



Photos: (above) CBS; (right) NBC

Water-cooled power tubes (above) used in a CBS television transmitter. . . . Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse (right) are televised through NBC'S experimental transmitter in New York.

# Television to Sell?

By Frank R. Elliott

*Experimental Psychologist and Author*



**W**ILL television pay its way? That's a question worrying American television research men and promoters more than their engineering problems. Advertising is what keeps radio going in the United States. But will John Q. and Mary A. Public give attention to television advertising—already dubbed "teladvertising"? Will they remember—and buy—televised products? How much teladvertising will they accept?

Psychologists are supplying some answers to those questions. And what they are saying isn't altogether reassuring to financiers and equipment manufacturers who had looked upon television as a promised land, a televiset in every cottage, and producers of toothpaste and trucks clamoring to purchase television time.

The early optimism for the commercial success of television is, however, understandable. It is elementary that the success of advertising is dependent upon arousing desires for goods. The printed page does it through the eye; the radio does it through the ear. But behold television! It combines both appeals. *Ergo*: it should be twice as effective.

To understand that course of reasoning, you need but listen to a speaker first with your eyes closed, then with

them open. This simple experiment will prove to your own satisfaction that you "take in" more of the speech when you see and hear simultaneously. Or, as the psychologists put it, multiple stimulation of human sense organs increases and intensifies reception.

Recently I demonstrated this with more than 25,000 people in the emotional-frame-of-the-life situation. Poster or eye advertising of an exhibit got attention from 25.4 percent of the audience; radio or ear advertising of the same exhibit, 32.1 percent; simultaneous poster and radio advertising comparable to television, 33.4 percent.

People likewise *remember* better when they have both seen and heard than when they have either only seen or only heard. This conclusion is warranted by a study made of more than 90,000 high-school seniors. Seven times as many, in proportion to numbers, responded with follow-up inquiries after they had been furnished literature and a speaker as when they had received literature only. Twice as large a percentage responded with university enrollment following combined visual-auditory presentation as compared with visual presentation alone.

A further series of studies, conducted with the coöperation of the Columbia Broadcasting System and Colum-

bia University, confirms this. Memory for trade names presented simultaneously by radio and on the screen was from 15.2 to 46 percent better than was memory following screen presentation alone, and from .5 to 30 percent better than from radio alone.

Even so subtle a response as that of a change in public opinion shows advantages of the television mode. A recent experiment in New York City with 400 college students showed that their views could be changed decidedly more by seeing and hearing an argument simultaneously than by reading the identical argument alone or hearing it by radio alone. If President Roosevelt won the 1936 election largely through his radio "fireside chats," as has been said, he probably would have won even more handily had his audience been able to see him as he talked.

Very few people would trade the sound films for the old-fashioned silent pictures. Why? For the simple reason that sight-sound subject matter is clearer than that presented to the eye alone. Good teachers recognize this



Photos: (above) Philco Radio & Television Corp.; (right) NBC

Careful makeup (above) is an important factor in television. . . . Through the eyes of the Iconoscope camera, Metropolitan Opera Tenor Mario Chamlee (right) makes a television test in an NBC Radio City studio.

advantage and are careful to illustrate highlights of their lectures on a blackboard.

With all these demonstrated advantages of the eye-ear approach, why should promoters have a doubt about teladvertising paying the bills for television?

One source of alarm arises from a mechanical limitation of television itself. Ultrashort waves of television without "boosters" reach only about as far as the horizon, some 25 to 40 miles. "Boosters" are necessary to televise from New York to Philadelphia. Furthermore, it is at present impractical to envisage television service without "boosters" extending very far beyond the limits of a score of the largest cities of America.

To the manufacturer who, through advertising, seeks national sales, that is a fact of dollar-and-sense interest. If teladvertising isn't going to reach the 100 million or so people outside the television zones, why should he advertise? If he doesn't, teladvertising must depend upon local merchants and others who seek to develop customers in urban areas. They may be induced to teladvertise—if John Q. and Mary A. Public accept teladvertising.

What will be the reaction of John and Mary? Perhaps an inkling of it can be gleaned from the experience of the short advertising films sometimes slipped between features of a motion-picture program. Studies and investigations point to the conclusion that unless the ad film is unquestionably clever, short, and snappy, the patron's attention sags. Boys and girls often will snicker. Collegiate brothers and sisters will wisecrack. Father and mother will audibly begin to wonder whether the icebox door was closed and the kitchen door locked.

All of which is surprising, for movie advertising, as has often been remarked, offers a tremendous potential market. Each week, some 88 million Americans sit before the silver screen. But apparently they don't like to mix their thrills and their commercial education, for it is a plain and simple fact that advertising hasn't caught on in a big way with theatergoers or advertisers.

Television in the home, of course, will not be exactly like sound films in the theater; it may be even worse from the advertiser's standpoint. The theater



patron pays for his seat; he gives voluntary attention in semidarkness; distractions are at a minimum; he feels "alone." At home, on the other hand, there is a hurly-burly of activity. The telephone or the doorbell rings. There's no social taboo on conversation. After the novelty of television has worn off, how is it to hold attention amid these and other distractions—to say nothing of brief interludes of teladvertising?

The difficulties of *attention-holding* in television will be realized when we compare television with newspaper, magazine, or even radio advertising. If the newspaper reader's attention wavers, there is the page to come back to; if the magazine reader quits the page, it is there hours, days, or even weeks later for his attention. Not so with television. Let the eye wander from the small screen—even for seconds—and that teladvertising is gone, never to be retrieved.

Radio makes much less claim on fixed attention than television does. Sound is nondirectional. Turn your head away from the radio set; turn your back to it; look out the window; tidy up the room; knit, sew, mind the baby, glance at the newspaper headlines—you can still hear the radio.

If the televised program is so wordy as to give the complete story via the ear, it will be so overloaded with talk as to be a-repetitious bore. If there is appropriate balance

But there's another thing worrying the television gentlemen. It is custom. Newspapers are thought of primarily as media of current information; magazines present information and entertainment; and the tendency is to regard movies, the stage, and radio chiefly as sources of entertainment.

When radio was in its infancy, educators hailed it as a means of formal instruction; now many think of it as attracting attention to education through good entertainment. You may not agree on that point, but, nevertheless, isn't it probable that John Q. and Mary A. Public will expect from television even more entertainment than they do from radio? If they transform one end of the living-room into a stage and the rest of it into a family auditorium, will they react kindly to the breaks in the dramatic continuity of their entertainment that teladvertising would entail?

Aye, there's the rub. Certainly the new eye-ear medium will have tremendous psychological advantages from multiple stimulation of the human sense organs. It will undoubtedly leave a deep impress upon the memory. It will have striking attention-getting advantages. But will it succeed at the extremely difficult task of *simultaneously holding both eye and ear attention*? Finally, *will the public taste tolerate enough teladvertising to foot the heavy television bill*? If not, what then? Will television fade into nonimportance?

Will Americans, perhaps, one day pay a tax to the Federal Government, as Europeans do for radio, to maintain television stations and provide programs to suit their taste?



Photo: (above) American Steel Export Co.; (right) NBC

*Radio amazes Wandorobo (East Africa) tribesmen (above), but wait till they see the artist, too—as can be done with a television receiving set (right). The picture is reflected in the lid's mirror lining.*

between words and pictures, as there must be, then both ear and eye attention must be given simultaneously. Failure of either must mean inadequate reception. True, the trade name in teladvertising may be heard without being seen, but will this be any better than less expensive radio advertising?

Commercial advertising over the air in America takes up only about 5 percent of total radio time—and some listeners object even to that much. Publications allow up to 60 percent of their space for advertisements. Readers seldom object to advertising—some listeners do.

