

Exploring the Nexus: A Study on Role and Use of Psychology in Communication

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Abstract

Communication psychology, is one field of study that is ubiquitous in present day, owing much of its credit to the widespread use of all forms of media. Every sector in modern world is heavily reliant on media and digital technologies, such as education, health, government, defence, trade and commerce, journalism, etc. While each field has its own research and development wing to find out on-going problems in the field and suggest solutions. Every sector also ensures that a viable amount of focus is also given to communication while doing the research. Since, researches on communication exist in almost every field, communication psychology comes into play automatically. Every time we talk about communication taking place, it is customary to think or talk about the effects it has on the audience. Almost all models of communication talk about feedback or effect, not having to mention, feedback stems from psychological effects of media and the message.

This research study aims to explore the roles and uses of psychology in communication. This research proposes to analyse and understand how deeply communication and psychology are rooted in each other. The researcher is well aware that, numerous researches have been conducted on communication psychology as a field of study. However, as a steadfast belief of research that there is always some room left for new knowledge, I have put my individual observations and opinions on the subject.

The first aim of the study was to understand and analyse the relationship between communication and psychology. This was achieved through review of literature and laying down the theoretical framework of the dissertation. In the history of social science, psychology and communication have collided with each other time and again, sometimes as parts of one another and sometimes as different disciplinary fields. A lot of work has been done on both the fields, leaving us with rich literature work to rely on. Therefore, content analysis of available literature was conducted.

The second aim of the research was to observe the psychological effects of mass media and content

on youth population for which university students from, University of Lucknow and Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow, were picked as the population of study. The researcher also aimed at verifying practical implications of communication theories like the cultivation theory, uses and gratification theory, agenda setting theory, etc.

The researcher found out that communication as a field of an academic discipline owes a lot of credit to psychology, an older and more established academic discipline. Psychology's theoretical framework provided the backbone that communication needed to establish itself as an academic field.

It was also found that mass media and content have a clear and distinctive effect on university students aged roughly between 18 – 28. Not only this it is also verifiable through this study that certain communication theories (mentioned later in data analysis and interpretation) do hold true and have observable practical implications. A questionnaire in the form of the google form was circulated on social media and researcher got 103 responses through the questionnaire.

Keywords: Communication Psychology, Mass Media Effects, Psychological Impact

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Introduction

When we combine two branches of social science, communication and psychology, we get a broader and more reliable view of the world and society. Psychology shapes our perception of the world and communication shapes our relation with the outside world. By definition, psychology is the “study of mind and behaviour (Britannica, 2003).” If we have to study more objectively, psychology is often studied in relation with another subject/branch of social and/or life sciences. In such a case, psychology is defined as the “study of mind and behaviour in relation to a particular field of knowledge or activity.” The above mentioned another field of study is communication. Therefore, it is important for us to define ‘communication’ under the light of psychology. Communication according to American Psychological Association is, “the transmission of information, which may be by verbal (oral or written) or nonverbal means. Humans communicate to relate and exchange ideas, knowledge, feelings, and experiences and for many other interpersonal and social purposes (American Psychological Association, 2018).”

The topic of the research talks about a kind of ‘nexuses of communication and psychology. One might wonder what a nexus is? Cambridge dictionary describes nexus as “an important connection between the parts of a system or a group of things.” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) It is a well-established fact that psychology and communication are intertwined with each other, so much so, that one cannot exist without the other. Both the fields have been well defined time and again individually and also with reference to each other. However, there has never been an approach to define what the connection between the two can actually be called. The researcher has refrained from doing so. But in her attempt to denote that connection with one word, for simplification of concepts, she popped up the word ‘nexus’.

Therefore, ‘nexus’ in the title of the research is simply the complex, entangled, and baffling relationship shared between psychology and communication.

Aim

With the fast pace growth and spreading of information and communication technologies, it is necessary to record, observe and analyse the psychological effects that present day media has on the youth population. Since, India holds the highest youth population, it is important to know the

psychological effects of media on them and in turn use it to direct their minds onto the right direction. Therefore, the aim of the study is to find out psychological effects of media on the youth of India and suggest changes accordingly to harness their potential in country's development.

Objectives

1. To analyse the role that psychology plays in communication.
2. To study the psychological effects of current mass media on university and college students.
3. To check practical implication of communication theories.
4. To study and observe the awareness about media literacy and its importance.

Research Questions

1. How is psychology related to communication?
2. What are the psychological effects of mass media and content on university students?
3. Do communication theories have observable practical implications?
4. Does youth understand meaning and importance of media literacy?

Literature Review

Psychology as Science

Psychology attained its status as an academic discipline in the year 1879, almost a century before communication. By the time, communication was accepted as an academic field, that is in 1980s, psychology had evolved much with many branches of its own. In the year 1870, Wilhelm Wundt, a German man, first attempted to treat psychology as a science. He attempted to study human mind by observing consciousness (Braisby N., 2012). His work was followed by Edward Titchener, who introduced structuralism. Then came the period of behaviourism. Behaviourism, dominated the psychology field from 1920s – 1950s. It only studied observable behaviour (Birenbaum, n.d.).

Cognitive Psychology

During the 1950s, psychology was hit by an anti-behaviourism wave and cognitive psychology came into the picture. Contemporary psychology is often called the cognitive psychology, largely due to the reason of more and more theoretical framework being webbed around the field. Finally in the year 1990, Alan Newell came up with his work in Unified Theories of Cognition.

The invention of computer systems gave the anti-behaviourists a conceptual framework where the human mind was compared with a computer processor and studied. This came as a result of Shannon's theorem in digital communications. This era was followed by cognitive neuroscience.

Cybernetics

Communication entered the field of psychology through the information processing theory. In 1950s, George Miller and some other psychologists came up with information processing theory, that compared human brain to a computer.

“Information processing theory (IPT) is a theoretical framework that seeks to understand how individuals acquire, process, store, and retrieve information. The theory posits that information is processed through a series of mental processes, including attention, perception, memory, and reasoning. IPT has been used to explain a variety of phenomena, including learning, problem-solving, decision-making, and cognitive development.” (Theory Hub, n.d.)

The Information processing theory contained three parts:

1. Sensory memory
2. Short-term off memory
3. Long-term off memory

Shannon and Weaver's model of communication is very closely related to the information processing theory. This is because it talks about an information source, a transmitter and a receiver, among other elements. This information source and the receiver were said to be human brain. A human being uses their brain to process any piece of information. Therefore, it was an interaction between one brain to another.

Persuasion

The concept of using communication to persuade public has been in communication theories since the time of Aristotle. This can be concluded because his model of communication talks of 'effect' as one of the five components of a communication process. (Pumble, n.d.) Persuasion is one of the key aspects that connects communication with psychology. Nearly **all communication** that occur in our vicinity depends on persuasibility. Persuasibility, was discovered to be a part of people's personality, although varying in intensity. (Britannica, n.d.)

Any individual's ability to get persuaded, relies heavily on their perception of reality and the world they live in. Perception of reality, makes an individual agree or disagree with any communication taking place. This again, in turn shapes the cognition and behaviour of the individual (Britannica, n.d.).

The relationship of oneself with oneself and of oneself with others, and the interaction that occurs in between, comes under contemporary psychology and tool that helps us to connect with others and ourselves is communication (NDHLOVU, 2020).

Therefore, it can be concluded that for communication to occur human brain works as the 'information processor' by encoding the messages in a language understandable to the receiver and by decoding the message at receiver's end. Although the intended message can sometimes lose its original meaning, it can be concluded that we use our minds, perception, conditioning and cultural background to communicate.

Research Gap

Technological advancements in any country changes the socio-political scenario of the country in a significant way. This has an impact on almost all the people, existing social systems, fields of study, etc.

India saw a huge surge in technological advancement in the past decade. From widespread use of mobile phones, to internet banking to the rise of OTT platforms, we witnessed it all. This rise in information and communication technology (ICT) had a huge impact on the minds and behavior of the countrymen too. Being a comparatively new development, not many researches have been

done to study the effects of media on communication psychology. In a country like India, with such diverse and huge population, impact of ICT should be thoroughly studied to pave better paths of mass communication.

With rise in technology, the mode of communication also underwent a significant change. With special focus on COVID-19, it can be easily said that world is dependent on virtual communication more than ever. This shift in communication channel has led to a negligence in considering non-verbal communication while studying communication psychology. Observation and analysis are restricted when it comes to studying and researching non-verbal communication in the age of technology. Therefore, a way has to be found in order to help the researchers of communication psychology.

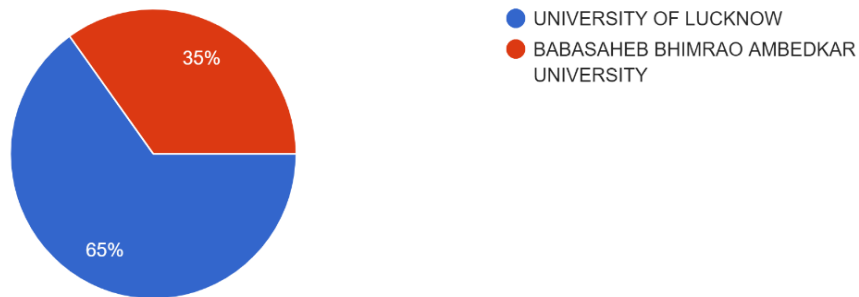
Research Methodology

For this research, purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used, as we were looking for students with a particular quality of a particular place. The researcher decided to work with more than 100 respondents from both universities, through simple random sampling. We wanted to work with more than 100 respondents. We got responses from 103 students. So, we included all 103 responses as our sample size. This sample size was purposively reached out for the survey. We selected two universities, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University and University of Lucknow, through simple random sampling (lottery method). For creating questionnaire, researcher used Google Forms, a tool which helps in creating survey forms and circulating them online to the target respondents. This research relies on the content analysis of secondary data and analysis of primary data collected through questionnaire. There is a cause-and-effect relationship that has been studied in the research. Therefore, it falls under the umbrella of explanatory and descriptive research.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Name of university you are currently enrolled in.

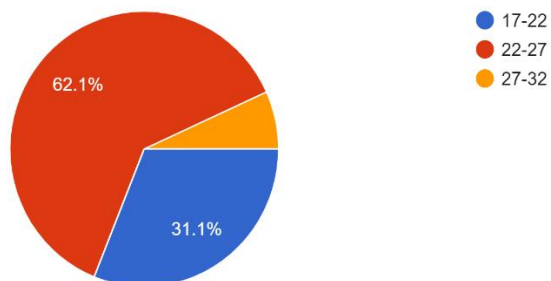
103 responses



There were total of 103 number of students who participated in the research, out of which students from University of Lucknow are 67, whereas that from Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University are 36.

Please mention your age.

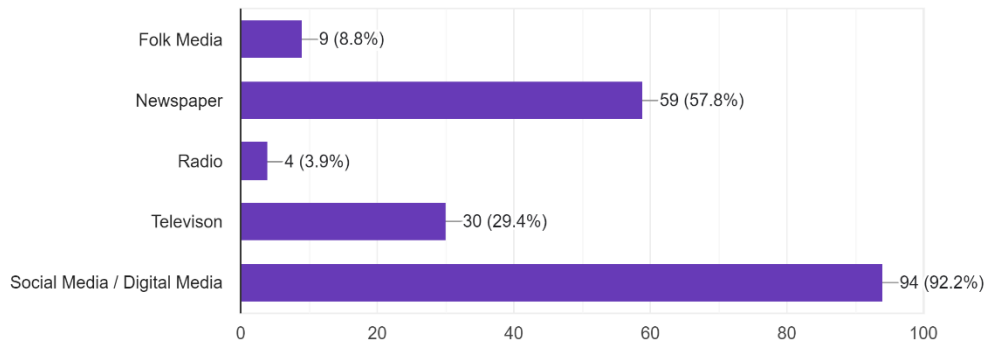
103 responses



Three age groups were taken for the study out of which 31.1% respondents belong to age group 17 -22, 62.1% respondents belong to the age group 22 – 27, while 6.8% respondents belong to age group 27 – 32.

Which medium do you use to seek information?

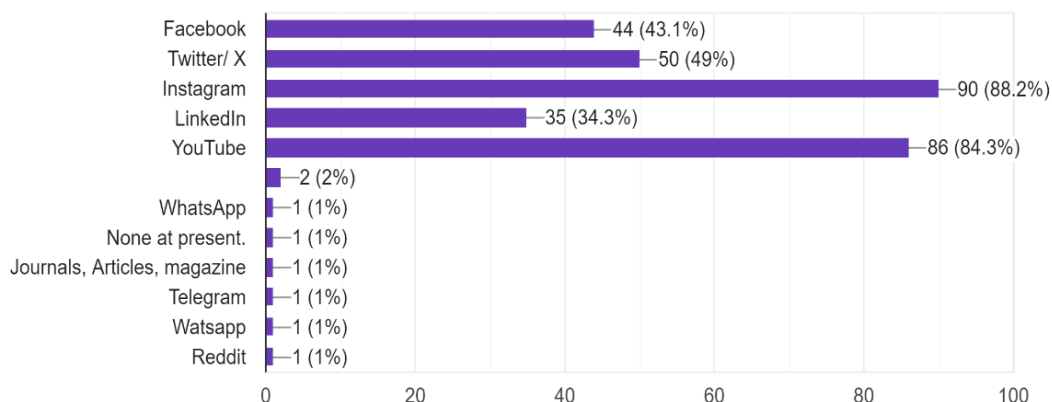
102 responses



9 respondents seek information through folk media, 59 through newspaper, 4 through radio, 30 through television, 94 through social media or digital media.

Which of the following social media platforms do you use currently?

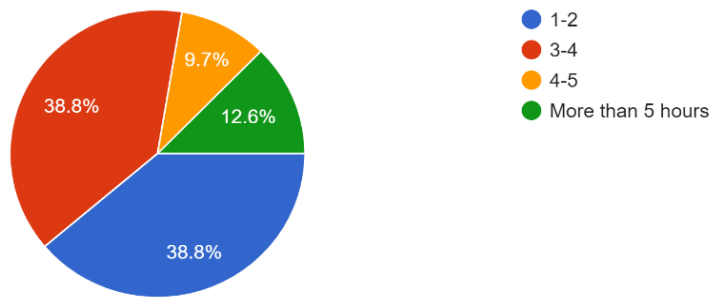
102 responses



44 respondents use Facebook, 50 use X/Twitter, 90 use Instagram, 35 use LinkedIn, 86 of them use YouTube, while 8 respondents used other apps that include WhatsApp, Telegram, Reddit, etc.

How many hours per day do you spend consuming media (TV, social media, movies, video games, etc.)?

103 responses

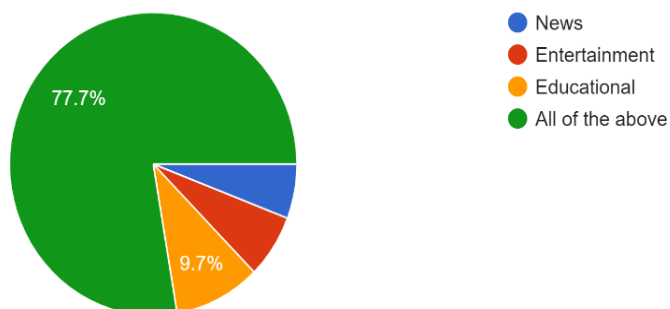


40 people spend 1-2 hours and other 40 spend 3 – 4 hours consuming media, 10 people spend 4 – 5 hours whereas 13 people consumed media for more than 5 hours.

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What type of content do you prefer consuming?

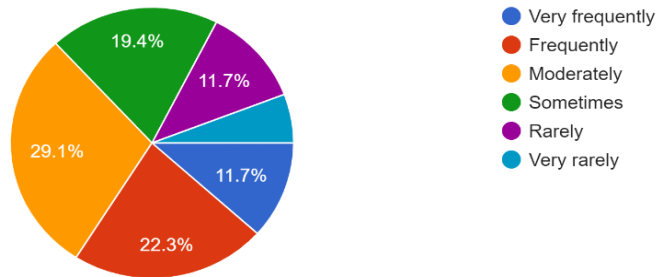
103 responses



people prefer consuming news content, 7 people consume entertainment content, 10 people educational content whereas 80 people consumed all the three kinds of content.

How often do you engage with emotionally charged (anger, violent, depressing, tragic, love, etc.) or controversial content?

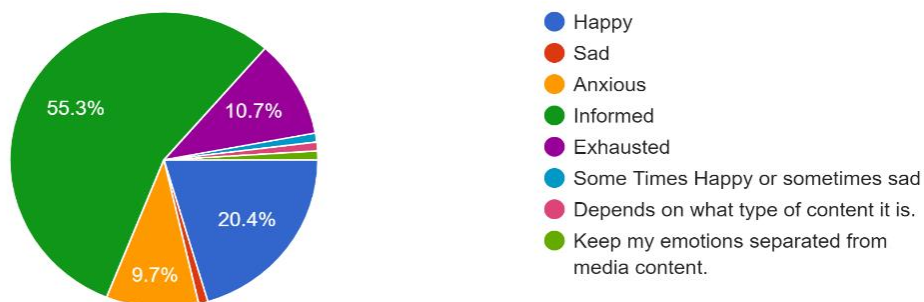
103 responses



12 respondents engaged very frequently with emotionally charged content, 23 engaged frequently, 30 engaged moderately, 20 engaged sometimes, 12 engaged rarely while 6 respondents engaged very rarely with such content.

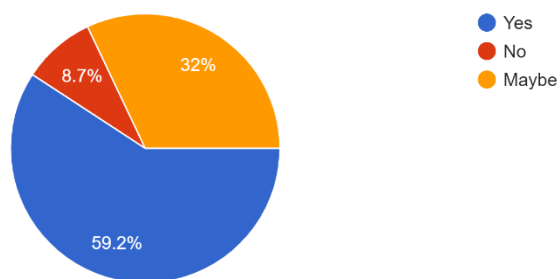
How do you feel after consuming media content? (e.g., happy, anxious, informed)

103 responses



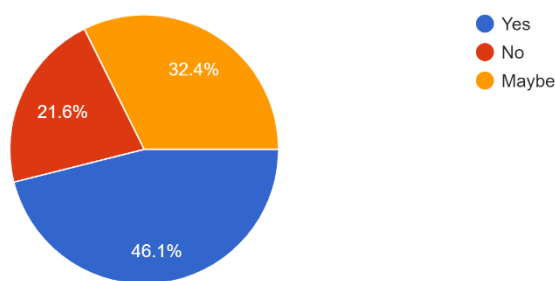
21 respondents felt happy after consuming media content, 1 felt sad, 10 felt anxious, 57 felt informed, 11 felt exhausted, while one sometimes felt happy sometimes felt sad, one respondent's feeling depended on the type of media content, while one person could keep their emotions separate from the media content.

Do you think media content has the power to influence your mood?(Eg. Your mood changes from positive to negative after watching certain content)
103 responses



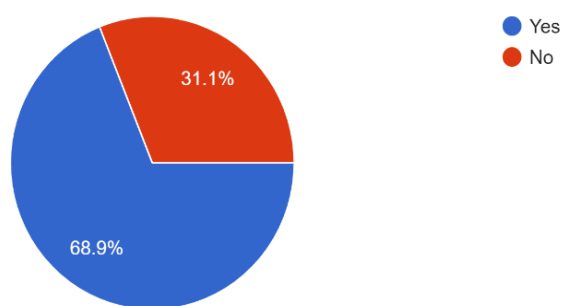
61 respondents felt that media content had an influence on their mood, while 9 didn't feel so. Also 33 of them were unsure on the influence.

Does consumption of media has any effect on your attitude?
102 responses



47 people agreed that media consumption does have an effect on their attitude, while 22 people disagreed. 33 people had no clear opinion on the subject.

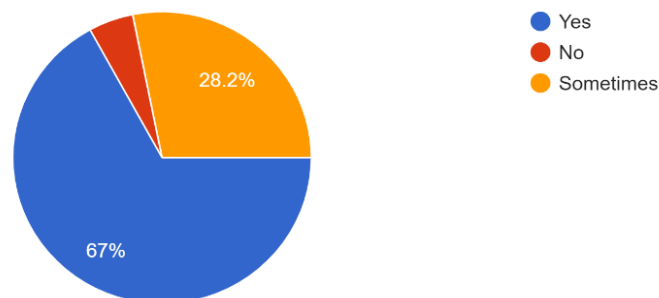
Have you ever changed your opinion or behavior based on something you saw in the media?
103 responses



71 people did change their opinion based on what they saw in the media, while 32 people didn't change their opinion.

Do you think media portrayal of any topic affects public's perception on the issue?

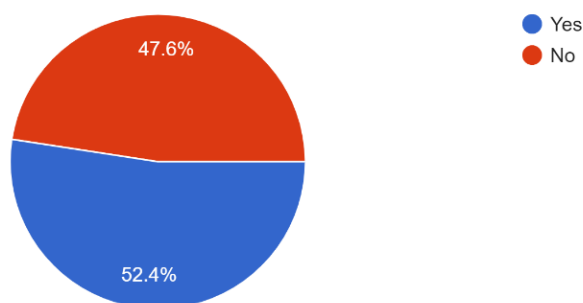
103 responses



69 respondents agree that media portrayal of an issue does change public's perception, while 5 of them disagreed. 29 respondents said it happens sometimes.

Have you ever felt pressure to conform to certain standards portrayed in the media?

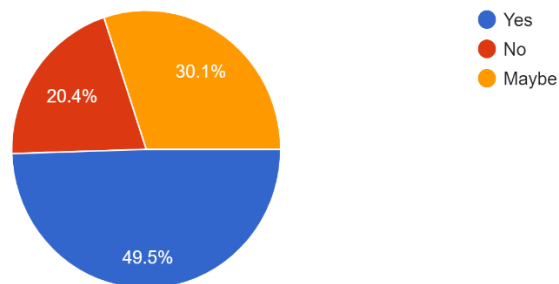
103 responses



54 respondents felt the pressure to conform to certain standards portrayed by the media, while 49 of them had no such problem.

Do you feel that media consumption affects your social interactions with peers?

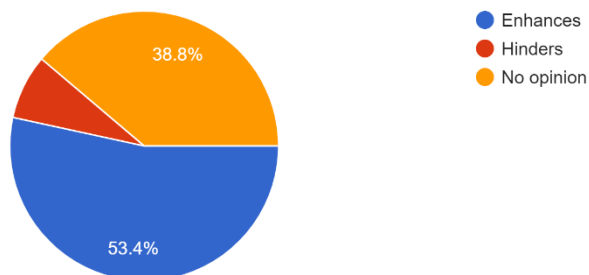
103 responses



51 people think media consumption effects their social interactions with peers, while 21 denied any effect and 31 were unsure of their opinion.

Do you think media consumption enhances or hinders your ability to communicate effectively with others?

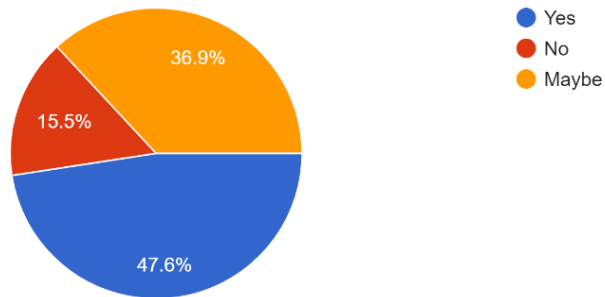
103 responses



55 people say that media consumption enhances their ability to communicate, while 8 said it hinders their ability to communicate. 40 respondents had no opinion on the topic.

Do you believe that media consumption has influenced your cognitive abilities (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, abstract thinking, creativity, etc.)?

103 responses

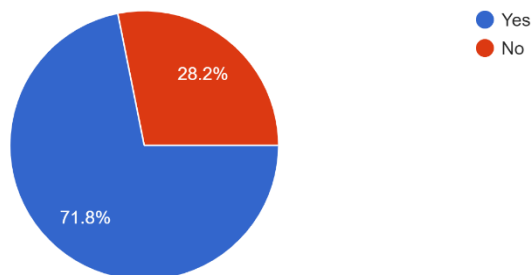


49 people agreed that media consumption influenced their cognitive abilities like critical thinking, creativity, etc. Whereas, 16 people disagreed on any influence and 38 were not sure of their answer.

Have you noticed changes in your attention span or ability to focus after consuming media content for extended periods (3 hours or more)?

74

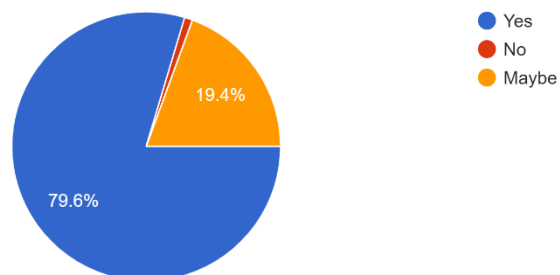
103 responses



respondents observed a change in their attention span after consuming media for more than 3 hours, while 29 noticed no such change.

Do you think media content has the power to influence societal norms and behaviors?

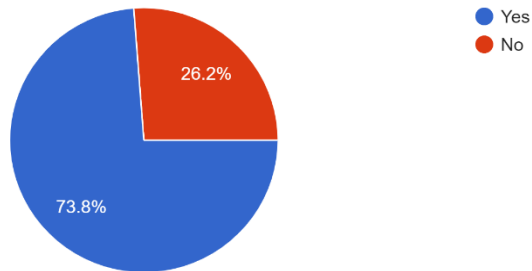
103 responses



82 respondents feel that media content has the power to influence social norms and behaviour, while 1 disagreed. There were also 20 people who were unsure of media's influence.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed or anxious due to the amount of media you consume?

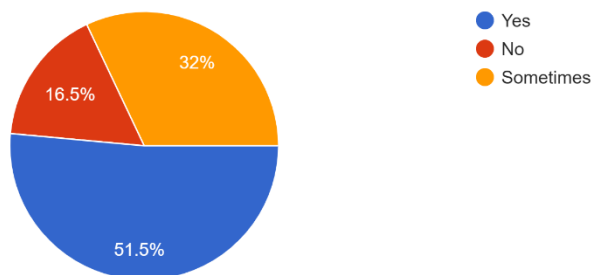
103 responses



76 people felt anxious or overwhelmed by the quantity of media they consumed, while 27 people didn't identify to any such feelings.

Do you actively try to regulate your media consumption to maintain mental well-being?

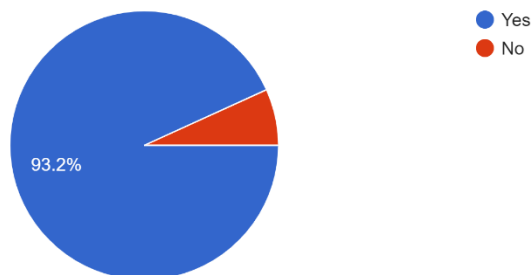
103 responses



53 respondents regulated their media consumption to maintain their well – being, while 17 did not regulate and 33 others did so sometimes and not regularly.

Do you believe that universities should play a role in educating students about media literacy and its potential effects?

103 responses



96 respondents agreed that universities should sensitize people on media literacy, while 7 of them disagreed.

Findings

The research study resulted in following findings:

1. Consuming media content led university students to feel happy, sad, informed, anxious, exhausted, etc.
2. Media content does carry the power influence their mood.
3. 46% of them agreed that media content has an effect on their attitude
4. Media content led them to change their opinion/behaviour on a subject.
5. 67% agreed that media portrayal of an issue changes public perception on a topic.
6. 52.4% gave into the pressure of certain standards portrayed by media.
7. 61.2% agreed that media consumption enhanced or hindered their ability to interact.
8. 47.6% said that media consumption influenced their cognitive abilities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, abstract thinking, creativity, etc.

9. A large percentage of 71.8% noticed changes in their attention span after consuming media for more than 3 hours.

10. 57.3% have imitated an action or behaviour they saw in the media

11. 79.6% feel that media does carry the power to influence social norms and behaviours.

12. Consuming media in large quantity left 73.8% of them feeling anxious or overwhelm.

13. To preserve their mental well-being, 83.5% of respondents regulated their media consumption at from time to time or regularly.

Hence, media has an observable and evident effect on the mind and behaviour of university students.

If not all, then at least hand countable communication theories showed up in the responses of the research study. Those theories are:

1. Uses and gratification theory - In a question where respondents were asked about how they felt after consuming media content, **more than 55% said they felt happy**. It is comprehensible that they felt happy because their gratification was met.

This clearly shows that uses and gratification theory does hold observable practical implications.

2. Agenda setting theory - In a question where respondents were asked if they changed their opinion or behaviour about something based on media portrayal, **68.9% said that they had changed their opinion or behaviour** on something they saw in the media.

When asked if media portrayal of an issue has any effect on public perception of the issue, **67% agreed** that media does in fact effects public perception.

Not only this, respondents were also asked if media has the power to influence societal norms and behaviours. **More than 79%** felt that media does carry the power to influence societal norms and behaviours.

Therefore, agenda –setting theory does carry practical implications in real world too.

Since 93.2% respondents felt the need for sensitization on media literacy, it can be said that they are aware of the importance of media literacy. To add to this, they were also able to identify the feelings

of anxiety, overwhelm and happiness, etc. They also identified, how the media consumption influenced their mood, attitude, opinion and cognitive abilities.

All these factors are enough to conclude that youth of present day understand the meaning and importance of media literacy.

Conclusion

The researcher aimed at finding answers to three questions through the study. The first research question wanted to find if mass media and content has any psychological effect on university students. The data showed that media not only led students to feel happy, sad, informed, it also had the power to influence their mood, attitudes and opinions. This very clearly depicts that media has direct individual-level effects on youth, or university students in this case. A majority of students agreed that media portrayal changes public perception, opinions, social norms and behaviours. This clearly infers that media has such power while communicating to society in general that it can influence masses and bring out a change.

Media does not have only positive looking effects, there are some down side too. Many respondents of study gave into the pressure of conforming to standards shown in media. They also felt anxious after consuming media for too long, leading them to regulate their media consumption. A large majority felt changes in their attention span, ability to interact with others and cognitive abilities such as imagination, critical thinking, creativity, etc. However, all these data do not necessarily mean that they are negative, but they can't be qualified as optimistic either. Therefore, these effects can be taken as an opportunity and a challenge from content production point of view.

Communication theories, have been in the field of media research since many decades now. They were at some point initially just research topics, which through surveys, observation and analysis found their way as theories. The researcher is aware that every theory, model, research work is open to criticism and limitations being drawn. However, such theories, frameworks, etc., do hold significance in the areas they are established in. Practical implication of two theories, 'uses and gratification' and 'agenda setting theory', showed straight up in the data where majority of respondents were feeling happy, informed, etc. through media consumption and when they agreed that media has the power to shift/change opinions, attitudes, norms, behaviours through communication. Hence, it can be inferred

that media does decide of the most important topics, issues, questions that will echo in chambers of social lobby of a nation.

Limitations and Recommendations

The limitation with the study was scarcity of time and funds. This research, if done on a full-scale level, requires some books of psychology, that are very expensive in India, due to belonging to foreign publication. Regardless of these limitations, the sample size for questionnaire and selected literature for content analysis proved to be more than enough.

Following are the suggestions based on this research study:

1. Media literacy should be made compulsory for each and every individual by inserting it in course syllabus of school and college students. Specially now, when we are entering the time when everything is online and artificial intelligence is a reality.
2. Not only media literacy but also communication psychology should be taught in colleges, so that an individual is aware of the effects and drawbacks of media.
3. All fields of media production should cautiously practice their freedom of speech in such a way that it doesn't negatively impacts the psychology of their viewers.
4. Governments should increase their budget for research and development of communication psychology as a field of study, so that we get to know more about humans and human interaction.

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