

News Presentation and the Third-Person Effect of Violent Video Games

Seong Choul Hong, Kyonggi University, Seoul, South Korea

ABSTRACT

The present study explored the relationships between the tone in news presentations and the third-person effect. It investigated whether news stories about violent video games changed viewers perspectives based on the positively or negatively portrayed messages presented by the media. Overall, this study examined how news stories encouraged or discouraged viewers from supporting government regulations of violent video game content. An online survey of 388 American adults served as the main source of data collection. The study found that presumed media effects decreased on both others and self when viewers were exposed to positively presented news coverage. Subsequently, their support for regulating violent video games was reduced. However, no changes were found in third-person perception. In addition, those who were exposed to negative news coverage showed no significant changes in their perceived media effects on self, others, and support regulations on video game contents.

KEYWORDS

Attribute Agenda-Setting, Support for Regulation, Third-Person Effect, Violent Video Games

INTRODUCTION

The news media often portrays video games as the prime instigators of violence when shootings occur in the schools. Since children and teens are a vulnerable and impressionable group, concerns continue to escalate among parents and policymakers as to the link between violent video game content and youth violence (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007; Livingstone, 2007). De Vaan, Boschma, and Frenken (2012) argue that news stories highlighting violence in video games surge as the popularity of gaming among children and teens rises. Moreover, some scholars believe that the government and its policymakers overestimate the effects of game content on others when imposing unnecessary regulations (Calvert, 1998; Schmierbach, Boyle, Xu, & McLeod, 2011).

The third-person perception lends an intriguing explanation of a public effort to regulate violent video games (Boyle, McLeod, & Rojas, 2008; Scharrer & Leone, 2006). The third-person perception indicates a tendency for people to overestimate the media's influence on "others" or to underestimate the media's influences on "me" (Davison, 1983). These perceptual gaps consequently (but not always) lead to a willingness to support media-content regulations. For over three decades, scholars have

DOI: 10.4018/IJGCMS.2019010102

Copyright © 2019, IGI Global. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global is prohibited.

offered robust demonstrations of third-person perceptions (Andsager & White, 2007; Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000; Sun, Pan, & Shen, 2008). Specifically, third-person perceptions and subsequent support for regulation was most salient with anti-social stimuli than pro-social stimuli (Innes & Zeits, 1988; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Johansson, 2005).

Considering that the news media provides a public standard for judging an issue (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs, 2004), it is plausible to associate research on the third-person effect with how news outlets present an object with a negative or positive story. Nonetheless, there are few studies to review the association between the third-person perception and the news presentation (Banning, 2001; David, Boyne, & German, 2009; Schweisberger, Billinson, & Chock, 2014). The present study investigated the presentation of news stories and how they influence pre-existing perceptions of harmful media by collecting and analyzing data collected from 388 web-based survey respondents. Thus, the study evaluated the relationship between news presentations about violent video games and third-person perceptions and explored the likelihood that what an individual learns about violent video games from the media links to their support of government regulations on video game content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Regulation of Violent Video Games and the Third-Person Effects

Violent video games have raised public concerns since the realistic depiction of killing and blood with 16-bit graphics first emerged in the early 1990s (Porter & Starcevic, 2007). After a 1994 congressional hearing and heated discussion over violent video games, several pieces of legislation at both the state and federal level in the United States resulted in the implementation of a voluntary rating system by the video game industry (O'Holleran, 2010). Although more than seven states (including California, Illinois, and Michigan) have passed statutes regulating the sale of violent video games to minors, federal courts struck down the statutes (Kenyota, 2008).

While state interventions attempt to regulate game content in the name of protecting children, scientific evidence lacks support for claims that violent video games contribute to crime. In 2011, the Supreme Court of the United States struck down a California statute prohibiting the sale or rental of violent video games to people younger than 18 years old (*Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association*, 2011). In a 7–2 ruling, Justice Antonin Scalia wrote to afford video games the same Constitutional protection as books, plays, visual art, film, music, and other forms of expression. Unlike U.S. courts, Germany and other European countries have successfully restricted minors' access to violent video games (Robertson, 2008; Saunders, 2013). Researchers studying the third-person effect focus on the presumed media's assumption toward media violence and the consequent unnecessary regulations (Andsager & White, 2007; Calvert, 1998; Connors, 2005). For example, Scharrer and Leone (2006) found that a child's estimation of violent video games had less effect on perception of his or her own aggression than on perception of aggression in others. Specifically, the magnitude of the third-person effect increased when children viewed "others" as younger than themselves. Schmierbach, Boyle, Xu, and McLeod (2011) determined a negative association between the frequency of playing video games and the third-person effect. For instance, frequent video game play had a smaller third-person effect than less frequent video game play. Accordingly, frequent players of violent video games were projected to have less support for censorship (Ivory & Kalyanaraman, 2009). Based on these studies, the third-person perception and the willingness to support regulations varied according to an individual's experiences. In combination with previous research, the present study proposed the following research hypotheses:

RH1: The frequency of playing video games is negatively associated with the third-person perception of violent video games.

RH2: The frequency of playing video games is negatively associated with an individual's willingness to support regulation.

11 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/news-presentation-and-the-third-person-effect-of-violent-video-games/228147

Related Content

Gerontoludic Design: Extending the MDA Framework to Facilitate Meaningful Play for Older Adults

Bob De Schutter (2017). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 45-60).

www.irma-international.org/article/gerontoludic-design/177271

Virtual Learning Environments. The oLTECx: A Study of Participant Attitudes and Experiences

Adriana D'Alba, Anjum Najmi, Jonathan Gratch and Chris Bigenho (2011). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 33-50).

www.irma-international.org/article/virtual-learning-environments-oltec/53152

Assassin's Creed and Transmedia Storytelling

Connie Veugen (2016). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 1-19).

www.irma-international.org/article/assassins-creed-and-transmedia-storytelling/147349

In-Game Advertising: Effectiveness and Consumer Attitudes

Mark Lee, Rajendra Mulye and Constantino Stavros (2009). *Digital Sport for Performance Enhancement and Competitive Evolution: Intelligent Gaming Technologies* (pp. 299-312).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/game-advertising-effectiveness-consumer-attitudes/8548

Video Games, Reading, and Transmedial Comprehension

Brock Dubbles (2009). *Handbook of Research on Effective Electronic Gaming in Education* (pp. 251-276).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/video-games-reading-transmedial-comprehension/20090