Media Psychology: A Field Whose Time is Here

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Feature

The convergence of media, technology, communication, art, and science is transforming our world, and the sociopsychomedia effect is as enveloping to our society as water is to fish in the sea. Universities have begun to respond to our changing world with fresh approaches to help professionals develop mastery of new and emerging fields. New career opportunities abound, and new types of positions are emerging. Burgeoning media industries have an accelerating need for capable media professionals, solutions architects, and highly-developed practitioners who understand both psychology and state-of-the-art technology such as writers, producers, programmers, engineers, designers, directors, artists, cinematographers, public relations, and advertising specialists.

Today's educational institutions need faculty and staff who understand higher concepts in media arts and sciences. Our new tools are both physical and intellectual, with an understanding of psychology being central to the most effective use of new media in society. Individuals must understand implications of media to perform competitively in the majority of new and emerging occupational specialties. The study of media effects and understanding the psychology of media are fundamental to emerging trends. This article offers an overview of new developments in media studies, and the emergence of media psychology as a rapidly evolving field of advanced study.

Media Studies programs are emerging in a variety of ways, and universities are launching new programs. All media manifests itself in communication, and effective communication requires an understanding of human behavior. Media Studies is the field covering the broad study of media effects,

the area of research where psychology and media elements converge. Media psychology is related to Media Studies much as arithmetic is related to accounting.

June Wilson, one of my students, is completing her PhD in psychology with an emphasis in Media Studies. Her description of 13 major U.S. and international Media Studies programs may be seen in the full text version of this article on the CPA website at **www.calpsychlink.org**.

Psychology and Education

In 1998, Lilli Friedland and I co-chaired the APA Division 46 (Media Psychology) Task Force Study on Psychology and New Technologies. Using Delphi methodology to survey a wide variety of experts, we identified 11 major fields where psychology is fundamental to their application:

1. Writing about media or performing as expert guests on various media
2. Consulting with media personnel
3. Researching ways to improve all forms of media
4. Making new technologies related to media more effective and user friendly
5. Using new technology in media to enhance clinical psychology
6. Most areas of education or training
7. Developing media standards
8. Working in commercial fields
9. Studying sociological and psychological media effects
10. Developing materials for physically and developmentally challenged populations, as well as all underserved populations.
11. Working with deviant or criminal populations

Media Psychology and Education

The Fielding Graduate Institute (www.fielding.edu) School of Psychology offers the first PhD program in Media Psychology in the United States. The program focuses on the applications of psychology to multi-media and media effects. The School of Education also offers an EdD that may include Media Studies tailored to programs customized for those who wish to focuses on higher education, community colleges, K-12, corporate training or other specializations.

Media psychology embraces *pscybermedia*, a neologism that combines psychology, artificial intelligence (cybernetics), and media. Media psychology also includes an understanding of

both physical and emotional aspects of the brain, range of emotion, the psychologies of expression, persuasion, sexuality, and gender. It encompasses study of theories of emotional control, believability, situational cognition, assessment, learning, mapping, feedback, reinforcement, mastery, persistence, success, and failure.

Dimensions of Media Psychology

Media psychology is both an art and a science, embracing teaching, theory construction, research, application, and performance as they pertain to the production and to the processing and impact of mass communications and entertainment media messages on individuals, groups, and societies. It views these impacts in terms of sensory and cognitive processes, as well as larger group and individual effects related to cultivated or instigated behavior, attitudes, and values. The wide and exciting realm of effects research (how various news and entertainment media effect and are affected by audiences, audience demographics and audience numbers) is central to media psychology. Examples of such influences would be formation, maintenance and/or change of individual and group stereotypes, on-camera and off-camera diversity and its effects on media stories and media perspectives, advertising and propaganda messages, and learning and utilizing new skills and information.

Another dimension of media psychology in the applied realm involves the appearance of psychologists in various print, electronic, and computer-based media, and their presentations of information about, and clarification of, the entire discipline of psychology. This group includes psychologists who consult with the media on various topics, psychologists who produce products for the media (such as books, films, magazine articles both on and off-line), psychologists who appear on radio or television in various guest and host capacities, and psychologists who offer on-line services such as education, advice and counseling information.

A third dimension of media psychology concerns those who work with and within the government, business, and learning industries in the never-ending process of adapting hardware and software to various goals of information communication; and those who apply psychology in a variety of fields including commerce, education, entertainment, government, health services, and telecommunications. Multi-media presentations in institutional settings, as well as the pursuit of

commercial opportunities and/or innovations in remote or distance learning for educational and corporate university populations, are also part of this dimension.

Theories examining the effects of verbal and nonverbal communication in understanding music and sound, images, and orienting human reaction may be applied through media psychology. Luskin's (2002) *Three S's* is among a number of distinctive and specialized areas of application. The S's are: (1) *Synesthetics*, the study of stimulating and combining one sense with another; (2) *Semiotics*, communication through identification, manipulation, and use of symbols, including screen design, iconography, navigation and user interface; and (3) *Semantics*, the understanding of the use, effects and implications of words. An understanding of synesthetics, semiotics and semantics is pivotal to the relationship between media, the human response, and the evolving language of this new field. New vocabulary, such as emoticon, screenager, webhead, and cybrarian, are examples of emerging terms and changing language.

The Scholar Practitioner Approach
The field of psychology is rapidly evolving and expanding. Most of the emphasis over the years has been on Clinical Psychology as an area of key importance. As the broader aspects of psychology gain attention, a new vision of the scientist practitioner is emerging. Building programs in psychology that offer new opportunities in health services, public service and public policy, publishing, education, entertainment, and commerce opens a world of potential for those whose foundational understanding of psychology is sound.

The concept of the scholar practitioner is interesting to contemplate. It is logical that those who are highly educated in understanding the mind and human behavior are well suited to assume key positions to help the world solve its problems and to capitalize on its opportunities. In education, coupling psychology and media will contribute significantly to the field of educational psychology. In public policy, such knowledge will be central to the dramatic socio-psychomedia world in which we live. All fields will be affected.

 Thucydides, author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* written in 431 BCE, is reputed to have said, "A nation that draws too broad a difference between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking being done by cowards, and its fighting done by fools."

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