

A Theoretical Appraisal of Models that Argue Against Mediated Violence

ASHAMERI, Idongesit Misheal

Department of Communication Arts
University of Uyo, Uyo
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

&

OKON, Christopher Effiong

Department of Communication Arts
University of Uyo, Uyo
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

&

UNWANA, Charles

Department of Mass Communication
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osuura
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Abstract

Most violent acts exhibited by children and young ones in the society have most often been attributed to influence by the mass media. Theorists and communication scholars have attempted to either confirm or refute such claims in their various studies on mediated violence. This study therefore set out to examine some theoretical frameworks on mediated violence, with particular reference to theories which argue against holding the media entirely responsible for violent display by children who are often exposed to televised violence. The assumptions are always that there is a strong link between real-life violence and exposure to violent media contents. This paper adopted the limited effect paradigm and critically analysed the Uses and Gratification and the Social Cognitive Theories which attempted to dilute the 'all-powerful' picture painted by the mass media by identifying media consumers as active partakers of media contents and that behavioural change depends much on the factors - environment, people, behaviour, and generally culture. The paper concludes that the media are definitely powerful but must exercise this power in agreement with the media audience. In essence, it is our reasoned

argument in this paper that the media alone could not be held responsible for violent conduct in children or individuals but that a nexus of factors must interplay for such influence to happen. In other words, this paper aligns with the notion that the media exert considerable level of influence on media consumers, but very unlikely to be all-powerful.

Keywords: Media Effect, Mediated Violence, Children, Limited Effects

Introduction

There is no doubt that the mass media have over the years exerted considerable level of influence and effect on the society. To a very great extent, it is believed to exert significant level of impact on individual's choices and actions and even purchase decisions. Unfortunately, however, the media always are blamed for most societal disequilibrium, as pushed by mass society theorists.

The argument about the media's role in fermenting social instability and instigating violence reached a peak in the late 1960s after disruptive riot in Los Angeles suburb of Watts and in the cities of Cleveland and Detroit. Baker and Ball (1969) reports that President Lyndon Johnson established two national commissions, the Kerner Commission in 1967 and the National Commission on the Cause of Prevention of Violence in 1968. This Commission offered some serious criticisms of media and recommended a variety of changes in both news reporting and entertainment contents.

Writing in the preface to the 1968 Commission's staff report, violence and the media editor Paul Briand queried that the media cannot claim that there is no objective correlation between media portrayals of violence and violent behaviour and at the same time claim an impact on the viewer's commercial attitude and behaviour. He therefore asked a fundamental question: "Can they do one and not the other?" (Baker and Ball, 1969).

Many scholars have over the years devoted efforts to establishing a link between consumption of media content and violence in real life among children and the youths. Consequently, Stain, Hewsman, Johnson Linz, Malamuth and Wartella (2003) and others studied the extent and level of media effects and influence on the society, especially on children. This study resulted in a major overview of the current state of thoughts on the influence of media violence on youths, published in the journal of psychological science. Their study among other objectives was geared to;

1. Assess current thinking on the media violence link in the wake of new interactive media such as video games and internet
2. Counter the intransigent assertions made by a number of vocal critics and various

interest groups that the media- violence link does not exist.

The researchers' aim was to set the record straight. Though their findings may not be the focus of this work, but such effort has pointed the fact that the media have over the years been considered as powerful instrument of influence on people's behaviour. However, predicting and establishing how far reaching such influence may be remain an uphill task. Undeniably, our world is saturated with media products, so widespread are these products that even though you shut all your media devices, you would still be confronted with enough to keep you conscious of the existence of the media and its considerable influence. The media according to these scholars have therefore become early windows, that is; they allow the children to see the world well before they are capable of completely interacting with it. But could it be only about the media?

McQuail (2010) listed certain social and demographic variables such as age, sex, education as well as social psychological factors like personality type, persuadability, predisposition, prior attitudes, degree of interest and motivation and trust in source to have played significant role for media influence and effect on people, especially children.

The concerns have pushed nations of the world to rise to their feet to look into the influence of the media on consumers. North America for instance has long been concerned about the possible effects of media violence and most especially, its effect on youths. The leading concern is that, media violence may cause aggression or violent and criminal behaviour. Various scholars, political groups, and organisations have reported that there is clear and consistent evidence that violence in the media causes real-life aggressive and violence.

In June of 2000, a number of America medical and psychological associations, including the American Medical Association and the American psychological Association, issued a joint statement about the pathological effects of entertainment violence (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2000). According to these groups, evidence points to a causal association between media violence and aggression behaviour in some children. Some scholars have evaluated the magnitude of media violence effects on violent behaviour as almost as important as gang membership (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley, 2007).

To further support the justification for this current study, Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015, p. 53) argue thus:

Many scholars and researchers have often accused television of manipulating children resulting in increasing level of violence amongst youths. Most of the scholars who did one form of work or the other in this area clearly note that television programming have maintained increasing level of violent content and the youths are the chief users and audiences of these programmes. This has necessitated the fears expressed by many that televised violence is

harming the future of our younger generation.

While this debate on who is responsible for the violent conduct of children who are heavy viewers of television continues, this particular study seeks to identify and interrogate further some theoretical models that seem to suggest that media may have a role but definitely not to be held entirely responsible for such aggressive behaviours in children or youths. In essence, this paper reviews several theoretical constructs and models to sustain its argument against the mediated violence. This study is therefore a continuum of the argument against the “all-powerful” claim of the pro-mediated violence researchers.

As we conclude this section, we argue that there are possibilities, as would be adduced from theory, to support the argument that violence and aggressive behaviour of children which are often linked to the media are not baseless but not entirely true. This, is the thesis that defines this particular paper.

Literature Review

Mediated Violence Controversy

Concerns about the effect of media violence on aggression are not restricted to any specific media type, but frequently apply to television, film, music video, and computer games. Media violence has been defined as “visual portrayals of acts of physical aggression by one human or human-like character against another” (Huesmann, 2007). However, others have argued that even violent lyrics could lead to aggression (Barong & Nagayama, 1995; Fischer and Greitemeyer, 2006).

Aggression is commonly defined by psychologists as any behaviour that is intended to harm another person (Anderson et al., 2003). Aggressive behaviour may take various forms. Physical aggression includes a variety of acts ranging from shoving and pushing to more serious physical assaults, including violent acts which may cause serious injury (e.g. shooting). Less serious forms of aggression include verbal aggression (e.g. saying hurtful things to others and relational/indirect aggression (e.g., telling lies to get a person in trouble or to harm their interpersonal relationships).

Aggressive and violent behaviour are said to be caused by multiple factors which converge over time. It has been argued that influences that promote aggressive behaviour in children such as media violence, can effectively contribute to increasingly aggressive and violent behaviour years later (Anderson *et. al.*, 2003).

Liebert and Sprafkin (1988 cited in Okoro, 2008, p. 217) also argue that:

Studies using various methods have supported the proposition that TV violence can induce aggressive behaviour in children. Whether the effect will hold only for the most susceptible individuals (e.g. boys from disadvantaged homes) or whether it will hold for a wider range of youngsters obviously depends in part

upon the measure being used.

Continuing in this line of argument, Berelson (1948) observes that some kind of communication on some kinds of issues have brought to the attention of some kind of people under some kind condition, have some kind of effects. That is to say that certain media content may have certain effect on certain people due to certain situation surrounding them.

Based on this, Ekeanyanwu & Peter (2015, p. 55) highlight “another significant study that established a correlation between children's exposure to televised violence and the tendency to behave violently”. This study was carried out by the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behaviour established by the United States Federal Government in 1969. The Committee, according to Baran and Davies (2003), is to “commission a broad range of research on television effects that might determine whether television could be an important influence on children's behaviour” (Ekeanyanwu & Peter, 2015, p. 57).

The Committee, headed by the US Surgeon General, Jesse Steinfield, concluded its assignment in two years, spent over a million US Dollars surveying and interviewing US households and families and reached the ominous conclusions, as reported by Jesse Steinfield himself to the United States Senate Sub-Committee handling the issue thus:

...it is clear to me that the causal relationship between televised violence and antisocial behaviour is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action. The data on social phenomena such as television and/or aggressive behaviour will never be clear enough for all social scientists to agree on the formulation of a succinct statement of causality. But there comes a time when the data are sufficient to justify an action. That time has come (Ninety-Second US Congress, 1972, p.26 as cited in Baran and Davies, 2003, p. 188).

To further push every blame surrounding the aggressive attitude of violent-prone children to consumption of media contents, research and theory on administrative issues such as the effect of food advertising on children's diet, the link between media violence and aggression, and media use and learning of gender roles, have logically been expanded. Critical researchers and theorists have debated the concept of childhood and more specifically, on the definition of loss of childhood. The sociologist Neil Postman (1994) had this to say about “the disappearance of childhood”. He wrote;

Unlike infancy, childhood is a social artefact, not a biological category “one that is difficult to sustain and in fact irrelevant” because ubiquitous connection to the media robs youngsters of the charm malleability, innocence and curiosity of childhood, leaving them “degraded and then transmogrified into lesser features of pseudo-adulthood.

Huston *et al* (1992, pp. 54-55) also have this to say after an extensive study in the relationship between heavy television viewing and display of aggressive behaviour:

The accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behaviour – that is heavy viewers behave more aggressively than light viewers.... Both experimental and longitudinal studies support the hypothesis that viewing violence is causally associated with aggression... Field (naturalistic) experiments with preschool children and adolescents found heightened aggression among viewers assigned to watch violent television or film under some conditions.

But Baran (2004) had presented various position by researchers to counter the claim that the media have such enveloping effect on audience members. Some of the arguments raised by Baran include; that the media contents are only make-believe. That the media have limited effect on people and that such effects are not the media's fault as it merely holds a mirror to reflect what the society holds. The researchers also made reference to other factors which could contribute to behavioural pattern.

The media, according to McQuail (2010), have the potential to encourage, if not solely responsible for all the crimes, violence, aggression, anti-social behaviour and all the criminal behaviour in the society. There have been very concerted attempts to analyse the relationship between violence in the society, the media, and in fact most rebellious attitude going on in the world. To drive home this claim, the American Academy of Paediatrics (2009) has attributed certain physical and mental health problems attacking children and adolescents, including nightmares and sleep disorder to consumption of media contents. On this, the researcher observed that consistent and significant association between media exposure and increases in aggression and violence have been found in the American cross-cultural studies in field experiments, laboratory experiment, cross sectional studies and longitudinal studies.

The arguments continued and the debate remained as controversial as ever, as more studies are carried out and more insights recorded by scholars of opposing viewpoints to support their positions. This informed Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015)'s conclusion on the controversy thus:

Other similar studies had similar conclusions while those that did not were not able to proof anything beyond establishing a causal relationship between children's exposure to televised violence and a possible tendency that is prone to violent display. This may have been the reason Okoro (2008, p. 217), who did a detailed case studies' evaluation of some of the notable studies concludes thus: "The thesis of the foregoing argument is that since media violence is capable of inducing aggressive behaviour, TV violence could be a principal cause of violent behaviour even though it cannot be

held responsible for being the only cause of aggressive behaviour” (Ekeanyanwu & Peter, 2015, p. 57).

Major Limitations of the Mediated Violence Claims

The argument in support of mediated violence has many methodological and theoretical limitations. Following the review of literature, we shall attempt some of these major limitations in the argument for mediated violence thus:

The first limitation is that the critics of the media have failed to acknowledge the role of social contexts in which media violence is experienced. The argument here is that within the theoretical models explaining the influence of video exposure on aggression, for instance, no acknowledgement is made towards the understanding of social gaming experiences and contexts on these outcome, that is; differential outcomes of gaming arise as a result of different social contexts (online versus offline gaming) and social dynamics involved in social gaming experience (Kaye and Bryce, 2012). Existing theoretical models assume that the outcome of gaming is equivalent regardless of these different contexts. Within the context of gaming, this is not true.

Second is the failure to acknowledge that genetic and social variables such as societal, personality, background and one's exposure could play a very significant role on an individual's disposition to violence. Sometimes, the need to fight for self-emancipation could prompt certain individuals to take up violent behaviours, even among members of a community which has little or no contact with the mass media. The individual of the psychological discipline has also had a significant impact on the way in which children are regarded in effects research. Whilst sociology in recent decades has typically regarded childhood as a social construction, demarcated by attitudes, traditions and rituals which vary between different societies and different time periods (Aries, 1962; Jenks, 1982), the psychology of childhood – development psychology – has remained more tied to the idea of a universal individual who must develop through particular stages before reaching adult maturity, as established by Piaget (1926). The developmental stages are arranged as a hierarchy, from incompetent childhood through to rational, logical adulthood, and progression through these stages is characterised by an 'achievement ethic' (Jenks, 1996).

Third, one must not also forget that children are equally rational beings, most of whom can make well-informed choices and decisions. There is no doubt about the level of media literacy of certain well guided children which has over the year assisted them to determine what should be stored and what must be discarded. For instance, it is common to hear children respond to certain violent contents with; “It's not real, it's film trick”. This may be due to the child's level of media literacy and parental guidance which best explains why several recent studies have found that when factors such as mental health, family environment and personality are controlled, no predictive relationship between the

television violence and youth violence would remain (Ferguson, Miguel and Hartley, 2009).

Fourth, the media effect theoretical model assumes superiority and all-powerful status of the media. Relevant theoretical models have come to debunk this. The argument is no longer whether the media are powerful but that they are not All-powerful, destructive of the traditional social order and exudes uniform response/effect on the media audiences that consume the media contents (Ekeanyanwu, 2019). Surveys typically show that whilst a certain proportion of the public feel that the media may cause other people to engage in antisocial behaviour, almost no-one ever says that they have been affected in that way themselves. This view is taken to extremes by researchers and campaigners who bring them into regular contact with the supposedly corrupting material, but who are unconcerned for their own well-being as they implicitly 'know' that the effects could only be on others.

Fifth, Ferguson and Killburn (2009) in an article in the *Journal of Paediatrics*, identified failure to employ standardised, reliable and valid measures of aggression and media violence exposure as one of the weaknesses working against the effect models. They set up the criteria for what constitutes media violence study, plus specific search terms in the database to gather their studies. For example, they included video, computer, comic television, music, movie etc, with violence. Along with all the variations of the words, they wanted studies published in perceived academic journals between 1998 and 2008. The authors found out that the older studies have lots of methodological flaws while the other studies did not turn up any correlation between media violence and aggression.

Sixth, the media effect models tackle social problems 'backwards'. To explain the problem of violence in society, researchers should begin with that social problem and seek to explain it with violence, quite obviously, to those who engage in it: background, lifestyles, character profiles, and so on. The 'media effects' approach, in this sense, comes at the problem backwards, by starting with the media and then trying to show connections from there on to social beings, rather than the other way around.

This is an important distinction. Criminologists, in their professional attempts to explain crime and violence, consistently turn for explanations not to the mass media but to social factors such as poverty, unemployment, housing, and the behaviour of family and peers. In a particular study, the researchers interviewed 78 violent teenage offenders and then tracing their behaviour back towards media usage, in comparison with a group of over 500 'ordinary' school pupils of the same age (Hagell and Newburn, 1994). Hagell and Newburn (1994) also found out that only young offenders watched less television and video than their counterparts; had less access to the technology in the first place, had no unusual interest in specifically violent programmes, and either enjoyed the same material as non-offending teenagers or were simply uninterested. This point was demonstrated very clearly when the offenders were asked, 'if you had the chance to be someone who

appears on television, who would you choose to be? Most of them chose non-violent characters and personalities while others chose super heroes/heroines.

Finally, the protagonists of the media effects paradigm failed to acknowledge the arguments raised by the Reinforcement and Catharsis theorists. We argue here that the tenets of these two schools of thought are worth paying attention to. For the Reinforcement model, it may be true that media may be powerful in reinforcing whatever the audience comes to the media place with. In other words, no individual or media audience is a 'tabula razer' or empty slate (Ekeanyanwu and Peter, 2015). Catharsis on its part argues that the media could actually get individuals to forget or reject violence by purging such individuals of any violent tendencies through what it called vicarious experience. Social Learning theory talked similarly about this under inhibition. In essence, Catharsis would argue that watching TV helps to release tension. In other words, watching violence on TV would help to release violent tendencies in the viewer (Ekeanyanwu and Peter, 2015).

These are some of the core arguments that limit the effect and popularity of the all-powerful/media effects models.

Theoretical Appraisal of Models that Argue Against Mediated Violence

Our argument in this section will be based on extant and relevant literature, library research and other forms of secondary data that emerged in the course of our readings for this paper. This implies that several research and studies were evaluated within the context of this paper to reach the conclusion, which we now promote.

One of the major studies that influenced this current position is recorded in Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015). In fact, their work influenced the current effort, which emanated from an earlier seminar in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a doctoral programme in Advanced Communication Theory. According to the authors,

Having established a relationship and to be more specific a correlation between children's experience of television and the tendency to behave violently; we argue that since television is not proven as a sole factor of supposed violent acts of youths that constantly experience it, it is then important to reconceptualise some selected theories, hypotheses, or models that came out of such related studies on media effects. In other words, research findings and literature on mediated violence and the influence they have on society requires a major rethinking (Ekeanyanwu & Peter, 2015, p. 58).

Our paper is another insight into that rethinking, which also finds support in the conclusive argument of Baran and Davies (2003, p. 9 as cited in Ekeanyanwu & Peter, 2015, pp 58-59) thus:

If we have learned anything about media over the past century, it is that they are not demonic forces that inevitably precipitate societal or personal disasters. Media alone don't create couch potatoes and cyber-addicts, or foster massive political demonstrations. But neither are they benign agents of a New Order ushering in the Age of Enlightenment. People using media have the power to create either division or community. Media technology alone is powerless to initiate useful change. But technology can augment and amplify the actions of individuals and groups and in so doing, facilitate rapid and widespread social change on an important scale.

As the link between media violence and aggression came to be generally accepted, media researchers, theorists and scholars have given some critical look at tenets of media theories which argue against mediated violence. In the light of some of the points outlined above, many criticisms have been lodged against purported media-effects findings. One of the theories used in defending the purported 'all powerful' effects of the media is the Uses and Gratification theory, propounded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974). This theory is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs.

The theory is also an audience centred approach to understanding mass communication. Against other effect theories, Uses and Gratification theory focuses on what the people do with the media. It postulates that media are highly available products and that the audience are consumers of same products. It assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media but have power over media consumption and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. This theory is therefore concerned with what people do with the mass media, instead of what the media do with the people. The assumption is that the people influence the effects that the mass media have on them.

The Uses and Gratification theory is unique in the following sense:

1. That the media audience is active and its media use is goal oriented;
2. That the initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member;
3. That the media compete with other recourses for need satisfaction;
4. That people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use; and
5. That the value judgment of media content can only be assessed by the audience (Baran and Davies, 2003).

The Uses and Gratification approach to limited effect theories in the 1950s bore the identity of freshness, as it was carefully presented to shield the media against the easy pessimism and crudely behaviouristic effects of previous effect studies. This theory,

according to Anaeto, Onabajó and Osifeso (2008), perceives the recipients as actively influencing the effect process since they selectively choose, attend to, perceive, and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc.

Queuing behind the Uses and Gratification theory in arguing against the media and mediated violence, Branston and Stafford (2006) opined that Uses and Gratification model emphasises what audience, readership and users of media products do with them. Their position is that the power to choose lies with the individual consumer, who is believed to consciously use the television, internet, video games and any other means of communication to gratify certain needs and interests. Against other beliefs surrounding mediated violence, these scholars see media consumers as literate enough to either accept or reject media contents, no matter what type or in what forms it comes.

On his part, Baran (2004) says the Uses and Gratification theory is sometimes seen to be apologetic for laying emphasis on audience member's motives for making specific choices and the consequences of such intentional media use. This is to say that when media effects are seen as the product of audience members' media choices and use, the media industries are exonerated of responsibility for the content they produce or carry. The argument here is that the media simply give the people what they want.

Paradigms do not shift easily. Limited effects researchers were unable to ignore the obvious media effects such as impact of advertising, the media role in sustaining sentiment against the law in Vietnam and in spreading support for civil rights and the feminist's movement all over Europe, and the increases in the real-world crime that appeared to parallel increase in televised violence. They turned their focus to media consumers to explain how influence is limited. The new body of thought that resulted, called the Uses and Gratifications approach, claimed that the media do not do things to people, rather, people do things with the media. In other words, the influence of the media is limited to what the people allow. In essence, media power must align with people power for any meaningful impact to happen in any media-people exposure relationship (Ekeanyanwu and Peter, 2015).

According to Folarin (2002), Uses and Gratification theory holds the opinion that recipients of media contents are actively influencing the effect process, since he selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of the individual's need or belief. The focus of the theory, according to Folarin, has therefore shifted from content production and transmission to the media consumption function.

Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015, pp 62-63) further argue that

Uses and Gratification theory is a suggestion that individuals are active/literate users of the media for reasons of gratification or satisfaction they hope to get from such experience. In other words, the decision to watch television is made by an individual who already knows the type of satisfaction he or she expects from the

exposure. Therefore, if an individual wants entertainment, no matter how violent the movie turns or is framed, he simply sees it as mere entertainment and refuses to be influenced by any other stimulant from the exposure. In another sense, such an individual who goes for entertainment may never be moved to violent behaviour because expectation is what births manifestation; and since there was no such violence expectation, there will be no violent display afterwards.

Continuing, Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015) attempted to connect the arguments of Uses and Gratifications theory to that of the Selective processes to score further points in their claim that mediated violence cannot happen with media efforts alone. In their valid submission, Selective Exposure (for instance), which argues that people tend to expose themselves to or attend to media messages that they feel are in accord with their already-held or pre-existing views and beliefs, supports the arguments of Uses and Gratification Theory which rightly questions the so-called “All-powerful Media Theory” that blames the media for the violence in our societies and communities. We consider this argument valid because under selective exposure, people tend to avoid that which might be discordant to their beliefs and value system (Ekeanyanwu and Peter, 2015).

And to sound definitive in their submission, Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015, pp 68-69) conclude thus:

Our thinking here is that children and youths who get violent from watching violent movies on television come to the media with violent tendencies and may have had a violent upbringing. In fact, we believe that if the programme the individual came to watch is changed suddenly for some other kind of less violence prone movie, such an individual will fleetingly walk away from the media because no other programme may interest him or her at that point in time.

Individual Differences perspective also adds another drama to the whole discourse. Individual Differences pushes the agenda that individuals have different socio-psychological makeup that will predispose them to individual reactions to any media stimuli, including mediated violence. From a medical and especially, psychological point of view, Individual Differences is true. No two individuals (even identical twins) can possibly think alike, act alike, respond similarly to the same questions etc in predictable ways simultaneously. These have been proven long before media researchers delved into media effects studies that indicted television of causing children to behave violently.

In other words, no two individuals may likely react similarly to the same media stimuli except there are some socio-

psychological consistencies in their psychological makeup. Fifty children who watched the same violent movie will not all end up violent. Some may likely walk away from the exposure condemning the violent nature of the movie while some may merely be sympathetic to mediated violence as mirroring the society. True that some may end up displaying violent behaviour or emotions; but the argument here is that it is not a given that all children and youths who watch mediated violence always end up displaying violent behaviour.

Our support of Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015)'s arguments here are definitely based on research because of the theoretical underpinning of their arguments. They were also pragmatic in their conclusions noting that the media role in causing violent conduct in children is real but more real is the fact that children merely find more support from the media as they help to reinforce whatever situation/condition they (children) come to the media place with. This is the insight that most media scholars of the historic Magic Bullet era failed to understand or just pretended never existed.

In their final argument to support their well-argued position, Ekeanyanwu and Peter (2015, p. 70), submit thus:

All possible expectations that could happen to children who experience televised violence should feature in the literature on mediated violence instead of the dominant paradigm that pretends all exposure to media violence always leads to violent display or emotions. As we have also argued earlier, children and youths watch other stuffs on television that are far from violence. There are stories of love, nationalism, friendly sports, reality, and a host of others that people are exposed to in their daily lives. If the dominant paradigm that people become what they see or read or watch in the media is true; then our world will be filled with love, nationalists, crime fighters, drug barons, philanthropists, gangsters, mobsters, rapists, addicts, robbers etc. If this is not the case then the argument that people get violent from watching violence on television is contradictory and cacophonous to the very ideals that empiricism represents.

Another notable theory in favour of limited effects arguments of the mass media is the Social Cognitive Theory propounded by Miller and Dollard (1941). This theory assumes that behavioural change depends much on the factors – environment, people and behaviour. It specifically identifies environment (social and physical) as factors that can affect a person's behaviour, and as Glanz (2002) puts it, “the situation refers to the cognitive or mental representation of the environment that may affect a person's behaviour”. As Miller and Dollard posited, if humans were motivated to learn a particular behaviour, they would be able to learn by observing models and then, reinforced by

intimating those modes as well.

The Social Cognitive Theory is mostly concerned with behaviour effects. The crux of the theory is that people tend to judge the value of persuasive message according to how those messages blend into their personal cognitive pattern, or system of understanding. This means that they derive value from, or accept messages that remind them of something they already know.

Drumming support for this theory, Glanz (2002) says, “The situation refers to the cognitive or mental representations of the environment that may affect a person's behaviour. The situation is a person's perception of the time, physical features and activities”. This is to say that three factors – environment, physical features, and activities are constantly influencing each other. Behaviour is not simply the result of the environment and the person, just as the environment is not simply the result of the person and the behaviour.

Modified into Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1986), the theory suggests that children may learn aggression by merely observing others. This, of course is not restricted to the mass media. The notion that the media exert an all-powerful effect and influence on consumers here runs in sharp contrast with McQuail (2010) argument that humans cannot learn all or even much of what is needed to guide one's own-development and behaviour from direct personal observation and experiment alone. The implication is that several factors interplay in the development of a child and humans generally. Holding the media completely responsible in fact insults the media audience, whether a child, youth or even an adult. It is like saying we are completely helpless with and before the media. Fortunately, research and/or empiricism suggests otherwise.

To further advance on this argument, McQuail (2010) presented four basic processes of social learning that occur in sequence; attention, retention, production and motivation. Media consumer's attention is only directed to contents with potential relevance and value. It is also common knowledge that it takes conscious effort to retain what we picked from our media use. Production is the third stage in the sequence, which refers to the actual application of information or knowledge acquired from the mass media. It is after this level that decision to either adopt or discard such information would come into play – by way of motivation.

The Social Learning Theory relates largely with socialising effect of the mass media and the adoption of various models of action. It connects our daily activities cutting across purchasing choices, eating, modes of interaction, fashion sense, etc. This theory applies only to behaviours directly represented in symbolic forms and seeks to establish the fact that the mass media could not solely be relied upon for social learning and behaviours as other important variable such as families, schools, associates, and peers may as well exert considerable influence on one's behaviour.

To drive home his point, Bandura conducted an experiment in which he showed

children a video of a model beating up a bobo doll and then put the children in a room with a bobo doll to see if they would imitate the behaviour previously seen in the video. The findings of the experiment suggested that children tend to model the behaviour previously seen on the video. This appears to imply that children may imitate aggressive behaviours seen in the media. Though this may appear to support the idea of mediated violence, it would, however, be difficult to establish if there were other factors that also prompted such compliance.

Making reference to Miller and David's; Baran and Davis (2010), credited the Social Learning Theory as the first serious look at learning through observation. They argued that imitative learning occurred when observers were motivated to learn, when the elements or cues of the behaviours to be learned were present, when observers performed the given behaviours and when observers were positively reinforced for imitating those behaviours.

Feshbach on his part did demonstrated a reduction in aggression after exposing a set of children to television programme with violent contents and another set to non-violent contents. Feshbach and Singer (1971) reports that the research was undertaken in a group home for pre-adolescent boys. For six weeks, half of the boys were restricted to watching television programme with little or no violence, while the other half was allowed to watch TV programmes with violent contents. From the study, a variety of behavioural measures indicated that the boys viewing the violent programmes were less aggressive. The boys who were placed on non-violent programmes were rather violent, and such, according to the report may have been due to a feeling of frustration resulting from not being allowed to watch the violent contents.

What social scientists would eventually learn, however, is that presentation of mediated violence and aggression can reduce the likelihood of subsequent viewer aggression. This could largely be because viewers may have learnt that violence might not be appropriate in a given situation. Judging from Feshbach (1961), maybe those who had seen the brutal boxing match, who had seen unnecessary pain inflicted on fellow humans, simply concluded within themselves that "Aggression is not a good thing". Their aggressive drive might not have been purged, but they might have simply learned that such treatment for fellow human is inappropriate. In other words, their inclination towards aggression may have been inhibited by the information in the media presentation.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The media effect models, as we have seen, have failed to provide an empirical explanation for human behaviour, or of the media's role in society, as it has assumed more than the necessary level of influence and effects on the media, therefore undermining other notable variables, which Obanua and Ekeanyanwu (2010) consider as combination of factors

which could provoke violent disposition and which play vital role in individual's choice and development. This, however, is not to say that the media do not have considerable level of influence on consumers of media contents, but the weakness of the media effects argument lies in its inability to provide convincing evidence of the claimed 'all-powerful effect' and the competing defences by models which modestly presented arguments that audience members are active, and that the media merely mirror the society and present that which the society holds.

The researchers therefore recommend that further research be carried on other sources of influence that can stimulate aggression in children. They also recommend positive utilisation of the media as socialisation agent in children upbringing as against its perceived use as tool for mediated violence.

In conclusion, we submit that it will be poor scholarship to dismiss any of the schools of thought that have provided pragmatic or at best empirical evidence to support whatever position they have taken with regards to who or what should be responsible for violent or aggressive behaviour children and/or youths or even adults who frequently expose themselves to mediated violence. It is therefore important that we continue to interrogate the different arguments and submission, hoping that superior argument prevails. This is what this paper is all about and hope to achieve as another contribution to the debate.

Based on this submission, we end with Ekeanyanwu and Peter's (2015) advise that "All possible expectations that could happen to children who experience televised violence should feature in the literature on mediated violence instead of the dominant paradigm that pretends all exposure to media violence always leads to violent display or emotions. If the dominant paradigm that people become what they see or read or watch in the media is true; then our world will be filled with love, nationalists, crime fighters, drug barons, philanthropists, gangsters, mobsters, rapists, addicts, robbers etc. If this is not the case then the argument that people get violent from watching violence on television is contradictory and cacophonous to the very ideals that empiricism represents" (Ekeanyanwu and Peter, 2015, p.70).

References

- American Academy of Paediatrics. (2000). Joint Statement of the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children:
- Anaeto, S. G., Onabajo, O. S., and Osifeso, J. B. (2008). *Models and Theories of Communications*. Bowie, Maryland: African Renaissance Book Incorporated.
- Anderson, C. A., Gentile, D. A., & Buckley, K. E. (2007). Violent video game effects on children and adolescents. *Theory, Research, And Public Policy*. New York:

McGraw Hill.

- Anderson, C. A., L. Berkowitz, E. Donnerstein, L. R. Huesmann, J. D., Johnson, D. Linz, N. N. Malamuth, and E. Wartella (2003). "The Influence of Media Violence on Youth." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4, 81-110.
- Aries, P. (1962). *The Discovery of Childhood, Centuries of Childhood*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Baker & Ball, S. J. (Eds). *Mass media and violence* (Vol IX, pp. 311-339). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office Retrieved from http://respository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/214
- Bandura, A. (2002). "Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication', in J. Bryant and D. Zillman (eds), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, 2nd end, (121-154), Hillsdale, NJ; Erlbaum.
- Baran, S. J. (2004). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture*. 3rd Edition. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Baran, S. J. and Davis, D. K. (2010). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. USA: Wadworth, Cengage Learning.
- Baran, S. J. and Davies, D. K. (2003). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* (3rd Ed.). Belmont, USA: Thomson & Wadsworth.
- Barong, J. and Nagayama (1995). A Theory of Decisions, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 25 (5), 35-42.
- Berelson, S. (1948). 'Communication and public opinion', in W. Schramm (ed.), *Communications in Modern Society*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press
- Branston, S. J. & Stafford, R. (2007). *The Media Student's Handbook*. New York: Routledge.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2019). Media Effect, No Effect: A Critical Evaluation in Nsereka Barigbon (ed). *Critical Media Discourse: Readings in Communication Study Controversies* (pp 34-58) Port Harcourt: LSB Media Limited.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. and Peter, A. S. (2015). Children, Youths and Mediated Violence: A Reflective Evaluation of Some Selected Theoretical Models. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 12(1), 50-71.
- Ferguson, C., Miguel, C., and Hartley D. (2009). A Multivariate analysis of Youth Violence and Aggression: The influence of family, peers, depression and media violence. *Journal of Paediatrics*, 155(6), 904-908.
- Feshbach, S., and R.D. Singer. (1971). *Television and Aggression: An Experimental Field Study*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fischer P, Greitemeyer. T. (2006). Music and Aggression: The Impact of Sexual-Aggressive Song Lyrics on Aggression-Related Thoughts, Emotions, and Behaviour Toward the Same and the Opposite Sex. *SAGE Journal*.
- Folarin, B. (2002). *Theories of Mass Communication: An introductory text*. Abeokuta:

Link Publications.

- Glanz, R and Lewis, F. (2002). *Health Behaviour and Health Education: Theory, Research and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossay- Bass.
- Hagel, A., and Newburn, T. (1994). *Young offenders and the Media: Viewing habits and Preferences*. London: Policy Studies Institute (PSI).
- Huesmann, R. (2007). The impact of Electronic media violence: Scientific Theory and Research. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Accessed via <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/83439>
- Huston, A. C. E., Donnerstein, H., Fairchild, N. D., Feshbach, P. A., Katz, J. P., Murray, E. A., Rubenstein, B. L., Wilcox, and Zukerman, D. (1992). *Big world, small screen*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Jenks, C. (1982). *Sociology of Childhood*. Botsford: Social Science.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J and Gurevitch, M. (1973) Uses and Gratification Research, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37 (4), Accessed via <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>
- Kaye, K. & Bryce, J. (2012). Putting the “fun factor” into gaming. The influence of social context on experiences of playing video games. UK: Edge Hill University.
- Liebert, R. M. and Sprafken, J. N. (1988). *The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth*. New York: Pergamon.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage
- Congressional Public Health Summit, July 26, 2000. Retrieved January 18, 2008
- Miller, N. and Dollard, J. (1941). *Social Learning and Limitation*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Obanua, A. S. & Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2010). The Theory of Triadic Influence, Media Literacy, Adolescents and Alcohol Advertising in Lagos State. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 1(3), 34-39.
- Okoro, N. (2008). Television violence and children: A case studies exploration of the violent behaviour paradigm. *International Journal of Communication*, 1(8), 203-230.
- Piaget, J. (1926). *The Language and Thought of the Child*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Postman, N. (1994). *The Disappearance of Childhood*. NJ: Vintage Books.
- Singer, P. (1971). Famine, Affluence and Morality. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1(3), 231-248.