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HEALTH EDUCATION BY TELEVISION IN SAUDI ARABIA

by

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Television came to Saudi Arabia in the latter part of 1955 when the American Training Mission began operating a 150-watt television station at the Dhahran Air Field. Shortly thereafter, television antennas could be spotted on the roofs of a few village homes. Then in September 1957, Aramco began operating its own 6000-watt television station for its Arabic speaking employees. Whereas practically all of the Air Field programmes are in English, all of the Company's programmes are in Arabic. The coming of Arabic television created a boom in the Saudi Arab television market and the rush was on to buy sets. Television dealers in the Eastern Province claim to have sold 471 sets and have orders for many more. In "cinemaless" Saudi Arabia, pictures that move are the ultimate in entertainment at present and will probably continue to be until that day when motion pictures become a part of the Saudi's everyday life.

Though health films are used quite extensively in the Eastern Province schools, they are still limited to particular groups, and showing films to the general public is not practised. Therefore, it is understandable why the people flock to television sets to see many of the things they have previously only read or heard over the radio. The Saudi population is eager for

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information, and the majority of the townspeople have radio sets. This creates still another outlet for health information which is presently being investigated.

The task of putting on a TV health show was given to the Health Education Section. The Health Education Section is part of Aramco's Preventive Medicine Division consisting of the various specialties encountered in most of the health departments in the United States. The Division's primary concern is the health of the Aramco employees and their dependents, but upon the request of the Saudi Government, it cooperates in various other public health activities for the mutual benefit of both parties. A prime example of this type of programme was Aramco's participation in a malaria control programme in the Qatif Oasis, Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, that resulted in the reduction of the malarial parasite rate from a high of 85% in 1947 to a low of 6% in 1957. At the beginning of the 1956 control programme, the Saudi Government took complete control of the spray teams and have successfully carried on this programme since that time. The Preventive Medicine Division is now participating in other programmes similar to this and it is anticipated that they will follow the same successful pattern established by the malaria programme.

The Health Education Section, one of six Sections^(M) in the Preventive Medicine Division, is actively engaged in a variety of health education activities within Aramco facilities for Company employees and their dependents and, to a lesser degree, in Saudi Government schools and local villages. In working outside Company facilities, the Section is limited in quantity of work that can be successfully carried out with its limited personnel. The varied activities of the Health Education Section range from maternal and child health classes and food handler training within Company facilities to a cooperative health education programme in the Saudi Government schools. It is anticipated that the maternal and child health classes will be given on a demonstration basis in a few of the villages sometime in the near future.

^(M) The others being: Entomology, Epidemiology, Environmental Sanitation, Public Health Laboratory and Industrial Medicine

When Arqamoo's Television Station opened, a new road for disseminating health information was established, not only to employees and dependents, at whom the programmes are primarily aimed, but also to the homes which have had the least chance to see or hear this type of information before. A health series was planned before the opening of the station and during the first week of programming, a show called "Your Health" was telecast for the first time. "Your Health" has been presented weekly since that time.

After the first few programmes it became evident that producing a weekly television show was no small undertaking and would require the services of a script writer with a general knowledge of Saudi habits, traditions, and customs. Fortunately, a person with script writing experience, who has lived in Saudi Arabia for several years, was obtained and has been generally responsible for the programme's success.

In the preliminary planning, it was necessary to determine the types of health programmes most acceptable and beneficial to the Saudi and yet within reach of attainment. Therefore, a tentative programme outline was established for each of the four monthly shows as follows:

1. Doctor Interview
2. Local Health Conditions
3. Health Film in Arabic
4. Health or Medical Film with locally added introduction and Arabic commentary

This programme plan proved successful through the first four weeks of telecasting and since that time, an attempt has been made to follow this general monthly outline.

Health films in Arabic require a minimum of effort since it is necessary only to submit the films to the studio for telecasting. Many of these Arabic speaking films need an introduction or closing in order to adapt them to the local situation. Very few are capable of producing the desired effect without such an introduction or closing.

Health or medical films, produced in foreign countries with locally added Arabic commentary, facilitate the production of a health show. Their local effectiveness depends on the care used in screening the film for local adaptability. Approximately one film of this type is used on the health show per month but only after careful screening. Films of this type must always have an introduction.

The "Doctor Interview" programme is relatively easy to produce, although much depends on the doctor's adaptability to television - as they say in television circles, "his television personality". Although some of the doctor interviews are live programmes, most of them are filmed several weeks in advance. When the programme is filmed, it can be re-shown at various intervals and establish a television health film library.

The most difficult type of programme is that involving the filming of Local Health Conditions. This entails a detailed shooting script, transportation for the camera crew to the various locations, plus obtaining a satisfactory group of actors. These shows must be planned far in advance in order to obtain the best results. Finding the required props and locations plus familiarising the actors with the script are additional factors that make this type of programme difficult.

Each month the Health Education Section prepares and distributes a health "package" to all Company schools and 36 Government schools in the Eastern Province. This "package" includes a teaching outline, pamphlets, and posters to assist in teaching the health topic selected. The same health topic covered in the package is used in one or more of the television shows during the month. Thus, the increased emphasis on television programming gives the health package more impact and interest. In this respect, television serves as another health education tool in a coordinated effort to achieve the Health Education Section's goal.

Most of the health shows are pointed toward a 15 minute programme although a few have been longer and some shorter. "Your Health" has been particularly fortunate in having good moderators and actors. One of the two most

frequently used moderators is a Saudi Arab with specialised training in health education. His enthusiasm for his subject and sincere interest in the health of the Saudi population has undoubtedly been instrumental in the success of the programmes. This particular moderator conducts his programmes primarily in colloquial Arabic. To add variety and prestige to the programmes, another Saudi, a regular moderator with the television station, is used quite often. He has used predominately classical Arabic on all of the health shows in which he has appeared. One of the survey questions asks the viewers preference for colloquial or classical Arabic and is discussed more thoroughly in the results of the survey.

According to some of the more popular references on the subject, it is said that television is a wedding of radio, the theatre, motion pictures, the graphic arts, fine arts and electronic engineering (Hall, 1956). It resembles each of its parents in certain respects, yet it has a personality all of its own. Here is how it differs.

a. First, it gives a person a feeling of being spoken to directly. It is an intensely personal situation second only to a face to face situation.

b. Secondly, the "here-and-now" feeling in which there is a sense of being "in on" something actually happening.

c. It provides an opportunity for a two-way experience, that is, action and reaction or showmanship and audience-ship.

d. Finally, and perhaps most important, is television's demand for attention. Whereas in radio you can do other things and still listen, television requires the individual's undivided attention in order to know what is happening^(a).

With all of these things in mind and nine months of experience in production, it was felt that the time had come to see if "Your Health" was being watched by: (1) the Aramco employees and (2) the general public. Also, to find out how the people liked the programmes and to obtain any possible suggestions for the programme's improvement.

(a) Pelton, W.J.

Since the Company provides television sets for Arabic speaking employees in libraries and recreational centres in the different bachelor employee living areas, it was easy enough to "count heads" on the nights when "Your Health" was telecast and compare the number of viewers with the number of employees watching other programmes on other nights. Another method of determining employee reaction to the health show was to interview Saudi employees known to have television sets. The more difficult job lay in interviewing the householders in towns where television sets were found in the greatest numbers. These two areas will be referred to as Town I and Town II.

Several questionnaires were prepared before a decision was made to use the one shown in Figure A. This questionnaire was pre-tested in Town I before the survey was begun, and further changes were made to make it more reliable and understandable.

The value of any survey lies in the type of questions asked and the manner in which the inquiry is made. The interviewers were composed of two health education trainees, two male public health nurses, one senior high school student, a female graduate social worker, plus a recent college graduate temporarily assigned to the Health Education Section. Each interviewer was thoroughly schooled on the necessity of being objective; and, generally speaking, little prejudice on the part of the interviewers was noted as shown by the information obtained. Only 7 or 3.5% of those interviewed were women. This small group was interviewed by the female social worker to get some idea of the reaction of the women to the health show. In general, there was no noticeable difference between men and women in this small sample.

The primary objective of the survey was to obtain the answer to two questions:

- (1) Are the people watching the health show?
- (2) Do the people like the health programmes?

It might appear that if question number one was answered affirmatively then question number two would also be affirmative, but in pre-testing it was realized that both questions would be necessary since it appeared that the great majority of people were watching all programmes, including the health show, whether they liked them or not. These two questions were answered quite dramatically as 94.6% of the householders indicated they were watching "Your Health". It was interesting to note that 64.4% watched the show weekly, whereas 29.7% watched the programme occasionally and 5.9% never watched it.

There was also an apparent liking for the show as indicated by 99% answering "yes" to the question "Do you like the health programme?" This answer was pleasing of course, yet it is felt that regardless of how objective the interviewer might have been, the interviewees, after getting the idea that the survey was being conducted for information on the health show, automatically gave answers that he, the interviewee, thought the interviewer wanted to hear. The habit or custom of nodding the head in agreement with what is being said is a Middle Eastern characteristic that must always be considered when conducting a survey, teaching, or giving simple directions such as work assignments. This is especially true in those instances when the person giving the directions, or in this case asking the questions, is believed to be a person with a high degree of intelligence or authority. Therefore, if this question, along with many of the other questions, had been answered by mail, comments would probably have been less favorable.

Question number one shows that the boom in television is continuing at about the same pace and that the listening audience will continue to grow. Table I shows the length of time the householders have owned a television set and the number of sets purchased during a given period of time.

Table I.

Length of Time Television Sets Owned by 200 Interviewees

<u>No. of Months</u>	<u>No. of Sets</u>	<u>%</u>
Under 1 month	4	2.0
1 to 3 months	44	22.0
3 to 6 months	65	32.5
6 to 12 months	45	22.5
12 months and over	<u>42</u>	<u>21.0</u>
Total	200	100.0%

You will note 21% purchased a television set before Aramco's station began telecasting, whereas 56.5% purchased sets during the past six months. Apparently, sets are being purchased as interest in the programmes increases and a sufficient amount of money is accumulated. Thirteen different television dealers and distributors^(*) in Towns I and II claim to have sold 471 sets, have 501 on hand and have ordered 377 additional sets. One dealer estimated 10% of his sets had been sold to English speaking foreigners. This leaves approximately 424 sets sold to Saudi and Arabic speaking non-Saudis. Of the householders interviewed 94.6% were Saudi Arabs and 5.4% were Arabic speaking non-Saudis.

Taking into consideration the varying factors, such as number of television sets, family members, television-watching guests, etc., it is estimated that "Your Health" has an average viewing audience of approximately 4,050 persons outside Company facilities. Over a four week period, the average number of Company employees and guests watching "Your Health" in Company facilities numbered 744. This gives the health show an average of 4,794 viewers each week. It was interesting to note that 157 of those interviewed had an average of 4 guests per night to watch television. It is a custom for the hospitable Saudi to have frequent guests, thus increasing the viewing audience considerably.

(*) Only known dealers and distributors in Saudi Arabia

In comparing the health show with three other well known television programmes, the following question was asked. "Which one of these programmes do you like best?" In this question, 161 gave only one choice as shown in Table II below.

Table II.

Programme Choice of 161 Persons Interviewed

<u>Programme</u>	<u>No. Persons</u>	<u>%</u>
"World of Sports"	17	10.6
"Cowboy Pictures"	34	21.1
"Your Health"	50	31.0
"Travel Around the World"	<u>60</u>	<u>37.3</u>
Total	161	100.0%

Before the survey most of the interviewers believed "Cowboy Pictures" would be the most popular programme, yet only 21.1% chose this programme. It was also surprising that there was so little interest in sports, but this might be attributed to the fact that many of the activities shown on the sports show are games not particularly popular in Saudi Arabia. If soccer were shown each evening, undoubtedly "World of Sports" would be the most popular programme. The Arabs have been wanderers and travellers for years, so perhaps their interest in "Travel Around the World" comes from this background. Probably more reliable is the fact that "Travel Around the World" is an easy programme to understand, educational and highly interesting. One of the reasons "Your Health" is believed to be popular is its use of local people, familiar scenes and situations, plus the simplicity of the script. It is also hoped the people are stimulated by their desire to learn more about health. Since this question on programme choice was only the second question asked, with no previous reference to health by the interviewer, it should be relatively reliable. It was also interesting to note that 74% of the 50 persons choosing "Your Health" were Company employees. Are the Company employees and their families more interested in health? Possibly

the continued emphasis on health within Company facilities has increased their interest in the subject.

When types of health shows were arranged in order of preference the ratings were as follows:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Arabic speaking doctors (Talks and interviews) | 37.8% |
| 2. Health films produced in other countries | 32.1% |
| 3. Showing local health conditions | 21.1% |
| 4. Interviewing local Saudis about health matters | 9.0% |

It is pleasing to know that the viewers prefer physicians on the programmes since this is one of the easier programmes to produce and yet probably the most effective. It was disappointing to see that "Health films produced in other countries" were next in popularity, but again this may be explained by the remark of one Saudi when he said, "I like to see how the people live in other countries". These films might well be more interesting to the people from the standpoint of "seeing how people live in other countries" than they are from the health point of view.

Originally, question number 8 on the interview form read, "For best understanding by you and your family, do you prefer colloquial or classical Arabic?" In pre-testing, 100% of those questioned said that they preferred classical Arabic. It was apparent that this was a prestige question; so the question was changed to: "For the best understanding by the people in your community, do you prefer colloquial or classical Arabic?" Even after changing the question only 21.7% said that they preferred colloquial Arabic. Yet, one of the more frequent complaints mentioned to the interviewers was that the Arabic used was often very hard to comprehend. One point definitely in favor of the classical Arabic is the fact that there are many local dialects and while one village might comprehend one dialect, the next village may have an entirely different dialect and find it difficult to understand what is being said in the villages around it. In regard to the previously mentioned question in which the people were asked their preference for moderators, 48.5% liked the moderator using predominately colloquial Arabic and 51.5%

preferred the moderator using predominately classical Arabic. This tells us little except to possibly refute the question in which the viewers preferred classical Arabic almost 4 to 1.

The two questions with possibly the greatest and most accurate information are questions 11 and 12 which read:

11. Did you see the health show on Baby Feeding last week?

12. Did the women in your family see it?

One hundred and twelve (55.4%) of the men interviewed said that they had seen the show. One hundred and sixty seven (82.7%), of 202 persons interviewed, said that the women in their families had seen it. Contrary to popular belief, that many of the Saudi women would have less opportunity to view television than her more sophisticated husband, it appears the women in Saudi Arabia, as in many other parts of the world, are the most resolute radio "listeners" and television "watchers". Question number 11 is probably a better index of how many of the interviewees watch the programme every week, as previously asked in question number 3. In this question 64.4% reportedly saw "Your Health" weekly as compared with 55.4% seeing the "Baby Feeding" programme mentioned above in question 11.

It is hard to visualise the average Saudi Arab who has a television set; but summing up the information obtained from the questionnaire, he might fit this description: He has had a television set a little over 6 months, and he prefers to see programmes about travel. He likes to hear classical Arabic, and he watches over 50% of the "Your Health" programmes. Interviewing Arabic speaking physicians is his favorite type of health show, and his wife watches "Your Health" more often than he does. He usually has many guests who watch the television shows with his 7 family members. He evidently likes both of the moderators equally well on "Your Health" and would like to continue seeing the programme weekly. He believes that additional programmes on baby care, family nutrition and housekeeping would be beneficial to his family. The average Saudi television owner does not work for Aramco

although 31.3% of the sets are owned by Company employees. It could also be added that he is probably of the middle or upper middle class, which somewhat limits the health education potential; and yet it is probably this vigorous section of the population through whom the greatest advances in health education can be achieved.

One year ago health education by television in Saudi Arabia was a "rose colored" dream, somewhat hazy in perspective, that has obviously developed into full-fledged reality. Television certainly has its place in the health education programme in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. In this area where the spoken word reaches a much larger group than the written word, television with its visual-plus factor, can and will continue to aid in helping people to help themselves in matters pertaining to health.

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SAMPLING TEST

HEALTH SHOW

1. How long have you had a T.V. set? 6.8 months (average)
2. Which of these programmes do you like best?
(a) Sports 10.6% (c) Your Health 31% (Of 161 persons choosing only one category)
(b) Cowboy programmes 21.1% (d) Travel 37.3%
3. Have you ever seen the "Your Health" T.V. show?
How often? Every week 64.4% Occasionally 29.7% Never 5.9% Yes 190 No 12
4. Do you like the health programme?
How often would you like to see a health programme?
Every week 75.8% Monthly 9.4% Other 16.8% Yes 189 No 1
5. Do all members of your family see the Health programme? Yes 95.5% No 4.5%
6. Do you have many guests to see your T.V. shows?
How many (ave. per night) 4 No. of family members 7.1 ave. Yes 157 No 45
7. What is your favourite programme on
(Aramco) Channel 2 25.7% chose "Your Health"
(Air Field) Channel 8 40.1% do not watch Channel 8
of those watching 30% chose Drama
8. For the best understanding by the people in your community do you prefer colloquial 21.8% or classical 78.2% Arabic?
9. Which one of these health shows would you like best to see?
(a) Arabic speaking doctors 37.8% (Of 156 persons choosing only one category)
(b) Local Health conditions 21.1%
(c) Interviewing local Saudis about health matters 9.0%
(d) Health films made in other countries 32.1%
10. Whom do you prefer to see on the Health programme?
Hassan Ali Wahab 48.5% or Fahmi Basrawi 51.5%
11. Did you see the health show on "Baby Feeding" last week? Yes 112 No 90
82.7% 17.3%
12. Did the women in your family see it? Yes 167 No 35
13. Would other programmes like this help your family? Yes 99% No 1%
14. Would your family enjoy a programme on "Family Feeding" and "Housekeeping"? Yes 99% No 1%
43.1% 56.9%
15. Do you work for Aramco? Yes 57 No 114

94.6% of those interviewed were Saudi Arabs.