

MANAGING THEORIES, EFFECTS AND MECHANISMS FOR NARRATIVES IN A MEDIA TEXT

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Abstract: *We have been living in a world where media is everywhere. We use media consistently from radio, TV, to internet, video games and advertising in all sorts of ways. We simultaneously use devices that bring closer a variety of media products: phones, social networks, other communication means. Media has become so prolific that sometimes we enjoy these products without asking ourselves why and without noticing how important it is the role media has in the decision making process, in the beliefs that we build ourselves or in the attitudes we display. In this respect, a proper management of media competences leads to a better understanding of social phenomena, to an enhanced decision making process.*

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1. Introduction

Once the internet has arrived into our lives, the distinction between mainstream media and new media is blurred even more with the transfer of the traditional media in the online- online TV, live radio and online press. The distinction between the old and the new media is extremely debated and conclusions are still drawn on the definition of what new media is since it is not new anymore, because traditional media has once been new, as some might argue, fueling the debate open.

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2. Theories and effects of media use

Which are the effects media inflicts upon society and how much good or bad influence does it have in present are topics that will never lose interest for the researchers, since the media effects are always different once there are never ending sources to be able to render through media a proper representation of reality as it is in the real environment, correlated with never ending information overload. A constant analysis can thus highlight the state of society seen through media lenses, considering various reactions to information structure, culture level and intensity that media can show, in asurge to change perceptions, even though a large variety of information sources can generate a raised awareness of critical thinking and comparative assessment skills for any of the new information that reaches us on various channels.

Needless to say that one of the contemporary society characteristics is the overwhelming media information load. Toffler(1970) was mentioning the”information overload” in the 1970s, speaking about a lot of verbal and visual material, leading to disorientation and confusion. Today yet, the expression has a new meaning, including, beside the verbal and visual, the auditory component, in a multimedia combination. Data chunks become increasingly mobile, more complex and more complete due to a better interconnectivity (Mihăescu, 2009).One needs today media competences among others, to be able to make a difference, to see the core of the informative chunk clearly, to differentiate it from the fake or redundant one, from the propaganda or marketing. Otherwise, publicity works because one is not able to see it, lacking awareness that any attitude or product we use or which defines our appearance daily is a constant publicity. People advances themselves as public figures, appealing to products, unaware of that. Media competence helps raising awareness beyond largely debated fake news for which only this is the solution, to work in identifying and assessing the content, comparing sources and corroborating information to decide over truthfulness.

For these reasons, approaching media effects are the most accessible way to study the media power and understand the complexity of the messages sent through various dissemination channels, to manage information and become content managers in a society that is in a constant knowledge motion, because these focus on visible results of the media consumption over human body. What effect does violence in the media have or promoting celebrities or shows

that belong to popular culture can get over individuals' education and values are questions that generated a plethora of studies and controversies as well.

In this respect, the theory of *hypodermic needle* (Laswell, 1935), focused on the effects radio propaganda had over audience along with the *theory of excitation transfer* (Zillmann, 1971), in connection to violent reactions that are apparently without any justification for those who watch aggressive programs in spot or films are but the basic instruments for an analysis performed over society. What is important is that most studies concentrate on media negative effects over people. *The uses and gratification theory* (Katz et al, 1974) on the other hand goes beyond this approach, to see people as a passive consumer of violence when pointing to a certain society and considers the media audience as an active user highlights the needs media should answer in order for the users to stay tuned. Seen this way, media has an evolutionist role, if we see media consumption as an instinctive need for individual's control over the environment. For example, the news on violent outbursts broadcasted in an area with violent potential can only enhance imminent danger awareness for the locals and hence the need for permanent control of information, manifested through *surveillance function* (Shoemaker, 1996), which considers that audiences give trust to that information they find relevant, while the same pieces of news have no relevance in a risk free area. These theories actually speak about a double edged relationship built between the public and the media (Ball-Rokeach, DeFleur, 1976). Audiences earlier formed from passive users that are easily impregnated with messages of certain consistency use traditional media currently for surveillance and evasion reasons only (Vincent, Basil, 1997). The appearance of online news complicated things and brought a new development and need for skills to manage information, since a lot of people use news shallowly due to the information abundance. In consuming media they simply click from one hyperlink to another, changing pages and sites, comparing, yet not following carefully anything at all from the beginning to the end (Diddi, LaRose, 2006). The internet bridges the gap though and the online environment connects people especially when there is a common goal. On the other hand, to support people's shallow attitude in media consumption *the cultivation theory* (Gerbner, et al, 1978) conveys the idea that media cultivates certain viewpoints and values for the audience, highlighting the popularity of certain programs over others and appealing thus to the idea of convergence or common topics in more media cultures across the world. A set of trends is

generated considering these effects can be intensified through area resonance for situations with certain significance for the audience in the proximity.

The audience is thus active all the time and this is an issue that should not be ignored since it interprets the information based on needs generated by the social or personal context, by relevance and priorities, and that is why recent research state that interpreting media text is a matter of subjectivity and cannot be put in theoretical patterns or in those generated by media producers since "there is no text, no audience, there are only viewing processes" (Fiske, 1989), thing that explains why audience is still free to do what they wish with the cultural product they receive. One thing is certain-understanding how media acts over audience and which are the mechanisms that power it, people will be aware of the media effects over society and they will use the information critically.

As far as the studies performed and disseminated on the media, one needs to consider that most people mention negative effects media has over society. Few examples mention yet the benefits media manifests especially on young people. If movies, for example, contain violence and crime they induce violent and aggressive behaviors but there are media products that stir a positive effect on the way people act, a prosocial one, either as children shows (Muppets for example was a children show that invited parents to watch along with their children by introducing the two characters in the story- Statler and Waldorf that make various juicy comments which cannot be perceived by children) or through shows that have an explicit educational content. Media positive effects are not that much highlighted and research in the field states (Hill, 2001)- that entertainment media should be criticized since it promotes lower standard morale information and addresses to the masses, not to the elites, because the former mentioned are easier to impress. We mention here the *third person effect* (Davidson, 1983), related to the fact that we see others as more influenced by media than ourselves, so much so they are younger, have less education and a socio-economic inferior status or if they belong to an ethnic minority. The third person effect works for all genres and channels and comes especially from the academic area.

Focusing more on the negative effects yet considering that they are dominant in the broadcasted programs, *the priming effect* (Berkowitz, 1984) is an important factor in the situations where violent movies provide scenarios which audience can apply at a later date in ambiguous social contexts in reality

since they can provide a reason to generate aggressive thoughts. These aspects accompany *the desensitization audience* (Linz, Donnerstein, Adams, 1989). Towards violence, an attitude by means of which a repeated viewing of the violent scenes leads to emotional low intensity status giving a drug addiction effect. People who watch a lot of violence are no longer impressed or affected by violence, considering it something natural and common. They thus no longer feel the need to stop violent act when they experience or witness it. Among stimuli that generate desensitization and priming as elements of antisocial behavior, studies have revealed certain categories as being the most met and responsible- cartoons, behavioral demonstrations on TV, sports, adventure movies, crime stories, internal or external breaking news, almost all except entertainment. Indirect aggression (gossip, hostile attitudes) on the other hand is often associated with popular stars, generating a new concept, “relationship aggression” which means interpersonal relations are exploited in aggressive purposes through denigrating conversations in mediated context. Tied to this, research has proved that women get into a more relational aggression while men display more of physical aggression. Conversely, our decision, of people in general, tied to violence, is influenced by the environment where we formed and by the set of values and norms which we apply in social interactions.

On the other hand, the prosocial effects- kindness, altruism- beneficial effects of a positive media content like a movie is wholly different from the antisocial negative effects, by means of intentionality- a prosocial behavior is always planned, intended, while the antisocial is always incidental. Positive effects should be more powerful, longer lasting, being planned. Among the fewer examples one counts the educational programs, covering vocabulary and math, public health campaigns and so on. Prosocial media effects are amplified especially in the medium social class where individuals perform parental mediation as a buffer for media negative effects; that is they consume media products with their children in order to be able to explain and reinterpret the ambiguous content that can produce misunderstandings and alienations. Another example of prosocial programs are the programs that broadcast serials or other fictional products as vehicles for punctual promotion of topics in pre-established dramatic formats, hoping that the audience will resonate with the program due to realist characters and educational topics brought under lens, especially when the target is made of women. Health for instance is one of the

topics that are frequently chosen for bringing awareness through serials, especially for topics on serious illness.

3. The importance of framing in the media

To help the awareness process of the media consumption effects but also to help for a better, more educated, more informed consumption, the media effects and theories must be correlated with models that help the information be built and disseminated to the public in the context of *agenda setting theory* (McCombs, Shaw, 1972) along with its consequences. If agenda setting points audience attention to certain subjects not only through the selection of what needs to be broadcasted but also highlighting the importance with the aid of broadcasting frequency, *framing* (Goffman, 1974) or building a media frame concept extends the theory that originates in, by showing that more than showing the public what to look at, this procedure leads the audience to a certain interpretation with the help of building the message through the following devices (Fairhurst, Sarr, 1996):

- The metaphor that gives an interpretation to a concept in relation to another;
- Myths and legends that provide meaning through narration in a vivid and memorable way;
- Traditions or rituals, ceremonies, point at cultural customs that give significance to mundane actions;
- Slogans, jargon and colloquialisms help fixing aspects in a memorable and reproductive way;
- Artefacts- objects or actions with an intrinsic symbolic value frame a cultural or visual phenomena a highly important one;
- Contrasts- describe objects or actions from the viewpoint of what they are not;
- Biased formulae meant to represent a concept in such a manner that can provide valuable interpretations, positive or negative that are not visible as such instantly, to build inherent biased prejudices.

Framing based media analysis examines features of the informative media products to identify a series of contexts built and used for presenting certain topics in news bulletins, on sites, in the press. One can thus notice that opinions formed by some parts of audience come from influential figures that inspire each other in common groups, after thorough information gathering

from the media or from the cultural influence performed by media products. A topic can thus come in a variety of angles; then the audience is invited to conclude and hint at other connected topics. From a framing point of view this process can go positive or negative, it can go profitable or it can be lost (Tversky, Kahneman, 1981). A certain medical product can for example be presented as beneficial or detrimental. From this viewpoint, advertising uses a single pattern, the one of gain-loss, even though recent studies mention the existence of more such models. In this respect, the concept of framing is no longer valid exactly for this reason- the existence of more than one narrative pattern. One thing is important though- framing highlights several ideas, activating a mental pattern, a cognitive bias, triggering the decision making process seen as the act of turning thought into action (Pânzaru, 2010), to then trigger the audience towards a certain reaction (Entman, 2007). A new perspective, however, considers framing either as a cognitive bias or as a simplified understanding pattern (Gamson, Modigliani, 1989). What is important here is the variation of framing patterns that are connected to many media elements: for example, the basic element of a piece of news, the title, provides information on actors, while photos give information on the context, the lead and subtitles split the material in subsections and guide lecture. The pattern of influence can be done starting with the title first, to go on with the rest. If the basic elements sustain themselves, placing them in the reading context or the framing process is not random. There are actually a series of stages conducive to generating a frame- identifying the event, identifying characters, analysis of narrative structure, linguistic analysis, overview and final analysis. Placing the product and the characters in a certain category render information on the nature of the event as well as on the meaning gathering pattern the media designed. Using then some common patterns helps audience to better understand the information and that is why the tendency to generalize it all can generate juxtaposing reports with variations in the background. Literature in the field identifies several scaffolds for a single topic- the scaffold of human rights, the personal scaffold, the scaffold of social pressure resistance, the scaffold of social change. By simply analyzing these patterns, highlighted elements can be analyzed and they can be compared with the amplitude of the depicted event. A correlation with other materials on the same topic can provide the message beyond what media shapes of reality, be it through agenda setting or framing.

Conclusions

Media influence on society is not often brought into the limelight and that is why studies and analyses that raise awareness on such things help in at least a desired disambiguation of narratives that come as an inherent extension of agenda setting. Media has become so prolific that sometimes we enjoy these products without asking ourselves why and without noticing how important it is the role media has in the decision making process, in the beliefs that we build ourselves or in the attitudes we display. In this respect, a proper management of media competences leads to a better understanding of social phenomena, to an enhanced decision making process.

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