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RESEARCH PAPER

Role of Breaking News in Creating Anxiety among TV Viewers in Lahore: An Analysis of Cultivation Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study is an effort to understand the effects of constant exposure to television breaking news on the state of anxiety among the viewers in Lahore. The research undergoes the Cultivation Theory, which explores how a rise in protracted exposure to unexpected and tense news contributes to psychological fragility. Crises such as political unrest, violence, and disasters are a part of the breaking news, which may increase panic and ambiguity among people. A survey was also done on 400 regular TV news watchers ages 20-45 and quantitatively. Spss was used to analyse data, with the aid of Chi-square tests to evaluate the correlation between the consumption of breaking news and the level of anxiety. Results indicate that there is a positive significant correlation between repeated exposure to breaking news and anxiety. The theoretical argument that long-term media use influences both the emotional conditions and the threat perception was supported by the heavy viewers which reported more anxiety compared to moderate and light viewers. Encourage responsible journalism, diminish sensationalism, enhance media literacy training and offer mental health support and awareness programmes to enable the viewer process news information critically as well as dealing with anxiety.

| **Keywords:** | Breaking News, Anxiety, TV Viewers, Cultivation, Lahore Population |

Introduction

The influence that breaking news has on the television is difficult to overestimate in the times of rapid information distribution. It is also possible that a person becomes more anxious about the world by watching a lot of breaking news on TV. Cultivation theory of Gerbner et al. (1986) holds that when one watches much of something on TV, then it may affect the way we perceive the world. In the instance of breaking news, the fast and sharp news may be causing us to get even more frightened and apprehensive over things.

The effect of Breaking News on mental health may be considerable particularly in areas of the region that are directly impacted by the News. Lahore is a high population city and as such, there are high chances of the city having a high level of people affected by Breaking News and whose mental health may be greatly impacted by breaking news. According to Ahsan (2014), the media has the power to evoke powerful emotions like fear and rage. They can also arouse milder feelings like grief, resentment, and anxiety.

People can be so scared and nervous about hearing about such things as terrorist attacks, natural disasters or political unrest. The same thing happens when the news continues to discuss these occurrences continuously, this may exacerbate those feelings further and may lead to symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Anxiety Disorders. As Television offers a comparatively small number of options to an otherwise unlimited range of interests and publics, argue Gerbner and colleagues. With commercial imperative, most of its programming, as Gerbner et al. (1986) point out, is intended to be viewed by practically everyone, in a rather nonselective manner.

People can be scared, anxious, or traumatized about news stories of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, or political instabilities. Holman and Silver (2019) state that these feelings could be accelerated by the continuous media coverage of such incidents and result in the development of symptoms of anxiety disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Considering the impact of social media and the Internet on mental health is also necessary. The information spreads at incredibly high rates on these sites, and there is an opportunity to observe various perspectives and opinions regarding the same event. This may leave people bewildered, frustrated and unable to do anything about it.

The impact of breaking news on the mental state of individuals in Lahore has to be dealt with. In order to reduce the harmful consequences of the breaking news, it may be beneficial to educate the population on effective coping skills, offer mental health options, and ensure safe environments of open communication and support.

Literature Review

Breaking news

In Pakistan where political instability, terrorism and other serious issues are the norm, it is believed that news channels are the channels which are most watched in the majority of households. Breaking news is very effective in stimulating the curiosity of readers. Sensational news printing is not a modern fashion, this has been the order of the day in society and some types of magazine. Beisecker et al. (2022) explain that attention-grabbing breaking news boosts traffic and revenue on the advertisements that are displayed alongside the story.

According to Lazar (2021), social media and internet news sources focus on attention- grabbing headlines in the form of breaking news in a world where consumers receive too much information and do not have time and patience to read and watch in-depth news. By implication, therefore, the influence of dramatic headline in a news piece tends to overpower the content of the stories or the credibility of the source.

Visentin et al. (2019) state that eye-catching breaking news titles are written in ways that attract the readers to pay attention and elicit as many reactions as possible. This is a strategy that will make these headlines appear in the feed shows of a very large number of people, which ensures prompt sharing across all media channels. Therefore, the copy is often not scrutinized in order to make it right, and the headline alone makes a permanent impact on the reader.

According to Vettehen and Kleemans (2018), breaking news can help to attract the audience and keep them engaged with the news as long as possible. News channels usually use sensational messages to gain viewers. One should bear in mind, however, that not all people find breaking news to be successful as every viewer features individual traits, which influence its effect.

Anxiety

Bad news is more preferred to watch compared to the positive one. It sells more copies of sensational news as compared to any other section of the news. The images one sees on the news on the electronic media remain in their minds and affect their mental health heavily. The psychological impact also appears to appeal to people of every age. Children respond to TV during a time when they are unable to distinguish between reality and imagination and may perceive violence as commonplace (Luo, Mohamed, & Rosenheck, 2018).

On the one hand, there is comprehensive literature on the psychological effects of media and breaking news, in particular, but the research on the role of breaking news in the development of anxiety in Lahore is scarce. Nevertheless, similar research done in the Western setting has useful information. An example is a study by Smith et al, (2018), which provided a positive relationship between the exposure to breaking news and the level of anxiety among a sample of American viewers. These results present the problem of the fact that the phenomenon should be explored with a careful focus in the cultural framework of Lahore.

Sharma and Gupta (2017) claimed that in this globalized world, the media plays a significant role in the lives of all people. It is also necessary to communicate the point in a short span to a large and diverse audience, which is scattered all over the room. To be more exact, mass media has become an inseparable part of the audience life and one of the main determinants of many aspects of the life of an individual.

Mental Health

Mental illnesses also referred to as mental disorders are mental aberrations which lead to persistent behavioral patterns which greatly influence the day to day endeavors of a person. Wichmann, Kirschbaum, Boehme, and Petrowski (2017) also list anxiety, irritability, chronic headaches, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) under it.

As Hassan et al. (2014) state, news outlets have recently become a regular bearer of violent acts, instances of terrorism, and speculation, as to the reasons behind such acts, and have become inundated with increasingly reiterated views regarding violent acts.

According to Westerman *et al.* 2014, Consumers are drawn to sensational news at times due to their curiosity, employing heuristics to assess the credibility of the information. This makes the evaluations of credibility of news more important than the content.

A related research was conducted in Pakistan to investigate the impact of the news on the adult population of Karachi in terms of their mental health. According to the cross-sectional study involving 400 people, it was discovered that a higher percentage of 68.3% of the people depend on the TV to update them on news and that 43.3% feel stressed out after exposing themselves to the media. Through the Psychological Stress Scale (PSS) 72 percent of the sample had moderate stress levels, 19.8 percent had low levels of stress, and 8.3 percent had high levels of stress. Therefore, this study proved the negative impact of news on the mental health of viewers on TV (Daredia, 2013).

Those who suffered unpleasant psychological effects tend to have long-lasting consequences on children and the youth, and when the elderly suffer, their depression tends to deteriorate. Bad news attracts more people as compared to good news. When one is viewing the news one might go on thinking about those ideas since they have a way of staying in the mind. It adversely affects the daily activities of people when they start seeing situations and things negatively.

This tension generated in the above-described manner affects all other spheres of life. Besides, tension, the images on TV cause a long-term psychological effect (Daredia, 2013).

Crime news is said to affect mental health of the viewers whether they watch it frequently or not (Morrall et al., 2010). That is, psychiatric ailments can be gained by crime news consumers.

The illness known as a mental disorder includes abnormal thoughts and behaviors. The simplest way to understand mental disorders is to categorize them as abnormal, dysfunctional, or distressing thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or interior experiences (Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007).

Cultivation

The intensity and unpredictability of breaking news may leave the viewers more emotionally aroused and uneasy (Grabe and Drew, 2007) and may entail anything, such as violent crimes, or even natural calamities.

Nevertheless, Huesmann and Taylor (2006) argued that the anxiety factors of the audience have been attributed to the breaking news which is characterized by its timeliness and often unpleasant content. Previous studies indicate that stressful or violent experiences on the media may increase stress and anxiety.

According to Signorielli (2005) in her book Violence in the media, television has a unique gift to tell stories in a convincing way and its growing commercialization is a matter of concern. There have been countless researches conducted to establish the impact of media broadcasting real-life violence on the psycho-emotional state of the audience.

One of such studies was conducted by Davey and Wendy (1997) in Britain to understand the connection between viewers emotions and television newscasts and how the two correlated with personal issues of viewers. In one of the experiments, it was demonstrated that three different viewing groups were presented with exactly edited newscasts, which had favorable, neutral, or negative news content. The study results revealed the findings that individuals who viewed negative news reports experienced elevated anxiety and depression as compared to other individuals, and that they were also characterised by a strong tendency to exaggerate their acute fears.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses to be supported by this study are the following:

H1: Publication of news in the media raises the anxiety of the TV Viewers in Lahore.

H2: The idea of light, and heavy viewers produces the variation of the effect of breaking news.

Theoretical Framework

The cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner is a theoretical framework used to conduct the exploration of the impacts of breaking news on the anxiety of TV viewers in Lahore. Signorielli and Gerbner (1980) argued that there is the cultivation theory which states that the attitudes and perception of people are influenced by repeated exposure to the media contents which also influences how individuals perceive reality.

Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner Cultivation Theory was used as a guide to reach the consequences of the study. This study has the potential of becoming a new theory in case it is guided by this theory. According to cultivation theory, television, being a widely used and powerful medium, has a big impact on how people see the world. According to the hypothesis, watching television over extended periods of time helps a society develop common attitudes and views. For instance, Morgan and Shanahan's (2010) study showed a cultivation effect,

whereby exposure to media content about crime extended was linked to a greater fear of crime.

Shanahan and Morgan (1999) argue that empirical data regarding the use of cultivation theory in media effects, such as anxiety, is overwhelming. It has been shown that there is a positive correlation between media intake, which is high, and anxiousness.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) state that George Gerbner's cultivation theory highlights the long-term and cumulative impacts of media exposure on people's views of social reality. The cultivation differential refers to the difference in beliefs and attitudes between heavy and light viewers of television. Heavy viewers are more wont to embrace the reality on television. Gerbner coined the term mean world syndrome when referring to the propensity of heavy television viewers to assume that there is more violence and danger in the world than there is in reality. This perception can be a contributor to more anxiety and fear.

As per this theory, the media develops attitudes and beliefs in the society that already exists. Through promotion and perpetuation of such values among its members, the media assists in cohesion of a culture among its members. Researcher employed Cultivation theory because of the title of the research: Role of Breaking News in Creating Anxiety among TV Viewers in Lahore: An Analysis of Cultivation Theory. The principal cause of the process of the adoption of this theory is to nurture the mind of TV Viewers of Lahore. Since Television, as the cultivation theorists believe, has minuscule, sluggish and indirect long term effects that is both cumulative and significant. The excessive television watching is said to produce more of the perceptions that are rather aligned to the imaginary world than reality.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Beginning with the work of Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory highly relates to this study as it explains the view that emotions, including anxiety, are emanating from the evaluation undertaken by individuals as pertaining relevance to their wellbeing. According to the theory, the feelings emanate from two major kinds of appraisals, to wit:

Primary Appraisal: Evaluation of whether an event is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. Breaking news will, in most instances, be appraised as a stressor threatening either personal or societal well-being since most breaking news relates to disasters, political crises, or violence.

Secondary Appraisal: Evaluation of the resources and alternatives available to deal with the perceived threat. Viewers who experience frequent breaking news may feel helpless or inadequate to handle the situations brought before them, thus increasing anxiety.

According to Holman and Silver (2019) research underscores the powerful impact of framing in breaking news, especially during catastrophic events. This framing significantly shapes viewers' appraisals, leading to increased emotional arousal and heightened anxiety (Holman & Silver, 2019).

While (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall) 2011 quoted that the vivid and negative tone of news content aligns with the primary appraisal stage in Cognitive Appraisal Theory. At this stage, viewers often interpret such news as threatening, which can exacerbate feelings of anxiety (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2011).

Material and Methods

The study adopt quantitative research method**.** The study was conducted among television viewers aged 20–45 in Lahore, Pakistan. A non-clinical sample of 400 respondents (male and female) was selected using purposive sampling, as the study required individuals who regularly watch TV news. The sample size was based on the WHO sample estimation formula, where the minimum required participants were 387; however, 400 respondents were included to ensure reliability.

Research Instrument

Data was collected through the MHI-38 (Mental Health Inventory) developed by Veit and Ware (1983), a standardized self-administered questionnaire used to assess psychological well-being in both clinical and non-clinical populations. Additional closed-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree) were used to measure viewing patterns and anxiety levels.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual TV viewer, as responses were collected from each participant regarding their media exposure and emotional experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed in person across different localities in Lahore to ensure diversity. All 400 questionnaires were returned completed, resulting in a 100% response rate. Data was analyzed using SPSS, which included descriptive statistics and inferential tests. Microsoft Excel and Word were used for tables, charts, and presentation of results.

Results and Discussion

Reliability and Validity Test

Table 1
Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.769	17

Here, Cronbach's Alpha = .769 (out of 15 questions in the survey)

According to the results, a certain set of values such as Pearson correlation or correlation value between of the item with a total score was a level of significance of 5% but N is the sum of the survey respondents was 400. The value of R is over 0.05 that is why it is possible to conclude that the items was valid.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 2
Hypothesis 1 testing

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.805ᵃ	2	<.001

Chi-Square calculated value = 22.80, p- value = .001

The researcher used Chi-Square test in table 2 in order to be aware of the level of significance of the hypothesis that Breaking news on media raises the level of anxiety level among TV Viewers in Lahore. Chi-Square test was mostly used to be aware of the relationship or association between two variables. In this respect, therefore, the Chi-Square test was used to understand, whether the variables are related, or not, the variable here

being (p<.05) so, the hypothesis was accepted by the results in the table; thus the Breaking news on media contributes to the level of anxiety among the TV Viewers in Lahore.

Table 3
Hypothesis 2 testing

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Watch News Channels	1.17	.376
No. of Hours watch TV Channels	2.16	1.014
Watch Breaking News	2.18	1.021
Breaking News impact on behaviors	2.23	.993
Nervous or jumpy with excitement or unexpected situation	2.68	1.352
Nervous person	2.89	1.305
Felt tense or high strung	2.92	1.215
Hands or body shake	3.27	1.412
Feel nervousness, or your nerves,	3.06	1.282
Felt restless, fidgety or impatient	2.90	1.302
Upset or flustered	2.92	1.342
Anxious or worried	2.84	1.225
Trying to calm down	2.98	1.306

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables including mean and standard deviation. The first variable is "watch news channels", mean value of this variable is 1.17 and the standard deviation is .376. The next variable is "No. of Hours watch TV Channels", mean value of this variable is 2.16 and the standard deviation is 1.014. The next variable is "Watch Breaking News", mean value of this variable is 2.18 and the standard deviation is 1.021. The next variable is "Breaking News impact on behaviors", mean value of this variable is 2.23 and the standard deviation is .993. The second variable is Nervous or jumpy with excitement or unexpected situation and the mean value of the variable is 2.68 and the standard deviation is 1.352. The second variable is the "Nervous person, mean value of this variable is 2.89 and the standard deviation is 1.305. The second variable is "Felt tense or high strung so the mean of this variable is 2.92, the standard deviation of this variable is 1.215. The second variable is called Hands or body shake with the mean value of the variable being 3.27 and the standard deviation being 1.412. The second variable is the variable "Feel nervousness, or your nerves, the mean of the variable is 3.06 and the standard deviation of the variable is 1.282. The second variable is the one called Felt restless, fidgety or impatient which has the mean value of 2.90 and the standard deviation of the variable is 1.302. The second variable is that of Upset or flustered the mean value of this variable is 2.92 and the standard deviation is 1.342. The second variable is Anxious or worried, the value of mean of this variable is 2.84 and the standard deviation is 1.225. The second variable is Trying to calm down and the mean of this variable 2.98 and the standard deviation is 1.306.

Table 0
t-test for H2 testing

Variable	Test Value	$t(251)$	p	Mean Difference	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Effects	0	63.91	< .001	27.68	26.83 – 28.53
Hours of TV Watching	0	63.09	< .001	1.74	1.69 – 1.80

The coding of daily television viewing (1 = light viewers; 2 = heavy viewers) allows meaningful interpretation of the results. The mean viewing score of 1.74 indicates that the majority of respondents fall into the heavy viewer category, suggesting that most participants watch four or more hours of television daily. The one-sample t-test confirms that this mean is significantly different from the test value, establishing a strong pattern of high television consumption within the sample.

The "Effects" variable also shows a high mean score (27.67), with a highly significant t-value, demonstrating that breaking news content exerts a strong and consistent influence on respondents. Although both variables show significant and meaningful results, the one-

sample t-test does not evaluate differences between heavy and light viewers. Therefore, these findings do not directly confirm the hypothesis that heavy viewers and light viewers differ in their reactions to breaking news. A comparative analysis between the two categories is required to test the hypothesis.

Conclusion

In the present case, the researcher has attempted to determine the effects of the breaking news that causes anxiety to the TV viewers in Lahore. The level of anxiety among the heavy, medium and light viewers depending on how they consume breaking news. The conceptual framework and hypothesis of this study along with methodology positively contributed to the existing knowledge on the subject. This study can be used as secondary data by future researchers and academics. Moreover, this study can help policy makers and mental health professionals to appreciate the chances of breaking news on mental health and put in place mechanisms to deal with psychological aftermaths as means of helping people overcome anxiety.

The researcher utilized the Cultivation Theory to achieve this study. This study was done using the quantitative research method. The researcher stratified random sampling and simple random sampling between the residents of Lahore. A descriptive form of survey analysis in 400 respondents was performed between 20 to 45 years of age among the residents of Lahore.

Researcher get the result that breaking news have a strong impact on life of the residents of Lahore. The researcher observed that heavy, medium and low viewers have different impact according to their consumption of TV watch hours. According to data collection, researcher found that breaking news has significant impact on all age groups.

In the present study, two hypotheses statements were formulated. Hypotheses were observable and measured by survey. The first hypotheses statement was tested on Chi-Square Test. Chi-Square test was applied to know the association between the variables, with a value of ($p<.05$) in this case. Therefore it was established the effect of breaking news in the generation of anxiety among the TV viewers in Lahore.

Under the second hypotheses, the researcher outlined the descriptive statistics of the variables of the second hypothesis of the study. Descriptive Statistics explains the central tendency of variables (Mean, Standard Deviation). Mean is the arithmetic average of the series and Standard Deviation is the dispersion or scattering of the series. The author of the research explains the average and standard deviation of each statement of the breaking news impact. The mean value of the variable, Hands or body shake, is the highest with mean equal to 3.27 with a standard deviation of 1.412.

Recommendations

- Future researchers should use **larger and more diverse samples** from multiple cities or provinces.
- **Mixed-methods research** (quantitative + qualitative) is recommended to gain deeper insights.
- Additional age groups should be included to examine generational differences.
- Future studies can explore the impact of **different types of breaking news** (e.g., sports, entertainment).
- Increasing the sample size could improve the **reliability and generalizability** of findings.

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