



A comprehensive view: media effects through the theoretical lens of psychoanalysis

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Abstract:

People watch dramas for entertainment, news for information, and social media content for infotainment without realizing how it affects their daily lives. The study focuses on the undeniable fact that media content has a significant impact on people. Individuals' perceptual abilities influence their reactions to media. People's emotions are not the only thing affected by media use; it also has psychological and behavioral effects, both consciously and unconsciously.

This article examines how viewers interact with media content, the psychological effects on their lives, and how media influences their mental health, both consciously and unconsciously. A theoretical analysis was conducted based on Sigmund Freud's theory, which posits that unconscious memories, thoughts, and urges shape the human mind.

Individuals are influenced by media content through various factors. The study resulted in thematic impacts, including psychological effects. Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Perception. These factors can be treated according to Freud's belief that "making unconscious motivations and thoughts conscious would allow a person to obtain insight". However, the basic objectives of this study have been achieved by identifying and exploring the effects and perspectives of psychoanalysis.

The study provided a comprehensive media and psychological analysis that raised awareness among media producers and the general audience about content choices and their unintended consequences in their lives. However, media content can have both positive and negative psychological effects, depending on the conscious selection of content and its outcomes.

Keywords: Psychological effects, media content, wellbeing, Sigmund Freud, Psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

Media significantly influence human thoughts, opinions, actions, and overall personalities. The content individuals absorb from various media channels, including television, social media, movies, news, music, video games, and others, can have a profound effect on psychological well-being. Even a brief, one-time exposure to a news story can influence people's unconscious behavior. (Bastick, 2021).

The unconscious mind is entirely unavailable to the individual and constitutes the majority of the mind. According to Freud, it mostly encompasses a person's negative elements, such as immoral drives and phobias, that affect mental health. (Davis, 2017)

Studies found that exposure to violent or unpleasant media content, whether in the news or entertainment, results in increased aggression, desensitization to violence, and lower empathy. Positive and uplifting media content can boost positive emotions, empathy, and overall health and well-being. (Krahé B, et. al 2011).

According to Silverstone (1994), media are now "part of the grain of everyday life," particularly in the case of television (Silverstone, 1994). Additionally, there are television shows that study and bring society's reality to the public's attention. Media like television frequently portray reality on a larger scale than the facts, and because it is frequently objective, people are eager to accept it. This causes people to consider the appearance of the imagined world and the pursuit of it (Giddens, 2003). To fully understand how the media has permeated society and everyday life psychologically, it is essential to comprehend its impact on people. Every aspect of life in the modern world is influenced by the media, including politics, entertainment, and aesthetics. The phrase "mass media influence" refers to the impact of the media on people's attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts, as defined by the field of media psychology. Either a positive or a negative outcome is possible (Gauntlett, 1998).

There is evidence that the media has the potential to influence subconscious attitudes and influence behavior. Psychology has recently placed a strong emphasis on how unconscious attitudes may impact moral, emotional, and cognitive functions; yet, people may not be aware of the origin, nature, or influence of these ideas on their subconscious. Building on Freud's theories, contemporary psychoanalytic scholars have explored the unconscious's role in creativity, problem-solving, and emotional regulation. The idea that a large portion of our mental processing takes place outside of conscious consciousness

is supported by neuroscience research, suggesting that the subconscious mind is essential to daily functioning (Banger, 2024).

According to Silverstone (1999), studying the media requires us to confront the unconscious's role in the constitution and the difficulty of experience. If we are to respond to the question of why we study the media, we must also acknowledge that it provides a path—if not a royal one—into uncharted mental and meaningful realms (Silverstone, 1999).

Every generation will make its mark on the earth, supporting its mental models and the vast changes in media today. This goes a long way toward describing the discrepancy in attitudes toward media use between generations (Rutledge, 2010). The study focuses on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis to explore the media's impacts on media consumers. The study may be able to do more justice to the psychological effects on human well-being.

2. Research objective

To highlight the effects of media content on viewers' well-being within the framework of Freud's psychoanalytic perspective.

3. Research methodology

The researcher conducted a comprehensive review of data to assess the connection between media and audience well-being. Researchers defined media as encompassing news, entertainment, and a proportion of social media content, analyzing how it affects people's thinking, unconscious memories, perception, behaviors, thought patterns, and overall human well-being. To better understand these impacts, Freud's psychoanalytic approaches have been studied.

4. Data collection

The data were gathered through electronic searches in Google Scholar, as well as books, articles, media reports, and multiple research papers. Using relevant, database-specific search phrases for both the media effects and Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Such as

with theoretical research of the connection between media consumption or content and one or more psychological outcomes.

5. Theoretical framework

Most media study focuses on human subjects as media, consumers, or creators (Dahlgren, 2013). Emphasizes his disappointment with the current state of media studies in terms of theoretical conceptual frameworks and research on the human subject as a media audience, and he especially advocates for (Freudian and post-Freudian) psychoanalysis as a potential pathway.

Human well-being may be impacted by media material both consciously and unconsciously. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, media can subtly influence our thoughts and behaviors by appealing to our most basic instincts and needs. For instance, media portrayals of unattainable beauty standards might encourage eating disorders and a negative body image (Emmert-Streib et.al, 2019). The significance of unconscious mental phenomena, or mental processes in which the individual is not conscious, is a significant component of this approach. Individual vulnerabilities, reasons, tensions, desires, guilt, fantasies, or urges may be included. (Emmert-Streib et.al, 2019). Psychoanalysis benefits media and communication studies as Freud claimed (Devereux, 1967; Freud, 1978). The idea that "unconscious processes enter the narrative accounts supplied by research participants" is supported by psychoanalytically informed research, which also supports the need for interpretive procedures targeted at exposing these unconscious processes (Frosh, 2010). This is not to argue that psychoanalysis provides a vocabulary to understand or decode how a participant might genuinely know or claim to know something that the participant is not aware of. Instead, it might be helpful to picture a study subject "whose inner world is not merely a reflection of the outward world, nor a cognitively motivated inclusion to it" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

The range of unconscious influences is significantly increased when the operational definition of unconscious shifts from the anachronistic subliminal one—whether the individual is aware of the triggering information itself—to the far more common scenario of not being aware of that stimulus's influence. Since people often fail to recognize how external events (consumed media material) influence their decisions and behavior, self-report measures of mediating internal mental processes should not be used. These are the

basic ways that everyday unconscious influence manifests. The person's primary developed wants and reasons, as well as active goal pursuits, function unconsciously to modify one's attentional choices, purchasing preferences, and consumption. Common external triggers, such as flyers from the grocery store and emails from the boss, can cause these. Immediate preconscious perceptual cues from the outside environment influence choices that appear to be free in the mind. The same outcomes are produced by action processes, which result from the transfer of conscious experiences from one circumstance to another. This is where encouragement or priming impacts are used, and numerous field research and meta-analyses have shown how effective they are (Bargh, 2021).

Freud contended that all cognitive functions are unconscious and that some of these functions' results are only incidentally manifested in consciousness. Thoughts that are referred to as aware are only unconscious thinking representations. In addition to all of this, Freud dismissed the usefulness of introspection as a tool for psychological research because awareness only reveals the results of unconscious cognitive processes, thereby denying consciousness access to the cognitive processes that produced these results (Smith, 2010).

In psychoanalysis, a subject who is not constantly conscious of certain parts of oneself is theorized. Psychoanalysts have specific perspectives on the matter. They view the topic as having conflicts, dynamism, several layers, contradictions, and three levels of complexity (Freud, 1978).

This is contextualized about the already commonly acknowledged fact that ideas of emotional accuracy and well-being in our culture dominate the media landscape concerning identity. How do media representations of psychoanalysis relate to its theoretical concepts? To what degree does the development of newly emerging subjectivities based on emotional concerns and endeavors make psychoanalysis a primary object of struggle? It is now widely believed that our experiences with mediatized forms of experience are closely linked to our conceptions of identity, largely due to the widespread assumption that we live in a mediatized society. Bainbridge (2011) explains the shifting media attitudes toward psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as "therapy culture" solidifies itself in the mediatization of daily life, given the pervasive emotional

inflection that pervades many media platforms in contemporary popular culture (Bainbridge, 2011).

Multiple media researchers used and continue to use psychoanalysis to varying degrees (Dahlgren, 2013; Krüger & Johanssen, 2016). It is helpful to consider psychosocial and cultural advances in the study of what is known as "therapy" or "therapeutic" culture when discussing the connections between television and psychoanalysis. The history of psychoanalysis and popular culture is also closely tied to the prominence of emotions in popular media, as the vocabulary, methods, and images of psychoanalysis and its related issues are frequently invoked in everything from advertising to movies. (Yates, 2014).

6. Media consumption & psychological effects

Without a question, viewing television has an impact on one's mental health. Numerous studies and analyses of the psychological effects of television on American society have been conducted by Gerbner and his colleagues (2002). Most of these have concentrated on the effects of television on individuals (Gerbner, G., et.al 2002).

The effects of the media vary depending on the individual's perception. For example, the media is considered an important resource by those who study politics, yet some people view it as a means to promote different cultures to diverse audiences. However, in the corporate world, factors such as audience size, composition, and personal preferences and choices are considered important indicators for increasing commercial market sales. Since the media promotes a culture of crime and violence, religious leaders may view it as a risk factor for young people. Since the media has an impact on everyone's life and the development of essential societal foundations, people in today's environment must view it from a variety of perspectives (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

The nature of social media is reinforcing. By producing dopamine, a "feel-good chemical" associated with enjoyable activities such as sex, food, and social connection, its use stimulates the brain's reward region. The platforms are linked to bodily illnesses, anxiety, and sadness, and they are made to be addictive (McLean, 2023). With an emphasis on the impact of social media use on psychological well-being, research on the possible consequences of this new communication medium has exploded (Valkenburg et al., 2022)

7. Effects On Adults & Youngsters

Media influences psychological behavior & serves as a medium via which the behaviors and experiences of individuals in one culture are immediately transmitted to those in another, causing a sort of mobility among them (Saddiqi & Silab, 2023). Freud's theories have a significant impact on the media, particularly among middle-class readers who receive a substantial portion of the broadsheet newspapers. The fact that Freudian concepts are adopted and used in the context of media production, with TV series, print media, and movies frequently emphasizing their importance, further demonstrates the breadth of their influence. It would be feasible to develop fresh viewpoints on the use of psychoanalytic methods for media and culture studies by considering the connection between the media and the inner world, since there is potential need to reexamine concerns regarding media uses and gratifications and to consider mediatization as a process and how it reflects ontological structures of being in daily life (Bainbridge, 2011)

Media exposure increases the likelihood that people will suffer from the negative social and psychological effects of mass media, which can lead to poverty, criminality, sexiness, violence, poor physical and mental health, sleep disturbance, peer pressure, bullying, rumors, and other significant repercussions. Investigations and research have shown that the media's failure to analyze and control (censor) primary sources has had a significant impact on various aspects of society. All of these factors have a profound impact on the mental, spiritual, and social aspects of life, which can lead to both immediate and long-term mental, spiritual, and social issues (Saddiqi & Silab, 2023).

Similarly, the impact that violent television programs have on children's and adults' conduct is the largest concern for educators and parents in today's culture. Young children are prone to deviation and lack the cognitive capacity to comprehend and respond to aggression. These violent shows disrupt the neurological systems and sense of normalcy of children and adults; thus, it is critical to teach adults appropriate television viewing habits and shield children and adults from the negative effects of television. According to a study, the media is encouraging chaos, violence, and profanity, all of which are worsening the existing state of affairs. The viewers' social, mental, and psychological well-being is negatively impacted by the violent and immoral content of its programs. (Saddiqi & Silab, 2023)

This is partially due to the Media and the Inner World project's emphasis on the potential value of object relations psychoanalysis in forming fresh perspectives on the function of emotion.

Psychoanalysis has the critical ability to confront unconscious patterns and the "messiness" of the human condition. It also provides valuable insights into our prevailing culture of consumption and "happiness" (Bainbridge, 2011).

According to the study's findings, media content, which is typically thought to have a positive influence, can have negative consequences on people, especially young people. As 46% of young people feel that entertainment media content shapes their attitudes, behaviours, ethical values, and language, the media have both positive and negative effects on these traits. Nearly 55% of youth believed that media content influences them both consciously and unconsciously. As a result of entertainment media, the study discovered that many respondents use slang. Intriguingly, the study found that 48% of youngsters believe that entertainment media have normalized negative behaviours, including lying, cheating, westernization, and interpersonal aggression. While 49% of people claim to have sexual desires after viewing erotica (Hasnain, 2023).

8. Negative Effects

People may experience anger, crime, violence, nudity, poor mental and physical health, and other disastrous consequences as a result of the detrimental effects of the media on society. For example, when a crowd becomes agitated over rumors that have spread online, it is rare for them to harm innocent persons. The best illustration of the detrimental effects of mainstream media on society can be found in these unreported news headlines. However, as children frequently engage with negative news items, action films, and video games, incidents of children killing unarmed citizens are thought to be among the most detrimental consequences of mass media on children. (Gauntlett, 1998).

In addition to other mental states, the mass media can excite, provoke emotional reactions, and even alter aggressive tendencies. When discussing the media in general, the term "mood" is commonly used. People choose which media to watch or listen to based on their current emotional or mood states and their expectations of how the media will affect or change those states. The goal of the mass media is to evoke strong emotions in its audience. The study postulated that the emotional experiences of mass media

viewers might be vicarious, which may explain why this is the case. When watching a dating show on television, such as *The Bachelor*, viewers can experience a range of emotions from the viewpoints of the female contestants or the bachelor. When a movie's hero experiences fear, the audience may experience a similar sense of arousal and fear (Barlett & Gentile, 2010).

Examined are the prevalence, accuracy, and significance of media portrayals of mental illness. The frequency and content of media depictions have been the subject of numerous studies, and the findings are in line with clinical findings that mental illness is commonly portrayed in the media, particularly in the entertainment industry, and that these images are typically unflattering and unreliable. New studies of this type are still required, though, because of constraints like the age of the research and the disproportionate weight given to psychiatry, psychology, and mental illness. Research on the specific effects of these portrayals supports the notion that media representations of mental illness, especially those that are entertaining, have the power to change how people view mental illness and its treatment profoundly (Saddiqi & Silab, 2023).

A study examined the impact of social media use on personality and psychological well-being. One of the significant links discovered here is "the negative relationship between social media usage and psychological well-being," which should serve as a caution to young adults and future generations alike (Crolic et al., 2021).

9. Positive Effects

Entertainment serves as a vehicle for social change and mental well-being, rather than just being a means of entertainment. Additionally, it may be a form of media that subtly conveys cultural experiences. Modern entertainment has considerable potential to influence human behavior due to advancements in media technology positively. In this sense, it is necessary to consider how entertainment progressively evolves alongside human civilization, as well as how potential future entertainment technologies may impact people's lives (Chang et al., 2015).

Richards (2004) goes on to say that "things including media content and media consumption are what matter here in determining the outcome". Richards (2004) refers to theories of psychoanalysis in his work, demonstrating how psychoanalytic concepts

such as containment, projection, and introjection can provide media analysts with fresh approaches to addressing the complexities of emotional experience in modern society.

The child's mental processing includes a behavioral script that transforms a television image into a behavior guide. According to a study, youngsters who watch television for more than 90 hours per month are more susceptible to the effects of advertisements. Additionally, it states that youngsters internalize the morals and behavioral traits of their main role model. The idea is that frequent exposure to violent media causes a psychological or emotional adjustment, which causes the initial emotions of fear and revulsion to lessen or fade (Danasabe et al., 2022).

Thames Television and Euston Films created the television drama *Shrinks* in this setting. Known as "Harley Street Blues," according to Patrick Stoddart of *The Sunday Times*, this program focused on "a psychiatric technique where patients who cannot cope with the hardships of the 1980s paid £60 an hour to tell someone (Stoddart, 1991). The patients, who included a wifebeater, an abandoned mother, and a couple hoping to rekindle their passion by dressing up as ice skaters, were criticized for being largely clichéd.

Moreover, for Hollywood, Freud and psychoanalysis will not suffer much long-term harm, regardless of how discredited they become. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts have often been grouped as a single discipline in American cinema. Freud's complex theories of development, which gave filmmakers like Nicholas Ray (*East of Eden*, *Johnny Guitar*) and Alfred Hitchcock (*Vertigo*, *Marnie*) plenty of material in the 1950s, have now been reduced to explaining murderous rampages in slasher films (Jason in the *Friday the 13th* series, Michael Myers in *Halloween*) (Anwar, 1994).

10. The Effects of Social Media

As one of Freud's main concepts was the unconscious mind, which contains suppressed thoughts, desires, and fears. According to Freud, our online presence may represent or satisfy several unconscious needs for us rather than just being a means of staying in touch, advertising, or showcasing ourselves. For example, if you were raised feeling "unseen," social media may become a place where this unmet need fuels a desire for an audience; on the other hand, it may reenact the trauma, which could cause emotional harm, jealousy, and pain when others receive big followings while yours stays small. People create a well-manicured self-image on social media, creating a façade that hides who they truly are.

Freud may contend that this dissonance could be a contributing factor to anxiety, insecurity, and existential concerns regarding authenticity in the digital era. The contrast between the digital persona and the real self can cause a sense of detachment from one's genuine identity. Another study contributes to the body of knowledge by revealing a negative correlation between social media use and psychological well-being. A positive association between the predictor and the outcome is another notable discovery, indicating that using social media is associated with increased neuroticism (Crollic et al, 2021).

11. Psychological Theory Applications in the Media

To elicit specific emotional reactions from their audience, media producers may purposefully or inadvertently incorporate psychoanalytic aspects into their works. For instance, horror movies often exploit viewers' underlying concerns and tap into their basic phobias.

In media studies, psychoanalytic critique is a novel method that explores the enigmas of human psychology as they are portrayed in movies, TV shows, and other media. People can gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind media content and its impact on audiences by applying psychoanalytic ideas in practice (Hulatt & Freitas, 2024).

12. Role of the Unconscious in Media

The interpretation of movies and stories can be improved by being aware of how the unconscious affects the production and consumption of media. Stories can connect on a deeper psychological level because characters often represent suppressed desires, fears, or conflicts that resonate with the reader on a personal level. A character's recurring behaviors, for instance, may reveal their unconscious battle with inner impulses or fears, giving their on-screen persona additional depth (Hulatt & Freitas, 2024).

13. Psychoanalytic Impact of Social Media

Social media may present psychoanalytic organizations with a fresh chance to impact some of the conscious and unconscious mechanisms that contribute to the unfavorable perception of psychoanalysis that has so significantly fueled the current crisis (Mauss-Hanke & Rink, 2015).

14. Conclusion and recommendation

According to the study, media content has a variety of effects on people, which not only compromises their well-being but also contributes to societal chaos. Based on Freud's belief that making unconscious motivations and thoughts conscious would allow a person to obtain insight, these elements can be addressed. However, by recognizing and examining the impacts and viewpoints through psychoanalysis, the study's fundamental goal has been achieved.

All cognitive processes are unconscious, according to Freud, and the outcomes of some of these processes only coincidentally show up in consciousness. The so-called aware thoughts are merely representations of unconscious thinking. Self-report measures of mediating internal mental processes should be avoided, as people often fail to recognize the influence of external events (such as media content) on their behavior and decision-making. A person's primary goals and motivations, as well as their active pursuit of these objectives, are the fundamental ways in which every day unconscious influences manifest. These factors operate unconsciously to influence one's attentional choices, purchasing preferences, and consumption.

The mass media can stimulate, elicit emotional responses, and even change violent tendencies, among other psychological states. "Mood" is a phrase frequently used to describe the media in general. People choose which media to watch or listen to based on their current emotional or mood states and their expectations of how the media will affect or change those states. Research has shown that exposure to unpleasant or violent media, whether it be entertainment or news, causes people to become less empathetic, more aggressive, and desensitized to violence. On the other hand, uplifting and positive media content can enhance empathy, promote positive emotions, and improve overall health and well-being. The psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, explains how media impacts people's well-being. For example, exposure to violent news and entertainment media can increase despair and social isolation. Freud highlights that media content, mental models, and unconscious instincts, urges, and wants all have an impact on human behavior.

Freud's theories provide a valuable perspective for understanding the intricate relationships between media and human well-being. Understanding how media content impacts our unconscious mind and mental processes can help us develop more effective techniques for promoting mental health and appropriate media consumption. While media literacy classes can help people recognize the potential influence of media on their thoughts and behaviors, mindfulness methods can help individuals manage their emotions and mitigate the negative effects of media exposure.

Any media-based psychological theory, however, can only be beneficial if each person is prepared to accept some degree of accountability for the system. Media outlets provide content that viewers desire because they can only exist by maintaining their audience's interest. Viewers must acknowledge the changing media landscape. The challenge of teaching the next generation to interact with media constructively and responsibly will be one of the key responsibilities of media psychologists.

Given the widespread emotional inflection that permeates various media platforms in contemporary popular culture, the media's changing attitudes toward psychoanalysis and psychotherapy come at a time when "therapy culture" has solidified itself in the mediatization of everyday life. When discussing the links between television and psychoanalysis, it is useful to consider psychosocial and cultural developments in the study of what is referred to as "therapy" or "therapeutic" culture.

Research on the specific effects of these portrayals supports the notion that media representations of mental illness, especially those that are entertaining, have the power to change how people view mental illness and its treatment profoundly. The Media and the Inner World project's focus on object relations psychoanalysis's potential utility in developing novel insights into the role of emotion is partly to blame for this. In order to address unconscious patterns and the "messiness" of the human experience, psychoanalysis is a necessary tool. Additionally, it offers insightful information about our dominant culture of consumerism and "happiness." In this case, media consumption and content are crucial factors in influencing the result. Research demonstrating how media

analysts can use psychoanalytic ideas like containment, projection, and introjection to address the complexity of emotional experience in contemporary culture

The essence of human potential lies in the complex interplay between consciousness and the subconscious. By using psychoanalytic theory as a lens, we may see how deeply the subconscious shapes our beliefs and behaviors. The transformational potential of using our subconscious abilities by exploring the dynamics of suggestion, belief, and the interaction between the conscious and unconscious domains (Banger, 2024).

The following are thematic impacts that are extracted from the study,

Psychological Effects:

Priming, vulnerabilities, unconscious consumption, coping mechanisms, stress, fear, sleep disturbance, poor mental health, guilt, bullying, anxiety, impaired cognitive functioning, depressive disorders, desensitization, misidentified or unclear memories of previous experiences, vulnerabilities

Emotional and Behavioral Effects:

Affectivity, desire, arousal, fantasies, urges, aggressive tendencies, provoking different emotions, spiritual & social facets of life, learning, chaos, nudity, crime, violence, ideal personality traits, role model, behavior guide.

Effects of Perception:

Reasoning, insights, negativity, mood swings, Profanity, sexuality, unrealistic standards, unchecked mental processes, sensing objects, cultural clarity, and unconscious manifestations.

Humans' mental states are changing over time due to the influence of media content. The entertainment, news, and social media industries are not regarded as responsible.

An increasing number of media networks allow their audiences to watch content at their leisure. Since there may be a need to reconsider concerns about media uses and gratifications, as well as to take into account mediatization as a process and how it reflects ontological structures of being in everyday life, it would be possible to develop new perspectives on the application of psychoanalytic methods for media and culture studies

by taking into account the relationship between the media and the inner world. However, these impacts can be controlled by conscious awareness and media selection.

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