Will Restraints on Marketing Violent Movies Deter Crime?

Sriram Venkataraman*

Pradeep K. Chintagunta[†]

Sudheer Chava[‡]

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.

We do so using a structural model of movie demand and a crime production. We calibrate our models by fusing five 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, (iv) Nielsen's MarketBreaks database containing media-market breaks by television schedule, and American Time Use Survey (ATUS) data which measures how people divide their time among life's activities.

^{*}Sriram Venkataraman is an assistant professor of marketing at the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. Email: venkats@kenan-flagler.unc.edu

[†]Pradeep K. Chintagunta is the Joseph T. and Bernice S. Lewis Distinguished Service Professor of Marketing at the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago. Email: pradeep.chintagunta@chicagobooth.edu.

[‡]Sudheer Chava is an associate professor of finance at the Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology. Email: sudheer.chava@scheller.gatech.edu.