Media Psychology: A Personal Essay in Definition and Purview
by
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Introduction

The subject matter of media psychology is a mother lode of material that psychology has actively mined for decades, but only within the last ten to fifteen years has the enterprise emerged as a distinct and explicit subdivision of psychology.

Media psychology found its inspirational roots more than 90 years ago within the discipline of social psychology and in the early work of social psychologist Hugo Münsterberg concerning the psychology and the psychological impact of film. Published in 1916 under the title, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, it was the first empirical study of an audience reacting to a film. Münsterberg also provided such a keen analysis of a screenplay's (then called a photoplay) grammar of visual construction and nascent cinematic conventions and their psychological impact on the audience, that his incisive words still echo today in numerous film school lecture halls and classroom seminars.

And there was psychologist L.L. Thurstone, arguably the Father of Attitude Scale Construction and Measurement (a signature area of theory and research in social psychology), who developed scales for the measurement of attitudes toward movies for the famous and notoriously politicized Payne Fund Research in 1928. This study's practically avowed purpose was to indict (not investigate) the medium of film as a source of inspiration of bad behavior in a youthful audience.

Few psychologists, however, followed Münsterberg and Thurstone into the thicket of entertainment media influences and effects. It was not until the advent and market penetration of television in the 1950s coupled with concerns about unconscious influences of advertising, in all its forms and venues, that the attention and media interest of psychologists truly crystallized. Even then, academic psychology's interests largely centered around television's use by children and how it influenced their acquisition of reading skills and imitation of anti-social behavior.

This narrow focus persists today; the research on media effects still draws most attention from theorists and researchers whose professional interests are children-centric. But the truth is that the various media impact on virtually everyone and, in many ways, every living thing on the planet, from bovine milk production (the "Mozart effect"), to plant growth, to electronic Prozac

for malcontented family pets.

Most psychologists, and people in kindred fields like communications studies, journalism or sociology, largely address the negative effects on young people inflicted by such mass media as television, film, or popular music lyrics, effects such as promoting violence or premature or ill-considered sex. Concerns about gender conditioning, sexism, racism, ageism, etc., are also in evidence, numerically but pale in comparison with concerns and studies about sex and violence.

However, the truth of media effects and influence, positive or negative—there are both — is far deeper and pervasive and passes little-noticed by consumers and little-appreciated in the grand scheme of a media-centric culture by producers of media appliances and content. Like the proverbial fish and water, the users and producers of media are often the last ones to discover how totalistic the medium of media has become. Students of media are and will continue to be increasingly called upon to chart the topographic surface and deep structures of media influences on individuals, groups and, finally, the family of man.

Media Psychology: A Definition

Broadly speaking, media psychology uses the theories, concepts and methods of psychology to study the impact of the mass media on individuals, groups, and cultures. But this definition is too broad to be very useful, and it ignores the very dynamic and reciprocal nature of media and people or consumers.

More specifically, media psychology is concerned with the inter- and intra-personal psychological dimensions underlying the impact and use of any medium of communication, irrespective of the nature of the subject matter being communicated.

The key delimiting definitional element in this view is that such interpersonal communication is accomplished by way of something other than face-to-face, oral-aural communication. In other words, media psychology is concerned with the social and psychological parameters of communications between people (or people and other organisms) that are mediated by some technology or conduit other than simply air.

Disciplines are as much defined by what they exclude as what they embrace; by what they are not as much as what they are. To wit, media psychology is not concerned with the dynamics of speech as a form of communications per se. Nor is it concerned with the science and technology behind devices for mediated communications per se. Media psychology is not

concerned, for example, with speech pathology except insofar as such pathology is better understood, obscured, or affected by some mediated influence. Hence, it is of <u>possible interest</u> to media psychology that the use of print as a communications vehicle can hide or obscure a speech impediment such that people who correspond via the Internet and who have any sort of speech impediment, can eliminate it from the ongoing communication equation. It is of <u>definite interest</u> to media psychology if someone consciously uses text messaging, email and/or Internet chat rooms precisely because these media obscure their speech impediment thereby effectively and favorably altering their self perception and self presentations.

Many practitioners in the field of media psychology apply and ply their various skills, training and expertise in a variety of arenas. Not only do they teach courses in the field but also do research on media issues, appear in print and electronic media as interviewees and columnists. They also advise various media organizations including movie studios, independent filmmakers, television networks, screenwriters, producers and directors, on the myriad aspects of human behavior and how such information might be most accurately portrayed in the media. Useful advice to media organizations, however, requires more than a knowledge of psychology; it requires a knowledge of how media function as well as an understanding of the media's need to strike a balance between accuracy values and entertainment purposes.

In sum, media psychology is principally interested in all forms of mediated communications and their related effects on both senders and receivers. To fully appreciate the discipline, we must look more extensively at its embrace, its purview.

Media Psychology: A Purview

Media, Technology and Human Behavior

How do media hardware and the information they transmit influence the way we think, the way we relate, our attitudes, values, and beliefs about the world? How do they shape our use of leisure and work time, limit and expand our recreational outlets, outline our sense of history and politics, simultaneously expand and diminish our world? How does the proportion of mediated and direct world experience change as a function of reliance on communications technologies? These are media psychology questions.

The field of media psychology embraces the teaching, study and analysis of, and research and commentary on the various media as they exert their presence in and influence on the arenas of entertainment, communication, and the field of information technology (IT). IT, in turn, looks

at the technology of information gathering and telecommunications or information transmission or exchange, as well as how content and behavior are influenced by innovations in media-related technology. Portability, miniaturization, and wireless technology are, for example, radically transforming the way people communicate, what they communicate, how often they communicate, and why they communicate. Dick Tracy's wrist radio is now a quaint fictional antecedent to what is available to the cell phone or PDA user.

The Personal Medium vs. the Mass Media?

Media psychologists talk of a communications medium like television. We talk of a collection of communications media as a collective noun – the media. And we talk of mass media. What makes a medium of communication a mass media rather than simply a personal medium?

A defining element for a medium to be specified as mass vs. personal must be that the medium reaches out to a high volume of people rather than to only one or a few. The medium of communications known as the telephone is a not per se a mass medium (even if it is hosting a conference call); nor is the palm pilot or the cell phone, even if they connect to a system of broadcasting over or receiving from a mass medium, such as the Internet. For example, the phone doesn't transmit the digital image, the Internet does.

Mass audiences define a mass medium. TV, motion pictures, radio, newspapers and magazines and, increasingly, the personal computer with the growing availability of bulletin boards, data bases, fax and modems devices, and, of course, the Internet, are distinctly mass media.

Yet, while the telephone, in all its current incarnations, is not a mass medium, it is a communications medium. And it is increasingly a multi-purpose device. Because of this, the study of phone-related behavior easily falls within the purview of media psychology For example, the use of cell phones by teens for a variety of purposes other than simple communication, such as gaming and entertainment, has expanded the potential influence of this protean instrument in unanticipated ways. This certainly engages the interest of media psychology. It also taps into the REM cycles of movie studio executives.

"Tweens" and teens, the premier target audiences for 70% of Hollywood releases, now use cell phones for instant text messaging. During the show or immediately afterwards, these techno-savvy demographic age groups can instantly praise or bury a summer blockbuster on its

Friday night opening. In a nanosecond, the best laid and most expensive plans for a studio public relations blitz slams into a dream or nightmare. Such speed of judgment dissemination was unheard of in the halcyon "slower days." The new cell phone-digital camera technology which can instantly record and transmit pictures is on the media psychology radar screen, especially when such phone-cameras are deployed in paparazzi fashion to spy on and publicly expose celebrities in private, intimate, or compromising situations.

Technology, communications speed, youth market disposable income subsidized by parents who are otherwise engaged, entertainment product and industries, these are all part of the expansive purview of media psychology.

Pervasive Effects of Media

The media have come to be integral parts of a variety of social institutions such as schools, hospitals, political and military systems, even religions, and their real and virtual assemblies. The media shape the way news gathering and transmission, advertising, political processes and campaigns, wars, diplomacy, education, entertainment, and socialization are conducted. The effects the media have on these human enterprises are legitimate points of interest on the expanding scope of media psychology. Examples:

- If the U.S. is more likely to intervene in a natural or man-made catastrophe in another country precisely because television images of human suffering move audiences to contact their government representatives, that is a media psychology effect and that is a media psychology event.

- If television has changed the way sports are played, demands game rules to speed up on-field action in order to keep the home viewing audience watching the commercials between plays, that is a media psychology effect and that is a media psychology event.

- If athletes become celebrities who can command multi-million dollar contracts because of their appearances and performances on television, that is a media psychology effect and that is a media psychology event.

- If we are a culture obsessed with celebrity because of the endless sources of entertainment and news about entertainment and entertainers; if everyone is just waiting for their chance to step in front of a camera to become "somebody" in a world where, unless your picture or name is in the media, you're just a "nobody;"

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> if these are current phenomena that significantly define our evolving culture, then these are matters of interest to media psychologists.
>
> - If news about celebrities push off the front pages and out of prime time news agendas and people know more about The Apprentice's Omorosa and American Idol's Paula and less about Islam's Osama and Russia's Putin, that's a media psychology effect.

Not surprisingly then, media psychology looks at the phenomenon of the elevation of celebrity to a level of importance unprecedented in history, especially if importance is measured in terms of the amount of time and space devoted to the coverage of celebrities or to their pop culture products. It also looks at the ways in which national and local news have agendized their programming such that viewers come to know and understand less and less about what directly affects their lives and more and more about what has little or no consequence for their lives. Media psychology looks at how the network economic bottom-line directive to make news more entertaining morphed into the directive to make entertainment more newsworthy.

In the matter of celebrity, media psychologists also look at the disturbing and rapidly expanding flip side of celebrity, fandom, and how intense passion for celebrities can lead to the pendulum arc from fan to fanatic, from star admirer to star stalker or star murderer.

The Media and Mind, Self, and Society

Media and the Sense of Self and Self-History

Existential ramifications are dizzying in an age of media innovation, expansion, and penetration. As media content and technology evolve, so does culture. As culture evolves so does the media and so does the manner in which reality is understood. As culture evolves, social and political agendas are set, and personal exploration, discovery, and productivity are conceived of, formed and transformed, in an endless developmental cycle of technological breakthrough, social adoption, market penetration, maturation or saturation, market decline, and, eventually, adaptation (redefining a market focus, e.g., radio evolving from a venue for plays and live concerts to a venue for music and talk) in the face of newer technology and attendant competition for consumer dollars and consumer attention.

When some piece of media technology (e.g., camcorder or digital camera) becomes cheaply available in the consumer market, it has a tendency to change our sense of self through the passages of time. People capture still or moving pictures of themselves or their loved ones

on cameras, tape recorders, camcorders, and leave records of their lives, of precious, tender, intimate, or painful moments, records of complexity and continuity, to a degree unheard of and undreamed of in previous centuries.

On the most personal level, our sense of self, our clear grasp of aging, of the passage of time has become democratized. What was once the privilege of the wealthy who could command portraits or statues of themselves, or of movie stars who could chronicle their careers through the eyes of the motion picture camera with images engraved on film, is now universally available on digital images and videotape. If we want to, we can all record passages and smile or scowl or weep at the tales told and the life led -- truly an unprecedented opportunity to grasp life's arc. Our lives are there to unfold for our children on bequeathed DVDs.

Yet, the interesting question arises: How will family legends and icons fare under the scrutiny of live action chronicles? A photo captures a moment in time and conjures projections, fantasies, and imaginings. But a video portrait, across time and space, leaves far less to the imagination. Will that enhance or stunt family myth-making? Will we be culturally richer or poorer for these vivid, visual accounts?

Media and Groups and the Chronicling of Cultural History

Before the advent of photographs and recorders of voice and moving images, legends were made and tales were woven and embellished in the recounting of events from memory and in stories passed on from one generation to another, in voice or in print.

In the past, people of questionable motive, behavior and accomplishment became the stuff of myth and legend. Such legend and dream weaving may be diminished, cut down to size with current recording technology. People like George Armstrong Custer, Billy the Kid, or Jesse James were once outsized "legends" by virtue of exaggerations and fabrications by politically biased or profit-motivated pulp writers who preferred to make Western myth rather than impart truth of the old West. Such so-called "heroes" may, in their contemporary incarnations, be relegated to minor or ignoble places in historical recounting because audio and visual recordings are now available to "keep the record straight."

The contemporary understanding and evaluation of violence at the hands of agents of government or terrorists is similarly dramatically modified and memorialized by current image-storing technology. The ready availability of camcorders easily records events like the Rodney King beating, the police trial and subsequent riot in Los Angeles, and the events of September

11, 2001 and its chilling revelation of America's vulnerability to world-wide terrorist movements.

Videotaped capsules of history have shaped public reactions even as they traumatize viewers who were subjected to an endless repetition of images of brutality and carnage. At the same time, attitudes toward war and its conduct are altered by miniaturized television cameras in smart bombs and missiles and used by journalists "embedded" in caravans of military vehicles in "search and destroy missions."

Other sea changes in military strategy and flexibility derive from technology-enriched "command and control centers." These centers provide military decision-makers with real-time bird's eye views of Mogadishu or Baghdad battles, arrayed on banks of color television monitors which are near the fighting or thousands of miles away. War history, as we chronicled it, historicized it, and as we thought we knew it, is no more! The media have turned the page on the business of war, or more accurately, started a whole new set of books on the subject.

Media Psychology and Kindred Disciplines

Certainly other disciplines have looked at and continue to look at the impact of the mass media on society. The fields of communications, popular culture, sociology, and critical studies have long traditions of addressing such issues. So too has psychology, but not as a distinct subdivision of the larger field. In fact, until recently, psychologists who were principally interested in studying media effects found more congenial academic homes in university departments other than psychology. What does the psychological perspective bring to the study of the mass media that other disciplines do not?

The fact is that many of the theories and research in other disciplines devoted to the study of media derive directly from psychological theory and its methods of research. Clinical and personality psychology have traditionally looked at how events shape individual behavior. Social psychology has traditionally looked at the way social forces impact on individual behavior and attitudes. All of these sub-specialties of psychology provide theory, research, and methods to assess the effects these major social forces – the personal and the mass media – have on the individual and, consequently, on the society in which the individual resides.

The clinical, personality and social perspectives of psychology are ideally suited to add extra dimensions to the study of the impact of the media on our personal and collective lives, dimensions beyond those provided by other academic disciplines. Together however, the

confluence of diverse academic perspectives, viewed through the organizing lens of media psychology, has the potential to bring to light a fuller understanding of the dynamic interrelationship of media and society.

Time and perspective are imperative if we are to truly understand the media's tectonic shaping of the world of people and events as they exist in the present and as they will exist in the future. We cannot reliably assess the impact of any mass medium by its effects on individuals or even groups of individuals. We must attempt to understand such impact over a longer time perspective and as a larger and more complex cultural phenomena, one which will inevitably have unforeseeable effects and unintended consequences, e.g., television viewing, entertainment eating, obesity, and epidemic childhood diabetes.

Moreover, we must look at incubation, threshold, and synergistic effects. Take, for example, the issue of so-called media-induced violence: how much and what sort of media-displayed violence, over how many years, catalyzed by what kind of personal experiences, interacting with what kind of personality configurations, absorbed through what media environments or venues and confluence of media environments and venues, is necessary to inflect a culture and its people towards violence? This is the complex equation that must be formulated in order to truly talk of the effects of the media on society. Any conclusions about the impact of media displays of violence on viewer real-world violence is, at present, quite premature and unwarranted and certainly provides no valid basis for legislative action.

Only by understanding how and why mass media influence our lives can we better cope with them and only by coping with them can we change them so that they serve us rather than control us.

Media, Messages, and the Medium as Message

Media are vehicles for transmitting. What a particular medium transmits defines the nature of that medium. How it transmits (i.e., the nature of the delivery system), draws upon, emphasizes, or even cultivates one or more senses and skills in the receiver or consumer. Neal Postman noted, for example, that, before German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg, invented the printing press in the 15th century, there was mass illiteracy. In part this related to the fact that there were very few books available and were very expensive; they had to be laboriously scripted by hand (hence the term "manuscript."); oftentimes by monks and mostly about religious topics.

But with the cheap and easily produced books and pamphlets from Gutenberg's

invention, suddenly there was a reason to learn how to read and literacy spread through nation-states like wildfires, but especially in the middle and upper classes. Not surprising, religious tracts gave way to erotica as a principal subject matter for publishers -- the erotica industry, an unintended consequence of the printing press and pervasive literacy!

Media titan and guru, Marshall McLuhan , observed in his seminal 1964 book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,* that "The medium is the message." While this dictum is now repeated in cliché-babble mode, it still points the way: Among other things, a medium, irrespective of what it is transmitting, shapes the way the audience interacts with it and with the content being transmitted. Radio and music recordings, in whatever format, are auditory media. Print is a visual medium; the Internet, television, and film are audio-visual media. Their respective sensory-cognitive demands are both informative and transformative.

The audience, however, is often unaware of just how important a given medium has been in shaping audience comprehension and expectation. In other words, the audience of a new medium must be trained to decode the message of a medium, learn the proper language, grammar, emotional impact and requisite senses, skills and aptitudes demanded by the new medium. It is this novelty of psychological and sensory-motor schemata that quickly separates generations, in terms of comfort with and mastery of new media. It also endlessly creates new classes of technogurus and technophobes.

Each new medium has its own learning curve to ride before it begins the process of self-actualization. Television is an excellent example. This new medium, born commercially after the end of WWII, had to find its televisual voice and its unique immediacy of transmission of live pictures and sounds of entertainment programming and breaking sports and news events before it could became the 800 lb. Gorilla we know and ambivalently embrace today.

The infant medium of television had to borrow the concept of advertising subsidy from radio and convert it into funding for television programming. Its inspirational sources of program content, the creative component of the broadcast medium, began with theater, radio, motion pictures, and the phonograph.

Eventually and inexorably, television had to distinguish itself from these pre-existing media and find what it did differently, worse than and better than each of those ancestral media. It began to shape the product it transmitted, revised how it transmitted it, how it looked and sounded and, finally, it reformed the variety of options available to the audience to consume it.

Americans had free television because no one tried to evaluate the psychic cost and effects of watching commercials, hour after hour, and day after day, over a lifetime.

Meanwhile, other nations, in other parts of the world, went a completely different direction. TV was subsidized by the government and by taxes on the purchase of television. There was, in effect, no such thing as commercial television in Europe. How European television began to eventually look more like American commercial television is a story for another essay.

Of course, the medium itself is not and cannot be all. The content transmitted, what people ordinarily think of as "the message," or the programming, is just as important. It is the reason people come to a medium to feed at its trough. People buy, rent, or lease, or steal media appliances for two basic purposes: to be informed or to be entertained.

Information And/As/Or Entertainment

We have come to talk as though we are in the "information age." But is information what most media are about?

Hardly. The media transmit entertainment and related diversions. The vaunted information highway and the 500 channel universe are a little less grand and a little more grandiose when such portals are principally used the purposes of entertainment. Repeated studies reveal that 70-80% of the reasons cited for watching television, going to movies, or surfing the internet, relate to purposes of entertainment or relaxation or fulfilling a social function, i.e., sharing an enjoyable experience with others. To illustrate, the dominant purpose for most non-work time users of the Internet (and some work-time users as well) is email, "eBay-addictions," sex, and sex lies, games, forums and chat rooms. In other words, for most people, the highways and universes will be traversed and explored largely for entertainment's sake—as well as for acquisition, social outreach, and social bonding.

Shorn of spin doctoring the truth is then, that for most, the media, mass or personal, serve entertainment purposes. The advertisers may advertise them as educational tools, business tools, and world-expanding tools ("where do you want to go today?"), but they know and we know that such an ostensible purpose is a salve for the superego. Id-pleasure is what the media really provide.

Film and Television

Film and television are the dominant forms of audio-visual media-delivered

entertainment. (The Internet, as will be noted later, is challenging that dominance.) But film and television frequently breach the boundaries of entertainment and become virtual teaching and inspiration machines. They educate or create dreams, hopes and fears. In the first instance, a host of anecdotal data shows that how Hollywood portrayed America in such programs as *Dallas* or *Fresh Prince of Bel Aire*, or in such films as *Boyz' N' the Hood* or *Pretty Woman*, shaped immigrant expectations of what American life is *really* like. Films such as *El Norte* showed immigrants striving to get to America to live the life promised in these fictional television programs or movies. At the same time, in an opposite vector, we are currently witness to ethnocentric protectionism and Fundamentalist outrage at American cultural exports through its films and television programs. Such is the power of products of popular culture. They create dreams and inspire wars.

In the second instance, research clearly indicates that people are offended by how their groups are portrayed in film and that different groups take offense at different portrayals and representations. Research shows, for example, that Blacks resent Black criminal stereotypes in film while Asians resent model minority stereotypes but not as much as they resent on-screen Asian invisibility. Other work shows how Muslims are offended by endless media stereotypes of them as either rich and profligate or brutish and violent -- even before 9/11! Since then, it's only gotten worse.

Importantly, what research has **not** shown yet is the short- or long-term impact of such portrayals, either with reference to ingroup self-concept or to perceptions of the ingroup by some outgroup, an outgroup which is either majority-dominant or merely minority-competitive. This omission is of intense interest to media psychology because much print ink, speech time, and classroom lecture has been spent detailing the precise negative effects of such portrayals of demographic groups. In other words, there are many words and very few facts on the subject of effects of stereotypes in the media on self-perceptions of those in portrayed groups.

So too is the fact that television can be a window to a wider world or a too-ready escape from learning the skills necessary to succeed in life. It is important to media psychology that some people who have poor reading skills fall further behind in school because they choose to watch television rather than read books. Television is an easier way to be entertained than is reading and thus the skill of reading is further retarded by such convenience choices. Yet, crucial research shows that those who do not have difficulty reading are not affected adversely

by television watching, unless television watching reaches levels above 30-40 hours per week. Negative impact on reading skills once viewing reaches that high a level is known as a "threshold effect."

"But wait, there's more."

Yet, there is another side to all this raging against the machine. Television can be good for you! Most people shrug off the demonstrable fact that television can be a very effective teaching and motivation technology. True, it cannot do so well what print can; but equally true, print cannot do so well what television can. In the right hands, with proper guidance, at home or in the classroom, both media can be used synergistically, each can support the other: one (TV) excites interest while one (print) provides intellectual elaboration once the interest is excited. From media, out of nothing can come passion, direction, and illumination.

Television alerts and sensitizes people to current social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, drunk driving, birth control, AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, divorce, and matters of crimes of hate, fear and revenge. But how it does it best is most fascinating. Research shows that lecturing to people about these issues in what are called Public Service Announcements (PSAs) is a far less effective means of education than incorporating these issues into storylines of fictional programs like sitcoms or dramas, or afternoon soap operas. People learn and are more willing to take effective action when messages are able to bypass censors and inclinations to selective attention. A pro-social message that tags along with the fate of a loved character on *The Young and the Restless*, has a greater chance to make the trip into the mind's inner space and set behavior change into motion than does an uninspired Public Service Announcement or on a PBS special.

The Internet-Television Interface

Recent research shows that young people between the ages of 14 and 35 are now spending more time surfing the Internet than they do in front of the television. This is a tsunamic shift in leisure time activity and points to the increasing penetration of interactive media. Parenthetically, whether this means that interactivity is going to displace passive television watching or merely that interactivity is finding its place at the table of entertainment options is an intriguing question. This media (r)evolution may follow the scenario that unfolded when, in the 1950s, the upstart medium of television rapidly ravaged and decimated the audience for movies. The massive population shift from one medium to the other [a drop of weekly movie attendance

from 90 million in 1948 to 19 million in 1958] seemed to signal the death of the motion picture as a leisure time activity. It was not to be, of course. The two media found their unique strengths and weaknesses, cooperated and eventually each secured or re-secured its place on the entertainment menu of America, even feeding each other talent and product.

Similar changes and merges are afoot with the computer, the Internet, and the television. The single console with interactive capabilities at onsite and remote locations, bundled into the capabilities of smart houses is in the offing. How such "in touch" capacities will change the way people live and interact is the speculative stuff of science fiction writers and futurists. It is almost certain that the changes in routines and expectations of the typical American that will be wrought from such advances will whet the appetite and stir the interests of future media psychologists.

How the media of film and television, by use of music, camera angles, editing, lighting, color and black and white recording, image size, and all facets of sound and image production, create impressions and facilitate our suspension of disbelief to become absorbed in fictional stories is, of course, another dimension of interest of media psychology. It is tantamount to studying how, technically, media have the effects they have on viewers.

Print

Daily newspaper, Monday through Friday readership, has declined from 70 percent of the population in 1979 to 50 percent in 2000, and dropping. More recent research indicates that almost 70% of Americans get most of their news from television and of the remaining 30% that get their news from newspapers, almost 60% of them are over the age of 50, stigmatizing newspapers as a "geezer" medium. This decline has been in place since the early 1960s and threatens to continue unless newspapers find some more effective way to grow readers.

Newspaper owners have countered this trend of television to erode readership by diversifying investments, both vertically and horizontally, into other media venues and by expanding into cyberspace. Steven L. Seraita, Senior Vice President of print media for Scarborough Research in New York City, recently pointed out "The growth of e-readership is up among all age groups, but especially among young adults. The Internet is a way to capture some of these young readers."

This then, is one of the reasons why newspapers, local, regional and national, have developed a major presence on the Internet. In part, such sites gather readers who want more in-

depth coverage of breaking stories and of complex issues; and, in part, such a web presence has the potential for cultivating a new generation of newspaper readers.

Yet, something disturbs! Studies conducted over the past 50 years comparing absorption of information from reading newspapers versus watching television repeatedly show that information recall is greater for print than for television. This would suggest that the nation's youth is turning away from its best source of information and analysis for understanding critical social issues *and* turning to a headline-depth source of information, television.

Because of declining subscription, newsstand, and advertising revenues, newspapers struck back at television-molded minds by what they deemed the best strategy—imitation! They aped television with new products such as *USA Today*, a colorful, non-taxing, non-regional, graphics-heavy success story. They turned over new leaves and increased their entertainment and sports sections, and to many critics, newspapers "just plain dumbed down."

This Faustian bargain entered into by newspapers has been only partially successful. In terms of major metropolitan dailies, newspapers are still losing readers. But they are increasing circulation with minor community, daily and weekly newspapers, products that, unlike major metropolitan dailies, are intensely local in coverage and have essentially abdicated state, national and international coverage.

The abandonment of national and international news by small local papers leaves their readers highly dependent on television for their state, national and international news. Given that the amount of news on such programs has dropped both absolutely and in proportion to the amount of time devoted to sports, entertainment and celebrity goings-on, this reliance on local television outlets for most of the news is both alarming and depressing. The implications for maintaining an educated electorate and citizenship are enormous, and, not coincidentally, of major interest to media psychology.

Recent changes in FCC regulations allowing the intensification of mergers of major media conglomerates promises to accelerate trends toward both superficialization and parochialization of America's world view IQ—"If it's not happening in my town, state or country, I'm not interested."

Ironically, however, there is a bright side to this. While the Internet is, for many, principally a social contact and entertainment platform that, like television, drains leisure time activities away from reading and other "growthful" hobbies and activities, it is, nevertheless,

increasing literacy. Effective use of the Internet and online game playing and interactions demands that users, especially those who shied away from reading because it was, on the surface, too hard, are now motivated to develop literacy skills precisely because it allows for more effective game playing and interpersonal communication. Thus it would seem that, for many poor readers, the obstacle to improved reading skills may not have been task difficulty. It may have been task motivation.

Media as Treatment Delivery Platforms

Bibliotherapy is a traditional adjunct to therapy. It entails the use of books and other written materials to help patients further understand their psychological problems. A recent modernization of this intervention strategy has emerged in the form of a specialization called, variously, cinema therapy or film therapy. Movies, being more of a limbic than cortical audio-visual experience, are believed to provide, for many, a quicker access to problem areas than either books or other printed material.

Film Therapy or, the term more commonly used, Cinema Therapy (CT) is an area of growing public interest and professional organization and is generating numerous publications relating specific movies to specific areas of psychopathology. Felicitously, the area of CT is also generating a growing number of research studies which are seeking to validate the methodology and specify its strengths and weaknesses. CT also possesses the *cachet* of motion pictures and for many patients it is easier to employ than assigned reading, especially given the innovation in availability of videos through rentals, purchases, VOD or PPV. Of course, television also provides programming that serves purposes similar that of film in using fiction to touch people where they emotionally live and sometimes hurt.

The media of film and television join the clutch of art intervention strategies, such as art therapy, dance therapy, writing therapy, etc. Collectively, these "therapies" are all techniques designed as either supplements or alternatives to drug and talk therapies. They are employed as treatment modalities, with the aim of helping people get better acquainted with their problems.

The field of media psychology has becoming increasingly interested in how the various media can help in delivering medical and psychological treatments and intervention strategies. The popularity of Internet medical sites and medical chat rooms has increased dramatically as well. People are reaching out to others for advice about experience with medical conditions. One result is that inquirers become more knowledgeable about their medical conditions, more

willing to ask more and better questions, and even take knowledge-based issue with the opinions of medical practitioners. Research suggests this oftentimes results in better treatment.

Similar help and education have made for quick national, hemispheric, and global communications for wildlife rehabilitation specialists who are often hundreds of miles from trained veterinary assistance. Online forums for such animal rescuers provide support, instructive photographs, recipes for feeding neonates of all species, and even surgical intervention techniques.

Thus, Internet human and animal medical sites and chat rooms have become not only knowledge resources but, importantly, separated the people with internal locus of control –"seek and ye shall find" -- from those with an external locus of control –"please tell me what to do." A welcome research area is whether information availability can move people with an external locus of control regarding their psychological or physical health to the status of someone with an internal locus of control. Research shows that few people are internal or external across all areas. In some areas they feel more powerful, in others, less. Understanding how the Internet informs and empowers, and possibly transforms styles of problem solving or coping, is of significant interest to media psychologists.

Media and Crises

On a distinctly darker note, media psychology also examines the phenomena sometimes called "disaster marathons," hours or days of intense media coverage of great tragedy, of which the events of 9-11 and its aftermath were recent examples. It looks at the possible destructive consequences on viewers and on journalistic ethics, of the formulaic, emotionally saturated over-coverage of these traumatic and traumatizing events. What's more, it offers recommendations for better ways to keep the public informed in these moments without inflicting additional damage in the process.

Business and Citizen Consumers and the Media

There is a fundamental conflict in our society -- between consumers and business. This conflict is played out on the fields of the mass communications media. To be sure, there is overlapping interest. Consumers often want to buy and businesses always want to sell. But the concept of advertising is predicated on salesmanship, i.e., it's no trick to sell people what they want to buy; the trick is to make people want to buy what you want to sell. When you succeed at that, you're a salesman. Otherwise, you're simply a clerk. Media advertisements and

commercials are designed to be salespersons, not clerks.

Consumers think purchasing decisions are within their control. If they are told they are being manipulated into wanting to purchase a product, they will recoil. They know ads are designed to "sell" but they think that such susceptibility mostly applies to others, not to them. This is known as the "Third Person" effect.

People also want to be entertained. But they do not want to think that entertainment is, in fact, merely a vehicle for inducing them to purchase advertised products. They want the boundaries between entertainment and advertising pitches to be clearly delineated. That delineation is the last thing business wants. Not until or unless consumers of entertainment understand how businesses manipulate them into awareness of and desire for their products via ostensible entertainment programming, will the media playing field ever be level.

Yet, there is a dialectic tension afoot. It is a war of wills out there. The relationship between the networks and advertisers, on the one hand, and the listener or viewer on the other hand, is essentially point-counterpoint. When consumers found the remote, the videotape and most recently, TiVo, they zapped commercials. Sponsors first panicked and then responded with breaking up programming into unpredictable time units. When that failed and commercials were still being zapped (research shows that females like to watch commercials more than do men), advertisers returned the volley with *product placement*.

Product Placement

Thanks to the explosive sales spike of Reese's Peanut Butter Pieces after they were featured in Steven Spielberg's movie classic, *E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial*, placing a purchasable product conspicuously in a movie (or television program) is now commonplace. In feature films, where advertising had never established the foothold it had in television and other media venues, deals between producers and advertisers have flourished. Studios are paid large fees for conspicuously placing products in a scene or making brand name products part of the storyline. Screenwriter Shane Black tells the story of how promotional fees were paid by Subway Sandwiches so that the characters in *Lethal Weapon II* made a pit stop at Subway even though the entire scene was absent from the original script and served no purpose in advancing the story.

Curiously, product placement, visual or auditory, may, in fact, be superior to straight commercials because, except for those who intentionally search for shopping inspiration, people generally put up defenses against invitations to a purchase. Product placement circumvents these

defenses and places the product in the viewer's eye and mind…for future influence. Moreover, recent media psychology research suggests that embedding PSA-type messages into storylines is more influential on motivational arousal and attitude change than placing the same message as a stand-alone PSA. So, beware of movies like Spielberg's *Minority Report*, with Tom Cruise. It is wall-to-wall product placement.

TV, like its big brother, movies, is becoming a virtual product placement free fire zone. You can run but you can't hide. Advertisers are even returning to the early days of television when a few or a single product (e.g., Kraft, Chrysler) sponsored entire episodes or whole series.

Children and Television Advertising

Children are not inhabitants of commercial-free zones. They are prime commercial targets. Networks previously sold toys and other products to children by blurring the boundaries between what is the commercial and what is the program. This was accomplished by selling children's products during commercials which featured the same characters appearing in the children's programming. Media activist Peggy Charren's work on behalf of children led to legislation that required commercials and program content to be clearly delineated. Charren's arguments to Congress were buttressed by the results of hundreds of research studies conducted by psychologists specializing in media effects. One small step for children…

Media Literacy

Adults and children can and should be media savvy. They can and should be educated to understand the costs and benefits of living in a politically free but materialistically dictatorial society that stands on the twin pillars of production and consumption. Media literacy, knowing how media affect us emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally, and how to defend against their messages if we want to, is vital for an informed, free society. We need "defenses", Neal Postman opined in his classic book and polemic against television and other entertainment diversions, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, "we need defenses against the seductions of eloquence," against the emotional manipulations embedded in all appeals to buy and use and discard and to buy and use and discard again.

Media manipulation is so complex an art form it is doubtful that, even with government legislation and safeguards, the citizen-consumer can ever be on a par with goal directed advertisers serving their clients. While companies spend thousands of hours and millions of dollars devising ways to manipulate the public, the public spends little time and little money

designing counter strategies. Business can only win and the public can only lose.

The public loses, not because business is inherently bad. It isn't. Advertising can be a very desirable forum for public education and personal development. Rather, the public loses because it ends up buying things for the sake of buying things. Advertising promotes the mantra that to buy is to be alive, to buy is to be real, to be important, to count! It's the American way.

Summary

To summarize, media psychology is concerned with a wide swath of human behavior, especially so in an increasingly media-dominated society. Its purview captures the worlds of entertainment and advertising and their short- and long-term impact on values, attitudes and behavior. It explores the media as they exert influence on social, educational and strategic communications, on Information Technology and telecommunications, on politics and sports, on ideology and on religion, on war and peace and on diplomacy and terrorism, and on physical and psychological wellbeing. Media Psychology analyzes how media cover great or tragic moments that come to define a culture, such as the first walk on the moon or the last moments of a fallen president.

These same media not only help define an American culture but they bring these American images, values and accomplishments to the eyes and imaginations of those in many other world communities. These images and implicit values oftentimes parade promises, visions and life styles that strike the fancy of some and arouse fear and outrage in others. To understand the ramifications of cultural commerce in this emotionally charged symbolism is a highly placed item on the intellectual menu of media psychology.

Arguably, the field of media psychology may be the study of a religion. The forces of media create the celebrity gods we both adore and hate. They create the means by which we come to understand ourselves and evaluate others. They provide the intellectual, spiritual and hedonic manna that fills our senses and alternately crystallize or cloud our thoughts. They inspire the dreams of our ambitions and the demons of our nightmares.

The media business and creative elements, whether they fully appreciate it or not, constitute a priest class that has the power to move us and to shake us. They create the songs to be sung, the instruments on which they are composed and performed, and designate who are to be the performer demigods of the moment.

Conclusion

Media technology, embodied in celestial eyes or terrestrial cameras, provide witness to our private thoughts and public forays. In time, magical media machines will offer virtual paradises for those seeking the safe remove from a too-demanding world or provide the thrill of the dangerous, the forbidden or the unattainable for those for whom such sojourns are either materially unavailable or personally inconceivable. What but the handiwork of transcendent mortals could offer such dangerous wonders? In the beginning there was the word. In the beginning there was the image. And in the beginning there was the voice. Media psychology is about this trilogy. It is about all that is human and all that is of interest to humans. Humans interest humans, humans in word, in sound, in image.

The media is devoutly a reflection of its creators, in all their mediated reflection, incarnation, aspiration and rumination. To study this remarkable panoply is to study the creators and their creations. It is to come to understand their arenas of work and arenas of play, their things of work and their things of play. To study media psychology is, in the final scene, to study how humans represent themselves to themselves through lenses, through harmonics and through spectra and how humans send these self-images across time and space in a fierce proclamation of existence.