

Effects of Media (Television) on Mental Health

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In the current study the effects of television have been investigated as an information source with special reference to mental health of its audience. A sample of 470 individuals of both genders was approached conveniently of ages 18-60 years. An exploratory survey approach was designed for preliminary investigation regarding the effects of media on its audience. The results were compiled through frequency counting, percentages and content analysis techniques. Findings revealed that media contents are portraying an unhelpful role by promoting Violence (41%), Vulgarity (46%) and Chaos (65%) while the smaller proportion (22%) of the sample reported media as entertaining. Moreover the most devastating effect of media is, its key role as a contributor to stress and tension (97%), which is waning the mental and psychological health of its audience. It has been concluded that media is producing adverse effects on the psychological wellbeing of its audience.

Key Words: effect, mental health, tension and stress, psychological wellbeing

Mass media is defined as any medium that carries messages to a large number of people. Media can play a variety of roles. It can be used as a source of information, amusement, recreation as well as anxiety and restlessness. Engaging with mass media cannot only affect our emotions but it is also capable of challenging our intellect. Mass media include books, radio, magazines, newspapers, television, sound recordings and computer complexes. All these mediums are useful for the audiences in their own way. Each medium is a soft face of a big industry, which is further linked with other related industries. Therefore media serves both the industries and its audience through advertising. Media programming is actually spent in the ease time available to the individuals. An idol person automatically has an innate indication of relaxation by means of enjoying and appreciating the television programs (Hills & Michael, 1997). Storylines provide viewers to experience situations otherwise unachievable to them. Media programs possess the ability to affect the nation's ethical and economic principles by taking the advantage of its suggestible viewers. When experienced in a balanced dose, the media programs promote positive attributes, societal goodness and idealism. The balanced consumption of media programs improves the personal and societal happiness (Zillman & Peter, 2000).

Media reveals different impacts on different individuals according to their perceptual abilities. For example, for some the media is perceived as a source of promoting different cultures to various audiences; whereas for students studying politics, it is considered as an important source. However in the commercial world, variables such as spectators' size, configuration and people preferences and choices are

considered vital indicators to gain revenue in the commercial market. From religious leader's viewpoint, media could be considered as risk factors for the youth by instilling an attitude of crime and violence amongst them. The aim to view the media in different perspectives is important in today's world as it is playing a significant role not only in everyone's life but also in the formation of the key social foundations (Lawrence & DeFleur, 1995)

Television is a medium of information. In this research the effects of the television on the population were studied. Television is a graphic medium incorporated with encoding techniques having no counterparts in the real world and is used to produce streams of constantly changing images. It also has the ability of producing special affects such as camera cuts, slow motion techniques, accompanying music, unusual sounds, cries, noises and faceless narrators in unique and innovative ways. Since this source of media, has the ability to produce a variety of multimedia content, it is capable of changing an individual's insight to reality. Bruni and Stance (2006) defined television as an important agent of socialization, which defines the society and determines its goals. Moreover, Shrum (2005) reported that regular awareness of TV use and its content build perceptions of societal realities. This includes the occurring of material comfort that could mislead and might influence the means that spectators reflect upon themselves and the society. Due to such an influential role, it can be inferred that television produces powerful effects on health, interpersonal relationships, social religious and cultural beliefs as well as the values of the society including individual behaviours.

Television can have both positive and negative impacts on its viewers.

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Of the many positive uses, a common and powerful one is the receiving of the latest news in a fraction of a second. Overall, media helps the common man to receive and exchange information. It enables the communities to acquire information about realities and question it through watching and reading the bulletins and news. It also allows the youth to increase their logical thinking through watching the game shows etc. However, alongside the positives, there are some negative attributes too. Some information and news shown can create feelings of stress, anxiety and negativity. Through watching violence children learn from the movies and dramas and mimic those roles in real life; hence endangering their life. Similarly, overexposure to the television and such negative messages intend to make them behave more aggressively which could be a risk to their future. Another interesting effect of media is through the arts, music, dramas and fashion shows which appeal today's youth. Through these images, today's youth is driven to the concept of spending unnecessarily on the objects of satisfaction. The trends entice them to participate in such programs that could be inappropriate for them. (Conversation: conversation about everything, every news, 2010)

By having a brief overlook at the media, it will not be unrealistic to state that the messages and information that are broad casted through media, do effect and shape the opinions, attitudes and psychological states of the audiences. Although individuals and communities are receiving day-to-day news, information and other messages, the literature distinctly lacks the information about how the media is affecting the audience through broadcasting these messages. Our country is already passing through a critical phase in many aspects; hence under such circumstances having no such evidence about the effect of media on the psychological well being of an individual is a gap in the knowledge and system.

Method

Sample

For this study, exploratory survey research method was used. The data was collected from 470 participants, including both males and females ranging in age from 18 -60 year old

Instruments

Questionnaire

Four questionnaires were developed for conducting 3 surveys. These were developed to explore the opinions of the participants about current role of the media in Pakistan

Form 1

At the commencement of the study, a questionnaire was distributed to receive responses. To get an unbiased opinion from the sample i.e. both on positive and negative aspects of the media, the form had one open-ended question. i.e. "what is the role of media in the current scenario"

Form 2

Following the responses received from the form 1, another questionnaire was developed that included 5 open-ended questions.

Form 3

Form 3 had two separate sets of questionnaires, 3.a and 3.b.

Both questionnaires, comprised of 15 four choice questions, with yes, no response choice. Both 3.a and 3.b measured same variables however between the two questionnaires the questions were worded slightly differently from each other. Statements in 3.a were phrased in the favour of media and 3.b were phrased against the media. For example question one of 3.a was: Anchor-persons are playing a positive role in news channels. Question one of 3.b, Anchors are playing a negative role in news channels. This procedure was carried out to eradicate of possibility of response bias.

Procedure

The current study was exploratory. The aim of the study was to investigate "The role of media in the current scenario". The independent variable was the role of media while the dependent variable was the perceived effects of the sample.

For this purpose three surveys were conducted. At the commencement of the research a questionnaire was distributed (appendix A) to receive responses from the cohort about the role of media. The questionnaire comprised of only one open ended question. . i.e. "How do you assess the role of media in the current scenario"? The question were worded such, that the respondents were free to express their viewpoint. A total of 100 respondents were selected through the convenience sampling techniques ranging in age from 16-60 years. After having received the responses, the results were evaluated by Content Analysis Technique. Content analysis assist the researcher to study the human behaviour in an ancillary manner by analysing their communication whether written or oral (Fraenkal & Wallen, 2003)

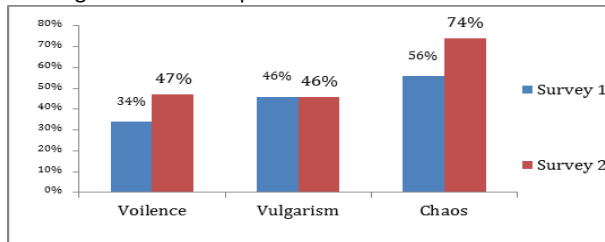
After having the preliminary results, a second survey was conducted. For this purpose another questionnaire was developed (Appendix B). The second questionnaire comprised of 5 questions. 170 participants answered the questionnaire. The sample population was selected via convenient sampling techniques. Following collating the data, the results were analysed through content analysis technique.

The third and the final survey were about the most prominent and important effects of the media extracted through the responses from survey 1 and survey 2. This survey was carried out on 200 individuals for whom a two sets of questionnaires 3.a and 3.b were developed (Appendix C) A gap of one week was given between the distribution of

questionnaires 3.a and 3.b to avoid any biases in the responses.

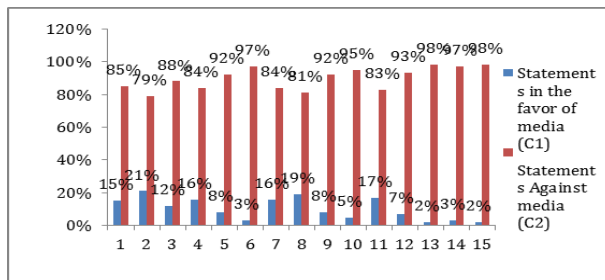
Results

FIGURE 1
Percentages of responses of the participants in Survey 1 & 2 showing differences of opinions on Media's Role



Graph is illustrating the role of media in two surveys.

FIGURE 2
Percentages of responses of the participants in Survey 3 showing differences of opinions on Role of media under two different conditions



Graph is showing the differences of opinions on the role of media under two different conditions

Discussion

In today's world, media has become an integral part of everyone's life and a convenient source of information. It is used as a tool to update, inform and amuse people about a variety of issues occurring around the world. During this course, the people working in the field of media, sometimes put their life at risk, just so the information can reach across all audiences through media. Since media has an input in shaping our views, if it plays its role fairly, it could be a great strength in structuring the state (conversation: conversation about everything, every news, 2010). Television is an essential part of modern families both in the rural and urban areas. A survey conducted in Pakistan showed that about 81% of Pakistani population prefer to watch televisions on daily basis to get information and entertainment.

In the preliminary phase about 100 individual were selected to receive open-ended responses on the current role of the media on the audiences.

Looking at figure 1, the results show that a major proportion of the participants reported violence, vulgarism and chaos as the three major trends promoted via media.

34% of the participants reported that media is promoting violence while 46% reported vulgarism as a major elements promoted through media. Moreover, chaos was another important component reported by 56% of the respondents.

Therefore, it is concluded that media is playing more of a negative role by inculcating violence, vulgarism and chaos amongst the audience.

The figure 1 is giving a comparative analysis of the results of survey 1 and survey 2.

Only 22% of the sample reported that media is playing a positive role in the current scenario whereas the rest of the 78% of the sample reported otherwise.

It was interesting to find that both survey 1 and survey 2 highlighted violence, vulgarism and chaos the three top most important trends conveyed through the media. The only difference was in the percentages of the responses. i.e. violence reported as 47%, vulgarism as 46% and chaos 74% compared to previously reported 34%, 46% and 56% respectively.

The sources of violent behaviour in society are complicated and interconnected. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) 1994 reported that there is a trend in media towards increased exposure of violence which endangers the healthy development of an individual. It further reported that television has the potential to be an influential educational tool in inculcating violent behaviour. A research demonstrated that watching television is a very compound cognitive motion in which active learning of the viewer is involved (Anderson & Collins, 1998). In today's world the portrayal of violence, sex and drug abuse has been recognized as unfavourably affecting the behaviour of its audience. A study conducted on causes of violence by Jahangir (in press) found television as one of the major source of promoting violence. Violence on media is frequent, usually inconsequential and often rewarded. People are exposed to violence daily on television in a greater amount. Latest technologies bring on-the-screen coverage of firearms, rifle shots and other bodily violence directly into homes. Television amuses its viewers with realistic and bloody performances of killings, whippings and torture (Eron, 1995). Research consistently identifies 3 problems associated with heavy television violence, which are:

- i. Individuals may develop decreased sensitivity to the discomfort and despair of others
- ii. They may become more terrible of the world around them
- iii. They can behave more aggressively or in risky ways toward others (National institute of mental health, 1982; Singer & Singer, 1984; Singer, Singer & Rapaczynski, 1984; Rule & Ferguson, 1986; Simon, 1989).

In a research study, Bushman and Anderson (2014) reported that continuous exposure to media violence make individuals less sensitive and less helpful to the injuries of others (Physical/Psychological) thus adversely effecting the psychological wellbeing of them by making them immune to the threatening conditions. Villani (2001) described increased violence, aggressive & risk taking behaviours and accelerated onset of sexual activity as primary effects of media. Further, the data assumes that if an individual could acquire aggressiveness through television, some of them might be likely to absorb heightened sexual behaviour as well (Earles, Alexander, Johnson, Liverpool & McGhee, 2002).

Cultivation theory describes media role as responsible for shaping or cultivating viewer's ideologies about societal realities. The constant exposure to media messages over time reforms the basic conceptions of the viewer and ultimately shapes the person's perception as per media content (Gerbner, 1976). Moreover Bandura (1986) describes in his theory that people especially children learn and imitate the behaviours, witness in reality or through media. Strasburger, Jordan and Donnerstein (2010) revealed in a study that recently media is negatively affecting the mental and psychological wellbeing of children and adolescents. Another study reveals that exposure to anxiety and fear through the media inculcates the same emotions in its viewers and thus negatively affect the psychological health of its audience. It further suggests that extensive viewing of television violence alters a child's view about acceptability of violence may hinder the development of their moral reasoning (Wilson, 2010). Moreover Singh & Sandhur (2011) reported that television damages social, moral and religious values and negatively sways human behaviour. It violates ethical norms and dispute the integrity of cultures, the consequences of which manifest themselves in the form of degrading the women, sexual preoccupation and boost materialism. In the current scenario of Pakistan, media has been determined as a major cause of psychological problems by the portrayal of violent contents in its transmission. The study further reveals that such a continuous violence exposure is shackling the psychological health of its audience at a very rapid rate (Begum, Khowaja & Ali, 2012)

After assessing and analyzing the results of survey II and I it is concluded that media is promoting 3 elements, which are violence, vulgarism and chaos amongst which chaos is leading. Thus, the next survey was conducted to identify what factors might lead to promote chaos in the audience. For this purpose another questionnaire was developed (Appendix C) which comprised of two parts i.e. Positive Aspects of media (Appendix C1) and negative aspects of media (Appendix C2). Both parts were given to the respondents one by one to get responses by a gap of one week between each survey. The respondents had to answer 15 statements in either "Yes" or "No" format. In the result section Figure 2 is indicates the results of survey 3 conducted on 200 participants to identify the factors promoting Chaos.

Figure 2 indicated that only 15% of the sample (200 participants) report media playing a positive role while the remaining 85% report otherwise. On statement number 2, twenty-one (21%) of the respondents reported that media is working only for the benefit of the nation and its audience. On the other hand 79% of the sample reported that media is working against the benefits of its audience and nation. The next statement was about the attitude of the anchor persons in talk shows about which 12% reported that anchor persons remain neutral while anchoring the program whereas 88% reported vice versa. Statement 4 was about the process of questions and answers from audience on news channels upon which 16% of the respondents reported that it was totally neutral while 84% reported that the process was totally biased on the part of the channels. Next statement was again about the attitude of anchor persons while running a program upon which 8% reported that anchor persons provide full opportunity to their guests to give their opinions freely while 92% reported that they do not have their own hidden agendas. Statement 6 was about the mental health and healthy feelings of the audience by watching news about which only 3% participants reported that while broadcasting news, channel owners and presenters try to give healthy postures and cues so that to give a healthy and better expression to its audience to make them feel healthy and calm. On the contrary 97% were of the opinion that anchor persons create panic, disturbance and misleading conclusions that adversely affect the mental health of the audience.

Statement 7 was regarding mudslinging on the guests during the talk shows by the anchorpersons. 16% reported that media channels do not malign their guests while 84% reported that they do so by design. Statement 8 which asked about polling from audience 19% sample reported that news channels include cent per cent results of its polling through its audience while 81% reported that it is not so. In Statement 9, eight per cent (8%) of the participants reported that anchorpersons facilitate understanding environment for the politicians through their discussion while 92 % reported that they do not do so. Statement 10 was about authenticity of breaking news. Only 5% of the participants reported that news channels always broadcast news after its confirmation while 95% reported that they do so without confirming the underlying truths to sensationalize the issue. According to the results on statement 11 regarding weightage given to personal interest over nation's interest were 83% and 17% respectively. As per statement 12, only 7% were in line that anchorpersons would allow the guest to give opinion contrary to their own view. Statements 13, 14 and 15 were related to mental illness, stress and anxiety respectively. Only 3% reported media as a source of pleasure while 97% reported that currently television programs are only the source of stress, tension and anxiety.

Conclusion

The study shows that media is playing more of a negative role in the current scenario by promoting Violence,

Vulgarism and Chaos. This is subsequently associated with adverse effects on the mental and psychological wellbeing of its audience through immoral and aggressive contents of its programs.

Implications

By having the conclusions, certain suggestions could guide media to achieve a positive role in the society, which are as follows

1. Media's role has been revealed positive in terms of information flow and as a source of entertainment but sensationalization of the news and programs produces detrimental effects at the psychological wellbeing of its audience. The major implication would be to select an objective and less emotional way to elucidate the news and programs.
2. The role of anchor persons have been perceived as biased with tinge of mischievous behaviour therefore the proper training and accountable institution should be there to evaluate their behaviours and attitudes during programs and news.
3. The literate proportion of the society relies more on other sources of information as Internet and newspaper with a perception of media's role for vested interests. In this manner media's role is being perceived as entertaining and supportive to illiterate and cliques of the society. Thus producing frustration in the literates.
4. The major population of the audience rely on the obvious information being provided by the media due to lack of information or understanding. Media as a prior source of information has the capacity to shape individual's mind both in positive or negative direction. In this way the objective evaluation of the news and programs by the audience could be at stake. In other words accountability of information cannot be ascertained through reliable filtration process.

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