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Journal of Communication and Media Research (JCMR)

Vol. 9 No. 1 issue of June 2017

ISSN 2141 – 5277

www.jcmronline.com

Traditional & New Media of Mass Communication:

**Blending Traditions and Modernity: Television, Education and
Life-Skills orientation of Urban Youths in Uganda**

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Abstract

This paper explores opportunities and constraints of using television for enhancement of life-skills orientation for urban youths in Uganda. In the wave of rapid urbanization, globalization and mobility, African socio-cultural institutions continue to be eroded and the urban youths need alternative frameworks of support to orient them into responsible adults. Creative use of television could be central in imparting the requisite skills for living in the 21st century. Despite its great attributes and abundance in urban homesteads, television has not played a central educational role in the lives of the urban youths. A qualitative study approach was undertaken to determine constraints in the use of television for education and development communication. Focus group discussions, content analysis, in-depth interviews, documents analysis and reviews of recent studies were used to collect data. Findings reveal that television as a medium offers great opportunities for life-skills orientation for the urban youths. The failure to optimally use the medium is attributed to technical and epistemological factors on part of educators and communicators. Recommendations are offered to optimally utilize use this abundant and attractive medium for life-skills orientation.

Introduction

As rapid urbanization and mobility continue to erode traditional social networks, urban youths are left with fewer socio-cultural institutions to orient them into responsible adulthood. This is due to lack of support frameworks to orientate them. The urban youth are expected to behave in certain ways but they are confronted with negative social norms and role models that point in a very different direction. For instance, while health campaigns urge them to remain abstinent, they are surrounded by images in the media which are centred on desire. The youths are exposed to pictures of glamorous people having sex, smoking and drinking (UNESCO 2002). The media do not adequately address the arduous task of building enduring human relationships. The youth are faced with challenges that include making responsible choices about; a) sexual partners/marriage; b) choosing careers; c) selecting peers; d) suitable forms of leisure and entertainment. They need problem-solving skills to cope up with the 21st century challenges. A big number of them drop out of schools early in their lives while others never attend school at all. Young women who leave their villages to avoid early marriages have limited education and limited access to employment (Hakkert & Ralph 2007). Poor negotiation skills and irrational decision making coupled with attractions

of urban areas subject many of them to early sexual intercourse, sexual harassment, abuse, psychological violence and increased risk of HIV and AIDS. (UN-Habitat 2007; Hartell 2005, MoH 2006).

In a typical African society, life-skills were imparted to youths through the socio-cultural frameworks of the extended families around fire-places riddles, legends, myths, proverbs and fairy stories. In the wave of rapid urbanization, this rich cultural heritage has been substituted by market-driven media storylines. Unfortunately, the media creates distorted representation of reality among young viewers (Pardun, L'Engle & Brown 2005). The advertisement industry in particular glorifies the physical aspects of sex, drinking and smoking but does not seem to instil critical life-skills and values that would enable the youths to interpret and challenge the associated negative social norms. The media-constructed values influence youths' choices, fashion, hairstyle, artistic tastes and social interaction. As storylines become more global, media serve as primary common storytellers for an otherwise heterogeneous population. Media thereby become the cultural modifier and unifier. Mainstreaming is the process by which media dependency erodes the socio-cultural values (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli & Shanahan 2002). Unfortunately, the choices provided by the media are limited and restricted because the storylines are crafted along market orientations and specifications. To aggravate matters, high proportions of urban youths do not live with their parents (Population Council 2005) and thus depend on media for their information on various life issues. The 'pedagogy' of the media seems to prevail over the influence that families and educational systems would have over the youths (Kellner 2001).

It is hereby argued that life-skills orientation should not be left to be spearheaded by spontaneous media influences. There should be deliberate initiatives by responsible agencies to make media instruments for education and development communication. A number of civil societies have attempted to engage urban youths in developmental discourses using various platforms. However, they occasionally use standard health education materials whose languages are not in mother tongues to convey social messages to youth (Kalina, Bessie & Nyanzi 2005). The high illiteracy levels among the non-school going youths make it difficult for them to benefit from the initiatives (Albright, Kendra & Kawooya 2005). It is hereby premised that with its audio-visual component, television could be an instrumental medium for education and development communication for urban youths in Uganda.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework:

Television has great potential to convey social message using an edutainment approach which is considered to be popular to the youths. By utilizing the appeal of entertainment, it can be used to capture the attention of the youths and to expose issues that cannot be communicated using explicit statements. The audio-visual aspect enables television to illustrate messages to illiterate audiences and to convey factual, graphical and linear aspects of social messages. Given its call-in capabilities, it enables an interactive mode that promotes dialogue between two or more people. Television also provides opportunities for convergence between electronic media and the parallel networks of cultural media for peer-based educational initiatives. Despite these great attributes, television has not played a central role in the life orientation of the urban youths in Uganda (Okuti 2006; Albright & Kawooya 2005).

The assumption was made that technical and epistemological issues limit the extent to which television could be a medium for life orientation programmes. One of the constraints was presumed to be embedded in the African cultural norms, social values, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. Communication in a typical African society is characterized by patronage of elders over the youths. Adults believe that youths have deficits in knowledge and values and that it is the duty of elders to address the deficits by imparting knowledge and value to the youths. The Social Constructivist perspective adopted in this paper premises that reality is interactive and is based on the social experience of the individuals (Vygotsky 1978). Based on this principle, knowledge comes from a variety of sources in the environment of the young people. Other than attempting to make prescriptions to the youths, educators need to help the youth to search for meaning so as to create their own reality (Cohen *et al.* 2003). By reflecting on their experiences, many of the youths can make sense out of new information. The meaning derived out of new information is negotiated on the basis of their past experiences and knowledge (Wink & Putney 2002). Their perceptions and world-views are likely to be influenced by both old and new experiences. The *Symbolic Interactionism (SI)* perspective may help to understand the youths' engagement with interactive media. SI focuses on symbols, negotiated reality and the social construction of society. Society is perceived as consisting of organized and patterned interactions among individuals (Blumer 1969). Being creative, dynamic and pragmatic actors, the youths construct their social world not as passive or conforming objects of socialization. They adjust their behavior in accordance with the actions of other players and events in their

environment. It is suggested that messages are generated, transmitted and received by the youths in ways that are meaningful to them and therefore media is used by youths for functional and cultural creation (Cheliotis 2009). Information is drawn from different sources into the youths' own spaces and is creatively reused by youths in their networks (Lessig 2008). To be affective, communication with youths has to be in a form that is appropriate to their sub-cultures. The quasi-modern youths' subculture has unique symbols, choices, fashion, styles, interests, slang; music and film genres (UNESCO HIV 2002; Hebdige 1979). It also has distinctive forms of recreation, socializing, coping and unique role-models and expressions (slang). This unique sub-culture occasionally generates communication gaps between the youths and elders.

On the basis of the above conceptual and theoretical framework, this study attempted to investigate facilitators and barriers for the use of televised educational programmes for enhancement of life-skills and for development communication for Urban Youths in Uganda. Specifically, the following questions guided the study; 1) Do urban youths perceive televised educational programs as an appropriate medium for their life-skills enhancement? 2) What are the opportunities and chief barriers in the use of television for enhancement of life-skills for the youths?

Methodology

A qualitative study approach was used from 2009 to 2011 to conduct this investigation. A total of 70 (15 to 24 year old) urban youths' within 15 Km radius of Kampala city: 15 from two high schools; 15 from two training colleges and 20 from two universities and 20 community youths involved. A descriptive and case study design was used and a preliminary survey was administered to respondents that were selected using a cluster sampling procedure. The participants for the focus group discussions and structured interviews were selected through a snowball sampling procedure. There were more university participants because their institutions provide abundant media access such as internet which is free to students. Besides, the majority of university students have mobile phones. Urban youths were selected because most of the media outlets such as radio; television stations are concentrated in the urban areas where there is electricity and other necessary infrastructure. Thirty (30) key informants mostly educational and communication professionals and parents were interviewed to generate insights on the way youths participate in civic dialogue on various media and to get their opinions about the focus and quality of the youth's dialogue on

various programmes. The informants included 10 staff from television stations moderating youths-focused interactive call-in programmes) and 10 persons from civil society (NGOs/CBOs).

For comparative purposes, a content analysis of interactive (call-in) dialogues on social network sites (mainly Facebook) and interactive radio call-in programmes was made. The aim was to examine the focus of youth's interactions and to identify the topics that they dwelled on most frequently; and to determine the intensity of interactions on various issues. Document analysis of various records and achieves in offices of civil society agencies was also made. These include reports, work schedules, youths' projects and other relevant documents

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with selected youths' participants whose responses during the interviews and questionnaire sessions suggested that they could be source of great insights. During the FGDs, the youths were shown recordings of selected television programmes including; a) programmes locally developed for educational purposes; b) entertainment programmes (particularly soap operas that are imported and also those that are locally developed. The criterion for choosing these entertainment programmes was based on having educational content or social messages. After watching recorded excerpts of these programmes, participants were engaged in discussions that centred on the educational components and the social messages in the programmes. The common areas of focus were; reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, drinking, smoking and drug abuse; relationships and career development. The FGDs allowed for intensive interactions to enhance researchers' understanding of participants' views, beliefs and attitudes (Green and Thorogood 2004; Rabiee 2004). Members of individual focus groups were familiar with each other and comfortable discussing together (Krueger and Casey 2000). The youths were encouraged to use day-to-day language and expressions, including the various youth slang and jargons. Finally, the study included elements of participant observation; whereby the researcher attended various youths-cantered call-in television programmes and listened to their interactions over various topics.

Study findings

The presentation of findings in the following sections is based on the questions that guided this study. The two guiding questions sought to determine; a) whether urban youths perceive televised educational programs as an ideal medium for their life-skills enhancement; b) what professional educators and communicators perceive to be barriers and facilitators in the use of television for enhancement of life-skills for the youths.

Do urban youths perceive televised educational programs as an ideal medium for their life-skills enhancement?

Government departments and civil society organizations have been central in developing media programmes for enhancement of life-skills among young people. In the section that follows, the views of various youth's groups are described in relation to their perceived suitability of televised educational programmes.

Preachy storylines and Didactic messages

Close to 75% of the youths participants indicated that mediated programmes on television are dominated by adults-centred prescriptions, preachy storylines and didactic messages in form of dos and don'ts. It was also noted that developers of the dramas have a skewed perspective of young people. During an interview, two participants working on HIV/AIDS projects argued that televised drama is pre-constructed with stereotype opinions, biases and attitudes. Consequently, their media products may not address the issues and challenges of youths. Most of the key informants that produce educational programmes admitted that some of the developers of the programmes were not professionals. The productions are based on the belief that young people have to be guided all the time. Producers of the drama believe that they know all the answers to young peoples' social challenges

Messages detached from social reality

One of the common remarks by the youths was that televised educational programmes do not provide practical remedies for the challenges faced but rather criticize their behaviour. Both the youths' participants and some of the key informants pointed out that many of the mediated educational programmes on various themes are characterized by fear-arousing and scaring messages. The messages are developed to deter the youths from doing what adults

perceive to be unbecoming; particularly in areas of reproductive health, alcoholism, drug abuse, and others. Respondents reasoned that the patronising programmes may not serve the intended purpose of educating the youths because modern youths dislike presentations that arouse anxiety and discomfort. One of the educators pointed out that young people easily detect aspects of the presentations that contain the scaring messages. As soon as the youths note that the presentation is creating anxiety, they lose concentration and divert their attention to other activities. Most of the youths indicated that storylines in the educational drama could be compared to the traditional taboos that are embedded in folk stories and riddles. These are designed to keep the young people disciplined. As pointed out by Blumberg (2000), fear-provoking prevention messages could lead to defensive coping strategies among youths.

Bias towards adults' centred materials

It was asserted by both the key informants and youths participants that young people have biases towards what they consider to be adult-centred materials. Adults are perceived to be too old-fashioned to understand the problems of the youths. Televised educational programmes are intended by elders to shape the youths to behave like adults. It was also stated that the youths enjoy frustrating anything that adults propose because they believe that adults are over-patronizing. Consequently, the youths may not wait long enough to see the unfolding educational drama; to determine whether it is good or not. Some aspects of the drama however, are considered real and representative of real life situations. The youth find such drama both interesting and educative. The findings show that the youths have capacity to identify gaps and contradictions within the drama and in the subliminal cuts. On their part, young people also have their biases towards the locally made drama on HIV and AIDS. They are more inclined to watch television soap operas which are presumed to have better plots and exciting presentations. Given the limited funding base and other technical issues in the development the programmes, locally made programmes occasionally fail to attract the youths. Nevertheless, there are a number of participants who admitted that they prefer watching locally made drama because of the proximity to socio-cultural contexts in society.

Identification of spontaneous social messages in commercial television soaps

Participants made comparisons between television programmes developed for educational purposes and those that are commercial in nature, which have occasional spontaneous social messages. These are discussed below.

Representation of real life situations in television soaps

Comparing television soaps with the televised educational dramas, participants noted that the former look more real and tend to flow more naturally. In particular, it was noted that television soaps communicate social messages through non-didactic formats. The producers do not attempt to make the messages too obvious as it appears in the educational television dramas. A male student among the university group observed that young people may receive HIV and AIDS messages from the television soaps without anybody pointing at it. In support of this view, a female participant in the same group commented that she could see more realistic messages on HIV and AIDS in *Secreto D'mour* (commercial soap) than in *Life Choices* or in *Time to Care* (two locally produced educational drama). It was generally noted that television soaps generate more social debates among the youths than what locally produced drama do. One participant noted that the way relationships are depicted on television soaps appears to be real. In particular, it was noted by one of the female youths that television soaps do not attempt to hide anything about sex. She added that girls learn the tricks of men and men also get to understand more of women's nature.

“Those chics you see in de soaps live a realistic life, one without pretence. They do what they want at the time they want to do it. They speak out their heart. In real life, that is what happens. But look at the dramas including the one you showed to us. Much of what we are told to do is far-fetched. Most of it simply doesn't happen that way”.

Instrumental viewing of television soap operas

During interviews and FGDs, an impression was created that some individuals watch television soaps not only for entertainment, but also to fill some information gaps in their lives. Many participants described the social distance between them, their parents and teachers. It was noted that many parents do not talk openly with their children partly because they are very busy with routine work. Some teachers were described by participants as too shy to talk about sexuality. The Chaplains and Pastors are known to focus only on sexual abstinence. Television soaps seem to be the only un-edited source of information about sexuality and relationships. The messages are provided in non-didactic entertainment programmes presented in plots that are entertaining. Many of the participants reported using television soaps to learn about norms for sexual behavior and other aspects of sexual socialization. Female participants indicated that soaps give them an opportunity to learn the

tricks of men. This prepares them for the challenges when necessity comes. Through their story lines and appealing images, television soaps provide information that young people seek in regard to various aspects of social life. Television soaps present an opportunity to convey social messages in an entertaining format. It seems that there is a relationship between education and entertainment. Young people unknowingly pick up social messages.

Findings show that the majority of participants knew that soaps create both realistic and distorted representations of life-situation. About six participants noted that some television soaps were exaggerated. A graduate participant who appeared to have seen a number of soaps observed that the plots of television soaps have almost the same patterns. The programmes in question included; *Woman of my life*, *Passions*, *The Rich also Cry*, *Riviera*, *Wild Rose*, *Lorenzo*, *All about Camilla*, and *The Gardener's Daughter*. The central theme in such stories rotates around young women from a humble families getting rich and occasionally achieve prosperity through attachment to rich men. These examples show that the participants are critical and could identify exaggerations and fantasy in television soaps. This seems to suggest that youths may not be passive consumers of television soaps. They can identify instances where fiction and fantasy are depicted in the plots and storylines. They seemed to know how television soaps affect audiences that do not distinguish fiction from reality.

By attaching the risk narratives to popular characters in the stories, the producers of television soaps have higher chances of captivating young audiences. Their structure and set-up could be emulated by educators and development communicators to captivate the youths. What is needed is to identify the strength and limitations inherent in the genre of television soap operas.

Opportunities and barriers of television as medium for life-skills orientation of the urban youths

The fact that television has not yet played a central role in developmental communication to benefit the urban youths could be explained by two main factors; a) the opportunities availed by the medium of television have not been optimally identified and utilised by the relevant agencies; b) there are technical and epistemological factors in the production and development of educational programmes for urban youths.

Opportunities of the medium of television for development communication

Findings of the study reveal that there are opportunities that could be tapped by educators and development communicators for life-orientation of the urban youths. One of such opportunities is the existence of a variety of exciting television programmes which could innovatively be used to engage the youths in developmental dialogue as discussed below.

Subliminal cuts

These include advertisement spots or public service announcements. These presentations that are significantly shorter than drama may take one-or two minutes to inform audiences and show a benefit of a specific behaviour change. They are also used to correct misinformation, or expose a social ill.

Television magazines and variety shows

Attempts are made to weave together songs, drama, comedies, call-in segments, quizzes, and discussions into a single presentation for broadcast. It is meant to appeal to a wide range of viewers while allowing for the educational content to be repeated in several segments of a single program

Reality television

This is a relatively new programming that presents people in a natural realistic context. Real events and live situations are used to convey social messages. This genre is based on the display of relatively unconstrained, apparently spontaneous social interaction. Reality television presents testimonials, interviews, diaries, or talk shows on issues such as relationships, family, friends, health, career and general conduct. The popularity of reality television is steadily increasing.

Educational drama

The dramas are presented as series or serials. Serial drama (soap operas) is a continuing story presented for a specified number of days permitting the creation of a lifelike social context in which characters change slowly and face successes and setbacks typical of what happens in real life. This creates opportunities for the audiences to know and identify with the characters in the drama. Youths are allowed to explore social issues in depth and

from the perspective of several characters. On the other hand, drama series present a new and complete story in each episode but the main characters may be the same. This suits viewers who may not intend to watch every episode in a drama series. The presentation of alternative narratives in serial drama aims to open up new possibilities for making health-promoting choices. The narrative of the series is composed of interlocking story lines that focus on the relationships within a specific community of characters. This set-up is more appealing to female audiences than males (Ward 2002). While some television soaps are for education purposes, the majority are developed for commercial entertainment purposes. However, even within the commercial soaps, there are health and other social messages that are incorporated in the storylines.

Interactive call-in components for television

Almost all television stations in Uganda have incorporated into their systems a component of interactive call-in dialogue. This component is being exploited more by business interests than educators and development communicators. To illustrate the potential contribution of the call-in interactive component of television towards development communication, a case study of a youths-based interactive health communication initiative on radio is hereby described. Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS in particular are the focus of these interactive radio programmes. These call-in programmes are sponsored by NGOs and therefore they are toll-free. Three of the community-based organizations that conduct these programmes include: *Young Empowered and Healthy (YEAH)*, *Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre (NTIHC)* and the *Straight Talk Foundation*. The interviewed key informants suggested that the discussions of the callers facilitated their understanding of young people's issues on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

'Their voices give us the direction in effective programming/strategizing messages that can benefit our target audiences' (interview with female, YEAH).

The parents who were interviewed indicated that the programmes add a new dimension to the concept of responsible parenthood, particularly in reference to adolescents. They learn a lot from the experiences of the young people as well as the other parents who participate in the '*Parental Radio Programme*' and '*Parent and Child*' programmes:

'Before the call-in programmes started, we thought we understood our children. It is after listening to the programmes that I have come to realize that parents do not

know much about their own children (interview with parent of Straight Talk Foundation employee).

A remark from another interviewed parent echoed this:

We always think our children are young and you cannot imagine that they are of age to conceptualize issues the way they do on radio. When you get to know the age of the caller, you realize that he could even be younger than your own son. It is simply amazing (interview with female parent of a YEAH caller).

One of the youth participants in the study had this to say about the call-in communications:

Listening to the voice of a fellow youth talking about a problem similar to yours creates a pleasant experience. The expressions and the language used are no different from that of our buddies (male participant of focus group discussion at NTIHC).

The staff of the youth-based organizations also commented on these programmes in a positive manner. For example, one of the ways in which they benefit from call-in programmes is that they get the opportunity to improve subsequent programmes after getting feedback from the youths who call. One of the interviewed staff members stated:

Definitely, their voices give us the direction in programming and planning to reach our goals. It helps us in developing effective programming and messages that can benefit our target audiences (interview with female at YEAH).

About four of the female respondents indicated that anonymous calling allows girls to openly seek information on sexuality without fear of being termed as promiscuous. Due to gender stereotypes in society, girls are expected to remain ignorant and innocent regarding sexual matters. For a young female to seek knowledge on sex matters is perceived to be equivalent to being promiscuous. Ignorance on sexuality is associated with purity. It came out clearly that the anonymous call-in programmes gave opportunity to girls to speak out without fear of being identified. They no longer had to risk their sexual health just to appear ignorant. One respondent remarked:

'You can talk freely because no one knows you; you ask anything you like to know. You do not mention your name or even the whereabouts' (female participant in focus group discussion at Straight Talk Foundation).

Males also seek information through interactive radio programmes without fear of being regarded as sexually naive. Socio-cultural expectations drive males to prove their manhood through sexual aggressiveness. They are expected to be knowledgeable and therefore they are not expected to openly seek information on sexuality. It came out clearly that anonymous call-in interactions not only empower them as communicators but it also fosters independence and freedom of expression. Besides, anonymous callers do not fear to be reprimanded or embarrassed for their comments.

The findings in the section above suggest that on the rare occasion when elders (adults) come out to experiment the prospect of empowering the youths over mediated interactions, the outcomes are very productive. It is therefore plausible to suggest that the youths have capacity to engage in civic debates competently if adequate orientations are made. The convergence of television and mobile telephony is positioned to support the sharing of insights among the youths and between youths and adults. It is particularly handy for young women in Uganda who are confined to household chores and cannot afford movements and meetings outside their homes. The arrangement fits well in the African oral cultures where there are high levels of illiteracy and poor reading cultures. It also fits well in settings where technologies are less sophisticated. According to industry estimates, 14 million Ugandans (42% of the population) own at least a cell phone¹. Existence of local FM radio stations in many districts is an opportunity for the social marketing approach. This case study illustrates the capacity of the youths to conceptualize issues in their day-to-day living and to engage in protracted arguments. It also demonstrates that the successes made over interactive radio could be transferred to interactive television with an additional visual and edutainment components.

¹ <http://www.busiweek.com/11/news/uganda/1207-mobile-phone-subscribers-hit-14-million-in-uganda>

In summary, the existence of a variety of exciting television educational programmes should be a great opportunity for development communicators and for educationists to engage the youths in constructive developmental discourse. It calls for reorientation of the philosophy of communication (addressing the question of the origin of wisdom and knowledge). It also calls for an understanding of the salient features of youths' audiences.

Technical and epistemological challenges in the production of development communication programmes for urban youths

In the section below, findings are presented in regard to the technical and epistemological issues surrounding the production and development of television educational programmes. An explanation is offered to understand some of the barriers associated with producing youths-friendly educational programmes on television.

Segmenting youths' audiences

Conventional practices in development of televised educational programmes seem to be based on assumptions that audiences are uniform. However, information gained from interactions with youths and key informants reveal that youths are diverse. Their diversity could complicate the task of developing life-skills programmes over the medium of television. The diversities among the youths audiences are manifested in the aspects of; a) instrumental vs. ritualistic television viewership; b) varied personality traits

Instrumental vs. ritualistic television viewers

It emerged that youths audiences vary in the way they watched television. Some of the youths (who can be referred to as *instrumental viewers*) are selective when watching television. They have a purpose that goes beyond mere amusement. They plan to watch specific programmes and specific content. It seems that they actively watch television to seek information on a number of social issues. On the other hand, some youths watch television programmes precisely for amusement, companionship, passing time, relaxation, and arousal; and to escape from boredom. This category could be referred to as *ritualistic viewers* because their viewing is non-selective. They view television to pass time and may not focus on any specific programmes. Their engagement with television programme does not last long. They are neither captivated to follow any chronology, nor influenced by the characters in the dramas. They do not mind skipping some episodes or even abandoning the programme altogether. They actively choose when to watch the programme, what meanings

to assign, which television model to like or to hate. Development of communication initiatives for such a diversity of viewers calls for sophisticated audience-segmentation frameworks.

Diverse personality traits of television viewers

It also emerged that personality traits have a bearing on television viewing patterns. To begin with, there is a category of youths that are not interested in watching television. They do not believe that television can serve as an adequate substitute for interpersonal interactions. On the other hand, some viewers prefer watching fast-paced television programmes featuring sports, fighting; and other action-packed films. Another category of youths has preference for peculiar television programmes. During the focus group discussions, a young lady indicated that she likes watching films that other people find unpopular. She gets attracted to programmes which repel other viewers. Some individuals prefer to watch television individually while others watch television communally. A big number of respondents reported to enjoy watching television in groups; either with siblings, close relatives, neighbours or other peers. It was noted that communal watching of television creates opportunities for discussions and sharing of insights. There is a possibility that lack of understanding of the features and characteristics youths audience hinders the use of television for education and developmental communication for the youths.

Inadequate understanding of youths' sub-cultures

Professional communicators and educators have a skewed view of youths' practices and sub-cultures. A big number of them find it hard to believe that the youths could control their destiny and that they may not need a lot of guidance from elders. Both the youths' participants and key informants stated that young people are occasionally regarded as passive consumers of what adults prepare for them on television programmes. Interactions between youths and elders have historically been characterized by patronage and dynamics of control and resistance. The youths believe that they should have control over their destiny if given the opportunity. While electronic media appears to be replacing the fireplace stories and riddles, the patronizing tendencies of the adult media producers remain intact. Old media such as radio, television and landline phones were in the past used by elders to monitor youths' communications. The new social media provide opportunities for the youths to keep

adults out of their communication. For instance, adults may not trace their children information on face-book. By creating structural barriers, youths protect the information from the watchful eye of parents and teachers. They mainly fabricate key identifying information like name, age, school, home and photograph. From the symbolic interactionism perspective, youths sub-cultures give-rise to distinctly different communicative norms and styles. The mediated communications between youths and adults is further complicated by poor ICT skills on part of many adults;

Absence of media literacy initiatives in the country

Information obtained from youths participants and key informants reveal critical shortage of competences (knowledge and skills) necessary for citizenship and civic participation. This shortage is manifested in low abilities among many youths for making critical analysis of the content that they retrieve; and inability to deconstruct message components. Many of the youths do not have the ability nor willingness to; a) appreciate how media messages are constructed) determine/evaluate quality of a message points of view; and more importantly; c) planning, designing and creating their own messages using a variety of media forms. Documents analysis in government and civil society agencies' records reveal no traces of plans to develop media literacy programmes for the youths in the country.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings above describe the nature of televised educational programming designed to orient the youths into responsible citizens. It is suggested that televised educational programming for the youths could become effective when some factors that have hitherto limited its effectiveness are addressed. In the section that follows, a detailed discussion is given on how traditions and modernity could be blended to make television a central tool in the life-skills education of the urban youths in Uganda.

Perceived sources of knowledge/wisdom; determination of what is right

At the centre of the youth-adults interactions, there are fundamental philosophical debates rotating around the question of what is right and who determines what is right. Traditionally, wisdom in traditional Africa was conveyed from adults to the youths mainly through oral processes of fire-place riddles, legends, myths, proverbs and fairy stories. The behaviourist's pedagogical philosophies influence the existing structure of televised education programmes. Educational programmes are developed on the assumption that educators are the primary source of knowledge on all issues. This knowledge is presumed to have enduring validity. On the other hand, the Social Constructivist framework stipulates that knowledge comes from a variety of sources (Mertens 2005). Educators and communicators need to acknowledge that the youths could have independent and superior information sources on specific aspects of their day-to-day living. This is more evident in light of their mobility and more advanced mastery of ICT. Educators could simply play the role of facilitators; but not the custodian of wisdom and knowledge on all aspects of life.

Optimizing benefits of popular television programmes

As suggested by Buckingham (2005), the programmes that young people enjoy watching should be investigated as sources of learning in their own right. Many of these programmes have in-built social and health messages (Obregón 2005) and in particular, they are a source of sexual socialisation for young people (Gunter 2002). As already observed, sexuality information provided by parents and teachers is insufficient for the youths. Socio-cultural factors restrain parents and teachers from talking boldly on sensitive sexuality issues. The youths find television soaps to be a reliable source of insights on a number of social issues. Young viewers attempt to emulate what role models (on TV soaps) do and how they overcome problems. While television soaps could have negative effects on some young people, findings of the study suggest that many of the urban youths have capacity to differentiate between reality, fiction and fantasy in the television soaps. Other than attempting to control their viewing habits, educators ought to assist the youths with critical media literacy to enable them to navigate through the massive media exposure. Findings reveal that the youths are not passive recipients of commercial programmes on television. On the contrary, many of them are purposive viewers of commercial television programmes. As they watch television, they perceive messages against accumulated experiences of real life situations.

Enhancing psychosocial and cultural aspects of television viewing

Reference is made to the discussed challenges associated with personality traits; and the distinction between instrumental vs. ritualistic television viewers. Developing educational television programmes could benefit from a careful examination of youths features and characteristics. One of the features is communal television viewing. In a typical African setting, young people watch television in groups; either with siblings, close relatives, neighbours or other peers. Given that behaviour of young people is likely to be influenced by peers, communal viewing of television could be both negative and positive. Capitalizing on the positive aspects, peer pressure could contribute greatly to the successful development of the life-skills needed by the youths for responsible citizenship and civic participation. The social nature of human interactions means that television viewing is communal and the subsequent interpretations are collectively done (Gavin 2000 2001). In collective viewing, the messages are absorbed by the audiences and transformed into forms that make them more meaningful. The way youths experience televised messages depend on the norms and values of the different sub-cultures of the audience (Tulloch & Lupton 1997). The communal aspect of viewing not only contributes to pleasurable viewing, but also enhances an interpretive negotiation towards a cultural unity.

From a Social Constructionist perspective, the construction, maintenance and transformation of mediated information are done through group interaction. Communal viewing influences the extent to which the meaning of the messages is negotiated. The interpretation as a collective process is influenced by the shared practices of the audiences (Gavin 2000). The interactions that follow television viewing can culminate into collective interpretive processes which are culturally entrenched (Gavin 2000, 2001). Collective interpretation of television messages is likely to be influenced by shared history, experiences, language and psychosocial factors. Every effort should be made by educators and development communicators optimize peer influence for educational purposes. Young people feel compelled to behave in ways that will be approved by their colleagues and peers. They are very sensitive to the opinions of their peers and are reluctant to deviate from peer norms. It may be important for parents and educators to initiate programmes that rotate around peer/buddy training.

Closely related to the concept of communal television viewing, it is imperative that parents gain constructive skills in moderating their children television viewing. Studies show

that parental participation in television viewing and discussion can enhance constructive sex education (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter & Miu 2004; Greenfield 2004). The parental prompting and guidance enables the youths to think outside the programme's content. People raised in families where sex is treated as taboo may be more susceptible to the influences of sexually explicit media than those raised in homes where sex is a permissible subject of conversation (Gunter 2002). Parents need to be provided with skills on how they can reduce the negative influence of television on their children. They need to have the skill of generating prompting questions that encourage inquiry, dialogue and exploration. In order for the parents and educators to reduce the negative effects of television, young people and their parents need to be encouraged to view television collectively, other than individually.

Active vs. passive television viewers

Youths should be conceptualized as active, not passive participants in meaning construction. As they watch television, they take along with them accumulated experiences from peer interactions, story-telling, myths, proverbs and legends. In the backyard of their minds, there are culture's dominant assumptions, expectations, and interpretations of social reality. As mediated messages are conveyed to them, their interpretation is amenable to change. Negotiation refers to the balance between the viewer's lived-experiences of social issues and the portraits of the same on the television programs (Gavin 2001). With respect to the visual aspect of television, people interpret pictures against a complex network of various socio-cultural factors. In this regard, Muturi (2007) and Hugo (2002) advocates for the harmonization between audience factors, picture coding factors and socio-cultural factors in the design and development of programmes. The implication of this approach is that televised programmes should not conflict with the youths' conceptualization of reality and common-sense understanding of social issues.

Way-forward: promoting media literacy initiatives for urban youths

Making television (or other media) instrumental for development communication calls for initiatives towards media literacy. This is the ability to retrieve/access, evaluate/analyse, produce and convey media content in a variety of forms. While modern

ICTs generate positive development such as civic participation, plurality and diversity of opinions, they also create challenges. The challenges include unedited and unfiltered information, misinformation and unhealthy habits (Martinsson, 2009). It is imperative that the youths are empowered to seek information independently and to critically scrutinize it. Youths' as citizens have a right to be informed, but also have a responsibility to become informed. As pointed out by Tornero (2008), media literacy could be instrumental in promoting critical thinking, problem solving, personal autonomy, social/communicative skills and lifelong learning. It could help the youths to develop opinions on a variety of social issues; to express the opinions individually and collectively in various contexts and across various media.

Conclusion

Television, like other forms of media could be a negative or positive agency for the socialization of the urban youths. Negatively, it could lead to erosion of socio-cultural values through a process of mainstreaming. It could also present contradicting messages and conflicting role models to the urban youths. With regards to message construction in the drama, participants compared it with the way instructions are given in institutions like schools, the church and the family. On the more positive side, television could be a tool in the hands of educators and communicators for the promotion of life-skills for urban youths. Successful use of television depends on so many factors including parental mediations and innovative use of peer influence. The findings presented above suggest that there are opportunities and challenges in the use of the medium of television for imparting life-skills for the urban youths. Using such opportunities, educators and developmental communicator's could make television an effective house-hold substitute for the fire-place riddles, legends, myths, proverbs and fairy stories that traditionally oriented youths into adulthood. It is imperative however for modern educators to blend aspects of the traditional cultures with modernity in order to develop effective televised programmes that could impact the 21st century youths. One of the issues that educators and communicators have to address is the excessive patronage of elders. Study findings reveal that young viewers classify televised educational programmes as didactic which prompts them to ignore the intended messages. The youths try to resist what they consider to be social control over them by the elders. Using their experiences in television viewing, they interpret the genre in the programmes and determine that the intention of the producers is on patronizing. Adults are accused of

attempting to influence the youths through the television drama; and induce youths to adopt what the adults consider ‘*acceptable*’ and ‘*ideal*’ behaviour. There also seems to be challenges in message construction, storyline development and technical issues of programme production. These challenges must be addressed by educators and programmes producers in order to engage the urban youth constructively.

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