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MEDIA IMPACT: AN INTERPRETATION OF MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society. This is predicated upon their ability to reach a wide audience with a strong and influential message. Marshall McLuhan uses the phrase "the medium is the message" as a means of explaining how the distribution of a message can often be more important than content of the message itself.

KEYWORDS
Media Impact , Mass Communication Theory , strong social .

Aims and Objectives

This study was aimed at finding out impact of mass media and interpretation of various mass communication theory. Besides this the following objectives are also taken into consideration.

- To make a comparison of the media habits of two groups of people in the same locality i.e. urban elite and common people.
- To find out the access to media.
- To ascertain the media content and preference.
- To assess the impact of mass media on social, cultural and economic fronts.

INTRODUCTION:

This century, economy, politics, culture, and people's everyday life in most societies increasingly dependent on and adapted to the media; at the same time we are also using media as resources in greater extent for information and entertainment. This medialization process is reinforced by strong tendencies of media globalization and the rapid development of new information and communication technology. The media are constructing images of reality and fantasy, and recurrent patterns of such images. With increased medialization, some of these patterns are more and more often regarded problematic, be it gratuitous representation of physical violence, violent or too much pornography, too much and biased advertising, stereotyped, humiliating portrayals of children, women, ethnic and linguistic minority groups or other countries, racism and hate. However, we wish for both entertaining and informative media contents to contribute to constructive intercultural dialogue, democracy, citizenship and human rights.

People have always wondered how media messages are affecting them by bringing about an imperceptible change in their culture, values and behavioural patterns, many critics charged that the motion pictures had a negative influence on children. The study of the anti-social effects of viewing television and motion picture is one of the intensely researched areas of mass media. The impact of pro-social content is a newer area and grew out of recognition that the same principles underlining the learning of anti-social activities ought to apply to more positive behavior.

Then only, mass communication theory has been examined by three different approaches:

(1) A media approach: which explains how the media function or how they should function;
(2) A media/society approach, which helps us understand the impact of the media on society; or
(3) A media/individual approach, which helps us understand the impact of the media on individuals.

Theories on the Media's Impact

It demands discussion on theories based on observational learning and information processing emphasize lasting effects of exposure to media contents. The framework of this research is based on the set of three theories i.e. Uses and Gratification Theory, Cultivation Theory and Social Learning Theory. These theories are discussed below in relation with the present study in brief.

(i) Uses and Gratifications Theory

Utility Theory, often known as the "Uses and Gratifications Approach", offers another way of explaining why people expose themselves to some communications and not others (the preferred channels/ programmes/newspapers, etc.); why they perceive a fraction of these to which they are exposed and why they remember –correctly or incorrectly-- only some of these (effects on lingo). Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratification Theory suggest that media users play an active role in choosing and using media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal-oriented in their media usage. Theorists say that media users seek out source that best fulfils their needs. Uses and Gratifications Theory assumes that users have alternate choices to satisfy their needs. Focus of this theory is that viewers attend, perceive and remember information that is pleasurable or that will in some way help satisfy their needs.

Fig-1. Media Impact

Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratification Theory suggest that media users play an active role in choosing and using media.Instead, they believe there are as many reasons for using media as there are media users.

According to the theory, media consumers have a free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them. Blumler and Katz believe that media consumers can choose the influence media has on them as well as the idea that users choose media alternatives merely as a mean.

In other words, media user actively seeks something from media based upon his/her wishes, needs and motives. Instead, focusing on what media do to peoples, these studies question: what do people do with media.

(ii) Cultivation Theory

Essentially, the Cultivation Theory states that heavy exposure to mass media namely television creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media conjured version of reality than with what

actual reality is. The Cultivation Theory asserts that heavy viewers' attitudes are cultivated primarily by what they watch on television. Gerbner views this television world as "not a window on or reflection of the world, but a world in itself".

Fig-2. Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, in its most basic form, suggests that television is responsible for shaping or 'cultivating' viewers' conceptions of social reality. The combined effect of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and, ultimately, for our culture as a whole. Thus, cultivation research is in the effects tradition. Cultivation theorists argue that television has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. They emphasize the effects of television viewing on attitude rather than the behaviour of viewers. Heavy watching of television is seen as 'cultivating' attitudes which are more consistent with the world of television programmes than with the everyday world. Cultivation theorists are best known for their study of television and viewers and, in particular, for a focus on the topic of violence. However, some studies have also considered other mass media from this perspective and have dealt with topics such as gender roles, age groups, ethnic groups and political attitudes.

Cultivation theorists are best known for their study of television and viewers and in particular for a focus on the topic of violence. However, some studies have also considered other mass media from this perspective and have dealt with topics such as gender roles, age groups, ethnic groups and political attitudes. A study of American college students found that heavy soap opera viewers were more likely than light viewers to over-estimate the number of real-life married people who had affairs or who had been divorced and the number of women who had abortions.

(iii) Social Learning Theory

The principal understanding of Social Learning Theory is tied to the social context of learning. Bandura has emphasized the fact that people who observe responses of individuals tend to exhibit the same when placed in similar settings. According to Bandura, behaviours and responses that are repeated, perceived as real, distinct, functional and salient are more likely to be attended to, thus more likely to be learned. When observing an event, which receives some kind of reward like social approval, pleasant experience and when the observer feels confident to perform, its symbolic imitation is facilitated.
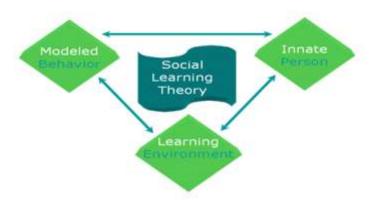
Fig-3. Social Learning Theory

The social cognitive principle has been widely employed to explain the television effects on a variety of social issues such as aggression, ethnic stereotypes, alcohol attitudes and behaviour. It also stresses the importance of viewer's cognitive activities when consuming television messages. Any person's socialization process is influenced by innumerable factors such as family, school, environmental factors etc. Direct experience and participation are important parameters which shape the youth's impressions of the perceived structure of their environment. However, these forms of experience are usually limited to the immediate environment. Mass media, particularly television, plays a crucial role in bringing the outside world into homes.

Modeling Theory is also useful for describing the application of general Social Learning Theory which explains how new behaviours are acquired by people from media portrayals.

Journalistic ethics and compares it to past methodological inquiries to present exploitations of mass media concluding that: "In journalistic practice, the goals of balance and accuracy (non-distortion) may not always be compatible". Secondly, he notes the undeniable influence of (1) political partnership, (2) advertisers, and (3) editorial decision-makers.

Hackett explicitly notes that, "the message intended may not be the message received". He says that qualitative methods be used and repeatedly de-coded and re-coded. Hackett concludes that a quantitative approach to media analysis is helpful, however a qualitative approach such as content analysis and semiotic deconstructions help to pin-point media bias in society.

According to Joshi the recent advances in science and technology has created a new type of cultural colonialism which has had a far reaching impact on intelligentsia than western cultural impact in earlier centuries Melkote noted that two decades of planned development have little to show by way of improvements in living standards on developing countries. He examined some of the issues surrounding development from an ethical perspective Yoshii considers how society and culture could change as a whole with increased dissemination of new media, changes in communication and states.

As a result of new media as a whole speeding up the flow of information, the world will undergo radical changes such as it has never before experienced. These changes will, like it or not, transform social organizations, bringing about what business administrators call 'temporariness'. And the world will shift to a value system that applauds changes.

Goonasekera relates the relationship between media and social imperatives. It is possible for a third world country to adopt communication policies to bypass early stages of industrialization and leapfrog the modern technology.

The role of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in the field of education is examined by Karnik. Her study revealed that ICT facilitate the extension and outreach of education. She says that

increasing privatisation and commercialisation of education is an evident trend worldwide. To this, technology has added a new dimension: globalization through trans-national satellite broadcast of distance education programmes. Though this is just the beginning but this trend is likely to continue. The implications and effects of this trend, especially for developing countries, need to be carefully examined There are also numerous issues about cultural diversity versus homogeneity that need consideration but still ICT throw open a vast field of opportunities in the education sector.

McQuail opined that the trance of entertainment through television channels is so great that no common man irrespective of his age, sex and education can claim immunity from it. The entire study of mass communication is based on the premises that the media has significant effect in every society. Yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects. He argues that heir affects take various forms. We choose what movies are based on what we see in advertisement or in newspaper.

Fatima in her thesis "Effects of satellite channels (Zee TV) on Lahore middle class" concluded that Zee TV is gaining popularity over PTV and other channels among middle class and our social values are changing slowly and steadily.

CONCLUSION:

This century, economy, politics, culture, and people's everyday life in most societies increasingly dependent on and adapted to the media; at the same time we are also using media as resources in greater extent for information and entertainment.

- A media/society approach, which helps us understand the impact of the media on society; or
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