

# Media influences our beliefs and attitudes



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Time changed era's changed generation changed channels of communication changed but the way of receiving the information was same through out. Which is that one thing which has not changed? What is it, which we seek in television, radio, newspaper and now the Internet?

The answer to all these questions is media and information. For information we only and only rely on media. We live in a mediated world we accept it or not but we are surrounded by media.

Media has a kind of an image in the mind of an individual. This is because the communication is presented in a way that the mass audience likes it. Which can be explained by the hypodermic needle theory which media as a direct, immediate and a powerful effect on its audience.

## **What are Media effects?**

Different researcher's had a different viewpoint what they had to say about

Media effects but there was no as such definition according to McQuil(1983) there are effects from" the media" , though what precisely these effects are and the means by which they can be identified and measured has been the subject of extensive debate (p. 175), (Lasswell 1948, emphasis in original ) " Who Says What to whom in which channel and to what effect ?" , Katz describe the history of communication theory which is swinging between active and passive audience between minimal and powerful effects(1980) Mc Guire noted several of the most commonly mentioned intended media effects which were listed as (a) the effect of advertising on purchasing (b) the effect of political campaigns on voting (b) the effect of public service

announcements on personal behavior and social improvement (d) the effect of propaganda on ideology (e) the effects of media ritual on social control and the most commonly ones (f) the effect of media violence on aggressive behavior (g) the effect of erotic and sexual material on attitudes and objectionable behavior (1986, cited in Elisabeth M Perse, p. 1).

Media impacts many facets of our daily lives and even contribute to our scene of personal identity how we dress for work, sometimes the route we take for work, what we plan to do this weekend our general feeling of wellbeing or insecurity, the focus of the world beyond immediate experiences and our concerns about the issue of the day all are influenced by what we see in media “news” Maxwell McCobs and Sheldon Gilbert (1986).

As it is not easy to accept in the same way it is not easy to argue as well that media has influence not only on an individual but also on the society, which we live in. ‘What do mass communication actually do to us, both individually and collectively [society]?’ Lowery and DeFleur (1995 Quoted in Brian O’Neil p. 320)

The study of media influence is important so that we can increase the understanding of the role media plays in shaping our lives, views and personal identity.” It is because the media are central to our everyday lives that we must study them ... as social and cultural as well and the political dimensions of the modern world Roger Silverstone (1999).

The essay is going to include first the introduction, what are media effects? Secondly a brief history about media effects from the time of World War 1 till

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date, thirdly different ways in which media affects an individual with relevant effect theories, Scholarly research and examples of the same. Lastly to conclude with my viewpoint and the just of the scholars arguments.

## **HISTORY**

Going back into the history there were three phases in which the effect tradition could be described how over the period of time media's relation with its audience changed with its changing effects.

The first phase, called as powerful media started from World War 1 until the late 1930 was the time when media was known to have powerful effects on its audience it could change habits, opinions and viewpoints of the people. Which were mostly in the hands of the controllers Bauer and Bauer (1960 cited in Denis McQuail p. 458).

Then second phase which was called Testing media power now this phase was the time to put theoretical knowledge to test that was what people thought in phase one was that actually happening did media has it's effect. A well stated example of this in the early 1930s research literature by the series of Payne fund studies in the United States Blumer, Blumer and Hauser, Petrosen and Thurstone (1933). The main focus was children and young people how films as media influenced them? This era of media research last until the 1960s. The concentration was mainly on the films and the other types of media how they can be used for brainwashing and informing. Some of the examples of this are campaign, which was designed for the United Nations to improve on their public support Star and Hughes (1950 cited in Denis McQuail p. 458).

Investigating the capabilities of democratic election campaigns Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) and Berelson et al. (1954). As the time passed away the nature of research changed as there were new accepts which should be taken in account earlier the researchers saw the effects according to the social and psychological characters then later it went on to the intervening effects and lastly why people were listening to media, the purpose The end of this era was marked by the illusion which resulted in the this kind of media effect research (e. g. Berelson, 1959)(Denis McQuail). Klapper says that limited and minimum effects in the fear of brainwashing were seen to be over hyped and to form a opinion was a complex social process in which media played an integral part but not the complete role (1960).

The third phase that was called Return of powerful media started in 1960 which started from the year 1960, which marks the return of the powerful media which is still there till today dealing with the effects and issue of media violence, functions of media in socialization diffusion and formation of ideology (McQuail 1983, p. 178)

Media had no effects or negligible effects this was the conclusion which was written in the text books which was challenged by researches who thought this was a made up story there were many evidences which could prove that media have social impact and could be used for exercising social and political power (for example, Lang and Lang, 1981; McGuire, 1973; McLeod et al., 1991) ' The evidence available by the end of 1950s, even when balanced against one of the negative findings, gives no justification for an overall verdict of " media importance " '(1981: 659)according to them the "

no effect ” imagination was not because of one factor but was a combination of different factors . The most highlighted one was short-term effect like the election tenor.

One of the major reasons that contributed to unwillingness to accept “ minimal effects ” was the arrival of television in 1950s and 1960s as this was the new medium, which seems more powerful as it had visuals. The third phase was still looking for the potential effects according to the new concepts. The investigations that were done before relied on the model that the more exposure to media had more effects.

### **Change in media power with change in time**

As we read in the history different phases of media power and how the power of media changes with the change in time. ‘ The main reason for the argument in the effects from the time of powerful -limited – more powerful model is that the world was changing all this while ‘ Carey (1988 quoted in Denis Mc Quil , 2005, p. 462). We cannot deny the fact that media are influential. There are many examples to explain this statement like ‘ impingement of communism in Europe or to international conflicts such as Gulf and Balkan wars of the 1990s and the Afghanistan and the Iraq wars that followed 9/11 ‘(Denis McQuail 2005, p. 463). It is only through media that people do know about such historic events as the time has changed probably people are more dependent on the media when information is concerned (Ball-Rokeach and DE Fleur, 1976; Ball-Rokeach, 1985; 1998, cited in Denis Mcquail 2005 p. 463). When we look at television there is a huge difference in content and as a social experience from the 1950s to 1980s (this was the time when first research took place) till now where the

television experience has changed again. This clearly states that media is not constant it changes with time.

The different models of media effects: (Perse, 2001: 51)

Direct: it is quite self-explanatory the effect is immediate, constant and observable it's a short term effect which emphasis on change where media content is silent, awakening and truth.

Conditional: It depends from person to person reinforcing of change in the thought process towards awareness and knowledge, emotional influence and behavioral it can be short term and long-term effect.

Cumulative: it based one exposure to many things not one in particular it is either cognitive or emotional in very few cases it is behavioral. It has a long lasting effect. The media content is accordant, re occurring and across channels.

Cognitive transactional: the effect is immediate and short term it is based on a small exposure it is cognitive and effective; behavioral effects are possible.

There are different theories, which explain and talk about the effects what sort of effects every theory looks into the media effects on its own prospective

### **Short Term Effects:**

In the earlier times when we look into media research, the model, which strikes the mind, was simple stimulus response model that means media provided the agent and the response to it was change in opinion or

something like this. This approach was not was not accepted. People don't react to anything immediately and if they do then media is not the only reason behind it, there are many other reasons as well. Sometimes this approach was also known as the 'hypodermic needle/bullet effect' this was basically as if some people were injected with some media information and they reply to it accordingly Graeme Burton(2002).

One of the famous examples which is stated by the theorist for this theory is in the year 1939 the War Of The Worlds by H. G. Wells the broadcast of this science fiction created a panic amongst the people and this was purely the effect of the broadcast. On the contrary it is said that the circumstance in which the broadcast was heard this would not be sufficient to explain the effect of strong feeling or the judgment that was passed by an individual Brian O'Neil (2011). The argument, which was given, was that psychological personality traits like self-conviction, religious beliefs and self-expectance these were the traits, which made an individual to believe what they were listening to Cantril(1940, cited in Brian O'Neil, 2011, p. 324).

To add to this according to another theorist this incident was just being exaggerated Heyer(2005 cited in Brian O'Neil, 2011, p. 324).

On the contrary it is said that there is no such proof, which can clearly demonstrate that media violence leads to violent behavior. If we look into the example of September 2000 where a 15-year-old boy from Florida was accused his abuse of his 8-year-old sister. He said he got this idea from seeing Jerry Springer Show when looked into the matter the statement made



was false he was lying the show was totally blameless. Graeme Burton (2010)

### **Two -step flow theory:**

The theory states that media influences us in two different phase. The first phase comprises individuals who pay lot of attention to media and it message and receive information from them the second phase comprises of opinion leaders, members of peer group family, friend's people on whom we rely the most. We listen to what they want to say and not the media. If media influenced them then we would be influence indirectly Graeme Burton (2002). One of the important part of the work is to see how active or passive we are as receivers of the communication Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). Unlike the hypodermic needle theory this theory lacked on media effects it emphasis more on ' human agencies ' lowery and DeFleur .

### **Uses and gratification theory:**

" What do people do to the media"(katz2006, p. xviii)

The uses and gratification theory says that the audience is active.

The theory explains that the audience consumes media to gratify or satisfy their own needs for ' information, entertainment, knowledge, personal identity' and social definition Graeme burton(2002).

Media message cannot influence a person who does not have any use of those messages consumed Katz (1959).

Example: There were several examples, which state that there are some, or the other needs of an individual which are fulfilled by consuming media. '

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Radio quiz programs and its listeners' Satisfaction of watching a soap opera which need or gratification was obtained? (Herzog 1940, 1944 quoted in Chris Newbolt, 1995, p. 121) and why does one read newspaper? Was it for information, entertainment or to while away the time which need was fulfilled? (Berelson, 1949). All these experiments were done to state consumption of different kinds of media gave what kind of satisfaction or which need of the audience.

Effects can be of different kinds/types and vary from person to person. Few of them are listed below: –

Attitude change: Media has the power of changing people's way of thinking or looking at the world. This means they change the attitude towards a person or issues Graeme Burton (2002).

“ Media is highly effective in creating attitudes on newly arisen or newly evoked issues”(Joseph Klapper)

Moral/Panic: Media have the effect of anxiety, fear, and anger about issues. Issues can be anything. These reactions are joint actions experienced by a group Denis Mc Quail (2005).

Personal Response/Emotional Response: These reactions are basically unplanned and depend from individual to individual, taking an example of an anti aging cream people ignore the fact that the product is not appropriate because the skin cannot generate cells at a certain point in age (Graeme burton 2002; Denis Mc Quail 2005).

Some of the major issues on which media effects/influence research has been done are stated below:

## **Children and Media:**

When a child is concerned it automatically becomes a special case when we talk about influence as it is assumed to be vulnerable.

The impact of television on children

## **Can lead to Violence**

One of the major concerns what parents have is impact of television violence on their children. The concern is that television has portrayals of violence throughout and children are affected by these portrayals more easily because they are at growing age they don't have the understanding. As this is not only the case with kids but similar reasons are given for adult violence as well John P. Murray(1993). There were many research's done which concluded that media violence can lead to short term changes like attitude and behavior changes (Bandura, D. Ross, S. Ross, 1961; Berkowitz, 1962).

Example: Murder of James Burgess in 1993 this was the influence of violence video over 2 school boys David Buckingham (2001)

Another great research 'Bobo doll experiment' which concluded that children exposed to violent model were more likely to act aggressively than those who were not exposed to such situation Albert Bandura (1961).

According to Ferguson this research was not related to child aggression but this research was motivated to please the adults (2010)

Contrary to this research it is said that some children to whom television effect will not be good in a certain condition and some children to whom in some other condition the television effect would be good or to other kids in the same condition television effect will be different (Schramm; Lyle and Parker 1961, p. 13).

There have been many researchers, which stated the positive influence Friedrich, and Stein that viewing Master Roger did not have any impact on their behavior where as it widen their knowledge. A very strange result was noticed the children who watched Minster roger seemed to be more helpful they were likely to play more cooperatively with their peers. (1975 cited in Jerome Johnston & James S. Ettema p. 144).

## **Affect education**

What or rather I should say who is it we blame if the child is not getting good marks? There are only 2 people who we tend to blame for our children's performance one the school in which he/she studies or the teachers. So the blame game is totally on the school. But wait lets think on it once again is it really the teachers to be blamed? " Teachers are doing the same job which they use to do 10-12 years ago " something is there, which is different? What is that something?

The answer is Television.

The current estimate states that a child spends twice the time in watching television than in the classroom studying. It is very surprising to see that it is 22, 000 hours of television is consumed before a child passes his/her high school Don Oldenburg (1992).

Heavy viewing of television by kids show lower information, lower knowledge, lower concentration lower reading ability it lead to aggressive behavior as compared to the kids watching less television (Jerome L. Singer, n. d).

On the contrary it was said that studies found out that there was no as such evidence which proved that watching television had negative effects like lower concentration and less reading ability and things like that (Neumann's, 1991 cited David Gauntlett in 2005).

### **The Recent statistics**

In the year 2008 there was survey done Dr. Tanya Byron where the question was about the effects. Result of the survey was that 83% of the parents thought that watching TV was entertaining followed by education 58% and relaxation 53% and only 4 % said it was dangerous. Parents also felt that there child had gained an expended imagination 63% and increase in vocabulary and over two fifth said that their child had developed 28% said that it was used as a kind of activity.

So this shows the television effects were positive according to the parents. There was no kind of violence seen or a negative effect was observed (2008 p. 8).

There has been no perfect evidence which proves that media is the only cause of violence. But it can be said that media can lead to change in attitude and responses towards violence. This kind of a response could be because of 2 reason first media and the real life experiences.

## **Media and the society**

As we know media plays an integral role in our lives. This media is the only medium of so many debates discussions like does television has any effects on our children? Does advertising influence us as consumers? Last but not the least is violence because of media? A long list of questions which because all this is a part of the society which we live in David Croteau and William Hoynes(2003).

Thinking about the impact of media on the society is exhibited in the conventional history by the abundant view of media being powerful and quite much effective on the powerless and passive audience which can be described by the Hypodermic Needle Model also called the Magic Bullet, it assumed that the media were so powerful that they could inject their messages as the name suggests “ hypodermic needle” the needle is injected. The advertising messages were targeted as magic bullets. (Dennis and Wartella 1996, p. 169)

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) says, “ The image of the mass communication process entertained by the researchers had been one of the ‘ atomistic mass’ of millions of readers, listeners and movie goers prepared to receive the message; secondly... every message was conceived of as a direct and powerful stimulus to action which will elicit immediate response “

## **Campaign and Advertising**

Campaign is basically used to affect the behavior of the public for their health or their safety. Campaign can be classified in two parts one is political campaign as the name suggests its agenda is politics (election, voting) and

the other is public service campaign, which is in favor of public beneficial for them like (campaign on family planning, smoking and issues like aids).

Campaigns reach to large amount of public there were a lot many researches done, which showed that there was a change in knowledge and attitude but no change was shown on the behavior David Gauntlett(2005).

Political Campaign: These could always be traced back at the time of election as earlier said there were many research done to see whether political campaign has any effect on the voting patterns of an individual.

The two major studies which were done in this field first study was ' people choice ' 1940 elections of Ohio and the main reason behind these research was to find out that do people vote because of some influence? This research took place in 1932 just before the television came in as a medium of communication and radio was the medium at present.

The result was that 8 % were actually converted 53% voted because of their own beliefs and understanding 14% were influenced to vote and lastly 25% had minimal effect, which was next to nothing.

The findings of the research was that a) people are influence by peer group or opinion leaders people who they rely on trust like friends, family etc. b) There was not the same effect on every<sup>1</sup> that is everyone responded to media in their own way c) it was not the campaign through which people got the information but through people Paul Lazerfield, Bernard Berelson& Hazel Gandet().

The second one was called 'Unseeing eye' 1972 elections between George McGovern and Richard Nixon. The result was similar to the first one political campaigns had less effect on the people Thomas. E. Patterson & Robert D. McClelland

On the contrary Mc Combs and Shaw whose research was also into political communication and voting behavior and the research was done on US presidential election in 1968 where the research was on how newspaper, journalists and editors play a vital role in making the audience perceive political reality in their own way.

The research ended with a conclusion, which was quite different from the earlier research that was the information which was given to the public didn't only make them aware about the issue of the political campaign but also made them think that this issue was important and will affect us only. So here the political campaign seemed to be quite effective (1972).

Public service campaigns: these campaigns were basically for the wellbeing of an individual's who made the society. There were many research which were done on this criteria like did people reduce smoking or stop smoking after seeing the PSA which talks about increased cancer risk due to smoking. One of the projects was called North Karelia project a program whose main aim was to reduce heart diseases in Finland. There were 1.75 US billion dollars spent on this campaign and the result of this was that smoking declined amongst men by 34% and rate on women smoking went up slightly (Puska et al., 1985 cited in DAVID GAUNTLETT (2005)).



Another example is increasing population level the problems of developing countries social marketing approach was introduced, promotion of contraceptive pills and condoms Atkin & Meichke(1989) . In Bangladesh the sales of condom graph saw a unbelievable rise in 1976 -10 million to 82 million in 1983 and India saw an increase of almost 400% and by 1984 these had almost doubled again to 200 million per year DAVID GAUNTLETT (2005). The research ended by saying that media is just an helper to influence where the messages are reinforced by verbal communication. We have seen that it created a positive sign in most of the experiments but still it cannot be correctly judged that campaign has any effect or not.

## **Advertising**

Advertise which means to draw attention. Advertisement addresses us as shoppers or consumers rather than Citizens. The prime focus is that we are the potential buyers Lewis et al (2005). It is quite difficult to access the effect of advertising on an individual and society because advertising does not make an individual do something which one would not like to do , it just tries to change our behavior. Advertising can make product A look better than product B but if observed would be no difference as such and thus it influences our purchasing decision DAVID GAUNTLETT(2005).

It is not just advertising which makes a person go and buy a product in the market gone are the days when people use to understand advertisements are ficious created by advertisers to sell their product now days consumers are exposed to advertisements day in day out the only factor which makes them but the product is top of mind recall that is by repetitiveness of the advertisement Rachel Eyre(2002).

Another researcher says that advertisement is not only the factor for buying a product there are other factors like packaging and distribution which influence buying decision Schudson (1933).

Where on the contrary Leiss et al. (2005) says there could be many reasons why advertisements may not work.

Example: 1980 coffee consumption fell at the time when expenditure on coffee advertisement was rising.

1985 coke fiasco when the audience did not accept the new taste Graeme Burton (2011).

As said by all the researcher's advertising does influence us but it is not the whole sole influencer behind our buying.