



Reading about the impact of television on promoting violent behavior in children

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Abstract

Immersion in the world of media has raised concerns among psychologists, educators, and sociologists about the negative effects on children's behavior and mental and psychological development. This is especially true of television, as the most important communication and media innovation, with its diverse content and high ability to attract and dazzle. Given the importance of this topic, this study seeks to raise the issue of the relationship between violent scenes shown on television and violent behavior in children through an analytical approach that examines the nature of television violence and explains the role of television in promoting aggressive behavior in children.

Keywords : Television _Violence _ Television violence_ Media

Introduction

The world is undergoing a scientific and technological revolution known as the information age or the age of various high-density communication devices that combine video, computers, and the Internet... "Since the early 1970s and the end of the Cold War, the world order has undergone a major acceleration unprecedented in history. This was mainly represented by a major technological explosion in the field of media and communication, which increased the power of collecting, storing, utilizing, and transferring information to levels unprecedented in human history. New phenomena emerged in the midst of this, perhaps the most widespread and popular of which was globalization. (Yahyaoui, 2002, p. 20)

Industrialized countries were quick to embrace this new civilization, but its effects have reached the Arab world, which now enjoys and suffers from it at the same time. We are now living in an era characterized by rapid and enormous changes, changes that are expected to increase in speed, depth, and scope in the future, with distances shrinking and almost disappearing with the increasing capacity of modern communication devices and the resulting flow and invasion of information. The world is becoming more interconnected and more quickly affected by what is happening in different parts of it, and the dangers threatening it are also increasing in severity." (Arab Journal of Education, 1990, p. 43)

As a result of these transformations and developments in communications and information and technology achievements, the media circle has expanded, programs have multiplied, and viewers have been given a wide space in which to choose what they want, when they want. The media has gained importance through the speed with which it delivers its message and in accordance with people's need to communicate with others. It has become the most important platform for obtaining information and expressing opinions, and one of the most prominent tools for exchanging experiences and transferring cultures between societies, performing an educational, guiding, and entertaining function. " Communication and media scholars have divided the stages of media technology into five basic stages, beginning with the oral stage, followed by the written stage, then the print stage, then the electronic stage, and finally the multimedia stage, or what is called the interactive communication stage, where media technology and information technology converged, which we call the digital blue space (Bin Abdullah, 2021, p. 165).

In light of the free flow of information, the media has come to play an important role in individuals' lives and contribute to shaping their behavior and personality. Direct communication and interaction are no longer the predominant method of communication between individuals. However, what is dangerous is that the values and cultures broadcast by these media often conflict with the social and moral standards of society and contribute to the spread of deviant behavior, as the images of violence they broadcast influence individuals and dominate their minds. We often hear about crimes of assault, rape, and murder as a result of imitating violent scenes shown on television. It also contributes to the emergence of many problems resulting from the use of modern technologies and the extent to which they control our lives.

The role of the media in promoting aggressive behavior among the receiving audience has preoccupied social researchers, psychologists, and media professionals... They have focused more on children and television, investigating several possible effects of watching television, the most important of which are emotional arousal, removal of inhibitions, imitation, and reduced enthusiasm (Mukaffin, 2004, p. 392). This negative effect is particularly evident in the images of violence presented on television, which foster aggression in children, many of whom imitate the violence they see on television. Children living in poor neighborhoods are no longer only exposed to violence when they go out on the street. but the virtual street, with its negative situations, has become available to them and reinforces the emergence of aggressive behavior. "From an early age, children are exposed to a considerable number of media programs, and often these programs are not designed for their generation. Therefore, they are exposed to all the violent content on television, and even topics that are not suitable for their generation, such as excitement and sex, which ultimately leads to them losing their childhood" (Mohammed, 2022, 177). The results also show us that television violence produces violence when it is increasingly presented in realistic ways that make the violent hero appear just and defensive. Studies have proven that television has a negative impact on viewers through violent films. In the US state of California, the percentage of adolescents among perpetrators of murder and violence reached 10%. and in 1999, this percentage rose to 19% due to the scenes of violence, aggression, and fighting shown on American television (Bordell, 1994, pp. 101-102).

Based on all of the above, the current study addresses the role of television in developing violent behavior in children through its portrayal of violence, crime, and drug use, which affect the individual's personality, especially with the frequency of violence in television programs, which has become a danger and a cause for concern due to its negative effects in promoting aggressive behavior, especially among children and adolescents. Our reading was based on the theories of social learning and cultural conditioning, which address the effects of media content on the receiving audience. We defined the problem of our study in answering the main question: What is the role of television in promoting violent behavior in children?

1 _The Effects of Media on Children

1_1 The Role of Media in Socialization

The French dictionary Le Petit Larousse states that "media refers to all means of disseminating information, including radio, television, and other media devices, and at the same time, it refers to a means of expression and a medium for conveying news to the public." (Dictionnaire Le Petit Larousse, p. 47)

The media is considered one of the most important innovations of modern times due to its effective role in transferring knowledge and enhancing communication between people. Its importance stems from its speed in delivering messages through words, images, and sound. The media, including radio, television, and newspapers, plays an important role in the social development of children due to their powerful influence, imposing their presence in people's lives and making the world a small village, facilitating communication and interaction between its members. "These media have come to follow children everywhere and at all times with images and sound, even in their bedrooms, to convey news, explain events, and display images that develop their minds and nurture their emotions" (Darbal, 2019, p. 10).

Especially television, which affects children's psychology, with the decline of other social institutions and the emergence of these new value systems. Faced with the development of the media, with its diverse ideas, information, and news in all fields, children find themselves confused about what to choose from this flood of information that permeates society culturally and contributes to changing the behavior patterns of individuals who follow it without awareness or consciousness.

The impact of the media varies according to the different stages of an individual's life, but it is difficult to accurately measure its impact, given the absence of scientific standards capable of measuring this impact. Many have emphasized the negative impact of the media and its invasion of societies, transforming them into digital, media, and internet societies that influence individuals' concepts, standards, ideas, and relationships with one another. This impact is particularly evident in children and adolescents due to the sensitivity of their age group, dominating their feelings, minds, and emotions, which often contradicts the values and standards that the family and educational institutions try to instill in them. In fact, the outside world, with its entertainment broadcast by the media and its temptations, becomes more enjoyable than the restrictive school environment.

1_2 The effects of media on children

Many studies have sought to identify the positive and negative effects of media, which can be summarized in the following points:

Positive effects of the media on children

The media is a form of entertainment that provides amusement and gives individuals opportunities to express their talents, broaden their horizons, and develop their imagination. It also provides children with cultural information that develops their personalities and contributes to shaping their attitudes and behavior. With the ease of transmitting information at high speed, barriers and distances between different parts of the world are broken down.

Negative effects of the media on children

Among the negative effects of the media are :

- The transfer of foreign values and lifestyles from other environments to our society, which leads to a disruption of the value system in children's minds and changes their perspective on the world around them.

- Children acquire aggressive behaviors by repeatedly watching violent content in the media, especially on television, through action movies, horror movies, and cartoons that depict fictional heroes, which influences children to imitate their violent behavior. Leonard Berkowitz confirmed that there is a correlation between aggressive behavior in children and watching television programs that contain violent skirmishes and clashes, especially if reinforced by cultures that encourage violence, such as cultures that demand that males be violent. Thomas Robinson pointed out that every hour a child or adolescent spends watching television increases their likelihood of becoming addicted to alcohol. "The hours that children and adolescents spend in front of the television or playing video games also have a tremendous impact on the brain's neurotransmitters, increasing the secretion of adrenaline due to the emotional response to stressful situations. This hormone, in turn, increases stress and anxiety, which can affect cardiovascular health if secreted in excess. Exposure to exciting scenes and acts of violence, such as the appearance of a gun or knife, also predisposes the brain to violence, making aggression more likely. This conditioning occurs by stimulating certain areas of the brain, such as the frontal lobe, which controls thinking, behavior, and decision-making, and the occipital lobe, which controls visual processing, distracting the mind from distinguishing between reality and fantasy (Tariq, 2024).

- Wasting time unproductively and negatively affecting the child's academic achievement due to sitting for long hours in front of the television without supervision or guidance.

- The child's mind becomes dulled due to prolonged television viewing, and their mental and cognitive abilities decline.

- The child's prolonged viewing of violent television programs leads to increased isolation and feelings of tension, which generates feelings of aggression and makes them more violent in their interactions with others.

- Negative effects on children's health, including obesity and lethargy due to lack of exercise, especially since this daily activity is always accompanied by eating and avoiding activities that are beneficial to their health, such as sports, which can lead to obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol. World Health Organization reports state that the prevalence of obesity among children is directly linked to the number of hours children spend in front of the television and computer. A British study found that flashing images and certain shapes appearing on television screens, video games, and computers increase the risk of children having epileptic seizures, as there are technical measures that trigger seizures in people who are more susceptible to the disease. The age group between 7 and 19 years old is more susceptible to visually induced seizures. (Al-Asra Magazine, 2018)

- Influence on the formation of values and future attitudes in children.

2-The role of television violence in promoting aggressive behavior in children

2_1 The concept of violence

Staros defines violence as "a response to an external stimulus that leads to harm to another person in the form of a violent act charged with emotions of anger, agitation, and hostility, resulting from a state of frustration" (Wadug, 1997, p. 32).

Proponents of social learning theory refer to violence as "acquired and learned behavior that humans learn through imitation and the availability of violent models they observe. It is a social phenomenon, and individuals and groups acquire violent and nonviolent behavior through the culture that exists in society via control mechanisms and behavioral norms (Khalil Ahmad, 1984, p. 49).

2_2 The concept of television and its characteristics

Television is an audiovisual medium that relies on sound and images. It has been defined as “a communications system used to transmit and receive images and sound via electrical or digital signals for the purpose of conveying visual and audio content” (Gluksman, 2000, p. 74).

Television is considered one of the most important mass media outlets, characterized by its attractive elements that draw audiences and its effectiveness in sending many different messages to millions of viewers. Shram refers to television as “dominates all other means of communication and media, forming a magical gateway to a world of fantasy, wonder, and excitement. It is also an invitation to relax and escape from the problems and sufferings of everyday life and its various troubles, as it encourages people to immerse themselves in the enjoyment of the characters in a film or story. (Sharam and Leil, 1965, p. 4). Television also enables individuals to build new relationships with others due to its ability to present programs and events that lead to changes in behavior and practices.

Television is one of the most attractive media, especially for children, because part of its appeal lies in its ease of understanding and perception, and because it is both a visual and auditory medium. In addition, it plays an important role in the socialization of children alongside the family and school, as it is a source of education and knowledge for children (Muzahira, 2012, p. 91).

2_3 The concept of television violence

Television violence is defined as “a series of interactions and emotions known through television that are described as illegal and immoral when practiced in real life. These interactions include scenes that depict behaviors, words, and symbols that are contrary to social values, principles, standards, and norms, and leave their mark on individuals and groups” (Gluksman, 2000, p. 17).

Television violence is also referred to as “the public depiction of an act involving a form of violence intended to threaten or cause harm, which is visible, apparent, or clearly audible” (Hassan, 2007, p. 78).

2-4 The impact of television violence on children

Upon closer examination of the films and series broadcast on television, we find many programs that contain aggressive behavior in series, sports programs, and cartoons, which affect the behavior of children and adolescents, highlighting and reinforcing violence in their behavior and exposing them to programs whose content is not appropriate for their age group. This television violence is often used to increase viewership by arousing viewers' emotions and portraying criminals as heroes who act aggressively to protect humanity.

Exposure to violent content on television is one of the important factors that contribute to the reinforcement of aggressive behavior in individuals, along with other factors related to the prevailing social, cultural, and economic context in the social environment in which the individual lives. Discussions on the topic of violence in the media began in the late 1950s with sessions held by the US Congress to try to determine the extent of the impact of violence portrayed in the visual media and its effects on viewers (Lamia, 2020, p. 250).

The relationship between television violence and the development of aggressive behavior in the viewing public is one of the topics that has attracted the attention of researchers. Many theories have attempted to explain the effects of media content and its depiction of violence and crime on the spread of violence in society, confirming the existence of a correlation between watching television programs that encourage violence and aggressive behavior in children, such as the cultural conditioning theory, which originated with American scholar George Gerbens, who researched the impact of the media on the cultural environment. The cultural conditioning theory is based on the main hypothesis that “intensive exposure to fixed and repetitive cultural models and images gradually shapes an individual's perception of the social reality surrounding them as a result of cumulative exposure to the media in general and television in particular” (Palous Insap Santosa, et.al., 2005, pp. 361-370). P.P.361-370,).

The proponents of this theory point out that increased exposure to television leads to changes in individuals' perceptions and shapes their understanding of social reality and various issues, as individuals who are exposed to television unconsciously internalize perceptions and values that they believe to be realistic. and emphasizes the importance of television and its influence on the perceptions of individuals and society, shaping mental images of the outside world that can be influenced by social characteristics and traits (Al-Mazahirah, 2012, p. 43).

Cultural implantation theory points out how television has taken on the socialization role that was previously played by the family, school, and church, which is the function of education, due to its prevalence in homes and children spending most of their time in front of the television, which has become a dominant force for many people and a major source for shaping their perceptions of reality. Thus, the relationship between exposure to television and acquired ideas reveals the importance of television's role in shaping values and perceptions of social reality" (Hassanein, 2014, p. 105)

The negative influence of the media, especially television, as a source of violence, particularly given the diversity of satellite channels and the images of violence they present, affects adolescents and makes them long to fulfill their daydreams by imitating what they see when they are impressed by a powerful and strong hero and see him in a heroic and violent situation on television. This affects their psyche, so they imitate him, and this behavior is reflected in their actions and appearance. "Children have always wanted to emulate their fathers or teachers, seeing them as role models and ideal examples to aspire to. However, with the emergence of new value systems promoted by the media, which have contributed to their prominence and glorification, This has led to the disappearance of the true standards for things and people and the marginalization of heroic standards of struggle, which have been replaced by licentious images and fictional heroes" (Boubaker, 2003, p. 173), especially in the absence of parental supervision of what their children watch and the harmful influences it broadcasts. Benadora and his theory based on the principle of imitation and emulation that individuals acquire aggressive behavior patterns through aggressive models they see. Consequently, adolescents imitate the behavior of adults and try to resemble them, including the violent behavior they see on television, whether physical or verbal, or even in imitating clothing, hairstyles, or wearing certain accessories in the case of males.

Among the factors that increase the likelihood of imitative violence from watching it on television programs is the expectation of reward without encountering consequences, as well as the similarity between the situation presented on television and the situation faced by the viewer after being exposed to television violence. the expectation of social approval and support for the individual's behavior from other viewers who express admiration for the violent acts committed by television characters (De Florio Rocchi, 2001, p. 294).

Children and adolescents are attracted to aggressive films such as action films that tell stories of superheroes and imprint themselves on their imaginations, turning them into role models that they try to emulate, especially given the particularities of the age they are going through and their desire to express themselves and achieve independence and freedom. They find this in such films and their suspense, action, and excitement, thus fulfilling their daydreams. This is especially true for males, as males are more prone to violence and the nature of these films, which contain scenes of murder, assault, and explosions. These scenes affect and dominate young people, who become captivated by them. They capture their attention, reinforce their violent impulses, and influence their mentality, especially in the absence of moral and social controls. "Modern man is a new Proteus who can transform himself into whatever he receives from the outside world. He is overwhelmed by a flood of images resulting from the torrent of technical and cultural influences and trends that flow from the mass media, and he adapts to the need to reconcile his impulses, perceptions, and actions." (Team of specialists, 1993)

Conclusion

Studying the problematic impact of television violence on promoting and developing violent behavior in individuals has become an urgent necessity due to the seriousness of violent images and the tendency to imitate them, given television's direct and indirect influence on the behavior and personality of individuals, especially children and adolescents. Television content is not free from scenes of violence, destruction, beatings, assault, and robbery, presented in a dramatic format that affects viewers, especially with technological and technical developments in the media field and the violent content of programs that viewers can easily access without barriers or censorship.

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