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Violent commercials: Children's responses and parental mediation

by

Akshaya Vijayalakshmi

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Business and Technology (Marketing)

Program of Study Committee: Russell N. Laczniak, Major Professor Deanne E. Brocato Samantha N. N. Cross Douglas A. Gentile Sridhar N. Ramaswami

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

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DEDICATION

It is only apt to dedicate this dissertation on parents and children to my own parents. I came this far because of Amma and Appa's love, encouragement, and support.



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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Eight to eighteen year olds spend 7:38 (hours: minutes) on an average daily on media, with 4:29 (58.73%) of that time spent on watching TV (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts 2010). These young viewers are likely to be exposed to 25,000 commercials across all programming every year (Desrochers and Holt 2007). Researchers have estimated that there are two to three acts of violence per commercial minute in movie previews or commercials aired during Super bowl and Saturday morning children's shows (Blackford, Gentry, Harrison and Carlson 2011; Oliver and Kalyanaraman 2002; Shanahan, Hermans and Hyman 2003). Based on an average of these figures, a child is likely to be exposed to thirty thousand acts of violence every year from viewing commercials alone. This is in addition to 10,000 acts of violence from viewing two hours of cartoons every day for a year (National Television Violence Study 1998). Hundreds of studies using multiple methods of investigation (including lab and field experiments, longitudinal studies, cross-sectional studies and meta-analyses) have concluded that chronic exposure to media violence results in aggressive cognitions, aggressive affect, aggressive behaviors and desensitization in viewers (Anderson, Gentile and Buckley 2007). Despite high levels of violence in commercials targeted at children, research on the influence of violent commercials on children is sparse (Rifon, Royne and Carlson 2010). Moreover, there is little work where parents' reactions to violent commercials targeted at children have been studied (cf. Brocato, Gentile, Laczniak, Maier and Ji-Song 2010; Jones, Cunningham and Gallagher 2010). Given this lack of knowledge, this dissertation provides a perspective on parental mediation of violent commercials and



highlights the influence of violent commercials on aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions in a young viewer.

Exposure to media violence is considered a "risk factor" that increases aggression in children (Gentile and Sesma 2003). The presence of a single risk factor is not enough to cause violence but every additional one enhances the probability of increasingly aggressive responses. Thus the chances of a child moving from not reacting to behaving aggressively to using violence increases in the presence of additional risk factors (Gentile and Sesma 2003). Similarly, using protective factors can reduce the probability of behaving aggressively or violently. "Protective factors" such as parental mediation, open communication with parents, etc., counteract, and lessen the effects of risk factors (Gentile and Sesma 2003). Thus, a child might not commit any violent acts despite consuming large amounts of media violence (Gentile and Bushman 2012). While protective factors might shield the child from committing any acts of violence, they might or might not guard the child from changes to psychological level variables like increased aggressive thoughts, hostile feelings or enjoyment of violence (Gentile and Bushman 2012). Factors like exposure to violent media and parental mediation is relatively easy to manage compared to the difficult task of altering other risk factors like lower SES or prior victimization (Subcommittee of Youth Violence 2013). This dissertation therefore focuses on both children's risk from viewing violent commercials and potential effectiveness of parental mediation of violent commercials.

It is important to focus on violent commercials for reasons including: (a) high levels of violence in commercials vs. programs (3.46 vs. 1.32 acts of violence per minute) targeted at children (b) their likelihood to cause aggressive cognitions in young viewers



and (c) young children's vulnerability to the negative effects of violent media because of their limited processing abilities (Brocato et al. 2010; Brucks, Armstrong and Goldberg 1988; Shanahan, Herman and Hyman 2003; Wood 2007). The first essay of this dissertation focuses on the parent, particularly the process by which they currently mediate their child's exposure to violent commercials. A framework of parental mediation of violent commercials was developed based on these studies. In the second essay, the focus was on the effect of viewing violent commercials on psychological level variables (aggressive cognitions and affect) in children. I find that children's viewing of violent-humorous commercials leads to increased aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions. However, parental active mediation has a boomerang effect on aggressive affect after exposure to violent-humorous commercials.

Overall, questions were raised regarding the influence of violent commercials on affect and cognitions, the nature of parental mediation of violent commercials, the circumstances under which mediation occurred and its ultimate effectiveness in moderating the impact of violent commercials on a child's behavior. The first essay contributes by developing new theory on parental mediation of violent commercials, while the second essay adds to existing findings on psychological effects from exposure to violent commercials.

Dissertation organization

After the December 2012 Sandy Hook elementary school shooting incident in Newtown, Connecticut, the National Science Foundation convened an expert panel to produce a report on youth violence. The panel identified exposure to media violence, mental health, and access to guns as three factors causing mass violence in youth



(Subcommittee of Youth Violence 2013). Media violence is any media based content that depicts intentional attempts by individuals to cause harm to others (Anderson and Bushman 2001). An intentional attempt to cause harm is known as aggression; violence is an extreme form of aggression that causes severe harm such as death or grave injury (Anderson and Bushman 2002).

Prior research suggests that factors like open communication with parents and parental mediation reduce the negative impact of consuming violent media (Gentile and Bushman 2012). For example, a recent study on media content for children found that reduced consumption of screen violence and increased exposure to pro-social programming *at home* positively influences a child's behavior (Christakis et al. 2013). In order to make effective recommendations to parents regarding reducing their children's consumption of violence, it is first important to understand their perceptions of violent media. In a survey of 1000 parents by Kaiser Family Foundation, 46% of them suggested they were *very* concerned that their child was exposed to too much violence in the media the child used (vs. 51% of them being *very* concerned about exposure to too much sex) (Rideout 2007). However, in a focus group discussion with parents of young children, Brocato et al. (2010) found that parents expressed little concern about effects of violent commercials on their children. It is interesting that despite higher levels of violence in commercials (almost three times that of programs), parents seemed less concerned about their child viewing violent commercials compared to viewing violent programs (cf. Brocato et al. 2010 and Rideout 2007). This varying level of concern was the basis of the first essay. This essay provides a parental perspective of violent commercials with the aid of two qualitative studies. One objective of the essay was to develop a parental definition



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of violent commercials. Another objective was to identify the way parental perceptions of violent commercials influences their mediation of violent commercials. In doing so, the essay addressed the question- whether parents use rules, co-viewing, or any other specific mediation methods to control their children's exposure to violent commercials? Thus, the first essay of this dissertation provides a richer understanding of parents' perspective on violent commercials — definition, motivation for mediation and mediation techniques. To begin the process, data were gathered from the Internet as researchers consider the web to be a space rich with information on consumer's beliefs and behaviors (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Brown, Kozinets and Sherry Jr. 2003). This technique was particularly useful to explore topics with limited prior information. Internet comments helped in purposefully sample parents who have an opinion on violent commercials viewed by children from a population of TV viewers. The comments provided critical direction on how to develop the research agenda and build theory. Following Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) guidelines, data were identified and collected using keywords such as "violent ad" and "violent commercial". The data that represents parental comments on violent commercials were collected from individual sites, tweets, and UseNet sources for content analysis. The online data collection was supported by a second qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews with 8-12 year olds and their parents. The data from parents and children helped develop an exhaustive understanding of parents' motivation and mediation of their child's exposure to violent commercials.

In addition to investigating parental view on violent commercials, this dissertation looked at the process by which violent commercials influenced children's behavior. A violent portrayal that poses greatest risk involves violent actions that are depicted as



humorous (NTVS 1998). Therefore, the focus was particularly on violent commercials couched in humor. Humor is used as a contextual characteristic to make violent action seem funny (Potter and Warren 1998). In violent-humorous commercials the self is enhanced by disparaging, denigrating or teasing others i.e. the intent toward others is detrimental (Blackford et al. 2011). Half of the 536 aggressive commercials analyzed by Scharrer, Bergstrom, Paradise and Ren (2006) contained humor. Therefore, in the second essay, I studied the influence of violent-humorous commercials on aggressive affect and cognitions of young children and the role of parents' active mediation in reducing those aggressive affect and cognitions. In order to test the above-suggested hypotheses, a 2×2 experiment was designed where children were shown a combination of violent/nonviolent and humor/no humor ads. The viewing was followed by questions on ad evaluation, program evaluation, and aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions. In addition, parents were surveyed on their extent of mediation.

Conclusion

Parents and media transmit relevant societal and marketplace norms, attitudes, motivations, and behavior to their children through processes including modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Ward 1974). This dissertation looks at parents, children, and their interactions in the context of violent commercials. I believe that parental perceptions about harm from violent commercials and effects of TV are likely to influence their mediation strategy to manage violent commercials. Further, I find that exposure to violent-humorous commercials can lead to aggressive affect and cognitions. I also explain the role of active parental mediation on a child exposed to violent commercials. It is important to emphasize that the three studies



of this dissertation provide us a comprehensive understanding of violent commercials as a 'risk factor' and parental mediation as a 'protective factor' to children. The conclusions are built strongly on the foundations of previous research and qualitative and quantitative analysis of data from both children and parents.

By focusing on the triad of parents, children and advertisements, these studies provide implications for parents, researchers, marketers, and public policy makers. From a researcher's perspective, the first essay builds new theory on parental views and actions in the context of violent commercials. The parental definition of violent commercials helps researchers and marketers identify when violent commercials are likely to produce resentment and mediation from parents. Further, it helps understand the basis of heterogeneity in parental actions. Moreover, marketers and public policy makers can design effective customized marketing or intervention plans for parents based on their distinct characteristics. Another theoretical contribution includes identifying the psychological process by which violent commercials influence young children. Thus, this dissertation contributes to the slowly but steadily growing literature on violent commercials.

A note on the research methods

Making assessments at multiple levels helps in developing a comprehensive understanding of consumption of violent commercials. The data collection was divided into three studies- two qualitative and one quantitative study. The first qualitative study gathers parents' opinions on violent commercials from the Internet. Kozinets (2002) suggests that collecting data from the web for research purposes is innovative and offers a bouquet of advantages including unobtrusive data collection, a context that is not



fabricated by the researcher, and data availability in various forms including messages, pictures and videos. I examined parents' comments about violent commercials posted on the Internet specifically from websites with articles on violent commercials, and posts on the same topic in social media including Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and UseNet sites. This approach included purposefully selecting comments that reflected parents' views on violent commercials. In order to substantiate the web data, a process of in-depth interviews with both parents and children was undertaken. By using multiple methods and samples, two levels of triangulation was achieved to address any concerns of rigor. The quantitative study similarly involved collecting data from parents and children. The data from children were obtained through a 2×2 mixed design online experiment while data from parents were gathered from a survey. A mixed design (between and within subjects) was used in order to achieve greater statistical power.

First, triangulation was achieved by collecting data through Internet comments, indepth interviews, and survey. Second, triangulation was achieved by interviewing both parents and children, thus adding to the credibility of the conclusions. Porter (1999), in his book *On Media Violence*, emphasized the need for triangulation particularly in the area of media violence to essentially avoid limitations of any single method by combining each method's view of this phenomenon. Triangulation of method and data makes the data more reliable, dependable, and confirmable. Reliability was established by finding consistency in conclusions among interviews of parents and children and among comments by parents on the Internet, in-depth interviews, and survey (Anfara, Brown and Mangione 2002). Further, using multiple sources for parents' data only strengthened the confirmability of conclusions. Moreover, data were collected from a



wide spectrum of parents making data representative of the population (Muniz and

O'Guinn 2001). Another support for the notion of representativeness is from the variance

in views encountered during the data collection. These quality indicators build trust on

the conclusions of the dissertation and offer substantial opportunities for future growth

and replication (Brantlinger et al. 2005).

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CHAPTER 2. HOW CHILDREN CONSUME VIOLENT COMMERCIALS: UNDERSTANDING PARENTS' MEDIATION OF VIOLENT TV COMMERCIALS

A paper to be submitted to the *Journal of Marketing* Akshaya Vijayalakshmi¹, Russell Laczniak², Deanne Brocato³

Abstract

I examine parental perceptions and mediation of violent commercials that come up during their child's TV viewing. In the first phase, data are collected from the internet and in the second phase data are collected through in-depth interviews with parents and children. It emerges that parents can be divided into four segments based on two dimensions- beliefs about the impact of TV viewing and views on harm from exposure to violent commercials. Manager parents are likely to control and restrict their child's media environment while educating their child about the effects of violent commercials. Coviewer parents are likely to spend a lot of time co-viewing prime time TV while engaging their child in conversations on violence but not specifically on violent commercials. In order to maintain harmony in the household, harmonizer parents merely restrict viewing of violent commercials without educating their child about their effects. Finally, nonbeliever parents are likely to co-view violent commercials without discussing it with their child. By focusing on the triad of parents, children and advertisements, this study will help researchers and marketers identify the reasons why parents object to violent commercials and when it is likely to be resented and resisted the most. Further, policy makers can develop effective intervention strategies.

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Introduction

The Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a survey of 1000 parents and found that 46% of them were *very* concerned that their child was exposed to too much violence in the media the child used (vs. 51% of them being *very* concerned about exposure to too much sex) (Rideout 2007). Forty- three percent of those surveyed also believed that media violence contributed to violent behavior in children and 66% of them wanted new government regulations to limit the amount of sex and violence in early evening TV shows (Rideout 2007). In another study, over 1000 parents were shown TV spots for Mrated video game Hitman: Absolution and R-rated movie Gangster Squad and asked if it was appropriate for their child to watch these violent ads. Eighty- four percent of the parents said it was *inappropriate* for their child to watch the ad for Hitman: Absolution and 63% claimed the same for Gangster Squad (Common Sense Media and the Center for American Progress 2013). However, such findings appear to contradict Brocato, Gentile, Laczniak, Maier and Ji-Song's (2010) focus group findings where parents did not appear to be concerned about effects from viewing violent commercials. Similarly, Gentile, Maier, Hasson and Bonetti (2011) surveyed 769 parents and found that parents were less concerned about their children watching violent vs. sexy commercials (Minimum age appropriateness: 15% vs. 4% for 7-9 y and 29% vs. 14% for 10-12 y). At this juncture there are some mixed findings regarding parents' concern of violent commercials. Thus, there appears to be a need for research which provides a richer understanding of parental beliefs about violent commercials. Moreover, it is critical to focus on parents because of their impact on children's behavior (Moschis and Churchill 1978).



Young children are mainly reliant on their parents to learn, react and respond to images which they view on TV (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka and Engelbertson 1999). The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP 2010) recommend that adults watch TV with their children and help them process media violence through discussions. AAFP particularly stress on the need for social interaction between parents and children to develop general cognitive abilities in children. Similarly, American Psychological Association (2005) recommends that teaching children about the effects of media violence will help in providing them with the ability to critically evaluate media. This ability will help children negate the effects from exposure to violent media (Nathanson and Cantor 2000). For example, children are less likely to demonstrate aggression after viewing a violent TV program if their parents discussed effects of violence (vs. no discussion) as a way to manage exposure to violent TV images (Nathanson and Cantor 2000). Further, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) recommends parents make thoughtful media choices, co-view with their children, limit screen time for children, use V-chip technology and keep children's bedroom media-free to reduce the impact of exposure to media violence. Limiting screen time and other parental monitoring activities are suggested to lead to pro-social outcomes and decreased aggressive behavior in children (Gentile, Reimer, Nathanson, Walsh and Eisenmann 2014).

Given the impact parents can have on their children's TV viewing, it becomes critical to understand the significant role parents can have in mitigating the negative influences of violent commercials. Such research may be warranted for TV commercials since researchers have noted that children are more likely to develop aggressive cognitions after being exposed to violent commercials as opposed to nonviolent commercials



(Brocato et al. 2010). Further, parents often lack the tools to restrict their child's viewing of widely prevalent violent commercials (cf. Yoon and Kim 2014). While parents seem to be intervening to manage violent TV programs, this paper seeks to discover if parents are likely to adopt similar or different measures to manage violent TV commercials (cf. Cantor and Wilson 2003). Unlike TV programs that can be managed by limiting viewing, TV commercials cannot be as easily controlled. As a result, parental mediation techniques could vary for violent commercials. This essay is an attempt to build knowledge and develop theory on parental perspective and handling of violent commercials. The driving **research questions** are:

1. What are parents' perceptions of violent commercials?

2. How do parents' manage violent commercials?

3. What are parents' motivations to manage violent commercials? In order to shed light on the above research questions and develop theory in this area; two qualitative studies were conducted. For the first study, data on parent's beliefs about violent commercials were gathered through research on websites where parents had commented on violent commercials. While for the second study, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with both parents and children.

Studies grounded in the context of violent commercials offer a preliminary set of insights on the way parents manage TV when violent commercials are aired. Further, there is a void in prior research with respect to understanding the reason behind parents mixed responses toward violent commercials. I aim to identify and put forth the reasons for parental differences to get a broad understanding of how violent commercials are managed in households. The data collected was used to develop a conceptual framework for parental management of violent commercials. First, a selected review of existing



literature on parental strategies to manage TV viewing is provided. The literature review helps in developing a structure for the qualitative studies, as well as identifying major gaps in parental mediation research which needs to be filled. The literature review is followed up with details on the studies.

Literature review

Mediation Strategies

Based on previous research, Nathanson and Cantor (2000) organized parental mediation with TV viewing into three types - restrictive, active and co-viewing for violent TV viewing

Restrictive mediation. Restrictive mediation involves setting rules, prohibiting viewing of specific content and/or limited TV time (Valkenburg et al. 1999). Gentile et al. (2014) find that parental rules on screen time and media violence exposure are significantly correlated i.e. reduced screen time leads to reduced media violence exposure in kids. This reduced exposure is likely to result in increased pro-social outcomes and reduced aggressive behaviors in children between the age of 6 and 11 (Gentile et al. 2014). Therefore restrictive mediation by parents is likely to have a positive effect on child's behavior.

Active mediation. Active mediation entails parents explaining images on TV to the child during or after the show. The explanation could involve highlighting harmful effects of violence (Valkenburg et al. 1999). The evaluative instructions help children understand the exaggeration of TV commercials thus making the child more vigilant of the persuasive intent of ads (Moore and Moschis 1978). Further it provides children with the ability to elicit critical defenses against ads in general and counter argue against the incoming message (Goldberg, Niedermier, Bechtel and Gorn 2006). Parental



communication about TV is also likely to have positive impact on children like reduction in child's materialistic attitudes, purchase requests and conflict with parents (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2005; Moschis and Churchill 1978). Essentially, through these interactions children learn about their parents' attitudes and use them as one of the main inputs to make judgments and decisions about products (Lewis and Lewis 1974). It is suggested that active mediation reduces a child's generalized and TV-induced aggressive inclinations even after exposure to violent media (Nathanson 1999). While active mediation of violent TV helps in mitigating the effects of violence, restrictive mediation has a boomerang effect on the child i.e. children are likely to be more violent because of restrictions (Nathanson 2002).

Co-Viewing. The final style suggested is co-viewing where parents and child watch TV together. Passive co-viewing is likely to have an adverse impact on children viewing violent TV. The lack of any objection by parents to the violent images on TV is considered by children as an approval of it thereby enhancing the negative effects of violent content (Cantor and Wilson 2003).

Antecedents to parental mediation

Antecedents to restrictive mediation. Parents who are more concerned about TV content and believe that TV viewing can have a negative effect on their child are most likely to intervene, compared to those who don't believe viewing can have a negative impact on their child (Hoffner and Buchanan 2002; Valkenburg et al. 1999). Particularly, parents with a negative or skeptical attitude toward TV were found to impose restrictions and co-view to keep tab on their child's TV viewing (Austin et al. 1999; van der Voort, Nikken and van Lil 1992). Laczniak, Carlson and Walsh (1999) find that authoritative (warm and restrictive) mothers were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward TV ads



and programs and were concerned about the impact of ads on children. Consequentially these mothers were more likely to have restrictions and increased parental mediation of the negative effects of TV. Similarly, Valkenburg et al. (1999) suggest that parents who are concerned about television induced aggression, were more likely to use the strategy of restrictive mediation to control TV viewing. Further, parents who carefully use electronic media were also likely to monitor their child's media use, be consistent in application of restrictions, be knowledgeable on the effects of media and create alternative opportunities (vs. media) to spend time for their child. Most importantly, parental concern about media seems to drive parents' adoption of restrictive mediation strategy (Barkin et al. 2006).

Antecedents to active mediation. Parents with positive or trusting attitude toward television viewing were likely to watch a lot of primetime TV, used it as a babysitter and use programs as a means to have discussions with their child (Austin et al. 1999; van der Voort, Nikken and van Lil 1992). Such parents were also likely to have good relationships with their child (Barkin et al. 2006). The warm relationship is essential for parents to communicate with their child about the images viewed on TV in order to avoid a boomerang effect (Moschis 1985). Through this process of discussion, parents help the child develop their own view of the world and build a certain amount of ad skepticism (Moore and Moschis 1978).

Antecedents to co-viewing. Parents who believe that media has little or no effect on the viewer were likely to spend a lot of time co-viewing TV with their children (Austin et al. 1999; Valkenburg et al. 1999). These parents were also less likely to monitor their child's media consumption (Gentile and Walsh 2002). Children whose media was not monitored are likely to be at high risk of being affected by repeated exposure to violent



media (Subcommittee of Youth Violence 2013). These children are likely to watch significantly more amounts of TV (4.1 hours vs. 2.4 for instructive and 2.9 for restrictive) and have a TV in the bedroom (Barkin et al. 2006). Therefore, it becomes critical to study effects of various kinds of mediation on children's behavior as all of them do not have same consequences on the child.

Cantor and Wilson (2003) in their review of research on adult intervention of violent media comment on the urgent need for research *exploring* parental mediation with TV viewing as previous studies might not have considered all factors. One of the major limitations of existing studies is that they have applied existing general parental mediation strategies to the context of violent TV consumption without exploring if parents are likely to adopt other specific strategies for violent TV, like time shifted TV (e.g. Netflix, DVR recording) for example (Thierer 2007). In order to further our knowledge in the area of violent TV commercials, there is a need to continue to *explore* parental perceptions and mediation strategies for violent commercials.

Research procedures and analysis

In order to develop a parental perspective of violent commercials, data were collected in two studies. In the first study, parents' reactions to violent TV commercials are gathered from the World Wide Web. The sources on web provided us with small virtual groupings of parents interested in the common topic of violent commercials. Data analysis suggested that parents could be broadly classified on two dimensions- beliefs on TV viewing and beliefs on viewing violent commercials. This analysis from the first study was then used to structure in-depth interviews. The data collection for second study therefore included in-depth interviews with parent-child dyads. The interview data



pointed to the presence of four different types of parental segments based on the two emergent dimensions. The details of both phases of data collection and analyses are presented below.

Study 1: Internet data

In this phase of data collection, the focus was on gathering a wide array of parental opinion from a variety of sources including blogs, news articles, social networking sites, UseNet groups to ensure the data were representative (cf. Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). For example, a search on Topsy (an analytical software to analyze messages posted on Twitter) for 'violent ad' and 'violent commercial' words yielded a total of 11,316 tweets. These 11,000 plus tweets include retweets, links of articles and videos shared by people and several comments on the effects of violent commercials. Those deemed relevant to the study were the original tweets posted by parents of young children on the topic of violent commercials. Using this criterion, a manual search yielded 110 relevant tweets which included images and reference to ads. Similar keywords were used to search for information on search engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing), social media (Facebook), UseNet groups (Google, Yahoo) and blogs (Google). The search was conducted on a computer based in a midwestern city in the US between July and November 2013. Several search engines and up to 50 search pages (on Google) were referred to avoid geographical responses. While the search was conducted in 2013, the articles included ones from 2010. The sites generated by the search engines mostly included news reports or articles on violent ads. The comments that referred to children and violent ads following these articles were considered for analysis. The reports were downloaded from wide variety of sources including prominent news outlets like New York Times, CNN and gaming commentary sites like kotaku and 1UP. Only webpages which had relevant comments



www.manaraa.com

were considered which meant going over hundreds of pages to identify the ones useful for our analysis. Over 400 comments from more than 30 individual sites, 110 tweets and around 50 comments from UseNet sources were identified for content analysis (See Appendix A for a source of the websites). While the web offers tremendous amounts of data, the search was stopped when additional comments gathered did not add anything new to the existing data i.e. when data collection began to saturate and when we repeatedly started encountering irrelevant webpages.

Parental definition of violent commercials

Analysis of the data led to the development of a parental definition of violent ads. First, we identified ads which parents had mentioned in the comments. A total of 25 ads which could be clearly identified from the internet data were considered for further analysis. The ads included promotions for upcoming movies, shows, and video games. The words used to describe violent ads included bloody, horror, murder, graphic, disturbing, gory, and massacre. These ads were coded using the Coding and Health Media Project's Violence Code Book (cf. Bushman et al. 2013, Bleakley et al. 2014) (See Appendix B Table 2 and Table 3 for examples of coding of violent ads and coding definitions). Most of the ads depicted violence using a weapon. In addition to analyzing the ad, I evaluated the comments associated with these ads using Batra and Ray's (1983) cognitive responses assessment criteria. Batra and Ray's assessment criteria were used since I was interested in parents' emotional reactions and evaluation of the executional elements in the ad. Some of parents' criticisms were about the feelings which the ad elicited (e.g. commercial was scary) and the others were complaints about the element of execution (e.g. opening their (kids) eyes to cannibalism). Based on the above analysis, violent ads were those which (a) contained shooting/stabbing to intentionally harm a



person/people (b) with a weapon (c) while not showing the fatalities or the consequence of the violence and (d) were non-cartoonish. Except for one comment, there was no complaint about comedic violence. Parents also believed violent commercials sometimes could scare children who were of 'impressionable' age and instill fear in their minds. This view of violent commercials matches Brocato et al. (2010)'s finding from the focus group interviews of parents. Compared to researchers' definition of media violence, the parental definition of violent commercials was very restrictive. Anderson and Bushman (2001) define media violence as any media based content that depicts intentional attempts by individuals to cause harm to others. Researchers who have specifically analyzed violent commercials similarly consider verbal aggression, physical aggression without weapon, violence in a humorous context, relational aggression and cartoonish violence all part of media violence which can have adverse impact on the viewer (cf. Larson 2001; Scharrer et al. 2006; Shanahan, Herman and Hyman 2003). This quote by a mother and father further illustrates the limitedness of parental definition.

F: I don't think watching Tom and Jerry where a cat is a killing a mouse is really a big deal for us. We are more concerned about him watching something where somebody is shooting 60 people.

M: It is not as much real as much as these shows they make the person with the gun out to be the hero, you know. It is not necessary where it could be an alien looking creature but it is this thing that the guy who goes out and kills a bunch of people. He is the hero

F: He is the guy who wins the thing or gets the girl or whatever

F: Or escape. But this kind of thing where the cat will take a...like a frying pan and hit the mouse on the head and mouse will become a pancake. It is very clear even to children I think that it is a big joke. They don't actually perceive the mouse was very very hurt because of the pan hitting the head. So the show is itself making it appear that it is completely unrealistic and hence the violence is completely simulated

It is important to take note of these differences in perceptions as it is likely to have

significant implications on the way parents handle exposure of violent commercials and



child's behavior. If parents' notion of violent commercials is restricted to harm from a weapon, then they are less likely to interfere and manage the other types of aggression.

The second objective piece of information was the duration of these ads e.g. most of the ads were suggested to appear during sports shows like NFL and Olympics (refer Table 4) which were considered as *family time* shows. Parents were concerned that the 'bad depictions' in the ads were during daytime when kids were most likely to watch TV. Parents' anxiety about violent commercials during live sporting events is understandable as Blackford, Gentry, Harrison, and Carlson (2011) find that super bowl ads on an average have 2.13 acts of violence per commercial minute with 14 million children watching the super bowl in 2008. Further, the total ad time has averaged around 45 minutes in the last few super bowls which means children are likely to be exposed to more than 100 acts of violence while watching super bowl (cf. Blackford et al. 2011). In summary, parents while co-viewing noticed ads with violence and expressed their concern about it. Frequently these ads were for upcoming shows, new movie releases or video games.

Having looked at the objective components of the data, I now looked at the data as a whole to derive more meaning from it. The data gathered were initially analyzed using data analytic software, SaturateApp and ATLAS.ti, known for its ability to assist in organization and analysis of textual data. An inductive approach was followed to analyze the data. Preliminary interpretations were generated initially from the internet data through manual coding. A content analysis of the comments revealed that parents beliefs could broadly be divided into two prominent categories- belief about effects of TV viewing (TV viewing has effects on the child vs. TV viewing has *no* effects on the child)



and belief about impact (harm vs. *no* harm) from violent commercials. These results are in agreement with existing literature as well. The next step was to identify how the beliefs interacted to influence parental views of violent commercials. In order to do that, second round of data were collected.

Study 2: Interview data collection

In this phase of data collection, the emphasis was on acquiring deep insights into parents' beliefs about TV viewing and violent commercials. The in-depth interviewing process incorporated structured questions on the above concepts and ad elicitation. The ad elicitation technique involved introducing existing TV commercials mid-way through the discussion to stimulate reactions from parents on violent commercials. This was used to get a deeper understanding of parents' beliefs about violent commercials. The three ads selected for this purpose included Betty White's Snickers ad, Mario Brother Super Smash video game ad and Whac-a-Mole arcade game commercial. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio taped and transcribed. The interview with parents lasted between 45 and 90 minutes while interviews with children lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. The survey and interview schedule are presented in the appendices. Twenty indepth interviews comprising of seven dyads (mother and child) and two triads (motherfather-child and mother- two siblings) were conducted. The families interviewed included White, Asian American and Latino and both mono and bi-cultural families. After the interviews, parents were debriefed about media violence and compensated with a gift card for their participation.

Similar to internet data analysis, the interview data were manually coded. The analysis was an iterative process of transcribing, interpreting and coding till theoretical saturation occurred. Subsequently both interview and internet data were compared and



collectively interpreted to verify consistency of data. An overarching framework was finally developed based on all the analyses. The interpretations from the data were also finally reviewed using textual analysis software in order to increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Two dimensional typology of parental mediation

Two dimensional typologies are based on the idea that the combination of two dimensions would represent qualitatively distinct and meaningful description of children's environment of learning (Ward et al. 1979). These dimensions help us isolate four segments of parents based on their beliefs of violent media. The characteristics of the four segments of parents are explained below.

Segment 1: Managers

Parents' views on TV viewing. Managers believe that both general TV viewing and viewing violent commercials have negative effects on children. Some of the negative effects they worried about included the influence of TV commercials like Ray, father of an 8 year old boy suggested:

We don't want him to grow up with a lot of commercials. We don't want him to grow up watching fast shows that are not good for his mind...

The thing about commercials is we are trying to raise him without...all kinds of the you know, 'you got to eat at McDonalds' and you have to have that and that toy is a must. We are trying to raise him without that.

While they expected TV viewing to have some positive effects, they believed that negative effects were more dominant than positive effects. For example, parents suggested that educational programs like MythBusters or Magic School Bus would help create a scientific temper in their child. Manager parents seemed to have acquired a skeptical view of TV programs and commercials through reading and watching news on



media effects. These parents seem to be active information gatherers. For example, a mother of a nine year old boy, Ginger, mentioned that she searched online for reviews on violent and sexual content in movies or TV shows while Alberte, Ray's wife, mentioned using Kids-In-Mind review site to make movie or show choices. As a result parents used media management strategies that included rules for screen or TV time, restrictions on content, or choosing alternative media options to minimize consumption of unapproved content. Their general approach to media was to restrict and minimize their child's engagement with it to avoid negative impact.

We do have parental controls on the shows so it won't let him watch anything above that's above, you know, mature rating. That is how they do it on Hulu or Netflix. That is how Netflix and Hulu is set up. You can set parental controls... He is allotted only so much electronic time a week or a day. During school, he can't have more than an hour on a week day during school... and then on the weekends he can have more or if a friend is over, we do allow more- Ginger

Managers wanted their children to develop their own view points and decision making skills. Consequentially, parents exposed their children to controversial content but ensured that they discussed the content and its effects during or after TV viewing. Like the mother of an 11 year old girl, Miriam, explained that she thinks it is important for her daughter to recognize the violence in war and the horrors of it so that her daughter has an accurate representation of the world in her mind. "Like if it is a war, it is a war movie and that's what happened. That's how people treat each other...That's how they hang somebody. I mean it is really disturbing. I don't want them to see that...It is ok, she has to know that happens. It is not like that the world is pink, you know, and good. It is not good to watch all the time though especially since it changes their behavior." Children are exposed to controversies and are encouraged to weigh in with their opinion without any fear of retaliation. These families are characterized by the free and open



communication between parent and child on several issues ranging from sex to drugs to violence.

Ray offered insights into the way parents leveraged co-viewing opportunities for discussions. "We might even discuss why someone who is trying to do a commercial would want it this way. Trying to basically say, look the whole point is to fool you into buying this. The question is 'are you getting fooled?". These kinds of discussions appear to occur often during viewing or sometimes after the viewing. Parents particularly used co-viewing as an opportunity to bond with their child and discuss issues on TV which they felt were against their values. For instance, Ginger talked to her son and his friends about excessive violence after having co-viewed the movie, Fast & Furious 6⁴. Below she describes the mechanics of discussions with her son.

If we don't think a movie is appropriate we will stop the movie. But there are so many websites where you can get the ratings and tell the content of the movie. It is pretty easy to screen beforehand. But yeah or if it is something which needs to be talked about, we will talk about it after the movie. Like if it's a scene that might need a little more information. Maybe if it's a language involved, like there is language I don't want him to use but it was there in the movie we will talk about it. It was in the movie but he is not allowed to use the language and things like that. Or if maybe someone was bullying another person or using names in that sense. If someone is being racially bigoted. We will talk about that too because he does not have experience with those situations.

Parents' opinion on media for children was fraught with skepticism and concern that over exposure or excessive usage would result in undesirable impression on their child's minds. These parents fit the authoritative stereotype of parents in terms of co-viewing, concern about ads, negative attitude toward ad, media mediation, and parent-child communication (cf. Carlson and Grossbart 1988). Of all the segments studied, these parents had most number of restrictions on their child's media consumption with strong

⁴ While Fast & Furious 6 is a PG-13 rated movie, the parent decided to take her child and his friends to it after having read the reviews. By the end of the movie she was troubled by violence which she found was excessive for her son and his friends. Consequentially, she had a discussion on violence with them.



opinion on media and its effects. However, these parents also showed high levels of warmth and low amounts of anxious involvement.

Regarding violent commercials. Managers were mainly frustrated that they could manage exposure to violent TV shows/games/movies by reading reviews and then choosing not to consume them, but they couldn't do the same with violent commercials. Ginger complained about how her son and his friends were exposed to violent trailers of PG-13 movies when they had gone to watch a non-violent PG movie. "We took a friend, and his friend's little brother. There were violent advertisements to Fast and Furious and some other violent movie. And he was like "oh, wow". He is not allowed to watch those. It was during a PG movie but advertisements were for PG-13 movies. And he is not allowed to see those." The presence of violent commercials during sporting events and in channels which children watch also bothered parents (FTC 2009; Anderson 2001; Blackford et al. 2011). This was also evident from parents' comments. "Mid-afternoon Saturday & I WANT to share some #Olympic viewing with my kids- but violent & beer ads?? REALLY #NBC ?" commented a parent on twitter. Ginger also talks about the kind of violent ads which bother her and the inability to control them frustrates her.

It seems like there is (aggression in commercials), especially the video game commercials. I don't know if you have seen any of those. They are quite aggressive. And not all of them are age appropriate commercials. You might be watching the super bowl and a commercial comes on that is not appropriate for say my son to watch and you have no control over it other than turning the TV off during the TV commercial.

Particularly, parents were bothered by the glorification of violence. Like Ray comments about the glorification of the hero for attacking an old defenseless victim in Snicker's Betty White ad. "This is a certain kind of humor out of violence. It is violence against defenseless old people, in a sense glorifying it. I would find it objectionable".



Another concern parents have is that young children can't tell the difference between reel and reality and they wouldn't understand the harm caused by imitating violence in the ads. Moreover, they worried that violent commercials were likely to disturb their kids and give them bad dreams or nightmares.

No no, I don't (think the ad Super Mario smash brothers is child appropriate). It is because of the violence because they beat each other up. They background is so calm and nice and friendly. And suddenly it makes it is ok, kind of to hit someone and be violent. I don't know I don't like it. I know kids play like that roughly with their friends sometimes with each other. But it is not ok to watch it over and over again. It is in their heads-Miriam

Given that there were commercials on TV that were violent, parents attempted to create an environment where they could openly engage in evaluative discussions about the negative effects of violence and minimize the consumption of violent commercials. As mentioned earlier, managers liked to be in control of what their child watched in order to avoid child's exposure to content they did not approve of. In fact, a parent commented that they had the right to choose and filter images which their child watches and did not like their child being subjected to images they did not approve of. These parents recognized that it was difficult to control commercials unlike TV shows or movies which they could choose based on ratings and reviews. So they shifted to or depended heavily on time-shifted TV like Netflix or DVR recordings or Hulu/Youtube. (Netflix had no commercials, DVR recordings gave parents the opportunity to fast forward through commercials and Hulu/Youtube played commercials which were mostly relevant to the content chosen to be played on those channels.) By choosing these alternative media options, parents regained control of the media environment thus reducing exposure to



violent commercials. In fact, Ginger mentioned she is glad that they got rid of cable and now have a more manageable situation at home.

We are grateful to have the ability to set parental controls on the regular cable channels. Please offer us a way to turn off or filter the content that comes through on the On-Demand menu. We believe that by offering the ability for parents to choose only Grated ads, it would increase On-Demand usage in homes with young children- online request by a mother to Comcast

I identify managers as having open communication that were evaluative in nature with their child (active mediation). All the parents interviewed in this segment mentioned repeated engagement with their children on issues from violence to alcohol. Particularly, the discussion on violent commercials included explaining the harmful effects of violence, conveying the distinction between reel and reality and providing their own view on violence. Managers applied 'co-viewing with discussions' strategy that they used for TV program viewing to violent commercials as well. They also had strict and consistent restrictions on content. Further, Ginger explains that discussions played an important role since exposures to violent commercials couldn't be completely avoided.

There was this NWA 3 video game and it has a very violent commercial... We actually had my nieces with us and it was very violent. We just turned it off. But by the time you get it off they have seen 30 seconds of the commercial. It was on during the day, so. I then spoke to them about it and they said our mom won't let us play the game and they know it is not appropriate

Child's response. The children of managers were very aware of the kind of content they could watch and when they could watch. But more importantly, they were aware of the reasons they could or could not watch certain content. In general, these children appeared to exhibit a strong understanding about media effects because of their constant interaction with their parents. For example, children were not just aware of movie ratings but also their purpose and function. Ginger's son explained the difference between



violence on reel and in reality. "I know its not real, so it doesn't really scare me. It is a movie, it is not real. Unless it is based on some true events even then it not real, it is based of of something." Like the parents had suggested, these children were actively involved in a lot of alternative activities which was likely to satisfy their arousal needs thus reducing the dependence on violent shows for fulfilment of that need.

I don't want video games. It is because all you are doing is moving some things and moving it around on the screen. To me that is not fun. Fun for me is reading. – Miriam's daughter

In summary, managers believed that violent commercials could be harmful for the child so they intervened to mitigate its likely negative influence on their child. While they considered violent commercials as a threat, they used discussions and existing media resources to counter its effect. Managers were likely to control the media environment by changing media consumption options, restrictions, and active mediation strategies. Further, these parents strongly believed that a child's behavior was dependent on his/her upbringing and things which were reinforced while talking to them. They decreased exposure by constraining the opportunities of viewing violent commercials to a safe, narrow and manageable set by leveraging on resources like Netflix, DVR recordings or Hulu. When they were unable to avoid exposure to violent commercials, managers intervened by engaging their child in discussions on violent images and its possible impact. The child's TV viewing was limited but it was replaced with alternative activities, most of which were not screen based. Essentially, these parents exhibited characteristics of authoritative parents who believed TV regulation was parents' responsibility (Walsh, Laczniak and Carlson 1988). Further, it appeared parents repeated engagement with their children paid off as the kids exhibited an understanding of why



their parents had certain restrictions and the effects of media. Because of this constant care and engagement by managers on issues of violence, it is less likely that these children would be desensitized to violence or demonstrate aggressive behavior.

Segment 2: Co-Viewers

Parents' views on TV viewing. Co-viewers were less likely to believe violent commercials had an impact on their child's mind despite their beliefs about negative effects from viewing TV. The reason these parents are called co-viewers is because of their interest in consuming significant amounts of TV. While they did believe TV had negative effects and took steps to guard their children, these parents also believed TV had some significant positive effects like bringing together a family. As Anita, mother of a 9 year old girl, explains... "We have family time. So we will try to watch a movie that is appropriate for her or we will watch some TV and she has some programs she likes. So we try to do something together, watch TV or play a game so that she at least has an idea that we have a family time". Co-viewers beliefs about low amount of violent commercials and beliefs about positive effects from TV viewing differentiated them from managers. However, there were similarities between co-viewers and managers including monitoring of child's media usage, open communication, media skepticism, and negative attitude toward ad.

Co-viewing provided the opportunity for parents to choose the kind of programs their children could watch. For instance, Rita, mother of a 10 year old girl, explained why she and her husband had decided that their children shouldn't watch shows on Disney or Nickelodeon.

I don't know whether you have watched, but if you would watch any of the, of the Disney or Nickelodeon shows. Like I can remember years ago there was Amanda, Amanda, Amanda and there was this thing with Miley Cyrus... and there is... You find a



lot of negative messages that we didn't like... like for instance, they would like I guess they wouldn't curse so much, like they would tell a lot of lies. Somehow it was ok to tell your parents a lie if something happens or I don't know its like kids are generally unruly, it seems like there is no discipline.

Similarly, the parents were knowledgeable about media effects and ratings and used that knowledge to create restrictions for their children. Anita explained that she had to deny her daughter's video game requests because it contained violence and she was concerned about its effect. "Mama, can I have that game? And then I check the game. No, you can't have that game. No, you are not going to be exploding people's heads". Since co-viewers had a warm relationship with their children, the parents did not worry about their child resenting them for denying requests.

Co-viewers allowed their children to co-view TV-14 or even unrated shows because of their own preference to watch these shows. However, these parents took advantage of co-viewing situations to hold open evaluative discussions with their child on controversial topics including sexually responsible behavior, negative influence of drugs or explaining how violence hurts the other person. For example, Rita co-viewed 16 & Pregnant and used the opportunity to explain her own views and discuss teen pregnancy to her 10 year old daughter. Or Anita used Bones, rated TV-14, to have a discussion on violence.

I talk to her about movies. This killing is just a show (Bones)...she likes watching bones. That is a serious... But I tell her this is just a, this is just a show. You have seen a dead person there and it happens in real life unfortunately. This is something you need to know that you can never do, you know. Talk about it. This is completely wrong. This is a show.

The discussion then moves to Anita telling her daughter to not use violence in her interactions with others. "It starts with the little things, you know. Don't... don't attack your classmates. Don't hit anybody because that is not right. What happens is you cannot



feed this anger and grow up to be someone who is impatient, violent and... this is not correct." However, the parents are cautious about the extent of adult content, especially violent and sexual content, their child watches. While they believe viewing some mature content is educational, they ensure that a line is drawn at some point. "I have talked to her about violence and things that are right and that things are wrong, you know, drugs, alcohol and stuff. So she has the idea of the real world, what can happen to you if you do something against the law and everything. But then I tell her in the movies, it is just movies, it is a story, you cannot do those things in the real world because you are gonna be in trouble, you know. So she knows. But kids at 10, I am not sure if she has the wisdom to discern what could be part of the real world or not. So I don't let her watch those things", says Anita. Even though co-viewers complained that there was resistance from their children about having in-depth discussions which are evaluative in nature, they nevertheless raised issues of concern with their children. Like Rita explained the mechanics of discussions with her children.

If they are watching, and, because I sometimes think it's a lesson, if something comes up and I want to talk to them about it and they say "yes, yes, yes, we know, we know, please don't talk to us about this". Because, we we, both me and my husband, we, you know, when something comes up, some opportunity presents itself, somebody did something wrong, somebody is lying, we will say oh, that's not good to lie, see what happened because he was lying. So, so...we, we see it as teachable moments. But our kids don't like it. They want to watch the movie and get on with it.

Parents frequently denied requests for watching certain programs; however they actively discussed reasons about why they were declining the request and were consistent in their reasoning. Sometimes co-viewers did not deny their child's media requests but used the opportunity to let the child learn from their own experience about the kind of images they should view. Anita, for instance, did not deny her young daughter's request



to watch 'I am Legend'. Anita wanted her daughter to realize that some images will scare her and she should stay away from them. However, Anita co-viewed the movie with her daughter to reassure and comfort her. While this kind of interaction was significantly different from the way managers handled TV consumption, the stress still remained on continuous engagement and interactions with the child.

Regarding violent commercials. Co-viewers were not really worried about violent commercials. "I think they tend to have commercials that are not really bad, right? Especially during prime time TV. I don't have to worry about those" said Anita. Parents are not likely to believe ads to be violent because of their personal preference for TV viewing and to avoid cognitive dissonance. Further it would make co-viewing difficult since parents would then deliberately be exposing their kids to violent content. However, when they did notice something violent, co-viewers were likely to be engaged in evaluative instructions with their child warning them about the content. "See, dear, this commercial is not very good. Because you know what they are trying to do there is to make you convince me"- Anita. Since co-viewers believed media had adverse effects and tried to gather knowledge on its impact, these parents were most likely to change their beliefs about harm from violent commercials and adopt better management strategies if provided with the evidence for it.

Co-viewers are likely to exhibit characteristics of a permissive parent in their extent of co-viewing, low concern about violent commercials, open communication, low restrictiveness and low anxious emotional involvement (Carlson and Grossbart 1988). Co-viewers, similar to permissive parents, are likely to believe it is the responsibility of firms to ensure that their child is not exposed to untoward commercials (Walsh, Laczniak



and Carlson 1988). Further they are likely to support the idea of an independent rating organization for commercials.

Child's response. Children are aware of the reason for parents' monitoring, criteria they use to select programs, ad intentions, and the media options available to them. "My parents always monitor what I am watching. I can't watch anything which is not appropriate for my age and I understand why. Because there are inappropriate scenes and stuff" said Anita's daughter. The children also showed good knowledge of ratings and its purpose.

I am only allowed to play E for Everyone, E 10 & up or Teen game. No M or R. And there is like this video game...that is called RP... rating waiting. it is like rating is not on yet. It might be a really high rating and not for everyone or something like that. There are different ratings and there is this rating ages 3 & up, and there is E for Everyone and 6 & older and E 10 & up means everyone 10 and up. Sometimes E 10 & up has cartoon violence which is just like you hit something and it loses health. Like if a game has violence with blood in it, that is definitely not a game I can have. Cartoon violence has no blood, it is just like the thing you are attacking loses health... even though he (friend) has some M rated games. My mum said if he asks me to play M rated games I say no and I can only play E's or teen game. So I normally say that and he agrees. Or he is playing an M-rated game while I am playing with his hamsters or something like that.- Anita's daughter

However, the children are also likely to feel that sometimes parents are being excessively restrictive as some of the shows they believe aren't bad after all. Parents' discussion of effects of violence reflects in the child's views on violence- "I don't like fighting. It is not nice. People get black eyes. They get hurt. They get hurt physically. Their feelings get hurt. Fighting is bad" explained Rita's daughter. According to the child, violent images are "terror, horror or scary things". Further, anything with blood would be inappropriate viewing.

They don't show blood in either (Bones or NICIS) shows which is why it age appropriate. No blood or any kind of bad scene is inappropriate... we have this thing at



home called family time. And we watch Bones, and Wipeout, and top 20 funniest commercials, or just top 20 funniest and Bones, all together- Anita's daughter

Interestingly, even though the parents did not identify violence in commercials or expressed concern about them, Anita's daughter expressed their fear of violent movie trailers and talked about ways in which they avoided it. Children's focus on blood and gore as violence goes back to the parental definition of violence from Study 1. It appears that parents' limited definition directly influences children's own definition of violence.

In summary, co-viewers are likely to engage in a lot of co-viewing which leads to a lot of open discussion in the form of evaluative discussions with their child on issues which come up during viewing TV. While the parents are not very concerned about violent commercials specifically, because of their general discussions on violent content the children are likely to be less affected by exposure to violent commercials. Because of parents' negative attitude toward ad and positive attitude toward knowledge (similar to permissive parents), they are likely to act if they are provided with evidence that violent ads can have a negative effect on their child. Since co-viewers relied a lot on ratings to understand program content, these parents are likely to be relatively less desensitized because of the overall conversations parents engage with them. That will help children mitigate some of the negative influences from viewing violent commercials. However, children's screen time is still higher when compared to manager's children.

Segment 3: Harmonizers

Parents' views on TV viewing. Harmonizers are distinguished by their low belief about harm from violence or TV viewing. These parents are known as harmonizers because of their objective to maintain harmony in the household by avoiding engagement



on controversial topics. Consequentially, harmonizers frequently skip channels to avoid untoward content, have restrictions without justification, and are likely to give in to child's requests to avoid uncomfortable discussions. Harmonizers are likely to have both positive and negative attitude toward TV as they have seen both positive (i.e. helps relax) and negative (i.e. scares children) effects of TV on their child. While parents are concerned about exposure to sexual and violent images, they are less likely to believe that their child's behavior could be affected by it. The lower amount of negative attitude toward TV is likely because parents don't believe that only media is to be blamed for a child's behavior. They believe other factors like child's upbringing, child's age, peer influence and personality traits are likely to impact a child's behavior. Another likely contributing factor is parents own positive attitude toward TV and their preferences for certain TV shows or sport programs. As Traci, mother of a 12 year old boy, explains that she lets her son watch Big Bang Theory (rated TV-14) as she believes that he is not likely to understand the meaning of a sexual scene. Moreover, at any point if certain scenes seem inappropriate, she would skip to another channel.

Yes, there are sometimes, those two (Big bang theory and Modern Family shows), especially. We are like uhh... that's not good. We will change the channel. If there is more than just a couple of words or like a short part, then we change the channel. As far as talking about it, umm, we probably don't specifically talk about it at that time. But it is more in our normal conversations. So if they see in Big Bang Theory, Penny and Lenard are in bed then I don't know if they register what is going on for sure, they might not even think about that. But they know that we would prefer, you know, you do that when you are married. I am not a 100% sure yet...so yeah, sometimes we change the channel, sometimes we kind of say "don't listen to that" "that is not good to listen to". These parents exhibit some levels of concern for content but are not as skeptical of

media as co-viewers or managers. For instance, they are less likely to rely on existing ratings to choose media content for their children. Traci mentioned getting her child an M-rated game even though she was warned by the retailer about the content being



inappropriate for her son's age. Instead of relying on ratings, Traci said she tracked her son's behavior once he started playing the M-rated game to identify any incidents of aggression and also tracked if he was slipping in his grades. Traci applied similar discretion while letting her son watch TV-14 or unrated TV shows.

Since the focus is on maintaining harmonious relationship with their child, harmonizers tend to tread carefully with regard to exposing their kids to controversial content or engage in any discussion on controversial topics. They are more likely to suggest to their children to not watch certain images as opposed to explaining why they shouldn't watch certain images i.e. they engage in non-evaluative discussions. For example, Traci said "...and he would tell us about it (youtube videos). And you know we will say that kind of stuff is not good to watch." Similarly, Traci prefers skipping channels (restrictive action) to avoid discussion on controversial content.

...watching when we change the channel for them, we would say this is not appropriate to watch, it is not appropriate, change the channel.

Harmonizers are characterized by skepticism about media violence, inconsistency in application of restrictions, and a need to maintain harmonious relationship with children.

Regarding violent commercials. These parents believe that violence was not really prevalent in the shows they watched; hence they were less worried about the prevalence of violent commercials during the breaks. "Commercials have not been a problem...No verbal aggression in ones we watch. We don't watch shows with verbal violence or aggression" said Traci. However, when violent commercials did appear, the parents were frustrated. They considered it as a violation of the sanctity of family time. Family time is considered as *shared time where memories are created through bonding, sharing parental interest for sports and other activities and an occasion to teach children about*



their interests. Parents feared violent commercials not for its impact on behavior as much as its ability to scare children or force parents to have discussions on contentious issues.

Personally, I don't like having to change the channel while watching a football game with my 5 year old son (who loves watching the sport) every time I leave the room or when a horror movie commercial comes on...- online comment from a dad

In order to preserve family time and maintain harmonious atmosphere in the household, harmonizers were likely to mute the channel or switch channels till the commercial break ended. However, these parents did not want to do exhibit these restrictive actions repeatedly as it would reduce the quality of TV viewing and could potentially lead children to ask questions about their restrictive actions. Further, the discussions are likely to be non-evaluative in nature i.e. rules without engagement on basis for rules. Consequentially, harmonizers prefer government, regulatory board or advertisers to take action and create a conducive environment for family viewing. That would help them maintain harmony in the household. For example, a mother commented online suggesting a ban on all violent advertisements. Some other parents have petitioned to senators, sports channels and regulatory bodies or requested networks to advertise after 9 PM. This comment by a parent online summarizes the harmonizers' views on violent commercials.

I had the Bears game on weekend before last....Sun afternoon, family time, right? WRONG! I had to have DD leave the room three times because the ad for "Hostel" came on and was so scary I was afraid she would have nightmares. It really irritates me when stations, and FOX is particularly at fault, do this. I remember being mad during the World Series for the same reason, completely inappropriate ads during the games. I have emailed the local station but of course get no response.

Child's response. Children of harmonizers are aware of restrictions on content but are not aware of the exact reason why he/she cannot consume them. Like Traci's son tries to explain "They are not appropriate... like they have adult content in it, adult content".



Unlike children of co-viewers or managers, they have trouble articulating the reason certain shows are restricted. This can be attributed to the lack of evaluative discussions between parent and child on several issues. The children did not identify violence as an issue or discussed about it.

The three shows my dad doesn't like are the amazing world of gumball, the adventure land and the regular show. Yeah, it is cos they are not entirely good...like they are kind of weird at some parts...My dad has told I shouldn't watch them because they are inappropriate.

In summary, harmonizers are likely to engage in some amount of co-viewing but mostly without any discussions, have few restrictions based on what they deem is appropriate, and have non-evaluative instructions on violent commercials. These parents are more likely to worry about disruption of family viewing atmosphere from violent commercials over likely harm from consuming violent commercials. Children of this segment are likely to be more affected from viewing violent commercials than children of other two segments of parents as they are not prepared to protect themselves against media violence. Since harmonizers' objective is to maintain harmony in the household by minimizing controversial discussions, they are likely to seek out government regulation, independent ratings organization, and expect broadcasters to step in more than any other segment of parents. Overall, harmonizers have qualities similar to authoritarian parents. They co-view less than permissive and authoritative parents, are less worried about the influence of ads, and favor government regulation to prevent their child's exposure to violent commercials (cf. Carlson and Grossbart 1988).

Segment 4: Non-Believers

Parents' views on TV viewing. Non-believers don't believe TV viewing or violent commercials can significantly influence their child's behavior. One of the reasons these



parents were not very worried about influence of TV programs or commercials was because they believed other factors like school and peers had much stronger influence on the child than TV. "The school and the day camps he is in, play a much bigger role than media in his life so far. So I mean just school, school activities, he absorbs from schools and day camp activities, because he is in a day camp, from 8 to 6... a lot of interaction through games" commented Jenny, mother of an 8 year old boy. Consequentially, they did not engage in many interactions regarding TV content with their children. Nevertheless, they have a few restrictions on content and duration of TV viewing, however the children are not provided with reasons for the restrictions. Apart from the few restrictions, non-believers do some co-viewing but without discussions.

Parents had an indifferent attitude toward TV consumption. They used TV for various purposes. Sally, mother of a 9 year old girl, mentioned that TV helped her daughter relax. Sally let her daughter watch TV before she went to bed- "She needs TV like to relax her and go to bed. So she watches between 15 to 30 minutes of TV before she goes to bed". Since parents were indifferent toward TV viewing they were less likely to explain or take time to engage in a discussion with their child on the differences between violence on reel and in reality, effects of violence, and behaviors which the child should not imitate. For instance, Jenny explains her brief discussions with her son about a video game which he is playing. "Yeah, I just say- the name is trigger happy and it is so stupid. All this yelling and this stomping, it is too violent here. And then he goes "no, it is not violent at all". And I say ok- ten minutes, you are done". The discussions are essentially very brief and abrupt without serious engagement.



Sometimes she will ask questions. But like usually we don't ask questions about the show. If she has a question, she will ask us. She has watched shows that we don't approve of. We will tell her she can't watch those shows- Sally

Regarding violent commercials. Non-believers are less likely to have any discussion on commercials, leave alone violent commercials. Like Jenny suggested, "No, we never had any conversation about those commercials". Apart from that, parents are also less likely to recognize the presence of violence in commercials. Jenny believed violence to be more prevalent in movies and video games rather than TV commercials. "There is not much of a violence component in super bowl commercials. But in other commercials, in movies, yeah there is." Further, the parents assumed congruency in program and ads i.e. if they choose a nonviolent program, the ads played would also be nonviolent. This congruency assumption existed even amongst harmonizers. However, research suggests that violent ads are prevalent in child shows as well as during sporting events (cf. Shanahan, Hermans and Hyman 2003; Blackford et al. 2010). For instance, Sally predicted that violent commercials are less likely to play during their 'family time' shows.

The commercials kind of go with the show you watch. I mean like if it is a family show, they are not gonna always have the violent commercials out there... but I don't remember very many commercials where there is a lot of fighting. You know like, like...you know like there may be a bit of fighting but it is like a fun fighting or fighting fighting. I can't even think of a commercial that I can tell you is violent that is on top of my head.

Child's response. Because of the limited discussions children have with their parents about violence and its effects, children built their notions of violence from the shows or games they consumed. For instance, Jenny's son said- "This cartoon violence... it is not bad". The children then use their personal definition of violence to justify their playing a



particular game or watching a specific show. Further, they are less likely in a position to protect themselves from the negative influences of violent commercials

That's (skylanders video game) mild cartoon violence. Just a little bit... exploding and stuff...there is no blood, there is just people falling over and their heads go over the body. They are broad guys, their head and leg detach and stuff like that. They are zombie heads.

Overall, non-believers appear to have qualities similar to neglecting parents. They coview the least, are not concerned about the influence of ads, do not mediate TV commercials, and have limited communication on TV content with their child (Carlson and Grossbart 1988). One of the reasons these parents seem to be less concerned about violent commercials is because they believe other agents are likely to have a greater influence on their child's behavior than TV. The children of non-believers are likely to be most affected by viewing violent commercials because of their limited knowledge about violence and its effects.

Establishing trustworthiness of interpretations

The manual coding themes were verified by testing the data using content analysis software to increase trustworthiness of the interpretations. Manual coding involves a thorough and detailed analysis of the text to develop new themes while coding. One of the drawbacks of manual coding is that the results are likely to be subjective. Text analysis helps overcome the subjectivity as it uses an algorithm and not the researchers' definitions to develop themes (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, and Berthon 2011). Textual analysis was conducted using a text analysis tool called Text is beautiful (TIBtextisbeautiful.net). This tool was previously used to analyze web-based conversation in a paper published in the Journal of Advertising (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, and Berthon 2011). TIB analyzes the words to identify key concepts in the word pool and how they relate to



each other. It uses Bayesian theory to predict concepts from the given corpus of words. These concepts are then presented in different visual formats. For example, in concept cloud visualization, concepts are organized into themes and each theme is denoted by a color (refer Figure 3 in Appendix B). If two concepts belonged to the same theme that means they are closely related. In concept web visualization, concepts are arranged by position i.e. concepts close to each other are placed near each other (refer Figure 4 in Appendix B). The themes generated from the software analysis matched with our interpretations thus increasing the trustworthiness of our conclusions.

Discussion

Parental strategies to manage violent commercials are embedded in a context that requires an understanding of parents' beliefs and parents' relationship with their children. The findings of the present study support the general consumer socialization model put forth by Moschis and Churchill (1979). According to the authors, agents adopt certain socialization processes which influence outcomes in children. Here, the agents who influence the process of learning about violent ads are parents. Parents were divided into four types based on their belief that TV can have a harmful effect on the child or/and violent commercials can be harmful. The four types of parents based on the two dimensions include managers, co-viewers, harmonizers, and non-believers. Further, child's age influences extent of parental mediation (Bybee et al. 1982). The four segments of parents are likely to adopt one or several of the following processesrestrictions, co-viewing with and without discussion, interactions (evaluative or nonevaluative), and/or media control. Each of the following processes could be supplemented with evaluative discussion. Managers are like to engage in evaluative



interactions, restrictions, and control their child's media environment by providing alternative ways to consume media. Co-viewers are likely to engage in evaluative interactions on violence but not necessarily on violent commercials while they co-view content together. Co-viewer's and managers' evaluative engagement with their children involves categorization (reflecting the real world), validation (endorsement/ condemnation), and supplementation (additional information) (cf. Fujioka and Austin 2003). On the other hand, harmonizers are likely to engage in non-evaluative instructions and impose restrictions. Finally, non-believers who are not worried about influence of TV programs or commercials on their child are likely to co-view without discussions and have a few restrictions. These processes are likely to influence the kind of behavior or attitude a child demonstrates after viewing violent commercials. Importantly, a warm relationship with open communication between parent (i.e. managers and co-viewers) and child is likely to negate any influence of violent commercials on children. Figure 2 presents a summary of the framework of parental management of violent commercials.

The present study helps researchers in developing a more nuanced understanding of parental segments and how they likely influence mediation strategies. Particularly, the dimension of beliefs about harm from violent ads helps researchers and managers gain a deeper understanding of motivations of parents' behavior. This study also uncovered a new mediation technique used by parents, i.e. media control, to manage commercials. Finally, this study provides viewers' definition and perspective of violent commercials. Thus, this essay adds depth to our understanding of parents' behavior and expands mediation categories for violent commercials.



Implications, limitations and future research

One of the limitations of the current study is the small sample. Future research is required to empirically verify the proposed framework and the segments using a larger and more generalizable sample. Future research should also test the framework in the context of various cultures to identify if and how the segments vary. During the interviews, parents were asked about 'violent' ads that could have influenced their limited perspective on violent ads. Future research should consider whether parental responses on ads change if they are asked about aggressive ads. Another issue to be considered in future research is to determine if parental mediation strategies for violent ads will change with child's age. The current study focuses on children in the age range of 8 and 12 years. It is likely that as children grow older parents will engage in more active (vs. restrictive) mediation.

From a review of our Internet data, I found that there was a backlash against parents who complained about violent commercials. The online comments suggest that parents need to "lighten up a bit" and not be sensitive about 30 seconds of violence. Further, comments suggest that parents should take responsibility for their child's viewing and not expect firms to change their marketing. Comments online accused parents of sheltering children, as there were far more violent things in the world than 30-second commercials. These viewers were mainly concerned about the possibility of new regulations or a government ban that would restrict their freedom.

Am so tired of hearing, "what about the kids!?" arguments. There are adults out there (the majority of the population) who would like their adult entertainment without having to worry about it being tamed down because some kid might see it- online comment from a viewer.

Parents' belief about violent ads is likely to have several implications for firms.

Managers believe that advertisers are trying to get around even the most attentive parents.



Managers believe they are already working hard on monitoring TV programs, now they have to monitor ads too. Some parents are calling for ad ratings similar to program ratings. From the Internet data, I find that the struggle to manage commercials is driving parents to time-shifted TV solutions. Parents recommend and practice watching deferred telecast on YouTube, Hulu, and DVR with time delay. Further, parents are willing to pay for a device that block ads or offers an ad-free program time. According to Nielsen's report- time spent on time-shifted TV increased by one and half hours from 2008 to 2009, a 26.9% increase compared to just 0.4% increase in time spent watching live TV during the same period (Nielsen 2009). In July 2013, as more shows from Cartoon Network became available on Netflix, Cartoon Network's rating fell by 10% compared to July 2012 in households with Netflix. A parent comments about the role of TV in their lives.

TV plays a marginal role in our lives. Because we have computers...My husband watches online- news and TV. It is on-command, on-demand, whatever we want we choose to access that. But TV, it is passive. You switch open the TV and settle on a channel and whatever they play you watch. Yeah, we don't have time for that. And I don't like commercials. So, no TV, no. Especially now, we have don't even choose to have cable- Jenny

Some parents have suggested not buying products which advertise violently or cancelling cable. In fact, some parents used #notbuyingit hash-tag in their tweets during Super Bowl to protest against violent or sexy commercials being aired. On the other hand, harmonizers are seeking out to networks to play violent ads late in the night or in programs that does not attract a significant child population. Parents are also sending petitions to FTC, senators and TV channels requesting banning or changing duration of violent commercials played during TV shows watched by significant number of children. These actions by parents have significant implications for researchers as well. I add media control as a method of parental mediation. Media control helps explain the media



choices that parents are making to provide a safe and educational media environment for children. There is also a need to study the implications of parents' limited definition of violent commercials and how it is likely to influence children's responses after exposure to other kinds of violence including hostile humor, cartoonish violence or even verbal aggression. Further, there is a need to investigate the outcome of parental actions on children's behavior.

Finally, there are implications for policy makers. It appears that policy makers have to educate parents on an expanded definition of violence and the prevalence of violent commercials. There is a need to segment and target policies, i.e. based on parental segment offer various tools to parents to manage violent commercials. The data suggests that RQ3 is valid only for Managers since they seem to be motivated to manage violent commercials. This suggests that policymakers have to identify parental motivations to manage programs and commercials before recommending how to manage them. Policymakers might also want to consider the frequency of violent movie ads being played on children's media channel. While MPAA and ESRB have reduced advertising of R-rated movies and M-rated games respectively in programs viewed by a significant population of children, similar efforts might be needed for PG-13 movies. Thus, by focusing on the triad of parents, children and advertisements, this study has offers significant implications for parents, researchers, marketers and public policy makers.

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APPENDIX A: INTERNET DATA SOURCES

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APPENDIX B: RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Details of Interviewees
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Participant	Parent Interviewed	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Housing	# of children	Anyone else in the household
1	Mother	35-39	Female	Married	Rent	2	No
2		10	Female				
3	Mother	35-39	Female	Married	Own	1	No
4		10	Female				
5	Mother	45-49	Female	Married	Own	1	No
6		11	Male				
7	Mother	35-39	Female	Married	Own	2	No
8		11	Male				
9		10	Male				
10	Mother	35-39	Female	Married	Rent	1	No
11		9	Female				
12	Mother	35-39	Female	Married	Own	1	Grandparents
13		8	Male				
14	Mother	40-44	Female	Married	Own	2	no
15		10	Female				
16	Mother	40-44	Female	Married	Own	2	No
17	Father	45-49	Male				
18		8	Male				
19	Mother	40-44	Female	Married	Own	1	No
20		10	Male				

Table 2: Example of coding violent ad content

	Explicit				
Ad	Violence	Weapon	Injuries	Fatalities	Comedic
Snickers	0	0	1	0	1
Xbox 360	0	0	0	1	1
I am Legend	3	1	0	0	0
Evil Dead	5	0	3	0	0
Doritos	2	1	1	0	1
M & M	0	0	0	0	1
Shark Week	2	0	0	0	1
Despicable Me	3	1	0	0	1
24	3	1	0	1	0
NCIS	3	1	0	0	0
Texas Chainsaw Massacre	3	1	1	0	0



Table 3: Violent Ads Coding Definition from Coding and Health Media Project's Violence Code Book⁵

Explicitness of Violent Content (Adapted from Leone, 2002):

0. No Violence - Coded only if no violence occurs in the segment.

1. Low – The result of violence shown (e.g., a dead body), but the act of violence itself is not shown. Includes representations of injuries, such as maimed, disfigured, or dead bodies; characters bleeding; pool of blood.

2. Somewhat – Includes two forms of portrayal: (a) Unarmed violence in the form of punching, kicking, pushing with intention to harm but without depiction of blood, bodily penetration, or murder; (b) Or use of weapons (bullets, swords, knives, poison, etc.) with consequence implied but not shown (e.g., man heard being shot but not shown).

3. More – Violence, including the use of weapons, to inflict blunt force, but without bloodshed. The act must be depicted on-screen (i.e., a character is struck by a bat). Includes portrayal of murder.

4. Very – Includes two forms of portrayal: (a) Level 3 with bloodshed or (b) Use of a weapon that penetrates without bloodshed (e.g., person murdered with no blood shown).

5. Most – In addition to level 4, violence resulting in penetration and bloodshed.

Use of a Weapon: Code anytime weapons are used violently. Punching, kicking, wrestling, or other handto-hand combat is not considered using a weapon. Anytime a character uses any object in a violent manner (chairs, broken bottles, poison, etc.) code it as a weapon present.

Injuries Depicted: Only code for representations of injuries, not implied injuries. The injury must be depicted on the screen separate from the violent action. (For example, if a character is shot, this is not an injury depiction. If the character is shown bleeding or dead after the shooting takes place, this is an injury depiction). Code only for the highest level of injuries depicted.

1. Mild - representation of bruises, lacerations, or broken bones

2. Moderate – representation of bodies maimed, blinded, impaired, or disfigured

3. Extreme – representation of fatally wounded bodies (body shown)

Fatalities from Violence: Any character dies in this segment as a direct or indirect consequence of a violent act. Unlike the injury scale, the dead body does not necessarily have to be shown (e.g., a person dies in a car explosion) for a fatality to be shown.

Comedic Violence: Violence is intended to cause laughter or comedy in the scene, or violence that is not done with the intent to cause serious harm. This is strictly slapstick comedy (e.g., *Three Stooges*).

⁵ From Violence Code Book at http://www.youthmediarisk.org/Menuitem.aspx?Id=28



Туре	Words
TV Channels	Fox, NBC, CBS, ESPN, Networks, TNT, ABC
Commercials	TV programs: NCIS, Nashville, 24 Video Games: Assassins Creed, Call of Duty, Halo Movies: Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Hostel, Transformers, Gangster Squad, Dark Knight, Untouchables
Duration	NFL, Football, Sports, Bowl, Superbowl, Olympics, NBA, World Series; Afternoon, Day, Sunday, Morning, Daytime

Table 4: Parents mentions on violent ads from Internet data

Table 5: Examples of comments from Internet data

Beliefs about Violent Commercials

Harmful:

"The violent commercials (for movies, video games and TV shows) are the worst for me. I don't want my early elementary school children seeing those images."

"The DVR is essential to keep them from seeing these commercials but even then, some violent images get displayed as I advance through the commercials 30-seconds at a time. I've experimented with the V-chip but that doesn't work for commercials since they aren't rated."

"My 6 year old son loves to watch sports, but even on a Saturday afternoon during an NCAA football game, we are constantly barraged by a slew of advertisements for alcohol & sexually charged commercials. More disturbing are the over- the-top violent commercials for R-rated or or Teen video games and movies. It's to the point where sometimes we have to record the sporting events and be sure to fast-forward through all the commercials."

"Where is the mentality of your advertisers? With all the violence in the world, we as parents and teachers are attempting to teach our children not to hit others, yet your newest ad has a woman tasting a new food and slapping a man across the face."

"Finally, the "industry" needs to stop talking about this. It doesn't take a whole lot of effort to "daypart" commercials just like radio does with music. And a note to Sales Managers and Account Executives: just because a client gives you money to run a spot with violent or se*ual content in your early local news or Sunday's NFL game, doesn't mean you can't say, No thanks."

"Hey @pandora_radio - please do not play commercials for violent TV shows in between songs on any kids' channels. #please #kidsarelistening"

"good parenting is hard. But no, it's not anyone else's responsibility to ensure our kids aren't "bombarded" by anything we don't want them exposed to."

Not harmful:

"I believe that the bottom line is that parents must take responsibility for their own children. They must not turn the other way and blame their electronic babysisters, the wealthy corporations, or the corrupted teenage friends."

"There's a bunch of research out there. Most of it is vague and out of date. There's evidence that watching a lot of TV and a lot of violence leaves kids uncertain and more likely to be violent. But you can't tie it down to commercials."

"Geese! Lighten up, Mr. Sensitive. Did you become a raving violent maniac from watching cartoons when you were a kid? Don't worry about it. If you teach them right from wrong, you won't have to depend on TV to teach them, now will you"

"Has there EVER been a Superbowl commercial that had impressionable football fans replicating the next day? Is there a big jump in Clidesdale sales? Do babies start trading stocks? Is there a surge in car accidents of people replicating stunts they saw on a commercial?"

"What violence in media gives us is ACTION in the media. without action, media would be boring!" "So banning a 30 second ad is going to stop soccer riots from happening altogether?



Table 6: Interview questions and objectives addressed for the study on parental perceptions and
management of child's viewing of violent commercials

Grand Tour Question to Parents	Objective
Tell me about your child's routine for (a) weekday and (b) weekend	Warm Up
Tell me about your child's TV viewing habits	Child's Media Habits and Parental engagement
Now I will show you three ads and ask for your opinion on those ads. What do you think about these ads? (Elicitation technique)	Parental perceptions on Violent Commercials
Describe, if any, type of TV program(s) you do not want your child to watch; Describe, if any, type of TV program(s) you do not want your child to watch	Parental Concerns and Management of TV programs and commercials
Can you recollect and describe an instance when your child mimicked something on TV?; Can you recollect and describe any instances when your child used aggressive measures to catch your attention or make you yield to his/her requests?	Child's relationships with others and behavior
Grand Tour Question to Children	Objective
What is your favorite TV (a) program (b) commercial (c) character?	Child's TV habits
Tell me about the things you do at home to help your parents; Tell me how you spend time with your sister/brother(s)/friends? Tell me how do you spend time at school?	Child's relationships with others and behavior

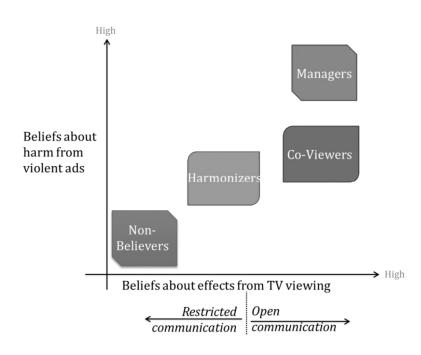


Figure 1: Parental segments



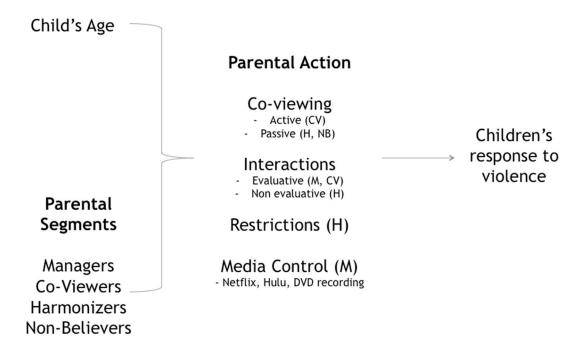


Figure 2: Framework of parental mediation of violent ads



Figure 3: Textual analysis of tweets by parents on violent commercials



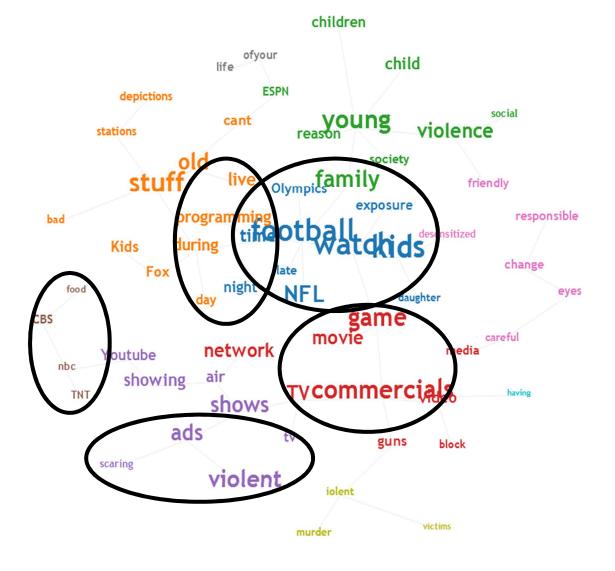


Figure 4: Concept web of data obtained from the Internet



CHAPTER 3. WHEN VIOLENCE BECOMES ACCEPTABLE: THE CASE OF VIOLENT-HUMOROUS COMMERCIALS

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Abstract

Violent commercials have been associated with aggressive cognitions, increased arousal and aggressive tendencies in viewers. However, little is known about the influence of violent-humorous commercials. The aim of this study is to understand the influence of violent-humorous commercials on a young viewer's psychological responses. Using the General Aggression Model (GAM) as a theoretical foundation, I find that violent-humorous commercials lead to higher levels of aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect in young viewers. Further, active parental mediation has a 'boomerang' effect on aggressive affect from exposure to violent-humorous commercials.

Introduction

Several hundred studies have concluded that heavy exposure to media violence results in aggressive cognitions, aggressive affect, aggressive behaviors, and desensitization in viewers. These studies have used multiple methods of investigation including lab and field experiments, longitudinal studies, cross-sectional studies and meta-analyses (Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley 2007). The correlation between media violence exposure and aggressive behavior has been established to be 0.32 (Paik and Comstock 1994). The meta-analysis suggests that there is a higher probability that chronic exposure to violent images will lead to aggressive behavior than passive smoking to lung cancer (0.15) or reduced calcium intake to reduced bone mass (0.1) (Bushman and Anderson

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2001). Exposure to media violence is considered a "risk factor" that increases aggression in children (Gentile and Sesma 2003). The presence of a single risk factor is generally not enough to cause an individual to engage in violence. However, additional factors enhance the probability of an aggressive response (Gentile and Sesma 2003). A risk factor like exposure to violent commercials is relatively easy to manage (e.g. by limiting TV viewing) compared to the difficult task of altering other risk factors like lower SES or prior victimization (Subcommittee of Youth Violence 2013). This essay focuses on violent commercials couched in humor since such commercials are increasing both in number and popularity (number of acts with humor and violence- 143 in 180 (approximately 79%)) (Blackford et al. 2011). In addition, violent ads couched in humor elicit greater mediation with the ad message, enhance attitude toward ad, and are more likely to be passed around virally (Brown, Bhadury, and Pope 2010). While research has established that commercials contain significant amounts of violence and humor, it has not yet established the extent to which violent-humorous commercials influences children's aggressive responses.

Producers of commercials have only 30 seconds to communicate. In this duration, they may exaggerate the vividness of the violent cues to grab viewers' attention and potentially prime semantically related thoughts and feelings. Violent commercials have been found to increase aggressive tendencies and physiological arousal in adults and aggressive cognitions in young children (Caprara, D'Imperio, Gentilomo, Mammucari, Renzi, and Travaglia 1987; Brocato, Gentile, Laczniak, Maier, and Ji-Song 2010). Aggressive thoughts and feelings generated in response to violent ads are likely to activate aggression-related knowledge structures (scripts, schemata, beliefs); repeated



exposures to violence strengthen the link between cues and knowledge structures (Anderson and Bushman 2001). Once a knowledge structure is established, the viewer can develop long lasting aggressive personality traits. These traits can prompt viewers to act more aggressively than they would have, had they not been exposed to the violence in commercials (Brocato et al. 2010).

While risk factors cause harm, "protective factors" such as parental mediation and open communication with parents may counteract and lessen the effects of risk factors (Gentile and Sesma 2003). Protective factors may shield the child from committing any acts of violence, they might or might not guard the child from changes to psychological level variables like increased aggressive cognitions or affect (Gentile and Bushman 2012). It is important to study aggressive cognitions as it is likely to influence four of the five aggressive knowledge structures which are likely to lead to the formation of an aggressive personality (Bushman and Anderson 2001). Aggressive affect can interfere with the cognitive process of reasoning and help the aggressor maintain their intent to aggress for a longer duration (Ramirez and Andreu 2006). This paper therefore focuses on both children's responses to violent-humorous commercials and potential effectiveness of active parental mediation of such commercials. I expect children who watch violent-humorous commercials to show highest levels of aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect (since humor justifies violence). Finally, this essay looks at responses of children whose parents actively mediate their child's TV consumption. Active mediation involves discussing television content with children (Nathanson 2001a). For reasons noted above I believe active mediation by parents may attenuate the ill effects of media violence.



Background

Influence of violent TV

Children in the age group of 8-18 spend more time watching TV everyday (4.5 hours) compared to spending it on any other media (total media time: 7.67 hours) (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). In fact the time children spend watching TV is greater than the time they spend participating in out-of-school activities like homework or reading (Groebel 1998). Further, children today are exposed to more violent content than a few decades earlier, with constantly increasing levels of both physical and verbal violence in TV programs (American Academy of Pediatrics 2001; Bozell III, Winter, Barnes, Caldwell, and Fyfe 2007). A content analysis of TV programs in the US revealed that out of 8000 hours of programming, 4800 hours (up to 60%) of programming contained violence. Additionally, half of the 4800 hours of violent content contained an element of humor (National Television Violence Study 1998). It has been approximated that children are likely to have been exposed to up to 200,000 violent acts on TV by the time they are 18 (Potter 1999). Based on a meta-analysis of 217 studies conducted between 1957 and 1980, Paik and Comstock (1994) reported that the correlation between media violence exposure and aggressive behavior is 0.32. It essentially means that 32 out of 100 viewers are likely to demonstrate aggression after being exposed to media violence. Additionally, several (thousands) studies and expert panels have concluded that exposure to TV violence is a major factor for aggression and violence in at least a significant part of the population (American Academy of Pediatrics 2001; Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley 2007).

Viewing TV violence has both immediate and delayed affects. Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen, and Brook (2002) studied 707 individuals over 17 years and found that



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three hours or more of TV viewing at age 14 was significantly related to aggressive behavior at ages 16 or 22. The participants were interviewed through 1991-93 on TV viewing and through 2000 on aggressive behaviors including criminal behaviors. TV viewing increased tendency to act aggressively against others after controlling for previous aggressive behavior, childhood neglect, family income, neighborhood violence, parental education, and psychiatric disorders (Johnson et al. 2002). Similarly, childhood exposure to media violence, identification with TV characters, and perceived realism of TV violence predicts an individual's aggressive behavior 15 years later (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, and Eron 2003). The above evidence suggests that viewing TV violence has both a short- and long-term impact. It is therefore important to focus on children, as they are likely to be affected by the consequences of viewing violence both immediately and much later in life.

Research on violent TV viewing has also associated it with other problems including desensitization to violence, fear, depression, nightmares, and sleep disturbances (American Academy of Pediatrics 2001). Fanti et al. (2009) found an inverse U-shaped relationship between repeated viewing of violence and enjoyment. In addition, the authors found a U-shaped relationship between repeated viewing of violence and sympathy for victims. Similarly, Drabman and Thomas (1974) and Thomas, Horton, Lippincott, and Drabman (1977) in their early studies on TV violence exposure, found that fictional violence reduced a child's sensitivity to real life violence, reduced anxiety toward aggressive behavior, and made him/her consider violence as normative. Long-term media exposure increases a child's aggression in inter-personal interactions (Wood, Wong, and Chachere 1991). It also leads the viewer to believe that the world is a



dangerous place to live where others cannot be trusted (Murray 2008). Essentially, consumption of media violence reduces a child's ability to take perspective and leads to lowering of moral reasoning about justified violence (Krcmar and Vieira 2005).

Violent commercials

Media violence is any media based content that depicts intentional attempts by individuals to cause harm to others (Anderson and Bushman 2001). An intentional attempt to cause harm is known as aggression; violence is an extreme form of aggression that causes severe harm such as death or grave injury (Anderson and Bushman 2002). Eight to eighteen year olds spend 7:38 (hours: minutes) on an average daily on media, with 4:29 (58.73%) of that time spent on watching TV (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). These young viewers are likely to be exposed to 25,000 television commercials every year (Desrochers and Holt 2007). Advertisers are increasingly using violence to attract viewers' attention (Gulas, McKeage, and Weinberger 2010; Palmerton and Judas 1994). Researchers have estimated that the commercials aired during Super bowl or Saturday morning children's shows have at least two to three acts of violence per commercial minute (Blackford, Gentry, Harrison, and Carlson 2011; Oliver and Kalyanaraman 2002; Shanahan, Hermans, and Hyman 2003). Extrapolating these figures, a child is likely to be exposed to thirty thousand¹ acts of violence every year from viewing commercials alone. This is almost three times the amount of violence children are likely to be exposed from viewing two hours of cartoons every day for a year (National Television Violence Study 1998). While parents can choose the kind of TV programs their children watch, they have little control over the kind of commercials see during the programs. For example, NFL broadcasts, which are widely watched by families contains a significant number of violent commercials. Forty-seven percent of the



5000 or more commercials sampled during the 2008 telecast contained violent or sexual content and 10% of the total commercials contained murders, explosions, and gun fights (Associated Press 2009). Below I explain the nature of violent commercials.

Extent of violence in commercials. A content analysis of Saturday morning children's TV shows by Shanahan, Hermans, and Hyman (2003) found that in the most violent 30 minute block of children's TV program there were approximately 17 acts of violence per *commercial* minute as compared to approximately 8 acts of violence per *program* minute. Larson (2001), in her review of 595 commercials featuring and targeted at children, found that almost 35% of the commercials contained at least one form of aggression while 7% portrayed more than one form. These commercials were mostly for upcoming programs or movies. An example of this violent content can be depicted in a scene from Nickelodeon's SpongeBob SquarePants, a cartoon program rated TV-Y (program suitable for young audiences): "A promotion for Lego's latest 'Batman' action figures features pint-sized 'Caped Crusader' dodging falling missiles as his car explodes. Meanwhile, audiences are told to "strike back" with the aid of Lego's new missile-equipped toy fighter jet: "Take control, load the weapon, and hunt down 'The Joker'," child audiences are told, as the ad depicts air combat complete with several more rocket attacks" (FCC 2006). In this ad the children are encouraged to harm Joker using advanced weaponry (as 'intention to harm' forms the core of aggression definition).

Duration. Violent commercials seemed to appear with equal probability in both lowand high-violence cartoon programs as well as sports shows (Palmerton and Judas 1994). A content analysis of the 1998 baseball playoff commercials found that there were at least nine violent commercials per game on an average; again most of the commercials



were promotions for upcoming TV programs or big screen movies (Anderson 2000). It is important to consider sports shows alongside children's shows because viewing it is considered part of family time and many children tend to co-view it with their parents. For instance, 23 million children aged 6-14 watched NFL during the 2012 season and 14 million children watched Super bowl in 2008 (Berfield 2013; Blackford et al. 2011).

Marketing violent entertainment. After the Columbine school shooting in 1999, President Clinton requested the Federal Trade Commission to study the marketing of violent entertainment to children (Clinton 1999). Afterwards, between 2000 and 2009, the FTC commissioned seven reports on marketing of violent entertainment to children. In their latest report, the commission studied the marketing plans of six PG-13 and R-rated movies. The commission found that movie studios targeted violent PG-13 movie spots at children under 13 both through direct advertising and tie-ins with foods, toys, and other licensed products. Direct advertising occurred in children's networks including Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon which typically have at least 50% audience of 2- to 11- year olds. The movie studios also placed a significant number of ads for R-rated movies in shows in which more than 35% of the audience was under-17 (FTC 2009). FTC also found that the M-rated video game Halo 3 was significantly cross-promoted with Mountain Dew, Burger King, and 7-eleven slurpees (FTC 2009). Similar to FTC's reports, Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood (2009) found that between March 17, and June 14, 2004, 2734 ads of four PG-13 movies, including Terminator Salvation and Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, were aired on children's networks like Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon between 6:00 and 8:00 PM. Fifty-one percent of the movie ads were cross promotions with food or toy products. In another study, Oliver and



Kalyanaraman (2002) found that two-thirds of the previews for PG-13 movies contained at least one scene of aggression while one-third of the movie trailers had at least one scene that featured gun use. While the three major studios (Fox, Warner Bros, and MGM) have implemented specific standards for advertising R-rated movies to children, they do not have similar restrictions for advertising PG-13 movies. This is concerning since gun violence in PG-13 movies has tripled since 1985; in 2009, PG-13 movies had as much or more gun violence than R-rated movies (Bushman, Jamieson, Weitz, and Romer 2013). More violence in movies implies more violence in the trailers; consequentially children are exposed to more violent commercials (Oliver and Kalyanaraman 2002). Similarly, video game advertisers regularly use (56% of the ads) violent acts, weapons, and threats to advertise their products. In fact, even games rated E for 'Everyone' contained violent acts, weapons, and violent words in their ads (Scharrer 2004). Marketers try to persuade viewers by showcasing the game's ability to provide players with a thrilling experience (Shimanovsky and Lewis 2006). Overall, violent commercials seem to very frequently appear in shows watched by young children. Most of the commercials are for violent entertainment including movies and video games. Despite high levels of violence in commercials targeted at children, research on the influence of violent commercials on children is sparse (Rifon, Royne and Carlson 2010). In the next section, I look at the process by which violent media influences an individual's behavior.

Theory: General Aggression Model

General Aggression Model (GAM) is helpful in understanding the process by which chronic exposure to violent images leads to aggressive behavior (Anderson and Bushman 2002). According to GAM when individual factors (e.g. traits, sex) and situation factors



(e.g. provocation, aggressive primes (media violence), or high temperatures) interact there may be a change in the individual's internal state. That is, there may be a change in affect, cognitions, and arousal. For example, Bushman (1995) found that exposure to violent videos (situation prime) increased both aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions (internal state) in individuals with high trait hostility (individual factor). Aggressive cognitions include beliefs that suggest aggression is normal and scripts which prescribe retaliation as a typical response to provocation (Gentile and Bushman 2012). Aggressive affect is an emotional response (feelings of anger or hostility) to an aggressive cue (Gentile and Bushman 2012). Anger consists of negative feelings which vary in intensity from mild irritation to annoyance to fury and rage while hostility refers to aggressive attitudes directed at destroying an object or harming a person/people (Zuckerman, Lubin, Vogel, and Valerius 1964). A change in internal state is likely to influence the person's appraisal and decision making process i.e. in many cases influence them to adopt aggressive behavior (Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley 2007; Anderson and Carnagey 2009; Lindsay and Anderson 2000).

The process of interaction of individual and situational factors leading to change in internal states which then influences the appraisal and decision making process is one episode. Repeated episodes result in strengthening of the link between aggressive cues and aggression-related knowledge structures in the viewer's mind through learning, rehearsal, and reinforcement. That is, when a child watches a violent commercial there is likely to be a change in his/her internal state (increased aggressive cognitions and affect). Repeated viewing of violent commercials is likely to strengthen the link between aggressive cues and aggressive knowledge structures. Aggressive knowledge structures –



aggressive beliefs and attitudes, perceptual schemas, expectations, behavioral scripts – influence the formation of aggressive personality. An aggressive personality feeds into the individual factors influencing an individual's appraisal and decision-making process when they encounter a situation with aggressive cues or primes (like media violence) in the future (Anderson and Bushman 2002; Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley 2007).

Humor and violence in advertising

"In fact, violence is often funny on television," quote authors of the NTVS (1998) study. Viewers are likely to derive meaning of violent acts by simultaneously drawing information from other contextual factors like humor (Potter 1999). Humor appears to be an excellent partner for violence with at least a quarter of all acts and threats of violence on TV conducted in a humorous context (Smythe 1954). Moreover, aggressive humor is suggested to lead to aggression and hostility in viewers (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir 2003). In children's TV programming the comedy drama genre had the highest number of violent acts (36.6 acts per hour) compared to children's drama (22.4) and general-audience drama (6); particularly Saturday morning cartoons had more violent acts (25.9 acts per hour) than the action-adventure programs (18.3) aired during that time (Potter 1999). Violent-humorous ads often target, denigrate, or insult actors while the violence is rewarded or unpunished (Blackford et al. 2011; Potter and Warren 1998). Scharrer (2004) in her analysis of ads for video games found that in addition to violence, advertisers used humor to persuade viewers. Of the 536 aggressive commercials analyzed by Scharrer, Bergstrom, Paradise, and Ren (2006), over half of them contained humor. The prevalence of humor in aggressive commercials was close to 88% when only commercials for products or services (after excluding promotions for movies or TV



programs) were considered (Scharrer et al. 2006). Similarly Gulas, McKeage, and Weinberger (2010) found that 13.6% of the humorous ads played during the 1989 super bowl had aggression in them while the number rose to a staggering 76.9% in 2009. Leonard and Ashley (2012) and Gunter (1985) suggest that dichotomizing images into violent and nonviolent provides only a limited view of their impact on the viewer. The authors recommend simultaneously studying other dimensions like humor to gain a broad based view of the influence of violence.

Aggressive effects of violent-humorous commercials

Violent humor involves a hostile attempt to ridicule, deprecate or injure another individual. It enhances the individual who is being violent while being detrimental to the victim (Brown, Bhadury, and Pope 2013; Blackford et al. 2011). Firms use violenthumorous commercials as viewers are more likely to be involved with these commercials because of an element of surprise in them. The element of surprise increases attention, likeability, recognition, and recall. Similarly, violence in a commercial can increase attention and memory however it comes at a risk of an increased negative evaluation (Brown, Bhadury, and Pope 2013). By using violence and humor together, firms can increase attention while reducing negative evaluation of the ad. Humor is supposed to distract the viewer from unfavorably evaluating the content in an ad and focus on the humorous part instead (Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014). However, viewers reported significantly more aggressive thoughts after watching situational comedies than crime shows (Chory-Assad 2004). Comedic violent cartoon has been suggested to lead to higher rates of aggressive behavior (Silvern and Williamson 1987). Similarly, Anderson, Carnagey, and Eubanks (2003) find that songs that combine both humor and violence in their lyrics produced the greatest amount of aggressive cognitions while humorous



nonviolent lyrics produced least amount of aggressive cognitions in the viewers. Nathanson and Cantor (2000) find that young children experienced increased aggressive tendencies after viewing a funny cartoon with aggression in it. The authors conclude that a video where a funny perpetrator of violence was viewed and no reference to consequences were offered, there were increased aggressive inclinations in children. Overall, when violence is presented in a humorous context there seems to be increased aggressive responses.

Researchers of the NTVS (1998) report consider a violent-humorous portrayal highrisk because the violence in the act goes unpunished, violence is justified, and the perpetrator of violence is made to appear a hero. In fact, humor is suggested to be negatively correlated to the perceived violence (Blackford et al. 2011). Humor is believed to signal that a violent act has trivial consequences. As a result viewers are likely to apply less critical mind-set and demonstrate high tolerance towards otherwise offensive or even unacceptable content (Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014). By ignoring a humorous attack the viewer is tacitly agreeing with the attack and is likely to believe that physical violence is a reasonable response to minor offences (Gulas, McKeage, and Weinberger 2010). Essentially, humor lends legitimacy to violence and violence that is justified is more attractive to a viewer which is then more likely to influence his/her responses (Brown, Bhadury, and Pope 2013). When violence appears attractive there is also a likely reduced inhibition toward its use. Additionally, trivialization of violence leads to greater probability of violence getting imitated (Chory-Assad 2004).

As explained previously in the GAM model, knowledge structures (person factor) influence the interpretation of situational variables (e.g. response to an attack). The



combination of these factors results in the activation of aggressive cognitions and production of aggressive affect (i.e. a change in the internal state). The interaction among these aspects of the internal state then predicts an aggressive response to the situation (Bartholow, Anderson, Carnagev and Benjamin Jr. 2005). In the case of violenthumorous content, previous research suggests that violence in a violent-humorous act is justified and justified violence increases tolerance of and lowers inhibition towards the use of violence (Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014; Chory-Assad 2004). Repeated viewing of such content only strengthens the link between those concepts (Bartholow et al. 2005). As a result next time a violent-humorous content is viewed, humor in the content serves as a cue to aggression since it is closely linked with aggression-related concepts (e.g. aggression is acceptable or justified) in memory. While media violence is already believed to increase accessibility to or create links to aggression related concepts, I hypothesize that humor along with violence will only further ease the access to or create new links with aggressive concepts leading to increased aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect (Bartholow et al. 2005). Therefore, I predict that exposure to violent humorous commercials are likely to lead to significantly more aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions than nonviolent humorous or violent non-humorous or nonviolent non-humorous commercials in young children. First, I establish that commercials with violence alone (vs. nonviolent) are likely to lead to more aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions.

H1: Children exposed to violent commercials are likely to have more aggressive affect than children exposed to nonviolent commercials.



H2: Children exposed to violent commercials are likely to have more aggressive cognitions than children exposed to nonviolent commercials.

H3: Children exposed to violent humorous commercials are likely to have more aggressive affect than children exposed to violent non-humorous commercials.

H4: Children exposed to violent humorous commercials are likely to have more aggressive affect than children exposed to nonviolent humorous commercials.

H5: Children exposed to violent humorous commercials are likely to have more aggressive affect than children exposed to nonviolent non-humorous commercials.

H6: Children exposed to violent humorous commercials are likely to have more aggressive cognitions than children exposed to violent non-humorous commercials.

H7: Children exposed to violent humorous commercials are likely to have more aggressive cognitions than children exposed to nonviolent humorous commercials.

H8: Children exposed to violent humorous commercials are likely to have more aggressive cognitions than children exposed to nonviolent non-humorous commercials.

Essentially, from H3 to H8 I compare violent-humorous cell to every other cell and predict violent-humorous commercials to lead to higher levels of aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions than any other commercial (See Table 1).

Parental active mediation

Young children are mainly reliant on their parents to learn, react, and respond to images which they view on TV (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, and Engelbertson 1999). Parents are likely to be involved in one of the three ways – active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-viewing – in managing their child's TV viewing (Nathanson 2001a). Active mediation is talking to children about TV viewing, restrictive mediation is setting



rules about TV viewing, and co-viewing is passively watching television with children. Each type of mediation is not just distinct in its input but also varies widely in the way it influences a child's response to TV content (Nathanson 2001a). Several studies point to active mediation as being most effective in attenuating the effect of media violence. Below I explain the process by which active mediation influences viewing and how it might help reduce the impact of viewing violent-humorous commercials.

It has been found that children who watch TV with their parents (vs. who don't) are likely to have lesser aggressive cognitions when exposed to violent commercials (Brocato et al. 2010). When parents use TV programs and commercials as an opportunity to educate their children, they increase media literacy, and prevent the child from watching any inappropriate content (Bleakley, Jordan, and Henessey 2013). During discussions, parents are likely to make anti-aggression statements or/and ask children to consider the victim's feelings. When parents mention negative comments about content on TV, children are likely to believe that the content is not worthy, useful, or important (Nathanson 1999). Further, active mediation increases media skepticism and provides children with a better understanding of TV plots (Nathanson 2001a). Active mediation is also a means to communicate what behavior is not acceptable (Nathanson and Cantor 2000). As a result, when children watch violent content they are less likely to imitate it. While positive comments about violent content could only lead to imitation and acceptance (Nathanson 2002). This is likely to make active mediation effective compared to other methods. However, a parent merely viewing violent TV together without any discussion has a boomerang effect on the child. That is, when parents invest time viewing TV and do not object to it, children believe that the content is worthy of their attention



and show increased preference for similar behavior (cf. Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014; Nathanson 2002). For instance, co-viewing is related to aggressive tendencies in children, positive attitude toward and viewing of television violence and sex (Nathanson 1999; 2002).

Similarly, by restricting access to violent media (restrictive mediation) children are likely to believe that the content is not important to them. Limiting screen time and other parental monitoring activities are suggested to lead to pro-social outcomes and decreased aggressive behavior in children (Gentile, Reimer, Nathanson, Walsh and Eisenmann 2014). But high level of restrictive mediation is likely to make the child resent their parents since there is no direct communication about why the violent content is harmful for the child (Nathanson 1999). It is also likely to attract the child to the restricted content (Cantor, Harrison, and Nathanson 1997). As a result, children are likely to view the restricted content with their friends as restrictions without communication encourages rule breaking when parents are not around. Overall, restrictive mediation is related to less positive attitude toward parents, more positive attitude toward violent TV content, and more viewing of restricted content with friends (Nathanson 2002).

Previous research suggests that children respond better to open communication rather than control (Otto and Atkinson 1997). In fact, Nathanson (1999) finds that talking to children is more effective than using harsher, power assertive techniques. American Psychological Association (2005) recommends teaching children about the effects of media violence thus providing them with the ability to critically evaluate media. The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP 2010) recommend that adults watch TV with their children and help them process media violence through discussions. AAFP



particularly stress on the need for social interaction between parents and children to develop cognitive abilities in children. These are all characteristics of active mediation. In terms of GAM, active mediation leads to concepts from parental discussions against violence being linked to violent media content. That is, when parents offer negative commentary against violence during a violent-humorous act, the negative commentary is likely to become part of the child's knowledge structure. Consequentially, concepts from parental discussions against violence are likely to be activated every time a child watches a violent-humorous commercial. Therefore, I expect children whose parents are actively involved to show lower aggressive responses to violent-humorous ad. As a result, I hypothesize a negative relationship between parental active mediation and aggressive cognitions and affect.

H9: Active parental mediation will reduce aggressive cognitions in children watching violent-humorous ads.

H10: Active parental mediation will reduce aggressive affect in children viewing violent-humorous ads.

An in-depth analysis on the possible outcomes from exposure to violent commercials in the presence of humor, thus provides an opportunity to understand the impact of violent commercials on children at an age (8-12) when they are building knowledge structures (Brucks, Armstrong, and Goldberg 1988).

Research method

Participants and design

An online consumer panel of 359 parent-child dyads was recruited through a research firm. Parents living in the US with children between the age of 8 and 12 years were



specifically recruited for the study. The final data set had 334 participants with 165 participants in the non-humorous condition and 169 participants in the humorous condition. The final sample included 225 mothers (67.4%) and 75% of the participants were married. The median income of the participants was between \$55,000 and \$99,999 and 311 participants were native English speakers. The average age of the child participant was 10.37 years and 152 (45.5%) girls participated in the study. The entire study was hosted on Qualtrics.

A 2×2 experiment with a within (violent vs. nonviolent) and between subjects (humorous vs. non-humorous) design was developed. Children were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions- non-humorous condition or humorous ad condition (between-subjects). Each participant first filled a media habit survey where they gave titles of the most watched TV show and video game, levels of violence in it, and frequency of viewing/playing (scales from Gentile et al. 2014) (All scales provided in Appendix B). Following the survey, the participants watched two treatment ads (within subjects: a combination of nonviolent ad and violent ad). The two aggression-related dependent variables couldn't be measured one after the other in the same exposure because of likely order effects i.e. measurement of one variable could impact the measurement of another (Lindsay and Anderson 2000). Hence the same ad was played twice- first to measure aggressive cognitions and the second time to measure aggressive affect. Aggressive cognitions were measured using the pre-aggression and postaggression questionnaire designed by Nathanson and Cantor (2000). The pre-aggression score was used as a control variable in the analyses. The measure for aggressive affect was developed from the state hostility scale (Anderson and Carnagey 2009). In the end,



children were debriefed about the harmful effects of viewing media violence. Parents were provided with a brief survey with questions on child's media habits, parental active mediation, and demographics. The reliabilities of the scales are presented in Table 3, Appendix C.

Pre-test and manipulation check. An initial list of eight ads (from existing TV ads) was pretested with 30 undergraduate students from a Midwest university. The participants had to view each of the eight ads (randomized) and respond to the 13 item, 10 point ad rating scale used by Gunter, Tohala, and Furnham (2001). The eight ads included two for each of the four conditions. Mario video game ads that differed in levels of humor and violence were chosen for the four conditions. This product category was likely to be of interest to children thus capturing their attention. Further, previous studies suggest significant portion of the violent commercials on TV were marketing entertainment that was another reason to prefer Mario game ads. Four ads were chosen based on the participants' ratings for the items violent, hostile, humorous, and funny. The Mario violent ad involved Mario tripping Yoshi followed by punches exchanged between all the characters including Donkey Kong and Pikachu. In the background, audience is encouraged to but the "star studded slam fest". In the violent-humorous ad, Mario is seen playing football where he kicks, pushes, and injures football players in order to score a goal. He also attacks the referee in the end. The kicking and punching are done in a humorous context such that the violence seems acceptable. Both the violent ads meet the media violence definition of intentional harm to a character. There are also images of fire blasts in the violent ads. The violent-humorous ad was also considered as equally violent (M = 4.33 vs. 3.69; t(70) = 1.09, p > 0.05) but more humorous and funny (M = 7.00 vs.)



5.38; *t*(60) = 2.67, p < 0.05; *M* = 7.35 vs. 5.68 ; *t*(60) = 2.94, *p* < 0.00) than the violent ad.

The humorous ad involved Mario and Sonic visiting the palace in London. They are forced to control their urges to run, climb a pole with a flag, or jump hoops since they are in the palace premises. The violent-humorous ad was also considered as more violent (M = 3.69 vs. 2.00; t(70) = 3.62, p < 0.00) but equally humorous and funny (M = 7.00 vs. 6.52; t(60) = .88, p > 0.05; M = 7.35 vs. 6.39; t(60) = 1.93, p > 0.05) compared to the humorous ad. The nonviolent-non-humorous ad involved Mario and Sonic training their teams to twirl the Wii remote in order to get them ready for Mario and Sonic at the 2012 Olympic games. The violent-humorous ad was also considered as more violent (M = 3.69 vs. 1.78; t(70) = 4.41, p < 0.00) as well as more humorous and funny (M = 7.00 vs. 3.68; t(60) = 5.80, p < 0.05; M = 7.35 vs. 3.84; t(60) = 6.33, p < 0.00) than the nonviolent non-humorous ad. All the four ads had Mario playing a central role.

Correlations and Confounding Checks. The variables which were likely to have significant impact on the dependent variables were identified from existing literature (See Table 5). For the dependent variable aggressive affect, there were no significant effects of TV in room (F(1, 655) = .17; p > .10), or gender of child (F(1, 655) = .00; p > .10) but there were significant effects of videogame playing in room (F(1, 655) = 16.74; p < .00) and physical fight in last one year (F(1, 655) = 12.31; p < .00). For the dependent variable aggressive cognitions, there were no significant effects of TV in room (F(1, 655) = 2.04; p > .10), or gender of child (F(1, 655) = .04; p > .10) but there were significant effects of videogame playing in room (F(1, 655) = 12.31; p < .00). For the dependent variable aggressive cognitions, there were no significant effects of TV in room (F(1, 655) = 2.04; p > .10), or gender of child (F(1, 655) = .04; p > .10) but there were significant effects of videogame playing in room (F(1, 655) = 12.31; p < .00), pre-aggressive cognitions (F(1, 655) = 47.63; p < .00), and physical fight in the last one year (F(1, 655) = 47.63; p < .00), and physical fight in the last one year (F(1, 655) = .00; p < .00).



= 8.29; p < .00). Other factors like frequency of playing violent video games, watching violent TV, income of the household, or parents' marital status were not correlated to any of the dependent variables. Variables with significant effects were used as covariates.

Hypothesis testing. The two dependent measures for the study included aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions from viewing violent and nonviolent ads. I first examined the main effects of violence by running repeated measures ANOVA (since I had a within subject sample). Violence was the repeated measure for both the humorous and non-humorous condition. I also examined the main effects of humor by running an ANOVA with violent humorous and violent non-humorous ads.

Aggressive affect. In support of H1, children who watched violent ads had higher aggressive affect (M = 1.80) than did viewers who watched nonviolent ad (M = 1.52) (F(1,161) = 24.80; p < .00; partial η^2 : .13). In support of our hypotheses, the results for H3, H5, and H7 suggest that violent-humorous ads lead to highest amounts of aggressive affect. For H3, I found that children who watched violent-humorous ads had higher aggressive affect (M = 2.13) than children who watched a violent ad without any humor (M = 1.84) (F (1,330) = 2.58; p < .10; partial η^2 : .10). Similarly, for H5, I find that children who watched violent-humorous ads had higher aggressive affect (M = 2.16) than did viewers who watched a nonviolent ad with humor (M = 1.92) (F (1,166) = 15.29; p <.00; partial η^2 : .08). Finally, for H7, I find that children who watched violent-humorous ads had higher aggressive affect (M = 2.12) than did viewers who watched a nonviolent ad non-humorous ad (M = 1.57) (F (1,330) = 14.78; p < .00; partial η^2 : .04).

Aggressive cognitions. In support of H2, children who watched violent ads had higher aggressive cognitions (M = 1.81) than did viewers who watched nonviolent ad (M = 1.53)



(*F* (1,161) = 8.74; p < .00; partial η^2 : .05). In support of H4, children who watched violent humorous ads had higher aggressive cognitions (M = 1.99) than did viewers of violent non-humorous ad (M = 1.80) (F (1,330) = 7.10; p < .01; partial η^2 : .02). However H6 was not supported as children who watched violent humorous ads did not have significantly higher aggressive cognitions (M = 2.01) than viewers of nonviolent humorous ad (M = 1.98) (F (1,165) = 2.50; p = ns; partial η^2 : .02). Finally, for H8, I find that children who watched violent-humorous ads had higher aggressive cognitions (M = 2.01) than (M = 1.74) (F (1,330) = 12.78; p < .00; partial η^2 : 0.04).

Results of the experiment suggest that children are likely to have increased aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect after exposure to violent-humorous and violent commercials. Children generated most aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect when exposed to commercials that contained elements of violence and humor than when compared to those television ads with only violence or any other ad. Moreover, children generated more aggressive affect after viewing violent or violent-humorous ads when compared to those television ads without any violence. Thus, it appears that violence alone or in combination with humor has the potential to influence a child's internal state.

Parental active mediation. Since violent-humorous ads lead to higher aggressive cognitions and affect, one way to reduce it would be through active parental mediation. H9 and H10 suggest that active parental mediation will help reduce aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect in children who have been exposed to violent-humorous vs. violent commercials. The hypotheses were tested via regression analysis. Aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect served as the dependent variables while parents' self-reported



active mediation was used as the independent variable in the analysis. The co-variates included child gender, pre-aggressive cognitions, child being involved in physical fight last year, video game playing in room, and ad type (violent and violent-humorous). While there was a significant relationship between the ads and parental mediation, it was in the reverse direction of hypotheses. Active mediation was positively related to aggressive cognitions ($\beta = .03$; p = ns) and aggressive affect ($\beta = .19$; p < .01) from exposure to violent-humorous ad after controlling for the above variables. There were no significant interaction effects. The results suggest that active parental mediation in fact has a negative boomerang effect leading to increased aggressive affect in children viewing violent humorous commercials.

There could be several reasons for the boomerang effect. One of it could be that parents find the violence in such ads justified and do not communicate with their children about the harm from violence (cf. Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014). The absence of a 'harmful' cue (in addition to the perception that violence in a humorous context is justified) could lead children to believe that violence is acceptable. This is particularly likely for children whose parents are actively involved as they might be used to learning from their parents about media content. The combination of justified violence and 'no objection' from parents makes viewing of violent-humorous ads increasingly potent.

General discussion

The experimental results suggest that both violent and violent-humorous commercials occurring during children's TV viewing could lead to increased aggressive tendencies in children. Particularly, I find that violent humorous commercials had the most negative influence on young children. The GAM model suggests that aggressive cognitions and



aggressive affect would influence how an individual evaluates a situation. Higher levels of aggressive cognitions and affect are likely to make an individual believe that the situation is threatening and prompt the individual to respond with aggression or violence. Moreover, repeated exposure to violence results in rehearsal and reinforcement of the links between aggressive cues and aggressive knowledge structures (beliefs, attitudes on violence) (Anderson and Bushman 2002).

These studies also highlight the masking role of humor in ads with violence. The context of humor was specifically chosen because more than 75% of the violent ads seem to have an element of humor in them (Blackford et al. 2013). Based on previous advertising and media violence studies I had hypothesized that violent-humorous ads would lead to increased aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect in the viewer. As expected I find viewers who watched violent-humorous (vs. violent) commercials had higher amount of aggressive cognitions. Similarly, viewers who watched violent-humorous (vs. violent) and aggressive affect. The results seem to suggest that humor justifies the violence and makes the young viewer believe that anger or violent response is an appropriate response to an ambiguous situation with aggressive cues.

Although I expected that active parental mediation would help in reducing aggressive responses on viewing a violent-humorous ad, I observe a boomerang effect for aggressive affect. I find that active parental mediation leads to increased aggressive affect and has no impact on aggressive cognitions in children after they have viewed violent-humorous commercials. As hypothesized earlier, it is likely that parents find the violence in a violent-humorous commercial acceptable and hence don't intervene and object to it.



Nathanson (2002) found that co-viewing without intervention was interpreted by children as parents' approval of the material. It is speculated that a similar process is occurring with violent-humorous commercials. Parents' enjoyment of humor and lack of objection to the violence might serve as a cue to the child that violence in the commercial is acceptable. When parents invest time viewing TV and don't object to it, children might believe that the content is worthy of their attention (cf. Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014; Nathanson 2002). This also points out that parental mediation with media is far more nuanced than our current understanding. This result is of significant concern since high number of violent commercials contains an element of humor in them. By failing to identify violence in these commercials, parents are amplifying instead of reducing the negative impact of violent-humorous commercials. The other likely reasons for the boomerang effect are (a) children of actively mediated parents are not used to watching violent content and hence don't know how to protect themselves, (b) actively mediated children are used to their parents assistance (not available here) while watching TV, (c) it could be because of a methodological limitation. All these reasons point to the need for a future study which confirms these speculations.

Lerner and Keltner (2001) have showed that all negative affect is not equal. The researchers find that anger vs. fear has a differential impact on approach vs. avoidance strategy adopted by the consumer. Future research is needed to understand how anger generated from violent-humorous commercials is likely to impact advertising and marketing variables. One of the limitations of this study is the inability to measure physiological responses. Future research should continue to explore the effects of violent-humorous commercials on physiological arousal, aggressive behavior, and attitudes. It is



likely that violent-humorous commercials lead to increased aggressive behavior in children. However, attitudes toward the ad and brand might be positive because of the presence of humor in the ads. Future research should also consider looking at the impact of violent and violent-humorous commercials after a time delay or repeated exposures and in adults to see if the aggressive responses persist. In the current study, I only look at active mediation of parents. Future research should also consider how other kinds of parental mediation like restrictive mediation, co-viewing, and rules influence a child's responses to violent-humorous commercials. Since the study was conducted online, there was a limitation in the options available in Qualtrics to conduct randomization. While the child participants were randomly assigned to humorous or non-humorous condition, all participants first saw the violent ad followed by the nonviolent ad. Future research should test to verify if the differences in responses persist even if the order is flipped, i.e. nonviolent ad followed by violent ad. It is likely that the differences become even larger because of the contrast effect in terms of violence.

Most of the studies in the domain of violent commercials have studied the impact of violence on attitude toward ad, attitude toward brand, purchase intentions etc. By studying psychological responses, I can speculate the possible aggressive outcomes from exposure to violent commercials and explain the process by which violent commercials influence children's behavior. That has significant implications for researchers and advertisers while also contributing to media violence and advertising literature. Furthermore, the role of parental mediation is mostly assumed to be positive. However, I find that parents' good intention to be involved with their child's TV viewing might actually harm their child because of being distracted by humor in a violent-humorous ad.



¹25,000 commercials is equivalent to witnessing 10,717 minutes of commercials from viewing TV for 3 hours 15 minutes every day on an average for a year (Desrochers and Holt 2007). Average of 3.46 and 2.13 acts of violence per commercial minute * 10717 minutes of commercials = 29,954 acts of violence (Shanahan, Hermans and Hyman 2003; Blackford et al. 2011).

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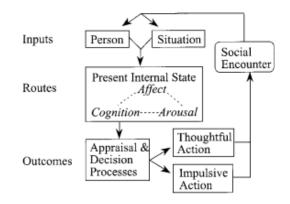
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APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND



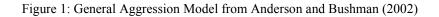


Table 1: Summary of hypotheses

(The shaded cells are the ones being compared. The cell labeled 'higher' is hypothesized to lead to higher aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions in the viewer)

	Humorous	Non- Humorous		Humorous	Non- Humorous
Violent		Higher	Violent	Higher	
Nonviolent		H1, H2	Nonviolent	H3, H6	

	Humorous	Non- Humorous
Violent	Higher	H4, H7
Nonviolent		

	Humorous	Non- Humorous
Violent	Higher	
Nonviolent		H5, H8



Table 2: A summary of studies on violent commercials

Authors	Findings
Caprara et al. (1987)	Violent (vs. nonviolent) commercials increased aggressive tendencies in viewers. Further violent commercials increased arousal in males
Anderson (2000)	At least nine violent commercials per baseball playoff in 1998
Larson (2001)	35% of 595 commercials targeted at children contained at least one form of aggression while 7% portrayed more than one form
Oliver and Kalyanaraman (2002)	Two-thirds of the previews for PG-13 movies contained at least one scene of aggression while one-third of the movie trailers had at least one scene that featured gun use
Shanahan, Hermans, and Hyman (2003)	Review of Saturday morning TV shows: Amount of violence in TV commercials is more than <i>twice</i> the amount in TV programs (3.46 vs. 1.32 acts of violence per minute)
Scharrer (2004)	56% of the video game ads contained violent acts, weapons, and threats
Scharrer, Bergstrom, Paradise, and Ren (2006)	Over half of the 536 aggressive commercials analyzed contained humor
FTC 2009 report on Marketing of violent entertainment	Direct advertising of PG-13 and R-rated movies in Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. Violent movie ads cross-promoted with food and beverage products
Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood (2009)	2734 ads of four PG-13 movies were aired in a three month period on children's networks like Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon between 6:00 and 8:00 PM
Associated Press (2009)	46.5% of the 5000 or more commercials from the 2008 NFL telecast contained violent or sexual content and 10% of the total commercials contained murders, explosions, and gun fights
Gulas, McKeage, and Weinberger (2010)	76.9% of humorous ads had violence in the ad
Brocato et al. (2010)	Increased aggressive cognitions in young viewers after watching a violent vs. nonviolent ad. Children whose parents co-viewed showed reduced aggressive cognitions
Blackford et al. (2011)	Approximately 79% of violent commercials have humor in it (number of acts with humor and violence- 143 in 180)



APPENDIX B: SCALES

Media habit questionnaire (Anderson and Dill 2000)

- 1. What is your favorite TV show?
- 2. How often do you watch this show?
 - Almost every day
 - About 2-3 times a week
 - About once a week
 - A couple of times a month
 - I almost never watch this show
- 3. How often do characters help each other in this show?
- □ Always □ Often □ Sometimes □ Rarely □ Never
- 4. How often do characters try to shoot or hurt each other in this show?
- 5. How often do characters try to hurt each other's feelings in this show?
- 6. What is your favorite video game?
- 7. How often do you play this game?
- 8. How often do players help each other in this game?
- 9. How often do you help others in this game?
- 10. How often do you shoot or kill creatures in this game?
- 11. How often do you shoot or kill **<u>players</u>** in this game?
- 10. How often do players try to hurt each other's feelings in this game?

Aggressive affect (Anderson and Carnagey 2009)

Please rate the commercial/clip for each of dimensions listed below. 1 being non-agreeable and 10 being highly agreeable

- 1. I feel mean
- 2. I feel like yelling at someone
- 3. I feel angry
- 4. I feel like banging on a table
- 5. I feel mad
- 6. I feel irritable
- 7. I feel furious

Aggressive cognitions (Nathanson and Cantor 2000)

Before viewing the ads

- 1. When another kid hits me, I hit them right back
 - Not at all true
 - A little true
 - True
 - Very True
- 2. Sometimes fighting is a good way to get what you want
- 3. If another kid tried to take something that is mine, I might push or hit that kid
- 4. When another kid calls me names, I call them names too

Post-viewing ad

- 5. I like to watch people fight
- 6. It's funny when people get into fights
- 7. Sometimes fighting is a good way to get what you want
- 8. It's okay to hit someone if they hit you first
- 9. If someone was really bothering me, I might push or hit them to get back at them



- 10. If someone did something mean to me, I might push or hit them to get back at them
- 11. If another kid tried to take something that is mine, I might push or hit that kid

Parent survey

Please circle the appropriate letter next to each question (Never to Always)

- 1. How often do you watch TV commercials together with your child?
- 2. How often do you talk to your child about the TV commercials he/she watches?
- 3. How often do you point out the good things on the TV commercials your child watches?
- 4. How often do you point out the bad things about the TV commercials your child watches?
- 5. How often do you discuss with your child how TV commercials and shows are made?

6. How often do you discuss with your child how what happens in TV commercials wouldn't happen in real life?

7. How often do you encourage your child to consider how the victims of violence in TV commercials might feel?

- 8. How often do you tell your child not to imitate how the characters in TV commercials behave?
- 9. Does your child have a TV in his/her own room?
- 10. Does your child play video game in his/her own room?
- 11. Has your child been in a physical fight in the past year?



APPENDIX C: DATA AND RESULTS

Table 3: Reliabilities of dependent variables

Scale	Items, No.	А	Score, Mean(SD)
Pre-Aggressive Cognitions (NH)	4	.78	1.79 (0.68)
Post Aggressive Cognitions (V-NH)	6	.86	1.79 (0.64)
Post Aggressive Cognitions (NV-NH)	6	.87	1.73 (0.65)
Affect (V-NH)	6	.95	1.81 (1.32)
Affect (NV-NH)	6	.97	1.53 (1.19)
Pre-Aggressive Cognitions (H)	4	.84	0.78 (0.31)
Post Aggressive Cognitions (V-H)	6	.92	2.01 (0.81)
Post Aggressive Cognitions (NV-H)	6	.83	1.98 (0.84)
Affect (V-H)	6	.97	2.16 (1.67)
Affect (NV-H)	6	.98	1.91 (1.60)
Active Mediation	8	.93	2.77 (0.75)

Table 4: Hypothesis results

Hypothesis: Prediction	Means	p value	Support			
H1: Affect: V > NV	1.79 vs. 1.72	< .00				
H2: Cognitions: V > NV	1.81 vs. 1.53	< .00	Supported			
H3: Affect: VH > V- NH	2.13 vs. 1.84	<.10	Supported			
H4: Affect: VH > NV-H	2.16 vs. 1.92	< .00	Supported			
H5: Affect: VH > NV-NH	2.12 vs. 1.57	< .00	Supported			
H6: Cognitions: VH > V- NH	1.99 vs. 1.80	< .01	Supported			
H7: Cognitions: VH > NV-H	2.01 vs. 1.98	ns	Not supported			
H8: Cognitions: VH > NV-NH	2.00 vs. 1.74	< .00	Supported			
Hypothesis: Prediction	β (SE)	p value	Support			
H9: AI reduce cognitions from VH	0.15 (.09)	ns	Not supported			
H10: AI reduce affect from VH	0.03 (.03)	<.01	Not supported			
NH: Non Humorous; H: Humorous; V: Violent; NV: Nonviolent; AI: Active Mediation						



Table 5: Basis for selecting covariates

Dependent Variable	Control Variable		Significance
	TV in bedroom	Show higher chance of being affected by media(Gentile and Walsh 2002)	<i>p</i> > .10
	Gender of child	Females vs. Males produced higher negative affect on listening to violent song (Anderson, Carnagey and Eubanks 2003)	<i>p</i> > .10
Aggressive Affect	Videogame playing in bedroom	Show higher chance of being affected by media. Unmonitored media exposure leads to increased aggressive tendencies (Gentile and Walsh 2002; Nathanson and Cantor 2000)	<i>p</i> < .00
	Physical fight in the last one year	Prior fight increases the mediation in a fight in the future and also influence response to media violence (Gentile and Bushman 2012)	<i>p</i> < .00
Aggressive Cognitions	TV in room	Show higher chance of being affected by media(Gentile and Walsh 2002)	<i>p</i> > .10
	Gender of child	Boys have significantly higher AC from violent videogame playing (Gentile et al. 2014)	<i>p</i> > .10
	Videogame playing in bedroom	Show higher chance of being affected by media. Unmonitored media exposure leads to increased aggressive tendencies (Gentile and Walsh 2002; Nathanson and Cantor 2000)	<i>p</i> < .00
	Pre-aggressive cognitions	From Nathanson and Cantor (2000) who controlled for it in order to study TV- induced aggressive cognitions and not effects of some prior experiences Prior fight increases the mediation in a	<i>p</i> < .00
	Physical fight in the last one year	fight in the future and also influence response to media violence (Gentile and Bushman 2012)	<i>p</i> < .00



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Income	1											
2 Child Gender	01	1										
3 PreAg_V	.12	12	1									
4 PostAg_V	.15	18*	.68**	1								
5 PstAg_VH	.11	15*			1							
6 PreAg_VH	.10	12			.9**	1						
7 Affect_V	.05	05	.46**	.57**			1					
8 Affect_VH	.14	05			.72**	.69**		1				
9 ActInv	.02	.02	.19*	.14	.31**	.31**	.16	.32**	1			
10 Physical fight in past year	.13*	02	.42**	.34**	.51**	.55**	.30**	.44**	.23**	1		
11 Video games in	00	04	.18*	.12	.31**	.27**	.14	.16*	.22**	.19**	1	
room 12 TV in room	04	.06	.18*	.05	.22**	.20**	.08	.08	.23**	.16**	.52**	1

Table 6: Correlations between regression variables

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
c. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.



CHAPTER 4. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The intent of the dissertation is to further our understanding on the impact of violent commercials. The dissertation mainly focuses on parental mediation of violent commercials targeted at children and likely impact of those commercials on young children. Chapter 1 introduces the dissertation topic, Chapter 2 (Essay 1) presents parental perspective and mediation of violent commercials, and Chapter 3 (Essay 2) puts forth and tests the process by which violent commercials influence aggressive responses in children. In this final chapter, Chapter 4, a summary of findings from all the studies of this dissertation is presented along with recommendations for future research.

The objective of Essay 1 was to gain a better understanding of parents' mediation of violent commercials on TV. In order to achieve that objective, two studies were conducted. In the first study, parental views on impact and mediation of violent commercials were gathered from various Internet sources including blogs, news articles, and twitter. Analysis of these comments provided a parental definition of violent commercials. Parents mainly considered an ad where another person is harmed using a weapon as a violent commercial. This definition is limited when compared to researcher's definition of media violence that considered all kinds of harmful acts including verbal aggression or cartoon violence. Further analysis suggested that parents' views on violent commercials and beliefs of negative effects from viewing TV. In order to gain a better understanding of how these two dimensions interacted to influence parents' behavior, a second study was conducted. In-depth interviews with 20 parents and children were conducted as part of Study 2. Data suggest that parents could be divided



into four segments (based on the two dimensions) (Refer Figure 1 in Essay 1). The division into four segments helped explain differing parental views on violent commercials and the various parental mediation techniques for violent commercials. Segment 1, Managers, was highly concerned about the negative effects of violent commercials as well as the negative effects of TV viewing. As a result, these parents relied on controlling their child's media environment via and use of rules, non-cable options, and openly communicating with their children about the effects of violent commercials. Segment 2, Co-viewers, was concerned highly about the negative effects of TV viewing but not so much about the effects of viewing violent commercials. These parents viewed a great deal of TV with their children and used TV content as a means to educate their children on pro-social behavior. While Co-viewers explained to their children about the harm from violence, they did so for violent movies and TV shows and not particularly for commercials. Segment 3, Harmonizers, was not worried about the negative effects of violent commercials or TV viewing on their child. They were more concerned of the potential of violent commercials to disrupt 'family time' since Harmonizers' main intention was to maintain harmony in the household by not engaging in any controversial discussions. In order to maintain a warm relationship with their child, Harmonizers did not want to deny their child's TV viewing requests. As a result, these parents desired government regulations for banning or limiting violent advertising or marketers' involvement in censoring violence in order to maintain harmony in the household. Segment 4, Non-believers, was not concerned about either the effects of TV or violent commercials on their child. Consequentially, they were not likely to employ any specific method to mediate violent commercials.



Managers	Co-viewers	Harmonizers	Non- believers
Media Control	Active Co-viewing	Passive Co-viewing	
Evaluative	Evaluative	Non-evaluative Interactions	Passive Co-
Interactions	Interaction	Restrictions	viewing

Table 1: Preference for mediation based on parental segments

Based on the above analysis a new research framework on socialization of violent commercials is developed (Refer Figure 2 in Essay 1). The framework includes antecedents to mediate violent commercials and likely outcomes from adopting different mediation routes. The antecedents include the four parental segments and child's age. Parental segments and child's age together determine the kind of mediation a parent adopts to manage violent commercials. The four types of mediation include co-viewing, active mediation, restrictive mediation, and use of new media. Each mediation technique is then likely to influence a child's beliefs about violence and violent commercials in its own unique way.

The focus of this Essay 1 was to develop new theory on parental mediation of violent commercials targeted at children. Future research needs to test the model developed in this paper. More importantly, future research is needed to identify the consequence of parents' limited definition of violent commercials. Parents' restricted view of violent commercials means they are likely to ignore ads, for example, where violence is presented along with humor or in a cartoonish format or without any blood or gore. Does this mean that children are likely to believe violence presented in any of the above-



suggested formats is acceptable? How is it likely to influence aggressive responses in young viewers? Further research is needed to answer these questions.

In Essay 2 the impact of violent commercials on children, including violent commercials with an element of humor in them was studied. The General Aggression Model (GAM) is used as a framework to develop hypotheses that potentially explained viewing of violent-humorous ads resulting in aggressive responses in children (Anderson and Bushman 2002). GAM suggests that exposure to media violence is likely to bring about internal changes in cognitions, affect and arousal which might then influence the viewer's behavioral response. Humor is chosen since violent-humorous ads formed a significant portion (approximately 75%) of the violent commercials (Gulas, McKeage and Weinberger 2010). A 2x2 experiment was conducted in which 334 8-12 year old children are assigned to either humorous or non-humorous ad condition. In each condition, the participants watched a violent and a nonviolent ad and responded to questions on aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions. Further, parents of the 334 children were surveyed to gather data on parental mediation. Parental mediation is hypothesized to act as a 'protective factor' that attenuates the negative impact of media violence (Gentile and Sesma 2003). Parental mediation is likely to be in one of the three forms: active mediation (open communication), restrictive mediation (rules), and coviewing. In this essay, I focus only on active mediation since it is considered the most effective form of TV violence mediation (Nathanson and Cantor 2000). The results suggest that violent commercials with humor caused highest amounts of aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect in children compared to the other three ads (violent-non humorous/nonviolent-humorous/nonviolent- non humorous). Further, active parental



mediation instead of reducing, surprisingly increased the amount of aggressive affect in children who viewed violent-humorous commercials.

Research on violent TV programs and violent video games suggest that repeated viewing of violent content is likely to lead to desensitization, aggressive behavior and increased arousal in viewers (Anderson and Bushman 2002). In this Essay, I attempted to extend those results to violent commercials. I find that violent commercials are also likely to lead to aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect. Future research may explore the other effects of violent commercials including arousal and desensitization. Further, I used Mario video game commercials (participants' product relevance) to study aggressive effects of violent commercials. Future research should use other product lines and other video games to generalize the study findings. Parental mediation is supposed to act as a protective factor against viewing of violent commercials (Gentile and Sesma 2003). However, I find that parental mediation of violent-humorous commercials has a boomerang effect. It is likely that parents are distracted by the humor in a violenthumorous commercial (cf. Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014). When parents don't object to the violence in a violent-humorous commercial but respond to the humor in the ad, it is possible that children perceive it as an approval of the violent behavior thus leading to increased aggressive affect in young children. In the first essay, parental definition of violent commercials was presented and questions were raised regarding the manner in which parents' limiting definition could affect children's behavior. The results of this essay confirm that concern. This dissertation only explored one kind of parental mediation i.e. active mediation. Future research should test the impact of other kinds of



parental mediation including restrictive mediation and co-viewing. It is likely that restrictive mediation has a more protective effect on children than co-viewing.

This dissertation aimed to contribute to the growing research in the area of violent commercials. A comparison of the amount of violent commercials aired over the years suggests that they are growing in number (Blackford et al. 2013). The two essays demonstrate that it is important for researchers, marketers, policy makers, and parents to pay more attention to the prevalence and influence of violent commercials. As researchers, we now have a better understanding of how parents mediate viewing of violent commercials. Parents not just have different views on the impact of violent commercials but that influences their mediation of violent commercials. Moreover, I find that violent commercials can cause aggressive affect and aggressive cognitions in young children. In fact, viewing of violent-humorous (vs. purely violent) commercials might have an impact that is even more negative on young children. These results imply that marketers need to be more cautious about using violence in their commercials. While violence attracts attention, it is also likely to increase aggressiveness in children. Public policy makers need to be cautious when they make recommendations to parents, as parents differ in their beliefs that influence their mediation. There is a need to segment and target public policies in order to make them more effective. Finally, parents need to be more aware of their child being exposed to violent commercials and of their own responses to violent commercials.

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