THE EFFECT OF MEDIA VIOLENCE ON THE VERBAL AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS OF MALAYSIAN CHINESE INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Tan Yun Hoong[1], *Paul GnanaSelvam Pakirnathan[2], Irene Law Hong Ling [3]

[1]Faculty of Arts and Social Science,
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman,
43600, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia

[2]Faculty of Arts and Social Science,
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman,
43600, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia

[3]Faculty of Arts and Social Science,
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman,
43600, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's email: paulgselvam@gmail.com

Abstract

With the rising ownership of mobile phones and access to social media, school teachers have noted and reported on the increase in secondary school students' use of verbal aggressive behaviours at school compared to the past. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the effect of media violence on the verbal aggressive behaviours of male and female Chinese independent secondary school students in Malaysia. In this quantitative study, 380 male and female Malaysian secondary school students enrolled in Forms Three to Five were selected through simple random sampling method. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed through a survey form. The Free Time Questionnaire (Gunderson, 2006), Content-Based Media Exposure Scale (Den Hamer, 2017), and the Verbal Aggressive Scale (Infante& Wigley,1986) were used to collect data. The data were then analysed using the SPSS- 23. The results showed that the most popular media used among Malaysian secondary school students were videos and computer games. The results also showed that media violence significantly affected the verbal aggressive behaviours of Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students. However, there was no significant difference between male and female students in indulging in verbally aggressive behaviours. Thus, the results of this study are significant for parents, educators and school administrators to be aware on the types of media violence that could indirectly stimulate students to committing verbally aggressive behaviours which in turn lead to other negative socio-communicative implications.

Keywords: Social Media, Teenagers, Verbal Aggressive Behaviour

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Improved technology and robust innovations in mass media have brought many changes to the world today. Television, radio, movies, videos, social media, and video games have taken up dominant and

crucial roles in our daily lives (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006). However, these changes have negatively impacted the lives of the younger generation. Studies show that students, especially those between 13-18 years old spend over nine hours every day in utilising media and 67% of them have their own smartphones which are popular for updating social media accounts, watching videos and playing mobile games ("Media Use by Tweens and Teens: Infographic/ Common Sense Media", 2015).

According to Rosner and Kramer (2016) and Lan, Abdullah and Roslan (2010), violence is often present in today's media. For example, programs for children are known to carry more violent content compared to programs for adults, based on the findings of National Television Violence Study (NTVS) by Kaise Family Foundation (2013). Furthermore, there are many internet users who post aggressive reviews online by taking part in the social media platforms to express public criticism, individual resentment or just simply letting off steam every day (Rosner& Kramer, 2016). As a result, children who spent excessive amount of time using media are indirectly exposed to media violence and emulate the violent traits or behaviours from media content and other users and purposely try to harm others (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Therefore, media violence is also known as relational aggression, where violation is learnt from electronic information or cyber aggression and is later translated into abusive language which is verbal aggressive behaviour (Busching, Allen & Anderson, 2016).

According to Infante and Wigley (1986), verbal aggressive behaviour is an attack on a person's self-concept by humiliating, shouting, threatening, satirising and defaming. In a research carried out by Wotring and Greenberg, (1973) to investigate potential impact of televised violence in the context of physical aggressive behaviour, it was found that verbal aggressive behaviour was usually learnt from televised aggressive reactions and was more normative than physical violence. Lan, Abdullah and Roslan (2010), on the other hand, found that children who were exposed to media violence had indicated that media violence had a negative long-term influence on their verbal behaviours. These long term verbal aggressive behaviours occurred due to constant exposure to media that had violent content and the children committed physical assaults or spousal abuse later in life. Meanwhile, short term exposures increased not only the probability of physical and verbal aggressiveness, but also promoted aggressive thinking as well as aggressive emotions. By saying so, there is a high risk that physical and verbal aggressive behaviours will be learned or mimicked through the media. According to Hamilton (2011), this phenomenon can damage the growth of both individuals and society.

Hence, this research aimed to investigate the effect of media violence on the verbal aggressive behaviours of secondary school students in Malaysia. Specifically, it aimed to answer the research questions,
RQ1: What kinds of media channels are popular among Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students?
RQ2: What is the extent of use of verbal aggressive behaviours among Chinese independent secondary school students in Malaysia?
RQ3: Does media violence significantly affect students' verbal aggressive behaviours of Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students?
RQ4: Is there a significant difference between the male and female Malaysian Chinese independent students in their verbal aggressive behaviours?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media Violence

According to Lan, Abdullah and Roslan (2010), students in the 21st century face greater challenges than those in previous decades. Since the arrival of the digital age, the issue of the exposure to media violence and its effects on student's aggressive behaviours has gained public attention. The reason being, nowadays, there is an increase in students' utilization of social media and access to online television,

video, and games channels. Anderson and Bushman (2001) had reported that students, aged between 8 to 18 years old spent more than 40 hours per week on media by watching television and videos as well as playing computer and video games. According to another study, the Kaiser Family Foundation Study (2010) found that children aged 8 to 18 in the U.S. spent more than seven hours daily in using media, with approximately four hours of watching television, two hours of listening to music and other audios, one hour of computer use, and one hour of playing video games. Although there are video games which are educational, non-violent, sport-based, and stimulating for music and drawing skills, violent video games such as virtual combats are the most popular and highly consumed by young people in the market (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). According to Carnagey, Anderson and Bushman (2007), over 85% of video games are filled with violent content or extreme elements.

Kumarasuriar, Pangiras, Sinappan and Sivan (2011), had conducted a survey on Malaysian students between 13 to 17 years old using the The Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire in order to understand the level of the participants' awareness towards verbal aggressive behaviours. The results of the study showed that students who reported higher exposure to violent video games also reported to be involved with higher levels of verbal aggressive behaviours. The study also reported that most Malaysian parents and marketers ignore violence in media and are not aware of the video games content their children indulged in. Their study had also pointed out that many Malaysians were not aware that aggressive verbal behaviours committed by secondary school students in Malaysia had also increased.

According to Rajasakran, Wong, Sinappan, Kumarasuriar and Sivan (2014), with video games becoming popular, easily available and accessible through mobile phones, Malaysian students are increasingly being exposed to media violence. Through this study, the researchers had indicated that male students have higher exposure to violent video games than female students which positively affected their verbal behaviours and academic performances. Their study also showed that male students in Malaysia spent more time playing video games in order to seek stimulation and excitement. On the contrary, female students reported lower effect and excitement while being exposed to video games.

2.2. Verbal Aggressive Behaviour

Verbal aggressive behaviour can be defined as a direct verbal confrontation which attempts to hurt a person psychologically but not aiming at damaging a relationship in the long or short term (Coyne Callister, Pruett, Nelson, Stockdale, & Wells, 2011). There are many types of verbal aggressive behaviours such as making fun of others, competence attacks, tackling one's self-concept by using nonverbal emblems, swearing, accuse, personal attacks, denial of others, harmful comparisons as well as sexual harassment (Infante, Riddle, Horvath & Tumlin, 1992). According to Infante (1995), the psychological pain that follows a verbal abuse leads to a sense of depression, failure, misery, hopelessness, shame and anger in the victim. Therefore, verbal aggressive behaviour is considered as negative communication because it could produce dissatisfaction between people and influence relationship between individuals.

In a mixed methods study, Tian (2014), had conducted a research on the usage of English swear words among Malaysian Chinese youths ranging from 15 to 16 years old by using a questionnaire and focus group interviews. Tian's study (2014) showed that Chinese male youths indicated that they used verbal aggressive behaviours because they were used to it, as a way of showing and fighting off irritation and peer influence. On the other hand, the study also showed that the Chinese female youths tended to use verbal aggressive behaviours when they were being emotional, upset or angry. The results also showed that negative verbal behaviours and particularly swearing were used as a tool to release stress or anger and defense mechanism. Many respondents in this study also believed that their swearing habit did not offend any of their friends.

Intan, Naem, Marlyna and Kesumawati (2017) had also conducted a study on the verbal aggressive behaviours of Malaysian youths. Their survey indicated that 92.86% among the 50 Malaysian youths ranging from 18 to 28 years old swear frequently. It was so prominent among youths in Malaysia that it has become a part of communication style that is even considered as polite during conversations if the speakers only wanted to express their emotions. Hence, verbal aggressive behaviour has become a norm among Malaysian youths to bond with their peers.

According to Taylor and Smith (2017), the occurrence of verbal aggressive behaviours of students in schools is widespread. In a recent research carried out across five schools in the southeastern United States, Taylor and Smith (2017) designed the Verbal Aggression Survey-Teacher (VAS-T) and surveyed 279 teachers on their students' behavioural disorders. The result of this survey indicated a significant prevalence of verbal aggressive behaviour among students as 71% of the teachers had observed that their students used verbal aggressive behaviours during their conversations in the classroom. Besides, this study also found that students' verbal aggressive behaviours occurred during verbal or physical retaliation, avoiding help from adults, ignoring authority and countering direct and indirect verbal aggressors.

2.3 Effects of verbal aggressive behaviour on students

The impact of verbal aggressive behaviour is a topic of concern in today's society because it is affecting the socio-emotional health of children and youths (Spivak & Prothrow-Stith, 2001). Literature shows that verbal aggressive behaviours among students can decrease their emotional and cognitive learning, motivation, and satisfaction (Teven, 2001; Myers & Knox, 2001; Myers, 2002; Schrodt, 2003). Other researches showed that verbal aggressive behaviours such as name calling, making sweeping comments of dislike towards people, and swearing have led to a high percentage of bullying and victimization (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, & Ruan, 2001; Spivak & Prothrow-Spivak, 2001). Research conducted by Bosworth, Espelage and Simon, (1999) showed that 81% of secondary school students have been involved in bullying behaviour in the form of verbal and physical aggression. This results in many serious consequences to students such as depression and lack of self-esteem when they are growing up (Olweus, 1992). According to Shear and Salmon (1999), 30% of secondary school students have suffered from verbal aggression in school and 8% of them skipped classes at least one day in a month because they are afraid of becoming victims of peer verbal and physical aggressions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was adopted to conduct this study. A survey was administered to collect data. 400 Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students from Kampar district, Perak, enrolled in Form 3 to Form 5 were selected through random sampling. However, only 385 survey forms were returned out of which five were deemed unusable. The 380 respondents consisted of 190 male and 190 female students. Three sets of pre-existing questionnaires were included in the survey form. The Free time questionnaire (Gunderson, 2006) consists of 7-items that measured the amount of time respondents spent on media per week was used to answer the first research question. The 20- itemed Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986) was used to measure the respondents' traits of verbal aggressiveness and answer the second research question. Respondents were required to answer based on 5 item Likert scale responses ranging from 1= almost never true, 2 = rarely true, 3 = occasionally true, 4 = often true, and 5 = almost always true and has a reliability of $\alpha = .80$. Finally, data to answer the third research question was gathered using the Content-based Media Exposure Scale (C-ME) (Den Hamer, 2017). This 17-item scale measured the types of media use through a Likert scale ranging from, 1 = never, 2 = incidentally, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = very often. It is made up of four dimensions, sensation seeking, trait aggressiveness, violent media, and general media with a reliability of $\alpha = .84$, $\alpha = .87$, $\alpha = .77$, and $\alpha = .70$ respectively. The Statistical Package for Social-Science (SPSS) Version 23 was used

for the statistical data analysis. The analyses included descriptive statistics (RQ 1 and 2), simple linear regression (RQ 3), and independent samples t-test (RQ 4).

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Question 1

What kinds of media channels are popular among Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students?

Table 1 shows that video or computer games were the most popular among the respondents compared to television and movies. The majority of respondents (47.1%), played video or computer games for 11 to 14 hours each week, followed by respondents (18.7%) who played video or computer games for 7 to 10 hours each week. 13.2% of the respondents played video or computer games for more than 15 hours each week and only 2.9% of respondents did not play any video or computer games.

Table 1: Video or computer games

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No time	11	2.9	2.9	2.9
1 to 2 hours each week	26	6.8	6.8	28.4
3 to 6 hours each week	43	11.3	11.3	86.8
7 to 10 hours each week	71	18.7	18.7	21.6
11 to 14 hours each week	179	47.1	47.1	75.5
15 hours or more each week	50	13.2	13.2	100.0
Total	380	100.0	100.0	

4.2 Research Question 2

What is the extent of use of verbal aggressive behaviour among Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students?

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of Malaysian secondary school students committing verbally aggressive behaviour. The results show that 72.6% of respondents were more likely to be involved in verbally aggressive behaviours whereas only 27.4% of respondents reported of not being involved in non-verbally aggressive behaviours. Thus, the results show that most of the secondary school students committed verbally aggressive behaviours.

Table 2: Verbal aggressive behaviour of respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Non-aggressive	104	27.4	27.4	27.4
Aggressive	276	72.6	72.6	100.0
Total	380	100.0	100.0	

4.3 Research Question 3

Does media violence significantly affect the verbal aggressive behaviours of Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students?

The simple linear regression analysis was used to identify the effect of media violence on the verbal aggressive behaviours of Malaysian secondary school students. Table 4.3 shows that media violence significantly affects the verbal aggressive behavioursof the Malaysian students ($p \leq 0.05$).

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis on media violence and verbal aggressive behaviour

Variables	Model 1		
N = (380)	B	t	P
Media Violence	.116	2.27	.024
R^2	.013		
Adjusted R^2	.011		
F	5.157		
Sig	.024		

N= 380, *P ≤0.05

4.4 Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference between male and female Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students' verbal aggressive behaviours?

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the use of verbal aggressive behaviours between male and female students. The results in Table 4 show that there is no significant difference in the scores obtained between male (*M*=58.44, *SD*=6.57) and female students [*M*=57.43, *SD*=8.32; *t*(358.654)=1.308, *p*≥0.05]. Therefore, there is no significant difference between gender and verbal aggressive behaviour.

Table 4: Independent-samples t-test of difference between gender and verbal aggressive behaviour

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
SUMVAS	Equal variances not assumed	4.236	.040	1.306	358.654	.192	1.00526	.76961

4.5 Discussion

Generally, the results show that media violence plays a crucial factor in influencing the social-economic and demographic fabric of Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students and their verbal aggressive behaviours. The results indicated that video or computer games have become part and parcel of these students' lives. With technological advancement, video games have become more realistic with graphics and have continuous episodes of stories that progress from one level to another. Once students are addicted to them, they spend more time in the games, becoming more involved cognitively, physically and emotionally. They also engage with their peers and take on roles of the games characters, combat strategies and context of the video games. Thus, the mannerisms, language styles and tones are usually imitated into their real lives, resulting in verbal aggressive behaviours. This is consistent with the findings of Rajasakran, et al. (2014), the Kaiser Family Foundation Study (2010) and Anderson and Bushman (2001). The results also indicated that more than half of the respondents indulged in various types of

verbal aggressive behaviours. Swearing is one of the most repeated types of aggressive behaviours and has become part of everyday communication among them. The students have learnt swear words from the media and used it freely among their peers because they think it is part of a communicative function. This is confirmed by the findings of Taylor and Smith (2017), Intan et al. (2017), and Tian (2014).

The results also pointed out that media violence significantly affected the Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students' verbal aggressive behaviours and are consistent with past studies. According to Anderson et al (2003), short term exposure to media violence results in aggressive thoughts such as beliefs and attitudes that will lead an individual to commit verbally aggressive behaviours. When the individual is exposed to media violence, he or she will build a knowledge structure about the the character's actions in dealing with challenges and problems as depicted in the program. Therefore, the verbal aggressive behaviour of the Malaysian secondary school students may be formed by learning and copying the characters on media and committed to their schema. Therefore, providing the rationale where respondents in this study assumed that verbal aggressive behaviour is acceptable and normal.

This study also showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in engaging in verbal aggressive behaviours. This means that both male and female students equally indulged in verbal aggressive behaviours. This is consistent with the findings of Tian's (2014) study which mentioned that both male and female students similarly indulged in verbal aggressive behaviours but for different communication purposes. However, the results of this study contradict the findings of Kumarasuriar, et al (2011). Kumarasuriar, et al (2011) study indicated that male students exhibited more frequent verbal aggressive behaviours compared to their female counterparts because male students had higher exposure to violent media.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the effect of media violence on verbal aggressive behaviours of the Chinese independent high school students in Malaysia. This research demonstrated that media violence is significant in affecting the verbal aggressive behaviours of the Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school students, especially through long term exposure to computer and online games. The study also revealed that both male and female students indulged in various verbal aggressive behaviours and for different reasons. Swearing, in particular is an accepted norm of interpersonal communication feature with their peers. Therefore, this study implies that parents, teachers and school administers need to play a crucial role in providing guidance and controlling students' usage of media. They also need to make sure that the school environment is conducive to learning positive inputs. As most students now carry a mobile phone, parents have to monitor media content and filter their children's' internet browsing. Teachers, apart from parents need to be watchful and alert to the quality of their students' conversations. The government, on the other hand should implement stricter policies in restricting violent media content in online videos and games. This study had focused on various media channels that had included T.V. and radio that are usually scrutinised and filtered by their respective media and government agencies. Future studies could include deeper investigations on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and other sources with live-streaming features of movies and video games and their impact on Malaysian secondary school students' verbal aggressive behaviours.

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