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### Media Psychology: Past, Present, and Future

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The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology

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### Abstract and Keywords

In this concluding chapter, general issues related to the future of media psychology are presented. Among these issues are the growing concern over negative media effects; how to avoid reductionist and dichotomous thinking about media; emphasizing effective communication about media psychology research and application to the public; continuing to define and refine the field of media psychology; and avenues for extending and complicating theoretical approaches. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive list of future directions for new research in the field.

Keywords: media psychology, negative media effects, communication, media psychology research and application, media use, love/hate media debate

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Media use and its role in our lives is growing and changing. As these changes unfold, the discipline of media psychology has emerged to investigate and better understand the interaction between humans and media.

Worldwide, nearly 7 trillion text messages were sent in 2010. China and India have, by far, the most mobile device users, accounting for almost a third of the world market. Although the United States is a distant third in the percentage of mobile device users, 88% of American adults own a mobile device—and they are more likely to own a mobile device than any other digital device such as a computer or tablet (MobiThinking, 2012). Texting is on the increase and talking on the phone is on the decrease. Among US teens, texting is by far the most common daily communication activity (69% of teens text daily), followed by cell phone calls (35%) and in person socializing outside of school (29%) (Lenhart, 2012).

Social networking via media is a relatively new phenomenon, but one that has embedded itself in social life around the globe. Sixty-six percent of American Internet users access social media online. The average American Facebook user born in Generation X has 197 Facebook friends, and the average Millennial has 318 (MobiThinking, 2012; Ranie, 2012). Facebook reported that 425 million people used its mobile app monthly in 2011. Today, the average Facebook user spends 405 minutes on Facebook online monthly (Osborne, 2012).

Though new media use captures our attention and imagination, some traditional media use is also growing. Television viewing continues to rise, with Americans and Australians, for example, reporting increases in traditional television viewing and also increased viewing through online streaming and DVR use as well as increased media multitasking. According to Nielsen (Nielsen Wire, 2011) the average American spends 20% of his or her day watching television.

### Why Media Psychology? Why Now?

The sheer amount of current media use, the evolving media landscape and its importance to our daily lives all clearly suggest the need for us to understand our relationship with media both as creators and consumers

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(Bartholow & Bolls, Chapter 27). As Bartholow and Bolls (Chapter 27) put it: “media use occurs on a scale that is nearly too massive to comprehend.” The way we send and receive information of many kinds is shifting and we want to know what implications this has for us as users and creators. For example, there is a shift from reading news via print media to both reading and writing content online and on smartphones. These changes from print to digital and from passive to active users and cocreators (Chapter 2) excite public curiosity. Our discipline of media psychology is the field that is best poised to answer questions scholars, consumers, educators, health care providers, journalists, politicians, and the general public need to know about the evolving role of media in our modern lives.

To help us understand media psychology, this volume (see, e.g., Bartholow & Bolls, Tuma, and Brown Rutledge; Chapters 3, 4, and 27) offers a history and some preliminary definitions of the discipline. These chapters explore the essential ideas and approaches of the field and what it offers. For example, Tuma (Chapter 4) asserts that media psychology has its roots in disciplines like media studies, and social and perceptual psychology, and argues that the deeper and foundational roots of media psychology are to be found in past research on the psychology of the image, culture, aesthetics and of (p. 536) what she calls the “mediation of reality through our senses” (Tuma, Chapter 4).

Brown Rutledge (Chapter 3) explains that media psychology emerged from foundational disciplines such as sociology, media studies, and communications, but that the discipline is unique in that “the focus of inquiry [shifts] from media-centric to human-centric.” Rather than focusing on specific media tools (e.g., what’s the role of Facebook in human social interactions?) she focuses attention on the “space between” humans and technology, thus making the discipline of human factors highly relevant to media psychology. Rutledge also notes that definitions of media psychology have proved elusive in the past.

Bartholow and Bolls (Chapter 27) also trace the history and melding of media studies and psychology, especially social psychology. They note that “Psychological experiments on media effects often involve exposing participants to some form of media, and media studies includes psychology as part of its epistemological foundation. Separately, however, these two disciplines lack critical conceptual and operational components required for truly advancing knowledge of the brain ‘on’ media” (Bartholow & Bolls, Chapter 27). All of these are arguments that a variety of related fields came together and formed something novel to address the fact that the human mind that we study is now very often the mind “on media” and that media psychology therefore is crucial to our understanding of human psychology. Taken together, the chapters in this Handbook argue that there is something important about our new and emergent field of media psychology that its constituent fields lack. I think we can yet improve upon the discipline as we know it if we also heed our authors’ advice on how to create this more perfect union of the discipline of media psychology. Specifically, the authors tell us collectively that there are specific ways we can enrich our methodologies, our theoretical foundations, and the way we tell others outside our discipline about our work and how it applies to the hopes and concerns many of us have for the fast changing role of media in everyday life. I will elaborate on these ideas later in this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume, there are current working definitions of media psychology. As noted, one working definition that received informal support among authors of the Handbook follows: **Media psychology is the scientific study of human behavior, thoughts, and feelings experienced in the context of media use and creation** (Dill, Chapter 1). Brown Rutledge (Chapter 3) offers this definition: **Media psychology uses the lens of psychology to study and understand the complex relationship between humans and the evolving digital environment.** Neal (Chapter 29) uses cutting-edge semantic analysis software to derive a map of the discipline through the words of the authors of the Handbook. His research uncovered subject themes including children and adolescents; content themes including violence, sex, video games, persuasion and narrative; and research themes including effects, approaches, journals, and research.

For a new discipline like the field of media psychology, solidifying a definition for the discipline is important. The pages of this volume help us do just that. For instance, I find Bartholow and Boll’s definition of media psychophysiology very apt and also more generally applicable as a definition of media psychology. I’ll paraphrase it here as follows: **media psychology is the study of the brain “on” media.** Or as they may prefer, media psychology is the study of the embodied brain “on” media.

## The False Dichotomy: Media as All Bad or All Good

One important issue to understand as the field of media psychology grows and evolves is the context in which those changes are taking place. An important facet of that context is the tendency for reductionist and dichotomous thinking about media. Specifically, media psychology research—and the public, journalistic, and governmental understanding of it—has tended to view media and its effects as either bad or good, harmful or beneficial. Sex and violence in the media are among the most commonly-researched media effects (see Derwin & Demerode, Chapter 5, for a discussion). Debates about sex and violence in the media (see Huesmann, DuBow, & Yang, Chapter 9; McIntyre, Chapter 26; Potter, Chapter 24; Prot & Anderson, Chapter 7; Shafer, Bobkowski & Brown, Chapter 13), for instance, tend to be seen as disagreements between media detractors and media enthusiasts—lovers and haters of media themselves, rather than as fair-minded analyses of research data. We might call this the **Love/Hate Media Debate**. This is, of course, a false dichotomy because media are neither all inherently harmful nor inherently beneficial but generate nuanced, varied, and changing effects and influences to individuals and cultures.

For example, in 2012, a group of experts (Pew, 2012) predicted that youth who grow up with (p. 537) today's Internet will likely both benefit and suffer because of it. This is an example of the benefit/harm perspective of media experts that is not inappropriate in substance, but that leads to misunderstandings in practice. It's not difficult to see why media psychology and the public understanding of it have taken on this benefit/harm framework. Psychologists and other professionals tend to take a child protective stance, thus seeking to identify and prevent harm. As Arke notes, when Clinton administration cabinet officials met and addressed the issue of media violence and American children, they concluded, "that the media is so much a part of daily life that few people are aware of the impact of media, whether it be positive or negative" (Arke, Chapter 6).

Concern for negative media effects is reasonable. Given the natural interest in raising healthy children, it's understandable that media psychologists have focused on harmful effects in the hope of helping people avoid them. In addition to media violence effects (see, e.g., example Brockmyer, Chapter 12; Krahe, Chapter 20), other topics of concern covered in this volume include technology addiction (Gentile et al.), sexual content (Shafer et al., Chapter 13), racial and sex role stereotyping (Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, Chapter 14; Scharrer, Chapter 15), media-related attention deficits (West & Bailey, Chapter 23), and issues of newer technology and children such as sexting and cyberbullying (Donnerstein, Chapter 21).

Enthusiasm for and interest in all that technology offers society are equally understandable. For example, Rutledge notes (Chapter 3), "The proliferation of media, and particularly social technologies, has created growing interest across society in understanding how technologies fit into individual life and society as a whole." She cites civic engagement and social support as benefits of media in everyday life. Gregory (Chapter 10) cautions that in terms of media effects, "The sky is not falling," and calls for a positive psychology perspective on children's media use that emphasizes prosocial and other positive outcomes. Similarly, Blumberg et al. (Chapter 19) explain how and why the growing genre of serious games have positive effects, persuading and educating players in areas ranging from health and education to civic engagement. Blumberg et al. address how the use of avatars can provide rich experiences and alter our sense of self for the better. Blascovich and McCall explain how new virtual environments provide a context for experiencing and studying social interactions and influence. Chamberlin and Maloney (Chapter 18) concur with Blumberg et al. and with Blascovich and McCall about the potential positive use of video game avatars. They also explain how exergames, a popular genre of video games, have not only physical benefits, but also psychological and social ones.

Headlines probably sell more magazines and newspapers when they purport to share information that the public needs to know, including risks and benefits of media. It is true that positive and negative effects of media use are supported by research. However, I argue that media psychology and public discussion of it should actively avoid reinforcing a false dichotomy of media as either all good or all bad, because this stance is reductionist and therefore limiting. It also tends to send the message that media psychologists are biased and fight among themselves. A critical thinking approach to media psychology is key...that is, an approach that recognizes one's own biases, but also fairly weighs evidence and does not frame research by personal perspectives but by scientific principles (see also Huesmann et al., Chapter 9). Avoiding the substance and the appearance of this bias in the field can be difficult and fraught with pitfalls (see, for example, Huesmann et al., Chapter 9; McIntyre, Chapter 26; Prot & Anderson, Chapter 7), especially if industry has a vested interest in a benefits approach to the media

that profit them.

I want to stress once again that studying harmful and beneficial media effects are not bankrupt perspectives, but have value. In fact, from an evolutionary psychology perspective, it is understandable that we would focus on identifying risks (Wilson, 2002) and factors that would help us survive and thrive. But there is a danger associated with approaching research from a wrongheaded stance that assumes that all or most media are either inherently harmful or beneficial. It is this biased polarization that set the stage for Huesmann et al. (Chapter 9) to explain why people do not want to believe that media violence causes aggression, despite research evidence that would have been more than ample to convince an audience in a domain that did not impinge upon their feelings of self-worth. One reason why a chapter like the one by Huesmann and colleagues is so important is that when we understand better how and why people react the way they do to media psychology research findings, we can take a respectful and informed approach to how we communicate that work to the public.

Moving forward, our approach to media psychology should include identifying and avoiding (p. 538) bias, but also not allowing bias to undermine the most reasonable interpretations of quality research. One way to address this issue is to endeavor to do research that is rich and contextual and that shows multiple media facets rather than focusing on a single facet. Another is to use a broad range of approaches in one's programmatic line of research, being especially careful to avoid the reductionist version of the **Love/Hate Media Debate**. Furthermore, as a scientific community we must not tolerate any *ad hominem* arguments. These and other signs that criticism has moved out of the realm of science and into the domain of bias should be considered seriously. This would include reviews and other public communications that make inappropriate, nonscientific criticisms or *ad hominem* attacks.

## Communicating about Communication

Media psychologists should emphasize effective communication about our work to the public and other stakeholders in our graduate training programs. As we have seen (for example, McIntyre, Chapter 26) when we try to ensure that public policy is informed by research, business interests can stand in the way of the public good. And because businesses have resources academics do not generally have, skillful arguments can be made which obfuscate important research in media psychology.

Additionally, the fact that media psychology is a vibrant field with broad interest to the public, businesses, journalists, and lawmakers likely has multiple feedback effects on the field. For instance, the aforementioned stakeholders are not scientists and may tend to ask for oversimplifications of media psychology research. Stakeholders may, in fact, discourage nuance in reporting our findings and encourage the **Love/Hate Media Debate**. After all, stakeholders are busy and may focus rather simplistically on benefit and harm because, from an evolutionary psychology perspective, they most urgently need to know what relates to their ability to survive and thrive. In terms of communicating research findings, questions scientists field may therefore tend toward sound bites that oversimplify and exacerbate the **Love/Hate Media Debate**. And as Potter (Chapter 24) posits, debates such as the media violence debate have a tendency to turn off an audience because those who already disagree with one side of the debate will not engage with that argument.

Furthermore, we know from the chapter by Huesmann et al. (Chapter 9) that there are a number of reasons why a variety of stakeholders may reject our research findings. This problem is complex and will call for complex solutions. For now, the important thing is to begin to recognize the issue and formulate ways of addressing it (see, e.g., Dill, 2009, Chapter 9). One of those solutions is to explicitly include graduate coursework that addresses how to communicate one's research work to a variety of stakeholders. McIntyre's chapter notes a number of pitfalls to communicating media psychology research to legislators, journalists, and the public. I provide below a set of basic assumptions and ideas for addressing our issues with communicating media psychology research and application. This is meant as a starting point and a basis for future collaboration on these issues.

## Effective Communication about Media Psychology Research and Application: Tools and Assumptions

1. Effective communication begins with an understanding of the audience receiving the message. It is important to address how to communicate basic scientific principles in a way the audience understands. For

example, considering how a variety of audiences understand cause and effect and how they understand a variety of research evidence types is important to ensure audience understanding.

2. Using communications and psychology literature and work of related fields to understand how to make compelling and concise arguments and how to respond to a variety of arguments and criticisms.
3. Understanding how to make arguments in a variety of time frames and settings.
4. Using a variety of media platforms and applications to communicate media psychology content.
5. Roleplaying common situations in which media psychologists are asked to discuss their work, such as radio talk shows, television interviews, and e-mails and phone calls from journalists of a variety of types.

### Considerations for an Interdisciplinary and International Field

We will continue to define and refine the field of media psychology. As we do, one of the issues will be that the people who do media psychology come from a variety of fields. Several authors in this volume have mentioned by name a variety of fields that contribute research on topics in media psychology. The interdisciplinary nature of the field presents both (p. 539) challenges and opportunities to our growing body of knowledge and to how the field will advance. One aspect of a truly interdisciplinary field is that the individual disciplines bring with them preferences for both methods and theories. Sometimes these preferences lean toward being biases. They can also lead to favoritism to the researchers' personal history and training. Derwin and DeMerode (Chapter 5) elaborate on these issues, which include barriers and biases at the journal, departmental, and conference levels.

In addition to being an Interdisciplinary field, media psychology is also an international field. I've endeavored here to include media psychologists from around the world, although the emphasis was on researchers from the United States. The United States is still arguably the epicenter for the discipline of psychology (Schultz & Schultz, 2011), having many training programs, journals, and psychological associations that are internationally recognized as important. However, like the interdisciplinary nature of the field, the variety of geographic and cultural venues that produce media psychology research strengthens the field. Sakamoto (Chapter 28) explains, for example, the relationship between media psychology research in the United States and Japan and also the specific Japanese approach to media psychology. Sakamoto (personal communication, 2011) also suggests that a lack of sufficient translations (for example, from Japanese to English) is still a barrier to disseminating research findings in the field. I therefore suggest that one important part of strengthening the international aspects of media psychology is to work, whenever and however possible, toward creating more translations of media psychology work. Greater support for translations is available today than ever before, including some automated translation aids.

### The Future of Theory and Method in Media Psychology

#### Extending and Complicating Theoretical Approaches

The **Love/Hate Media Debate** may come in part from Potter's (Chapter 24) point that we have been lost in generating discreet findings rather than taking a more theoretical approach to the field. Similarly, Prot and Anderson (Chapter 7) warn against our doing research in a conceptual vacuum, ignoring what is broadly known about psychological processes.

In this Handbook, a number of authors address broad theoretical issues. For example, Nabi and Moyer-Gusé (Chapter 16) explore underlying theory and frameworks of media persuasion. Konijn (Chapter 11) explores the role of emotion in media use and creation, while also juxtaposing emotional and cognitive experiences of media. Green and Dill (Chapter 25) examine media influence via transportation into narrative worlds and consider why the audience may not comprehend that they have been changed by their interactions with media. Similarly, as noted previously, Huesmann, Dubow, and Yang (Chapter 9) explain why it is hard for people to believe that media violence exposure causes increased aggression.

Bartholow and Bolls build on Lang's view of media as a dynamic interaction between mind and medium, tracing an area ripe with theoretical and methodological advances. This psychophysiological approach "moves the study of media effects to mental processes, embodied in neural activity, that underlie the effects of media content on individuals and provides a general framework for studying media that can accommodate current as well as future forms of media" (p. 2). Multiple chapters in this volume concur that it is the theory and underlying constructs that

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matter rather than the particular tools themselves, which will come and go (see, e.g., Bartholow & Bolls, Chapter 27; Nabi & Moyer-Gusé, Chapter 16; Brown Rutledge, Chapter 3).

In working toward a greater understanding of broad theoretical concerns like the emotional and cognitive processing of media and media persuasion, it is time to complicate arguments about the role of the audience as well. If we've tended to polarize around the notion that media are all good or bad, we've also polarized around the audience as savvy thinkers versus automatons. Such arguments belie the true nuance, richness, and variability of audience experience.

An increased emphasis on theory might well encourage stakeholders and scientists both to think more in terms of the underlying psychological mechanisms rather than discreet findings and reductionist views of media as primarily good or bad. For example, understanding how using social networking sites or avatars contributes to the construction of self is a more nuanced approach to media psychology than beginning with the notion that using social networking sites or avatars is inherently either largely harmful or beneficial.

At the same time as we are careful to avoid thinking that the tool is more important than the psychology behind its use, we should understand that the evolution of media themselves may offer us (p. 540) both new facets of media psychology to study and new tools with which to study them. We've already seen Bartholow and Bolls explain how evolving psychophysiology equipment and methods help us answer important theoretical questions. Neal also demonstrates how the latest software tools can help us answer questions about textual data that were difficult or impossible to answer without automation. The media we study and the tools we study them with will continue to change rapidly (Isbouts & Ohler, Chapter 2) and media psychologists will need to keep pace thoughtfully with these changes.

## Media Psychology Methods

In these pages, you will find the perspectives of some of the finest minds in media psychology research methods that exist anywhere in the world. I have every confidence that the methods content of this book will be highly read and cited and will become very useful tools for training graduate students in media psychology. In reading the methods content of this Handbook, students, mentors, and other interested parties can take stock of what is and what could be ahead on the methodological landscape of our field.

Across the history of psychology, we have witnessed a variety of trends in methodology and design. I read the following from the first published book called *Media Psychology* (originally published in 2003) with great interest: "There was no single text that covered all the material to which I wished to introduce students...Most relevant texts were aimed at media and communications students, and assumed a lot of background knowledge about media history that psychology undergraduates rarely possess. Others failed to go beyond the basic "effects" paradigm, or were largely concerned with cognitive processing of media rather than placing them in a social and cultural context. Others, typically those in the European media studies tradition, erred in the opposite direction, blandly dismissing psychology as at best a relic of behaviorism, at worst as fascist propaganda!" (Giles, 2010, p. ix).

In the 2010 edition, reworked and retitled as the *Psychology of the Media*, Giles writes: "Media scholars are hostile toward effects research because they see it as removing all context from media, reducing them to mere stimuli... This rift in understanding stems as much as anything from the different perspectives of psychologists and media scholars. A psychologist is primarily interested in understanding why human beings behave as they do, and media constitute just one of several influences that contribute to the overall picture. A media scholar, however, is primarily interested in media and their products as cultural objects, so chopping them into 10-minute clips of violence...makes little sense. It turns cultural material into meaningless chunks of information" (Giles, 2010, p. 16).

From the standpoint of an American psychologist, the first time I discovered this perspective was a watershed moment for me. As someone who had taught introductory psychology courses for years, I knew well that the very essence of our research methods approach was to emphasize the hierarchical goals of psychological research as being: to describe, predict, explain, and control human behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Anyone may open the methods section of a typical introductory psychology textbook and find this content. And of course, what "explain" means to a psychologist is experimental work, or what Giles had referred to as the "effects tradition." So a major

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goal of the American approach to psychology is this “effects tradition.” By some transitive property then, Giles appeared to be saying that there are a lot of folks who question the entire American approach to psychology, and maybe even psychology itself. Questioning the appropriateness of methods tends to make a field stronger than if scholars used a method unreflectively. However, I advocate employing a variety of methodologies that have real strengths rather than rejecting any of them utterly.

I relate my experience here because it represents the point of view of an American social psychologist (now beginning to call herself a media psychologist) during the early years of this new thing we were calling media psychology. Across the history of psychology, we have seen different movements appear and evolve. At this time in the history of media psychology there are disciplinary, subdisciplinary and geographic boundaries in media psychology. These approaches are especially relevant to methods, though they have broader implications. One question we can all consider is whether and how these various approaches might coalesce over time. Will they remain distinct or will they intertwine and evolve together?

I would be remiss if I did not point out that many outside of psychology who study media do effects research. There are volumes published by communications researchers devoted to effects research. Also, examining the Handbook authors’ definitions of media psychology, and the research (p. 541) approaches used in this Handbook, you will see that effects research is strongly represented.

I agree that the themes Giles identifies here are reflective of some of the current perspectives of our field. In fact, a variation of this argument takes place in the pages of the Handbook as a variety of views are proposed and discussed. These are fundamental questions: How can we best study what's important about media psychology? What are some assumptions and approaches that have validity? In what ways can our approaches be clarified, improved, and extended? I believe there is room for a variety of methodologies and approaches to media psychology to be embraced and respected for what they offer us in terms of knowledge and insight.

This Handbook contains descriptions of the most popular approach to media psychology research (see, e.g., Huesmann, Dubow, & Yang, Chapter 9; Potter, Chapter 24; Prot & Anderson, Chapter 7), the quantitative methods approach favored in the United States. As noted, the United States is still arguably the geographical and philosophical home of modern psychology (Schultz & Schultz, 2011) and also influences media psychology research in other countries such as Japan (Sakamoto, Chapter 28).

This Handbook also presents compelling arguments about how those methods should be augmented and extended. Potter (Chapter 24) argues that traditional experiments (what he calls “Groups-Differences” studies) should evolve to include research that specifically tracks how the individual changes from baseline over time. Prot and Anderson explain the value of using multiple methods in multiple settings in order to triangulate via multiple operationalism to support or elaborate a conceptual relationship.

Qualitative research addresses how we make meaning from media (Polkinghorne, Chapter 8). If we fail to focus on this issue of meaning making, we miss a tremendous opportunity to understand the human experience with media more deeply than ever before. Increasing our output of excellent qualitative research is an important goal for the future of media psychology and a key way we will contribute a growing body of knowledge that is of broad interest and significance.

Because qualitative research is valued more in other fields outside of psychology (see Polkinghorne, Chapter 8), conducting more high quality qualitative research will both strengthen the research methods commonly used in psychology and take advantage of the interdisciplinary nature of our field. Hybrids tend to be stronger than nonhybrids and this applies to fields as well as to organisms. Rather than rejecting theories and methods that are nontraditional in our individual fields (which can occur via journal editors and reviewers, hiring committees, and publishing houses, for example), true multiple operationalism should embrace high quality research from a variety of theoretical and methodological traditions. We are in a particularly good place to make this happen as we move forward together to shape the field of media psychology.

### **Applying Lewin's Person × Situation Perspective**

Brown Rutledge argues that media psychology shifts the focus from the medium to the human. Meanwhile, Potter

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argues that we not debate the primacy of the medium or the audience, but study both. Polkinghorne (Chapter 8) explains that qualitative research is used to study both the experience (of using and creating media) by the human being and the content of the media itself. In this way, we can learn more about the intensive experiences of the audiences and creators of media.

Bartholow and Bolls (Chapter 27) suggest balancing the study of mind and content. They suggest using Lewin's classic social psychological approach of viewing the person in the situation as the unit of analysis. They remind us that situations and responses are dynamic. For instance, a person playing a video game is the correct tableau for a media psychologist, understanding that the action and reactions are dynamic. As William James said, "you can't step into the same river twice;" and the mind on media is ever changing like a river. I would also add another classic social psychological perspective to this viewpoint, namely that the subject matter we are studying is the human perception of the content rather than any attempt to objectify the content itself.

So, in our field some favor audience-centered and some favor media-centered approaches. And some favor experimental approaches, whereas others feel they isolate content from its important context. One way to address both of these issues is to move more deeply into a truly interdisciplinary approach to media psychology...one that, as Bartholow and Bolls say, balances mind with content and sees them both as rich and dynamic. This would entail a broader unit of analysis and richer methodologies that borrow from and respect all the disciplines that (p. 542) form our foundation as a field. Embracing multiple operationalism, including methods from all our constituent disciplines, and holding in mind both content and context, are important ways of addressing these issues.

The study of narrative—including narrative effects and qualitative studies of those effects—also moves beyond simply studying the person or the medium as relatively static and isolated. In this next section, I continue to emphasize the importance of studying the person in the situation, or the mind on media, using engagement with narrative as one instantiation of this perspective.

## Engagement with Narrative and Character

"In the history of human experience, one of our most pervasive and enduring reference points is our need for story. Stories help us to understand ourselves in terms of who we are, what we need, and why we behave the way we do" (Isbouts & Ohler, p. 2).

...people are genetically predisposed, neurophysiologically wired, and motivated to frequent virtual environments...Story telling, painting, sculpture, theater, manuscripts, the printing press, photography, cinematography, radio and television, and, most recently, digital technologies all serve to facilitate psychological engagement in virtual environments. (Blascovich & McCall, p. 3)

Narratives have the ability to activate human faculties—such as feeling, empathy and affinity—that remain mostly dormant with intellectual rhetoric and learning. Stories can impart not only information but also meaning...Stories, in sum, are quite simply the literary vehicle of our thoughts. (Isbouts & Ohler, p. 5)

Recall that in the *Psychology of the Media*, Giles relates that media effects research is viewed as bankrupt by some because, "It turns cultural material into meaningless chunks of information" (2010, p. 16). And indeed, as someone who values and conducts experiments, one of my misgivings about them is just this: that isolating media content tends to decontextualize it and sidestep the richness of the experience of the person's interaction with the medium. As Prot and Anderson (Chapter 7) rightly relate, every methodology has strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of experimentation are widely recognized. But it is only through multiple operationalism that we can gain the clearest, richest, and most nuanced picture of the phenomena we seek to understand.

## Summary and Conclusions

I believe that the future of media psychology should respect and support multiple operationalism, including methodologies that are more popular outside the discipline in which we earned our doctoral degrees. As a social psychologist trained in a strong effects tradition, I will step outside of that training and suggest that we need to embrace a richer and more contextualized approach to media psychology research that includes both a view of the dynamic person in the dynamic situation and the increased use of qualitative methods.



One aspect of this approach will be to pay careful attention to elaborating on our human attraction to and engagement with narrative and characters. Humans are compelled by story. It is no accident that most of the time when we have a choice, we choose to engage with story, whether it be via television, Facebook, a video game, or a song. We need to understand this engagement with story better than we do now and also understand our psychological connection to the characters and figures in those stories.

So it is vital that as we move forward we learn more about engagement with narrative and meaning making via media. The word “narrative” was one of the words that the content analysis of the Handbook (Neal, Chapter 29) revealed was used most often by the Handbook authors. Leximancer is a fine-grained tool and the Leximancer results were not simple word counts, but contextual interpretations of words, adjusting for factors such as word frequency in the English language. The presence of the concept of “narrative” as a key term in this Handbook is promising and I believe, is the harbinger of things to come in media psychology.

Focusing on our engagement with story and our ability to make meaning from story has implications for methodology, data analysis, and for the framing of research studies and the questions we ask. As communications and psychology researchers (and those from related fields) come together, we must eschew taking solely a person approach or solely a media approach, but form a more perfect union which integrates and goes beyond those viewpoints. The future of media psychology must address the dynamic human mind “on” media, which are themselves dynamic and multifaceted. It also must build on the assumption that the content of our field is the perception of the user in the context of the fluid mediated situation.

Moving forward, there are some clear directions we can take to improve our basic and applied scientific contributions to academia and for our stakeholders (who (p. 543) include the business community, lawmakers, journalists, educators, and the public—notably parents).

I'd like to thank all of the authors of the chapters in this Handbook. Your research and the compelling way you communicated key insights have made this Handbook a great resource for other media psychologists and for our students. I am grateful for your contributions and look forward to what I know will be a fascinating future for our discipline.

### Future Directions for the Field of Media Psychology

What follows is a list of some of the items I've emphasized throughout this chapter, for easy reference. To review, I believe media psychologists should:

1. Emphasize the development of theory in media psychology and use theory as a foundation for programmatic research.
2. Focus more on the big picture issues such as narrative, transportation, persuasion, emotional engagement and the social psychology of media, particularly with regard to new media (for example, self concept as related to mediated projections of self like avatars and social networking site content and audience as content creators).
3. Expand and develop qualitative research methods and tools; provide editorial and reviewer support for publishing high quality qualitative media psychology research. Refine current experimental approaches to study how media use and creation changes individuals.
4. Avoid simplistic arguments that present media audiences as uniformly weak or strong, easily persuadable or uniformly savvy. Instead study audience factors in deeper, more nuanced ways (for instance, elaborate on audience transportation, and cognitive and emotional aspects of persuasion and attention) and complicate our view of the audience.
5. Openly address and challenge the **Love/Hate Media Debate**...or the notion that media are all good or all bad. As researchers, avoid the tendency to take either extreme position or to make *ad hominem* attacks on researchers perceived as advocating the “other side.”
6. Develop training for media psychologists to communicate our work to stakeholders that takes into account the interested audience, and the debates and controversies in which our research is disseminated.
7. Break down barriers between the disciplines that do media psychology research and application. For instance, support interdisciplinary programs, journals, and faculty hires. Within that approach, support a wide array of quality research perspectives that allow critical analysis and not simply tradition to influence

scholarship in our field.

8. Continue to grow international collaborations and approaches to media psychology. This includes seeking to translate work not originally published in English. Lack of adequate translation hampered the understanding of Wilhelm Wundt's work for generations (Schultz & Schultz, 2011). This should be much less of an issue in the modern era in which translations are more easily accessible. At the same time, we should not underestimate the influence of inadequate translation on scholars' ability to contribute to the field.

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