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Mass media and its influence on society

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In the last five decades or so, the media and its influence on the society, has grown exponentially with the advance of technology. First came the telegraph and the post, then the radio, the newspaper, magazines, television and now internet and the new media including palmtops, cell phones etc. There are positive and negative influences of mass media, which we must understand as a responsible member of a society.

Before discussing the influence of mass media on society it is imperative to explain the three basic functions of mass media; they are providing news/information, entertainment and education. The first and foremost function of the media in society is to provide news and information to the masses, that is the present era is some time ago as the information age as we know it. People need news/information for various reasons, on one hand it can be used to socialize and on the other to make decisions and formulate opinions. Entertainment should be the other function of the media where it is mostly used to amuse the masses in the present day hectic environment. Informing the masses about their rights, moral, social and religious obligations is another important function of mass media, which should be given emphasis.

In the present era of globalization, it is the duty of people in the society to stay connected to the world and do our daily duties like work, entertainment,

health care, education, socialization, traveling and anything else that we have to do. A common urban person usually wakes up in the morning checks the TV news or newspaper, goes to work, makes a few phone calls, eats with their family or peers when possible and makes his decisions based on the information that he has either from their co workers, TV news, friends, family, financial reports, etc. we need to be conscious of the reality that most of our decisions, beliefs and values are based on what we know for a fact, our assumptions and our own experience. In our work we usually know what we have to do, based on our experience and studies, however on our routine life and house hold chores we mostly rely on the mass media to get the current news and facts about what is important and what we should be aware of.

We have put our trust on the media as an authority to give us news, entertainment and education. However, the influence of mass media on our kids, teenagers and society is so big that we should know how it really works. The media makes billions of dollars with the advertising they sell and that we are exposed to, every single moment. We buy what we are told to buy by the media. After seeing thousands of advertisements we make our buying decisions based on what we saw on TV, newspapers or magazines. These are the effects of mass media especially in teenagers, they buy what they see on TV, what their favourite celebrity advertise and what is acceptable by society based on the fashion that the media has imposed on.

There are some positive and negative influences in young people of our society due to these ad campaigns in the media. Here is a positive influence example, if there is a quiz show on education that is getting a lot of attention by the media and gains popularity among your friends and society, you will more likely want to actively participate and watch these quiz shows. These activities are good for the society and will promote literary activities in the youth. However a negative influence in teenagers is the use of guns and ammunition by celebrity movie stars, the constant exposure of which would seduce the teen to replicate the same behavior in the real life. When we watch TV or an action movie we usually see many images of violence and people hurting others.

The problem with this is that it can become traumatic especially in our children as they see it more and more. Our kids that are starting to grow and are shaping their personality values and beliefs can become aggressive or they can lose a sense of distinction between reality and fiction.

Another problem is that real war is used as a form of entertainment by the media, we should make our kids and teen aware that war is not a form of entertainment and that there is no win or lose like in video games, in real war everyone lose.


Teens, youngsters are in a stage of life where they want to be accepted by their peers, they want to be loved and be successful. The media creates the ideal image of beautiful men and women with all the ingredients of a successful person, you

can see it in movies and TV. It's a subliminal way to persuade the masses that if you want to be successful and look like them then you have to buy that particular brand or product. Another negative influence in teenagers, especially in the USA, that has grown over the last years is obesity. There are millions of adolescents fighting obesity, but at the same time they are exposed to thousands of advertisements of junk food, while the ideal image of a successful person is told to be thin and wealthy.

The media has a huge impact on society in shaping the public opinion of the masses. They can form or modify the public opinion in different ways depending of what is the objective. For example, Pakistani media influenced the public opinion against the Taliban in Swat by repeated telecast of a video clip showing whipping of a woman by a Taliban. Before that the public opinion over the military action against the Taliban in Swat was divided, but repeated telecast of this short video clip changed the public opinion overnight in the favour of the government to take action.

Other ways to influence are with polls and trends, especially in political campaigns.

The candidates that can pay for more TV and media exposure have more influence on public opinion and thus can receive more votes. Finally, the impact of the mass media needs to be monitored; so that it can be determined what kind of and how much impact the media has on people and society and what are its positive and negative influences especially on the youth.


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