

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS OF IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

We cannot pretend that there is no impact that is adverse on our culture and children if there is too much violence coming out in what they see and experience. This study sought to determine the influence of social media on aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state. Three research questions guided the study. Adopting the descriptive survey research design, the study made use of 200 respondents selected via administration of aggression inventory developed by Buss and Perry. Data used in the study were generated from copies of the questionnaire administered to and retrieved from the respondents. Frequency and percentages were used to answer the research questions. Results obtained showed that social media (exposure to violent television programs, watching violent films, videos/video games as well as assessing different social sites) have a very negative impact on adolescents as it promotes aggressive behaviours among them. Recommendations were made among which is restructuring of academic contents in our secondary schools to be more practical, fact-finding and problem solving rather than just theoretical to enable the adolescents who at this stage of life are filled with life and energy to direct their attention even at home more to their academic pursuit rather than sitting down for hours watching films and assessing various social sites.

Key words: Social media, media violence, aggression, and adolescents.

Introduction

We live in an era of digital technology where one can get connected to any part of the world just in few seconds/minutes using any social media network. There is hardly any aspect of the lives of young people that social media has not saturated. The media no doubt provides the youth with the fastest and most efficient means of receiving and sharing information, education and entertainment and even building and sustaining friendships.

Everything the adolescents see or hear in the media early in their lives affects them in some way. Positive parenting role models indicate that in the

best interest of our children, we should limit their exposure to violent acts. Unfortunately violence is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Nigeria especially in films and movies.

Anderson (2016) asserts that media violence simply means scenes and story lines in which at least one character behaves aggressively towards at least one other character. Thus television shows, movies and video games in which characters fight example in boxing, wrestling or say mean things about each other (often called relational aggression), or kill bad guys are all instances of media violence, even if there is no blood, no gore, no screaming in pain. Anderson concludes by saying that most modern games, by the above definition are violent video games.

Television violence usually refers to all the violence appearing on television screens. It includes material broadcast over the air, distributed by cable and satellite systems, and available on videocassettes and disks (publications.gc.ca> LoPBdp > CIR). The California law defines violent video game in 150 words as in part, a video game in which the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being (<https://www.rwjf.org>>2010/10>de--).

Adolescence is the period of turbulence, instability, and a higher likelihood to take risks that may lead to aggressive behaviours. Adolescents who have family problems might use social media to escape from the problems and may lead them to aggressive behaviours (Strasburger, Wilson & Jordan, 2013). Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood. Adolescence is a stage of life in the development of an individual which is between childhood and adulthood occasioned by physical changes called puberty. Adolescents pose a lot of concern world-wide to the individual himself, parents, teachers, in fact to the caregivers. Adolescent stage is a critical time/periods in human development as many harmful and often-times lifelong behavior patterns stem during them (Mawson, Bestwith, Dingle & Lubman, 2015; Merikangas & Mcclair, 2012).

Adolescence is accompanied many physiological and physical changes, and is also a stage of complex psychological maturation and development. The young person progressively frees himself from parental dependence and develops a high level of social interaction.

He/she seeks new experiences which often includes a certain resistance to established rules. Adolescence also constitutes a phase of curiosity, risk taking and deviance. Adolescents spend a considerable portion of their time watching television, movies, playing video games, browsing on the internet,

using their cell phones. Ipad, laptop, chatting on facebook, twitter, whatsapp, instagram etc.

The evolution of the social media has nearly made the youths natives of the virtual world with a lot of them spending several hours of the day interacting with near and far friends (Unachukwu, Ebenebe & Nwosu 2019). Many youths have become so addicted to these online interactions that their lives revolve around chatting with friends on whatsapp and facebook , watching videos and pictures on instagram and youTube. Due to the interconnected nature of these media sites, people from all walks of life and ethnicity with diverse personalities and moral upbringing are brought together which could lead to exchange of negative materials on the internet. Most of these materials are not censored due to the gateless nature of social media sites which means that anything can be posted especially by adolescents.

Social media refers to all networking sites that are used for interactions. These social media sites include facebook, instagram, twitter, linkedin, pinterest, youTube, and so many other networking platforms (Ngonso, 2019). While the benefits of the social media are widely acclaimed, there have been lots of concerns over the negative effects of the social media on youths. Social media obviously has effects on in-school adolescents, more specifically, the violent content that are aired in those sites. Various forms of media have assumed central roles in people's lives. Social media refers to online communication channels wherein users create and share content and interact with each other in many different ways. These social media channels provide easily accessible and easily usable platforms and enable users to communicate with each other freely. Social media can also be explained as interactive computer-based mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (Gentile, 2009).

Social media has changed not only our powers of thinking, but today governs our behaviour and social conducts as well. Media is entrenched in the lives of the generality of people that no day will pass without one accessing or interacting with one form of media or another.

The researchers observed via interviews with the students and school authorities (guidance counselors, class teachers) that media violence and violent video games have had a very negative impact on students and their day to day behaviour. This agrees with the assertion by Steven (2010) that adolescents all over the world are exposed to increasingly higher doses of aggressive images in the media.

Adolescents no doubt are the worst hit by social media wave as the majority of them were born and surrounded by the media and spend the most

part of their days on the social media. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2018), adolescence is a period where young people engage more with the world around them, grow physically, try new activities, begin to think critically and develop more varied and complex relationships. These relationships are usually done with friends outside the home and they model behaviours which are deemed acceptable to these groups. These groups are readily found on the social media and their behaviour both positive and negative modeled by the adolescents who easily follow the trend. This leads to prolonged use of the social media by adolescents who have raised concerns among researchers on whether the social media influences the development of aggressive behaviour by adolescents.

Social media can contribute to an aggressive culture. Psychologically, aggression is a term which refers to a range of behaviours that can result in both physical and psychological harm to ,yourself, others, or objects in the environment. This type of behaviour centers on harming another person either physically or mentally. Aggression can be a sign of underlying mental health disorder, a substance use disorder, or a medical disorder. Supporting the above notion, Akcay, and Akcay (2019) pointed out that aggression is defined by psychologists as any behaviour that is intended to harm another person. They went further to explain that there are many forms of aggression example verbal aggression which usually involves saying hurtful things to a victim. Relational or indirect aggression refers to behaviour that is intended to harm a targeted person, into trouble or to harm his/her interpersonal relationship.

Aggression can take various forms such as name calling, verbal abuse, pushing, hitting someone and various other antisocial behaviours which intends to harm the next person. Aggressive behaviours as observed by Akcay and Akcay (2019) are behaviours that are intended to harm another person.

They further argued that aggression could be verbal example saying hurtful words to a targeted person, indirect aggression example telling lies against a victim to cause trouble or ruin relationships or physical aggression which may involve hitting or pushing a person with the intention to cause harm on the person.

Aggression in adolescents could be interplay of various factors ranging from their raging hormones to the various physical and emotional changes going on in adolescents and their desire to discover the world among them. The social media therefore becomes their safe haven where answers to their questions are just a click away. Adolescents therefore spend several hours of the day moving from one social media site to the other where they are exposed to various media contents which could be violent in nature.

Aggressive behaviors are those behaviours that are intended to harm another person who does not wish to be harmed. Thus hitting, kicking, pinching, stabbing and shooting are types of physical aggression (Anderson, 2016). Encyclopedia of children's health explains aggressive behaviour as reactionary and impulsive behaviour that often results in breaking household rules or the law. Aggressive behaviour is violent and unpredictable. Aggression can be problem for children with both normal development and those with psychosocial disturbances. Aggression constitutes intended harm to another individual even if the attempt to harm fails.

Exposure to social media violence could lead to the modeling of aggressive behaviour by adolescents. Unachukwu, Ebenebe and Nwosu (2019) share this view as they posited that children no longer show empathy due to their exposure to social media violence. Yamamoto & Anaonu opine that it is easier to make an unkind remark in an online environment because one cannot see the emotional distress which the remark causes on the receiver. This pattern of aggressive behaviour is common among secondary school students.

Most students in secondary schools in Anambra state manifests aggressive behaviours ranging from hitting, pushing, fighting, outright disobedience and violation of school rules and regulations, bullying, intimidating or verbally berating another person among others. Aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents take a variety of forms including: physical, verbal, mental and emotional.

Interview schedule with the students revealed that their engagement in these aggressive and violent acts serve a number of purposes including to express anger or hostility, to assert dominance, to intimidate or threaten, to achieve a goal, to express possession, a response to fear, a reaction to pain, to compete with others, to portray their "big-boys" stuff.

People who are already aggressive use the media as a further continuation of their beliefs, and attitudes which in turn are reinforced through social media. Violent television programs, in fact, media violence and violent video games have had a very negative impact on adolescents behaviour as often as you see most of these adolescents imitating these behaviours and then trying to practice it. Adolescents learn best by observing behaviours and then trying it. This agrees with what Albert Bandura (1969) in his social learning theory termed 'modelling'. Bandura noted that from their first days children watch the behaviour of those around them and try to imitate what they see. He felt that much of human learning is directly by observation of a model.

In this way, behavioral scripts are learned and store in memory. Adolescents after viewing many violent scenes they become desensitized to the real world violence. Despite the numerous advantages that social media

has, the depiction of aggression and violence has become a thing of serious concern to all and sundry. Social media has become a contemporary and global issue which constitutes serious hazard not only to the adolescents but to the entire populace.

The incidence of social media violence prompted this research. Adolescents mostly enjoy watching these violent programs. Violence in social media has a detrimental effect to all-round development of an adolescent. For example, boko-haran, Niger-Delta militants, suicide bombers, Fulani jihadists, various terrorist groups, armed robbery, kidnapping, raping etc. These aggressive and violent groups, acts/ behaviours have their roots not far from influence of social media. There is no doubt that the relationship between social media and aggression are moderated by the nature of media content characteristics and social influences on the individual exposed to that content. Viewing so much violent sites can encourage an imitative behaviour. It is against this background that the researchers want to investigate the influence of social media on aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state.

Adolescents spend a considerable portion of their time watching television, movies, playing video games and browsing on the internet. Media poses a threat to public health as much as leads to an increase in real-world violence and aggression. We often see students' exhibit behaviours like hitting, fighting, bullying etc. We look at aggressive behaviours here in terms of behaviours like repeated tantrums, arguments, hostility towards parents/school authorities, bullying behaviours such as beating and pushing younger students, threatening younger ones etc.

What students watch in social media no doubts affect their behaviour either positively or negatively. The aim of the study therefore is to determine the influence of social media on aggressive behaviour of in-school adolescents in Anambra state. This study was guided by three research questions. They are:

- What is the role of media example violent television shows (boxing, wrestling, murder, rape, cartoon among others) in promoting aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents?
- What is the role of violent films, video games/videos in promoting aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents?
- What role does social sites example Facebook, instagram, twitter, whatsApp among others play in promoting aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents?

Method

Descriptive research design was adopted. A descriptive survey aims at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features and facts about a given population (Akinlua, 2019). The population of the study comprised students in all the government and private owned day secondary schools in Anambra state. The choice of day schools was because day students have access to social media than their counterparts in boarding schools. Also, most school authorities restrict students using of cell phones. From the six educational zones in Anambra state (Awka, Ogidi, Otuocha, Nnewi, Aguata and Onitsha), the researchers employed purposive random sampling technique to select 20(twenty) day secondary schools. From these 20 day secondary schools, only senior secondary 2(SS2) male students numbering 2,800 were used. The choice of gender-specific male students was predicted upon the fact that male students dare violent and aggressive behaviours as show off of 'big boyism' than female adolescents. Again interview schedule with the school authorities precisely the form teachers, guidance counselor and the principals revealed that most of the reported violent and aggressive acts/activities involve mostly the male students and also those in senior classes. The later also prompted the researchers' use of SS2 students on the basis of the following reasons: most of them fall under the adolescents' age range and secondly to avoid distracting the examination class precisely SS3 students.

Two questionnaires were used for the study. Firstly, the researchers tried to establish aggressive students by administering an aggressive inventory developed by Buss and Perry on them. The students were sincerely assured that the questionnaire was strictly for research and academic purposes and not for taking any disciplinary actions against them. This assurance however empowered the students' honesty in filling the questionnaire. Buss and Perry's aggression instrument consist of 29 items for measuring aggressive behaviours including 4 dimensions – physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. The inventory used a likert answering system. Study subjects/respondents were asked to select the choice that best suited them from the following options: 1- extremely uncharacteristic, 2- somewhat uncharacteristic, 3- neither uncharacteristic, 4- somewhat characteristics and 5- extremely characteristics. The study reliability was confirmed by repeating the test and calculating the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ($r = 0.80$).

The cronbach reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.71. At the end of the test, 200 students were selected for the study. Secondly, researcher's constructed questionnaire to find out the influence of exposure to

violent media content on adolescents' aggressive behaviour was also used for the study. This was structured on a 4-point scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Only the researchers constructed questionnaire was subjected to validation process. The validity of the instrument was determined by three experts in educational psychology and measurement and evaluation from Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach alpha with overall reliability coefficient of 0.81. The researchers' administered the questionnaire to the chosen sample for the study and collected the filled questionnaires on the spot. Frequencies and percentages were used for answering the research questions.

Results

Table 1: Result of Students Response to Buss and Perry's Aggression Questionnaire

No. of Items	Response	Frequency	Percentage
29 Items	Extremely uncharacteristic	1040	37.14%
	Somewhat uncharacteristic	697	24.89%
	Neither uncharacteristic	546	19.5%
	Somewhat characteristic	317	11.32%
	Extremely characteristic	200	7.14%

N = 2,800

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of influence of violent television shows on students aggressive behaviours (N = 200).

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	161	80.5%
Agree	31	15.5%
Disagree	5	2.5%
Strongly disagree	3	1.5%

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of influence of television shows on aggressive behaviors of in-school adolescents in Anambra state. The table revealed that 80.5% students strongly agree that watching television shows like wrestling, boxing etc influences their aggressive behaviours, 15.5% agree, 2.5% disagree while 1.5% strongly disagree.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of influence of violent films, video games/video on student’s aggressive behaviours.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	112	56%
Agree	79	39.5
Disagree	9	4.5%
Strongly disagree	Nil	Nil

N = 200

The above table revealed that 56% of students are of strongly agree opinion that watching violent films, video games/videos promotes aggressive behaviour, 39.5% agree, 4.5% disagree while none strongly disagree.

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of influence of social sites eg facebook, instagram, twitter, whatsApp etc on students’ aggressive behaviours.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	84	42%
Agree	108	54%
Disagree	5	2.5%
Strongly disagree	3	1.5%

N = 200

Table 4 shows that 42% of students strongly agree that social sites like facebook, istagram, twitter, whatsApp among others influences students aggressive behaviours, 54% agree, 2.5% disagree and 1.5% were of strongly disagree opinion.

Discussion

Result of the findings asserts that exposure to violent television programs/shows like wrestling, boxing, murder, rape and cartoon promotes aggressive behaviours among adolescents’. We cannot pretend that there is no impact that is adverse on our culture and our children if there is too much violence coming out in what they see and experience. Watching violent television shows example murder, rape among others communicates to the adolescent the false notion that in every conflict there has to be a winner and a loser, thus making them believe that violence is a successful means of resolving conflicts.

In Anambra state where this research was conducted, the researchers experience is that one has only to turn on the television to observe the growing proliferation of violent and aggressive content in today's media. A regular offering includes daytime talk shows, some of which are characterized by blatant emotional, psychological and physical abuse by panel guests toward each other. World champion wrestling, boxing among others are viewed by a growing number of Nigerians, many of whom include adolescents. Daily network news is littered with graphic renderings of murders, kidnappings, rape, traffic accidents and war scenes among others. All these promote aggressive behaviour in the adolescent.

This agrees with the findings of Sonu (2011) that the average child sees 12,000 violent acts on television annually including many depictions of murder and rape. According to him, television violence increases aggressive behaviour particularly in boys. He advised that physicians who see a child with a history of aggressive behaviour should inquire about the child's exposure to violence portrayed on television. Also, Anderson (2009) observed that children who view television media violence are more likely to have increased feelings of hostility, decreased emotional response to the portrayal of violence and injury that lead to violent behaviour through imitation. Clifford (2011) citing the American Psychological Association says there are 3 major effects of watching violence in media that is violent video games and violent television programs. Firstly, Children may become less sensitive to pain and suffering of others. Secondly, children may be more fearful of the world around them and thirdly, children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or hurtful ways towards others.

Furthermore, Kaplan (2012) said, you turn on the television and violence is there, you go to movie, and violence is there, reality is distorted, if you live in a fictional world, then the fictional world becomes your reality. He noted that the 2 teenage boys who murdered 12 schoolmates and a teacher and injured 21 others at Columbia high school in Colorado before killing themselves, lived in a pathological environment. Their lives centered round violent video games.

The findings also revealed that watching violent films, video games/videos encourage aggressive behaviours among adolescents. In Anambra state where this research was carried out, students in an interview schedule with the researchers confessed that they can sit down every day for upwards of 7(seven) hours watching films non- stop, morning to even late in the night as long as electricity light or any other power source is available.

This is serious at the detriment of their academics, other issues like helping their parents in domestic chores seem to be 'no go' area. Going by

this, there is no doubt therefore that the longer adolescents are exposed to violent video games, the more likely they are to have aggressive behaviours, thoughts and feelings as children are very good in imitating and copying others behaviour. This is justified by Albert Bandura in his social learning theory. Manali Oak(2012) in confirmation of the above findings noted that an early exposure to bold or violent films, books, publishing adult content and news portraying ugly social practices has a deep impact on young minds. Video games are clearly capable of producing an increase in aggression and violence.

Victor (2017) also observed that adolescents regularly use the internet, cell phones and video games to gather information and communicate with each other. This ability to interact with each other is the unique feature of social media which provides powerful ways for adolescents to create and navigate their social environments. She noted that the role of media in the adolescent has undergone a revolutionary change and adolescents playing violent video games can cause later aggressive behavioural problems.

The findings also revealed that via social sites like facebook, twitter, instagram etc aggressive behaviours are promoted among adolescents eg assaulting minors. Frequent use of social sites leads to addiction, inculcates bad habits, vulnerability to crimes, insecurity activities like fraud, impersonation, scam publishing and blog among others. Comparing oneself to other people is a sure path to anxiety and social media has only made this easier to do. While social media makes it easier to meet new people and make friends, it also enables cruel people to tear into others with little effort. Supporting the above findings, Ganser (2017) argued that social media provides unfettered access to images of real-life violence example, recent videos of murders and gang violence uploaded to facebook, live overall exposure to, and potential for imitated aggression may be increased.

Desmond, Jun, Megan, Sadiq, Caitlin, Rob and Washington (2014) affirmed that social media has become recognized as a vehicle through which youths perpetuate acts of violence against their peers such as bullying, harassment, dating aggression etc.

They opined that Social media sites such as facebook, youTube, twitter, instagram have provided unmonitored and uncensored environments, which can easily expose adolescents to illegal activities and/or aggressive behaviours. Research has proven that adolescents who viewed violent content online were more likely to commit serious crimes and their potential for copying violence was increased (<https://blogs.unsw.edu>).

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media is an indispensable part of adolescent life and the negative health impacts of social media overuse is inevitable. Today adolescents spend a lot of time with media products and are exposed to scenes of violence in almost all type of media content. The amount of time spent in front of the screen can be problematic, triggering a sedentary lifestyle as well as tyrannical and risky behaviors. Exposure to social media products with violent content and long periods spent engaged with these products increase the tendency toward aggression and/or aggressive behaviours.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend as follows:

1. Academic programs/contents in our secondary schools should be restructured. It should be more practical, fact-finding and problem solving than just theoretical. This will make the adolescents who at this stage of life are filled with life and energy to spend most of their time even at home in solving academic problems rather than spending hours assessing various social sites and watching films.
2. The fact that social media is popular among adolescents and adolescence is the period of turbulence, it is worth considering that parents play an important role during the adolescence period. Parents' role in educating adolescents on how to behave and interact with each other is really important as the family is one of the primary social environments for adolescents. Having an informed discussion with their children may prevent them from aggressive behaviours.
3. Parents should avoid too much permissiveness in child rearing. They should as a matter of fact supervise and monitor television programs watched by their children as well as the various sites they visit/assess daily.
4. The Nigerian communication commission should regulate/screen the content and quality of programs transmitted via different social media platforms/sites to reduce or minimize to the barest minimum transmission of violent contents.

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