

Impact of television on sexual behaviour of youths media essay



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INTRODUCTION

Television, radio, films, newspapers, magazines, books, and other media are increasingly persuasive and influential in people's lives around the world.

New technologies such as the Internet, cell-phones and chat rooms, have changed the nature of the media experience in significant ways through the information they provide to users. The information obtained from mass media maybe constructive or detrimental and it is for that reason there is need to assess the impact it has on teenagers' sexual behaviour by mainly focusing on televised programmes.

Background of the Thesis

Televised programmes do qualify as one of the convenient sexual educators in our culture but laden with contradictions. TV's accessibility and popular appeal make it an excellent instructor, offering a convenient way to learn about sex without embarrassment which usually arises between parents and their children when discussing sex related issues. While TV's sexual messages are not always explicit, they are abundant, and often provide information youth do not get elsewhere. Through its dialogue, characterisations, storylines, and themes, television presents adolescents with numerous verbal and visual examples of how dating, intimacy, relationships, and sex are handled. On the other hand, concern is often expressed that the messages TV sends about sexuality are limited, sometimes stereotypical, and potentially harmful. The concern is that the prevalence of sexual content on TV inadvertently overemphasizes the role of sex in male-female relationships. Of equal concern is the impression that television provides a one-dimensional picture of sexual relationships and

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sexual encounters are always spontaneous, romantic, and risk free. Thus, because of the prevalent yet limited nature of TV's sexual content, researchers and educators have become interested in/whether viewing of these portrayals is associated with distorted expectations, irresponsible sexual decision-making, and permissive sexual attitudes.

Although the research in this area has been sparse in Kenya, research findings do associate amount of TV viewing with viewers' sexual attitudes, expectations, and behaviour. First, greater TV exposure has been linked to viewers' attitudes about sex and sexual relationships. Both heavy regular consumption of and experimental exposure to sexually-oriented genres, such as soap operas and music videos, have been related to expressing more liberal sexual attitudes, to being more accepting of sexual improprieties, and to more negative attitudes toward remaining a virgin. Together, these findings but not limited to, provide tentative evidence of a link between watching sexually-oriented programming and viewers' own sexual attitudes, expectations, and behaviour.

The effects of television consumption on teenagers' behaviour regarding to sex are of increasing interest to educators, policy makers, program planners and the society as whole. The concern is that the extent to which frequent consumption of media with high levels of sexual content and low levels of portrayal of responsible sexual conduct is a pivotal influence on young people's subsequent sexual behaviour, including the responsible use of protection from pregnancy and disease.

Research done in United States has demonstrated that young people are heavy consumers of sexually- oriented media including TV, both broadcast and cable channels, videos, movies, magazines, and, more recently, the internet. The researcher acknowledges that the above mentioned relationship cannot be generalised across cultures especially Kenya and United States, however televised programmes do carry sexual content across board. Content analyses have also demonstrated that broadcast television contains a high, growing and increasingly explicit dose of sexual messages, and that a proportion of such messages display or model either restraint or contraceptive use. However, scientific evidence has not yet established a causal relationship between exposure to sexual content in the media and teenagers' attitudes concerning sexuality and their own sexual behaviours.

Therefore a detailed research that addresses the nature and magnitude of the role of television in teenagers' decisions regarding sexual intercourse and protection from disease and unintended pregnancy might create data which could guide future policy making and programming, both in the government and in the media industries.

Statement of the Problem

The role of television as a sexual educator in our culture is perceived to be inappropriate. On the one hand, television's accessibility and popular appeal as an excellent instructor, does offer a convenient way to learn about sex and sexual behaviours without embarrassment. While television's sexual messages are not necessarily visually explicit (which can be either non-

verbal or verbal cues), they often provide information that teenagers may not receive elsewhere.

One dimension of involvement to be considered is viewing motivation, or viewers' expected uses of television. People use and select media (television) to gratify specific needs, and that specific uses lead to differences in behaviour and outcomes. According to this construct, people exhibit varying levels of activity when using the media, differing in their selectivity, attention to, and involvement with the content viewed. However, while the expectation is that the effect of television content will therefore depend on one's level of active involvement. It is argued that facilitative activity, which includes selectivity, attention, and involvement, is more likely to enhance television effects on sexual behaviour, whereas inhibitory activity, which includes avoidance, distraction, and scepticism, should deter teenagers' involvement in sexual activities. Focusing on the two dimensions of facilitative activity and inhibitory activity, the researcher seeks to determine to what extent television viewing impact on teenagers' sexual behaviour.

Thesis Objectives

In order to achieve the purpose of the study which is to determine the impact of television on the sexual behaviour of the youth by exploring aspects of television use that are associated with teens' sexual behaviours and expectations, hence the research has based its objectives on:

To investigate whether television content affects the sexual beliefs and behaviour of the youth

To investigate what sexual content the youth pay attention to and how they interpret what they see and hear.

To investigate whether television as a form of media can be used to promote responsible sexual behaviour

Thesis Questions

What sexual content do teenagers pay attention to, and how do they interpret what they see and hear?

Do sexual media content affect teenagers' sexual beliefs and behaviour?

Can the mass media be used to promote responsible sexual behaviour among teenagers?

Hypotheses

The study will test the following hypotheses;

Sexual behaviour among the youth is influenced by what they see on television.

Television is appropriate channel to educate the youth on responsible sexual behaviours.

Television has become a peer to the youth.

Limitation of the Thesis

For comparison reasons, the research is limited to researches done on the similar topic on argument impact of television on the sexual behaviour of youths. The study sample of teenagers between the age of 15 to 17 living in

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Starehe constituency may not give a fully representation of the each and every youth in the country. It's important to note that there no readily available research or documented information regarding to television viewing among teenagers in Kenya which would have added value to this research.

The study is limited in collection of primary data specifically in interviews and questionnaires. The question of whether the respondents will accept appointments, attend, answer and return the questionnaires in good time is delimitation to the research. It is important to mention that not all respondents will be able to reply to the questionnaires adequately due to reasons beyond the researcher's control, while some may have clerical errors. Concerted efforts will be ensured for better response and retrieval of important information from relevant sources.

Motivation

This study is important for Kenyan society, in understanding the impact of television on the sexual behaviours of youths. Furthermore, the information attained in this study could also help in understanding sexual decisions that are made by youths. As the country and the world as a whole are working towards combating the HIV and AIDS epidemic, it is imperative to try and understand the different aspects (peers, parents, television, as well as the media as a whole) that contribute to such decisions, particularly since statistics have highlighted that they are more vulnerable to being infected and are at the risk of experiencing teenage pregnancy.

Thesis Structure

The thesis will be segmented in chapters; the first chapter will concentrate on the sociological analysis of the topic whereby the study will look at the problem, its root-cause and what has been done by other researchers on teenagers' sexual attitudes and behaviour regarding to what they watch on televised media. In this particular chapter the study will look at various communication and psychological development theories which tend to explain teenage sexuality.

The subsequent chapter or segmentation of this study will document the research methodology in collecting primary data, sampling of respondents, data collection and analysis. The study uses descriptive survey research design whereby the researcher will describe a scenario to a respondent who will then give in-depth response on the same. The research population is drawn from teenagers of age 15-17 years old whereby stratified sampling will be applied to select the respondents.

The final chapter deals with elaboration of the communication strategies available such as injection theory and agenda setting theory followed by the justification of the communication theories through the research findings and details on the implementation of the proposed thesis. It will end with general conclusion based on the findings expressed from data analysis and discussed literature in view of thesis objectives.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter deals with literature concerning previous studies relating directly and indirectly to the influence of television on adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour. Furthermore, this chapter furnishes a detailed description of how different researchers view the underlying assumption of this study together with a consideration of the different methodologies employed to conduct the various studies which have resulted in similar conclusions.

This chapter further describes how television has influenced other aspects of adolescent life and behaviour. Although the study solely focuses on the impact of television, the study also describes mass media in order to broaden the perspective regarding media influence among adolescents. In addition, the researcher indicates how television influences other behaviours other than sexual. The reason of including other manifesting behaviours is to illustrate that if television is able to influence teenagers in this manner, it may also influence their sexual attitudes and behaviour.

Teenagers and Sexuality

Teenagers undergo adolescence which is viewed as a time of adjustment and is often characterised by turmoil resulting from issues regarding identity and sexual identity and orientation. A key period of sexual exploration and development occurs during adolescence. During this time, individuals begin to consider which sexual behaviours are enjoyable, moral, and appropriate

for their age group. Many adolescents become sexually active during this period.

Sexuality is a developmental milestone among teenagers with which each generation struggles. Sexuality encompasses behavioural components with boundaries of sexual activity moving in an increasingly permissive direction. Perceptions appear to be constant through the ages while only the circumstances change. An emphasis on individual freedom and rights-driven culture in societies may be influential in this apparent permissiveness. A number of factors which include media and the internet, urbanization, electronic communication, peer influences and the breakdown of traditional parental and community structures also play a part. Therefore, we look at these factors in more detail.

Factors Influencing Sexual Behaviour

There are many factors that contribute to and influence sexual behaviours among adolescents. Family structure, age, gender, parenting styles, and type of parental communication have all been pointed out as factors that influence teenagers' behaviour. However, family structure has been of particular interest to most researchers as more adolescents are being exposed to family disruption and are moving away from traditional lifestyles. The positive or negative impact of these changes on adolescents may also influence their sexual behaviour. Teenage sexual attitudes and behaviours are also influenced by:

Biological and psychological factors within an individual – this refers to age, level of maturity and gender

Close relationships in family and peer groups – refers to the people with whom a teenager enjoys near, close or intimate relationships.

Socio-cultural contexts such as race, religion, school and the media – refers to the kind of environment from which a teenager come from, their belief systems, the kind of education, as well as the kind of media (television, print media, internet, radio), to which they have been exposed.

Consequently this research aims at determining television as an influencing factor on the sexual behaviour of teenagers in Starehe constituency.

One potential but largely unexplored factor that may contribute to sexual behaviours among adolescents is exposure to sexual content in the mass media. The average youth spends one third of each day exposed to media, and the majority of that exposure occurs outside of parental oversight.

Although mass media have been shown to have an influence on a broad range of behaviours and attitudes including violence, eating disorders, tobacco and alcohol use, surprisingly few studies have examined the effects of mass media on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.

Theoretical Perspectives: Attitudes and Behaviours

The potential for mass media to influence behaviour has been supported through a number of different psychosocial theories, hypotheses, and models. Although there is considerable variation in theoretical mechanisms by which media might affect adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviours, most posit that sexually related message content and behaviour act over time as stimuli to change consumer psychological, physiologic, and

behavioural function. The study thus analyses two theories namely Social-
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Learning Theory and Cultivation theory to relate the sexual behaviours among teenagers.

Social-Learning Theory

Bandura's social-learning theory provides ample evidence that even when children and adults have not actually performed a behaviour, they can learn by imitation. Bandura identifies three main processes involved in learning: direct experience, indirect or vicarious experience from observing others (modelling), and the storing and processing of complex information through cognitive operations. This theory suggests that behaviours are learned and that they are influenced by social context: " Television is seen as an increasingly influential agent of socialization that produces its effects through children's propensity to learn by imitation."

The premise of Social learning theory is that it focuses on viewers' personal connections with the portrayals via identification and perceived relevance to the self. The dimensions here emphasize on television characters as models of behaviour. The hypothesis proposes that specific critical portrayals may exert a stronger force on impression-formation and image-building than might the sheer frequency of television characters and behaviours viewed. This notion emphasizes the power of individual performances to affect viewers, most likely portrayals that speak to the viewer in some way.

Bandura's theory predicts that teenagers will imitate or model what they see on television when those television personalities are rewarded or are not punished for their behaviour, and are perceived as attractive, powerful, and similar. Indeed, evidence suggests that perceiving TV figures as sexual role models is associated with more permissive sexual attitudes, more extensive <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-television-on-sexual-behaviour-of-youths-media-essay/>

sexual experience, and greater dissatisfaction with one's sexual status and sexual experiences. Thus, it is expected here that the contributions of TV's sexual content will be stronger among teenagers who more closely identify or connect with the portrayals of television personalities.

In light of the aforesaid, the most common examples of social learning situations are television commercials, movies and music videos. Sexual content displayed in these programmes may suggest that certain sexual behaviour renders teenage boys and girls more attractive and admirable. The theory further indicates that human sexual behaviour is governed mainly by social conditioning, rather than endocrinal stimulation. Sexual modelling presented on television teaches affectionate techniques, reduces sexual inhibition, alters sexual attitudes, and shapes sexual behaviours by conveying norms: for instance, which behaviours are socially acceptable and which are not.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory posits that heavy exposure to mass media creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media-directed version of reality than with reality itself. Up to this point, the dominant theoretical model supporting this research has been the cultivation theory.

The cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, & Signorielli, 1994), proposes that television's consistent images and portrayals construct a specific portrait of reality, and as viewers watch more and more television, they gradually come to cultivate or adopt attitudes and expectations about the world that coincide with this portrait. Although this model has typically been employed

to explain the impact of TV violence, it has been applied successfully to the cultivation of attitudes about gender roles, politics and marriage.

Accordingly, if content analyses indicate that sex on TV is glamorous, prevalent, recreational, and relatively risk free, the cultivation model predicts that frequent teenage television viewers will be more inclined than sporadic viewers to hold and accept this perspective of sexuality.

Media portrayals and messages might affect the behaviour of teenagers over time by enabling them to acquire new attitudes and behaviours or by changing the likelihood that they will perform new or previously learned responses.

However, while the results reported thus far are provocative and informative, and do support the premises of this model, they offer a limited analysis of television's role in the sexual socialization process. It is argued here that viewing amounts should be seen as only one avenue through which TV exposure might affect teenagers. Indeed, the processes by which television viewing shapes viewers' attitudes and expectations are varied and complex, with several factors contributing at the same time.

Therefore, to better examine contributions of television exposure, other dimensions of viewing need to be considered. In particular, a key element missing has been the role of viewer involvement. The study believes that teenagers' perceptions of the portrayals and their connections with the material are likely to be critical factors in the socialization process. Drawing on the premises of several theoretical perspectives, I have outlined four aspects of viewer involvement which I believe may play an important role. It

is my argument that teenagers who feel more connected with the material and who are more involved in the viewing experience will be most affected by it. To contextualize the Cultivation theory, the study discusses viewing motivation, active viewing and perceived depiction.

Viewing Motivation

One dimension of cultivation theory involvement to be considered is viewing motivation, or teenagers' expected uses of television. Gratifications concepts contend that people use and select media to gratify specific needs, and that specific uses lead to differences in viewing behaviour and outcomes. While some viewing is believed to be more ritualized, in which a television is used to fill time, escape, or provide company, other television use is more instrumental, in which viewing is purposeful and goal-directed, perhaps driven by information-or arousal-seeking. In relation to the study, we focus on instrumental motives, more specifically on viewing TV to learn about the sex. The expectation is that the effects of TV's sexual content will be stronger among teenagers who are intentionally using TV to learn about sexual behaviour.

Active Viewing

A second dimension of Cultivation theory focuses on the level of active viewing. According to this construct, teenagers exhibit varying levels of activity when using the television, differing in their selectivity, attention to, and involvement with the content viewed. However, while the expectation is that the effect of TV content will therefore depend on one's level of active involvement, the direction of this effect is unclear. The suggestions are that active teenage viewers are more affected by television's messages; others

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indicate that passive teenager viewers are most vulnerable. In reconciling this debate, a current perspective suggests that different ways of being active contribute to different outcomes. It is argued that facilitative activity, which includes selectivity, attention, and involvement, is more likely to enhance television effects, whereas inhibitory activity, which includes avoidance, distraction, and scepticism, should deter them. Focusing here on facilitative activity only, the expectations are that the socializing effects of TV's sexual content will be stronger among teenage viewers who tend to engage in more facilitative activity.

Perceived Depiction

A third dimension of involvement considers the perceived realism of the portrayals. Although most television programs are fictional, there are many aspects of the portrayals (such as the clothing, physical settings, dialogue, and situations) that closely resemble those in real life. Consequently, most notions predict that television's impact will increase the more realistic its content is perceived to be. Evidence supports this premise, with cultivation effects appearing to work stronger for those who view the portrayals as realistic. Thus, it is expected that the socializing effect of television's sexual content will be stronger among teenage viewers who perceive its portrayals as more realistic.

Influence of Television on Teens

Television has proven to exert a large influence on people's attitudes and behaviour. It has been found to reflect and possibly shape the attitudes, values, and behaviours of young people. According to them, this medium has become so influential that it serves as a teacher, often providing a common

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source of information to young people. The role of media in teenagers' lives has raised concerns in many respects, such as violence, sexuality and body dissatisfaction.

Although numerous studies have demonstrated the effects of media on various behaviours, including violence and aggression, social stereotyping, and pro-social behaviours, the systematic process of examining sexual content on television and its impact on adolescent sexual behaviours is in its infancy. Studies have demonstrated clearly that sexual content is pervasive in TV programming, movies, music videos, and magazines; however, much less is known about sexual content on the radio (including remarks by presenters) and the sexual content of video and computer games. It is surprising that only a few studies have assessed the sexual content of the television, and none have specifically examined this content in relation to teenager exposure. This is particularly troublesome given that what little evidence there is indicates that the television programmes may contain the most sexually explicit content.

Studies on the effects of television on teenagers' sexual behaviour have found that prime-time programmes and music videos, focusing on sex outside marriage, promote more justifiable attitudes about premarital sex. Two cross-sectional surveys have linked frequent exposure to sexual television content and transition to sexual intercourse. However, because time order was not clear in these studies, Ward and Friedman further state that it is credible to conclude that teenagers who were having sexual intercourse were also those most interested in sexual content in the media, rather than that exposure to sexual media was accelerating the initiation of

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their sexual activity. The single longitudinal study on this topic found that adolescents (12-17 years old) who watched television shows with more sexual content were more likely than those who viewed fewer shows with sexual content to have engaged in more advanced sexual behaviour, as well as sexual intercourse, up to one year later.

Larson is of the opinion that the exposure to portrayals of sex may affect adolescents in developing beliefs about cultural norms as well. He states that television may create the illusion that sex is more central to daily life than it truly is and may promote sexual initiation as a result, a process known as media cultivation.

Exposure to the social models provided by television may also alter beliefs about the likely outcome of engaging in sexual activity. Social learning theory predicts that teens who see characters having casual sex without experiencing negative consequences will be more likely to adopt the behaviours portrayed. Although televised sexual portrayals can theoretically inhibit sexual activity when they include depictions of sexual risks (such as the possibility of contracting an STI or becoming pregnant), abstinence, or the need for sexual safety, this type of depiction occurs in only negligibly of shows with sexual content. As a result, sexual content on television is far more likely to influence sexual behaviour among teenagers than discourage it.

Teenage Sexual Behaviour in Kenya

It has been documented that modernisation increases opportunities for sexual encounters and provides new models for sexual behaviour. The

results suggest that modernisation favour transgression of the more restrictive traditions that existed decades. The scenario in Kenya regarding to teenage sexuality, little has been done to study the trends on the issue.

Some of the close related studies done have mainly focused on sex education and reproductive health among adolescents. Problems related to sexuality and related behaviours seem to play a central role in the lives of many teenagers. In many parts of Kenya sexual debut begins early and in the absence of information and services. They state 7 out of 10 young people in Kenya have had sex before the age of 19. This high level of sexual activity is associated with risks such as HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, unsafe abortion, economic hardship and school dropout. Currently 5 in 10 girls in Kenya have begun childbearing before age 20 years. In most communities in Kenya, adolescents are faced with many of the same problems and violations of rights that may lead to sexual abuse.

In their report, they have identified some reasons to explain this situation; the break down in traditional family systems in both urban and rural areas, influence of the mass media and modernisation as well as the lack of access to information and services are just some of the factors. In some cases they have pointed out that there is poor packaging of information for teens' consumption hence having a negative impact on their sexual behaviours.

In compounding this, it illustrates that not only do teenagers lack the right information and skills they need to make sound, healthy choices, but they are at particularly high risk of serious, long-term consequences of poor

decision-making about sexual activity regarding to STIs, sexual abuse and early parenting.

Narrowing it down to area of study, Kenya boasts over five national television stations and cable television. These stations broadcast various programmes featuring music videos, films, educative programmes, soap operas, all these shows run under various themes which may or may not have sexual connotations. Due to limited dedication to sex education among teens, the outcome is that these teens will rely on their own judgement or peer advice to make decisions regarding to sex.

Thesis Critique

Based on this review, the study identified many gaps in our knowledge of the sexual content of various television especially Kenya, the amount of exposure to it by adolescents, and the impact of this exposure. Moreover, there is a noticeable scarcity of well-conducted, scientifically rigorous studies that examine the impact of sexual content in the television media on sexual behaviours among adolescents, and there are no studies that have longitudinally examined the cumulative effects of sexual content in different types of media.

It is critical that longitudinal research be conducted, and within the multilevel context of child development: that is to say, different groups of adolescents (defined by age, geographic location, tribe, domestic situation, and other variables) have different media diets, and identical diets may have differing effects depending on a number of factors.

Based on this review, future studies should survey parents to assess the effectiveness of parental involvement, communication, supervision, and monitoring of media sexual content in the media in influencing the sexual attitudes and behaviours of teenagers. Also there is a need to evaluate adolescent and parent media-literacy education to determine best-practice interventions and their impact on youth viewing choices, interpretation of content, and sexual attitudes and behaviours: Intervention studies are needed to examine whether current media-literacy education has an impact on adolescent sexual attitudes, decision-making, and behaviours and how such programs may be improved to best protect teens.

Throughout the study, there no are tangible researches in relation to teen sexual behaviours done which has taken into account early initiation of sexual intercourse, number of sexual partners, other sexual behaviours such as oral sex, dating violence among teenagers.

Conclusively, this study categorically urges that there is need to address potential mediating variables such as puberty, peer factors, society and family factors (e. g., parental supervision and monitoring of media use); only in such ways can we determine the effects of television on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on discussing the theoretical framework that underlines this study. A review of social learning theory and cultivation theory with the main emphasis placed on cultivation theory. The importance of observing modelling behaviour, attitudes and viewing motivations of

teenagers is addressed, as is the fundamental assumption of social learning theory and cultivation theory.

The modelling process, factors influencing observa