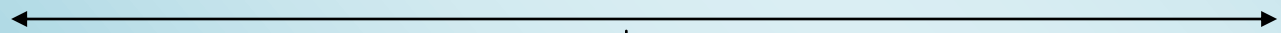


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THE EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO MASS MEDIA ON TEENAGE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of exposure to mass media on teenage behavioural patterns in Hwange District. Mass media is a vast form of communication that permeates nearly every aspects of culture. Both positive and negative media effects of mass media were unveiled. The study used the descriptive survey design method. The research instruments used were the questionnaires. The study concludes that the media has both positive and negative influences on teenagers. Teenagers strongly agreed that the mass media content had an influence in their thinking and behavioural patterns. It recommended that a policy document on the right and proper use of mass media should be made available and displayed in strategic places. Parents must supervise and monitor mass media usage at home. It was also recommended that the use of cell phones at school must be discouraged because they are very disruptive.

Key words: Teenager, mass media, behaviour, content, influence.

INTRODUCTION

The media exerts an enormous, almost a normative influence, over the lives of many. It influences, particularly among teenagers, the ways in which individuals and group dress, talk, behave and think. The media, in the forms of movies, television, radio, and print as well as the new electronic communications media of the internet, helps to connect individuals to one another and to the entire world. Invariably, this powerful influence shapes the ways in which viewers or participants perceive the world and their own place within that world. Given that teenagers are often highly impressionable and subject to such influence, this study considered the effects of media on this particular age group. Specifically, the study considered the ways of media influence on teens and at the end, solutions for the problems related to them.

Also the study focused on both the positive and negative effects of the media and how these affect the culture. Mass media interacting with culture can be seen in the disappearing dress code, behaviour and language differences. Word usage and pronunciation is becoming more homogenized through the transfer and learning that takes place in the mass media. The mass media continually normalizes violence, reinforces racism and creates myth of who we are as people. The research identified the effects of the following different types of media, that is, print, electronic and the new –age media.

Hwange is a mining area located in Matabeleland north province in Zimbabwe and it lies along the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road. Most of the teenagers in the area are ably supported by parents who work in different mines dotted around the area and Zimbabwe power company (ZPC), an electricity generating company. Teenagers in Hwange district speak Nambya, Ndebele, Shona, Dombwe, Senga, Shangani, and Tonga. However, they use English language in their different schools as a medium of instruction. They also enjoy internet connectivity as the area is well serviced in information, communication and technological services.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Industrialization, urbanization and technological advancement in mass media have led to cultural imperialism. As a result there has been a gradual change in behaviour among teenagers. This change in behaviour is attributed to technological advancement in the mass media. The media which have been evolving rapidly over a few years and are readily accessible to teenagers have led to cultural decadence among the youth. Teenagers imitate what they see in televisions, movies, face book, iPods, cell phones and internet. This study therefore seeks to investigate into the effects of exposure to mass media on teenage behavioural patterns in Hwange district of Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify how cultural values are being eroded.
- To explore the effects of mass media on teenage behavioural patterns.
- To assess the effects of mass media on behavioural patterns of teenagers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was premised around two theories that are related to the study of media effects on teenage behavioural patterns. The theories that are used are as follows:

Social learning theory

Bandura's social- learning theory offers sufficient evidence that even when children and adults have not in fact executed behaviour, they can learn by imitation (Bandura, 1999). Three main processes are involved in learning: "direct experience, indirect or vicarious experience from observing others (modelling), and the storing and processing of complex information through cognitive operations" (Bandura 1999). This theory proposes that behaviours are learned and that they are of socialization that produces its effects through children's propensity to learn by imitation.

Cultivation theory

This theory proposes that "serious exposure to mass media create and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media- directed version of reality than with reality itself" (Shanahan and Morgan (1999). Media depictions and messages may influence the behaviour of teenagers over time by making it possible for them to acquire new attitudes and behaviours or by changing probability that they will carry out new or formerly learned responses. This occurs, when the teenagers' expectations about the outcome of certain behaviours are altered through identification with the character portraying or providing the stimuli, by raising or lowering behavioural inhibitions, by modifying the potential for environmental cues to foster certain behaviours, or by linking specific meanings to behaviour.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Mass media as defined by Baran (2004) is any medium used to transmit mass communication. Baran (2004) further states that it comprises of the eight mass media industries: books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio, movies, television and the internet. People often think of mass media as the news, but mass media also include entertainment like television shows, books and films. It may also be educational in nature, as in the instance of public broadcasting stations, which provide educational programming to a national audience.

Mass media plays an extensive role in an individual's daily life. The influence of mass media operates with the mission of providing one with more information than he/she might have expected. This could relate to the decision made, for example, at the workplace, people may be based on the information that comes from television, newspapers, the internet, friends, family or any other related individual. The mass media works like a pull factor- it just drags one into its world, and makes believe that whatever one does or hear is true and the most trustable.

A Teenager is a person between the ages of thirteen (13) and nineteen (19). Adolescence is arguably one of the most challenging periods in any teen's and parent's life. Helping your teen cultivate a positive attitude can help him/her more efficiently and effectively navigate the tumultuous waters of adolescence and beyond. According to Sonenstein (2012) teens who displayed a positive attitude had a decreased likelihood of depressive symptoms and risk-taking behaviour in early adulthood. Teenagers' age is the period of transition; biological; psychological; social; economic, whereby they become wiser, more sophisticated and better able to make their own decisions. Teenagers become more self-aware, more independent, and more concerned about what the future hold (Steinberg, 2005). Steinberg (2005) further states that there are three fundamental changes that define this period; the biological- the onset of and puberty; cognitive- the emergence of more advanced thinking abilities and the social- the transition into new roles in the society.

The mass media's impact on society and on each and every one of us is clearly one of the main reasons for our need to know as much as possible about the media and what they communicate. But because this seems obvious, one should remember that studies of the media and their texts- are these religious hand bills, poetry, novels, radio, newspaper articles or television programmes- need not primarily be conducted because one is worried about the damaging effect on teenagers and other tender souls. However, to some extent, it may simply make one wiser. The media's text may be studied because one wants to know more about the world in general or about a particular problem.

Mass media are diversified media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience via mass communication. The mass media is another agent of socialization. Television shows, movies, popular music, magazines, websites, and other aspects of the mass media influence one's tastes in popular culture, news of women, people of colour and many other beliefs and practices. In an ongoing controversy, the mass media are often blamed for teenage violence and many of the society's ills. The average child sees thousands of acts of violence on television and in the movies before reaching young adulthood.

Baran (2004) propounds that the media like television, radio and the internet increase an overall awareness of the masses. They enhance the general knowledge by providing information from all over the world. News broadcasted through different media helps us to know about the day to day events in the world. News, tele-films and documentaries revolving around social issues increase a social awareness in teenagers and develop their concern towards society. Baran (2004) further postulates that newspapers, also contribute to the enhancement of the vocabulary. Newspapers are the best beginners in developing reading habits in teens. Media also plays a

significant role in shaping public perceptions on a variety of important issues, both through the information that is dispensed through them, and through the interpretations they place upon this information. Media also play a large role in shaping modern cultures, by seeking and portraying a certain interpretation of reality; they shape reality to become in line with interpretation.

On the contrary, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) states that it is often seen that young girls and boys imitate their role models blindly. The negative things the celebrities do are often talked about. The Media often highlight the controversies in the lives of the celebrities. This leads to a blind imitation of what appears in the news. Media always exaggerates the scintillating things about the celebrities. The negatives in society are highlighted with intent to awaken the teenagers about the society of the modern days, hence, are losing the identity. Television viewing gradually leads to the adoption of beliefs about the nature of social world which confirm the stereotyped, distorted and very selective view of reality, as portrayed in a systematic way in television programmes.

However thus, Kamilipour (2002) asserts that the television set has widened and speeded up the process of contact and influence. "This has created the possibility for direct efforts to influence the thought and opinions of the people within and across nations, or what has come to be considered public opinion." Traditional cultures are being eroded by television global cultures concede. Just as the term 'abrasion' is used to refer to erosion caused by friction between a physical terrain and an agent or material carried by that agent, the construct can be applied to explore the potential for media systems. It is further emphasized by Curran and Gurevitch (1991) that, television's participation in events further blurs the line between 'social reality' and media reality'. It goes to the heart of the role of the media as 'definers of reality', and beyond. However this hype is actually having a negative effect on society. Teenagers are only seeing the negatives around them. Controversies are constantly being bombarded on them. All this is responsible for influencing the society negatively.

Anderson and Dill (2002), also realised that today's mass media has influenced teen sexuality more than any other time. The strongest relationship with sexual behaviour is associated with movie viewing followed by listening to music, watching television, and reading magazines. The media influences teenagers immensely in relation to the development and manifestation of body image and sexual activity. The watching of soap operas, movies (Tiggerman and Pickering, (1996), have been associated with a teenager's level of physical dissatisfaction and their desire to lose weight. Identification with television stars (girls and boys), female models also contribute toward body dissatisfaction by teenagers. Teenagers feel less confident, and more disgruntled with their weight and physical appearance. Children as young as ten years old stated that they were not happy with their bodies

after watching one Britney Spears video and a segment from an episode of 'friends' (Mundell, 2002) The numerous mediums through which impudent messages are delivered assist in leaving behind a plethora of needless and unwanted detrimental circumstances associated with the self concept. The conditions that a teenager might find himself or herself experiencing could only mean that some wrong choices are made, a wrong approach is chosen, and a healthy stride is overlooked.

Anderson and Dill (2002) suggests that mass media, effective as it is, can be used on the youth to drive home pressing concerns in the country such as mitigating effects of child obesity, the dangers of alcohol, and prevention of drug abuse, alcohol abuse and pre-teen sexual relations, promotions and importance of healthy life styles such as dieting, exercises and fitness. There is an increase of mass media programmes, campaigns and commercials that advocate for good morals. They highlight the dangers and prevalence of HIV and AIDS related complications, prevention and abstinence from pre-marital sex amongst the youth.

From the foregoing, it became apparent that the mass media contributes in the socialization of the teen. Teenagers perceive anything portrayed in good light by celebrities even if it is bad to them is normal, morally good and worth imitating.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The research design adopted was a descriptive survey design. Babbie (2001) define research design as a plan or blueprint of how a researcher conducts research. The research design focuses on the kind of study being planned and the results aimed at. When choosing research design it depends on the type of research problem, and the resources available to conduct that study.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

This study used a questionnaire as a research instrument. Wimmer and Dominick (2000), define a questionnaire as, 'a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents.' The good part about questionnaires is that they are also fast and cheap since they can be issued on targeted respondent's simultaneously. The teenagers were also be interviewed, about their attitudes and behaviours.

POPULATION

The population of interest for this study is five hundred (500) teenagers drawn from Hwange district. In this study, the target population is pupils aged thirteen (13) to nineteen (19).

SAMPLE SIZE

A sample is a representative subsection of a precisely defined population. It is selected in order to make inferences about the whole population. A representative sample is one that contains the characteristics of the population as closely as possible. A sample would be a small subset of the population and it is the one from which the researcher extracts information from which to make conclusions about the population. In this study the sample size of Two hundred and fifty (250) is drawn from the population of five hundred (500).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The researcher self-administered the questionnaires to ensure maximum response from the teenagers. A hundred percent response rate was achieved.

Of the total sample size, 133 (53%) of the respondents were teenage boys and the remainder, 117 (47%) of the respondents were teenage girls. The highest response 130(52%) of the respondents was in the 15-17 age brackets. It is assumed that at this stage, the teenagers are the most vulnerable and gullible to the effects of mass media. The other age group response was at 85 (34%) of the respondents who are in the 13-14 age group. It is assumed that these teenagers have just left primary school and they are starting to learn new things. They are very adventurous and cannot distinguish between what is morally good or bad. In the 18-19 age groups, they were 35 (14%) teenagers. It is assumed that these teenagers are now approaching adulthood and they can distinguish between what is right or wrong.

The response to mass media frequency shows that the highest number of teenagers, both male and female teenagers at 100 (40%) has frequent access to the television. This is so, considering the fact that, television is viewed as an instrument of communication which is important in the spread of culture and its development. Most of the teenagers spend quality time watching and listening to videos, films, movies and music on the television, thereby wasting as lot of time earmarked for study purposes. Second in popularity are the cell phones at 90 (36%) and recent mobile phones have the capacity to store pornographic and musical videos in their memory cards. On third place is the internet at 40 (16%). The newspaper, radio, novels, and iPods came fourth at 5(2%) each.

Concerning the radio, it has lost its popularity among teenagers. The iPod is relatively not common with most teenagers in Zimbabwe.

In response to the question of whether mass media content influence teenage thinking and behavioural patterns, 140 (56%) of the teenagers who strongly agreed and 50 (20%) who agreed that mass media had an influence. The number of teenagers who disagreed that the mass media content had an influence was 35 (14%) and finally those who strongly disagreed that the mass media content influence one's behavioural thinking was paltry 25 (10%). From these results, it became apparent that the mass media content has an influence in teenagers thinking and behavioural patterns.

The research study also sought to establish the media content that teenagers paid attention to. The highest response rate was at 50 (20%) of teenage respondents who paid attention to musical media content. 42 (16%) searched for educational material and information. Sports content was followed by 40 (16%) of the respondents. They were 35 (14%) that followed games. There were 30 (12%) that followed social networks such as Gmail, Yahoo, twitter and face book. Those who sought religious content and political content were 10 (4%) each. 12 (5%) of teenagers has a strong inclination towards watching movies. those watching Global news editions were at 7 (3%). They were very few teenagers who visited websites with a cultural content hence the 5 (2%), while 4(2%) confessed that they paid attention to pornographic materials.

From the foregoing discussion, it became apparent that materials with a musical content had the largest number of respondents followed by educational, sports, games, social networks, movies, political and religious, global news, and pornographic were the last three at the bottom with few teenagers paying attention to them.

This other question sought to understand whether the quantity and duration of exposure to mass media could influence teenage behaviour. The results proved that the majority of the teenage respondents felt that the quality and quantity of exposure to mass media indeed could influence their behaviour. From 250 total number of respondents, 175 (70%) of the teenage respondents said 'Yes' whilst 75 (30%) said 'No'. This shows that the mass media certainly has an influence on teenage behavioural patterns. A number of teenage respondents agreed that they often mimic their favourite film stars, music icons, actors/actress, and news anchor/TV and radio presenters' mannerism of speech, dress and behaviour. They were 153 (61%) of the teenagers who confessed copying or imitating their favourite idols and 97 (39%) said they do not do it. The reason most of them copied is that, most teenagers are fashionable and they are eager and willing to be associated with people of high standing, rich and famous.

From the results of the study, the majority of the teenagers who responded stated that it was not possible for them to control what they view or listen to. 193 or (77%) of the teenagers had 'Yes' responses whilst 52 or (21%) had 'No' as a response and only 5 or (2%) did not respond. From these responses, it became apparent that the mass media has an effect that teenagers can hardly control.

The teenage respondents felt that it would be prudent by the various mass media to shun any productions or publications that had indecent and pornographic materials in their content. They also stated that during prime time viewing or listening on both television and radio violent films and musical pieces with vulgar language must not be played. They further advocated for more educational channels on both television and the internet. They also called for talk shows and documentaries that discourage violence, alcohol abuse and offensive language. They felt it was prudent for the broadcasters and editor on-line to air programmes that bring awareness to teenagers on health issues such as sexual transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS.

CONCLUSIONS

The research made the following conclusions:

- The television and cell phones were the most widely used mass media.
- The teenagers subscribed to a certain dress code that is popular with celebrities.
- Teenagers have access to pornographic materials, which they store in their mobile phones, and other media.
- Teenagers strongly agreed that the mass media content had an influence in their thinking and behavioural patterns.
- The quantity and duration of exposure to mass media has an influence in the behavioural patterns of most teenagers.
- Most of the teenagers are able to distinguish what is right and wrong when it comes to imitating their role models.
- The teenagers felt that the mass media must shun productions or publications that are indecent and pornographic in approach.
- Most parents have no control over the media content teenagers have access to.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to the above conclusions, this study recommended that:

- The use of cell phones at school must be discouraged because they are very disruptive.

- Parents must supervise and monitor mass media usage at home.
- A policy document on the right and proper use of mass media should be made available and displayed in strategic places.
- Encourage teens to continue pursuing and paying attention to educational content and cut down on musical and movie consumption.
- Parents, schools and communities must be encouraged to educate teenagers to be media literate as a means of protecting them against accessing unwarranted negative contents.

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