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press
publications
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3 Reaching People

with information...

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE • INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE • UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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4 April 22, 1964

A new format for "REACHING PEOPLE"

 * Please read, check, and circulate *
 * County Agricultural Agent *
 * County Home Agent *
 * County 4-H Agent *
 * County Ass't Agent *
 * Secretary for Filing *

Starting with this issue, Reaching People is shifting somewhat in format and content. From time to time it will feature a discussion of some mass communications topic--a topic which seems to be of concern to a variety of persons concerned with transmitting messages through the mass media in rural areas.

The Visual Aids Tip Sheet and the Publications listings will continue to be included in mailings to county extension personnel.

We will welcome any reactions you may have to this publication in its new form. Please let us hear from you.

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A few summers ago, 131 of the visitors to a field day at the University's Rosemount Experiment Station were asked how they found out about this event. The responses may be summed up this way:

- 73 said they had heard about the field day on a radio program.
- 66 had read about it in newspapers.
- 49 had been told by vocational agriculture teachers.
- 37 read a notice mailed to them by the station.
- 50 persons mentioned a variety of other contacts, mostly personal.

While scores of persons mentioned a variety of other contacts, radio clearly received the most individual mentions, with newspapers close behind. Yet, while these two mass media apparently served as information sources to at least half the respondents, one might profitably ask why half had failed to see a newspaper notice, or why 58 failed to recall hearing it on radio. The event had been mentioned more than once in both Twin City newspapers and in practically every local paper in the surrounding three or four counties. A major radio station had mentioned it several times at several different broadcast times.

The concern here is not as much with the apparent extensiveness of contact with mass media, but rather with the cases where contact did not occur. As one approach to this question, one might refer to some research on what is often

termed "mass media behavior." In a very general way, one might thereby develop a better understanding of the likelihood of reaching different people with different media.

Age, Sex, Education and Occupation and Mass Media Behavior

Of all the factors investigated in years of research, these four have generally been found to be among the best predictors of mass media behavior.

A typical youngster introduces himself to mass media through its pictorial content. His first brush with mass media is probably with the family television set or the picture books read to him by his parents. He starts watching for the comics long before he can read them and he may be an avid fan of sales catalogs, especially those featuring toys, dolls, and motorboats. Later on, he moves to the photographic content of the paper, especially that in the sports pages and sunday supplements, and then moves gradually into the written content. While there is much variation among individuals, men usually reach their peak in reading sometime between age 30 and middle age. A generation ago, reading was believed to drop off sharply with increasing age, but this point is no longer so clear. Improvements in eye glasses and better artificial lighting are probably helping extend the age of heavy reading. In one recent midwestern study, persons 70 and older spent more time with newspapers than any other age group.

Many attempts have been made by audience researchers to separate mass media content into two major categories, one which might be termed "light," or "sensational" content (including crime, sports, human interest, comics, light entertainment) from "serious" content (editorials, public affairs news, science, and cultural material). In general, these studies indicate that interest in the more "serious" content increases with age and education. Reading of editorials has been shown to continue increasing beyond middle age, partly at the expense of some entertainment-oriented reading.

Reading of so-called "serious" material tends to be greater for men than for women. It increases with amount of education, income, and occupational status. Even among adults at the same educational level, those in professional and technical and white collar occupations often are shown to spend more time reading "serious" content, compared to persons in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. Farm laborers (other than owners and operators) tend to be lower than most other occupational categories in terms of this kind of reading.

Related to the pattern on reading of public affairs and science content is the fact that persons with more education are more likely to rely primarily on print media, as compared to radio and television. This point is illustrated by the data in Table 1. The question asked was: Which medium is more important to you in finding out what is going on?

Table 1

Preference for newspapers and television according to education
(Wisconsin data, 1963)

	<u>Newspaper ranked first</u>	<u>Television ranked first</u>
Eighth grade or less	35%	37%
Some high school	46%	35%
High school graduate	48%	30%
Some college	50%	23%
College graduate and beyond	64%	18%

The pattern is fairly clear. The newspaper was ranked first more frequently among persons with more education, while television was ranked first with less frequency as education increased.

Some rural-urban differences

The often-heard point about increasing similarity between the rural and urban culture is not necessarily supported by findings on mass media audiences. In terms of amount of time spent with newspapers, radio, and television, one does often find little or no difference between city, town and country residents. But when questions are asked about reliance on different media as general information sources, some rather noticeable differences often emerge. Table 2 gives some of these differences, based on the same question as asked in Table 1.

Table 2

	Preferred News Medium		
	<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>Television</u>	<u>Radio</u>
City dwellers	50	29	22
Village dwellers	43	31	27
Farm dwellers	36	37	27

One can see from this table that reliance on the newspaper as a preferred medium drops off as you go from city to farm, while reliance on television actually increases. Half of the city dwellers prefer the newspaper, whereas among farm dwellers, fewer than two-fifths give newspapers top preference. Why should these differences occur? Two reasons which might be suggested are these:

1) Farm dwellers tend to have less education than city dwellers, and persons with less education are also less likely to prefer newspapers, as shown in table 1.

2) The newspapers generally available to farm dwellers are different in content, are more likely to be weeklies, and presumably play a different part in the lives of their readers than is true for newspapers in cities. One factor in this availability difference may be the problem in getting metropolitan dailies to rural areas while the news is still "hot."

The results in Table 2 must be considered according to the specific question asked. If the question had dealt with sources of information on one's specific occupation (such as farming) one probably would have found radio playing a bigger role among farm dwellers and a noticeable proportion of farm dwellers would have named magazines.

Some farm audience data

In the late 1950's, the University of Wisconsin conducted an intensive study of how farm people use their time during the winter. The research people left diaries with members of a carefully selected sample of farm persons and measured amount of time spent on different activities.

Before looking at some of the findings, one should again keep in mind their limitations. This is a self-kept diary, for one specific time of the year. The data may be subject to a certain amount of reporting error, which may not be the same for all activities. However, these data nevertheless represent some of the best information of this type available.

First, consider the media which were found to be available. The findings indicated that in these farm homes:

- More than 19 homes in 20 had radio sets and half had two radios.
- A third of the farms had radios in the barn.
- About 17 homes in 20 had television sets.
- Three homes in four subscribed to a daily newspaper.
- Three homes in four subscribed to a weekly.
- More than 19 homes in 20 subscribed to at least one farm magazine and more than two-fifths of the homes received at least four farm magazines regularly.

These summary findings suggest that farm homes may have a variety of potential contacts with mass media. The percent having access to any newspaper, as found in this study, is comparable to findings reported in several national surveys. The same is true for radio and television access.

Now looking to the other side of the coin, one might note that a fourth of the homes did not report receiving a daily and a fourth received no weekly. Even for use of the weekly newspaper as a shotgun approach, then, one's enthusiasm over a news column must be tempered by the fact that a considerable portion of the farm clientele is not even in the potential audience.

Whether one has access to a communication channel is one question, but of at least equal importance is the amount of time spent with that channel even if it is accessible in the first place. For example, many studies of a population cross-section have indicated that nearly one person in four reads no newspaper in a given day. In this Wisconsin study, 44 percent of the farm operators on a given day read any newspapers--a figure considerably lower than for the general population. Figures for residents of small communities tend to be intermediate between farm residents and residents of metropolitan areas.

The actual amount of average daily time spent on different media is of some interest (Table 3). Data from the Wisconsin diary study indicate that television and radio each accounted for more than twice as much time as did reading for men, and for three times as much, or more, for women. However, these data do not indicate whether the viewing or listening was done in combination with some other activity; radio listening in the barn or while ironing are common examples of media behavior shared with work.

Table 3

Average time of Wisconsin farm people spent on different media, in minutes

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
TV	99	165
Radio	88	123
Reading	40	39

Reading time, on the other hand, tends to be relatively less competitive. About a third of the reading time of men was spent on magazines and similar publications and the rest on newspapers. For women, about a fourth of the reading time was on publications other than newspapers.

These data are for adults. How about young people? We shall cite only the figures for those spending any time with media on a given day. For boys, the figures were 75 percent for television, 38 percent for radio, 18 percent for dailies, and two percent for weeklies. For girls, the percentages were similar except that nearly half spent some time with radio on a given day. The low percentages for time spent reading newspapers is consistent with the general statement earlier that reading behavior develops more slowly and reaches later, compared with attention to electronic media.

Relationships between media use and other factors were much the same here as in other studies. That is, amount of time spent in reading was greater for older persons and for persons with more education. Similarly, amount of time spent with television decreased with age. Time spent on television also decreased with higher education, but this finding is not always supported in other studies.

A person's family structure and work situation also predicted something about his mass media behavior. In general, in the Wisconsin study, fathers and mothers with large families reported less media time. However, children in large families were heavier readers than those in smaller families. And another exception is that being in a large family meant more of a chance for television viewing among adults and less among children. Increased working time tended to mean less media time--except for radio, which is often listened to in barn, shop or car. Heavy work schedules were most likely to cut sharply into media time for children. Among adults, the most impact from working time was on television; for children, work time was more likely to be at the expense of reading. Among girls, for example, increased working time was associated with more viewing--perhaps because viewing could be done concurrently with household tasks.

Summary

Most studies of mass media audience behavior, regardless of the population studied, show that age, sex, and education are fairly consistent predictors of gross mass media behavior. In summary, it is quite clear that attention to printed mass communications increases with education and is greater for men than women--although the difference may not be as sharp among rural as among urban people. For radio and television, the pattern is less clear. People who do not own television and radio sets are concentrated in the lower educational and income groups. However, among people who have television and radio sets in working order, one often finds that the heaviest viewing and listening is among persons with less education.

Rural-urban differences in media behavior apart from education differences are still apparent. The still unsolved problem of putting the metropolitan daily on doorsteps in Granite Falls, Perham and Aitkin when newsboys are delivering it in Minneapolis is probably one major factor. At any rate, daily newspaper reading is less widespread in rural areas and television and radio there play a relatively greater role as information media.

Perhaps one of the most important findings from audience studies in terms of planning educational publicity campaigns is the fact that large chunks of the audience in a circulation, listening or viewing area, fail to have any contact with some or all of the mass media on any given day. Many rural people still fail to subscribe to either a daily or weekly; even radio ownership is not universal.

On the other side of the coin is the equally apparent fact that people with more education and income--including those who are likely to be community leaders and influentials--are the heaviest readers of the printed word and are more likely to seek out from mass media the type of information that adult educators have to offer.

One might recognize that the relatively lower availability of printed media in rural areas has in fact been exploited by extension educators in past years. Rural people receive fewer newspapers, and those they do receive contain less material, compared with newspapers in urban centers. Educational material printed in rural newspapers, then, has generally not been forced to compete for reader attention with as much other content as would be the case in a 28-page or larger urban daily. Furthermore, with small staffs on rural newspapers, extension material often competes well with other material for space in the newspaper itself.

A question might be raised as to whether extension educational material is likely to suffer either in reaction from editors and programmers or in attention from readers, listeners and viewers as the population shifts more and more to urban areas. Presumably, increased pressure will be placed on educators to make their material appeal to a broader audience. As people gain more education and widen their appetite for reading and viewing, the less they may look to local media outlets for specific professional advice as compared with specialized publications and contacts. They may, however, continue to look to local media for comprehensive information on the local community--if the local media prove themselves able to provide it. Educators may have a fundamental role in helping local media meet these rising expectations.

Publications and Direct Mail

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Last-Minute Fallout Protection Measures. Rural Civil Defense Tip Sheet No. 11.

Fallout Protection for Livestock. Rural Civil Defense Tip Sheet No. 12.

REVISED PUBLICATIONS

Insecticides and Their Uses in Minnesota. Ext. Bull. 263. J. A. Lofgren and L. K. Cutkomp. Some change in format which ultimately will speed revision and reduce per copy cost. Don't order till you receive notification copy.

Controlling Insects in the Home Vegetable Garden. Entomology Fact Sheet 11. John Lofgren. Describes a chemical control program for common leaf-chewing and sap-sucking insect pests in the garden. Available mid-May. Discard old copies--revision contains new chemical recommendations.

Disease Control for Strawberries. Plant Pathology Fact Sheet 2, Herbert G. Johnson. Describes a disease control program for strawberry production. Available mid-May. Discard old copies--revision contains new chemical recommendations.

Growing Grapes. Horticulture Fact Sheet 1. Orrin C. Turnquist. Gives recommended varieties and cultural practices for growing grapes in Minnesota. Now available.

Home Fruit Spray Guide. Ext. P. 184. J. A. Lofgren, H. G. Johnson, and O. C. Turnquist. Provides information to assist the home fruit grower produce good clean fruit. 8-page railroad fold. Now available.

Late Blight of Potatoes. Plant Pathology Fact Sheet 1. Herbert G. Johnson. Tells how you can successfully and economically control late blight. Available mid-May. Discard old copies--revision contains new chemical recommendations.

Tips on Tapes. Information Service Series 8. Ray Wolf. Full of useful tips on recording and caring for tapes. Available late April.

Today's Fibers. Ext. F. 218. Lists the advantages and limitations of the natural and manmade fibers. 8-page railroad fold. Available early May.

1964 Vegetable Varieties. Ext. F. 154. Orrin C. Turnquist. Summarizes the observations made at various test locations in Minnesota in 1963. Also lists the tested varieties that are dependable for Minnesota. 12-page railroad fold. Now available.

REPRINTED PUBLICATIONS

Varietal Trials of Farm Crops. Misc. Rpt. 24.

Liming Minnesota Soils. Ext. F. 210.

The Dutch Elm Disease. Ext. F. 211.

Chemical and Cultural Weed Control. Ext. F. 212.

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The next issue of Minnesota Tourist-Travel Notes is due out in mid-May.

--Harlan Stoehr
Shelly Elliott