

The Effect of Television on Children a Case Study of Owerri Municipal Council

Onyinyechi Henrietta Usuh ¹, Ugoeze Progress Maximilian ², Chibueze Uzoma Chibunna ³, Esther Dominic Peter ⁴

¹ College of Management Science and Engineering, Chengdu University of Technology China

² Department of Guidance and Counselling, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Akwa, Anambra Nigeria

³ College of International Studies, Chengdu University of Technology China

⁴ College of Management Science and Engineering, Chengdu University of Technology China

E-mail: onyinyechiusoh@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

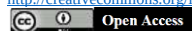
Keywords:

Television,
Children,
Television Viewing,
Media Influence,
Child Development,
Parental Supervision.

Vol.01, No.03, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CCBY4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



ABSTRACT

Television is one of the most common forms of media used by children for entertainment, education and information. However excessive and unsupervised television viewing may have both positive and negative effects on children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. This study examines the effects of television on children, with particular attention to how viewing habits influence their academic performance, behaviour, communication skills, sleep patterns, and social interaction.. the study recognizes that educational age appropriate television programme can improve children's knowledge, language development, creativity and awareness of the world around them. On the other hand, excessive exposure to television may contribute to reduced concentration, poor academic performance, sleep disturbances, aggressive behaviour and reduced opportunities for family and peer interaction. The study therefore emphasizes of importance of parents supervision, appropriate program selection, and reasonable limits of children's television viewing. It concludes that television can be beneficial to children when used appropriately, but excessive and uncontrolled exposure may negatively affect their overall development.

1. Introduction

Television is seen as a powerful agent of socialization, transformation and development.

The advent of colour pictures and the invention of the video cassette and compact disc in last two decades have increased the range of television usage. Children are more exposed to television than other media of mass communication. This is because of the audiovisual nature of the television.

A constant flow of information is vital for societal developmental change. Society as a whole cannot survive if it is not properly informed about its polity, economy and social well being. Television as a means of broadcasting was invented for the purpose of dissemination of information, entertainment and education. What the inventors of television had in mind was to influence the society positively; and this to a very great extent has been achieved. However, television programming if viewed negatively, the influence on the society becomes negative. According to Nwuneli (2013) "The preparation for this new technology itself was full of promises and the founding fathers concentrated on repeated statements of television's capacity to inform, educate and entertain". This implies that the society would not have been what it is today without mass-communication and television in particular. Because of the high breed nature of television and it's proven power to communicate effectively to most number of people at the same time, it expresses and communicates issues more effectively than any other medium of communication.

Before the invention of television, cinema was the major source of mass entertainment. People go to cinema houses as a group or as a family. Movies then were shown in theatres, the auditorium or in the classrooms. But with the advent of home videos, cinema houses became out of use.

Our society today is full of stress and troubles. And because we live in a turbulent world, emphasis is now placed on entertainment to cushion the effects of real troubles in the society. Man has to contend with numerous harsh realities such as bomb explosions, oil pollution and vandalization, toxic waste, acid

bathes, earthquakes, assassinations, flood disasters, accidents and others. These and many more have forced man to seek entertainment.

As a matter of fact, issues on arts, music, dance, drama, paintings, politics, religion and social activities form the main stable of television programming.

Television broadcasting wields its influence on the society using programming as its vital tool.

Film today exists in two formats (videocassette and compact disc). But standard motion pictures as produced in Hollywood and other minor centres of the film industry around the world are shot in celluloid format.

These formats range from 16mm through 35mm to 76mm all for the professional class. The 8mm format is usually for the amateur film producers Ekiye (2019).

Film is divided into two major classifications – documentary and feature films. These major classifications are broken down into several types of films. These include adventures, horrors, romance, comedy, scientific discovers musicals, crimes, war and historical films. Each of these films has a message to convey and to influence or shape peoples' opinion and attitude in various ways. This is why there are films for children and films for adults.

Based on this distinction therefore, films may be classified as adult film, general interest film and teenage films. Adidi Ugo, (2017). The Payne studies (1930) had also reinforced public fears that the movies were responsible for bad ideas, morals and behaviours among the children.

It is a common belief that most films shown over our television screen today are violent. It is based on this that Robert Coles, a child psychologist say that violence is that value predominating in most screen today. Sex and horror has been identified as the two factors used to restrict viewership of films to adults. These restrictions hold in the developed countries but not in the developing countries

In Nigeria, with particular reference to Owerri Municipal Council, unregulated video bars are found in every corner. Our children are publicly seen at odd hours watching these supposedly restricted films which is a very dangerous trend.

According to Blumler (2013), the movies or films as a social force reflect and shape the society. Motion pictures have profound influence on the mental and moral out-look of the younger ones. The reason is that the motion pictures provide a vivid visual presentation in which the images are already fully established, easily identified and copied. Children generally are seen as people who copy or easily emulate any life style they deem fit. These movies tend to influence manners, attitudes and behaviours. For the fact that movie stars are mostly young people, and majority of their audience

are children, the propensity to copy therefore is automatic. Once a star is idolized whether he or she plays negative or positive role, the out come is that children will start to practice that role. For example majority of our male children today want to become footballers because of Kanu Nwankwo.

Currently our society has been characterized by violence and corruption. Film has been accused of spreading these evils that do the society no good. This is why the assessment of the effect of television on children is an important area of study, using youths in Owerri Municipal as a case study.

Purpose of study

For sometime now there is great worry in the society concerning the behaviour of children. There is so much moral decadence in the homes, schools, and the society at large. The schools authorities blame the parents for lack of proper upbringing. The parents in turn blame the school authorities for not taking good care of the children. These blames have not solved the problems.

Since the media is a powerful agent of socialization and development, one now tends to look into its role in the behaviour of the children.

In spite of the numerous functions of the media is accused of being responsible for the high level of moral decadence in the children. This study therefore tends to access the effect of television on the attitude of children using Owerri Municipal Council as a case study.

Therefore the purpose of this study includes the followings:-

1. To ascertain if children in Owerri Municipal actually watch television and films.
2. To find out if the television programmes influence their attitude and behaviour.
3. To access the general effects of television / film on their attitudes.
4. To determine the best viewing period for these programmes.
5. To ascertain the level of parental guidance on the types of film their children watch.

Significance of the study

Television has been accused of affecting learning and academic performance including spreading violence among children.

Violence has become a recurring theme of contemporary films. In 1992, 66% of Hollywood films contained violent series. Awake (July 2020). These views of the majority seem to ignore the position roles of television on the children and society at large.

The outcome of this study will help to fill the vacuum of ignorance in this perspective. It will also help parents to appreciate the need to set limits on the amount of time spent by their children in watching television. It is equally help parents to see the need to assist programme managers of electronic media in determining the type of children programmes to be aired.

Research questions

In a study of this nature it is proper to raise some questions such as:-

1. Do children view violent programmes on television?
2. Do these programmes have negative effect on children?
3. Do movie stars influence children?
4. Do parents monitor what their children view on the television?

Conceptual Clarification

In order to give clarity to this study, three core concepts must be defined.

Keywords: Television, children, and television viewing

Television: This is an electronic medium used to transmit programs that combine sound and visual images. Children use television mainly for entertainment, education, news, cartoons. Movies, and other forms of information. Television can influence childrens attitudes, behaviour, language etc. The effect depends largely on the amount of time spent watching and the type of program viewed.

Children : Children are young individuals who are still undergoing physical, mental, emotional and social development. They are particularly influenced by their environment, including what they watch on television, because children are still developing their values, attitudes and ways of thinking. Repeated exposure to certain television content can influence their behaviour and perception of society.

Television viewing: This refers to the amount of time children spend watching television and the types of programs they watch. It includes the frequency, duration, and content of television exposure. Moderate and supervised viewing can provide entertainment and educational benefits, whereas excessive viewing may interfere with sleep, physical activity, schoolwork, family interaction and other important aspects of children's development

Theoretical Framework

Many theories predominated in the violence relationship but four are stated in this study.

Cultivation Theory: Early work in this area of theory began with Gerbner et-al (1973). In propounding this theory, they discovered that heavy television viewers had a markedly different view of reality than light viewers. Heavy viewers over estimate and confuse issues. The cultivation theory asserts that the media, especially television, exert tremendous influence on people by altering the individual's perceptions of reality.

This suggests that exposure to violence on television will raise the level of excitement in viewers, forming a catalyst to figure already learned behaviour resulting in violent acts being repeated in real setting.

Reinforcement Theory: The work of Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in 1944, called "the people's choice" provided the basis for this kind of the theory. They discovered through research that the mass media had little or nothing to do with people attitudes, decisions and behaviours. Rather the main effect of the media was the reinforcement of existing attitudes of the audience. Inherent in such a theory is the probability that the violent person with violent tendencies perceives violent behaviour as a real life experience. While the non – violent person may perceive the violent programme as entertainment without becoming psychologically involved with the programme.

The Observational Learning Theory: This theory suggests that we can learn violent behaviour from watching violent programmes and films. This could also be linked with magic bullet theory. This suggests that audiences receive the message as they are given or fired at them.

In what communication scholars have described as the "crudest form of theoretical effects model, the theory of uniform, powerful, direct media effects nevertheless gained currency and popularity within the first half of the 20th century.

The main assumption of this notice is that individuals in a mass society perceive messages from the media in the same fashion and react to them strangely and very similarly, (Harris 1994). "Magic bullets", "Hypodermic needles" Lasswell, "Plug in drugs" Winn (1977), have been used to describe media effects. This also gave rise to the idea that the mass media has unlimited power in the modern society, the powerful idea of the media is very popular among pressure groups and lay persons, especially such groups as "morality in media" and the "National coalition on television violence" in the USA. Such pressure groups are yet to emerge in Nigeria.

The notions of powerful effects are also popular among media writers, producers, broadcasters and directors in recent times.

Before and up to the 1930's most mass communication theories also assumed that mass media were capable of influencing the values, opinions and emotions of audience members. This assumption made it necessary to embrace the concept of the society that emerged from the study of the fundamental changes that had taken place in the industrialized societies over the last two centuries.

According to Lowery and Defleur (2013), the term in this context refers not just to numbers of people but to a destructive process or pattern of social organization that occurs when urbanization, industrialization and modernization modify the social order. With such shifts resulted widespread psychological alienation as well as the decline of traditional scholars of that era to rather perceive audiences as an independent and culturally isolated group of people. According to early communication theorist, if individuals were no longer supported by traditional social units but shared the same psychological media messages, the media would presumably have a powerful, predictable and uniform effect on all members of the audience. Tan (2016) further notes that the audiences were best thought to be classified by such demographic characteristics as age, sex, socio-economic status and education rather than as members united through social affiliations.

The "bullet theories", "hypodermic needle theories" "stimulus response theories" or "theories of uniform influences" of the time appeared to receive empirical validation from studies conducted after propaganda and advertising campaigns in newspapers were very effective in shaping the attitudes, beliefs and consumer behaviour of their audiences. They suggested that messages only need to be loaded, directed to the audience and fired like bullet. If they hit their target then the expected response would be obtained.

This was the notion of bullet theories of media effects. Audiences were assumed to act on impulse, emotion and instinct rather than on reason and self-control.

The growth and development of empirical social science techniques enable researchers to have something with which to study media effects. The studies they conducted gave credence to the belief that the media were really powerful in influencing the audience. However, there has been a change in the view of scholars on media effects. Black and Bryant (2015) observe that for several decades, research evidence indicates that the relationships between the media and their users are not that simple. This is in spite of a lingering belief today in the powerful, uniform and direct effects of the media.

According to Black and Bryant, since the 1970's cognitive psychologists, sociologists and communicologists have collaborated with specialists in computer modeling and artificial intelligence especially in such industrialized countries as USA, Britain, Austria, Germany etc to become "cognitive scientist". The specialists have been able to explore more systematically what goes on in the minds of viewers, readers and listeners of mass media messages. Following this emphasis on the cognitive aspects of media users there has therefore been a shift from an examination of effects to a greater emphasis on process. There has also been a shift in researcher's perception of communicators. For instance, we notice this change in that section of the theories that had perceived audiences as passive recipients or consumers of mass media messages. Today, recipients are rather seen as "active user" of media messages.

What is the place of goal-oriented media use? This question has frequently agitated the minds of cognitive media scientists over the years. According to John Bargh (1988) a cognitive media use researcher, "the nature of media user goals" is critical in determining more than just what information they receive from media messages. According to him, the type of information one attends to, how much

regard one has for it, how one decodes and interprets it and how one remembers it all are greatly influenced by ones processing goals while encountering the information. Moreover, cognitive scientists have offered mental analogies to explain why we process different types of media message differently (that is why the same type of media messages id processed differently in diverse contexts).

Taking a cue from Delleur and Ball-Rokeach's dependency theory, Esther Thomson (1989) present a model for the cognitive processing of television commercials that includes the elemental considerations of goal specification, memory mechanisms, language structure, emotional state distraction, as being constructive of the totality of the model elements crucial effects in cognitive processing of television commercial.

Review of Empirical Studies

A study was carried out by Okunna (2012) to determine the effect of media on their audience. Four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study, and survey research design was used for the study. Data collection was achieved with the use of questionnaire as instrument. The population of the study comprises 225 adults from both federal and state agencies. The data collected were analyzes and result showed that the media can help bring about and spread social change in the society. It also shows that media influences the public's perception of reality of what current public issues are and what importance they have as well as which conditions are social problems requiring solving.

Similarly, Thompson (2019) carried out an investigation on the effects of television viewing on the society. The study was guided by six research questions. Descriptive survey was used to conduct the study. The population of the study was made up of 123 Lecturers in four federal universities in the south eastern Nigeria. The questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analyzed by mean percentage and frequency counts. The findings revealed that television and its content encourages rapid societal growth, development and modernization by bringing to bear the current and more modern infrastructures, technological advancements and equipment in its program content.

Boylse (2014) investigated television as an effective means of communication. The study was carried out to determine the relationship between television and communication. Five research questions were posed, and four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population of this study was made up of the one hundred and one (110) staff working in the Imo Broadcasting cooperation. The result of the study showed that the majority of the staff indicates that the various kinds of content provided by the mass media often portrays social activities and general group life. These portrayals are representation of reality that reflects accurately or poorly, the nature of many kind of groups. The experience of exposure to portrayals of a particular kind of group results in incidental learning of behaviour patterns that are expected by others when acting within such a group.

Research Methodology

The research method used in this study is the survey research method. The decision to used survey method is based on the fact that it is reliable. According to Graltung (2017) Survey method is mainly the examination of current issues relating to the aspect of society with a view to finding effective moves for future improvement. The survey approach used in data collection is the cross sectional survey. Which relies on the sample of elements from the population of interest which is measured at a single time. The target population is 1200 while the sample size is 300 consisting of parents and children in Owerri Municipal council of Imo State. The instrument for data collection is the questionnaire.

Discussion of Findings

After analyzing the data collection from respondents, in which the research questions were addressed. It was observed that television viewing has a very strong impact on children. It effects their attitude and changes their behaviour because children are capable of absorbing and practicing what they see and hear from the media. The media have messages from children that can broaden their knowledge. Apart from this, they also have programs that influence and change their attitudes and behaviour. Viewing violet programs affect the children, it makes them to feel that it is a normal way of life.

Unregulated programming on the screens is the problem of our television industry. Television viewing can reinforce real life behaviour in children. Television viewing consumes children studying hours. This accounts for the reason why we have less studious children.

It can be seen from these that effect of television on children cuts across homes, institution, neighborhood and gender.

Conclusion

The study which was aimed at finding the effect of television on children has been analyzed and discovered that television has negative influence on children in particular and every viewer in general. Information and visuals displayed on them stimulates its audience to action.

However, television has really contributed to children's bad behaviour. According to Akpan (2014) in Nigeria people are eager to expose themselves to television. This wide exposure of the audience to television plays a tremendous role in the attitudinal change observed in the society today.

From this study, it is found that children learn very fast through the audiovisual medium (television). Whatever they learn, have very serious impact in their behaviour. They tend to practice the knowledge gained through visuals.

References

1. Adidi U.G. (2017) The problems of Television as an effective medium of mass communication in Nigeria. Calaba Development Digest Limited
2. Akpan B.E. (2014) Radio Television and society New York, Oxford University Press.
3. Baridam D.M. (2019) Research methods in administrative Science. Portharcourt, Belic Publishers.
4. Black P.B. (2015) Motion Pictures and standard of morality, New York, the Macmillan Company.
5. Blumer C.S (2013) An experience in the prevention of child delinquency. New York, Columbia University Press.
6. Boyle K.E (2014) Your Child Home, Your Child's Topics. Umuts Home Televisio, USA, U.M. Health systems
7. Defluer and Dennis (2015) Understanding Mass Communication. U.S.A. Houghton Mifflin Company.
8. Ekiye D. D. (2019) Media and Mass Communication in Nigeria. Ibadan, Gong-Duyison Publishers.
9. Graltung T.A. (2017) Seminar Paper on Television and society: Issues and Decision
10. Nwunali O. (2013) Mass Communication in Nigeria, A book of Reading, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers
11. Ogbuoshi L.I. (2016) Techniques of film and Television production, Enugu, Rhyce Kerex publishers.
12. Okunna C.S (2012) Introduction to Mass Communication, Enugu, New Generation books and images publishers.
13. Tan S.N. (2016) Mass Communication Theories and Realities, Enugu, Bismark Publishers.
14. Thompson E.O. (2019) Audio Visual Medium, Radio, Television, Film and Theatre. Owerri, Top Class Media.