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Notes and Comment

*The Electronic Information Media in the Second Decade of Development**

CARLOS ARNALDO

It was recently said by an Asian revolutionary: It is easy to start a rebellion for freedom. It is more difficult to administer the tasks of building the nation.

In a sense, as we begin the second decade of development, we might call the first decade the beginning of the electronic revolution to free the masses from ignorance. The advent of the transistor in the Sixties proliferated the pocket-size radio throughout the country ten times faster than the nation's already high birth rate. Radio quickly became the poorman's newspaper, drama theatre, and jukebox.

But today we may ask, is that electronic revolution already over? Is it time now to set the mass media to the tasks of building the nation? Or is the first decade still an unfinished revolution since the masses are not yet freed from the proverbial ignorance? But whether we consider this second decade of development as finishing the revolution, or as setting down to the tasks of building the nation, the mass media have a long way to go before fully liberating the common man from the chains of tradition, superstition, fear and ignorance.

We must necessarily take stock of the potential of the electronic media, if we wish to harness its massive power more effectively to the goals of nation building.

* A paper read at the Conference on National Development, sponsored by the Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unions; December 7, 1970, Sulo Hotel, Quezon City.

In this paper, we'd like to examine this potential and investigate the stumbling blocks that tend to neutralize and even negate the role of mass media in national development. We will focus on the electronic media of radio and television as channels of information. We shall try to determine how information and freedom of opinion and dissent on radio and television can be utilized more effectively to tap the rich resources of this country and its people. And when we think of the electronic information media in Marshall McLuhan's (1964:7) terms, as electronic extensions of *man*, his eyes, ears, and tongue—his communication organs—we are dealing with that machine which can help directly to tap our most precious resources, our own people, our *human capital*.

1. MYTHS IN THE MEDIA

First let us clarify some widespread misconceptions about mass media. The many myths, slogans, and labels applied to the electronic media have not only served to describe them, but also to disguise their underlying failures and weaknesses. No doubt, one has heard of radio as the speedy medium with widespread dissemination. One hears also of television's visual impact. Speed, spread, and impact—these are three labels we'd like to clarify.

Speed

It is true that radio is today the fastest medium for information. Radio can give news bulletins almost 24 hours before they're printed in the newspapers the next day. Radio can also give the news *as it happens*, as Radyo Patrol and other stations covered the demonstrations of January 1970, the elections, and even the Pope's recent visit to the Philippines.

And yet in August 1968, it took a week for the news of the earthquake disaster in Casiguran, Baler, and Dingalan to reach Manila! This year, it took almost a whole day for the devastation in the Bicol provinces during Typhoon Norming to reach Manila. And when there is an electric blackout in any major part of the country, for sure, news and information will also be blacked out. For while the tiny pocket transistor can operate on batteries, the giant transmitters, SSB communications, and other telephone and telegraph lines require huge amounts of electricity. Those stations fortunate, wise, and wealthy enough to have standby generators are on the right track. But to keep information moving all around the country, every key station must have its own independent electric source.

Another irony about the speed of radio and television is that we can get satellite programs from the U.S., Europe, Tokyo, Asian Games in Mexico or Bangkok, if not instantaneously, at least within hours. With-

in an hour, the entire story of Robert Kennedy's death in 1968 was whipped around the world. Even in a remote rural municipality like Infanta, Quezon, the whole town was buzzing with news. And yet within our own country, news travels slowly from province to province.

In summary, while radio by its nature is a speedy medium, it has not been fully *utilized* as a speedy medium in this country. Some of the hindrances are electricity sources, distance, deliberate news black-outs, and even at times the newsman's lack of alertness on the beat. Especially in disasters, the time when speed counts the most to save lives, it is quite obvious that the electronic media are not and often cannot be fully tapped for their speed.

Spread

Radio in the Philippines is widespread. In a sense, this is very true. Radio today saturates 70% of Philippine homes, and some 270 AM radio stations dot the entire archipelago of the Philippines. Although the number of FM receivers in the country is still very small, six companies have already set up FM radio stations, one in stereo with sound in "colorful dimension!" And if you count it in hours, there are some 5,000 hours of electronic radio sound going through the country everyday.

Yet, when we speak of spread, where are these radio stations? Forty three are in the Greater Manila Area alone! The others cluster around the main cities and municipalities in the country, where they can be easily fed with technical personnel, advertising, and a sizable audience. Major cities have as many as ten to twenty radio stations a piece! But in the isolated areas, in the mountains, in the inaccessible coastal areas, there are few radio stations—where they are needed most!

Because of radio's spread throughout a country, McLuhan (1964; 299-301) refers to radio as the nation's tribal drum, uniting it, thumping out a rhythm for all the nation to follow as Goebbels did in Hitler's Germany. But we must recall that Germany is a compact land mass, it has a unified language and culture. But in the Philippines, our people are scattered over 7,000 islands, speak at least eleven major dialects and some 80 subdialects, and today live a multicolored culture of Indo-Malay, Arabian, Chinese, Spanish, and the various folk cultures. It would seem that radio in this archipelago fragments society rather than unifies it. Each station programs its own language, features its own local stars and local news, and gives only secondary stress to items of national importance. Local broadcasters have an extremely difficult time trying to make certain national or international news events relevant and interesting to the local audience.

And so radio may be widespread throughout the country, at least through the major cities, but there are still 30% of Philippine homes

without radio; there are still areas which no station's signal can reach, where the local station has little impact on its audience because it lacks a vital contact with its listeners. And in the multi-island context of the Philippines, radio, instead of unifying, appears to fragment and isolate the people.

McLuhan (1964: 306) recognizes this ambivalent characteristic of radio to both unify and pluralize. He writes:

Radio provides a speed-up of information that also causes acceleration in other media. It certainly contracts the world to village size, and creates insatiable village tastes for gossip, rumor, and personal malice. But while radio contracts the world to village dimensions, it hasn't the effect of homogenizing the village quarters.... Radio is not only a mighty awakener of archaic memories, forces, and animosities, but a decentralizing, pluralistic force, as is really the case with all electric power and media.

Impact

Television with its immediate visual presentation of information, its combination of sound and sight brings an impactful experience to the viewer. Or does it?

From the theory to the reality, we have a gap as large as the difference between having facilities and not having them; between having a generous budget and not having it; between utilizing broadcast skills and not utilizing them.

In news programs for instance, mug shots of public officials are not particularly impactful, unless the statement is world-shaking. Neutral court scenes, committee hearings, even picket lines are not especially stunning. Provincial TV stations, without film stories, end up with a few slides, some graphics, a script, a voice, and the newscaster's own mug shot. And again, no impact—unless the story itself commands attention.

All of this boils down to what the TV news story is and how to exploit the medium to gain full impact aurally and visually. These are the basic questions we have to ask, before we speak of opinion making and dissent. For in the electronic media, opinion and dissent are coursed through electronic changes. And these changes can enhance, emphasize, and stress the message; or on the contrary, they can garble, misinterpret, or even negate the message.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASS MEDIA

One way to describe the structure of the mass media is to compare it to a heavy nucleus with light weight electrons in three orbits. The

nucleus represents Manila where two-thirds of all daily newspapers are circulated, almost one-fifth of all radio stations are established, and where nine (including two ETV stations) of the country's fifteen TV stations beam their signals. In the outer orbits, the rest of Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, the print and TV media structure thins out like scattered electrons. The exception of course, is radio which saturates from 60-80% of the non-Manila areas.

Here are some data prepared by the ABS-CBN Research Department in 1969:

Region	Radio Homes	Television Homes
Greater Manila	81%	49%
Ilocos	81	2
Cagayan Valley	62	—
Central Luzon	74	7
South Luzon	76	10
Bicol	62	—
W. Visayas	69	2
E. Visayas	71	2
N. W. Mindanao	65	—
S. W. Mindanao	72	1

On a larger scale, we can see the comparisons of radio, television (excluding comics and magazines) and newspapers/growth over the years. (see Figure 1).

These data show that almost 70% of the nation is saturated by radio, the medium of speed and spread. Only 7% is covered by television, the medium with the impact. Approximately 15% has access to newspapers. Over the years, it can be seen that newspapers kept up a steady growth, but hardly increased their general circulation in comparison with the millions who now listen to radio. This is all the more surprising when the Philippines has a 73% literacy rate, the second highest in southeast Asia. But the Philippines has one of the lowest daily newspaper circulations in the Southeast Asian region. As one veteran newsmen put it, the Filipino is not worth even a pound of paper a year! And it's not surprising, when one calculates that it would take the minimum wage earner two full week's salary to afford a year's subscription to a Manila daily. That is why at this stage of development in the Philippines, the emphasis is put on the cheaper electronic information medium of radio.

The data also point out that electronic newscasting has come to the fore! Before the advent of the transistor and the TV, newspapers of course were our prime source of national information. They carried

the bulletins, the headlines, the complete story, the follow-up, the editorials, and so forth.

But now, radio and even TV beat the newspaper deadlines by as much as 24 hours. A late evening radio newscast and the regular TV newscasts now on almost all Manila channels can even give a complete story. The follow-up and the details are found in the morning paper the next day. In some provincial cities, the morning paper takes its stories and headlines from the local TV newscast, even giving credits to the television station. The day is past when a professional radio or TV newscaster reads a newspaper on the air. Electronic newscasting has even influenced a change in newspaper formats. Some dailies, notably *The Manila Chronicle*, stress interpretative reporting, backgrounders, and investigation reports. These papers leave the bulletins and hard news to radio and television, and concentrate on depth reporting.

Summing up these ideas on the structure of the electronic media in the Philippines, we can say that there are too many radio stations and there are too few! — too many stations are cluttered in the city areas and too few are established in the more isolated, less accessible areas. Better control over the granting of franchises and frequencies is needed here. To do this efficiently, a group must study the technical layout of the country, the paths of radio waves and their behaviour under varying atmospheric conditions, to ascertain the best allocation of frequencies and transmitting power.

For TV, still an infant medium, we must find a way to bring down the cost of this expensive but effective medium, if we want to utilize it more totally for nation building. Cost studies will have to touch on all aspects of TV broadcasting, from transmitters and equipment to personnel training and utilization. Otherwise we end up with expensive machines, and still no impact.

III. THE PROBLEMS OF THE BROADCASTER

We could probably sum up all the problems facing the broadcaster under one item: *money*, but in the long run, money is not the problem. It's the *solution*!

In this section, we would like to focus especially on the immediate problems of informational broadcasting, namely personnel and facilities. Although there are several other program types, we would like to concentrate our attention on news programs and similar informational type programs, since in the commercial setup, these have shown the greater potential for nation building.

Facilities

At first sight, especially from the transistor end of radio communication, it would seem that radio broadcasting facilities are not expensive. If the broadcaster just stays in front of the microphone all day long, that is very inexpensive. But radio news requires a lot more. A good radio news organization will need: 1) teletype services of both local and foreign news agencies; 2) a multiple telephone system, with several trunks; 3) mobile patrol cars with two way VHF radio; 4) SSB or single side band radio systems to link all network stations together, and preferably a microwave link which gives a better, more dependable signal; 5) a shortwave monitoring receiver to get the latest foreign news with voice actualities; several portable tape recorders for taping local voice actualities and events; and a master patch system or console that can receive any electronic message and feed it to its proper outlet on the radio stations.

Now a major Manila station may be able to afford all this, but even then many still cannot. The province stations have harder conditions. In the provinces, there are radio newscasters who have to provide their own tape recorders and even typewriters! Some even buy their own earphones and headsets! Many an important news event did not get through on time because of breakdowns in obsolete equipment, or because the newsman had no tape recorder, or mobile system.

Under such conditions, radio newscasting will definitely be held back a couple of years, and maybe decades. To fully equip a radio newsroom is costly. Hopefully, the day will come, when broadcast management will plan out carefully a more effective electronic news facility program and implement it.

But let's tackle a much larger problem in facilities: the network. Many groups of stations call themselves "networks," but do not operate as networks, when it comes to news. A network connects a number of stations together in a conference loop, and provides two-way communication for all stations, *on-air*. This means, for example, that at eight o'clock in the evening, a newscaster will broadcast from Manila and be heard in several other parts of the country simultaneously. On the same program, he will call upon other stations to give their news to the entire country, simultaneously. On a third part, the Manila newscaster may even invite dialogue, comments, or follow-ups from the local newscasters.

At present two major networks have a network newscast: Radio Mindanao (tri-Media) Network and ABS-CBN. But a lot is still to be desired in the quality of the signal, the scope and quality of the news, and especially the choice of topics of national importance on the local levels. The on-air two way communication has yet to be perfected. But

the network news is definitely one vital way towards unifying the country, towards keeping all areas and all sectors informed of current events, and towards bringing the nation closer to itself. It is the one vital positive factor towards unifying our easily fragmentable society. If we are ever to achieve national consensus on issues and goals, a network system is a must.

For television news, we must add to the above-mentioned equipment: film cameras with sound facilities, mobile Video Tape recorders, and mobile lighting gear. The TV network is still a few years away, but it is coming and will have to come. We already have TV satellite, which in a way is a little anachronistic. For we can get instantaneous coverage of foreign events, but we can't even see what's happening outside the purview of our own cameras! To solve this problem, Inter-island Broadcasting recently decided to cancel their subscription for foreign films and allocate these funds to support more local news films.

Lastly, remote facilities are still underdeveloped in the Philippines. Every station has some equipment, but no station has everything and enough of it, especially for the television remote coverages. In the recent coverage of the papal visit to the Philippines the networks wisely pooled their equipment together and covered the Papal Visit as one group. It seems the most sensible and logical thing to do. But in the broadcast industry, the competition for sales and advertising, the keen rivalry and even jealousy that creeps in are counteracting forces. Overall, a pooled coverage should turn out better, but although the equipment multiplies when it is pooled, not all equipment is prepared for pooled coverage. For example, not all stations are prepared to provide an "override" or a sound signal that gives all announcers the director's instructions. Not all stations can provide a sufficient number of monitors for announcers to see the events they are covering. And it seems, not all broadcasters fully understand what a pooled coverage means. The broadcasters have yet to formulate more definitively the requirements and obligations of pooled coverages. But in the face of expensive equipment, pooled coverages do provide a handy method for covering big, lengthy events, like the Pope's recent visit.

Personnel

Despite the finest equipment available, the ultimate determining factor of quality is the *personnel*. Today, trained personnel in news broadcasting are at a premium.

The key person in newsbroadcasting is the news gatherer, called at times, newsmen, reporter, correspondent. Here, we need a man with both training and integrity. He must have the training to write quickly, clearly, factually, informatively, and with general appeal. He should be adaptable to print, radio and TV media. But he must also be a

man of integrity. For on the beat, he will meet all kinds of overtures. It may come in the form of an envelope containing some crisp bills. It may be in the style of the "flesh conference" on Roxas Boulevard. It might even be a simple mimeo sheet, with the day's propaganda. But the trained, sincere newsman will be able to distinguish between fact and fiction, between the rhetorical issues and the real issues. He will be daring enough to risk his life to write the truth! A bullet here and there hasn't stopped the real newsman from writing and voicing the truth. As the saying goes, "Truth will out," and it has. The truth has come out in various forms on the Bantay case, the Cadiz landgrabbing, the Davao farmers' problems, and even on the latest "karate chop" during the Pope's visit.

From the newsbeat, personnel need training in the various radio and television production techniques, in order to fully exploit the medium. Radio news style differs from TV news. Radio must give the details that the listener cannot see. But when the viewer sees what is happening on screen, the TV writer must then fill in the background, the depth behind the story, the facts and figures, the whys and wherefores. He must choose slides, graphics, and film to fill out the story and make it impactful. And he must not end here, but advance to other types of radio and TV informational programs aside from the hard-news story.

IV. CATALYZING OPINION LEADERSHIP

Now we come to the most important part of this position paper, opinion leadership. Relating it to the overall roles of the mass media in national development, Schramm (1964:125) says that the mass media have three basic roles:

1. to inform
2. to educate
3. to catalyze opinions and provide a forum where leaders can make decisions.

It is this third task, we'd like to focus on here. In the broad field of journalism, some refer to it as the "two W's." A newsman must write *who*, *what* *when* and *where* in his opening paragraph. But what the newsman often neglects in his complete story are the other two "W's," *why*? and *what next*? The electronic media being immediate and visual, have a distinct advantage over the print medium, in giving the "why?" and the "what next?" of the day's events. Increased information especially over the electronic media,

... provides a climate for national development. It makes expert knowledge available where it is needed, and provides a forum for discussion, leadership, and decision making. It helps to raise the general level of aspirations (Schramm, 1964: 43-44).

And this opens up the whole perspective of training personnel and utilizing facilities of radio and TV in the most impactful, meaningful, and effective way towards nation building. For it seems that the key to unlocking many of our development problems lies in convincing the decision makers or those who influence the decision makers. Witness how powerful the mass media were in convincing the Chief Executive to grant land to the Davao farmers, in arousing sympathy to aid the victims of typhoons Sening and Yoling, even in arousing apathy against the striking jeepney drivers. These examples are from the usual newscasts and commentators. They were not part of an organized appeal or documentary type program, they were not dramatized to effect a response.

The problem with opinion-making programs is that quantitatively we have too many; but qualitatively, we have very few, if any! In the newspapers, every columnist could be considered an opinion-maker and some of them opinion leaders. On radio, opinion makers proliferate. But T.V., being an expensive medium and the "cool" medium has few opinion makers although there are several newscasters.

But of the radio commentators, how many have spent their half hour or hour ranting on a subject until it is wrenched dry, instead of fully exploiting the medium with interviews, taped voice actualities, documentary presentations? How many have played on sensationalism, boldness, and satire bordering on libel, just to attract attention? Actually, in our society, it has been said that freedom of the press and freedom of speech is too free, almost licentiously free (Cruz, 1967). As a matter of fact, there is even the element of "overkill." An issue is attacked so strongly, so violently, so frequently, that it ends up by-passed and forgotten! Oftentimes, highly opinionated press and radio statements are dismissed as fanatical or biased.

This is what challenges the would-be opinion leader in the mass media today. He must be strong, factual, and positive in his statements; yet he must avoid the extreme of being opinionated, thereby risking his credibility altogether. He must be stable, firm, and intellectual, yet he must not be so wishy-washy or academic that no one pays any attention to him. The challenge is all the more difficult because his predecessors have already rendered the public immune by their sensationalistic, opinionated reporting.

Sensationalism in the news often serves to attract readers, listeners, and viewers, and thus helps to sell the newspaper or airtime on radio and television. But sensationalism carries its own backlash. It tends to distract the public from the key issues and entertain them with the sideshows. News reports often tend to play up the violence of demonstrations and touch lightly or not at all on the issues. In January of 1970, newsmen headlined the molotov cocktails, the policemen's

truncheons, the storming of Malacañang, the killing of seven students. But the main issues of a non-partisan Constitutional Convention and the criticism of the 1970 State of the Nation Address were not given full attention, were not adequately analyzed, were not sufficiently acted upon.

Opinion leadership in the mass media is perhaps the most vital facet of this tool in building the nation. It is also the most delicate, requiring extreme sensitivity, full personal integrity, and a command of the medium. Opinion leadership on television has been least developed.

The TV panel and documentary programs at first sight seem to be the most logical outlet to air opinions and catalyze leadership. But these are also the programs least watched! A top rating newscast draws only a 9.7% audience, compared with a top entertainment program which rates between 30-35% of the total TV audience. Panel type programs are way at the bottom of the list, of some 180 programs. But then again, maybe the panel or documentary program is aimed at a particular segment of society, and if it hits enough of that sector, it can be considered successful. That's another worthwhile thought. But one is always plagued by the worry that 90% or more of the TV audience isn't watching! Furthermore, a station that caters only to that intellectual 10% won't last long, for the sponsors will go to the programs that draw the remaining 90%.

But let's analyze the other side of the coin called opinion making. Dissent is also a factor to be considered in a society's decision making process. Here we face a very ominous question. Do the media represent anyone in particular or everyone in general? The fact is that most radio and television newscasts do a good job of representing the government and business side of the news. For here, it is easy to pinpoint responsibility, leaders, and opinions in these larger, monolithic organizations. It is much more difficult to amass the residents of a city and assess their dissent, and much more so of a nation! The problem is further complicated when a broadcaster tries to represent the sentiments and feelings of *unorganized* masses, such as farmers, or non-union laborers, or the ordinary citizen.

Here is definitely another unexplored horizon for the electronic information broadcaster. The importance of the challenge lies in this, that if the broadcaster does not muster mass opinion, he will end up merely another propaganda voice for the powers that be. Dissent, it seems, will have to come from the newsman of integrity, who can present both sides of an issue, who will take the time and effort to seek the other sides of a story, the opposing stand on an issue, the minority or even majority opinion.

In connection with this, it should be said, that the coming Constitutional Convention may well end up a mere politicians' convention and a politicians' Constitution, unless mass opinion is consolidated and presented to the delegates in some form. To effect this, all the mass media should cooperate to gather that mass sentiment and present it to the delegates, to insure that the new constitution will truly reflect the mind and will of the entire nation.

V. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS OF THE MEDIA

In this last section we would like to present only two sets of recommendations, one for the broadcasters themselves, and one for the delegates to the coming Constitutional Convention.

Our recommendation to the broadcasters is one that comes from the broadcasters themselves, articulated when a group of newsmen from radio, television and the press held a conference in Cebu, October 10-11, 1970. There, the broadcasters were of one accord that an Electronic Newsmen's Institute was needed. This institute based on a central secretariat would serve the following purposes:

1. to be a clearing house for all decisions concerning several radio and/or TV stations, such as pooled coverages, consortium ownership of equipment (satellite, microwaves), legal decisions involving the broadcast industry as a whole, representing the industry to other sectors;
2. to publish a professional journal, to keep broadcast newsmen abreast of new developments, to provide reading for in-service-training, to provide depth articles for better news service, to provide a forum for opinion, and to be a critic or watchdog over itself;
3. to organize seminars and training programs; to act as general recruitment office for broadcast personnel, scholarship, and international conferences; and
4. to provide a central organization for research and information, with library facilities.

A first task for this Institute would be to prepare a draft of the Canon of Electronic Journalism in the Philippines.

The second recommendation is addressed to the delegates of the Constitutional Convention. All is not well with the present structure of the mass media in the Philippines. Many of the problems of cities glutted with too many radio stations, many areas without radio or television, a dog-eat-dog competition for sales and advertising, indiscriminate and often selfish neglect of some stations to remain within their own frequency area, the abuse of media ownership and monopolies—many of these problems can be solved by an efficient National

Broadcast Commission. But first, this commission must be such that its officers are not victimized by the pressures of politics and bribery. Second, they must be given the financing and personnel needed to fulfill the objectives of their office. Third, this commission must have the power not only to grant franchises and frequencies under specified conditions, but also the police power to revoke franchises upon proven violations of law. Fourth, the Commission must also be able to set up certain standards of broadcast quality, efficiency, and integrity, that it expects the industry to live up to. Fifth, the Commission should be empowered to study what type of broadcast system is best suited to this country, whether it should remain commercial as it is now, or develop towards some kind of public broadcasting system as is had in Japan, Australia, Germany, Canada, and Great Britain, or some other form, combining the best elements of these.

These two recommendations will not solve all the problems of the electronic news media, but they will go a long way towards setting down basic policies, setting up standards and criteria, and urging and supporting the electronic newsman to give better information service to his people.

If we want to start building the nation, we should start by building the basic and vital *tools* that build the nation.

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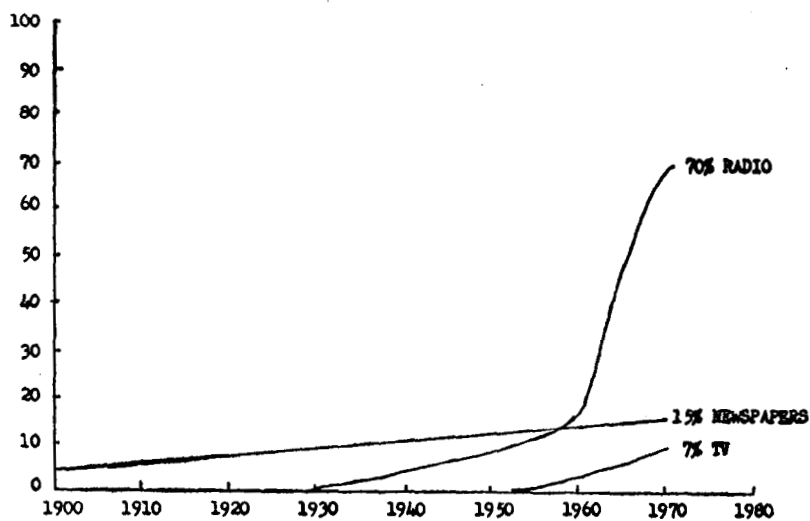


Figure 1: Projection of % of 1970 Media Homes and Growth Trend 1900-1970