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Princeton Review  
Radio Study

# The PUBLIC OPINION Quarterly

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC  
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



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PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

May 11, 1937

ask HUR. HUR. 5/14/37

Mr. John Marshall  
Rockefeller Foundation  
49 West 49th Street  
New York City

Dear Mr. Marshall:

It seems advisable to elaborate more in detail the answers I outlined in our telephone conversation regarding the exact ways in which Project I will supplement and go beyond the research now being carried out by the radio industry. As I understand it, Project I will build on the techniques now known as the result of both commercial and non-commercial research, and will, at the same time, go far beyond any program of investigation that the industry itself is likely to undertake in the next several years. I am taking the liberty to ask and to answer certain questions that seem to cover the general query you put to me.

1) What data are available regarding the tastes, habits, and attitudes of the radio audience? What techniques have already been established to study the value of radio to listeners of various types? As you realize, an answer to this question would require a lengthy review of the literature. Hence, a cursory report of the outstanding developments seems in order. I am enclosing, as an answer to this question, a summary of data and techniques prepared by Dr. Frank N. Stanton and delivered by him at the radio conference in Washington last December. You will note in his report that we have certain data on the habits of the listening audience - viz. who listens, when, and to what. Although this information still possesses lamentable lacunae, especially regarding the different listening habits of various age, vocational, and educational groups, it seems rich when compared to what are really more fundamental questions; namely, why people listen, and what effect their listening has on their attitudes, conduct, and information. Project I proposes to fill in the existing gaps and do almost pioneer work in discovering and using techniques to understand the complex problem of why people of various types do listen. In other words, Project I proposes to explain what existing techniques make it possible merely to describe in rough fashion.

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2) To what extent can Project I utilize the available information regarding research techniques? No doubt, most of the investigation in the field of radio has been conducted by men in the field of market research, who have reported their findings to the industry or to agencies. Many of their data, as well as some of their specific techniques, are regarded as confidential. However, my own interest in this field, and my activities as associate editor of the Public Opinion Quarterly, in charge of research activities, has led me into close contact with such workers as Crossley, Gallup, Link, and Starch. I am familiar, not only with the methods they use, but what is more important, with the problems they are facing in designing new instruments of research. The advice and aid of such men would, I am sure, be freely given and there would be no need for Project I to discover in a trial and error fashion what is already known. However, the practical and immediate interests of these workers makes it impossible for them to indulge in what seems to me to be more basic investigation, concerned with problems other than who listens to what.

3) How will the techniques, developed and used in Project I, differ from the research already accomplished by the industry? As I have implied above, the chief concern of the industry has been to plot the size and distribution of the listening audience at various times of the day, and to various programs. Their research has been limited by the frame of reference dictated by their commercial interests. This frame of reference does not embrace vital areas of interest to the educator and the social scientist. For example, the educator is unable to regard the "listening audience" as a mass affair to be covered by a program seeking the lowest common denominator of taste or interest. He realizes that a specific educational program should be designed for a selected minority of the population. At the present time, he does not know into what natural groupings the population falls. He does not, in other words, know the role which radio plays in the lives of citizens whose education, age, vocation, or financial status places them in a separate category from the majority of their fellow citizens.

4) Why is it unlikely, if not impossible, that the further development of technique and the subsequent gathering of data will not be promoted by the radio industry itself? As pointed out above, data are available on certain general points included in Project I. The industry, however, guards some of these data and is inclined not to seek out other findings for several reasons.

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The broadcaster is interested primarily in the listener as a purchaser. For the present, then, his concern lies chiefly in finding out how many listeners there are and how much money they can spend. Little interest has been shown by broadcasters in the other aspects of the listener, however important they are to a better understanding of the radio audience from the point of view of the educational broadcast.

This interest in the listener as a purchaser has been extended to show how many listeners there are. "Mass" has been the cry of the radio industry. They would lead us to believe that the tastes of the audience are almost the same from one economic group to the next. To indicate otherwise reduces the scope of the broadcaster's potential audience, and, hence, limits his rates.

In order to obtain certain all-over figures included in Radio In 1937, CBS had to have their investigators get information on the percentage of sets in use daily, by half-hour periods. These findings, however, are not available for general distribution, probably because the audience load is not commensurate with the rates in certain instances. Hence some advertisers might be dissatisfied with their potential audience and rates. At present, this information is made available to some buyers of commercial time.

On the question of program preferences, no systematic analysis has been attempted by the broadcasters, probably because findings which would be complimentary to one program or advertiser would, by implication, reflect unfavorably against another sponsor using the network or station, and thus, perhaps, discourage the advertiser. Program rating services are available by subscription, but they are, for the most part, inadequate because the information is not available by important breakdowns such as sex, age, income, and interest groups.

A further deterrent arises from the peculiar financial relationship between the broadcaster, advertising agency, and sponsor or advertiser. The agency's fee is paid in the form of a commission by the broadcaster for business placed with the broadcaster by the agency. The agency, in many cases, is interested in having the sponsor spend as much as possible because the agency's income is affected directly. The industry, therefore, cannot afford to have data which may be unfavorable to the advertiser, because it places the agency in a bad light with his client and may result

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in curtailed radio expenditures. On the other hand, if the agency obtains the data directly, the industry does not offend the agency or sponsor.

A further instance of the lack of the industry's interest in detailed listener research is revealed in their attitude toward securing data on what the listener does while he listens. While this is important in an understanding of listener behavior, the broadcasters, in most cases at least, are not interested in the findings because they cannot afford to indicate that people do anything but listen while the radio is in use!

Finally, business is so "good" in broadcasting that the industry is not inclined to spend money for research until they are forced to do so, not only because of the embarrassment such data might cause, but because business does not demand it. Ultimately the industry will have to go deeper, in a research sense, in order to maintain its position. This will be in the distant future, perhaps. In the meantime, we might obtain data to guide the educator and direct the appeal of broadcasts.

I have taken the liberty to go into these problems at much length, since you may wonder why the industry did not assume some responsibility for Project I.

Sincerely yours,

*Hadley Cantril*

HADLEY CANTRIL

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