A brief history of Media effects research and theories

Powerful effects theory
- Magic bullet, AKA hypodermic needle model
News media influenced Americans’ support for Spanish American War
U.S. propaganda Americans’ support for World War I

World War I
George Creel headed Committee for Public Information
Propaganda campaign to generate support for the war
Encouraged people to enlist and to buy war bonds
Blended propaganda and public relations
Demonized Germans

Movie industry’s effects on viewers
- turn of the century
  > one-reel (12-minute) films
  > travel logs, documentaries, docudramas
Harold Square, New York, 1896
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiVr39mDp50&feature=related
Great Train Robbery, 1903
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69grwvuVEec
D.W. Griffith’s “Birth of a Nation” 1915
> 3 hours long, with high production quality
> tickets cost up to $2

Payne Fund Studies – 1929-1932
Looked for causal relationship between movies and children’s (negative behavior)

Payne Fund Studies
Looked for a causal relationship between movie content and children’s actions and attitudes
Interviewed and observed 2,000 people for 13 studies
Conducted content analysis of 1,500 films made between 1920 to 1930.
Classified movies by 10 categories:
  - children-oriented
  - comedy
  - crime and mystery
  - history
  - love and sex
  - travel
  - social propaganda
  - war
75% of all the films were crime, love or sex
Methodology

- Quantitative analysis of movies
- Census and survey data
- Effects were measured using experimental design, questions, case studies and interview
- Measured emotional stimulation

Payne Fund Studies conclusions

- Young children not affected by romance movies
- Older adolescents had strong reaction to romance movies
- Children adopt social learning – emulating the heroes in the movies
- Movies affected how children performed in school – their school work was poor, and they were less cooperative
- Children had harder time judging right from wrong
- Children were slightly less emotionally stable

Orson Welles’ “War of the Worlds”

- The night that panicked America
- Oct. 30, 1938
- More than 1 million people believed that Martians had invaded New Jersey

Another example of powerful effects theory

People said they believed the program because
- They trusted what they heard on the radio
- The story referred to real locations
- The “experts” interviewed seemed real and gave the report credibility

Study found that people who did believe there was an invasion had, in general,
- Less critical thinking ability
- Less self-confidence
- Less emotional security

Belief in the powerful effects of the media and their ability to influence people led to a LEGACY of FEAR

- Widespread belief that movies were dangerous
- Effects of media messages might pervert and upset proper social order
- Belief that film makers should exercise a greater sense of social responsibility

Message is a two-step flow

Media message → Audience

Powerful effects theory
- Magic bullet, AKA hypodermic needle model

Media’s message was accepted by public without question or filtering by other influences
**People's Choice study**

*“How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in an Presidential Election”*

Looked at how and why people chose to vote in 1940 presidential election

Franklyn Roosevelt (D) vs. Wendell Wilkie (R)

Research innovations:

> Use of control groups
> Use of longitudinal design as a viable way to study change

**Findings:**

> People in high socioeconomic level more likely to vote Republican
> Blue collar more likely to vote Democratic; white collar more likely vote Republican
> Self-identification makes a difference; business class tend to vote Republican. Self-identified blue collar, regardless of occupation, favored Roosevelt
> Religious category influenced voting decision. Catholics more Democratic; Protestants more Republican.
> Democrats younger in both categories of Christians.
> Rural more Republican

**“Why We Fight”**

U.S.-produced anti-German propaganda

[Image]

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=830EisL9S4s&feature=related

The films were intended to instill

> a firm belief in cause for which we fight
> a realization that it was going to be a tough job
> a determined confidence in our ability to get the job done
> a confidence in the ability and integrity of our allies
> a resentment, based on knowledge gained from the films, against our enemies for starting this war
> a belief that through a military victory, we could achieve a better world order (bring democracy to the world)

**Methodology:**

> Two groups: one group saw the films and a control group didn’t see the films
> Anonymous checklist questionnaires of both groups before and after one group saw the films

**Results:**

Results: Little change in attitude

“Why We Fight” had limited effects on viewers

This study was the first sophisticated set of experiments in media history
Evils of Comic Books

1954: *Seduction of the Innocent*, by Frederic Wertham – famous psychiatrist

Funded by National Research Council

Wertham believed exposure to the messages in these comic books could corrupt children

Lead young people into a life of reckless crime and self-abuse

Conclusions do not represent the larger population of comic readers

“Research” procedures were not scientific

Content analysis procedures not systematic

Limited-effects perspective

Joseph Klapper’s “The Effects on Mass Communication”

> Effects of mass media range from small to negligible

The Limited-Effects Perspective

The research on TV’s effect on audiences led many to question limited-effects perspective

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

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

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

The notion of selective exposure to communication

Cognitive dissonance: messages that contradict assumptions and beliefs and therefore make us uncomfortable

Late 1950s The Dawn of Television

Many reports of imitative crimes, particularly among youths proliferated

Scientific reports showed no definitive correlation between exposure to violence and aggression
Government started to make grant money available for scientists who wanted to study media’s impact on human behavior

*Television in the Live of Our Children*

- First major study
- Looked at children’s uses and functions of TV rather than simply effects of TV

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

Limited-effects perspective started to give way to new paradigm based on more sophisticated scientific techniques

**Micro-level effects:**
Examines effects on individual media consumers

**Macro-level effects:**
Examines media impact on communities

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**Content-specific effects**

- How certain content of a film affects a person’s behavior
  - For example, violent/sexually explicit vs. nature television programs
- Diffuse general effects
  - Factors within the media that affect the audience but are not part of the media messages
  - For example, does television or computer games increase obesity levels?

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**Attitudinal change vs. behavior changes vs. cognitive change**

*Attitudinal change:* The idea that exposure to media changed people’s attitudes
  - Attitude change does not always produce behavior change and cognitive change.

*Behavior change:* A change in the way a person acts after constant exposure to a certain content in the media

*Cognitive change:* Changes in what people think about

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**Alteration vs. stability**

- Exposure to media messages sometimes alter
  - Public opinion
  - Decision in buying a certain product
- Exposure to media messages sometimes focus on the status quo