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Outline the main characteristics of the "Hypodermic Needle" model of media effects.

What does this model presume about its audience.

What are the limitations/problems of this particular approach?

How has the debate moved on?

In what way have video games still been seen to inflect the hypodermic needle theory in audiences.?

The Hypodermic Needle theory, is a theory developed by Harold Lasswell on how mass media influences large audiences. The concept is that ideas are injected into passive peoples minds by consuming ideas propagated by media channels. The model was developed in the 1920's and 30s after studying World War 1 propaganda, and also after the Orson Welles, 'War of the Worlds' radio incident.

The idea relies on people being all the same, and reacting identically to media stimuli. It is more or less the same idea as the 'Magic Bullet Theory' which suggests the media shoot ideas into peoples heads using a 'magic bullet.

The Hypodermic Needle theory is a linear communication model , that presumes the media has a direct and powerful effect on a passive audience, all reacting the same way to media messages.

The model has since, for the most part been left behind , in favour of other models that have been developed and in many cases , it has been rubbished, for being based on non-empirical data. As more empirical ways of assessing peoples opinions began to be used, it was discovered that the majority of people are completely unaffected by propaganda.

Another theory that was developed was the "The 2 step flow theory" where opinion leaders pay close attention to the mass media and pass on their opinions to others , were audiences are active participants. A modern example of this can be seen on twitter where people with large numbers of followers (typically famous people) can be very influential, and it is known in the world of advertising that word of mouth is very powerful.

Another theory that attempts to explain how the mass media influences the public , it the "Agenda Setting Function Theory" , that espouses that , while the media cannot tell us how to think, it dose tell us to think about, by daily deciding what key topics and agendas that will be printed or shown on TV news. It is also generally agreed that powerful people in the media, such as Rupert Murdoch can decide what agendas news agencies have, and so direct the public's attention towards or away from topics of its choice.

Another theory is that of Joseph Klapper's 'Reinforcement Theory'.

Klapper states the the media is more likely to reinforce than to change people's opinions. He says that peoples opinions are mostly likely to be influenced by their schools, family , community and religious organisations.

An addition to the theory is the notion that people do not buy news papers to have their views challenged, but rather buy newspapers that reflect the views and opinions that they already hold, and thereby 'reinforcing' their values.

So when it comes to assessing how video games inflict the hypodermic needle theory on audiences, given the amount of moral panics that have been created by video games, it would be foolish to completely ignore it as a factor.

Perhaps however, given that we have extra ways in which to analyse how the media has generated any given moral panic, we could do so including all of the above theories, but also including the 'Hypodermic Needle'

Typically when the media want to cause a stir about a video game, it is done so focusing on parents, specifically mothers of gamers. In this case it is very easy for an *opinion leader*, a columnist perhaps, to *inject* the idea of a video game being associated with violent behaviour in children. Anybody reading this particular columnist, is typically already a fan of the writer, and so they (the columnist) is setting an *agenda* that *reinforces* the readers already held beliefs, and so stirring up moral panic, and resulting in letters to politicians and greater restrictions on games that legislators do not understand.

So I suppose, in some sense, it is the hypodermic needle by proxy, whereby the video game itself is not the media causing the panic, but rather a catalyst, mobilising concerned parents against things they don't understand.

So while it has generally been proven that the majority of people are not affected by propaganda, this this overlooks that some are.

Granted this is typically reinforcing ideas that they already hold , but new ideas can be introduced to people by the media, and if the Hypodermic Needle theory can effect even a tiny amount of people, is it then worth of continued study by media students, or is it about as relevant as steam engines in a silicon world.

Given that on its own , the theory does not really explain the complexity of how ideas are disseminate through society it is only really a historical starting point for media studies in the area.