

Effects of TV ad violence, Super Bowl implications on kids (w/ Video)

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The Super Bowl annually produces the year's largest TV audience, making it a prime event for advertisers to debut their flashy, new commercials. But ads with violent content aired during a sporting event that also contains violence may amplify aggressive thoughts in kids, the authors of a new Iowa State University study say.

Five ISU researchers authored the study, "Television Commercial Violence: Potential Effects on Children," which was published in the most recent edition of *The Journal of Advertising*. It found that kids who viewed violent ad content also had more aggressive thoughts, so the Super Bowl's football violence may have a compounding effect on kids.

"You put it [violent content in TV commercials] in the context of football -- which we generally think about as sport, not violence -- and I think there is potential for kids to respond to this aggressively," said Russell Laczniak, a professor of marketing in ISU's College of Business and one of the study's authors.

"There is the opportunity for parents to co-view and we found that co-viewing and discussion can lower children's tendency to respond aggressively," he continued. "But given the context of people being at Super Bowl parties, I'm not sure parents are going to take time to talk with their children about the violence."

Focus groups and an experimental study

Deanne Brocato, an assistant professor of marketing; Douglas Gentile, an associate professor of psychology; graduate student Julia Maier; and Mindy Ji-Song, a former ISU assistant professor; also collaborated on the study. Their research encompassed focus groups of 42 children and 40 parents to investigate their perceptions of [media violence](#) and how TV commercial violence may influence children; and an experimental study of 165 children (ages eight to 12, split between the sexes) to determine the kids' aggressive thoughts after they viewed TV commercials containing violence. The researchers defined violence as "actions depicting intentional harm to victims who would not wish to be harmed."

In the focus groups, parents expressed little concern with the effects of violent commercials on children. Both the parents and children associated violence with actions that resulted in "blood." Both also indicated that realism was an important characteristic of violence. Cartoon or animated scenes depicting violence were perceived as being more fantasy than violence by the subjects.

"Sex and selling made them [focus group parents] mad, but their definition of violence was if it didn't have blood and gore and wasn't realistic -- as opposed to cartoon violence -- then it wasn't violent," Brocato said. "Parents also had issues with movie trailers as a separate category."

In the experimental study, children were surveyed on their media viewing habits and then shown one of eight videos containing both children's content and either violent ads or non-violent ads. The researchers then measured the subjects' aggressive thoughts through their responses to a post-viewing questionnaire. They determined that exposure to ads containing violent content clearly increased the amount

of [aggressive thoughts](#) that were generated by the children.

Parents should be concerned about violent ads

The researchers conclude that parents should be concerned about their children's exposure to violent content through TV ads. Previous literature -- including a 2002 study by ISU psychologists Craig Anderson and Brad Bushman [now at The Ohio State University] -- found that violent cognitions may start a process that reinforces kids' aggressive knowledge and may make them more likely to engage in aggressive acts.

"It increases the risk and the [aggressive] tendencies they have," Brocato said. "You're allowing your kids to have higher potential to engage in this activity and it puts them at a higher risk because they become desensitized to the violence."

Because the study also found that parents play such a pivotal role in how media and advertising consumption affect children, the authors recommend three things parents can do to mitigate the effects of violent media on their children:

1. Limit the amount of time viewing the content
2. Limit the media content to non-aggressive, age-appropriate media
3. Active mediation -- where parents discuss media thoughtfully with their [children](#).

And given the potential double-dose during the [Super Bowl](#) telecast, parents may want to take action with their kids Sunday.

Provided by Iowa State University

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