There are bigger dangers to the youth than broadcast content

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A view of and Apple iPhone displaying the Facebook app's splash screen. Recent studies have shown that social media platforms are increasingly becoming powerful spaces of engagement and socialisation among young people. PHOTO | AFP

In Summary

- We are living in a rapidly changing society where a multiplicity of factors are contributing to the difficulty of regulating, or even monitoring, content that our young people have access to.
- Many now agree that a modern child, especially among the middle class, is raised by the house help, the media, and the teacher.
- Children have access to more damaging content from the internet and mobile devices than from television.

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A series of guidelines and directives issued by the Kenya Film Classification Board in recent days has stoked controversy surrounding media regulation.

Several questions have been raised, not only regarding the mandate of the board, but also whether regulating broadcast content, in itself, will serve any purpose in contemporary society.

While I do not entirely disagree with the need to protect our young people from exposure to inappropriate content, I also believe that, to continue focusing our attention on media regulation is to miss the bigger picture regarding the complexity of the moral question in the everyday life of our young people.

We are living in a rapidly changing society where a multiplicity of factors are contributing to the difficulty of regulating, or even monitoring, content that our young people have access to.

The rapid evolution of information technology, coupled with the challenges of everyday life that have considerably reduced the level of interaction between children and their parents, have altered the forms of socialisation that our children are exposed to.

Many now agree that a modern child, especially among the middle class, is raised by the house help, the media, and the teacher.

In most modern families, especially those that live and work in urban centres, parents have limited time with their children.

They leave for work before the children wake up and go back to the house when the children are preparing to, or have already gone to bed.

Even when parents are able to have contact with their children, the stresses of everyday life make it difficult to engage in meaningful conversations that would help the children make sense of, and cope with, their world.

Parents come home tired and having a lot to worry about. They, therefore, need space to relax and reflect on the events of the day and think about their future.

CULTURE POWER

In such scenarios, a parent is more than willing to hand over his/her mobile phone or tablet to the children so as to keep them busy.

Some parents have even installed television sets and computers in their children's rooms in a bid to ensure that they are kept engaged.

Many of these parents do not know what their children are accessing on these platforms.

Recent studies have shown that social media platforms are increasingly becoming powerful spaces of engagement and socialisation among young people.

A recent study I conducted on social media use among college-level students showed that the youth are actively engaged in social media discussions about issues such as drugs, sex, and relationships from a considerably young age.

A number of my respondents have told me that they joined social media groups when they were in Form One.

Others have talked about high school students being members of WhatsApp groups that discuss "weed, girls, and alcohol".

One such group was aptly named "the stoners", from the word "stone", commonly associated with marijuana.

In this kind of scenario, it is inconceivable that regulating the broadcast content would, in itself, protect our children from getting access to inappropriate content.

Children have access to more damaging content from the internet and mobile devices than from television.

THE BEST FORMAT

To make matters worse, most parents are neither aware of this nor are they knowledgeable on how to regulate their children's exposure to inappropriate content on mobile devices.

While broadcast content regulation is necessary, especially where it is applied in a more systematic and logical manner, the biggest challenge lies in educating both parents and children on the dangers surrounding access to inappropriate content.

Discussion needs to shift to how our school curriculum can be restructured to prepare children to face a changing world.

It is a lot easier to educate a child about the dangers of accessing inappropriate content than to prevent them from accessing such content.

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