

# Promoting Prosocial Beliefs and Behaviour Towards People with Disabilities in Nepal, Through a Children's Entertainment-education Programme

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## ABSTRACT

### **Purpose**

*This quasi-experimental field study examines the prosocial influences of a children's entertainment-education television programme, Khushi Ko Sansar, on children's beliefs and intended behaviour towards people with disabilities in Nepal.*

### **Method**

*Pre-test and post-test survey data were gathered from 357 Nepali children from nine communities that took part in the study. The children were shown two television episodes in which the star of the programmes, a dog named Khush, befriends and visits people with disabilities.*

### **Results**

*Post-test results show that children developed strong identification with Khush and adopted his prosocial beliefs and behaviour towards people with disabilities.*

### **Conclusions**

*The authors conclude that the entertainment-education television programme, Khushi Ko Sansar, provided a positive role model for children who encounter people with disabilities. Implications of these findings suggest that entertainment-education media can improve the treatment of people with disabilities and can promote beneficial health beliefs and practices.*

**Key words:** *Children's television, entertainment-education, Nepal, people with disabilities, role models*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most encouraging developmental trends is the strategic use of entertainment media to address societal needs, foster social change, and promote

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prosocial beliefs and behaviour. Prosocial beliefs and behaviour are defined as those which are considered to be socially desirable or preferable by most members of society, based on commonly held values (Rushton, 1982). Purposefully infusing entertainment with educational content, to reinforce or promote prosocial beliefs and practices, is commonly known as the entertainment-education communication strategy (Brown and Singhal, 1993). Entertainment-education programmes are created when media planners purposefully blend educational messages with entertainment programming such as radio and television dramas, films and videos, theatre productions, music, comedy, and interactive games in order to reinforce or promote prosocial values, beliefs or practices. Much of the application of entertainment-education strategy is to promote beneficial health practices (Piotrow and de Fossard, 2004). The purpose of the present study is to assess the effectiveness of a children's entertainment-education television program, *Khushi Ko Sansar* (World of Happiness or Happy World), on children's beliefs and intended behaviour towards those with disabilities in Nepal.

Developing countries like Nepal are home to most of the world's people with disabilities (Lamichhane and Sawada, 2009), few of whom have access to health care and rehabilitation services (Sandhu, Saarnio and Wiman, 2001). In a country of nearly 30 million people, estimates of the number of Nepalis with disabilities range from 5 per cent (Boyce and Paterson, 2002) to 13 per cent reported in a study by Danida (Dyssegaard, 1998), with the WHO estimating a disability prevalence of 10 per cent for developing countries (Joshi, 2004). Nepal is also one of the poorest countries in the world, adding to its challenge in caring for people with disabilities, since disability and poverty are inextricably linked (van Kampen, 2008, Shrestha, Shrestha and Deepak, 2009). In the South Asian region, less than 10 per cent of children and youth with disabilities have access to any form of education and fewer still have access to rehabilitation (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2003).

Defining disability is a complex task, since the concept of disablement is socially constructed and culturally determined (Dalal, 2001; Green, 2003). The International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health (ICF) of the World Health Organization (WHO) provides a comprehensive classification scheme for defining the world's people with disabilities (World Health Organization, 2001). The ICF conceptualises disability as the product of the interaction of a person with a health condition in a given environment that involves body structure and functions, the performance of activities, and participation (Simeonsson,

2003). Thus ICF's model accounts for both the physiological and psychological dimensions of disability.

Like many health conditions, people with disabilities bear the burden of stigma (Cross and Choudhary, 2005; Saul and Phillips, 1999). Beliefs about the causes of disability in Nepal and the stigma associated with being disabled are complex (Bishnu, 2006; Goudel, 2004). Some of these beliefs are religious; for example, many people believe that disability results from divine retribution for sins in a previous life (Lakhan and Sharma, 2010). Religious beliefs provide an important conceptual framework for understanding the ontological beliefs about disabilities, and profoundly affect rehabilitation efforts (Dalal, Pande and Dhawan, 2000; Marshall, 2002). In a national study of 43 districts in Nepal, 39.2 per cent of the respondents cited bad Karma as a cause for disabilities (Boyce et al, 1999). In a similar study in western India, 78.6 per cent of tribal parents and 46.2 per cent of non-tribal parents believed sin in a previous birth was the primary cause of their children's disability (Lakhan and Sharma, 2010).

### *Changing Beliefs about People with Disabilities*

Beliefs about people with disabilities can be changed through intervention efforts, especially with children (Simeonsson, 2003). Danida's study of two rural areas of Mongolia and Nepal indicate that attitudes, behaviour and communication towards people with disabilities can be changed through education, even with limited economic resources (Dyssegaard, 1998). Two other studies by Haber et al (2000) and Boyce and Paterson (2002) indicate that community-wide involvement can produce long-term behavioural changes towards people with disabilities. Liesener and Mills (1999) showed that using a video to role model positive communication with people with disabilities, increased participants' favourable attitudes and behaviour towards them. A study by the Jewish National Fund showed that a multimedia campaign depicting people with disabilities as normal, produced a positive change in public attitudes (Robinson, 2000).

In Nepal, entertainment-education programmes have been successfully produced to promote prosocial beliefs and behaviour. "Cut Your Coat According to Your Cloth", a radio drama serial, promoted family planning in Nepal between 1996 and 2000, reaching an estimated 8 million men and women of reproductive age (Storey et al, 1999). A second Nepali radio programme, "Service Brings Rewards", modelled positive client-physician interactions and portrayed health workers as integral members of the community. Both programmes received extensive

inputs from listener groups in Nepal who provided feedback to producers. The Meena Communication Initiative (MCI), a UNICEF sponsored multi-media human rights campaign in South Asia that began in 1991, promoted equality and education for young girls. The communication materials developed by the UNICEF Regional Office in Kathmandu successfully communicated girls' rights, promoted acquisition of life skills, and encouraged prosocial behavioural change by modelling equality for girls (McKee et al, 2004).

### *Social Change Theory*

One of the primary reasons for the effectiveness of the entertainment-education communication strategy is the heightened audience involvement with media personalities and characters of entertainment programming, also called personas, who can role model prosocial beliefs and behaviour. Television is particularly effective in creating strong audience involvement because of the illusion of intimacy that is created between viewers and personas (Hoffner, 1996). Audience involvement has been approached theoretically and methodologically through different kinds of mediated processes. One of these forms of involvement that is directly linked to social change is audience identification.

The concept of identification has been discussed by a number of prominent scholars, including Sigmund Freud (1989/1940), Harold Lasswell (1965/1935), and Kenneth Burke (1969). Kelman (1961) introduced a theory of identification in the early days of television, defining it as a process of persuasion in which a person seeks to adopt the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of another person through actual or perceived relationships. Kelman (1958) described classical identification as attempts to be like, or actually be, the other person. Although television programming is susceptible to increasing the knowledge gap in regions of the world where great health inequities exist, television programmes can also increase interest in health-related issues (Chew and Palmer, 1994), especially when they have a high entertainment appeal. Television programming can be an effective means of promoting health practices, and entertainment programmes are especially adept at modelling health behaviour through drama (Bandura, 2004), especially in developing nations like Nepal, where the television industry is still in its early developmental stages.

### *Khushi Ko Sansar*

Khushi Ko Sansar (KKS) is the first entertainment-education television programme for children in Nepal, which directly promotes better treatment of

people with disabilities. It is a thirty minute weekly children's TV show that is now one of the highest rated programmes in Nepal. A religion-based character education programme presented in an entertainment format, throughout the show KKS has music, song, dance and brightly coloured, amusing sets that appeal to children. Common topics addressed include biblical themes such as speaking no evil, sowing and reaping, using things properly (not being destructive with other's property, books, household items, tools and school items), choosing good role models, good health, honesty, not stealing, friendship, respect for elders, and similar subjects relevant to a child's character development. The stars of KKS are Khush - a giant dog, played by a male actor - and Didi - a young, attractive female co-host.

In addition to the above topics, some shows contain a specific educational element which discusses people with disabilities. These programmes explore the lives of people with many different kinds of disabilities, such as deafness, blindness, physical and mental disabilities, accident victims confined to wheelchairs or using other walking aids, or other health-related needs. These programmes are intended to educate children about disabilities so that they understand the importance of everyone's right to dignity in life, and respect and include those different from themselves. They emphasise how every person has worth and value, and that with love and acceptance a person with disability can live almost as normal a life as a person without disability.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Several research questions and related hypotheses that emerge from the literature review are posed. First, the effects of two episodes of KKS that address the issue of disabilities are assessed. Second, the research tests what role if any, identification has in influencing children's beliefs and intended behaviour towards people with disabilities. The first research question is as follows:

RQ1: What are the effects of exposure to the TV programme KKS on Nepali children's attitudes, beliefs and intended behaviour towards people with disabilities?

Since the programme producers deliberately created the main character of the programme, the dog named Khush, as a role model for helping those with disabilities, the following predictions were tested in this study:

H1: Exposure to KKS will increase viewers' desire to have a friend with a disability.

H2: Exposure to KKS will increase viewers' belief that it is acceptable to talk to a person with a disability.

This study also explores how Nepali children's involvement with a television character might, through the process of identification, lead to role modelling on that character's beliefs and behaviour. This modelling influence led to the second research question:

RQ2: What effect does identification with Khush, the main character in KKS, have on Nepali children's beliefs and treatment of those with disabilities?

Previously cited research shows that identification with a television character can promote the adoption of prosocial health beliefs and behaviour. The following hypotheses were posed to test this prediction:

H3: As identification with Khush increases, children will more likely learn the beliefs that Khush values.

H4: As identification with Khush increases, children's intended favourable treatment of people with disabilities will also increase.

Finally, this study considers the potential demographic influences related to watching KKS, as indicated by the third research question:

RQ3: Are there any demographic characteristics of Nepali children that affect identification with Khush and influence their attitudes, beliefs and treatment of those with disabilities?

## METHOD

A pre-test post-test treatment group only research design was employed for this study, as part of a baseline study before the programme was regularly broadcast in Nepal. Two television episodes of KKS in the Nepali language were shown to school-aged children. The programmes contained messages and images presented in an entertainment-education format with music, skits, crafts and testimonies by and for children, and specifically presented interactions with people with disabilities. In one programme, the audience viewed the history of deaf schools around the world. Featured prominently was one of the world's largest schools for the deaf, in India. Deaf students at this school share their stories, and tell the audience what it is like to be deaf and how it affects their lives. In this episode Khush, the main character, talks about his own beliefs and attitudes toward deaf people.

The second episode of KKS used in the study focused on a girl in a wheelchair. Her life story about an accident which caused some paralysis and brain damage, is powerfully portrayed. She is now an accomplished artist. In this show, Khush visits the artist and brings her a gift. He talks to her about her artwork, sits with her and hugs her. The girl's mother and a narrator describe the impact that having a disability has on their lives, their family and society at large.

## **Participants**

Participants in the study were 357 children from seven different communities in Nepal. The children, ages 6-15, were selected from nine different schools in the following regions: two remote villages, Subarnabur and Babanagar, located in the southern Terai region; Pokhara, a city in the central region of Nepal; Taplejung, a community in the Far East; Dhangadi, a community in the Far West; Banepa, a community in Kathmandu Valley; and Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Children in each location were asked at random, by research coordinators with consent from their teachers, if they would like to participate in watching and discussing a children's television programme. The groups of participants ranged in size from 13-70 children. The estimated response rate exceeded 90 per cent.

## **Research Design and Procedure**

The study was implemented in three stages: (1) participants completed a pre-test survey questionnaire, (2) participants then watched two 20-minute TV episodes of KKS, and (3) finally, a post-test survey questionnaire was administered. All children were part of a pre-test group and a post-test group. None of the children had previously seen the two episodes of KKS. First, all children completed a short pre-test survey questionnaire in order to assess their current attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards people with disabilities. They then viewed the two KKS episodes about disabilities, and immediately afterwards completed a post-test survey questionnaire in order to assess the impact the shows had on them.

Due to the low expectation that pre-test measures would create social desirability effects, given the Nepali cultural norms not to interact with people with disabilities, the research funding agency did not feel that the added expense of pre-test post-test control groups was justified. No internal validity threats were anticipated through the media environment. All the participants answered pre-test and post-test survey questionnaires which measured beliefs and intended behaviour toward people with disabilities.

## Instrumentation

Survey items consisted of both Likert scale questions and categorical questions. The research instrument was pilot tested to validate that the children in the target age group understood all the survey questions, and that the translation of the questionnaire into Nepali was accurate. Initial factor analyses were conducted with both sets of questions, in order to create two measurement scales. Selected questionnaire items from a previous published measurement scale for identification were used, to create a measure for identification (Brown and Bocarnea, 2007). In order to simplify the lengthy Likert scale so it could be used for children more easily, the authors selected eight items and created a categorical scale (ranging from 0 to 8) to measure identification with Khush, the main character of the television programme. A reliability analysis was conducted on the eight-item scale, producing a Cronbach alpha of 0.70. Sample items from this scale include : *“Khush is the kind or person I can learn from,” “I want to be more like Khush,”* and *“Khush sets a good example of how I should live my life.”*

A second scale was created to measure treatment towards those with disabilities. This scale was created with six 1-5 Likert scale survey questions (ranging from 6 to 30). The Chronbach alpha computed for this scale was 0.76. Sample items include: *“Khush teaches me to talk to people with disabilities just like I talk to other people I know,” “Khush teaches me to treat people with disabilities just like I would other people I know,”* and *“I think it is important to treat people with disabilities just like I would other people I know.”* All other variables were measured with single questionnaire items. Descriptive statistics for these two scales are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1**

### Descriptive Statistics for Measurement Scale Variables

Variable	Scale Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
Identification with Khush	8.0 (0 to 8)	4.0	8.0	7.8	0.7	0.5
Positive Treatment of PWD	24.0 (6 to 30)	19.0	30.0	27.8	2.3	5.3



## RESULTS

### Demographic Information

Boys comprised 57.5% of the sample while girls were 42.5% of the sample. The 15 per cent gender discrepancy is due to the fact that girls are not encouraged to attend school as much as Nepali boys. The three major religious affiliations of the sample were Hindu (64.9 per cent), Buddhist (13.5 per cent), and Christian (20.5 per cent), with about 1.0 per cent Muslim. Christian populations were purposefully oversampled because of the Christian content of the programmes.

### Effects of Watching *Khushi Ko Sansar*

The first research question which explored the effects of exposure to the TV programme KKS on Nepali children's beliefs and intended behaviour towards people with disabilities, was assessed by two hypotheses. The first hypothesis predicted that exposure to KKS would increase viewers' desire to have a friend with a disability. Results provide strong support for this hypothesis. In the pre-test, 218 children (61.8 per cent) said it was OK to have a friend with a disability; after watching the two episodes of KKS, 319 children (90.4 per cent) said it was OK to have a friend with a disability ( $\chi^2$  (df=1) = 78,  $p < .001$ ). The second hypothesis predicted that exposure to KKS would increase viewers' belief that it is acceptable to talk to a person with a disability. Results also strongly support this hypothesis. In the pre-test, 267 children (75.6 per cent) said it was OK to talk to a person with a disability; after watching two episodes of KKS, 329 children (93.2 per cent) said it was OK to talk to a person with a disability ( $\chi^2$  (df=1) = 40.1,  $p < .001$ ).

Additional post-test questions indicated that 95 per cent of the study participants reported that they learned from watching the programme, and 90 per cent reported that they would like to have a friend with a disability.

### Effects of Identification with Khush

The second research question examined the effects of identification with Khush, the main character in KKS, on Nepali children's attitudes, beliefs and treatment of those with disabilities. Two hypotheses were derived from this research question. Several t-tests and a correlation analysis were conducted to test hypothesis 3, and regression analysis was conducted to test hypothesis 4. In the first analysis, the association between identification with Khush and learning the beliefs Khush

valued (a nominal variable) was analysed. Results from the t-test conducted show that as predicted, children with a higher identification with Khush were more likely to value what Khush valued ( $t = 2.4$ ,  $df = 1, 28$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In the second analysis, the association between identification with Khush and wanting to learn more about Khush's beliefs (a nominal variable) was analysed. As predicted, t-test results show that children who more strongly identified with Khush through exposure to the television series wanted to learn more about his beliefs ( $t = 5.15$ ,  $df = 1,342$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the third analysis, the association between identification with Khush and modelling Khush's respectful behaviour towards people with disabilities through conversations (a nominal variable) was analysed. Contrary to expectations, the t-test results indicate that children who more strongly identified with Khush were not more likely to express positive feelings toward people with disabilities when talking with friends ( $t = 1.18$ ,  $df = 1, 14$ ,  $p = .26$ ). In the final test of hypothesis 3, a correlation analysis was used to analyse the association between identification with Khush and acceptance of having a friend with a disability (a scale variable). As predicted, those who identified with Khush more strongly were more likely to accept a friend with a disability ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Since three of the four tests for hypothesis 3 were significant, the hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that identification with Khush would lead to more favourable treatment of people with disabilities. Regression analysis was used to test the relationship between these two discrete variables (described previously in Table 1). As predicted, those who more strongly identified with Khush also intended to treat people with disabilities more favourably ( $\beta = 0.57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus hypothesis 4 is supported.

### **Demographic Influences**

The third research question explored whether any demographic characteristics of Nepali children affected their identification with Khush, or influenced their beliefs about and treatment of those with disabilities. Geographic location of the study participants had no influence on their beliefs about and treatment of those with disabilities, therefore the data were analysed as a single data set. Results of a SAS (2004) General Linear Models (GLM) regression analysis showed that gender and age influenced identification with Khush ( $R^2 = 0.10$ ,  $F = 3.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not religious orientation ( $F = 2.96$ ,  $p = .09$ ). A subsequent t-test analysis showed that girls identified more strongly with Khush than did boys ( $t = 3.45$ ,  $df$

= 256,  $p < .001$ ); and an ANOVA analysis indicated that older children identified more strongly with Khush than younger children did ( $F = 2.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

A second GLM analysis showed that age, gender and religion influenced treatment towards people with disabilities ( $R^2 = 0.13$ ,  $F = 3.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post-hoc regression analyses and bonferroni t-tests were conducted to examine these demographic influences on treatment towards people with disabilities, and to make pair-wise comparisons among various demographic groups. Results show that 9-year olds had significantly stronger identification with Khush ( $M = 28.7$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ) than did 12- year olds ( $M = 27.2$ ,  $SD = 2.5$ ) and 14-year olds ( $M = 26.9$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ). No other groups differed indicating that overall, identification varied little across the ten age groups (it ranged from a low of  $M = 26.7$  to a high of  $M = 28.7$  on the identification scale). Table 2 summarises the results of the two GLM analyses of the demographic variables.

**Table 2**

**Demographic Influences on Identification and Treatment towards People with Disabilities**

Demographic Variables	Dependent Variables	Type III Sum of Squares	F-Value	P-Value
Age	Identification	10.5	2.7	0.005**
	Treatment towards PWD	87.3	2.2	0.021*
Gender	Identification	2.7	6.4	0.012*
	Treatment towards PWD	61.8	14.1	0.000***
Religion	Identification	1.3	3.0	0.086
	Treatment towards PWD	13.0	3.0	0.032*

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

Regarding gender, girls showed slightly more favourable treatment towards people with disabilities ( $M = 28.3$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ) than did boys ( $M = 27.4$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ), a difference confirmed by a t-test ( $t = 3.76$ ,  $df = 252$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Concerning the influence of religious affiliation, bonferroni t-tests indicate that children whose families were Christian expressed more favourable treatment towards people with disabilities ( $M = 28.0$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ) than did children from Hindu families ( $M = 27.2$ ,  $SD = 2.5$ ) and children from Muslim families ( $M = 25.0$ ,  $SD = 0.0$ ). Controlling for age, gender, and religious orientation did not change the results for the effects

of identification. Identification with Khush added unique variance to adopting Khush's favourable treatment towards those with disabilities ( $F = 7.2, p < .01$ ) after all the demographic control variables were entered into the regression equation.

## DISCUSSION

As predicted, children's exposure to KKS initiated identification with the main character of the programme, Khush, which in turn promoted a positive change in how they perceive people with disabilities. This change was accomplished primarily through two means: (1) creating more positive beliefs about people with disabilities, and (2) increasing more positive intended behaviour towards those with disabilities. Overall, the findings of this study are encouraging and optimistic with regard to the use of an entertainment-education television programme to promote positive thinking and favourable treatment of people with disabilities.

In Nepal, the people with disabilities often face difficult communication interactions and negative reactions from others in their everyday lives. Results show that they may benefit from popular entertainment programmes like KKS, that educate and inform people about disabilities and that advance the government's desire to promote inclusiveness of this marginalised group. Support for the four hypotheses suggests that KKS, which has grown in viewership during the past two years, will continue to promote prosocial attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards people with disabilities in Nepal.

### Study Limitations

The short time-frame of this exploratory research did not allow for examination of long-term belief or behavioural change. For an entertainment-education programme concerning disabilities to remain effective, it is not enough to simply change attitudes or beliefs. The results of this study show that participants formed more favourable beliefs in the short-term, but it is not possible to extrapolate these findings beyond the immediate effects. Now that KKS has been broadcast on television in Nepal for more than a couple of years, a longitudinal study of the programme is currently in progress.

A second important limitation of this research is the survey instrument itself. Answers to the survey by some participants indicated they did not understand how to respond to negatively worded sentences. The negatively worded items

seemed to confuse some children, resulting in a low reliability coefficient for the identification scale. The survey instrument was also long, given their short attention spans, and could have been worded more simply throughout to increase the children's understanding.

A third limitation is the sample collection procedures. Although care was taken, through collaboration with Nepali researchers, to obtain a sample representative of the population of children who watched television, this task was extremely difficult to achieve. Severe logistical challenges such as poor roads, frequent power outages (power was on for an average of only 6-8 hours a day during the data collection period), political instability and ongoing fighting between the Maoists and their detractors made field research extremely difficult. The sample had a much larger population of children from Buddhist homes and a much smaller population of children from Hindu homes than was originally intended.

### **Future Research**

This study presents many possibilities for future research. Assessment of entertainment-education disability initiatives through media would be enhanced greatly by ethnographic research. Analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions would help to create better understanding of how children are modelling themselves on others who interact with people with disabilities.

Field observations also would enrich future research and evaluation. Future studies should assess how audiences relate to specific characters with disabilities through popular media.

Future research should also include in-depth, personal face-to-face interviews with Nepali families and their children between the ages of 5-16 who watch *Khushi Ko Sansar* on Nepali television. Focus groups, one-on-one interviews and participant-observations could be employed to study how children respond to characters modelling prosocial behaviour through television programmes that address the issue of disabilities, in order to better capture the personal, cultural and socio-economic context of children's viewing experiences. It would be beneficial to study television programmes similar to KKS in other cultures, so as to further assess the effectiveness of this kind entertainment-education intervention, particularly among people who also are predisposed to negative thoughts and attitudes towards people with disabilities. Future studies should take into account external variables such as social norms, peer influences and media exposure.

## CONCLUSION

As was expected, children who watched episodes of *Khushi Ko Sansar* adopted more prosocial beliefs and intended behaviour towards people with disabilities. The response of the children was consistent with the theoretical expectations derived from the theory of identification. Entertainment-education interventions can increase the adoption of prosocial attitudinal, belief and behavioural changes when popular media personas role model the intended behaviour. Media interventions which use clear, simple messages and powerful images can increase awareness about disabilities and encourage people to form more positive attitudes and intended behaviour towards people with disabilities.

One final conclusion drawn from this study concerns *Khushi Ko Sansar*'s entertainment appeal. Virtually everyone, adults and children alike, who watched these specific episodes, commented on their enjoyment of the programme. To improve the lives of those with disabilities, in developing countries the potential for using high quality entertainment television programmes with imbedded prosocial educational and health messages is great.

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