Media television and its influential aspects

Sociology, Violence

Media Television and its Influential Aspects As many can clearly see, our relationship with the media today plays an important role in shaping the wellbeing and character of who we become. This ' love affair' (Dill, 2009) that has blossomed in our relationship with television has provided a field for many debates and approaches as to which is correct and applicable in the rapidly growing popularity in the media; whether it is a reflection of today's reality and expectations, or whether it is actually more prominent in molding our behaviour. Theories such as the effects model (Lazarsfeld, 1948) and the hypodermic needle theory has emerged to support the suggestion that media ' injects' the information into an individual, and that one behaves as ' sitting ducks' (Croteau, 1997) and thus is inevitable to be influenced by the media. While it is true that we are constantly forming opinions and views from media intake, there are flaws to these theories. This essay shall discuss to what extent the theories mentioned above are applicable and to what limits individuals can be influenced. Among the many forms that media takes, television is known to be the most ' massified' of mass media and has the largest and most heterogeneous audience (Wilensky, 1964). This supports how we can easily conclude that television would be a large factor as to how we gain new information and knowledge. Glasser (1988) conducted a study that was to analyse people's understanding of how systems function in today's society from watching television, and it was found that what they understand was really what they have seen on television. It occurred that an average person who watches a lot of television series about cops and detectives does not actually have direct experience with either the police of the justice system, especially when it involves a

serious crime. Also, most of the crime showcased on television would tend to be street crime and nonstop action instead of drab corporate crime. This develops into the argument of ' social construction of reality', where it is believed that one would choose ' fantasy' every time over reality (Holderman, 2008). USA Network's all-time favourite criminal eradicator, Adrian Monk is a man suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder where he would pinpoint his suspects just by looking at his/her eating habits and mannerisms, and Monk was never wrong. On television it is just ' way cooler' to be a detective than an ordinary person. The pervasive role of television in informing us about crime has been leading us into this judgment of choosing fantasy over reality over time. When we are watching a television drama, we subconsciously imagine ' what if' the characters were real people and ' what if' we would be in the show if it were real. In the case of the sitcom ' Friends', we are constantly watching how well we can connect our own lives to it, although it might just be a product of imagination from writers and producers. We are more entertained by what we can see in a sitcom being applied to real life than hard-core fictions that seem would never happen. The reality of a fictional story is not whether it is fantasy or creation, it is whether it is believable and attractive (Dill, 2009). This brings about the next argument that media affect the way we behave and act. A study from the researchers in the University of Toronto (Whiteside et al., 2004) suggested that Friends affect not only usage of the American language but also mannerisms, fashion and hairstyles. Friends is known to have started the trend of putting ' so' into a sentence to imply ' totally and completely', as in " You are so dead, " and so forth. One of the reasons behind such influential

power behind friends was that they were seen as ' hip', and so audiences would imitate to be seen more ' hip' to his/her actual friends. So does that mean watching Monk, CSI or gangsta raps on television increase the chances of an individual, especially children, to grow into a ' bad' individual? Violence is one of the most disputed topics in the discussion on media effects. Many researchers examine (Irwin and Gross, 1995; Ballard and Lineberger, 1999) the impact of playing violent video games and watching movies with violent content, and it was found by others (Cooper and Mackie, 1986; Graybill et al. 1985; Scott 1995) that youth in particular are not affected by media violence. A film produced in the 1974, Born Innocent, in which a young girl was raped by four others with a wooden stick has caused a debate on whether it has a correlation with an event that triggered a group of girls doing the same thing a few days after it was shown on cinemas. The mother of the victim filed for charges against the producer, NBC, which were then dropped due to proof that the ringleader had not watched that film. Fowles (1999: 3) pointed out that while individuals believe that there is too much violence on television, people still get a ' daily fix of TV mayhem as if they are not also part of the problem'. In other words, the adult public is keen to condemn television for its routinized portrayal of violence and aggression when actually the ' abnormal' acts committed that are directly caused by television must be miniscule. In conclusion, while media, in the forms of many tools (television in this essay), may try to influence, and usually temper opinions, it does not determine who and what people become. Media may provide us with information, news and knowledge, but in the end it depends on one's rational thinking to form one's own judgments. Companies

with vested interests might play subjectively, but one should not, or cannot, entirely blame media for the collapse and eventual change of one's opinions. One might imitate what is showcased in television and implement it in our manners and actions, but the effects model does not provide an explanation to tackle the argument regarding the aggressive behaviour that has been proven almost irrelevant to exposure to media violence. Although media may be a contributor in forming our perception and views, it is also, like many other things, has its boundaries.

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