

MASS MEDIA INFLUENCE UPON SOCIETY

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Summary: The article deals with the influence of mass media on society. Social and cultural impact upon society is considered. The conclusion is made that mass media influence all the spheres of life, activities of people and society.

Key words: cultural influence, mass media, social influence, social violence, society.

Анотація: Стаття присвячена впливу засобів масової інформації на суспільство. Розглядається соціальний та культурний вплив на суспільство. Зроблено висновок, що засоби масової інформації впливають на всі сфери життя, діяльності людини та суспільства.

Ключові слова: засоби масової інформації, культурний вплив, соціальне насильство, соціальний вплив, суспільство.

Анотация: Статья посвящена влиянию средств массовой информации на общество. Рассматривается социальное и культурное влияние на общество. Сделан вывод, что средства массовой информации оказывают на все сферы жизни, деятельности человека и общества.

Ключевые слова: культурное влияние, общество, социальное насилие, социальное влияние, средства массовой информации.

The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society. This is predicated upon its ability to reach a wide audience which often sends a strong and influential message. Marshall McLuhan uses the term “the medium is the message” as a means of explaining how the distribution of the message can often be more important than the message itself [1, p.4–5]. It is through the persuasiveness of media such as television, radio and print media that reach the target audience. These have been influential media as they have been largely responsible in structuring people's daily lives and routines [4, p. 5–7]. Television broadcasting has a large amount of control in the content that society watches and the times in which they are viewed. This is a distinguishing feature of traditional media and although they are by no means redundant, the development of the internet has challenged the traditional participation habits involved in media such as television. The internet has lifted some of the restrictions, heightened level of consumer participation. There have been suggestions that allowing consumers to produce information through the internet will lead to a bombardment of too much information. It can however allow society a medium for expressing opinions and moving away from the political restrictions placed on society [4, p. 35–36].

There are three degrees of involvement of mass media into social life. The first of these is primary involvement, in which the audience is solely concentrating on consuming the media text. For example, they are sitting down solely to watch their favorite program on television. Secondary involvement is when an audience's concentration is split between the media text and another distraction. For example, working on the computer while watching television.

Tertiary involvement is when the media text is merely in the background, with no real concentration upon it at all. For example, glancing at a newspaper on a crowded train. While this theory is somewhat simplistic, it provides a clear and probable explanation as to the changes in audience reception.

Perhaps the most widely accepted theory on audience reception is Denis McQuail's Uses and Gratifications model. This places emphasis on why audiences consume media. The first reason outlined in the model is the need to reinforce your own behavior by identifying with roles, values and sex presented in the media. Secondly, we need to feel some kind of interaction with other people; this is offered by text such as soap operas and lifestyle magazines. The third reason is the need for security in our lives. Media offer us a window to the world that allows education and the acquisition of information. The final reason is the need for entertainment through both escapism and the need for emotional release, such as laughter. Strength of this theory is the emphasis on the audience as active in the reception of media. However, this would suggest no passivity within the audience whatsoever. A person may, for example, be too lazy to turn off their television and so consume any media that is available. This theory also pays little attention to the short term and long term effects of media on the audience.

David Gauntlett, the Professor of Media and Communications at the University of Westminster, proposed ten criticisms of the Media Effects model. First, that media effects researchers go about their research starting with the assumption that media does in fact cause violence, and thus producing studies where media is administered and violent reactions are looked for, whereas, Gauntlett prefers that things should be done the other way around.

To explain the problem of violence in society, researchers should begin with that social violence and seek to explain it with reference, quite obviously, to those who engage in it: their identity, background, character and so on [5].

Gauntlett goes on to criticise studies that focus on children by stating that they do not utilize adults as a control group, and that the studies are conducted primarily to further a "barely-concealed conservative ideology", and counters the premise of these studies with the concept that not all depictions of violence are even bad to witness.

David Gauntlett explains further that objects that are "violent" or "anti-social" may not be such in the minds of the viewer. Additionally, he claims that the effects model makes no attempt to understand the meanings of media. Historical criticisms situate the "meta-narrative" of effects theory within a long history of distrust of new forms of media, dating as far back as Socrates's objections to the deleterious effects due to the written alphabet.

Political criticisms pose an alternative conception of humans as rational, critical subjects, who are alert to genre norms and adept at interpreting and critiquing media representations, not passively absorbing them.

Supporters of effects theory contend that commercials, advertising and voter campaigns prove that the media influences people's behavior. In the 20th century aggressive media attention and negative depictions of trials revolving around celebrities as Roscoe Fatty Arbuckle or Michael Jackson have influenced

the general public's opinion, before the trials effectively started. However, these critics do point out that while the media could have an effect on people's behavior this isn't necessarily always the case [2, p. 1–2].

Critics of the media effects theory point out that many copycat murders, suicides and other violent acts nearly always happen in abnormal upbringings. They were raised in a violent, emotionally neglected or aggressive environment which influenced their behavior more rather than watching certain programs, films or listening to certain music. Most people who carry out these acts are also mentally unstable to begin with. Critics also point out that just because an audience sees acts of violence on TV, etc, this does not mean they will actually do it themselves. Of the millions of people who watch violent films, only a small number have carried out acts of violence as a direct result. People regularly exposed to violent media usually grow up to be completely normal people. If there are any effects from media, they only affect a very small number of people.

Also there are other thinkers who criticize effects based research, such as Terry Flew and Sal Humphreys, Barker and Freedman. Martin Barker criticised Elizabeth Newson who alleged link between media violence and real life violence in her report in 1994, Brooke, for example talks about this in details. And the report gained the media concerns and attentions when it claimed that the horror film “Child's Play 3” had influenced 10 years old boys behaviors and led to murder of James Bulger in Feb 1993. After examining and assessing Newson’s report case studies in his research and other researches, it was apparent that there is no clear link between film and crime. Bulger case was one of examples of her case studies in the report and which was contested by Barker. Critics criticized her report by pointing out that her case studies were very reliant on press accounts and opinions rather than independent research. However, Newsons report was influential, it has influenced public and institutions and result in more concern on censorship on videos and more concern from the British Board of Film classification on Psychological effects of media violence. The attention and question become whether they were watching violent media.

But Barker doesn’t agree with Elizabeth Newson. He rejects her claim about the connection between media violence and real life violence. In his argument, he indicates that there was not a scrap of evidence that the boys had seen the movie and «Child Play 3» is a moral film. He also criticized anti media campaigns and described them as ignorant and disguised political campaigns. He states that these claims are represented by media and most of people have no chance to check the credibility of them, he also points out that these films including “Child play 3” are often attacked because they deal with political issues.

Moreover, he lists real cases, for example “a man takes a gun and shoots his entire family after watching the news, arrested and tried, he explains his actions on the basis that the world news was so bad there seemed no point anyone going on living”. Barker suggests that this case for example is no different that other putative cases of media a causing violence, Barker said that we should not always blindly blame the media because people are not copycats, instead we should be aware of someone mental state and take other factors into account before making

such claims. For example, in his case he states that the man reaction was abnormal. Therefore, his behavior could not be explained by suggesting “the effects of the news”. There are other social and cultural factors in criminal acts in which the media are not the basic influence. Barker also suggests “that we must look beyond a specific film to think about the specific context in which it has been consumed, and the wider social background of the people”. According to Barker there is no such thing called violence in the media that either could or could not cause violence, we should rather pay attention to how social factors and background make some people consume media in specific way. For instance, even the news also show lots of violence, so people should rather pay attention to how social factors and background make some people consume media in particular way. In addition Barker proposes further research, he suggests that the theory of media violence connection must be tested because identification with particular element in a film is not something can be seen. He also noted problem with campaigners treating delinquents as normal people who become influenced by the media. Therefore, he suggests further research on how these people understand and consume media [3, p. 10–14].

Critics of effects based research see no connection between exposure to media violence and real life violence, because human are not copycats and they can realize what is wrong and what is right. Although some research states claims that heavy exposure to media violence can lead to more aggressive behavior, but not criminal violence and even in these researches it has been suggested that exposure alone does not cause a child to commit violence and media alone are not seen to be the main influence.

Also the ones that claim such connection are rare.

Flew and Humphreys said that the assumptions of effects researches are frequently flawed. According to Flew and Humphreys, Freedman and Goldstein have found that the number of studies on games and violence is small and the research suffers from flawed methodologies and ambiguous results which do very little to prove a direct link. Terry Flew and Sal Humphreys also state ‘that differing context of consumption will always mean we need to take account of the particularities of players and how and why they play, effects researches often give insufficient account to the relevance of cultural contexts and the way in which media are actually implicated in the circulation of meanings in our cultures.

Freedman is another thinker who rejects this idea, in reference to the FCC “the Federal Communications Commission in US” report that suggests link between media violence and real life violence, Freedman indicates the lack of discussion and states that the FCC does not make a sufficient distinction between people’s opinions, intuitions and musings on the one hand, and the hard scientific data on the other, and he indicates the lack of discussion of one of the strongest arguments against the idea that media violence causes aggression. According to Freedman the rate of violent crime in the United States increased sharply from 1965 to 1980 and some people blamed that increase on media. The rate of violent crime leveled off until about 1992, since that time, television continued to have violent programs, there was also more scenes and media showing more violence, if

exposure to violent media cause real violence one would surely expect the rate of violent crime to have increased sharply, yet, since 1992 there has been a dramatic drop in violent crime, it seems clear that media violence did not cause the earlier increase. Therefore, it is widely accepted that there is no convincing evidence that prove that media violence cause violent crime or any type of real life violence [6].

Thus, mass media influence all the spheres of life, activities of people and society. But the problem of bringing violence into social life by mass media is controversial.

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