International School

Media

6.5 Different models of media effects

Direct effects

- Media-centric models models - argue that media have direct effect on behaviour ('strong media, weak audience' models).

- **Hypodermic syringe model:** media effects theory that argues that media messages are like a drug injected directly into the audience's mind in ways that change their behaviour.

- Audience are seen as passive receivers

- Variation of this idea suggests that media effects are cumulative

- **Desensitisation**

Direct effects

- **Gauntlett (1998):** such models have a basic flaw: they see audiences as uncritical individuals, easily influenced by whatever they read, see or hear.

- There is lack of empirical evidence

  - [The Bobo Doll Experiment - Albert Bandura on Social Learning](#)

  - **Belson (1978):** prolonged exposure to media violence produces violent behaviour in young males. **Hagell and Newburn (1994)** found a general lack of interest in TV among young offenders.

- The focus of direct effects models moved towards vulnerable audiences (children).

Indirect effects

- **Katz and Lazarfield (1955)** suggested a **two-step flow model** of messages flow:
  - From media to opinion formers
  - From opinion formers to people in their social network

- *Perception:* people notice some messages but not others
- *Exposure:* people choose media messages consistent with their beliefs
- *Expression:* people listen to opinion of people important to them
- *Retention:* people remember things that fit with their beliefs
- *Selection:* some messages are never relayed

- The two-step flow model is an example of a **normative model**

Indirect effects

- **Uses and gratification model:** a normative model of media effects that argues that consumers pick and choose both media and messages. The media is used by audiences to gratify their own particular uses and needs.

- Audience controls media ('weak media, strong audience approach')

- McQuail et al. (1972) suggested for primary uses and gratifications:
  - Entertainment
  - Social solidarity
  - Identity
  - Surveillance

- Companionship???

Indirect effects

- **Cultural effects:** a model that proposes that media effects are strong in the long term. They are slow, cumulative and operate through the ability to become a part of an audience's cultural background.

- These models are related to neo-Marxist hegemonic theory of the media - media are seen as agents of social control.

- **Chandler (1995):** media 'induces general mindset' around particular areas of social life, such as crime, taking on a hegemonic role where some beliefs are encouraged and others discouraged. Attitudes and behaviours do not change overnight, however.

Indirect effects

- **Audience reception theory** is based on the idea that media messages always have a range of possible meaning and interpretations, some intended by the sender and others read into the message by the audience.

- Hall (1980) argued that media messages such as advertisements involve:
  - Encoding
  - Decoding

- Hall suggested three main ways a media message is read by an audience:
  - Hegemonic codes, negotiated codes, oppositional codes

Strengths and limitations of the different models of media effects

- Strength of media vs strength of audiences

- Immediate effects vs accumulative effects

- Media diversity relates to two main areas: Different types of media - Old and new forms of media

- The meaning of 'an effect'

- Problems and debates about the type of research method

- Problems of interpretation of media content

Rose (2007): researcher requires a thorough understanding of their subject matter if they are to identify and understand the symbols, codes and conventions involved. An analysis of the Indian film industry would be difficult for researcher with little or no knowledge of this culture and genre.

Strengths and limitations of the different models of media effects

- **Livingstone and Hargrave (2006):** in relation to rap music lyrics, 'different people do not interpret content in the same way'. There is a difference between the interpretation of 'fans of a genre vs. those who only occasionally view and this make it risky to draw conclusions about media effects'.

- Consumption context affects how it is experienced and its possible effect:

  - Physical consumption

  - Mental consumption. It is difficult to know how research carried out in one society, such as India or the USA can be applied to different societies that have different:

    - cultures

    - media regulations

    - media content.

Strengths and limitations of the different models of media effects

- **Postmodernists:** conventional effects theories look for the wrong things in the wrong places in the wrong ways. They question three assumptions on which conventional theories are based:

  - Undifferentiated mass audiences are now rare
  - Media literacy
  - It takes for granted distinction between those who produce and those who consume it. This presents two main problems:

    - Consumers are producers (Instagram, Twitter)

    - **Staiger (2000):** audiences are increasingly perverse spectators - they use media in their own way and for their own means through activated meanings created by how they interact with media.

Arguments and evidence about the extent to which human behaviour is influenced by media

- Conventional analysis focus on negative impacts

  - Society as a whole - general political, economic and cultural negatives
  - Social groups - how media contributes to moral panics
  - Individual level

- Economic terms: large media corporations and operate as oligarchies that:

  - Prevent entrance to media markets
  - Restrict competition
  - Limit consumer choice

Lechner (2001): this creates media homogenisation by developing a consumerist culture, in which standard commodities are promoted by global marketing campaigns to create similar lifestyles.

Arguments and evidence about the extent to which human behaviour is influenced by media

- Political impacts - extension of surveillance and loss of personal privacy.

- Culturally - media encourage a cultural hegemony that colonises local cultures with the products and lifestyles of dominant cultures

- Marxists explain negative impacts in terms of manipulation theories.

  - **Adorno and Horkheimer (1944):** in a mass society characterised by social isolation and alienation, the media become source of mass culture through the agency of a 'culture industry'. Audiences are uniquely receptive to whatever the media transmit because there are few links to alternative sources of information.