Scientific Research Publishing

Mass Media and Children, Alertness Should Be Crucial for Safety (Including a Case of Media in Tanzania)

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Abstract

This article articulates the effects of the advancement of Mass Media, and how advantageous it is to society, but how should it be used with caution as it also holds ineffective causes, especially for young adults and children. All groups of people are called to use it attentively, but particularly parents and guardians are further provided with suggestions on how to guide their children in the use. The study focused on a descriptive approach, deliberately involving identified and selected individuals who are knowledgeable and suitable to the area of interest. The situation of the progress state of Mass Media is expressed with mere examples of the effects of Mass Media stated by different scholars, Media personnel and other involved individuals in the area of study, with a focus on television medium, in the case of an East African Country—Tanzania, but also globally and with New Media use.

1. Introduction

It is difficult to imagine the world without Mass media, especially with Radio, Television and the Internet, for an average standard family or person, because most of us use these tools every day continuously as we are at home, working place, school along the way in our cars, bus and almost everywhere.

Mass media include television, radio, press, computers, the internet, mobile phones, landline telephones as well as video cameras which are used to record pictures. However, television transmissions are extremely attractive and they affect several senses simultaneously which means that they fully engage the viewer.

Nowadays, the internet tends to compete with television, offering us the possibility of watching films, series or Television programs. It is also widely used to listen to music, play computer, communicate with others, and meet with new people. The use of media takes a lot of time and pushes others on spending more free time with it than with physical beings.

As Mass media play an important role in everyday life, at home and at school, so it is not surprising that media greatly influence children and young people as these are the key places where they hugely spend their time. Yet, it is children who are more impacted by it with regard to the fact that it has to do with their growing and the social culture and biological state they are conveyed to.

It is a fact that social media through the means of Internet, Twitting, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tiktok and alike have grabbed a lot of the attention of many. But worldwide, with children, television is still the most influential of them all and therefore this article will concentrate more on this type of media. Gerbner et al. (2002) recognized researchers on television content, in his book titled: *growing up with television*, he explains that Television is the source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history. It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live our lives, even though new forms of media seem to shoot up quickly.

Television can be for more than eight hours a day in the average Tanzanian's home. Television can be switched on around 3 in the afternoon after school to 10 in the night, whether watched directly or in the background. And over the weekend, it might even be more switched on from early morning to late night. Unlike other media, in more circumstances, you do not have to wait for, plan for, and go out to pay much money for television. It comes to you directly at home and it is there all the time. It has become a member of the family, telling its stories patiently, interestingly, and persistently. Just as television requires no mobility, it requires no literacy. In fact, it shows and tells about the world to the less educated and even the nonreader.

Media and the Problem of Unethical Content

These vast amounts of information from the Media that society receives, could be important or misleading, constructive or distrustful but very influential. Society gets influenced by what is offered by the media, and in turn, the media becomes powerful in society. To reduce its influence, the media is monitored, limited and guided by national agencies created by different governments. But even with the establishment of these agencies misleading and unethical content continues to be rampant and here is where the problem arises of having unethical content in Media which has become a long-time problematic challenge to many countries worldwide.

With regard to Okpo (2013), the problem of unethical content within the Media/Newspapers and electronic operates under society's pressures. There are pres-

sures imposed by ownership and control; these are pressures that, directly or indirectly, shape the media policies and the output of the media products. Many of the ethical dilemmas journalists or media staff face begin with the inherent conflict between the individual's role as a journalist and his or her employer's quest for profit.

In Tanzania, with regard to the general data of unethical content, particularly on television stations, collected from The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA), under TCRA content committee reports on television stations that were penalized and cautioned with regard to violating the TCRA regulations of Broadcasting Services (content) Regulations of 2005. And the electronic and postal communications (Radio and Television broadcasting content) regulations of 2018, they revealed 6 cases in 2016, of which 4 were related to obscene and violent content, and 2 cases in 2017 which were generally about unethical content. In 2019, no case was found on television related to unethical content, 3 cases in 2020, of which two were related to obscene and violent content, 2 cases in 2021, of which 1 was of obscene content and 3 cases up to march, 2022, in which 1 was of obscene content. However, such low-rate cases were reported in particular years. The researcher conducted a content analysis for a single program on a local Television for three months (January, February and March, 2022) and observed unethical content daily during the particular program.

Furthermore, the researcher observed that all local television stations have music programs that are unquestionably unethical and are aired during normal times, on which it is possible for children to view such programs.

However, Tanzania is under a media with a social responsibility theory practice, which is also mostly practiced by a vast of democratic countries, on which this theory has an obligation to society, and media ownership is a public trust, News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant. The media should be free, but self-regulated. The media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct under some circumstances, the government may need to intervene to safeguard the public interest. But the actual practicability in this area has been a challenge and therefore country governments should thrive to find means of overcoming this problematic status. But as the authorities and the governments continue to do so, parents and Guardians should be at the forefront of these efforts in order to rescue the younger generation before the worse cripples into the younger generation.

2. Recognition of the Problematic Status Globally

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2022) contains comprehensive standards for the Convention together with other things recognize the quality of content which will promote children's development and well-being (Article 17) and stresses the need for children to be protected against material that can harm their well-being and mentions the media and parents or guardians how to act solely for children protection.

The Council of Europe (2019) had also shown concern through what is going on, on the media and documented an article expressing on how the UN Convention on the rights of the Child is aware of the harm that could be caused to the minor through the media and stressing on the essential of how the society as well is responsible on protecting the minor against harmful materials from the media. The council expresses that while it is the task of governments to create and ensure effective adoption and implementation of adequate laws and policies, the task of protecting the best interests of the child should engage all members of society how various media literacy initiatives can be used to target all relevant groups of society and empower them to take an active part in preventing and adequately responding to instances that pose danger to the well-being of minors.

3. Main Body

3.1. Findings in Tanzania

In Tanzania, in a study conducted by McCrann (2017) on the *Factors associated with child sexual abuse in Tanzania.* It was found that in the homes where children and adolescents freely access entertainment on television and especially watching movies with sexual arousal scene, an act of abuse, occurred.

On another hand, asked about the programs that she admires most and watches at home after school every day, Clara Mazumbe, a 13 year old Tanzanian girl at Mbezi zone answered: "I always watch Heiress around 9:45pm to 4:30pm in the night". Though Clara explained that it is a good teaching program, on which it is true, as this program is of a Philippine-Chinese community, describing a poor girl who moves from a village to town to work and face challenges and struggles to overcome them, but along the way, the input also include indecent content with inputs such as *abusive*, *fierceness* and love *affair*. However, these are the kind of programs that are found very interesting to different families in Tanzania, especially with ladies, aged and young to the extents that are nearly found to all common television stations.

With regard to some of the main Television station in Tanzania, a question was asked: how is the procedure of editing programs conducted, most source's generally answered that: the television stations edits' its own programs but external produced programs are edited by the creators themselves, though chances are that they might be checked or verified once again with the specific television stations before being exposed, the chances of being edited are minimal as the programs are payed for to be aired exactly as they appear. On the other hand, this is uncertain as the codes of ethics on media and the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) have principles and standard set accordingly for the maintenance of the matter.

Preserving media obligations appears to be a key concern to the Tanzanian President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, as during one of her early presentation to the public on an event to swear in newly appointed permanent secretaries. She ordered responsible authorities to lift a ban on all media outlets that were closed

under the previous administration and caution them to follow the law and government guidelines on their daily functioning in order to stay operating.

Furthermore, recently on the World Press Freedom Day, 3rd May, 2022, the president declared that journalists must do their job of informing the public in a professional manner by conducting in-depth investigations, so as to avoid providing confusing or insulting information, as doing so undermines media credibility as a whole. She also warned people misusing social media by putting offensive content that violates people's rights and the countries laws[1].

On the same occasion, talking about the freedom of the press, spokesperson Greyson Msigwa said: "You cannot have a profession without rules to govern, like a tire moving without any control". He said, "We must reach a place that we all agree that we need to protect the interests of media and the people as well"[2].

Justus August, a Tanzanian psychologist, recently explaining on how technology, television and "mobile phones" are creating an antisocial society on a television conversation program called *KIOO*, at TBC (Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation) he said: "These days in our houses, it is common to find when a visitor comes and the parents are not around, a child tells the visitor to wait for their parents and just switch on the television for the visitor and move away with his or her mobile phone or ipad in another room". This situation is taking our children to value more things rather than human personality.

On the other hand, Siegfried Mbuya, also a Tanzanian psychologist and philosopher, on the same program said: since we have not yet being affected much than the developed nations. It is high time for us to take control of this habit and he stresses that: "Setting standards in a family is of prime importance in relation to the use of television and mobile phones, and since parents also are overwhelmed with the use, they need to start that change, having free time from them, and it will be easier for the children to take over with the change as well, such character should be permanent to yield the difference for creating that important ample time of person to person intimacy in our families".

Though a lot of parents might not yet be very conscious of the arising consequences of media to Children. It is encouraging to notice that they are some that have learnt the lesson already. A Tanzanian mother, Esther Kizito is mothering a 5 year old girl and a 3 year old son at Msigani-Maramba mawili road, Talking about the schedule of the children, she emphasis that: "I have already tradition them to watch cartoons only about 2 to 3 hours per day, and they are used with that, because I already evidenced the craving character of television to my first born son and how it used a lot of his time messily and therefore I would not allow it to happen again to these ones".

3.2. Other Discoveries Worldwide

3.2.1. Television Medium

However, a number of studies suggest that more of screen media exposure is re-

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[1] https://www.ippmedia.com/en/news/samia-roots-ethical-investigative-reporting.
[2] https://www.voanews.com/a/in-tanzania-hope-rises-for-a-better-journalism-climate.

lated to more of negative developmental outcomes than positive. On an article from Canadian Paediatric Society (2003) titled: *Impact of Media Use on Children and Youth*, lists a number of facts that current literature suggested that, there is a relationship between watching violent television programming and an increase in violent behavior by children, excessive television watching contributes to the increased incidence of childhood obesity, excessive television watching may have a deleterious effect on learning and academic performance, watching certain programs may encourage irresponsible sexual behavior.

In South Africa, in his research paper on *The Influence of Television on Adolescent Girls' Sexual Attitudes and Behavior in Mabopane Township—South Africa*, Moswang (2010) describes how constant exposure to television influence girls sexual attitudes and behavior. The adolescent girls that participated in Moswang's study indicated that the girls regarded television as one of the major influences in their lives, and not only towards sexuality but in other aspects as well, such as aggression/violence, as well as experiencing contentment with their bodies. The participants acknowledged that television influences them not only positively but also negatively.

3.2.2. The Media in General

According to Kolucki et al. (2011) on their book titled *Communicating with Children*: Research conducted around the world suggests that good-quality media products produced for children (television and radio programs, books, Internet sites, mobile phone information services, public-education street-sign campaigns, puppet shows, dramas, etc.), can be effective in promoting a host of development goals. For example, educational television has been proven to encourage school preparedness among preschoolers, to encourage early literacy and to teach schools curricula effectively. This approach is tied to the field of development communicating with children.

Kolucki et al. express that to communicate well with children needs the following principles, whether be personal or through the media, Principle 1, states that, "communication for children should be age-appropriate and child-friendly", and is supported by guidelines to: use child-appropriate language, characters, stories, music and Communicating with Children: Introduction, humor, encourage and model positive interaction and critical thinking, and use special effects judiciously and wisely. Principle 2 states that, "communication for children should address the child holistically", and is supported by guidelines to: use an integrated rather than single-issue approach to communication, offer positive models for adults in their relationships with children as full human beings in their own right, and create "safe havens". Principle 3 states that, "communication for children should be positive and strengths-based", and is supported by guidelines to: build self-confidence as well as competence, use positive modeling, include children as active citizens learning about and modelling social justice, and do no harm. Principle 4 states that, "communication for children should address the needs of all, including those who are most disadvantaged", and is supported by

guidelines to: reflect the dignity of each and every child and adult, be inclusive: celebrate and value all types of diversity, ensure communication is free of stereotypes, and reflect and nurture the positive aspects of local cultures and traditions.

Convention on the *Rights* of the *Child* (*CRC*), also *recognizes* the significance of the mass media in realizing its broader goals, with article 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)[3], which recognizes the child's right to access "information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health". Understanding how children of different age groups process information, how they perceive, learn from, conceptualize and act upon what they see and hear, will go a long way in ensuring that what and how we communicate with children, is effective and empowering.

Other means notable in limiting media negative problems should be through parents using safety precautions for protecting their kids with either television or the internet, this can be through inserting a form of control or regulating what they can be able to see or not, media personal to have awareness campaigns about social media to educate the kids and have a close, good relationship with their kids to the point of them being able to dialogue with their parents about anything.

3.3. The New Media

With the new media technologies, such as smart phones, influence children's cognitive abilities. Parents and children have access to more media content and platforms than ever before. The use of new media takes up a lot of time and pushes other, more valuable ways of spending free time into the background. Some research indicates that smartphone are more problematic than the traditional form of television because they can be taken anywhere (car, restaurant), and that this technology is getting even more disruptive and distracting for the parents and guardians than television.

Bark is a content monitoring tool. It releases annual reports analyzing messages across texts, email, and 30+ apps and social media platforms. It identify critical trends in mental health, online predators, and much more to help communities be better equipped to help keep children safe[4]. In Bark Report of 2021, in a documentary titled: *Social media dangers*, explains that some parents were asked how you like or dislike social media, many parents answered that they like the social media in the productive way, how it has improved in communicating, but dislike what it does to their children. As most parents observed their children to have much time with their phones on social media tools such as twitting, face book, snapchat and alike rather than socializing physically with them or

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[3]https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.
[4]https://www.bark.us/how.

with playing with friends outside the house.

On the mentioned documentary, Statistics shows that many of these kind of children have been affected on their mental health, as a lot happens along with the chatting, in competing with each other through photos, video as who gets a lot of "likes" on either *twitter* or *you tube* and when they impress their friends, with many "likes", it gives them a very good feeling of being appreciated or becoming famous but when they fail to impress their friends with lots of "unlike" they get frustrated, depressed and to others, even to the point of committing suicide.

With regard to *The Digital Watch* (2022), states that despite the many benefits of the Internet, children and young people who are particularly vulnerable due to their age, face a number of risks, including: Inappropriate content, including age-inappropriate content (such as violent and sexual websites) and illegal content. Online games such as the Blue Whale Challenge have been used to provoke young adults to carry out a series of "challenges"—some of which are life threatening are particularly harmful; Inappropriate contact, including being the victim of bullying, grooming, and harassment; Inappropriate conduct, including sexting, self-generated explicit material that is shared with others, sexual harassment, and the bullying of others. Such conduct often leads to reputational damage, issues, including spam, hidden costs (such as in-app purchases), inappropriate advertising, and data collection which infringes on children's rights, and overuse, including Internet addiction, as well as gaming disorders which are now considered a medical condition by the World Health Organization.

According to *The World Economic Forum* (2022), The We Protect Global Alliance estimates that a staggering 54% of those who regularly used the internet as a child (now aged 18 - 20) were the victims of at least one online sexual harm.

Also, worldwide, researchers attempted to identify the key dimensions of parental warmth/control more strictly referred to children's behaviors on the Internet or new media, for example, according to Benedetto and Ingrassi (2020), styles used by parents were noted: 1st Observation: Supervision—"I am around when my child surfs on the internet, 2nd Observation: Stopping internet usage"—"I stop my child when he/she visits a less suitable website", 3rd Observation: Internet usage rules: "I limit the time my child is allowed in the Internet (e.g. only 1 h a day)", 4th Observation: Communication: "I talk with my child about the dangers related to the Internet (costs, addiction to games, computer viruses, privacy violation, etc.)", 5th Observation: Support: "I show my child "child friendly" websites (library, songs, crafts, school website, etc.)".

UNICEF of 2015[5], on the guidelines for Industry, on the Child Online Protection states an example of how a collaborated manner could be useful to create order in a media and internet usage ground for the security of children, the book mentions that it could be through providing guidelines on, Child Online Protection, which could be through consultations with members of the field, as

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[5]https://www.itu.int/cop-Industry-Guidelines-for-Online-ChildProtection.pdf.

well as a wider open consultation that invited members of civil society, business, academia, governments, media, international organizations and young people to provide feedback on the guidelines. The Procedures apply to the safety of children when using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Which can provide advice on how industry can work to help ensure children's safety when using the Internet or any of the associated technologies or devices that can connect to it, including mobile phones and game consoles. Through such involvement other strategies could be clarified: As to establish a common reference point and guidance to the ICT and online industries and relevant stakeholders, provide guidance to companies on identifying, preventing and mitigating any adverse impacts of their products and services on children's rights, provide guidance to companies on identifying ways in which they can promote children's rights and responsible digital citizenship among children, suggest common principles to form the basis of national or regional commitments across all related industries, offers sector-specific checklists that recommend actions to respect and support children's rights for the following sectors: Mobile operators, internet service providers, content providers, and social media service providers, National and public service broadcasters, hardware manufacturers and operating system developers and app stores.

With regard to Du (2022), in his article titled: *is There Still a Need to Regulate the Television Industry in the Digital Age*? He suggests that, there is still a need to regulate the television industry under the guidance of the government and utilize digital technology properly to achieve a balance to facilitate sound development and adds that, the relevant departments should improve the regulations designed for harmful content and encourage original content, promoting high-quality TV products on multiple platforms.

4. Conclusion

However, we all know that it cannot be realistic for a parent or guardian to be able to monitor effectively every move of their children on either Television screens or Internet surfing. While others can try to do so, others can also try somehow and others may fail at all. And it is more noticeable that in our lives today, the internet and alike is crucial for all, including children we noticed during the pandemic/COVID-19 with the internet availability, children could do their school work, socialize with friends and relatives and have fun with different games and other programs.

It is obvious that advance in technology in these areas of communication, is what has brought us here, to the World of advances development we are enjoying. What should be taken into mind is how to deal with it, on the other side of the coin, that is being *Media literate*, focusing on the wise use of the media, on how can we reach children and enrich their lives by using media responsibly for their well-being and healthy development? For example, how can we opt to use a certain type of media for a specific purpose and in a given time, this will assist

children in ways that build their resilience, help them survive in an orderly use of media and consequently set them on the path for a better life.

In addition to this, children, parents and teachers should be provided with safety tips, articles, features and dialogue about digital social ethics, as well as links to useful content. Safety advice should be easily spotted and provided in easy-to-understand language. Platform providers are also encouraged to have a uniform navigation interface across different devices, such as computers, tablets or mobile phones. Offer parents clear information about the types of content and services available and how to promote the importance of social reporting, which allows people to reach out to other users or trusted friends to help resolve a conflict or open a conversation about troubling content, for example, with safety pop-ups that remind appropriate and safe behavior such as not giving out their contact details.

Therefore, through the efforts of a vast number of groups of people in a society, in prioritizing for the cautiousness to mass media awareness effects, in relation to children, children will be safe or rather limited to the possible dangers. But most importantly, it should be known to the parents and guardians that they are the significant bases for this accomplishment as they are the closest people connected to their children.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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