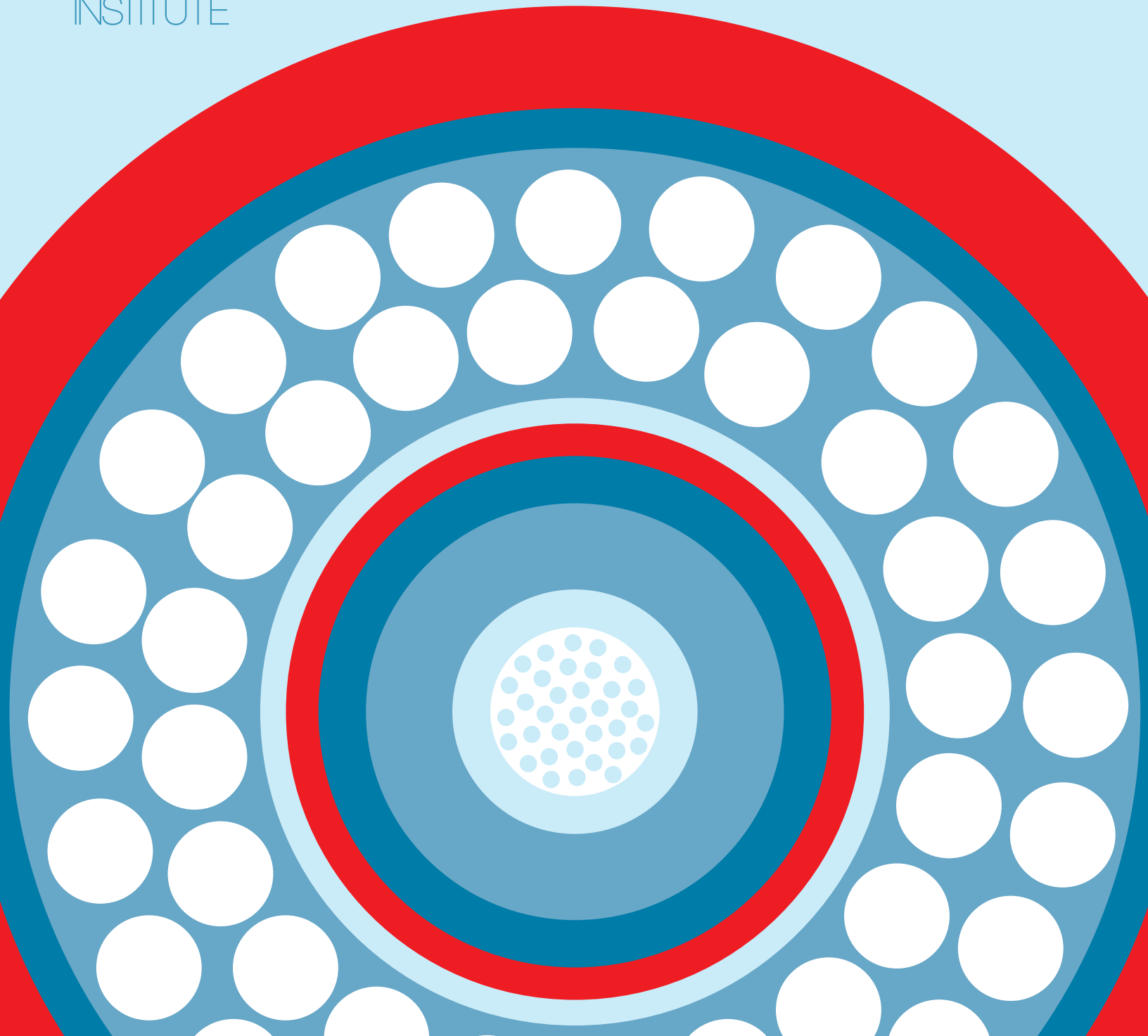


Net Neutrality For The Win

***How Entertainment and the Science of Influence
Can Save Your Internet***

HARMONY
INSTITUTE





The Harmony Institute Method for ENTERTAINMENT- EDUCATION

Concern about net neutrality stems from an awareness that supporting fair, open access to the Internet is one of the most powerful ways to foster democracy, nurture innovation, and provide access to services that have the potential to enhance our public and private lives.

By strategically promoting net neutrality among entertainment audiences, communicators are not simply promoting an open Internet, but investing in a rich platform for national debate on issues from domestic health care reform to international energy policy—issues that are greatly influenced by these online conversations.

Part II of *FTW! Net Neutrality For The Win: How to Use Entertainment and the Science of Influence to Save Your Internet* will introduce communicators to a new methodology created by the Harmony Institute for incorporating social issues into entertainment, one that supports dialog and behavior change through narrative entertainment. Illustrating strategies derived from the behavioral sciences, this guide is written for policy makers, educators, advocates, media professionals, and entertainment creators who seek a comprehensive framework for embracing entertainment as an effective advocacy tool.



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WHAT IS ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION?

Entertainment-education defines a growing number of strategies for incorporating social messages into popular entertainment. This chapter describes how organizations have used mass media to expand their audiences, reinforce positive behaviors, and create more impactful messages.

One such example is the Harvard Alcohol Project, which from 1988-1994 developed one of the most successful entertainment-education campaigns to date by partnering with Hollywood screenwriters from shows like *Cheers*, *L.A. Law*, and *The Cosby Show* to create storylines that included references to “designated drivers.” The campaign garnered support from advocates of the issue, and rapidly began influencing public behavior. During its initial four-

“The [Harvard Alcohol Project] broke new ground when TV writers agreed to insert drunken driving prevention messages, including frequent references to designated drivers, into scripts of top-rated television programs ... Entertainment not only mirrors social reality, but also helps shape it by depicting what constitutes popular opinion, by influencing people’s perceptions of the roles and behaviors that are appropriate to members of a culture, and by modeling specific behaviors. When the campaign began in late 1988, annual alcohol-related traffic fatalities stood at 23,626. By 1994, fatalities had declined by 30%.”

**JAY WINSTEN, PH.D.
DIRECTOR OF HARVARD CENTER
FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATION¹⁸**

year run, annual drunk driving fatalities declined 24%, compared to no change during the three years prior.²⁰

In the last fifteen years, entertainment creators and educators have created sophisticated methods for developing narratives that engage audiences in social issues. The Harmony Institute method sets itself apart from previous efforts by supplementing existing frameworks with behavioral science research. Developed with oversight from a broad network of academics in psychology, sociology, economics, and public policy, this science-based approach uses applied theory to reveal cognitive processes, choice and decision-making models, and, most importantly, ideas for long-term behavior change to assist communicators in creating compelling campaigns.

The use of behavioral science by media makers has been successfully employed in Latin America through telenovas, or Spanish language soap operas. One such example is *Ven Conmigo*, or *Come with Me*, which featured a storyline centered on an elderly man grappling with illiteracy. After struggling to read letters sent from a favorite granddaughter, the grandfather seeks out a public literacy program. Upon graduation he is finally able to, albeit through tearful eyes, pour over her correspondence.

Social modeling and narrative transportation can greatly influence the outcome of an advocacy campaign. Mexico has a national literacy curriculum that at the start of the series had registered 99,000 students. By its finale, 840,000 people had registered for the courses, an increase of 848% from the start of the series.²¹

Unlike previous entertainment-education programs, the method developed at the Harmony Institute focuses on communicating primarily through mass media projects. With a strong belief that popular movies, television shows, and other

entertainment products have great impact on behavior, the Institute supports collaboration with franchises that have existing audiences and are a source of popular discussion.

Lastly, the Institute encourages comprehensive impact evaluation. It is now understood that media with valuable social and environmental messages should present an opportunity for building compelling case studies of the power of applied theory. By setting up modes of evaluation during the brainstorming phase, communicators can chart the successes and failures of messaging and the immediate and long-term impact of narrative. The Harmony Institute specializes in this type of research and looks forward to working with communicators contributing to this emerging field.

HARMONY INSTITUTE'S FOUR STEPS TO INTEGRATING BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE INTO ENTERTAINMENT

STEP ONE:

BACKGROUND RESEARCH begins with a review of the specific social issue to be addressed. It is essential that communicators develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue and examine different perspectives and opinions. Communicators should contact leading organizations working on the issue that can offer goals and incentives for behavior change in the audience. This process also highlights who may be receptive to messaging and the types of media they consume.

STEP TWO:

LOCATE AUDIENCES deals with finding and understanding the people who need to take action for concrete change to happen. The most

effective campaigns target a combination of core and persuadable audiences. Communicators can identify these groups via surveys, focus groups, and information gathered by supporting organizations. Understanding the audience helps communicators select the most appropriate behavioral science models to employ. It also helps determine the preferred media channels (mobile phone, Internet, television, film, print) for transmitting the message to a specific audience.

STEP THREE:

CREATE MESSAGES focuses on developing the narratives that will engage audiences in the issue. Ideas from behavioral science are applied

with a firm understanding of the issue and its audience to maximize the effect of a campaign for change.

STEP FOUR:

EVALUATE is concerned with understanding and documenting the effects of a narrative. Drawing up case studies and best practices illuminates the valuable lessons learned from a media project.

The next chapter explores current behavioral and persuasion theory and how it applies to audiences of entertainment.



INFLUENCING THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT

In 1998 NBC introduced a primetime sitcom about a single woman and her male best friend living together in a Manhattan apartment to its line-up. *Will & Grace* chronicled the comedic escapades of a group of thirty-something, career-oriented friends. It also happened that two of the main characters were homosexual men.

Over a decade later and countless hours of editorializing, homosexual characters on major network television are commonplace, and the effects of *Will & Grace* on the attitudes toward and perceptions of gays in America is widely recognized. In a 2006 study, researchers found that the sitcom had the strongest influence on reducing sexual prejudice among those viewers who had the fewest direct gay contacts, the same group of respondents who reported having the highest feelings of prejudice toward homosexuals before viewing the show. In a balanced pool of respondents, a range consisting of those who reported feeling highly prejudiced toward gays and those reporting little-to-no prejudice, 60% felt that the show encouraged them to think more positively about homosexuals.²²

Even with successes like *Will & Grace*, nar-

rative is still largely untapped in its potential to motivate change and increase awareness. Mainstream entertainment influences our perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, often in the name of consumption. But the extent and quality of the media we consume can also profoundly influence our social attitudes. Social learning theory illustrates that behavior change can be achieved through an individual's connection to vicarious experiences.

The following sections will explore behavioral theories that, when applied to narrative, have the potential to significantly influence the effects of a social issue campaign.

FRAMING

Embedded in the information we receive each day, from newspaper headlines to medical results, are framed messages. Some frames are unconscious, others intentional. Framing is most simply an attempt to achieve a desired interpretation of an issue or event. By contextualizing your message in a way that resonates with a target audience, the

twin goals of defining an issue and motivating a particular group to act become much more likely to succeed.²³

For example, the current debate on net neutrality employs frames that resonate with Americans and their value system. Senator John McCain's bill, the "Internet Freedom Act," frames deregulation as freeing the Internet from the dominant hand of Washington. This frame does not fit the social consequences of the policy, since the Internet Freedom Act would enable major ISPs to centralize Internet content, services, and applications. "Freedom" and its connotations are widely valued by Americans, and its use by opponents of net neutrality distorts the argument. Framing the fight for net neutrality as an issue of "fairness" or of "protecting the middle class" can help re-frame a debate currently centered on partisan definitions of "freedom."

PROMOTION VS. PREVENTION

Determining how one would like an audience to perceive a social issue is just the first step in creating appropriate frames. Communicators must also understand which frames will motivate a particular audience to act. As discussed in Chapter Four, people generally approach their goals in one of two different ways. Prevention-focused people seek to maintain the status quo or to do what ought to be done. Promotion-focused people seek progress, seeing their goal as the ideal result. Research shows that tailoring messages to a person's particular focus increases the likelihood for agreement and response.

Research on net neutrality shows that the public is generally less concerned with gaining faster, more affordable service (a promotion focus). Rather, they prefer maintaining the cost

and connection speeds currently offered by their ISP (a prevention focus). Therefore, a message directed to small businesses owners, for instance, who have a vested stake in the open Internet but are as yet unaware of the net neutrality debate, should discuss the need to "defend" (as opposed to "attain") the open Internet.

Consider the different connotations of the two sentences below:

PROMOTION

Attaining open Internet protections today is the best way to secure long-term financial security for our business.

PREVENTION

Defending our access to the open Internet is the best way to secure long-term financial security for our business.

Prevention wording can be added into a narrative to guide the overarching theme of a storyline. A complete list of promotion and prevention words is available in Part I of *FTW!* on page 14.

ADDRESSING ATTITUDES

Using applied behavioral science theory can help promote controversial issues even among the most skeptical audiences. Much of social psychology looks at how people are prompted to change their attitudes and beliefs, even taking action on an issue through subtle and unconscious routes. The way a message is framed and the terms associated with this frame only scratch the surface of the many things that influence whether or not an

audience will trust and support the position taken in a media campaign.

Persuasion theory has identified two routes that influence how an audience receives a message. One important factor is the strength of the argument. People are more likely to embrace an issue if they clearly understand the justifications for or against it and agree with its solution. Storytellers should strive to insert accurate, intelligible reasons for the given position.

Who communicates a message also has great influence on how it is received by audiences. Messages resonate best when they originate from an “expert” source or attractive personality. Spokespeople are highly effective at promoting brands for just this reason. Research has found that a trusted, admired, or respected messenger is effective at establishing credibility for arguments among audiences that might have been otherwise opposed.²⁴

Neither of these routes should be emphasized more than the other. A careful balance between clearly articulated, logical arguments and the charisma or authority of your spokesperson should produce a longer-lasting effect than total reliance on one or the other.²⁵

NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION

While research shows the power of persuasion by the two routes outlined above, there are ample arguments for the limitation of this strategy if used alone. The main shortcoming remains its long-term impact. Standard models show a steep decline in effect as time passes, resulting in advocacy campaigns that produce only small shifts in the attitudes or behavior of an audience.²⁶ We have identified two ways to remedy this: the first

is to employ narrative as a persuasion tool; the second is to repeat the message.

Research into the effect of fictional narratives on real-world perspectives suggests that belief change not only persists, but also may be magnified over time.²⁷ When audiences enter a fictional world they take a mental journey that allows them to suspend the confines of their traditional beliefs. This allows the storyteller to propose new ideas that would have, under other circumstances, been rejected. Psychologists suggest that the acceptance of these ideas through narrative takes place involuntarily as the brain immerses itself in the fictionalized world. The long-term persuasive power of narrative resides in its “sleeper effect,” i.e., the impact of an idea increases over time when the one discounting cue, that the source of information is a fictional account, is forgotten.²⁸

The effects of repeat exposure have also been readily researched and employed by communicators. Many times, audiences develop a preference for things based purely on familiarity. Repeating an argument and solution for the threat to net neutrality is easier for audiences if embedded in an entertainment series. TV shows, web programs, video games, and book series can restate and reaffirm a position, draw in larger audiences, and provide a more sophisticated dialogue on a social issue than a 30-second public service announcement.

WHY SCARCITY SCARES

The concept of scarcity offers a persuasive frame for social issues. Take note of how the idea of scarcity has infiltrated the debate on immigration. The argument that illegal immigrants place an unfair tax burden on the public plays into concerns about the scarcity of wealth and personal re-

sources. The psychological response that scarcity triggers influences many charged social issues.

Predictably, people are much more likely to take action if they believe that their current way of life is threatened.²⁹ For example, framing the open Internet as interconnected with other social problems, especially those that affect local communities, will keep individuals from ignoring the debate or leaving action for another day. In this instance, keeping narratives local means discussing the dominate Internet service provider in an area by name, talking about regional policy struggles and personalities instead of “the government,” and using characters that could be neighbors or friends.

SOCIAL PROOF

Narrative provides the perfect setting for another theory known to significantly influence our behaviors. Social proof refers to the way people learn through observing and modeling the behaviors around them. Our attitudes and actions are the result of closely monitoring our peers and community leaders. Studies have revealed that the more a peer or leader possesses characteristics that people find appealing, such as talent, intelligence, power, popularity, and physical attractiveness, the more likely people are to model their behavior.³⁰

By creating characters that serve as role mod-

els for the audience, communicators can verbalize powerful messages and exhibit proactive behavior. Entertainment-educators have found that narratives in which positive characters are rewarded and negatives ones are punished create lasting effects in real-world audiences.

MAGNIFY YOUR MESSAGE

Have you ever talked to your friends about the plot

“The possibility that Will & Grace could reduce prejudice against gay men is supported by research investigating parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction simply refers to the phenomenon that viewers form beliefs and attitudes about people they know ... through television, regardless of whether such people are fictional characters or real people. Perhaps, because the human brain typically processes media experiences similarly to how it processes ‘direct’ experience, people often react to televised characters as they would real people.”

SCHIAPPA, GREGG & HEWES³¹

of last night’s episode of *Lost* or maybe he romantic comedy you saw last weekend? Studies show that the more individuals discuss entertainment in groups, the more they internalize its values and themes.³² By opening up conversations to a wide range of knowledge, skill, and personal experience, people access information that far exceeds their individual ability “to know.” By hearing a range of perspectives, people come to more feasi-

ble conclusions that fit into group norms, amplifying social proof.

To initiate broader conversations with audience members who cannot physically gather together, communicators can coordinate both informal and formal discussions online. Social networks, online games, and live events can bridge the gap between fictional narrative and real life, uniting fans of the entertainment with those who are interested in promoting the open Internet.

For example, the award-winning online narrative game *World Without Oil* made use of blogs, web video, voicemail, digital images, and message boards to create a collaborative fictional account of a 32-week global oil crisis. By channeling the “collective imagination,” the game was able to create and disseminate solutions to a crisis before it occurs.

OVERCOMING THE SINGLE ACTION

Offering up multiple solutions counteracts a behavioral problem known as the single-action bias. Although most people realize that complex problems often require more than a single act to fix, humans tend to choose and participate in one action that alleviates feelings of responsibility.

Studies have found that taking any action, even a small or ineffective one, quells negative emotional prompts such as vulnerability, fear, and guilt.³³ Once individuals meet these emotional needs, they are less inclined to engage in other solution-oriented behaviors. The single-action bias can sabotage comprehensive but multi-step solutions.

For maximum effectiveness, narrative campaigns must have an associated action strategy for their audiences. Asking for a commitment to act and providing an immediate outlet for action will engage people. Combating the single-action bias also means following up with your audience, recruiting them to take additional actions and reminding them that acting once is never enough.



MEASURING YOUR IMPACT

One of the biggest challenges to creating effective social and environmental narratives with proven impact is the lack of clear case studies evaluating the power of entertainment-education. Measuring the impact of a message enables organizations to evaluate the success of a project, report to funders, and draw up best practices. Independent research organizations, university-based professionals, or groups like the Harmony Institute generally conduct evaluations for entertainment campaigns.

Measuring impact is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. To gain quantitative information, communicators should conduct a base-line survey of their audience before the launch of their project to understand their perceptions, knowledge, and behaviors on an issue like net neutrality. This information can then be contrasted with results from one or more post-air surveys. When developing a survey, evaluators consider:

- What is the audience's size and characteristics?

- What does the audience know or think they know about the issue?
- What is the audience's attitude toward the issue? How likely are they to share these opinions with others?
- What is the audience's behavior around this issue?
- What is the audience's belief in their ability to influence the issue? Do they feel they have adequate support to influence the issue? Have they taken any action?
- How has the entertainment influenced the answers to these questions?

Depending on the entertainment medium, online web analytics, broadcast ratings, and ticket sales also supply information about audience size, duration, and number of viewings, as well as how and where the campaign is being shared (i.e., through social media, press, or word-of-mouth). Qualitative evaluations can provide more in-depth understanding of how audiences identify with the issue

after viewing the entertainment. Responses to the media project can be solicited through direct correspondence with viewers as well as mined from public meetings or online discussion boards.

The key questions asked while assessing the impact of entertainment on audiences will help improve the methods entertainment creators and

educators use to support social concerns like net neutrality. Building on previous work, these studies can contribute to a greater understanding of how people understand and why they take action on an issue. Such insights have the capacity to transform the advocacy world as a whole.



The influence mainstream entertainment has on our perceptions, emotions, and behavior is often profound. Mass media permeates the public and private spheres of society, flooding people with messages from a wide-range of sources. *FTW! Net Neutrality For The Win: How to Use Entertainment and the Science of Influence to Save Your Internet* was developed to help communicators from policy, education, advocacy, media, and entertainment harness the power of mainstream media, offering U.S. audiences entertainment that educates them on net neutrality and provides concrete ways they

can support the cause.

Advertisers regularly take advantage of the reach and influence of entertainment. But net neutrality supporters from a variety of backgrounds have yet to tap its potential for incorporating social messages. Creating entertainment with the Harmony Institute methodology will help communicators connect with viewers on both a conscious and emotional level, providing a channel to significantly influence social change and keep the Internet open and equal for all.

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ABOUT THE HARMONY INSTITUTE

The Harmony Institute is a non-profit research organization that works to harness the power of mainstream media and entertainment within the United States to increase awareness and provide motivation for transformative action within traditional viewing audiences. With a keen understanding of behavioral science, and a wide network of academic and industry supporters, the Institute assists in the production of entertainment that connects with viewers on both a cognitive and emotional level. Accomplishing this goal not only means advising on conceptual projects and existing productions, but also providing key members of the media, advocacy, and public-policy realms with the tools and information they need to develop and market projects that accurately evaluate current concerns and offer empirically-based alternatives.

For more information, visit harmony-institute.org

The Institute welcomes feedback about this guide. Please send emails to ftw@harmony-institute.org

