

Media influence on aggression

Essay question:

Discuss with reference to psychological theory and evidence, the extent to which the various forms of media may influence aggression or violence in an individual. 2,500 words

Aggression can be shown in several different ways which can be mild actions, which could include calling each other names to impeling to even becoming more bodily, much like punching or kicking, or even worse, involving stabbing, shooting, or even leading to death (Allen.,J. 2017). The media is the key aspect questioned in situations when individuals behave badly. Inspectors often ask if the individual in question watches or has seen anything including violence or aggression online for them to commit such acts (Giles.D.,2010)There is now a huge amount of research out there that demonstrates that viewing violence is linked to aggressive behaviour or is even the leading cause (Bushman and Anderson,2001). Even since the earliest days of Hollywood, there has been a focus on the amount of violence showcased within films, and millions of dollars have been put into looking at the effects of viewing violence in the laboratory (Gunter,2008). It is also argued that media violence is encouraged by creators who view the categorization of violent media as preferable to the public, meaning they influence it into the media as they know it will draw attention and gain themselves views, which may impact on the level of violent crime such as social deprivation, isolation, and intimidation (Brewer,2011).

According to Bushman and Anderson (2001), children alone watch almost forty hours of television per week, which totals to almost nine years worth by the age of sixty-five, which is frightening as research indicates that 60% of television programs contain violence (Wilson et al,1997) Childrens tv programs often portray violence but are not thought about as it often portays humour alongside it and is often unrealistic (King 2000, Potter&Warren 1998). Aggression or violence in programs such as the news or documentaries are also not often emphasized as it is shown for 'entertainment' (Brewer, 2011) It is also a known fact to which if a victim of the violence shown on tv is showing pain then it is categorised as violence more so then if it wasn't emphasized.

However, all research is different and 'violence' could be understood by several different definitions from being mild acts to quite severe. There have been several psychologists that have studied the persuasiveness of the media, as much as it makes us feel happy or sad, it may also contribute to aggression and violence. It is more often considered when such violent crimes are committed (Brewer,2011), an example of this would be the case of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in 1999. They entered a columbine High school and killed twelve students and one teacher before shooting themselves. After the killings, several movies, songs and video games that the boys enjoyed were highlighted, there was also a reminiscent of the main character in one of the films as they wore long trench coats just like the main character in the film, however, the general perception that these viewings contributed to the killings continued.

There is also a 'copy cat' element to the media, in which it is thought for people to copy or gain new ideas from what they see, in this case it is well shown in the "Hi-Fi murders" committed in Utah in 1974, William Andrews and Pierre Selby forced their hostages to drink an abrasive drain-cleaning fluid called Drano, it was argued that the men got this idea from watching the film Magnum force, in which a prostitute is forced to drink the fluid. (Brewer,2011).

In terms of scientific evidence, from an experimental point of view, it suggests that exposure to violent media does increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour, even though there is less evidence of there being an increase in criminal violence (Savage, 2004).

Coyne et al. (2008) asked women to view movie scenes featuring either physical violence or nonphysical aggression, or another scene that did not include physical or verbal aggression. Women who had watched the first choice of scenes behaved more aggressively towards the researcher compared to those who watched the scene without violence, as well as this similar results have been obtained from cartoons and dramas from different participant groups including young children and adolescents.

Using longitudinal research evidence provided by Lefkowitz et al (1977) found that preference for aggressive media at age eight predicts aggression being developed at age nineteen. Huesmann (1986) also reported that preferences towards aggressive material during adolescence, predict the number of seriousness of convictions at age thirty.

Social learning theory is the most well known theory in the field of the impact media violence has on individuals, Aggression may be learned through direct experience, such as when a child uses aggression to steal another child's toy. If rewarded by being given the toy, they are more likely to repeat the behaviour. The basis of this theory is indirect experience which is observation and imitation of aggressive behaviour.

It is argued that observing characters online and not just in person affects us the same and are just as easily copied by an individual watching (Brewer,2011). The theory provides an explanation for both the effect violence has on us for a short amount of time and longer, Shorter effects occur when the person watching copies behavior displayed. These regular interactions of observation and copied behaviour adds to the long-term impact. According to this theory, the viewer may not intend to learn behaviour in this way and may not even realise that it is taking place.

The Boho doll experiments conducted by Bandura, Ross and Ross which began in 1961, was one of the most ground breaking experiments studying aggression to ever be recorded. The experiment included 24 preschool children that were categorised into one of three conditions, one of which had to watch an adult play aggressively with an inflatable plastic boho doll, as well as a second group watching an adult play normally with the doll then finally a control group, which had not been shown anything to do with the doll (Bandura et al,1961).

As well as that, half of the children had same-sex models and half had models of the opposite to assess whether the sex of the model had any influence. The Subjects were then tested for imitative as well as nonimitative aggression performed in a new situation when the models were absent (Bandura et al, 1961).

The results found that the children who got shown the aggression imitated the behaviour considerably more than those in the control groups, ending with a much higher mean aggression score. Bandura et al, 1961 stated "Children in the aggressive condition exhibited significantly more partially imitative and nonimitative aggressive behavior and were generally less inhibited in their behavior than subjects in the nonaggressive condition" (Bandura et al, 1961).

To conclude this experiment, the length in which children copied the model was also impacted by the sex, with males showcasing more aggressive behaviour towards the same sex compared to females. Bandura put forward that after watching behaviour done by other people it is one effective way of obtaining certain responses, for which the original probability is very low (Bandura et al., 1961). At the time of their experiment, these specific thoughts disagreed at certain views, which stated that learning is a result of direct reinforcement (Skinner, 1938; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003).

Another theory that goes along with aggression is The Script theory. This theory adds great prominence on the thought processes influenced by violence in the media, and hold the thought that individuals hold a wide range of cognitive scripts which are thought to escort their behaviours. Already existing scripts are stored in our memory but can continue to develop as an individual views new behaviours and grows up. This may change in cases such as Easter, as a child easter is looked forward to as it's a time for the easter bunny but as you grow that reason tends to fade and its more about family gatherings. The same goes for christmas as a child you think of christmas as the time focused on santa, toys and sweet treats but as your older it may be a time more focused on money and preperation. In day to day life a person selects a script that resembles their life and chooses a good place within that script to guide their actions, in this way the development of violent scripts can lead to real life aggression. Huesmann and Eron (1986) argued the fact television can create new scripts and reinforce ones that already exist. Which concludes that the media impacts on both the development and maintenance of aggressive behaviour.

To link with these theories, exposure to violence through the media can contribute to future behaviour, it has been linked to antisocial behaviour within young individuals, witnessing violence or victimization were strongest influencers of these behaviours (Blum, Ireland 2003) .

A report conducted by the US secret service and the US Department of Education in 2002 tested 37 targeted school shootings and school attacks between 1974 and 2000 in the country found that over half of the people who attacked showcased some sort of interest in violent movies or video games, aswel as other media.

In a 2009 Policy Statement on violence in the media, the American Academy of Pediatrics said "Extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed." This year, the Media Violence Commission of the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) stated in its report "Over the past 50 years, many studies conducted around the world have shown that watching violent television, watching violent films, or playing violent video games increases the likelihood for aggressive behavior".

With link to the scripts theory specifically, applying it to a real life scenario today if an individual was to play video games which included violence in them and replayed that game that aggressive script gets repeated in their cognitive processing. Thompson and Haninger(2001) assessed 55 E rated video games which are suited for all ages and found that 64% included intentional physical aggression and 31% of the game was violent, and a further 60% of the games involved injuring someone in order to move forward within the game. According to Anderson et al (2003) and Gentile (2003) young children are most vulnerable and feel most anxiety when exposed to violence and that they also find it hard to distinguish between fantasy and reality. When watching violence on tv, Comstock (1985) suggests that it is much harder to imitate violence if the pain of the victim is magnitised, told by the NTVS 90% of movies contain violence and 70% of dramas aswel as comedies and reality series both having 35% (Smith, 1998).

In a study created by Roberts et al in 2005 found 65% of 8-18 year olds listen to rap or hip hop, 32% listen to rock and 27% listen to heavy metal which means each of these are exposed to an amount of aggression, Smith and Byson(2002) analysed 1,962 videos from music channels, they found that 15% contained intentuonal physical aggression. Rap contained 29% and heavy metal contained 27% of aggression. (K.Thomas,2023).

The extent of which individulas may take their influences from media aggression is dependent on the individual, found from research, it is not entierly known that the media makes someone commit crimes or even gain aggressive behaviour but only adds ideas or adds to living thoughts (known through the scripts theory) or they just copy the acts they see only (shown through the social learning theory). Social media doesn't portay a lot of violent media, as they have a filter to make sure no young users are exposed to harmful resources which could potentially harm them in the long term or even cause issues for the companys. The company like anyone, must make sure to have guidelines in place to make sure it is a safe place for everyone, however, if media was to be exposed the news or documentaries and even conspiracy theories may be accessable, which could influence aggression from either the acts being shown that could cause anger or sadness as they could include topics from the past or the present news or in documentaries they could include aggressive material.

However, with the news this could be more influencial for aggressive topics as it includes more triggering material, such as murders with slight details of how the crimes were committed, criminal convictions, wars and fights. An example of this is the Snapchat murder, Mark Jones who was twenty years old, stabbed his friend in the heart and posted videos of his body on snapchat to embarress him, he has since been sentenced to at least 16 years in jail. Hundreds of people had seen the footage online, his sister being one of them, the family feared that it had affected his sister mentally (Hoskin,2021). This showcases that sometimes it may not be what the media produces itself but what people put out on the media that may affect people or may make others do the same or similar acts, or it may affect them mentally in the long-run.

Snapchat stated that their different to other social platforms, it has no open news feed of unvetted content and it is designed to limit any harmful content from being recommended or to go viral and that they encourage users to report anything they see that comes under the topic of violence or aggression or anything that can be potentially triggering for people, so this particular incident took everyone by surprise but may suggest that they don't take the right care for their content.

The same goes for news papers which tend to build an image in your head of that specific scene your reading about, rather than seeing it visually through the news.

To conclude, there is psychological evidence that the media does influence aggressive behaviour but not for everyone, it may depend on the type of person someone is or what they are exposed to, online or in person. There is several experiments, theories that surround the media and aggression that have found a definite influence by the two, more extreme in some cases. Through the studies previously mentioned it has demonstrated that there has been an influence of the media through preferred videos or music in some way of the criminal convictions. As said by Bandura, most human behaviour is learnt through the act of modelling, people act to which they see and what they are taught not so much what they are told to do. Even when seeing things online like a stranger performing aggressive acts could be an aggressive model for children (Bandura, 1977). Aggressive behaviour is dependent on what models an individuals, what makes them the person that they are, the things they see online are just the outer influences. Them of course will create their scripts, especially if they're repeated, this will be something that they're used to and will add a long-term implication compared to if you only watch a film with aggression sometimes, that script is not repeated constantly.

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[Lecture 7 - Aggression and Violence in the Media](#)

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