

Nambawan To Watch: EMTV, PNG's Only TV Channel

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Abstract

This paper examines the program content of Papua New Guinea's only home-based television channel, EMTV. It presents research identifying the extent to which programming reflects the cultural, informational and development needs of the people in the country. It situates this research in the contexts of the history of television in PNG and the experiences of other Pacific Island nations and developing countries. It concludes that while there is evidence that some programs that center on information and development needs are being broadcast the vast majority focuses on entertainment that has no relevance to the lives of Papua new Guineans.

Introduction: The PNG Media landscape

PNG has the largest media industry in the Pacific, but the country has some of the lowest levels of information and communication technology in the developing world. Out of every 1,000 people in the country, 86 have radio sets, 17 people have television sets and 14 read newspapers daily. There are a total of 50,000 Internet users (nine per 1,000 people) (AusAID, 2004, p. 16).

EMTV is the only television station in PNG, and is owned by the Australian company Channel Nine. EMTV can trace its origins back to 1984 when Media Niugini, a community video company, began playing in market places around Port Moresby, videotapes containing popular programs from overseas with some local advertising and community announcements. This market place TV consisted of educational messages on issues like political education, family planning and AIDS awareness campaigns (Sinebare, 1997, p. 34).

In 1987, Media Niugini became EMTV and began a television service. EMTV was established as a private enterprise first as cable TV and later as broadcast TV. Although EMTV is the only free to air television station broadcasting from PNG it is possible for people with satellite dishes to receive other stations. Due to its geographical location, PNG falls into the footprints of different satellites and can receive TV signals from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and others.

PNG has two daily newspapers and both are based in the capital Port Moresby. The *Post-Courier*, the oldest daily newspaper in PNG, established in 1969, is owned by South Pacific Post, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd, and the *National*, established in 1993, is Malaysian-owned with a subsidiary of timber company Rimbunan Hijau, holding a majority shareholding.

The only weekly national newspaper, the *Wantok*, is published in the tok pisin language and is owned by Word Publishing through Media Holdings Ltd. Its shareholders are the mainstream churches in PNG: Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Anglican, and Uniting Church.

Radio in PNG is in the hands of a bureaucracy, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), which as the only radio broadcasting authority in the country is the nation's public service provider. At its peak, NBC reached about four million people in about 60 different languages as well as English (Nash, 1995, pp. 42-43). NBC has been in decline in recent years as the number of commercial stations, playing mostly music, based in and around PNG's urban centers, grows.

The geographical isolation of much of the country makes it difficult for media to penetrate beyond the main urban areas. In urban areas, radio and TV are both effective ways of reaching people; 63 per cent of urban teenagers and 38 per cent of urban adults watch TV every day. Although newspaper readership in urban areas is far higher than in rural areas, just 22 per cent of urban teenagers and 21 per cent of urban adults read newspapers every day (AusAID, 2004, p. 16).

In rural areas, 80 per cent of teenagers and 43 per cent of adults listen to radio every day. No teens and no adults read newspapers everyday (meaning that the numbers are so small as to be statistically insignificant); 5 per cent of rural teens and no rural adults watch TV everyday (AusAID, 2004, p. 16)

In PNG radio is the most widely accessible information and communication technology. Five times as many people own a radio set as a television or purchase a daily newspaper. (AusAID, 2004, p. 16) The cost of television sets is beyond the reach of most Papua New Guineans. TV sets require more complex power sources than radio; most Papua New Guineans do not have access to reliable power, other than batteries (AusAID, 2004, p. 19)

History of PNG TV

When TV was introduced into PNG no consideration was made for issues such as cultural relevance, its effects on people, or its impact on their culture and the country. TV was introduced before any national policy framework was established and thus no guidelines were available for TV broadcasters like EMTV (Sinebare, 1997, p. 34).

Three PNG commissions of inquiry into television broadcasting held between 1966 and 1987 envisaged that there would be regulations to oversee television in PNG, perhaps with some form of broadcasting tribunal, along with comprehensive legislation and a public broadcasting / educational channel operating alongside PNG majority-owned commercial channels (Thomas, 1994, p. 8). These commissions saw television as primarily an educational medium that supplemented teaching in primary and secondary schools. They wanted the majority of programs to be locally produced and for imported

programs to be appropriate to PNG society, with strong emphasis placed on trying to preserve PNG's multi cultures. This did not happen as commercial interests quickly dominated television in PNG.

Before the arrival of commercial television into PNG in 1987 urban areas of PNG had access to foreign television via subscribers clubs which were able to use illegal satellite dishes and cable systems because there was no legislation to stop them (Thomas, 1994, p. 9)

In 1984, NBN of Australia had a formal application to start a television channel approved by PNG Post and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC), but PTC, unsure of how to proceed asked the government for directions on what the PNG's communications policy should be. No decision was forthcoming but PTC issued licenses to Niugini Television Network (which was 90 per cent owned by an Australian company) and to a subsidiary of NBN.

In 1985, Media Niugini made submissions to extend its established marketplace television service. Licenses were issued for both NTN and Media Niugini but after the prime minister intervened and asked NTN not to start broadcasting and following a subsequent court challenge, NTN began broadcasting in January 1987, followed by Media Niugini's EMTV in August 1987. NTN ceased broadcasting in February 1988 due to financial difficulties (Thomas, 1994, p. 9; Lie, 1994, pp.190-195).

Television in developing countries

There were many concerns raised at the time television was introduced into PNG that its effects would be detrimental to the indigenous culture of PNG.

Musawe Sinebare reported that there was doubt as to whether television would serve a useful purpose by disseminating information. The information needs of ordinary PNG people vary from village to village, but in the traditional context of PNG societies information needs were conveniently met within each village or region (Sinebare, 1997, p. 35)

There were also unfavourable experiences from Pacific Islands and other developing countries. Maria Burke found that when TV was introduced into American Samoa it promoted cultural imperialism. She felt TV violence deceived people and advertising created false expectations, affected traditional values of modesty and promoted cargo-cult mentality 'with everything appearing so real, so easy and so simple' (Burke cited in Sinebare, 1997, p. 35).

Pamela Thomas, writing in 1986 found that TV programs in most developing countries contained almost no local content and even less that could be called developmental (Thomas, 1986, p. 23). She found transmission time was filled with cheap, imported material, most of which originated in the US where enormous multinational media organizations with worldwide affiliates and outlets can distribute material more cost effectively than elsewhere.

It is important for television stations to provide programming content that is created locally because such content expresses the community's local needs, knowledge and experience that is relevant to the community. James Bentley says the process of creating and disseminating local content provides opportunities for members of the community to interact with each other, expressing their own ideas, knowledge and culture in their own language (Bentley, 2002, p. 2).

The development agency AusAID believes television and radio are extremely effective avenues for preserving PNG's cultural diversity. At present EMTV does this to the extent that it broadcasts programs that encourages a local music industry (*CHM Supersound*) but AusAID feels more can be done especially by promoting local talent in the production of drama (AusAID, 2004)

Bentley studied television across the whole of the Pacific and discovered the lack of local content was evident across all media and information channels. There was an overwhelming presence of content coming from non-local sources, reflecting language, values and lifestyles which were often vastly different from those of the community 'consuming' the content (Bentley, 2002, p. 3).

Bentley concluded that to create relevant content you need owners or producers with the motivation to create it. To do this in developing countries all levels of the society, including the policy-making, must recognize the need to support those who create, produce and distribute the programs (Bentley, 2002, p. 3).

Television has tended to alter social relationships within communities. Michael Ogden's research in Belau and Marshall Islands concluded that TV has changed the way average Pacific Islanders spend their time. This change has meant that time in the evening is no longer spent storytelling and therefore the continuity of the people's history is put in danger since they have an oral tradition which is passed from generation to generation through such storytelling sessions (Ogden cited by Anyanwu, 1995, p. 55).

Niik Plange and Bruce Horsfield found the average Fijian family lifestyle has been altered both in speech pattern, family gathering time and mealtime because of TV (cited in Anyanwu, 1995, p. 61). In a study of television in rural India Kirk Johnson found that the communities that used to be defined by their own oral traditions and stories are now being structured and reorganized by what they see on television (Johnson, 2001, p. 147).

Johnson found that television has significantly contributed to the restructuring of social relationships in the Indian villages he examined. Television brings both men and women of all ages together on a regular basis in close proximity for an extended period of time. This closeness over time has created new types of relationships among people of different ages and genders. It is not only the physical proximity of people on a daily basis but that television informs and imparts messages and images to every viewer equally.

You do not have to be literate or educated to watch television. Children and youth are often as informed and knowledgeable if not more so than adults. The need to watch television among family members initiates a breakdown in the sex-role differentiation of work toward sharing certain responsibilities, so everyone may watch television. Today, women and men are occasionally seen eating together in order to finish the chores in time for their favourite TV program (Johnson, 2001, pp. 151 – 157).

EMTV programming

The purpose of this research is to identify the extent to which programming in PNG's only TV channel, EMTV, reflects the cultural, informational and development needs of the country. To do this a survey of all programming for the 31 days of March 2004 was undertaken. The television schedules were divided into programs that originated from within PNG and those that came from other countries.

Further, a survey of the PNG produced programming was also undertaken to determine the types of programming broadcast this was done in the context of studying the extent to which PNG programming was locally produced and might be considered to be culturally relevant to the people of PNG.

To facilitate this, operational definitions for program types were identified. These were adapted from similar definitions used by Johnson in his analysis of the way rural people in India used television.

Informative: News, current affairs and parliamentary debates

Development: Social, economic or educational programs

Entertainment: Any program that did not have a development or informative message and was watched purely for relaxation (game shows, serials, films, pop music)

Sport: Programs of live sporting events or panel-led discussions that have sport as their main subject (Johnson, 2001, p. 168)

Table 1: Time allocated by program type.

Type of programs	Number of hours broadcast (programs of PNG origin)	Number of hours broadcast (programs of non-PNG origin)	% of total programs with PNG origin	% of total programs with origin from other countries
Development	80.5	0	52.10	0
Entertainment	26	192	16.82	49.58
Information	42	102	27.18	26.33
Others	0	48	0	12.39
Sport	6	45.25	3.88	11.68
TOTAL	154.5	387.25	100	100

Source: Author

Table one shows that during the survey period of 1-31 March 2004 there were a total of 541.75 hours broadcast. Of this 28.52 per cent of programs originated from PNG and 71.48 per cent from other countries. PNG content tended to be between 33 and 35 hours per week and could be as low as 1.5 hours per day.

More than half (52.1 per cent) of all PNG programming is development, defined as social, economic or educational programs. This figure is inflated by the 'education' programming which is entirely schools broadcasting – there are three to four hours per weekday. These programs mostly consist of cameras in a classroom capturing the class in progress. Lessons that are broadcast range from grade seven to grade eleven and cover mathematics, science, physics and geography. The 73 hours of education classroom broadcasting accounts for nearly half (47.24 per cent) of the total 154.5 hours of PNG originated programming.

These schools programs are produced by the National Department of Education with the support of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). EMTV is prepared to broadcast educational programs free of charge at non-peak times because it costs EMTV less to run its transmitters 24 hours a day than to turn them off and it is therefore cheaper to broadcast content than a blank screen. (AusAID, 2004, p.15 (fn))

A total 42 hours (27.18 per cent) of PNG produced programming is informative. This total is made up mostly of the daily 30 minute *National EMTV News* bulletin. The figure is inflated by the inclusion of the repeat of the 6 pm broadcast (usually at 10.30pm or 11pm.). Therefore the total time devoted to news during the survey period was 31 hours. The remaining 11 hours included the weekly magazine program *Tok Piksa*, a weekly paid-for news broadcast from the National Capital District Commission (*NCDC News*) and a weekly program devoted to development issues, *Insait PNG*, all programs which are relatively inexpensive to make.

The 26 hours (16.82 per cent) of PNG originated entertainment consists of a weekly *CHM Supersound*, airing music videos sponsored by a leading music producer and retailer, and a program of videos called *South Pacific Music*.

The six hours (3.88 per cent) of sport produced within PNG consists entirely of panel discussion programs such as *Sportscene*.

While it could be said that programs made in PNG are trying to educate citizens, most of the overseas' programming is geared to mass taste. Nearly half (49.58 per cent) is entertainment, mostly US drama series including *JAG*, *Third Watch*, and *ER*. The Australian-produced entertainment includes *Australia's Funniest Home Videos*, *The Price is Right*, *Stingers* and *McLeod's Daughter*.

More than a quarter (26.33 per cent) consists of information programs, largely made up of current affairs programs (*Today*, *A Current Affair* and *Nightline*) that run five days a week. None of these programs contains items about Papua

New Guinea and little that has relevance to ordinary people in PNG. None of the programs from overseas falls into the 'development' category.

Sport (11.68 per cent) consists mostly of rugby and Australian Rules football from Australia and the 12.39 per cent of programming designated 'other' is mostly evangelical Christian preaching from the US.

The results from this 2004 survey have similarities to a 1990-91 survey that found that comedies and soap operas accounted for 21.5 per cent of total programming on EMTV. Children's shows took up 18.8 per cent of time and movies and dramas, 14.7 per cent. The television schedules were dominated by non-developmental / educational material with only 2.5 per cent of time devoted to educational material and documentaries and 14.0 per cent to news and magazine programs.

Of the total content in 1990-91 only 15.5 per cent of programming (compared to 28.52 per cent in 2004) was produced within PNG (Thomas, 1994, pp. 9-10).

We should not be surprised by this data. John Taylor, a former chief executive of EMTV, speaking in the 1990s, said, 'Our prime purpose is entertainment, entertainment is what the viewers want to see, so that the more viewers we get for particular programs the more revenue we can ask [from advertisers] and in this way keep the service going. That's a commercial reality'.

It is generally understood that media operating to make a profit in a free market (such as exists in PNG) work towards maximizing income by way of various marketing strategies. If Taylor's way of thinking is typical (and there is no reason to suppose that it is not) then it appears that EMTV has a clear strategy to encourage large numbers of viewers by broadcasting programs of appeal to mass audiences. Such programs are imported into the country and largely consist of movies, dramas, game shows and sport.

In 2004, television viewers in PNG are able to access channels beamed in by satellite. None of these channels have content specific to PNG. Depending upon where you live in PNG it is possible to access US-owned movies, sports and general entertainment channels (such as HBO, Star World and Star Sports), Australian general entertainment channels (SBS, Channel Seven, WIN, ABC) and news channels (BBC World, CNN, Bloomberg).

In his study 'One Way Information Flow, The Case of Australian TV Channels Received in Papua New Guinea', Sinebare concludes that if you take the foreign content on EMTV and add the foreign content on satellite 'such is the magnitude in which people are being fed with foreign content and this is seriously affecting them socially and culturally in irreversible ways' (Sinebare, 1997, p. 36).

He says that the majority of Papua New Guineans who live in urban areas are virtually inundated with information that is culturally irrelevant to them. The

expectations promoted on TV are beyond their means and the values and lifestyles portrayed contradict and conflict with those of their own culture.

Sinebare was particularly concerned about the type of material being beamed into PNG via satellite, for example nudity / sex scenes are beyond accepted level of decency and morality in Melanesian culture (Sinebare, 1997, p. 35)

Sinebare concluded that the potential effects in internationalizing TV may be detrimental to the audience for whom it is not initially intended. For example, PNG's cultural values will be seriously damaged if PNG children continue to be exposed to TV programs with massive foreign content which do not promote PNG cultural values. 'Hence today's PNG children will regrettably become "Anglo American" or 'Australian' in their mentality without ever setting foot in those countries, instead of identifying themselves with Papua New Guinean values and traditions' (Sinebare, 1997, p. 36).

Amos Thomas, writing in 1994, believed it was reasonable to suggest that television in itself was at least 'a partial cause of PNG's social problems such as the decline of traditional social control mechanisms, urban drift and consequent unemployment and crime' (Thomas, 1994, p. 11).

Anecdotal evidence also suggested a significant rise of the incidence of crime from the mid-1980s 'coinciding approximately with the introduction of private cable systems'. The management of television stations counter this by stating that television has actually reduced the incidence of crime by keeping people off the street at night (Stewart cited in Thomas, 1994, p. 11).

Conclusions

EMTV has never seen its role as being much more than providing an entertainment service for viewers. Television (like all commercial media) has strong commercial incentives to target their program content towards relatively affluent urban audiences. But the program survey in this paper shows that the material produced within PNG contains a sizeable amount of educational / development / informational material.

We should be encouraged by this because if television is to realise its full potential in contributing to PNG's development priorities then it has to broadcast programs that address those priorities (AusAID, 2004, p. 19).

Recent thinking in this area suggests that people, especially in rural areas, will welcome greater access to better quality and more relevant program content, especially if it is available in vernacular languages (AusAID, 2004, appendix).

However, we do not really know what ordinary Papua New Guineans want from their television. A company called Marketsearch has conducted annual media surveys of what types of media people in PNG read, watch and listen. It surveys 1,200 people, but provides a limited picture because it focuses on five

urban areas. So it follows that we do not know anything about rural preferences (AusAID, 2004, p. 69).

AusAID believes that an audience survey is needed in PNG to discover what people want from their television, radio and newspapers. There is a big information divide in PNG between people in rural areas who have little access to media and urban populations where most commercial media is concentrated (Rooney et. al., 2004, AusAID, 2004, p. 69). This lack of opportunity determines access to, use of and preferences for different types of media and also to a lesser degree their social participation.

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