*ПОТРЕБИТЕЛИ И ЗРИТЕЛИ
В ЭРУ ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИИ:
НЕГАТИВНЫЕ И ПОЗИТИВНЫЕ
ЭФФЕКТЫ МЕДИА ПРОЦЕССА*

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CONSUMERS AND AUDIENCES IN THE GLOBALIZATION ERA: NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE EFFECTS OF EMEDIZATION PROCESS

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Abstract. The exploration of the interaction between media and audiences is the main focus of this article. In order to narrow down the topic, the impact of television on young viewers was investigated by means of the interpretations of studies conducted by television researchers. This article argues that media in general and television in particular is a specific form of dialogue that can produce not only negative effects (e.g. aggressive and violent behavior) but positive effects as well. The media is deeply embedded in the fabric of modern society's culture in the Globalization era and television presents the potential source of a child's information and learning experience about the world.

Key words: audiences, consumers, children, television, violence, eMedization, globalization

In the contemporary world the media have become an important integral part of people's everyday life. This process of the 'eMedization' of a society in the globalization era resulted in a great number of public discussions and academic studies regarding this phenomenon (Gollin 1988; McQuail 1997; Yang, Coffey 2014). Research on the mass media addresses various issues related to this highly controversial topic: the nature of audience (Ang 1995, Kent 1994), the impact of the media on various types of audiences (Belson 1978, Cantor 1996), influence of the media on violence and suicide (Phillips 1983; Dubow, Miller 1996; Smolina, Pekhotskaya 2017). However, the subject of the media's influence on the audience appears to be more often the focus of the studies.

The media's audience, by no means, is homogeneous. In fact, it may be stratified in various respects. For example, audiences differ in terms of the preferences of the media channels such as radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and television. Of course, this distinction may seem artificial to some extent due to the fact that the populations are subjects of the combination of various media resources. Yet, it is important to distinguish the difference because media sources produce effects that are not alike. The other way of defining the audience is quite obvious and derives from the notion of gender, namely, the male and female audience. In addition, children constitute a specific type of audience, most vulnerable and affected by the media's influence.

In most studies of the media's impact on children done by scholars, media is perceived as a negative phenomenon which yields an aggressive and even violent type of behavior. This is hardly surprising; in many parts of the academic world the issue of human aggressiveness is seen as the main cause of the problems in modern society. Indeed, the understanding of the nature and origin of aggression is perceived as the solution to the problems mankind faces nowadays. Moreover, the exploration of the causes of aggression and violence in the present-day world seems to be the main topic of investigation for most social scientists. The media, in this case, presents a unique solution, in a sense a 'scapegoat', which can be accused of the spreading violence in the society. With the appearance of the mass media as an important and integrated aspect of humans' life, it was easily transformed to the main cause of manifestations of aggression. Therefore, children's exposure to the violence presented in the media has been viewed as a particular threat to society.

The exploration of the interaction between media and children is the main focus of this work. In order to narrow down the topic which appears to be too broad to grasp, the impact of television on young viewers would be investigated by means of the interpretations of studies conducted by television researchers. I will argue that media in general and television in particular is a specific form of dialogue that can produce not only negative effects (e.g. aggressive and violent behavior) but positive effects as well. More specifically, the main arguments of the destructive effects of violence projected by television on children will be considered in light of the cause-effect relationship. Then, I will proceed with possible explanations for the

phenomenon based on scholarly evidence. Finally, an analysis of the proposed solution to the problem of television violence will be explored in the present paper.

Before turning to the issues outlined above, one should clarify the concept of audience in general. It is worth pointing out the fact that the audience in social science tradition is understood and analyzed in the context of two complimentary approaches: (1) audience as mass and (2) as market. According to Ien Ang (1995) the term mass audience appeared early in the XX century with the emergence of cinema and radio. Since then, this conception of audience has prevailed among the media scholars with an emphasis on the relationship between mass audience and media resources. On the one side of this dichotomy is the media – powerful and manipulative. On the other side, the passive audience with individuals isolated from each other. The other approach suggests regarding the audience mainly in terms of consumption, thus, perceiving the audience as a market. The function of the audience in this sense is purely commercial. The dialogue between media and audience in this viewpoint is based on the potential consumption of the products propagated by the mass media (Ang 1995: 209-211).

One may argue about the notion of dialogue when speaking about the media - the audience relationship due to the passive perception of viewers and media as a machinery-like phenomenon. However, as some social scientists argue, "media texts are fundamentally dialogic … because they are intended to provoke some kind of response from the audience" (Tester 1994: 58). The kind of response from the receivers of the messages transmitted by media depends on the context. One cannot disagree that audience is not only a passive mass but also active participants in the interaction.

The audience engages in the active ways of communicating with the media. People react to what they see and/or hear; they consume the products of the mass media. Even children, though not seen as major consumers because of the limitations of financial sources, purchase the products by means of involving parents in the consuming process. Advertisements showed on television encourage children to buy certain products that are presented in an appealing fashion to them. Among those products are soft drinks and sugar-based foods which support the spread of poor eating habits. The consuming process is only one side of a dialogue taking place between the television and the young members of the audience.

What is more, children are actively engaged in the way they watch television. They seem to be confident in this type of interaction by switching on the television, choosing the programs and playing with it. These activities of children in front of the television set show that "television is the focus of games, play and acting out" (Silverstone 1994: 17). This entertainment side of the television has been emphasized by many researchers conducting studies in relation to children. Von Feilitzen (1997, [1976]), for example, stresses that entertainment is a primary reason for children's use of the television. Other motives include: informational and social needs; mood management and consumption satisfaction (von Feilitzen in McQuail 1997: 71-72).

The entertainment side of television, indicated above, is very much a part of the large narratives, lessons, myths and values that viewers, especially children, learn. That learning experience includes televised violence, and the debates about the effects on children have propelled the issue of violence in the media to a prominent place in public policy discussions. Following this mainstream, social scientists conducted a number of studies to explore the phenomenon of aggression and its relation to the mass media. From the very beginning, the influence of the behavioral approach led to the execution of the research on violence and aggression in the laboratories, in the form of experiments. Laboratory experiments were based on the same basic design. Typically, two groups of people were exposed to different types of films. While one group of viewers watched scenes containing violence, another (control group) was supposed to watch a 'neutral' film. Then, the responses of both groups were measured and the results were subject to comparison (see for example, Bandura, Ross and Ross 1993 [1963]; Berkowitz 1993 [1964]). Violence and the media in these studies have been considered closely related phenomena. Nevertheless, this assumption could be challenged because of the main weakness of the studies, namely, the laboratory setting. Limitations of the laboratory experiments produce little value due to the fact that human behavior is studied out of its natural social context.

The research on violence in a natural setting has been pioneered by William Belson (1978), who in his famous book *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy* used more sophisticated tools to assess the impact of television media on children. A field study, which included interviews with more than 1,000 boys, was conducted by Belson in the

early 1970s. Adolescent boys were asked to report on the violent/aggressive behavior they were involved in during a certain period of time. A questionnaire, designed specifically for the purposes of the study, also contained questions on what kind of programs boys prefer to watch. The data collected from the sample showed that television viewing of violent scenes increases the degree of antisocial type of behavior (Belson 1978: 520-522). However, the findings revealed the complex relationship between the presentation of violence on television and the real behavior. For instance, it was found that not all the programs with violent scenes affect children, but only those which show spontaneous, unplanned and easy-to-imitate type of violence.

In addition, one can point to the fact that other relevant factors should be taken into consideration when making conclusions on aggressive types of behavior. The stimulus-response assumption which prevailed after the popularity of the behavioral approach can be contested in various ways. One of the main arguments to this is that "media content is not the same as media effect" (Gollin 1988: 116). Moreover, other factors can contribute to the manifestations of aggression, namely, the family environment and individual predispositions. Before considering these factors, however, it is important for the purposes of this work to analyze the concept of aggression.

As it was shown earlier, aggression is assessed by a wide variety of methods, with as yet an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon. Two major viewpoints can be distinguished in this respect. The first approach claims that aggressive responses are bound with social identification and learning processes which lead a child to behave as others do. The second viewpoint considers aggression as an innate characteristic of a personality. For example, the longitudinal research on 875 respondents done by Leonard Aron suggests that "the level of aggression remains very stable in individuals and may be well established before the age of eight" (Aron in Barnouw 1985: 205-206). The discussions on the nature and origins of aggression and violence produce a wide range of opinions. If one perceives aggression as an innate personality trait, there is no question of whether media can yield the violent type of behavior or not. While the supporters of the assumption that media has a destructive effect on the audience, evidently, presume that aggression is a socially constructed and learned phenomenon. Therefore, the exposure of children to violent scenes on television, according

to media scholars, reinforces manifestations of aggressiveness. Deeply convinced researchers assuming that "violence in children's TV programming leads to violence on the playground", seem to underestimate other factors which can promote violence (Gollin 1988: 117).

Returning to the issues of factors contributing to the projection of violence, one should acknowledge the role of adults and peers as main agents of the socialization process. While individual biological factors may account for violence, patterns of behavior shown by parents largely influence antisocial behavior in children. According to Dubow and Miller (1996), "children can learn aggressive patterns of interaction through parental reinforcement of their aggressive behavior, by observing family violence, or both" (Dubow, Miller 1996: 118). Thus, when making conclusions about the media's impact on children viewers, it is important to remember that other factors can reinforce delinquent behavior among youth.

Television researchers traditionally assume television is one of the major sources of information about the world, thus, blaming the media for destructive effects. However, one can challenge this statement because children are exposed to the influence of a variety of sources. What is more, they should learn about the world through different sources, including parents, teachers and friends and not from the media exclusively. This concerns the important questions of how children should be raised and how they should interact with the media. There are no simple answers to that. Not only are there opposing views in the discussions on the general pedagogical tactics and strategies, but also people do not agree on the exact actions which should be taken regarding the media violence and children.

Different public and private organizations have devoted their attention to the problem of media violence. Many had appeared only due to the emergence of this issue as a popular topic in a societal realm. Major organizations financed studies on television violence and its effects on children. In the United States one can hardly find a public organization which has not devoted time and money to this issue (see for example, American Psychological Association, Department of Education, National Coalition on Television Violence, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Action for Children's Television). It seems that society has become obsessed with the topic of violence and the solutions to this problem. Two main strategies are usually proposed in regard to that: (1)

traditional program for the reduction of the effects of television by developing book literacy and (2) critical media pedagogy which stresses the importance of cultivating critical skills for approaching the media (Kellner 1995: 336). The latter proposes to teach children on how to use the media in terms of educational enrichment and enhancement. In other words, critical media pedagogy promotes the idea that media in general and television in particular can have positive effects when used properly. Among the positive effects is the educational side of television. For instance, as Patricia Greenfield (1988) points out that the media "can be used in schools to help build print literacy" (Greenfield 1988: 135). Besides, media resources can be used to enrich the comprehension of literature among children. The exploration of positive effects and ways to use the media, however, has been underrepresented in the majority of the studies.

Researchers more eagerly concentrate on the possible negative effects, such as violence and aggression. As a consequence, more frequently the negative image of the media is transmitted by means of advising parents to reduce the time children spend watching television. Parents are suggested to take the following actions toward the problem of violence on television: "Give your children consistent love and attention"; "Make sure your children are supervised"; "Show your children appropriate behavior the way you act"; "Keep your children from seeing too much violence in the media".

All of the above statements indicate that a contemporary viewpoint had changed from blaming solely media for the manifestations of violence; other factors are taken into consideration. Still, such advice as: "Keep your children away from television as much as possible" are widespread (Ritzer 1993: 187). This illustrates, again, that the audience in a sense acquires a one-sided negative image of the media's impact on children, which is supported by the majority of social scientists. Academics more routinely study the negative effects of the media on children. However, as television researcher Bob Mullan (1997) indicates: "After years of a focus on what does audience harm, on concentrating on the negative aspects of television – violence, bad language and exploitative sex – perhaps we should ask questions as to what might do audiences good" (Mullan 1997: 202).

Thus, the appeal here is for the development of the analysis of the non-negative effects of television on young viewers in the general framework of media studies. This seems to be of a particular importance due to the fact that the media is deeply embedded in the fabric of a society's

culture and television presents the potential source of a child's information and learning experience about the world. Children learn the patterns of behavior as a part of growing up and in this case the family environment and especially parents play a significant role in the process of acquiring socially positive types of behavior. The majority of social scientists who have worked in this field, as it was shown, have concluded rather pessimistically that television has negative effects on the audiences and media is the medium which should be blamed for spreading violence. People are eager to accuse media, rather than take responsibility for their own mistakes and/or problems. This results in the negative image of the television and does not eliminate the problem of violence that society faces today. The phenomenon of violence is highly complex and is subject to discussions. Thus, one should be careful when making statements of the impact of television on contemporary audiences in general and on children in particular.

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