Influence of Mass Media on Deviant Behavior among Bachelor-Level Students in Kenya

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Abstract

The mass media has a significant impact on the psychosocial development of children and adolescents. Kenya has seen a tremendous and rapid expansion of the mass media, with a large proportion of features oriented toward Western culture. The majority of the information showcased in the media is about violence, drugs, relationships, and sexuality. Most young people consume a lot of both electronic and print media. This study is aimed to determine the influence of mass media on deviant behavior among bachelor-level students in Kenya. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was 16,421 university students selected from universities in Nairobi County. Using Yamen's sample size calculation formula, the sample size was determined as 390, but only 372 students were available in the four selected universities' main campuses and willing to receive the questionnaire. The study established that 84% of the respondents suggested that the music lyrics contributed to violence and aggression among young adults. The results also indicated that 78% of the students believe that television characters' aggressive lifestyle encourages deviant behavior. Therefore, the study recommends that awareness programs on the influence of mass media on deviant behavior in secondary schools, universities, and among parents should be promoted. Media regulatory authorities should ensure that aggressive and violent films and music are minimized on Kenyan television.

Keywords: *Mass media, bachelor's level, deviant behavior, violence*

1.0 Introduction

Social media engages more than half of the world's population (Sánchez-Páramoarianna & Legovini, 2021). The use of information technology has changed how Kenyan universities perceive aggressive behavior. Deviance is shown in the media as entertainment, and the shows are crafted to be more personal and emotional, with the potential of influencing the audience's character. Most violent events on TV tend to be portrayed as popular (Xie et al., 2019). Local television news often has dramatic, interesting, and enticing reports about antisocial behavior portrayed as entertainment. One of the main ways the media influences deviant behavior among bachelor's level students in Kenyan universities is by making people more comfortable with immoral behavior. Sánchez-Páramoarianna and Legovini (2021) asserts "leveraging social media for social and behavior change communications is a natural and needed next step for addressing large-scale challenges."

Generating a wealth of morally responsible citizens with appropriate skills and governance abilities is one of the most vital contributions of higher learning institutions. They remain the primary place where a country gets its technocrats. According to Munene (2019), universities are places where ideas are presented, debated, clarified, and questioned in the most respectful and cooperative way possible. People usually treat them with the respect, reverence, and dignity that serious minds doing introspective work deserve. Learning institutions are countries' consciences, reminding people of the values on which their countries were built and of the universal desire for justice, equality, and dignity.

Sociologists describe deviance as any behavior that violates cherished social values and norms, meaning there should be a social audience that determines whether a behavior is deviant. Social moral transformation is only possible if every mass media channel conveys moral ideals that help young people become honest, decent, self-controlled, and independent adults. Inculcation of moral values has been difficult due to how formal education is mostly presented in Kenya. For example, the previous education system had its disadvantages. Still, it mostly considered students as "consumers." In contrast, educators were considered "producers" of knowledge who deliver the competencies and abilities necessary for the labor market (Chepchieng et al., 2006), with little room for moral education. Knowledge was properly divided into blocks of a particular number of weeks during a semester. For instance, bachelor's level students would complete a brief course over a few weeks of lectures, reading, and writing essays. They took a final test and were given a grade and a certain number of "credits" for the course. A student enrolled in a bachelor's level program received a bachelor's degree after earning enough points for four years. In many formal education systems, the casual student-teacher interactions that allow educators to impart life-changing moral principles, insights, holistic nurture, and direction have been neglected, and the mass media has shaped the behavior of young adults.

1.1 Problem Statement

University students have been a crucial force for social change. They have been at the forefront of movements to promote human rights and democracy. However, the mainstream media has contributed to moral decadence among university students in Kenya and other places in the world. While the media only reports a fraction of all risky behavior, incidences of risky behavior among students have existed since 1908 (Opere et al., 2019). Over the past twenty years, a year has hardly passed without reporting cases of risky student behavior such as substance abuse and school riots. Taking a strange twist from the 1990s, riots in learning institutions in Kenya have intensified. Violent incidences have not only been violent and destructive but also premeditated and planned to cause maximum human and material loss. Crutcher writes, "Universities in Kenya are hot-beds for violent activities" (Crutcher, 2010). The University of Nairobi has been closed more than seventeen (17) times since the 1970s (Crutcher, 2010). Each closure always leads to the expulsion of some students, often bright young men and women who may not even have been involved in the riot but who, on account of being stigmatized as troublemakers, often cannot find other training opportunities later.

The ample amount of moral information promulgated through mass media has an imperative connection with creating awareness among young people of accepted and unaccepted behavior because young people and children learn best through observation and imitating behavior. Their likelihood of repeating a behavior is influenced by the outcomes of their behavior attempts. This observation is in line with Teng et al. (2019), who suggested that violent media can teach specific violent acts. Some mass media programs young people watch and listen to convey the mistaken notion that there must be a winner and a loser in every disagreement, leading them to feel that violence is an effective technique for settling disputes. When young

people witness numerous violent scenarios, some are desensitized to violence in the actual world. They have difficulty distinguishing between reality and the violent pictures depicted in mass media, thus depicting aggressive behavior through their undergraduate education, hence the need to investigate the role mass media play in deviant behavior among young people cannot be overemphasized.

1.2 Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. How does mass media influence bachelor's level students in Kenya to depict negative moral values?
2. In what ways does mass media promote deviant behavior among bachelor-level students in Kenya?
3. How can mass media control be useful in ensuring that aggressive programs are regulated?

2.0 Literature Review

Theories of Deviance

Every society creates and imposes rules, values, regulations, norms, and other forms of social control to maintain peace, promote harmonious relationships, and preserve stability. However, some members of society transgress and violate the rule and laws, defying cherished values and rebelling against the established social order. These people are often tagged as deviants, and three of the many theories that discuss transgression of established laws considered deviant behavior, are discussed below.

Anomie or Strain Theory

Emile Durkheim and Robert King Merton are frequently linked to the idea of anomie. According to Ballano (2022), when a society undergoes a sudden change, such as during an economic downturn, there is also a change in the balance of the society and a disorder brought on by that change. Anomie is the term Durkheim uses to describe this disorder and this deviation from social norms. The impact of established rules is diminished when sudden changes disrupt the social order, functions, and relationships. This process is known as anomie and lasts until the relationships, functions, and order are restored. Anomie, according to Merton, is a breakdown in the cultural structure that happens, especially when there is a significant divergence between culturally defined norms and goals and socially constructed capacities of individuals to conform to these norms and goals. Durkheim defined anomie as "relative normlessness in a group or a society" (Merton, 1968). While Merton contends that society's order, or more specifically, the stricter norms, is what puts pressure on individuals and ultimately causes them to engage in deviant behavior, Durkheim contends that society's order stops people from becoming deviant (Harris et al., 2019).

2.3 Social Control Theory

The key query, in accordance with social control theory, is not "why they do it," but rather "why they don't do it." Deviant behavior is not viewed by the social control hypothesis as being problematic (Hirschi, 2002). According to control theory, norm-conforming conduct should be examined rather than norm-violating behavior. In other words, it should be researched how social control influences people to behave in ways that adhere to social norms. According to social control theory, everyone would violate societal norms if left to their own devices (Goode, 2019). Control theory provides various social control mechanisms that socialize people in accordance with norms and keep them from deviating (Costello & Laub, 2019). Important

socializing factors include family, school, teachers, classmates, religion, and the media. According to the control hypothesis, people affirm norms to the extent of their social connections. Accordingly, theory predicts that individuals with less stake will engage in more abnormal behavior than those with significantly greater stakes. For instance, people who are married compared to single people, in the workforce compared to those who are not, or in college compared to their peers are less likely to engage in criminal activity. Theoretically, it is less probable for those who face significant risk breaking from accepted norms than it is for those who do not (Goode, 2019).

Functionalism

Howard Becker claims that functionalism views society as an organism. Deviant behaviors are those that disturb the balance or order of society. Deviant behavior, in accordance with functionalism, is behavior that endangers the viability of society (Barmaki, 2019). Functionalism contends that society maintains itself by forbidding behavior that would be detrimental to it and encouraging behavior that would be advantageous. Prohibited acts are typically those that "produce hatred, dissension, and conflict and whose adoption will consequently increase social instability and reduce its viability" (Goode, 2019). Durkheim argued that deviant behavior can be distinguished from other types based on how it is dealt with. According to Durkheim, punishment is not meted out in response to wrongdoing. Because a certain action violates a set of rules, it is punished (Jones, 1981). Durkheim also points out that a society without crime is also impractical because "even in a society of saints, the slightest infraction will create punishment and condemnation." A crime is not only inevitable but also advantageous for society. First, a crime's punishment solidifies societal laws, norms, and moral principles (Goode, 2019). The other community members get together to express their displeasure when a highly respected norm is broken. This circumstance unites people in a shared morality, and their links of solidarity are strengthened. Second, crime is an indicator of societal development and the ideals that will guide it in the future. Crime keeps society from congealing and becoming unchangeable.

Mass Media and Cognitive Effects

In terms of behavior, children from chaotic households regard violence as a realistic means of resolving life difficulties, resulting in a learned and imitated habit (Ahn et al., 2019). Children's sensibility and spirit are shaped unfavorably by the pictures they see on television, which are promoted as authentic behavioral patterns. Lavorgna & Sugiura (2018) suggest that mass media has a huge impact on a small portion of the population and a small impact on the remainder. The primary effects are mimicry in young adults and disinhibition, which informs about the techniques of violence. Because the media causes emotional desensitization, lowers empathy, and frequently induces a feeling of catharsis, those predisposed to violence embrace the presented scenarios. Thus, even intrinsic or taught violence can be defused by watching violent scenes or engaging in aggressive activities.

According to Lorgulescu (2018), some of the psychological reasons that influence university students to exhibit deviant behavior due to mass media include:

- **Frustration** happens when a person is denied certain moral or material rights to which they think they are entitled. Frustration is a clash between one's feelings and thoughts, disrupting cortical activity and sending the sub-cortical into overdrive.
- **An inferiority complex**- is a feeling of helplessness or inability to do anything. It is often caused by intellectual or physical flaws, real or imagined, but it can also be caused by other people's rude, offensive, obvious, or hidden attitudes.

- **Affective immaturity**- is shown by acting like a child and having a big difference between how one thinks and feels. They often have emotional crises and bursts of crying. When a criminal is emotionally and mentally immature, they act dangerously impulsive and antisocial.
- **Ego-centrism-** the criminals think that they are important. Egocentric people exaggerate their good qualities and downplay their bad ones. They think they are always right and only care about their goals and interests. Instead of admitting their mistakes, they get angry and lament that they are being persecuted.
- **Affective indifference**- is linked to egocentrism and is one of the most common childhood problems caused by a family structure that does not work. The criminal does not have a real sense of guilt or conscience and does not realize that one is emotionally shut down, which makes them cold and calm.

3.0 Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive survey design because it enables researchers to identify patterns in research data and develop an in-depth understanding of the problem under investigation without making conclusions about cause-and-effect associations between variables. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) suggested that a descriptive research design is suitable for providing an accurate, descriptive analysis of the characteristics of the sample from the population. The descriptive research design is most appropriate when researchers do not have adequate knowledge about a research problem, like in current research. Hence, the design helped the researchers describe the participants' characteristics, like their experiences making moral decisions and the frequencies or trends of deviant behaviors among bachelor's level students in Kenya.

Study Population and Study Sample

The study population shown in Table 1 involved 16,421 bachelor's level students taking the four-year undergraduate curriculum. Nairobi County was selected due to its metropolitan status. Students from every community are more likely to be found in the capital than in any other city in Kenya. Thus, research carried out in chartered universities in Nairobi County will likely bring out students' opinions from diverse cultural backgrounds. Selection of the university involved ten (10) chartered universities, of which only four (40%) were selected using the lottery method of simple random sampling. The names of the universities used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the university.

Table 1: Study Population

Number	Universities
1	Maua University
2	Mumo University
3	Mwangaza University
4	Neema University
5	Peace University
6	Unity University
7	Upendo University
8	Ushindi University

9	Victory University
10	Wisdom University

Sampling Process

The researchers grouped chartered universities in Nairobi County into two categories, public and private universities. The names in each category were written on small pieces of paper and put in different baskets. Two universities from each category were picked. The two public universities picked were Mwangaza and Neema, while the private universities were Peace and Mumo as shown in Table 2. In the selected public main campuses, bachelor's students were between seven thousand (7,000) and nine thousand (9,000), while in the selected private universities, bachelor's level students were between six hundred (600) and eight hundred (800) in the main campuses. Mwangaza main campus students were approximately 8,002, Neema approximately 7,103 students, Peace approximately 705, and Mumo approximately 611 students, a total of 16,421. The Yamane's sample size calculation formula where n = N/ (one + Ne^2): **n** being required sample size, **N** target population, and **e** Margin of error (MoE) at 0.05 confidence interval: 16421/ 1+16421 (0.05)^2 gave a sample of 390.48~390. The focus team leaders, the Chaplain, and the Dean of Students only managed to distribute three hundred and seventy-two (372) closed-ended questionnaires on various days and at times. ReadexResearch (2022) suggested that a small sample size fits the bill if the research seeks to represent the whole population. Hence, 372 distributed questionnaires were considered adequate for determining the pervasiveness of students' views regarding the family's role in young people's deviant behavior.

Table 2: Sample Population

University		Approximate Populations	Questionnaires	Percentage %
Public	Mwangaza	7,000 – 9,000	99	26.6
	Neema	6,000 – 8,000	99	26.6
Private	Peace	600 – 800	87	23.4
	Mumo	600 – 800	87	23.4
Totals	4		372	100

Since a Likert scale questionnaire is one of the most dependable methods of measuring people's opinions because they enable researchers to understand the complex views of research participants (Simms et al., 2019). The research used a 34-three-point Likert scale: always, never, and sometimes, to measure the extent to which students perceived families as influencing the deviant behavior of young people.

The research employed descriptive analytics in analyzing the data. Unlike other forms of data analysis, descriptive analysis does not make predictions about correlations between variables. It simply summarized the data in terms of the pervasiveness of research participants' views to make it more meaningful. This did not make it possible to make predictions about cause and effect, but the information is extremely valuable in suggesting viable ways of curbing deviant behavior among youth, who make up 70% of the entire population.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The research findings are presented in two main parts: questionnaire response rate and data collected in response to the three research questions.

Questionnaire Returns

Out of the three hundred and seventy-two (372) questionnaires administered, two hundred and sixty-one (261) questionnaires were returned (131) from public university-main campuses and (130) from private university-main campuses. Two hundred and sixty-one participants responded to the survey, constituting a response rate of 70.16 %, as shown in Table 3. The outstanding one hundred and eleven (111) questionnaires were not returned.

Table 3: Return of Questionnaires

Questionnaires	Number of questionnaires	Percentage %
Returned questionnaires	261	70.16
Unreturned questionnaires	111	29.84
Total number of questionnaires	372	100

Influence of Disrespect among Media Actors

The pervasiveness of disrespect among media actors as a factor influencing adherence to negative moral values was tested among the studied university students. Figure 1 gives a summary of the results.
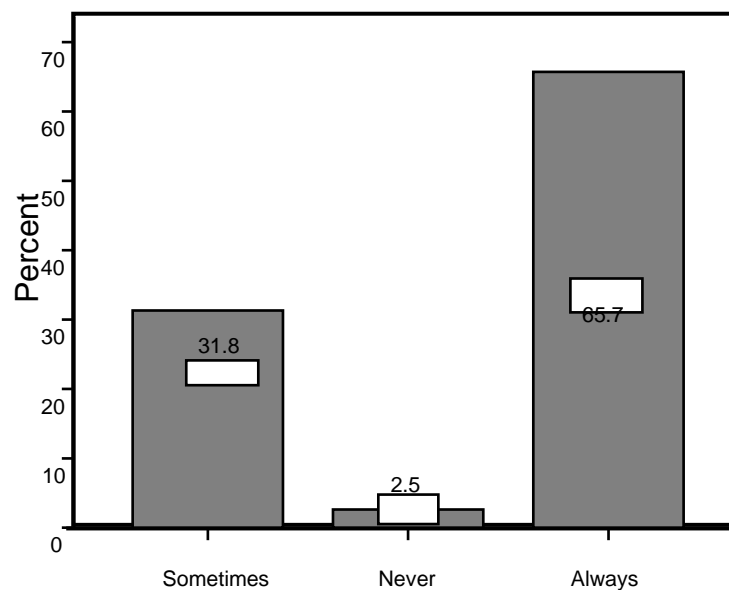

Figure 1: Influence of Disrespect among Media Actors

Figure 1 indicates that (83) 31. 78% of the participants perceived disrespectful behaviors such as coarse language and unprincipled code of dressing among media presenters as sometimes influencing adherence to negative moral values, (7) 2.54% perceived disrespectful behaviors among media presenters as never influencing adherence to negative moral values while (171) 65.67% of the participants perceived disrespectful mannerisms among media presenters as always influencing adherence to negative moral values. The results indicate that the perception of disrespectful mannerisms among media actors is highly pervasive (65.7%) among the participants as a factor that influences living in accordance with negative moral values.

The pervasiveness of amoral media messages as a factor influencing adherence to negative moral values was tested among the studied university students. Figure 2 gives a summary of the results.
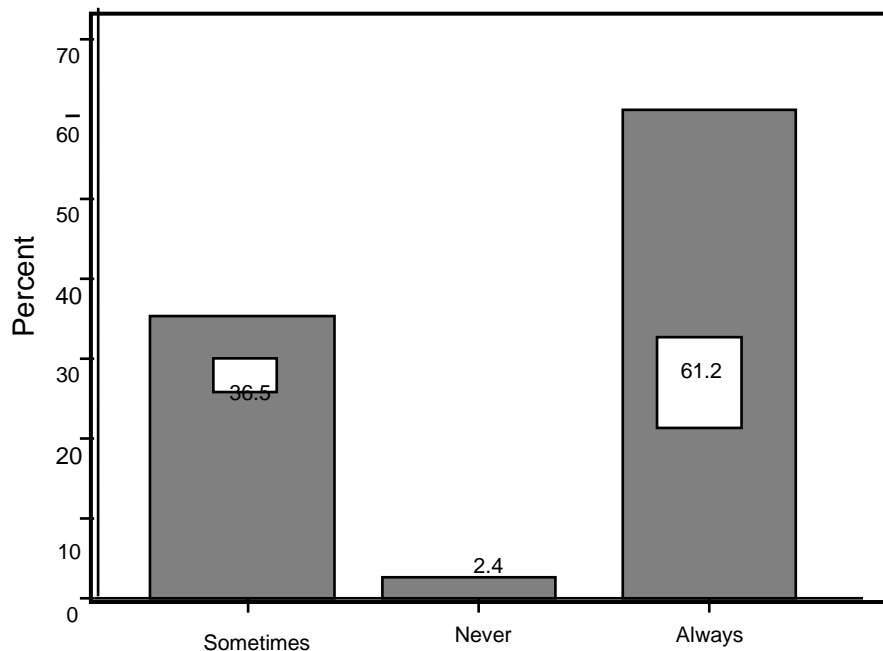

Figure 2: Influence of Amoral Messages

Figure 2 indicates that (95) 36. 53% of the participants perceived amoral media messages as sometimes influencing adherence to negative moral values, (6) 2.38% perceived amoral media messages as never influencing adherence to negative moral values, while (160) 61.18% of the participants perceived amoral media messages as always influencing adherence to negative moral values. The results indicate that the perception of amoral messages is highly pervasive (61.2%) among the participants as a factor that influences living in accordance with negative moral values.

The pervasiveness of media music lyrics as a factor influencing adherence to negative moral values was tested among the studied university students. Figure 3 gives a summary of the results.
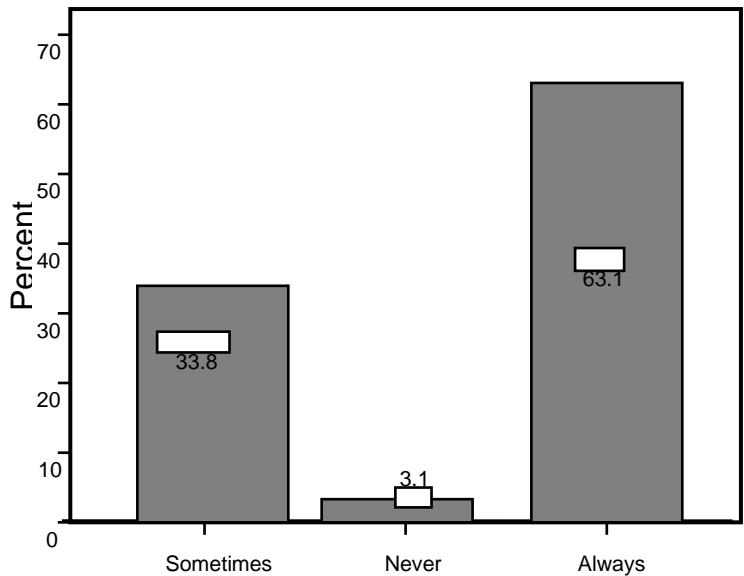
Figure 3: Influence of Media Music Lyrics

Figure 3 indicates that (88) 33. 84% of the participants perceived media music lyrics as sometimes influencing adherence to negative moral values, (8) 3.09% perceived media music lyrics as never influencing adherence to negative moral values, while (165) 63.08% of the participants perceived media music lyrics as always influencing adherence to negative moral values. The results indicate that the perception of music lyrics is highly pervasive (63.1%) among the participants as a factor that influences living in accordance with negative moral values.

The pervasiveness of unhealthy media lifestyles as a factor influencing adherence to negative moral values was tested among the studied university students. Figure 4 gives a summary of the results.
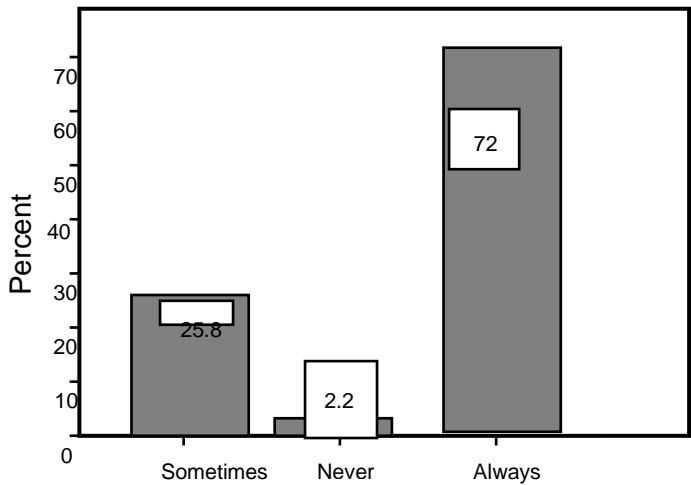

Figure 4: Influence of Unhealthy Lifestyles in the Media

Figure 4 indicates that (67) 25.78% of the participants perceived unhealthy lifestyles in the media as sometimes influencing adherence to negative moral values, (6) 2.21% perceived unhealthy lifestyles in the media as never influencing adherence to negative moral values, while (188) 72.03% of the participants perceived unhealthy lifestyles in the media as always influencing adherence to negative moral values. The results indicate that the perception of unhealthy lifestyles in the media is highly pervasive (72.02%) among the participants as a factor that influences adherence to negative moral values.

The pervasiveness of media on moral disintegration as a factor influencing adherence to negative moral values was tested among the studied university students. Figure 5 gives a summary of the results.
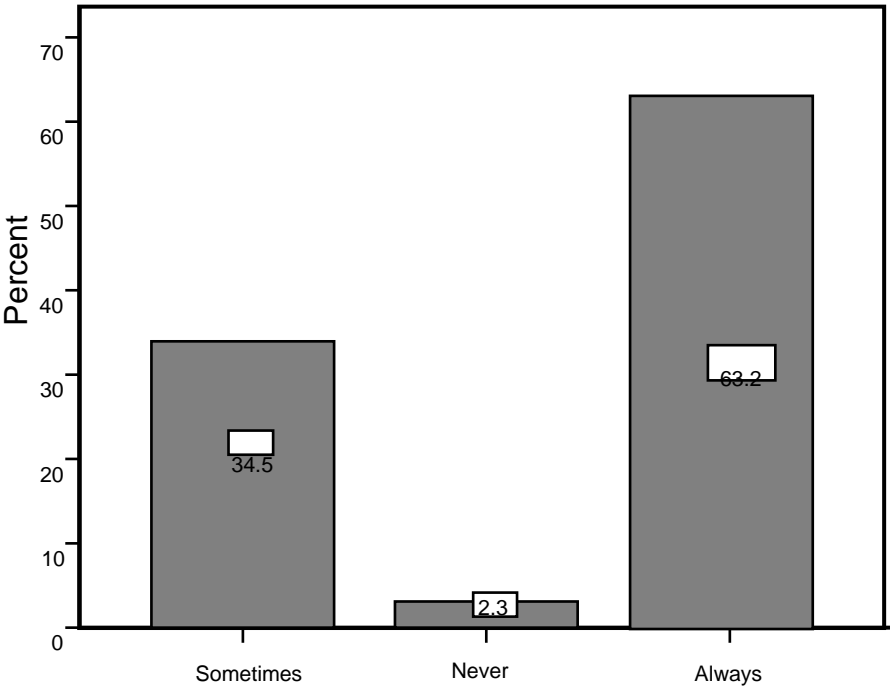

Figure 5: Influence of Media on Moral Disintegration

Figure 5 indicates that (90) 34.48% of the participants perceived media on moral disintegration as sometimes influencing adherence to negative moral values, (6) 2.32% perceived media on moral disintegration as never influencing adherence to negative moral values, while (165) 63.24% of the participants perceived media moral disintegration as always influencing adherence to negative moral values. The results indicate that the perception of media on moral disintegration is highly pervasive (63.2%) among the participants as a factor that influences adherence to negative moral values.

Table 4 summarizes participants' perceptions concerning sub-themes related to the media's influence on adherence to negative moral values.

Table 4: Summary of Participants' Perceptions of the Media-Related Sub-Themes

Sub-themes	Sometimes	Never	Always
Disrespect among media actors	31.8	2.5	65.7
Amoral messages	36.5	2.4	61.2
Influence of media music lyrics	33.8	3.1	63.1
Unhealthy lifestyles	25.8	2.2	72
Low moral standards	34.5	2.3	63.2

5.0 Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the researchers conclude that mass media as technologies affect young people's behavior. Mass media is a daily tool of communication, entertainment, information, and a source of moral values for young people. Mass media is an integral part of young people's lives that give them ideas on acceptable and unacceptable behavior as well as inspiring them to do certain things. The media controls society and is capable of changing human behavior, living style, and moral thoughts and consequences. The researchers concluded that despite the mass media being a potent tool for entertainment and education, it has been criticized by the public press, politicians, and many researchers as encouraging youth to engage in deviant behavior. Many teenagers are influenced by immoral television shows, where films and music portray violence, drug abuse, and irresponsible sexual behaviors.

The findings also revealed that mass media does influence young people's behavior both negatively and positively. Violent behavior among young people is therefore linked to high exposure to violence on television. This research findings concur with researchers like Sánchez-Páramoarianna & Legovini (2021), who assert that "social media and edutainment can reduce frictions and barriers that are in the way of individual action." The findings also point out that intensive television viewing, including video and computer games that encourage trigger-pulling behavior, reinforces quick, impulsive, reflexive responses in children and youth, which can develop acceptance of violence in young people, if not to train them in how to be violent. As a result, violence and immorality depicted in the media poison many young people's minds, and even those who attend churches fall prey to mass media coercion.

6.0 Recommendations

In accordance with the study's research questions, the following recommendations were made based on the findings.

1. Parents should limit the frequency, types, and length of time their children watch and listen to media.
2. The study found that exposure to mass media had an impact on undergraduate students' interpersonal relationships, resulting in confrontational relationships between students and those with whom they interacted, such as parents, teachers, siblings, and classmates. As a result, it was suggested that Secondary School students be guided in their media choices by providing them with relevant information before enrolling in University.
3. Regulatory authorities such as the Kenya Film Classification Board should intensify their efforts to limit the amount of time dedicated to aggressive television shows and

music. In addition, they can start a campaign that creates awareness among parents and young adults regarding the influence of mass media on deviant behaviors.

4. Considering the findings and the scope of this study, a gap that could be explored during further research includes the parental role in regulating mass media consumption by their children.

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