Religious broadcasting influence on Presbyterians: An Omaha case study of diffusion

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Religious Broadcasting Influence on Presbyterians: 
An Omaha Case Study of Diffusion

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of Communication
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
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May 1997
THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Chairperson

Date April 10, 1997
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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the diffusion of the ideological messages of conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist religious broadcasters upon the decision-makers and the influences upon the social system of the congregations within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA.

The study revealed that most of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery do not listen to or watch religious broadcast programs on a regular basis, however, about one-third of the decision-makers do watch and listen. The study showed the ideological messages of the religious broadcasters do not play a large part in the opinion formation process of the decision-makers with regard to controversial issues and political elections. Contemporary Christian music was the type of programming which appeared to have the greatest influence. Nearly 60 percent of the survey respondents said their congregations included elements of contemporary worship into their regularly scheduled services. The most often mentioned element of contemporary worship was Christian music. About one-third of the respondents indicated that religious broadcasts were an influence upon the formatting of their congregation worship service.
Acknowledgments

Several individuals played key roles in the development of this thesis. The thesis committee; Dr. Jeremy Lipschultz, Dr. Michael Sherer and Dr. James Thorson; provided leadership, guidance and encouragement throughout the process. The assistant director for Academic Computing at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Frank Hartranft, provided invaluable assistance in the statistical analysis of the survey instrument data. The entire faculty and staff of the Communication Department of the University of Nebraska at Omaha were all very supportive. Thank you to Dr. Bart Brenner, the Executive Presbyter of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery and to the staff of the Presbytery for the many resources which played a salient part in the research for this thesis. Last, but by no means least, I wish to thank my dear wife, Karen, who provided a constant source of sustaining inspiration which was needed to bring this thesis project to completion.
Chapter I
Introduction

The existing literature on diffusion and theory on social systems provides guidelines that are used to describe and understand how innovations and new ideas are adopted within a social system (Valente 1995; Rogers 1983; Mendez 1968).

Synthesizing the two constructs, diffusion and social systems, for the study of an ideology was at the heart of the Strodthoff, Hawkins, and Schoenfeld (1985) study which focused on environmentalism as a social movement. Strodthoff et al. (1985) found the ideology diffusion process consists of incremental dynamic steps which flow from media attention toward becoming a social reality within a particular social system. Strodthoff et al. (1985) concluded that an ideology follows a path over time from being unfocused information which is broadcast by the media to a substantive concern for a social system organization.

The ideology to be looked at in this thesis consists of the conservative, evangelical, fundamentalist information being programmed on local religious broadcast stations in Omaha, Nebraska. Research has shown that the majority of contemporary paid-time religious programming contains a conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist ideology (Thomas 1989; Peck 1993).
The terms conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist have specific operational definitions for this thesis. Conservative is defined as adhering to and tending to preserve the existing order. Conservative is one of the terms applied to the religious and politically active right (Hoover 1988). The conservative ideology which dominates religious broadcast programming manifests itself in the approach taken toward issues such as abortion and homosexual rights. The views expressed by most religious broadcasters regarding abortion and homosexual rights are based on a premise which perceives these topics to be examples of deviant sinful conduct (Gerbner, Gross, Hoover, Morgan, Signorielli, Cotugno, Gallup Organization & Wuthnow 1984). The religious broadcasting audience identifies with the conservative view. For example, Gerbner et al. (1984) found religious conservatives identify themselves as advocates of tougher laws against pornography, opposing an end to nuclear weapons research and supporting more traditional roles for women. Evangelical denotes an attitude which is in agreement with the teachings of the New Testament. Evangelicalism stresses divine inspiration, authority and sufficiency of Biblical scriptures, salvation by faith in the redeeming work of Christ and spiritual regeneration. Evangelicals consider the spreading of the Gospel message through evangelism and missionary work as the main goal of
the church (Hoover 1988). Fundamentalism is defined as a response to modernism. Bendroth (1996) defines fundamentalism as a cultural roadmap for Christians who want to maintain their supernaturalistic faith in an increasingly materialistic culture.

Diffusion theory attempts to describe the process of how an innovation is communicated through a channel over a specified time period among members of a social system. Innovation can consist of a new idea or series of ideas, a new thought process, a new product, or any number of inventions, creations or breakthroughs. Diffusion theory relates to the communication process where participants create and share information with the goal of reaching a greater mutual understanding. The channel can take several different forms. These forms range from mass communication to interpersonal communication (Valente 1995; Rogers 1983; Brown 1981).

Understanding what is meant by the word "system" is key to defining social systems theory. A system is a set of objects together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes (Hall & Fagen 1975). Systems theory covers the specific concepts of wholeness, growth, differentiation, hierarchial order, dominance, control and competition. Systems theory attempts to explain principles which are interdisciplinary, in an effort to generalize
explanations to cover the broad scope of organizations and social groups. A synthesis approach is used in systems theory to put together ideas, concepts, principles and axioms which form the basis for generalizations (Bertalanffy 1975; Rogers 1983).

In this case study the social system is the Missouri River Valley Presbytery and the diffusion process is how the ideological messages being broadcast on religious electronic media are received and processed by the lay and clergy leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

Social integration of new ideas within the local congregation system have been shown to be related to the consumption of religious broadcast programs (Welch, Johnson, and Pilgrim 1990). Welch et al. (1990) confirmed that the frequency of communication by church members with church leaders about current topics discussed on religious broadcast programs is related to the amount of time spent watching and listening to religious broadcasting.

While research has shown a relationship (Welch et al. 1990), various other studies have yielded different results concerning the impact of religious broadcasting upon the local congregation. For example, clergy and lay leaders among the mainline denominations have expressed concern about studies which have demonstrated that religious programming represents a substitute for church participation.
and attendance (Welch et al. 1990; Hoover 1988). Yet the research (Gerbner et al. 1984; Wuthnow 1984) for the Annenberg School of Communications study of religion and television concluded that consumers of religious broadcasting were likely to be regular contributors to the local congregation. The regular contributors also have been shown to be the same consumers of religious broadcasting who were also the ones attending regular worship services (Gerbner et al. 1984). The Presbyterian Church USA was among the 38 sponsors of the Gerbner et al. (1984) research project.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the knowledge, opinions, and behaviors which result from the knowledge level and opinions of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA regarding religious broadcasting.

The decision-makers are defined as those individuals who serve in leadership positions of the local presbytery. The operational definition of the local presbytery is based upon the governing structure of the Presbyterian Church USA.

The Presbyterian Church USA is governed by representative bodies composed of ordained clergy and lay leaders. These bodies are called session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. The session (made up of elected elders) is the governing body of the local congregation. The presbytery
consists of a group of congregations. Synods are groups of presbyteries and the General Assembly is the national governing body (The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA Part II Book of Order 1995-96).

The structure of the Presbyterian Church USA provides a way of identifying a specific social system within the organization. The constitutionally defined structures provide a method of narrowing and focusing research on a specific, well-defined unit. The local presbytery is the focus of this study. The study of just one presbytery makes it possible to devise a manageable research project on one part of the church's social system. The innovations at the presbytery level can be studied to determine if there is a relationship between religious broadcasting and the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA.

The Missouri River Valley Presbytery is a part of the Lakes and Prairies Synod of the Presbyterian Church USA and covers a geographic area which encompasses portions of eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. The Missouri River Valley Presbytery has 58 congregations with a total membership of 15,225 (Comparative Statistics Presbyterian Church USA 1994).

The Presbyterian Church USA is a mainline denomination with 11,399 congregations and a membership of 2,698,262 in
Portions of this thesis replicate parts of earlier studies (Johnstone 1971; Parker, Barry and Smythe 1955) which focused on who listens to religious broadcasts and the listening/viewing habits of pastors and their families.

Johnstone (1971) looked into the influence of religious radio programs, generally, and how much influence, if any, the Lutheran Hour program exerted among listeners. Parker, Barry and Smythe (1955) interviewed pastors to determine their attitudes toward the policies and practices in religious broadcasting. Parker et al. (1955) collected data on pastors' likes and dislikes about religious broadcasting, opinions regarding influence that religious broadcasting had on their church members, and what religious programs pastors watched on TV or listened to on the radio.

The role of leadership is strongly related to interest level -- as the rate of interest escalates in a given subject by an individual, the role of influential opinion leader for that particular person increases in the communication process (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). The pioneering work of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) explored the role of opinion leaders in the communication process and concluded that leadership is more than just a case of being more interested in a topic or field of study than others; rather leadership is connected with being interested when
others are interested as well. The relationship between personal influence and interest level of opinion (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) is tested in this thesis by identifying the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA regarding religious broadcasting. The amount of knowledge, the attitudes, and the beliefs about religious broadcasting by the Presbytery decision-makers are measurable indicators of how much the ideological message of religious broadcasters has diffused into the social system of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

For perspective the literature review for this thesis covers a history of religious broadcasting, a look at the Presbyterian Church USA and the theoretical constructs of diffusion and systems theory.
Chapter II
Literature Review

Religious broadcasting dates to the very beginning of the broadcast industry. One of the first documented broadcasts was on January 2, 1921, when Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania radio station KDKA broadcast a worship service from Calvary Episcopal Church (Ellens 1974; Hill 1983; Voskuil 1990; Martin 1990).

Religious Broadcasting History

The roots of modern religious radio and television formats come from a combination of urban revivalism and the Golden Age of radio broadcasting (Bendroth 1996: Schultze 1991). Revivalism was a movement away from the mainline denominations to restore what certain individuals saw as conditions and principles of religious salvation (Bendroth 1996; Schultze 1991; Frankl 1984; Frankl 1987; Frankl 1988).

The Golden Age of radio is looked upon as the years where radio was the dominant media for news and entertainment. Sterling and Kittross (1978) defined the Golden Age of radio as 1934 to 1941. These were the years before television was a readily accessible form of electronic media and radio provided the American public with their news, information, and entertainment.
An example of the revivalist movement is that of prominent urban revivalist Charles Grandison Finney (Frankl 1988; Frankl 1990). Finney withdrew his Broadway Tabernacle in New York City from the Presbyterian Church and established an independent conservative movement (Frankl 1988). This split between liberal and conservative parallels the current situation where radio and television evangelists, for the most part, are separate from the mainstream religious organizations and denominations (Peck 1991; Hoover 1988; Virts 1980).

The Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, founded by Dwight L. Moody, had already been in operation for 30 years when radio broadcasting began in the 1920s. The fund raising strength of the Moody organization provided the opportunity to take advantage of the new radio broadcasting technology. The impetus for the Moody organization to use their resources for radio was the potential audience of millions. Founder Dwight L. Moody spoke to hundreds of thousands of people in his lifetime, but the new technology of radio provided a way to reach millions on a regular basis. The Moody Bible Institute put WMBI on the air in Chicago in 1926. WMBI is the oldest listener-sponsored station in the United States, and the Moody Radio Network is a major producer of Christian programming which is distributed
nationally (Armstrong 1979; Hill 1983).

Finney and Moody set the stage for radio and television preachers such as Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham to utilize the technology of broadcasting to reach the mass audience that the early revivalists could only imagine (Frankl 1988; Armstrong 1979).

Academic studies which have focused on religious broadcasting have made only a surface scratch in trying to identify and understand the impact of religious broadcasting upon the local congregation (Schultze 1985; Schultze 1988). There is very little literature about how religious broadcasting affects American culture and religious life from historical and cultural perspectives (Schultze 1988). Studies which have analyzed audience measurements have been inconsistent, and questions have been raised about the significance of viewing or listening results which are based on available information (Hoover 1988). Very few researchers have concentrated on the relationship between religion and mass media use (Buddenbaum and Stout 1996).

An example is the limited amount of textbook space devoted to the subject of religious broadcasting. In Head (1972) there was one reference to religious broadcasting. The Head (1972) textbook mentioned religious broadcasting by
focusing on the Red Lion, Pennsylvania WGCB 1967 fairness doctrine case involving a demand of equal time because the station carried a program by the Reverend Billy James Hargis. The index of Head (1972) references this mention of religious broadcasting under the heading of "right-wing syndicated programs."

Sterling and Kittross (1978) mentioned religious broadcasting three times. Each time only the name of a religious broadcast program is provided under the category called, "other programs." There were no details provided about the programs.

Head and Sterling (1982) showed nine references to religious broadcasting covering about nine textbook pages in a textbook which contains a total of 642 pages. Head and Sterling (1982) discussed religious broadcasting origins, growth, formats, First Amendment issues, and aspects regarding the selling of airtime for religious programs. Head and Sterling (1982) used the term "startling" to describe the growth of religious broadcasting in the 1970s and the term "right-wing fundamentalists" was used to portray the issues discussed on religious broadcast programs.

Head and Sterling (1991) contained nine references to religious broadcasting. Head and Sterling (1991) recognized
the continued growth of religious broadcasting, but no further description or analysis was offered than earlier editions provided. It is interesting to note that Head and Sterling (1991) included data from the 1989 Broadcasting/Cable yearbook which showed the third most popular radio format in the United States was religious/gospel. Despite religious programming being near the top of the popularity chart, only brief mentions of religious broadcasting were contained in nine pages within a 437 page textbook.

In Head, Sterling and Schofield (1994) the number of references to religious broadcasting increased to thirteen. Head, Sterling and Schofield (1994) included an updated chart from the 1992 Broadcasting & Cable Market Place which showed the category of religious/gospel continued to be the third most popular radio format in the United States. Despite religious programming continuing to be up near the top of the popularity chart, only brief mentions of religious broadcasting were contained in thirteen pages within a 579 page textbook.

Only a handful of studies have been published which addressed questions about religious radio and television. Who listens to and watches religious broadcasting programs? What is watched or listened to? Why have people continued to
tune into religious broadcasts? Do pastors and their families tune into religious broadcasts more often than the rest of the population? Is the split between the conservative evangelical broadcasters and the mainline denominations widening or narrowing? (Hill 1983)

Fundamentalist radio

Cyclical waves of fundamentalist Christian Right activity have been identified from the 1920s through the 1980s (Pettey 1990; Wilcox 1994). The up-cycle of fundamentalist Christian Right activity during the 1920s coincided with the beginning days of broadcasting. During the 1920s, radio communication technology had reached a point where broadcasting to a mass audience had become feasible. The growth in the number of radio experimenters and amateur radio operators showed an interest by the public in this form of communication. The novelty of wireless communication began to fade and the technology began to be viewed as a way to get information and entertainment to a mass audience (Wyatt 1992; Head and Sterling 1991).

At the time the religious fundamentalists were in a strong position to jump on the new technology of radio and start building their base in the broadcasting industry (Bendroth 1996; Frankl 1988; Hoover 1988). The
evangelical fundamentalists had a history of being leaders in the development of all major media in the United States (Schultze 1996, Bendroth 1996).


The Praise The Lord (PTL) program of Jim and Tammy Baker had a profound effect on religious broadcasting, both in its success and in its failure. The success of the Baker's approach was a combination of personal charisma, real-life soap opera drama, and high-tech television communication techniques. Baker's message that all Christians could have a fun-loving Jim and Tammy life style which combined materialism and the Christian faith was appealing to millions of faithful television viewers. This
approach proved successful in attracting and maintaining their television audience. The failure of PTL came when the materialism took over, and the Christian faith was left behind. Millions of dollars went to support lavish lifestyles and not to further the ministry work. The widely publicized scandal and subsequent conviction and prison sentence handed down to Jim Baker tarnished the image of religious broadcasters everywhere (Schultze 1991).

Research into these cyclical waves of fundamentalism predicts another peak in the cycle as the world approaches the millennium in the year 2000. The year 2000 has special significance for many fundamentalists who believe deeply in Biblical prophecy which predicts how the world will end (Wilcox 1994).

Neuendorf (1990) identified four eras of religious broadcasting:

Era 1: Precommercial (through about 1927);
Era 2: Sustaining-time religious broadcasting (1927 - 1960);
Era 3: Paid-time and the growth of the electronic church (1960 - 1980s); and
There appears to be a similarity in the pattern of cycles of Christian Right fundamentalism activity identified by (Wilcox 1994) and the eras of religious broadcasting depicted by (Neuendorf 1990). This possible relationship is another area where further research is needed in the field of religious broadcasting.

Midwestern religious broadcasting


The first nondenominational religious service ever carried on radio was broadcast Sunday April 8, 1923 on WOAW (later became WOW) in Omaha, Nebraska. This first nondenominational service radio broadcast was conducted by Christian and Missionary Alliance preacher, Reverend R.R. Brown of Omaha. Reverend Brown's "Radio Chapel Service" ministered for many years to what became known as the "World Radio Congregation" (Ward 1994; Wyatt 1992; Voskuil 1990; Hill 1983; Armstrong 1979).

On January 25, 1927 a 150 watt religious broadcasting radio station was put on the air from a local hardware store in Boone, Iowa by the Reverend Charley Crawford. Reverend
Crawford served the Congregational Church in Boone as well as the Boone Bible College and the Boone Boys Home. Reverend Crawford needed help to run the station and turned to his daughter Lois. In the early years of broadcasting the United States government required a First Class Radiotelephone license holder be on duty to operate any radio station so Lois Crawford began studying electrical theory, rules and regulations. Lois Crawford became the first female in the United States to obtain a First Class Radiotelephone license (Ward 1994; Armstrong 1979).

In the early years of religious broadcasting both the mainline traditional denominations (Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant) as well as evangelical churches non-denominational and interdenominational) took advantage of the technology to reach out to the listening public. The different monetary support methods used by the two groups and their opposing viewpoints on certain key issues soon lead to a split which had a profound effect upon the make-up of religious broadcasting. The different views (1) spiritual versus social, and (2) commercial support versus listener non-commercial support -- caused a split in the way religious programming met financial obligations (Virts 1980). The mainline denominations preferred listener supported non-commercial funding for broadcasting religious
programs. The evangelicals saw nothing wrong with serving the spiritual needs of listeners by buying airtime or selling commercial announcements (Virts 1980; Ward 1994).

The "Old Fashioned Revival Hour," hosted by Charles Fuller, is an example of this split. Fuller's religious radio program on the Mutual Radio Network's affiliated stations (most of these stations were secular outlets) reached an estimated audience of 20 million every week during World War II. Fuller faced opposition from the Federal Council of Churches, an organization sponsored by mainline traditional groups representing Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism who opposed paid religious broadcasting. Under pressure from the Federal Council of Churches, Mutual dropped Fuller from their network in 1949.

Fuller was fortunate because he was able to get back on the air almost immediately since the brand new ABC network, in 1949, was eager for revenue sources, including religious programming (Burgan 1996; Martin 1990; Hill 1983).

The alliance between conservative religion and the electronic media, and how the evangelicals have come to dominate the airwaves of religious broadcasters, is one of the most noteworthy religious events in the United States (Litman & Bain 1989; Voskuil 1990).
The domination of the conservatives on the religious airwaves resulted from a combination of the disagreement among churches over the propriety of purchasing airtime and the ban which networks placed on selling time to religious broadcasters. The ban on paid network time for religious broadcasts resulted from the negative impact of highly politicized sermons (Armstrong 1979; Schultze 1990; Voskuil 1990).

One of the most prominent examples of an individual who broadcast highly politicized sermons was Father Charles Coughlin. Father Coughlin was a Canadian-born Roman Catholic priest who moved to Royal Oak, Michigan in 1926. Father Coughlin recognized the potential of broadcasting to reach a mass audience in the United States and began his radio ministry on WJR in Detroit. Within seven years Father Coughlin had expanded his ministry to other radio stations and the CBS Radio Network. Father Coughlin's audience peaked at forty-five million in the 1930s as he verbally attacked the policies of Franklin Roosevelt and proposed his own socialist solutions to end the pain and suffering of the masses during the great depression. During a broadcast Coughlin called Roosevelt "stupid" for appointing Hugo Black to the Supreme Court. Coughlin gained an anti-semitic reputation for a pro-Nazi speech broadcast November 20,
1938. Coughlin eventually received a reprimand from his Bishop and the broadcasts were canceled. At this same time the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) adopted a strict new code which prohibited all controversial speakers from buying air time on radio unless they appeared on a panel where other views were also presented (Ellens 1974). The new NAB code brought an end to religious broadcasters buying time because the religious broadcasters fell into the category of controversial speakers.

Eventually, The National Council of Churches (made up of mostly mainline denominations) reached agreements with the networks to produce religious programming for the networks. The networks liked this mainline denomination monopoly because they had control and could pre-empt programs produced by sectarian, evangelical, fundamentalist Protestant groups which fell into the category of controversial speakers (Voskuil 1990). The evangelicals were frozen out, in large numbers, and the stage was set for their entry back into broadcasting by starting new stations and buying existing stations in the years following World War II (Ward 1994).

Evangelical and independent religious broadcasters recognized that there was a need to organize in response to more and more network doors being closed to religious
programming. The National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) was organized April 12, 1944 and officially incorporated on December 18, 1944 (Hawkins 1996).

Regulatory and market conditions, as well as technological advancements, have contributed to the growth of religious broadcasting. While the major secular networks limited broadcast time for religious programming in the 1930s, 1940s, and to some extent in the 1950s, market conditions changed by the 1960s. Secular broadcasters and networks became interested again in the revenue generated by airing religious programs after huge amounts of advertising dollars were lost when tobacco and liquor advertisements were banned from the airwaves (Frankl 1988). Increased competition from more and more broadcast outlets, and cable services, enticed owners and programmers to look at religious broadcasts as sources of revenue, not just a way to fulfill public service obligations (Frankl 1988).

Deregulation of the broadcast industry during the 1980s divided rules into two categories -- behavioral regulation and structural regulation (Head, Sterling and Schofield 1994). The deregulation philosophy was to seek to discard or at least minimize behavioral rules and maintain only those structural rules which shaped the overall marketplace and terms on which would-be licensees could enter the
marketplace (Head, Sterling and Schofield 1994). The two deregulation changes which had the greatest impact upon religious broadcasters were the rule modifications which permitted the ownership of more broadcast licenses by a single entity and the elimination of the fairness doctrine. Religious broadcasters were able to expand the number of broadcast outlets they owned. The end of the fairness doctrine meant religious broadcasters were free to air programs of their choice without fear of violating the fairness doctrine. The fairness doctrine required broadcasters to afford reasonable opportunities for the discussion of conflicting views on issues of public concern. The fairness doctrine consisted of scheduling time for programs on controversial issues and ensure expression of opposing views on those issues. Many broadcasters considered this a right of reply (Head, Sterling & Schofield 1994). The only case of a license not being renewed because of violations of the fairness doctrine, a failure to fulfill program promises and a failure to ascertain local needs involved the religious broadcast stations WXUR AM/FM in Media, Pennsylvania (Head, Sterling & Schofield 1994).
Recent developments

Conservative Christian organizations, in larger numbers, have been bringing their messages of cultural values to the American public through radio and television broadcasting technologies. The number of religious radio broadcasters in the United States has increased dramatically in the past 20 years from 111 stations in 1973 to 1,400 in 1995 (McCord 1995, pp. 69-70). Schultze (1990) attributed the growth to three factors: (1) the growth of FM radio in the 1960s; (2) the rising popularity of gospel music; (3) and the use of prerecorded programs. The limited number of AM broadcast licenses that were controlled by established broadcasters since the 1920s kept religious broadcasters from being able to establish new stations and expand their audience, but this changed when FM broadcast licenses became available. During the 1960s religious broadcasters were able to start up operations on readily available FM frequencies at a relatively low cost, and consumers had access to FM receivers which greatly expanded the potential audience. The upswing in the variety and quality of religious music recordings provided ample program material for the new religious broadcast stations. Cost effective tape recording equipment made it possible to have prerecorded programs available from local as well as

Religious broadcasting is now the third most common format in the United States.

⇒ In 1995 one in ten radio stations in the United States identified their programming as religious, which is a 33 percent increase from 1980 (Hawkins 1996).

⇒ In 1995 the number of television stations that identified their programming as religious totaled 163 (Hawkins 1996).

Religious broadcast stations offer a wide variety of inspirational and entertainment programming ranging from traditional religious teaching to live telephone call-in talkshows. Stations broadcast a variety of Christian music which includes contemporary, rock, rap, jazz, and heavy metal (Howard 1992; Romanowski 1990).

The religious broadcasters have grown to the point where they now have their own networks through satellite technology and have no need to rely on the secular networks to reach the nation. Numerous networks provide news, information, talk-shows, music and traditional teaching programs around the clock (Schultze 1991; Howard 1992; McCord 1995; Ward 1994). Two examples are the USA Radio Network and the Christian Broadcasting Network.
The USA Radio Network has been in operation since 1985 and founder, Marlin Maddoux, describes USA as the first American news radio network to deal with key issues from the conservative standpoint. The USA Radio Network, which is totally supported by advertising, is now carried by over 200 stations (Ward 1994).

The Christian Broadcasting Network was incorporated by Pat Robertson in 1960 with three dollars in the bank and began broadcasting from a single UHF television station. Today, the Christian Broadcasting network has grown to include The Family Channel cable network with nearly 60 million subscribers, two radio news networks, a motion picture company, a university, an international relief agency, a national political education movement, and a public service law center (Schultze 1991; Ward 1994).

The Omaha market is served by three religious radio stations, two full-time low power UHF television stations and numerous cable channels available through the various cable systems in the market. The Omaha broadcast market, as defined by the rating services of Arbitron and Nielsen, encompasses the geographic area included in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

The geographic area of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery covers several counties in eastern Nebraska and
western Iowa. The Missouri River Valley Presbytery has 58 congregations with a total membership of 15,225 (Comparative Statistics Presbyterian Church USA 1994).

**Audience measurement**

Religious radio broadcasting tends to reach those who already have a formal relationship with a religious institution (Parker, Barry, and Smythe 1955; Casmir 1959; Johnstone 1971; Gerbner et al. 1984). Subsequent research has confirmed the findings, but little is known about the size of the religious broadcasting audience and the impact religious broadcasters have upon their audience (Schultze 1988). Armstrong (1979) claimed a total audience of over 100 million for religious television. Gerbner et al. (1984) found the audience for religious television is smaller than that claimed by religious broadcasters, but those identified as religious television viewers were consistent in their viewing habits. According to Gerbner et al. (1984) there were about 13.3 million regular viewers of religious television programs covering all denominations which was about 6.2 percent of the estimated number of persons in households with televisions.

Audience measurement techniques for religious broadcasters are the same as those used for gathering
ratings data for secular stations. Typically religious stations attract the smallest audiences of any local stations. Most religious stations are not included in local audience measurements by the major research companies, and the growth in audience numbers can be attributed more to the increase in the number of stations, not the overall increase in audiences for any one station. Audience research for religious broadcasters is sketchy at best. Available estimates have limited value for learning more about the religious broadcast audience. There is a need for better data to produce improvements in the explanations of the phenomenon of religious broadcasting audiences. The available research shows that little is known and understood about the effect of religious broadcasting on American culture and religious life (Schultze 1988; 1990; Hoover 1988).

The role played by the mass media in the lives of individuals, social groups, and for society has been traditionally hard to identify (Anderson and Meyer 1975). The lack of understanding of effects upon American culture and religious life by the religious broadcast media cannot be blamed entirely on the existing body of research in the specific field of religious studies. These studies are subject to the same limitations as others dealing with
functionalism and the mass media (Anderson and Meyer 1975; Pryluck 1975).

There is a strong tie between conservative religion and the electronic media of religious broadcasting. This tie between conservative religion and religious broadcasting is one of the most significant recent religious events in the United States (Litman and Bain 1989; Voskuil 1990).

Johnstone (1971) pointed out very little is known about how many people listen, how often they listen, or who are the listeners. In order to find answers Johnstone (1971) devised a survey which gathered data on: denominational affiliations, frequency of attendance at religious services, importance of religion, age of respondents, gender of respondents, education, geographic region, and urban/rural differences.

The success of religious broadcasters have raised questions about the power and the position of national denominations by contributing to a blurring of the boundaries of mainline denominations. Religious broadcasters provide individual evangelicals, fundamentalists, and charismatics within mainline or liberal churches with a source of orientation, insight and reinforcement (Hoover 1988). Hoover (1988) suggested that mainline denominations are faced with redefining themselves
and become more appealing in an effort to counter the clearly focused conservative symbols in the ideological messages coming from religious broadcasters.

**Presbyterian Church USA**

The Presbyterian Church USA is a mainline denomination with 11,399 congregations and a membership of 2,698,262 in 1994 (Comparative Statistics Presbyterian Church USA 1994).

The Presbyterian Church USA has not been active in producing religious broadcast programming to any large extent (Dr. Bart Brenner, Missouri River Valley Presbytery Executive Presbyter, November 7, 1995 personal communication interview) -- despite the urging of the General Assembly (the national governing body of the Presbyterian Church USA) to develop programs of media information to better advise consumers (Church & Society 1993). The Presbyterian church was active in producing thirty second and sixty second public service announcements during the 1960s and 1970s mainly for use among the secular media but the production of such announcements has ended due to fiscal budget restraints (Dr. Bart Brenner, Missouri River Valley Presbytery Executive Presbyter, November 7, 1995 personal communication interview; Ellens 1974).
Even though the Presbyterian Church has not traditionally been producing programs for broadcast, it is interesting to note that the first network religious program in the United States came from a Presbyterian Church. In 1928 Reverend Donald Grey Barnhouse of the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Tenth Presbyterian Church entered into a $40,000 contract with the CBS Radio Network for airtime (Ward 1994). Also, of interest is the fact that the Dundee Presbyterian Church of Omaha, Nebraska has had a thirty minute weekly broadcast on Omaha radio station KFAB since November 22, 1930 (Dundee Presbyterian Church 1996).

While the Presbyterian Church USA has not been prominent in religious broadcasting, some influences upon local congregations from conservative elements of religious broadcasting have been identified. These elements have been in the form of demands for more basic Bible study and discussions of program topics heard on religious broadcast stations (Wuthnow 1990).

The Presbyterian church provides a good research opportunity for examining liberal versus conservative tensions which have surfaced in American religion in recent years because the denomination has systematically collected data on the beliefs and attitudes of the laity and clergy. Research has shown that, as a group, Presbyterians have a
long history of internal conflict and do not differ a great deal from the members of other denominations on the most important social and political issues being debated within American religion -- including abortion, euthanasia, gender, feminism, and the roles of gays and lesbians.

The Presbyterian Church does ordain women into the clergy, but research shows nearly half of the laity have fears of appointing a woman in their own congregation because of the belief that this would cause strife within the congregation. Studies have shown that the Presbyterian clergy is more liberal than the typical parishioner (Wuthnow 1990).

Research conducted in the late 1980s showed a majority of elders (the elected leaders which make up the governing body of the local Presbyterian congregation) described their congregations as moderately conservative (Wuthnow 1990).

Three theoretical aspects of influence upon Presbyterian congregations have been recognized. At one end of the spectrum is the idea that the local church is greatly influenced by outside sources. The other end of the continuum says tradition and theological convictions minimize or eliminate cyclical fads. The third approach is that the reality is somewhere between the two extremes (Wheeler 1990).
Systems theory

Presbyterian congregations can be described in terms of organizational communication systems. Wheeler (1990) noted that those congregations which have not been responsive to environmental influences have contributed to their own decline while those that have chased after current fads lost their coherence and also faced decline. Wheeler (1990) agreed with the conclusion of Wuthnow (1990) that a conscious strategy of adaptation needs to incorporate the strengths and foundations which come from the traditions of the past. Dr. Bart Brenner (1995) noted that the strength of the Presbyterian Church USA has been to adapt to the changing cultural environment without losing its roots to the traditional past. According to Brenner (1995) the traditional past of the Presbyterian Church USA forms the economic, theological, and social system structure which allows the church to continue moving forward in an ever changing world (Dr. Bart Brenner, Missouri River Valley Presbytery Executive Presbyter, November 7, 1995 personal communication interview).

Advanced technology has made large scale denominational surveys possible, but there is still valuable information which can be gathered from congregation-specific case study research projects.
The case study method is used to systematically investigate individuals, groups, organizations, or events (Wimmer & Dominick 1994). Merriam (1988) listed four characteristics of case study research:

1. Particularistic - focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon;
2. Descriptive - the result is a detailed description of the topic under study;
3. Heuristic - provides new interpretations, perspectives and meanings; and
4. Inductive - principles and generalizations are developed from an examination of the data.

Case studies generally try to discover new relationships rather than attempting to evaluate hypotheses (Merriam 1988).

Babbie (1994) approached field research case studies by first identifying units of analysis. The units of analysis for a case study may be the people who are members of the organization under study. The observed descriptions of the individual units of analysis can be combined to provide a composite picture of the population which makes up the organization (Babbie 1994). Wimmer and Dominick (1994) pointed out:
The case study method is most valuable when the researcher wants to obtain a wealth of information about the research topic...The case study can suggest why something has occurred...The case study method also affords the researcher the ability to deal with a wide spectrum of evidence. Documents, historical artifacts, systematic interviews, direct observations and even traditional surveys can be incorporated into a case study. In fact, the more data sources that can be brought to bear in a case, the more likely it is that the study will be valid. (pp. 154-155)

Types of congregations

Carrol and Roozen (1990) identified a need to classify congregations for specific research projects and conducted a study which yielded six types of classifications for congregations of the Presbyterian Church USA. The research was based on data drawn from a random sample national survey of 1000 congregations, stratified by region and church size. The six types were labeled as sojourner, activist, evangelical, civic, Old First Presbyterian, and family. The sojourner describes a congregation as being different in values and lifestyles from those who live immediately around the church and as congregation which does not consider itself as one of the status churches in the area. The
activist classification describes a congregation that views itself as serving the world beyond the congregation's membership with an emphasis on social issues. The evangelical congregation, more than all others stresses the "born again" experience. The civic identity describes an emphasis on an education approach to social issues and on education and nurture as a means of salvation. Old First Presbyterian reflects a strong sense of Presbyterian identity, traditional rather than contemporary, similar in values and life style to the people living immediately around the church, and members view their church as being prestigious in the community. Family is the classification which comes from the group of congregations which describe themselves as feeling like one large family, influenced by history and tradition, strong sense of Presbyterian identity, are educational and individualistic in their approach to social issues, and take a nurturing approach to individual salvation (Carroll & Roozen 1990). The identity element of congregational culture explains variations in congregational characteristics.

The importance of the Carroll and Roozen (1990) work to this study is that their congregational profiles are used to develop research questions which probe the links or influences to or from religious broadcasters upon the
Presbyterian Church. For example, Carroll and Roozen (1990) found Presbyterian congregations which fit into the evangelical category. The evangelical category is much smaller than the civic and Old First categories but it does exist. This discovery leads to the question, are those identified as evangelical the regular consumers of messages from the fundamentalist and evangelical broadcasters who dominate the religious broadcast media?

Framing the study

The struggle for influencing our cultural values is characterized as a battle by both the conservative and liberal sides (Detweiler 1992; Bennett 1994).

The Reverend Barry Linn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, believes the religious right is out to destroy America's public schools, subvert religious freedoms and do away with reproductive choice. In a speech delivered on the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus Reverend Linn targeted Reverend Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition and American Center for Law and Justice; Dr. James Dobson's Focus On The Family; and Randall Terry's Operation Rescue anti-abortion group as examples of individuals and groups who have an ideological lock on the Congress, a tremendous
amount of money at their disposal, and widespread media resources to deliver their messages (McCord 1995). The three organizations cited by Reverend Linn are all prominent forces in contemporary religious broadcasting (Ward 1994).

Dr. William Bennett (1994), former Education Secretary and Drug Czar in the Reagan and Bush administrations and senior editor of *National Review*, believes "those whose beliefs govern our institutions will, in large measure, win the battle for the culture" (p. 266).

Traditionally our society has been shaped and maintained by the institutions of home, school, and church through face-to-face communication. Now the mode is one of mediated communication from radio and television. The storytellers of our time, through radio and television, speak with an amplified presence where the battleground is the consciousness and awareness of individual minds (Fore 1993). Robinson (1972) showed television viewers believe they are experiencing and learning about real-life situations.

If electronic media viewers and listeners learn through this mediated communication form, then what are they learning? Are there any indicators of who is winning the battle over cultural values in the institution of the Presbyterian Church USA and what role, if any, does
religious broadcasting play in affecting the attitudes and beliefs of those who govern? These questions frame the starting point for this research project.

The Presbyterian Church USA is governed through a hierarchial system which starts at the top with the national General Assembly and extends downward into Synods, Presbyteries, and then the local congregations. These divisions make it possible to select a single entity for study. In order to make this thesis a manageable project, the Missouri River Valley Presbytery, with its headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, was selected for study.

Diffusion theory

Diffusion studies try to explain why the rate of adoption of an innovation starts out slowly, but then (at levels ranging from 10 percent to 25 percent adoption by members of an organization) the rate suddenly spirals upward to the point where in a very short time nearly everyone in the system has adopted the innovation (Rogers 1983). This process is quantitatively represented by a graph which shows what is called the "S" curve. This curve shows the initial slow growth and then (at the 10 percent to 25 percent point) the curve suddenly turns upward to show the rapid increase in adoption of the innovation (Valente 1995; Rogers 1983).
Diffusion History

Diffusion theory has its roots in agricultural research. Ryan and Gross (1943) studied the process of how and why farmers started using hybrid-seed corn during the 1920s and 1930s. The work of Ryan and Gross formed the basis of the methodology, theoretical framework, and interpretations of the diffusion process.

Diffusion theory rapidly expanded from its beginning in agricultural research as scholars from other academic disciplines discovered many applications in anthropology, sociology, education, public health and medical sociology, marketing, geography, and communication.

One of the first diffusion research efforts involving the mass media was a study of the flow of information regarding the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s more research was conducted on the spread of news bulletins about major events such as the launch of the first satellite to orbit the earth, the assassination of John F. Kennedy (Greenberg 1964), and the resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew (De Fleur 1987).

Fewer studies in communication diffusion theory were conducted during the 1980s but some of the most prominent studies looked at the diffusion process of how people found
out about the assassination attempts on President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II, and the explosion which destroyed the space shuttle Challenger in 1986 (De Fleur 1987; Mayer, Gudykunst, Perrill & Merrill 1990).

These communication diffusion studies all confirmed the importance of the multi-step flow of communication where persons who heard the news passed it on to others through interpersonal networks (Valente 1995; De Fleur 1987).

**Diffusion Process and the Multi-step Flow**

The diffusion process itself concentrates primarily on the final stage of adoption or rejection of an innovation but the multi-step flow explains how an individual receives information and then passes it along to others (Severin & Tankard 1992).

The multi-step flow has been proven to be very complex. There has been little argument about the fact that the multi-step flow plays an important part in the diffusion process, but exactly how the process works and how studies should be designed to accommodate the complexities has been the subject of much disagreement among scholars.

Communication definitions must emphasize communication as an integral relationship which involves feedback loops within culture, space, and time (Fore 1987). These
relationships imply communication is not one-way but true communication is always multi-way -- involving an exchange between a sender and a recipient to ensure that there is a dialogue (Pieterse 1990).

There are a number of relationship factors which shape the multi-step flow. Leonard-Barton (1988) found managers implement innovation within the constraints formed by characteristics of transferability, organizational complexity, and divisibility.

The strength or weakness of network ties within a community or social organization have been shown to affect the diffusion process more than the amount of exposure to media information about a particular topic or innovation (Weenig & Midden 1991). The multi-step flow is not predictable because there is no way to say for sure an individual will share information with another person (Mayer et al. 1990). Given the substantial influence of the importance and relevancy factors, diffusion depends on what the individual members of the audience think is important, not what the media decides is of value (Basil & Brown 1994). If the message is perceived as important and relevant the process continues. The emphasis grows over time from important and relevant, but unfocused information, to eventually a belief context that becomes a substantive
Diffusion Theory Research

Diffusion theory research has evolved from its infancy in the 1940s to a well defined set of recognized criteria. Everett Rogers, one of the foremost academic scholars in the study of diffusion theory, recognized eight typologies in diffusion research (Rogers 1983):

1) earliness of knowing about innovations;
2) rate of adoption in a social system;
3) innovativeness;
4) opinion leadership;
5) who interacts with whom;
6) rate of adoption in different social systems;
7) communication channel usage; and
8) consequences of innovation;

Time is a factor in diffusion theory research because timeliness relates to relevancy and importance. The time factor can be of an immediate nature or for an extended period, depending upon the specific circumstance. Chatman (1986) tested diffusion theory in the areas of awareness, use, and innovation in regard to the flow of information about employment opportunities to a specific social group. The results showed the job information was following a
diffusion process which was time sensitive in that the information was the most valuable at the beginning of the diffusion process, which is logical because this meant the job was still open and had not been filled. Diffusion theory can also take on the perspective of a much longer time frame when studying cultural change and correlation to change in a social system. Mendez (1968) used this aspect of diffusion in a study of slowly changing rural Latin American villages and concluded that the diffusion of innovation reflects basic structural features which means the theory can be used as an effective method to study society.

Van De Ven & Rogers (1988) cited four requirements which must be present for the methodology in order to study the process of innovation in real time:

1) clear set of concepts about the object of study;
2) systematic methods for observation over time;
3) methods for representing raw data to identify the process pattern; and
4) theory to make sense out of the process.

Van De Ven & Rogers (1988) list four requirements for a theory:

1) explain how structure and individual purposive action are linked at the micro and macro level;
2) explain how innovation is produced by internal functioning of the organization and the external actions of individuals;
3) explain stability and instability; and
4) include time because change is a difference that can only be noted over time.

In diffusion theory, the first people to adopt do so because they are in a position to gain the most benefit. At what point does an individual decide to adopt the innovation? The threshold point is another crucial aspect of diffusion theory, especially when studying leaders within groups and organizations.

**Group leaders**

Research has shown that the leader or manager within a centralized group or organization plays an important role in the diffusion process because once the leader or manager reaches the threshold point and adopts the innovation the diffusion is likely to continue throughout the centralized group or organization. The leader or manager has been described as the gatekeeper with the power to encourage or discourage adopting the innovation (Strodthoff et al. 1985). A decentralized group or organization exhibits a slightly different pattern where the experience of certain individual
members may be the catalyst but there is still an important threshold point (Valente 1995; Leonard-Barton 1988; Strodthoff et al. 1985; Rogers 1983).

Markus (1987) compares this threshold to reaching a critical mass in regard to defining the point where pressure or influence becomes great enough to push a person to adopt an innovation.

Diffusion theory also addresses the fact that innovation is not necessarily always positive. There are situations where the influence of the diffusion process may actually bring negatives into the structure of an organization (Brown 1981).

**Diffusion Theory Advantages and Limitations**

Communication scholars have an advantage in diffusion research because the tradition of communication research makes it possible to study virtually any innovation process through the concepts of credibility, network analysis, and semantic differential (Rogers 1983).

Several studies have pointed out limitations of current diffusion theory to account for the distortion which occurs between sender and receiver. Neuberg (1988) claims the diffusion process introduces distortions to the original information due to real world influences which shape and
direct the individual information processing within the mind of the person or persons receiving the information. There are concerns about misunderstanding and misinterpretation because of noise factors in the communication channel between the sender and the receiver (Pieterse 1990, Fore 1987). Studies of the diffusion process are also limited by the type of organization and the environment in which an organization operates. Organizations adopt innovations of various types of radicalness in order to respond to changes in their environment. Higher performance levels by groups and organizations have been recognized when there is flexibility in innovation strategies which are determined by environmental conditions (Damanpour 1988).

The guideposts of existing diffusion theory provide a path to study the influence of ideas, attitudes, and innovations upon the Missouri River Valley Presbytery which are coming from religious broadcasters. Is the conservative ideology being broadcast on religious stations having any effect on the clergy and lay leadership in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery? Are the religious broadcasting contemporary forms of performance based worship music and teaching styles having any affect on the clergy and lay leadership in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery? Has the ideology and contemporary forms of worship diffused from the
religious broadcasts to the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery?

Systems theory

Systems theory as applied to organizational communication describes systems as being opened or closed but always involved in some process of transformation. An open system is dynamic, everchanging and particularly responsive to environmental influences. A closed system is just the opposite: static, predictable and devoid of interaction with outside influences. Systems theory states that organizations vary a great deal in the amount of interactive processes with the environment but that, in the end, all organizations must be relatively open in order to survive (Andrews & Baird 1989).

General systems theory seeks to explain the concepts of organizations, social groups, and much more. General systems theory is also known by the label, structural functionalism, which appropriately describes what the theory seeks to explain. For the purposes of this study the review of literature has been limited to general systems theory research studies which included aspects of mass media relationships to social groups and organizations.
The communication system perspective looks at communication as an integrated process which operates under combinations of rules and laws and is not just a series of isolated random events (Infante, Rancer & Womack 1993).

To further define general systems theory for communication, Fisher (1975) identified four axioms for communication theory from a system perspective:

1) communication takes place in a social system;
2) structure and function of a system can be observed in individual behavior;
3) the structure of a communication system is defined by predictable, recurring interactions and relationships; and
4) the function of a communication system exists in the form of degree of probability that subsequent events occur in the presence of antecedent events, and a system in flux is responding to positive feedback.

Ruben (1975) defines communication systems as the study of the roles played by symbols, symbolization, and symbol internalization in the creation, maintenance and change of all human individual and multi-individual organizations.

General systems theory contains an underlying theoretical assumption which seeks to find order by trying to make sense out of what is called the communication

General systems theory attempts to explain the principles involved in the communication process within the broad scope of organizations and social groups. General systems theory takes the perspective of looking at communication as being an integrated process which operates under combinations of rules and laws and that communication is not just a series of isolated random events (Bertalanffy 1975; Infante, Racer & Womack 1993).

**General systems theory history**

General systems theory and functionalism share many of the same basic tenets even though the theories originated from different viewpoints (Perry 1972). General systems theory is described by Boulding (1975) as the skeleton of science because the goal of theory is to provide a framework or structure of systems. This approach to theory building has been used by numerous researchers. One example is the work of Shannon and Weaver (1949) in the mathematical theory of communication and information. Boulding (1975) identified two approaches to the organization of general systems theory based on the pioneering work of scholars, such as Shannon and Weaver. The first approach is to study
general phenomena which are found in several disciplines and build relevant general theoretical models. The second approach is to arrange fields of study according to complexity level. Examples of these fields are frameworks, dynamics, control mechanisms, open system, division of labor, view of the environment, human symbols, human images, and social organizations. Once the field of study has been organized research can be conducted which studies the individual or unit of behavior. Conclusions can then be drawn, which are based upon the analysis of the collected data, to develop theory which explains the action or behavior change which results after contact or some relationship is formed.

The key part of the history of general systems theory is that the theory has shown it is possible to study the individual and look for trends which can form the basis of theory which generalizes to the larger group or population. This aspect of general systems theory makes it applicable to the study of influences from religious broadcasting upon the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA. The leadership within the Presbytery, consisting of the clergy and the lay leaders of the congregations can be studied to look for trends which can be generalized to the larger group or population.
Relationship

Key to general systems theory is the study and explanation of the interdependent, integrated, relationship which occurs in any communication process. The systems perspective concentrates on these aspects of communication and de-emphasizes the role of the individual (Infante et al. 1993). The interdependent aspect looks at the cohesive group or system which works toward a common goal. A typical example of this would be the family. This interdependence means that when one part of the system is influenced or affected in some manner than there are changes in other parts of the system.

Influence can come both from within and outside the social group or organization. An organization cannot exist without the internal and external functional information processes. An organization or social group relies on information to determine goals and objectives; making adjustments and judgments; and every member must know what is expected of him or her (Thayer 1968).

General Systems Theory Research

Thayer (1968) identified four characteristics which must be present for messages to be informative in organizations, management, and interpersonal relations:
1) within the receivers' purview;
2) comprehensible;
3) validated; and
4) utility for the receiver.

Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz, and Power (1987) looked at social influence effect on individuals' attitudes toward communication media systems and media use behavior and concluded attitudes are influenced by perspectives which come from one's own past behavior. This result confirmed media use occurs within a web of social relationships which dictates the way research should be conducted. Fulk et al. (1987) listed five points to keep in mind when conducting research when studying communication media systems and media use behavior:

1) incorporate measures of group-level attitudes or behaviors;
2) keep in mind how individuals learn to make sense of their media environment;
3) look for variations in media perceptions across social or organization groupings;
4) discover normative as well as task-based influences; and
5) study the dispersion of perceptions because this could be as valuable as looking at central tendencies.

Grunig and Disbrow (1977) developed a multisystems theory of communication behavior into a normative theory that helped to explain the decision making process. This study determined that systems theory is better at explaining the communication process because the theory takes into account that a final state can be reached from different starting points. This aspect can account for the human freewill factor. Grunig and Disbrow (1977) showed quantitatively that it is possible to measure which messages are relevant to what part of the population or audience.

Systems theory allows the study of the process through a methodology which accounts for the interaction and complex circular flows of human communication (Krippendorf 1975) because mass communication is part of a multi-person system which provides a channel where information-behavioral patterns are diffused and perpetuated.

Schroder, Driver, and Streufert (1975) identified structural variables that provide a way to measure what information comes from the environment and what information is internally generated in the process of adaption. This process takes place through development, personality,
attitudes, intelligence, performance, and interpersonal and intergroup relations.

In a study of the roles played by the mass media in the lives of individuals in various demographic and social groups Anderson and Meyer (1975) list four common functions of media as: 1) surveillance, 2) correlation, 3) transmission of culture and 4) entertainment. In the opinion of Anderson and Meyer (1975) functional analysis of mass media seeks to answers these basic questions: 1) How does the social system of which the media are a part, work? 2) What parts of the system contribute to normal operation of the system? 3) How is the system affected when the balance is upset or altered? 4) What mechanisms in the systems are used to deal with imbalance or threats to normal operations? Anderson and Meyer (1975) concluded that field research is needed to document the behaviors of individuals related to information flow of which information diffusion research is at least a beginning.

Studies have used a synthesis approach in general systems theory research by combining a functional approach and general systems theory to gain greater insight into marketing activities (Lewis and Erickson 1969, Stidsen & Schutte 1972).
Criticism of General Systems Theory

General systems theory and functionalism have been criticized by some mass media researchers for trying to understand and explain the relationship between media and society by looking at the individuals not the numerous systems and sub-systems which make up society. Critics say the lines between social and individual determinants of behavior are unclear (Pryluck 1975).

The response to this criticism is that the weakness of functional analysis is the same failing of all social science methods -- because rarely can findings be validated in the individual. Social science looks for trends in behaviors based on statistically sound evidence (Anderson & Meyer 1975).

Research Questions

Diffusion theory and general systems theory provide the theoretical framework to formulate research questions to study the relationship of Christian religious broadcasting and decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA.
RQ: 1 Is there a relationship between religious broadcasting and the opinions of decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA?

The existing literature contains very little information on the knowledge, the attitudes, and the beliefs of Presbyterian clergy and lay leadership regarding religious broadcasting. However, research literature shows changes in traditional Presbyterian worship services which now contain more contemporary elements (Wuthnow 1990). The first research question will see if there is a relationship between these contemporary elements and religious broadcasting.

RQ: 2 Is the conservative ideology of religious broadcasting diffusing among the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery?

This research question will pinpoint the exact changes, if any, which are already evident and some insight into future changes which now are in a formative stage.
RQ: 3 Have the ideological messages of religious broadcasters been diffusing into the social system of the Missouri River Presbytery as viewed by the clergy and lay leadership?

Good research contains the goal of adding to existing knowledge of explanation and understanding. This research question will allow a critical analysis of diffusion theory and systems theory.
Chapter III
Methodology

The three general purposes of research are exploration, description, and explanation. These three purposes form the framework for designing research methods which can be used to answer research questions (Babbie 1995). The methodology for this study was selected to explore, describe, and explain the relationships and differences between Christian religious broadcasters and the clergy and lay leadership within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA.

Subjects and Setting

The subjects of this study consist of the clergy and lay leaders who serve as the opinion leaders in the diffusion process within the system setting of the churches which make up the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

Clergy is defined as those persons who have been ordained by the Presbyterian Church USA and are currently serving in a recognized pastoral calling within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

Lay leadership is defined as the persons serving as Elders within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. Each church within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery is
governed by a Session. The Session is made up of Elders who are elected by the membership of the congregation. The constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA specifically defines the governing body (the Session) and the leadership roles which must be carried out by the elected Elders (Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA 1993).

Variables

The study specifically explores (1) the knowledge level of the clergy and lay leadership about religious broadcasting, (2) the opinions of the clergy and lay leadership about religious broadcasting, and (3) identify behaviors of the clergy and lay leadership which result from relationships and influences of religious broadcasting.

Variables are defined in terms of their relationships with one another. Dependent variables are observed and their values are understood to depend upon the effects of the independent variable. The dependent variable is what the researcher wishes to explain (Wimmer and Dominick 1994).

There are three main goals in this study. First, to identify if the clergy and the lay leadership within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery listen to or watch religious broadcast outlets. Second, this study seeks to find out if the conservative ideological messages being
broadcast by religious electronic media are affecting the opinion leaders and the social system of the churches within the Presbytery. Content analysis has confirmed that religious television and radio programming is dominated by an evangelical and fundamentalist theme (Gerbner et al. 1984; Litman and Bain 1989; Voskuil 1990). Third, are there relationships and differences between religious broadcasting and the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery?

Identification of the independent and dependent variables for this study was made by devising a communication flow model (see Appendix B) of media influence. As a starting point for this study the assumption was made that there was a communication flow of media influence from the ideological messages of religious broadcasters to the decision-makers of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The model recognizes that the flow of media influences is not direct but is mediated by social and psychological factors in a multi-step process (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955; De Fleur 1970; De Fleur 1987; Lowery & DeFleur 1988). The model consists of steps in the process which depict the communication flow of media influence. The simplified representations in the model begin with media use and demographics among the decision-makers of the Missouri
River Valley Presbytery. The next step is the reception and comprehension process of the ideological messages from the religious broadcasters by the decision-makers under study. The third step in the model consists of the process where the decision-makers discuss, accept or reject the messages from religious broadcasters. Based upon this model the decision-maker's media use, demographics, comprehension and information processing make up the independent variables. The dependent variables in this study consist of the decision maker's discussion, acceptance or rejection of the ideological messages of the religious broadcasters.

Instrumentation and Data Gathering

The instrument for gathering data in this study was a survey (see Appendix A) which was sent to all clergy and selected members of the Session in each of the 58 congregations which make up the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

A purposive sample procedure was chosen because all of the congregations could be included in the data gathering process due to the fact there are 58 congregations. Thus, a census of these people was used to study the population. The selected members of the Session and the pastor of each congregation were provided with a survey. The goal was to
obtain a 60 to 70 percent return rate. Babbie (1994) described a response rate of 60 percent as good and a response rate of 70 percent as very good. The cooperation of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery Executive Presbyter, Dr. Bart Brenner, also enhanced the return rate of surveys.

The office of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery provided their 1996 mailing list of all clergy and Session members within the Presbytery. Only clergy listed as active were sent surveys. In order to assure a random sample of Session members, every third name was selected from the mailing list. A total of 376 surveys were mailed -- 65 to active clergy and 311 to Session members. The clergy list provided by the Missouri River Valley Presbytery contained the names of all clergy. The Presbytery clergy list noted each clergy person as either active or retired. The determination to survey the 65 active clergy was based upon the assumption that these respondents would provide the most relevant information for this study.

The much larger number of selected Session members was arrived at by taking into consideration that the rate of survey return among the Session members would likely be less than the clergy. By mailing surveys to 311 Session members the assumption was made that an adequate number of surveys would be returned in order to make this a valid study.
Survey instrument questions pertaining to specific categories of religious programming were based upon available broadcast schedules from stations which serve the geographic area of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery (KGBI 1996; KCRO 1996; KLNG 1996; Trinity Broadcasting Network 1996).

Analysis Procedure

A statistical analysis using the social science research computer program called SPSSX was used. The first step in the analysis procedure was to run a complete set of frequencies in order to show how many decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery listen to or watch religious broadcast programming. The frequency run permitted a breakdown of clergy and lay leadership use of religious broadcasting by providing a listing of which group is utilizing the electronic religious broadcast media and to what extent. This first statistical analysis procedure provided answers to the first research question about determining if there is any relationship between the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery and religious broadcasting.

The survey utilized Likert Scale questions, closed end questions and opened ended questions. The Likert Scale
questions provided information about the intensity of influences or attitudes about religious broadcasting. The closed end questions provided specific information about the knowledge of and the listening/watching patterns of the clergy and lay leadership. The open end questions provided qualitative information to gain insight into the diffusion of religious broadcasting ideology into the social system of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. Further statistical analysis in the form of Chi-square was utilized to determine whether statistically significant differences and/or relationships exist between the clergy and lay leadership level of knowledge and attitude toward religious broadcasting. Survey data yielded information about contemporary worship services and trends in worship practices. This data provided information about the source of influence of contemporary Christian music and the use of performance based music within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery churches. The music information was a key in determining the diffusion of religious broadcasting ideology into the Missouri River Valley Presbytery churches social systems.

The statistical analysis also yielded indications of the amount of influence coming from religious broadcasting regarding political and social issues. This information
provided indications of diffusion of religious broadcasting ideology into the church social system by measuring the behavior of the opinion-leaders within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. Key questions in the survey asked for qualitative data through open-ended "why" inquiries. Other key questions give respondents the opportunity to explain their answers by asking for specific examples of influence from religious broadcasting upon the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.
Chapter IV

Results

A total of 376 surveys were mailed to potential respondents. Out of the 376 mailed surveys, 218 surveys were returned completed. Four surveys could not be delivered by the United States Postal Service. The response rate of 59 percent was close to the goal.

Respondent Profile

The breakdown of the 218 respondents showed 49 ordained clergy, 167 elders and two respondents did not indicate their leadership position. There were 118 female respondents and 97 male respondents.

It is interesting to note that 67 percent of the ordained clergy are males and 33 percent are females. Almost the opposite is true of the make-up of the Sessions in the Presbytery -- 39 percent are males and 61 percent are females (see Table I).
Table I
Gender by Leadership Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male respondents</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female respondents</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy respondents</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder respondents</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male clergy</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female clergy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male elder</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female elder</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male clergy percent</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female clergy percent</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male elder percent</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female elder percent</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The oldest survey respondent was 91 and the youngest respondent was 18 years of age. The mean age of all survey respondents was 54 years of age and the mode was 50 years. The ages of the decision-makers in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery were widely dispersed. Most of the respondents fell into the age range of 38 to 74 years.

The racial or ethnic background of decision-makers in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery was 96 percent white.

The majority of the decision-makers in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery have education credentials at the graduate level. The number of graduate level respondents was probably influenced by the high response rate of the clergy, who all have training at the graduate level as a prerequisite to their ordination to serve in the Presbytery. The survey instrument results showed 39 percent have a graduate level degree, 24 percent had undergraduate degrees, 22 listed some college and 15 percent listed their education level as high school.

Almost all of the respondents were registered voters and indicated that they had voted in the most recent political election in which they were eligible to participate. About half of the respondents considered
themselves as having a moderate political orientation with more leaning toward the conservative end of the political spectrum than toward the liberal side. A breakdown of political orientation between clergy and elders showed the clergy tended to be more liberal than the elders (see Table II).

Table II
Political Orientation by Leadership Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elders</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (For Table II survey instrument categories "very conservative" and "somewhat conservative" combined into "conservative"; "very liberal" and "somewhat liberal" combined into "liberal.")

Most of the decision-makers in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery listed their political party affiliation as Republican. The survey instrument results showed 54 percent Republican, 34 percent Democrat, 11 percent Independent and 1 percent in the other category.
The geographic area of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery encompasses metropolitan, suburban and rural areas. Most of the respondents described their church setting as being in the Omaha city limits, as expected, because of the population concentration of congregations within metropolitan Omaha. The second largest category of respondents listed a church setting as rural Iowa. The Presbytery geographic boundaries include a large portion of southwest Iowa which contains many congregations that are in a rural setting. The third largest setting category was suburban Nebraska, followed by Council Bluffs city limits, suburban Iowa and then rural Nebraska.

Research Question 1 Answers

The first research question was designed to probe the relationship between religious broadcasting and the opinions of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The first step, in looking for any relationship, was to determine the knowledge level of the decision-makers by determining their listening habits and patterns. The second step was to determine opinions of decision-makers and to see if those who do listen or watch religious broadcasting actually have their opinions influenced by the medium.
For simplicity in the analysis, the survey instrument five-point scale answers -- all of the time, most of the time, sometimes, rarely and never -- were collapsed into three categories; sometimes, rarely and never. The five-point scale answers -- strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree -- were collapsed into three categories; agree, neutral and disagree.

General results of the survey show that most of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery do not listen to or watch religious broadcasts on a regular basis. However, the SPSSX frequencies analysis of the survey results showed a consistent pattern of listening and watching by about one third of the respondents. Survey respondents indicated that religious broadcasting plays a very limited role in changing or reinforcing attitudes toward controversial issues, partisan and non-partisan elections, worship practices or ideology. However, about one-third said that religious broadcasting does influence the formulation of contemporary worship services.

Based upon the consistency of respondents' answers on the types of programming which is watched or listened to, the assumption can be made that one-third (18 to 48 percent) of the decision-makers have some relationship with religious broadcasting. This relationship takes the form of listening
to religious broadcast programs. The results showed that about one-third (30 percent) of the decision-makers felt that religious broadcasting played a role in formulating contemporary worship services, especially in regard to music (see Table III).

Table III

Types of Programming Listened to or Watched

Do you listen to or watch any of the following types of programming on religious broadcast stations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Programming</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious teaching/preaching</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkshows</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Commentary</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship services</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusade programs</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special holiday programs</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you listen to local radio broadcasts of contemporary Christian music? Sometimes Rarely Never

38.9% 23.6% 37.5%

** ("All" and "most" of the time survey instrument categories were combined with the "sometimes" category and not reported separately in this table.)

Do you believe religious broadcast programs are sources of ideas and influence in formulating your contemporary worship services? Yes No

29.2% 70.8%

The majority of respondents indicated they had at least a general knowledge level about religious broadcasting. Research cited in the literature review for this study showed that religious broadcasting is dominated by conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist ideologies. When respondents were asked about this ideology, 53 percent agreed that religious broadcasting is dominated by conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist ideologies; 43 percent were neutral indicating they did not know and four percent disagreed with the statement.
Research Question 2 Answers

The results of the survey show that about one-third of the respondents listen to or watch religious broadcast programs at least sometimes. Over half of the respondents identify the ideology of most religious broadcast programs as conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist. Very few respondents indicated that the conservative ideology being broadcast has any influence on their attitudes toward controversial issues, partisan or non-partisan politics and contemporary worship trends.

Most respondents said their attitude toward the controversial issues of abortion, euthanasia, gay/lesbian rights, feminism, role of the church in politics/social concerns and First Amendment separation of church and state were rarely or never changed, or reinforced by religious broadcast programming. A consistent pattern emerged from the analysis of the answers regarding controversial issues. Most of the respondents perceived their attitude toward the controversial issues listed in the survey instrument was never changed or reinforced by religious broadcast programming. In a separate question asking respondents if religious broadcasting ever influenced their attitude toward any controversial issue an 77 percent said "never" (see Table IV).
Table IV

Changed or Reinforced Attitude Toward Controversial Issue

Has religious broadcast programming changed or reinforced your attitude toward any of the following controversial issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay/lesbian rights</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordination of gays/lesbians</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics/social concerns</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Amendment</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Has a religious broadcast program influenced your attitude toward a controversial issue?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** ("All" and "most" of the time survey instrument categories were combined with the "sometimes" category and not reported separately in this table.)
Respondents also perceived that they were never influenced by religious broadcasting programming in their election voting behavior. When asked about any influence on the decision-making process in partisan and non-partisan elections, over 90 percent responded that religious broadcast programming never played any part (see Table V).

Table V
Partisan and Non-partisan Influence

Has a religious broadcast program ever influenced you to vote for a particular candidate for a partisan political office? Sometimes Rarely Never
5.1% 8.3% 86.6%

Has a religious broadcast program ever influenced you to vote against a particular candidate for a partisan political office? Sometimes Rarely Never
4.6% 7.9% 87.5%

Has a religious broadcast program influenced you to vote for a particular candidate seeking a non-partisan office? Sometimes Rarely Never
.9% 7.4% 91.7%
Has a religious broadcast program influenced you to vote against a particular candidate seeking a non-partisan office?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** **("All" and "most" of the time survey instrument categories were combined with the "sometimes" category and not reported separately in this table.)

Based upon the analysis of the survey results the second research question can be answered by saying that there appears to be very little self-perceived diffusion of the conservative ideology of religious broadcasting among the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.

The only indication of diffusion was the use of contemporary Christian music by congregations in the Presbytery. The diffusion of contemporary Christian music into the social system, in the form of congregation worship services leads to a possible answer for the third research question of this study.
Research Question 3 Answers

A majority of respondents identified religious broadcast ideological messages as conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist, but the survey showed very limited evidence of diffusion of these messages into the social system of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The only exception appeared to be contemporary Christian music which was identified as a type of religious programming which, to some extent, had an influence upon contemporary worship services.

The extent to which religious broadcasts of contemporary Christian music influences contemporary worship services within the Presbytery was difficult to precisely show. The analysis of the survey results gives some conflicting signals, but at the same time does indicate that there is a measurable influence. The survey revealed many respondents do listen to contemporary Christian music. The response to the category music showed 51 percent listened sometimes, 21 percent rarely and 28 percent never listened. The question which specifically asked if respondents listened to radio broadcasts of contemporary Christian music yielded a result of 39 percent listening sometimes, 24 percent rarely listening and 37 percent never listening.
Twenty-five percent of the respondents indicated that their congregation had a contemporary form of worship service and 60 percent said their congregation incorporated elements of contemporary worship into their traditional service. About one-third of those surveyed indicated that religious broadcast programming is an influence as a source of ideas in formulating their contemporary worship. There does not appear to be any precise data which can provide a definitive measurement of the influence of religious broadcasts of contemporary Christian music upon the congregations of the Presbytery. However, a qualitative assessment of the individual comments made by respondents show a common thread. One-third of those surveyed listen to religious broadcasting, one-third believe religious broadcasting influences the formulating of their contemporary worship services and slightly over half of the respondents listen to contemporary Christian music.

Based on the analysis of the survey instrument results, it appeared that if any ideological message has diffused into the social system of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery, it has taken the form of contemporary Christian music.
Listening patterns

Of the three specific religious broadcast stations listed on the survey instrument KGBI had the most listeners among the decision-makers of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The survey showed 36 percent listened sometimes to KGBI, 16 percent listened sometimes to KCRO and 15 percent said they listened sometimes to KLNG.

Those respondents who indicated they watch or listen to religious broadcast programs said they watch or listen most often on Sunday. This was true for both clergy and elders. More elders than clergy said they watched or listen on Sunday. Out of the total number of respondents, 27 percent of the elders and 23 percent of the clergy said they watch or listen sometimes on Sunday (see Table VI).

| All(times) Most(times) Sometimes Rarely Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clergy | 6.1% | 2.1% | 22.4% | 16.3% | 53.1% |
| Elders | 2.4% | 10.9% | 27.1% | 30.1% | 29.5% |
Previous research into the demographics of religious broadcast audiences, in general, have shown political orientation to be a factor. The research has shown that religious broadcast audiences tend to be toward the conservative end of the political orientation scale. Political orientation appeared to have some connection with watching or listening habits of the decision-makers of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. A statistical cross tabulation showed those who called themselves somewhat liberal indicated they never watched or listened to Sunday religious broadcasts. Those who were moderate to somewhat conservative indicated they watched or listened to Sunday religious broadcasts on a regular basis (see Table VII).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (For Table VII survey instrument categories "very conservative" and "somewhat conservative" combined into "conservative"; "very liberal" and "somewhat liberal"
combined into "liberal." Five point scale answer data collapsed into the categories "sometimes" and "never".

Research Questions Results Summary

Statistical analysis of the results show there is a relationship between religious broadcasting and the opinions of about one-third of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The conservative ideology of religious broadcasters is readily identified by the decision-makers of the Presbytery, but it does not appear that this conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist ideology is diffusing among the clergy and lay leadership to any large extent. Most of the clergy and lay leadership do not regularly watch or listen to religious broadcast programming. The one area identified in the survey which shows ideological messages diffusing into the social system is contemporary Christian music.

This chapter has concentrated on over-all results of the survey primarily from a quantitative statistical basis. The survey also provided a wealth of qualitative information from the one third of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery decision-makers who do listen to or watch religious broadcast programs. Many comments also were made by the
those who do not listen to or watch religious broadcast programs. The qualitative aspects of the survey results provide the basis for the discussion in chapter five.
Chapter V
Discussion

The survey instrument was designed not only to yield quantitative results but also qualitative information which would provide further insight into the diffusion of religious broadcast messages to the decision-makers and the social system of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. Opportunities were provided throughout the survey instrument for respondents to add their comments about why they answered a question in a particular way. Respondents were given the opportunity to describe a situation and to list specific religious broadcast programs which were listened to or watched. These open-ended questions yielded a wealth of qualitative data. Many respondents took time to write comments. Those who indicated they rarely or never listen to or watch religious broadcast programs provided as many comments as the one third of the respondents who said they do tune into religious broadcast programs a regular basis. The comments, both pro and con, showed most respondents had a basic knowledge of religious broadcasting program content. By the number of respondents who took time to write down comments it was obvious that the respondents welcomed the opportunity to express their opinions, ideas and attitudes.
The survey instrument questions (see Appendix A) which generated the most qualitative comments were: question 30, attitudes toward religious broadcasts sincerity; question 32, broadcasting as an effective means for proclaiming the Christian message; question 33, attitudes toward religious broadcast ideology; and questions 35 and 37 which related to sources of influence for contemporary worship services. Several other questions yielded valuable qualitative data, specifically listing particular religious programs and indications of why a respondent either did listen to or did not listen to religious broadcasters.

An important category of information which emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data was that many of those who do listen to religious broadcast programs listen to the religious programs that are broadcast by secular stations in the geographic area of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The survey instrument specifically listed stations which identify themselves as religious broadcasters but did not list secular broadcasters that carry religious broadcast programs. The most often mentioned secular broadcast stations were KMA, Shenandoah, Iowa; and Omaha stations KFAB, WOW-AM and WOW-FM.
The clergy of the Presbytery tend to be more liberal than the elders of the Presbytery according to the survey results. This political orientation also provided an indication of attitudes toward religious broadcasting in general. The clergy generally appeared to have a more negative attitude toward religious broadcasters than the elders. Many clergy commented about the shortcomings of religious broadcasters. One clergy respondent summed up his attitude by saying the only reason he tunes into religious broadcast stations is for comic relief. Not all of the clergy were this negative about religious broadcasting nor were all of the elders completely complimentary about religious broadcasting. Generally, the comments made by elders tended to be more open to listening and watching religious broadcasting as well as getting the mainline churches involved to a greater degree.

Previous research has shown education level and demographics to be related to the make-up of religious broadcast audiences. As the education level increases, the amount of listening to or viewing of religious broadcast programming tends to go down. The survey results showed a high proportion of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Presbytery have undergraduate and graduate degrees, but only one-third of the decision-makers are regular
viewers of or listeners to religious broadcasters. This observation would tend to confirm the earlier research and partially explain the relatively low number of decision-makers within the Missouri River Valley Presbytery who indicate they listen or watch religious broadcast programs.

Comments from listeners

The survey instrument did not use the name of any specific religious broadcast program but the qualitative comments by respondents listed 41 different religious broadcast programs (see Appendix C).

The Billy Graham broadcast *Hour of Decision* was the most frequently mentioned program. Over half of the respondents who do listen to religious broadcast programs on a regular basis indicated they listen to the *Hour of Decision*. The second most often mentioned program was the locally produced *Dundee Church of the Air*. *Focus on the Family with Dr. James Dobson* was third on the list of programs listened to by the one third of the respondents who indicated they listen to religious broadcasts on a regular basis. The programs of Dr. Robert Schuller and Dr. Charles Stanley tied for fourth and Dr. Charles Swindoll's *Insight for Living* rounded out the top five. The next five most frequently mentioned programs, in descending order, were;
Comments about attitudes

Question two on the survey instrument explored whether religious broadcast programming changed or reinforced attitudes on controversial issues. The quantitative analysis of the survey results showed that few decision-makers in the Missouri River Valley Presbytery have their attitudes toward controversial issues affected by religious programs. The qualitative comments provided some insight into why this was the case. There were also comments by some who said religious broadcasts did influence their attitudes toward controversial issues.

The comments, both in support of listening to religious broadcasts and those who did not support the idea of listening to religious broadcasts, demonstrated a general knowledge of the type of programming found on religious stations as well as the ideology message.

The comments from those who listen on a regular basis formed a theme which indicated that listening provided food for thought not heard on mainstream media. These listeners indicated views were presented that they had not thought about earlier, and the messages were a part of a thought
provoking process. A comment from a regular listener summed up what the results of this survey indicated: "listening made me realize that there are others who think like I do and believe the same things I do but most of the time my congregation doesn't seem to feel the same as I do."

The comments from those who do not listen to or watch religious broadcasts on a regular basis ranged from saying their attitudes were never influenced by religious programming to those who said their negative attitudes toward religious broadcasters were reinforced by what they heard when they did listen. These negative attitudes were associated, by respondents, with the perception that religious broadcasters exhibited, "bigotry, hatred and self-righteousness through their narrow Biblical views."

Very few of those who said they do listen or watch on a regular basis actually listed any ministries which they supported financially. The most frequently mentioned ministry which received some financial support from decision-makers of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery was the share-a-thon fund raising for listener supported Grace University radio station KGBI.
Religious broadcasters' sincerity

Question 30 in the survey instrument attempted to gain insight into the decision-makers perceived attitudes about the sincerity of religious broadcasters. The survey results showed 54 percent of the respondents indicated an indifferent attitude on the sincerity question. There were 17 percent who said they did not believe religious broadcasters were sincere, but 29 percent thought religious broadcasters were sincere.

The major themes which emerged from an analysis of the comments made in regard to the sincerity of religious broadcasters revolved around trustworthiness, personal integrity, power and money. Many of the respondents cited the scandals surrounding the prominent televangelists James Baker and Jimmy Swaggert. The comments did not show a distinct separation, in the attitudes of the respondents, between religious television and radio broadcasters. Most comments appeared to regard them as the same. The adjectives used to describe what has influenced negative attitudes toward religious broadcasters included: showmanship, arrogance, emotionalism, too political, too phony, hypocritical, self-serving greed and dogmatic viewpoints. Some respondents said that those who go into religious broadcasting often enter with a sincere desire to
spread the gospel, but too often they get caught up in the celebrity status and lose focus. Respondents who indicated they believed religious broadcasters were sincere provided supportive comments such as aside from Baker and Swaggert most religious broadcasters have a burden to share the gospel, and the electronic media is the most effective method to achieve that goal.

Skepticism was a common theme for most respondents in their attitude toward the sincerity issue. Respondents said scandals of the past have left an unsettling feeling -- is it God or money? Accountability seems to be a problem. It was felt that some are deluded and this gives all a bad name -- too many scandals, too much money and too little service. One respondent observed that some religious broadcasters do not walk the talk, another noted some are rational and full of ardor but some are full of ardor, but they are air heads.

Getting the gospel message out

Question 32 on the survey instrument sought to learn what the decision-makers of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery thought about the effectiveness of using religious broadcasting to reach out with the gospel message. The effectiveness question generated more comments than any
other question on the survey instrument.

While the decision-makers of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery are generally skeptical of the programming on religious broadcast stations, most feel the electronic medium could be an effective way to reach out with the gospel. The survey results showed 52 percent agreed that religious broadcasting is an effective way to reach out to society with the Christian message, 33 percent were indifferent and only 15 percent disagreed.

The most common theme in support of using broadcasting to reach out with the Christian message related to making the message available to those unable to attend regular worship, those who find it inconvenient to attend regular worship and for the electronic media to reach people who have no church affiliation.

Some respondents observed that the conservative, evangelical and fundamentalists have found religious broadcasting to be very effective for getting their message out to society: "the extreme right has found it useful and the mainline church still doesn't know how." These respondents felt it was important for the mainline churches to take a more active role in participating in the programming of all forms of electronic media.
Many of the comments under the heading of effectiveness also addressed the issue of integrity, citing the scandals of the past and what one respondent called the "cheesey" nature of current programming. The reference to "cheesey" programming was defined not only by appearance (the respondent commented on hairstyles and apparel) but also by the content of the broadcast messages.

One major concern expressed, regarding the effectiveness of using the electronic medium to reach out to society with the Christian message, had to do with the loss of personal contact and fellowship. Some respondents believed that the actions of people are a more powerful force than impersonal television or radio broadcasts. Some said it would be hard to minister to the whole person and whole life because the use of radio or television promotes individualism and detracts from real fellowship. This concern was summarized best by the comment, "the Christian message is a message to be shared and discussed in community through personal relationships not as individuals secluded in our homes listening to the radio or watching the television."
Religious broadcast ideology

The survey results showed 53 percent of respondents agreed that the ideology of religious broadcast programs is conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist. Only three percent disagreed with the statement and 44 percent said they were indifferent with regard to religious broadcast ideology.

The comments made in conjunction with the ideology question generally followed a pattern of expressing negative statements with regard to program content. One area of criticism was defined as the conservative, evangelical, fundamentalist simplistic approach to complex issues. According to some respondents this simplistic approach leaves little room for understanding, compromise, tolerance and ignores social justice issues.

One respondent criticized the survey instrument for placing all religious broadcast programs in the category of being ideologically conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist. The respondent said that while this is generally true there are programs on the air that do not fit into this category and more programs from mainline churches would be beneficial to balance the broadcasts now on the air.
Contemporary worship and music

The survey results showed 59 percent of the respondents said their congregation incorporates elements of traditional and contemporary practices into their worship services. The comments generated by survey questions 35 and 37 indicated that the most common element of contemporary worship was made up of music. Based on the survey results just over half of the decision-makers within the Missouri River Presbytery listen to contemporary Christian music but it is not clear as to where they listen or what influences them to listen and incorporate contemporary music into their worship services. The survey does show that 90 percent of the respondents felt the source of contemporary worship ideas and influence came from congregations members. As for religious broadcasting being a source of ideas and influence, only 30 percent said yes and 70 percent said there is no religious broadcasting influence. A qualitative assessment of the comments made by respondents show that many credit their choir director, music director or pastor with introducing contemporary Christian music into the worship service. Even those respondents who said they do not now have a contemporary worship service said they are either in the process of planning or are open to new ideas and are waiting for them to be implemented.
While the congregations of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery are traditional by most standards, there are components which indicate some diversity. The introduction of contemporary music is one and another is the combining of other traditions into the orthodox Presbyterian worship service. For example, one respondent explained that their church combines traditional Presbyterian worship practices with an African-American flavor.

Summary

The diffusion of religious broadcasting ideology into the social system of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery appeared to be minimal at this time because most of the decision-makers do not listen or watch on a regular basis. The important finding of this study is that there appears to be a solid core of about one third of the decision-makers who do listen, watch and in some manner support religious broadcasting. This core group is made up of mostly the elders who identify themselves as politically conservative. The more liberal clergy of the Presbytery (at least more liberal when compared to the elders of the Presbytery) generally do not watch or listen to religious broadcast stations or programs and principally do not look at religious broadcasting as an effective means to reach out
with the Christian message. The elders appeared to be a little more open to the idea of using the electronic medium to reach out with the Christian message. This core group needs to be the subject of future research to see if it is growing in size and influence, or not.

Further research is needed in several other Presbyteries before any generalizations could be made about the diffusion of religious broadcasting ideology into the social system of the Presbyterian Church USA. Contemporary Christian music is being used in one form or another in many congregations of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. More research is needed to explore further the extent of diffusion of contemporary Christian music into the social system which makes up the worship practices of individual congregations.

Follow-up research will be needed to see if the core group of religious broadcast watchers and listeners is growing and expanding their influence into the social system of the Presbytery.

Another aspect for future research is the possibility that the third person affect plays a role in the respondents' self-perceived indication that there is very little diffusion of the conservative ideology of religious broadcasting among the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery.
Religious broadcasting is constantly adapting to an ever changing business environment to remain competitive. The Presbyterian Church USA and the Missouri River Valley Presbytery are also changing to meet new needs of society and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in an ever changing environment without losing the strong foundations built upon church traditions. New research projects need to be designed to monitor and interpret the changes which may affect the attitudes of the clergy and elders toward religious broadcasting.
Appendix A

This survey is an instrument to gather information on the knowledge level, opinions and beliefs about religious broadcasting by the clergy and lay leadership of the Missouri River Valley Presbytery. The questionnaire will take less than ten minutes of your time. Your help with this study is greatly appreciated. Do not put your name on this paper; the results will be kept entirely confidential. After completing the survey put it in the enclosed business reply envelope and drop it in the mail. Thank you for helping with this study.

******************************************************************************

1. Do you listen to or watch any of the following types of programming on religious broadcast stations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Programming</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious teaching/preaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
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<td>Sports</td>
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<td>News</td>
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<td>Talkshows</td>
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<tr>
<td>News commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious worship services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crusade program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holiday programs/services</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Has religious broadcast programming changed or reinforced your attitude toward any of the following controversial issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
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<td>Gay/lesbian rights</td>
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<td>Ordination of gays/lesbians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church in politics/social concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Amendment separation of church and state</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was the key element(s) in the broadcast that changed or reinforced your attitude?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Do you watch or listen to religious broadcasts on Sunday?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</thead>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | |
|                |                 |                  |           |        |       |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you watch or listen to religious broadcasts on weekdays?</td>
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<td>5. Do you watch or listen to religious broadcasts on Saturday?</td>
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<td>6. Do you listen to religious radio station KCEO AM 660?</td>
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<td>7. Do you listen to religious radio station KGBI FM 100.7?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Do you listen to religious radio station KLNG AM 1560?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Do you listen to religious broadcasts on shortwave frequencies?</td>
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<tr>
<td>List station(s) and time(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Do you listen to religious broadcasts directly from a satellite system?</td>
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<tr>
<td>List station(s) and time(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Do you watch the Trinity Broadcasting Network on UHF channel 45 or on a local cable television channel?</td>
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<td>12. Do you contribute money to a religious broadcast ministry?</td>
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<td>If you do contribute what is the key motivating factor(s)?</td>
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<td>If you did contribute but no longer do what changed your mind?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Do you attend meetings and events that were made known to you by broadcasts on religious stations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Has a religious broadcast program ever influenced you to vote for a particular candidate for a partisan political office?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please describe the circumstances:</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Has a religious broadcast program ever influenced you to vote against a particular candidate for a partisan political office?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please describe the circumstances:</td>
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<td>16. Has a religious broadcast program influenced you to vote for a particular candidate seeking a non-partisan office?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please describe the circumstances:</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Has a religious broadcast program influenced you to vote against a particular candidate seeking a non-partisan office? Please describe the circumstances:</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Has a religious broadcast program influenced your attitude toward a controversial issue? Please describe the circumstances:</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Do you listen to local radio broadcasts of contemporary Christian music?</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Do you listen to or watch live interview/call-in shows which air on local religious broadcast stations? If so, please list:</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Do you listen to or watch local broadcasts of church services? If so, please list:</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Do you listen to locally produced religious radio programs? If so, please list:</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Do you watch any national/regional produced religious television programs? If so, please list:</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Do you listen to any national/regional produced religious radio programs? If so, please list:</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Do you listen to or watch religious broadcast programs to keep up with current worship trends? If so, please describe:</td>
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<td>26. Do you use the Internet to obtain information via computer about religious issues, events, trends and discussions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Do you use PresbyNet to obtain information via computer about religious issues, events, trends and discussions?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
28. Listening to or viewing a religious broadcast has caused you or someone you know to be saved.

29. Listening to or viewing a religious broadcast has aided you or someone you know to give up a bad habit.

30. People engaged in religious broadcasting are sincere and deeply religious.

31. There is a need for a religious revival in our society today.

32. Religious broadcasting is an effective way to reach out to society with the Christian message.

33. The ideology of religious broadcast programs is conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist.

34. Does your church have a traditional worship service (structured liturgy, organ music, unison hymn singing)?

35. Does your church have a contemporary worship service (unstructured liturgy, performance based music with soloists or groups, music of contemporary Christian artists)?

36. Does your church combine traditional and contemporary worship practices into a single service?

37. Please indicate whether or not you believe the following are sources of ideas and influence in formulating your contemporary worship services?

   Religious broadcast programs
   Congregation members
   Missouri River Valley Presbytery
   General Assembly

Please explain your answers:
38. What is your church leadership position?  
   Ordained clergy ___  
   Elder ___  
   Deacon ___  
   Trustee ___  

39. What is your gender?  
   Male ____  
   Female ____  

40. In what year were you born? _________  

41. What is your racial or ethnic identification?  
   African-American ____  
   Asian ____  
   Hispanic ____  
   Native-American ____  
   White ____  
   Other—specify _________  

42. What is your education level?  
   Less than High School ____  
   High School ____  
   Some College ____  
   College Graduate ____  
   Graduate School ____  

43. Are you a registered voter?  
   Yes ____  
   No ____  

44. Did you vote in the most recent election?  
   Yes ____  
   No ____  

45. What is your political orientation?  
   Very conservative ____  
   Somewhat conservative ____  
   Moderate ____  
   Somewhat liberal ____  
   Very liberal ____  

46. What is your political party affiliation?  
   Republican ____  
   Democrat ____  
   Independent ____  
   Other ____  

47. What is the geographic setting of your church?  
   Omaha city limits ____  
   Council Bluffs city limits ____  
   Suburban Nebraska ____  
   Suburban Iowa ____  
   Rural Nebraska ____  
   Rural Iowa ____  

Appendix B

Model

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Presbyterian clergy and lay leadership

media use

demographics

comprehension

reinforcement

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Presbyterian clergy and lay leadership

acceptance

rejection

discussion
Appendix C

List of Programs Mentioned by Respondents

Hour of Decision - Dr. Billy Graham
Dundee Church of the Air - Omaha Dundee Presbyterian
Focus on the Family - Dr. James Dobson
Hour of Power - Dr. Robert Schuller
Dr. Charles Stanley
Insight for Living - Dr. Charles Swindoll
First Plymouth Church
Methodist Hour
700 Club - Dr. Pat Robertson
Truths That Transform - Dr. D. James Kennedy
Lutheran Hour
Kountze Memorial - Omaha Kountze Memorial Lutheran
Open Line
Odessey
Elizabeth Elliot
Minrith Meyer
Back to the Bible
Lutheran Vespers
Randall Terry Live - Randall Terry
Bev LaHaye Live - Dr. Beveraly LaHaye
Christ Community - Omaha Christ Community Church
Johnny and Friends
Promise Keepers
Kenneth Copeland
James Eckman - KGBI
Westside Baptist - Omaha Westside Baptist Church
Lloyd Olgivie
Jesus & His Times - TLC Network
Mysteries of the Bible - A & E Network
John Osteen - Family Channel
Thru the Bible - Dr. J. Vernon McGee
Point of View - Marlin Maddoux
Adrian Rogers
Dawson McCallister Live - Dawson McCallister
KGBI Sports Spectrum
KGBI Ron Brown Sport Report
KGBI Sunday Morning
Money Matters - Larry Burkett
Cal Thomas Commentary
The Spoken Word
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http://www.tbn.org


