

# MASS MEDIA HABITS OF RURAL PEOPLE IN A PHILIPPINE MUNICIPALITY

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## ABSTRACT

**Two-hundred-fifty rural household members from Lucban, Quezon, Philippines were interviewed to determine their mass media habits, the relationship between selected demographic characteristics and their mass media habits, their attitudes towards the mass media and, on the basis of the findings, draw out guidelines for reaching rural people through the mass media more effectively. Results showed that of the six media, radio was the most availed of. Majority of the respondents owned radio sets and had easy access to movie houses. The respondents spent more time with the broadcast media (radio and TV) than with the printed media (newspapers, comics and magazines). The media were availed of mainly for entertainment. Radio, magazines and newspapers were considered as the most useful sources of information. Radio was the most reliable medium. Among the suggested measures to improve the media were: "lower price," "lesser advertisements/commercials," "lesser obscenity in comics and magazines," "more realistic stories," "more news (in radio)" and "add more pages/stories."**

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the important elements of the communication process is the audience or receiver of the message.

Communication is said to be effective when the receiver responds in accordance with what the message sender expects him to. Oftentimes, however, the desired

response or result is not realized. In such cases, it is likely that while the communicator is competent and has adequate communication facilities, his timing, medium or strategy does not correspond or jibe with the preferences, habits, opinions, or interests of the receiver. Many communication problems occur for lack of understanding of audience behavior and characteristics, and this is compounded by the limited information available about the mass media habits of people, particularly those in rural areas. Thus, program planners and implementors often grope for factual bases in designing and implementing development programs.

Considering the importance of knowing the mass media habits of rural people, a systematic inquiry into this subject matter is vital to the task of disseminating development information to them. As de Fleur (1966) observed, the different media of communication are innovations around which the ordinary person organizes his life in different patterns because of their presence. Thus, this study was an attempt to determine which of the different media of communication rural people prefer, and why? What kinds of mass media content do they expose themselves to and for what reasons? What functions do mass media perform in their lives? Are their mass media habits related to their socio-economic characteristics like age, sex, education, occupation and income?

At a time when Asian countries

are pursuing common development objectives on a cooperative basis, studies of this nature are timely. Information on the mass media habits of rural households, if gathered and made available to mass communication practitioners, educators and government policymakers, could serve as the basis of decisions in the mass communication industry, furnish materials for teaching, and suggest government policies and programs (Jamias, 1972). The results could also serve as guidelines for more efficient use of the media, since in many countries in Asia there is an increasing interest in development communication.

## METHODS

The sampling unit of this study was the rural household. The sample consisted of 250 rural people, drawn from the town proper of Lucban, Quezon and three of its barrios. The three sample barrios were selected based on their distance from the town proper, i.e., Maka (a nearby barrio which is 4-7 km from the town), Mayit-Manasa (an intermediate barrio which is 7-8 km from the town), and Nagsinamo (a far barrio which is 10 km from the town). Sample households were randomly drawn using the "proportional allocation" formula to determine the number of sample households for each location. The respondents were chosen on the following order based on availability: 1st, the head of the household

(whether male or female), male was interviewed if both were available; 2nd, the spouse; and, 3rd, the eldest son or daughter. Data were collected through an interview schedule. Percentages and the chi-square test were used in analyzing the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Profile of Respondents*

There were 250 respondents, of whom 196 were household heads, and 54 were youths. Majority (65%) resided in the barrios, while the rest (35%) resided in the poblacion. Their ages ranged from 15-65 years. The females slightly outnumbered the males (135 vs 115). Majority (60%) had a low level of education (elementary, *cartilla*, or no schooling), while the rest (31%) either had high school or college education. Nearly half (48%) were farmers; the others were employees (17%), livestock raisers or weavers (22%), and the unemployed (13%). Their monthly incomes ranged from less than ₱100 to over ₱300, with most of them (42%) earning less than ₱100 per month (\$1 is equivalent to ₱7.37).

### *Mass Media Habits of Rural People*

*Types of mass media to which rural people were exposed.* Of the six media, radio was the medium to which the greater number of respondents (88%) were exposed, follow-

ed by movies (71%), comics (68%), newspapers (52%), magazines (49%) and television (46%).

*Means by which respondents had access to media.* Majority of the respondents (84%) owned radio sets, while only 15% owned television sets. Majority of the comics (60%) and magazine (67%) readers borrowed from their neighbors, while the newspaper readers (49%) bought their own copies. More than half (53%) of the respondents had easy access to movie houses.

*Frequency with which the respondents availed themselves of the media.* The most frequently availed of medium was radio, with 86% of the respondents tuning in to their radio sets everyday. Television viewing was done once a week (33%). The printed media were less frequently availed of, with 49% of the respondents reading magazines once a week, 40% reading comics once a week, and 40% reading newspapers rarer than once a week. In the case of movies, almost half of the moviegoers went to movies as often as once to twice a month.

Approximately seven out of 10 of the print media consumers spent less than one hour in their reading; the rest spent one or more hours. This pattern was reversed in the case of the broadcast media consumers; about 8 out of 10 respondents spent one or more hours listening to radio or viewing television.

*Mass media content preferences and purposes.* The mostly read newspaper section was the local

news (87%), followed by national news (62%), entertainment news (62%), and editorials 32%).

The large majority of the comics readers and TV viewers read comics and watched television programs for entertainment. Radio was used for both entertainment and information purposes.

*Time of exposure to mass media.* About half of the newspaper readers (49%) read newspapers after 5:00 p.m., while most comics and magazine readers read between 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. The prime time for radio listening was before 9:00 a.m. The peak time for TV viewing was from 5:00 p.m. up to 9:00 p.m.

About four out of five radio listeners listened with other people; the others listened alone.

*Relationships Between Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents and Mass Media Habits*

The following relationships were confirmed:

1. Place of residence was significantly related to newspaper and magazine reading, and television viewing (Table 1). Place of residence was also significantly related to frequency of television and movie viewing (Table 2) and to means of acquiring comics and television ownership (Table 3). Respondents from the town were more likely to read newspapers and magazines and view television than those from the barrios. Respondents from the town also viewed

**Table 1.** Summary of relationship between media exposure and place of residence, type of respondent, education, occupation and income.

<u>Media Exposure</u>		
	d.f.	X <sup>2</sup>
<u>Place of residence</u>		
Newspaper	3	16.14 **
Comics	3	7.507 *
Magazine	3	12.45 **
Television	3	65.25 **
Movie	3	7.72 *
<u>Type of respondent</u>		
Newspaper	3	2.379 *
Comics	3	9.93 **
Magazine	3	4.16 *
Television	3	1.44 *
<u>Education</u>		
Newspaper	1	28.88 **
Comics	1	8.52 **
Magazine	1	18.53 **
Radio	1	0.319 *
<u>Income</u>		
Newspaper	1	18.49 **
Comics	1	2.54 *
Magazine	1	0.369 *
Television	1	22.813 **
Radio	1	0.231 *
Movie	1	3.999 **
<u>Occupation</u>		
Newspaper	3	23.099 **
Comics	3	4.216 *
Magazine	3	5.50 *
Television	3	44.373 **
Radio	3	8.627 **
Movie	3	1.801 *

\* Not significant

\*\* Significant at 5% level

television and movies more frequently than those from the barrios. There were 29 TV owners in the town, while only 9 owned TV sets in the

**Table 2.** Summary of relationship between frequency of mass media use and place of residence, type of respondent, education, income and occupation.

<u>Frequency of Mass Media Use</u>		
	d.f.	X <sup>2</sup>
<u>Place of residence</u>		
Television	3	10.307 **
Movies	3	15.752 **
<u>Type of respondent</u>		
Television	3	3.762 *
Movies	3	7.472 *
<u>Education</u>		
Newspaper	1	22.577 **
<u>Income</u>		
Newspaper	1	15.276 **
Movies	1	0.595 *
<u>Occupation</u>		
Newspaper	3	34.983 **
Comics	3	3.28 *
Movies	3	7.971 **

\* Not significant  
\*\* Significant at 5% level

barrios.

2. Type of respondents was significantly related to comics reading (Table 1). Household heads were more likely to read comics than the youths.

3. Education was significantly related to newspaper, comics and magazine reading, and to frequency of newspaper reading (Tables 1 & 2). Respondents with a high level of education were more likely to expose themselves to printed media and read newspapers more frequently than those with a low level of education.

**Table 3.** Summary of relationship between means of acquiring media and place of residence and income.

<u>Means of Acquiring Media</u>		
	d.f.	X <sup>2</sup>
<u>Place of residence</u>		
Newspaper	3	2.357 *
Comics	3	20.18 **
Radio	3	2.81 *
Television	3	33.951 **
<u>Income</u>		
Newspaper	1	2.507 *
Comics	1	0.773 *
Magazine	1	6.26 **
Radio	1	0.224 *

\* Not significant  
\*\* Significant at 5% level

4. Income was significantly related to newspaper reading, television and movie viewing (Table 1). Income was also significantly related to frequency of newspaper reading, and to the means of acquiring magazines (Tables 2 & 3). Respondents with a high income were more likely to read newspapers, view television and go to movies and buy magazines than those with a low income.

5. Occupation was significantly related to newspaper reading, radio listening, and television viewing (Table 1). Occupation was also significantly related to frequency of newspaper reading (Table 2). Respondents who worked as employees were more likely to read newspapers, listen to radio and view television than those who worked as farmers, livestock raisers or were unemployed.

### *Attitudes Towards the Mass Media*

*Usefulness and adequacy of the media.* People consume the media for certain purposes. To the extent that the media serve these purposes, people will continue using them. Results showed that radio, magazines, and newspapers appeared to be the most useful sources of information. The least useful media were comics and TV. As to the most adequate media for meeting the information needs of the respondents, radio was rated first in terms of adequacy of providing local, national, international, educational, and entertainment news, but last in

business news. Television ranked first in national news, business news and sports news, but last in international news and educational news. Newspaper ranked first in advertisements, and second in local, international, educational, business, and sports news.

As to which media was most useful in meeting specific needs of the respondents, such as educational needs, information on government domestic affairs, and job opportunities, it was found that radio was the most useful, followed by newspapers and TV. Comics and movies were the least useful, except for entertainment purposes.

*How reliable are the media?* Based on the ranking made by the respondents, the most reliable medium was radio, followed by newspapers, TV, comics and magazines. Movies was the least reliable. To probe on how the respondents really regard the media, they were asked: "Do you enjoy reading/listening/viewing (medium) now more than before?" While there were more respondents (87%) who enjoy reading newspapers now, there were also more (17%) among them who enjoyed their reading of newspapers in the past compared to radio listeners and TV viewers.

*Making the media more useful to rural people.* The respondents were asked to suggest measures for improving the media. For newspapers and magazines, the most commonly given suggestion was "lower price." Considering the relatively low income of most of the

respondents, this is understandable. Comics appears to be cheaper. This partly explains the higher consumption of comics among the respondents. Among radio listeners and TV viewers, including a considerable number of newspaper readers, excessive advertisements and commercials seemed to be their major complaint. While commercials and advertisements are inevitable, being the primary source of media funds, measures could be initiated to tone down their obtrusiveness to media consumers. Another suggestion was to "add more pages/stories" to comics and magazines. This could be related to the demand for "low prices." Possibly, some comics and magazine readers felt that they were not getting their money's worth for every comics or magazine they bought. A number of comics readers preferred more realistic stories. Although most comics stories are fiction, the writers can perhaps inject developmental messages to make them more realistic and more appealing to the readers. The respondents also mentioned about "obscene stories

and pictures" in comics and magazines. "Obscenity" is a many-sided issue. While some readers can bewail certain publications as containing "obscene materials," editors can claim otherwise and invoke that their publication have been approved by the government. In fact, other readers who relish reading such controversial materials may even side with the editors. Obscenity, after all, is a very relative term to define.

The other suggestions were typical of those from rural people: "less long stories (in comics)," "use Tagalog (in comics and magazines)," "more agricultural news/stories (in magazines and radio)," and "more drama (in radjo)." A number of radio listeners and TV viewers wanted "more news." It was indeed evident that news programs in radio and TV were too few and too short. Considering that majority of the respondents depend on radio for "news," radio station managers would do well to give more time slots for news programs, if only for the benefit of the rural population.

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