

Marketing Colloquia

Thursday, March 21, 2013

Where: 741 JMHH

When: 3:00 PM to 4:20 PM

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Will Restraints on Marketing Violent Movies Deter Crime?

ABSTRACT: The escalation in youth crimes and school shootings has garnered renewed interest in understanding the determinants of violent crime and ways to curb it. Violence portrayed in movies and video games is often blamed for social vices such as crime, participation in gangs, road rage, etc. However, content in movies and video games remains protected by the First Amendment. Hoping to deter violent crime, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), has repeatedly called for greater self-regulation and restraint by movie executives in the practice of marketing of violent movies to children. But do the FTC-issued guidelines deter crime? This study investigates this important and timely research question.

Before assessing the effectiveness of the FTC advertising restraints, we test the widely held belief that violent movies spawn violent crimes. We do so using a structural model of movie demand and a Cobb-Douglas crime production model. We calibrate our models by fusing four different databases, specifically: (i) field data containing ZIP code-movie-specific box office admissions for movies, (ii) the National Incident Based Reporting System's (NIBRS) event-by-event crime data, (iii) Kantar- Media's Stradegy database containing creative-level advertising spends, and (iv) Nielsen's Market-Breaks database containing media-market breaks by television schedule.

Albeit small in magnitude, consistent with extant experimental studies, we find that violent crime increases on days with a larger movie audience for violent movies. However, violent crimes also increase on days when the demand for mildly-violent and non-violent movies rises. An increase in violent movie attendance by a thousand patrons on average increases violent crime by 0.06%. A similar increase in mildly violent and non-violent movie attendance on average increases violent crime by 0.10% and 0.05%, respectively. Interestingly, the impact of non-violent movie attendance is highest between 6 A.M. and noon (0.30%), while that of mildly-violent movies is highest between noon and 6 P.M. (0.64%), and violent movies is highest between midnight and 6 A.M. (1.05%). These findings highlight the role of self-selection by different types of movie-going patrons by movie-type and time-of-day. However, our counterfactual analysis of the FTC-recommended marketing restraints suggests that the proposed restraints, at least in the short-run, do little to deter crime.

These findings shed valuable new light on the age-old debate around the short-run implications of exposure to violence in media. Like the extant experimental studies, the long-run implications, while important, remain outside the scope of this study.