A Brief History of Media Effects Research

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Why the need to know the History of Media Effects Research?

- Read past research so as to not “reinvent the wheel”
- Research interest change over time and interact with available technologies
- Understand development of research area over time for solid understanding of any research area
- Know history to know what kind of questions to raise about study of Media Effects
- Some events happen to stir interest in study of Media Effects. E.g.: Columbine shooting incident
1898
War on Spain Declared

- William Hearst-Famous Newspaper publisher
- May have caused to stir up public support in favor of war through his publications
- Helped support Congress with public mandate

1917
Propaganda in WW1

- President recognized power of media to influence public opinion- (William Hearst)
- Organized the CPI (Committee on Public Information) / Creel Committee
What is the CPI/Creel Committee?

• U.S Congress declared war on Germany- caused much anti-war sentiment internally
• CPI formed to counter anti-war sentiment in U.S
• CPI headed by George Creel-an investigative journalist
What did the Committee do?

- Main purpose of CPI was to bolster popular support for American involvement in war.
- Creel used propaganda to target American citizens.
- Through posters:

What did the Committee do?-Cont...

- Movies: “To Hell With The Kaiser”
- Pamphlets: the CPI published nearly 75 million pamphlets
- News bulletins & headlines: The CPI had control over the kind of information to be published/broadcasted.
- Four-Minute Men: trained public speakers - delivered 4 minute speeches in churches, schools, at military camps and during movie intermissions
- Other means: conferences, exhibits, marching bands, billboards, pictures, and flyers
1920s-Movies Explode as Mainstream Entertainment

- Motion pictures- main form of entertainment as there were no radio or T.V sets during that period
- Was obvious that frequent visits to watch movies had impact on attitudes and behaviors of people.
- Researches launched series of studies focusing on effect of films.

1929-1932
The Payne Fund Studies

- Purpose
  - To discover the real impact of movies on the younger generation

- 13 studies conducted
Film Content

- Researcher Edgar Dale studied film content-categorized films into 10 groups

- Found >75% fall into Crime, Love and Sex categories

- Same kind of trend probably seen today
How Payne Fund is conducted

- The methodology.
  - Qualitative analysis of the movies was used.
  - Census and survey data.
  - Effects were measured using experimental design, questionnaires, case studies and personal interviews.
  - Emotional stimulation.

What was observed?

- Attitudes were changed.
- Emotions were stimulated.
- Health effects.
- Behavioral changes.
- Overall, researchers found that movies influenced both children's attitudes and behaviors.
Emotional Impact of Movies

• Research was done on how certain themes affect viewers.

• Children and adults were tested for their response to romantic/sexy content - galvanic skin response

• Findings show older adolescents more responsive - children not so affected

2 ideas still present in current research today:

~ Researchers make theoretical distinctions between younger and older children

~ Techniques used to measure psychological responses to media messages still used today
Behavioral Impact of Movies

- Herbert Blumer conducted questionnaires and interviews with children to young adults.
- Respondents reflect on how exposure to media messages affected their behavior.

Result: People believed they have been influenced by media messages.
- Herbert Blumer in his book *Movies and Conduct* said, "put forward the most far-reaching hypothesis about the impact of movies on American society."
Behavioral impact

• Blumer used student autobiographies.

• movies had "a profound effect upon fantasy life" - dreams and passions are far removed from reality

Problems with Blumer’s Study

1) Due to the Social Learning Theory, respondents might not be affected by the movie.

2) The technique assumes that people are aware of how media affect them.

◊ People may be mistaken about the effects on their own behavior.

◊ It was not accurate to rely on people’s own reports about media impact.
Ted Bundy

- Bundy murdered scores of young women across the United States between 1974 and 1978
- Claimed that pornography (the media) made him commit all those crimes
- No social scientist or law enforcement officer took him seriously

**OTHER POSSIBLE REASONS OF MURDER**

1) Lack of love and acceptance in his home since childhood.
2) Bundy’s family members could influence his growing up years.
3) Stephanie Brooks (his serious relationship partner back in college).
The Payne Fund Studies-
The Aftermath

• Lowery and DeFleur: Conclusions of the studies helped to establish a **legacy of fear.**

  **LEGACY OF FEAR:**
  1) Widespread belief that the media were dangerous
  2) The effects of the media messages might pervert and upset the proper social order.

• Film makers should exercise a greater sense of social responsibility

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**POWER RANGERS STUDY**

• Investigating the effects of watching the Power Rangers television show on children's behavior.

• Done by Boyatzis, Mattillo, and Nesbitt 1995.

• First study to assess the influences of the show on children's aggressive behavior.

• Positive correlation between watching Power Rangers and Aggressive behavior amongst children.

• This finding supports the results of the Payne Fund study.
George Gallup

- Pioneering pollster
- Determined that in seeking the truth, his guiding principle would be independence.
- Unbiased stand.

- Audience research in Hollywood during the 1930s and ’40s
- His techniques guide moviemakers to this day.
- Walt Disney subjected every film it made from 1946–52 to a Gallup preview.
• Invitational Preview

• Audience devices – Dial device.

Late 1930s-Invasion From Mars

• Radio--dominant form of communication medium
• Mass reaction to Orson Welles’s “War of Worlds” spurred research interest
• Princeton University conducted research
Late 1930s-Invasion From Mars-
Research at Princeton

- most Americans had tremendous confidence in Radio as news medium
- Creative technique of show was very convincing.

Research at Princeton

- Research focused on characteristics of people who believed program was real.
- People affected were those lacking critical ability, low self-confidence, low emotional security
- People with strong religious beliefs likely to believe in aliens
Studies till the late 1930s were not characterized by well-developed theory and testing of specific hypothesis

Early Theory of Media Effects
The Magic Bullet Model

- Also known as the Hypodermic Needle Model.
- Like a magic bullet/a hypodermic needle, the media message will exert powerful, relatively uniform effects on everyone who processes it.

The Magic Bullet Model

Conceptual Model:

Audience:
- powerless in resisting the impact of media messages

Media:
- Dangerously powerful
Theoretical Critique:

The People’s Choice Study

Conducted by
Paul Lazarsfeld,
Bernard Berelson,
& Hazel Gaudet.

The People’s Choice Study

• A study to find out “how and why people decided to vote as they did” during the 1940 presidential election.
The People’s Choice Study

• One of the methodological innovations of this ambitious study was the use of large control groups.

• Why use control groups?

• Important finding: Longitudinal panel design as a viable method for studying change.

The People’s Choice Study

• Media impact in the 1940 Campaign: Conversion VS Reinforcement

• Far from the view that media effects were comparable to a magic bullet, the newer research indicated that the media had only limited effects.
The People’s Choice Study

• Experiments on World War II Movies:
  - use of the experimental method
  - the first sophisticated set of experiments in media history

• Results:
  The Ceiling Effect VS The Limited Effects

The Limited-Effects Perspective

• Joseph Klapper’s
  The Effects of Mass Communication

• argued that the effects of the mass media ranged from small to negligible.

• Ironically, his comments came when the television came about.
The Limited-Effects Perspective

• The research on TV called this perspective into question.

• This shows how theories about social phenomena can change as society changes.

• Today, political scientists work with a term called voter volatility.

The Limited-Effects Perspective

• One important principle to emerge from the limited-effects perspective that remains important today:

• The notion of selective exposure to communication
Evils of Comic Books

- 1953 research of Frederic Wertham – famous psychiatrist
- Published *Seduction of the Innocent*.
- Funded by National Research Council.
- “Research” procedures were non-scientific.
- Content analysis procedures non-systematic.
- Conclusions do not represent the larger population of comic readers.

- Wertham believed exposure to the messages of these comic books could corrupt juvenile behaviour.
- Lead young people into a life of reckless crime and self-abuse.
Late 1950s
The Dawn of Television

- Many reports of imitative crimes, particularly among youths proliferated

- Scientific reports showed no definitive correlation between exposure to violence and aggression.

- Government started to make grant money available for scientists who wanted to study media’s impact on human behavior

- 1960s-1970s were years of new theories and research about media impact.

- Limited-effects perspective started to give way to new paradigm based on more sophisticated scientific techniques
TODAY…
Research still goes on…

GALLUP POLLS

- The Gallup Organization is a world leader in the science of research.
- Founded in the 1930s by George Gallup.
- The Gallup Organization has studied human nature and behavior for more than 70 years.
- Senior Scientists.
• October 29, 2004 - A new Gallup poll showed that teenagers prefer a good (or even bad) TV show to a good book.

• The poll revealed teens' habits by asking kids 13-17 what they did "yesterday." About 90 percent said they watched TV, by far the most popular activity.

• November 29, 2006 – A new Gallup poll showed that 1 in 4 parents worry that their children watch too much TV

• The poll asked parents about their children's television viewing habits. About half say their children watch a great deal or fair amount of television, but most are not concerned about the amount of television or the types of programs their children are watching.
Stanford University Medical Centre
Limited TV viewing reduces Aggression in children.

• Tom Robinson, MD, MPH, assistant professor of pediatrics and of medicine-lead author of the study.
• This study is the first to show that such behavior can be unlearned by reducing the exposure.
• Ratings of aggression were about 25% lower than those at the control school.

TYPES OF MEDIA EFFECTS
Micro-Level Effects of Media

MICRO-LEVEL EFFECTS:
- Involve effects on individual media consumers
- For example, studies were conducted to find out audience’s reaction to horror movies.

Macro-Level Media Effects

MACRO-LEVEL EFFECTS:
• Examines media impact on large communities.
• For example, conclusions were drawn and generalized based on the given community.
Content-Specific or Diffuse-General Effects

- Content-specific
  - How certain content of a film affects a person’s behavior
  - eg. Violent/sexually explicit vs nature television programs (Jamie Bulger Case)

- Diffuse general effects
  - Effects that affect the audience disregarding the content of the media messages
  - eg. How television or computer games increase obesity levels

ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

THE MAIN FOCUS OF STUDY

- Up to 1980, exposure to media changed people’s attitudes

HOWEVER……

- Attitude change does not always produce behavior change and cognitive change.
BEHAVIOR CHANGE

• A change in the way a person act after constant exposure to a certain content in the media.

EXAMPLE:
A boy once burnt his sister’s bed after he saw a similar scene in the cartoon Beavis and Butthead.

COGNITIVE CHANGE

• Changes in what people think about

EXAMPLE~
• Michael Moore’s Documentary-Bowling For Columbine claims that we can’t connect the massacre to rock music. It’s all in the mind.
ALTERATION

ALTERATION
- Terms of change

EXPOSURE TO MEDIA MESSAGES CHANGE:
- Public Opinion
- Decision in buying a certain product

STABILITY
- Maintaining things the way they are

MEDIA MESSAGES ALSO FOCUS ON:
- Status Quo

MEDIA HAS AN IMPACT ON US WITHOUT US KNOWING IT.
THE END!

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