

Development of an Audience-Tailored Film

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EVERY MOTION PICTURE is intended for a particular audience, and in that sense, every film is audience-tailored. More precisely, the film designer has a perception of the audience for which he intends the film, a perception based in part on his knowledge of the characteristics of his audience.

The designer's knowledge of his intended audience, as well as his skill in utilizing this knowledge in the development of the film, is likely to influence the effectiveness of the product. A film may be effective even though the designer is unable to actually verbalize the basis on which he developed it. However, when a film is to be used in communication research, there should be real advantages in delineating (1) those audience variables which may interact with the film, and (2) the procedure utilized in the development of the film.

This article will be restricted to that type of film intended to mediate a change in opinion. A description will be given of a procedure of measuring and analyzing opinion, and of utilizing the results in the development of a film. The procedure will be exemplified by a description of the development of a specific film, *The New India*. A discussion of the procedure will be reserved for the final section.

The New India was intended to mediate an opinion change among university students with respect to India. For simplicity the only audience variable utilized in this study was opinion concerning India. The content of the film was determined essentially by this pre-film opinion. The procedure involved the determination of the number of relatively independent opinion dimensions with respect to India,

and the development of a film with as many sequences. These two steps—determination of the opinion dimensions and development of the film—will be elaborated upon in the next two sections.

DETERMINATION OF THE OPINION DIMENSIONS

Since the film was intended for use at the university level, the opinions on which the film was based were solicited from students at the University of California at Los Angeles. Opinions were obtained during the spring semester of 1958 from 252 respondents enrolled in two classes in introductory psychology—one at the freshman level, the other at the junior level—and two classes in audiovisual education.

The opinion dimensions were derived by factor analysis of the responses to an opinion questionnaire. This questionnaire, itself a film, will be referred to as the "opinion film-questionnaire." Each item in the opinion film-questionnaire consisted of a film scene, a narrated question, and an abbreviated repetition of the narrated question printed on a mimeographed form in the student's hand. Each scene lasted about 15 seconds, during which time the narrated question was asked. The respondents were asked not to record their answers until the scene was finished. At the end of each scene a title, ANSWER ITEM__, appeared on the screen in black letters. The remainder of the screen was illuminated by the 16mm projector, allowing the respondents to see their mimeographed questionnaires by reflected light. In some rooms this light was supplemented by subdued and continuous overhead or natural light. The projection time of the title after each item gave the respondents about 15 seconds to answer the question.

An example of the 69 multiple-choice items intended to elicit response shows a woman baking bread in an outdoor oven in India. The narration asks, "Do you think this woman would continue to cook bread in her traditional way if she were given a modern stove?" At the end of the scene the cue ANSWER ITEM 34 appears on the scene directing the student to the matching question on his answer sheet: "Would woman continue to cook bread in traditional way if given modern stove? (a) no, (b) yes."

A factor analysis of the responses, described elsewhere (6), revealed 10 common factors. An attempt was made to name each dimension according to the content of those items representative of the dimensions (items whose loadings for the factor were as large as .30). Each dimension and its content is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1—CONTENT OF EACH DIMENSION ARISING FROM THE OPINION FILM-QUESTIONNAIRE

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Content</i>
1. Realism	Realistic India vs. exotic India
2. Equality	Equality in intellectual, ability, and social areas
3. Government	Form; foreign relations; orientation toward caste
4. Hinduism	Basis; effect on India; comparison with Western religions
5. Underdevelopment	Causes; effect on U. S.
6. Adaptability	Ability to adapt to industrial technology
7. Progress	Rate of change; compatibility of new with old
8. Discernment	Functional vs. physical aspects of scenes
9. Aid	American aid to recalcitrant India
10. Overpopulation	Rate of increase; importance of control

Two of these dimensions (realism and discernment) appeared to reflect general perceptions of India, but the remaining eight appeared to indicate opinion dimensions with respect to specific content areas. These eight opinion dimensions formed the basis for the development of the film.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FILM

The object in developing the film was to create a stimulus material which, presumably, would mediate opinion change in a desired direction. The development of the film required the determination of (1) the content areas to be included, (2) the order of the film sequences, and (3) the type of appeal to be employed. These three aspects will be discussed separately.

Content Areas

Each of the eight opinion dimensions emerging from the responses to the opinion film-questionnaire suggested a content area of the same name to be covered in the film. The eight areas were highly similar to those arising from a survey by Balasundaram in which he undertook to determine what topics American college students considered important for their understanding of India (1). The Balasundaram list also included the content areas of history and political neutrality. Presumably these two areas would also have emerged from the film-questionnaire had pertinent items been included. Therefore, it was decided to incorporate them and thus to cover 10 content areas in the film. This example indicates the necessity of selecting items from the entire opinion domain.

Before constructing the film, it was necessary to decide on the orientation (approach, thesis, slant) to be followed for each content

area. This orientation was coincident with the direction of desired change in opinion. These content areas are described elsewhere (6), but Table 2 summarizes each content area and its orientation according to the order in which it appeared in the film.

TABLE 2—ORIENTATION FOR EACH CONTENT AREA COVERED IN THE FILM

<i>Content Area</i>	<i>Orientation</i>
1. History	History leading to independence and partition
2. Underdevelopment	India's underdevelopment due to historical circumstances
3. Government	India is a democracy opposed to caste
4. Adaptability	India is showing adaptability to industrialization
5. Progress	India is showing progress in many areas
6. Equality	India is intellectually equal to West
7. Aid	American aid to India also benefits the U. S.
8. Overpopulation	Overpopulation problem has been overexaggerated
9. Hinduism	Hinduism is congenial to modern technology
10. Neutrality	Understanding India's neutrality benefits the U. S.

Order of Film Sequences

The order in which the content areas appeared in the film (as shown in Table 2) is calculated to achieve a maximum effect. McGuire (8) found that a communication which began with those arguments engendering the least opposition had greater total effect than a communication in which the arguments were ordered in reverse. An attempt was made to construct the film so as to capitalize on the more favorable order. Frequency distributions of the film-questionnaire items within each opinion dimension were evaluated; each dimension and its content area was ordered according to the degree of opposition with respect to the film orientation. Thus, the order of the film sequences, like the determination of the content areas, was eventually based on the responses to the film-questionnaire.

One film sequence was constructed for each of the 10 content areas. The message was carried essentially in the sound track, but an attempt was made to select scenes which confirmed the arguments advanced in the narration. Throughout the film, the narration catered to the opposition in the hope of minimizing defensiveness. The length of each sequence was determined more or less by the extent of the opposition—the greater the opposition, the more extensive the treatment.

Type of Appeal

The type of appeal used in the film tended more toward the intellectual rather than the emotional, the decision being based on three considerations. First, it would have been more difficult to support an emotional appeal with the scenes available since they contained little dramatic value, at least in the theatrical sense. Second, the film-questionnaire was intended to yield opinions with respect to India, and as such, gave little information about the respondents' emotions toward India. Finally, there exists no critical evidence of the superiority with respect to opinion change of the film employing an emotional or dramatic appeal over that employing an intellectual appeal. Of four film studies (2, 3, 5, 7) showing no significant change in opinion, three employed dramatic films, whereas only one used films with intellectual appeal. Of four studies (4, 9, 10, 11) reporting boomerang effects (effects opposite to those anticipated), three utilized dramatic films.

DISCUSSION

The procedure just described conforms to the general process involved in the production of every film intended to mediate an opinion change. Every such film reflects the designer's perception of (1) the opinions held by the intended audience, and (2) the manner in which the film material might best be presented so as to modify these opinions. These perceptions are not necessarily correct, and the designer may not verbalize them or even be conscious of them. With regard to the study described, the two points above correspond to the determination of the opinion dimensions and to the development of the film.

However, the procedure involved in the development of *The New India* employed three operations not generally utilized in film production: (1) use of the film-questionnaire, (2) multivariate analysis of the responses, and (3) utilization of the quantitative results in the determination of the film sequences. The implication of these operations to film production in general is worth discussing, but inasmuch as no critical evaluation was made of them, the discussion cannot be in rigorous terms.

The opinion film-questionnaire employs verbal responses, and in this respect is no different from the conventional opinion questionnaire. The difference is in the enrichment of the stimulus material to which the responses are made. Since each question is an audiovisual presentation, responses may reflect more accurately the reactions which

would occur to the completed film. However, films have not been used extensively in measurement, and little is known about the relative characteristics of the film-questionnaire when compared with the conventional questionnaire.

Multivariate analysis of opinion items is being utilized more extensively now that computers are available generally.* Such analyses usually result in more than one opinion dimension, especially with respect to complexly perceived objects like Russia, the church, socialism. The implication seems to be that the film designer intending to mediate a change in opinion should concern himself with the interpretation of these dimensions, their interrelationships, extent, and strength.

Utilization of statistical results in the determination of film structure (number, length, and order of sequences) should carry with it the usual advantages of specification. For instance, film specification increases the objectivity with which the film could be varied systematically in the test of an hypothesis, and allows different experimenters to discuss film stimulus material in less ambiguous terms. In these days when meaning is so intimately related to operation, specification is definitely in step with the tenor of the period.

While the procedure described in this article may be applied to any group, it is far too simple to result in a maximally effective film. A more elaborate approach would involve the measurement of other audience variables which might be related to opinion change. Also, opinion change from tentative versions of the film should be analyzed for clues allowing the preparation of a more effective film. Evaluation of all such procedures depends on the validity of the measure of effectiveness; film design and effects measurement are intimately related.

Finally, the procedure described in this article is conceived as an integral part of film production. The term "pre-production planning" seems inapt, for it appears to imply that it is possible to plan a film before shooting begins so that the final product will have a predicted effect. While it may be comforting to believe that the effectiveness of a film can be so predicted, there is little evidence to indicate that

* The calculations implied in this article were performed on SWAC, a computer operated by Numerical Analysis Research, UCLA, and supported in part by the Office of Naval Research. The author also wishes to acknowledge the programs made available for this study by Andrew L. Comrey, Department of Psychology, UCLA.

such prediction has been achieved to any great extent: for every film study which confirms predicted opinion change, there are often 10 studies in which confirmation is lacking. Planning is desirable at every stage of production.

SUMMARY

Since every motion picture is intended for a particular audience, every film is audience-tailored according to the perceptions of its designer. However, when a film is to be used in communication research, there are advantages in delineating the procedure employed in the development of the film.

An example was given of the development of a film intended to mediate a change in opinion. The procedure involved (1) the use of an opinion film-questionnaire, (2) multivariate analysis of the responses, and (3) the application of the statistical results to the design of the structure of the film. These three operations were discussed in terms of their implication to communication research.

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