
The Influence of Media on Young People's Attitudes towards their Love and Beliefs on Romantic and Realistic Relationships

Myrien Eulah Kezia G. Banaag, Kathleen P. Rayos, Miriam Grace Aquino-Malabanan, Elna R. Lopez

Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas, Philippines

DOI: 10.6007/IJARP/v1-i2/1049 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARP/v1-i2/1049>

Abstract

This study aimed to measure the level of romanticism/realism of young adolescents, to assess differences on romanticism/realism among single and in a relationship young adolescents in terms of love after exposure to relevant media, and validate the Cultivation Theory proposed by Gerbner and Gross. The results showed that there is a significant difference between the scores of the groups toward the effect of media on young people's perception of love. The significance level is less than point 0.05, therefore the result of the quantitative data is "statistically significant" and unlikely to happen by chance. This proves exposure to romantic medium affects romanticism/realism of respondents and also validates the theory of Gerbner and Gross.

Keywords: media, love, romantic, realistic, media consumption, Gerbner and Gross

Introduction

The ways of media have changed over time, and so has the meaning of love. A decade ago, television and radio were the main tools for information transmission to public. But at present day, the Internet has served vast number of individuals to inform, entertain and communicate with one another. In the same way, years before love has been a term of two couples who have understood their mutual feelings towards each other; however, with the changes the modern society has brought, the most precious gift for the humankind is now considered as a game for young people.

Authors have attempted to review the literatures concerning the influence of media on the society. Mass media can affect knowledge, attitudes, opinions and behavior of individuals. Effects may be immediate or delayed, of short duration or long-lasting. The effects on persons can slowly become converted into formal changes. They can come about in simple reactions or complicated chains as when formal changes produced by the media in turn affect individuals. (McDonalds, 2007). Zwier (2012) conferred the links on the effect of media and media exposure on teenagers. Agreeing with previous researchers, Zwier talked about the prominence of effects

on teenagers coming from various social backgrounds. Adolescents in their own way do explore what the society expects from them through information provided by mass and social media. Hecht (2011) discussed the relationship of media and the viewer's construction of social reality. Learning of new information and consciousness can be from mass media and, more ideas can be derived from more time spent in its consumption. Media affects its viewers by becoming the foundation of they perceive is reality.

Mass media consumption forms a basic part of young people's lives today. Livingstone (2009) claims that this is because these young people are the first generation to live in an environment where electronic media technologies have become a vital part of everyday life. According to Zwier (2012) emphasized that adolescents see media as a reflection of where they stand at the moment. It has become a mirror of their real life experiences and has become their outlet for self-identification. Mass media are perceived to be a part of their distinctiveness as a member of a fast changing society. Zwier also stressed that the characters and plotlines involved in different programs depending on young people's choice serves as values and blocks of their characters. Some idealistic films reflect information that conveys messages of intimacy and these media becomes young people's outlet for their questions and gratifications towards love. Hefner (2011) stated that these types of films influence their perception, shape their beliefs of norms in terms of love. Mass media provides imagery of love interests with qualities that are often considered ideal. These naive images about romance and romantic relationships also impacts young people's thoughts on love and relationships.

Given this, individuals who are heavily exposed to television begin to adopt and develop dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. Gerbner and Gross' Cultivation theory has been used to study the effects of television on people's perception of reality. This theory has been one of the meticulously explored approaches to mass communication effects (Bun, 2007). As cited by Bun, Gerbner and Gross believed that the relationship between media messages and individuals' beliefs and attitudes about their social environment is curbed by overall television consumption. Since Social Cognitive Theory suggests that individuals learn what is valued or deemed appropriate in society regarding relationships and internalize this information into their own beliefs, expectations, and ideals. The vicarious capability of individuals allows them to engage in 'observational learning', witnessing and considering the experiences and responses of others rather than learning through the consequences of their own actions only. Indeed, those observed in the media may serve as symbolic models, suggesting to individuals by example what constitutes an 'ideal' partner or relationship.

The researchers found the need for this study upon observation of numerous unrealistic television programs and movie currently available in the Philippines. In the same manner, the authors of this paper noted that major audiences of such kinds of media are young adolescents. With the support of Gerbne & Gross' Cultivation theory, the researchers want to explore and know the response of Batangueño youth among the innovations brought by the millennium and how they cope in terms of a social process called love. Target participants of this study were 50 random teenagers who have internet connection and television sets at their home. The

participants should have an average of 1 hour of internet usage and 3 hours of television consumption a day.

Primary beneficiaries would be the participants themselves for they would gain knowledgeable of the unconscious effect of mass media. It would also be a great help for the community they belong in, because they could share and transmit the ideas concluded in the study that might affect their buddies. The study could contribute to the field of psychology through the validation of cultivation theory of Gerbner and Gross and identify the effect of media in the values formation of teenage youth in Batangas City. This study could also help future researchers to serve as basis for papers about media and love.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this paper was to establish if media consumption and the perception of love and relationship values are associated with each other. The researchers tested love ideals among Batangueño youth in the context of their media exposure. Specifically, this study sought results for the following objectives: to determine the respondent's attitude towards love as to romanticism and realism, to identify the influence of media in the beliefs of the respondents in terms of love, to determine how young adolescents perceive relationships after examining the effects of media on their beliefs on romantic/realistic love and to validate the Cultivation Theory proposed by Gerbner and Gross.

Theoretical Basis

The Cultivation Theory was developed in 1969 during Gerbner's Cultural Indicators Project (Potter, 1993). It was advocated by Gerbner and his associates of the Annenberg School for Communication. The theory defines that prolonged television viewing among audiences produces beliefs and ideas from the themes of the programs which instill unrealistic tendencies. In this way, viewers tend to foster what they grasp on television into their perceptions of reality.

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory rests on its most basic assumptions that it is not only through direct experience that people learn but learns more through vicarious learning. Vicarious learning is learning by observing other people. Observational learning as what it is also called is much more efficient than direct experience. By observing others, human are spared numerous responses that might be followed by punishment or by no reinforcement. Young people observe characters on television for example, and repeat what they see or hear.

METHOD

This part includes the research design used in the entire duration of the study, the participants involved, and the measures and procedures that was used.

Research Design

This study used triangular research design that employed qualitative (focused group discussion), quantitative (survey questionnaires) and experimental approaches. The study analyzed and measured the effect of romantic media in the perception and behaviors of teenagers with regards to love.

Quantitative method included the measurement of the participants' attitude towards love, its statistical analysis as well as the mathematical modeling of the involved psychological process. This kind of approach is a systematic empirical investigation of social phenomena via statistical, mathematical or computational techniques. Qualitative method, a method of inquiry employed to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior, was a focused group discussion tackling the participants' behavior and relationship beliefs. A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards an idea. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

An interview guide was provided for uniformity. As for the experimental approach, the researchers designed an experiment protocol to monitor the whole process.

Participants

The participants of the study were 50 teenagers who met the criteria set by the researchers. The participants should have viewed 7 movies from the check list prepared by the researchers, should have watched at least two soap operas on the primetime slot or an American series at a cable channel and spends an hour or more on social networking sites.

The researchers divided the participants in two groups, the "Love" group who were exposed to love films, and the "Horror" group whose members were exposed to horror genre.

Measures

In quantitative method, the researchers used a standardized survey questionnaire authored by Clyde Hendricks entitled "Love Attitude Scale" (see Appendix). The 30 item-scale was designed to assess the degree to which the participants have romantic or realistic attitudes toward love. As for the qualitative measure, the researchers used a picture as stimuli for focus group discussion. They also used an interview guide based on the contents of the standard survey questionnaire to support the study with essential information.

In the survey questionnaire used, the lower the total score, (30 is the lowest possible score), the more romantic attitudes toward love is. The higher the total score (150 is the highest

possible score), the more realistic attitudes toward love is. A score of 90 at the midpoint is between being an extreme romantic and an extreme realist.

Procedures

The researchers conducted a survey among participants who were handed out a standardized questionnaire each. The instrument is entitled "Love Attitude Scale" by Clyde Hendrick. The standard survey questionnaire included a check list (see Appendix) that stratified the participants if they will proceed to the experiment proper. The check list included at least 30 movies recently shown in theaters, 6 soap operas on local channels, 6 American series on cable channels and the number of hours spent surfing the Internet in a day. For the data collection, the researchers used a triangulation method. First, the respondents answered the Love Attitude Scale by Clyde Hendricks for the pre-test to determine their level of romanticism and realism. Then the next step was the experiment proper which were two times a week for a month. The researchers also have film viewing in two groups, one group for experimental or romantic film viewing and one group for controlled film viewing or those films not related to romance. Lastly, a focused group discussion was the post-interview for the participants. Pictures (see Appendix) will be shown and the participants will be asked about their personal opinion. An interview guide (see also Appendix) will be used for structure and organization of the whole process.

Experimental Protocol

The participants were exposed to both local and foreign films two times a week for a month. Group I was the controlled group wherein the participants watched romantic films while Group II were the baseline group where films not related to romance were shown. Upon the end of the experiment, the experimenters conducted the post-test and post interview to measure the changes in their perceptions.

Analysis

The researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative measures in the entire study. As for the quantitative part, which included a standardized questionnaire that was administered before and after the experiment procedure, t-test for independent groups was used. The quantitative part was a focused group discussion, to be analyzed through thematic analysis. It emphasized, examined, and recorded patterns on or themes in data gathered.

RESULT

The following tables and data below are both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the procedures of this research.

The tables are the quantitative data acquired from the questionnaire “Love Attitude Scale” by Clyde Hendricks calculated statistically by finding the means, standard deviation and ANOVA of the scores.

Table 1. Participants’ Attitudes toward Love

	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Mean	SD	VI	Mean	SD	VI
Love Group	77.96	13.21	Romantic	66.32	13.64	Romantic
Horror Group	82.68	10.27	Romantic	85.92	8.51	Realistic
Total	80.32	11.85		76.12	14.9	

This table shows the results of the quantitative data from the standardized questionnaires that were given to the respondents. For this first table, the data were classified into the pre-test, or before the experiment and the post-test, or after the experiment. There were also two groups which is the Love group and the Horror group. For the Love group (which was the first group), the Mean score of the pre-test is 77.96 and the standard deviation was 30.91, while the post-test had a mean score of 66.32 and standard deviation score of 13.64. And for the Horror group (which was the second group), the Mean score of the pre-test 82.68 and the standard deviation is 10.27, while the post-test has a mean score of 85.92 and standard deviation score of 8.51. The total pre-test mean score of the two groups was 80.32 and the standard deviation was 11.95, for the post-test, the total mean score was 76.12 and standard deviation was 14.99.

Table 2. Effects of Media on Teen’s Perception of Love

	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig
Paired Sample	4.20	11.79	2.518	49	0.015

Note: **p<.05

The table two shows the combined result of the two groups toward the effects of media in their perception of love. The overall mean score of the paired sample is 4.20 with the standard deviation of 11.79 and the degree of freedom of 49 the statistical significance is 0.015. The significance level was less than point 0.05 therefore the result of the quantitative data is “statistically significant” and unlikely to happen by chance. In this table, individual scores on the pre-test are compared with the scores on the post-test. The score of respondent 1 in the pre-test, and his score on the post-test were compared and process went on until respondent 50. For the result, it was noted that media not only influenced the groups (Love and Horror group) but also has influenced the individuals.

Table 3. Significant Differences Between the Two Groups

	df_b	df_w	df_t	F	Sig
Pre-test (Love and Horror group)	1	48	49	1.988	0.165
Post-test (Love and Horror group)	1	48	49	37.121	0.000

The obtained data proved a significance of 0.165 in the pre-test and 0.000 in the post test with the alpha level of 0.05, meaning that there was a significant difference among the respondents before and after the experiment. The results prove that media can affect the audiences' thinking and belief. It also supports the idea that audiences base their concepts of reality according to what they see or hear from media. In conclusion, media effects were found to be statistically significant.

Regarding the result of the respondent's attitudes on love, their beliefs and perception were not altered. There were no signs of unrealistic belief towards this emotion.

DISCUSSION

Influence of Media

As shown in table 2, the result of the combined scores of the two groups produced a significant data. This means that media did somewhat affect teenager's perception of love and relationship. Mass media consumption accounts as a basic part of young people's lives today. Livingstone (2009) claims that this is because these young people are the first generation to live in an environment where electronic media technologies have become a vital part of everyday life. He explained that people used to watch television sitting on the sofa with others, but today most people are sitting in front of their computer spending a great deal of their time multitasking on the internet.

Most of the plots in today's primetime television consist of idealistic visual cues that create an adolescent's concept of romance. When exposed to a particular recurring theme in romance, young adolescents tend to incorporate these values in real life. As what Richards (2010) stated, the years in a teenager's life can be crucial in their self-development because this is the time where they learn to apply the things they see in their environment. Some young people deviate from their parents' ideal versions in favour of being their own "unique" self. This is also the time when they alter their priority from traditional values. Milkie (cited by Richards, 2010) also explained that, even though teenage girls know that some images are unrealistic, they still think it is viewed normally by the society.

In this case, the results supported the claim of Gerbner and Gross that repetitive, highly stylized, and stereotypical messages media shares with viewers, depicts themes that are perceived as essential for socialization. According to Hefner, romantic movies can inculcate hope to real-life relationships. These genres of movies depict love expression with no limit and

boundaries. Though obstacles may be present, mass media still offers optimism and survival from complications. The conflict in most films does not exhibit the element of love where it displays complexity beyond surface problems. Some writers consider the preference to focus on the “happily ever after” aspect as the reason for marital insecurity in the 20th century. The results indicate that exposure to a themed media affects the audiences’ belief and thinking.

Seiter (2008) observed that young people famously use digital communications instant messaging, cell phone texting, and social networking Websites to maintain their social capital, at least with those peers who can afford to keep up with the costly requirements of these technologies. In this case, young people use media as their basis for new knowledge and information especially that with romantic themes. Further, these cinematic genres of romance is appealing to viewers because romantic content is familiar and contributes to the feeling of nostalgia that allows the past to be remembered. In addition, romantic motion pictures are appealing because they depict a romantic journey that viewers can identify with, thus merging identity and myth together so that a film can be perceived as real and symbolic (Abbott & Jermyn, 2009).

A motivation for consuming romantic media may be the desire to learn. Hodgetts and Chamberlain (as cited by Hartley, 2011) suggested that the audiences rarely take up the real insights of the story from media and added that viewers tend to select, accept, reject, resist and modify representations of media according to their personal needs and opinion. Livingstone supported this idea and stated that audiences of media have different reception of the messages conveyed by the television program or movie, for it can be diverse depending on the understanding of the viewers. The use of the mass media plays an integral part in the lives of young people. In table 4, most of the respondents believed that media becomes the audiences’ map for the real world. They believed that these programs created by media form part of an individual’s holistic learning and intelligence.

In this case of media effect in people’s system of values, teenagers may view values on television as somewhat unrealistic for them personally, but still feel that they are the values of society. Milkie (as cited by Richards, 2010) found that even though many teenage girls may consider mediated images unrealistic, they still believe these images are viewed by others as norms. Thus, the media can be seen to reflect the viewpoints of the generalized other, even if these viewpoints are not personally held by the viewer due to other factors.

Love Beliefs and Attitudes

There has always been a change in the beliefs and attitudes about love among the youth of this generation. As supported of this study, teenagers exposed to romantic themed programs established a dysfunctional belief or attitude expecting his/her partner to behave like those seen in movies. Through decades, there has been a drastic change on how young people learn and associate with their environment. Livingstone (2007) in her study described the young ones in the 1950’s playing outdoors and socializing with other children. It can be observed that fast

changes in media also bring reform to its viewers. Watching television and films accounts are now the greatest proportion of school aged children's media consumption (Ofcom, 2008). With these, it is not surprising to collect answers from the respondents that suggest their belief towards media and knowledge. Like the answers from the first group, respondents believed that media has always been playing an integral role to the knowledge and compilation of information from their natural environment.

This study can be further be improved by using several kinds of media to further ensure the validity. Romantic genres of music and exposure to romantic teleseryes and programs can also be facilitated. The use of different social networking sites can also be utilized. With the following concluded, it can be noted that the Lyceum of the Philippines University - Batangas should examine every theme presented to their students. The administration can also conduct seminars that will promote awareness to their faculty members and entire community as well about the delicateness of media presented to the students. Television networks should also be informed about the effect of media to young people's values and knowledge formation, for they are becoming the pillars of information of today's youth. As for the parents guiding their teenage children, might as well include minors and toddlers, to screen and manage what kind of themes in media their children are watching and listening to lead them into the right direction.

For the future researchers interested in pursuing this topic, it is suggested to unpack the complexities associated with viewing romantic comedy films and endorsing ideal beliefs and understand individuals who watch a specific type of media with the intent of learning they acquire from it.

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