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ABSTRACT
                "Quasi-mass media," refers to a type of communication
and communication media that lies between mass media and
interpersonal communication. This paper defines quasi-mass
communication in terms of its messages, how it is generated, and
audience membership, and discusses its uses in promoting political
and community development, information flow, and decision making. The
paper suggests quasi-mass media as a possible solution to problems
related to the limited usefulness and accessibility of mass media and
as a means of resolving the debate over elitist versus pluralist
control of community government in the United States. A list of
references is included, along with suggestions for further research
for areas of possible assessment. (MAI)

QUASI-MASS MEDIA AS COMMUNITY

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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PREFACE

There is often a problem in choosing an appropriate word or phrase to describe a phenomenon, especially one that has only recently been explored. So it is with the choice of "quasi-mass."

The idea that there is a type of communication and communication media that is neither mass nor interpersonal has been around for almost a decade now. This communication has been categorized under a variety of titles: "mini-comm" (Gumpert, 1970), "quasi-mass communication" (Menzel, 1971), "medio communication" (Bleke & Haroldson, 1975), and "narrowcasting" (Chaffee, 1972). For the purposes of this paper "quasi-mass" will be used. This term is, however, inadequate since it implies that the communication resembles mass communication. It does not. It is distinct of itself. But since there is no better term . . . yet . . . "quasi-mass" will have to suffice.

A society's media of communication can determine the nature of the communication that takes place within the society. Will the communication be mass in nature or interpersonal? Will the media be available to all members of the society? Will the media provide for feedback from receivers or simply provide a one-way flow of information?

Changing technology, needs and uses for media in the United States suggest that we are moving away from a mass media society to a less mass, or "quasi-mass," media society. At least some of the functions within our society can only be served by quasi-mass media.

This paper will explore the emerging ideas on quasi-mass communication, its uses and needs for it. Suggested hypotheses and areas of investigation for quasi-mass communication will also be presented.

Quasi-Mass Communication

In order to define quasi-mass we need to look first at the characteristics of mass and interpersonal communication.

Mass communication has been distinguished by the following characteristics by Wright (1959): 1) directed toward large, heterogeneous, and anonymous audiences; 2) transmitted publicly, often to reach receivers simultaneously; 3) transient in character; and 4) operated within a complex organization that may involve great expense.

Additional characteristics provided by Menzel (1971) include: 1) standardized messages uniformly broadcast to all whom they concern; 2) contacts too fleeting for messages to be tailored to the recipients; 3) severely limited feedback; 4) special expertise required in operation of the medium; and 5) full control by the originating source.

Gumpert (1970) adds other characteristics: 1) the code of the message is known to all, i.e., there is little use of jargon; 2) direct cost to the receiver is minimal; 3) the communication is rapid; and 4) it is consumed on a short term basis.

Most definitions of interpersonal communication, especially in relation to
interpersonal media, tend to reflect the opposite characteristics of mass communica-
tion. Interpersonal communication would then involve a homogeneous, private
audience, etc.

Bienvenu and Stewart (1976) evaluated the characteristics that related to
the development of interpersonal communication. Several factors related to char-
acteristics within the communicator, self-disclosure and self-awareness, while
others related to the external nature of interpersonal communication, acceptance
of feedback and clarity of code.

Barnlund (1968) identified five characteristics of interpersonal communica-
tion: 1) physical proximity; 2) single focus of attention; 3) exchange of messages;
4) use of many senses at once; and 5) unstructures setting.

Mass media and interpersonal media would, of course, be the technical devices
or environment through which the communication takes place.

Imagine now a continuum running from ideal mass communication to ideal inter-
personal communication. Quasi-mass would fall somewhere along that continuum
between mass and interpersonal. Quasi-mass can, therefore, be defined with
characteristics that fall between those of mass and interpersonal communication.
Of course, some media are less mass than others, but using this definition does
help us easily distinguish media which are clearly quasi-mass. This will be
demonstrated with an example on pp. 3-4, below.

Using dichotomous pairs, taken from characteristics described above, limits
can be set up within which quasi-mass would fall.

Quasi-mass _messages_ would be described between the following pairs:
1) public/private; 2) standardized vocabulary/individualized vocabulary;
3) rapid transmission/leisurely transmission; 4) transient/persistent; and
5) control by source/considerable control by receiver.

The quasi-mass _institution_ would be described between the following pairs: 6) complex, expertise required/simple, little expertise required; 7) limited access/ongoing opportunities for access; 8) high cost/low cost; and 9) source physically far away/source proximal.

The quasi-mass _audience_ would be described as between the following pairs: 10) large/small; 11) heterogeneous/homogeneous; 12) limited feedback/instantaneous feedback; and 13) anonymous/known.

The newsletter of a community association serves as a good example of a quasi-mass communication medium. The newsletter would relate to the thirteen pairs just described above in the following ways:

1) It is not public since it is not intended for mass distribution, yet it is not private since copies are often distributed in public settings such as a city hall.

2) The message may include vocabulary specific to the interests of the association, like acronyms, but it must be written so that members with various levels of knowledge may read it, e.g., new members.

3) It may be transmitted (distributed) at varying rates, at meetings, through the mail, or left on counters in public buildings.

4) The message may be related to a continuing issue, such as a school bond referendum. It will then have meaning beyond the time of distribution.

5) Contributions to the newsletter may be open to all members of the association. The actual composition of a newsletter, however, may be limited to a committee.

6) A newsletter does not require the expertise of the journalist or type-setter. It does, however, require some skill if it intends to communicate with a variety of receivers.

7) Membership on the newsletter committee may rotate among members or be open to volunteers. A designated staff is usually needed to consistently turn out a newsletter.

8) Cost would be lower since volunteers would be used and printing costs would be minimal. There would be more cost than with face-to-face communication (excluding opportunity cost).

9) The source would be the association, close to the receiver in the neighborhood, but not next door to everyone.

10) The number of members (audience) and prospective members would probably not include all members of the community. The association would need more than a few members just to exist.

11) Members would be homogeneous to the extent that they share a common interest (perhaps a position on a school bond referendum). They would likely not all be personal friends with the same interests.

12) Feedback mechanisms would be built into the association: election of leaders, speaking at meetings, letters to the editor of the newsletter, and talking among each other. There would be limits on feedback, e.g. limits on speaking at meetings to preserve order.

13) Members would know each other by face and through a membership list, but not all would be personal friends, knowing each other perhaps fleetingly.

So far these are only the definitional characteristics of quasi-mass. Important questions should be raised about the relation between quasi-mass and society.

Uses of the Quasi-Mass Channel

Channels of communication which contain opportunities for feedback and control by the receiver can offer benefit to society in several ways. They can assist in the development of political movements. They can build an understanding of one's community through social and cultural exchange. They can open a community's decision-making process to community input by placing communication channels in the hands of citizens.

An example of the need for non-mass channels is reported by Fainstein and Fainstein (1974). In West Side Manhattan, the Joan of Arc (school) Governing Board, when faced with deteriorating buildings and minority staffing problems, found itself unable to organize its community and communicate its needs to city and state governments. The only communication media available were mass media newspapers which ignored the Board's problems. And since the Board had neither the time nor the expertise to organize the necessary campaign through mass media channels, and since there was no ready-made channel available with which to mobilize the community and communicate with decision-making institutions, the needs went unfulfilled. This occurred even though there was no conscious effort to suppress communication from the Board.

Community understanding can also come from community integration. Conrath and Thompson (1973) found new forms of communication, which are not mass in nature, can serve as the means through which an individual can become integrated in his community. Posner (1974) believes that the effect of new channels not devoted to "mass appeal" programs can open a new world of culture and arts for the receiver, and, through a more responsive economic feedback system, give greater opportunity for receivers to use non-mass channels. In Detroit (Cable TV Study Committee, 1972) the possibility of community understanding through the exchange of culture through local cable television channels was the impetus to include provisions for such channels in a cable TV plan for the city.

The importance of non-mass forms of communication has also been pointed out in literature on dissemination of innovation. Katz (1962) showed the importance of non-mass media in the acceptance of a new agricultural practice by farmers, and a new drug by doctors. While mass media conveyed information, there was a need for both farmers and doctors to use other forms of communication in acquiring acceptance of the new idea, including the use of friends, neighbors, colleagues, and specialized journals.

Rogers (1962) saw the communication of innovation as more complex than a "two-step" flow of information from a county agent to an innovator to the rest of the farmers. Rogers suggested that there must be other types of communication at work beside mass and one-way interpersonal media since other variables not studied contributed more to acceptance of innovation than interaction with the innovator.

Dahling (1962) observed the acceptance of an engineering idea in an academic community. He noted especially the importance of "centers" of information exchange where groups could assemble and exchange ideas.

In the area of innovation quasi-mass channels would offer a medium through which homogeneous groups (such as farmers or doctors or engineers) could come together (proximity) and exchange (feedback) information.

The importance of control of a medium in a power relation has been pointed out by Etger (1976) and Schramm (1963). Etgar showed that power over those dependent on the channel (in this case insurance agents) was a function of how much control one had over the channel of information. This control was based on the maintenance of expertness and a one-way flow through the channel. Schramm notes that control of media, such as radio in a remote village, is not only the essence of power, by controlling knowledge of what is happening in other areas, but it is a symbol which confers status upon the controller. When the communication channel becomes more widely available either democracy occurs or unrest occurs. A quasi-mass channel then can wrest communication control from a dominator.

Communication is also important in the decision-making process of a community. Grunig (1972) tells us that communication sets the stage for issue discussion. It makes alternatives known about an issue. It gives a period of breathing time during which citizens can seek alternative and additional information.

Without communication, and certainly without the means with which to initiate communication, the potential for what Bachrach and Baratz (1970) call "non-decision" is greater. Without access to a channel to place an issue before the

public, a citizen is relegated to the limbo of non-decision (as was the Joan of Arc Board, p. 5, above).

The process through which a decision is made is a relation between the sender and receiver, according to Whiting (1976). He found that a decision to dig a well in an agricultural area would be more likely if the receiver was involved in the communication which was taking place.

So quasi-mass channels can open a forum for an issue that might otherwise not reach the public agenda, as well as enhance participation in the decision-making process.

There are also psychological benefits from participation in the communication process (Thayer, 1968). These benefits derive from "communication satisfaction" which comes from ingesting communication through a "matching" that occurs between the sender's and the receiver's communication systems. Here, too, quasi-mass can at least allow that matching to occur by bringing both the sender and receiver into the communication channel.

There are a variety of uses to which a quasi-mass channel can be put, and a variety of ways in which a quasi-mass channel can cohese a community and involve a community in its decision-making processes.

Obstacles to Mass Media Usefulness

The need for quasi-mass channels arises to a great extent from the inadequacy of mass media to serve any but mass events which attract large audiences, are easily understood, and which have been sustained long enough to achieve recognition by the mass media.

Rada (1977) studied the case of a Chicano union strike in Texas. It took two years, planned marches on the state capitol, and a national boycott to obtain local mass media coverage. Certainly issues without such wide support have little chance of recognition.

Minorities have traditionally found that access to media is blocked where the mass media are concerned. Chicano media use has been largely restricted to cable television access channels or specialized Spanish language newspapers (Lewels, 1974). And the "Black press" in America had to be created in order to attempt to break down barriers already perpetuated in other mass media (Stanley & Steinberg, 1976).

The nature of the financial base of mass media also imposes barriers on the usefulness of mass media to issues of narrow interest. Owen (1975). Owen, Beebe and Manning (1974), and DeFleur (1972) have all pointed out the restrictive nature of mass media financing. Since each audience member is valued equally by the financiers (advertisers) there can be no assessment of an intense demand for a specialized use for the medium. Thus, mass media are limited to mass issues.

Quasi-mass media can help fill the void left by the inadequacies of mass media.

Mass Media Decline

It may be that quasi-mass channels are part of a natural social and cultural development that is a result of changes in technology and industrial development.

Parker (1973) believes that the changes in technology of communication are already taking place. The question he raises is: what social effects will follow. He believes that the most important media will be those undergoing change, and that those controlling the new communication technology will be in a position to determine benefit or harm.

Maisel (1973) sees the United States engaged in a third stage of industrial development (for more information on the third stage of development see Bell, 1968; Clark, 1957). This third stage is characterized by a shift from manufacturing to service industries. Along with this shift comes a need for specialized forms of communication to meet the growing needs of specialized services. These new media would direct themselves at smaller, more homogeneous audiences. In an historical analysis Maisel has found that while mass media use continues to grow

its growth rate has slowed considerably, and there is now a shift from rapid increases in the use of mass media to more rapid increases in the use of more specialized media.

It may, therefore, be inevitable that quasi-mass media will arise while mass forms will diminish.

Quasi-Mass and Community Power

Community power research has centered around the pluralist-elitist debate According to Walton (1976) such research has concentrated on access to and participation in decision-making. He observed that most research dealt with the outcomes of group participation rather than the means by which groups achieve an outcome. Neglecting these means also neglects determining the potential of such means, including communication channels, to affect an outcome.

Hunter (1953) noted that interaction channels are used by men of power to choke off opposition. Hunter does not provide a description of the communication channels used b en of power. Are they mass media? Or do the powerful have their own forms of quasi-mass media that are not available to all? If so, what would be the effect of introducing quasi-mass channels into the system?

Rose (1967) points approvingly to the fac' .hat some local issues are decided democratically . . . when the population is mobilized. But how does that mobilization take place? What channels were available and used to promote the mobilization?

Dahl (1961) believes that one asset of community notables is the skill of "influence." How would that skill be affected when a channel which requires less expertise in its operation is introduced? Is the skill more a function of the channel than the individual?

When Domhoff (1971) responded to the plural'-ts he never refuted their argument that the economic elite is not united. Perhaps Domhoff could have turned the argument around and asked the pluralists: what are the means by which the

<u>non-elites</u> can unite? Certainly not through mass media. The question then becomes whether or not quasi-mass can help unite the non-elite, and, if so, are quasi-mass media available? Certainly Domhoff's models of the ruling class (1974) suggest a one-way, mass flow of information. There are no channels across models, no feedback channels. Does this mean no such channels could exist, such as quasi-mass channels? Or does it mean simply that such channels are unavailable?

If the masses are atomized (Prewitt and Stone, 1973) and no struggle exists between elites and masses, how can a struggle be created? How can cohesive groups be formed? What channels can be used to promote such cohesion?

For both pluralists and elitists communication channels should be important. And the emergence of quasi-mass channels should be of interest, too.

For the elitist, if mass media indeed do not function to serve citizen interest on day-to-day issues, and if quasi-mass channels are closed or under-utilized, the elitist position would be strengthened, i,e. it would be less likely that non-elites could affect the decision-making process.

For the pluralist, if quasi-mass media allow citizens to bring issues to the public and allow access to the decision-making process, their position would be strengthened, even if quasi-mass media are only now arriving, for they could point to the future with confidence.

Maybe quasi-mass media, though, are arriving to settle in a sort of middle ground. Prewitt and Stone (1973) observe that the degree to which one accepts an elite depends on the area one studies. So quasi-mass media and mass media may play different roles. If quasi-mass are narrower in scope than mass, maybe their primary importance will be in local issues, leaving national issues to mass media. And subsequently only clouding the question of whether citizens have access to channels of communication for decision-making.

Other Research Inadequate

It is unfortunate that research in media has failed to recognize the importance of quasi-mass media. Most research that compares media has relied on comparisons of media types, like television versus newspapers, rather than comparing quasi-mass with mass media.

Roper (1975) and Steiner (1963) only compared media types, e.g. newspapers versus radio versus television versus magazines, when assessing media use and media credibility.

McEwen and Hempel (1977) did look at specialized media such as church bulletins and specialized newspapers. But they neither looked at effects of specialized media nor at characteristics of those media users. Their only comparison was with the likelihood to use other specialized media.

Stone and Morrison (1976), while ostensibly looking for the purpose of community newspapers, merely performed a content analysis comparing coverage of news categories. They, too, failed to look at effects and characteristics.

Research that has compared quasi-mass use with local issues was done by Edelstein (1974). He found that those more informed about local issues were heavier users of all types of media, including quasi-mass. This was the only relation he presented, however. He did not look at relations among other variables between users and non-users of a variety of non-mass media.

The time is ripe for research in the quasi-mass area.

Homophily

The importance of homophily (or heterogeneity) of the receiver and source in many aspects of communication is raised in a review of homophily literature by Simons, Berkowitz and Moyer (1970). Several experiments (Byrne, Clore and Worchel, 1966; Sheffield and Byrne, 1967; Cantor, 1976) have shown the relation between similarity of source and receiver and attitude change and attraction.

Rogers and Bownik (1971) found that individuals interact more, and their communication is more effective, if they are an homophilous pair.

This idea of homophily is very important to the quasi-mass communicator intending to locate others of similar interests. The fact that the communicator is likely to have a small homogeneous audience would be beneficial if the intent is to move citizens to action (perhaps to vote on a school bond referendum).

Suggestions for Research - Hypotheses

The discussion of quasi-mass characteristics and uses suggests several hypotheses for future study.

If quasi-mass media are more open to control by receivers, then we would expect quasi-mass media to have available more feedback mechanisms through which a receiver can exercise control. Thus,

> H1: More instances of feedback responses will be reported for quasi-mass media use than for mass media use.

This may seem to follow from the definition of quasi-mass, but while opportunities for feedback may exist it is important to assess the extent to which they are being used.

If quasi-mass media are more sensitive to issues that are not covered by mass media, and if receivers have more control over quasi-mass media, we would expect receivers to feel themselves more involved in the communication process of the channel. And if quasi-mass media are more likely to deal with local issues, those less likely to generate sufficient scope to garner mass media coverage, we would expect to find that quasi-mass media would be seen as providing more information than mass media on local issues. With receivers involved in the channel, and with the channel providing more information, we would also expect quasi-mass media to be perceived as more credible than mass media on local issues. Thus,

> H2: Quasi-mass media will be rated more often as the principal source of information on local issues than mass media.

H3: Quasi-mass media will be rated as more
     credible than mass media on conflicting
     statements about local issues.

If mass media cover issues wider in scope, national issues, we would expect

the opposite of the two hypotheses above to occur where national issues are con-

cerned.

When comparing users versus non-users, or heavy versus light users, of quasi-

mass media, we would expect that, if quasi-mass media can provide a channel

through which an individual in a community can affect the decision-making process,

can become more aware of the culture of the community, and, in general, can feel

a part of the political and social processes, users of quasi-mass media will be

less alienated from the community and from the political process than non-users.

Thus,

H4: Quasi-mass users will be less dogmatic, less
     politically alienated, more socially responsible;
     more favorable toward local sources of power,
     more politically active and more politically
     informed than non-users.

H5: Quasi-mass users will have a higher general
     sense of community than non-users.

If quasi-mass media are aimed at and used by groups that are more homogeneous

than those who use mass media we ought to be able to identify users of quasi-mass

media as being more similar to each other than non-users on social and political

characteristics. Thus,

H6: Quasi-mass users will be more similar on the
     seven characteristics of H4 and H5 than non-
     users.

The idea of a communication media continuum can also be tested. If a continuum

exists we should be able to rank media based on the characteristics of each medium,

such as relative amount of control by the receiver, homogeneity of the audience,

etc.

Suggestions for Research - Areas of Assessment

Media use should be assessed, including use of mass, quasi-mass and inter-personal media. Local quasi-mass media should be identified, such as specialized cable television channels like governmental access channels. Ad hoc assessments based on the definition of quasi-mass can be made of newly discovered media.

Feedback should be measured. Comparisons of the number of feedback responses for each medium, letters to the editor, instances of actual participation in a medium, etc., should also be made.

In order to determine which medium is the principal source of information a ranking system such as that developed by White (1969/70) might be employed. White's system allows the pitting of specific media against each other and arriving at a single principal source of information. This can be used to test for principal sources on both local and national issues. This system can also be used to determine the single most credible source of information.

Media credibility can also be measured with a method similar to that used by Roper (1975). Rather than being general, a variety of specific local and national issues should be generated to compare quasi-mass and mass media.

Several measures should be used to assess political and social characteristics. The following (from: Robinson, Rusk & Head, 1973; Robinson & Shaver, 1973), not meant to be limiting, are suggested scales to be used with hypothesis 4:

1) Troldahl and Powell's "Short Dogmatism Scale"

2) Olsen's "Political Alienation"

3) Berkowitz and Lutterman's "Social Responsibility Scale"

4) Haer's "Attitude Toward Sources of Power"

5) Matthews and Prothro's "Political Participation Scale"

6) Matthews and Prothro's "Political Information Scale"

In addition to the above scales a general "sense of community" measure (Abel, Muth, & Reagan, 1977) is suggested for hypothesis 5.

The first approach toward quasi-mass assessment would probably involve investigational methodology employing personal interviews. This would limit one, of course, to assessing relations and no causes. It would be nice to know, if a relation is found, whether it was quasi-mass that brought about more community involvement say or vice versa. The first step, though, is to search for the relations.

Conclusion

This paper has developed an as yet untested conceptualization of quasi-mass communication. Of course, the hypotheses suggested are not meant to remain merely part of that scheme, but are intended to both encourage and provide a basis for research in this emerging area of communication.

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