

Television: the pros and cons

John Logie Baird would not have imagined that his invention of the television would become as popular as to threaten psychological and physical health of human beings, culture and ethics of millions of people and of course the very existence of books. Today the television is a Pandora's box. It is the magician's hat from which can be obtained just about any information possible. There is a spectrum of channels which cover a wide range of subjects from religion to entertainment to fashion. And that is the reason for the decline of the reading habit of the average citizen.

Only a few decades ago when the popularity or the affordability of the television was much less, the reading was the only way to obtain information. Books on every subject were written and read. The morning newspaper was an addiction without which the day would not start. However today the situation has changed.

The habit of reading has waned due to the advent of television with its numerous channels.

Children watch "TV" for almost as much time as they can. People get their daily dose of news from the prime time news channels.

If only it was the only shortcoming of the television popularity, but no, it is definitely not the only and worst threat it inflicts.

Studies have shown that watching television induces low alpha waves in the human brain. Alpha waves are brainwaves between 8 to 12 HZ. and are commonly associated with relaxed meditative states as well as brain states associated with suggestibility. It means that watching TV puts the viewer into highly suggestible sleep which is very similar to hypnotic state. This provides an easy access to the subconscious, where you can put any suggestion you want. Say "buy our new hair-care product" and person will buy it regardless of anything, show teenager the pictures of violence a day after a day and it will have a large impact on his development as a personality.

This hypnotic effect is largely caused by screen flicker which lowers brainwaves into an alpha state, a state of mind which you would normally associate with meditation or deep relaxation.

When you watch TV, brain activity switches from the left side of your brain (responsible for logical thought and critical analysis) to the right side, which doesn't analyse incoming information critically, instead it uses an emotional response.

Right brain activity causes body to release chemicals which make it feel good (these are called endorphins, a natural sedative with similar properties to heroin).

It is therefore not only possible, but probable to become physically addicted to television.

TV viewing reduces higher brain activity, promoting activity in lower brain regions. In other words it makes you less intelligent and you behave more like an animal.

Television viewing may also cause a person to develop a short attention span and increase the risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children. This is thought to be due to the frequent scene changes that occur with modern day video adds.

Frequent scene changes or cuts are used because it activates what is known as an "orientating response". This is a natural biological response that draws your attention to things that change in your environment.

Among other horrible effects scientists blame on television are:

- 1) It slows children's metabolic rate.
- 2) Triggers premature puberty.
- 3) Leads, from childhood, to a significantly elevated risk of sleep problems in adulthood, causing hormone changes, which in turn directly increase appetite and body fat production and damage the immune system leading to a greater vulnerability to cancer.

- 4) Is a direct cause of obesity and a bigger factor than eating junk food or not doing enough exercise.
- 5) Is the only adult pastime from the ages of 20 to 60 positively linked to developing Alzheimer's disease.
- 6) Is a major independent cause of clinical depression (of which Britain has the highest rate in Europe).

But television has its good side. It can be entertaining and educational, and can open up new worlds for kids, giving them a chance to travel the globe, learn about different cultures, and gain exposure to ideas they may never encounter in their own community. Shows with a [prosocial message](#) can have a positive effect on kids' behavior. Current research is discovering that individuals can employ television to create what is termed a parasocial or faux relationship with characters from their favorite television shows and movies as a way of deflecting feelings of loneliness and social deprivation. Just as an individual would spend time with a real person sharing opinions and thoughts, pseudo-relationships are formed with TV characters by becoming personally invested in their lives as if they were a close friend so that the individual can satiate the human desire to form meaningful relationships and establish themselves in society. When an individual is not able to participate in interactions with real people, they are less likely to indicate feelings of loneliness when watching their favorite TV show. Furthermore, when an event such as a fight or argument disrupts a personal relationship, watching a favorite TV show is able to create a cushion and prevent the individual from experiencing reduced self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy that can often accompany the perceived threat. By providing a temporary substitute for acceptance and belonging that is experienced through social relationships TV is helping to relieve feelings of depression and loneliness when those relationships are not available. This benefit is considered a positive consequence of watching television as it can contract the psychological damage that is caused by isolation from social relationships.