

Analysing Effects of Media on Audiences

Read the following scenario, and using your knowledge of media models, answer the questions that follow.

Scenario 1: Amy and TikTok

Amy is a third-year university student struggling with balancing academics, a part-time job, and maintaining friendships. Every night, she spends at least an hour on TikTok. She looks for different types of content depending on her mood—relatable comedy skits for a laugh, study tips to boost productivity, and aesthetic "clean girl" morning routine videos to imagine a calmer, more organised version of her life. However, she actively avoids content that might stress her out, such as advice about how procrastination impacts grades or videos showing students who seem far more accomplished.

Recently, Amy came across a TikTok study influencer who films peaceful "study with me" vlogs. Inspired by the content, Amy has started to emulate these routines by creating a small, tidy study corner in her room and making to-do lists every day. She even shared her own study video online, receiving praise from friends and followers, which reinforced her behaviour.

Questions for Analysis:

What models of media might explain Amy's use of media? Give evidence from extract.

What other models of media might explain the impacts that media has on Amy? Give examples from the extract.



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Scenario 2: Jake and the Moon Landing

Jake is a 25-year-old who spends a lot of time watching YouTube documentaries on conspiracy theories. He recently watched a professionally produced video claiming that the moon landing was staged, which used emotional appeals, fast-paced editing, and quotes from supposed "experts" to support its claims. Convinced, Jake began reposting clips from the documentary on social media, confidently stating that the moon landing was fake.

Initially, his friends were dismissive, but when a popular podcast host Jake admires started promoting similar ideas, more of Jake's peers began to take the theory seriously. Jake's newfound belief in the conspiracy led him to avoid mainstream news altogether, dismissing it as "government propaganda." Instead, he now exclusively follows independent creators and forums that confirm his ideas.

Questions for Analysis:

How does hypodermic syringe theory explain Jake's immediate belief in the moon landing conspiracy after watching the documentary?

How does the two-step flow model explain how the podcast host acted as an opinion leader, influencing both Jake and his friends?

How does selective filter theory explain Jake's rejection of mainstream media and his focus on sources that align with his beliefs?



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Scenario 3: Priya and the Netflix Drama

Priya, a sociology student from a low-income background, was excited to watch a Netflix drama about a working-class family dealing with financial struggles.

While some of her friends found the series heartwarming and inspiring, Priya had a very different reaction. She felt the portrayal of poverty was oversimplified and focused too much on the family's "resilience" rather than addressing structural causes of inequality.

Priya took her thoughts to Twitter, where she joined a broader conversation about the show's impact. Some users praised the series for sparking conversations about poverty, while others criticized its romanticization of working-class struggles. Priya avoided engaging with people who disagreed with her perspective, finding it emotionally draining and unproductive. Meanwhile, the show sparked larger debates in the media, with some news outlets using it to advocate for policy changes while others focused on its entertainment value.

Questions for Analysis:

How does reception analysis explain Priya's oppositional reading of the Netflix drama?

How does the cultural effects model explain the gradual societal influence of the show on public discourse about poverty?

How does selective filter theory explain Priya's decision to avoid engaging with opposing views on social media?



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Scenario 4: Liam and the Fitness Influencer

Liam, a 22-year-old student, has been following a fitness influencer who shares detailed workout routines and diet tips. Initially, Liam followed the influencer out of curiosity but soon became a loyal follower after seeing their consistency and apparent results. Liam purchased the protein powder they recommended and started posting about it on his own social media, tagging the influencer in his posts. His friends, impressed by Liam's visible progress, also started following the influencer and buying the same products.

Over time, Liam noticed a shift in the fitness content he consumed. Other influencers began adopting similar fitness routines and products, and gym culture in his social circles seemed to revolve around these trends. Liam began to question whether these shifts were purely about health or driven by commercial interests.

Questions for Analysis:

How does the two-step flow model explain the influencer's role in shaping Liam's behaviour and how Liam became an opinion leader for his friends?

How does social learning theory explain Liam mimicking the influencer's habits and how reinforcement (e.g., likes and comments) encouraged him?

How does the cultural effects model explain the broader trends in gym culture influenced by influencers?



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Scenario 5: Sophie and the Gaming Community

Sophie, a 19-year-old gamer, spends hours watching a YouTuber known for their aggressive and competitive style of play. The YouTuber regularly uses trash talk and intimidation tactics, which Sophie begins to emulate in her own gameplay. At first, her friends find it amusing, but as Sophie becomes more aggressive, some begin to avoid playing with her. Despite this, Sophie continues the behavior, rationalising it as necessary to win.

Sophie also starts seeking out other content creators who use similar tactics, avoiding channels that emphasize teamwork and inclusivity. When Sophie receives negative feedback from strangers online, she brushes it off as part of the gaming culture, believing that “everyone does it.”

Questions for Analysis:

How does social learning theory explain Sophie adopting the YouTuber’s behaviour and rationalising it through gaming culture?

How does the hypodermic syringe model explain the potential uncritical acceptance of the YouTuber’s behavior as “normal” for competitive gaming?

How does uses and gratifications theory explain Sophie’s preference for aggressive content that aligns with her perception of gaming as competitive?



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Scenario 6: Nathan and Climate Change

Nathan, a 40-year-old engineer, frequently reads news about climate change but avoids articles that link it to human activity. Instead, he focuses on media that attributes climate change to natural cycles. Nathan also watches YouTube debates where “experts” argue against mainstream scientific claims. Over time, Nathan has grown more dismissive of scientific institutions, believing they are motivated by politics.

However, Nathan’s teenage niece recently shared a video from her favourite influencer who passionately advocates for renewable energy. The video was filled with compelling visuals and personal stories, sparking a conversation that made Nathan reconsider some of his views, though he remains skeptical.

Questions for Analysis:

How does the selective filter model explain Nathan’s avoidance of human-caused climate change narratives?

How does the hypodermic syringe model apply to the influence of his niece’s influencer on his thinking?

How does the cultural effects model explain the growing normalization of climate change activism among younger generations and its impact on Nathan?



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Scenario 7: Zara and Mental Health Campaigns

Zara, a 21-year-old aspiring artist, grew up in a family where mental health was never openly discussed. Over the years, she has been exposed to increasing media coverage about mental health, including social media campaigns, celebrity stories, and documentaries. Initially, Zara dismissed these messages as “not relevant” to her life.

Everything changed when her favorite YouTuber shared a deeply personal story about struggling with anxiety. Zara found herself reflecting on her own mental health and began talking to her friends about their experiences. She also noticed that her university had started prioritising mental health initiatives, such as support groups and wellness workshops, which further normalised the conversation for her.

Questions for Analysis:

How does the cultural effects model explain the long-term influence of media campaigns on Zara’s attitudes toward mental health?

How does reception analysis explain why Zara initially resisted the messages but later experienced a shift?

How does the two-step flow model explain the influencer’s role as an opinion leader in Zara’s change of perspective?

