

A Historical Study of Major Events Related to Media Effects on Audience: An Appraisal of Hypodermic Syringe Model

Amna Tanveer Khan & Muhammad Moiz Khan

ABSTRACT

The society evolves with time and face new challenges that emerge from time to time. In the modern one of the biggest challenges society is facing is media related issues. Media has emerged as a means of mass communication which has multipronged benefits and harmful effects. In this study a survey report has been presented to highlight some of the major events and experiments conducted on the effects of mass media over its audience. Various modes of mass communication have emerged at different times in history. Earlier it was just newspaper, later radio entered in the arena. Then Television emerged and changed the media landscape to audio video communication. In the modern times after the introduction internet more vibrant and real-time transfer of information is taking place. At the outset it looks good for the audience however it also has its hide side. Studies have proven that mass media can be used successfully as a propaganda tool to make people believe whatever one wants to make them believe. Many times in last century unfortunate events have proven this fact. Other than that entertainment

programs based on fiction can also create mass frenzy and hysteria amongst its viewers. In such an environment it has become imperative to assess the situation and suggest measures to arrest it. This study is an attempt to understand the effects of mass media on its audience through Hypodermic Syringe Model based on the historical evidence.

Keywords: Hypodermic Syringe Model, propaganda, mass hysteria, media, Narcotization, Disinhibiting.

INTRODUCTION:

Media plays a humongous role in the lives of billions of people that inhabit planet earth. It has so deeply penetrated into our lives that it's second nature to us now and because of this infiltration we often fail to notice the influence that it exerts on our lives. We are so digitally surrounded by the mediums that we often fail to take notice of the processes through which the information is being sent and how then it is being received by us; the audience. A lot of time and effort has been invested into figuring out the 'right' process that is implied by those who produce the media messages but, as the messages aren't interpreted in the exact sense that they were meant to be taken in, we see a similar pattern in the communication theories. There are many schools of thoughts and every model comes with its supporters and critics. As it is a common occurrence, a human mind is driven to focus on the titbits of any particular element and so when a model is presented, it is not obtusely accepted but attempts are done to make it into something which can prove to be a beneficial discovery for people who are involved in this field.

The first model was presented by Shannon and Weaver which was a linear model of communication and is often known as 'the mother of all models'. In the linear model, more importance is attached to the sender as it states that the message is encoded by the producers and then is transmitted through media channels in

the presence of noise with the receiver being at the other end of the line, ready to accept whatever messages that are being sent along the medium channels without there being a chance of giving a feedback. As is acclaimed by the supporters of the linear model, because there is no disturbance in the flow of the message at the receiver end, the intentional message is delivered to the audience but what the advocates fail to see is that human communication is not a one way process where only one party has the right to hold an opinion and the presumption that the process of communication is characterized as one that has a beginning and an end without considering the possibility of it being continuous. To add to the linear model, the interactive model of communication was introduced where the receiver feedback was taken into account and made it into a two-way process, keeping in account a person's experience, for example, their cultural background, personal views, religious beliefs and how all this has an effect on their level of interpretation.

Numerous models have been introduced over a period of time to analyze the effects of the mass media on the members of the audience with the earliest one being the '**Hypodermic Syringe Model**'. This particular model suggests that that the media yields the power to act as a syringe with the intention of injecting the message in to the audience who are merely the receivers. For instance, if a person is exposed to a particular media message, the effects of it will be so potent that an individual will end up behaving in the way the message was encoded by those in authority. An example of it can be of the time in the 1930's when through the use of radio and cinema, coordinated by the Nazi's propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, Hitler was able to maintain a strong grasp over the German people. The hypodermic syringe model is in the same group as the linear model with the suggestion that the mass media has the power to influence a large group of people through messages that is successful in producing the desired responses from the passive receivers, which is in accordance with the linear model theory too.

NARCOTIZATION:

The model proposes that communicating an idea through the mass media can prove to be precarious because the audience is helpless and has no escape from the effects of the media messages and end up believing that what they are being told is the right information due to the non-availability of other sources of knowledge. The concept of '**Narcotization**' also draws on this model which refers to the mental and physical apathy that is hypothetically prompted by the mass media. Another example is of an episode of a radio drama 'The war of the worlds' that is an adaptation of a renowned novel by H.G. Wells, narrated and directed by Orson Welles' that was broadcasted on the eve of Halloween in the year 1938 (Schwartz, 2015). The radio program is known for causing massive hysteria among its listeners and gives the social psychologists and advocates of the hypodermic model something to talk about. The interruption of the show with a news bulletin which happened for the first time played a huge role. The show was well known for its uninterrupted broadcast and the out of the blue announcement about a Martian invasion left the audience in a state of frenzy. Out of the 12 million that listened to the broadcast, 1 million people were deeply affected and that led to a wave of widespread panic with people raiding stores in order to ration food, fleeing from their homes to the more rural areas in hopes of surviving the 'Martian attack'. The nation was in a state of disarray and this radio broadcast played a major part in it. A further inference that was made after the broadcast of the show was how the mass media can ascertain to be a perilous source in the communication of ideas due to the audience being unable to resist the impacts of it. Media theorists believe that this radio programme proved to be a quintessential example of the hypodermic model. When this broadcast is analyzed and the effects it had, it was deduced that the media holds the power to manipulate the passive and apathetic audience into believing ideas and theories that the makers consider suitable.

EFFECT ON GENDER PERCEPTIONS AND IMPACT ON WOMEN:

There have been many researches that have been carried out into the field of hypodermic syringe, mostly because of the beliefs of many researchers on the direct link between media violence and the effects that it has on the audience. “The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women” is a book by Naomi Wolf (1990) that focuses on how the pressure that women suffer from is caused by the unrealistic representation of size zero models in commercials that are all over the mass media and how this in turn is effecting not just their eating habits but also leading them on the road of obsession with just the physical beauty thus jeopardizing the ability of women to realize their true value (Wolf, 2002). A radical feminist, Robin Morgan’s (1980) phrase “Pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice.” has been a focal point for many passionate debates into this particular topic. Dworkin (1988) have hinted towards a strong relationship between the increase in the sexual crimes and the consumption of pornography. Norris (1996) makes the claim that the way the media reports a particular political issue has been known to be a major factor in controlling the voting behaviour of the audience. Another advocate of the hypodermic model, Marcuse (1964) believed that it was the media that played a humongous role in transmitting a mass culture that resulted in the populace becoming susceptible to the ruling class propaganda.

BOBO DOLL EXPERIMENT:

If there is a category in the field of media on which a lot of research has been carried out, its media violence which focuses on the violent content that is shown on media sources like television, video games, movies and others and how that in turn is related to aggression seeping out into the real world over a course of time. Many researches, have been carried out on this aspect of media, influenced by the ‘Social learning theory’ which was developed by a renowned psychologist, Albert Bandura; who holds the view that one way a human learns how to behave is through the process of

modelling which means that children have the tendency to imitate behaviour when they view others doing it. The 'bobo doll' experiment was conducted in the 1960s when Bandura examined children's behaviour by showing them adult model acting violently towards a **bobo doll** (A. Bandura & R.H. Walters , 1959). The result showed that those who were exposed to the aggressive condition had more violent responses; the boys reacted more aggressively than the girls and they were more hostile when the model was male.

DISINHIBITION EFFECT ON CHILDREN:

Another interesting gender based observation that was made during this experiment was the confusion that the children faced when they saw a female model being aggressive because it did not fit in their former learning about the culturally appropriate behaviour for a woman. But the aggression of the male behaviour wasn't just accepted but also somewhat lauded with the kids making a reference on how it was something that their daddy did. This experiment showed how learning becomes more effective when a particular behaviour is reiterated in the daily life of the observer, which is done through the media messages. When children see their favorite characters behaving in a distinct way and then getting remunerated for it, it tends to reinforce imitative behaviour and this is often known as the '**Disinhibition Effect**' (Potter, 1999). The study not only provided information into the field of behaviorism but also clued people into the practical implication of it- children being influenced by violent media messages.

The research by Bandura was one among the many. There have been innumerable researches that dealt with this feat with one being '*Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy*' that involved a higher number of participants around 1500 boys, and was carried out by William Belson in 1978, in the city of London. Belson discovered that high exposure to violence on television is a contributing factor in the increase of the extent of violence among young boys (Belson, 1978). Rowell Huesmann and Leonard Eron

research concluded that those 8 year old who watched more TV violence had a higher probability to be detained and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults.

Fredric Wertham's '*Seduction of the innocent*' brutally targets the crime comics and television and the consequences it has on the children that come in contact with it. Wertham did not only make claims but has also provided evidences for his proposed theory and the menacing effects of media through a combination of psychological test results of children and content analysis (Wertham, 1954). Wertham carried out various laboratory experiments with there being the 'Thematic Apperception Test' (Cramer, 2004) in which a 'child is shown a series of pictures depicting various scenes and is asked to tell stories about them' (Wertham). The other tests included the 'Duess Test' that involves the completion of stories that is told to the children through mediums like television or comics and the 'Rorschach Test' a psychological test in which a subject's impression of inkblots are noted and then interpreted using techniques like complex algorithms and psychological understanding respectively. Other tests included the intelligence and the aptitude test together with the Association Test, which is not used in today's time, proved to be of great help. As per Wertham, words are assets that can reveal a child's mental state and his fantasies, which are unobtainable through a mere questioning approach.

Wertham was able to jot down a list of psychological issues related to media effects. He believes that because children are not aware of the order of literacy, they often end up accepting whatever that is being shown on the mediums, which in turn leads to passivity. It is a well-established fact in his book of how media plays a part in teaching children detrimental values which they start correlating with the real world. For example, due to television children form a misconception that the only procedure to cope up with a problem is by killing, specifically shooting. The concept of imitation has a prominent place in Wertham's book where he states that children wilfully imitate what they learn from these mediums.

The playful banter often involves twisting each other's arms in order to replicate the action sequence that their favourite superheroes are shown doing. It is a common occurrence among human being to associate themselves with the one who is strong, powerful and has the means to achieve his goal through any means and so this pattern is also witnessed among children who identify themselves more with the villain than the hero, due to the portrayal of the villain as the all-powerful. Although Wertham's ideas were met with a lot of criticisms, his book was able to capture the behaviour of people at the dawn of a new medium: the television.

The concept of desensitization is when the emotional responsiveness to a negative, adverse stimulus is diminished because of continued exposure to it. Desensitization is one major factor about the media violence that even the critics cannot rule against. Because of the over exposure of violence in media, be it in the video games or the movies or television shows that we watch, we have slowly become a group of individuals to whom real life violence doesn't seem that shocking. The desensitization is to such an extent that the bloodshed ridden news doesn't have much effect on individuals but the same can't be said for when children are victims, because then instead of desensitization, the sensitization heightens.

The categorization of what passes as violent content is a topic of much debate with their being shows, that as per the populace cannot be counted in the field of media violence but experts hold a different opinion. The main example that children are exposed to is in the cartoons that are being made and broadcasted to kids as young as 2-3 months. Tom and Jerry, a popular animated series that was created in the 1940s and is still a favourite of not just children but adults, who grew up watching the comical bickering, that was laced with subtle hints of violence, between the two characters: a cat and a mouse. The cartoon has been an object of much controversy with cases of it being blamed for the increase in violence in many middle-eastern countries. Although this argument is met with much criticism, what should be

ignored is the fact that although ‘Tom and Jerry’ may not be a direct constituent of the rise in violence that is happening in the current times but because the pattern of violence that is shown repeatedly, despite the humor has been a major source of influence on our behaviour with effects like desensitization.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SITUATION:

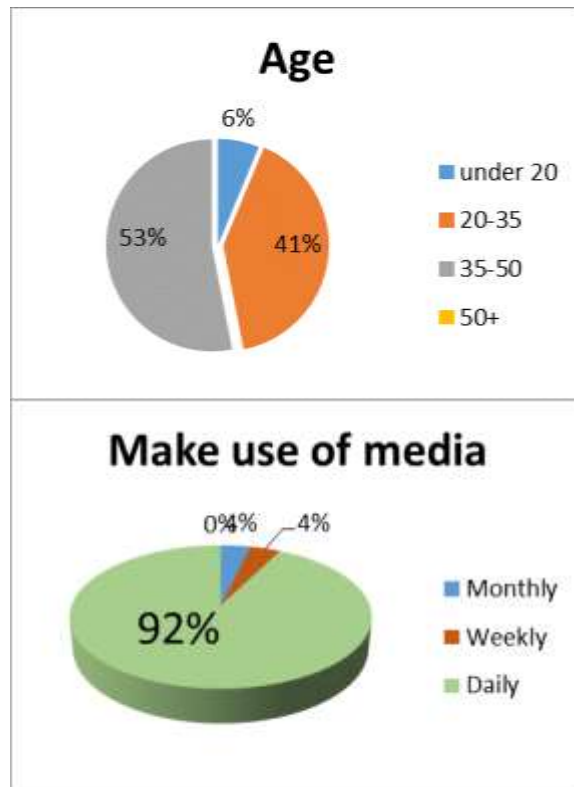
To have a better understanding of the situation people were contacted to participate in a survey based upon media available today. The method and the results of the survey are presented below;

RESEARCH MODEL:

A pre-coded questionnaire form with multiple choice questions was used to provide the respondents with a variety of choices. The choices were written keeping in mind the different aspects of not just the topic but also the workings of the society. It is an online form but the distribution was done only on social networking sites to ensure that people from every age group can partake in the research. The sampling method was the snow-ball effect. Apart from this, interviews were taken from children, aged 8-13, to get an insight into the effects that the media has on them and if they have certain urges and desires once they are done consuming the medium.

FINDINGS

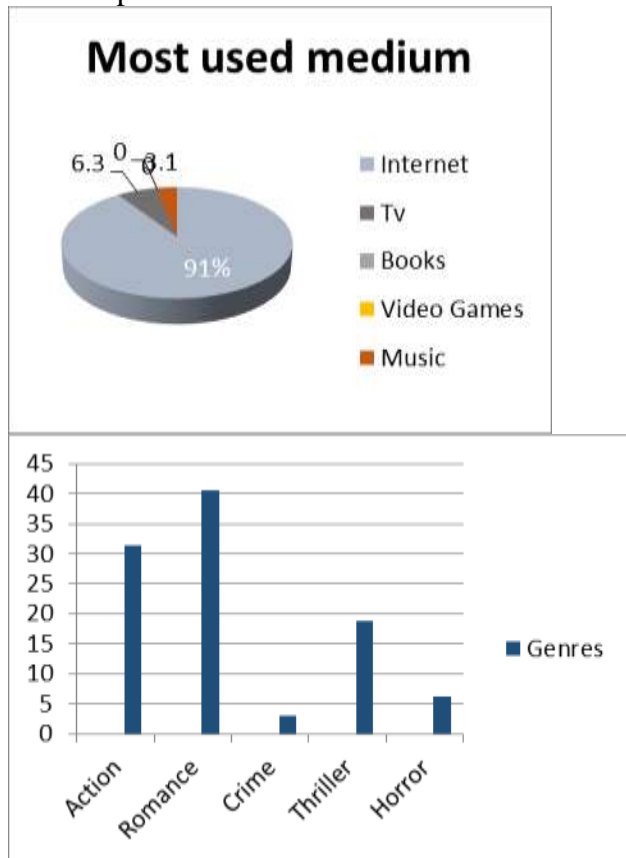
Around 30 people attempted the questionnaire that garnered diverse responses. The results are depicted in info graphs. The survey was completed by 32 people with the male/female percentage accounting up to 46.9% and 53.1% respectively. The age group that attempted the survey was below 50, with 53.1% from the 35-50 category, 40.6% from the 20-35 group and only 6.3% in the below 20 set. Around 93.8% used the media daily where as 3.8% of the respondent selected the weekly and monthly option separately.



The most used medium was the internet (90.6%) followed by TV (6.3%) and music (3.1%). The penetration of media into our lives can be deciphered from that fact that 93.8% of the respondents used it daily and one major reason for it is also because of the world we are living in now. Everything has become so technologically integrated, a person who is not a daily user may find it hard to keep up with the pace that our world is going at. 90.6% went with the internet option when asked about the most used medium and it is a small mistake from the researcher's end because in the current times, everything is run through the internet, For example, a person who watches 8-9 TV shows a week is although viewing a television production but he will watch it on internet be it to save time from the advertisements that are a constant theme in TV dramas. Because of the growing trend of video games, the researcher expected there to be respondents who

made use of it but the internet almost covers all aspects of media usage.

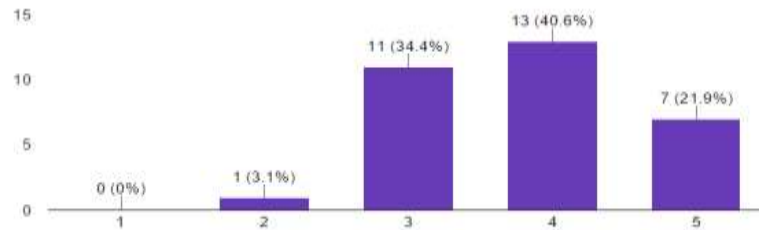
There were mixed responses on the type of genres the people prefer with the highest percentage favoring romance (40.6%), pursued by action (31.3%), with thriller accounting up to 18.8%; thriller at 6.3% and the genre of crime only at 3.1%. Romance was the most picked genre followed by action and thriller. Most people look for some sort of love and there are certain elements to a genre rule which the artist is not supposed to break for example in the romance genre there is supposed to be a happy ending and if that doesn't happen, the genre rule is broken, so no matter at the end of the day people do look for happy endings and escape the harsh realities.



On the question of how the respondents felt when they witness a character physically hurt, 43.8% said that they don't feel anything when they see a character physically hurt and this is an interesting discovery because it highlights the desensitizing effects of violent media content. 40.6 % believed the violence in media is at level 4 and 75% stated that media content does affect you. This shows people's awareness of the effects of media. The heart-wrenching case of the murder of Jamie Bulger, a two year old who was abducted, tortured and brutally murdered at the hands of two ten year olds: Robert Thompson and Jon Venables. It would be wrong to put the total blame of such a heinous crime on just the effects of media but the reports suggest that the boys had apparently watched 'Child's Play 3' before they inhumanely murdered the toddler. As Bulger's death was very similar to a death in the film, newspapers such as 'The Sun' began to fuel the debate as to whether such violence in the media should be accepted.

How much violence do you think is portrayed in media

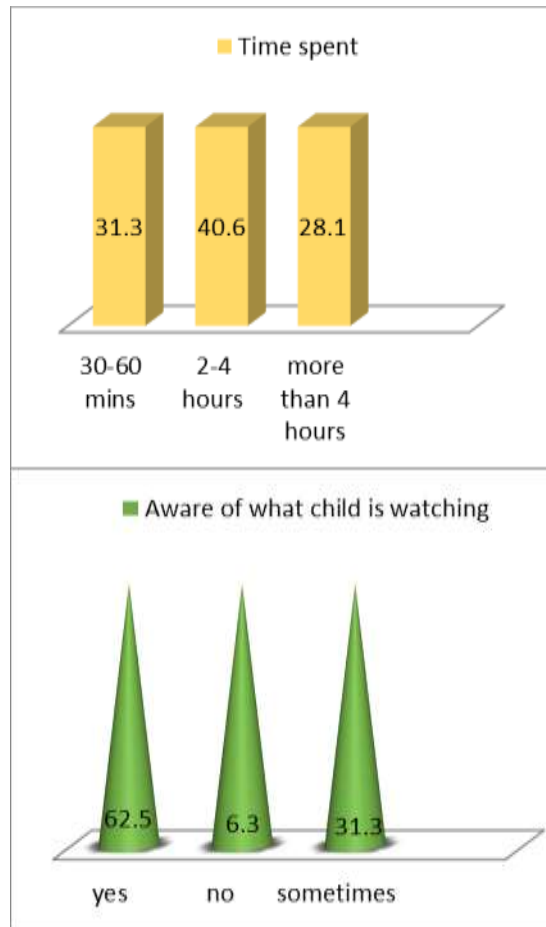
32 responses



59.4% believed that over a course of time, people become insensitive to violence because of the increased portrayal in media. 31.3 % went with the maybe option but 9.4 % believed that this wasn't the case. Around 56.3% of the respondents believed that it is the teens who are most affected by media violence and it maybe because of the transitioning age or the phase they are going through where they are vulnerable to every sensitive stimulus. An example of this is the very popular hit show, 13 reasons why, based on a novel by Jay Asher that deals with the issues a teenager

goes through in his/her lifetime and how certain horrible incidents lead them to take drastic actions.

The question dealing with the time spent by children in front of TV garnered responses that were: 40.6% for 2-4 hours, 31.3% for 30-60 minutes and 28.1% for more than 4 hours. 62.5 % were aware of what their child was watching, with 31.3 % going for the sometimes option. 6.3 % believed that they weren't aware. 28.1% stated that their child (respondents who are not parents were asked to consider the kids around them) spent more than 4 hours and this shows how the exposure to media is increasing day by day but what's reassuring is that almost more than 50% of the respondents were aware of what their child was doing.

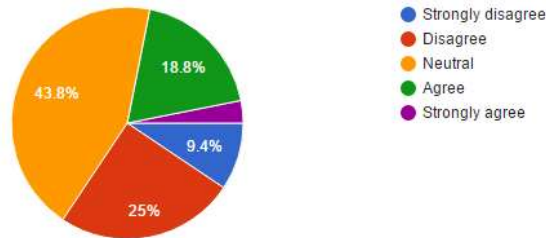


81.3% of the respondents believed that media does directly affect children, 15.6% weren't sure and only 3.1 % said that media has no direct affect. Nobody disagreed with the question of, if media played a part in increasing a child's aggression: 75 % said yes, 25 % chose the maybe option. There were mixed responses to the query asking if it's the naturally aggressive who are drawn to media violence. Around 75% believed that violence in media does play a part in increasing a child's aggression and it maybe because of the way it is portrayed. Violence doesn't always have to be blood and gore, it can be subtle and that leaves a lasting impact on the viewers. 43.8% were neutral when asked if it's the natural

aggressive people who are drawn to media violence and it maybe because they are not sure if it's the only reason. Media violence is often portrayed in a discreet way so the respondents that went with the neutral option may have considered the fact that sometimes people are not even aware of it.

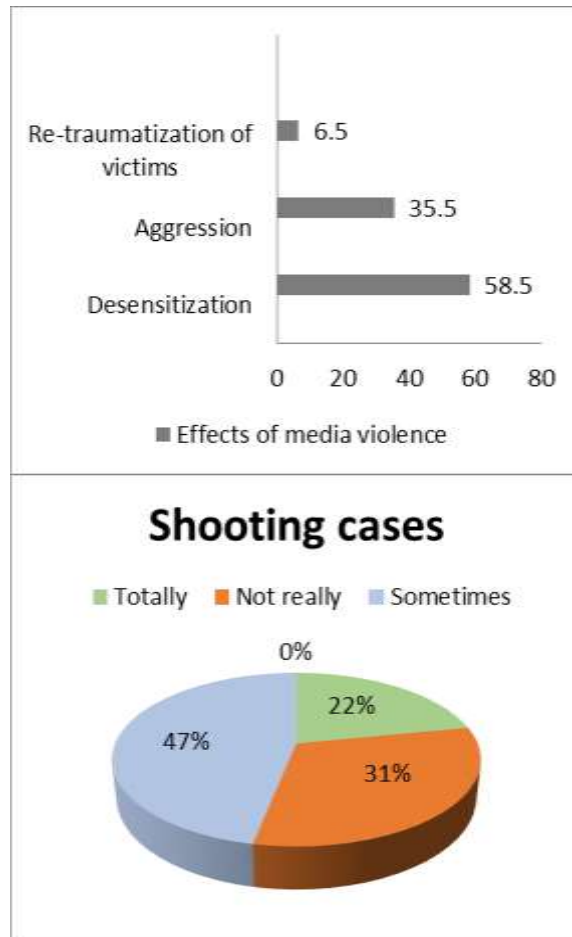
Is it that people who are naturally aggressive drawn to media violence?

32 responses



When the respondents were asked if they think it is the portrayal of violence in media that led to school/university shooting cases, 46.9% believed that sometimes it was, 21.9% blamed it totally on the media whereas 31.3% didn't think that was the only reason. 37.5% believed media plays a part in gender based violence, 50% went with the maybe option however 12.5% disagreed. 58.1 % stated that desensitization was one major effect of media violence on the audience, 35.5% picked the aggression option and 6.5% thought it led to the re-traumatization of victims. The shooting cases question garnered the highest response for the sometime option and that is because media violence cannot solely be blamed for something so atrocious. People who attempted the questionnaire did believe that media does play a part in gender based violence by side-lining the women and through pornography, sexual violence has become rampant. But as against the popular belief, it is also the men who become victims because they are always blamed for violence and are under-represented in being the victims. One major effect of media violence is desensitization where we become so used to a particular feat that we become numb to it and so in turn don't realize when it's

happening around us. The violence in media can also prove to be traumatizing for a victim who has already been through something similar, example rape, murder etc.



Interviews were taken from children aged around 8-13 and they were asked about the time they spent using internet and TV and the after effect of it. Most of the interviewees, most of the boys answer that they enjoy watching wrestling matches and prefer shows that have fights and subtle violence in them. When asked about what they feel after watching it, mostly said they felt like

beating each other up just like it happens on TV and are violent with their siblings too.

CONCLUSION:

Despite the criticisms that the hypodermic syringe model faces, it cannot be entirely dismissed. The mass media themselves tend to reproduce it when they report crimes that were supposedly caused by the media. When considering the violent content in media, the hypodermic syringe is useful to a magnitude to explain the violence in society because violence on TV and in the media can easily be imitated and carried out. Politicians and campaigners make use of this model when protesting against the increased portrayal of sex and violence in media when they argue for greater censorship or criticize certain programs. Now the time has arrived when we use the historical evidence to develop strategy to arrest the situation. The growth of new form of media is at an unprecedented rate. The social scientists need to focus more upon the empirical evidence to provide plausible solutions to make a shield the society from the harmful effects of the mass media which includes; newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and all forms of social media.

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