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Research Notes:

ETV production methods versus educational intention — some unintended biases

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Recent discussion in this journal has drawn attention to the need for examination of the effects on an audience of ETV production methods traditionally employed. It has been suggested, for instance, that the effectiveness of ETV presentation may be improved by the adoption of a 'textbook' approach involving a long process of checking and re-checking at both the molecular level (proof reading) and the molar level (review by consultants) before the final product is released. Notwithstanding the logistic problems of any lengthy process, such arguments will bear extension. Indeed it sometimes occurs that co-operation between academic disciplines of diverse style but similar interests can create awareness of the ways in which the impact of ETV can be improved. While the subject specialist may advise on details of content, and the audio-visualist on aspects of presentation and production, the psychologist can play a part by alerting both parties to unintended behavioural consequences of their techniques.

For some time psychologists have been studying aspects of communication ranging from the transmission of errors by morse-key operators to the effects on social communication of gesture, posture and 'behavioural' signals. In the middle ground (and perhaps more germane to ETV) lie studies of *context* and its influence on perception. For example, Levy* placed single photographic portraits of 'neutral' faces in arrays of other

photographs where the faces looked 'tense'. Instead of seeing the neutral portraits as neutral, observers saw them (in the context of the 'tense' photographs) as 'extremely relaxed'. By this and other tests, Levy was able to show that the context sharply interfered with normal perception of the photographs.

In ETV production similar types of context effect occur, perhaps due to the conflicting interests of the production team and the educators, and sometimes to the detriment of a presentation's educational value. The possibility that production techniques in regular usage may reduce a programme's educational impact certainly deserves scrutiny. How unfortunate it would be for a technically perfect presentation with intrinsic educational merit to be undermined by the unforeseen psychological effects of production technique alone.

In the standard presentation of a recorded lecture, for instance, a fairly basic tenet of the producer is that unrelieved 'straight' shots of the speaker can be tedious. While the focus or position of one camera is altered, shots of the audience are sometimes inserted; camera angles are varied; close-up shots are employed along with long shots, and so on. Though standard practice, the educational value of such manipulations is as yet untried: in the light of Levy's

findings, what effect do they have on a lecturer's recorded impact? Do shots of an audience, for example, indeed help to retain the viewer's interest, or might they have entirely unintended effects?

Bias in audience reaction

To permit an experimental test of these questions, two videotapes were prepared, each showing the same sequence from a lecture on welfare economics. The sequence lasted 3½ minutes and was made with a single camera at a fixed distance from the lecturer. At the same points in each recording, shots of an audience were inserted, prepared independently with the help of a group of student actors and edited into the lecture to give the illusion that audience and lecturer had been together at the time of recording. On one tape, members of the audience were shown looking interested, attentive, stimulated and impressed ('positive'), and on the other tape they appeared bored, inattentive, stultified and unimpressed ('negative'). Care was taken in editing to ensure that the amounts of time devoted to lecturer and audience shots were identical in both tapes. And the prediction that judgments of the lecturer would be influenced by the types of audience activity shown was then tested on two groups of students, each of which saw one of the tapes.

On the assessment of the viewers'

*Levy, L. H. 'Context effects in social perception.' *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.* 61, 295-7. 1960.

responses by psychological rating scale techniques, it was found that this prediction had been convincingly upheld. In the 'negative' condition the lecturer herself was seen as significantly more uninteresting and unpopular—results which validate the credibility of the editing process, and show that the two tapes really did present a 'positive' audience on the one hand and a 'negative' one on the other. But by far the most interesting and significant findings were that in the negative tape the lecturer was seen as more confusing, more shallow and more inexperienced. It is important to remember here that the presentation of the lecture and its content were absolutely identical in the two tapes and these effects cannot, therefore, be due to any activity on the lecturer's part. They are due

solely to the inclusion of the audience shots in the final production, indicating that production techniques and educational intentions may indeed come into sharp conflict due to effects on the viewers which such production methods can create at a psychological level. In itself this indicates that technical presentation methods may need somewhat closer scrutiny if ETV is to achieve its maximal educational impact.

But there is another side to the coin. In the positive tape the lecturer was seen as more straightforward, more profound, more interesting, more popular and more expert. Whilst one would be loath to argue that inherently boring lecturers should be cushioned from their just deserts by production techniques such as the insertion of

positive audience shots, these results do suggest that intrinsically difficult subjects could be enlivened somewhat for the viewers by shots of an audience reacting positively and being seen as interested and involved. While such consideration will serve greatly to enhance the educational value of ETV techniques *ipso facto*, it should also encourage greater co-operation between production teams and the educational expositor. Eventually, the final product of their collaboration must become more clearly the sole province of neither and serve the credit of both.

The authors are grateful to Miss Sheila Smith for allowing her recorded lecture to be used in the experiment, and to Mr S. McHale for his technical assistance.

International convention on satellite signals signed in Brussels

An international convention which may help to prevent pirating of TV programmes sent by satellite was signed at the Palais d'Egmont, Brussels, in May after the Diplomatic Conference of more than 50 States which had been meeting since the 6th May had adopted the text unanimously.

The Convention places the obligation on contracting states 'to take adequate measures to prevent the distribution of any programme-carrying signal by any distributor for whom the signal emitted to or through the satellite is not intended'.

Only the currently used point-to-point satellites needing a ground relay station are dealt with by the Convention, not direct broadcasting satellites. Article 3 lays down that the Convention shall not apply where the signals emitted by, or on

behalf of, the originating organization are intended for direct reception from the satellite by the general public.

Among the exceptions provided for is one allowing developing countries to distribute signals if this is solely for the purpose of teaching, including adult education, or scientific research.

The Conference, convened jointly by Unesco and the World Intellectual Property Organization, approved the text of a letter to be sent by the President of the Conference to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. This refers to a proposal by the USSR, Byelorussian SSR, Ukrainian SSR, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to insert an article in the Convention under which each contracting state would

undertake to exclude from programmes transmitted by satellite any material detrimental to the maintenance of international peace and security, publicizing ideas of war, national and racial hatred and aimed at interfering in the domestic affairs of other states or undermining their national laws, customs and traditions.

Although this issue was thought to be an important one by a significant number of delegations, says the text of the letter, the conference considered that it was not within the scope of the conference and it was agreed to send the report and verbatim records of the conference with the letter so that they might be submitted to UN member states and the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.