SYNOPSIS

DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON MODERNISATION  
AS A FUNCTION OF ECONOMIC CLASS:  
A ONE-VILLAGE CASE STUDY

A large scale survey of the impact of educational television in the year-long Satellite Instructional Television Experiment showed gains were greater for under-privileged villagers than for the well-off villagers. This in-depth one-village study focusses on understanding the process of such differential TV impacts on different strata during the first year of TV's introduction into one backward village in Kheda district in Gujarat State in India.

Theoretical Framework

A survey of the literature reveals no previous empirical study of differential impacts of communication on economic strata in a village. Further, there have been no in-depth attempts to look at the process of communication impacts on modernisation in the context of stratification.

It is widely held that development-support media (e.g., TV) cannot alone change specific attitudes but are able to create a generally favourable mental "set" towards change, called a "climate for modernisation" at the macro level. Modernisation continues to be defined and measured here in terms of the traditional indicators of this general pre-disposition in the diffusion of innovations literature, viz., favourable changes in urban pull, change agency contact, aspirations for one's children organisational participation, political efficacy, empathy (role-taking), secularism and fatalism.
The study is informed by two contrasting paradigms of development and communication that have distinct ways of looking at social change. The approach of the 1950s and 1960s, called the Optimistic Approach, looked at the problems of development in terms of transforming "traditional" attitudes so they were more similar to the attitudes held in the modern "developed" West. Then came disappointment with the nature of economic growth of the 1960s: while Gross Domestic Product increased in the developing countries, unemployment increased much more. There was an increase in the number of newspaper copies, radio sets and TV sets, but the poor had little access to them. This sobering experience led to a new approach in researches that now also takes into account social stratification, context and environment when studying the process of communication effects. Skinner's operant conditioning point of view and Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory combine to predict that differential reinforcements (and differential expectations of reinforcements) from the socio-economic environment of the receiver would determine who would be affected by communication, and in what way. This is called the Structural Approach.

The stress in this study is on economic structure influences on media effects, due to the new input's economic development objective in this case, and, the big economic component in development initiatives. Ownership of land is the classification used to assign positions in the economic structure, given that land is the basic productive resource in village India.

Method

The one-village case study method is used since the goal is to generate new hypotheses relating to process, rather than to re-test old hypotheses. A
blend of qualitative and quantitative analysis is used. Specifically the methods used were: field observation, sample surveys and content analysis of the year's TV transmissions.

Findings

1. The landless labour stratum watched TV more frequently than small farmers, who in turn watched TV more frequently than large farmers.
2. All three strata showed significant gain on four indicators of modernisation that are primarily attitudinal predispositions, viz., urban pull, aspirations for the future, empathy (role-taking), and fatalism.
3. The small farmer stratum and the large farmer stratum both showed significant gain on organisational membership. The lowest stratum, landless labour, showed no change on this dimension: that involves actual change in the composition of village institutions and structures.
4. The small farmer stratum showed significant gains on political efficacy where the large farmer stratum showed a significant decline.

Conclusion

The Sobering Structural Approach is supported by this study and suggests that development-TV impact on different modernisation indicators may well be a function of position in the economic structure and, that this structural context is affected by the content of the new medium and other simultaneous events (e.g., the Emergency). It is recommended that this insight supported by a one-village case study now be tested in large controlled field experiments.