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www.advancelrf.org**Why We Watch: Factors affecting Exposure to Tragic Television News. A Pakistani Perspective****Aqsa Iram Shahzadi Khan**

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ABSTRACT: The study examined empathically individual difference of tragic news viewing motives (surveillance and reassurance) and the positive relationship between personal distress and reassurance regarding suicide attacks news in Pakistan. Simple random sample of 50 respondents was taken. The results reveal that if affective motivations are taken under consideration then the causes of people's exposure of media can be explored which are uses and gratification, selective exposure and mood management.

Key words:- Uses and gratification, selective exposure, mood management theory, tragic news, suicide attacks.

1. Introduction

During the 21st century, everybody wants to be remained updated and well informed because of technological advances which have resulted in momentous raise in the propinquity and vivid nature of television coverage of recent events. And this is predominantly evident during moments of disaster, crises or divergence. Television is the best source of getting knowledge (Suruthi, 2012). Media works strongly in the age of crises (Taverner, 2005). And news is the most viewed segment of TV (Rubin, 1982). As Al-Jazeera presented different incidents including invasion of Iraq, September 11, Afghanistan war in such a way that world news media was surprised (Miles, 2005). News media is all time favorite field of interest for uses and gratification researches and even there is space of much more researches in different dimensions. Daily we are exposed to hundreds of tragic news on television. Researches show that there are a great number of audiences, who watch news content on TV (Fujioka 2009). Definitely there are some reasons of people's such selective exposure of causality news, positive news or background news (Zillmann, 1985).

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another (Empathy,nd) and if in news the element of empathy is present then its viewer ship increases because it provides feelings of involvement by utilizing our own feelings related to us. It also helps people to know how other people are responding in worst situations. Due to factor of empathy, one can differentiate the extent of news viewing motives

among individuals (Andre and Velasquez, 1989). These motives are surveillance (Wright, 1960. McQuail, 1972), reassurance and curiosity (McQuail, 1972). It is proposed by news-based studies that anxiety and depressing mood is increased among viewers due to much negative substance present in news content (Johnston & Davey, 1997). Viewers have different emotional responses (anger, sadness, fear) whenever they are exposed to tragic news on television. There is some relation among emotional response, news interests and exposure (Cassil et.al, 2009). Psychologists say that there is mood management theory behind the selective exposure towards television (Oliver, 2003). Along with involvement of mood there are few uses and gratifications of media consumption (Blumler, 1979). Bad news exposure evokes negative emotions. Terrorist attack is one of the most multifaceted and shocking face of crises. Terrorist attacks are intentional which create severe emotional and psychological chaos for the public (Ulmer et.al, 2007).

People are curious about the most recent events and happenings occurring around them. And Pakistan is suffering from different tragic incidents like plane crash, major road accidents, floods, target killing, drone attacks, suicide attacks etc. From the start of 2002 there is a countless series of such attacks and the intensity of these incidents was increased after 2007. During the years 2002 to 2006, there were 21 suicide attacks in the state. And in the year 2007 the number raised up to 54 (Nafees, 2012). While in the last year 2011 the total number of suicide attacks was 41 (Pakistan Assessment, 2012) and 14 in 2012 (Pakistan Body Count, 2012). Because of the most crucial issue of the state, most media coverage is given to the attacks. News is the most viewed content on television (Kelin 2003). Electronic media provide coverage to all such big issues. Yet exposure to such content can cause panic behavior among viewers. Greater level of exposure to tragic content creates distress among the viewers (Cassill et all, 2009). In the state of crisis need for information, its interpretation, assistance in bearing the shock and expressing of distress is increased (Schramm, 2000).

Suicide attacks were started in World War 2 by Japanese. They used this as a war tactic, resulting 372 American soldiers' death on May 11, 1945. Then in Srilanka, Tamil Tigers, mostly women, used this technique in guerilla war, resulting killing of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Joshi, 1996). Al-Qaeeda was blamed by America for the 9/11's tragic event (Geltzer, 2010). After the war on terror of America, in the world the ratio of suicide bombing is increased. American media presented tragic event of 9/11 with full objective, which clearly showed the long term planning and policy of America in concern to war against terror (Khan, 2005). Iraq war started series of suicide bombing which was taken to the peak by Taliban of Afghanistan as an answer to American invasion (Pape, 2003). Because unfair dispossession, either real or imaginative, is the definite reason of every terrorist activity (Islam, 2005).

Pakistan supported America in War on Terror caused a nonstop investiture of suicide attacks (Abbas, 2005). Pakistani news media gave a great coverage to the suicide attacks. Keeping the factors of selective exposure in mind the study wants to measure extend of this exposure towards casualty news, positive news, and background news. And why people watch tragic news on television? Which is the gratification of people among surveillance, reassurance and curiosity? Empathy (the reaction of one individual to the observed experiences of others) is also another variable which affects the exposure towards television news.

Herzog (1944) found three kinds of gratification among radio listeners. These were emotional release, wishful thinking and obtaining advice. Berelson (1949) analyzed by asking question to people why they read the paper on the one of the strike of a New York newspaper. He identified five categories of reading for information, social prestige, escape, as a tool of daily living, as a social context. Schramm *et.al* (1961) find parents and peer relationship has a great influencing factor along with individual mental ability in children regarding usage of television Caspary (1970) investigated about the evidence of mood theory in American people s public opinion and foreign policy. He analyzed people s attention (mood) towards foreign policy is low and fluctuated during crises. According to Windhal (1981) traditional effect approach researchers see mass communication. Zillman & Bryant (1985) write that affects, mood and

emotions have strong influence on selective exposure to communication. Individuals are very sensitive and mood is a very strong determinant of selective exposure.

Batson *et.al* (1987) define empathy as “a motivation oriented towards the other” and feeling of empathy include sympathetic moved, companionate, tender, warm, soft hearted etc. Zillmann (1988) argues that people expose themselves to specific messages to alter and regulate their existing mood states. This theory based on the selective exposure paradigm. His findings tell that bored and stressed individuals expose themselves to exciting programs. And non-hostile comedies are preferences of angry or frusted women as compared to angry or frusted men who like to watch hostile comedies. Albarran and Dimmick (1993) found in their study that television broadcast programmes was the most diverse medium in serving the cognitive gratification of the audience while cable channels and video cassette recorders were more effective in feeling and emotional gratifications.

Anderson *et.al* (1996) analyze that people use television to dissolve the stressful thoughts which is according to the prediction of mood management theory. In stressful situations individuals view contents having comedy more as compared to other programes like news. Rayburn (1996) explores that individuals who are the users of Mass Media are making their conscious choices about what they see and read in the media. He argues that uses & gratification paradigm helps to determine why, how and for what reasons people seek out media.

Kim & Rubin (1997) argue that media users to increase or decrease media effects do media transaction. This is done on the basis of selectivity, attention and involvement. Ferguson and Perse (2000) concluded that world wide web is a functional alternative to TV for the viewers and many of the motivations of usage were same for TV and as well as for world wide web. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) mentioned five motives utility, Passing time, seeking information, convenience and entertainment for the use of internet. Valkenburg and Soeters (2001) found that among the adolescents internet usage is only for enjoyment and to get information.

Sherry (2001) argues that much attention is given to explre, with the help of uses and gratification paradigm that what are the media uses and what are the effects. Yet the issue of etiology is ignored. In this study he digs out the association between motives of television use and biological temperament of individuals. He notices that these temperaments are mood, avoidance, approach and activity level. Dominant predictors of television use motives are negative mood, low task orientation and behavioral rigidity.

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) explained the uses and gratification as the view of the media consumer. They are in favor of the view that media users are fully aware of and can articulate their reasons for accessing various media content. In 1940s, researchers like Herzog and Berelson pay attention towards this approach that why people are engaging themselves in different media activities like radio listening and reading newspapers. Then further development in this paradigm is done in late 1950s and 1960s. In this phase social and psychological variables were given much focus that were determining the gratifications of viewers. During in this era mass media research shifted to the functional approach from traditional effects model become more conceptual and theoretical. And in recent days researchers use this approach to reveal impacts of news technologies on the consumers.

Rubin, *et.al* (2003) studied 354 adults to find out the motivation among viewers while watching different reality shows, and either they are different from each other or not. On the basis of the data they found that a group of people who watch a specific reality show use media for entertainment and excitement not for information, as compared to other group.

Weaver (2003) explored the Psychological origins of television viewing. He found linkage between three personality dimensions _ psychotism, extra version and neurocism and five television motives - pass time, companionship, relaxation, information and stimulation, Result showed that people in neuroticism personality dimension strongly endorsed pass time, companionship, relaxation and stimulation.

Baran and Davis (2003, 146) write selective exposure is that

“people tend to expose themselves to messages that are consistent with their preexisting attitudes and belief ”.

They further add that media usage is strongly related to social status and group application of the individual. Theory says that people watch on media what they want to see. They preferred electronic media instead of newspapers, as it is open medium of caring information.

Sparks (2006) analyzed that watch TV for learning, as a habit, companionship, arousal relaxation, escape and passing time. He also mentioned the problem with uses and gratification perspective that it relied on self-reports. He further added that individual s social and physical activities were displaced by use of media

Stroud (2007) investigated that due to noticeable raise in media choice and available variety in media outlets, more people have opportunity of selective exposure. In his study “Media affects, Selective Exposure and Fahrenheit 9/11” Stroud examined that Phenomenon of antic George W.Bush documentary Fahrenheit 9/11. He measured the degree of selective exposure and the potential of media effects. He measured the degree of selective exposure and the potential of media effects. He found that people who watched documentary have more negative attitude towards George W.Bush. The study also tried to explore either there was any political effect of the film or not. Results found that people who were intended to watch film had less negative attitude towards Bush as compared to those who viewed the film. Researcher also controlled the demographic, political and media use difference factor between the groups. It was also found that political discussion among people was raised by exposure towards film and Family and friend’s political discussion was not the cause to watch movie. And the findings supported that media effects has relationship with selective exposure.

Fujioka *et.al* (2009) writes in their article that there are certain reasons because of which people expose themselves to tragic TV news. They surveyed 376 undergraduates’ respondents to response about the event of September 11. They examined that news viewing motives for respondents were surveillance, reassurance, curiosity and anger, sadness, fear were the negative emotional responses. Causality news positive news was the sources of selective exposure. They suggested that studying effective motivations would explore other causes also.

H1 Empathic concern will be positively associated with (a) surveillance motives and (b) Reassurance motives.

H2 Personal distress will be positively associated with reassurance motives (but not surveillance motives)

RQ1 How will the two types of empathy be related to curiosity motives?

Researcher got a sample of 50 respondents by simple random sampling technique. For data collection a questionnaire was constructed comprising of 36 close ended questions.

H1 predicts that empathic concern will be positively associated with (a) surveillance motives and (b) Reassurance motives while H2 predicts that personal distress will be positively associated with reassurance motives (but not surveillance motives) and the research question is how will the two types of empathy be related to curiosity motives? To examine these hypotheses and research question two types of empathy and news viewing motives were examined with contrast to gender. To measure relation means, standard deviation and zero-order correlation are analyzed between predictor variable and criterion variables. Findings show that both the hypothesis is supported. Empathic concern is positively associated with the news viewing motives, surveillance and reassurance ($p < .001$). Personal distress is positively associated with reassurance ($p < .001$) and not to surveillance motive. As well as research question is

concerned findings show that personal distress is associated more with curiosity as compared to empathic concern. As shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Zero-Order Correlation between Predictor Variables and Criterion Variables

Predictor Variables	Mean	SD	Criterion Variables			
			News Interest	Casualty News	Positive News	Back ground News
Gender			-0.13	0.004	-0.05	-0.228
TV news exposure	3.54	1.92	0.14	0.25	0.35*	0.31*
Empathic concern	2.18	1.37	-0.11	-0.31	-0.05	-0.22
Surveillance	3.38	1.80	0.48***	0.34*	0.37**	0.32*
Reassurance	2.85	1.85	0.22	0.43**	0.35*	0.36*
Curiosity	2.66	1.95	0.53***	0.54***	0.10	0.24
Mean			3.31	3.06	3.26	3.45
SD			1.61	1.81	1.86	1.73

Note. Gender was coded 0=male, 1=female. All other variables could range from 0 to 6, with the exception of empathy measures (1 to 5); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

2. Discussion and Conclusion

Technological advancement in every field has changed the traditional concept of utilizing the things. Now every person tries to be remained up to date. And for information gathering, generally television is considered as the best source. We all are well aware about the importance of news. And as discussed earlier that daily people are exposed to thousands of tragic news.

History of suicide attacks is not so much old in Pakistan. Pakistan supported in War on Terror caused a nonstop investiture of suicide attacks in the state.. Pakistani news media gave a great coverage to the suicide attacks. Keeping the factors of selective exposure in mind the study wants to measure extend of this exposure towards casualty news, positive news, and background news. And why people watch tragic news on television? Which is the gratification of people among surveillance, reassurance and curiosity?

Empathy (the reaction of one individual to the observed experiences of others) is also another variable which affects the exposure towards television news.

Findings prove that there are few gratifications of selective exposure of public towards tragic news on television. Surveillance factor and the element of reassurance are the causes of such selective exposure. Yet empathic concern of public is more towards surveillance and reassurance as compared to personal distress which is more associated with reassurance rather than surveillance. Empathic concern and personal distress are the two factors to measure empathy. Curiosity is another variable which is much more associated with personal distress. Results clearly answer all the questions raised in mind. People have reasons (surveillance, reassurance, curiosity) of their selective exposure (causality news, background news, positive news) along with empathy (empathic concern, personal distress).

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