

Should there be regulations on the media that is consumed by children and adolescents?

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Digital media has evolved into a multipurpose, dominant tool with a rapidly growing user base worldwide. According to the National Library of Medicine, increased time spent consuming digital media such as social media leads to greater exposure to self-harm behaviour and suicidal tendencies (Memon et al., 2018). Though this data is U.S. based, this issue is all pervasive due to its world-wide reach, as even nations that have historically been less reliant on technology have been impacted. In order to reduce the negative effects on youth by digital media, sources from around the world argue that global initiatives for media literacy must be put into place to moderate content.

Populations in less developed countries tend to have more encounters with media than children in developed countries. According to a study done by Jacob Poushter, the Pew Research Center's assistant director of global attitudes and trends research, 59% of people in seven Latin American nations, examples of lesser developed countries, consume digital media daily compared to 55% in ten developed European economies (Poushter, 2018). Despite the greater technology use, the developing world also tends to fall short in terms of levels of media literacy. A study conducted by the American University of Beirut, which surveyed 2,554 individuals from developing countries in the Middle East found that although respondents were "adept at using digital technologies," they did not necessarily have the ability to comprehend and assess the media they encountered. Furthermore, the study found that most of the participants were overly trusting of online content and disagreed with the idea that the internet could pose threats to society (Khalid, 2023). Since adults are not aware of online dangers themselves, children have easy access to potentially harmful media in developing countries as there is little parental intervention stopping them. Once children are faced with social media, they tend to feel increased pressures to conform to potentially unhealthy foreign standards. For example, social media encourages unhealthy body standards, leading to concerns with body image. Francisco Uchôa's study, published in the National Library of Medicine, determined that 54.7% of the teens studied suffered a slight negative influence from media in terms of body image, and the other 45.3% suffered either a moderate or a strong negative influence from media on their body image and self-confidence. 28.7% of the surveyed also presented symptoms of body dysmorphia (Uchôa et al., 2019). These findings emphasize the negative impact of digital media on children and adolescents world-wide.

Increased access to digital media has also shown a pattern of damaging youths' relationships, especially in countries where family culture is highly valued. Due to the information that can be found online, children no longer feel the need to have discussions with family. A study from Archita Varma, a researcher at Delhi University, looked at how viewing foreign television affected the relationships between young boys and girls in New Delhi's families. The study surveyed 161 kids from a private school in Delhi, and it was discovered that exposure to overseas television programs changed students' psychological attitudes about family norms to contradict the traditional family-oriented mindsets families were used to. There were discrepancies in the attitudes of viewers and non-viewers, males and girls, and even non-viewers who could have accidentally come into contact with the programs. These changes in views may also result in conflicts within and outside of families because the sudden shift towards a less family oriented lifestyle would be a huge adjustment for certain cultures (Varma, 2000). Furthermore, adolescents prefer to talk to family and friends online rather than in person.

A study from the nonprofit Common Sense Media reveals that over two-thirds of American teenagers now prefer communicating with their friends online rather than in person. The percentage of young people who favor in person interactions has declined from 49% to 32% over six years (Morris, 2018). The study also indicates that teens' devices often distract them when they should be paying attention to people around them. This shift in communication preferences raises questions about the future of face-to-face interactions. This evidence supports the idea that digital media is ruining social relationships, despite many teenagers seeing social media as a way to foster relationships.

To bring up a contradicting argument, Yolanda Chassiakos, a doctor and the Director of the Klotz Student Health Center, emphasizes the potential benefits of consuming digital media, including support networks, health information, and increased connectivity across long distances. She also emphasizes that technology-assisted therapies can benefit children and adolescents with mental and physical impairments (Chassiakos, 2016). The Atlantic Press similarly argues that children and adolescents can benefit from digital media in various ways, including access to educational resources, increased access to information, and opportunities to connect with others (Santosa, 2019).

Action should be taken by school administrations to regulate film content and discourage the use of technology to create human connections, as argued by researchers world-wide. A study done by Ine Beyens, a researcher at the University of Amsterdam, took into account over 900 Dutch teenagers. The results showed that adolescents displayed greater conformity in their television preferences with classmates as opposed to peers who were not part of their school community. This observation highlights the crucial role played by peers who interact closely and frequently, who are often classmates, in molding adolescent behaviors (Beyens et al, 2016). This argument is supported by Ali Hassan, statistics professors at the University of Islamia, whose research suggests that Cartoon Network, a channel commonly watched and shared by children, has a notable impact on students that can be seen through their tendencies towards aggression and violence towards classmates and teachers. The two authors argue that these behaviors are more often than not also carried forward into the children's teenage years, forever impacting a student's behavior in school and work environments (Hassan and Daniyal, 2013). Although Beyens' and Hassan's research does not directly address regulation, they discuss the importance of considering the influence of school peers on media consumption and how the need children feel to conform to what they see on television affects their academic lives. This impact emphasizes the worldwide necessity for school administrators to pay attention to the media kids and adolescents are exposed to and to take action to promote human interaction, which is healthier than watching television.

Furthermore, the Federal Communications Commission of the United States of America passed the Children's Television Act in 1990, which mandated that all broadcast television stations in the United States offer content created especially to meet the informational and educational needs of young viewers; shows such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Yogi Bear* were changed to be more "educational" and fit the requirements stated by the movement, according to Dale Kunkel, a researcher affiliated with the University of California. The passing of the act demonstrates that federal powers in America are aware of the negative effects television can have on youth and have already taken actions to enforce positive media consumption (Kunkel and Goette, 2014).

Ultimately, while the worldwide increase in digital media exposure and usage among children and adolescents has positive effects such as better access to information, it also brings



great repercussions on youth. Research from multiple regions of the world share the idea that while digital media has advantages such as support networks and educational materials, it also has drawbacks such as bad influences that outweigh the positives. Initiatives promoting media literacy and regulating media intake in schools are critical for mitigating harmful effects and fostering healthy human connections. More studies are needed to understand the impact of digital media on youth in different nations and areas, because access and media patterns differ between regions of the world. This understanding will help society better prepare the next generation for safe and healthy digital media use.

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