

Impacts OF Media on Society: A Sociological Perspective.

¹Hakim Khalid Mehraj, ²Akhtar Neyaz Bhat, ³Hakeem Rameez Mehraj
Lecturer¹, Govt. College Baramulla

ABSTRACT: *Man is a social animal, he cannot live in isolation, so his actions affect not only him but society in general, society affects a man in so many ways. This paper gives a brief definition of what media is and what are the effects of media on society. During the course of this literature various types of Impacts of media on the individual, his family and society are highlighted.*

KEY WORDS : *Society, Media, Impacts of media, Theories of media, Communication theories etc*

I. INTRODUCTION:

Human beings express their nature by creating and recreating an organization which guides and controls their behaviour in many ways. This organization liberates and limits the activities of men, sets up standards for them to follow and maintain. Whatever the imperfections and tyrannies it has exhibited in human history, it is necessary condition of fulfillment of life. This organization which is responsible for fulfillment of life of every individual is called society. Man in every society has suffered from one or the other problems. Men in modern societies are also experiencing various problems and his behavior gets affected by many things, media is one of them.: Media is the plural of the word medium. Media are the vehicles or channels which are used to convey information, entertainment, news, education, or promotional messages are disseminated. Media includes every broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as television, radio, newspapers, billboards, mails, telephone, fax, internet etc (the main means of mass communication). The mass media occupy a high proportion of our leisure time: people spend, on average, 25 hours per week watching television, and they also find time for radio, cinema, magazines and newspapers. For children, watching television takes up a similar amount of time to that spent at school or with family and friends. While school, home and friends are all acknowledged as major socializing influences on children, a huge debate surrounds the possible effects of the mass media and findings both in favour and against effects are controversial. The question of effects is typically raised with an urgency deriving from a public rather than an academic agenda and with a simplicity which is inappropriate to the complexity of the issue (we do not ask of other social influences, what is the effect of parents on children or do schools have an effect which generalizes to the home or do friends have positive or negative effects).

The possibility of media effects is often seen to challenge individual respect and autonomy, as if a pro-effects view presumes the public to be a gullible mass, cultural dopes, vulnerable to an ideological hypodermic needle, and as if television was being proposed as the sole cause of a range of social behaviours. Such a stereotyped view of research tends to pose an equally stereotyped alternative view of creative and informed viewers making rational choices about what to see. Overview articles often describe a history of progress over the past seventy years of research which alternates between these two extremes -- first we believed in powerful effects, then came the argument for null effects, then the return to strong effects etc. -- a history whose contradictions become apparent when old research is re-read with new eyes. Contemporary media studies sometimes define itself through its rejection of the language of effects research -- criticising the laboratory experiment, the logic of causal inference, and psychological reductionism. S

II. FUNCTIONS THE MEDIA

Mass media is a tremendous source of information for individuals as well as society. We know a bit about the role of mass media in a democracy. Let us now see how the media perform their functions to bring about changes.

III. MASS MEDIA CAN HELP IN CHANGE

Using mass media, people's attitudes and habits can be changed. For example all of us have mistaken or wrong notions about various diseases like leprosy or HIV/AIDS. Many of us think that by touching people suffering from these diseases we would be infected. You might have heard on radio or watch television programmes or read messages which tell us that by touching an HIV/AIDS patient we do not get infected. Similarly, for eradicating polio there are special programmes and messages disseminated through the media.

They inform people about the need for giving polio drops to children and about the day that is declared a 'polioday.' Special arrangements are made to give polio drops to as many children as possible on polio day. Change would also mean things for the better. The concept of development of a country is again a matter of change, when old practices and equipment are changed and new, better and more efficient means are being used. Mass media play an important role in communicating this change. By giving the necessary information, and sometimes skills, the media can help bring about this change. You may ask how media can impart skills. Mass media like television can demonstrate and show how things work. You would have seen on television how a certain dish is cooked using modern kitchen equipment.

Mass Media have made the World Smaller and Closer :The speed of media has resulted in bringing people across the world closer. Let us take an example. When you watch a cricket match between India and another country in England, Australia or New Zealand, live on television, you feel you are part of the crowd in that stadium. Events, happy or sad, happening anywhere can be seen live. Sometimes we feel that the entire world is one big family. You might have heard the term "global village". It means that the whole world is shrinking and becoming a village. Wherever we go to any part of the world, we see the same products such as soft drinks, television, washing machine, refrigerator etc. and the same type of advertisements. Similarly, the world wide web and internet have brought people and countries much closer.

Mass Media Promotes Distribution of Goods : Mass media are used by the consumer industry to inform people about their products and services through advertising. Without advertising, the public will not know about various products (ranging from soup to oil, television sets to cars) and services (banking, insurance, hospitals etc.) which are available in the market as well as their prices. Thus mass media help the industries and consumers

Entertainment and informative :Mass media is one of the best means of recreation. Television, radio, internet are the best means of entertainment and extremely informative. Social media keeps us up to date with the happenings around the world.

We can sum up the functions of media as:

- [1] Media provide news and information required by the people.
- [2] Media can educate the public.
- [3] Media helps a democracy function effectively. They inform the public about government policies and programmes and how these programmes can be useful to them. This helps the people voice their feelings and helps the government to make necessary changes in their policies or programmes.
- [4] Media can entertain people.
- [5] Media can act as an agent of change in development.
- [6] Media has brought people of the world closer to each other.
- [7] Media promote trade and industry through advertisements
- [8] Media can help the political and democratic processes of a country.
- [9] Media can bring in positive social changes.

IV. SOCIAL IMPACTS OF MEDIA

The mass media occupy a high proportion of our leisure time: people spend, on average, 25 hours per week watching television, and they also find time for radio, cinema, magazines and newspapers. For children, watching television takes up a similar amount of time to that spent at school or with family and friends. While school, home and friends are all acknowledged as major socializing influences on children, a huge debate surrounds the possible effects of the mass media and findings both in favour and against effects are controversial. The question of effects is typically raised with an urgency deriving from a public rather than an academic agenda and with a simplicity which is inappropriate to the complexity of the issue (we do not ask of other social influences, what is the effect of parents on children or do schools have an effect which generalizes to the home or do friends have positive or negative effects?). The possibility of media effects is often seen to challenge individual respect and autonomy, as if a pro-effects view presumes the public to be a gullible mass, cultural dopes, vulnerable to an ideological hypodermic needle, and as if television was being proposed as the sole cause of a range of social behaviours. Such a stereotyped view of research tends to pose an equally stereotyped alternative view of creative and informed viewers making rational choices about what to see. Overview articles often describe a history of progress over the past seventy years of research which alternates between these two extremes -- first we believed in powerful effects, then came the argument for null effects, then the return to strong effects etc. -- a history whose contradictions become apparent when old research is re-read with new eyes. Contemporary media studies sometimes define itself through its rejection of the language of

effects research -- criticising the laboratory experiment, the logic of causal inference, and psychological reductionism. This rejection is, I will suggest in this chapter, in part justified and in part overstated

Media effects: a matter of change or reinforcement?

If by media effects, we mean that exposure to the media changes people's behaviour or beliefs, then the first task is to see whether significant correlations exist between levels of exposure and variations in behaviour or beliefs. 'Change' theories -- on which this chapter will focus -- generally presume that the more we watch, the greater the effect. Most research does show such a correlation (Signorelli & Morgan, 1990), albeit a small and not always consistent one. The next question concerns the direction of causality. For example, having shown that those who watch more violent television tend to be more aggressive (Huesmann, 1982), researchers must ask whether more aggressive people choose to watch violent programmes (i.e. selective exposure), whether violent programmes make viewers aggressive (i.e. media effects), or whether certain social circumstances both make people more aggressive and lead them to watch more violent television (i.e. a common third cause). To resolve this issue, the effects tradition has generally adopted an experimental approach, arguing that only in controlled experiments can people be randomly assigned to experimental and control conditions, thereby controlling for any other variables in the situation. Only then can causal inferences be drawn concerning any observed correlation between the experimental manipulation (generally media exposure) and resultant behaviour. In research on media violence, some researchers offer a bidirectional argument, concluding that there is evidence for both selective viewing and media effects (Huesmann, Lagerspetz, & Eron, 1984). Undoubtedly, many viewers choose selectively to watch violent or stereotyped programmes (after all there has always been a market for violent images). However, it does not necessarily follow that there are no effects of viewing such programmes or that motivated viewers can successfully undermine any possible effects. Many remain concerned especially for the effects of violent programmes on children and so-called vulnerable individuals, irrespective of whether they chose to watch them.

However, if by media effects, we mean that the media do not generate specific changes but rather reinforce the status quo, then empirical demonstration of media effects becomes near impossible. It is difficult to know what beliefs people might have espoused but for the media's construction of a normative reality, and difficult to know what role the media plays in the construction of those needs and desires which in turn motivate viewers to engage with the media as they are rather than as they might be. Nonetheless, arguments that the media support the norm, suppress dissent and undermine resistance, remove issues from the public agenda, are central to theories of ideology (Thompson, 1990), propaganda (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986) and cultivation (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Similarly, it is extremely difficult to test the argument that the media, in combination with other social forces, bring about gradual social changes over the long term, as part of the social construction of reality. Yet for many, these 'drip drip' effects of the media are likely to exist, for television is 'telling most of the stories to most of the people most of the time' (Gerbner, et al., 1986, p.18). There are, then, difficulties in conducting empirical research on both change and reinforcement conceptions of media effect. As we shall see, the findings of the field are in many ways inconclusive. It has been argued, consequently, that the media effects debate can never be resolved and so research should cease. This raises two related questions. First, can any general conclusions be drawn from effects research to date concerning both the overall balance of findings and promising future directions. Second, if the issue will not go away -- as the history of effects research and public concern throughout this century suggests -- how should the question of effects be reformulated.

V. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF COMMUNICATION:

The sociological approach to communication theory is based on assumption that there exists a definite relationship between mass communication and social change. Some of the relevant theories which are going to be discussed here are :

- [1] **The cultivation theory:** It was developed by George Gerbner in 1967. It is based on the assumption that mass media have subtle effects on audiences who unknowingly absorb the dominant symbols, images, and messages of media. He calls it "cultivation of dominant image pattern". According to this theory a long persistent exposure to TV is capable of cultivating common beliefs about the world.
- [2] **Social Learning Theory:** It is one of the most widely used theories in mass communication. According to this theory the media are active but subtle educators in teaching readers, viewers, listeners about the world. An important component of this theory is that it explains how people can learn from observations alone.

- [3] **Agenda Setting Theory:** The term was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L Shaw in 1972 in the context of election campaign where the politicians seek to convince the voters about the party's most important issues. This theory tries to describe and explain as how stories are selected. (a)Packaged and presented- a process known as Gatekeeping,(b)by resulting agenda (c) how this agenda affects what people think about the relative importance of the issues presented. This theory also "predicts" that of particular news item is presented prominently and frequently by the press, the public will come to believe that it is important.
- [4] **Play Theory:** In this theory of mass communication William Stephenson counters those who speak of the harmful effects of the mass media by arguing that first and foremost the media serve audiences as play experiences. Even news papers, says Stephenson are read for pleasure rather than information or enlightenment. He sees media as buffer against conditions which would otherwise be anxiety producing. The media provides "Communication-pleasure"
- [5] **Uses and Gratification Theory:** This theory has emerged out of the studies which shifted their focus from what media do to the people to what people do with media (katz,1959). The uses approach assumes that audiences are active and willingly expose themselves to media and that the most potent of mass media cannot influence an individual who has "no use" for it in the environment in which he lives. The uses of the mass media are dependent on the perception, selectivity, and previously held values, beliefs and interests of the people.

VI. MEDIA EFFECTS

Sex and violence in the media

One of the more controversial areas of study of the media is what effect the media have on us. This is particularly timely as eyes are on Hollywood and the violent and sexy movies it makes.

Does all the sex in the media, particularly the movies and television, have anything to do with the sexual mores of society?

How about violence in the media?

Does it have a relationship with the increase in violence in our society?

Does the media just mirror the sex and violence in society, or does it influence society?

Remember the theme for this class that we discussed the first week (go back to themes lecture for a refresher.)

There have been countless studies trying to find out. Some of the most famous were the Payne Studies in the late 1920s that looked at the impact of movie violence on children. And starting in the 1960s people started looking for a cause for the increase of violence in society.

Violent crimes in this country were on the rise.

We were at war.

A president (John Kennedy) was assassinated.

A presidential candidate (Bobby Kennedy) was assassinated.

A civil right leader (Martin Luther King) was assassinated.

There was an attempt on the life of the Pope.

There had to be a cause. Why the sudden increase? To some, the media --especially television-- seemed a good candidate. After all, in the 1960s we had the first American generation raised on television. And if you looked at the fare on television, you saw all kinds of cop shoot-em-up shows. Movies, threatened with extinction thanks to television, had responded by including more violence and sex.

A number of long-term studies were conducted to determine what, if any results, all that media violence was having on us. Four major results came from these studies. A fifth one has evolved overtime.

Catharsis Theory : The first of these theories suggests that rather than be harmful violence in the media actually has a positive effect on society. The central assumption of the Catharsis Theory is that people, in course of daily life, build up frustrations. Vicarious participation in others' aggressions help release those tensions. In other words, every day we frustrations in us build up. Without a release valve we risk the chance of becoming violent, or at least aggressive. You do poorly on a test. You have to park to far away from the classroom. Some jerk cuts in front of you on the freeway. You get home and your significant other, or a child, starts demanding your attention. You snap back by yelling or hitting. That counts as violence as much as shooting someone. It is only a matter of degree. The Catharsis theorist would say that by watching violence in the media you release some of that tension and are less likely to be aggressive or violent. But can you say the same thing about sex in the media?

Aggressive Cues Theory : Then there is the opposite view, that violence DOES have an impact. Probably most prevalent of these theories is the Aggressive Cues Theory that has as its central assumption this: Exposure to aggressive stimuli will increase physiological and emotional arousal, which will increase the probability of violence. In other words, all that violence gets the adrenaline juices in us flowing and makes us more edgy, increasing the chance that we'll be more aggressive or more violent. Aggressive Cues theorists are quick to point out that watching violence does not mean we'll always be more aggressive or violent, but it increases the chances. And the way in which the violence is presented will have an impact on us, too. If we can relate to the protagonist committing the violence, or if the violence is presented in a justifiable way, we can be led to aggressive behavior. If a bratty kid gets spanked in a media portrayal --clearly an aggressive and violent act-- it sends a message that corporal punishment is acceptable under the right circumstances. If steelworkers see a show where steelworkers drink and brawl after work every day, they are more likely to accept that drinking and brawling are normal behavior.

Observational Learning Theory :The Observational Learning theorist would take the Aggressive Cues theory a step further. This theory says that people can learn by observing aggression in media portrayals and, under some conditions, model its behavior. If there are 50 ways to leave your lover, then there must be at least 49 ways to be violent or aggressive. And watching violent media portrayals will teach you new ways to be violent. Ever watch a whodunit, such as a Columbo episode, where you spot where the criminal makes the fatal mistake? Ever catch yourself saying, "If I ever committed a murder I would not make THAT mistake?" What? Are you suggesting there is a circumstance where you would kill someone?

Or, how about this? Imagine walking down a dark alley and someone steps out in front of you and makes a threatening gesture. What would you do? Anyone think of some kung fu/karate moves you might make to defend yourself? That's a pretty aggressive/violent thought. And you learned it by watching a media portrayal. So the Observational Learning theorist says that not only would the media violence increase the probability of the viewer committing an aggression or violence, it teaches the viewer how to do it.

Does media mirror society or does it influence it? (The answer is both.)

Further, the Observational Theorist hedges his bet by pointing out that you will not automatically go out and mimic the violent act, but you store the information away in your brain.

Again, think about sex instead of violence. Does watching sexual portrayals teach you new ways to think about sex and perhaps engage in sexual acts? If you see that sleeping with someone on a first date is normal, after a while you start believing that everyone must be doing it, so you should, too.

Reinforcement Theory : One theory says that media violence decreases the probability of violence by the viewer. Two others say that it will increase the probability of violence. And then there is the Reinforcement Theory that debunks both. The central assumption of this theory is that media portrayals reinforce established behaviors viewers bring with them to the media situation. Violent portrayals will increase the likelihood of violent or aggressive behavior for those who accept violence and aggression as normal. It will decrease the likelihood of aggression and violence for those brought up to believe that violence is bad. Violence merely reinforces prior beliefs. Instead of looking for blame in a violent media portrayal, the Reinforcement theorist would say that if you want to predict an outcome, look at the viewer's background. Look at the person's cultural norms and views of social roles. If person grows up in a crime-ridden neighborhood, then violent portrayals are more likely to lead to violence. Obviously, selective perception (go back to the communication lecture) is going on here. But the Reinforcement theorist would point out that there is going to be the exception to the rule. You are going to run across the gentle old man who everyone believed would never hurt a fly who whacks his family into a thousand pieces one day. Or you are going to find the gang member who one day recognizes the futility of violence and turns to the priesthood.

Cultivation Theory : A final theory on the effects of violence in the media has evolved out of more recent studies. It is the Cultivation Theory. Rather than predict that we will turn to or from violence, it looks at how we'll react to the violence. The central assumption of the theory is that in the symbolic world of media, particularly TV, shapes and maintains audience's conception of the real world. In other words, the media, especially TV, creates fantasy world that is mean spirited and dangerous. It also creates stereotypes of dominant/weak folk in society. For instance, imagine a bank robber who is big and mean. Is your imaginary bank robber of certain race? Are all people that look like this bank robber actually mean back robbers? Or how about this? You are starting to show some signs of age with gray hair and wrinkles around your eyes. If you are guy in the media, that is good. It shows a maturing. If you are woman, that is bad, it just shows that you are getting old and less vital. A male can be dominant and be looked up to.

A woman who is dominant can be a bitch. All lawyers are crooks. All journalists are seedy (as in "The Front Page"). All media stereotypes! And the media tell us that it is a mean world out there. Driving freeways is unsafe because of driveby shootings and spectacular police car chases. Crime in the neighborhood is rampant if you look at the nightly news. Some people who live vicariously through television feel it is unsafe to leave their home or apartment and become shut-ins.

What type of media is used by youth

- Computers
- Texting
- Facebook
- Youtube
- Smart phones with apps
- ipads
- Television
- Movies
- Video games
- Tweeting
- MySpace
- Pinterest

Use/ Consumption of Social Media

- 93% of teens are active users of the internet (60-70% daily)
- 75% of teens own a cellphone
- Teens average over 3000 texts per month (100/day)
- Text messaging has increased most dramatically, along with media multi-tasking

What Teens do Online

- The percentage of Internet users, ages 12-17, who do the following online:
- 89% send or read email(Chat)
- 84% go to websites about movies, TV shows, music groups, or sports
- 81% play online games
- 76% go online to get news or information about current events
- 75% send or receive instant messages
- 57% go online to get information about college
- 43% buy online merchandise
- 22% look for information about a health topic that's hard to talk about

Teen Social-Networking by the Numbers

- 51% of teens check their sites more than once a day.
- 22% of teens check their site more than 10 times a day.
- 39% of teens have posted something they later regretted.
- 37% of teens have used sites to make fun of other students.
- 25% of teens have created a profile with a false identity.
- 24% of teens have hacked into someone else's social-networking account.
- 13% of teens have posted nude or seminude pictures or videos of themselves or others, online.

Impact of media types

- Induced fear and phobias
- Media multi-tasking affects attention
- Reality vs. fantasy
- Role models
- Time use

Impact of high exposure on behavior and mental health

- Middle schoolers use more media than any other age group (8 hrs., 40 min per day)
- Lower academic achievement, grades
- Lower attachment to school
- Shorter attention spans
- Among youth who report internet harassment victimization and unwanted sexual encounters (sexting), 25% report extreme upset

Exposure and violence

- Visiting hate and satanic sites are associated with significantly elevated odds of violent behavior perpetration
- Exposure to media violence does not affect all children in the same way
- Gender
- Aggressive/ CD youth vs. non
- Physical vs. social aggression

Brain studies

- fMRI studies show exposure to TV violence activates brain regions that regulate emotion, arousal and attention, and episodic memory
- Extensive viewing may lead to a large number of aggressive scripts stored in long-term memory that end up influencing behavior
- Aggressive media viewing= blunting of emotional response and reduced attention with repeated viewing
- Among aggressive youth, media violence exposure may habituate amygdala responses to violent stimuli (lower emotional impact)

Is exposure to media violence a public health problem?

- Overall, studies do not provide evidence that media violence exposure leads to aggressive behavior
- Average effect sizes are $r = .08$
- Compared to $r = .90$ for smoking and lung cancer; genetics and violence $r = .75$; selfcontrol and criminal behavior $r = .58$; poverty and crime $r = .25$; exposure to child physical child abuse $r = .25$.

Types of Bullying

Direct Bullying: (more typical of boys)

- Open physical attacks on victim
- Verbal (threats, emotional harm)

• Indirect (Relational) Bullying: (more typical of girls)

- Social isolation
- Peer rejection

• Cyber bullying/ electronic aggression

- Social network sites, facebook, twitter, email
- Blow down pages→ fake sites created to spread rumors

VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have discussed various positive and negative impacts that today media has on society. We find that major chunk of youth is using social media networks more than 5 hours a day resulting in decreasing their general health in general and mental health in particular. We also found that media is playing both constructive as well as destructive roles on one hand it has lots of advantages but on the other hand it has lots of disadvantages and at the end it's upto the individual and society to decide which ones to use.

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