

# Traditional and new approaches of media effect



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How do you think the media affect us? Critically evaluate debates on media effects and traditional and new approaches to media effect theories. With reference to one particular case study, provide you considered assessment of how the media influence, and affect, us.

It has been widely accepted by the public that the media is capable of influencing societies on a large scale. The media has long been deemed as a very powerful force within society that can subvert norms and values that could ultimately undermine our social order. How the media exactly affect us can be seen as a rather complex issue that concerns many media scholars for a long time. Various theories on media effect has been created by some of the world's renowned communication scholars in order to depict how the media influence people. Debates on how the media influence may cause more harm than good is still ongoing till now. Hence, it is the utmost importance to analyse the various models of media effect and how it has evolved in order to fully understand how the media actually influence us. Especially now since we are currently living in a media saturated culture, more than ever we depend on the media for our understanding of world events.

This essay aims to analyse traditional and new approaches of media effect, and sought to debate on the credibility of various media effect theories. The five media effect theories mentioned in this essay will include the Hypodermic Needle Theory, The Reception theory, Two Step Flow theory, Catharsis theory and Encoding & Decoding theory. To further the analysis of media effect on society, this essay will also touch on the subject of moral

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panic and how it is related to media influence. Finally, this essay will also perform a case study on the prevalence of violent behaviour among young people caused by high violent imagery portrayed by media industry. Some people argued that the amount of violence presented in the media is the core reason causing young viewers to adopt violent behaviour, but this may not be necessarily true.

The idea that the media has powerful effects on people gained ground during the 1920's and 1930's, in light of the fascist treatment towards society and dictators utilizing the media as a propaganda tool in countries like Germany and Russia. After researcher began observing the effect of propaganda during World War 1, they brought about the very first theory of media effects which is called the Hypodermic Needle Theory or the Magic Bullet Model. The Hypodermic Needle Theory is a linear communication theory which suggests that media messages are injected directly into the brains of a passive, receptive, uncritical audience.

A classic example of the application of the hypodermic needle theory was illustrated on October 30, 1938 when Orson Welles and the newly formed Mercury Theatre group broadcasted their dramatization of H. G Wells' " War of the Worlds." The program, which was presented in the format of a news bulletin, caused one million listener of the 12 million listener in America to be " panic-stricken". A wave of mass hysteria disturbed households, interrupted religious services causing severe traffic jams and clogged major communication system. People even fled their homes in the city to seek shelter in more rural areas, grocery stores were raided and people began to ration food. The nation was in a state of chaos caused by a single broadcast

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of what was meant to be a radio dramatization of a well-known book. After the event occurred media theorist classified the “ War of the Worlds” broadcast as the archetypal example of the Hypodermic Needle Theory and an example of moral panic. This event demonstrated perfectly on how the media worked, simply by injecting the message directly into the bloodstream of the public like a drug, it then successfully stimulated a uniform response from the mass population.

This theory shows how audiences are seen a passive and gullible individuals who could easily be manipulated by the media. Although the Hypodermic Needle Theory has died away in the 1930’s since it fails to recognize the fact that audience themselves are active producers of meaning. Nevertheless, the Hypodermic Needle Theory is one of the earliest and fundamental theory of media effects that continues to influence the way we talk about the media and the creation of other media effect theory.

However, this theory may still be applicable to children or young viewers as they are considered extremely passive audience and uncritical. They would not be able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong and may possibly see violence as an acceptable behaviour in society. Hence, it is often recommended that media industry to apply censorship to prevent children from latching onto violent behaviour.

Unlike what Hypodermic Needle Theory depicted, the media effect process can be seen as a more complex thing, the media doesn’t necessarily have total direct and powerful influence on audiences as it involve more variables. Media and audience relationship does not exist in void but is involved and

influenced by many things such as social context, culture and political-economy. Audience would consist of unique individuals who have different social and culture which makes it problematic to conceptualise one mass audience. The term active audience was then created alongside the Reception theory which is the exact polar opposite of the Hypodermic Needle Theory. This theory recognises viewers as active participants in media that is able to form out unique responses from each individual viewers. Campbell and Morgan (2009) states that one particular message received by five different people most probably create five unique responses depending on personal factors such as religion, education, culture, political affiliation and legal framework.

Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955) also add that people may become opinion leaders, usually are individuals who pay close attention to the media. This also bring us to the next media effect theory called the Two-Flow step theory which suggest that media meanings are mediated through key individuals that influences how we think. These so called 'opinion leaders' sought to observe media content and pass on their interpretation of media to others. In a paper presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual World Wide Web Conference in 2011, researchers managed to look into the flow of information on the social networking site Twitter and revealed that they had found significant evidence to support the Two Step Flow Theory. Researchers found that news distributed in twitter find its way through people a number of prominent and influential opinion leaders like celebrities, journalist and bloggers. Ultimately the media is no longer seen as having strong powerful direct effect on audiences anymore. (Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Another theory called the Catharsis theory was created, the term “Catharsis” is derived from the Greek word Katharsis which literally means cleansing, purging, or purification. This theory has played an important role in the discussion about the effects of violence in the mass media for many years. It implies that the execution of an aggressive action under certain conditions diminishes the aggressive drive and therefore reduces the likelihood of further aggressive action. The crucial point in Catharsis Theory is that the observed aggressive action does not necessarily need to be executed in reality, it can instead take place in the audience fantasy and imaginations. This is closely linked to the consumerism aspect of mass media in whereby audiences use what they see on the media to fulfil the different needs and wants they have (Goldstein, 1998). One of the most common needs of audience is the urge to escape reality. The mass media industry is able to give these sensation through wide array of films or games exhibiting characteristic of tragedy and violence for the audience to cleanse their negative feelings (Campbell and Morgan, 2009).

Catharsis is then deemed to be beneficial to both the individual and society. People viewing violence-oriented television programs, films or video games experiences emotional release from negative feelings such as fear and anger. The thrill and excitement delivered by these media text meets the adventurous needs of the audience without actually placing them in any real risk (Edgar, 1977). This theory then suggest that children who are exposed to violence on the media are unlikely to end up practising it, since they are purged of their aggressive drive and negative feeling.

All of the theoretical approaches discussed have only allocated power to either the audience or the media. One of the pioneer works to break away from this over emphasis of unilateral power was established by Stuart Hall's through his encoding/decoding theory developed in the 1980's. Hall (1980) argues that media producer 'encode' specific meanings in media text, which is distributed to audiences who will then decode and reproduce these meanings through their own understanding (Hall, 1980 pp 128). Hall does not just chart a middle ground between audience and the media but also introduces media producers into the equation and their roles in this relationship. Hall suggest that producers of the media message would usually encodes their agendas and assumption in the media text which will then shapes the 'preferred meanings' of the text. Such meanings would then limit and guide audience interpretations. Similarly to the Reception theory, Hall's Encoding & Decoding theory suggest that specific factors outside the media text such as gender, education and ethnicity do play a role in influencing audience's interpretations. One of the reasons why encoding and decoding model is significant in media studies is because it balances the relationship between the media and the audience, returning some power to the media while at the same time maintaining audience as active participants. This approach acknowledges both audience and the media as sites of meaning making. Hall then further develops the audience decoding method as affected to four different levels of responsiveness. Firstly, dominant meaning the audience recognise and agree with the preferred meaning offered by media text. Secondly, oppositional meaning that the audience disagree with the preferred meaning because it contradicts to their own set of beliefs and attitudes. Thirdly, Negotiated, is <https://assignbuster.com/traditional-and-new-approaches-of-media-effect/>

when audience opposes or adapts to the preferred meaning. Finally, aberrant meaning the audience gives meanings deviant to the preferred meaning.

This theory then suggest that producers of media text may encode their preferred meaning inside the text, but it is up to the audience to decode the messages from their very own perspective.

By analysing these various media effect theories presented in this essay and how they have evolved. It has become clear that the way media affect us involve a particularly complex process. Nowadays the media does not directly influence us

it is clear that the way the media affect

These different media effect theories that are presented in this essay attempt to explain and justify the manner in which the mass media influences society are all practical in their own

## **References:**

Campbell, S., & Ling, R. (2009). Effects of mobile communication. In B. Jennings & M. B.

Oliver. (Eds.). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 592-606).

New York:

Routledge, New York.

: As one of the recommend readings for media effects, it draws the reality of modern society apparently and describes the way media has an influence on the modern society and human life by providing the difference between

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modern and past world. The more media is developed, the more convenience people are. Whilst, the more opportunities people get to share or communicate with the others, the more problems such as privacy issues or mobile violence are occurred. So this gives both sides of idea with some examples.

Cline, V. B., Croft, R. G., & Courier, S. (1973). Desensitization of children to television violence. *Journal of personality and social psychology* , 27 (3), 360

: This Journal draws the present environment of children who are now surrounded by mobile technologies such as television, computer and Smartphone. Also this tells the reader that children are now exposed from violence contents. Even though most of the media such as film, news usually deals with dramatic violence; it is able to have influence on children to follow the contents recklessly. Furthermore, it proves these conditions by measuring the physical and psychological change of children and links the results with the media violence. The text criticized contemporary society that is desensitized from the conditions.

Edgar, P. (1977). *Children and screen violence* . St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

: In this text Edgar defines what violence is and interprets the norm of violence in the area of media technologies by providing several examples. Also, it contains the theoretical research of mass media and its violence. This more focuses on the mass media violence on children and adolescence and discusses whether it is one of the most considerable issues or not in contemporary society.

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Goldstein, J. (Ed.). (1998). *Why we watch: The attractions of violent entertainment*. New

York: Oxford University Press.

: This text provides some reasons why people are attracted to violent entertainment in social and mass media such as films, video games, sports programs and news. Goldstein insists that the audiences may have all different reasons why they are attracted by violent media contents. For instance, some are attracted by violent content of media due to stress-elimination and some are exposed by those just for self-satisfaction in fictional places. Moreover, this points out the reason why media violence is considerable issues in modern world from different points of views and how it affects the number of people predominantly.

Katz, E. & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955) *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*, The Free Press, New York.

: In this text, Katz and Lazarsfeld analyse how mass communications and mass media affects on people and the way they will be changed. As the form of case study, the text gives fairly detail examples in real world. It also emphasises and deals with the role of the people in contemporary society such as sharing the common belief, communication or sending messages among people. Similarly, they states that messages transmitted through mass media go directly into the minds of those who receive or view the content and describes that those then leads the audiences to believe the stories conveyed and act in a uniform manner as suggested by the information they now have.

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Poynting, S., & Morgan, G. (2009). Introduction. In S. Poynting & G. Morgan (Eds.),

*Outrageous!: Moral panics in Australia* (pp. 1-10). Hobart: Australian Clearinghouse for

Youth Studies.

: The text is one of the required readings for understanding the media affect. As form of case study, this provides the detailed examples and helps readers to understand the concept of moral panic in Australia clearly. Also, this text points out the connection between the impact of modern social technologies, media and past Australian society.

Seymour Feshbach (Catharsis theory