

Assess the  
usefulness of the  
hypodermic syringe  
model of the mass  
media essay sam...

[Media](#)



Assess the usefulness of the Hypodermic Syringe model of the mass media.

The hypodermic Syringe Model (HSM) is an early theory model, which believes that there is a direct correlation between the violence and anti-social behaviour portrayed in different media types (e. g. Television, computer games and films). Sociologists found that the most vulnerable audience to the HSM are children and teenagers. This is because they are still in the early stages of socialization so are therefore very impressionable. A prime example to support this theory is the case of Jamie Bugler. Jamie was a 2 year old boy that was abducted and murdered by two 10 year old boys. The boys had apparently watched 'Childs Play 3' before they murdered the toddler, and as the murder was very similar to the death in the film newspapers such as 'The Sun' created a debate to whether such violence in the media should be accepted. However, when the case was carried out, the police found no actual evidence of Jamie's killers watching 'Childs Play 3' or that they had been influenced by it. Leading on from this point, 'Imitation' or 'Copycat Violence' have also shown a relationship with the media. Early studies focused on conducting experiments in laboratory situations to test if this theory was true. A main case study for this is Bandura, who looked for a direct cause-and-effect relationship between media content and violence.

Testing 4 groups of children, he showed 3 a video of a woman beating up a 'bobo' doll and the 4th group no violence. Then, when placed in the room with the bobo doll the 3 groups that were shown the violence supported Banduras theory by also acting violently (e. g. hitting and kicking the doll in the same way the woman first did). The 4th group acted less violently, thus concluding imitation or copycat violence. Support for this theory also came <https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-usefulness-of-the-hypodermic-syringe-model-of-the-mass-media-essay-sample/>

from other sociologists such as Martin and McCabe. they argued that such media violence has a ' disinhibition effect' which convinced children that in some social situations, the ' normal' rules that govern conflict and difference can be suspended. The problem with this experiment are the laboratory issues of it being small scale, cannot control the variables prior to the experiment and it being low in validity as it is not in a natural setting, just to name a few. Desensitisation is another theory connected to the HSM, created by Elizabeth Newson.

She argued that ' sadistic' images in films and on TV too easily encouraged viewers to identify with violent perpetrators rather than the victims. She also concluded that teenagers and children are exposed to thousands of violent acts and killings throughout their childhood. This created a ' drip-drap' effect, from being exposed to violence over such a long period of time teenagers became desensitized. this results in accepting violent social behaviour, resulting in her conclusion that young people are more likely to behave antisocially than previous generations. Alternatively, desensitisation is contrasted with sensitization. Media sociologists (for example Jack Young) argue that seeing the effects of violence along with the pain and suffering caused to the victim and their families make us more aware of the consequences. In some cases, the violence portrayed can be so shocking and disturbing that the viewers are put off creating any violence or aggression. This results in views of the aggressive and violent media are actually less likely to commit violent acts.

Along with the laboratory problems, the HSM alternatively has other criticisms. Some media sociologists actually claim that media violence can prevent real life violence, such as Feshbach and Sanger. They found that screen violence can provide a 'safe outlet' for people aggression. By looking at the effects of violent TV teenagers, they carried out the following research. A large sample of teenage boys from private schools and residential homes watched TV for 6 weeks. Some groups could only watch aggressive TV, and the other could only watch non-aggressive TV. The results showed that after the 6 week period, the boys that had to watch aggressive programmes were found to actually be less aggressive in their behaviour compared to the others. It was then suggested that by watching an exciting film aggressive energy is released into safe outlets as the viewers immerse themselves in the action. This is known as Catharsis. Further problems have also been identified with the various research conducted above in the methodology of hypodermic syringe studies (e. g. Bandura's have been questioned). The studies (noted by Gauntlett) have often been completed in the laboratory which, as previously mentioned, creates low validity as they are in an artificial context and are not in a natural setting.

Children especially do not behave naturally under these environments and conditions, so this can make the sociologists findings questionable. Small sample sizes are often used, which means that the findings cannot be generalised. this means that the results cannot be applied to a greater audience with confidence as some of the results may not be the same when the experiment is carried out with more people. Another criticism against the

<https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-usefulness-of-the-hypodermic-syringe-model-of-the-mass-media-essay-sample/>

HSM is that some studies are not entirely clear on how violence is defined as there are a number of different types of violence that are put into different categories (for example, authentic violence from war pictures compared with sporting violence such as boxing). This is associated with whether these different types of violence have the same or different effects upon their audiences, and if different audiences react differently to different levels and types of violence. In the media studies this is unclear, and it is often argued that the HSM tends to be selective to one particular type of violence; only focusing on particular types of fictional violence. Finally, it is argued that the effects model fails to put violence into context.

Morrison makes a point of it viewing all violence as wrong and it fails to see that audiences interpret the violence differently as they interpret it according to the narrative context. Morrison's research concludes that the context in which screen violence occurs has different effects on the audience. In his study, he showed women, men and war veterans various clips but two from 'Ladybird, Ladybird' and 'Pulp Fiction'. Most audiences found the scene from 'Ladybird, Ladybird' where the man beats up his wife most disturbing as the context is so real and strong. They were also concerned for the child actors on the scene, and were distressed from the scene's realism. This is contrasted by the 'Pulp Fiction' scene where a man accidentally shoots another man mid-conversation by going over a bump in the road. Because of the light-hearted dialogue, viewers found the scene humorous and not violent. This evidence supports Morrison's theory. Another main argument against using the HSM is that children are more sophisticated media users than the model makes them out to be. They are not as

venerable to the violence and can distinguish between fictional and non-fiction violence from a very early age. This theory is supported by two sociologists: Buckingham and Wood.

Buckingham found that children are sophisticated in their understanding and are more media literate than expected. Wood, by conducting a small scale study of a boys use of video, concludes that violence of horror films is all part of growing up. This is from studying the boys reactions to watching a horror video when their parents are away. By being able to swear and behave in a macho way it allows the boys to provoke their masculinity. In comparison to the HSM, active audience approaches see the media as far less influential and people have a choice on how to be influenced and consider the media. The ' Two Step Flow Model' is the first version of this view. This accounts for a completely opposite view compared to the HSM model as that is primarily based on being influenced. Created by Katz and Lazarsfeld, they argue that an individual interprets media in different ways according to interaction/conversations that they have had with peers, friends and family. This results in modifying or rejecting media messages. Another argument of theirs is that social networks have are dominated by people who have strong ideas on a range of matters, exposing different types of media. As these people are looked up to and listen to by others, they have been named ' Opinion Leaders'. From this, an individual's interpretations are passed on to their social circulating and therefore start expanding. However, before the spread of messages, the media messages have to go through two steps.

The first is the opinion leader needs to be exposed to the content, and the second is those who respect the opinion leader internalize their interpretation of the content. This process will not work without those two steps (according to Katz and Lazarsfeld). On the other hand, critics of this model point out that there is no guarantee that the opinion leader has not been subjected to a desensitising effect. For example, a gang leader may pass on the message that violence is ok and acceptable from playing on too many violent computer games that do not show the consequences of the actions committed. Also, socially isolated individuals are most at risk, not people who look up to 'Opinion Leaders'. This is because they are not members of any social network so do not have access to an opinion leader who might change the individuals mind in a more positive and healthy way. Another version of active audience approaches is created by Klapper.

It suggests that media messages must pass through three filters to have any effect. The first filter is named Selective Exposure. The audience must choose to read/view/listen to the content of specific media, but the audience's choice depends entirely upon their interests. There is a restriction to this however as if films are chosen, there is an age limit put in place by the BBFC certificates system which prevents some audiences from viewing a particular film/TV show. Selective perception is the second filter, which is when the audience may not accept the media message at all. They can take notice of the content, but can reject and abandon it. Festinger argues that people will only seek out information that confirms their existing attitudes and view of the world. This particularly applies to newspapers.

Finally, the third and final filter is Selective Retention. most people only remember things that they broadly agree with, but the messages must 'stick in their mind'. Postman argues that we live in a 'three-minute culture'- the attention span of an average member of society is three minutes or less. In conclusion, Klapper suggests that the three filters involve being actively chosen by the audience. This whole process and second version of active audiences approaches is called The Selective Filter Model. In conclusion, the evidence collected for the HSM model is weak as most of the studies that have looked at how children are affected when TV first arrives in a society have found little change. Overall, there is no conclusive evidence either way that violence shown in the media influences or changes people's behaviour.