

# **Violence in entertainment media: implications on national security in Nigeria**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This work is an appraisal of the entertainment industry aimed at ascertaining the linkages between dramatised violence and the security challenges in the country. The study found out that certain factors, called aversive events, physiological arousals or simply environments of frustration, are known for linking violence in entertainment with aggressive behaviours that challenge national security. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the various issues of crises, militia and terror groups, violent demonstrations in higher institutions of learning, arm robbery, kidnapping, ritualism, bullying and sexual assaults prevalent in the country are attendant challenges of the marriage between violence in entertainment media and the frustrations of citizens in Nigeria. The study recommends, amongst other things, that the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should ensure that violent content is eliminated in home videos except where it is presented as an evil that should be avoided; in which case, the aggressive character must receive obvious punishment as a moral warning to viewers. Again, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) must join the fight against corruption by organising and conducting credible elections that will produce credible leaders who will eliminate all environments of frustration that impregnate violent entertainment media to give birth to social vices and insecurity in Nigeria.*

**Key words: Violence, entertainment, media, security**

## INTRODUCTION

The entertainment media have come under serious scholarly criticism with regards to issues of violence. This is because it is often dressed in the regalia of violence. (Bayrakter, 2013) for example, accuses the media of marketing entertainment contents with violence. (Weight, 2011) also complains that the media have given legitimacy to violent content in the market place; while (Martinez, 2002) describes it as “turning dimes into dollars.”

Violent entertainment appears to have become media epidemic. Most television series and movies these days are story-lined on exchange of aggression between and among humans or between humans and robots or animals.

A plethora of researches have been conducted aimed at determining the prevalence of violence and its linkages with real social life. For example, a seven-year study by Laval University professors on six Canadian television networks, examining films, situation comedies, dramatic series and children’s programming, cited by (MAN, 2013) states that television (TV) shows in 2001 averaged 40 acts of violence per hour, with Francophone viewers experiencing the greatest increase.

A recent content analysis by the US National Television Violence Study, of more than 8,000 hours of programming on cable and broadcast television in the United States from 1996 to 1998, cited by (Bushman and Anderson, 2011) found that about 60% of television programmes contained violence; projecting that by the time the average American child graduates from elementary school, he or she will have seen more than 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other assorted acts of violence like rapes and assaults on network television alone.

Another study by (Provenzo, 1991), cited in (Ebarstadt and Layden, 2010) found that 85% of the most popular view games in America were violent games.

In Nigeria, Haynes, cited by (Kur and Edogoh, 2010) write that the advent of home video in Nollywood has introduced a new culture for entertainment characterized by brutal vengeance, armed robbery, ritual killings, assassinations, wife-snatching, kidnapping, man’s inhumanity to man and other different kinds of violence.

Cartoons today often feature dramatic display of bombs and weapons among other violent aspects. Music and sports are not exceptions, for example, a recent content analysis of 2,000 music videos by (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold and Baumgardner, 2003) indicates that at least 15% of them contained violence.

In all literatures and empirical works reviewed, the linkages between media dramatised violence and security challenges in Nigeria have not been found. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing a definite answer to the uncertainty of the linkages between violence entertainment media and the plethora of security challenges in Nigeria.

## **CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

### **(A) THE CONCEPT OF MEDIA VIOLENCE**

Media violence in this work is defined as the visual depiction of aggressive behaviour among characters in the media story. According to (Gentile, Saleem, & Anderson, 2007) such characters can be human or nonhuman, cartoonish or visual realistic; fictional, unrealistic or even animations.

Aggression, according to psychologists is a behaviour that is intended to cause harm to another individual. In a survey of 23 countries of the world, using over 5,000 children (12 years old) (Groebel, 1999) found that media violence is a universal phenomenon. The study also found that 99% of children in western countries and 88% in African countries including those from rural, urban or even refugee camps had access to a TV set; and that almost nine out of ten of the world's children knew "Terminator" – the violent movie character in Arnold Schwarzenegger film.

Some critics argue that media violence is simply representative of real-world violence; meaning that violence seen on the media is a direct replication of what is happening in society both by frequency and intensity. However, (Gentile, Saleem, & Anderson, 2007) states that the media normalise an unrealistic and exaggerated culture of violence in their viewers by over-exemplifying the frequency and intensity of violence. Citing a Content Analysis by Oliver on Portrayals of Crime, Race, and Aggression in Reality-Based Police Shows (1 (Gentle, Saleem &

Anderson, 2007) again argue that the reality-based police in America shows 87% of the criminal suspects are associated with violent crimes, however, in reality, only 13% of the crimes are violent.

Again, a study by another film critic (Medved, 1995) noted that “about 350 characters appear each night on prime-time TV; an average of seven of these people is murdered every night. If this rate applied in reality, then in just 50 days everyone in the United States of America would be killed and the last left could turn off the TV” Media violence therefore, is not a replica of violence in reality; it is often over-exaggerated both in the frequency and the intensity of the real violence in society.

## **(B) THE CONCEPT OF ENTERTAINMENT**

Entertainment may be defined as the pleasure or enjoyment given to a person or the public, meant to hold their attention for the period of time the object or occasion is perceived.

Entertainment has been part of human life. (Rothman, 2003) says it is “the storehouse of national values,” which means every nation or country cherishes entertainment and upholds it as an important aspect of life of the citizenry.

People are generally attached to entertainment. This is evident in the large crowds we often witness at entertainment events such as sports, cinema shows, street performance, etc and the filial attachment to the media of entertainment such as television, comedy books, festivals, etc. A study by Brock and Livingston, cited by (Bates & Ferri, 2010) found that more than 50% of Americans would demand over a million dollars, with several others demanding over a billion dollars if they were to give up television for the rest of their lives.

Sociologists have discovered that entertainment does not provide only pleasure or entertainment. (Stebbins. 2006) for instance writes that although laughter is the main emotion, which entertainers seem to stir, they do provide the audience with aesthetics and emotionally moving experiences. Examples of such entertainment include soap operas and televised crime shows. He further states:

Some stage arts are performed for “experts” or for a variety of other types of listeners whose reasons for consuming the art are other than the pursuit of pleasure.

The role of entertainment therefore, is actually broader than amusement, pleasure or enjoyment. The entertainment industry involves professionals and amateurs. According to (Stebbins, 2006) entertainment professionals are public centred, serving the public needs through arts, sports, science, and entertainment while the amateurs are centred on individual (clients’) need of amusement and pleasure. Discussion of the role of entertainment should therefore, go hand-in-hand with discussion of the careers of those who fill it (the entertainers).

Very often, individual entertainment stars have been the object of interest to the public with children and youth modelling their lives after them not minding whether in real life situations, these stars actually live the kind of lives they are identified with in entertainment. This is one instance in which entertainment poses a threat to society. It is common sight in Nigeria to see children assume the role of aggressive actors they watch in entertainment while practicing such aggression against their playmates using miniaturised weapons. In a short time, such children only need access to real weapons in order to join the real business of violence. This partly explains the prevalence of child soldiers among militant groups in Nigeria like the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), *Issakaba* in the east, and *boko haram* in the north-east, to mention just a few.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This work is anchored on the theory of Utilitarianism. According to (Causer, Tonra & Wallace, 2012), utilitarianism as a distinct ethical school of thought emerged in the eighteenth century, championed by Jeremy Bentham in his book “*An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*” printed in 1780 but not published until 1789.

Utilitarianism, a theory of normative ethics (the study of ethical actions), holds that the proper course of action is the one that maximises utility, usually defined as maximising total

benefit and reducing suffering. In other words, people should act in the best interest of everyone concerned rather than for the interest of a few. The catch-phrase here is “the greatest good for the greatest number,” and the consuming passion is the good of the majority, rather than the interest of a single or few individuals.

This theory is found relevant for this article because the issue of violence in entertainment media is obviously an ethical issue. Some people believe in the good effects of dramatised violence, evident from the scholarly review above. Entertainment media however, is aimed at happiness for all and sundry in society. The tenets of this theory will therefore, guide us in taking an ethically accepted standpoint on the issue of violence in the entertainment media to the benefit of majority Nigerians.

## **EVOLUTION OF VIOLENCE IN ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA**

Violence is not a new trend in entertainment; it dates back to ancient times before the coming of Jesus Christ. For example, (MAN, 2013) writes that between 2000 BC and 44 A.D, the ancient Egyptians entertained themselves with plays re-enacting the murder of their god –Osiris. (Bushman and Anderson, 2011) also write that violence in drama is as old as drama itself – from Greek drama to the Elizabethan theatre, to modern electronic dramas. Early violent dramas include William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *the great train robbery*, directed by Edwin Porter in 1903, etc.

(MAN, 2013) reports that the ancient Romans were given to lethal spectator sports as well, and in 380 B.C Saint Augustine lamented that his society was addicted to gladiator games and “drunk with the fascination of bloodshed.” This explains that attraction to violence is a historical trend. According to (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold and Baumgardner, 2003) “massive violent entertainment” is one of the explosive contributions of the mass media to society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A new paradigm of violence which holds that violence is beneficial to individuals and society was introduced during this period.

## **VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT AND HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY**

Generally human beings like watching violence. It is a common thing today in our society that key players in violent sports including Wrestling and Boxing like *John Cena, Undertaker, Big Show*, etc have become household names and many children have chosen to be called after them. This is because our society identifies with violence.

In the US, (Bushman and Anderson, 2011) write that the “American public has consumed violent entertainment media as if it were Ambrosia.” Citing the findings of Buchman and Funk (1996) they state that American girls and boys reported that the majority of their favourite games were violent ones (59% for girls and 73% for boys).

(Goldstein, 2011) reports that in Japan both men and women heavily read “Manga”- an extraordinary gruesome comic books that feature extreme violence. Again, most of the local African movies like Nollywood films have storylines on home violence but interestingly, media reports have indicated they are selling heavily both at home and abroad. Now, why is violent entertainment so attractive? (Goldstein, 2011) provides certain facts about violent entertainment attraction.

- (i) People like violent entertainment for justice motives – they want to see justice enacted and violent movies may reassure them that Good can prevail over Evil. In the Nigerian context for instance, children from aggrieved regions like Niger Delta and the extreme northern Nigerian where the people believed are marginalised in one way or the other, and who are regularly exposed to violent media content will certainly grow up with violent tendencies as a way of seeking self-justice.
- (ii) Some adherent of images of violent, death and dying seek excitement, others companionship or social acceptance through shared experience.
- (iii) People prefer realistic violence as presented in sports, movies and news reports.

- (iv) Violent entertainment appeals mostly to males, (mostly in groups) - those with above-average level of aggression and a moderately high need for excitement. This is the likelihood of the formation of militia groups in such regions with high level of grievances like Niger Delta, for example Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and Boko Haram in the north of northern Nigeria.

## **EFFECTS OF VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT ON SOCIETY**

Several studies on media effects have confirmed linkages between violent media entertainment and human behaviour in society. Most of these effects are linked with antisocial behaviours such as fighting, bullying, home violence, homicide, genocide and suicide etc.

(Bayraktar, 2013), citing the reports by Centerwall (1989) states that “after the introduction of television in the American households, there occurred a significant increase in the number of violent crimes.” The US Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001, cited by (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold and Baumgardner, 2003) also provides that adolescents and adults in the United States still experience over 6 million such crimes annually. (Groebel, 1999) in a work title “the UNESCO study on media violence” writes that real violence, especially among the youth is growing in relations to the increase in the quantity of aggressive media content consumed daily by this group.

Again, the annual review of researches on public health in America for the year 2006, quoted by (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006) indicates that fictional television and film violence contribute to both short-term and long-term increase in aggression and violence in young viewers; and that exposure to violence on television and video games increases the risk of violent behaviour on the viewer’s part just as bringing up a child in an environment filled with violence increases the risk of violent behaviour in the child. (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006, p. 1 & 394) further states that:



Weight of evidence indicates that violent actions seldom result from a single source; rather, multiple factors converging over time contribute to such behaviour. Accordingly, the influence of the violent mass media is best viewed as one of the many potential factors that influence the risk of violence... the average overall size of the effect is large enough to place it in the category of known threats to public health.

According to (Bayraktar, 2013), the most negative effects of violent media entertainment are on children. This can best be explained using the **social learning theory** by Albert Bandura and his colleagues. The theory, according to (Baran and Davis, 2005) states that individuals learn by observation in social situations, and that they tend to act like those they observe in action on the media. By implications, much exposure of children to violent media content does build in them violent tendencies in their relationship with people in society – the tendency of seeking self-justice earlier mentioned from Goldstein's report. Several studies on media effect suggest that children imitate either directly or indirectly what they see on the screen or they integrate the observed behaviour patterns into their own repertoire. Social learning theory also considers the role of cognition. If a child sees that certain behaviour, for instance an aggressive one, is successful, he/she tend to believe that the same is applicable in his/ her own life.

(Brodeur, 2012) further explains that violence in entertainment has three kinds of influence on children: (1) most of them perceive it as approval for bullying, hitting and humiliating their peers who offend them, (2) it also encourages between 5 and 10% of children viewers to accept the treatment they suffer without seeking help, (3) it reduces empathy in them and makes them prefer ganging up with the aggressor instead of helping the victim.

Another school of thought sees violence in entertainment in a positive light. Proponents of this school are supported by the tenets of **mood management theory**. The theory, according to (Folarin, 1989) implies that media can help us cope with problems in our lives – problems that regularly induce bad moods. Based on the tenets of this theory, therefore, entertainment violence impacts positively on human society. (Baran and Davis, 2009) explaining this theory state that people who suffer relationship problems are more interested in horror entertainment.

Violent reactions arising from violent media content are also linked with the personal state of the viewer. This is the position of the **frustration-aggression-hypothesis** by Leonard Berkowitz. It is assumed here that viewers who have been frustrated in their actual environment, example people who feel physically deprived, tend to read the media violence as a signal to channel their frustration into aggression. This explains why children and youth in areas with social problems are open to media-aggression effects.

In another context, it is argued that the glamour of violent entertainment has something to do with physiological arousal of the viewer. (Groebel, 1999) for instance writes that people tend to react more aggressively in a state of arousal. In his **theory of excitation-transfer** (1960s to early 1970s), Dolf Zillmann also explains that the violent content would not result to violent reaction if it is not accompanied by formal features such as sound and visual effects. This might explain why arousing TV scenes would lead to higher aggression among viewers who are already frustrated or angered.

Scholars of cultural studies have also linked cultural construction of meaning with the manner in which viewers react to violent content. According to this school, the decoding and interpretation of images on the media largely depends on traditions and conventions. This could explain why within a national culture different groups would read a picture as aggressive in some regions while in some regions it will not elicit aggression. Cultural theatrical performances in Nigeria are full of exchange of aggression between puppets depicting the traditional powers of the ethnic group in waging successful war against those they consider as invaders. Such performances are capable of building aggression or war confidence in children and the youth. These could be linked with several violent reactions that are ethnic-based, which have been recorded in the history of the world, Nigeria particularly.

In summary, the effect of violence in entertainment is dependent on various conditions or factors including:

1. Frequency of exposure – effect of long term exposure: when people (men particularly) get used to bloody scenes, their empathy towards aggression victims is reduced. Violence is internalised and becomes a normal way of life.
2. Characteristics of the viewer and his surroundings – environment of frustration, such as idleness or unemployment, corruption in the land, electoral malpractice, etc. People who feel frustrated in their environment for instance, tend to read violence in entertainment as a call to channel their frustration into aggression. This is often spurred by proliferation of arms (weapons).
3. Mood of the viewer or physiological arousals, such as hunger and poverty, feelings of injustice, etc.
4. Cultural traditions and conventions, etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nigeria is bedevilled with a lot of issues that frustrate her citizens, called them aversive events or physiological arousals. These include the high rate of unemployment, poverty, corruption in public offices, injustice in the judicial system, electoral failures, etc. There is also the exigency of long-term exposure to violent entertainment content on the mass media which comes in forms of movies, video games, children cartoons, sports such as wrestling, boxing, judo, etc.

The linkages between violence in entertainment media and these environments of frustration or physiological arousals have been established in the various scholarly works reviewed. It is therefore obvious that the various issues of crises, militia and terror groups, violent demonstrations in higher institutions of learning, arm robbery, kidnapping, ritualism, bullying and sexual assaults prevalent in the country are attendant challenges to the marriage between violence in entertainment media and the frustrations of citizens in Nigeria.

There is conflict of interests over issues of violence as reviewed from the various literatures and empirical studies; it therefore means violence is an ethical issue in entertainment media. This

is also supported by the fact that the issue of violence is a key factor in most of the media codes of professionalism. (NBC, 2006) for example provides that: “a programme portraying excessive pain, physical violence or horror shall not be broadcast, unless relevant to character development or to the advancement of the theme or plot: even so, graphic and gory details shall be avoided,” etc.

According to the theory of utilitarianism, which is our guiding framework, activities that are ethically right are those that produce the greatest good or happiness for the greater number in society. Since violence is largely considered bad and with greater negative effects on society, the entertainment media cannot serve the society in ethically responsible manner if they continue waxing in the floodtide of violence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusion, this study recommends the following:

1. The Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should ensure that violent content is eliminated in home videos except where it is presented as an evil that should be avoided. In which case, the aggressive act in the film must receive a clear punishment as a moral warning to viewers.
2. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should ban the transmission of violent sports such as wrestling, boxing, etc on all home channels in Nigeria.
3. The NFVCB should collaborate with the Nigerian Immigration Service to ensure that imported movies conform to approved content for home consumption in Nigeria.
4. The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) must join the fight against corruption by organising and conducting credible elections that will produce credible leaders who will eliminate all environments of frustration or the physiological arousals that impregnate violent entertainment media to produce social vices and insecurity in Nigeria.

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