

Media effects theory

Media



This is a short discourse on the research of the Media Effects Theories, showing how the new theories or current information that is available currently support old theories such as the cultivation theory, spiral of silence theory, and uses-and-gratifications theories among others. This will begin with a brief discussion on Media Effects Theory and proceed to highlight the current developments in this scholarly field and finally show how these theories support different effects models.

Introduction

The developments in media have accelerated at an enormous rate given the recent advances in technology. New forms of media such as DVD and the internet have changed the way media is delivered to the audience and also the way it is perceived thus raising the question of whether or not the conventional theories on Media Effect are still viable for the current scenario. To properly understand this, it is important to first delve into the nature of Media Effects Theories. Media Effects Theory

Media Effects theory can be generally defined as the theory that postulates that any level of exposure to representations or depictions of violence in any of various media cause or have the potential to cause increased aggression or violence in the behavior of the audience (Bryant 15). Media Effects Theories are developed to provide a better understanding and to gain a deeper insight into the effects that media has had with respect to society and also the role that media plays in influencing social and political change (MacQuail 37).

The recent developments in media however have raised new concerns regarding the perspectives and a proliferation of approaches concerning the Media Effects Theory including its research methodology, communication education, and public policy issues (Berger 4). Given these criticisms of the theories on media effects, it becomes relevant to examine the existing theories and to examine how an application of the current theories and research may help in addressing this concern. Existing Media Effects Theories This section will briefly discuss a few of the more predominant and influential Media Effects Theories today.

The first discussion will be on the Hypodermic Needle Model, which is a theory that the influence of media is so powerful that it can be used to “inject” messages into the minds of the audience and control them (Baran 485). This model was developed by the Marxist Frankfurt School of intellectuals in the 1930s. The current application of this theory today is criticized by many because the Hypodermic Needle Model was mainly a result of the fear and concern that was generated during the practice of political propaganda and psychological warfare during World War I (Baran 485).

The second Media Effect Theory that will be discussed is the Empiricist Tradition which as the term suggests employs an application of the methodologies and principles of the natural sciences to attempt to measure the direct effects on audiences that may be attributed to media exposure (Mass Media Effects: A Study 4). Paul Lazarsfeld, an important researcher who contributed much to the development of empirical conducted a study into voting behavior carried out in the 1940s which to the development of

the highly influential Two Step Flow Model of masscommunication(Bandura 272).

There have been many criticisms with regard to this theory. While early on it was regarded as influential in this field with the theory of the " Limited Effects", there have been studies conducted in Europe that show the exact opposite. The current application of this theory now might be made more credible by improving the methodological diversity which scientists and social theorists have criticized (MacQuail, 315). Another influential Media Effect Theory is the Cultural Effects Approach which basically tries to analyze the social, political and cultural effects.

The advocates of this approach fall into two (2) categories, the Marxist Approach and the Literary Criticism Approach (Mass Media Effects: A Study 6). While these two (2) views have gained a strong following among many, the most common criticism is that given the technological advances today, there must be a method by which these theorists are able to provide empirical evidence supporting their assertions (Chomsky 79). The other influential perspective is the Uses and Gratification Approach which allows insight into precisely how the " new" media differ from the " old" insofar as audiences utilizes these media (Gauntlett).

This focuses primarily on how the audience or people in general use the media to gratify their needs. While this approach is still widely used, the problem of different needs and uses particular to a single individual makes the approach unreliable to some. As MacQuail pointed out, " it's very difficult to connect a particular need with a particular type of media content since

media use may be considered to supply at one time or another all the benefits named (57)”

Now that it has been shown how these approaches have defined and been applied in Media Effects Theories, an examination of the current theories and research prevailing today must be done. Current Theories and Research As previously mentioned, the recent technological advances have altered the way that media is perceived and received by the audience, allowing for arguably greater effect or influence upon the general public.

This section will attempt to discuss how the traditional approaches may utilize the current theories and research available to be able to adapt with the ever changing needs and demands of this field of study. The first critical issue to be discussed is the rising influence of postmodernist thought on the approaches to Media Effects Theory (Fisher 538). The main ideas of this theory rely on the fact that the ideas and perceptions of individuals has already been preconditioned by media in a sense that whatever input or meaning that is derived from media is already placed in a predefined context.

This school of thought therefore suggests that in analyzing the behavior and effects the fact that media has already preconditioned the minds of the individuals and influenced the “reception” (Miller 116) For example, in a study which analyzed the depiction of people with disabilities in Japanese TV dramas, it was found that the portrayal of people with disabilities are limited to stereotypes; that they were always portrayed in a predefined context. (Saito and Ishiyama 440)

An approach that is closely linked with this development is the New Audience Research, which focuses primarily on the ethnographic studies of audiences while not totally disregarding the “theory” aspect of the matter (Fisher 535). This approach uses the reception analysis, which has developed from a combination of traditional qualitative research strategies in sociology with some of the ideas of reader response theory in literary criticism (Mass Media Effects: A Study 8).

The important aspect of this approach is ability to confront and properly address the issues concerning the origins and influences of meaning that an individual conceptualizes with regard to the media input that he is exposed to. Another important factor to consider is the cultivation theory, which was primarily concerned with the “cumulative and overarching impact it (media) has on the way we see the world in which we live (Miller 281).

” The relevance of this approach to the Theories on Media Effects lies in the fact this approach considers the context within which the images presented in media with respect to the changing times and culture (Bandura 275). For example, in a study conducted of students in secondary schools in Belgium, it was found that those who watch television more are more likely to start smoking at an earlier age. Cultivation theory suggests that “exposure to messages influence smoking attitudes.

” (Gutschoven and Van den Bulck 381) While this approach may not be necessarily complete and is not without its criticisms, when combined with the Empirical Tradition, a new method which combines the stronger features of the scientific method and the approach of the cultural method may prove

to be credible enough to silence its critics. Conclusion There will always be debate concerning the correct approach to Media Effect.

Certain schools of thought will always insist on the application of a more totalitarian perspective that incorporates unquantifiable characteristics or effects while others will insist on an empiricists approach and the application of the principles and information that the natural sciences provide. The key to resolving this issue may very well lie in which school of thought is regarded as authoritative or persuasive enough to convince the other of the credibility and validity of their findings.

While this may not seem possible, events in the past have shown that even for brief moments a single school of thought or approach was held in high regard (see Empiricist Tradition). The use of these current theories on the approaches to Media Effects Theories may however be the final factor which determines what school of thought or media model will prevail.

The way these current researches have incorporated the key aspects of the technological development in media as well as the way that they have addressed the previous concerns or criticisms regarding the traditional approaches makes them a valuable tool indeed in providing a deeper understanding of human nature and the relationship that it has to media.

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