

Can television affect society?

Introduction: Recently, a French mother filed a suit against the head of a State television channel, France 2; her complaint was that her 17-year-old son died trying to emulate the hero of an American serial who mixed sugar and weed killer in the handlebar of a bicycle to manufacture a bomb. She accused the TV chief of murder and she intended to use the lawsuit to campaign against violence on television. Of course, violence is just one aspect of the social scene, but there is a clear feeling in many that television violence does have any effect on the viewers. It may not make the impressionable viewers actually violent, but it does tend to make them insensitive to its effects. Not just in the matter of violence. But in other aspects, too, what is shown on television affects society.

TV a powerful tool of communication: TV provides a concentrated focus, and the boundaries of the screen setting off the behavior from its surrounding context, can result in stronger stimulus to imitative learning than does real-life observation.

TV colors perspective of real life: Research in the US has found that there exists strong associations between patterns of dramatic entertainment and viewers' conception of social reality. Heavy viewers respond more in terms of TV world—more distrust of people, exaggerated sense of danger, etc.

Other factors moderate TV influence: Other researchers have found that perceptions varied from person to person. The degree of reality perceived in a television program by a viewer depends on several other factors – the viewer's sex, age, economic status, environment and so on. Viewers' perceptions also differ depending on their current state – fatigue, relaxed, etc. More important factors influencing perceptions of program realism are their enduring traits – intelligence, perceptual styles, set of values, receptive capacity; and all these are closely linked to the age of the viewer.

Conclusion: Television can have effect on viewers, and thus society, under certain conditions—recurrence from program to program of values or ideas; dramatic presentation of values so that they evoke primarily emotional reaction; presentation of values which link with the individual's immediate needs and interests; an uncritical attachment to the modicum. The impact is likely to be greater when the individual has not already been supplied through his immediate environment with a set of values which provides a standard against which to assess the views offered by television.