

A Dual Media Model of Cultivation Effects on Values and Subjective Well-being

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Introduction

Media wields powerful influence on individual attitudes and behaviors in the modern society. Decades of research on the cultivation effects of television media established a robust linkage between television viewing and individual values and subjective well-being (e.g., Belk, 1985; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

Recent years have seen an explosion of social media powered by the internet technology. Social media, as a powerful platform for information dissemination and communication, revolutionized the way people communicate with each other. A growing body of literature has capitalized on this trend with numerous studies devoted to understanding the internet phenomenon. Yet, there is a paucity of empirical research investigating both types of media simultaneously regarding their influence on individual values and attitudes. This study fills this gap by juxtaposing the social media (new media) and television media (traditional media) to investigate their respective cultivation effect on materialism, religiosity, and to predict perceived standard of living and life satisfaction. Our focal research question is: do social media and television media differ in their influence on values and subjective well-being, and if so, how?

Theory

Media exposure and materialistic and religious values. Television cultivates materialism (the importance an individual places on the acquisition and possession of material objects) because it can over portray affluence relative to its real-world incidence (Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1994). As such, the amount of television viewing can cultivate materialistic attitude, which in turn, leads to diminished life satisfaction (Shrum, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2005). In a related vein, religiosity, as a fundamental cultural value, was found to counteract the effect of materialistic attitude and enhance subjective well-being among individuals (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Based on cultivation theory and research, we predict that social media can increase materialism and decrease religiosity the same way television media does. Also, we expect that materialism to be negatively associated with perceived well-being while religiosity to be positively associated with perceived well-being. These relationships have been well documented in the literature.

Media exposure via internet versus television and well-being. We expect that the relationship between social media and life satisfaction will be different from that between television media and life satisfaction based on several theoretical rationales. First, social media can function as a socializing agent more than

television does. Television viewing tends to reduce life satisfaction because it may foster a more extrinsic focus on material values at the expense of intrinsic values such as friendship, spirituality, and societal contribution (Shrum et al., 2005). Social media, while plays a similar role as television media in accentuating materialistic attitude, it has also been reported to facilitate the accumulation of social capital and development of life satisfaction (Johnston, Tanner, Lalla, & Kawalski, 2013).

Second, internet has an expanded ability than television to make a wider range of content available for users. The content available on internet is also less edited or molded. Social media users has more choices and control over the content and depth of their media exposure. Third, internet users may find more similarity between them and the referent models from social media and as such more likely to identify with the referent models. In comparison, the degree of similarity that traditional media can offer is often limited to categorical similarities, such as gender, ethnicity, or age. Fourth, internet also provides the capability to deliver individualized messages with customized information to an individual based on characteristics that are unique to that person and related to a behavior interest (Kreuter, Stretcher, & Glassman, 1999). Thus, social media is more likely to boost model identification. Together, the different degree of similarity and identification can lead to different effectiveness of learning processes from social media vs. television media. Finally, the high level of interactivity on the social media platform provides an ongoing feedback mechanism to help participants adjust their expectation and behavior, offer encouragement, which can lead to boosted self-efficacy (Lieberman, 1997).

Given the potential of social media to contribute to socialization, choice and control, similarity and identification, and feedback, we expect social media to enhance life satisfaction (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, we propose that social media will be positively related to life satisfaction while television media will be negatively related to life satisfaction.

Concerning the evaluation of standard of living, individuals develop their perception by comparing the materialistic aspect of their lives to the commercial information depicted on television and internet. Literature on marketing and advertising suggests that television and internet are both primary vehicles companies use for brand building, and that the messages they deliver to the receivers tend to be consistent and coherent (Draganska, Hartmann, & Stanglein, 2014). Therefore, we expected a similar negative influence on perceived stand of living from both social media and television media.

Methods

Analysis. We used a survey to collect data from 1102 business college students from 7 counties (U.S., China, Croatia, Lebanon, India, Pakistan, and South Africa). We used the two-step approach for structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis following the suggestions of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). We ran a series of CFAs to validate the 6-factor measurement model and its constructs depicted in our conceptual model. Goodness-of-fit statistics were excellent (e.g., CMIN/DF = 2.31, CFI = .971, GFI=.951, AGFI=.94, RMSEA = .034, PCLOSE = 1.00). The CFA results indicated convergent validity: each indicator's estimated coefficient loaded significantly on its underlying construct; and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were all above the suggested cutoff score of .5 (O'Leary-Kelly & Vokurka, 1998). Results also confirmed discriminant validity at both the construct and item levels. For all constructs, the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) values are less than the AVE values; and the AVE values are above the Average Shared Variances (ASV) values. Also, the square root of AVE are larger than the inter-construct correlations in all instances. Coefficient alphas and composite reliabilities (C.R.) were calculated to assess the internal reliability of scales; all were well above acceptable levels of .7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Results. Regarding the direct cultivation effect, we found both TV viewing ($\beta=.112$, $P=.008$) and internet usage ($\beta=.093$, $P=.015$) led to higher level of materialism. Internet usage had a negative relationship with religiosity ($\beta=-.122$, $P=.000$), whereas television viewing ($P=.171$) did not relate to religiosity. Regarding the distal cultivation effect on perceived well-being, both internet usage ($\beta=-.112$, $P=.000$) and television viewing ($\beta=-.069$, $P=.053$) led to lower evaluation of standard of living. Concerning the proposed divergent effect of internet vs. television media on life satisfaction, we found a strong, positive impact of internet usage ($\beta=.267$, $P=.000$) on life satisfaction. Television viewing ($P=.478$) did not predict life satisfaction in our sample. Consistent with previous studies, religiosity ($\beta=.086$, $P=.008$) increased life satisfaction while materialism ($\beta=-.189$, $P=.000$) decreased life satisfaction. In addition, evaluation of standard of living ($\beta=.20$, $P=.000$) is positively associated with life satisfaction. Overall, our model is robust, explaining 26% of the variance in self evaluated standard of living and 23.1% of the variance in life satisfaction.

We also controlled for three demographic variables, gender, income level, and nationality, which have been shown to have independent effect on well-being in the literature. Results showed that female ($N=602$, 54.6%) and male ($N=500$, 45.4%) respondents did not differ in their evaluated standard of living ($P=.763$). Yet, female respondents ($\beta=.092$, $P=.003$) reported slightly higher life satisfaction than male respondents. Evaluation of standard of living from the U.S. ($\beta=-.376$, $P=.000$) and Croatia ($\beta=-.168$, $P=.002$) respondents were significantly lower than that from the other countries. However, respondents from China ($\beta=-.309$, $P=.000$) reported a significantly lower life satisfaction than their counterparts from the other countries. U.S. respondents, despite their lower evaluation of standard of living, reported a significantly higher level of life satisfaction level ($\beta=.112$, $P=.068$) than those from the other countries.

Conclusion

Our findings confirmed the cultivation effect of both television media and social media on values and that of values on perceived well-being. Indeed, social media differs from television media in predicting life satisfaction. According to Chafee and Metzger (2001: 369), internet “allow for a greater quantity of information transmission and retrieval, place more control over both content creation and selection in the hands of their users, and do so with less cost to the average consumer.” Given the changing landscape of media and the distinct characteristics of social media, it is critical for scholars and practitioners to understand the effects of new media on individual and organizational life for years to come. Our study makes a valuable contribution to this line of research by testing predictions of media effect developed based on the traditional media era under internet contexts. Our results show that social media and television media have both convergent and divergent influences on individual values and attitudes.

Future Study

This study is the first step of an integrated research program that systematically investigates the influence of television media and social media on individual values and attitudes in a global context over time. In this first study, we take a quantitative focus to examine the influence of media on values and attitudes based on the time individuals spend on television and internet.

In our next study, our focus is to delineate the qualitative differences of specific usage of television program (social comparison) and internet (company website and social network) to predict their influences on values and perceived well-being. Social cognitive theory maintains that media is an important source of information that facilitates observational learning and hence increases self-efficacy to perform given behaviors (Bandura, 2001). Drawing from social cognitive theory, we expect specific usage of television program and internet will have both positive and negative effect on individual values and perceived well-being and will examine the specific linkages.

In addition, we will test our model and hypotheses among different cultural groups to uncover the influences of cultural and economic context. In a global study, Speck and Roy (2008) tested the cultivation theory among 1211 college students from 13 countries. While their findings provided support for the negative cultivation effect of television viewing on life satisfaction, their research also highlighted that there was a cultural and regional boundary condition over the relationships between television viewing, materialistic and religious values, perceived realism, and perceived well-being. Our future study will further their research agenda by examining how the inclusion of internet as a media platform will affect individual values and perceived well-being in different countries, in addition to the traditional television media.

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Appendix: Conceptual Model

