

# Mass media and the matriculant mind: a case study of political socialisation in South Africa

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## 1. Introduction

As separate areas of study, both political socialisation and the mass media has received much attention. However, there seems to be a paucity of empirical studies which engage both variables as an agent of political socialisation. Very few studies exist which test hypotheses with regard to the effect of media experiences on the cognitive and affective development of children.

The profusion of studies examining the role of political socialisation agents in society is sadly not reflected in research on the South African society. It is of particular interest to examine the socialisation agents in South Africa because it is through these agents that new members of the political system learn traditional as well as revolutionary forms of political life. Although a few analyses of the mass media have been undertaken,<sup>1</sup> especially with regard to its propaganda role, no studies focus on the role of the media regarding political socialisation.

This article is an attempt to rectify (albeit partially and very superficially) the situation described above. The possible role of the mass media in political socialisation of South African school children is investigated here.<sup>2</sup> This cross-cultural study<sup>3</sup> (cross-cultural in that the sample group includes members of all the country's population and language groups) focuses on children completing the highest possible level of available secondary schooling in South Africa — matric.

In the first part of this article the methodology and structure of the questionnaire will be adumbrated. The concept "political socialisation" as well as the role of the mass media as a sociali-



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sation agent is then discussed. To end with, the most salient findings of this investigation will be analysed.

## 2. Methodology and Structure of the Questionnaire

During the second half of 1983 a comparative political socialisation study was undertaken

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among matriculants in the Johannesburg area. The fact that the results under discussion were part of a more comprehensive comparative study of political attitudes of African, Coloured, Indian and White scholars, presents the opportunity to evaluate the role of the media and attitudes towards the political system. Altogether, 1 100 respondents — 412 African, 413 Whites (226 Afrikaans-speaking and 187 English-speaking); 166 Indians and 109 Coloureds — completed the questionnaire. The respondents included pupils from Eight 'Black', six 'White', three 'Coloured' and two 'Indian' schools.

It was endeavoured to obtain a proportional socio-economic distribution while selecting schools for inclusion. With regard to the Black schools an ethnic balance was maintained. Three Afrikaans and three English schools were included. The 'White' sample consisted of pupils from three Afrikaans medium schools and three English medium schools. All the other schools had English as medium of instruction.

As far as the structure of the questionnaire was concerned, a Likert-type attitude scale was utilised for testing the items. The questionnaire was concluded with biographical questions and open questions for comments.

To prevent general methodological problems regarding survey research, concepts were called for that can be implemented in a cross-cultural context. Problems with conceptualisation and other linguistic aspects that could give problems in comparative research, were to a large extent eliminated beforehand by giving specific attention to the phrasing of items and also diminished by the fact that the respondents were all matriculants with English as medium of instruction (with the exception of the White Afrikaans respondents who received an Afrikaans questionnaire). The concepts used in the questionnaire were familiar to all four sub-cultures.

A further problem that can occur with cross-cultural research, is the interviewer-respondent relationship which can cause problems especially where respondents are under pressure and could be prejudiced against the interviewer. This problem was to a large extent eliminated by the use of a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed by teachers. Anonymity was guaranteed in the introductory paragraph.

### **3. Political socialisation and mass media in a cross-cultural context**

#### **3.1 The concept political socialisation**

The importance of good definitions cannot be stressed enough — Sartori (1970:1038) stated in this regard: "In this messy confrontation about quantification and its bearing on standard logical rules we simply tend to forget that concept formation stands prior to quantification. The process of thinking inevitably begins with a qualitative natural language, no matter on which shore we shall subsequently land." The first task at hand is thus a short discussion on and definition of political socialisation.

Rosav (1977:31), Elkin and Handel (1972:4) and Stacey (1978:2) state that socialisation refers to the development procedure whereby a person obtains knowledge, abilities, beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions which makes it possible to function as a more or less effective member of society. Socialisation can thus be seen as a process whereby each society tries to shape the new and young members of society and to prepare them for successful incorporation in group life by means of the positive development of innate characteristics and the allotment to a succession of "contents" learned and assimilated by the individual. Stacey (1978:2) considers this to be a conservative point of departure and takes the view that the conceptualisation should also provide for those people in society who are socialised to reject the conventional norms, values and behaviour patterns of society and as such contribute to radical change.

Writers such as Greenstein (1970), Langton (1969), Nimmo and Bonjean (1972) point to the fact that both individualistic and system orientations exist in the study of political socialisation. The first approach focuses on the individual as the main unit of investigation whereas the systems approach focuses on the role of political socialisation in system stability and system maintenance with such scholars as Merton and Parsons as exponents.

Taking a variety of definitions into account, Greenstein (1968:551) offers both a narrow and broad conception of the term: "Narrowly conceived, political socialisation is the deliberate inculcation of political information, values and practices by instructional agents who have

been formally charged with this responsibility.” Broadly conceived, political socialisation encompasses “all political learning, formal or informal, deliberate and unplanned, at every stage of the life cycle, including not only explicitly political learning but also nominally non-political learning.” Generalizing from the different definitions, one can conclude that political socialisation involves individual roles, content, and agents (as a process of learning about politics.)

### 3.2 Mass Media as agent of political socialisation

One of the major issues of political socialisation research is the role of agents of political socialisation. An emphasis on these agents is due to the domination of the “teaching” perspective in contrast with the learning approach which stresses the individual’s own learning activities (Renshon, 1977:115). A political system impresses norms and values in its members through its “agents”. Basic political orientations are, for the most part, transferred by those institutions that also contribute most to the non-political socialisation of the young or new members of a society — for example, the family, the school, peer groups and the mass media. (For an excellent discussion on the role of the primary agents — family, school and peer groups — see Rensohn, 1977:22-138). In the present study the emphasis is only on the mass media.

The following perspectives on the role of the mass media in the political socialisation process obtains in social science literature today:

(a) It has been ascertained that the mass media is the major source of political information for adolescents and children in various cultures (see the studies conducted by Connell (1971) and Koff and Van der Muhl (1973));

(b) A very common argument in the literature is that the media have no or very little impact in the political socialisation process. Klapper (1960) argues that opinion leaders usually interpose themselves between the media and the receiver. In other words the media message is defined for the receiver by his interaction with other opinion formers e.g. the family, school or peer groups. Sears and Whitney (1973) on the other hand argue that there is evidence that the receivers have direct access to media messages, but these messages are rejected if the

information contained therein is not congruent with beliefs already held. The implication in both cases is that the media have a relatively limited role as agent of political socialisation; and

(c) The role of the media in the transmittance of political orientations cannot however be underestimated. It has been found that the media can indirectly e.g. in representation of heroes and villains influence eventual political orientations. The sudden rise in the 60’s and 70’s in the American mass media of the representation of the “positive qualities” of ethnic minorities has facilitated the integration of these groups in society. Similarly recent trends in South African media to break away from traditional South African stereotypes of Blacks can change the racial attitudes of the new generation of White South Africans.

“ In summary then it would seem that the effects of the mass media on the political socialisation process are very subtle and take a long period of time. It is highly unlikely that the mass media can effect radical change in the political orientations of most people over a relatively short period of time. “

Notwithstanding the criticism against the concept of mass media “exposure” as principle variable employed to explain possible media “effects”, it is conceivable to put up a solid argument for its application in South Africa. (For the criticism see Iyengar, 1979; McLeod *et al.*, 1977 and Zulin, 1977). As is the case in many deeply divided societies the mass media tends to mirror the political divisions between the sub-cultures in South Africa. The situation is thus that the issues to investigate are not only *how much* an individual is exposed to the media but rather whether the individual is exposed *at all*. Even if the “limited effects” model of the mass media, which considers the mass media as a reinforcer of existing political orientations is rejected as Chaffee in Renshon (ed.) (1977), Robinson (1976), Krauss and Davis (1976) and Tan (1981:280) did, there still exists a case to investigate the pattern of media exposure in South Africa. It is to be expected that, with reference to newspapers and radio particularly, certain sub-cultures will have little cross-cultural media exposure. By implication this also holds true for alternative political views.

### 3.3 Newspapers, Radio and TV in South Africa: A brief overview

#### The press

In the South African context where for instance, the newspapers with fairly remarkable consistency “have revealed the aspirations and visions of the two competing White groups and have only very rarely found common course” (Potter, 1975:30), the need for an understanding of the nature of the media and for a historical perspective is essential to an understanding of the tensions which have arisen in such a heterogeneous society.

The newspaper press in South Africa exhibit a remarkable dichotomy in politics: all major English language newspapers to a greater or lesser degree support the liberal opposition and all the Afrikaans language newspapers are Nationalist orientated.<sup>4</sup> Although the English language press took the side of the opposition since 1948, this alliance was never so strong as that which exists between the Nationalist Party and the Afrikaans papers. It must be added that in recent times the traditional English liberal press has come out in support of Nationalist ‘reform’ — see the pro-constitution support given by the *Sunday Times* in the 1983 Referendum or the tepid almost neutral stance adopted by the *Star*. The government’s strongest and most consistent opponents — the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express* were forced to close (albeit by financial considerations) early in 1985.

Apart from the fact that two former editors of Afrikaans papers (Dr. Malan and Dr. Verwoerd) became Prime Ministers at a later stage, various ministers sat on the boards of the large Afrikaans press groups until 1978. This exposed them to sporadic accusations of being a “kept” press. In an analysis of the last general election (1981) Finn (1982:87-89) found this group commitment came very strongly to the fore in coverage of the election.

The point of view of the English language press is described as follows by a former editor of the *Cape Argus*: “The English newspapers also have a common outlook and a single orientation. They are unanimously in opposition, anti-Nationalist, greatly preoccupied with politics and frankly and forcefully partisan...” (Herbst, 1982:392). As was pointed out earlier

this view must be qualified now in connection with a number of English papers.

With reference to the Black Press it is sufficient to say that these papers are exclusively financed and controlled by White interest groups and run by Blacks. The “extras” published by “White” newspapers must also be taken into account — these are special supplements to some papers for Black, Coloured and Indian readers. In 1980 there were 255 Black journalists in the employ of newspapers in comparison to more than 3 800 White journalists (Steyn Commission, 1981:1080). Because of the relatively small Black press, the English press provided a political outlet for their Black readers.

Overall the Black press is not less politically orientated and in October 1977 *World* and its weekend edition *Weekend World* with a circulation of 178 000 were banned for political reasons. The former editor of this paper later started *The Post* and *Weekend Post* which in its turn was discontinued for a few weeks in 1980 because of a national strike. As a consequence their re-registration as newspapers was refused by the Minister of Internal Affairs (Horrel, 1981:98).

The silencing of Black newspapers was widely deplored by critics of the government and it was pointed out that it would not make the reality of Black aspirations and demands disappear. In fact these papers were soon followed by new voices — the *Sowetan* and *City Press*.

Since the sixties the government has become increasingly more critical of the “English” or opposition press (included here was the Black press) in South Africa. The opposition press was accused at regular intervals of supporting the United Nations, World Council of Churches, the Progressive Federal Party and even terrorists. The press was warned numerous times to “get their house in order” As recently as August 1985 the State President intimated that certain elements of the press must be held responsible for political turmoil in this country. In addition to the legislation controlling the press, there has been increasing efforts, some of them successful, since 1978 when Mr P W Botha became Prime Minister to restrict the “freedom” of the press with direct legislation (For a discussion of the various laws

affecting the press in South Africa, see Stuart, 1982; Strauss *et al.*, 1976; Duff, 1980 and Polak 1981).

### **Radio and television**

Radio and television in South Africa are controlled by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), created by Act of Parliament in 1936 and amended by Act No. 73 of 1976. Broadcasting started as a private enterprise in 1927 but the government took control in 1936. A one-channel TV service transmitting 37 hours a week commenced only in January 1976 — devoting equal time to its English and Afrikaans services. Two channels transmitting nation-wide in Zulu and Xhosa (the Nguni service) and regional in South Sotho, North Sotho and Tswana (the Sotho-service) came into operation in January, 1982.

An SABC Board, appointed by the State President is responsible for all policy matters. The SABC claims to operate on the lines of a public corporation under independent charter. Critics of the corporation maintain however, that it is biased and being used as a propaganda “tool” of the government. Media spokesman of the PFP, Dalling, puts it as follows: “Over the past thirty years, through judicious ministerial appointments to the Board, the government has effectively taken control of the SABC ... No single member of the Board supports the opposition PFP ... As a result nearly all sensitive senior positions in this semi-state monopoly have been filled with Nationalist adherents” (quoted in Honikman, 1984:2). Dalling says the following regarding policy: “... the ethnic policies are religiously followed and the policy of apartheid is promoted as the natural and general norm.” According to Hachten (1979:62) who did a study on SABC TV, Meyer, the previous SABC Board chairman, said the fear that the Afrikaner identity might be “trampled to death by the imperialist Anglo American culture and media” was the reason why TV was only introduced as late as 1976. Hachten points to various instances of government bias in the covering of major events and states that: “Television is used as a propaganda instrument to espouse the political goals and aspirations of Afrikanerism” (Hachten, 1979:62). It must be remembered that the SABC has the monopoly of broadcasting in South Africa. (This monopoly is determined by law). Recent attempts by

Bophuthatswana Television and some independent (homeland-based) radio stations to breach this monopoly has met with swift repression from the SABC. The SABC monopoly of broadcasting is more than a mere financial arrangement—it enables that organisation to monopolise opinion.<sup>5</sup>

Over the years the SABC strenuously denied allegation of bias. In evidence to the Steyn Commission a Director-General of the SABC said that although the SABC “stood above” party politics it had regard for “state security and national interest”. He also conceded that the corporation was never neutral but was responsible in terms of the country’s “general interest” rather than “objective” (Horrel, 1982:99). In the end the Commission recommended that the SABC’s autonomy and impartiality should be assured. However, it made no effective recommendations to end government control of SABC-TV. (For a critical analysis of the Steyn Commission’s Report see Roelofse, 1983).

In contrast to the approach of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media (Steyn Commission, 1981) that depicts South Africa as a democracy, the South African form of government should rather be seen as an autocracy (Theart, 1980 and Tyson, 1980). It is within this framework of an authoritarian state that the press should also be evaluated.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that the mass media in South Africa is strongly divided in a pro-government and an opposition group. This division also holds strong ideological implications—it is a division concerning racial issues that extend deeper than mere political partisanship. It could, apart from a pro- and anti-apartheid division, also be described as reflecting the language divisions — Afrikaans-speaking people nearly all support the Nationalist Party and English people predominantly support the liberal opposition parties. Exposure to the press also reflects this pattern of division.

The popularity of television is very high — over 20% of a group of White high school pupils watched television for more than four hours per day during the school term (Van Vuuren, 1985:23). It thus seems as if the potential political socialisation role of this medium may sur-

pass that of the newspapers and radio. As a result of government control of radio and television, this medium can possibly exercise a pro-government influence.

#### 4. Findings

Firstly, some results on the exposure of the various matriculant groups to the mass media will be given. Then we will look at the type of material they prefer reading in newspapers. Thirdly, findings regarding their listening patterns will be given. Fourthly, their preferences regarding TV material and other reliability ratings of newspapers, radio and TV will be tabulated. Finally, to place these findings in a political context, two tables illustrating the pupil's political attitudes to basic civil rights are included.

From *table 1* the following conclusions can be drawn:

(a) The group of White Afrikaans-speaking matriculants for the greater part ignore daily

newspapers — Sunday papers are read to some extent, however. This pattern largely repeats itself as far as the group of White English-speaking matriculants are concerned. The major difference between the two groups is that the majority of English-speakers read one daily paper (*The Star*) fairly regularly, whereas no single paper is read by substantial numbers of Afrikaans-speakers. It would also seem that more Afrikaans-speakers read English papers than vice versa.

(b) The Black matriculant group has the largest percentage of daily newspaper readers in the given sample. This group mostly reads Black and 'liberal' English-speaking papers.

(c) Coloured and Indian matriculants read the daily newspapers more regularly than their White counterparts.

(d) White Afrikaans-speaking pupils and Coloured pupils read a wider cross-section of Sunday papers than their counterparts.

TABLE 1: FREQUENCY OF NEWSPAPER READERSHIP BY THE DIFFERENT GROUPS

		Blacks	Whites Afrikaans	Whites English	Coloured	Indian
		(N __ 412) %	(N __ 226) %	(N __ 187) %	(N __ 109) %	(N __ 166) %
Star	Almost daily	59,6	13,2	71,7	74,3	81,2
	Never	8,3	36,1	2,1	6,4	3,6
Beeld	Almost daily	0,3	9,4	2,1	9,2	0,0
	Never	87,1	20,3	88,2	45,9	80,0
Citizen	Almost daily	10,5	5,7	10,7	3,7	2,4
	Never	40,6	64,4	40,6	67,6	67,3
Sowetan	Almost daily	47,9	1,3	1,6	18,3	9,1
	Never	11,9	97,4	93,6	42,2	49,7
Rand Daily Mail <sup>5</sup>	Almost daily	57,7	1,8	16,0	44,0	35,8
	Never	10,5	79,0	31,0	13,8	17,0
Rapport	Every Sunday	9,8	80,6	2,7	25,0	1,2
	Never	88,0	8,4	90,4	49,1	89,1
Sunday Times	Every Sunday	63,0	30,0	82,9	71,6	75,8
	Never	13,9	47,1	6,4	7,3	6,7

From *table 2* it is obvious that the Black group is the most interested in reading about politics — nearly twice as many as the second highest ranking i.e. Indians and Coloureds. The White group exhibits the least interest.

From *table 3* it is evident that the music stations Radio 5 and 702 (both stations deliver

more or less no social and political comment) are the most popular with the White, Coloured and Indian groups. The Black group prefers the English and African services to the music stations. It is interesting to note that the Black, Coloured and Indian groups listen much more to overseas services than the White group.

TABLE 2: TYPE OF ARTICLE PUPILS PREFER TO READ IN NEWSPAPERS

Type of Article	Blacks (N __ 412)	Whites (N __ 226)	Whites Afrikaans (N __ 187)	Coloured English (N __ 109)	Indian (N __ 166)
		%	%	%	%
Political Emphasis	41,1	17,2	16,4	23,4	21,3
General Information	39,0	54,3	63,4	55,1	48,7
Entertainment	7,1	5,7	8,2	11,2	12,5
Sport	12,8	12,8	12,0	10,3	17,5

TABLE 3: RADIO STATIONS PREFERRED BY PUPILS

		Blacks (N __ 412)	Whites Afrikaans (N __ 226)	Whites English (N __ 187)	Coloured (N __ 109)	Indian (N __ 166)
		%	%	%	%	%
Afrikaans	Once or more per day	6,1	35,7	2,7	21,1	0,3
	Never	75,8	34,4	88,2	63,3	87,2
English	Once or more per day	64,0	7,5	40,1	46,0	56,1
	Never	16,3	64,3	33,9	36,7	25,0
Radio5/702	Once or more per day	45,3	84,1	90,9	56,9	86,6
	Never	25,8	7,5	1,1	6,7	17,4
African Stations	Once or more per day	61,3	0,9	1,1	31,6	4,8
	Never	21,7	97,8	97,3	51,4	86,1
Foreign Broadcasts (BBC, Voice of America)	Once or more per day	19,0	1,3	3,2	19,2	15,1
	Never	55,2	88,1	66,3	53,2	46,7

In *table 4* the same pattern as in *table 1* emerges. Whites are less interested in political programmes on TV than the other groups. All groups, except the Indians regard TV as the

most reliable medium (Table 5) — they see it as the least reliable. An interesting phenomenon is the little trust Whites, especially the Afrikaans speaking group, have in newspapers.

TABLE 4: TYPE OF TV VIEWING DONE BY PUPILS

Type of Viewing	Blacks (N __ 412)	Whites (N __ 226)	Whites Afrikaans (N __ 187)	Coloured English (N __ 109)	Indian (N __ 166)
		%	%	%	%
Political Emphasis	22,2	10,6	6,5	22,4	14,8
General Information	24,2	48,5	23,2	25,2	25,4
Entertainment	32,2	30,8	51,9	36,4	43,2
Sport	21,4	10,1	18,4	15,9	16,7

TABLE 5: RELIABILITY RATING OF MASS MEDIA BY PUPILS

Most Reliable Medium	Blacks (N __ 412)	Whites (N __ 226)	Whites Afrikaans (N __ 187)	Coloured English (N __ 109)	Indian (N __ 166)
		%	%	%	%
Newspapers	22,4	4,4	15,9	29,7	31,5
Radio	11,2	16,2	31,8	24,7	42,8
TV	66,4	80,4	52,3	45,6	25,7

TABLE 6: RESPONSE TO STATEMENT:  
ALL RACES IN SOUTH AFRICA SHOULD HAVE EQUAL POLITICAL RIGHTS

	Blacks (N __ 412)	Whites (N __ 226)	Whites Afrikaans (N __ 187)	Coloured English (N __ 109)	Indian (N __ 166)
		%	%	%	%
Strongly Agree	79,0	3,1	14,4	78,0	81,3
Agree	16,0	8,8	31,0	16,5	13,3
I Have No Option	2,7	5,3	18,2	1,8	4,2
Disagree	1,0	37,0	26,7	0,0	0,6
Strongly Disagree	1,5	45,8	9,6	3,7	0,6

The response reflected in *table 6* and *7*, clearly shows the differences between the Whites and the other groups regarding basic societal values. The English speaking group does however evidence a more "liberal" attitude.

## 5. Analysis and Interpretation

In an attempt to interpret the findings, the discussion may at times extend beyond the empirical data. Such interpretive statements

should be seen as hypotheses for future research.

As could be expected, the reading pattern of newspapers concur with certain ethnic patterns. Of all groups the White group reads the newspapers least. The Afrikaans-speaking pupils very seldom read the newspapers and when they do, it is Afrikaans newspapers with the exception of the *Sunday Times*. The other three groups evidence a congruent pattern. In a



TABLE 7: RESPONSE TO STATEMENT: PEOPLE SHOULD BE FREE TO TRAVEL WHERE THEY LIKE IN OUR COUNTRY WITHOUT ANY FORM OR PASS

	Blacks (N __ 412)	Whites (N __ 226)	Whites Afrikaans (N __ 187)	Coloured English (N __ 109)	Indian (N __ 166)
		%	%	%	%
Strongly Agree	63,6	11,0	19,8	69,7	77,1
Agree	13,6	19,4	38,0	17,4	15,1
I Have No Option	6,1	1,8	9,1	5,5	3,0
Disagree	10,4	42,7	21,9	1,8	3,6
Strongly Disagree	6,3	10,4	11,2	5,5	0,6

comparison of the categories that pupils prefer to read, the Black, Coloured and Indian groups prefer the category with a political content. One draws the conclusion that this is due to their high interest in politics. In response to the question: "How interested are you in politics?", nearly 42% of the Black group stated that they were "very" interested", with English-speaking White pupils rating only 17% — the lowest.

The greater interest of the Black group in politics is also evident in their pattern of television viewing. Together with the Coloured group they also show the highest preference for programmes with a political content. The type of radio services pupils listen to can also be an indication of the Black group's greater interest in politics. In contrast with the other groups, they are low on the list depicting preference for the music stations Radio 5 and 702.

To determine if the mass media play a role in political socialisation, especially from a social learning perspective, proof would have to be given of whether the media is readily available and that the media content deals directly with political orientations (Atkin, 1981:301) and that the learning of these contents will lead to intrinsic or extrinsic "rewards" (Tan, 1981:270). From *Table 2*, in particular, one can conclude that newspapers are readily available to most of the respondents. An analysis of the *All Media and Product Survey*, 1984 (S.A. Advertising Research Foundation, 1984) shows that the Johannesburg area has the highest average newspaper circulation of all urban areas. Sections 2.3 makes it clear that the papers take a relatively biased political stand.

The next relevant issue is the nature of television exposure as this medium can play a decisive role in political socialisation. In a content analysis of SATV and four newspapers (as controls) Honikam (1984:5) finds that there is a great difference between the number of social conflict items presented in the press and on TV news. Honikam comes to the conclusion that TV news bulletins not only gave less scope to particular domestic conflict issues, but that some domestic issues which appeared in most newspapers were omitted from SATV bulletins. The *Rand Daily Mail* evidenced a trend totally opposite to that of the SATV and the other newspapers by giving prominence to domestic conflict. Honikman finds that of the social conflict items presented on TV, 29% dealt with South African domestic topics, 58% with foreign topics and 13% with topics that were both local and international in subject. Honikman (1984:10) comes to the conclusion that: "It could be assumed from this that the SATV's audience is being led to believe that domestic conflict is a simpler, less intense and easier to solve affair."

One must draw the conclusion that television plays an important role in political socialisation when the reliability rating respondents give to television is considered. Only the Indian group does not see it as the most reliable medium. A possible reason for this is the fact that more or less no time is devoted to the Indians as a group on SATV. In contrast with the Coloureds, there are also very few Indians that appear in "visible" positions on television such as journalists or continuity announcers. Another possible reason is that the Indians as the group with the

strongest political views against the present political dispensation (see Tables 6 and 7) possibly see television as "being in the government's service." They see the radio as the most reliable medium — a special time is allocated on the English service for news and cultural programmes for Indians.

Furthermore, they are also the group that probably listen most often to overseas radio stations. This could perhaps be due to Indian language broadcasts from India and Pakistan. They are also the group that give newspapers the highest reliability rating: As they read only English newspapers, they are to a very small extent exposed to pro-Nationalist Party influences through this medium.

The very low reliability that Afrikaans-speaking pupils accredit to the newspapers, could be attributed to the fact that newspapers are criticised collectively by government spokesmen. The standpoint that the Afrikaans language newspapers took up against the Conservative Party, has irritated many Afrikaans-speaking people. Some people believed that the Afrikaans newspapers over-reacted politically against fellow-Afrikaners by criticising their conservative viewpoints (which are acceptable to many of the readers) too harshly. The high reliability that Blacks credit television with, does not concur with their political views as evidenced in tables 6 and 7, and cannot be explained without further research. A possible explanation for this might be found in the argument that insists that people have a tendency to reject information inconsistent with beliefs previously held (Sears, 1973:8). The implication of this may be that Blacks may automatically reject what they see as political propaganda while they may attach some veracity to items with a relatively low political content like sport and entertainment. TV is, however, generally considered to be the most credible among major sources of political information (Tan, 1981:27). In the light of this, the large deviation of the Indian group is therefore of more interest than the high reliability that the Black group attributes to television.

Both newspapers and television carry a high political content and all the groups in the sample are exposed to it. There is every opportunity, therefore, for political learning to take place.

Although one usually expects the media to play a reinforcing role regarding its supportive function of the system, there is a definite clash to be seen in the motivation patterns of the press in South Africa. The English language press is a source of motivation for negative reinforcement. They support the "voteless" in their plight who are told that they are not getting what is "justly" theirs from the system as Easton and Dennis (1969:57) put it. Exposure to this type of content may lead to distrust of the system as well as lower levels of political efficacy and participation. A good example is the relatively low "trust" expressed by Coloureds and Indians in television — a system reinforcing media — and their relatively high support for the newspapers — a negative reinforcer in these groups' ease. These findings may serve as a partial explanation for the Coloureds and Indians strong anti-system stand (see tables 6 and 7). However, the role of other primary political socialisation agents should not be overlooked.

## 6. Conclusion

From the above analyses the following conclusions can be made:

(a) Different patterns of media exposure are manifested as far as the different racial, culture and language groups in the South African society is concerned;

(b) In general TV was accorded a relatively high level of reliability although the Indian group deemed the newspapers and radio to be more reliable; and,

(c) It can be said with some certainty that the white group (the English-speaking group to a lesser extent) and the so-called non-white groups occupied the extremes of a spectrum as far as political attitudes regarding the system are concerned.

A number of issues also need further investigation:

(d) An earlier study (Kotzé & Norval, 1983) which compared only White and Black pupils pointed to a very different pattern of political socialisation when the primary agents — family, school and peer groups — were taken into account. The distinctly different roles which the various agents in the Afrikaans-, English-speaking and Black sub-cultures play regarding political learning were quite clear from this

earlier study. The role of these agents in society in conjunction with mass media as agents should be investigated — with specific emphasis on the learning theory perspective. At this stage it seems certain that at least in the case of the White group, the mass media plays a secondary role as agent of political socialisation.

One of the weaknesses of the above study is that no attention is given to the content of programmes watched or listened to, or articles read. (In the present study, the form of viewing, listening and viewing patterns are sketched). In future studies the symbolic content of programmes and articles should be analysed for there is reason to believe that this aspect of the socialisation process has a more pervasive influence in the long term than the overt transfer of political information.

There is however, some justification for the study of the way in which political information is communicated via the mass media in our society. Although it has been shown that linkages exist between the media and the communication of political information the connection between political information and political opinion has generally been underplayed in the available literature. It is often argued that political opinions or preconceptions act as a filter as far as political information is concerned. For instance a person receiving new information with negative connotations on a political figure may reject or disregard this information in terms of his previously held opinions. One also has to consider that political information can to a large extent determine political opinion. The implication of this is that the various media insofar as they transmit political information — whether true or propagandistic — can indirectly shape political opinion. (A very good illustration of the socialising role of the media via the communication of “new” political information is to be found in the shifts of American attitudes towards the South African issue. Low saturation coverage and the creation of a definite antipathy towards South Africa’s racial policies). It may be fruitful to establish a research framework where the relationship between political information and political socialisation may be studied in a wider field in the South African context.

(e) In the present study the apparent differ-

ences in political attitudes among the different sub-cultures point to the need for more cross-cultural research on political socialisation if one wants to explain these differences in more depth.

1. In an overview of communications research in South Africa, Puth (1985:65) points out that this type of research is still younger than two decades.

2. Cross-cultural research is research that is conducted concurrently in more than one culture. It can thus be a bi-cultural or multi-cultural study aiming to enhance theory or knowledge by means of comparison.

3. *The Citizen* is the only pro-government English language daily newspaper with a circulation larger than 50 000. It was established as a government “mouthpiece” during the seventies and was a subject of controversy during the “Information scandal”. The present owners are the Afrikaans press group Perskor.

4. In 1986 a new independent TV-service, M-Net, will be introduced. It will be jointly administered by the Afrikaans and English Press groups.

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