MASS COMMUNICATION MEDIA, READING COMPREHENSION, AND INTELLIGENCE

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This study investigated the relationships between the reading comprehension and intelligence of junior high school students and their use of the mass communication media. Robert M. Sekerak is head of the department of audio-visual communications, California State Polytechnic College, Kellogg-Voorhis Campus, Pomona, California. This paper is based upon his doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Southern California.

If the charge is true that mass communication media are interfering with the reading comprehension of American youth, research has not as yet been able to substantiate such a charge with concrete findings. We hear constantly the voiced fears of parents and teachers that children somehow are being "ruined" by television viewing and comic book reading. People have appeared before investigating committees and have stated flatly that they feel certain forms of mass communication are corrupting our youth. There is considerable speculation, based on a priori assumptions, regarding the effects of certain mass communication media on intellectual competence. Some educational leaders go so far as to criticize openly certain mass media because they believe them to be influencing learning adversely.

It appears obvious that much research is necessary to find factual evidence which will prove or disprove these subjective judgments. With such an end in view, this study was launched in order to reduce to objectivity as many factors as possible in the area of mass communication behavior.

THE HYPOTHESES

The purpose of the study was to attempt to discover any relationships between the amount of time spent in contact with various
means of mass communication and the reading comprehension achievement scores of certain junior high school students.

The study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

1. There is a relationship between reading comprehension and the use of the mass communication media.

2. There is a relationship between intelligence and types of mass communication media used by the individual in his free time.

Sub-hypotheses suggested by the major areas of investigation were:

3. The non-language intelligence quotient of the individual is positively related to the amount of time spent in contact with the non-reading type of mass communication media.

4. The mass communication behavior of pupils in two consecutive years does not vary significantly.

THE PROCEDURE

It was felt that in order to insure an accurate account of the mass communication behavior of the subjects being studied, an instrument which fit the unique situation would have to be developed. A series of pilot studies evolved a diary-questionnaire form which contained its own cross checks and validating information. The instrument was designed to assist the participants in summarizing the time each has spent in contact with the following mass communication media: television, radio, motion pictures, books, magazines, comic books, comic strips, and newspapers.

The subjects selected for the study were students at the San Fernando Junior High School, San Fernando, California. Although the entire student body participated, the data submitted by 366 eighth- and ninth-grade students were selected for final analysis. These data were selected on the basis of accuracy and completeness of reporting.

Each student submitted a daily diary of his free-time mass communication activity for two consecutive weeks. The diary-questionnaires were administered by members of the student council, under the supervision of the homeroom teacher, during the daily homeroom period.

Data thus gathered were supplemented by information