

## Screen-based literature as an element of social control: A case-study of the youth in Bo city, southern Sierra Leone

Philip Y Thulla, Kuyateh Gibson, Peter M Muffuh

Institute of Languages and Cultural Studies (INSLACS), Njala University, Sierra Leone

---

### Abstract

The study; 'Screen-Based Literature as an Element of Social Control: A Case-Study of the Youth in Bo City' was conducted in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone. The study sought to assess the effectiveness of literature, specially the screen channel, in attaining social control among the youth in Bo. It is generally believed by people in Sierra Leone that, the youth are responsible for most of the crimes and violence perpetrated in the urban areas. Studies have further shown that there are many cases of obvious youth involvement in crimes, violent behaviours, and violation of social norms and values in the country. Newspapers, magazines, the TV, and the radio often speak of the anti-social behaviors of youth and the menaces they pose to the peace and stability of the state. For social control to be maintained within the contexts described above, the role played by the screen channel is crucial and was of interest to the study. The data were collected from two sources: Primary and Secondary by the use of structured questionnaires and Semi-structured personal interviews. The research findings confirmed that, respondents recommended the screen channel as a potent means of controlling the behaviours of youth particularly and people in society in general. The data also proved that what people view in screens can influence their ways of life. From the research findings, it was again concluded that social control can only be effective if the screen channel is used with necessary guidance to control the behaviours of people, consequently making a society relatively peaceful.

**Keywords:** Censor. Anti-social. Pornographic movies. Youth. Screen channel.

---

### 1. Introduction

The study of literature and other disciplines have focused on societal control through many ways. For instance, in the reading of novels, the reader grabs the contents of the writer's Experience which he or she feels reflect on the existing social order in which he or she lives. Literature, it is often believed, is transmitted extensively through reading, but because of the high illiteracy level in Sierra Leone and the decrease in the reading tradition of literary materials, the screen channel seems to have negatively impacted the lives of people in the country and the requisite behaviour of youth has also been eclipsed. This is not a new problem. The want of social peace had long been sought after mostly through myths that were passed on from generation to generation to promote communal harmony. With time, however, the relevant facts of these myths were distorted primarily due to time lapse. Written literature, it was presumed, was the only reliable means of recording human experiences relevant to social solidarity. It was in this respect that the screen channel (TVs or Media) was looked at in this research; as a potent tool in controlling the behaviours of people in society. Television, for instance, is one of the technological implements in the world that is available in most households in the urban areas. Bo city is not an exception. With the influx of the Nigerian, Ghanaian, European, and Sierra Leonean movies, so many disorders in the lives of the youth in Bo city could be seen. Whether these were as a result of this influx is a matter investigated in this study.

McIntyre L.J., (2006) says; "there is a great deal of debate about the degree to which the media influence a variety of different behaviours. For example, does watching violent television shows and movies or playing violent video games diffuse

children's violent urges or cause them to act upon them?" (9155). what is not controversial; however, is the fact that exposure to media influences people's perceptions of reality. For example, research shows that "television viewing shapes viewer's conceptions of social reality. Specifically, the more one is exposed to television, the more likely one's interpretation and perceptions of social reality will reflect the television world, as opposed to the real and observable world...Although television is hardly the only medium to which people are exposed, it does seem to be the most pervasive" (155).

Similarly, a recent American study reveals that, only 38% of parents believed that television mostly helped children's learning, but they were relieved to make use of media, because they saw advances in the educational quality of media content (Kaiser Foundation: 2006:32).

The scenario for youth in Bo City seems largely different from the American children in that, a number of the youth in Bo do not go to school. They therefore prance around in violent dresses; engage in fidgeting, gambling, sometimes in duels, and much other debilitating behaviour.

The research therefore proposed that literature through the screen channel could serve a more plausible means to control the behaviours of these youth than other similar means.

Many adults think that youth, especially at the adolescent stage, face few problems and worries as compared to adults in society. The falsity of such assumption becomes apparent when youth behave in ways contrary to that of the social order. If this is allowed to prevail, social unity or control will become an unfulfilled dream. In reality, the adolescent stage is a confusing and stressful time. It is a time of questions and anxieties about

the physical and emotional changes that are taking place. Croan (2013) indicates that “Maturity is when your world opens up and you realize that you are not the center of it” (.2). David (2003) says “young people, however, tend to ignore the customs of their elders. Adolescent rebellion has been responsible for all manner of absurd costumes. The more ridiculous a certain fashion is, the more adolescents will cling on to it...” (26). They learn to make more and more decisions for themselves – decision that may affect their lives today, tomorrow, and year to come (26). Suleiman (2013) expresses this turbulence thus; “The period of adolescence is the most crucial period in the life of human beings” (3). Equally, the screen channel seems to offer such ambiguities. Elder people most times feel the decision young people and even adults make are as a result of misinformation. For example, teenagers receive double messages from the media, TV, Movies, the internet which sometimes are misleading:

*“Violence is common and the commission of crime is generally powerful, exciting, charismatic and effective. In later life serious violence is most likely to erupt at moment of severe stress...much of this sense will have come from television.”* (Nabieu, 2003, p. 28)

Sexual images and messages are everywhere; young people become interested in the male and female characters portrayed on the TV shows, and in movies and start to see them as real people when, these people are in actual fact just playing a role. They work with people who put on makeup and clothes as required by the production staff. Their hair are coloured and styled according to production staff’s wish. Sadly, these people are being machinated. Good or bad, the behaviours of these youth are being influenced by these media. To find out whether this was so among youth in Bo city and how such portrayals could be overturned positively necessitated the research.

**The specific objectives of this study were:**

1. To point out the screen channel or media commonly exploited by the youth in Bo.
2. To point out the most common antisocial problems among the youth population in Bo.
3. To assess whether screen media have effect on the behaviours of youth in Bo.
4. To show the ways recommended by People in Bo to use literature for social control.

**2. Methodology**

**a) Case Study:** Due to limited time and financial constraints, vast coverage was not possible; the case study approach was therefore used to reduce the level of dependence on non-professional assistants who might be tempted to falsify data, thereby reducing the validity of the research results. However, the study yielded more information than the bureaucratic formal system of data collection would have possibly yielded.

**b) Sampling Techniques:** Two sampling techniques were used (a) the simple random sampling and (b) stratified sampling methods: Random sampling was introduced in order to expose all respondents to equal chances of being selected thereby avoiding bias; while the stratified sampling was used to ensure that all classes of respondents (heads of Video Centres, and

Internet Cafés, play station centres, youth including students, etc.) were sought after for the questionnaire.

**c) The Research Population and Sample Size:** The study was conducted at four sections in Bo namely: Kedevela Layout, Salina Section, Shellmingo, and New England Ville. Structured questionnaires were administered to forty (40) respondents in these communities. Heads of (3) Video Centres and (2) Internet Cafés in Bo City were also interviewed. The questionnaire sought to obtain data ranging from the heads and youth’s personal background related to the research topic. Most of the questions were closed-ended. Of the forty (40) questionnaires administered all were received, giving it a 100% response.

**d) Sources of Data Collection:** The data were collected from two sources: Primary and Secondary sources. Two primary data collection instruments used were:

1. Structured questionnaires
  2. Semi-structured personal interviews of key informants.
- These were used to increase the data yielding capacity. In addition to these, secondary data were collected through desk research. The internet also served as a very useful source of data collection.

**e) Data Analysis:** Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for the study using questionnaires, interviews, field observation, and documentary sources. The quantitative data conducted with all other categories of respondents were analyzed, collated, and converted into percentages and then tabulated. These tabulated data were then presented diagrammatically in the form of bar/pie charts using a simple Microsoft Excel programme. The results were then interpreted.

**3. Summary of Research findings**

Generally, it was evident that social control and literature especially through the screen channel could provide the subtle means of adequately handling evil behaviours in society. The following points also stood out distinctly:

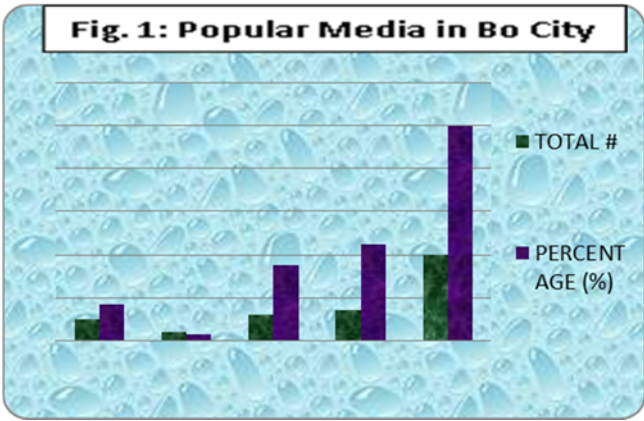
- The most common anti-social problems among youth in Bo City were street fighting, stealing, drug abuse, use of abusive language, and other related abuses.
- The common screen channels exploited by youth in Bo were mobile phone/I-pad, play station, television, and internet respectively.
- Films, texts, and plays were the ways recommended by people in Bo to use literature for social control.
- The screen channel had tremendous influence on the behaviour of the youth population in Bo.

**4. Results**

As said, thirty questions were asked in each copy of the forty questionnaires. For the data to be accurate and for it to provide information that addressed the research objectives, four among the thirty questions were analyzed. Charts and graphs were used to show the analyses of the various responses got from these forty youth.

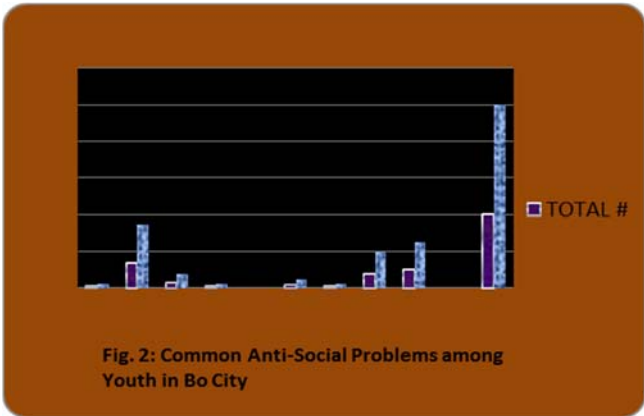
**A. Most Popular Media Used in Bo City**

Figure 1 below shows the most popular media in Bo city. As indicated in it, 45% of the youth in Bo use Mobile Phones/ I-pads, 35% exploit Play Stations, while 17% use Televisions. Much less popular is the Internet, (3%).



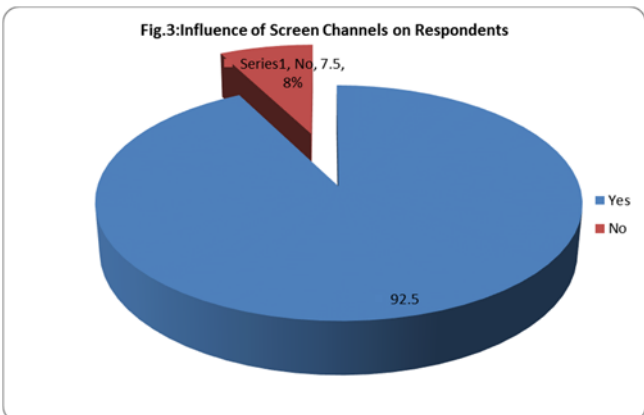
**B. Common Anti-Social Problems among**

Figure 2 displays below the common anti-social problems among youth in Bo city. Responses gathered from them indicated that Stealing (35%) is the commonest of the crimes committed by youth in Bo. Next is Street Fighting (25%); then Drug Abuse (20%). There seemed to be no indication of Killing among these youth. Gambling, Prostitution, and Gossiping, are proportionately of the same level (2.5%). Though not proportionately high, compared to Stealing and other related crimes, rape (5%) seems to be at a relatively much alarming level.



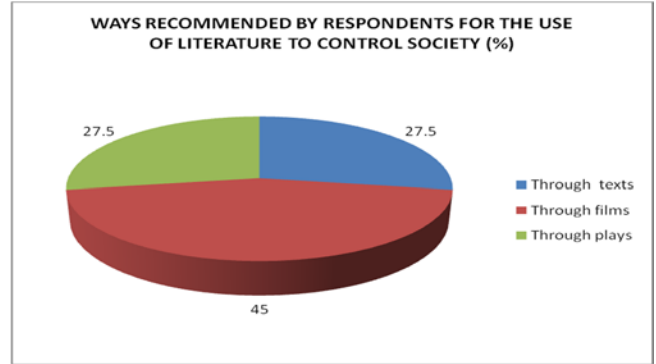
**C. Influences of Screen Channel on Youth in Bo**

Figure 3 shows the responses of respondents for the question that required them to answer Yes or No to whether screen channels has influence them or their ways. The majority of the respondents [92.5% (37)] answered “Yes” while 7.5% (3) answered “No”.



**D. Ways Recommended by Respondents for the Use of Literature to Control Anti-Social Problems**

In Figure 4 it is seen that the comprehensive analysis shows that the majority [45% (18)] of the respondents recommended ‘through films’; while, 27.5% (11) recommended ‘through plays’ and equally, 27.5% ‘through texts’. As this figure suggests, literature through the screen channel seems to be a more potent means of social control than any other means.



**5. Discussions**

The discussions in relation to the results and the review of literature are presented in this section.

**A. Most Popular Media Used in Bo City**

Figure 1 shows the most popular media in Bo city. As indicated in it, 45% of the youth in Bo use Mobile Phones/ I-pads, 35% exploit Play Stations, while 17% use Televisions. Much less popular is the Internet, (3%). This agrees with the Ofcom Report (2006)that confirmed that, “the latest media literacy audit shows that, 72% of children aged 8-15, and youth now have access to digital TV, 64% have access to the internet at home, half own game consuls, and 65% of 8-15 years own mobile phones (including 49% of 8-11 year olds)(1)”. There is reason to believe that media presentations, including those in entertainment programs, are important sources of information on topics such as occupations, crime, law enforcement, alcohol and drug usage, the environment, and minorities. One recent study of high school students, according to Dominick J. R. (2001), found that about 2 in 10 students listed rock music as an important source of information about moral values and that 1 out 4 specified it as an important source of information about interpersonal relationships (484).

**B. Common Anti-Social Problems among Youth in Bo**

Figure 2 displays the common anti-social problems among youth in Bo city. Responses gathered from them indicated that Stealing (35%) is the commonest of the crimes committed by youth in Bo. Next is Street Fighting (25%); then Drug Abuse (20%). There seemed to be no indication of Killing among these youth. Gambling, Prostitution, and Gossiping, are proportionately of the same level (2.5%). Though not proportionately high, compared to Stealing and other related crimes, rape (5%) seems to be at a relatively much alarming level. Suleiman (2013) reveals this in a study that, “Murder, rape, use of illegal substances, and a wide variety of activities are deemed anti-social behaviors. In addition to actions that oppose established law, anti-social actions also include activities that members of society find objectionable even if they are legal, such as drunkenness and sexual promiscuity”.

### C. Influences of Screen Channel on Youth in Bo

Figure 3 shows the responses of respondents for the question that required them to answer Yes or No to whether screen channels can influence them or their ways. The majority of the respondents [92.5% (37)] answered “Yes” while 7.5% (3) answered “No”. This outcome had earlier been obtained by Senesie (2011) when he revealed that; “The younger the people, the more effectively literature serves as an instrument for changing their attitude; older people are more resistant to literature as an instrument to control society” (25). This view affirmed the research-outcomes. In addition to this; some reviews have found strong correlations between aggression and the viewing of violent media. Barbara (2003) makes this point when he says:

“...If you watch TV for time, day in day out, you will begin to notice something eerie and unnatural about the world portrayed therein... I mean something so deeply obvious that is scary. When you watch television, you will see people doing many things-chasing fast cars...shooting each other at close range, etc...” (21).

Appropriately, the personal interview confirmed that, majority of the respondents had learnt ‘self defence’ through watching films that portrayed such action. Some had been able to control their anger through the films they had watched. Some, however, viewed movies just for the entertainment they provided and not to learn any of the skills from the films they watched. Correspondingly, Morrow (2006), outlined that “The screen channel is neither good nor bad for both children and youth, but its impact is complex in the way it affects children’s knowledge, beliefs and values” (7). Although they may seek out “educational” content, they can derive both pleasure and learning from programmes which combine both these elements (literature and screen channel).

### D. Ways Recommended by Respondents for the Use of Literature to Control Anti-Social Problems

In Figure 4 it is seen that the comprehensive analysis shows that the majority [45% (18)] of the respondents recommended ‘through films’; while, 27.5% (11) recommended ‘through plays’ and equally, 27.5% ‘through texts’. As this figure suggests, literature through the screen channel seems to be a more potent means of social control than any other means. One social media report that made this point is Ofcom (2006) when it stated that “The urban youth and children used different media in their everyday life, but still ...the screen channel is the most popular medium, occupying a significant proportion of children and youth’s time”. He further stated that no wonder social network like Face book, WhatsApp, and other mobile games are becoming popular by the day.

### 6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analyses *Screen-Based Literature as an Element of Social Control* and in line with the discussions of the findings and the major considerations of the literature review, the following conclusions are drawn:

- that the most popular media exploited by youth in Bo are Mobile phones/I-pads, play stations and televisions;
- that the common Anti-Social Problems among youth in Bo are stealing, Street fighting and drug abuse;

- that the respondents recommended ‘th films, plays and texts as means to control anti-social problems; and
- that social control can be effective if the screen channel is used with necessary guidance to control the behaviours of people, subsequently making a society relatively peaceful.

### 7. Acknowledgment

I would want to thank Dr. Samuel M.B. Senesie, Acting Direction of the Institute of Languages and Cultural Studies.

### 8. References

1. Anderson D. Researching Blue’s Clues: Viewing Behaviour and impact. *Media Psychology* (2000). Baker, M. *et al* III Effects: The Media/Violence Debate. London, Routledge, 2001.
2. Barrie JM *et al.*: Quotations for Adolescence <<http://www.wikipedia.com>> Sept, 2013. BBC/CBBC’S, Commissioning Updated <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/commission/tv/network/genres/cbbc.shtml>,> 20 November, 2013.
3. Belmont CA, Thomas W. *Sociology: (The Essentials)*, 2006.
4. Buckingham. *Literacy Learning and Contemporary Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Sept, 2003.
5. Deviance and Social Control:[www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius-02/htm/web/](http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius-02/htm/web/) Sept, 2004.
6. ELIUM J. Quotations for Adolescence <<http://www.wikipedia.com>> Sept, 2013.
7. Fisch S. Children’s Learning from Television’, in *Television 18/2005E* Munich: IZI, 2005.
8. Jabbie MAS. *Literature and Social Change: A Collection of Successful Outcomes* Dissertation Njala University, 2003.
9. Livingstone S. *Young People and New Media* London: Sage, 2002.
10. Marsh J. ‘Digital Beginnings: Young Children’s Use of Popular Culture, Media and New Technologies’ *Literacy Research Centre: University of Sheffield*, 2005.
11. McIntyre LJ. *The Practical Skeptic: Core Concepts in Sociology/ (3rd ed.)* Mc Graw Hill Companies, Inc., 1221 Avenue of Americas, New York, NY, 10020, 2006.
12. Nabieu VK. *The Screen as Literary Medium: Its Implications for Criminality (a case study of some youths in Freetown)*, 2003.
13. Ofcom Report: *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy amongst Children* London: ofcom <<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/madialiteracy/medlitpub/medlitpubrscs/children/children.pdf>> 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2013.
14. Poore S. *Overview of Social Control Theories*. The Hewett School October, 2, 2012.
15. Senesie SMB. *Social Disorders and Corporate Attitude in Sierra Leone*. Dissertation, Njala University, 2011.
16. Suleiman M. *Nigeria: Talking Anti-Social Behaviour among Youth*. Daily Trust Copyright ©2013 allAfric.com, 2013.
17. Weber MA. *Literature as a Social Tool, Education and Cohesion or Class Domination by Anti-Social Behavior*, 2012.
18. <<http://www.studentpulse.com/Home/topic/literarycriticism>> Fahrenheit 451 December 2012/July, 2013.