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THE MASS MEDIA AND FEEDBACK: AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTRONIC AND PRINT PARTICIPATION BY INDIVIDUALS IN A COMMUNITY

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PREFACE

This report presents findings of research dealing with the parameters of users and uses of the mass media as participatory channels in modern society. A developmental grant by the Canada Council (Grant #69-1005) aided in preparatory work; an unrestricted grant by the London Free Press and CFPL Broadcasters helped carry forward the research; and finally, Department of Communications Grant OPG1-0033 made possible detailed analysis and the preparation of the present report.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Previous Research in Feedback and the Mass Media

There is very limited research dealing with feedback in written and printed media. Some would perhaps argue that content analysis of grafitti found on cave walls of early man provide us with as definitive data as the research of the last 30 or 40 years. One of the early studies (Sayre, 1939) reports an attempt to analyze letters written by listeners to an American radio show of the 1930's, "America's Town Meeting of the Air." There was an attempt made to estimate the social status of the sender by such surface criteria as quality of paper, cleanliness, punctuation and spelling, words and phrases used, etc. Results were not reported and with good reason, for the validity of such a method is highly questionable. However, the sample of letters did indicate that writers of letters came from larger cities, with cities of 100,000 and more over-represented by 60 per cent and towns of less than 2,500 under-represented by 75 per cent. (Sayre: 275)

In perhaps the best analysis to date of letter writing to public officials, Leila Sussmann (1959) traces the pattern in the United States beginning with the first two decades of the 19th Century when "only a narrow elite engaged in this type of letter writing," to the 1950's when congressional and presidential assistants were assigned to read and present statistical summaries of letters mounting to the millions. (Sussmann: 203) During Lincoln's tenure the mail count at the time of the Civil War reached a rate of 44 per 10,000 literate adults and by Franklin D. Roosevelt's time, during the depression, it had soared to 160. (Sussmann: 204) National emergencies such as wars and depressions increase the mail flow, however, Sussmann finds the change in educational structure is one of the major underlying factors. "A certain minimum facility with language and pen is prerequisite for writing a letter. Education is also linked to political letter writing through the intervening variable of political interest. Well educated people are known to be more interested in politics than the less educated, and political interest is highly related to political letter writing." (Sussmann: 205)

Among other factors, she includes the development of mass communications media, particularly radio, which through its ability to generate constant interest in national and international news also encouraged political mail. (Sussmann: 205)

Father Coughlin, for example, is said to have received 1,200,000 letters in response to one broadcast in 1930. (Sussmann: 211) Overall, Sussmann estimates that from 15 to 20 per cent of the American electorate have written a political letter to some public official at some time in their lives. (Sussmann: 206)

A more recent study of letter writing concerned letters from citizens of Wisconsin addressed to certain of the state's administrative offices and found that the largest number of letters complained of a lack of response to an early communication to an administrative agency. (Olson: 1969)

The little research that has been done on letters as feedback to officials has focussed upon it as a political mechanism on one hand, in which an individual presents his opinion on an issue to an official, as a request for information or help on the other. There are, of course, other channels that can be used to reach individuals directly, including personal visits, confrontations and the telephone. There is no data available at this time on these modes of feedback.

Letters to Newspapers

There is considerably more research available dealing with letters to the editors of newspapers. Its weakness lies in the fact that this research, for the most part, consists of letter counts to newspapers, surveys of writers of published

letters and content analysis of such letters. As Grey and Brown point out, "since most of the 30 years research on letters-to-the-editor has been based on only those published, it may be that the profile which has emerged reflects less the writers themselves than the selection of editors. A broader but largely invisible cross section of Americans may have been writing for some time; theirs may be the inarticulate, sometimes abusive letters screened from print. Until more systematic knowledge of editorial selection decisions is available, we may be losing valuable indicators of political attitudes, frustrations and change." (Grey and Brown: 471)

In spite of the limitations indicated above, we shall review the research that has been done to date on letter writing to newspapers for the insights that may be provided.

Probably the two most prestigious newspapers (from the point of view of having a letter published) in North America are the New York Times and the Toronto Globe and Mail. In the case of the New York Times which published its first letter several days after its first issue appeared on September 18, 1851, approximately 40,000 letters are

received per year, 4.4 for each 100 papers sold (based on 40,000 letters and 902,437 circulation).[1] The Globe and Mail received approximately 10,000 letters, with a circulation of 287,621, for a ratio of 3.5 per 100 papers sold. The London Free Press, data for which is analyzed later in this report, has a total circulation of 119,340 and receives 2,100 letters per year, for a ratio of 1.8 letters per 100 papers sold daily. The probability of letters being published is six per cent for the New York Times, 36 per cent for the Globe and Mail and 80 per cent for the London Free Press. The probability is in part related to the circulation of the newspaper, obviously, but is also related to the number sent per 100 readers. That New York Times readers are more likely to write than readers of the London Free Press probably reflects the fact that its audience is more inarticulate, of higher social status and more involved in national and world affairs.

Some evidence that one's social status is associated with the likelihood of writing to newspapers comes from studies

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[1]The circulation figure is based upon the current data for the average number of weekday, Saturday and Sunday papers sold.

that have been done, primarily, of letter writers themselves. Vacin (1965) found in a study of 123 letter writers to three Kansas daily newspapers that letter writers were higher than average in terms of education and of occupational status and subscribed to an average of four magazines. Forsythe (1950) studied 44 letter writers in Kentucky and reported that they were predominantly middle aged and older (median age was 59), above average in education and occupation, possessed an essentially "local" orientation and were conservative in their world views. The content of the letters column of The Times of London, England is described as "an authentic . . . expression of the upper-middle class . . . A few thousand well-placed men and women, who instinctively know each other's feelings, signal to each other in print." (Lewis, 1970: 54) One individual who attempted to compile the professions of published writers in The Times of London, England submitted this list:

Dons and schoolmasters		436
MP's	Conservative	147
	Socialist	138
	Liberal	7
	Other	10

(Lewis: 62)

The New York Times has been accused of favoring big names: "Some names that have graced the letters column in recent years include three men who later became President: Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon; also Hubert Humphrey, Dean Acheson, Robert Kennedy, John Kenneth Galbraith, Felix Frankfurter, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Luther King, Helen Keller, William Faulkner ... " (Rosenthal, 1969: 116)

It is also clear that letter counts per se, may give misleading indications of how widespread letter writing is, for there are some non-celebrity writers who appear repeatedly and who are described as "professional" letter writers. Charles Hooper, who was active earlier in the century and who published 16 letters in the New York Times by 1936, prior to its establishment of a two per person per year limit, had written by his own estimate hundreds of thousands of letters to newspapers before his death in 1941. (Rosenthal: 116) Marvin Wolfson, a Brooklyn economics teacher, credited with being the "most prolific and persistent writer of letters to the (N.Y.) Times" has had 2,000 letters published in various places since 1927. (Rosenthal: 116) According to Newsweek, one individual, Alan Kline, has written 3,000 letters in nine years of which 1,500 were published. (Newsweek, 57: 48)

There is some evidence that suggests, on one hand, limited participation by the great mass of individuals and on

the other, rising interest and participation and a possible shift in the sociological characteristics of the contemporary letter writer. A survey done by the Michigan Survey Research Center of the 1964 U.S. presidential campaign found that only three per cent of the electorate had ever "written a politically relevant letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine." (Grey and Brown: 454) Yet, according to Rosenau (cited in Grey and Brown: 456) there is a "small, but nonetheless steady, expansion in the number of citizens who develop and maintain a continuing interest in public affairs" and as proof that such is growing faster than the population, Rosenau cites data that suggests a "surge of letter writing activity in the 1960's." (Grey and Brown: 471) The New York Times' increase in letters received between 1958 to 1966 was 12 per cent per year as daily circulation increased 1.6 per cent annually; the circulation of the New York Post decreased between 1955 and 1966, while its mail was increasing more than 5 per cent annually. This was found true for other newspapers in the East, Midwest and West. (Grey and Brown: 471) Similar findings for the last few years are found in an unpublished study by Singer and Cameron for Canadian daily newspapers (1971). Larry Smith, Editor in Chief of the St. Catherines Standard reported that "in the past year we have seen a tremendous increase in letters

received and used." The Orillia Packet and Times reported "We are getting more letters now than ever before." The Stratford Beacon Herald said the "number of letters received has increased substantially in the past year or so." The now defunct Telegram also reported a "greater volume of mail coming in."

The question dealing with why some people participate by writing is not the same as what stimulated them to write. Some analysts point to needs of the individual and others stress factors external to the individual. However, one theme that recurs revolves around the catharsis function in one form or another: Leo Bogart, in his analysis of fan mail suggests as motives "The general 'excitability' of the person; his psychological need to express himself; the importance he assigns to his letter -- that is, the things he expects it to accomplish." (Bogart: 434)

Wyant and Herzog in their analysis of interviews conducted with 65 people who wrote to their senators in 1940 concerning a selective service bill, classified the motives of writers as either "expressive" or "instrumental." The instrumental writers sought to influence the passage of the bill and the expressive individuals appeared more concerned with the gratification they received from writing per se, the feeling that they were performing a duty as a conscientious citizen. (Cited in Sussmann: 207)

Forsythe asserted, newspaper letter writers reported to him that "they describe themselves as crusaders for this or that special cause, some stating that letter writing is a means for 'blowing off steam;'" and concludes that letter columns function as a "social safety valve." (Forsythe: 144) Vacin (1965) suggests, in his survey of newspaper letter writers, that writers were convinced that they were in some way or another affecting events through their letters. Lewis, on the other hand, has described the function of the London Times letter columns as gossip among insiders. (Lewis: 144)

Davis and Rarick's study of editorials and letters to the editor in 1962 in Oregon newspapers in which the subject was whether a communist should be allowed to speak at state supported colleges and universities indicated that "examination of the letters revealed frequent references to editorials and to other letters. Consequently, it appears that the editorials often stimulated letter writers and that letters in turn often stimulated further letter writers." (Davis and Rarick: 109) The content analysis by Grey and Brown of California newspapers during the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign also agreed that "many letters were triggered by an editorial or some other letter. Although some volunteered their thoughts, most people simply responded to something they had read in the paper." (Grey and Brown: 452) They cite a study conducted

nearly a third of a century earlier than theirs (Foster and Friedrich cited in Grey and Brown: 453) which found:

1. The newspaper itself conveyed the most frequent stimulus to write to the editor. The majority of published letters referred to news items, other letters or to editorials.

2. Most letters are 'agin' something or somebody.

The answer to why this form of participation is increasing may be related in great part, as Sussmann asserted, to social structural changes, such as a higher proportion of educated, literate people, as well as the increase in proportions of young people.

In addition, a further explanation for the rising participation in printed forums may be the shift from passivity to activism of younger people (as well as minorities) who in the past were not heard as often, along with the earlier mentioned rise in educational levels. Young people or individuals represented as leaders in youth cults are shown in the mass media asserting themselves, making demands, being interviewed; they may serve as role models and stimuli for others to assert themselves in the public media. (Singer, 1972) Alvin Toffler (Future Shock, 1970: 274) quotes a letter by Allen Ginsberg to Timothy Leary:

> Yesterday got on TV with N. Mailer and Ashley Montagu and gave big speech . . . recommending everybody get high . . . Got in touch with all the liberal pro-dope people I know to have /a certain pro-drug report/ publicized and circulated . . . I wrote a five-page summary of the situation to this friend Kenny Love on The New York Times and he said he'd perhaps do a story (newswise) . . . which could then be picked up by U.P. friend on national wire. Also gave copy to Al Aronowitz on New York Post and Rosalind Constable at Time and Bob Silvers on Harper's ...

As to what stimulates individuals to write who might not otherwise, Sussmann's insightful comment concerning radio can be extended to television: more issues and more controversial issues are more everpresent than ever before, resulting in greater consciousness and stimulation for more people. Radio and television forums, rather than replacing the printed columns, may well be stimulating greater use of them.

Thus, the interaction of social structural forces, social psychological effects (the aforementioned role modeling), technological developments (television and the call in show) and perhaps even the media ombudsman, a new social invention undoubtedly are interacting to explain the surge in participation in the printed media.

The Newspaper Ombudsman

The newspaper ombudsman is a new social invention that answers in part the question posed by William F. Buckley

in an article entitled, "Why Don't We Complain?" (Buckley, Esquire, Jan. 1971: 47) Buckley says that the reason people in America do not complain is "because we are all increasingly anxious in America to be unobtrusive, we are reluctant to make our voices heard, hesitant about claiming our rights; we are afraid that our cause is unjust, or that if it is not unjust, that it is ambiguous; or if not even that, that it is too trivial to justify the horrors of a confrontation with Authority ... " (Buckley, Esquire, Jan. 1971: 48)

The newspaper ombudsman goes by many names. In Detroit in the Detroit Free Press the column is called "Action Line." In London, Ontario, the column is called "Sound Off." The principle is always the same: people who cannot solve their problems call, write or appear in person to complain about red tape, consumer frauds, non response from government officials. Armed with the power of publicity, along with experience in handling similar cases, the newspaper ombudsman solves the problem in a majority of cases. The idea apparently originated with Bill Steven, editor of the Houston Chronicle who initiated the ombudsman column, "Watchem" in 1961. (Time, Feb. 3, 1967: 58) Since then, it has become an institution found in increasing numbers of North American newspapers and the best read column in many newspapers.

It is unclear whether the newspaper ombudsman exists because of the inability otherwise of people to complain and thereby solve their own problems in an increasingly complex society or whether it is proof that people do complain.

There has been no social scientific research into this phenomenon to date, apart from that presented later in the present report. Since the media ombudsman is not restricted to print media, there will be further reference to such in the section on the electronic media and feedback.

The Radio Call-in Show

As scattered and poor as the research is on written and printed feedback, still it exceeds in both quantity and quality what has been done on feedback through the electronic media. Most of what has been done has been in popular magazines and impressionistic with the exception of a recent article by Crittenden in The Public Opinion Quarterly of limited scope and even more limited validity.

Newsweek (March 30, 1964: 74) traces the history of the radio talk show back to the late '40's in the United States, but another source suggests that the "all-talk trend" was initiated by radio station KABC in Los Angeles in 1963. (McEachern, Today's Health, July 1970: 69) In any case, this social invention swept to great heights of popularity in most North American cities during the 1960's and remains unabated

today. Some reasons that have been offered for the great willingness of people to participate include anonymity, the fact that it's easier to talk than write, the sensational topics that are exposed, their gossipy nature, the fact that the shows are a return to the small town forum amidst the forces of mass society that make our lives mechanistic and which cut us off from the primary groups we need for sustenance. However, there has been another function which most programs perform and which some have come to specialize in: that of the electronic ombudsman. This they share with the other social invention of mass media that has swept to great popularity during the 1960's, the newspaper ombudsman.

The electronic media's feedback operations seem to share the major attributes of the two printed media already mentioned, letters to the editor and the newspaper ombudsman: an opportunity to present one's opinion on some topic (letters to the editor) or an opportunity to get help for a complaint or information.

A recent article by Crittenden (The Public Opinion Quarterly, 1971: 200) addresses itself essentially to the first function. The study involved a mail survey with a 56 per cent return (based on random selections from the phone directory) in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1967; interviews with

regular callers and questionnaires sent to local leaders. The validity of the research is dubious, for the sample return provided only 11 persons who said they had ever called the "Speak Out" show; nine of the 11 were female. The survey essentially attempted to tap interest in the show. Table 1.0 drawn from the survey is reproduced on the following page.

In addition, the research conducted a content analysis drawn from twelve randomly selected and five not randomly selected programs in the summer of 1967 which were taped, transcribed and coded. The results are reproduced on the following page. The data provided in Table 1.0 of Crittenden is of little interest except for market research. The research also indicates there were few regulars who monopolized the show, but this was impressionistic and since the sample size (111) was so small and the subsample of individuals who called was but 11, it would be unjustified to attempt to guage the real impact of the more-than-once caller in this research.

The second table suffers from the fact also that it was of limited size (169 message units) and done during the summer only. Coding was by topic and the author presented only a brief statement dealing with interaction form: "opposition, support or ambiguous or irrelevant". (Crittenden: 207)

THE OPEN MIKE RADIO FORUM

TABLE 1.0

Levels of Attention To Speak Out[a]

Attention Level	General Survey		Leader Survey	
	Total Sample N=200	Usable Returns N=111	Total Sample N=54	Usable Returns N=40
Do you ever listen to Speak Out? (per cent "yes")	**	**	42.6%	57.4%
Listened one or more times past four weeks	25.5%	46.0%	37.0	50.0
Listened five or more times past four weeks	7.5	13.5	16.7	22.5
Level of interest[b]				
No interest at all	11.0	19.8	9.3	12.5
Very little interest	8.5	15.3	18.5	25.0
Some interest	14.0	25.2	27.8	37.5
A lot of interest	8.0	14.4	11.1	15.0
Extremely interested (I try not to miss it)	4.0	7.2	1.9	2.5
Sometimes keeps in touch by having someone listen and tell him what was brought up	**	**	27.8	37.5

[a]In order to provide conservative estimates, these percentages are based in the first instance on the total samples. However, if one wishes to compare leaders with the general sample it is necessary to control for response rate. Hence the columns labeled "Usable Returns." Cells containing asterisks represent data unavailable because of differences between questionnaires.

[b]Since respondents checked only one option, these percentages can be cumulated. Thus 12.0% of the general sample indicated "a lot of interest" or "extremely interested (I try not to miss it)." Percentages do not total to 100 among usable returns because of reduced response to the level of interest item.

TABLE 1.1
MESSAGE CONTENT

Category	Number of Messages
1. Community controversies (Fluoridation and new high schools the only subjects)	38
2. The flag (Proper display, proper support for, how to obtain and dispose of)	21
3. Speak Out (comments supporting or criticizing the program)	6
4. Government services and policies (Policies and services at any level)	45
5. Private individual or group behavior (Twenty different subjects)	32
6. Chit-chat (Personal conversations, reminiscence, and requests for information)	14
7. International affairs	9
8. Unclassifiable or unknown	4

Thus, ignored was the notion of stimulus to call contained on the show, unless one makes the assumption that all 169 message units were stimulated by the program to call rather than there having been a self initiating process as well (these issues will be discussed later in the present report). The author's coding scheme as indicated in Table 1.1 ignores the important ombudsman function of call-in radio shows as well as its information function by collapsing such elements in the categories as "private individual or group behavior" and "chit chat".

Moving on to the ombudsman function of two-way radio, probably the most unique demonstration of the ombudsman function as it is carried out in broadcasting, melds the two-way operation of telephone with the power of broadcasting to publicize local community problems that call for action. In fact, that is the name of the most effective radio ombudsman North America has seen: "Call for Action." The concept was pioneered by New York radio station WMCA in 1963 which included it in its regular format of pop music, disc jockeys and news. The station began to invite complaints from individuals about their problems, such as garbage removal, rat and pest control, voter registration, consumer fraud, air and water pollution, taxes and tax information, etc. A staff of volunteers manned telephones, equipped with an ever growing

list of sources of information "that could be used to solve problems once they were properly delineated." In three years, 45,000 complaints poured in. If the complainant was not satisfied, the volunteers contacted the agency, landlord, etc., with the implicit and often explicit threat of exposing the problem on radio. Where there was no response or insufficient response, the radio station broadcast a series of strong editorials (see Appendix I) which most often produced the meliorative efforts desired. Ultimately, the idea was successfully adopted in Washington, D.C. by radio station WWDC as well. As Nicholas Johnson, Federal Communications Commissioner put it, "It seems to me that no governmental institution can link government to the people as well as can radio and television. And broadcasting can become even more of a two-way means of communication which allows the people to reach their government -- and other people." (WMCA Radio Station (N.Y.) brochure, "Call For Action.")

Although "Call for Action" demonstrates the two-way ombudsman function of electronic media in the purest sense, the same function is being performed, mixed with others in most of the call-in radio shows being broadcast today. And, indeed, as data to be presented later will show, such radio broadcasts may be performing different functions for persons than is true for other feedback media.

2. The Central Questions

It becomes clear that the study of mass media as feedback channels has been relatively neglected in North American communications research. In particular, a number of relevant questions need to be asked in the following areas:

QUESTION ONE: What kinds of mass media channels are available in the typical Canadian city which make it possible for individuals to participate in the process of opinion formation, to ask and to be heard; to inquire and to seek help? What proportion of the population uses each of these channels at present?

QUESTION TWO: Who has access to such channels? No general survey has ever previously been fielded that answers the question: Who uses which channels for which purposes? The question, Who refers to the sociological characteristics of users. There is no sociological profile available that dispels stereotypes concerning users on one hand or perhaps general lack of access on the other.

QUESTION THREE: How do the various channels compare -- printed and electronic -- in carrying out relevant social functions? What kind of process is the communications linkage that is established?

There are a great many more questions that have been stimulated by modern social critics, some of which are

beyond the scope of the present research. Hopefully, some of the findings of the present research will generate further needed research into needed social inventions which can be provided by the technical availability of such present day channels. This kind of information is particularly relevant in a fast changing, complex society which is attempting to assess the quality of life for members in all sectors of the social system and which questions whether indeed there are sufficient communications mechanisms by which individual opinions may be made public and through which individual complaints may be directed to the proper source and by which individual needs for information can be supplied by such channels.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

1. Methodology

The primary source of data for this report consists of the results of a large sample survey (N=1,000) of adults, conducted in London, Ontario in November and December 1970.[2]

The interview guide included questions dealing with "participatory media," i.e., use of letters to the editor, the "Sound Off" column of the London Free Press and call-in radio shows. The questions relevant to the present report are reproduced in Appendix II.

The sampling frame used in this study was provided by the Municipal Tax Assessment Office which made available 1970 tax assessment records for all dwelling units (commercial and non-commercial) within the incorporated limits of London. The records are filed by ward level (seven in all) each of which is further delineated by subdivision. The total number of subdivisions is 504 from which a random sample of 101 subdivisions was selected.

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[2]The survey was conducted in cooperation with Professors C. Nobbe, G. Ebanks, J. Williams, R. Osborn and M. Rokeach of the University of Western Ontario.

A total of 14,373 residential units existed among the 101 subdivisions upon removal of all commercial units. A systematic sample of 1 in 12 (N=1196) residential units was selected from this total. Of the 1,196 units chosen, 1,000 units were actually interviewed. No interviews were obtained from 196 residential units either because they were vacant, because the respondents in the unit refused or because the interviewer failed to establish contact with the members in that unit.[3]

2. Socio-Economic Description of Sample

The demographic characteristics of the sample drawn in November and December, 1970 parallel in important respects the London population as described in the Census of Canada. The Census of Canada of 1966 was used when available, supplemented by data from the Census of 1961. The sample consisted of 471 males and 529 females.

Age

With respect to age (as can be seen in Table 1.0) the age category of 19 and below is under-represented in the sample. This was deliberate and resulted from the sampling procedure

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[3]This description of the sampling procedure was provided by the sampling Director, Dr. C.E. Nobbe.

TABLE 2.0

AGE OF RESPONDENTS AND

1966 LONDON CENSUS AGE BREAKDOWN BY SEX (PERCENT)

Age Category	Sample			1966 Census[4]		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
15-19	0.9	2.9	1.9	12.5	12.0	12.2
20-24	17.6	17.8	17.7	11.0	12.0	11.6
25-29	17.6	11.2	14.2	10.1	9.4	9.7
30-34	9.6	8.6	9.1	9.5	8.7	9.1
35-39	8.3	12.3	10.4	10.1	9.2	9.6
40-44	8.1	8.0	8.0	10.1	9.6	9.9
45-49	8.1	10.0	9.1	8.5	8.0	8.2
50-54	7.6	6.6	7.1	7.5	6.9	7.1
55-59	7.2	6.8	7.0	5.9	5.8	5.9
60-64	3.9	3.1	3.5	4.6	4.9	4.7
65-69	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.5	4.2	3.9
70-74	3.3	3.7	3.5	3.0	3.7	3.4
75-79	2.6	3.3	3.0	1.9	2.8	2.4
80 and above	1.3	2.0	1.7	1.8	2.8	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(N excludes 29 respondents (12 male and 17 Female) who didn't give their age)

[4]Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1966 Census Population (General Characteristics), (Ottawa: Queen's Printer), Vol. 1, "Age Groups", pp. 23-25, Table 23: Population by Five Year Age Groups and Sex, 1966.

of excluding most respondents who were less than 19 years of age since the population of interest is the London adult population. The 20-24 and 25-29 age categories are over-represented (17.7 per cent and 14.2 per cent sample representation in these respective categories as compared to 11.6 per cent and 9.7 per cent in these categories in the Census findings), but in other pertinent respects the distributions of the sample age categories correspond fairly closely to those of the London Census age categories.

Nearly a third of the sample (33.8 per cent) is under 30. Half of the sample is in the 30-60 age category (50.7 per cent) and the remaining 15.5 per cent are in the 60 and above category. A total of 29 respondents refused to indicate their ages.

Marital Status

Table 1.1 indicates three-quarters (76.2 per cent) of the people interviewed were married, one-seventh (13.4 per cent) were single, and one-tenth (10.4 per cent) were divorced, separated or widowed. The Single category is under-represented in the sample because of the greater difficulty of finding single respondents home after repeated call-backs.

Religion

Almost two-thirds (65.7 per cent) of the people in the sample were Protestants compared with the Census figure of 72.9. One-fifth (20.2 per cent) of the respondents were

TABLE 2.1

MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS AND
1966 LONDON CENSUS MARITAL STATUS DATA
(15 YEARS AND OVER)

	Sample			1966 Census[5]		
	Male	Female	Combined	Male	Female	Combined
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Single	12.5	14.2	13.4	26.8	23.6	25.2
Married	82.6	70.5	76.2	69.7	64.1	66.8
Widowed	3.0	11.2	7.3	2.9	11.2	7.2
Divorced	.6	1.5	1.1	.6	1.0	.8
Separated	1.3	2.7	2.0	not recorded	not recorded	not recorded
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0
	n=471	n=529	n=1000	n=68692	n=75586	n=144278

[5]Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1966 Census, Population General Characteristics), (Ottawa: Queen's Printer), Vol. 1,"Marital Status by Age Groups and Sex", pp. 35-37, Table 35: Population 15 Years of Age and Over by Marital Status, 1966.

TABLE 2.2

RELIGION OF RESPONDENTS COMPARED WITH 1961 CENSUS DATA

	Sample Percent	Population (1961)[6] Percent
Protestant	65.7	72.9
Roman Catholic	20.2	19.5
Other-Christian	6.9	5.0
Jewish	0.6	0.7
Other - Non-Christian	0.6	(Not recorded)
None	5.8	(Not recorded)
No Response	0.2	(Not recorded)
Total	100.0	100.1
	n=1000	n=181,283

[6]Source: Derived from Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961 Census, Population (General Characteristics), (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), Vol. 1 - Part 2, "Religious Denominations", pp. 45-47, Table 45: Population by Religious Denominations and Sex, 1961.

TABLE 2.3

EDUCATION LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS
COMPARED WITH CENSUS EDUCATION DATA

	Sample		Census[7]	
Primary School or Less	171	17.7	35969	34.0
Some High School	278	23.8	35733	33.8
High School Graduate	265	27.5	25185	23.8
Some College	105	10.9	3850	3.7
College Graduate and Post Graduate	146	15.1	4964	4.7
Total	965	100.0	105,701	100.0

(N excludes 19 respondents under 19 years of age and 16 no response respondents)

[7] Source: Derived from Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961 Census, Population (General Characteristics), (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), Vol. 1 - Part 3, "Schooling by Age Groups", pp. 100-106, Table 100: Population 5-24 Years of Age Attending School, by Highest Grade Attended, Five-Year Age Groups and Sex, 1961, and pp. 104-108, Table 104: Population 10 years of Age and Over Not Attending School, by Highest Grade Attended, Specific Age Groups and Sex, 1961.

Catholic (Census figure: 19.5 per cent) and .6 per cent were of the Jewish faith (Census 0.7 per cent). Over 5 per cent of the people interviewed indicated that they had no religious affiliation, a category not included in the 1961 Census.

Education

In order to compare the educational characteristics of the sample population with the London population of the 1961 Census (see Table 2.3), it was necessary to eliminate the effect of the population under 19 years of age from both the Census data and the sample. The sample population and the 1961 Census of London include both individuals over 19 years of age who are no longer attending school as well as those still going to school.

As seen in Table 2.3, about one-sixth (17.7 per cent) of the sample respondents had a primary school level of education or less compared to 34 per cent of the people in the 1961 Census. A little over one-half (56.3 per cent) of the people interviewed were high school graduates or had some high school education; the 1961 Census shows that 57.6 per cent of London's over 19 population were high school graduates or had some high school education.

A quarter of the sample (26 per cent) had some college education, were college graduates, or had undertaken some post-graduate training. The over-representation in the highly educated category compared with the 1961 Census data (8.1 per cent),

undoubtedly results from the significant increase in the proportion of individuals attending university in 1970, compared with the decade earlier. For example, full-time enrollment of the University of Western Ontario, between the years 1960-61 and 1970-71 has grown from 4,177 to 13,987 students. This represents an increase of 335 per cent over the ten year period. If the 1961 figure (8.1 per cent) is multiplied by 335 per cent the resulting expected figure for 1970 is 27.1, compared with the 26 per cent recorded.

Family Income

Table 2.4 shows that one-fifth (22.3 per cent) of the people in the sample had family incomes of less than $5,000; a little over one-third (36.3 per cent) of the respondents had family incomes somewhere between $5,000 and $10,000. In addition, another one-third (32.6 per cent) of the sample had family incomes in excess of $10,000. Because of inflation and the significant increase in disposable family income during the last ten years, a comparison of the sample population with the 1961 Census figures would not be meaningful and therefore is not included. Finally, 9 per cent of the respondents did not know their income or refused to answer this question.

However, data provided by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics based on a sample survey in 1967 indicated a median family income at that time of $7,860 and preliminary income data

TABLE 2.4

RESPONDENTS' TOTAL FAMILY INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES

	Number	Percent
Not working, no income	36	3.6
Less than $3,000	95	9.5
$3,000-$4,999	92	9.2
$5,000-$6,999	126	12.6
$7,000-$9,999	237	23.7
$10,000-$14,999	215	21.5
$15,000-$19,999	54	5.4
$20,000-$24,999	29	2.9
$25,000 and Over	28	2.8
Refuse to answer, don't know	88	8.8
Total	1000	100.0

Median Family Income = $8,350.

TABLE 2.5

SEX X EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

	Male Percentage	Female Percentage	Combined Sample Percentage
Working	73.0	32.7	51.7
Not Working	27.0	67.3	48.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
	n=471	n=529	n=1000

TABLE 2.6

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS SCORES OF RESPONDENTS

	Male Percentage	Female Percentage	Combined Sample Percentage
Lower Status (39 and below on Blishen Scale)	41.8	21.7	31.2
Middle Status (40-59 on Blishen Scale)	30.8	37.4	34.3
Upper Status (60 and above on Blishen Scale)	16.6	8.9	12.5
Student	9.3	5.5	7.3
Not Working*	0.2	23.3	12.4
No Response	1.3	3.2	2.3
Total	100.0 n=471	100.0 n=529	100.0 n=1000

*Includes Housewives

for 1969 show that the average family income in 1969 in Ontario rose 16 per cent.[8] If the London figures increased at the rate of the provincial average, the median family income in 1969 would be approximately $9,100. However, the increase in unemployment in 1970 and our over-representation of students living alone would tend to depress the median family income reported by our sample.

Employment

Table 2.6 indicates that 73 per cent of males and 33 per cent of females were employed. The 27 per cent males not working appears high unless one considers that 9.3 per cent of males were students and 10.8 per cent were over 65. This means that only approximately seven per cent of the sample of males who were listed as unemployed were neither students or over 65. Data from Federal Manpower office indicated that for Ontario as a whole, the male unemployment rate in November 1970 was 4.71; data treating London only were not available. The slight over-representation of unemployed males is not unusual in surveys in view of the fact that the unemployed are more likely to be at home.

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[8]Personal correspondence from J.R. Podoluk, Co-ordinator, Consumer Finance Research Staff, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa, July, 1971.

The socio-economic status of the sample respondents was evaluated and coded using the Blishen Socio-Economic Index for occupations in Canada.[9] This scheme evaluates the occupational levels in Canada, based on the 1961 Census data, assigning approximations of the Pineo-Porter prestige scale to census occupational titles. (The scale is reproduced in Appendix III) In order to approximate high, middle, and low status occupational levels, all occupations listed at 60 or above on the Blishen scale were categorized as high status occupations, 40 through 59 were categorized as middle status occupations, and 39 or less as low status occupations. For ease of presentation, respondents will be classified as having high status occupations, middle status occupations or low status occupations.

Table 2.6 indicates that approximately 31 per cent of the respondents were classified as having low status occupations, one-third (34.3 per cent) of them were classified as middle status, one-eighth (12.5 per cent) were high status. One-fifth (20 per cent) of the respondents were either students, housewives, or unemployed.

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[9] Bernard Blishen, "A Socio-Economic Index for Occupations in Canada", The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 1967, pp. 41-54.

Summary

Significant socio-demographic characteristics (age, marital status, religion, education, family income, employment status. and social status of the sample were described and compared with available census data Where such comparisons were justified, the characteristics of the sample population resembled the census population to a marked degree. These socio-demographic variables will be used throughout the study wherever we wish to characterize communications behavior by our respondents in terms of their social characteristics.

CHAPTER III

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The daily newspaper is the oldest and largest mass communication institution in London and when we speak of London's daily newspaper, the London Free Press, we observe that of the 89 per cent of the sample population who take a daily newspaper, nearly all (97 per cent) receive the London Free Press. Another 10 per cent of newspaper buyers receive the Toronto Globe and Mail.

The pattern of use of the letters column must be considered in the context of the earlier mentioned unpublished study on rates which indicates that smaller towns with parochial newspapers generally generate a lower per-hundred-papers-sold rate of letters sent than the high quality quasi-national newspaper, such as the Globe and Mail. Conversely, the probability of a letter being published, once it has been sent, is higher for smaller newspapers.[10]

Approximately 1.8 letters per 100 copies of the London Free Press sold, are sent and the probability that a letter will be published is 80 per cent. The probability that a letter will be

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[10]Singer and Cameron, 1972.

sent depends on the socio-economic profile of the readership of a newspaper. In the present study, the median family income of subscribers to the Globe and Mail only was $15,000 and for the London Free Press was $8,500. Approximately 3.5 letters per 100 copies of the Toronto Globe and Mail sold are sent and the probability that a letter will be published is 36 per cent. A related factor with respect to readership is education. The typical Globe and Mail reader had completed two or more years of university while the typical Free Press reader had achieved a grade twelve level.

Another aspect -- the kinds of interests of the readers -- may influence whether an individual will be stimulated to write. 70 per cent of Globe and Mail subscribers stated they purchased it because of its national and international coverage while only 14 per cent of the Free Press subscribers gave this as the reason.

1. How Many People Write

The survey did not ask to which newspaper the individual wrote but merely whether he had ever written a letter to a newspaper. The results indicated that an overwhelming percentage of the respondents had never written a letter to a newspaper. Only nine per cent of the sample had ever written a letter to a newspaper (Table 3.0) Across Canada, English language daily newspapers receive 3.0 letters per 100 papers sold, according to data for 1970 (Singer and Cameron, 1971).

TABLE 3.0

HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN A LETTER TO THE

LETTERS-TO-THE-EDITOR COLUMN IN A NEWSPAPER?

	Number	Per Cent
No	904	90.4
Yes	91	9.1
No Response	5	0.5
Total	1000	100.0

Approximately five per cent of the sample had written a letter to the editor during the past two years. One-letter writers amounted to 3.7 per cent and those who wrote two, three, four or more amounted to one-half per cent each of the sample. (Table 3.1) Approximately 73 per cent of all individuals who wrote letters sent one and 27 per cent of this subsample sent more than one. (Table 3.1) Thus, it appears that even of the small percentage of individuals who have ever written letters, few are "regulars."

2. Sex of Letter Writers

Males are more likely than females to write letters to newspapers. Approximately 58 per cent of the letter writers were male and 42 per cent were female. (Table 3.2)

3. Age of Letter Writers

The letter writer could not be distinguished from the non-letter writer in terms of median age. The median for both categories was 38 years. (Table 3.3) The evidence seems to contradict past research that letter writers tend to be elderly on one hand, or else there is a trend toward more letter writing by individuals in the lower age ranges than was once so. Comparison of Table 3.3's distribution with Table 2.0 (distribution of the sample) in Chapter II does not indicate any significant over-representation by any age category.

TABLE 3.1
HOW MANY LETTERS HAVE YOU WRITTEN IN THE PAST TWO YEARS?
HOW MANY WERE PUBLISHED?

Number of Letter Writers	Number of Letters Written	Number of Letters Sent	Percentage of All Letters Sent	Number of Letters Published	Percentage of Letters Published to Letters Sent
37	1	37	44.0	27	73.0
5	2	10	11.9	8	80.0
5	3	15	17.9	5	33.3
4	4 or more	22	26.2	2	9.1
Total 51		84	100.0	42	

(N excludes "No Response" and "Unknown" cases.)

TABLE 3.2
SEX OF RESPONDENTS X HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN A LETTER TO THE EDITOR?

	Yes		No		No Response		Total	
Male	54	11.4	413	87.8	4	0.8	471	100.0
Female	37	7.0	491	92.8	1	0.2	529	100.0
Total	91	9.1	904	90.4	5	0.5	1000	100.0

(N excludes "No Response" and "Unknown" cases.)

TABLE 3.3

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF LETTER WRITERS COMPARED WITH SAMPLE

	Letter Writers	Sample
Up to 19	1.1	1.9
20-24	21.6	17.7
25-29	13.6	14.2
30-34	5.7	9.1
35-39	12.5	10.4
40-44	10.2	8.0
45-49	6.8	9.1
50-54	8.0	7.1
55-59	6.8	7.0
60-64	2.3	3.5
65-69	1.1	3.8
70-74	6.8	3.5
75-79	1.1	3.0
80 and Over	2.3	1.7
Total	99.9	99.9

(N excludes 3 "No Response" cases.)

4. Education of Letter Writers

The median educational level of those who had written a letter was Grade 13, compared with Grade 12 for those who had not written a letter. A comparison of letter writers with the sample distribution of Table 3.4 indicates differences, however.

TABLE 3.4

EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF LETTER WRITERS COMPARED WITH SAMPLE

	Letter Writers	Sample
Primary School	10.1	17.4
Some High School	14.6	28.5
High School Graduate	29.2	28.8
Some College	22.5	10.7
College Graduate and Post Grad.	23.6	14.5
Total	100.0	99.9
	n=89	n=950

(No Response-Unknown answers excluded from base.)

The comparison of distributions leaves no doubt that lower educational categories are highly under-represented and higher educational categories are highly over-represented. Letters to the editor columns undoubtedly can be characterized as the domain of the well educated in our society.

5. Income of Letter Writers

Although the median family income of those who had written letters to the editor is higher than that of those who had not ($9,400 to $8,200), comparison of the distributions of letter writers with the sample reveals interesting differences.

TABLE 3.5

INCOME DISTRIBUTION OF LETTER WRITERS COMPARED WITH SAMPLE

Family Income	Letter Writers	Sample
Below $5,000	30.4	24.4
$5,000-$9,999	23.6	39.8
$10,000-$14,999	24.7	23.6
$15,000-$19,999	12.4	5.9
$20,000 and Above	7.8	6.3
Total	99.9	100.0

("No Response" answers excluded from base.)

It is clear that those in the very low income categories (below $5,000) and those in the high income categories ($15,000 and Over) are over-represented among letter writers. The low to middle categories ($5,000 to $9,999) are substantially under-represented. One meaning to be derived from this pattern is that those who are the most deprived in terms of financial rewards and those who are in the highest financial reward categories use this forum to gain their objectives while those in the middle do not find themselves particularly threatened and less often feel compelled to express themselves through this channel. This is in contradistinction to the previous findings on the high education of letter writers; there is a substantial sociological literature that treats the problem of "status inconsistency" (one example is high education with financial rewards that are below expected for a particular educational attainment).*

*See, for example, Elton F. Jackson, "Status Consistency and Symptoms of Stress", American Sociological Review, Vol. 27, No. 4, August 1962, pp. 469-480.

6. Success in Getting Letter Published

Earlier, it was indicated that nine per cent of the sample had ever written a letter to a newspaper. To write a letter does not assure,of course, that it will be published, in view of the fact that editors, functioning as gatekeepers may screen out the inarticulate, the uneducated.

In fact, only six per cent of the sample or approximately two-thirds of those who had sent letters had ever had a letter published. (Table 3.6). Although cells are small, some data are available on the socio-economic correlates of success in getting one's letter published. The median age of the successful was higher than that of the unsuccessful (41 years of age compared with 34 years). By collapsing the age categories, we should be able to establish which age categories are most and least successful.

TABLE 3.6

SUCCESS IN LETTER PUBLISHING AND AGE

Age	Success in Having Letter Published
Up to 24	60.0 per cent
25-39	64.3 per cent
40-59	66.7 per cent
60 and Over	72.7 per cent

The age comparisons indicate a positive pattern of relationships between age and success in getting a letter published.

Sex is also related to the probability of publication. 72 per cent of letters sent by males were published compared with 57 per cent of letters sent by females.

No pattern of differences emerges with respect to education, with the successful and unsuccessful letter writers both having a median education of 12 years. The distribution showed no discernible differences, either.

There is a relationship between family income and the probability of having a letter published. The median income of successful writers was $9,360 and that of unsuccessful writers, $8,840. Approximately 62 per cent of individuals who wrote with incomes below $10,000 had letters published and approximately 74 per cent of those with incomes above $10,000 were successful.

Another factor that seems to be related to whether a letter will be published is the issue of the number of letters written. During the past two years, 73 per cent of those who sent one letter saw them in print and 80 per cent of those who sent two letters were successful. But of those who wrote three, only 33 per cent were published and of those who wrote four, only 9 per cent were published (i.e., four individuals were responsible for 22 letters sent during the past two years but reported only two were published). (Table 3.1) Thus, the prolific letter writer is a notable failure in terms of percentages. It may be that the prolific letter writer is one who is easily and often aroused and doesn't choose his words well; our data, however, offer no concrete evidence that such is the explanation.

7. What They Write About

Individuals write about a wide variety of topics, from personal complaints about service at a local establishment or statements about treatment of animals to comments expressing their attitudes on politics, social issues and institutions. The content -- that is, the universe of their discourse -- will be found to vary somewhat from that found in other feedback media. Table 3.7 below provides a breakdown of the topic areas.

TABLE 3.7

TOPICS OF LETTER WRITERS

Topic		Number	Per Cent
I	Politics, government and social issues of the day	18	27.7
II	Local issues & services	11	16.9
III	Education	9	13.8
IV	Sports & Special Events	9	13.8
V	Mass Media	7	10.7
VI	Animals	3	4.6
VII	Complaints of a Personal nature or dealing with products or services	3	4.6
VIII	Health & Housing	3	4.6
IX	Other & Miscellaneous	2	3.1
Total		65	100.0

* See Appendix II for coding breakdown.

Note: A total of 65 individuals answered this question in such a way that the categories could be coded.

Giving their opinions on politics, social issues and local problems represents the majority of letter topics.

Another way of viewing the letters written is in terms of form rather than content. When the answers were recoded in terms of the question, what was the manifest purpose rather than substantive content, 54 of the answers could be categorized as indicated in Table 3.8 below.

TABLE 3.8

PURPOSE OF LETTERS

Purpose of Letter	Number	Per Cent
To give information	2	3.7
To get information	2	3.7
To give opinion on topic	18	33.3
To give an opinion on a local issue	13	24.1
To give an opinion on a national issue	2	3.7
To give an opinion on an international issue	0	0.0
To praise	2	3.7
Media complaints	7	13.0
General complaints	8	14.8
Total	54	100.0

(N excludes "No Response" and "Unknown" cases.)

It becomes clear from examination of the two preceding tables that the letters column provides an opportunity for writers to offer their opinions, that there is a small percentage

of writers (personal complaints for example, and "to get information") which implies an ombudsman function and that writers are parochial, concentrating on local issues when compared with national and international issues.

CHAPTER IV

THE URBAN NEWSPAPER OMBUDSMAN

The user of the urban newspaper ombudsman (in this case, the London Free Press column, "Sound Off) is rare. Only four per cent of the sample had ever contacted the column which was started in 1967 and has been under the stewardship of Gordon Sanderson since then. But the popularity of the column has been such that its once three-times-a-week appearance has been increased to daily. Because of the small size of this subsample, few cross tabulations could be run.

1. Sex of the User

Males more often complained to Sound Off. Approximately four and a half per cent of males compared with 3.6 per cent of the females had called upon the column for help.

2. Age of the User

The median user was 36 years of age and the median age of the non-user was 38 years, approximately the same as letter writers. Cells were too small to compare the frequency distribution with the sample.

3. Education of Users

The median education level of the column's users was 11 and that of non-users was 12. The distribution when compared to the sample indicates the column is most typically used by individuals low in formal education primarily.

TABLE 4.0

EDUCATION DISTRIBUTION OF SOUND OFF USERS

COMPARED WITH SAMPLE

Education Level	Users	Sample
Primary School	18.0	17.5
Some High School	38.5	28.4
High School Graduate	28.2	28.9
Some College	7.7	10.6
College Graduate and Post Graduate	7.7	14.5
Total	100.1	99.9

It is not the very bottom level but those with some formal education, but not a lot who on one hand may get themselves more involved with firms and agencies that they can't handle. On the other hand, respondents in the very lowest educational category may get just as involved but may not be as aware of the help such a column can provide or be too apathetic to use it.

4. Income of Users

There was little difference in the income levels of the user and non-user. The income of the former was $8,200 and that of the non-user was $8,350. Because cells were too small, comparison of frequencies would not be fruitful. However, one cell -- the $7,000 to $9,999 category was over-represented inasmuch as 36 per cent of all users fell there compared with 24 per cent of the sample. This may simply reflect the fact that with higher income, such individuals make more financial commitments, of which a certain percentage will inevitably involve some problem with the company. The median income of the user is higher than the non-user, thus it is likely that some have the income to involve themselves but not the sophistication that comes with education to handle the problem themselves.

5. Reasons for Contacting Sound Off

A total of 38 individuals provided reasons why they contacted Sound Off. Of these, nearly two-thirds concerned consumer problems (63 per cent), 18 per cent concerned problems with the government and less than 3 per cent each were concerned with media, health, education and welfare and employment problems as is indicated in Table 4.1 following.

TABLE 4.1

OVER WHAT ISSUE DID YOU CONTACT "SOUND OFF"?

	Number	Per Cent
Consumer Problems	24	63.2
Government Problems	7	18.4
Other	4	10.5
Media Problems	1	2.6
Health, Education, and Welfare Problems	1	2.6
Employment Problems	1	2.6
Animal Problems	0	0.0
Discrimination Problems	0	0.0
Culture and Special Events	0	0.0
Sports and Hobby	0	0.0
Total	38	99.9

(N excludes "No Response" cases.)

*For an explanation of the coding categories employed here, please see Appendix III.

One factor that distinguished the newspaper ombudsman from other media feedback institutions is that results are more often direct and measureable. This is because the communication from the aggrieved individual is usually specific and calls for specific action for an individual rather than referring to a class of individuals as is more often the case where individuals write letters expressing their opinions to the newspaper letters column. A limited amount of information was available concerning results, in response to the question, "What action resulted from contacting Sound Off?" Approximately 55 per cent reported positive action, 33 per cent reported no action, 3 per cent (one person) indicated action was still in progress and approximately five per cent (two persons) indicated their situation became worse. The fact that one-third of the respondents reported no action is possibly explained in great part by cases in which the complaint was not justified to one extent or another, in addition to those cases, involving lack of cooperation by the firm or agency which was the subject of the complaint.

CHAPTER V

THE RADIO CALL IN SHOW

The radio call-in show has become a North American institution during the 1960's. In London, CFPL began broadcasting its "Open Line" show in 1961 and this name is now virtually a synonym for such shows in the London area. The two other local AM stations added such programs in 1968 (CKSL) and 1970 (CJOE). However, theirs have been on-again-off-again situations while the CFPL programme has been on uninterruptedly for the past decade. The call in shows are popular or liked by approximately 60 per cent of the sample and disliked by 40 per cent. Prior to examining the data concerning usage, it would be of interest to know why individuals like or dislike such programs:

TABLE 5.0

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT OPEN-LINE PROGRAMS?

	Number	Per Cent
Information	161	28.8
Contact with people	121	22.7
Likes commentator	78	14.0
Chance to express opinion	68	12.2
Don't Know	64	11.5
Controversial	43	7.7
Problem solving	23	4.1
Total	558	100.0

(N excludes 385 respondents who disliked open-line programs and 57 respondents who did not indicate whether they liked or disliked open-line programs).

As can be seen in Table 5.0 preceding, the highest response category was "Information" followed by "Contact with people", liking for the show's host, a chance to express one's opinion, that it is controversial and finally that it solves problems.

On the other hand, as is indicated in Table 5.1 following, most objections to call in shows were based on the "mentality of callers," followed by dislike of the host, the airing of prejudices, blandness, too many such shows and finally the controversial nature of the shows.

TABLE 5.1

WHAT DO YOU DISLIKE ABOUT OPEN-LINE PROGRAMS?

	Number	Per Cent
Low mentality of callers	151	39.2
Dislike commentator	73	19.0
Don't Know	67	17.4
Airing of Prejudices	40	10.4
Too Middle of the Road	27	7.0
Too many open-line shows	16	4.2
Too controversial	11	2.9
Total	385	100.1

(N excludes 558 respondents who liked Open-Line programs and 97 respondents who did not indicate whether they liked or disliked Open-Line programs.)

1. How Many People Use the Call In Show?

It was surprising to find how much more widespread the use of the call-in show is than is true for printed counterparts. Approximately 20 per cent of the sample had called such a show in the past. Table 5.2 below indicates the frequency of usage:

TABLE 5.2

FREQUENCY OF USAGE OF PHONE IN SHOWS

	Number	Percentage of All Users
Once	120	62
Few Times	71	36
Quite Often	4	2
Total (N excludes "No Response" cases.)	195	100

The radio call in show, when compared with letters to the editor, does appear to indicate greater use by "regulars," i.e., individuals who have used it more than once, although the data are not, strictly speaking, comparable (the latter asked number of letters sent during past two years and indicated 73 per cent had sent only one). It is also possible that individuals underestimated the number of times they had phoned because of the cultural stricture concerning telephone use (i.e., being a "telephone gabber").

2. Sex of the Caller

It was not surprising to find that 63 per cent of those who said they had called such a show were female, compared with 37 per cent male (the comparable sample statistics were 53 per cent female and 47 per cent male), for the shows have been predominantly morning shows when the male of the household is more likely to be at work. An unpublished study (Singer, 1971) of taped from the air calls in London which is not comparable because the populations were different, (calls were sampled, rather than individuals) indicated 55 per cent of calls were from females and 45 per cent were from males but that the proportions exactly reversed themselves on Saturdays.

3. Age of the Caller

The median age of the callers was 40 years and of the non-callers 36 years. An examination of Table 5.3 following indicates that callers in age categories under 35 are under-represented, the cumulative frequency of callers being 37 per cent compared with 43 per cent for the sample. The callers in age categories 35-59 are over-represented 50 per cent to 42 per cent in the sample. For callers 60 and over, there are approximately 13 per cent compared with approximately 16 per cent in the sample.

TABLE 5.3

AGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF CALLERS AND SAMPLE

Age	Callers	Sample
Up to 19	2.1	2.0
20-24	14.3	17.7
25-29	13.2	14.2
30-34	7.4	9.1
35-39	12.2	10.4
40-44	8.5	8.0
45-49	10.1	9.1
50-54	11.1	7.1
55-59	7.9	7.0
60-64	3.7	3.5
65-69	3.2	3.8
70-74	3.7	3.5
75-79	2.1	3.0
80 and Over	0.5	1.7
Total	100.0	100.1

(N excludes "No Response" cases.)

4. Education of Callers

The median education for callers and non-callers was 12 years. Table 5.4 following indicates the distributions.

TABLE 5.4

EDUCATION DISTRIBUTIONS OF CALLERS AND SAMPLE

Education	Callers	Sample
Primary School or less	13.6	17.5
Some High School	35.1	28.5
High School Graduate	34.6	28.8
Some College	6.8	10.7
College Graduate & Post Graduate	9.9	14.5

(N excludes "No Response" Cases.)

Although the median education is the same, the distribution comparison reveals that the very low, the high and the very high education groups are under-represented among callers, while the low education and middle group (some high school and high school graduates) are over-represented among callers. The radio call in show appears to be a phenomenon dominated by the lower middle and middle education groups, then.

5. Income of Callers

The median income of callers was $8,800 and that of non-callers was $8,200. When the distributions are compared, there is slight under-representation among callers in the lower income groupings and slight over-representation in categories of $7,000 and over, according to Table 5.5 below. Actually, the income distribution of radio show callers corresponds more closely to the sample than is true for either letters to the editor or the use of the Sound Off column.

TABLE 5.5

INCOME OF CALLERS AND SAMPLE

	Callers	Sample
No Income	2.2	4.0
Up to $3,000	8.9	10.4
$3,000-$4,999	12.8	10.1
$5,000-$6,999	9.5	13.8
$7,000-$9,999	27.4	25.9
$10,000-$14,999	25.1	23.6
$15,000-$19,999	7.3	5.9
$20,000-$24,999	3.9	3.2
$25,000 and Over	2.8	3.1
Total	99.9	100.0

6. Topics of Calls, Purposes of Calls

We are making the same distinction here as was made for letters to newspapers, having coded separately for topics and for purpose of call. Table 5.6 below presents the eight topic areas indicated by the sample.

TABLE 5.6

TOPICS OF OPEN LINE CALLERS

Topic		Number	Per Cent
I	Politics, government and social issues of the day	38	23.8
II	Local issues and services	22	13.8
III	Education	8	5.0
IV	Sports and special events	23	14.4
V	The Mass Media	10	6.2
VI	Animals	26	16.2
VII	Complaints of a personal nature or dealing with products or services	20	12.5
VIII	Health and Housing	11	6.9
IX	Other and Miscellaneous	2	1.2
Total		160	100.0

(A total of 160 individuals provided answers that could be coded.)
(N excludes "No Response" cases.)

As can be seen, the leading topics, in order, were Politics, government and social issues of the day, animals and sports and special events, which together constituted more than half the respondents' answers.

Table 5.7 below indicates the distribution of answers coded for the purpose of the call.

TABLE 5.7

PURPOSE OF CALLS TO OPEN LINE

Purpose of Call	Per Cent
Give information	17.0
Get information	20.9
Give opinion on Topic	12.4
Give opinion on local issue	8.5
Give opinion on national issue	1.7
Give opinion on international issue	1.1
To praise	2.8
Media complaints	1.7
General Complaints	9.6
Lost & Found	9.6
Straw vote	3.4
Get help	4.5
Offer help	.6
Joke	.6
Offer items	3.4
Mediator corrections	2.3
Total	100.1
(N excludes "No Response" cases.)	

Table 5.7 indicates that the largest number of calls related to the giving or getting of information, approximately 36 per cent, followed by the opinion presentation categories, alltold approximately 22 per cent.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER FACTORS

1. Anomie and Communications Participation

Social critics have pointed out that one of the more serious consequences of existence in mass societies is the loss of ability to truly be able to communicate with others. This occurs as the proportion of channels which are one way compared with two way increases. The concepts "alienation" and/or "anomie" are often used to characterize inhabitants of societies of this kind.

The concept "anomie" has had a long tradition in sociology since Durkheim popularized the term to explain the psychological condition which intervened between certain states of social organization and the deviant behavior which resulted. It is closely identified with alienation. Some investigators who use it believe they are measuring a "pervasive sense of social malintegration".[11] Some would argue (with Durkheim)

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[11] John P. Robinson and Philip R. Shaver, Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, (Ann Arbor: 1969), p. 172.

that it reflects a state of "normlessness" in which the usual norms of society no longer are binding upon the individual. Others who opt for a definition more relevant to political life, think of it as the resultant of lack of political power, the sense that the individual has no control over his individual destiny within an unresponsive social order. Powerlessness, despondency over social life, pessimism -- the inability to plan or predict in a social order that is essentially unpredictable -- these are both implicit and explicit in the questions of the Srole scale which attempts to tap the presence of the phenomenon anomie.

The scale developed by Leo Srole was included in the present research in order to assess the possibility that one's access to and utilization of participatory media -- the feedback systems we have been discussing -- will be inversely related to the amount of anomie demonstrated. Clearly, if one does feel "cut off," incommunicado with the balance of society, then the result ought to be a high degree of anomie. And it seems clear that those authorities who believe that new communications technology will make possible greater opportunities for participation, also believe that man's psychological well being will be improved as a result of his access to and usage of these new means of expressing himself.

The hypothesis being tested is limited, however, to the following statement: the amount of anomie displayed will be

inversely related to the individual's utilization of participatory media (as defined in the present report). Unfortunately, we cannot specify causal directionality, i.e., if the hypothesis is supported, we cannot be certain which of the two following assertions is true:

1. Use of participatory media lessens anomie.

2. Individuals with low anomie will be more likely to use participatory media.

In addition, there can be an interaction effect between the two assertions. However, at the least, we can establish, for the first time, whether any relation obtains between usage and anomie as a prolegomenon to further research. (Further research, e.g., might be of this order: individuals are scaled for anomie, then one group is given a special program involving easy access to and high utilization of participatory media; after some time, the two groups are remeasured to see whether the utilization of participatory media by the experimental group had any effect in lowering anomie.)

The Srole Scale

The Srole anomie scale is composed of five statements. The respondent is asked either to agree or disagree with each item. Only the agreement responses are scored. Thus the respondent's total score falls in a range from 0 to 5. The higher the numerical

score the greater the amount of anomie demonstrated by the respondent. The scale consists of the following questions:

1. In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse. 2. It is hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future. 3. Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today. 4. These days a person does not really know who he can count on. 5. There's little use in writing to public officials because they often are not interested in the average man.

Approximately sixty-one per cent (60.5 per cent) of the sample scored low on anomie, agreeing with two or fewer statements according to Table 6.0 and this conventionally has served as the dividing line.[12] Of the 36.6 per cent of the sample who scored from three to five on the Srole anomie scale, the largest grouping (15.2 per cent) were in agreement with four anomie statements. The highly anomic group (five agreements) accounted for 7.9 per cent of the total sample.

Anomie and Letters to the Editor

Anomie was found to be inversely related to writing letters to the newspaper, according to Table 6.0. The mean

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[12] This compares favorably with the sample taken by Leo Srole, the creator of the scale, in Springfield, Mass., when 61 per cent of the respondents scored 2 or less. John P. Robinson and Philip R. Shaver, Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, (Ann Arbor: 1969), p. 172.

TABLE 6.0

ANOMIE SCORE OF RESPONDENTS AND WRITING LETTERS TO A NEWSPAPER

	Yes		No	
0-agree	23	25.8	197	22.4
1-agree	18	20.2	171	19.5
2-agree	28	31.5	166	18.9
3-agree	8	9.0	126	14.4
4-agree	7	7.9	144	16.4
5-agree	5	5.6	74	8.4
Total	89	100.0	878	100.0

(N excludes incomplete and no response cases.)

anomie score of those who had written one or more letters to the editor was 1.70 while those who had not written a letter had a mean anomie score of 2.08. The distribution in Table 6.0 indicates that those who scored two or less on the Srole scale account for approximately 79 per cent of letter writers compared to 61 per cent of the non-writers. Approximately 23 per cent of writers and 39 per cent of non-writers scored high on anomie, with three or more.

TABLE 6.1

ANOMIE SCORE OF RESPONDENTS AND EVER CONTACTED SOUND OFF

	Yes		No	
0-agree	8	21.1	213	22.9
1-agree	7	18.4	182	19.5
2-agree	8	21.1	186	20.0
3-agree	5	13.2	130	14.0
4-agree	9	23.7	142	15.3
5-agree	1	2.6	78	8.4
Total	38	100.1	931	100.1

(N excludes "No Response" cases.)

Anomie and Sound Off

The mean anomie score of respondents who had sought help from Sound Off was higher than those who had not, but only slightly higher, 2.23 compared with 2.04, as indicated in Table 6.1. The distribution comparison indicates small overall differences as well.

Anomie and The Call In Show

The mean anomie score of individuals who had used a call-in show was 1.98 compared with 2.06 for those who had not, an insignificant difference. The comparison of the distributions indicated no differences either.

TABLE 6.2

ANOMIE SCORE OF RESPONDENTS AND CALLING THE OPEN LINE

	Yes		No	
0-agree	46	24.0	176	22.6
1-agree	40	20.8	149	19.1
2-agree	33	17.2	161	20.7
3-agree	28	14.6	107	13.7
4-agree	33	17.2	119	15.3
5-agree	12	6.3	67	8.6
Total	192	100.1	779	100.0

(N excludes Incomplete and No Response cases.)

Summary Statement on Anomie

When the distributions of the three tables are compared, we find that approximately 79 per cent of all

newspaper letter writers, 61 per cent of those contacting Sound Off and 62 per cent of those calling Open Line shows are classified as low anomie. Thus, the only participation channel which indicates a general difference on this variable is newspaper letters. However, since past research has shown that there exists a relationship between the usage of the mass media and social status, this differential usage by social status may in fact suggest that some of the variation in our findings can be accounted for by the same factor. Some is accounted for by occupational status, per se. Occupational status (as measured by the Blishen scale) was therefore introduced as a convenient control measure. As is indicated in Table 6.3, lower status respondents who had written a letter to the editor had a mean anomie score of 1.8, while those who did not had a score of 2.7; middle status letter writers had a score of 1.5, while those who did not had a score of 1.7. Upper status letter writers score 1.5 while those who did not write score 1.4. Thus, it can be seen that for lower and middle statuses, those who wrote were lower in anomie than those who did not write.

Radio call-in shows, when controlled for occupational status, followed the earlier pattern, with little difference, according to Table 6.2. The controlled analysis of Sound Off suggests in general, a higher anomie score for users than

non-users. However, in view of the fact that it involved the smallest sample size and that cells were very small, the validity of results from this cross tabulation may be questioned, yet it suggests the possibility - for future research follow-ups - that the newspaper ombudsman serves a group whose alienation from society includes an inability to cope on their own or, alternatively, the failure of society to provide training and channels that would permit them to use their own resources to solve their problems. In this, they appear to resemble the subsample of high anomie individuals who use radio call-in shows for problem solving purposes, as described below.

Although the measures of central tendency do not indicate any difference between callers and non-callers, a more detailed analysis of the callers may reveal interesting differences in the functions performed by the call-in show for individuals who vary in anomie. This test of the function of a participatory channel is possible in the case of radio only because of the large size of the subsample, 190 callers who indicated why they had called. (The subsamples of letter writers and Sound Off clients were too small to permit such an analysis.)

First of all, a content analysis of the reasons for the call was performed and three general functions were discerned:

1. Some individuals called to give their opinions on a topic.

2. Some individuals called for informational purposes, i.e., to make announcements, to request information or to provide information.

3. Some individuals called for problem solving purposes, i.e., the radio host was asked to help them to solve a problem dealing with other individuals, organizations or firms.[13]

As has been pointed out elsewhere, radio shares with the letters to the editor column some functions, primarily, however, the opinion expressing function. In addition, it provides an important channel for the exchange of information and to some extent, provides an ombudsman function. It was hypothesized that the anomie scores of those whose calls tapped the ombudsman function would be, like the users of Sound Off, higher than those who used the show for informational or opinion expression purposes. The results were as follows:

Persons who called to give their opinions (N=74) had a mean anomie score of 1.86. Persons who called for informational purposes (N=96) had a mean anomie score of 1.85. Persons who called for problem solving purposes (N=20) had a mean anomie score of 2.60.

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[13]These three categories were achieved through collapsing the "Purpose of the Calls" categories.

It thus appears to be clear that the different channels not only serve different purposes and different audiences, sociologically, but that certain participatory channels provide a service needed by some parts of the population who can be identified in terms of social-psychological dimensions. Electronic participatory channels also offer a service which individuals who otherwise have difficulty coping, appear to need and use.

TABLE 6.3

ANOMIE AND USAGE OF PARTICIPATION CHANNELS CONTROLLED BY OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

	Lower Status		Middle Status		Higher Status	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Letters to Editor	1.8	2.7	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.4
Sound Off	3.1	2.7	2.0	1.7	2.0	1.3
Call-in Shows	2.6	2.7	1.6	1.7	1.3	1.3

(N excludes all incomplete and No Response cases.)

In summary, then, the data in this section suggest the potential importance of certain kinds of relationships to mass media for engagement in society and that what we call "participatory" media channels are not the same for all individuals. A new table has been constructed below which makes it possible to assess each medium comparatively.

TABLE 6.4

ANOMIE RATING OF USERS OF VARIOUS PARTICIPATORY CHANNELS

Classification			Anomie Rating
Yes	-- Letters to Editor		1.70
Yes	-- Radio Call-in Show		1.98
	. Opinions	1.86	
	. Information	1.83	
	. Problem Solving	2.60	
No	-- Sound Off		2.04
No	-- Radio Call-in Show		2.06
No	-- Letters to Editor		2.08
No	-- Any of three channels		2.10
Yes	-- Sound Off		2.23

The data above are suggestive, if not conclusive. They suggest, as one interpretation, that use of letters to the editor either reflects a group well integrated in

modern society, possibly one which knows how to use certain societal mechanisms for asserting oneself or "blowing off steam", or alternatively that those who customarily use such means become, through this process, protected from alienation or anomie. The radio call-in show does not discriminate on this dimension, nor does the use of Sound Off, although the detailed analysis of purposes served by radio suggests the differential functions performed for different kinds of individuals.

Stimulus to Participate

Earlier, in the review of past literature, the point was made that we can distinguish analytically between the issue why some individuals participate and what stimulated them to participate. The data in the present report aid us in understanding why in the sense that socio-economic data on individuals and topic distributions tell us something about the underlying factors that may predispose one or another group to participate using a given kind of channel or expressing themselves on a given subject. The question of the proximate stimulus cannot be as easily confronted. It should be added that although the distinction can be made analytically, empirically, in the actual world of events, it is more difficult to separate these factors. It will be recalled that the earlier

cited study by Foster and Friedrich done in the 1930's asserted that "The newspaper itself conveyed the most frequent stimulus to write to the editor. The majority of published letters referred to news items, other letters or to editorials." Thus, it is not the mere presence of a medium with a feedback channel but rather some content that elicits communicative behavior on the part of the reader or listener, according to the earlier study.

In an earlier paper, "Access to Information: A Position Paper on Communication Channels and Social Change" (1970), Singer suggested that in planning communications systems for the future, one should not be misled by optimistic technological determinists that the mere provision of multiple channels would assure their use. The behavior of the medium or channel (previous content), in a sense, will help to determine participation, not the mere availability of facilities. While the present data do not aid us in understanding this issue, findings in separate, unpublished researches help throw light on the matter. Content analysis of an approximately 23 per cent subsample (N=234) of 1,020 letters to the editor of the London Free Press and of 3,224 taped-off-the-air calls to London radio stations in 1970 revealed that approximately one-third of the letters (Singer and Cameron, 1972) and

approximately one-half the calls (Singer, 1972) were in response to previous stimuli in the newspaper or on the radio programme, according to Table 6.5 following.

It is interesting to note that approximately four times as many radio calls were stimulated by previous calls by other listeners as letters that were stimulated by past letters. Thus, it would appear that a major reason for calling the radio show is in fact located in the stimulating effect of other members of the audience. The analogies that have been made comparing radio call-in shows to small town telephone party lines may not be so far off.

Another point that might be made in line with the "blowing off steam" function various authors have discussed is that radio may be capable of originating, more often, the tension that subsequently, through a call, is cathartically drained off, whereas the newspaper letters column may present for its audience, a means of discharging tensions which are more often present due to other factors in social life. If one takes this analysis further, then it might also explain, (under the assumption that anomie score reflects a state of tension resulting from existence in mass society) why newspaper letter writers score lower on the anomie scale. These are possible explanations, which, unfortunately, the present research cannot confirm or deny.

TABLE 6.5

STIMULUS FACTOR FOR LETTERS TO EDITOR AND CALL IN RADIO SHOWS

		Letters to the Editor			Call in Radio Shows		
Self-Initiative		150	64.1		1593	49.4
Stimulated by Media Content	Letters	23	9.8	Calls	1319	40.9
	Editorials	20	8.5	Commentary	39	1.2
	Articles	41	17.6	Other Media D.J.	273	8.5
	TOTAL	84	35.9	TOTAL	1631	50.6
Total		234	100.0		3224	100.0

Note: All letters and calls that referred explicitly or implicitly to a previous letter, article, editorial, past call, radio commentary or statement by the radio host were coded "Stimulated by Media Content".

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Summary

The dearth of research dealing with the question of mass media feedback systems led to the posing of a number of questions in the present research.

The first deals with the issue of the kinds of mass media channels available in the typical Canadian city which make it possible for individuals to participate in the process of opinion formation, to ask and to be heard; to inquire and to seek help. What proportion of the population uses each of these channels at present?

The feedback channels made available by mass media in London included letters to the editor columns, the Sound Off column of the London Free Press and the call-in radio shows in London. Approximately nine per cent of the adult population had ever written a letter to the editor and six per cent had had a letter published. The newspaper ombudsman, Sound Off, had been contacted by four per cent of the sample and slightly more than half had had their problem solved as a result. Surprisingly, twenty per cent of individuals had telephoned a radio show.

How regularly newspaper letters were sent was guaged by the answer to how often during the past two years the individual had written. Only 27 per cent sent more than one. On the other hand 38 per cent of individuals who had called a phone-in show had done it more than once. There may in fact be more "regulars" who listen to be stimulated to call and who are therefore rather indiscriminate callers -- individuals who are multi-issue callers rather than selectively using the channel for fulfilling a previously held need, on a selective issue, to express themselves. The unpublished content analysis data referred to in the last chapter indicated that 50 per cent more often individuals who used radio call-in shows did so as a response to a stimulus within the medium, something which had been aired already, when compared with newspaper writers who had written in response to a previously printed item.

The second question asked: "Who has access to such channels? No general survey has ever previously been fielded that answers the question, 'Who uses which channels for which purposes?' The question 'Who' refers to the sociological characteristics of users."

The sociological characteristics of interest include sex, age, family income, education. The data clearly reveal that males are over-represented and females under-represented among

letter writers. Males were also over-represented among users of Sound Off. Among individuals who had called a radio station, on the other hand, females were over-represented, a fact attributed in part to the time of day the programmes are broadcast. Males, then, for the most part, dominate the printed media and females the broadcast channels.

There were no substantial differences in the ages of channel users, with the median age for letter writers and non-letter writers being 38, for Sound Off clients 36, with non-users 38, but there was a larger difference in median age of radio show callers to non-callers, 40 and 36; the youngest and oldest categories were under-represented and the middle-aged were over-represented by nearly 20 per cent.

There were greater differences on the variable education, however, with substantial over-representation among the highest educated groups in letter writing and, conversely, substantial under-representation among the lowest education groups. The user of the Sound Off column was lower in education, while the radio show caller tended to more often be in the middle education category, with the very low and very high education groups under-represented.

More often than not, the family income of the letter writer and the individual who called radio shows was higher than that of those who did not use these channels;

on the other hand, the family income of the client of Sound Off was slightly lower than that of the non-user.

Another factor examined was that of success in getting a letter published and here it was found that the successful were older, more often male, higher in income and were more likely to have sent fewer than three letters. Interestingly enough, education made no difference. These findings confirm earlier assertions that suggested that the editor as gatekeeper might screen out certain members of society, with the exception that lower education is not a factor in the screening process.

The occupational status controlled analysis of participation and anomie revealed that lower and middle status individuals who wrote to newspapers were less anomic, hinted that users of the newspaper ombudsman might be more anomic and indicated little if any difference in the use of radio call-in shows. The use of certain kinds of participation channels does appear to be related to one's feeling of integration in society.

The third question raised in this research was: "How do the various channels compare -- printed and electronic -- in carrying out relevant social functions? What kind of process is the communications linkage that is established?" The answer to the first question will be answered by summarizing the

findings concerning the purpose and content of the interaction; and the second seeks to appraise the stimulus factor.

The content topics of newspaper letters and radio call-in shows indicate, first of all, that the highest category of communications in both cases is politics, government and social issues of the day, with a slightly higher proportion being found in letters compared to telephone calls. Letter writers are more concerned with education and with local issues and with mass media. Callers are more concerned with animals, complaints of a personal nature or dealing with products or services. In general, the topics of the radio callers suggest a concern that is more immediate, of a more personal nature; and those in the newspaper appear to concern issues of longer range importance, more separated from the immediate needs of the individual. Radio performs more of an ombudsman function as well. This appears to be borne out when one examines the purpose of the letter or call. Approximately four times as many individuals used the newspaper column to give an opinion on a topic than was true for the radio caller. Nearly six times as frequently, radio callers used this channel to get information than was true for letter writers, and nearly five times as often to give information. Radio callers also used this channel for lost and found notices (not mentioned

at all by letter writers) and to get help on some problem.

When these channels, therefore, are compared with the newspaper ombudsman, Sound Off, whose most prevalent category was consumer problems, followed by government problems, it appears that radio call in shows actually combine the functions performed by the letters to the editor column and the newspaper ombudsman in being both an opinion forum as well as offering personal help in information seeking and problem solving.

The data from the unpublished study suggested that more often radio calls were stimulated by previous content and it seems likely, therefore, that callers are stimulated by content to give their opinions, on one hand, or bring to the channel their own needs for help or information, on the other hand.

These findings help to answer our question which called for a comparison of feedback institutions in terms of carrying out relevant social functions. Newspaper letters to the editor columns generally serve individuals more preferentially located in the social structure and function essentially as a means for presenting their viewpoints, more often generated apart from the stimulus of the medium: in other words, it is a channel less dependent upon its "symbolic surround." The newspaper ombudsman serves a less

preferentially located audience, is highly specific in purpose and aids individuals in relationships with organizations with whom they have had communications difficulties and lack of success in gaining their ends. The column accomplishes the task for the individual. Radio serves the most heterogeneous audience of all -- the closest approximation, in fact, to the population -- is more diffuse in function, serving to stimulate those who are listening to express their opinions on subjects more often generated by the program, and serves an ombudsman function as well.

2. Conclusions

Existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers has written that communication is "the universal condition of man's being. It is so much his comprehensive essence that both what man is and what is for him are in some sense bound up with communication."[14] Along with this communication-centred view of man's psyche, we consider the common plaint of critics of mass society, that this psyche is on the receiving end of a cultural apparatus which directs messages

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[14]Karl Jaspers, Reason and Existence, (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), p. 79.

to him: a one-way process that does not give modern man a chance to answer back. One model for the role of mass media in a true mass society has been provided by the late C. Wright Mills:

> Technical conditions of the media make a selection of speakers necessary and, by determining the low ratio of speakers to hearers, limits the chances to answer back ... Public opinion then consists of reactions to what is presented in the formal media of communication; personal discussion does not affect the opinion formulated; and each man is an isolated atom reacting alone to the orders and suggestions of the monopolized mass media.[15]

We have not yet arrived at that state, according to Mills; however, many critics of mass communications systems would argue that we are enroute. This should be viewed in the context of the "communications transactional view" of modern societies taken by such authorities as Deutsch and Meier which asserts that messages define the boundaries of organizations, are surrogates for trips, and that changes in patterns of human interaction to reduce communication stress are required to improve the welfare of urban residents.[16]

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[15] C. Wright Mills, "Mass Media and Public Opinion," in I.L. Horowitz, ed. Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), p. 582.

[16] Karl W. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government (New York: The Free Press, 1966).

Richard L. Meier, A Communications Theory of Urban Growth (Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1962).

How well, we can ask, do communications institutions in our society serve as true centers for transactions initiated from below, for the individual living in a complex society?

Optimists, relying on the new technologies being perfected in communications suggest that access to public communications will increase for the individual and this presumably will cause a surge in the proportion of two-way communication when compared with one-way message patterns. The functions performed by closed channel television and multi-channel cablecast, tape recorders, the linkage of telephone to radio and other developments will result in, among other things, the elevation of the public opinion process to parity with opinions generated at the top of the social structure, a new sense of efficacy for the common man in his attempts to actualize himself in Jaspers' sense, and perhaps, flowing from this, a lessening of the feeling of alienation or disaffection.

It is difficult, however, to assess the potential of such communications technologies for two-way communication without first establishing the meaning of such two-way communication -- the social and psychological functions they may perform -- and this we have attempted to do through an analysis of the usage patterns and kinds of users employing

present mass two-way channels. We have found three functions now being performed for users: opinion presentation, information seeking and provision and the ombudsman or coping function.

Of the three channels studied, newspaper letters serve individuals more preferentially located in the social system, who also appear to be the least anomic. It is used to disseminate opinions more often of a catholic nature. The radio show serves the most people and the most typical kinds of individuals, whose opinions deal with more parochial and personal concerns and more of the content is generated by the programme itself; but it also serves a two-way information function and as an ombudsman for more anomic individuals who need help. The newspaper ombudsman is the most specialized of the three channels and provides direct intervention for individuals who can't cope otherwise.

In addition to defining the present usage and users, this research suggests that some of the channels are operating in a closed system manner in the sense that many issues are raised within the boundaries of the system of broadcaster-to-audience, letters-column to user. This is in part true for the opinion presentation usage, more so with radio, less so with newspaper letters. The ombudsman and

information functions do not share in this.

The study of channels such as these can help to provide a sensitive picture of the state of the population, an index of important problems within the system, at the least. By their very presence, such institutions suggest the need within our society for more institutions devoted to the provision of information and coping which would be readily available by telephone for large segments of the population. At present such channels are self limiting in the sense that some opinion is generated within the system and much that comes from users does not go beyond the subsystem. Thus, it neither informs policy makers of a state of the system -- in the sense that other social indicators are used -- nor is there any assurance that effective action will be taken either on specific issues or classes of events: that opinions expressed, needs indicated will result in changes in the system.

One way, then, in which such quasi-closed two-way systems can be "opened up" would be for policy makers to use such two-way channels in a social indicators fashion, i.e., employ regular monitoring of such channels in order to assess a state of opinion as well as patterns of unmet needs, particularly from individuals less preferentially located.

While it can be argued that this method of making it possible for feedback to have an effect at the top may produce biased results -- in the sense that only certain segments of the population use certain channels -- nevertheless, with time, as opinions, quests for information and help became transferred into further concerned inquiry higher up, more individuals would find it efficacious to use such channels in a manner in which they would be most effective so that such institutions might ultimately come to approximate a true vox populi.

APPENDIX I

WMCA Sample Editorials

Broadcast 8 times December 13-14, 1964

PROMISE THEM ANYTHING, BUT GIVE THEM NOTHING

For 22 months, WMCA: Call For Action has fought for better housing enforcement as one way to wipe out slums.

One hot day last August, Mayor Wagner admitted that Call For Action was right in its accusation that dozens of different city agencies all had their fingers in the housing pie and they were making a mess of it.

So the Mayor gave his City Administrator some orders, and one of them was to set up a single telephone number for all housing complaints, as the very first step toward centralized housing enforcement.

We are now in a wintry December and even that first step hasn't been accomplished. We still don't have that single phone number, slum tenants still get a run-around and housing enforcement is still a mess.

From August to December is a long time to wait for a phone number. How can slum tenants hope to escape from their misery when the city's motto seems to be: "Promise them anything, but give them nothing."

Broadcast 8 times December 27-28, 1964

HOUSING #44

Our city's housing laws are enforced in total administrative chaos. Because of this, hundreds of hardened slumlords get away with criminal exploitation of the poor.

For almost two years, WMCA: Call For Action has said this and made several recommendations to the city, including the creation of a single housing enforcement agency.

The city has done nothing to bring order out of its chaos, except to study the problem. Our recommendations have been under study by the Columbia Law School and the City Administrator for months and months. A preliminary report is to be made to the Mayor before December 31st -- less than one week away.

We hope this means action -- and soon -- for the slum victims of our city government's chaos. We hope it's not just another case of "Promise them anything, but give them nothing."

(375)

Broadcast 8 times February 21-22, 1966

HOUSING #73

About fifty thousand slum tenants are being cheated out of decent housing by a ring of real estate speculators whom we call "Slumlords, Incorporated." WMCA has exposed some of them by name.

We have shown how they make fortunes, while their buildings fall apart. Big profits are being made out of the misery of thousands of men, women and children.

To correct this, WMCA is sponsoring bills to make slumlords personally responsible for repairing their rotten buildings. You can help get the WMCA bills passed.

Send a post card to "Slumlords," WMCA, New York City, 10017. Tell us you support the WMCA bills and we will see that the lawmakers get your message. That's "Slumlords," WMCA, New York City, 10017.

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(492)

APPENDIX II

TOPICS OF LETTER WRITERS

(Coding Breakdown)

I Politics, government and social issues of the day

- environment
- religion
- long hair, youth
- racial problems
- women's lib
- politics
- nationalism
- laws and policy
- strikes
- employment
- alderman invitation

II Local issues and services

- local service
- traffic hazard
- bus, taxi drivers
- recreation-Doidge Park

III Education

IV Sports and Special Events

- sports
- special events
- bingo

V Mass Media

- media
- offensive material
- coverage
- Needham
- advertising
- magazine article

VI Animals

VII Complaints of a personal nature or dealing with products or services

- personal problems
- products & services
- mistreatment

VIII Health and Housing

health
housing

IX Other and Miscellaneous

music
organizations

APPENDIX III

SOUND-OFF

(Coding Breakdown)

I Consumer Problems

- billings
- product complaints
- contractual obligations
- firm
- landlord-tenant

II Government Problems

- tax
- pollution
- city services
- legal problems

III Other

- neighbour problems
- family problems
- information

IV Media problems

- media complaint

V Health, Education and Welfare Problems

- medical service

VI Employment Problems

- employer

APPENDIX IV

OPEN-LINE CALLERS

(Coding Breakdown)

I Politics, government and social issues of the day

- laws & policies
- politics
- strikes
- militant
- Irish struggle
- war measures /FLQ
- environmental problems
- prejudice
- religion
- drugs

II Local Issues and Services

- local services
- police
- road conditions
- fraud, theft
- parking
- meter reading
- L.T.C.
- accidents

III Education

IV Sports & Special Events

- special events
- sports events
- Grand Theatre

V Mass Media

- contest
- disasters, storms
- location
- media
- weather
- poem
- historical facts

VI Animals

- animals
- Humane society

VII Complaints of a personal nature or dealing with products or services

personal problems
wallet
customs & etiquette
truck drivers
baby sitting
camp
products and services
insurance
car dealers
model train

VIII Health and Housing

landlord-tenant
cooking, diet
health
housing
wheelchair
chemicals

IX Other & Miscellaneous

organizations

APPENDIX V

Questions Relating to Feedback

in Communications Questionnaire

1. Name (last) (first)

2. What was the last grade completed (or highest educational level you reached(? Your spouse?

3. What is your religion?
   - Protestant
   - Roman Catholic
   - Other - Christian
   - Jewish
   - Other - non Christian
   - None

4. What is your main occupation? (If not working, what was your last job or occupation?)

5. What is your family's total yearly income from all sources? (Show respondent a cue card.)
   a) Less than $3,000
   b) $3,000-$4,999
   c) $5,000-$6,999
   d) $7,000-$9,999
   e) $10,000-$14,999
   f) $15,000-$19,999
   g) $20,000-$24,999
   h) $25,000 and Over
   i) Refuse to answer, don't know
   j) Not working, no income

6. Which newspapers do you get daily? (Specific titles needed). (Get=Receive, Buy or Subscribe to).

7. What is the main reason why you buy - 1st paper, then 2nd paper, 3rd etc. (Circle appropriate number below for each newspaper).
   - Local coverage
   - National news
   - International news
   - Editorial features
   - Sports
   - Other

8. Have you ever written a letter to the letters-to-the-editor column in a newspaper?
   Yes
   No
   Don't Know

9. Was the letter ever published?

10. If Yes, how many letters have you written in the past two years?

11. How many letters were published?

13. What was each of these letters about?

14. Have you ever contacted "Sound Off" in the London Free Press?
   Yes
   No

15. If YES, over what issue?

16. What action resulted, if any?

17. Have you ever called the Open Line show?
   Never
   Once
   A few times
   Quite often
   Every day

18. Why did you call this program?

19. We would like to ask if you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statement(s):
   Nowadays, a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.
      Agree
      Disagree

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