

Full Length Research Paper

Mass media as correlates of children's behavioural problems in Kwara State, Nigeria

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In the last 70 years, mass media such as radio, motion pictures, recorded music and television have become important agents of socialization. Television in particular is a critical force in the socialization of children. Many parents in essence allow the television set to become a child's favourite "playmate". It is generally agreed that children are exposed to a great deal of violence in the process. Mass media are important in socialization because they provide models of behaviour particularly among children. These models can have powerful effects on their behaviour, leading to behavioural problems. It is against this background that this study examines the relationship between mass media and children's behavioural problem in Kwara State of Nigeria in 2010. To achieve this, survey design was employed among 816 children exposed to mass media. The major research hypothesis tested revolved around the relationship between mass media and children's behavioural problems. The data were analysed using chi-square and Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient to indicate that the two factors were related. Based on this, it was recommended that public policy on media should focus on eliminating violent scenes in the mass media.

Key words: Mass media, behavioural problems, children, communication, technology.

INTRODUCTION

Behavioural problems can occur in children of all ages. Very often they start in early life. Toddlers and young children may refuse to do as they are asked by adults, in spite of being asked many times. They can be rude, swear and have tantrums, or an outburst of aggressive or disruptive behaviour (Carr, 2000). Some children may even have serious behavioural problems such as physical fights, drug abuse, arson etc. Rutter and Taylor (2002) admit that there are behavioural problems when the child continues to behave badly for several months or longer or if the behaviour is not of the ordinary and it seriously breaks the rules accepted in his family and community, these behavioural problems may be disruptive, delinquent and deviant. They opined that these sorts of behavioural problems can affect a child's development and also interfere with his ability to live a

normal life. In reference to the aforementioned, Reza and Mercy (2001) report that violence by young persons is one of the most visible forms of behavioural problems in human society. According to them, world newspapers and broadcast media report daily on violence by gangs in schools or young people on the streets. Young people's violence deeply harms not only its victims but also their families, friends and communities. Its effects are seen not only in death, illness and disability, but also in terms of the quality of life. Behavioural problems by young ones add greatly to the cost of health and welfare services, reduce productivity, decrease the value of property, disrupt a range of essential services and generally undermined the fabric of the society.

The issue of mass media and children has become very important not only because of its communicability but as a result of its effects on children's behaviour. Children are exposed to different social environments and hence they react differently to mass media. A typical African child has different social environments from that

Of a child in a developed country, like Britain or

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American (Gbadeyan, 2008).

In Nigeria, children are not exposed to those hobbies their counterparts in developed countries are exposed to. There are few recreational facilities in most of these developing countries. For instance, in Nigeria, children have recreational centres in Ibadan, Lagos and a few other cities. This consequently makes them rely on viewing television as a past-time and hobby. They watch television and home videos for long hours immediately after closing from schools about 2.00 pm till late hours in the night. In the process, they are exposed to so many hours of television commercials and programmes which eventually have consequential effects on their behaviour.

Children are surrounded by mass media. They are an ideal target, simply because they are avid viewers. Most big name brands and advertising agencies use television for example to try and influence children as consumers. Their behavior is a reflect of such influence: they choose what they consume, insist on their favourite brands and influence their families' choice (The Courier UNESCO 2001; Children Now, 1998; Gbadeyan, 2008).

Television and other broadcast media have been in existence over a century. However, there have been serious concerns about the impact of mass media on children's behaviour since inception. Since early 1950s, there has been growing pressure mounted by parents, teachers and social scientists on their legislators and governments "to do something" about the amount of violence within the mass media, particularly television. In addition to this initial worry about violence and other obnoxious issues around mass media, many professionals and parents are now questioning the quality of programmes designed by mass media for children, the amount of advertising directed at young viewers, and the way mass media portrayed men, women and ethnic minorities, and the effects of time that children are exposed to mass media (Murray and Lonnborg, 1995).

The perceived effects of the media on children are manifold. The media have been blamed for alienation, copy-cat killings, producing apathy amongst the population, reinforcing prejudices and trivializing important issues. Of course, the extent to which we blame the media for negative effects depends upon how active or passive an audience is. This study is an attempt to assess the effects of mass media on children's behavioural problems.

The media (traditional and new)

In the twenty-first century, communication technology is such that information can be shared instantaneously by millions of people simultaneously, almost anywhere around the world. Communication, which is the transfer of information from one individual or group to another, whether in speech or through the mass media of modern times is crucial to any society. One influential early

theorist of communication media was the Canadian author Marshall McLuhan. According to Giddens (2006), the medium is the message, that is to say, society is influenced much more by the type of the media than by the content or the messages, which the media convey (Giddens, 2006).

A society in which satellite television plays an important part is obviously different from the one that relies on the printed word carried aboard on ocean liner. We live today in an interconnected world in which people experience the same events from many different places. Thanks to globalization and the power of communications technology, people from Caracas to Cairo are able to receive the same popular music, news films and television programmes, twenty-four-hours news channels report on stories as they occur, and broadcast coverage of the unfolding events for the rest of the world to see. Films made in Hollywood or Hong Kong reach audiences around the world, while celebrities such as David Beckham and Tiger Woods have become household names on every continent (Giddens, 2006).

It is important to note that we have been witnessing a process of convergence in the production, distribution and consumption of information. Whereas at one time ways of communicating, such as print, television and films, were relatively self contained spheres, they have now become intertwined to a remarkable degree. The divisions between forms of communication are no longer as dramatic as they once were; television, radio, newspapers and telephones are undergoing profound transformation as a result of advances in technology and the rapid spread of the Internet. While newspaper remains central to human lives, the ways they are organized and deliver their services are changing as newspaper can be read online. Mobile telephone use is exploding, and digital television and satellite broadcasting services allow an unprecedented diversity of choice for viewing audiences.

Opening the global space of communication again is the Internet. The internet is at the heart of this communication revolution. With the expansion of technologies such as voice recognition, broadband transmission, web casting and cable links, the internet threatens to erase the distinction between traditional forms of media and to become the conduit for the delivery of information, entertainment, advertising and commerce to media.

Common behavioural problems in children

Gottfredson (2001) classifies behavioural problems in children into psychosocial disorders, habit disorders, anxiety disorders, disruptive behaviour and sleeping problems. The specific behaviours used to produce a diagnosis of behavioural problem fall into four groups: aggressive conduct that causes or threatens physical harm to other people or animals, non-aggressive

behaviour that causes property loss or damage, deceitfulness or theft, and serious violations of rules. Aggression and threats to do physical harm to people or animal is a very common behaviour for those with behavioural problem. Often, harm and torture of animals are displayed early in these children, even as early as 5 to 6 years old. Aggression is also showed towards other persons (children and adults) and include bullying, physical assault (body or with weapons), and even forced sexual abuse.

Furthermore, behavioural problem does not have to be physically violence towards others. Physical violence can include aggression towards non-human targets, examples include destruction of property (school vandalism, destruction of uninhabited homes) or fire starting. Fire starting is a very popular activity among those with behavioural problems. Destruction of property has little to do with revenge or making any form of statement, it is a thrill seeking behaviour (Ishola, 2009).

In a similar manner, the thrill factor of stealing is far greater for the child with behavioural problem than the attainment of these items. Some stealing may be to attain substances of abuse or to use the items to impress someone, but again, it is the thrill, not the attainment of wealth that is the reason for the theft (Banmrind, 1991). Lying is part of a game, a way out of a problem or a way to manipulate. Those with behavioural problems know how to manipulate situation very difficult to diagnose because they can change their tactics to fit the situation. If they get into trouble in school, they can change their story to make themselves the victims and the actual victim the perpetrator. It is very difficult to read them and know when they are telling the truth and manipulating the situation (Ishola, 2009).

Furthermore, behaviours that can be the most destructive to family and friends of children with behavioural problems are deceitfulness, manipulation, and theft. This stage is characterized by lack of conscience by the children. There are no boundaries for these children. All that is important to them is that their needs are met, even if they cause great harm to their supposed loved ones. The children with behavioural problems are only interested in their own needs, meaning that they have no problem with breaking rules they do not agree with, which include most rules that will impede their current impulsive need.

Intervention strategies

Many societies consider delinquency, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, and early patterns of sexual behaviour that risk sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy among unmarried teenagers to be serious problems. These can ruin adolescents' lives by making them to be put in jail, by limiting their education and vocational training opportunities. Risk factors for

behavioural problems occur throughout children's development, and children face new risks as they mature and encounter new challenges. Children's environments also become more complex as they grow older, making intervention more difficult.

Negative events and conditions that are stressful create difficulties for both parents and children (Briere, 1992). The entertainment media, including cinema, television and music, also affect young people's perceptions of norms of behaviour. Evidence suggests that seeing aggressive behaviour on television may make some children more aggressive. Some movies, television and music produced in the United States in particular may over emphasize undesirable behaviour. Parents can reduce the harmful effects of international and local media by keeping children from viewing or listening to programmes that present aggressive behaviour and other problem behaviour in positive light (Jason and Hanaway, 1997).

School can also reduce the harmful effects of aggressive media by teaching children that these shows are not accurate on the extent or result of violence and substance use. The school programmes and mass media messages used to emphasize positive things that young people are doing and to show that most young people are opposed to substance use and violent behaviour. Schools can reduce the amount of time children spend viewing or listening to programmes that present aggressive behaviour and other problem behaviour in positive ways.

Theoretical anchorage (cultivation theory)

The cultivation theory looks at the mass media as a socializing agent and investigates whether television viewers come to believe the television version of reality the more they watch it. The theory contends that television drama has a small but significant influence on the attitudes, beliefs and judgments of viewers concerning the social world. The focus is on "heavy viewers". People who watch a lot of television are likely to be more influenced by the ways in which the world is framed by television programmes than individuals who watch less, especially regarding topics of which the viewers have little first-hand experience.

Evra (1990) argues that by virtue of inexperience, young viewers may depend on television for information more than other viewers do. Mass media are seen as dominating "symbolic environment". Cultivation theory presents the mass media not as windows on or reflection of the world, but a world in itself (McQuail and Windahl, 1993). The theory argues that the over-representation of violence on mass media constitutes a symbolic message about law and order rather than a simple cause of more aggressive behaviour by viewers. Cultivation theorists argue that heavy viewing leads viewers to have more

Table 1. Relation between mass media and children's behavioural problems.

Variables	N	Degrees of freedom (df)	Observed X^2	Critical x^2 0.05 (a = 0.05)	Decision
Mass media and behavioural problems	816	225	12,240.000	124.342	Reject H_0

Remarks: $x^2 = 12,240.000$, $df = 225$, $0.05 = 124.342$, since $x^2 > t$ 0.05, Reject null hypothesis.

Table 2. Symmetric measures.

	Value	Assump. Std Error ^a
Interval by internal Pearson's R	0.1000	0.000
No of valid cases	816	

homogeneous or convergent opinions than light viewers. The cultivation effect of television viewing is one of 'levelling' or homogenizing opinion. The theorists argue that heavy viewers of violence on mass media come to believe that the incidence of violence in the everyday world is higher than light viewers of similar backgrounds. Misjudging the amount of violence in society is sometimes called the 'Mean World Syndrome'? Heavy viewers tend to believe that the world is a nastier place than light viewers. Pingree and Hawkins (1981) in Condry (1989) studied 1,280 primary school children in Australia using viewing diaries and questionnaires. They found that heavy viewing led to a television-based view of Australia as a "mean and violent place." The children with the bleakest picture of Australian were those who most watched American crime adventure programmes most.

Though, the theory offers a very plausible case, particularly in its emphasis on the importance of mediation and on the symbolic function of mass media in its cultural context. It has been criticized for neglecting other experiences by people and so on.

METHODOLOGY

The thrust of this study is an investigation of the relationship between mass media and children's behavioural problems in Kwara State of Nigeria. Kwara State with its headquarters in Ilorin, was among other eleven states created on 27th May, 1967. The state comprises of 16 local government areas (LGAs). The state has an area of 320,500 square kilometres. By location, it is bounded in the North by Niger State, in the South, by Osun and Ondo States, in the East by Kogi State and in the West by Oyo State. It shares international boundary with the Republic of Benin along the North-West part of the state in Baruten local government area (Bamiduro, 2002).

The data of the study were gathered through a structured interview based on questionnaires which were administered by a team of research assistants. The target population consisted of 7,420 children who are exposed to mass media. The sample size was 816 children drawn through purposive sampling technique from the sixteen LGAs of the state. Fifty one (51) respondents were selected from each of the LGAs. The respondents were encountered at home, on the streets and educational centres. The major research hypothesis tested revolved around the relationship

between mass media and children behavioural problems. The data of the study were analysed using chi-square statistics and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient to determine the relationships between mass media and children's behavioural problems.

ANALYSIS

Here, the results of hypothesis on the relationship between mass media and children's behavioural problems are provided.

Table 1 reveals a number of statistical information regarding the hypothetical relationship between mass media and children's behavioural problems. The chi-square data presented in the table indicate that the two factors are found to be related to each other. This is so because the observed calculated value of chi-square of 12,240.000 exceeds the table value of 124.342 at 0.05 with 225 degrees of freedom. The hypothetical decision emanating from the hypothetical relationship is that while the null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between mass media and behavioural problem is rejected, the alternative research hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between mass media and children behavioural problem is accepted.

The degree or strength of the relationship existing between the two factors considered in the hypothesis is also shown in Table 2.

From Table 2, it is obvious that the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient is 0.1000, given 816 numbers of valid cases. This means that there is a perfect positive correlation coefficient between mass media and children's behavioural problems. The results of the study indicate that children's behavioural problems can be predicted from the amount of media children are exposed to. Many attempts have been made to explain the relationship between mass media and children's behavioural problems. Explaining the relationship in general terms, Leung and Lau (1989) said that inadequate child rearing practices, home discord, mass media messages and child maltreatment are associated with children's behavioural problem. Williams et al. (1990) went further

to state that a number of social adversities in families and the social environment can affect children's behaviour. These factors include family violence, divorce, parental psychopathology, familial antisocial behaviour, teenage parenthood and violent films from media.

There is no doubt that mass media are one of the causes of children's behavioural problems. Anthony (1980) proposed reasons why children may become involved with deviant peers. Firstly, when parents fail to adequately monitor or supervise their children's access to the media, especially the television. Secondly, parents who display rejecting behaviour do not create the conditions, which are necessary to transmit those values to their children which make participation in a deviant group unattractive or costly.

Furthermore, the cultivation theorists emphasized the effect of media particularly television on the behaviour of viewers. Heavy watching of television is seen as "cultivating" attitude which is more consistent with the world of media programming than with the everyday world. Watching television particularly by children tends to induce a general mindset about violence in the world. The cultivation theorists looked at the mass media as a socializing agent with viewers coming to believe the television of reality the more they watch it.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of mass media is extremely important because of the key role it plays in behavioural problem among children. The issue of children reaction to mass media has become a very interesting and sensitive one not only to government and policymakers but also to parents. It is therefore very necessary to address some of the problems that are associated with mass media and children.

The governments of some of the European countries have introduced various forms of restriction on advertising that children may be exposed to because of what they regard as the harmful effects of media on children. The general belief is that young children do not fully understand the intent of most mass media programmes and where they do, they remain very vulnerable to peer pressure, upon which many programme. Generally, media were found to have implication for children behavioural problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result of this study, the following suggestions are made in order to address the problems relating to children's reaction to mass media in Kwara State of Nigeria in the following order.

The formulation of public policy by government should focus on eliminating violence scenes in the mass media, particularly television.

Mass media station should be made to provide programmes that serve the educational and informational needs of children.

Parents should watch out for media programmes that may mislead children. Children should be encouraged to be involved in other activities apart from staying glued to television programmes.

The government must ensure that children are well looked after from birth to adulthood when they are expected to contribute their quota to the development of the nation. Through an effective programme, all forms of child abuse leading to behavioural problems must be abolished by law and by appropriate state policies.

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