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Media effects during violent conflict: Evaluating media contributions to peace building

Kurzfassung: Die traditionellen Medienwirkungstheorien verfügen über ein enormes Potential, um den möglichen Beitrag der Medien zur Friedensbildung theoretisch abzusichern. Dennoch unternehmen Praktiker, die solche Projekte in Konfliktsituationen implementieren, kaum den Versuch, deren konkrete Wirkung in dem jeweiligen Konfliktfeld zu untersuchen, sondern gehen meist einfach davon aus, dass die Medien die Potenz zur Friedensförderung besitzen. Wenn die Medien Menschen dafür motivieren können, sich in einem Konflikt zu engagieren – so wird angenommen –, dann müssen sie auch die Fähigkeit besitzen, einen umgekehrten Einfluss auszuüben und Friedensprozesse zu fördern.
Die vorliegende Studie setzt sich mit den grundlegenden Medienwirkungstheorien des 20. Jahrhunderts auseinander und unternimmt eine Synthese der Medienwirkungstheorien mit dem Ziel, besser verstehen zu können, wie die Medien politische Konflikte beeinflussen. Nach einer Untersuchung der verschiedenen Typen von Medienbotschaften, des Medienpublikums und der Umweltbedingungen, unter welchen die Medien in Konflikten den stärksten Einfluss ausüben, werden mögliche Wege vorgeschlagen, wie die Medien effektiv zur Friedensförderung eingesetzt werden können.

Abstract: Traditional media effects theories have an enormous potential to provide theoretical support for the study of media contributions to peace in a conflict environment. However, practitioners who implement projects in conflict situations rarely attempt to examine the effects of these projects on a particular conflict. Most practitioners assume that media must have the power to influence the development of peace in a conflict environment. Practitioners and authors assume that if media can motivate people to engage in conflict, they must also have the power to exert influence in the opposite direction, thus promoting peace. This study takes into consideration the most basic theories of media effects throughout the 20th century. Ultimately, it attempts to synthesize the media effects literature, while hoping to improve the understanding of how media may affect political conflict. After examining the various types of media messages, people (audience) and conditions in the environment on which media have the most powerful impact in times of conflict, the study proposes ways to most effectively employ mass media in promoting peace.

1   Introduction

The history of the 20th century will prominently chronicle the relationship between war and the mass media. One obvious outcome of the relationship is the exploitation of media for war promotion and war propaganda (e.g. the effective use of early mass communication channels by the Allies in World War I and the pernicious exploitation of mass media by NS-Germany). It is not surprising to find a close association between media and violence in each conflict of the last decade. Several analyses even attribute an instigative role to the media in inciting violence (Thompson, 1999; Des Forges, 1999; Kirschke, 1996).

If the media have played an important role in breeding violence, it seems logical to examine the prospects for the reverse perspective – positive media contributions to ending violence and building peace. In other words, if media are often found to support forces that lead to violent conflict, they should also have the power to support the forces of peace. The fundamental issue to be addressed in this study is the contemporary understanding of the impact that mass communication channels have in modern societies experiencing conflict. Any application that engages media in promoting a specific type of behavior would have no scientific basis without a thorough analysis of how media affect audiences. While media have been prominent contributors to every post-Cold War conflict (Price and Thompson, 2002; Allen and Seaton, 1999), their role in post-conflict peace development has not been as apparent. However, in the past few years sufficient evidence has been accumulated to justify at least mild optimism regarding the role of media in peace development, thanks to devoted practitioners in international governmental agencies and non-profit organizations (Heiber, 2001; Spurk, 2002; Howard et al., 2003). These have made a major contribution by using mass communication channels to aid the recovery of post-conflict societies, and their initial accomplishments have been documented in Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, Croatia, Israel/Palestine, Macedonia, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, etc. These projects all had remarkably positive results and provide illustrations of positive, innovative uses of media in peace processes. The following three projects are the best illustrations of such practices:

Good Friday of 1998 will remain a special day in the histories of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. On that day, one of the longest running conflicts in modern history seemed to be finally over as representatives of the conflict parties of Northern Ireland agreed to a political settlement known as the *Good Friday Agreement*. Northern Ireland's most recent three decades of "troubles" were at last going to be consigned to the past thanks to the unstinting efforts of Catholic and Protestant peacemakers. The final step towards the acceptance of the Good Friday Agreement was to be a referendum. There was significant animosity toward the agreement on both sides, and for some time it seemed as if the agreement would not win sufficient public support. The British government decided to seek help from an unlikely source – McCann Erickson, one of the world's leading advertising agencies. McCann Erickson's solution was to develop a media campaign emphasizing the benefits of the Good Friday Agreement. A month later, the agreement received the support of 71 percent of the people on both sides of the conflict (Ark Survey, 1998). It is impossible to gauge the campaign's direct influence on the public's decision to support the agreement. However, it was documented that the advertising campaign played a role in the acceptance of the political agreement, leading to a peaceful resolution of the conflict (O'Neill, 1998).

At about the same time, the long-running Middle East conflict between Israelis and Palestinians was escalating. There was, however, one piece of good news. Research found that the younger generation was becoming more tolerant, especially those children who watched the Israeli-Palestinian version of "Sesame Street," called "Rechov SumSum/Shara'a SimSim" (Cohen, 2002). The program was a project of Sesame Workshop, the creators of "Sesame Street," which has provided many hours of educational programming to children around the world. This time Sesame Workshop produced a program for a society where violent ethnic conflict was deeply ingrained. It developed a show with the goal of increasing tolerance between the two communities. The results were very encouraging; children who viewed the show generally displayed improved levels of tolerance and acceptance of the other group in the conflict (Cohen, 2002).

During the 1994 conflict in Rwanda, Hutus committed large-scale atrocities against the Tutsi community. One of the main influences that provoked this violence is thought to have been a broadcaster, Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (Free Radio-Television of the Thousand Hills). While messages inciting violence were being broadcast on the radio, people were being massacred in the streets. After the violence, building on the prominence and assumed power of the radio in Rwanda, a group of peacemakers decided to use the medium to influence the population, just as Radio Mille Collines had, but with a diametrically opposite goal – peace and reconciliation. In 1995, Studio Ijambo (Wise Words) was established in neighboring Burundi by the international NGO, Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The main objective of the studio was to produce a variety of messages that could contribute to peace development. With the slogan, "Dialogue is the future," the studio has produced media offerings on social affairs, news programs, dramas, documentaries, children's programs, etc. Most of their programs directly address the roots of the regional conflict (SFCG, 2004).

All three projects have been viewed as successful media implementations in a conflict environment. However, practitioners implementing projects in conflict situations rarely attempt to examine the degree of impact that these projects may have on a particular conflict. A common assumption shared by most practitioners is that media have the power to influence the

development of peace in a conflict environment. This view is based on the conclusions of practitioners and authors who assume that if media can move people to engage in conflict, by the same token they must have the power to work in the opposite direction, thus promoting peace. Many articles and reports begin with such assumptions, but never attempt to find supportive evidence in the literature (Price and Thompson, 2002; Howard et al., 2003). Had such an analysis been made, it would have shown that not only are there few studies that attempt to establish a direct causal link between media and violence, but that this relationship is complex and cannot be simply taken for granted. What is significantly more problematic is that the weak correlation is now taken out the context of violent conflict and assumed to have the same intensity in facilitating peaceful outcomes.

To address this problem, this study proposes a rigorous evaluation of the possibility that media can contribute to conflict resolution and transformation. The most basic theories of media effects are considered. This study takes into consideration the development of media effects theories throughout the 20th century. As pointed out by McQuail (1994), *media effects* theories start with the phase of the 1920s, when the media seemed all-powerful, continue with the first empirical tests that showed only limited and moderate effects, and evolve into studies that have discovered powerful effects. To fully understand the potential for media to contribute to the peaceful resolution of hostilities in a conflict society, an historical examination of media effects is necessary. Media effects theory can help us to understand how an audience best learns from the media. It further explains a variety of conditions under which media are more effective, and vice versa. Finally, some research conducted in response to international wars and conflicts reveals how the impacts of media may be different during armed conflict. All of these issues should help to guide the contemporary implementation of peace-promoting media projects in societies undergoing conflict.

2   Media impact and conflict audiences, environments and messages

The issue of media effects theory has been at the center of mass communication studies ever since its development in the 1920s. Defined as a "relationship between the media content and its audiences" (Newbold, 1995, p. 119), media effects have been both confirmed and disputed throughout the history of mass communication studies. Even today, after many years and many studies, there is little agreement among scholars with regard to the magnitude of effects, or even about the best approach to the problem (McQuail, 1994). Contending theories of mass communication effects have been one of the hallmarks of mass communication studies.

Resistant as the field is to complete integration, all attempts to provide a comprehensive overview become chronological descriptions of developments in the field (McQuail, 1994; Baran and Davis 1995; Lowery and DeFleur, 1995). In this kind of environment, a synthesis of media effects theories into a single theory is still needed. These conditions, even though not necessarily detrimental to mass communication studies, have prevented the integration of media effects with other academic disciplines, e.g. conflict resolution. The best answer to the question posed by peace studies experts of "What can media do to help us resolve conflict?" could be suggested by their mass communication colleagues in the following terms: some media messages may influence some people under some conditions.

Working within these parameters, we should look at the types of media messages, people (audience) and conditions in the environment where media have the most powerful impact. Schramm and Roberts (1977) identified three factors – the *audience* factor, *message* factor (mass media), and *situation* (environment) – for their analysis of mass communication effects. For the purposes of this study, these factors are examined through the prism of a conflict situation.

2.1 Audiences in violent conflicts

After World War I, the first analyses and interpretations of mass communication assumed a very powerful influence of early media during the war (Lippmann, 1922; Lasswell, 1928; Bernays 1928). Persuaded by the power of government-controlled propaganda, the authors envisioned mass communication as a means to influence societies in the directions desired by elites (Lippmann, 1922). Stimulus-response psychology convinced those social scientists that mass media stimuli could control and induce entire audiences to behave in uniform ways. The dominant view at that time, which was, however, supported by very little empirical research, painted the picture of a monolithic, vulnerable audience passively absorbing media messages. Soon after the initial studies of propaganda, Lasswell, Lippman and Bernays hypothesized that if media are powerful in persuading people to support war, then they may also be used to bring about desired social improvements. Although social scientists have proposed hypotheses about the positive role of propaganda, the literature rarely addresses the positive influence of mass communication. This idealistic belief in the ability of social scientists to understand and use "propaganda" for positive rather than negative purposes is often neglected. Both Lasswell and Lippmann thought that propaganda had a place and purpose in the hands of a "specialized class." Lippmann's cynicism about the public as a "bewildered herd" and Lasswell's disillusionment with "democratic romanticism" share a common solution – the management of public interests by a responsible elite (Lasswell, 1927; Lippmann 1922, 1925). Bernays (1928) goes a step further to suggest that the intellectual minority should utilize such management in promoting international peace. Even John Dewey (1939) argued

for persuasion when he claimed that democracy was "persuasion through public discussion carried on not only in legislative halls but in the press, private conversations and public assemblies" (p. 139). Even if this is where the idea of peace media may have originated, the modern understanding of the effort hardly coincides with the ideas of the forefathers of communication research.

With the beginning of empirical research came doubts about both the direct effects of media and the passivity of the audience. Countering the dominant view, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944) initially suggested that "opinion leaders" often pass on mediated messages to their audiences. In the early 1950s, Berelson et al. (1954) and Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) explained that in informal social relationships leaders gain information from the mass media that they filter down to other, less active persons. They also described the audience's use of media as a selective process (Katz 1980; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Consequently, its perception becomes rather selective, thus contributing to selective exposure, selective perception and selective retention.

Building on this research, Katz and Lazarsfeld concluded that people actively pay attention to and select messages that agree with their preconceptions. This was later restated as the *reinforcement role* of media – the theory that media do not so much change as reinforce preexisting audience beliefs (Klapper, 1960).

In the 1950s, researchers decided that audience activity depends on the existence of specific needs. Herzog (1944) and Berelson (1949) concluded that media are often used in response to needs. This "*uses and gratification*" model helped explain why audiences are much more active than was assumed in the early stages of theory development (Katz, 1959; Blumler & Katz, 1974). The next few decades were devoted to a debate over whether audiences are more passive or more active. McQuail (1994) finds that the balance of expert opinion sides with the "active audience" perspective, despite opposing theories by Gerbner (Gerbner et al., 1986) and Noelle-Neumann (1984) that ascribe a powerful impact to media, thus reviving the concept of the "helpless audience."

In a conflict situation, it is very important to understand the direct impact of conflict on an audience in order to predict its behavior. The question that should be posed concerns the impact of conflict on the audience and the audience's reaction to the media in the conflict. What we know about people in conflict agrees with common sense: they are afraid, feel uncertain and vulnerable. Another common feature is that the need for information increases rapidly. Information acquired from media can play a decisive role in achieving a certain level of security. Information about the possible threats, direction and level of violence, even basic information about supplies are often shared through the media. A good illustration of the increased need for information is provided by the terror attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. At that time, several major Internet news services were overwhelmed (e.g. the CNN website experienced ten times the traffic of the previous day), phone calls flooded the major phone companies, and TV ratings sky-rocketed (CNN, 2001).

In a model that describes the power of media as the main agenda setter, McCombs (1996) identifies this situation as arising from a "*need for orientation*" and proposes that the greater the need for orientation becomes, the greater will be the power of media to influence audiences. In other words, in times of conflict, the multiplicity of uncertainties in the environment increases audience need for information, which consequently makes audiences more vulnerable to media influence. Gerbner et al. (1986) reach the same conclusion in a study of "heavy viewers." They argue that the viewers more prone to share the imagery of television are the ones who tend to watch more TV. In such a situation, this need for information creates a disproportionate number of heavy viewers. These are people dependent on TV for their information. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) claim that the more people rely on media information suppliers, the more influence media will have on their environment.

On the other side of the argument, Krugman (1965) suggests that with high audience involvement in a given subject matter, media tend to be less influential. McCombs agrees, as he rephrases the issue, when he claims that agenda-setting has little effect on "obtrusive" issues – ones that can be experienced personally without relying on media contributions. However, populations engaged in wars are rarely able to understand the war beyond what is happening in their immediate surroundings. Within society, war – although it is an *obtrusive issue* – is still to a large extent puzzling to the majority of people. Very few events of great importance unfold before their eyes. The need for orientation is actually maximal, because media accounts of larger contexts (political negotiations, battles on other parts of the territory, humanitarian aid, etc.) are essential to satisfy the need for orientation. Major, overarching occurrences determine the development of the war more than do particular local events. In other words, the need for orientation during war prevails over its obtrusive nature.

The *uses and gratification* model explains how and why audiences use media. It shifts the focus from the study of media to the study of audiences. It looks at the social and psychological origins of needs and how they determine the use of and expectations regarding media.

In terms of audiences, we have learned that what they bring to media interacts with what media bring to them (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1974; Herzog 1944). No longer can we perceive the audience to be atomized and vulnerable to the influence of media, but rather we must understand it as consisting of active individuals and groups with specific needs,

values, intellectual capabilities and personal characteristics. Therefore, these personal attributes of the audience largely determine the way it responds to media messages (Cantril, 1940; Hovland et al., 1949). For example, research on the World War II *"Why We Fight"* films, has shown that a better-educated and more intelligent audience can learn more from media content. This series of films was part of a propaganda campaign initiated by the U.S. government, which wanted to persuade draftees of the necessity to participate in the war. Soldiers were also more likely to engage in a more thorough analysis (Hovland et al., 1949). If it is likely that the audience will be exposed to arguments for other alternatives, both sides of the issue should be presented. Discussions of both sides of an issue also seem to have been more appealing to this demographic group, while less educated audiences seem to have been more easily persuaded by one-sided messages. Those kinds of messages are also better received in cases where the audience already agrees with the message. However, two-sided arguments were more convincing than ones that opposed the initial argument (Hovland et al., 1949). This means that in a post-conflict environment where conflicting group beliefs and opinions are expected and media presentations are uncensored and multi-faceted, "peace media" should present two-sided arguments. This also holds for the intellectual and better-educated population groups, such as journalists, community leaders and local politicians – in other words, opinion leaders.

Research conducted by Hovland and his colleagues shows that people can acquire both *information* and *attitudes* from media; but this does not necessarily happen simultaneously. Even though these are closely intertwined, information gain does not necessarily lead to attitudinal change. This information is invaluable to practitioners evaluating peace media projects, who may be too quick to conclude that media have failed if they do not produce attitudinal or behavioral changes. In some cases, contributing to *cognitive* knowledge is the only achievement of a media project. It was also found that people pay attention to information that fits their preconceptions (Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). In regard to conflict, people may reject or may not even take cognizance of information that is not in accordance with their beliefs. This agrees with the findings of Bandura's *social learning theory* (1986), which states that people learn best from behavior they understand to be beneficial. It is very easy to present peace as beneficial and to arouse preconceptions that favor peace over war and conflict.

2.2 Conflict environment

When Albert Bandura introduced his *social cognitive* theory, he stated that the human personality is influenced by interactions among the environment, behavior and the person's cognitions and emotions (Bandura, 1986). These factors have a bi-directional interactive relationship, where no one factor is solely predominant, but instead all the factors influence each other. In a conflict situation, one of these factors – environment – can be isolated in an attempt to examine its influence on audiences. An important question that arises here concerns what we know about the conditions in the conflict environment and how the environment impacts on media and audiences.

Mass communication research was institutionalized immediately after World War I, and a great deal of research was conducted on the propaganda used in both World War I and World War II (Bernays, 1928; Creel, 1920; Doob, 1935; Lasswell, 1927). Scholars also continue to examine the use of media in World War II (Ellul, 1963; Zemen, 1964; Thum and Thum, 1972) and the Cold War (Hallin, 1986; Jowett and O'Donnell, 1998; Chomsky and Herman, 1988). Thus, we should be able to describe the conflict-media environment condition with a great deal of accuracy.

One of the first studies of media effects was Hadley Cantril's analysis of reactions to the famous *War of the Worlds* radio play (Cantril, 1940). Audience responses to this radio broadcast of the dramatized H.G. Wells tale about a Martian invasion of the Earth helped provide insights into the importance of the environment and its relation to effects. In his monumental analysis, Cantril quotes listeners' explanations of the reasons why they panicked and started fleeing from their homes. One chapter of Cantril's book, *Being in a Troublesome World*, proposes that one reason for the panic had to do with recent war fears and the possibility of a foreign attack or invasion. Historical conditions at the time of the broadcast, namely Nazi politics in 1938, produced uncertainty, which consequently greatly influenced the way people behaved while listening to the broadcast. This tells us that a conflict environment, full of uncertainty and insecurity, is an environment that facilitates media effects to a greater degree. It is also safe to assume that if the conflict environment facilitates uncertainty, then the need for orientation will be rather high and media effects will be more powerful (McCombs, 1994). From a developmental perspective, Cambridge (2002) argues that in a time of stress the consumption of media increases, thus increasing the impact of media.

We know that in conflict situations media systems in general will usually be underdeveloped and rarely diverse. It is not uncommon to find that only a few news sources dominate the media environment (e.g. at the time of the conflict in Rwanda there were only a single national radio station and two weekly newspapers, *Imvaho* and *La Relévé*). In his study on media cultivation, Gerbner (Gerbner et al., 1986) explains that in countries with consistent and redundant television content, the opportunity for media to cultivate a particular set of beliefs is more predictable and consistent. Noelle-Neumann (1984) came to a similar conclusion when she explained how one-sided media content generates a dominant opinion that silences

the opinions of the minority, which is afraid of becoming isolated. A war environment reinforces a monolithic, unified response to reality and contributes to a crowd mentality. The '*spiral of silence*' best characterizes media in a war situation – an environment in which the prevalence of the majority opinion leads to the suppression of alternative views (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). This explanation outlines two different directions for media development during conflict. Firstly, if one-sided, consistent media content highlights conflict, then the proliferation of new and different voices is a way to counter homogeneity. Preferably, if there is an opportunity to build a new media system, such a system ought to be saturated with images and messages that emphasize the benefits of a peaceful society.

One of the main criticisms of Lazarsfeld's research on the 1940 election campaigns (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985) focuses on his method of measuring media effects in an environment where two political campaigns were competing with information that was often contradictory. What Lazarsfeld failed to take into account was that the media net effect is a zero-sum effect: "all those effects favoring the winning candidate, minus those favoring the loser" (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985, p. 273). These environments are characterized by competing, contradictory information that negates and denies the opposing message. A conflict environment is hardly the same as an election environment. Audiences in conflicts are often exposed to highly one-sided messages, with little exposure to opposing information. This is why it is invaluable to understand that the minimal effects of a bipartisan (election) environment may not translate into a more complex conflict environment.

In contrast, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) account for the increase in dependency on the media by proposing that such dependency is most obvious in two situations: a) where these media supply information central to the needs of the audience and b) where some sort of instability increases uncertainty and ambiguity. There can hardly be any doubt that a war environment is characterized by both of these conditions. Thus, the authors conclude, increased dependency on the media further increases media effects on audiences.

Marshal McLuhan (1964) identified the importance of media in *form* rather than *content*. McLuhan's idea that the "medium is the message" implies that the important effect of a medium results from its form, not its content. Transferred to a conflict environment, the form of the medium in a time of peace-building can be more influential than the actual message. Therefore, it may be in media institutions that the reconciliation or transformation of conflict should begin. More important than any specific story or message may be simply that there *is* a medium that can be listened to, watched or read by all parties to a conflict. Moreover, if this media project employs journalists representing all conflict parties, such a change in form, according to McLuhan, is more important than the message conveyed to the audience.

To sum up the presentation so far, a conflict environment brings about conditions of uncertainty, insecurity and "silence" that enhance the effects of media. This realization can offer a great potential for the advocates of peace as opposed to conflict to use such conditions to promote peace through the media.

2.3 Media messages during violent conflict

In general, media can influence any process of social change in two directions. As suggested by Kurt Lewin (1958), it is possible to pursue social change either by supporting the forces working in the desired direction or by opposing the forces oriented in the opposite direction. Transferred to a conflict environment, peace and reconciliation in society can be achieved either by countering the actors and processes that fuel conflict, or by supporting their opponents in the peace-movement.

One possible direction in media development for peace would be to eliminate the media practices, messages and resources that may have contributed to sustaining the conflict. In most of the conflicts that occurred over the past fifteen years, there has been a very close linkage of media and violence (Price and Thompson, 2002). It would be logical to assume that media can further the peace process through the suppression of the opposing force – war propaganda. This has happened in many cases of conflict, such as when radio broadcasts were banned in Rwanda (Metzl, 1997a; 1997b), or when the broadcasts of Bosnian nationalist stations were discontinued (Thompson, 1999). Because the suppression of information may be controversial due to the ethical implications, the role of media institutions in transitions to peace should focus on the latter. Therefore, this study is mainly concerned with discovering effective methods to aid the forces of peace. It is noteworthy that a large amount of literature already exists on how media promote conflict, but only very little is available on the role of media in contributing to peace-building. Thus, until we show that media can have a positive social influence in promoting peace, all we can do is to suppress what we identify as negative media forces.

There is no single way that media affect audiences. Unfortunately, almost a century after the first mass communication analyses, we know more about the limitations of media than about their potential. On one hand, media do not have the power to directly inject a certain behavior or attitude into people's minds, as was formerly believed (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Klapper, 1960). On the other hand, the effects of media are neither minimal nor negligible. Even though media are almost never the sole agents of change, they are a prominent factor in complex social systems that give rise to change (Severin and Tankard, 1992).

Over the last 80 years, and especially between 1930 and 1980, a number of studies have yielded a variety of explanations of how media affect audiences (De Fleur and Dennis, 1998; Lowery and DeFleur, 1995). The clearest way to describe media effects research is to present the chronological development of the studies and theories. After the early mass communication analyses of the use of media in World War I, the concept of all-powerful media was clearly the dominant paradigm (Lasswell, 1927; Lippmann 1922, 1925; Bernays 1923, 1928). What the authors of the post-war period described as the direct, powerful effects of propaganda were then perceived as dangerous in peacetime. The potentially manipulative nature of propaganda caused many social scientists to have second thoughts about its utilization. This produced a dominant effect paradigm that is best suggested by the "*hypodermic needle*" metaphor, which implies that media have the power to "inject ideas, attitudes, and dispositions toward behavior into a passive, atomized and extremely vulnerable audience" (Gitlin, 1995). In the 1920s, the Payne studies helped explain the influence of movies in constructing audience reality (Lowery and DeFleur, 1995). Movies can provide models of behavior, influence attitudes and shape interpretations of reality.

Along the same lines was research on the effects of movies on soldiers in World War II done by Hovland in his study of Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films. However, the results were slightly different (Hovland et al., 1949). Hovland concluded that movies could successfully transmit a large volume of information content to a large number of people in a short time with strong effects. Although the films succeeded in increasing soldiers' cognitive knowledge of the war, there was no evidence that films exercised a decisive influence on their attitudes and motivations. Furthermore, he speculated that source credibility is important in producing immediate change, but has less impact over the long term. Over time, audience members remembered parts of the message even though they could not judge the credibility of its source. Therefore, the implications of these findings for a conflict environment are the following: a) negative propaganda fueling hatred may be remembered even if it comes from a questionable source and b) peace media presentations may not immediately result in behavioral change, because informational gain does not automatically translate into changes in behavior.

A similar conclusion was underlined in a landmark study by Klapper (1960), who found that media play a role in the interplay among social, behavioral, environmental and other factors, with change resulting only from an overall set of complex variables. Klapper's (1960) paradigm-changing study states that:

Mass media ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effect, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors and influences. These mediating factors render mass communication as a contributory agent in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions. (p. 8)

Klapper's study appeared after a series of studies that were intended to provide empirical evidence but failed to show direct and powerful effects. However, Gitlin (1995) explains that these studies relied on short-term experiments and surveys, neglected the measurement of cumulative effects and focused on *behavioral* rather than *cognitive* effects. He states that the effects were so narrowly defined that the studies were likely to show at most only slight changes in effects. Many subsequent studies focused on cumulative effects over a longer period and explored conditions under which changed effects were more likely to be found.

Lippmann (1977) originally focused on how people respond not just to the real environment, but also to an environment they do not directly experience. He called this a *pseudo-environment* and claimed that it existed in the form of "pictures in our head." Gerbner et al. (1986) agreed and suggested that in modern society, TV is the most significant contributor to this pseudo-environment or, as he phrased it, "*symbolic environment*." It is through this environment that media are able to cultivate thoughts and attitudes in audiences. People have been found to acquire knowledge and behavior through modeling and imitation (Bandura, 1986). The question that arises here is: If this symbolic environment were saturated with images of peace instead of conflict, would such a media source cultivate peace in society? The answer would probably be in the affirmative. However, Gerbner suggests that the results of such an effort should arise through cumulative (repetitive, long-range, consistent exposure) influences on cognition rather than short-term influences on behavior. Drawing on this analysis, it may be more important that peace messages be present across the media environment in all genres and characteristics, rather than in an isolated persuasive effort. In a theory called "*mainstreaming*," Gerbner predicts that heavy viewing will override differences in perspective due to other variables (e.g. political preference, nationality, etc.). This gives us reason to hope that an audience that is highly involved in a shared media experience that promotes positive messages of peace will be more likely to overcome traditional differences that may have caused the conflict.

Another way to produce a positive effect through media could be in the form of *social learning* (Bandura, 1986). Social learning theory argues that people acquire behavior by observation and then store their observations to use as guides for future behavior. Similarly, media messages are capable of evoking semantically related concepts. This media effect, known as *priming*, implies that an idea expressed in the media can activate an idea in the audience that is similar in meaning. Many examples in meta-analyses by Andison and Chachere show that witnessing violence increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Jo and Berkowitz, 1994). However, there are conditions under which priming is more likely to happen: the meaning of the message must be interpreted as was intended, the interpretation must be worthwhile and justified, and there needs to be a positive identification with the character of the message. Providing that these conditions are met, there is no reason why pro-social behavior cannot be primed in the quest for peace.

The *agenda-setting* model of Shaw and McCombs (McCombs, 1994) represents another approach to the study of media effects. It does not argue that media have the power to directly inject attitudes and behavior into peoples' minds. On the contrary, it argues that media have effects on the scope of their thinking. Media do not tell audiences what to think, but rather what to think about (Cohen, 1963). In other words, the public often comes to share an agenda similar to the one that media present to them on a daily basis. McCombs admits that real-life events determine the media agenda more than any other factor. However, he also acknowledges the influence of politicians, journalists and journalistic practices. This would imply that when events in the environment are violent, then conflict-oriented media will probably mirror this as their own agenda. This is where the importance of a gatekeeper or news editor becomes apparent. Gadi Wolfsfeld's analysis (1997) of newspaper editorials published in Northern Ireland shows how editorial practices pursued an agenda of peace while maintaining journalistic integrity and professionalism. He examined Catholic and Protestant newspaper editorials during the peace negotiations in 1998. Of 152 editorials, only two opposed a peace agreement. Editors in Northern Ireland apparently felt little need to provide a balance between the proponents and opponents of peace. This finding is especially surprising, given that these editorials were written during periods of violence, when the peace process seemed to be in danger. It is possible that these practices adopted the *social responsibility* role of the press, as explained in 1963 by Seibert et al. The social responsibility of journalists is the professional sense of an obligation to present the full range of opinions. In addition, journalists are accountable not only to their audiences, but also to governments that reserve the right to criticize the media. There is no doubt that the agenda of social responsibility could facilitate the agenda of peace development.

3   Conclusion

Even though we are still unsure about the impact of media on behavioral change, we are confident in the power of media to influence beliefs, opinions and attitudes that eventually translate into action. We know that media influence people in both the short and the long terms. This impact depends on a wide range of variables. Media have powerful effects under the right circumstances, if appropriate communication techniques are employed. The environment of violent conflict and war enhances audience dependence and susceptibility to media, thus enhancing media impact. We have seen that a conflict environment is a specific situation that gives media more prominence and that certain techniques are more likely to influence an audience (see Table 1). Media effects must therefore not be ignored in the effort to transform a society of conflict into a society of peace.

Audience	Environment	Messages
Media used in war as propaganda – could be used for good causes	A conflict environment increases the impact of media	a) Messages in support of peace and b) suppression of messages inciting violence
Through opinion leaders	Uncertainty, insecurity, time of stress – media consumption increases	Considerable message effects – not as direct as in the "hypodermic needle" model
Selective exposure, perception, retention	Environment with homogenous media content cultivates beliefs more consistently	Messages influence attitudes, shape perceptions of reality, provide models for behavior
Consume information in response to a need	A one-sided media environment ignores minority opinions	Guide for future behavior
Increased need for information, need for orientation – more vulnerable to media impact	Dependency on media increases during conflict	Increase cognitive knowledge
Education and demographics influence the effects	Transformation of media institutions as a venue and a model for the peaceful transformation of society	Cumulative impact over time
Inclined to listen to information consistent with own beliefs		Over time differences are "mainstreamed" into more coherent views
Reception of information does not automatically lead to attitude change		Media set agendas – peace-oriented messages – more positive agenda

Table 1: Media effects in conflicts: Audience, environment and messages

What we know about media influence in conflict and peace is best summarized in the research literature on media effects. The literature suggests that media are capable of influencing audiences, and its impact can be both positive and negative. The role of media in building peace is simultaneously both substantial and limited. As is found in the literature, but also in

the practical examples from the field, media have the power to contribute to the formation of attitudes and opinions and to increase knowledge and awareness by supplying information. What is limited about its ability to facilitate peace development is the uncertainty that this positive impact will be translated into behavior or result in action. For this to happen, a number of other variables need to align with the media effort. Mostly because an action or behavior depends on many variables other than media impact, and because a variety of variables contribute to the end result as much as any form of communication initiative, only the true integration of media and the results of peace-building strategies can guarantee a significant move toward a peaceful society.

There is no doubt that the relationships among media and influences on behavior, actions and opinions are very complex. However, the effects of media on the formation of attitudes, beliefs, and opinions are much more apparent than the effects on behavior. What determines this impact depends upon the media type, form, source, environment and timing, but more importantly upon a number of other factors in the environment that have little to do with the media. It is important to note that in each of the examples given above, media appear as a single component of a comprehensive political process of peace development. Therefore, it would be a mistake to claim that the media could contribute to peace single-handedly. Media are a necessary but not sufficient element of peace development; they can only aid in solving problems of communication, but not in changing the deep-rooted causes of conflict. The role of media, as Lippmann suggested in the 1920s, is not to replace social organizations and institutions, but rather media can only be as strong as a society's institutions and processes. Just as pro-war propaganda does not single-handedly cause war, peace media cannot single-handedly end conflict. In order to be productive, media need to assist institutions in their pursuit of peace-building. Thus, media influences on peace development can be strengthened by thorough and rigorous interdisciplinary research.

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