DESENSATISATION OF MEDIA VIOLENCE THROUGH NEWS REPORTS

Rafia Taj*

Abstract

Desensitization may be described as a phenomenon where an individual's sensitivity diminishes towards a certain aspect due to repeated or continuous exposure to that particular situation. Masses of the Pakistani population are continuously exposed to violent situation through news reporting channels that are not reluctant to showcase uncensored images of atrocity. In the following article the desensitization, its effects on society and its use to news reporting channels is going to be discussed with the help of the theory of standardization of thought and the theory of cognitive dissonance.

The theory of standardization of thought explains how a hegemonic power may threaten freedom of human thought by; (a) dealing with society as a mass and diminishing individuality, (b) repressing rebellion and promoting conformity, and (c) diffusing the cruel reality and infusing a hypnotic state of self-satisfaction.

The cognitive dissonance theory on the other hand may be explained as a discomfort caused by holding conflicting cognitions (e.g., ideas, beliefs, values, emotional reactions) simultaneously.

* Rafia Taj, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication, University of Karachi, Karachi-75270, Pakistan

Desensitization Theory

The theory of desensitization is most easily applied to violent media. Constant repetition of violence in the media makes people jaded towards violence. The reaction becomes less prominent because as consumers of media we are used to seeing explosions, blood and guts and mayhem on a regular basis. Desensitization is usually measured by both psychological and attitudinal reactions.

Desensitization is a good example of classic conditioning. The first time a person views a violent act in the media he may react strongly, like would if the violence was occurring in real life. Consuming a heavy diet of violent media makes people less provoked and shocked by blood, guts and gore.

One of the reasons desensitization can be dangerous or it is so closely related to the pleasure of watching television or movies. The act of watching TV is an unlearned pleasurable behavior. When you combine this pleasure with violent images and content, then the person begins to associate the pleasure of watching television with the consumption of violent media. Images which might have initiated a negative response before, now give the viewer a sense of calm because of their link to relaxation.

There is a lot of mediated violence on T.V. The desensitization theory believes that the more violence viewers are exposed to it the media over a period of time, the less sensitive they become to it.

In contrast the sensitization theory will be horrified by seeing certain mediated content and become more sensitive to violence. In fact the media violence unknowingly becomes a part of the society as it grows slowly but captures minds and behavior of the people effectively.

Systematic Desensitization

Systematic desensitization is a type of behavioral therapy used in the field of psychology to help effectively overcome phobias and other anxiety disorders. More specifically, it is a type of Pavlovian therapy / classical conditioning therapy developed by a South African psychiatrist, Joseph Wolpe. To begin the process of systematic desensitization, one must first be taught relaxation skills in order to extinguish fear and anxiety responses to specific phobias. Once the individual has been taught these skills, he or she must use them to react towards and overcome situations in an established hierarchy of fears. The goal of this process is that an individual will learn to cope and overcome the fear in each step of the hierarchy, which will lead to overcoming the last step of the fear in the hierarchy. Systematic desensitization is sometimes called graduated exposure therapy.

Although as stated earlier that to begin the process of systematic desensitization, the individual must be first taught relaxation skills, it is not the only factor. A study of the contribution and importance of muscle relaxation to systematic desensitization therapy in four different phobic patients. The study proved that during a control phase of therapy if relaxation was taken away it made no or so little difference to the patients' improvement ability to perform in their case. In two cases, when measured by self-rating by removing

relaxation it slowed the progress through the hierarchy and therapeutic progress; however it has overall small effects if any. Concluding that other variables than relaxation are highly responsible for the therapeutic effectiveness of desensitization. Putting together visualization and relaxation of feared scenes helps certain individuals to attack their feared object or scenario in imagination, and may push them to attack it in reality as well.

Specific phobias are one class of mental illness often treated through the behavior therapy or cognitive–behavioral process of systematic desensitization. When individuals possess irrational fears of an object, such as height, dogs, snakes, and close spaces, they tend to avoid it. Since escaping from the phobic object reduces their anxiety, patients' behavior to reduce fear is reinforced through negative reinforcement, a concept defined in operant conditioning. The goal of systematic desensitization is to overcome this avoidance pattern by gradually exposing patients to the phobic object until it can be tolerated. In classical and operant conditioning terms the elicitation of the fear response is extinguished to the stimulus (or class of stimuli). Desensitization is commonly used with simple phobias like insect phobia.[1]

Steps To Desensitization

The first thing the person has to do in order to get over their fear is to learn how to relax their mind. After being able to do this, there are steps one should complete in order to desensitize oneself to that phobia.

In this example the person has a fear of spiders:[2]

1. Think of a spider
2. Look at a silly drawing of a spider
3. Look at a drawing of a spider
4. Look at a photo of a spider
5. Look at an empty spider web
6. Touch an empty spider web
7. Look at a real spider in a box
8. Hold the box with the spider
9. Look at a real spider, from across the room
10. Look at a real spider, from halfway across the room
11. Look at a real spider up close
12. Let a spider crawl on something you are holding, until you are able to have it crawl on you

Coping strategies

[1] ^ Chamove, A.S. (2005). Spider Phobic Therapy Toy. *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 6(2), 109–25
[2] DeLuca, Lisa C. (2009) Systematic Desensitization and Phobia Treatment. "How Wolpe's Desensitization Therapy is Used to Treat Specific Phobia."

Prior to exposure, the therapist teaches the patient cognitive strategies to cope with anxiety. This is necessary because it provides the patient with a means of controlling their fear, rather than letting it build until it becomes unbearable. Relaxation training, such as meditation, is one type of coping strategy. Administration of an anti-anxiety medicine prior to exposure to the phobia-inducing stimuli is another type of coping strategy. Patients who have serious anxiety that leads to breathing problems might be taught to focus on their breathing or to think about happy situations. Another means of relaxation is cognitive reappraisal of imagined outcomes. The therapist might encourage subjects to examine what they imagine happening when exposed to the phobic object, allowing them to recognize their catastrophic visions and contrast them with the actual outcome. For example, a patient with a snake phobia might realize that they imagine any snake they encounter would coil itself around their neck and strangle them, when this would not actually occur. These patients need to see that not all snakes are large and that most snakes are completely harmless so that they can get over their fear. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of this technique in helping subjects reduce similar animal phobias.[3]

Progressive exposure

The second component of systematic desensitization is gradual exposure to the feared objects or situations. Continuing with the snake example, the therapist would begin by asking their patient to develop a fear hierarchy, listing the relative unpleasantness of various types of exposure. For example, seeing a picture of a snake in a newspaper might be rated 5 of 100, while having several live snakes crawling on one's neck would be the most fearful experience possible. Once the patient had practiced their relaxation technique, the therapist would then present them with the photograph, and help them calm down. They would then present increasingly unpleasant situations: a poster of a snake, a small snake in a box in the other room, a snake in a clear box in view, touching the snake, etc. At each step in the progression, the patient is desensitized to the phobia through the use of the coping technique. They realize that nothing bad happens to them, and the fear gradually extinguishes.

Cognitive dissonance theory

1. Introduction

A theory concerning cognitive dissonance was put forth by Leon Festinger in his 1957 book, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Festinger defines cognition as “the things a person knows about himself, about his behavior, and about his surroundings . Dissonance and consonance he defines as “relations which exist between pairs of elements . Festinger states that “two elements are in a dissonant relation if, considering these two alone, the obverse of one element would follow from the other” . Essentially, cognitive dissonance is the situation in which two or more cognitions or thoughts are in disagreement with one another.[4]

[3] Arnold S. Chamove (2005): Spider Phobic Therapy Toy. *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 6(2), 109–13
[4] Leon Festinger (1957): A theory of cognitive dissonance, Stanford University press, pg.9

Festinger gives several examples of situations in which dissonance may arise. Simple logical inconsistency may cause cognitive dissonance. If a person believes smoking is bad for one's health yet continues to smoke, he is experiencing cognitive dissonance. Another situation where dissonance may be present is one of past experience. Festinger gives an example of a person standing in the rain. Past experience would tell the person that standing in the rain will cause one to get wet, but if the person had never experienced rain before, he would not have cognitive dissonance when standing in the rain.

People are naturally inclined to try to reduce cognitive dissonance because it is an uncomfortable state of mind. Festinger says that people can reduce dissonance in three major ways:

1. Changing one or more of the elements involved in dissonant relations.
2. Adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with already existing cognition.
3. Decreasing the importance of the elements involved in the dissonant relations.

One can reduce cognitive dissonance by changing either his opinion on the matter, or his behavior on the matter. If one changes his opinion about the issue at hand, the behavior is no longer dissonant with the opinion, and dissonance is reduced. Also, if one changes his behavior and the behavior now matches the opinion, dissonance is reduced. Another way to reduce dissonance is to simply decrease the importance placed on the elements in question. If a person no longer cares that his behavior and his thoughts are different, dissonance will be reduced.

The theory of cognitive dissonance is one of the most significant and influential theories in the history of social psychology. Suffice it to mention that only five years after its introduction, Brehm and Cohen Cohen , could review over fifty studies conducted within the framework the theory. In the following five years, every major social-psychological journal averaged at least one article per issue probing some prediction derived from its basic propositions. In the course of five decades that have passed since it was formulated by Leon Festinger, it has found widespread applications in various fields of scientific investigation, including communication studies, marketing, economic theory, and behavioral finance.

2. Fundamental concepts and principles

The central proposition of Festinger's theory is that if a person holds two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another, he will experience the pressure of an aversive motivational state called cognitive dissonance, a pressure which he will seek to remove, among other ways, by altering one of the two dissonant cognitions [5]. If we wish to analyze the hypothesis stated above in detail, it is essential to define several basic concepts. A cognition (also called a cognitive element) may be broadly defined as any belief, opinion, attitude, perception, or piece of knowledge about anything - about other persons, objects, issues, oneself, and so on,[6]. Littlejohn and Foss 2005 define a cognitive system as "a complex, interacting set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that affect and are

[5] IBID Bem 1967 pg.183
[6] Aronson, 2004, p. 146; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 77; O'Keefe, 2002, p. 78-81

affected by behavior". Festinger considered the need to avoid dissonance to be just as basic as the need for safety or the need to satisfy hunger [7]. Psychologists define a drive as any internal source of motivation that impels an organism to pursue a goal or to satisfy a need, such as sex, hunger, or self-preservation. The distressing (aversive) mental state termed cognitive dissonance is therefore conceptualized as an aversive drive.

In this paper, we are primarily interested in Festinger's theory as one of a diverse range of theories of human communication. Bormann refers to communication theory as an "umbrella term for all careful, systematic and self-conscious discussion and analysis of communication phenomena"[8]. Scholars have made many attempts to define communication but establishing a single definition has proved impossible[9]. For the purposes of the present discussion, communication will be taken to mean "all those processes by which people influence one another").[10] Inasmuch as Festinger's theory is concerned with attitude change and attempts to discern how persuasive messages are processed in the minds of listeners, there is no doubt that it may be regarded as a communication theory.

That brings us to the next point, namely the categorization of cognitive dissonance theory. As has been noted above, it is firmly planted in the sociopsychological tradition, which focuses on individual social behavior, psychological variables, perception, and cognition. At the same time, however, it is so infused with system thinking that it must be included in the cybernetic tradition as well. Festinger's theory is one of a group of cybernetic theories known as consistency theories, all of which begin with the same premise: people are more comfortable with consistency than inconsistency. In cybernetic language, people seek homeostasis, or balance, and the cognitive system is a primary tool by which this balance is achieved. The mind is imagined as a system that takes inputs from the environment in the form of information, processes it, and then creates behavioral outputs.

There are two distinct perspectives within the field of communication theory: objective and interpretive . Festinger's theory, belonging to the sociopsychological tradition, epitomizes the scientific (objective) perspective. Scholars in this tradition believe there are communication truths that can be discovered by careful, systematic observation. The objective approach of the theory manifests itself in its epistemological assumptions: there is one reality, waiting to be discovered by employing quantitative research methods such as experiments and surveys. In contrast to interpretive scholars, social scientists work to pin down universal laws of human behavior that cover a variety of situations. They consider good theories to be mirrors of nature. It can thus be concluded that the theory of cognitive dissonance is a nomothetic theory – one that seeks universal and general laws. This approach is based on the hypothetico-deductive method, which involves the following processes:

(1) developing questions,

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[7] IBID Griffin 2006 pg.228
[8] IBID Griffin p.6 as cited by 1989 Bormann
[9] IBID Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 12
[10] IBID Ruesh & Bateson, 1951, as cited in Watson & Hill, 1989, p. 41

(2) forming hypotheses,
(3) testing the hypotheses, and
(4) formulating theory.

Festinger's theory appears to make certain philosophical assumptions that are typical of nomothetic theories. In epistemology, the theory espouses empiricist and rationalist ideas. In terms of axiology, the theory takes a value-neutral stance. In terms of ontology, the theory assumes that behavior is basically determined by and responsive to biology and the environment[11].

Three possible relations might exist between any two cognitive elements. The first type of relationship is irrelevant (neither affects the other), the second is consonant (consistent), and the third kind is dissonant (inconsistent). Two elements are said to be in a dissonant relation if the opposite of one element follows from the other. The degree of dissonance experienced is a function of two factors:

(1) the relative proportions of consonant and dissonant elements and
(2) the importance of the elements or issue.[12]

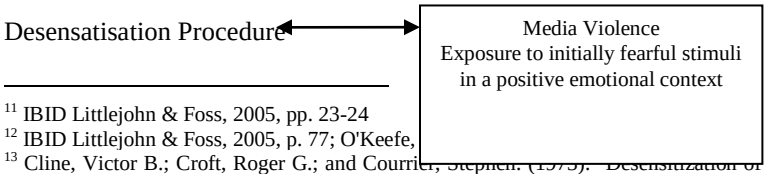
Festinger imagined a number of methods for dealing with cognitive dissonance:

(1) altering the importance of the issue or the elements involved,
(2) changing one or more of the cognitive elements,
(3) adding new elements to one side of the tension or the other,
(4) seeking consonant information, and
(5) distorting or misinterpreting dissonant evidence

The Case

Desensitization is a psychological process that has often been involved in explaining viewers' emotional reactions to media violence. Research of unemotional reactions to violent messages has been concerned with the possibility that continued exposure to violence in the mass media will result in desensitization, that is, that exposure to media violence will undermine feelings of concern, empathy, or sympathy that viewers might have toward victims of actual violence.

According to researchers; prolonged exposure to violence, crime and injustice makes the viewer more comfortable with the reality to which he/she previously reacted to with anxiety. Gordon Paul and D. A. Bernstein, states that exposure therapy is widely regarded as the most effective clinical therapy for training individuals to engage in behaviors that were previously inhibited by anxiety responses.[13]



[11] IBID Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, pp. 23-24
[12] IBID Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 77; O'Keefe,
[13] Cline, Victor B.; Croft, Roger G.; and Courrier, Stephen. (1973). "Desensitization of Children to Television Violence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27:360-365.

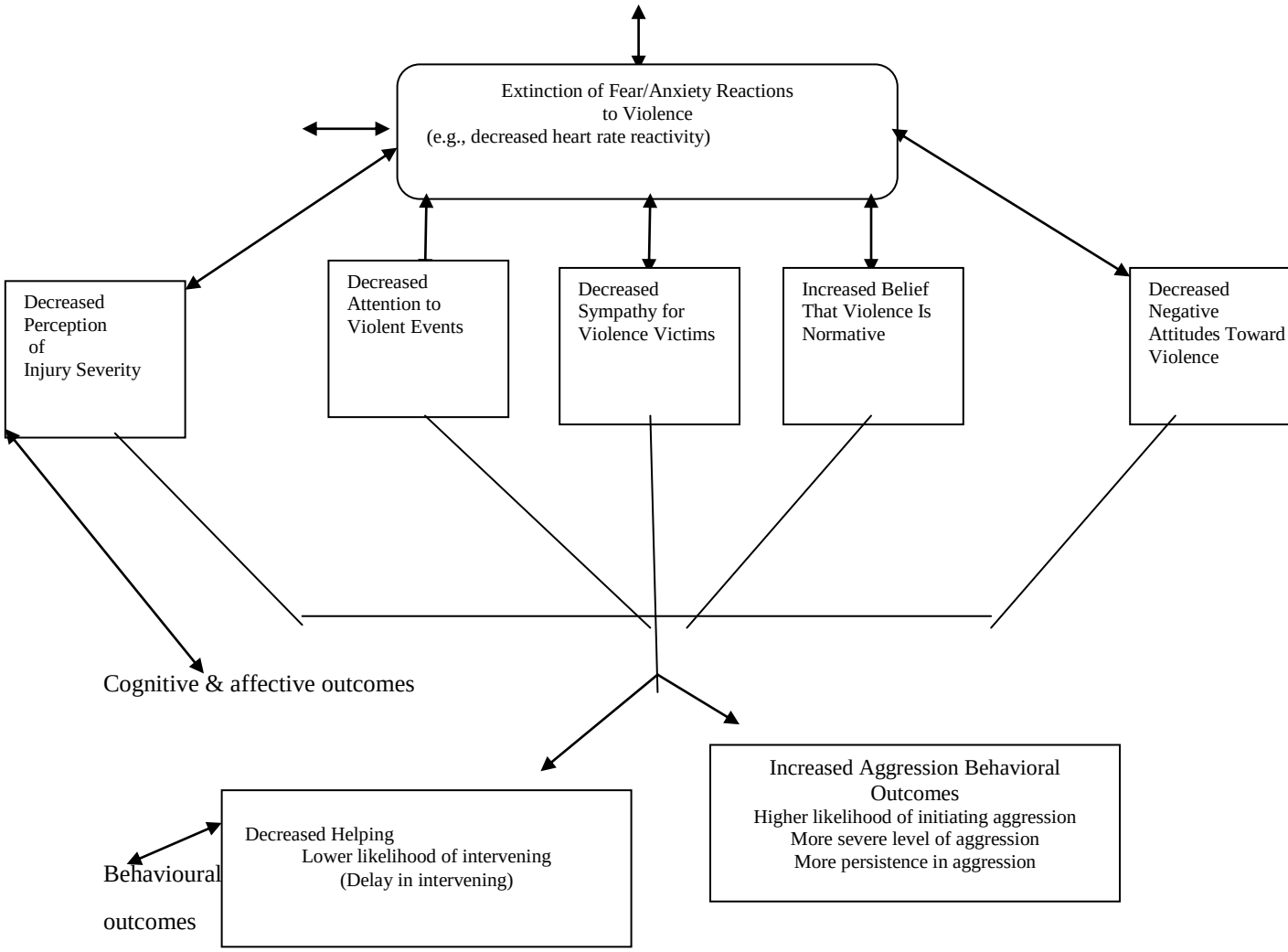


Fig. 1. Model of the effects of exposure to media violence. Such exposure serves as a desensitization procedure leading to increases in aggression and decreases in helping. Adapted from Carnagey, Anderson, and Bushman (2007).

The Pakistani news media, news reporting channels in particular seem to have little reservations while showcasing hair raising scenes of violence, crime and injustice. One such example of the unrestrained attitude of television news reporters towards the above mentioned aspects may be the brutal murder of two young boys in Sialkot in August 2010. Countless news channels aired the report of the beating and killing of these boys

along with a complete uncensored video footage of this event. Geo news for instance aired a complete 1 minute 2 second video of the outrageous event on 19th August 2010.[14]

A chronicle view on the portrayal of violence and other negatives aspects in the year 2010 by the Pakistani televised news media may shine light on how the media might be an active agent in the desensitization of the audience by continuously exposing them to one uncensored violent event after another, throughout the year.

1. January 2010: Suicide bombing at volley ball game in a town near Lakki Marwat (northwest Pakistan)[15]
2. Febuary 2010: Bomb blast in Pakistan claims lives. (Peshawar) [16]
3. March 2010 Minister of minority affairs murdered (Islamabad)[17]
4. April 2010:Suicide bombing kills 10 (Quetta) [18]
5. May 2010: At least 12 people lost their lives in northwestern Pakistan due to suicide bomb blast [19]
6. June 2010: Bomb blast at ISI headquarters (Lahore) [20]
7. July 2010: Airblue plane crash, no survivors (Islamabad) [21]
8. August 2010: At least 35 victims of sectarian violence lose their lives (Karachi) [22]
9. September 2010: Suicide bombing by Taliban in Quetta [23]
10. October 2010: Violence in southern Pakistan claims 16 live (Karachi) [24]
11. November 2010: Suicide bomb attack in Peshawar at a mosque [25]
12. December 2010: Ashura bomb blast claims lives (Karachi) [26]

Each one of these news reports no matter how significant or insignificant they may be in reference to one another, are portrayed by the media almost the same way; unexpurgated, brash and impudent. A common pattern that has been noticed about the audience of these news reports is that they would either blame a controlling agent (the police, military, the court etc.) , an authoritative figure (the government, a ministry, a political party) or they would simply become disheartened by the scene presented in front of them and would want to disassociate themselves from the society where it takes place. However scarce or in some cases none of the responses seem to indicate that an individual was disturbed by the graphic nature of the news report.

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[14] http://geodost.tv/2010-08-19-brothers-killed-in-sialkot-by-villagers/

[15] Covered by express tv exclusively on the day of the event and by other television news channels on the following days. Link to event; http://www.blinkx.com/watch-video/deadly-bomb-attack-at-pakistan-volleyball-game/xG4UmZn3IwbqHCODCqh4CA. Link2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKgzdPBl-dk

[16] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQphRhaN9Mo&feature=related

[17] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MSZUvbh2K8&feature=related

[18] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8624338.stm

[19] http://english.ntdtv.com/ntdtv_en/news_middleeast_africa/2010-05-18/135026750855.html

[20] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8TKNMHDCkE

[21] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phane9FqcBY&feature=related

[22] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLbyvmsd_aQ

[23] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZMVihDgASo http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV4UWD6D1tU&feature=related

[24] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3AWAFGlfa8&feature=relmfu

[25] http://english.ntdtv.com/ntdtv_en/news_middleeast_africa/2010-05-18/135026750855.html

[26] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-xMwgqUqGk

Take, for example, the responses of the a few individuals who viewed the following news report video. (On the same link as mentioned in footnote 2)

Example: Brothers killed and hanged in Sialkot

Responses of the viewers:

Response 1.

Name:Zulqarnain Naqi Oct 25, 10, 11:10 AM

video mein TAMAM POLICE waloon ko bhi isi tarha marna chahiye aur nokri say bahir karna chahiye (all the policemen in this video should be killed the same way and be sacked)

Response 2.
Name: Fatima Shah Aug 20, 10, 03:53 PM

I m quite unable to understand that are all of those standing and watching this incident humans? How a human can be so cruel?
Oh Allah please save Pakistan from more floods and more earthquakes.
please join hands and ask government to hang all of them, watching this incident silently and havnt tried to stop, till death in front of the whole sialkot and it should be covered by the media as well so that we could avoid such incidents in the future

Response 3.

Name: Anas Khan Aug 20, 10, 02:51 AM

so do im ashamed to be a pakistani.
It would be better if we would live in isreal the are yahood but still they have heart and feeling and humanity, Pakistan is full of culprits and im sure there will be no solution.

A Research Report named Comfortably Numb (Desensitizing Effects of Violent Media on Helping Others) by Brad J. Bushman and Craig A. Anderson (University of Michigan,VU University Amsterdam, and Iowa State University)discusses two studies tested the hypothesis that exposure to violent media reduces aid offered to people in pain. In Study 1, participants played a violent or nonviolent video game for 20 min. After game play, while completing a lengthy questionnaire, they heard a loud fight, in which one person was injured, outside the lab. Participants who played violent games took longer to help the injured victim, rated the fight as less serious, and were less likely to ‘‘hear’’ the fight in comparison to participants who played nonviolent games. In Study 2, violent- and nonviolent movie attendees witnessed a young woman with an injured ankle struggle to pick up her crutches outside the theater either before or after the movie. Participants who had just watched a violent movie took longer to help than participants in the other three

conditions. The findings from both studies suggest that violent media make people numb to the pain and suffering of others.[27]

Daniel Linz, Edward Donner-stein, and Steven Penrod, measured the reactions of adult men to films that portrayed violence against women, often in a sexual context. The viewings took place over a period of several days, and comparisons of first-day reactions and last-day reactions to the films showed that, with repeated exposure, initial levels of self-reported anxiety decreased substantially.[28] One can hold this study parallel to the exposure of violence experienced by the Pakistani population is exposed to by televised news channels and effectively conclude that they are too/ or may become desensitized to violence.

Furthermore, the research participants' perceptions of the films also changed from the first day to the last day. Material that was previously judged to be violent and degrading to women was considered to be significantly less so by the end of the exposure period. Participants also indicated that they were less depressed and enjoyed the material more with repeated exposure. These effects generalized to responses to a victim of sexual assault in a mock trial presented to the men at a later time. Men who had been exposed to the sexually violent films, compared to a no-exposure group, rated the victim as being less severely injured.[29]

The men who had been exposed to the violent film, again compared to men in a no-exposure control group, were also less sympathetic to the rape victim portrayed in the trial and less able to empathize with rape victims in general. These effects did not emerge following exposure to a single film. Longer film exposure was necessary for it to affect the violence-viewing participants' general empathetic response.[30] This may well prove that desensitization towards a negative aspect of a society (may it be rape or violence depicted in news reports) does little to make the society feel secure, rather it makes individuals unsympathetic towards the victims of these crimes and possibly unsusceptible of the criminal.

Linz and his colleagues (1984, 1988) suggested that the viewers were becoming comfortable with anxiety-provoking situations much as they would if they were undergoing desensitization therapy. Carol Krafka and her associates (1997) observed these same effects for women who viewed sexual violence. Linz and his colleagues (1989) also showed that a reduction in physiological responsiveness accompanies repeated exposure to sexualized violence and that viewing violent films results in less sympathy for victims of domestic violence as well as rape victims.[31]

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[27] http://sitemaker.umich.edu/brad.bushman/files/ba09.pdf

28 Linz, Daniel; Donnerstein, Edward; and Penrod, Steven. (1984). "The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence Against Women." Journal of Communication 34(3):130-147.

[29] Linz, Daniel; Donnerstein, Edward; and Penrod, Steven. (1984). "The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence Against Women." *Journal of Communication* 34(3):130-147

[30] Linz, Daniel; Donnerstein, Edward; and Adams, Steven M. (1989). "Physiological Desensitization and Judgments About Female Victims of Violence." *Human Communication Research* 15:509-522

[31] Krafka, Carol; Linz, Daniel; Donnerstein, Edward; and Penrod, Steven. (1997). "Women's Reactions to Sexually Aggressive Mass Media Depictions." *Violence Against Women* 3(2):149-181.

Most recently, Charles R. Mullin and Linz (1995) demonstrated that viewers who show desensitization toward victims of violence in non-media contexts following exposure to media violence may recover sensitivity rather quickly provided they are not exposed to additional violent depictions. An experiment was conducted to examine the effects of repeated exposure to sexually violent films on emotional desensitization and callousness toward domestic abuse victims. Results indicated that emotional responses, self-reported physiological arousal, and ratings of the extent to which the films were sexually violent all diminished with repeated film exposure. Three days following exposure to the final film, participants in the experiment expressed significantly less sympathy for domestic violence victims and rated their injuries as being less severe than did a no-exposure control group. Five days after the final film exposure, the participants' level of sensitivity to the victims of domestic violence rebounded to the baseline levels that were established by the no-exposure comparison group.[32]

Masses of the Pakistani population are exposed to violent situations cyclically through news reporting channels, which seems to be substituting desensitization therapy effectively. In a way, news reporting channels are continuously exposing the audience with horrific graphic images of reality, so they may become comfortable with it and with time start deriving pleasure watching videos with violent content. Some researchers may argue that the media may be attempting to create a hegemonic power using 'standardization of human thought' a tool.

In 1928, Edward Bernays already saw the immense potential of motion pictures to standardize thought:

"The American motion picture is the greatest unconscious carrier of propaganda in the world today. It is a great distributor for ideas and opinions. The motion picture can standardize the ideas and habits of a nation. Because pictures are made to meet market demands, they reflect, emphasize and even exaggerate broad popular tendencies, rather than stimulate new ideas and opinions. The motion picture avails itself only of ideas and facts which are in vogue. As the newspaper seeks to purvey news, it seeks to purvey entertainment." – Edward Bernays, Propaganda[33]

These facts were flagged as dangers to human freedom in the 1930′s by thinkers of the school of Frankfurt such as Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. They identified three main problems with the cultural industry. The industry can:

1. reduce human beings to the state of mass by hindering the development of emancipated individuals, who are capable of making rational decisions;

2. replace the legitimate drive for autonomy and self-awareness by the safe laziness of conformism and passivity; and

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32 Mullin, Charles R., and Linz, Daniel. (1995). "Desensitization and Resensitization to Violence Against Women: Effects of Exposure to Sexually Violent Films on Judgments of Domestic Violence Victims."Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 69(3):449-459.

33 Adorno, radical negativity, and cultural critique: Utopia in the map of the world Lexington Books, 2011 pg.20

3. validate the idea that men actually seek to escape the absurd and cruel world in which they live by losing themselves in a hypnotic state self-satisfaction.[34]

The above mentioned phenomenon may endanger the cognitive dissonance factor in individuals. The state of cognitive dissonance occurs when people believe two of their psychological representations are inconsistent with each other.[35] The media exposes the audience to violence constantly which inhibits their guilt of viewing the crime, injustice or violence taking place. The audience becomes desensitized towards the victim's pain and suffering and is thus making it possible for the viewer to watch violent acts take place without feeling guilt or cognitive dissonance.[36]

The media starts gaining more attention once its audience is sufficiently desensitized and standardized in their thought process. Individuals would be more comfortable and entertained once the theory of cognitive dissonance diminishes its impact on them, with limited conflict of thoughts and values in mind the individual is bound to be more at ease with the content displayed by news reporting channels and they would more likely conform with the information the news reporting channels provide. This would insure minimum rebellion against the propaganda that the news reporting channels are promoting along with a lesser chance of individuals challenging its authority.

In conclusion, exposure to violence in the mass media may result in a desensitization effect in which viewers experience diminished feelings of concern, empathy, or sympathy toward victims of actual violence. The televised news media may be using desensitization and the hegemonic power of the standardization of human thought to pave an easy passage towards popularity and increased ratings.

[34] Aldous Huxley, Robert Southwick - 1998 pg.124-244
[35] Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory By Joel Cooper . Sage publication Asia-Pacific PTE Ltd. First published 2007 p.6
[36] International handbook of violence research, Volume 2 By Wilhelm Heitmeyer, John Hagan. Published by Kluwer Academic Publishers 2003. p.788