

## THE MASS MEDIA IN BUSINESS

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To the businessman who thinks about peso returns, advertising is one of the means of communications. He knows that today, his biggest problem is not so much production, as it is marketing; in other words, his goal is a program of mass production supported by mass selling. Consequently, one big question continuously guides his marketing strategy: how can I reach the largest possible number of prospective purchasers at the lowest possible cost? For this reason alone, the businessman becomes increasingly conscious of an important prop of the modern economy aside from his daily companions of mass production and mass distribution: mass communications.

To the businessman, again, mass communication is nothing more than the mass media, which are nothing less than the problem of where his company image or his brand name will appear more profitably—whether on the screen, television, radio, or in print. Although it is true that the mass media are an important constituent of the mass communications system of a country, the field of mass communications itself covers a broader area of specialized studies. This area consists of —

Who	Control Analysis
Says What	Content Analysis
In Which Channel	Media Analysis
To Whom	Audience Analysis
With What Effect	Effect Analysis

The structure of mass communications is quite similar to the structure of the business operations along these terms:

Who	Company
Says What	Product
In Which Channel	Distribution, Marketing
To Whom	Consumer
With What Effect	Profit-Loss

It is evident that in both the communications and business fields, the mass media perform the function of the “gatekeepers,” the determining factor that decides whether or not a message can successfully flow from the transmitter to the receiver. With the pressure today of increasing production costs and greater needs for more aggressive selling, it is not surprising why media research and media evaluation occupy much time in an advertising campaign. Advertising men have racked

their brains for some infallible formula that would produce the right media for the right market, but at present, they still rely a lot on intuition.

Many of the functions of the mass media have already been profitably exploited by the business world. One of these is the status conferral function, which one sees everyday when Gloria Romero sells a cake of *Camay* soap. The mass media bestow prestige and enhance authority by legitimizing the status of certain individuals. When an executive professes to smoke *Salem* cigarettes, he is conferring his status on the product brand. At the same time, his testimonial is a tribute to his status as an executive whose opinion carries weight in the public eye.

Another more powerful function is the influence of the mass media in enforcing social norms or changing them. This covers the field of control analysis, a study of the pressure groups that manipulate the content of the mass media. The owners are one such group and the advertisers are another. Although the mass media in the Philippines are sometimes the owners' tools for political and personal uses, the advertising peso nevertheless maintains a hand in editorial content—maybe not directly on what to say, but on what not to say. Newspapers cannot be supported by circulation earnings alone. The point here is that the mass media seldom agitate for drastic changes since the advertiser is by nature conservative. He will not support experiments at changing behavior patterns which have not been time-tested. He would rather cajole psychological needs and canalize these idiosyncracies of the times to create brand preferences in his favor. A good example is the present hysteria for a cure against cancer and the effects of the cancer panic on the sales of cigarettes. Against the pressure of such a strong public opinion, the cigarette manufacturer will not stand a chance unless his allegations about his cancer-proof cigarette brand are backed by extensive medical research. At first bat, he will pull out his advertisements from the medium which is verbose about the dangers of smoking. But under continuous bombardment, he will realistically admit his *faux pas* and invest in his own scientific investigation to save face and profit. But all through out, the advertiser will use the mass media to enforce the social status quo which best suits his purposes.

There is, however, one function of the mass media which has been overlooked so far, mainly because its effects are felt indirectly rather than directly—the educational or informational function. Up to the present, the businessman, usually operating through an advertising agency, will look at the mass media as the forces that will insure him the highest level of advertising income potential. But frequently, he for-

gets that communication is a two-way system; that he actually uses the mass media as sources of market information pertinent to future market strategies, i.e., indices of consumer preferences, competition trends, market conditions, etc.

To illustrate: the editorial contents of newspapers inform him about national and sectional economic conditions (for example, Villegas' ban-the-provincial-bus experiment seriously affects transportation costs); news commentaries aired tell him the prevailing public opinion about present issues in the political arena. (The performance of government agencies has always been a strong market force, since many aspects of business activities are influenced by the government.) Soap operas on radio or television inform him of the social forces acting on his consumer. A study of the audience ratings of these shows will indicate the kind of human-interest appeals that suit his consumer's tastes. Finally, a look at the ads of competing brands will help him reassess the position of his product in the market, and will help him adjust his own strategy based on the changing nature of his competitors.

The businessman is frequently unaware that the mass media are the best channels of information within fingertip control: information about consumer behavior, competition, and government action, all of which are taken into account in decision-making regarding the general role which advertising should play in the business operations.

On a much wider scale, such as on the national level, the mass media serve as the vehicle for fast dissemination of information, particularly in economic planning. This was newly recognized by the advertising industry when, under the auspices of the Department of Commerce and Industry, media representatives and advertising agencies mapped out the role of the mass media in the government's socio-economic program. A rapid informational and educational program is imperative in the industrialization program of a country, particularly of a developing country whose economic needs seem to triple by the hour. Information about new farming techniques, industrial products available, new government restrictions and tax programs can be disseminated faster through the mass media rather than through the usual course of formal education. An educational program in which the mass media are used as reenforcing tools of personal contact has been found most effective. A UNESCO survey in 1961 of undeveloped countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia pointed out a very high correlation between the development of the mass media and economic factors, such as industrialization, urbanization, and most particularly, national income.

However, the mass media are important tools for the country and for the businessman only insofar as they are available; and they are effective marketing tools for the advertiser only if they are picked up and read, heard or seen by his potential customer. Advertisers generally agree that the present conditions of our mass media are far from ideal. They hope for some change that would develop the mass media into a real national media through larger circulation and more effective penetration of homes. Wishing is far from being the answer. Working together with the mass media is a better solution.

The UNESCO has designated a country as insufficiently provided with information media if it has less than the following facilities per 100 of its inhabitants:

- 10 copies of daily newspapers
- 5 radio receivers
- 2 cinema seats

The Philippines falls in a group of 27 Southeast Asian countries that have an average of 1.4 copies of daily newspapers, .07 radio receivers and .07 cinema seats for every 100 persons. This is evidently below UNESCO standards. Furthermore, the mass media in the Philippines are heavily concentrated in the urban cities with only a dearth in the rural areas, and are bogged down by rising production costs; lack of raw materials, such as newsprint; multiplicity of dialects; geographical barriers; illiteracy; etc. The irony of it all is that the conditions of the mass media in Manila are not to the liking of advertisers at all. Manila is totally saturated with media: 12 daily newspapers (6 in English and the remainder in Tagalog or Chinese), 30 radio stations and 7 television channels, with more being planned. This situation is a severe headache for the advertiser who is faced with too many competing media with low circulation.

On the other hand, rural Philippines is a society of isolated barrios whose solitude is sporadically perturbed by some mass communications agencies. In a study of 2,668 barrio dwellers from 58 sample barrios conducted by John E. de Young and Dr. Chester L. Hunt, it was discovered that only a small fraction of this sample barrio population were regularly exposed to mass media; and that despite our technological wonders here in the city, the chief source of information of barrio dwellers is still the barrio lieutenant. The position of the barrio lieutenant has a remarkable parallel in the "opinion leaders" of American society. In the "two-step" flow hypothesis of mass communications, these opinion leaders are a stronger force than the media. The theory questions the automatic effect of the mass media ("first-step") and purports that the message is effective only if it is supported by "opinion leaders" whose influence within their strata in society is unquestionable.

To continue with the Young-Hunt survey, of the 24% of the households in which some members reported reading newspapers (at irregular intervals), 85% of the newspapers circulated were in English, although Tagalog papers were frequently available. More than 90% of the magazines circulated were in the vernacular (primarily fiction), while only the *Philippines Free Press* had a substantial number of barrio readers. Despite the transistor revolution, which in 1962 increased the radio audience to some 5.88 million (1/5 of the total population), only 3.2% of the households studied had radios in operating conditions and about 1/3 of the battery radios were out of order at any given time. On the other hand, these radios had an average of 6 listeners per set, and with the barrio houses usually constructed close together, the loud volume of a transistor creates the equivalent of a "captive audience."

Evidently, the mass media still need to account for a very large area of uncovered grounds. The advertiser worries about this, and worries furthermore about the erratic and unconventional reading, viewing and listening habits of his consumer. The advertiser is a realist, and although he is sympathetic with the problems of the mass media, he is more directly concerned with making his advertising peso go as far as it can. The problem is unfortunately a vicious cycle. The advertiser demands better reproduction of color, and clamors for wider circulation and better editorial content. On the other hand, the mass media cannot offer improvements without financial assistance from the advertiser, who is reluctant to give it in the first place. A cooperative plan to soothe both parties seems to be in order.

First, the mass media should concede to the demands of the advertiser for better services other than just carrying his ads: submit to standard audits, allow split runs to help the advertiser gauge the effectivity of ad layout. The mass media should also be more honest about the composition of their audience and readership estimates, instead of just wooing every advertiser with exaggerated claims. The *Weekly Graphic* performs a service function for its advertisers which should be emulated. It publishes readership surveys and an annual report on different publications, with information about the total number of homes reached in different geographical areas. In addition, it also furnishes detailed information regarding the economic status of the readers of each of these publications. In 1951, radio advertisers formed the Philippine Radio Broadcast Corporation (PRC) to conduct surveys on radio and TV listeners. The success of this cooperative effort inspired the creation of a similar venture for the print media in 1957 — the Philippine Advertising Research Association (PARA).

Second, the advertising industry should expand its activities outside the advertising field by acting as liaison between the government

and the mass media. It could request the government to require transport costs of mass media materials to be fixed at a reasonably low level; to control the flood of radio and TV in the urban areas by maintaining a limit in the number of stations that can be installed; to license all receiving sets in order to help gauge the performance of the broadcast media; to subtly persuade publishers to concentrate on quality rather than on quantity productions by giving concessions to legitimate publications; and to require more rigid supervision by the Radio Control Board of television and radio in order to avoid abuses perpetrated on advertisers by competing channels. For example, certain channels deliberately delay the conclusions of its programs so the TV viewer will be too late to catch the shows on the other channels, thus forcing him to wait for the following feature in the same channel.

On the other hand, despite the virtues of close cooperation with each other, the advertiser and the mass media should guard against being slaves to one another. The advertiser must have other alternatives outside of the usual channels of radio, TV and print. For example, by shifting the burden of his market strategy from media advertising to sales promotions. Thus, he can guard against unreasonable price dictates by the media.

At the same time, the mass media must be constantly on the lookout for the interests of the public and not kowtow to the demands of the advertiser. The mass media must bear in mind that they are fundamentally mass communications agencies with the primary function of disseminating free information. They must realize that advertising is influence, and that it will therefore seek to provide the necessary information that will induce buying action. In order for the consumer to get maximum satisfaction for his expenditure, he must have the necessary knowledge about the qualities of competing goods. In this manner, he can choose intelligently among the new products in the market. This additional service the mass media should offer is consumer education, the counter balancing force against aggressive competitive selling and price dictates.

What is apparently needed is a code of ethics for the mass media and the advertising industry. Such a system of checks and balances can serve as a constant reminder that neither the mass media nor the business world can successfully profit without each other, and that therefore excessive demands on self-improvement programs without compensating help are unrealistic.