen the message and force the viewer to think.
- A truth or moral is often found as early as in the title.
- The programme results in, among others, an increase in knowledge and awareness, and leads to social mobilisation. It can influence the wider social climate rather than influencing people individually.  Discussions, in turn, lead to shared social norms in respect of appropriate behaviour, which eventually lead to behavioural change (Yoder, Chirwa & Hornik, 1996: 184-212).
- It can stimulate public debate in the media and can even influence legislation (Tufte, 2000: 1).

Apart from the social learning theory, E-E is also based on the hierarchy of effects. The hierarchy of effects is based on the following phases: exposure, knowledge, attitude, experimentation and adoption. The supposition is that the effect is much greater on the lower levels.

The way in which knowledge, opinions and behaviour are established in the communication-effect process is illustrated by Chafee and Roser's integrated model for a hierarchy of effects (McQuail & Windahl, 1993: 191).

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(I)                                           (III)
Low involvement                               Learning

Knowledge·········· Behaviour·········· Opinion·········· Knowledge·········· Behaviour·········· Opinion

(II)
Dissonance

············▶·················▶··············· Repetition of message ············▶·················▶···············

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Figure 1: Integrated model of hierarchy of effects
Source: McQuail & Windahl, 1993: 191.

This model suggests that the earliest phase in the communication-effect process starts with the low-involvement model. The receiver has little information and interest. Yet, a small amount of information is obtained, which leads to certain behavioural changes. These changes, in turn, lead to greater involvement. Values and behaviour are established and the method of reaction becomes more rational. The dissonance model takes over due to an increased desire for information, until the phase of the learning model takes over. The receiver's behaviour now increasingly becomes a familiar reasoned response.

Some studies have showed the success of E-E strategies. These include attracting large audiences, triggering interpersonal communication about issues and lessons from interventions, and motivating individuals to change behaviour and motivate behavioural change among others (Waisbord, 2001: 11). One such example is Soul City. The programme reached 79% of its target audience and was able to build partnerships with the government and community organisations (Singhal, Cody, Rogers & Sabido, 2004). Another example is the Indian soap opera Hum Log. This series featured both positive and negative role models for family planning (Brown, 1992). A hierarchy of effects was seen in interventions in Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines. The effectiveness of these campaigns was seen in audience recall, comprehension, agreement and talking with others about the messages.

Yoder, Chirwa and Hornik (1996: 184-212) however question the impact of E-E interventions due to little found evidence. "Why does the published evidence not provide a clear support for program effects that the enthusiasm for the approach suggests there should be?" These authors provide the following possible reasons:

- The format is probably less effective than its proponents consider it to be.
- Certain programmes probably were successful, but were not evaluated or, if they were evaluated, the results were not published.
- The ways in which these programmes bring about change are probably inconsistent with the relatively short-term evaluation design being employed.

To counter some of these shortcomings, Singhal and Rogers (2002: 132) propose that E-E "effects" research should consider employing a broader understanding of individual, group and social-level changes. They further propose a close investigation of the rhetorical, play and affective aspects of E-E. Lastly, they encourage more receptiveness to methodological pluralism and measurement ingenuity.

E-E strategies might also benefit from applying a more participatory approach. The participatory approach to development called for a move away from a top-down, ethnocentric and paternalistic view of the development of the modernisation paradigm. Paulo Freira became an influential voice in defining participatory communication. Freira identified dialogue and participation as important aspects of liberating education. Freira defined communication as "free dialogue that prioritizes cultural identify, trust and commitment" (Waisbord, 2001: 12-13).

Singhal and Rogers (2002: 132) speculated that E-E would in future integrate "modern" and "traditional" entertainment outlets and "big" and "little" media technologies more

closely. Waisbord (2001: 13) suggests a move away from mass media, usually controlled by the government and urban elites, to "small" media where community members are in charge of the decision and production processes. According to Waisbord (2001: 13) "the value of participatory media is not being an instrument of transmission but of communication, that is, for exchanging views and involving members".

### 4.1.1    Responsible entertainment

The function of being an agent of change brings with it an enormous responsibility. Thus, it is the responsibility of the producers and writers of entertainment programming to portray, for instance, people with disabilities correctly. However, entertainment programmes tend to sensationalise sensitive topics, such as pulling a cure for a permanent condition out of a magician's hat (Dhanarajan, 1998).

It is the responsibility of the producers and writers to decide which positive behaviour needs to be promoted. Furthermore, they have to make decisions as to how to represent the behaviour and beliefs of negative characters, and how such behaviour and beliefs are to be discouraged by the way in which such characters are ultimately made to pay for their actions. The challenge is to represent characters in such a way that the viewers not only grow to like the positive characters, but also become irritated with the negative ones (United Nations Radio, 2002).

A further challenge is to attempt to entertain, even when the issues touched upon are not in themselves entertaining. Thus, it is imperative that writers, especially, have to be creative. Entertainment comes first, but the ultimate aim is to assist people in making informed decisions. This must be accomplished not by traditional teaching methods, but by means of examples, role models and information conveyed through the content of the stories (United Nations Radio, 2002).

It is not so much a challenge, but nevertheless an important prerequisite that the influence of the programme on viewers and on society at large be evaluated. Focus group interviews and questionnaires should be employed to determine how much the viewers learn. This can also be ascertained by means of certain carefully constructed and professional pre-testing and post-testing (United Nations Radio, 2002).

The use of E-E however raises some important ethical considerations. Brown (1992) identifies the following issues. Firstly, who, if anyone, can decide on the criteria for prosocial and antisocial messages? Secondly, how do the producers decide which predevelopment message is more important than another? Thirdly, not all predevelopment programmes are beneficial to all segments of society.

Sighnal & Rogers (1999: 218) propose the use of formative and summative evaluation research to identify ethical concerns. According to these authors, the research will aim to (a) analyse the target audience's needs and aspiration, (b) produce relevant and user-friendly media material and (c) understand the intended and unintended effects of the intervention.

## 4.2 Characteristics of soap operas with development messages

The book entitled, Soap operas for social change: towards methodology for entertainment-education television by Bella Mody (1995) identifies the following three functions with which soap operas for social change have to comply. They must be entertaining, commercially viable and socially useful. Thus, they must be good for both the viewer and commercial sales.

Sabido (as quoted by Brown, 1992) believes that an effective predevelopment soap opera must "have the same dramatic tone as a traditional commercial soap opera because an 'intellectualised' soap opera with a distinct 'educational' tone would not be popular with the public". Ultimately, the success of soap operas is linked to the presence of the following characteristics: probability, established characters, suspense and drama, viewer involvement and cohesiveness, technical professionalism, balance and contrast, and plot line and context (Gunter, 2000: 153-154).

Characteristics linked to specifically soap operas with development messages would include the following and Modleski (1991: 190) states the following elements linked to audience involvement. The plot line is based on the personal and intimate secrets of characters and the viewers gain privileged access to such intimate secrets. This enables the viewer to become personally involved with the characters and their lives. Viewers remain interested and involved throughout, because conjecture about future developments is encouraged. Multiple plots also keep different viewers interested in different storylines. Furthermore, the programme format begs moral judgment of the characters and their behaviour, thus enabling the viewer to become actively involved and reflecting on the behaviours of the characters. Soap storylines are usually built around established families or communities, sometimes quite similar to these of the viewer, making it very easy for the viewer to identify with these families or communities.

Apart from enhancing involvement and identification, Modleski (1990:190) suggests the following unique characteristics of the genre. The viewer's need for continuity is satisfied by soap operas, whereas this need is apparently ignored by other genres, like dramas and sitcoms. Soap operas are usually viewed, discussed and analysed in a family context. This not only causes important issues to be placed on the agenda, but certain issues are also discussed further, and consequently the views are broadened. Greater family involvement is made possible by the soap opera format. Education and development thus take place through dialogue.

It must however be said that soap operas produced in the Third World have several unique characteristics that distinguish them from these produced, for example, in the USA (Brown, 1992). The researcher has identified some of these distinguishing characteristics in the South African soap opera, Isidingo. The characters of soap operas are used, inter alia, as positive role models to introduce new ideas and behaviour. The characters are portrayed in such a way that the viewers learn to like the positive characters and to become irritated with the negative ones (United Nations Radio, 2002). The audience relates to the character, which in turn leads to change in their own behaviour. In Isidingo

the weak become the strong, encouraging the individual to make a difference (Hofmeyr, 2002).

The producers of this soap opera want to give viewers a sense of power. One way of doing this is by using their interactive website, which provides fans with a way to communicate their responses (Andersson, 2004:10).

This genre has the capacity to unleash some sense of transformatory potential. In the South African context, it is a place where painful apartheid memories are flattened and rewritten (Andersson, 2004:10).

4.3 The uses and gratifications of soaps

The first investigation into the reasons for viewing/listening to soaps was conducted in 1942 by Herta Hertzog. This classical study is still used as the basis for research into soaps.

Matelski (1988: 47) and Cole (1970) refer to a number of factors that are, according to Hertzog's investigation, are responsible for the attraction of soaps: fantasy fulfilment, projections, emotional discharge and obtaining information.

Emotional discharge (catharsis) takes place as the viewer becomes aware, through the lives of the characters, that others suffer equally and struggle with similar issues. Through the actions of the soap characters, the viewer is able to give vent to feelings of anger, anxiety, grief and other emotions. The rich and happy lives of the soap characters provide an outlet for people's deepest fantasies. Soaps provide useful information to those who are less educated. It serves as a source for obtaining knowledge on certain issues, also by those with anxious natures who are pacified/soothed by the information thus obtained (Matelski, 1988: 47).

Silverstone (1994: 16) in turn identifies the need for continuity as a reason why people view soaps. This need intensifies due to the increasingly stressful world in which we live. Television programmes are the instrument for initially creating anxiety in the viewers and then dealing with it. Silverstone also views soaps as the ruminant of social reality. Soaps capture reality in complex narration by means of the medium of strong, recognisable situations rooted in reality. Silverstone (1994: 16) compares soaps with weather reports and news broadcasts, as they provide a framework for the hours, days and weeks of the year.

Following on these reasons, Greenberg & Woods (1999:251) have identified the following primary types of satisfaction, namely escape, social learning, social excitement and habit. Escape is important as it is a means of avoiding the unpleasantness of everyday life. The social learning factor comprises the use of soaps to observe and acquire social behaviour. Social excitement is the third of the primary need-fulfilling factors identified by Greenberg & Woods (1999: 251). It gratifies the viewer's need for excitement. Habit gratification refers to the extent to which soaps have become part of everyday life.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### 5.1 The functions of soap operas

Figure 1.2 illustrates the female viewers' perceptions of the functions of soap operas. The functions selected already indicate the relationship that viewers form with the programme.
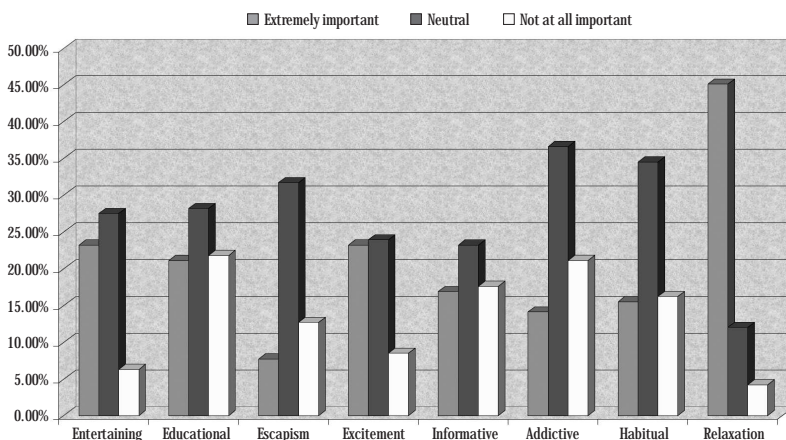


Figure 1.2: Respondents' views on soap opera functions

Relaxation seems to be the most important function of soap operas and education not at all important. It is thus possible to say that when education material is included in the content of soap operas, it must be done in such a way that the viewers are not aware of it. It is in this subtle merger of information with entertainment that the power of entertainment-education strategies lies.

### 5.2 Changing uses and the gratification of soap operas

A comparison between the results of previously conducted gratification studies (Compesi, 1980; Rubin, 1985; Babrow, 1987; Perse & Ruben, 1988 and Greenberg & Woords, 1999) and this study illustrates, on the one hand, something of the changing needs of the soap opera viewer. On the other hand, it confirms the difference between American and South African viewers. This comparison reflects a shift in emphasis in the South African approach to this genre from relaxation, denial/escape and leisure activity as the main focus, to a search for authenticity, a truly South African 'feel', positive role models and interesting plots.

The need for something with which the viewer can identify is apparent. Depicting specifically South African situations and portraying characters in a realistic way makes identifying

with them so much easier. The researcher is of the opinion that more can be learnt from a programme in which people and situations are closer to the everyday world of the viewer. Globalisation could further result in reaching back to one's roots and to the familiar for fear of their being lost. Isidingo attempts to provide a look into the lives of other South Africans, regardless of their colour, sexual preferences, vocations and culture. The results of this study emphasise not only the changing needs of soap opera fans, but also provide a reason why the content of South African soap operas is continually being adapted.

The following five main reasons have been identified for viewing Isidingo:
- The truly South African nature of the programme
- The authenticity of the characters and the situation
- The interesting nature of the programme
- Relaxation
- Devotion to the characters

A growing body of opinion suggests that soaps appeal because they engage viewers more intimately than other TV programmes or movies, and because they deal, in some way, with real issues (Andersson, 2004:10).

5.3 The portrayal of social issues

Calling Isidingo socially useful means that social issues are portrayed in such a way that viewers will learn from them and that their attitudes and behaviour will change due to the true-to-life portrayal of characters and situations.  Isidingo's primary aim is to entertain. Yet, entertainment is presented in a socially useful way. In the content of the soap opera, the producer deals with the results of the characters' actions – relevant issues are touched upon and the results of certain actions are demonstrated (Hofmeyr, 2002).

5.3.1    Social issues addressed in Isidingo
Dealing with social issues is not new to soap operas. However, until recently, the requirement was that a social issue was only to be touched upon if it was not too controversial and could be dealt with on a personal basis (Cantor & Pingree, 1983: 83).  According to Montgomery (as quoted by Atkin & Wallack, 1990: 115) entertainment programmes like soap operas could play a role in creating agendas in that they create awareness in the public in respect of certain public health problems and other important issues.

The following social issues have been or are touched upon regularly in this programme:
- Corruption
- Race relations
- HIV and Aids
- Homosexuality
- Dealing in and selling stolen goods
- Police activities
- Press activities
- Crime

- Gang activities
- Drug abuse
- Alcohol abuse
- Parenthood
- Immigration

When dealing with these issues in the storyline, viewers expect a true-to-life portrayal. Certain ethical considerations also come into play. Producers must resist the temptation to sensationalise certain sensitive issues (Dhanarajan, 1998).

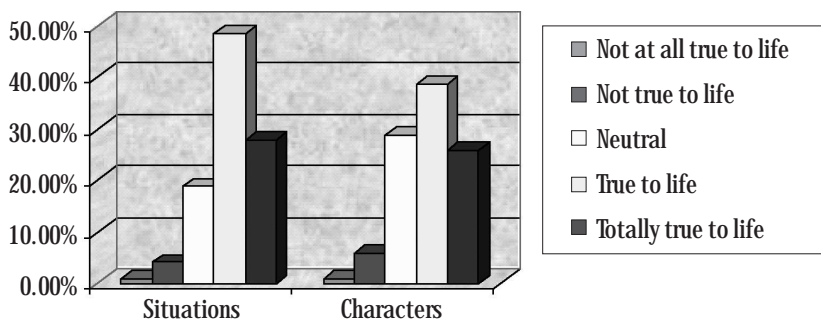The study made the following findings regarding the portrayal of social issues.



Figure 1.3: Respondents' views on how true to life the situations and characters in Isidingo are

The majority of the respondents felt that the situations depicted in Isidingo were altogether true to life (27,7%) or true to life (48.5%). A mere 5% of the respondents assessed the situations as not being true to life.

The characters and their actions within these situations were judged as follows. Whereas 64.3% of the respondents regarded the characters to be completely true to life, only 6.9% viewed the characters as not true to life.

5.3.2    Evaluation of the importance, appeal and portrayal of the social issues
According to Nwosu (1987: 368), entertainment programmes are playing an increasingly important role in providing a forum for discussing social issues. It would even appear that entertainment programmes such as soap operas are beginning to replace documentaries. Increasingly, soap opera viewers are receiving more information on current affairs in that fact and fiction are combined in this medium.

In the case of Isidingo, the producer not only wanted to create credible characters and a realistic set, but by analysing the South African psyche, he also wanted to create a plot line that reflects truly South African observations. Not only does the script force viewers

to learn to laugh at their own mistakes and those of society at large, but it also forces them to investigate issues threatening society. By emphasising issues like adult literacy, assault, abduction, corruption, crime and murder, debate is stimulated and viewers are encouraged to find their own solutions.

In this study the respondents evaluated the portrayal of social issues in Isidingo as follows:

| Social issues | Important | Interesting | Satisfactory |
|---|---|---|---|
| Corruption | 5/6 out of 10[9] | 4 out of 10 | 6 out of 10 |
| Racial relationships | 5/6 out of 10 | 5 out of 10 | 7 out of 10 |
| HIV and Aids | 5/6 out of 10 | 5/6 out of 10 | 7 out of 10 |
| Homosexuality | 2 out of 10 | 4 out of 10 | 6 out of 10 |
| Stolen goods | 3 out of 10 | 2 out of 10 | 5 out of 10 |
| Police activities | 3 out of 10 | 3 out of 10 | 6 out of 10 |
| Press activities | 3 out of 10 | 4 out of 10 | 6 out of 10 |
| Crime | 7 out of 10 | 5/6 out of 10 | 8 out of 10 |
| Gang activities | 3 out of 10 | 3 out of 10 | 5 out of 10 |
| Drug abuse | 5/6 out of 10 | 4 out of 10 | 4 out of 10 |
| Alcohol abuse | 5/6 out of 10 | 4 out of 10 | 5 out of 10 |
| Parenting | 5/6 out of 10 | 6 out of 10 | 7 out of 10 |
| Immigration | 2 out of 10 | 3 out of 10 | 6 out of 10 |

Table 1.1: Respondents' views of how important, interesting and satisfactory social issues are portrayed in Isidingo

In terms of importance, crime is rated the highest, followed by social problems such as HIV and Aids, drug and alcohol abuse, and problems pertaining to parenting. The latter is also rated the most interesting aspect and regarded as dealt with satisfactorily. However, crime is the issue consistently viewed by most students as being very interesting (5/6 out of 10) and as being dealt with satisfactorily (8 out of 10).

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[9]  Exposition of number of respondents out of every 10 respondents.

### 5.4 Acquiring information and effecting change of opinion and behavioural change

The following identified characteristics of Isidingo render it appropriate as an agent of change:

- It resists the temptation of sensationalising sensitive topics.
- It demonstrates both the positive and the negative results of behaviour, and emphasises positive behaviour in that the viewer is made to love the positive characters.
- It helps the viewer to make informed decisions.
- It has aspects of intimacy and continuity.

According to the study, 51% of the respondents said that they found the programme to be fairly or very educational; 45.5% of the respondents noted that they had changed their opinions and 39.6% indicated behavioural change as a result of what they had seen in the programme. The results reflect that the black respondents, in both cases, reported more change than the white group. Change of opinion was experienced by six of every ten black respondents, while in the case of the white respondents, it was five in every ten. However, the main difference between the two groups is related to the behavioural change they reported: for every three white respondents, there were six black respondents who had experienced behavioural change.
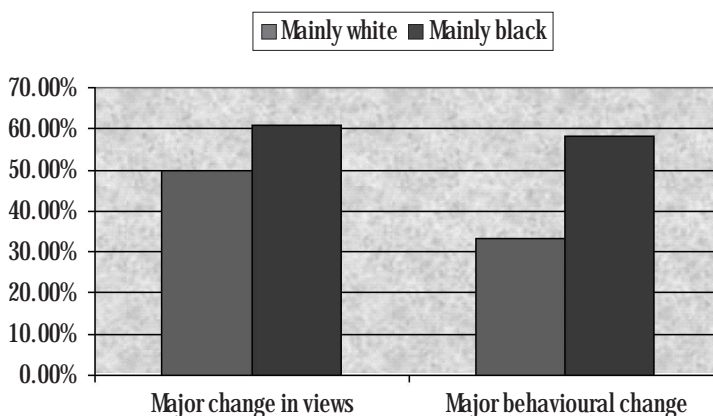


Figure 1.4: The evaluation of respondents from mainly white and mainly black schools regarding the views and behavioural changes caused by Isidingo

### 6. SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION OF ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION

Isidingo's success can be ascribed to the fact that viewers can identify with the characters and the content. It is seen as socially useful by the viewers because the information obtained can be used in their own lives. According to a communication by Ilse van Hemert (2002) Isidingo is neither based on fiction nor fantasy but is carefully designed by using facts and the truth.

Social issues touched upon in the storyline are relevant and important to the viewers. Isidingo tries to portray the South African realities within the multicultural context. The soap opera uses drama, tension and contrast to get viewers involved in order for observational learning to take place. The learning process is further stimulated by debate and discussions with parents and peers. Isidingo taps into the power of soap talk, the process whereby discussions take place during and after the show. It stimulates conversations and dialogue. And through dialogue, education can take place.

The primary goal is still to entertain, but to entertain in a responsible manner. By employing role models, the consequences of actions are shown. The seed is planted for attitude and behavioural change, without viewers really knowing that they are being educated and asked certain challenging questions. Certain social values are transferred and prosocial behaviour is rewarded.

However, the following limitations of the genre to engage in entertainment education should also be taken into account. Matelski (as quoted by Haynsworth, 2002: 70) warns that serial dramas tend to foster "addictive" viewing habits, which can make their cultural impact less positive. Furthermore, they carry the types of alluring cultural fantasies that are often seen as inhibiting the development of more self-actuated goals and values.

## 7.   CONCLUSION

Various characteristics of the soap opera render it unique, including its longevity, the loyalty of its audience, and the fact that it lays claim to specifically a female audience, to name but a few.  This research however emphasises a phenomenon within the genre where the functions of entertainment and education are combined.

These reality soap operas[10] aim to bring about an increase in knowledge or learning and even a change of opinion and behaviour. The fact that situations and characters are depicted as they are, and that learning, change of opinion and behavioural change can occur makes it socially useful in the eyes of the researcher and the viewers.

Certain important social and health-related issues are communicated to the viewer and placed on the agenda. These social issues are reflected in a socially responsible manner and, as a result, effective community communication can take place. Not only does it reach a large audience, but it also demonstrates a propensity towards community, interdependence, participation and self-reliance.

The following findings concerning the social usefulness of Isidingo were made: The viewers considered the social issues touched on to be important. They also considered the portrayal of social issues as realistic and satisfactory. The respondents felt that the programme – in addressing relevant social issues such as HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, crime, rape and violence – satisfied the needs of a multicultural audience. More than half of the research population learnt something and some even a great deal from watching the programme.

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[10] Gray Homeyr's classification of Isidingo.

The educational value emphasised by the producers was spotted by approximately 5% of the research population, yet, the respondents indicated that learning, change of opinion and behavioural change were brought about by the programme. Behavioural change as a result of viewing the programme was reported by 40% of the respondents.

The respondents noticed that the characters and situations were true to life. The uniquely South African feel of the programme, the realistic portrayal of situations and the fact that viewers are able to identify with the characters and enjoy them are mentioned as the chief reasons for viewing the programme. It is within a framework of realistic portrayal that the producers attempt to transmit certain social values to the viewers.

Although the soap opera functions of entertainment and education are combined to make these programmes more socially useful, it is believed that entertainment and the relaxation derived from such entertainment still remain the primary functions of soap operas.

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