

VIDEO REVOLUTION IN TRUK

Town Study Project

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Introduction

It is amazing that the changes in the entertainment business in Truk seem to have happened practically overnight. Within a period of ten years, the people of Truk have progressed from movies to televisions, and eventually to video cassette recorders. Similar situations might have occurred elsewhere in other developing societies but in Truk the situation is rather unique. It seems that in Truk the opening of the local television station made it impossible for the once popular movie theatres to remain in business. For some reasons that would be found later in this paper, the local television station was closed down in 1982. Then the introduction of video cassettes occurred. In less than three years Truk witnessed a boom in video cassettes; from two owners in 1982 to over 400 owners today. The local television station remains closed and the movie theatre industry is literally running out of business.

This unique situation has prompted us to look into it and try to find out more about it. We were puzzled by the fact that each innovation is being replaced by another. We find it strange that the people of Truk do not seem to appreciate the diversity and abundance of entertainment provided them. Instead of all three sources of entertainment operating and servicing simultaneously, the Trukese people can only settle with one source of entertainment at one time.

In this paper we will attempt to show whether or not there is any connection between the introduction of video cassette recorders and the declining popularity of the movie theatre industry. Similarly, this paper will also try to show whether or not the popularity of video cassette recorder has any direct relationship to the unopening of the local television station. We hope to show how and why video cassette recorder is a booming business industry. Finally, we would like to present the effects that this innovation has brought to the lives of the Trukese people.

Decline of Movie Theatres

The first movie theatre entertainment business started in 1968 by a businessman named Hermes Paul. His business went successfully for nearly ten years. He would receive two three new films every week and could keep them for a month. He would show a film four nights in a row and would charge a dollar from the adults and fifty cents from the children. Beside showing the films at his theatre, he would rent them out to other interested parties; businesses, families, schools and <sup>Prisoners</sup> ~~businesses~~. The rent varies from five to thirty five dollars a night. He saw that his business was so successful that he started another movie theatre in another section of the downtown area. He also raised the admission fee. The adults now paid \$2.00 dollars and the children \$1.00 dollar each. On weekdays, he would get the highest rate of 200 customers and the lowest rate of 100 each night from both cinemas. He would get an average rate of 150 customers a night from both theatres. On pay-day weekend nights, he usually found both of his theatres filled to the maximum capacity. Normally, he would have an average of 350 customers. Several times on a "good" pay-day weekend night, he had about 500 customers. On a "bad" pay-day weekend night, he would only have 200 customers.

In terms of money, Hermes Paul was a winner. His theatres were making money. During the weekdays on a "good" night, his theatres were making a lot of money. During such nights, his theatres would bring in as much as 325 dollars. On a normal night, the average amount was \$250 dollars. During the weekends, when more people come to watch the movie shows, Hermes Paul would find more money coming in, especially during a pay-day weekend. At such times, both theatres could make as much as 800 dollars, and as low as \$325 dollars. An average of 575 dollars would be taken in a normal night on such weekends.

Another source of money coming in for Hermes Paul was the renting out of movies. With the movies that were rented to him for a month from foreign movie companies for \$80 dollars or \$100 dollars

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each, Hermes would rent them out to local customers. Normally, the average rent of a movie was \$15.00 dollars. A new and popular movie could be rented out for as much as \$35.00 dollars while a second-hand movie could be rented out for a low \$5.00 dollars. Most of the renting out of movies were on weekends and on a single weekend, an average of four movies could be rented out.

In 1979, a local television station was started by a businessman named Shigeto Hashiguchi, but was run by a government employee. At first, the opening was an attempt to provide another source of entertainment for the people, elevate the students' standards in speaking english, and as a business industry for the owner. Free shows were purposely shown in order to attract the peoples interests before charging them later on. Like any new change in Truk, the television station became popular. People started buying television sets and antennas. From 1979 until two years later, the television station was a success.

In the midst of the television station success, the movie cinemas were loosing all the prosperity that they once had. As more people were buying television sets and antennas, fewer people were going to the movie theatres. The once enthusiastic movie-goers now preferred to stay home and watch the shows on the "tube".

To Hermes Paul, the increasing popularity of television shows meant an end to his successful movie theatres. In a desperate attempt to restore success to his business again, he tried as much as possible to show a new movie every night. He also tried to lower the admission fee from \$2.00 dollars to \$1.00 dollars for adults, and from \$1.00 dollars to .50¢ for the children. All efforts were in vain. Acknowledging defeat, he sold one of his theatres. With one theatre, Hermes Paul now has fewer customers and lesser money earned.. What was once a businessman with two theatres and an average of 150 customers during the weekday nights now has only one of his theatres struggling to remain open with an average of only twenty-five customers a night. On a pay-day weekend night in the past, Hermes Paul could get an average of 350 customers

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from both of his theatres. Now he gets roughly 35 customers from his single movie theatre.

In 1982, the television station was suddenly closed down. Many conflicting rumors on the reasons for the sudden incident were mixed. People who found their homes with useless television sets sitting in their living rooms were furious. The owner of the television was unable to heed the demands of the people for prompt action to solve the problem. The people started to blame the owner and the manager with poor management, misappropriation and lack of funds to buy new cassettes to air, and the typical Trukese insensitivity to public plea in order to show how powerful they were. In our research work for this paper, we found that the closing down of the television was a result of human error and mechanical problems. It seems that the manager upon experimenting to see how the machines function, disconnected some parts. The machines were never able to function again when the parts were put back again.

Whatever was broken in the machine, we were told by a former employee of the television station that such a part could have been fixed or repaired. Other reliable sources confided to us that the broken part could have been replaced but neither the owner nor the manager wanted to do that. An expert electrical engineer was hired to see the problems in the machines. Whether the expert could have repaired the broken parts, we do not know, but we were told that he was requested not to continue his work. A request by businessmen selling video cassette recorders and owners of video shacks wanted the television to remain closed for the sake of their businesses. As a result, the television station in Truk remained unopened until today.

A year before the closing down of the television station, businesses on Moen were already selling video cassette recorders. Before then, the video cassette recorders were practically unknown to the local people. Before 1977 there were no video cassette recorders on Moen. In 1977 to 1980, there were only two video cassette recorder owners on the whole island; a local businessman

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and Continental Hotel, the major tourist place. In 1981, businesses on the island were selling video cassette recorders but only a few people were interested in buying, due to the fact that the local television station was still in operation. One of the foremost video cassette recorder sellers was the owner of the local television station.

After the closing down of the local television station in 1982, people started buying video cassette recorders to accomodate their useless television sets. In a period of less than three years, more than 400 video cassette recorders were sold out. Given the average price tag of \$500 for a single video cassette recorder and the alarming number of underpaid people in Truk, we find it unbelievable that so many video cassette recorders could be sold out in such a short period of time. After carefully scrutinizing our data and information, we were convinced that the opening of the television station was an attempt to give the Trukese people a "taste" of the conveniences of television. And when the people were getting used to the luxury of home entertainment on the "tube", the television station was closed down. To us, it is a deliberate attempt to get people to buy video cassette recorders.

#### VCR as a Business Industry

As we already mentioned, the closing down of the television station was the spark in the video cassette recorder selling business industry. The first business that sold video cassette recorder started in 1981. In the first year, it sold out 22 video cassette recorders. In 1982, the second business started. Together with the first one, they sold out a total of 39 video cassette recorders. So, for the first two years, there were already 61 video cassette recorders sold.

In 1983, another store started selling video cassette recorders, and together with the two preceding businesses, sold a total of 62 video cassette recorders that year. Each video cassette recorder is about \$500 dollars and the Trukese had already bought more than



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120 video cassette recorders, spending more than a total of \$60,000 dollars. These businesses were at their most popular peak. The most winning business would get as many as 30 customers a year, and the least winning business would get as many as six customers a year. By 1984, each business had profited more than \$5,000 dollars. The rate of video cassette recorders sold had risen from 22 to more than 400 today.

About the same time that the video cassette recorder selling businesses were booming, another "parallel" business was emerging. This was the business of selling video cassettes. The first video cassette seller started his business in Iras village in 1981. The owner would then rent them out for \$5.00 dollars each 24 hours. He would get four customers a night. Each week he would profit about \$50 dollars. Even with the few video cassette recorder owners back then, his business was still a success.

In 1982, another business started renting out video cassettes for lower fee at \$2.50 each. He ordered his cassettes from a friend in Hawaii, who recorded the shows directly from the television channels. This one would receive 20 to 25 customers on pay-days, and an average of ten customers on regular days. The owner would profit about \$60 dollars to \$100 dollars in a week.

In 1983, more businesses selling video cassettes were opened. All kinds of shows were now available to the Trukese people but the rent remained at \$2.50 to \$5.00 dollars for a single cassette. X-rated movies cost higher at \$6.00 dollars each. When new cassettes were in, more customers would come especially if the cassettes were about popular movie shows. From 1983 to the present, more places renting out video cassettes were opened. Now there is a total of nine places on Moen where one can rent a cassette. In a period of about five years, the Trukese people have progressed from one video renting shack to nine. It is now one of the most successful business industry in Truk.

Effects of Video Cassette Recorders on the People

The wide popularity of video cassette recorders has influenced the people of Moen significantly. Because of the large number of people that are now exposed to this innovation, the effects can be said to be throughout the whole island. Due to the fact that Moen is the district center, we could call the changes resulting from video cassette recorders to be generally affecting the whole people of Truk State. In this paper, we will deal with four major areas in life which we consider to be the most affected. As more people are being exposed to this new source of entertainment, we found that changes are occurring in the people's education standards, in their culture and social behaviors, and in their use of time.

From our interviews, we found that video cassette recorders have been educational to the people ever since it was introduced. The people learned a lot of things such as world news and styles of dancing, but we found that the most significant value is the people's ability to understand and speak English better than before. It seems that because of the exposure of video cassette recorders and the fact that a lot of people watch video shows all the time, the ability in learning English has improved a great deal. This has helped the students in their <sup>ies</sup> ~~students~~ in their schools. Elementary students are now communicating with their teachers in English. Such is the case today which was unheard of in the past.

Another major area in life which has been affected by video cassette recorders is the culture of the people. We found out that the Trukese custom on Moen has changed dramatically. For instance, today the younger people have started dating in public. Boys can go to the girls' houses and ask the parents' permissions to take their daughters "out". According to our interviews, forty-two out of fifty-three (79%) teenagers interviewed said that after seeing the way the Americans date on video shows, they started to do the same. In the past, dating was considered a taboo. Another significant change is the lack of respect shown towards the elders. We found out that the children, especially the teenagers, have started



talking back to their parents and other people. Such a situation is forbidden in the traditional culture. All of these things never happened before video cassette recorders were popular in Truk.

The social relationship between the people have also been changed. We found in our data that the relationship between relatives and neighbors have been much closer than in the past. Relatives would come to other relatives' houses and watch a video show. This would result in the children beginning to know each other better, and the exchanging of ideas among the older people. In the same way, neighbors have developed a closer relationship. If one person does not have a video cassette recorder, he can come and watch from the neighbor's house. In the past, he would not have come to his neighbor's house. Now that there is a show being shown on the "tube", he can come over. Although there were cases where one person was not welcomed in his neighbor's living room to watch a show, we found that the majority of the people of Moen who have video cassette recorders are receptive to those that wanted to watch the shows. Thus, we can say that the video cassette recorders have brought about a closer family relationship as well as a better neighborly peace and friendship.

Finally, another important area in life that was affected as a result of popularity of video cassette recorders was the people's use of time. Watching video shows had prevented a lot of students from doing their studies or having their assignments completed. From our interviews, more than 50 out of 62 (84%) high school students interviewed experienced these problems at least once so far. The elders, government employees and family heads, also agreed that watching video shows at night made them sleepy and lazy during the day. Similar problems occurred to the nongovernment workers. Most expressed general laziness in working on the land, tiredness in going fishing, or even lacking of energy to do house-cleaning. All these problems were attributed to the constant watching of video shows, especially during the night. Majority of the people interviewed felt that they were not using time properly.

Conclusion

As this paper started out, we were trying to look "behind the screens" of the declining popularity of the movie theatres and the opening of the television station, whether they have any connection with the introduction of video cassette recorders. We were also trying to see whether video cassette recorders have any relationship with the closing down and the unopening of the television station. We found that it was because of video cassette recorder that the local television station was opened and then closed down, and also it was video cassette recorders that caused it not to re-open.

The opening of the television station was an attempt to expose the Trukese people to television show entertainment. The closing down occurred after the people were already used to it, and therefore, the people started buying video cassette recorders. We found that the opening and closing down of the television station were all intended for starting a new business of selling video cassette recorders. The television station could have opened up again but the businesses selling video cassette recorders and video cassettes asked that the television station should remain closed. To us, this is all a deliberate plan, a business deal for the winning video cassette recorder business industry and its related businesses to prosper.

Meanwhile, the movie theatre industry is losing business. In the long run, the Trukese people will miss the opportunities to get away from their homes, relax in the theatres, and associate with other people who are not their relatives. However, video cassette recorder is just as good or perhaps even better than the movie theatres. With video cassette recorders, the Trukese people are not losing but rather, gaining opportunities. Video cassette recorders have good effects on the people; educationally, socially, and culturally. Educationally, the people are learning English from the shows. Socially, relatives and neighbors are closer in relationships by watching videos in one house. Culturally, the

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people are neater, and they are exposed to the cultures of the people around them. In terms of entertainment, the shows on video cassettes are much better than the theatres. The shows are more up-to-date and cheaper than a whole family going to the movie theatres for a dollar each. Besides, the people have the freedom to choose what shows they want to watch.

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