Review Article

The Influence of Digital Media on Aggression in Indonesian Children : A Systematic Review

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Abstract: The effects of digital media on children are unfortunate given how much of an impact they have on the world. Children who are exposed to violent media may act aggressively both physically and verbally. Either right away after media exposure or months and possibly years later, the behavior takes place. Children will act according to what they see for most of their lives, which means how much time they spend watching content that endangers their lives, such as hateful material about other children, peers, adults, or animals, inciting racism, or posting or disturbing images. Children become aggressive due to violent television shows. "Television can harm children by making them passive learners, distracting them from doing homework, teaching them models of violent aggression, and presenting them with an unrealistic world view." A qualitative approach with a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) 2020 - based systematic review method is used in this study. The sample criteria used were derived from articles or journals that investigated the impact of media on aggressive behaviour in children aged 0-18 years. Children who spend 2-5 hours per day watching television can become aggressive. Violence-inducing television shows and online games, if consumed daily, will gradually lead to aggressive behavior, both verbally and physically. Social media will teach you to be verbally aggressive in the online world. Parents and teachers play an important role in children's development. Parents are expected to accompany their children to all home activities, while teachers are encouraged to educate students on the dangers of excessive digital media use.

Keywords: Aggression, Digital Media, Online Games, Social Media, Television.

1. Introduction

Children today are immersed in a variety of digital platforms, including television, video streaming, touchscreen devices, electronic games, and mobile applications. This exposure often occurs both directly and indirectly, particularly through media consumption patterns within the family environment [1]. With the widespread availability of smartphones and internet access, even young children are navigating an increasingly complex digital landscape. While these technologies offer educational and entertainment benefits, they also present significant challenges. According to UNICEF, although children frequently use online resources, they often lack the cognitive and emotional maturity to distinguish between accurate and misleading information, making them vulnerable to harmful content [2].

A growing body of literature has examined the impact of violent and unregulated digital media on child development, particularly in terms of aggression. The phenomenon of media-induced anxiety and concern over content is not new; debates surrounding media violence and its potential consequences have persisted for more than six decades [3]. In the context of Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and neighboring ASEAN countries, data indicate that approximately 9% of 12-year-olds are already active on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube [4]. This early exposure to social media intensifies the need for comprehensive investigation into the behavioral consequences of digital consumption among children.

Empirical studies conducted both globally and within Indonesia have consistently demonstrated associations between digital media exposure and aggressive tendencies in children. For instance, children exposed to violent content-whether through action movies or competitive video games-are more likely to internalize aggressive scripts, which in turn influence their thoughts and behaviors [5]. Research has also shown that unmonitored social media use can increase impulsivity and verbal aggression [6], and repetitive exposure to hostile or negative content can significantly heighten aggressive behaviors in school-aged children [7]. Additionally, violent digital games have been linked to physical aggression, while preschoolers who watch violent television without adult supervision often mimic aggressive behavior during play [8].

The consequences of such exposure are not limited to isolated behavioral incidents. Reports from Indonesia have documented cases of children reenacting criminal acts after viewing violent media, suggesting deeper developmental and societal ramifications [9], [10]. These observations underscore the urgency of evaluating the broader implications of digital content on child behavior.

To address these concerns, this study aims to conduct a systematic review of existing literature on the influence of digital media on child aggression in Indonesia. A systematic review serves to integrate and synthesize findings from prior research to identify overarching patterns, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual models [11]. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how violent digital content influences behavior and how these effects vary across media types. It also considers the contextual and cultural dimensions unique to Indonesian society, which may moderate or amplify the observed impacts. Specifically, this review explores: (1) the extent to which violent digital content contributes to aggressive behavior; (2) differences in effects across various media platforms; and (3) the cultural and environmental factors that influence these outcomes.

2. Literature Review

Various studies have explored media effects using quantitative surveys [1], observational methods [2], and correlational designs [3], [4]. While these approaches provide valuable insights into media-induced aggression, many face limitations such as small samples, limited geographic coverage, and fragmented focus across media types. Lowery and DeFleur's stimulus-response theory [5] conceptualizes audiences as passive recipients, reacting automatically to emotionally charged media stimuli. This early 20th-century model- also known as the "magic bullet theory"- emphasizes direct, uniform effects and was rooted in behaviorist and deterministic views [6].

This study focuses on the media's role in influencing children's aggressive behavior. Excessive media exposure, particularly without parental supervision, limits social interaction and cognitive development. Children often struggle to distinguish reality from fiction, especially when exposed to realistic content [7]. Furthermore, screen time reduces engagement in beneficial activities like studying or peer interaction, affecting skills such as narrative comprehension—key to academic success [7].

Media holds the powerful potential to influence various aspects of children's development, including weight status, early sexual behavior, violent attitudes, consumerism, and social isolation [12]. While its negative effects are well-documented, media can also play a positive role in promoting health and well-being among children. The challenge lies in optimizing the media's role by amplifying its benefits and minimizing its harms. Rather than resisting media, embracing it as a tool for positive communication may prove to be an effective strategy in shaping the behaviors of children and adolescents [13].

2.1. Theoretical Approach

Understanding the relationship between media exposure and aggression in children requires a careful synthesis of foundational communication theories and contemporary psychological frameworks. Among the most relevant are Lowery and DeFleur's Stimulus-Response Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, both of which offer critical insights into how media can shape and influence behavioral outcomes-particularly those involving aggression.

Lowery and DeFleur's Stimulus-Response Theory conceptualizes media audiences as passive recipients who instinctively respond to emotionally charged stimuli presented by the media [5]. Often referred to as the "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle" model, this theory suggests that media messages exert direct, immediate, and uniform effects on all viewers.

Originating from early 20th-century behaviorist thinking, the model assumes a linear relationship between exposure to aggressive content and behavioral response-implying that viewers, especially children, will mirror the aggression they observe [6].

While the stimulus-response perspective provides a foundational lens, more nuanced psychological models offer a deeper understanding of aggression as a learned and cognitively mediated behavior. A key example is Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that behavior is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Bandura's well-known "Bobo doll" experiment demonstrated that children who witnessed aggressive behavior in media settings were more likely to reproduce similar actions themselves [13]. According to this theory, media does not merely entertain-it also serves as a platform for behavioral modeling, shaping how children perceive social norms, interpersonal conflict, and acceptable conduct.

Building on this, Leonard Berkowitz's Cognitive Neoassociation Theory (CNA) highlights how exposure to aversive stimuli-such as violent scenes, disturbing noises, or emotional distress-activates associative networks in the brain that are linked to basic emotions such as anger or fear [14]. These emotional states, in turn, heighten the probability of aggressive reactions. CNA is especially useful in explaining the short-term, emotionally driven aggression that can arise from consuming violent media.

Further expanding the discussion, the General Aggression Model (GAM) offers an integrated framework that accounts for both situational and individual factors. According to this model, variables such as personal traits, environmental cues, and emotional states interact to influence cognition, arousal, and affect. These internal states then shape decision-making processes, which can result in either aggressive or non-aggressive behavior [15]. GAM provides a comprehensive explanation of how repeated media exposure contributes to long-term changes in cognition, including the development of aggressive scripts, desensitization to violence, and altered moral judgment.

Finally, insights from Developmental Psychology emphasize why children are especially vulnerable to media influence. During early developmental stages, children are still learning to differentiate between fantasy and reality, especially when exposed to highly realistic portrayals of violence [7]. Their limited capacity for abstract reasoning and moral discernment means they may internalize aggressive behaviors as socially acceptable or even desirable. Additionally, excessive screen time may reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction, cooperative play, and cognitive engagement-all of which are essential for healthy emotional and social development [7].

In conclusion, the theoretical foundations for examining media-induced aggression in children are grounded in both classic and modern approaches. Together, these frameworks underscore the complex interplay between cognitive processing, learned behavior, emotional response, and developmental maturity. This integrated perspective is essential for comprehending how media can influence and, at times, normalize aggression in young audiences

2.2. The Influence of Media on Aggression

Since the early 20th century, extensive theoretical and empirical literature has examined the relationship between media consumption and aggression, primarily emerging from North American, Western European, and Australian academic traditions. In recent decades, scholarship from Asia, Africa, and Latin America has begun to enrich the field, contributing valuable perspectives that contextualize the impact of media within diverse sociocultural frameworks.

A convergence of methodologies—ranging from content analysis and cultural studies to behavioral and longitudinal research—has facilitated a deeper understanding of aggression, typically defined as behavior intended to cause harm to others. Santrock underscores that media, particularly television, influences child development by fostering passive learning, modeling aggressive behavior, and distorting perceptions of reality through repeated exposure to violence and conflict [1].

In the Indonesian context, the significance of these findings is underscored by national statistics indicating high media consumption among children. Children aged 6 to 12 reportedly spend an average of 3.5 hours watching television on weekdays, with figures rising to 6.3 hours on holidays [2]. This extended exposure coincides with a study involving 71 school-aged children, in which 62% exhibited markers of media dependency and behavioral dysregulation [3]. The relevance of these findings is amplified by the legal framework

established in Indonesian Law No. 35 of 2014, which defines a child as any individual under 18 years of age and affirms the state's obligation to ensure developmental protections [4].

Theoretical frameworks, such as Social Learning Theory and General Aggression Model (GAM), have long guided interpretations of media's role in shaping aggression. Media exposure, particularly to violent content, is believed to activate and reinforce aggressive scripts, emotional desensitization, and normative beliefs about violence [16], [17]. These processes are especially salient in developmental stages marked by cognitive plasticity and identity formation.

Systematic reviews are instrumental in consolidating findings and advancing theoretical integration. Keles et al. [5], through the analysis of 13 peer-reviewed studies, identified consistent associations between social media use and elevated levels of psychological distress, including anxiety and depression. Howard et al. [6] emphasize that such reviews not only clarify patterns across heterogeneous samples but also illuminate critical methodological limitations and directions for future inquiry.

Socioeconomic variables further complicate media's influence. In lower-income Indonesian households, television and smartphones frequently function as surrogate caregivers due to dual-working parents and limited access to structured childcare [16]. This often results in unsupervised and unfiltered media exposure, with violent or sensationalist content shaping behavioral norms and emotional regulation. The growing dominance of digital platforms—such as YouTube, TikTok, and online multiplayer games—introduces interactive and immersive modalities of violence. Unlike passive television viewing, these platforms engage users in active participation, often rewarding aggression as a mechanism for progression or success [17].

This dynamic is compounded by low digital literacy among parents and guardians. A national survey conducted by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2022 revealed that 48% of respondents believed violent media posed minimal risk to child development [18]. Such misconceptions indicate a critical gap in public understanding and call for enhanced education on media's psychosocial effects.

The longitudinal consequences of violent media exposure are well-documented. Huesmann et al. [19] found that early exposure to televised violence was a significant predictor of aggressive behavior in adulthood, independent of initial aggression levels. Similarly, Anderson and Bushman [20] conducted a meta-analysis demonstrating that repeated exposure to media violence increases the accessibility of aggressive cognitions, intensifies affective responses, and lowers inhibitory controls.

These effects are not universally consistent across cultures. Recent studies highlight the moderating influence of cultural values, such as collectivism and family-centered socialization in East and Southeast Asia. Kim et al. [21] found that collectivist norms and filial piety may buffer against media-induced aggression, although prolonged exposure can still erode these protective factors when aggressive behavior is normalized through localized and dubbed content.

As media ecosystems evolve, it becomes increasingly essential to adopt an intersectional, multidisciplinary approach to research. Considerations of culture, age, socioeconomic status, media type, and regulatory frameworks must inform both empirical investigations and policy responses. The discourse must also shift beyond Western paradigms to include perspectives from the Global South, thereby constructing a more comprehensive and culturally situated understanding of media's role in the development of aggression.

3. Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted to compile a comprehensive body of evidence on the influence of digital media on aggression among Indonesian children. The review adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and academic rigor. Scholarly databases, including Google Scholar and MedPub, were systematically searched for peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2022. The scope of the review was restricted to empirical studies conducted in Indonesia and focused on participants aged 0 to 18 years. The following search terms were employed using Boolean operators and wildcards: "media*" (including "digital*," "social media*," "online games*," "television*," and "show*") AND "children*" AND "influence*" AND "aggression". To enhance specificity, terms such as "paper*" and "radio*" were excluded. Searches were limited to terms found within the title, abstract, and keyword sections. Articles selected for inclusion were required to present

original empirical findings, focus on digital media exposure as a variable, and assess aggression-related outcomes among Indonesian children. Non-empirical studies, literature reviews, editorials, studies not involving aggression, or those addressing traditional media formats outside digital environments were excluded. Data gathering tools included a laptop, tablet, and smartphone, which were used to retrieve, review, and organize eligible literature. Final sources were synthesized to extract patterns in findings, theoretical frameworks applied, and contextual factors unique to Indonesian socio-cultural settings influencing the link between digital media exposure and aggression.

3.1. Stages of Systematic Review

Table 1. Stages of Systematic Review

Stages	Process
Establishment of the need of review, objectives and sources of the review.	Researchers will define the topic, objectives, and research questions. It is being transformed from the influence of digital media on child aggression into a research question.
Development of the review protocol	Provide research guidance, such as piloting and study scoping. Location of the database of previous research results.
Evaluation of review protocol includes identification of research, selection of study based on criteria, and assessment of the quality of study	Researchers will collect research results that are relevant to the next research question, and the research will be excluded and included.
Extract of data	Data extraction from individual studies to obtain important findings in this study
Synthesis of data	Researchers choose to use the narrative method
Reporting the data	After collecting the results, the researcher will write down all of the research findings in a narrative or meta-synthetic format.

3.2. Inclusion Criteria of Study

Data	Explanation
Digital Media	Television, online games, social media
Aggression	Behavior that is shown with harsh words that aim to hurt someone (verbal) and non-verbal aggression is to take physical actions that are intentional such as hitting, kicking, etc.
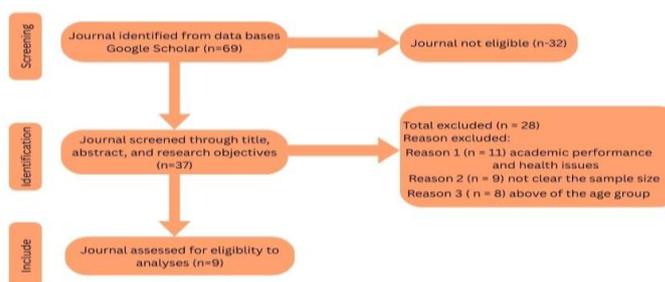
Picture 1. Identification of studies based on PRISMA as follows

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 69 articles concerning the influence of digital media on aggression among Indonesian children were initially retrieved through Google Scholar. During the first phase of eligibility assessment, 32 articles were excluded based on predefined criteria—primarily due to thematic irrelevance and duplication. The remaining 37 articles were subjected to a rigorous screening process based on their titles, abstracts, and research objectives. A further 28 articles were excluded at this stage: 11 articles focused primarily on academic or health performance, 9 did not report sample sizes, and 8 included participants outside the defined age group of 0–18 years. Following this systematic selection process, 9 articles met all inclusion criteria and were subjected to in-depth analysis.

The included studies varied in methodological approach, sample size, and media types investigated. Table I summarizes the key attributes of the studies: author(s), year of publication, methodology employed, sample size, participant age range, types of media examined, and principal findings. Most studies employed quantitative survey methods, with sample sizes ranging from 20 to 139 participants. The media types analyzed predominantly included online games and social media platforms. Several studies demonstrated a significant association between high-intensity digital media exposure—particularly violent or competitive online games—and elevated levels of aggression or antisocial behavior among children and adolescents. Notably, parental mediation, especially restrictive forms, was identified as a potential moderating factor in mitigating the negative behavioral outcomes associated with digital media use.

The findings collectively suggest a consistent pattern: excessive or unregulated digital media consumption, especially of violent content, may contribute to increased aggression in children. These results support the need for informed parental monitoring and further local interventions aimed at promoting healthy digital habits among Indonesian youth.

Table 2. Result Study The Influence of Digital Media on Indonesian Children

NC	Journal/article	Year	Methodology	Total Sample	Age Group	Result
1	Analysis of the effect of intense watching television on the tendency of aggression behavior with perceptions of parent-child interactions as moderator Variables. Kartika Sari Dewi et al	2013	Quantitative - cross Sectional analysis (questionnaire)	108 students	9 - 10 years	50.9% effect of watching on aggression; 19.9% from parent-child interaction, total 64.5% combined effect.
2	The influence of Facebook on cyberbullying behaviour on student in High-school 12 Pekanbaru. Siti Nurjanah	2014	Quantitative method - explanatory survey, researchers	195 students(Male and female).	15 - 17 years old	• Facebook has 2.3% effect on cyberbullying, 97.7% influenced by other factors.
3	The association of laying online games and incidents of aggression among teenagers in bulustalan Village, Semarang. Arentha Ayu at al,	2015	Quantitative method - descriptive analytical and cross-Sectional approach (questionnaire)	42 male students	13 - 18 years	59.5% did not exhibit aggression despite long gaming hours.
4	Intensity of watching violent Shows on aggression in elemntary students at Tirtomoyo State. Candra Dewi Puspita	2017	Correlative descriptive -cross sectional approach	87 students.	7 - 12 years	• 45 students showed no aggression; 53 played online games.
5	The influence of media on aggressive behavior children among Kranji Village Public Elementary School, West Bekasi. Icam Sutisna	2017	A quantitative method – survey	238 grade 4	9 – 12 years	• Low correlation (0.168) between TV and aggressive behavior in children.

6	The influence of the Naruto film with the level of aggressiveness among students in grades V and VI of Sumber 3, Surakarta). Galih Eko Nugroho	2018	Quantitative methods - questionnaires, interviews, and documentation.	56 students (28 from grade 5 and 28 from grade 6)	11 - 12 years	3% effect on verbal aggression and 1.9% on nonverbal (Grade V), 9.4% on verbal and 0.9% on nonverbal (Grade VI).
7	The relationship of violent shows and aggression in Salatiga Junior High School Students. Yosua Ivan Pradana et al	2018	Quantitative-descriptive correlational approach - questionnaire	198 students (grade 7 and 8)	13 - 14 years	Significant positive correlation (0.811) between violent TV shows and aggression.
8	High school students engaging in aggressive behavior while playing online games ((Bandar Lampung junior high school students) Octa Reni Setiawati and Agin Gunado	2019	Quantitative - cross Sectional analysis (questionnaire)	539 male students	12 - 15 years	98 students with low aggression, 403 with moderate aggression, 38 with high aggression
9	Behavior of Children Who Often Watch Cartoon Containing Violence of Fourth Grade Students of Public Elementary School Seluma 83 - Bengkulu City Muh. Hassan Fadlli	2021	Qualitative - observation, and interview	10 students 8 are male students and 2 are female students	11 years	Children exposed to violent cartoons tend to imitate violent behaviors and language.

The reviewed studies collectively indicate a significant correlation between children's exposure to violent media content—be it through television, online games, or social media—and the manifestation of aggressive behaviors. For instance, Nurjanah (2014) found a 2.3% influence of Facebook usage on cyberbullying behavior among high school students, while Setiawati and Gunado (2019) reported moderate levels of aggression in junior high school students who frequently played online games. Conversely, Pitakasari et al. (2015) observed no significant relationship between exposure to violent online games and aggressive behavior in adolescents, suggesting that other factors may mediate this relationship.

These findings underscore the complexity of factors contributing to aggressive behavior in children and adolescents, including media exposure, parental mediation, and individual differences. Therefore, it is imperative for parents, educators, and policymakers to collaborate in monitoring media consumption and promoting positive behavioral development among youth.

5. Conclusions

This study emphasizes the critical influence of digital media exposure on behavioral development among Indonesian children. The findings confirm that childhood, as a formative stage, is highly susceptible to environmental and social modeling, where repeated exposure to violent content—whether through television, online games, or social media—can result in increased verbal and nonverbal aggression. The study identifies that digital media consumption exceeding two hours per day is consistently associated with elevated aggression levels.

Indonesian boys show a stronger preference for violent-themed digital games than girls, aligning with international literature while highlighting the local dimension of this behavioral trend. The data also revealed that children between the ages of 15 and 17 already actively maintain social media accounts, particularly Facebook, suggesting early digital independence. Conversely, positive impacts were observed when children engaged with educational content, indicating that content quality remains a crucial mediating factor in digital influence.

Although this study provides valuable insight into the media-aggression correlation within the Indonesian context, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data and multilingual sources. Future work should incorporate primary data collection from children, parents, and educators to enhance empirical rigor and sociocultural specificity.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were generated or analyzed in this study. The study is based solely on secondary data derived from previously published articles and online sources. Due to the nature of this research, all data are publicly available through the original publications cited in the reference section. Translations were carried out by the author to align non-English sources with the research context. The datasets supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding sources cited in the references and are subject to their respective access conditions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest. The research was conducted independently without any commercial, institutional, or financial support that could be perceived as influencing the study's results. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results. All interpretations and conclusions are the author's own and reflect original work derived from publicly available sources.

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