

The Media Contact Record Sheet as Research Tool

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Abstract

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Research Briefs

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The Media Contact Record Sheet as Research Tool

As communicators, we all work from time to time—if not every day—with the various mass media. And each of us probably asks, sooner or later, “Is anyone reading, listening, or watching?”

This study represents an attempt to find how much contact one select group had with the mass media and to develop an effective but simple record-keeping instrument with which respondents could identify their own patterns of media use. The group consisted of students in an introductory agricultural communications course at the University of Illinois in seven semesters over a four-year period, 1977-80.

The study involved 309 students, 73 of them agricultural communications students, 18 in journalism, and the remaining 218 in various agriculture curricula. At a specified time each semester, each student in the class was given a media contact record sheet (see figure) and required to record all the time he or she spent in contact with any mass medium each day for a week. (An underlying assumption was that the exercise could enhance the students’ awareness of the pervasiveness of the media in our society.)

Data from all seven semesters were remarkably similar. Combined, they showed an average student media contact of 28.3 hours per week, or just over four hours a day. In terms of specific media, radio emerged as the most widely used—a predictable reflection of its “companion medium” characteristics—at an average nine hours a week. The combined data showed an average 7.2 hours weekly spent listening to records or tapes,

Day	HOURS (e.g., 3 hr., 1/2 hr., 10 min., etc.)							TOTAL
Monday								
Tuesday								
Wednesday								
Thursday								
Friday								
Saturday								
Sunday								
TOTAL								

Included in "Other": _____
MEDIA CONTACT RECORD SHEET -- This simple form allows respondents to record time spent each day reading, watching, or listening to various mass media. Columns may be totaled both ways, giving sums both by day and by medium

seven hours watching television, 2.1 hours reading newspapers, and 52 minutes with magazines.

One student added the following note at the bottom of his media contact sheet:

"Dear Professor: Due to various occurrences, this is not a usual week of media contact for me. This hectic university life sometimes excludes me from the rest of the world." How "excluded" was he? He reported 27 hours of media contact during the week.

Several conclusions were drawn from the study:

1. Students inevitably spent more time in media contact than they thought, based on pre-test estimates.
2. Students seemed to find the media contact record sheet easy and fun to use, indicating it is an instrument readily adaptable to other audiences.
3. Although the record sheet format might make "cheating" easy (just fill in the blanks), consistency of data over the long period of the study seemed to indicate validity.

College students probably are not typical of a general population, but they may not be atypical of a general population in their age group. This study needs to be replicated with various audiences (e.g., farmers in a given county) and in various social settings. The media contact record sheet provides a useful "first step" research tool to help communicators find out if anyone is reading, listening, or watching.

*--Robert Hays
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ACE Radio-Television Specialist Survey

The 1980 directory of agricultural communicators in land-grant universities and USDA agencies lists 97 persons with electronic media service responsibilities. In an effort to collect data useful in planning regional and national ACE meetings, a questionnaire was administered to determine the kinds of activities these individuals are involved in and their attitudes toward professional improvement workshops and training sessions.