

## EFFECT OF MEDIA ON COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AMONG RURAL AND URBAN ADOLESCENTS

Dr. Asghar Ali Shah\*

Najm ul sehr Janjua\*

### Abstract

The study was conducted to find the relationship, between media and cognitive dissonance, at high school level. Furthermore to test, whether, the urban teenagers had exhibited cognitive dissonance as compared to the rural pool. A pool of 405 adolescents (from rural and urban setup), is chosen, using stratified sampling technique. They were made to respond to the questionnaire consists of 75 items. Initially a scale was constructed, with items (n=150) measuring cognitive dissonance, its reliability was tested and retested, by doing a pilot study on a sample of (60) adolescents( $r=.89$ ). Statistical operations (correlation, ANOVA and t-test) were applied to calculate the significance in relationship among various variables. Results have revealed a strong positive relationship exists between exposure to media and cognitive dissonance ( $r=.89$ ;  $p<.01$ ). In addition, various TV programs ( $r=.799$ ;  $p<.01$ ) prompt cognitive dissonance among urban group as compared to their rural counterparts.

**Keywords:** Media; cognitive dissonance; satellite programmes, adolescents; rural and urban area.

\* Assistant Professor at Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic, University Islamabad.

The term *cognitive dissonance* refers to mismatch between attitude and behaviour and ditching either the behaviour or the belief will get one out of this trouble. Cognitive dissonance can be related to a condition in which there is a clear discrepancy between attitude and behavior. In addition, a measure that portrays an undisputable contradiction between the two factors (attitude and behaviour), or simply a score on cognitive dissonance scale.

The term *media* means the amount of time and preference for a particular programme, or choice of a special issue, in front of medium, named as TV. It could also take the mould of certain areas like sex, gender and identity lookout on various platforms of expression. In addition, it is a medium playing with the sentiments of masses for maximization of profits. It is nevertheless an entertainment zone to negate isolation and boredom effect, and perceive primarily, the world, by the click of a button. Not to mention the novel device for imitating and direct learning while enjoying the complete privacy.

Media is portraying and protecting different belief-systems and cultural modes. According to an academician Anthony Giddens (2006), global celebrities are the outcome of the satellite media. They are formulated and propagated by media. By any means, those global celebrities are promulgating the values and generating the cultural trends of various nation-states. If yes, then our adolescents, blindly imitating such universal trend-setters, ought to be exemplary in their beliefs and behaviors.

*Cognitive dissonance theory* by Leon Festinger (1957) states, people like to see themselves and be seen by others as being “consistent”, but what; if a contradiction occurs between a person’s attitude and the way he behaves, i.e. the attitude and behavior are in dissonance with each other, then arrives the psychological Tension, that will lead towards a psychological Drive to eliminate or reduce the Tension. Example is from a condition in which our behavior contradicts our attitude but not due to any pressure; instead we are influenced to behave voluntarily. Here the contradiction will not resolve easily. Festinger had worked on this example i.e. the justification for change. Likewise in this scenario, a person initiates a behaviour which is at conflict with the attitude; so he is going to minimize the importance of external incentives. Resulting in, the

blame-game will not be on the inducement for behavior change, instead the end-product will be change in attitude.

According to William Lidwell et al (2003), Cognitive Dissonance is a conflict arises in thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. To further elaborate his stance; he initiates it with examples; if thought one agrees with thought two, it results in “consonance” (state of comfort) but if thought one disagrees with thought two, it causes “dissonance” (state of discomfort). The resulting dissonance phenomenon is the major bone of contention, and the only way out is its reduction or elimination.

Alleviation of Cognitive Dissonance is functional in three ways; one, by reducing the importance of dissonant cognitions. Two; adding consonant cognition. Three; change or remove the dissonant thoughts.

In order to find out the relationship between TV programmes and cognitive dissonance in adolescents the issue has been explained through few examples from Pakistani satellite channels: Example one is of an advertisement showering love through diamonds, it does create cognitive dissonance among consumers. Next example is of a musical and dance program *Nachley* on ARY Digital, incentives for winner in this competition can create cognitive dissonance among adolescents. The third example is of a Tele drama on HUM TV, *Sheher e dil kay darwazay*; with favorite celebrities as the lead cast, portraying un-ethical roles does create cognitive dissonance among adolescents. Last case is of a music competition program between Pakistani and Indian singers, *jhalak dikhla jaa*, with incentives to win, again, could create cognitive dissonance among the viewers of GEO TV, especially the adolescents.

Three ways to reduce Cognitive Dissonance, in first scenario would be; one, reduce the importance of diamonds .i.e. they are mere pressed carbon. Two, add consonance cognition i.e. accept it; advertisement campaign is there to manipulate people using cognitive dissonance as a technique. Three, by removing or changing cognitive dissonance source through an action, in this case express love through some other source, or ultimately buy the diamonds.

Three ways to lessen cognitive conflict in case two ought to be; one, reduce the importance of recognition; dance and music is forbidden among Muslims. Two, add consonance i.e. to manipulate towards dance and singing. Three, stop watching the program, likewise; to switch over to other channels or finally practice hard to win the incentive.

To sum it up; if the incentive is small, there will be change in attitude, belief, and thought. On the other hand, if the incentive is large, no change in attitude, belief and thought ought to take place; instead occurs the change in behavior only. Therefore the absolute-challenge is between “inclination” and “justification”. Likewise only small encouragement is required for a sin to be committed; there exists a delicate line between a sin and the noble deed, once you cross it, then will only justify your act, afterwards.

A question arises here; what will be precarious in the long run; either a small incentive i.e. change of belief, thought and attitude or a big incentive; no change in belief, attitude or thought processes, instead a change in behavior only. Therefore the real fight is between the changes in attitude versus change in behaviour. A question arises here, whether the change visible in our adolescents is the change of cognitions or the change in actions only.

Consequently another question arises here, “do Pakistani adolescents change either for a small incentive i.e. inclination; or a large incentive i.e. justification”? If so; the responsible factions ought to be:

- Media to air, such programs for the sake of maximization of profit, or
- The TV producers keeping-in with the market interests. Or
- The Media policy; has permitted to let go such un-ethical, anti-religion programs.

Bottom-line ought to be, though cognitive dissonance is there but, it is either the change in behavior or change in attitude/belief. We can deduce, if incentive is small, point of minimal justification will lead to inclination, henceforth change in belief. If incentive is big enough, it will lead to justification; therefore only change in behavior is visible.

Jennifer et al (2007) has mentioned cognitive dissonance has an impact on eating habits; one suffers from eating disorders and loss of weight, which ultimately impairs memory also.

In the same way, in some “special circumstances” the utility provided by risky behavior may depend on the ability to consider it harmless, i.e. to deny or underestimate the risk, and this ability may be acquired through experiencing earlier risky behavior without short-term detrimental effects. Therefore to test the assumptions derived from cognitive dissonance theory in a “special circumstance” namely watching musical/dance programs in adolescents, in which dance programs can be described as a process of “beneficial addiction”, in which adolescents

learn to deny its riskiness through constantly watching, while this risk denial sustains subsequent loss of memory, in addition to depression.

## Method

### *Sample*

A sample of four hundred and five teenagers comprised of age range 15-19 years. They were made to fill in the questionnaire measuring their attitude towards various satellite programmes and henceforth their cognitive dissonance value. Initially, a sample of sixty adolescents was chosen for pilot study. They were made to fill in the questionnaire, so as to measure the reliability of cognitive dissonance scale. The sample was further bifurcated into urban (n=205) and rural (n=200) population of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

### *Procedure*

Explicit instructions were delivered before handling, the questionnaire to the sample, ought to complete the Cognitive Dissonance statements. In addition, the importance of the topic and reason of administering survey was also high-lighted, questions were entertained. Ethical guidelines were placed before them for complete confidentiality and privacy. Identities of the respondents were not revealed, so maximum liberty was provided to respond to the taboos in detail. The sample took approximately 20-25 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. Responders' were expected to circle the best suitable option, in accordance with their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. After completion, adolescents were honored and thanked by the researcher for their cooperation and help. Data was analysed by applying various statistical techniques to find out any significant differences that might exist between the cognitive dissonance score and its various sub-scales by using SPSS, and using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## Results

A self-constructed, instrument for measuring Cognitive Dissonance was used, having reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ) to measure the cognitive dissonance phenomena in urban and rural adolescents

ranging, age of 15-19 years. In addition, exposure to various TV programmes was also analyzed, by calculating the responses to the questionnaire being asked. Correlation between the rural and urban pool of teenagers was computed, using Pearson Product Coefficient Correlation. Values for cognitive dissonance scale and sub-scales (media watchers) were evaluated using t-test.

Initially a pilot study was conducted on 60 students, to make the scale a reliable one, altogether deducing statements to 75 items. The categorization of scale and subscales has extracted detailed information of the masses.

Table I

The reliability statistics for the self-constructed Cognitive Dissonance Scale show Cronbach's Alpha to be reliable at .89 and that of sub-scale media influence is .799

		<i>Alpha reliability</i>	
Scales	No. of items	Alpha	co-efficient
Cognitive dissonance	75	0.89	
Subscales			
Media	23	0.799	

Table II

*Mean, standard deviation & t-value of urban & rural adolescents on cognitive dissonance scale*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Urban	205	243.06	22.99	12.873
Rural	200	211.13	26.81	

$p < 0.01$ ,  $df = 405$

Mean difference on cognitive dissonance of urban & rural adolescents is significant

Table III

Mean, standard deviation & t-value on media exposure among urban & rural adolescents

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Urban	205	72.414	11.170	8.101
Rural	200	63.240	11.619	

$p < 0.01$   $df = 405$

Mean difference of media exposure between urban & rural adolescents is significant.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out, the relationship between watching satellite TV programs and cognitive dissonance tendencies among adolescents. Target was achieved by conducting the study on almost 405 adolescents, from various institutions of urban and rural pool. A self invented Cognitive Dissonance Scale was used for the response purposes towards satellite television exposure, was tabulated, using the response on a five points (always, occasionally, rarely, no, never) 75 items. Contextual information, like; age, socio-economic status, nuclear and joint family units, rural and urban background, gave an insight to further strengthen the cognitive dissonance state among teenagers. Research was conducted on diversified teens, from five colleges. Responses were tabulated using descriptive statistics, and mean was calculated. Alpha reliability coefficient on cognitive dissonance scale was .89, a strong positive indication. Reliability of scale and sub-scales was calculated. Pearson correlation confirmed the hypothesis; media exposure does have significant impact on the cognitions of adolescents.

“Electronic Media is a phenomenon of cognitive dissonance in adolescents”, proved a strong positive relationship exists between the two variables. These findings were also supported by Michael I. N et al (2003); even erroneous behavior of our media models imprints in our memory and change our attitude as well. In addition, this result is further confirmed by Corinne D. F & Marci Feldman (2007), that a positive correlation resides between electronic aggression and problem behavior among adolescents.

Exposure to various TV programs will trigger cognitive dissonance among youth, again verified by the analysis outcomes and confirmed by Jane de Brown & Elizabeth M .W (2002) that exposure to music videos lead to sexual arousal and henceforth pre-marital sex in male adolescents.

It is concluded that the present study verified positive significant relationship between the media and cognitive dissonance among the adolescents. At the same length it has come to conclusion that various TV programs are at an edge in instigating anxiety and creating disharmony between beliefs and behaviors.

Urban teenagers with long duration tend to have higher levels of dissonance phenomena as compared to their rural counterparts. It was well opinioned by Minnebo J. (2005) according to his

anticipation; high magnitude of anxiety is positively related to increase TV viewing and is negatively related to social interactions. Joint and nuclear family orientations are not significant force for creating conflict in thought and behavior.

To bring the issue to a substantial conclusion, a self-made scale was constructed and was applied to the representative sample. Various statistical operations were conducted to quantify the solution. Results are in consonant with the hypotheses. This study opens a new arena, is the first one of its kind to be conducted in Pakistan.

Cognitive dissonance, a very subtle and vicarious phenomenon is not being studied precisely before in Pakistan. Its vastness and altogether controversial trends need to be explored further. Its latest usability cannot be undermined, unfolded therapeutically. Major issues of discord, between attitude and behavior, among adolescents and children need to be addressed utilizing its healing strategies. According to Stone Jeff (2011), Cognitive dissonance can act as an effective tool for changing TV viewing habits, by the use of hypocrisy. In addition, Chyng F.S (2004) affirmed, rationalization can ultimately washes out conflicting thoughts. Likewise, there is need to re-ignite the national and religious identity among children, because sentimental values attached to any individuality, ought not to be changed.

**References:**

- Brown, D. J. et al. (2002). *Sexual teens, sexual media*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Corinne, D. F, & Marci Feldman, M.S. (2007). Electronic media, violence & adolescents: An emerging public health problem. *Journal of Adolescent health, 41*, 51-55.
- Forgas, P. J. (2001). *Handbook of affect & social cognition*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Hill, A. J. (2011). Endangered childhoods: How consumerism is impacting child & youth identity. *Media, culture & society, 33*, 347-362. [http://whgbetc.com/ifbm/cog\\_theory.htm](http://whgbetc.com/ifbm/cog_theory.htm)
- Lidwell, W. et al. (2003). *Universal principles of design: 100 ways to enhance usability, Influence*. CA: Peachpit Press.
- Makin, J. P & Cox, C. (2004). *Changing behavior at work: a practical guide*. NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Minnebo, J. (2005). Psychological distress, perceived social support & TV viewing for reasons of companionship: A test of the compensation hypothesis in a population of crime victims. *Communications, 30(2)*, 233-250.
- Roberts, DF. (2007). Media & youth: Access, exposure & privatization. *Journal of adolescent health, 27*: 8-14.
- Stone, J. & Focella, E. (2011). Hypocrisy, dissonance & the self-regulation processes that improve health. *Self and identity, 10(3)*, 295-303.
- Stone, J. (2003). Self-consistency for low self esteem in dissonance processes: The role of self-standards. *Personality & social psychology, 29(7)*, 846- 858.
- Sun, F.C. & Scharrer, E. (2004). Staying true to Disney: College students' resistance to criticism of the little mermaid. *The Communication Review, 7(1)*, 35-55.
- Wan, S. C. & Chiou, B.W. (2010). Inducing attitude change toward online gaming among adolescents players based on dissonance theory: The role of threats & justification of efforts. *Computers & Education, 54*, 162-168.