Commodity in Criminality

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Abstract: *Media plays a major part in providing news everyday and it frequently reports on crime activity. This sort of coverage leads to a greater amount of influence on people and thus leads to unhealthy status of mind and fear among the people. Media contributes to change in behavior, attitudes and character of the individuals and can influence the mores of the society. This article discusses about the amount of space given to crime news in the news media and its ill effect on the people.*

Keywords: News media, Crime News, Commodity, Fear and Suspicion

1. Introduction

Mass media has the power to influence people from all walks of life and people of all ages. It acts as a source of entertainment, knowledge and information for the masses. The discriminatory attitude of the media in broadcasting selective topics and resorting to biased coverage has been one of the most researched and debated topic. Interest and curiosity of a common man towards the subject of crime motivates the media to give paramount importance to crime related contents to accomplish their monetary mottos. Undue importance given to crime coverage by media brings the negative contents to the forefront which portrays the society in negative shade and it strongly impacts the belief of common man.

2. Review of Literature

A study by Graber, D. (1980), "Crime News and the Public", found that crime and justice topics accounted for 22 to 28 per cent of stories in the newspapers she studied, 20 percent on local television news, and 12 to 13 percent on network television news. Amount of space given to a news story varies according to a medium in which the news has been given and it also depends on the marketing of the newspaper.

A literature review of 36 American content analyses of crime news conducted between 1960 and 1980Marsh, H.L. (1991), "A Comparative Analysis of Crime Coverage in Newspapers in the United States and Other Countries From 1960–1989: A Review of the Literature', Journal of Criminal Justice", found considerable variation in the proportion of crime: from 1.61 per cent to 33.5 per cent. It is seen that there is a higher proportion of crime news presented in the newspapers as the years go on.

A historical study examined byReiner et al. (2000 a, 2000 b, 2001),"The Politics of the Police","Romantic Realism: Policing and the Media","The Rise of Virtual Vigilantism: Crime Reporting Since World War II" witha random sample of issues of The Times and the Mirror for each year between 1945 and 1991, found a generally upward trend in the proportion of stories focused on crime in both newspapers (from under 10 per cent in the 1940s to over 20 per cent in the 1990s). The sharpest increase occurred during the late 1960s, when the average annual proportion of crime stories almost doubled, from around 10 per cent to around 20 per cent in both papers. In both papers the proportion of stories about the criminal justice system, as distinct from the commission of criminal offences, has clearly increased since the Second World War

A study by Hall, S., Critchley, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., and Roberts, B. (1978), "Policing the Crisis" conducted a wide-ranging analysis of the development of a moral panic about a supposedly new type of robbery, 'mugging', emphasized the crucial part played by the media. Newspapers stimulated public anxiety, producing changes in policing and criminal justice practice which appeared to confirm the initial reports by processing more offenders: a self-fulfilling spiral of deviancy amplification.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., and Ros, S.A. (1961), "Transmission of Aggression through Imitation of Aggressive Models", experimented with children of four to five who were shown a five-minute film in the researcher's office, and then taken to a room with toys and observed for twenty minutes through a one-way mirror. The children were randomly assigned to watch one of three films, enacting scenarios in which a boy who attacked another boy and some toys was depicted as either being rewarded, punished, or neither. The children (especially the boys) who saw the film about the boy rewarded for his attack by getting all the toys to play with, were observed to carry out twice as much imitative aggression as the other groups

Gerbner, G., and Gross, L. (1976), 'Living With Television: The Violence Profile", found that although many studies do recognize the problems of inferring effects on audiencesfrom analyses of media content, there is usually at least an implicit assumption thatthe gap between media representations of crime and the actuality supposedly disclosedby official statistics causes significant problems. Most commonly, the media areaccused of exaggerating the risks of crime, cultivating an image of the world that is 'scary' and 'mean'. Fear of crime and the coping strategies it leads toare deemed disproportionate to the actual risks, and thus irrational and problematic in themselves (Sparks 1992 gives a cogent critique of this 'realist' conception of fear).

Lichter, S.R., Lichter, L.S., and Rothman, S.(1994), "Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture", operated a historical content analysis of 620 randomly selected prime-time TV showsbroadcast between 1955 and 1986 demonstrated the growing preponderance of violentcrime in television fiction. It found that 'television violence has far outstripped reality since the 1950s. In the first decade of our study, there were seven murders for every one hundred characters seen on the screen. This was more than 1,400 times the actual murder rate for the United States during the

same time period' (ibid.: 275; the measure of 'reality' is taken to be the FBI *UniformCrime Reports*, which of course suffer from the same limitations as other official crime statistics).Violent crimes apart from homicide also featured prominently.

3. Theoretical Background

Cultivation Theory
Cultivation theory was a theory composed originally by G. Gerbner and later expanded upon by Gerbner & Gross (1976 – Living with television: The violence profile. Journal of Communication, 26, 76.), they began research in the mid-1960s endeavoring to study media effects, specifically whether watching television influences the audiences idea and perception of everyday life, and if so, how. Cultivation theory states that high frequency viewers of television are more susceptible to media messages and the belief that they are real and valid. Heavy viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are affected by the Mean World Syndrome, the belief that the world is a far worse and dangerous place then it actually is.

Cultivation theorists posit that television viewing can have long-term effects that gradually affect the audience. Their primary focus falls on the effects of viewing in the attitudes of the viewer as opposed to created behavior.

Heavy viewers of TV are thought to be 'cultivating' attitudes that seem to believe that the world created by television is an accurate depiction of the real world. The theory suggests that prolonged watching of television can tend to induce a certain paradigm about violence in the world. Theorists break down the effects of cultivation into two distinct levels: first order – is a general beliefs about the our world, and second order – which are specific attitudes, such as a hatred or reverence for law and order, pedophiles, etc.

The theory suggests that this cultivation of attitudes is based on attitudes already present in our society and that the media take those attitudes which are already present and re-present them bundled in a different packaging to their audiences. One of the main tenets of the theory is that television and media cultivate the status quo, they do not challenge it. Many times the viewer is unaware the extent to which they absorb media, many times viewing themselves as moderate viewers when, in fact, they are heavy viewers.

The theory suggests that television and media possess a small but significant influence on the attitudes and beliefs of society about society. Those who absorb more media are those we are more influenced.

Agenda-Setting Theory
Agenda-setting theory describes the "ability [of the news media] to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda". Agenda-setting theory was formally developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election.

Agenda setting has two levels
The first-level of agenda setting is about the salience transfer of sets of objects. Media uses objects or issues to influence the people what people should think about Second level is about how the media focuses on the characters of issues how people should think about.

4. Method

This study is based upon extensive review of books, journals, articles, as well as results from many researchers on crime news coverage

5. Discussion

Crime is one of the most interesting subjects that attracts audience and makes them more involved into the news. Since crime news are more sensational and it deals with pains, lives and losses, people are immediately grabbed towards these crime stories.People find it more interesting in the intensely dramatized crime stories.Crime news gains attention from everybodyirrespective of ages and background of the people.Crime news from both electronic and print media quickly receive attention of the people and these news gets retained in the minds of the people than another news subjects.

Media gives its complete effort in keeping the audience engaged to their channels/ newspapers to sustain readers/ audience interest.Though media has many of its functions it actively holds peoples with lots of entertainment contents. Development or environmental news stories are seldom covered by media which is the need of the hour in developing countries like India.News is no more just a news. It is the product being sold by media and the crime goes for high price.

Crime news creates more amounts of sensationalization and curiosity when people go through it, because of which it has become the selling point for many newspapers. It's being very much entertaining and it is evident when a common person discusses it a lot. Crime newsare conversed by everyone irrespective of ages, gender and educational level.

Human has the tendency to imitate others behavior and this could be seen in many instance.We don't imitate every behavior of others rather it happens selectively. The biological and psychological nature of human makes him to imitate what he sees, so it is very easy for human to copycat a crimealso. Established offenders in particular will do it unless something intervenes to prevent it. Thus, the imitation capabilities in humans increase the complexity and diversity of copycat crime in the real world.

Crime news are more often found high in city pages than in other sections since the news around the proximal area creates much sensation and pull the readers to go through the content. Usually when the frequencies of coverage increases, the belief on it increases thus it may create a cultivating effect on crime and may create asuspicious and fearful feeling among the people. On the other hand this may also increase the copycat crime.

There are lots of techniques that journalists engage in to hold their readers and audience with their air channels or the newspapers. These days a peculiar form of news reading is seen with the private TV news. They hold a sensational type of tone to pull their audience and keep them engaged with their channels.

It is a big question whether the news media follows their journalistic ethics. It sometime discloses information about the rape victims and moreover it also releases the evidence of some crime issues. Thus violence is glorified in news media. This has become a competition among the news channels on who would cover these issues in first hand to gain the maximum TRP. It is clear that the press has become a complete business rather than a public service.

Since media is a mass effect, whatever it throws is reflected in a massive form. If it sows the seed of positiveness in the minds of people it could be seen in the real lives practices or if it is the vice versa, the society will be in a pathetic situation.

Media if it reduces cultivating this sort of negativity in the minds of people it would serve for the betterment of the humankind.These negativity filled entertainment would definitely affect the person who is low in his moral and mental health. This stimulus of negativity filled crime news may provocate the ill people and make them to fall into more and more sufferings in life.These negative thoughts being injected into the minds of the people as a slow poison and sometimes turns as a cultivation effect which they apply in real life.

Thoughts about the crime news create an uncomforted and self destructive feel.There is a disturbing emotional experience on the self. Though it is not desired by the readers, they cannot ignore or escape from it. Although people often fear crime and criticize that news are too negative and disturbing, they apparently find it more unsettling not to read. Creating such sensation may also make people deviate from performing their mundane task and leave them in consuming sensational news.

Most of the political parties own a private channel in which they give a complete mismatch news compared to one another. It is a complete negative news if it is the opposite party's channel and complete positives if it is the ruling party. The ruling party tries to impress the people by covering only the positive side of the party, its service and the benefits of the people.

This picture is completely different when the party changes. No sort of journalistic honesty is found in these type of coverages. People in general are attracted to negative contents and they are attracted to see the negative things that happen to others. In this case people get lot of exposure to negative news which could bring a fear and suspicion among some people and few others the dangerous habit of enjoying others sufferings. These thoughts may further progress into action and may cause sufferings to others. These negative news also stays as a source for copycatting crime in the real lives.

6. Conclusion

Media is a masterpiece in telling people about any happening and media also has the responsibility in maintaining the societal health. Informing public more about useful news is much important than filling the paper with coverages just for a profit sake. Crime news stories in media have an attractive power towards the public because of their sensational nature and it has the more number of coverage in news media comparative to other subjects. Frequent exposure to this sort of news creates a unhealthy mental status and also triggers fear and suspicion. Thus covering news in aunbiased way would serve the real purpose of journalism instead creating psychological problems.Too much of views into negative contents makes a man negative in thought and behavior as the famous saying goes,"What you see is what you believe".

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