

The Social Effects of Radios on Barrio Life

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The notion that "Communication is the essence of society" furnished the basis for this study. Since community life fundamental consists of a group of people who have frequent communication among themselves, many leaders of rural improvement efforts have maintained that an increase of communication would greatly assist in rural development programs. This represents an attempt to identify and clarify the specific social effects of donated radios, a newly-introduced instruments for the transmission of ideas.

Most innovations are usually first discussed as news items in these rural communities — oftentimes even before the innovation itself has appeared on the scene. The inauguration of a program for donating transistor radios to isolated settlements in the rural Philippines presented an

opportunity for controlled research on this topic. The communication networks of selected villages were studied both before and after the placement of the radios. In this sense it constitutes a comparative study of the sources, modes of transmission, and reactions to news and other materials that were broadcasted.

The findings of this study furnished estimates of the impact which various types of programs had on different groups within these rural settlements. These data, plus an effort to assay the role of the radio in community change, render this report most pertinent to current community development enterprises.

This study is concerned with the social impact of transistor radios donated to isolated rural Philippine villages (*barrios*). A national program for such radio distribution was begun in August, 1959 by

the Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE). This agency distributed approximately 1,600 of such radio sets during the years of 1959 and 1960.

This program offered an opportunity to make a "before-and-after" type of study by examining social life in selected barrios both prior and subsequent to the radio donations. Specific points of interest were changes in world-view operations of the communications network, social organization, attitudes, and social perception. The social processes involved in these areas of life were also considered.

The interviewers lived in these settlements both before and after the radios arrived. Thus the method of data collection involved a standard interview plus participant observation. This was augmented by information obtained in the municipal center (*poblacion*). All of the barrios studied were in either Batangas or Laguna provinces. All barrio surveys met the general requirements of being relatively isolated and having no electric power, their differences in exposure to commerce, social change, and diversity in land tenure patterns are marked. The crops and farming practices also varied con-

siderably. This variation is beneficial in that the general findings which are common to all five barrios thus have a wider range of applicability.

The general characteristics of the respondents were noted as part of the overall back-ground information. Only about one-third of the interviewees were still residing in the community of birth, but nearly all were still within the same district. Physical movement is thus frequent, but quite limited in range. Most of the respondents had only a bare minimum of literacy. World-of-mouth communication was accordingly most important. About four-fifths were farmers. However, most farmers supplemented farm income with other work.

Expressions of approval and disapproval registered on a check-list showed that status aspirations and economic motives were most commonly accepted as valid reasons for shifting residence. City life was seen as festive but unfriendly, and providing both status and economic opportunities but greater dangers. The dangers were perceived as outgrowths of less personal social controls in the city, so that people became "shameless." The barrio residents thus had only a partial knowledge but considerable

distrust of urban society. Success was defined in terms of status improvement plus economic gains. Good fortune was the most common explanation for one's "success."

Communication was largely verbal, with important people serving as prime news sources. These people included the barrio lieutenants, landlords, teachers, shopkeepers, and recent arrivals from larger communities. Newspapers and magazines were used by these key people, but rarely by others. The role of the cinema was insignificant for most. Women generally seemed to be more active in both reading and relating news to others.

Prior Radio Experience

Most of the respondents had heard radios elsewhere and did have some idea about

types of programs. Usually, those who travelled most also heard radios most and knew the news best. These prior contacts with radios were found to be mainly ones of hearing music or songs. The radio was thus largely perceived as an instrument of entertainment. Listening to radios for news seemed to be most characteristic of older males of a better-than-average income who traveled frequently.

Queries concerning program preferences gave highest ratings to music and news. Men tended to favor news more often than women. A three-fifths majority believed that the radio tells the truth at all times. The focus on entertainment again appeared in responses about what advantages the radio might bring to the home. Yet, in consider-

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DEVIL

Some wasps built their nests during the week in a Scotch clergyman's best breeches. On the Sabbath as he warmed up to his preaching, the wasps, too, warmed up, with the result that presently the minister was leaping about like a jack in the box, and slapping his lower anatomy with great vigor, to the amazement of the congregation.

"Be calm, brethren," he shouted. "The word of God is in my mouth, but the De'il's in my breeches!"

ing the barrio as a whole, news was thought to be the greatest advantage.

In a more diffuse sense, the radio was apparently regarded as an important status symbol. It also seemed to be anticipated as being analogous to a pleasant and entertaining companion.

Consequences of the Radio

First of all, the radio was seen as a gift from benevolent upper-class people to recipients of a lower stratum. Thus it harmonized well with the barrio *mores*. Moreover, since the radio arrived through governmental channels and was assigned to the barrio lieutenant, people tended to place a political interpretation upon the donation. Thus, the radio conveyed connotations, of prestige and social influence which have had their greatest effects on the barrio lieutenant and his relationships with the other villagers.

Radio listening had a differential impact upon the various age, sex, and occupational groupings. Generally speaking, females listened to the radio the most, particularly young maidens and adult women. Storekeepers listen more than farmers, and most men can only listen to a significant degree early in the morning and between the evening

hours of eight and ten o'clock. The role of women in the communications network has thus been enhanced, with as yet unapparent effects on the overall social system of the village.

The role of the radio in the communications network of these communities has been shaped by the nature of barrio social patterns. Most villagers still rely upon the direct, face-to-face contact with their associates as a medium of significant communication. The pattern of direct, purposeful radio listening for informational materials seems to be characteristic of only a small minority who play the role of key communicators in the barrio.

The radios were anticipated and reacted to primarily as entertainment devices. However, prior to the arrival of the radios, this entertainment function was seen in terms of *music*. After the radios were placed, the concept of entertainment shifted to such "human interest" programs as drama, accounts of personal problems and debates in verse (*balagtasan*). The growth of such a deep and widespread interest in these programs is consonant with the personalistic focus of barrio life.

Another aspect of the entertainment function of the

radio has been to furnish a background for social gatherings and companionship of a sort for those who feel lonely.

The sensationalistic presentations of news have often led to a heightened awareness of rural-urban differences. Barrio people can now enlarge their previous apprehensions concerning city life via crime reports, tales of city family problems, traffic accidents; and other disasters

Radio advertising has already begun to take effect, although rural incomes and living patterns limit its impact.

The semi-public character of nearly all radio listening situations provides many distractions and so reduces attention and comprehension. This situation is heightened by the fact that many programs are urban-oriented and so convey relatively less to rural residents.

On the whole then, the radio's effects have been, (first) to increase an awareness of what the rural people view as important rural-urban differences. Secondly, is the situation of an enjoyment of "human interest" materials as a source of patterns of conduct, advice, and storytelling besides entertainment. Then, third, is the attention given

by certain individuals to news and advertising who later communicate selected items to their associates. The amount of such effective listening and communication still remains problematical, however.

Social Change Implications

It is possible to offer certain ideas gained from the experiences in this research that may be of value in attempts to utilize the radio as an instrument for furthering social change. These are offered most tentatively. Only a good deal of trial-and-error and experimentation provide really definitive answers.

It would appear that the following factors should be taken into account.

1. The radio is seen in the barrio as a mark of status and a medium of entertainment. It makes people "happy and contented."

2. There is a heavy emphasis in the Philippine culture on giving advice. The radio is valued for the advice it gives, but the advice is limited. It is not a matter of how-to-do-it, but a matter of how others solve their problems. Much of this advice is disregarded, moreover, because it concerns unfamiliar situations or runs counter to rural traditions.

3. Barrio people pay a good deal of attention to dramas. However, there is no basis yet to conclude that they would see the characters in a drama as people to imitate. This is a matter which needs more attention. There is no reason to expect that they will imitate any or all of the central figures in a drama.

4. One cannot be sure that barrio people are listening very carefully to a program. It is evident that the radio oftentimes merely provides a reassuring background noise. On occasion they do listen intently but may not comprehend what they hear. Yet the people do not readily admit that they do not understand. Any program research should be accomplished by careful attention to and assessment of comprehension.

5. Many subtleties of differences in languages between city and rural areas must be taken into account. The villager can detect a city person by his speech. If one wished to broadcast a program directed toward barrio residents, it may well be that rural intonation would be necessary. It is strongly hinted that a city person who fails to cope with this speech difference will be perceived as a non-rural "outsider." Similarly, barrio folkways are different.

A city script writer is likely to be quite removed from barrio patterns. It has happened that Tagalog literature prepared by city writers for rural people is incomprehensible to the villagers.

6. The barrio people are most interested in news of provincial and *poblacion* affairs. Such programs do not exist. The rural folk therefore rely upon the barrio lieutenant for such information. To provide this news directly by radio over local stations might have both good and bad effects. It may possibly enhance the diffusion of more accurate and timely information but it may also undermine the traditional authority of the barrio lieutenant.

7. Although the barrio lieutenant is definitely the most important person in the communication network, his role as innovator seems much less decisive. The molding of public opinion and the induction of village improvements appear to be two separate and rather unrelated activities in these barrios. The communication of new ideas directly to the people will thus have uncertain effects on the formal role of the barrio lieutenant, but leaves the basic problems of leadership for change untouched. The findings of other studies point to

small sub-groupings within the barrio headed by neighborhood or "situational" leaders as basic units for the introduction and acceptance of change.

8. The motives to which one can appeal for acceptance of desired changes are not yet apparent. Certainly the motive for increased profits may not be very operative. Considerations of prestige and status are important. Community pride is at a low level while family pride is high. Keeping up with the Cruzes is a commonly expressed motive. However, it is not immediately apparent how this incentive could be utilized.

9. The role of music is not clear. Tagalog songs are used at fiestas, serenades and weddings. Members of the younger generation who want to appear "modern" sing popular songs in English. There are considerations which lead one to support the utilization of both kinds of music. It simply is not clear which kind, if either, would facilitate social change.

10. The *balagtasan* or debate in verse is very popular. The barrio people have great respect for well polished rhe-

toric. A rehearsal of reasons for acceptance of certain innovation such as wells or fruit trees would possibly raise considerable discussion. But whether action would follow remains to be discovered. Dis-course has many functions other than purveying facts. Actually, most facts are now conveyed in an informal person-to-person manner. The villagers have simply not yet learned to look beyond the barrio lieutenant and gossip (*Chismis*) for information.

CURIOUS FACTS . . .

(Continued from page 30)

160,000 miles of cable strung through the building.

The Pentagon, even if off the beaten tourist track, is well worth a visit. The concourse, with its shops, is a veritable main street. The courtyard at this time of year is festooned with azaleas, wild crab apple blooms, and dogwood.

There is an art collection in the mail corridor. Just ask for a map at one of the information desks and find your own way around, or if you are traveling in a group, ask for an especially conducted tour.

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