

NO PISA, PLEASE - TELEVISION AS A COMMUNICATION DEVICE IN CONSERVATION

Glenn A. Kovar
U. S. Forest Service
Angeles National Forest
Pasadena, California

About one-third of the way down the Italian coast there is a town, the town of Pisa. The town has been made famous by a certain building. The leaning tower of Pisa. Study it-- study it from all angles. It doesn't look too safe, does it? Not something you'd want to live in, is it?

Gentlemen--when we build our information programs, or plan our information divisions, let's not build a leaning tower of Pisa. No sir! No Pisa, please!

In building your information programs, use the right material. You notice--I build my foundation--I said, foundation, from strong bricks. But I'm not going to build the rest of my communications house from bricks. Above my strong foundation will be my working area. This I'll build from wood.

Why? Well, a working information division or communications branch needs good, solid construction. It also needs to be flexible to follow projected plans--to be able to quickly, quickly adapt to unforeseen situations. This is a must in effective human relations work. It is a must in management.

Let's take a look at our own communication house. Is it a Pisa? Or does it have a firm foundation with flexible working areas? Winston Churchill once said, "We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us."

I'm afraid as I've traveled around our country, I've seen some badly leaning towers. Many of our houses have weaknesses, gentlemen. Our organizations have wildlife management divisions and wildlife research divisions, fisheries divisions and fisheries research. Research helps guide the management division. But not so in many of our information functions. I have seen very few research divisions furnish needed facts and motivation studies to information divisions. The information division today often reacts to a given situation instead of planning action based on sound "people research" or, if you wish, call it "motivation research."

You know the dinosaur became extinct because his view into the future wasn't too good and he wasn't very flexible. He had a one-ton tail to knock down a banana.

Let's not be like the dinosaur, let's look into the future. In communications we work mainly with people. Does your information division know where the people are? Where they're living? Where they're moving? Many of our information divisions gear their press releases--in fact, the majority of their media work--to a rural population. Gentlemen, the people we need to reach aren't living there any more. Research shows us that we are changing--we are changing to a very urban-suburban society. Not only are the masses of people we need to reach in the city environments, but our policy and decision makers also dwell in this habitat.

Let's take a look at these people--for in order to work effectively with people, you need to understand them. You need to know what makes them tick. Different people tick for different reasons. Different age groups tick or motivate for different reasons.

First of all, the trend in rate of population growth in America gives every sign of persisting. How fast is the U. S. population rising?

At present, it is growing at about 1.6 per cent a year. I might add that, although the rate is dropping, it is still one of the highest rates to be found in any industrialized country. In fact, for a time after WWII, our rate of growth was about the same as India's.

It is difficult to say at the present time just what will happen in the future. The population of young women of prime reproductive years, that is, aged 20 to 29, will undoubtedly increase dramatically. There were about 11 million of them in 1935. By 1970, they will number 15.5 million, and by 1980 they will be 20 million. Of course, if the present trend toward fewer children continues through the reproductive years of these women, it would result in a considerably lower population increase than was foreseen a few years ago. But we cannot be certain that the trend will continue.

What will the U. S. population be in the year 2000? Nobody can accurately predict that. You have to take into account many things, including the way people may feel about having children at any given time, then make your best bet as to the future.

My bet right now, based on information research, would be that our population at the turn of the century will be something like 340 million people. That's nearly 145 million more than we have today.

How long did it take us to get our last increase of 145 million people? From about 1890 until last year. That would be about three-quarters of a century.

Would 340 million Americans living in the year 2000 have to undergo great changes from the kind of life we now have? Indeed yes! There will be tremendous changes in environment.

Most of these additional people are going to be living in cities. We're going to have a continuous city running down the East Coast, and another running down the West Coast. I would estimate that by the year 2000 the actual size of new urban areas on the West Coast will come to about 15 times the present area of Los Angeles.

If you go to the Sierra mountains in the year 2000 during the summer months and, if our society continues to make summer the major vacation months instead of spreading them out during the year, you might very well feel that the Sierras resemble Grand Central Terminal in New York.

When you look at today's urban sprawl, the traffic problem, the air, water and noise pollution, remember that all these problems and others are going to be greatly magnified. We must start thinking and acting about this--and start thinking and acting constructively. Let's not paint ourselves into a corner.

I mentioned the population trend--now research shows us there is also a trend within a trend. The number of young people under the age of 35 is going to increase sharply in the years up to 1980. The increase will be not only in numbers, but also in the proportion of the population.

The relative importance of these young people compared with those over 35 is seen in these figures: In 1968, the young voters will comprise 30.8 percent of the voting-age population. By 1980, their proportion will be up to 37.4 per cent.

How will this increase in young population affect your organization? How will we reach these people? You are well aware that communications media cover a wide range--but roughly they break down into four groups:

1. Print media--newspapers, magazines and book writers; including the highly important group of UPI and AP syndicated writers and Washington correspondents.
2. Broadcast and screen media--television, radio and motion pictures.
3. The academic group--this group influences not only the classrooms and our future leaders, but also exercises wide influence through research projects, writing, speaking, and consulting.
4. Men in public life, lecturers, philosophers, and clergy, all of whom are concerned with ideas and whose leadership of the thinking of others is effective.

But what is not always recognized is that these groups of people, though small in numbers, are perhaps the most powerful and influential in the nation. When they are largely united in their reactions, it is usually only a short time before public opinion comes around to a similar reaction.

Now let us look at television--the greatest mass communicator of our time. Several trends have become clear in television during the past decade. One is that television is now the primary source of news for most people. A survey by Elmo Roper and Associates in the fall of 1963 first detected that television had edged out newspapers. In 1964 these findings were confirmed when, again, television was most frequently mentioned as the primary source of news.

Another finding was that an increasing percentage of people finds television the most believable of the media. In 1959 only 29 per cent said they would believe a news story on television if it conflicted with reports from radio, newspaper, or magazines. By 1964, 41 per cent said they would believe the story on television.

Faced with an all-or-nothing choice, people were asked the question, "Suppose you could continue to have only one of the following--radio, television, newspapers, or magazines--which one of the four would you keep?" more people selected television than all the other things combined. The 1964 figures were: 49 per cent for television, 27 per cent for newspapers, 15 per cent for radio, and 5 per cent for magazines, while 4 per cent couldn't decide.

In mid 1964, news accounted for 25 per cent of a typical television station's locally produced programming; one year later, this figure had grown to nearly 40 per cent. Most hometown TV stations have regularly scheduled local news programs in the early evening and late night. I see no reason why this pattern will not persist. Rather, in keeping with our rising level of education and with the continuing demand for information, news will bulk larger and larger in broadcast programs. On a hometown television station staff, you will find that by and large your attention will be directed to local news and feature events.

Information research tells us something about not only the age of people we can reach through various media but their income brackets as well. Let's again look at the influential television. Who watches?

It hardly seems possible that in 1946 there were only six stations serving 8,000 families. Today, over 69 million homes, and that's more than 94 per cent of all the family units in the country, are equipped to receive television. Like the two-car family, the two-set or even three-and four-set family is no longer an oddity.

Regarding the "quality of audience", we see an increase in viewing for the upper (\$10,000 plus) and middle income (\$5,000 to \$10,000) homes. In fact, viewing by families in the better-educated half of the population is up by 1,100,000 homes in the typical evening minute.

There is ample documentation of television's continuing appeal for young adults. Nielsen's latest audience composition shows that the young adults (18-34) viewing in the average prime-time minute also rose substantially.

What of the future? We know that advances in electronic technology will soon make instant communication with any part of the world a daily reality. We have already seen what a satellite like Early Bird can do for transAtlantic communication. Miniaturization and transistorization will take the wristwatch radio and television out of the realm of Dick Tracy. Video and sound equipment will become much smaller and far more portable. Television receivers will come equipped with automatic devices for recording, storage and playback, so that we will not be so bound by the clock in meeting our information demands.

All these developments--for the gathering, transmitting, storage, and retrieval of information--will greatly enlarge the scope of man's capacity to communicate. We will soon have the hardware--fact is, we already have most of it. The larger question is--will we--will you--be able to cope with it? Will we be able to properly use this tremendous capacity?

This ability to receive messages from the ends of the nation--from the ends of the earth--does not amount to much if the information reported is faulty. Or if the information given to media is inaccurate. More than ever, we will need skilled gatherers and interpreters of information. Your story that starts out as a local story may end up as a national, or indeed, an international story.

In order to meet this big challenge in front of us, what sort of a communication house will we build in our own organizations? Will we have a leaning tower of Pisa--or will it be strong, yet flexible?

Would you like to see some of the strong bricks that have gone into my foundation? **NEED - TRUTH AND INTEGRITY - PERSPECTIVE - I&E RESEARCH - PROFESSIONALS.** These are just some of the bricks that should go into a strong foundation. What other bricks would you use?