

The influence of physiological arousal on the television viewer's employment of stereotypes

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Comprehending the mechanisms through which media controls human thought has recently been the center of attention of mass communication research. In revising the process through which people create meaning of mediated messages, researchers have realized the significance of the characteristics of the audience, counting attention, motivation, and more recently, affective state. How our moods influence the way one processes information has become a vital question in the field of psychology (cf. Zillmann 1988). Yet, the information that viewers encounter in television messages is processed similarly to the information viewers come across in everyday life (cf. Reeves and Nass 1996).

Taking into account the statement presented above, one can assume that stereotypes are employed to allow people to make judgments about an individual according to the categories to which the individual being judged is assigned (Stroessner and Mackie 1992). Similar to all heuristics, stereotypes permit one to reach a decision about a person founded on limited information and with little cognitive power.

This research aims at examining the influence of physiological arousal on the television viewers' use of stereotypes in making judgments about characters. To explain inconsistencies in past research, an experiment was conducted to evaluate the influence of arousal on television viewers' stereotype employment. The influence of various levels of physiological arousal on different participant's evaluations, after exposure to stereotypical images of these groups, is to be tested. Results of the study concentrates on indicating that the inconsistent findings in the affect literature surrounding affect and stereotype use may be caused by the effect of physiological arousal rather than the valence of the induced affect.

References:

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