



INFLUENCE OF VIOLENT TELEVISION PROGRAMMES ON CHILDREN'S AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OYE-EKITI, EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the influence of violent television programmes on children's aggressive behaviour in junior secondary schools in Oye-Ekiti. It is anchored on cultivation theory and social learning theory, and adopts the survey research design. A sum population of 1064 students was drawn from the junior classes of the five secondary schools in Oye-Ekiti. The stratified random sampling method was employed to generate responses from 152 respondents derived using Taro Yamani's formula for sample determination. Using descriptive analytical tools of frequency and percentage tables, the searchers found that the respondents frequently watched television; they preferred foreign 'action' movies to other programmes and 74% believed that violent television programmes had some effects on the aggressive behaviour of those exposed to them. The researchers recommended, among other things, adequate parental guidance in children's viewing choices.

Keywords: Influence, children, violence, aggressive behaviour, television, media, Oye-Ekiti

Introduction

Though there is a plethora of works on television influence – positive or negative – on viewers, none of these works have studied Oye-Ekiti with an aim to ascertain whether exposure to violent content on television has a correlation with aggressive behaviour in younger teenagers. This is what the researchers seek to establish. Violence has been defined as behaviour that is intentional, unwanted, nonessential and harmful (Hamby, 2017). Harm does not have to be physical only. It can be mental, psychological or emotional. Violence has been an object of serious discourse among sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and political scientists who have sought to establish the concept of violence in themes, types and



degrees (Bufacchi, 2007). The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2002) defines violence as "violent behaviour that is intended to hurt or kill somebody." From the foregoing, when behaviour is intended to hurt or kill somebody, such behaviour can safely be said to be violent. Violence can be physical, psychological, mental, emotional, etc. Thus screen violence includes that found in video games, television shows and movies. This is depicted by shooting, punching, fighting, torturing, and other frightful actions that cause harm or death and impinge on the psychology of viewers, especially at the impressionable age.

The issue of whether television viewing has any effect on viewers has been discussed extensively, and experts and scholars in communication and other Social Science fields have proved through research that television content affects behaviour (Strasburger & Wilson, 2003; Nazari, Hassan, Osman, Yasin & Parhizkar, 2013).

What may not yet be determined is the degree of effect as many variables come to play in determining level of influence. Environmental, economic and socio-cultural variables, as well as issues of parentage, degree of exposure and other determiners moderate or escalate the influence of television content on the behaviour of viewers. In the US, research on violence in young people has pointed to the media (especially television) as a major contributor to violence that escalates aggressive tendencies in viewers. (Johnson, Cohen, Smail & Kasen, 2002; Chakraborty, 2007; Mestel, 2008; AACAP, 2022).

The group under study here is made up of children of impressionable age, who can easily be influenced by what they see or hear. Again, many of these children have newly been exposed to television, especially satellite television content, as an index to the rapid urbanization of Oye town in recent times. These contents give access to unlimited time and programmes, many of which require parental guide for child viewers. The paper, therefore, seeks to



determine the influence of violent television programmes on the aggressive behaviour of young teens in Oye-Ekiti.

Statement of the Problem

Oye-Ekiti has transformed from a sleepy, rustic country-side to a sprawling sub-urban. Many families have moved to settle there, attracted by the burgeoning market created by the influx of both student and working populations since the establishment of a federal university in the town in 2011. The existing primary and secondary schools have also seen a marked increase in student enrollment, while more are established. Oye-Ekiti has thus acquired all the indices of an urban area with an increase in the number of households, television sets, and children who watch television programmes that may influence their behaviour in one way or the other. In the light of the above, this study seeks to find out the influence of violent content on television on the aggressive behaviour of junior secondary school students. This is important as watching a single violent programme can sometimes increase aggressiveness (AACAP, 2022).

Objectives of Study:

1. To ascertain programme preference among junior secondary school students in Oye_Ekiti
2. To determine the nature of violent television programmes to which the sample students are exposed
3. To determine the degree of impact of violent television programmes on aggressive behaviour of junior secondary children in Ekiti State



Research Questions

To pursue the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions are used as guide.

1. What is the programme preference among junior secondary school students in Oye-Ekiti?
2. What violent television programmes are the sample junior secondary school students exposed to?
3. What is the degree of impact of violent television programmes on aggressive behaviour of junior secondary school students in Oye-Ekiti?

Review of related literature

Studies on television violence and effect on viewers intensified in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Slotve, Carmen, Sarver and Villareal-Watkins (2008) in their work *Television violence and aggression: a retrospective study* compiled a compendium of reports that linked television violence with aggressive behaviour. All the reports emanating from studies conducted in the United States agreed that there is a correlation between television violence and aggressive behaviour. The reports, conducted at various times using different samples, all agreed that viewing violent programmes increases the aggressive and antisocial behaviour of some young viewers. Huesmann (2007) also has much the same thought in a separate work.

Huesmann and Taylor (2003) note that the United States Surgeon General reported to the Congress that there was actually a causal relationship between televised violence and antisocial behaviour, which gave plenty room for concern and called for appropriate and immediate remedial action. Many people have come to agree that there is too much violence on television. It is also a cause of worry that this violent content is often deliberately targeted at young people (Condon, 2002). Violence is depicted in television in film, music, sports, etc.



that contain physical aggression. Some cartoons are not spared. Ioan, Iov, Dumbrava & Ionescu (2013) quote the World Health organization (2002) as describing violence as the use of force or threat of force on intention to cause harm (physical or psychological) or death, among other things, to oneself, another or a group.

Many cartoons contain actions of shooting, fighting and other forms of heavy aggression. In many cases, cartoon and movie crime busters use heavy amounts of violence to fight the criminals. In the end, it is not easily ascertained who used the most violence: the criminals or the law enforcers. Regrettably, the violent actions of the 'good guys' give no worry as they are idolized as heroes. However, the child sitting before the television set assimilates all this and when he comes out, though he has no intention to mimic the criminals, his mimicry of the 'good guys' still ends up in violence and aggression. Ben Ten, Power Puff Girls, The Ninja Turtles and a host of other cartoons overlook the aggression and violence of crime fighters and crown them with the hero halo. They become idols to the growing child who wishes to act like them. Manufacturers seize this craze to flood the toy market with omnitrix, guns, power bikes and other items and toys that identify the child with his hero. According to Kirsh (2006), violence in cartoon has become an integral part of cartoon content, with a frequency that is higher than in live action dramas or comedies.

Tanwar and Priyanka (2016) observe that children today grow up in a world saturated with media use. They opine that for better or for worse, the mass media do have an enormous impact on people's values, beliefs and behaviours. They compared exposure to violent programmes on television, video, game, Internet, etc to growing up in an environment filled with real violence and concluded that both conditions increase the risk of violent behaviour. Other researchers have described certain television content as 'damaging'. One damaging effect of television content, according to Ojewole (2014), is that it destroys children's



sensitivity to violence, causing them to accept violent physical actions as ways of resolving conflict. This desensitization according to Cantor (2000) occurs when an emotional response is repeatedly evoked, and the action tendency that is associated with the emotion proves irrelevant or unnecessary. In other words, such a person is no longer moved by the results of his violence. To explain the desensitization phenomenon, Cantor narrated how a six-year old boy in Florida, in a fight, pushed his friend over the balcony railing from where he fell down ten stories below to his death. During police interrogation twenty minutes later, the boy was found eating pizza and watching cartoon. He was perfectly calm and showed no signs of apprehension over the incidence of few minutes earlier.

Again, Ioan, Iov, Dumbrava & Ionescu (2013) report that a minor who was convicted of murder was subjected to medical and psychological examination which showed that the thirteen year old boy, among other things, disclosed that he was inspired on how to commit the crime by a pattern he saw in a movie. For him, it was like a game. Again, there was no show of remorse.

Television movies and music videos make bearing and using weapons appear normal. They lend them glamour and display them as sources of personal power. Brown and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005) add that violent imagery in these media has remarkable short term effects of the arousal, thoughts and emotions increasing the likelihood of aggressive or fearful behaviour in younger children, especially in boys. Brink, (2001) laments that movie producers no longer plan murder to be incidental to the clever reasoning put into the discovery process rather, murder is now being planned to be incidental to the violence which is simply a way to have more violent interludes. In this way, she argues, the moral values that underlie the mystery are set aside in favour of setting the stage for more violence.



Researchers point at the imitation theory, also known as social learning theory, as a factor behind the heavy impression that television violence leaves on children.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on cultivation theory and social learning theory. The cultivation theory was propounded by George Gerbner in 1976. According to Asogwa and Esimokha (2015, p.96), the theory states that “television plays a very important role in shaping or cultivating people’s conception of social reality.” The authors note that the theory suggests that television has long term effects which are “small, indirect but cumulative and significant” (p.96). Asghari, Karimzadeh and Teymouri (2017) explain the theory as stating that reality watched through television affects beliefs and consequently, the behaviour of viewers. Thus, when a child is constantly exposed to same programme or others similar to it, the tendency of behavioural inclination towards the contents of such programmes becomes high. In the theory, Gerber identified persons who view television for four hours and above per day as heavy viewers, while those with less viewing hours he described as light viewers. In view of this, a child who sits in front of the television for four hours daily watching ‘action’ film, formula one, boxing and other programmes laced with aggression or violence, according to Gerber, soon develops the mean world syndrome; an idea that the world is more hostile and dangerous than it actually is (Helfgott, 2015). Such a child may also tend to display the violent tendencies that television has ‘cultivated’ in him. Besides traditional television programming, cable and satellite television subscriptions have left consumers with a large number of choices in time, channels and programmes. Some channels show only movies heavily laced with shooting, combat, and other actions that tend to violence. Cartoons and games follow similar pattern. These types of programmes incidentally have more appeal to younger audiences who see such as ‘action’ programmes. The theory is therefore interested in



the long-term effects of exposure as against the short-term impact on attitudes and opinions (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2012).

Another theory on which this work is anchored is the social learning theory propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. It is also referred to as the imitation theory as it asserts that much learning takes place through imitating the behaviour of others (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2012).

Researchers link the theory with the heavy impression that television violence leaves on children. It is believed that most research on television violence seek to show a clear connection between images seen on television and actions portrayed after seeing these images. The social learning theory suggests that after watching any content on television, children tend to enact what they have seen (learnt) when a conducive environment offers itself. This tendency to act in real life situation what they have learnt from television is referred to as the copycat effect (Colman, 2004; Helfgott, 2015). In this case, viewers try to behave as they have seen in television, males copy more than females and younger children copy more than the older ones (Nkwam-Uwaoma, Nsude, & Nwachukwu, 2017; Baviskar, Labhane & Nikam, 2021). Bandura (1971) posits that children may imitate acts of aggression they see which form part of their childhood experience. Bandura's conclusion derived from a research he conducted with a certain doll (LoBue, 2018). The researcher exposed the doll to aggression before a group of children while to a control group, he showed the same person being tender towards the doll. At the end of the experiment, it was seen that each group acted according to the scene that it was exposed to; those who witnessed aggression on the doll imitated the aggressive behaviour which they had witnessed. They were aggressive to the doll. When we apply this to television viewing, the result is not different.



Methodology

The survey method was chosen as a relevant design for eliciting responses from junior secondary school students on their television viewing behaviour. The retrospective research methodology, a type of analysis that looks backwards, asking respondents to recall events that happened earlier in their lives was also employed.

A total of 1064 junior secondary school students in the five secondary schools in Oye-Ekiti (as at the time of this study) form the population of this study. The schools comprise three government schools and two private schools listed as follows:

1. Saint Augustine's Comprehensive High School – girls 203, boys 207, total 410
2. Oye-Egbo Secondary School, Oye-Ekiti – girls 155, boys 176, total 331
3. Ekiti State Government College, Oye-Ekiti – girls 87, boys 103, total 190
4. Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Catholic secondary School, Oye-Ekiti – girls 43, boys 29, total 72
5. Concentric International Group of Schools, Oye-Ekiti – girls 33, boys 28, total 61

The population was derived from JSSI, JSSII and JSSIII students in all the schools, according to records obtained from the principal (or a designated officer) of each school.

To obtain the sample, the researchers employed Taro Yamani's sampling method to obtain the sample of each population group (i.e. each school). These sample figures were then added together to make a total sample of 155 students. Breaking it down, Saint Augustine's Comprehensive High School yielded 34; Oye-Egbo Secondary School, Oye-Ekiti yielded 36; Ekiti State Government College, Oye-Ekiti yielded 33; Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Catholic Secondary School, Oye-Ekiti yielded 26, and Concentric International Group of Schools, Oye-Ekiti yielded 24 sample students.



The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire, designed in simple language which JSS students could easily understand without seeking assistance or interpretation. Relevant documented materials were reviewed while few oral interviews were also sought. Data collected was analyzed and presented in frequency and percentage tables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

One hundred and fifty-five copies of the questionnaire were distributed through the stratified random sampling method to JSS students in the sample schools in proportion to sample figures obtained from each population set. The children ranged between the ages of nine and thirteen; the age range on which the fast-moving 'action' scenes of television programmes leave the most impression. Three respondents said they neither had television sets in their homes nor watched television programmes. This situation may arise more from religious choice than socio-economic considerations as it is on record that a certain Christian denomination discourages its members from acquiring television sets and watching television programmes. The issue under study here is one of their most potent reasons. These three questionnaire copies were removed and 152 affirmative responses to television ownership, access and viewership were used in the analysis.

Table 1: How often do you watch television? (This is to elicit the level of interest of respondents on television programmes).

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Total
20 (13.1%)	52 (34.2%)	46 (30.2%)	34 (22.5%)	152 (100%)

Findings in table 1 show that respondents watched television frequently. It is therefore safe to say that respondents do watch television and are legible to answer questions on television viewing.



Table 2: What television programmes do junior secondary school children in Oye-Ekiti prefer?

News	Talk Shows	Film(Movies)	Sports	Others	Total
12(8%)	17 (11.5%)	63 (41%)	46 (30.5%)	14 (9%)	152 (100%)

From the result in table 2 it is safe to conclude that respondents preferred movies to other television programmes.

Table 3: Viewing of violent content on television impacts on aggressive behaviour of children

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Undecided %	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Total %
54	45	17	14	22	152
36	30	11	9	14	100

We can safely say from reading on the table above that respondents agree that viewing violent content on television influences the aggressive behaviour in children

Discussion of findings

Findings reveal that respondents watch television on regular basis, and prefer movies to other programme types. Respondents also demonstrated that viewing of violent content on television can influence the aggressive behaviour in children. An aggregation of the viewing patterns will show that respondents watched television enough to yield any conclusions in this study.

These findings are in agreement with the theories of cultivation and social learning which link aggressive behaviour in some people, particularly children and young adolescents, to violent content seen on television. These findings are also in agreement with Nkwam-Uwaoma, Nsude, & Nwachukwu, (2017), Baviskar, Labhane & Nikam, (2021) and a large



number of researchers who have empirically established a correlation between televised violence and aggressive behaviour.

Respondents in this study had their preferred programmes and would tune in when occasion allowed. These preferred programmes include foreign movies (on the major part), cartoons and sports programmes.

The majority (74%) of the respondents believed that violent television programmes do have some influence on viewers. These responses somewhat agree with an account in *Los Angeles Times* (Mestel, 2002) of a study tracking more than 700 adolescents into adulthood, which found that young people watching one to three hours of television every day are almost four times more likely to commit violent and aggressive acts later in life than those who watched less than an hour of television a day. Although the study mentioned above lays emphasis on viewing duration and long-term effect, its confirmation of the power of television to influence behaviour cannot be denied.

The study further revealed that 69% of the respondents said they mimicked actions they saw on television. They, especially male students, demonstrated these actions in the classroom, by shooting invisible guns, while improvising the shooting sound with their mouths. Others mimicked karate and kung fu actions. Another group flexed their tiny muscles, pushed out and beat their small chests in the manner of wrestling champions; while yet others pranced around in the classroom, throwing wild punches in imitation of boxers. This recollection of actions is supported by the retrospective research method which is a type of research analysis that looks backwards, asking respondents to recall events that happened earlier in their lives (Lu, 2017). The children agreed that they often played these 'games' in their neighbourhoods for fun and recreation. However, in traditional Africa, depending on peculiar prevalent practices, female children played at cooking, child-rearing and general home-keeping, while



the boys played at farming, hunting and other activities that defined the 'family man'. These were roles they watched their parents and other adult members of their society play. Today, they watch television. To see these traditional roles replaced with shooting, fighting, boxing, wrestling and other violent actions as children's games shows how deep television programmes have permeated the minds of young children. Thus, the nature of effect of television programmes on children can be said to depend on the programmes to which they are exposed. Since children are attracted by fast-moving and vivid scenes which are often attendant of violent movies, these appeal to that part of human in them which takes pleasure in using aggressive behaviour to intimidate and humiliate others. In fact, Reissle (2006) contends that television may fill the void caused by parental neglect or abuse, but it never substitutes the parent role as a crucial one in the development of the personalities of the children.

Conclusion

It is no longer in doubt whether the mass media, including television, exert a powerful influence on individual (and group) behaviour. This powerful influence is subtle; gradually but inexorably permeating the subconscious of people, and altering existing attitudes and perceptions.

Theories of mass media effect arose as an attempt to explain media influence on audience. At first, media effect was seen to be total, meaning that the audience was helpless against the controlling power of the media. Then there was a paradigm shift in favour of limited effect which conceded the audience some degree of control in choosing media content. This latter paradigm gave rise to the individual differences theory, an offshoot of the uses and gratifications theory (Ndolo, 2005). The theory states that each of us has unique qualities that govern the way we differently react to media messages. Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso (2012)



are of the view that the differing effects are partially caused by our selective exposure and selective perception. Whether we react to media message totally or partially, the power of the media (especially television) to influence behaviour has been proved through research.

Recommendations

Television influence is great. Individuals have experienced behaviour modification through television viewing. Societies and cultures are battling against foreign cultural impositions through television. Owing to its tripartite appeals of sound, vision and motion, coupled with the illusions of reality, the pull of television is almost inescapable. A narration of the merits and demerits of television is outside the scope of this work, but suffice it to say that television has more violent content than programme designers and users may wish to admit. Thus, to protect children from the powerful pull towards aggression, violence and other negative attributes seen on television, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Parents should adequately guide their children to make right viewing choices.
2. Government should review and strengthen existing regulations on programme censorship.
3. Programme designers should use their programmes to promote beneficial social values and not turn them into vending units for violence and aggression.
4. Television station management should discourage film makers from making films with violent content. This they can do by refusing to show such movies.
5. Government must view research findings on television effect with seriousness and must consider researchers' recommendations in tackling the problem of violent television content.



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