INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY

(As per the Revised Syllabus 2014-2015 of University of Mumbai for BMM, Semester II)

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It gives me great pleasure to present this book on “Introduction to Media Psychology” as per the revised syllabus of Semester II of F.Y.B.M.M. There is now more of an emphasis on Media Psychology and its intricacies apart from the basic concepts and modern trends in psychology. Media Psychology is a continuously evolving dynamic subject. The topics of psychological, developmental and social aspects of media are reflected upon.

The book will try to make the students understand the use of media by different cultures, their understanding of it and its influence on them. The chapters are designed to be comprehensive and easy to read.

I thank my husband Rohit for his invaluable inputs and the Principal of Usha Pravin Gandhi College of Management Dr. Anju Kapoor for her continued support and encouragement.

Rashmi Gahlowt
INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY

Objectives:
1. To impart knowledge of the basic concepts and modern trends in psychology.
2. To provide an interdisciplinary study of concepts in the field of media, communication and psychology.
3. To expose students to a multicultural understanding, use, influence and impact of media.
4. To prepare students for a future filled with opportunities in the field of media and communication.

Topic 1: Evolution of Psychology 8 Lectures
(A) Definition of Psychology
   - Branches of Psychology – Overview of the fields
   - Media Psychology – Definition, scope and objectives
   - Psychology and Media – An uneasy relationship
(B) Research Methods in Media Psychology

Topic 2: Role of Psychology in Media 10 Lectures
(A) Memory – Definition – Information processing model, LOP
   Thinking – Definition – Lateral thinking and creative thinking
   Perception – Visual and Depth perception
(B) Cognitive and behavioural effects of media. (Focus on print, interactive medium and web advertising)

Topic 3: Psychological Effects and Influence of Media 12 Lectures
(A) Personality Theories (Trait theory, Cognitive theory, Psychoanalytical theory and Behaviour theory) and their relevance in mass media.
   Social Influence (Definition, conformity, compliance, obedience and indoctrination).
(B) Effects of Media Violence.
   Effects of pro-social media.
**Topic 4: Developmental Psychological Issues with Respect to Media**  
12 Lectures

(A) Learning – Theories – Classical conditioning and operant conditioning
- Cognitive Learning
- Observation Learning
- Social Cognition – Script and schema
- Motivation – Definition – Types – Need hierarchy theory.

(B) Young children and media – Socialization through media.
Media use and influence during adolescence.

**Topic 5: Social Psychology of the Media**  
6 Lectures

(A) Attitude Formation – Theories, cognitive dissonance, role of media in attitude formation
- Persuasion
- Prejudice

(B) Gender representation in media (Internal assessment)
- Representation of minority groups
- Media representation of disability
- Media representation of mental health
- Audience participation and reality T.V.
QUESTION PAPER PATTERN

Duration: 2 ½ hrs  Max. Marks: 75

N.B: 1. All questions are compulsory.
     2. Figures to the right indicate full marks.

Q. 1. Question without internal choice

Q. 2. Answer any one of the following sets
(a) (7)
(b) (8)

OR

(a) (7)
(b) (8)

Q. 3. Answer any one of the following sets
(a) (7)
(b) (8)

OR

(a) (7)
(b) (8)

Q. 4. (a) Long answer question

OR

(b) Long answer question

Q. 5. Short Notes. Attempt any three of the following.

(a)
(b)
(c)
(d)
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Definition: Psychology is the science of behaviour and mental processes. The three terms science, behaviour and mental processes are stressed upon in psychology.

It is a science because the people are observed and studied carefully in controlled environments. The precise and correct scientific methods are adopted and adhered to. Study of psychology is systematic. It can be both inductive and deductive in nature. Data is collected through experiments and observations and measurements are carefully done.

Behaviour is a person’s observable and manifest actions.

Mental processes are a person’s introspections, thoughts, emotions, feelings and motives which can be easily observed or detected.

Psychology is both an academic as well as an applied science in which the scientific study of both mental functions and behaviours are taken into consideration. The ultimate aim of psychology is to understand individuals and groups by establishing hypotheses, general theories, principles and case studies. Eventually, psychology aims for the betterment of the society. A professional practising in the field of psychology or a researcher in the field of psychology is called a psychologist. Psychologists can be of several kinds such as social, behavioural or cognitive psychologists. Psychologists find out about the role of mental functions in individuals and their social behaviour. They also conduct research on the physiological and biological processes that drive cognitive analytical processes and behaviours.

Psychology is also known as a “Hub Science” because its experiments, research and studies are intimately related to different
disciplines and perspectives such as social sciences, biological sciences, medicine and philosophy.

Wilhelm Wundt, a German physician first introduced psychological concepts into a laboratory setting. He is also known as the “father of experimental psychology”. He also laid the foundation of world’s first ever psychological laboratory, at Leipzig University in 1879. The thrust area of Wilhelm Wundt and his student Edward Tichener studied the mental process as their most fundamental entities, their organization and structure. This is very similar to the concepts of chemistry. Wundt’s work described the structures that build up the mind. This idea depended mostly on the scrutiny of sensations and feelings by using introspection, which is a completely subjective process. According to Wundt, only the properly and systematically trained persons could identify the mental processes that accompanied feelings, sensations and thoughts. This exploration of mental processes and their breaking down into different components is referred to as structuralism.

William James, the American philosopher, scientist, and psychologist proposed a functionalist approach as opposed to the structuralist approach. According to James, psychology should focus on having more of a practical value to benefit the individual and the society. James focused more on the functions of the conscious part of the brain and a person’s conscious awareness, voluntary action, overt behaviour, observable habits and emotions. James thus, emphasized more on the functions which the human mind performed instead of its composition and structure. Functionalism has had a major influence on contemporary psychology. Modern psychologists now focus more about the functionalist approach and its underlying cognitive processes.

**Contemporary Perspectives in psychology**: The two perspectives that have had a major impact on modern psychology are biological perspective and sociocultural perspective

**Biological Perspective**

These psychologists focus on the science from a biological perspective. They conduct research on the aspects of the brain that have a role to play in emotion, reasoning, analysis, speaking, etc., these researchers aim to find out the limit to which our psychological features like social and emotional are impacted by hereditary factors. Biological psychologists study the chemical substances, neurotransmitters, hormones and drugs influence the nervous system and consequently the behaviour.
Sociocultural Perspective

This perspective focuses on the idea that we learn our beliefs, attitudes, habits and skills are through social and culture group. How our personalities are shaped also depends on the society and the culture that we grow up in. The three main factors of the sociocultural perspective are: culture, ethnic identity and gender identity.

Culture is defined as the shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs and values that are common to a group of people. Culture is inclusive of several aspects which include language, festivals, superstitions, and cuisine, relationships, etc., an individual learns and absorbs all these aspects from the cultures he or she grows up in.

Apart from these aspects, the sociocultural perspective also depends upon the ethnic identity and gender identity. Ethnic identity is an individual’s identity which is shaped by her or his ethnicity. Every ethnic group around the world follows its own customs, traditions, ceremonies apart from having particularly identifying facial features, having particular beliefs and attitudes.

Gender identity is the personality which is shaped due to a person belonging to a gender: male or female. As children grow up surrounded by parents, siblings, teachers, professional acquaintances and friends, they learn how a male or a female behaves and what the society’s expectations from them.

Schools of Thought in Psychology

There are several schools of thought that have emerged which have sought to explain and understand how human beings think and behave. Each one of these schools of thought has made its own unique contribution to the modern psychology. Each has its own importance and significance. In how we study psychology today. Some of the more important schools of psychology can be mentioned as follows:

- Structuralism
- Functionalism
- Psychoanalysis
- Behaviorism
- Humanism
- Cognitivism
Basic Areas of Psychology

- **Biological Psychology**: This field is concerned with the functions of neurons and the nervous system and how they contribute to our behaviour.

- **Sensation and Perception**: This field is concerned with the way sense organs function and how human beings perceive the world around them through the sense organs.

- **Learning and Memory**: In this field, the way we learn, memorise and recall information, skills and habits are studied.

- **Cognition**: Psychologists in this area study the thinking process, analytical and decision making abilities apart from creativity, imagination, speaking and listening.

- **Motivation and Emotion**: The needs and states that activate, energize and guide behaviour are studied in this area. Our feelings and moods that give colour to our experiences are studied.

- **Goals of Psychology**: The goals or objectives of psychology are several. They tell us what the psychologists are trying to achieve. There are four main goals of psychology: Explain, forecast, understand and influence.

  - **To Explain**: The information or the knowledge which is gained through scientific and empirical research assists to explain or describe the various psychological phenomena clearly. For example, information gathered in a survey on the use of various social media among college students would tell us whether they are in a high risk group of being cyber addicts.

  - **To Forecast**: Psychologists can presage or predict future behaviour also. For example, tests have been prescribed which enable the college authorities to know which applicants will do better in the future.

  - **To Understand**: Behaviour and mental processes are tried to be understood through theory formation. Theory is a tentative description of facts and information and relationship between them.

  - **To Influence**: Psychologists strive to influence the behaviour of person in order to better him or her. After explaining, forecasting and understanding, the next step is influencing people or subjects. For example, a person is counselled to help
them get out of depression. To help students chose right career for themselves.

Branches of Psychology

There are mainly seven branches of psychology.

1. Biological Psychology: It is study of relationship of neurobiological processes and behaviour. The overt actions are a result of the electrical and chemical reactions happening inside the human body. For example, the occurrence of depression is explained in terms of the abnormal changes in the level of neurotransmitters or the chemicals produced in the brain.

2. Experimental Psychology: It is the study done through experimental methods to learn how people learn, remember, process, make decisions and respond to external stimuli.

3. Developmental Psychology: It is study of development of human beings and how it affects behaviour from infancy to growing old.

4. Social and Personality Psychology: Social psychology deals with how people grasp, understand and make sense of their social world and how their values, notions and behaviour are influenced by the society they live in. Personality psychology is concerned with how an individual’s behaviour and thoughts are shaped by their social world.

5. Clinical and Counselling Psychology: The clinical psychologists use psychological principles and theories are applied to diagnose and treat serious emotional and behavioural problems and issues. These illnesses include mental, drug addiction and marital conflicts among others. Counselling psychologists deal with problems which are less serious such as adjustment problems among university and college students.

6. School and Educational Psychology: School psychologists work with children to assess and gauge problems regarding learning and emotional behaviour. Educational psychologists are experts in teaching-learning methods. They conduct research on methods of teaching and assist in training teachers so that they become more effective.

7. Organizational Psychology: These psychologists work with a company or an organization. They help in selecting people who
would prove to be most suitable or right for a particular job profile. They design systems which help and encourage team spirit and build partnerships.

Psychologists in today’s scenario are using more and more objective, empirical methods and instruments to understand, explain, and predict how human being react and behave. The research in psychology is a scientifically structured process. It starts with a hypothesis that is then empirically tested. The science of psychology has two prominently significant areas which are academic psychology and applied psychology.

Academic psychology focuses on the study of various research topics in psychology such as human personality; social behaviour of human beings and human development. These psychologists conduct basic research that aims to broaden our theoretical knowledge and formulate principles.

Applied psychology focuses on the application and use of various psychological principles and theories to solve problems which exist in the everyday world. Examples of applied areas of psychology are forensic, ergonomics and industrial-organizational psychology. Several psychologists are employed as therapists who help patients in conquering their mental, behavioural, and emotional issues.

**Psychology Research Methods:** Modern researchers use and employ several scientific tools such as experiments, correlational studies, longitudinal research, among others to observe, test, explain, and predict behaviour.

**Characteristics of Psychology**

1. **Psychology is the Study of the Mind and Behaviour:**
   Psychology is the study of the mental processes and behaviour. The term psychology comes from the Greek word psyche meaning spirit and the logia meaning “study of.” Psychology is not only linked to biology and philosophy but also to sociology, medicine, linguistics and anthropology.

2. **Psychology uses Scientific Methods:** It is myth that psychology is nothing but “common sense.” Psychology is much deeper than plain common sense. Psychology depends upon proven and tested scientific methods to investigate problems and formulate conclusions. Scientific methods are employed to find out relationships between different variables.
A wide range of techniques are used by psychologists to study how humans think and behave. These techniques include observation, experimentation, case studies, surveys, interviews and questionnaires.

3. **Psychologists follow Several Different Perspectives:** The concepts and questions in psychology can be understood and solved in numerous ways. For example, different psychologists study violent behaviour or emotional intelligence through different perspectives. Some psychologists may focus on how biological factors influence violent behaviour or emotional stability, while other psychologists might look at other factors like culture, family relationships, social pressure and situational variables influencing violence.

4. **Psychology has many Subfields:** There are many different branches of psychology such as counselling, clinical, personality, social, educational psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and social psychology.

5. **Psychology is More than Therapy:** Psychology is not just about a therapist with a notepad taking down pointers while the client or the patient talks. Psychology is much more than that. It encompasses other areas such as teaching, training, research and consulting.

6. **Psychology is All Around Us:** Psychology is not simply an academic science which tests hypotheses and formulates theory. The theories and principles of psychology are all around us. We can observe them in our daily lives in common situations. The advertising and consumer industries rely heavily on principles of psychology. The various appeals that advertisers and marketers use are all derived from psychological phenomena. The new media and the Internet use psychological theories to attract attention, viewership and readership.

7. **Psychology Deals with Both Real-world and Theoretical Issues:** Psychology being a both academic and applied science, enriches and helps human beings in a great way. Psychologists focus on enriching and adding on to the field of psychology as a whole.

8. **Psychology Offers a Wide Range of Career Options:** Psychologists work as counsellors, clinical psychologists,
forensic psychologists, health psychologists and industrial-organizational psychologists.

9. **Psychology Studies both Normal and Abnormal Behaviour:**
Psychology studies both normal and abnormal behaviours. It is a vast, rich and fascinating science with a wide range of practical applications. The students of psychology stand to get richer and greater insights into the human mind and behaviour.

**MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY**

**Definition:** Media in media psychology stands for “mediated experience”. The mediation can happen through all forms of print, electronic and news media. Media psychology is the study of how people perceive, understand, respond and interact in the media saturated world of today. People are not just passive consumers of media but are active participants, producers and distributors of media content as well.

Media psychologists concern themselves with identifying the potentials or benefits and threats of media technology. They strive to maximise the benefits and minimize the threats posed by new media technologies. They conduct research and suggest ways in which the positives of the media are used to enrich democratic and culturally pluralistic societies.

**Objectives:**

Media Psychology’s objectives are:

- To make us understand that experience of media technologies differs by individual, society, culture and context.
- To conduct research to find out the related issues and to propose solutions to those problems. It focuses on both the negative and positive effects of the media. Negative aspects such as violence in the media and false representation of reality as well as an evaluation of the positive aspects such as community building and of other benefits of the media are also done.
- To understand how the media can be used for education, developing skills, building relationships, serving social justice and building the nation.
- To figure out how the interactions among individuals, groups society and technology takes place so that the media can be used in the most positive and productive way possible.
Scope of Media Psychology

Media psychologists work in the fields of advertising, marketing, education and health care. They apply all forms of media for community development, promotion of ethical practices in the media, use of technology for clinical applications, product and brand building among others.

APA (American Psychological Association) have a division dedicated entirely to media psychology. The APA offers training and advice for psychologists focusing on media effects. It also promotes the findings of researchers concerning the psychological aspects of media.

Media psychologists work as occupational psychologists. They offer advice on organizational behaviours and practice. They counsel with human resource departments of media companies.

Media psychology has a specialized role to play where the impact and effect of media on human welfare and community development is concerned. Media psychology is multidisciplinary in nature and borrows from several disciplines like sociology, anthropology, political science, international relations and public administration.

According to researchers, there are twelve main areas of media psychology:

- Performing as experts on different forms of media and writing about the various functions of media.
- Consulting with practitioners of media.
- Researching ways to improve all forms of media.
- Making new technologies related to media more effective and user-friendly.
- Using new technology in media to enhance the practice of clinical psychology.
- Most areas of education or training including delivery by traditional, blended and online methods.
- Developing media standards.
- Working in commercial fields.
- Studying the sociological, behavioral and psychological effects of media.
- Designing the media material for betterment of physically and developmentally backward people.
- Designing the media material for physically and economically backward populations.
- Designing media materials for unprivileged populations.
- Using the media to work with criminals or deviants.

Media psychologists concern themselves with identifying the potentials or benefits and threats of media technology. They strive to maximise the benefits and minimize the threats posed by new media technologies. They conduct research and suggest ways in which the positives of the media are used to enrich democratic and culturally pluralistic societies.

Today’s world is completely saturated with media. There are information technologies present in every sphere of our lives. The media psychologists amalgamate human behavior and cognition with media technologies. Media psychology tries to understand and comprehend the whole relationship with human beings to media and its technologies. It is inclusive of every aspect and component such as content producer, the technologies employed, the user-friendliness of those technologies, the response of the users and their interaction with it.

In the very dynamic field of media psychology, all these elements co-exists symbiotically with each other. The majority of the media psychology research now has spotlight on mass media. Mass media have been a crucial player in how human beings get informed, entertained and educated today. All the three organs, viz., the print, broadcast and the new media (Internet) have indeed created a global village. Various mass media theories have been put forward by researchers and social scientists to comprehend the phenomena and working of the various mass media. Some of the more prominent and influential of these theories are the Mass Society theory (Mass media being powerful and dominant and encountered little resistance from the masses). The Agenda Setting theory (The media don’t tell people what to think, they tell them what to think about), uses and theory (People use various forms of media to gratify and fulfill their needs for knowledge, entertainment and connectivity).

The audience is not an undivided, unthinking, homogenous mass of undifferentiated people anymore. They are discerning, thinking individuals with particular likes and dislikes and have opinions and beliefs of their own. In the hypercompetitive media saturated world today, the practitioners of media must find more innovative, interesting and different technologies and content for this discerning and
knownledgeable audience of today’s times. Media psychologists can help both media practitioners as well as the audience in this kind of a scenario. They can consult with content producers regarding the user-friendliness of the various technologies employed and they can help the audience understand the content better and to encourage them to become content developers themselves by interacting more with media.

This can increase the effectiveness of media manifold and media can serve their eventual goal of betterment of society. People are now involved with the media as producers, consumers and distributors.

Areas in psychology focused upon by media psychologists:

- **Cognitive Psychology:** It focuses on how people process information, analyze it, recall and retrieve information.
- **Developmental Psychology:** The different stages of human development and how it affects the comprehension of media texts and technologies.
- **Sociocultural Psychology:** Focuses on how the social and cultural aspects impact cognition and interpretation.
- **Positive Psychology:** The thrust is on how to make people better both emotionally and behaviorally.

The Duality of the media is most apparent in the current times. The media carries content which the consumers demand and media producers come up with content which they want the audience to consume. Media technologies have important roles to play in almost every sphere of human life such as information dispersal, connectivity, activism, healthcare, advocacy and entertainment. Psychology arms us with tools to understand human behaviour, personality development, social intelligence, self-esteem, emotional stability, persuasion, etc., these tools can be applied to development of media technologies in such a way that they benefit the societies to their fullest.
Psychology and Media: An uneasy relationship?

Psychologists are pursuing new and enriching innovations in media psychology today. Social media, distance education, virtual classrooms, corporate communications, entertainment consulting, consumer behaviour, brand building, marketing, advertising and product placement are all within the wide gambit of media psychology.

Media Psychology is crucial to cinema, which includes film analysis and criticism, media assisted rehabilitation, telecommuting communications, public service, public policy, and political campaigns. Media Psychology also finds application in the field of publishing. Social media has emerged as a central force of the Internet. This explosion of media technologies has brought with a gamut of disorders as well. The new breed of cyber addicts and couch potatoes are a cause of worry to the psychologists. Video games, I-pods and YouTube are some of the applications which have contributed to alterations of the minds of the addicts. At the same time it can be said that media can also be used to negate these issues and used in a positive manner to help the addicts overcome their disorders.

Teledicine, tele-therapy and tele-health are some of the more innovative tools to help those in need. Positive media messages are helpful in improving the understanding the issues of body weight and hypertension to the general public. These messages increase public awareness regarding such issues.

Source: Psychology Today
THE POSITIVE MEDIA EFFECTS

- According to researchers, the Intelligence Quotients of people in general are rising, which is mostly because of media assisted learning and interactivity of the media.
- Gender equality is on the rise. More awareness about the causes are contributed to the media.
- There is clearer and better communication happening across cultures throughout the world.
- Media has helped raise public understanding and awareness of many social, political and economic issues.

THE NEGATIVE MEDIA EFFECTS

- Attention spans of people are on the decline mainly due to the excessive use of stimulating and fast-paced media. Research has established and confirmed the direct proportionality between media stimulation and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).
- The depiction of excessive and mindless violence in media has caused apathy and desensitization to violence. Such depiction of acts of violence in films may cause the viewers to behave violently in real life.
- Existence of media-assisted crimes like identity theft and child pornography.
- Imitation is causing children and adolescents to imitate the images on screen causing disorders like bulimia and anorexia.
- Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) is becoming a common occurrence.

The relationship between psychology and media is said to be an uneasy and a constrained one.

This is Due to Several Factors

- Media psychology is a relatively nascent science. It has been cautious and careful while selecting the fields of inquiry and investigation. The research on study of media effects cannot be so easily performed in a laboratory.
- Psychologists in the academic fields mostly dismiss “media” as trivial and junk. Media is regarded more as a leisure activity.
For them, media is not important enough to be considered for serious study.

- The governments and beaurocracies also consider media as “cultural Disneyland for the weaker mind” (According to the education secretary of Conservative Govt. U.K. 1993)
- The pace of technological innovations and related social changes have been so enormous and overwhelming that psychologists and researchers are not able to keep up with.
- In the 1970s and 80s, a lot of research was conducted on “effects” of television and films. Most of these researches were done because television and films were seen as sources of imagery and content that would spoil the young innocent minds. These researches were mostly driven by problems rather than curiosity and interest. Most research found out a directly proportional relationship between violence in media and aggressive behavior of individuals.

**Research in Media Psychology**

Media includes all forms of mediated communication, interaction and experience. Media psychology is fundamental to the development, design and use of media technologies.

Research in media psychology includes: Interactive media, entertainment, educational media, gaming, social media, business communications, mobile technologies, interface design, user experience and communications strategy.

This research gives us a better and clearer understanding of:

- Mindsets and beliefs of people about technology and its use.
- Digital constructing and sharing content through different media channels.
- Participatory and collaborative media.
- Instant information need gratification through media.
- The use of technology for promotion of positivity such as a sense of self-esteem, positive social behavior and social connectedness.
- Building positive and fulfilling human relationships mediated by technology.
- Tools for learning through all life stages.
• Psychological, perceptual and cognitive aspects of using technology and understanding usability.

• The rapid adoption of media technologies highlights the importance of knowing how, why, and when media can impact, persuade and facilitate behavior.

There are several areas in which media research is being done. Some of them are:

• Issues regarding media ownership which influence the news and advertising.

• Technical concerns such as production techniques and structure of media texts.

• Studies of “effects” of media.

• Audience reception studies regarding media use.

• Surveys of relationship between audience and media.

• Research on media effects.

The media psychologists strive to study and understand better the new and revolutionary media technologies which have a huge influence on individuals and societies as a whole. They tell the world how people from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds use, respond and interact with various media technologies. Media psychology is the most innovative branch of psychology today. It gives us a clearer understanding of how people are affected by the various forms of media technologies at their disposal.

Research in Negative Effects of Media

Concerns regarding negative psychological effects of media are quite well known. The most widely discussed concerns are those regarding the causal relationship between violence in media content and violent aggressive behaviour among consumers of such content. Most of the media research done in the 1960s focused on the negative effects of media. The early studies media psychology dealt with the exploitation of media for propaganda and advertising.

The behaviourist media research was carried out by Albert Bandura in the 1960s. Children were exposed to violent media content in a laboratory setting. Then they were observed while playing with a variety of toys. Bandura and his assistants found that children who were exposed to violence displayed more aggressive and violent behaviour towards the toys than those who were exposed to non-violent content.
Majority of academic research and literature in the early years of advent of electronic media was essentially negative in its characterization of media. The most influential schools of thought in media theory talked about the threats of mass media and its “narcotizing dysfunction” (a media induced state of apathy where people were content to “know” rather than to “do”). Media were considered to be the promoters of junk culture and conventionality in addition to being unscholarly.

The effects research was later criticized because it individualizes media issues and overlooks the bigger social and cultural perspectives. The causal relationship between media and human behaviour cannot be simply studied in a detached state. These criticisms have given rise to new research in media psychology which focuses more on media influence rather than media effects.

**Research Methods used in Media Psychology**

Psychologists conduct research to understand exactly why people think, feel, and behave the way they do. Scientific methods are used for carrying out the research process. As in all scientific researches, bias and distortion of data is reduced to a minimum. Hypotheses is formulated, data is collected and organization and analyses of data is done. Inferences and conclusions are drawn. After this arduous and empirical process a theory is formed.

Psychological research offers immense benefits to the humanity as a whole. It impacts and influences all aspects of lives, such as how children are raised, how to discipline them to raise them as self-respecting and compassionate individuals, to peer pressure, to choosing the correct career for oneself, to how to build self-esteem and get rid of complexes, to how marketers and advertisers package and sell their products, to how to include criminals and terrorists to mend their ways and blend into the mainstream. The list is indeed exhaustive and extensive psychological research is carried out to make the individual and the society better.

**Research Terms**

Scientists use the following terms to describe their research:

- **Variables:** The events, characteristics, behaviors, or conditions that researchers measure and study.

- **Subject or Participant:** An individual person or animal a researcher studies.
● **Sample:** A collection of subjects for a researchers study. Researchers use samples because they cannot study the entire population.

● **Population:** The collection of people or animals from which researchers draw a sample. Researchers study the sample and generalize their results to the population.

**The Purpose of Research**

Psychologists have three main goals when doing research:

- To find ways to measure and describe behavior.
- To understand why, when, and how events occur.
- To apply this knowledge to solving real-world problems.

The 20th century has witnessed a revolution of sorts when it comes to advancements in media technology. The advent of television, digital media and Internet has led to a lot of research being done in the field of media psychology. Most of the media-related contemporary research deals with motivations of audiences guiding their media choices and preferences and effects of exposure to media content on individuals.

Psychologists use the scientific method to conduct their research. The scientific method is a standardized way of making observations, gathering data, forming theories, testing predictions and interpreting results.

Psychological research, like research in other fields, must meet certain criteria in order to be considered scientific. Research must be:

- Replicable
- Falsifiable
- Precise
- Parsimonious

Replicability of research means it can be replicated or repeated by other people. The researcher reports what has been found out as a result of the study. The methods employed are also described in detail by the researcher. If the research methods and tools used are revealed only then can someone else replicate the research. The theory is developed at the end of the research process which began with a hypothesis. A hypothesis is a testable statement which the researcher tests in order to prove it or negate it.
Research must also be falsifiable. This simply means that the theory can be proven wrong by other researchers. Researchers make observations when they are conducting experiments. They compute and record their observations. This data is then organized empirically. The hypothesis must be stated clearly and precisely. Only in this way can the research be replicated. The variables are clearly stated and defined at the beginning. The variable show the exact components which are being observed and measured.

Research also must be parsimonious. Parsimony, essentially, means being thrifty or stingy. In the scientific research arena, it means that the simplest explanations are offered for any observations done in the research. Parsimony is a handy tool to avoid outlandish and exaggerated theories.

Research involves two steps:

- Generating a scientific hypothesis
- Testing the hypothesis.

1. Generating the Hypothesis: It is the first step of any research process. Hypothesis is a testable statement. They are usually derived from theory. Theory is a set of related propositions about a phenomenon. Scientific research means that research methods are unbiased and reliable. A hypothesis is a tentative statement about the relationship between two or more variables. A hypothesis is a specific, testable prediction about what you expect to happen in your study.

For example, a study designed to look at the relationship between class attendance and performance in examination could have a hypothesis that states, “This study is designed to assess the hypothesis that students with minimum 75% attendance will perform better in semester end examination than those who have less attendance”. A hypothesis does not have to be correct. While the hypothesis predicts what the researchers expect to see, the goal of research is to determine whether this hypothesis is right or wrong.

While conducting an experiment, researchers might explore a number of different factors to determine which ones might contribute to the ultimate outcome. In many cases, researchers may find that the results of an experiment do not support the original hypothesis. When writing up these results, the researchers might suggest other options that should be explored in future studies.
Characteristics of a Good Hypothesis

- The hypothesis should be based on the research of a topic.
- The hypothesis must be testable.
- The hypothesis must include independent and dependent variables.

**Difference between Theory and Hypothesis:** A theory is a set of replicable well-established principle that has been developed to explain some area of the natural world. A theory is stated from repeated observation and testing and includes facts, laws, predictions and tested hypotheses that are widely accepted.

A hypothesis is a specific, testable prediction about what you expect to happen in your study. For example, an experiment designed to look at the relationship between attention span and Internet usage could have a hypothesis that states, “It is predicted that students with less hours spent on the Internet usage have better attention spans”.

The differences can be summarized as:

- A theory predicts events in general terms, while a hypothesis makes a specific prediction about a specified set of circumstances.
- A theory has been extensively tested and is generally accepted, while a hypothesis is a speculative guess that has yet to be tested.

2. **Testing the Hypothesis:** The next step is to test that hypothesis. The hypothesis can be tested in two ways: qualitative method or quantitative method.

Psychologists use many different methods for conducting research. Each method has advantages and disadvantages that make it suitable for certain situations and unsuitable for others.

**Descriptive Research Methods:** Case studies, surveys, naturalistic observation, and laboratory observation are examples of descriptive research methods. Using these methods, researchers can describe different events, experiences, or behaviours and establish relationship between them. However, these methods do not enable researchers to determine causes of behaviour.
Data Collection Techniques

Quantitative Techniques: It is a logistic method of data collection. It answers question like how many? Quantitative data collection refers to quantification and measurement. It is objective in nature. The methods of data collection are experimentation, observation, surveys, and case histories.

1. Experimentation: Media effects research used almost wholly on experimental methods for several years. Experiments are done both in the laboratories as well as in the field. Experiments are used to test hypotheses about cause and effect. The researcher controls the conditions in the laboratory and takes measurements. The causal relationship between variables is then found out. Participants are divided into two groups: control group and experimental group. In the experimental group the hypothesized cause is present whereas in control group the hypothesized cause is absent.

For e.g., experimental research has been used to study the effects of thin body images in the various media on young girls, the effects of violence depicted in the media on children.

In such experiments, experiment group is composed of participants who are shown film clips or printed material containing the hypothesized cause (violence, images of thin people) while the control group is composed of participants who are shown films or printed material in which the hypothesized cause is absent. All the participants are tested on various criteria and measures like change in attitude, behaviour, physiology, etc., both before and after the screening of such media content. Then a statistical test is used to find out whether such content has brought in a noticeable change in the experimental group. If there has been a change then it is compared with the control group. If there has been a considerable difference in the data of the two groups then the researchers claim experimental approval for their hypotheses.

2. Survey Methods: Surveys are done using a questionnaire which contains some basic questions regarding demographic (age, sex, income levels, ethnicity, numbers of hours spent watching TV or surfing the Internet in a day, number of magazines bought etc.) and psychographics (open-ended questions about media preferences and experiences).

Qualitative Technique: This is a dialectic method of data collection. It answers questions like what and why. Qualitative data collection refers to meanings, characteristics, metaphors and symbols of concepts. It is subjective in nature. It is used to develop theory. This
type of research is exploratory in nature. The techniques used in qualitative method are in-depth interviews and focus groups. Interviews are done on one-on-one basis to gather information on an individual’s media choices, uses and experiences. Focus groups are discussions held between 8-10 people with moderator present. The topics for discussion about media can be the role media plays in their daily lives, their concerns and expectations. The topics can range from soap operas to children’s shows. Such exploratory techniques give an insight to the researcher and these insights are used to generate ideas.

**Measuring correlation:** The correlation coefficient is a value that measures the degree of association between two variables. E.g., older people watch more television than younger people (positive correlation between age and TV viewing), younger people using more internet than older people (negative correlation between age and Internet use).

A correlation coefficient thus measures the strength of the relationship between two variables. A correlation coefficient is always a number between –1 and +1. The sign (+ or –) of a correlation coefficient indicates the nature of the relationship between the variables. A positive correlation (+) refers to an increase in the variable causing an increase in the other variable as well. It thus refers to a relationship of direct proportionality between the two variables.

A negative correlation (–) means that when one variable increases, the other one decreases. This indicates to a relationship of inverse proportionality between the two variables. The higher the correlation coefficient, the stronger the correlation. A +0.9 or a –0.9 indicates a very strong correlation; a +0.1 or a –0.1 indicates a very weak correlation. A correlation of 0 means that no relationship exists between two variables. Common correlational research methods include case studies, surveys, naturalistic observation, and laboratory observation.

**Case studies:** In a case study, a researcher studies a subject in depth. The researcher collects data about the subject through interviews, direct observation, psychological testing, or examination of documents and records about the subject.

**Survey methods:** Surveys are done using a questionnaire which contains some basic questions regarding demographic (age, sex, income levels, ethnicity, numbers of hours spent watching TV or surfing the Internet in a day, number of magazines bought etc.) and psychographics (open ended questions about media preferences and experiences).
Survey is a way of getting information about a specific type of behaviour, experience, or event. When using this method, researchers give people questionnaires or interview them to obtain information when subjects fill out surveys about themselves, the data is called self-report data. Self-report data can be inaccurate due to following reasons:

- The subject lies purposely
- The subject exaggerates or understates the answer to a question.
- The subject doesn’t understand the questions the survey asks
- The subject fails to remember or recollect the experience he or she is asked to describe.

**Naturalistic observation:** When using naturalistic observation, researchers collect information about subjects by observing them unobtrusively, without interfering with them in any way. Researchers create a record of events and note relationships among those events. In this kind of observation, the researcher must operate incognito and should not become visible or noticeable to the subjects.

**Laboratory observation:** In this kind of observation, researchers perform laboratory observation in a laboratory rather than in a real setting. In laboratory observation, researchers can use modern, state of the art equipment to measure and record subjects’ behaviour. In this kind of observation the researcher has a much larger control over the environment.

**Psychological tests:** Researchers use psychological tests to collect information about personality traits, emotional states, aptitudes, interests, abilities, values, or behaviours. These tests are standardized. This means that the researchers design uniform standard procedures for testing and scoring. During the scoring the test results are compared to norms which are established performance indicators on any aspect. A well-constructed standardized test can evaluate subjects better than self-report data.

**Reliability:** A test has good reliability if it produces the same result when researchers administer it to the same group of people at different times. Researchers find out about a test’s reliability by testing a group of people and then giving the test again to the same group of people sometime later. A test which is reliable will have approximately similar results at both the times. Psychologists also use alternate-forms reliability to determine a test’s reliability. They measure alternate-forms reliability by giving one version of a test to a group of people and then
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The reliability of a test is determined by giving another version of the same test to the same group of people. A reliable test will give almost the same results irrespective of the version of the test used.

**Validity:** A test is considered valid if it actually measures the quality it claims to measure. There are two types of validity:

- **Content validity** is a test’s ability to measure all the important aspects of the characteristic being measured.
- **Criterion validity** is fulfilled when a test not only measures a trait but also predicts another criterion of that trait.

**Experiments**

Experiments give us information about cause and effect relationships and links between variables. In the experimental method, a particular variable is changed, manipulated or altered under controlled conditions while the researcher observes the causal changes in another variable. The independent variable is manipulated while the resultant changes in the dependent variable are observed.

**Experimental and control groups:** The researcher distributes the subjects under observation into two groups. These are called control group and experimental group. Both the groups are treated the same but there is one significant difference between them. In the experiment group, one independent variable is manipulated while in the control group, it is not manipulated. The researcher then compares both the groups to find out how much the manipulation of the independent variable affects the dependent variable.

Often, subjects in the control group receive a placebo drug or treatment, while subjects in the experimental group receive the real drug or treatment. This helps researchers to figure out what causes the observed effect: the real drug or treatment, or the subjects’ expectation that they will be affected.

**Extraneous variables:** It is not possible for the subjects to be exactly identical in both the groups. There are always some differences present between the subjects. In order to overcome this, the researchers make groups with subjects that are similar in all respects that could potentially influence the dependent variable. Variables other than the independent variable that could affect the dependent variable are called extraneous variables.

Another way to overcome the extraneous variables is the use of random assignment. When researchers use random assignment, they
create experimental and control groups in a way that gives subjects an equal chance of being placed in either group. This assures that the groups will be similar to each other.

Disadvantages of Experiments

- One main disadvantage of experiments is that they generally cannot duplicate the real world settings. While conducting an experiment, researchers try to control variables for demonstrating clear causal links. While trying to do this, researchers must simplify an event or a situation, which often makes the situation artificial and it does not remain real any more.

- Another major limitation to experiments is that they can’t be applied to study everything. Sometimes researchers can’t control variables enough to use an experiment, or they find that doing an experiment would be unethical—that is, it would be painful or harmful in some way to the subjects being studied.

Bias in research: Bias means the results are inaccurate because a variable has been distorted. There are three main kinds of biases which are: sampling bias, subject bias, and experimenter bias.

- Sampling bias: The bias in sampling occurs when the sample studied in an experiment is not the correct representative of the population the researcher wants to study about.

- Subject bias: The subjects which the researcher has chosen or selected expectations can affect and alter the subjects’ behavior which results in subject bias.

- Experimenter bias: Experimenter bias occurs when researchers’ own personal preferences or expectations influence the readings and measurements and subsequently, the results of the research.

A method called the double-blind procedure can help experimenters prevent this bias from occurring. In a double-blind procedure, neither the experimenter nor the subject knows which subjects come from the experimental group and which come from the control group.

Ethics in Research

Several times in the past, the researchers, have done experiments and studies. For example, in one famous experiment, psychologist
Stanley Milgram made his subjects believe that they were giving painful electric shocks to other people. According to a school of psychologists this experiment is not ethical since it caused the subjects varying degrees of emotional and mental uneasiness and discomfort.

Nowadays norms have been laid out by statutory bodies which the researchers must follow while conducting any kind of research. The most important consideration is that the human and animal subject under study should not face any harm or discomfort during the research process.

Ethics are a set of moral values which guide people about the right and the wrong. The American Psychological Association (APA) requires all its members to adhere to its code of ethics, which applies to the treatment of both humans and animals.

**Research involving human beings as subjects:** Before beginning any research the researchers must inform clearly to subjects about the research being carried out. Subjects should give an informed consent to researchers. It means that the subjects should know about the research and that they are not under any coercion or force to participate in it. They must voluntarily agree to be a part of the research.

Researchers are ethically obliged to not cause any kind of physical or mental distress to their subjects. Subjects should be informed prior to the experiment about their role in the study. Subjects must be allowed to withdraw from the experiment at any point of time or decide not to participate in the research any more. The researcher must respect the wishes of the participants. The researcher should also protect the privacy and identity of the subjects. If they want anonymity, then the researcher must make sure the subjects remain anonymous.

In case, the researcher decides that certain degree is necessary for the research to be authentic and valid, then it is considered ethical but only with certain considerations such as:

The research would prove to be valuable in terms of benefitting the society at large and offer precious insight. It would be not be possible for the researcher to conduct the study without resorting to deception. The subjects will be told about the truth later on the methods employed will be disclosed completely.

**Research with animal subjects:** Even though most psychological research involves human subjects, some psychologists study animal
subjects instead of or in addition to humans. Research with animal subjects has helped psychologists do the following:

- To learn more information about the behavior of animal species.
- To discover ways to solve human problems and issues.
- To research issues which are not possible to be studied using human subjects for practical or ethical reasons.
- To refine theories about human behavior.
- To promote human welfare.

Animal activists question the ethics of animal research because sometimes it can involve procedures such as deprivation, pain, surgery, and euthanasia. Psychologists have ethical obligations to treat animal subjects humanely and to do research on animals only when the benefits of the research are clear.

Animal activists offer three arguments against using animals as research subjects:

Animals should have the same rights as humans, lawmakers and society should enact safeguards to protect the safety and welfare of animals, Researchers should not put the well-being of humans above the well-being of animals

**Applied Research in Psychology**

Applied research in psychology includes scientific empirical study aimed to find the solutions to problems which exist in real life. These include illnesses, human resources in organizations, teaching, learning, etc.

A few instances where applied research in psychology is used are:

- To find out the most effective way to reduce anxiety.
- To find out which ways are the best to motivate workers people at an organization.
- To find out the most user-friendly media technologies.
- To find out which strategies can be employed in order to raise children so that they display positive social behavior.

All the above examples are about issues which are relevant to the real world. They carry practical and useful implications if well designed and well-constructed. These applications go beyond the basic theoretical research of theory formation and focus on real life concerns.
Even though both applied and academic research are closely linked to each other, they both have their usefulness in the science of psychology. Without a concrete theory there can’t be any application of it. Thus, they both have a mutually symbiotic relationship with each other.

**Observations:** Applied research is all about investigation of real life problems. The researchers working in applied research are focused on the external validity of their studies. This means that they attempt to observe behaviours that can be applied to real life situations. This is crucial and integral to their studies because then the results and findings are applied to the problems and issues of individuals who have not participated in the research or to the individuals in the society at large. External validity is also a consideration in basic research but in some cases can be less important that it is in applied research.

Hospitals and clinics may need help in addressing problems that relate to preparing patients and their families for major surgery or working with those who have experienced a specific type of trauma. Business and industry may need assistance on personnel selection for given positions “on the line” or in upper-level management. A given industry may need to determine how to most effectively design a work space within a factory or the controls within an airplane cockpit to minimize fatigue and maximize performance efficiency. All of these and related questions require the knowledge, expertise, and training of applied psychologists and applied research.

**Consumers of Psychology Research**

Mass media organs such as journals and publications, radio and television regularly carry news reports and articles about psychology researches and studies being done in all parts of the world. Magazines and newspapers are filled with self-help articles. There are numerous talk shows on television with a psychological bent.

What are the ways of determining the credibility of such news reports and articles? One must be able to separate the chaff from wheat and identify the trustworthy genuine researches being carried out.

1. **The source should be considered:** One must seek the original source of information. The research studies which are published in professional renowned psychological journals are trustworthy. These have gone through a rigorous examination process and only after authentication have these been published. The research are usually backed by institutions such as schools,
hospitals and other organizations. In the peer reviewed journals, the research study and the tools employed are thoroughly investigated and checked by psychologists skilled in research methods and statistics before the study goes for publication. Original research also reveals the key elements and findings of the study in its entirety. There are no gaps or loopholes in the study which leave no room for confusion or misinterpretation by the end-user.

2. **Be sceptical of sensational or exaggerated findings:** When one goes through any kind of research study, one must be sceptical of the outlandish claims made by the researchers. Some findings may be difficult to believe given their sensational, shocking and unbelievable nature. Such fraudulent and exaggerated research only aims at causing sensation and garnering attention. Reporters and writers generally tend to emphasize on and focus on some elements of study while ignoring and not paying attention to certain other elements which are also quite important to the study.

3. **The research methods must be evaluated judiciously:** In order to judiciously consume psychological research and derive maximum benefit from it one must understand and comprehend the basic premises of research methods. Elements such as operational definitions, random sampling and research design are important for understanding the final results of a study. For example, a particular study may only focus on specific individuals within a population or it may consider only one aspect of a particular topic. Both of these factors can play a role in what the findings mean to the general population and how the results can be applied to understanding psychological concepts.

4. **Anecdotes do not mean data:** One must be wary of news and reports that depend entirely on anecdotal incidents and stories to support their claims. Empirical scientific research makes use of methods like probability and non-probability sampling and other research methods to make sure that the conclusions and findings of a study can be applied to the general population at large as well.

5. **Consider the financiers of the research:** While evaluating any psychological research, the fund providers must also be considered and looked into. Funding may have come from any
source like the government, NGOs or corporations. Be particularly sceptic and do not trust easily if the research seems to support the agenda or is apparently pushing for a change from an organization.

6. **Understand that correlation does not mean causation:**
Several widely read reports of psychological research hastily draw conclusions and make statements regarding a cause and effect relationship between variables. Even if there is a relationship between the two variables, it doesn’t translate into a cause and effect relationship. There should be a clear mention of researchers having discovered a relation between the factors or having identified a link between them.

The media saturated environment has publications and online sources full of all kinds of information regarding latest psychological studies and researches. It is always better to read the original study done by the researchers than the summary or a report of it in any other publication written by a reporter who interpret it in their own way.