

**Will the television be responsible for the death of art?
Analyzing the effect of television consumption on preschool children.**

Abstract:

The media has repeatedly been associated to obstruct developmental factors in children. Especially an increase in aggressive behavior and a decrease in creativity can be linked to children whose media consumption is above average. The study was conducted on preschool children aged from 4 to 6 years in Hungary. After an individual discussion with each child, the children were asked to draw what they see when watching television. The author discusses the quality of the children's drawings and reflects on possible effects deriving from the media consumption of the children.

Keywords: Preschool children, children's drawings, television, consumer behaviour

Introduction and objectives

According to research the children in our society today are often aggressive, antisocial and sexually precocious. Simultaneously all these developmental factors are closely linked to the media, accusing it to trigger indiscipline and aggressive behavior amongst children, as well as premature sexuality (Wilson, 2008).

There has been a long-standing debate as to whether advertising targeted at children should be permitted or not. There is some kind of confusion that surrounds the issue of children and advertising, since the fact that children can distinguish advertising does not necessarily mean that they also understand its persuasive role (Andronikidis and Lambrianidou, 2010).

Even though in many countries advertising ethics require that advertisements should not be directed at children because they tend to absorb information without filtering it, research results demonstrate that advertisements can affect children, whether they are the advertisers' target or not (Chan, 2000; Oates et al., 2003; Young, De Bruin, & Eagle, 2003).

Furthermore, media is said to loosen healthy social bonds. The media turns children into greedy consumers, who only desire things, that they do not have the slightest need for. At the same time, the electronic media plays an increasingly important role in our everyday lives. We cannot exclude the children from this specific medium. Since the television is a visual medium, the interpretation does not require any special skills, thus, children can use it of a very young age. Finally, in the age of niche marketing, children have become more valuable, as they significantly influence the purchasing decisions of their parents (Buckingham, 2000).

Research Questions

Considering the statements above, the following paper focuses on the way the media, in specific the regular viewing of television affect preschool children as consumers. It does so, by comparing the drawings of several preschool children who all view the television for different time intervals. Once the television viewing habits and consumption habits are discussed, a second research question deals with the question whether there is negative correlation between the television consumption of preschool children and their creativity.

Literature Review

The first studies regarding the media usage of preschool children can be traced back to the 70's. The study of Lyle and Hoffman (1971) examined 157 preschool children about their media and television usage. Six out of ten children viewed television in the afternoon. 17 percent of the three year olds said they viewed alone, compared with 11 percent of the four year olds and 6 percent of the five year olds. While the majority of five year olds say they make their own selections regarding programs, compared with only about one third of the three and four year olds. Children whose mothers work are more likely to say they make their own program selection, while the influence of non-working mothers is stronger. The impact of advertising was further emphasized by the fact that 87 percent of the mothers said their preschool-age children asked for food items they saw on television; 91 percent said their children asked for toys they saw on television (Lyle and Hoffman 1971). While the study by Ward et. al. examined two aspects of commercial watching behavior in children: degree of attention and types of behavior at commercial on set, and degree of attention and types of behavior during commercial exposure. The study indicates that children pay full attention to prior programming about 65 percent of the viewing time, although somewhat higher incidence

of full attention is found among younger children. Children make some verbal response at commercial outset about 25 percent of the time. When such a response is made, it is most likely to be favorable. Also the girls in the oldest age group talked during 28 percent of the commercial exposures, while boys in the same age group talked during 20 percent. Paying full attention to commercials during family viewing decreased with age, suggesting that older children use the opportunity of commercial breaks for interpersonal communication (Ward, 1971). In another study, Ward found kindergarten children exhibited confusion and judged the relationship between commercials and reality based on coincidental reasoning or affect (Ward, 1971).

A more recent Hungarian study by Antalóczy et al. (2012) on preschool children's media consumption habits, aims to answer whether the surveyed children can define their experiences, possible fears or joys, which are clearly interlinked with the media. The survey results confirm previous findings that nearly one hundred percent of the participants own a media device: only 3 families owned no mass communication tool. In contrast, approximately one in four preschool children own some form of device, typically a television. Our study also revealed that all young people watch television, about 80 percent of them turn on the television every day. The children's typical media consumption pattern is that the children typically watch television on their own or with their siblings. Parental control is becoming increasingly diffuse. The children prefer the cartoon channels, followed by various sports channels, sports programs and nature films. Finally, the children drew a drawing, which symbolizes what they do in their free time. From the 42 drawings completed, the television, computer or a video game only appeared in 4 cases as the popular leisure activity. In contrast, typically the children drew: swimming, playing with a ball, riding, driving or playing board games. It is important to note that none of the 4 TV or computer related drawings pictures violence or aggression (Antalóczy et al., 2012). While a study by Hofmeister-Tóth (2000) showed that the advertisements demand increasing character, causes 1.5 percent of the daily, and 5-6 percent of the weekly problems of Hungarian families (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2000).

Also linked to the topic how children's consumer behaviour changes when expressed to the media is a study of Pine and Nash (2002), who interviewed children aged 3-6 years, who had written letters to Father Christmas, regarding the extent and nature of their television viewing. Overall, children who watched more commercial television were found to request a greater number of items from Father Christmas, these children also requested more branded items. However, the children's requests did not correlate significantly with the most frequently advertised toy products on television in the build-up to Christmas. A positive correlation was found between watching television alone and number of requests. One interpretation of this may be that lone viewing renders children more susceptible to advertising (Pine and Nash, 2002). Thus all these recent studies suggest, that not only is the media consumption of preschool children growing drastically, it also affects them as consumers. However, most theory so far mainly focused on results from various interviews with children. Thus analyzing the drawings of children with high media consumption could therefore be an alternative, as research on children's drawing is becoming more popular. This is mainly because it is a source of understanding a child's cognitive, emotional, visual and motor processes (Frisch, 2006).

Children's drawings have been analyzed in the past with several techniques. Hopperstad (2008) discusses the quality of the children's play from a semiotic point of view in which children draw signs. These signs consist, at the level of the signifier, of visual-graphic marks such as lines, points, figures and colours. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) theory builds on

visual 'grammar'. The study draws attention to the ways that visual features in drawings made by the children in their first year in school can be found to carry ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning (Kress and Van Leuven 1996). While Coates (2002) examines the drawings collected together with transcriptions of the children's descriptions of their drawings (Coates, 2002). Lowenfeld and Brittain (1979) analyzed and sorted out thousands of children's drawings to see if they could find characteristic features that could be used to describe the development of pictorial marks among children (Frisch, 2006). Thibault (1997) argues that children's competence and experience with drawing must also be taken into consideration. It may be the case that children use talk, sounds and gestures because, at that time, they did not have access to visual ways of representing their interest in action (Hopperstad, 2008). Any drawing is the result of its maker's active and creative response towards their experiences (Frisch, 2006). The following study will analyze the drawings according to Kondács Mihályné-Podmaniczky's (1993) suggestions of children's drawing analysis, highlighting and contrasting the formal, content and developmental aspects.

Method

In the present study, in order to receive an in-depth understanding about the way the media affects preschool children, data was collected from 20 preschool children in Budapest, Hungary in various preschools and then analyzed through qualitative research techniques. The participants of the study were 4-6 year old preschool children, of which 12 were boys and 8 were girls. The families backgrounds differed in socio-economic status, but were not further analyzed.

Firstly, a short interview was conducted with the children. The length of the interview is vital, as children with such a young age have very short concentration ability. In addition, several factors must also be taken into account, which are related to the age of the children. For example, at preschool level, children do not know the time, thus it is needless to ask them how much time they spend watching television. Instead, one can ask them whether they watch TV before or after kindergarten. During data collection, the children were interviewed separately, face to face. The children were not recorded in order for them to focus on the questions asked and to keep them in their habitual, comfortable surroundings. In order to comfort the children even more, the interviewee spent a few days with the children in their various preschools, prior to the interviews, making sure the children do not feel they are talking to a stranger. The first few questions dealt with the television viewing habits of the children, followed by questions of their shopping habits. Following the interview, a non-verbal form of data collection was selected (this is extremely important when working with children). The children were asked to draw, what they see, when they watch television.

Findings

From the 20 children participating, only one child did not have a television set at home. In contrast, 11 children claimed they watch television every day. There were children in the sample, who were allowed to watch in the morning and in the afternoon as well. The remaining eight children watch television less often, some only at their grandparent's home. 12 children knew how to handle the remote control. Most of the children claimed to watch the television alone or with siblings. Only two children from the sample watched television regularly with their parents. Most of the children were allowed to decide for themselves what they watched on television, though some watched DVDs instead of cable television. Each

child watched cartoons; some children said they also watch sports regularly. Some children could specifically name the children's channel they watched at home.

The purchasing habits of children were also extremely interesting. From the 20 children who participated in the study, only two did not accompany their parents to the store. From the remaining 18, only five claimed not to ask for anything at the store from their parents. The rest regularly ask for certain goods. In general, the majority of the children mentioned sweets (9), but some children also mentioned toys (3). One child mentioned: *"I go to the store with my mom, but I do not ask for anything, because I know she won't buy it. But if I can, I prefer LEGO, they have it at Spar."* It is also interesting to note that in addition to the above two brands, the only further brands mentioned regarding shopping is 'Kinder chocolate'.

The children were also asked what they would like from Santa. Interestingly, very few children mentioned branded toys. Only three branded toys were mentioned by the children: two girls asked for Elsa dolls, two boys mentioned Star Wars games, and four boys asked for Lego. Finally, twelve children drew at the end of the interview, what they see while watching television. The result was partly reassuring, as all the children drew their favorite cartoons. None of the children drew toys/ or other advertised products.

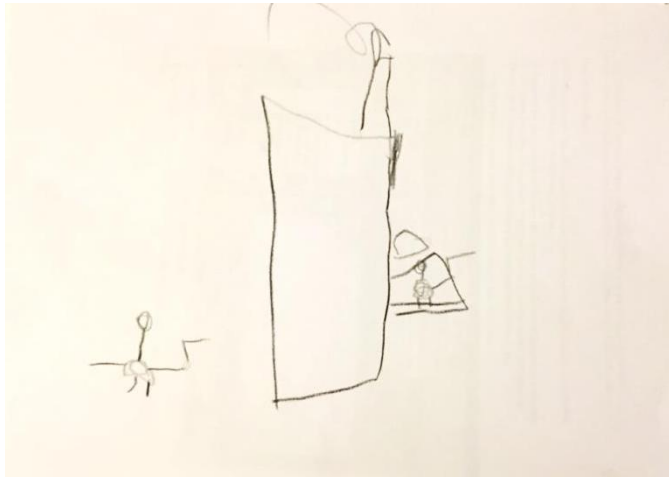
Figure 1. Charlie, aged 5. "Angry Birds"



In terms of television consumption, Charlie belonged to those children from the sample that hardly get to watch any television. He was only allowed to watch cartoons at his grandparents' house and not at home. Like all the other children, Charlie drew one of his favorite cartoons the "Angry Birds" (figure 1). Compared to the other children, Charlie used the most colours (8 different colours), which is very positive. He uses the space of the paper well, while the drawing itself is very developed for a boy his age. The picture shows from left to right, the pig king, a tree, the black angry bird, a sling-shot, 3 small blue angry birds, a red angry bird and a yellow one. Charlie pays attention to detail. All birds have a beak, eyes, even eyebrows. One exception is the black bird, which has not much detail (the eyes and nose look like a skull); this bird is also slightly larger. This is also the only bird which he actually names "the bomb". Other than that, the characters have different facial expressions. The birds look angry, while the pig has a happy face. The pig is also the only one looking at the viewer, while the other birds are all tilted to the left (except for the black one). Unfortunately, this cartoon in itself is a slightly aggressive one, as the pigs constantly try to steal the bird's eggs, who therefore regularly take revenge on them. Whilst the fact that the child is rather focused

on “the bomb” character underlines that the child is rather focused on the aggression aspects of the cartoon.

Figure 2. Daniel, aged 4. “Star Wars”



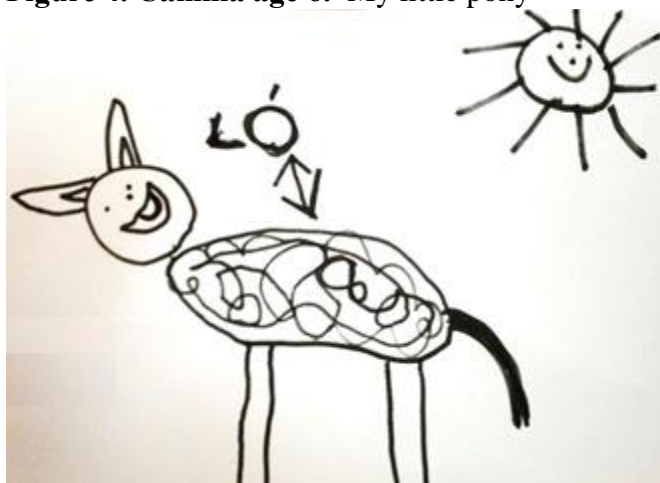
While Daniel (figure 2.) is the greatest contrast to the Charlie, as he has the highest daily television viewing average of all participating children. He watches television before and after kindergarten. He is even allowed to eat in front of the television. His picture is also a great contrast to the first picture, as he used no other colours except for black. The picture depicts a Jedi with a laser sword. The house in the center is their ship, while the Jedi in the far right (also with a laser sword) is sitting in a small spaceship. Interestingly, the picture is very borderline regarding use of space. As the research in this field still argues what this means exactly, if a child leaves too much blank space on a picture. If done regularly, this can mean inferiority, isolation from the group or anxiety (Kellogg, 1969). Also, a very big contrast to figure 1., is the lack of detail in figure 2. Children at the age of 4 usually draw a lot more detail on bodies than Daniel did. The face, the hair, hands and feet are completely missing. Most children this age often draw stereotypical houses described by Kellogg (1969) and Duffy (1998), just like in this picture (although the child verbally highlighted, that this is a “battle ship”. Again the topic is filled with aggressions, as star wars itself is a film not intended for preschool aged children. However, interestingly most children adore star wars at this age for same reason, most children have not yet seen the actual movie.

Figure 3. Luka aged 5. “Madagascar”



The third drawing above belongs to Luka (figure 3), who is also one of the children in the study whose television consumption is above average. He also chose to draw one of his favorite TV cartoons the penguins of Madagascar, which stars numerous, once again angry, penguins. Unlike the other two children, Luka uses colour signals to highlight the importance or salience of a specific element (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996). In this case the only three things he chose to draw with colour is the sun (yellow), the beak of the penguin (orange) and the legs of the penguin (blue). As Luka did not explicate what the penguin holds in his hand, we cannot know for sure, but it looks very much like a gun. While the sizes of the penguin and the evil villain varies vastly. Some children place certain elements higher up on the page to indicate that some things are in the background, behind other elements which are drawn further down on the page, causing the effect of them being in the foreground (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996), this could also be the case with the villain. Also, interestingly, the face of the penguin is very detailed and precisely drawn, while the face of the villain is barely recognizable.

Figure 4. Camilla age 6. "My little pony"



The final two pictures are from two sisters. Their television consumption is average compared to the sample. As they are allowed to watch TV nearly every day, however, the time they watch television is limited to 1-2 cartoons at a time. The elder sister Camilla chooses what cartoon the siblings watch. They always watch television together, thus their TV consumption is identical.

Figure 5. Dora age 4. “Elsa is the big one, while Olaf and Anna are in the triangle” (from the Disney movie Frozen).



Figure 4. depicts Camilla's picture she wrote 'ló' in Hungarian, which means horse, with an arrow pointing to the horse. As she draws, she highlights that this is not a normal horse; this is a 'my little pony' horse. Camilla used a black marker for her entire picture. The horse itself is very detailed. Both the horse and the sun are smiling. The overall mood of the picture is positive one, however as she failed to use colour although she had a wide range of colors to pick from, which her little sister clearly made use of.

Dora, like all children drew her favorite story, Frozen. The objects and actors are arranged according to size. Visually, the result is a very ordered, allowing each element to stand out. She used graphic lines to frame elements, creating a triangle, in which she placed two of the actors (Hopperstad, 2010). Dora only used two colours yellow and blue, however as the title Frozen indicates, there is lots of ice and snow in the movie, thus the selection of colour is justifiable. Figure 5. is also generally a picture which does not show aggressions of any kind. Also, Dora's drawing abilities are adequate for her age.

Discussion

Overall the drawings were colorful and cheerful, however not all were free of aggression. A clear pattern could be observed between the amount of media consumption and the children's drawing abilities for their various ages. The boy who viewed the least amount of television from the sample had drawing skills that were beyond average for his age, while the boys drawing abilities, who viewed the most television, were rather underdeveloped for his age. A possible explanation for this could be, that the child who spends much less time watching television, has more time for other activities, such as developing his or her drawing skills further.

A similar pattern evolved regarding the use of colour. The boy who viewed the least amount of television had the most colorful picture, while the two children decided to only use black

colour (one child whose television consumption was above average and one, whose consumption was average). Here, the results suggest, that children who view more television lack in creativity, which obviously would need to be validated in a greater sample.

Interestingly, at first glance, the drawings appeared to be free of media influence as none of the children drew actual commercials or advertised products. However, they all decided to draw their favorite cartoon. At this point, it is important to mention, that the toy industry uses these cartoons and movies to sell various merchandise products, which makes up a substantial part of their annual sales.

Finally if the gender differences are compared amongst the children's drawings, there is only one substantial difference, all drawings of the boys contained some form of aggression, while on the contrary not only did none of the girls drawings contain any aggression, their pictures were extremely positive and happy. This suggests that today's programs aired and targeted specifically for boys are by far more violent than those targeted at girls.

Conclusion

Based on the first research question, findings indicated that the media, television in specific, indeed affect preschool children as consumers. What is more, results have indicated that television not only limits the creativity of the children, it also seems to influence the drawing abilities and thus the overall development of the children.

Furthermore, television consumption, especially in preschool boys, promotes aggression, which on the long run also can have a serious effect on the child's mental development. At the same time, in the present study, no direct link can be drawn between the outcomes and advertising screened on various television channels.

Limitations

Despite the inherent strengths of the present study, some limitations need to be considered. Firstly although the sample size is large enough for a qualitative study of this manner, a wider range of children (especially those who have hardly any contact with the media) could have added to the value of the study. Furthermore, past research suggests, that analyzing only one picture of a given child is not enough to get a complete picture, as it can often be misleading. A series of pictures would be necessary for an adequate and thorough analysis, especially in analyzing the child's development (Kondacs Mihályné Podmaniczky, 1993).

Likewise, a wider focus could have been set the exact narratives of the children whilst drawing. Finally, it has also not been screened whether the children participating in the study have any sorts of social disabilities (for example dysgraphia or autism), which could perhaps distort the results.

Further research

Many issues raised in the research could have been answered with a detailed questionnaire from the children's parents. For instance information regarding the overall development of the children would have been a valuable input, or to know what exactly the children watch at home; what channels they prefer or which DVD's they look at (of course DVD's do not

contain targeted advertising, which would have been another valuable information). Thus such a survey could be used to expand the current research further.

Moreover, the children from the study could be analyzed over various time periods, repeating the drawing sessions quarterly, in order to track every child's individual developmental process. Also, the current study could be repeated with an international sample, which could also bring new, interesting insights.

Managerial Implications

The current study has several practical implications. The results suggest, that the media influence affects preschool children in numerous ways, thus it lies in the responsibility of the advertising companies and decision-makers to protect the future generations and to ensure that they develop in an adequate and healthy manner. However as we live in a profit oriented economy perhaps the first steps in the right direction could be some form of harsher legislation regarding advertisements directed to children. Furthermore it is necessary to educate parents (through kindergartens and schools) of the affects excessive media consumption can have on their children, as they are often completely unaware of this specific issue. It is essential that parents learn how to properly guide their children in the inevitable world of media.

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