

Student Number: 12345678

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Szabo and Hopkinson (2007) investigated whether watching the news affected individuals' psychological state and if psychological or distraction techniques could reduce any possible effects produced. The methodology employed was an experimental between-participant design, with a sample of 179 undergraduate students. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions; a progressive relaxation or a lecture control condition. All participants were required to complete three questionnaires; these measured state anxiety, positive and negative affect and total mood disturbance at three points in the experiment. These points were before and after watching a pre-recorded 15-minute newscast and lastly after either a 15-minute relaxation or lecture. Their results revealed that after watching the newscast, the positive effect decreased, and both total mood disturbance and state anxiety increased in both conditions. Furthermore, these adverse psychological effects were reduced in the relaxation group. However, they remained the same in the control lecture condition. The researchers interpreted these results by explaining that watching a newscast does negatively impact individuals psychological state. However, these adverse effects can only be reduced by a psychological aid such as progressive relaxation and not a distraction task such as a lecture. The study undoubtedly has its limitations. Most importantly, its unrepresentative sample and self-report measurements, both of which limit the generalisability and validity of the study.

From the outset, the paper poses that research in this area is scarce, with very little empirical evidence. This assertion is supported by more recent literature, with most news and media research concerning its effect on cognition rather than emotion. Thus, the relationship between news and emotion has been essentially dismissed (Hoog & Verboon, 2020). However, the paper strongly argues the importance of this research as the research generated has suggested that watching the news does indeed affect emotion, and clearly in a negative way. For instance, the paper references studies such as Potts and Sanchez (1994), who presented an association between depression and strong negative feelings after watching television broadcasts. The paper also included experimental results, such as negative newscasts increasing individuals' self-reported anxiety (Johnston & Davey, 1997). The paper also explores possible explanations for these adverse effects, mainly deriving from research suggesting that most broadcasted news is negatively biased and thus is likely to result in unfavourable emotional effects (Galician, 1986). However, the paper fails to explain this using psychological theories, unlike other researchers, such as Hoog & Verboon (2020), who apply a cognitive dual-process model to help support their interpretation. Although lacking theoretical background, this paper adds to our understanding by examining if news watching has a negative effect and if an intervention such as progressive relaxation can dissipate these harmful effects.

In discussing the methodology used, the paper firstly explains the sample of 173 undergraduate students from Nottingham Trent University, studying sport and exercise psychology. The age range of participants was 18-24. Thus it is evident that the sample is not representative of the whole population, but not uncommon in Psychological research. Additionally, the authors fail to include any other demographic information such as socioeconomic background, which makes the sample somewhat less generalizable still. However, using a convenience sample is cost-effective,

so this would likely be the reasoning for their choice. The procedure is then clearly stated with enough detail for the study to be replicable. A particular strength of the materials used was the newscast presented to participants being 'blind to experimenters' – meaning the experimenters didn't know the content of the stimulus material. This enhances the validity of the study as it eliminates experimenter bias. However, if this were replicated, a new newscast would need to be used and matched to the one used in this study, and this could potentially influence the results, for instance, if the newscast contained more or less negative content. This is a very real challenge to find an equivalent newscast, with similar features.

Furthermore, the researchers have operationalised the psychological intervention into a 15-minute recorded relaxation tape and the control into a 15-minute PowerPoint live lecture. It is important to highlight that the 15-minute lecture was led by one of the experimenters.

Undoubtedly, this could open the door to experimenter bias. Thus the lecture should be pre-recorded or delivered live by someone blind to the experiment in future research. The psychological effects were measured using three self-report questionnaires, these being; the Profile of Mood States Inventory (Grove & Prapavessis, 1992), the State Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger et al., 1970), and the Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (Gauvin & Szabo, 1992). Although each questionnaire is regarded as a robust measurement for each psychological variable, they allow participant bias. For instance, participants may display desirability bias by reporting lower anxiety after the relaxation as they believed the researchers wanted them to report this. Additionally, the question arises as to whether self-reporting psychological states such as anxiety is valuable, as it is questionable if individuals can introspectively assess their own emotions. They may respond in a particular way unconsciously due to social desirability

(Harmon-Jones et al., 2016). This being said, the use of questionnaires was straightforward, and as all questionnaires are available freely, they could be used in my future research.

In the results section of the paper, both the results and statistical data analysis were comprehensive. The study used a repeated-measures ANOVA, with the independent variable being the time point in which the questionnaires were administered. Thus before the newscast, after the newscast and then after the relaxation or control condition. The dependent measure was then the questionnaire scores. Accordingly, there were four measurements: scores on state anxiety, total mood disturbance, positive affect, and negative affect. The results were neatly presented in four graphs, which showed the levels of each dependent variable at each time point and allowed a clear presentation of results. A Bonferroni-corrected t-test was also used to show statistically significant results in three of the four tests, with negative affect not being statistically significant for both groups. This result supported their hypothesis that there would be a negative psychological effect from watching the news. Regarding group differences of psychological effects after the relaxation or lecture, four independent t-tests were conducted where the significance level was corrected using further Bonferroni corrections. They were able to see a statistically significant difference, such that the relaxation group results returned to a similar level to before the newscast. In contrast, the control group largely remained unchanged. This result implies that relaxation buffers the adverse effects of watching the newscast, whereas a lecture does not. Furthermore, their choice of analysis enabled both of their hypotheses to be addressed in a clear, logical and sequential way.

The interpretation of the data is well justified in the discussion of the paper. Their results support previous literature (Johnston & Davey, 1997). However, they add to knowledge as they could see that the effect of a lecture control condition (so arguably, just a distraction) did not reduce the

adverse psychological effects of watching the news. However, a psychological intervention did mitigate the adverse effects. These results raise multiple questions, one being whether alternative distraction techniques would be effective as the distraction hypothesis has previously shown that some forms of distraction have effectively altered mood (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1993). It is probable that a lecture was just not a sufficient distraction. Future studies could include more conditions, each with different distraction techniques designed to work slightly differently.

Although the study used a replicable methodology and clear data analysis, there are multiple possible improvements. Firstly, the unrepresentative sample used. The study included 127/179 male participants, and thus the majority were male. Additionally, the age range was limited to 18-24-year-olds. A future study ought to comprise a more diverse sample with clarity on their demographics. Another aspect of the study which could be improved would be the measurement of psychological effects, in which the self-report questionnaires were used. Although easy to administer (Egloff, 2002), this specific choice of measurement allows for multiple types of participant bias and demand characteristics, and thus it would be helpful to include experimental tasks or objective measures. One suggestion would be the Implicit Association test for anxiety, which through measuring the strength of associations, is an indirect way of measuring anxiety (Egloff, 2002). In order to measure mood, the Emotional Stroop task could be implemented (Strauss et al., 2005). It is a task that would help reduce bias and, used alongside questionnaires, could improve reliability.

Overall, I would argue that the strength of this study lies in its replicability. The study uses a simple method that could be replicated and adapted to the mini-dissertation. However, I propose to try to eliminate some of the extraneous variables and biases that have been previously discussed. For instance, a more generalisable sample should be a primary goal, in which relevant,

targeted and ethical demographic information could be gathered. This demographic information could be used to match participants into the two conditions, which could help to eliminate some noise created in the data by individual differences. The study could still use self-report measurements. However, the inclusion of an alternative task may aid in making the study more valid by triangulating with the questionnaires. I am uncertain at this time what type of measures might be suitable using online testing, but my Lab Tutor has given us some useful places to start assembling candidate tasks.

In order to improve this research, my mini-dissertation will also investigate if different forms of news have psychological effects. Replicating the newscasts used in the study is difficult, but we see this as an opportunity to introduce content or tone as a group-wide IV manipulation. I deem this important as while television newscasts are still the leading form of media consumption in the UK, in younger adults, 80% of individuals report using the internet to consume news, either through uploaded video or news articles (Watson, 2021). Furthermore, with other forms of media being so prevalent, it is vital to understand whether they too cause adverse psychological effects or if this is just unique to television newscasts. We haven't exhaustively looked at literature for other media, but we will, and such research will be useful in the literature review section of the mini-dissertation. I am determined that my mini-dissertation will not solely rely solely on self-report to measure psychological effects. We will include a task such as the Emotional Stroop task or IAT to increase the reliability of our results, but also to give us all the experience of designing and using both a self-report measure and a psychological task or test. This way, we will all be more competent in both areas for the final year 3 project.

I believe my mini-dissertation (and future research) is of great importance, with mental health problems increasing in the UK, with approximately 21% of adults experiencing depression

(Williams, 2021), the relationship between news consumption and one's psychological state is critical to understand. And if news consumption is partly to blame, then interventions are needed to help individuals cope with this.

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