



Children Television Viewing Patterns and Parental Media Literacy in Pakistan

Vol. IV, No. III (Summer 2019) | Page: 403 – 411 | DOI: 10.31703/grr.2019(IV-III).45

p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X

Attia Zulfiqar*

Noshina Saleem†

Faiza Latif‡

Abstract

This study examines the television viewing routines of children in Pakistan. Familial, as well as individual, television viewing patterns were explored. Explanations for the children's content choice and parental rationales behind allowing free content consumption are listed. Parental media literacy, especially concerning the content rating system, was examined. 2000 Pakistani parents, of varying educational backgrounds, contributed to the survey. Accordingly: 16% of parents allow their children unsupervised television viewing. 86% of children watch for 1 to 3 hours, and 14% watch for 3 to 5 plus hours daily. Preferred children's programs, at 96% (n= 1915/2000), in Pakistan, are cartoons and animated movies 77% (n=1548/2000). Children are allowed unadulterated viewing for entertainment's sake. According to media literacy check, only 46% of parents know of the existence of rating systems. Highly educated parents are better informed, however, both genders are equally ignorant of what is age-appropriate in children's shows

Key Words: Media Literacy; Rating System; Family Television Viewing Patterns

Introduction

Parents are more conscious about the harmful effects of media after the introduction of a cable network in Pakistan. Unrestricted media consumption for little children usually starts with animated movies and cartoon shows which is considered a suitable, harmless leisure time activity for ages from three to ten. In the absence of any locally produced entertainment programs for children, most parents in Pakistan prefer to avail cable network cartoon channels to amuse their children. Families with the minimum economical resources are bound to entertain their children with this cheap and easy to access the source of entertainment.

Media technology has become a large part of our children's lives, in the 21st century, the electronic world is also observing a dramatic change in terms of new gadgets and their usage. Television was considered one of the most dominant media outlets until recently it has been combined by iPods, instant texting, iPads, mobiles, computer, the internet, emails, and tablets. Most children have unrestricted access to all kinds of media, especially television. Children are exposed to a variety of messages without adult supervision, it puts them in a vulnerable position. Exposure to harmful content is related to the wellbeing of our young children and content matters a lot especially when it is unsupervised (Field, 2000).

The entertainment industry is bombarding its audience with engaging and entertaining productions at local, global, national, and regional platforms. Media industries from developed countries having their perceptible agendas are influencing the global consumers on a cultural, economic, and ethical level, especially those living in underprivileged third world countries. Underdeveloped countries depend on global media to fulfill their entertainment needs and all this without realizing the effects of harmful features imported in the name of entertainment especially on children (Water Ella, 2001).

Billions of people entertain themselves and bring pleasure to their lives through the entertainment industry but it's also been criticized for inflicting negative effects on our children, it also damages our attention spans, demeans classical culture and promotes trivial vulgar tastes whilst also endorsing violence, diverging audience, and destabilizing communities (Blakley, 2008).

*Student, Institute of Communication studies, University of Punjab, Pakistan. Email: haseebwaraich79@gmail.com

†Professor, Institute of Communication studies, University of Punjab, Pakistan.

‡Assistant professor, Department of mass communications, Lahore College for Women University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

The quality and appropriateness of the content according to the age group of the children is a matter of prime importance. The research done by 'The future of children' includes key findings related to the media content illuminates the fact that it's not the time spent on media but rather its content that determines its constructive or destructive effects. Media multitasking has made it difficult to keep a record of child media usage. Children's media content should ideally promote positive values including altruism, pro-social behavior, tolerance, teamwork, manners, and humanity. But on the contrary, some children's media entertainment channels are promoting violence, subliminal sexual messages, and sacrilegious language. Some highly precarious behaviors like drug use, alcohol, and smoking are also related to media exposure. The incongruous content exposure can lead to the adaptation of risky behaviors in children. (The Future of children, 2008).

Literature Review

Despite the growing popularity of other digital media, television still covers a significant amount of time in family life especially families with little children. During the early days of television, it was mostly placed in living rooms, and the whole family was used to sitting around it and this was considered as a social family event. An average family had only one set with a limited choice of channels and most of the programs were family-oriented rather than for a specific age group. With the arrival of more channels, cable, and satellite network an unlimited choice of channels became available to the viewers (Paik, 2001). With the increasing amount of media violence and sexual content, it has never been this important for parents to get involved and keep an eye on the media use of their little children. Still, several countries don't have a proper kind of media regulation policy hence the parent must keep their children safe from inappropriate media content (Brigitte, 2009).

Parents are apprehensive about child media usage, especially television. Research on a large scale conducted by Kaiser Family Foundation reported that indeed parents are very concerned about inappropriate media exposure of their children (Rideout, 2007). Parents are generally less worried about screen time and more concerned about age-inappropriate content such as nudity, violence, sexual themes, and off-color language (Woodard & Gridina, 2000). There are concerns about the Americanization of cultures as American produced programs are covering a large share of local media markets and basic apprehension is about the availability of inappropriate content like sex, violence, and profanity (Fass, 2007, Lemish, 2007).

Media literacy addressed by Renee Hobbs says that just because media technology can be used by our children doesn't mean that they can effectively analyze and criticize the media messages. They need to learn some specific skills to deal with the information they receive through media. Media literacy includes the skills that would help make judgments about media content. Media illiterate parents put their children in a more vulnerable position as parental supervision can help children to unlearn negative media content influence. The media literacy of the parents can help a child to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Young children's exposure to unsupervised media content can result in their confused perception of many issues (Ferrington, 2006).

With a reasonably great number of caretakers and parents worried about content and screen time of their children, an important question is to check and measure the supervision methods of media control applied by parents. How many parents are actively involved in media supervision? It is related to the knowledge of parents that children spend their television time how, where, when, and with whom (Bersamin et al., 2008).

Media literacy and classification system defined by regulatory authorities are determined by its harmful effects on the audience including elements like nudity, violence, sex, adult themes, drug use, and language. Media literacy and rating systems were to preserve the childhood of a kid who cannot decide himself on his own. Childhood is not just about belonging to a certain age group nor is it related with the cognitive, physical, or social development of a child. It's the innocence that defines childhood, parents deliberately try to protect their child from early age adult material because they might not be able to comprehend it properly and end up confused and baffled. "Indeed, there is no aspect of adult life, whether it be perversity, promiscuity, dishonor, or confusion that seems outside the realm of today's children" (Hill, 2011, p.13).

Parental rules and regulations are often related to their cultural beliefs and their perception of the benefits of TV viewing rather than based on evidence. A study revealed that different ethnic heritage indicates disparities among parents related to the television viewing habits of their children. The study indicated that Hispanic, Asian American, and African American children were among those who watch television for a longer period.

Socioeconomic status is another reason that caused differences, parents from a lower income group were less concerned about their children's media exposure (Njoroge et al, 2013).

Parents can play an important role in reducing media risks and enhancing the benefits by properly using their controlling strategies. Parents can promote prosocial behaviors while watching a program with their kids by explaining and describing positive and negative messages. They can also develop a critical approach to potentially harmful messages related to violence, sex, and antisocial activities. Boys with guidance acted less aggressively compared to the girls (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000).

Objectives of the study

- To explore the media choices of children in Pakistan.
- To identify children television viewing patterns in Pakistan
- To what extent parents know the media rating system.

Research Questions

- RQ 1. What children like to watch on television in Pakistan?
- RQ 2. How many children have television sets in their bedrooms?
- RQ 3. What are the television viewing time patterns of children in Pakistan?
- RQ 4. What is the television co-viewing patterns prevalent in families in Pakistan?
- RQ 5. Why parents let their children watch television?
- RQ 6. How many parents know the media content rating system?

Methodology

This study explored the television viewing patterns and the media choices made by children in Pakistan. This study was designed to check the attitude of parents towards media content and it also helped to gauge the reasons working behind the control and restrictions applied by the parents in Pakistan. In developed countries, the importance of media literacy on both educational and policy agendas is used to empower the media-savvy audience, and it also helps to reduce the risk of children's access to inappropriate media content. On the other hand, third world countries importing foreign media to entertain their media illiterate public increases the harm of damaging its basic norms and cultural values. Using foreign entrainment media to amuse unaware children without any regulation policies and parental content mindfulness can cause unrepairable damage to the impressionable minds of its young viewers (Livingstone, 2008).

The theory of moral panic works when media highlight something as a potential threat to the morality and values of a person or society. Stanley Cohen explained moral panic happens when "condition, episode, person or group of people emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen, 1973). Parents stay highly alert to the news focusing on something harmful for their children so their literacy and control define the level of concern they show for the wellbeing of their offspring.

Hypothesis

Highly educated parents are more knowledgeable about Media Literacy and Rating System as compared to less-educated parents in Pakistan.

Hypothesis

Fathers have more knowledge about media literacy and rating system as compared to mothers in Pakistan.

The notion of media literacy and media control was only possible to check through the point of view of parents. The age of the child matters a lot while controlling their daily media supply based on which the target parents were selected from elementary schools. The average age of this group was 4 to 15 years, which was a suitable age gap to check the control of the parents upon their children. A total of 2000 parents took part in this survey from different areas of Pakistan including rural and urban residences. The main objective of the study was

to check the parental media control and media literacy about their education and gender so the data was selected with great care to ensure the equal participation of mothers and fathers with different educational levels. To find out the answers to the above-mentioned questions and hypotheses, the survey method was used to approach the maximum number of parents in different areas of Pakistan. A descriptive survey method was used to get data from parents.

Viewing Patterns

This area of the study was designed to explore the general viewing patterns of children's television viewing in Pakistan. It explores daily media consumption of children related to viewing hours, choices of the programs, and the availability of the television in children's rooms.

Co-viewing Patterns

Co-viewing strategy denotes to the amount to which media has been used together by a family but without a discussion on content. It includes the efforts put by parents to give time to family and watch something together to enjoy quality family time. This area explores the family television viewing patterns in Pakistan like do children watch television alone.

Parental Media Literacy

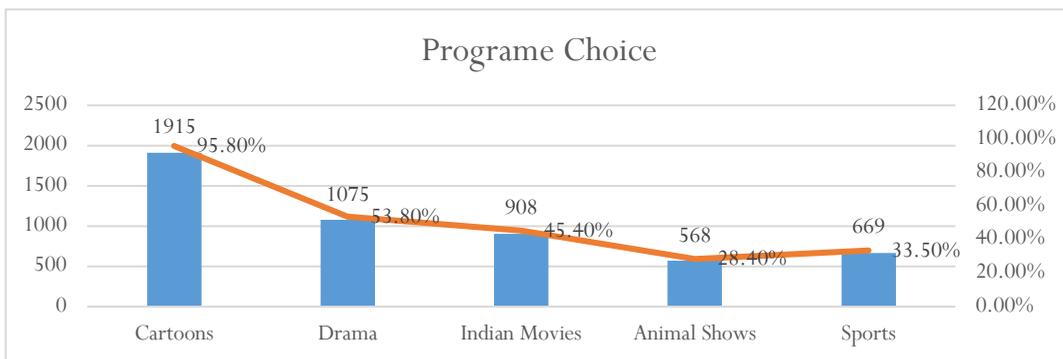
The concept of media literacy defined by European Commission in 2009 says “media literacy may be defined as the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate the power of images, sounds and messages which we now are confronted with daily, are an important part of our contemporary culture as well as to communicate competently in media available on a personal basis” (ec.europa.eu.p. 27).

The concept of media literacy in this research stands for the understanding of parents related to children's foreign cartoon channels available in Pakistan. How well they understand the nature of children cartoon programs. Do they know about the content of the shows? Do they know about the rating system?

Data Analysis

The most popular programs watched by children are cartoon shows 96% (n= 1915) and animated movies 77% (n=1546) followed by dramas 54% (n=1075), Indian movies 45% (n=908) are also included in the popular list of media choices made by children. As reported by their parents. 33% (n=670) of Children also watch English and 22% (n= 410) horror movies. Children also like to watch animal shows 28 % (n=568), sports programs 33% (n=669), and music programs 14% (n=282) as per reporting of their parents.

RQ 1. What are the patterns of television content consumption among children in Pakistan?



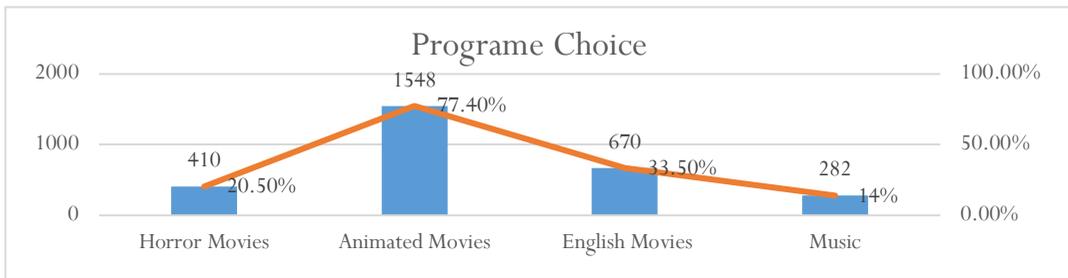


Figure 1: Children Program Choices

RQ 3. How many children have television sets in their bedrooms?

Yes	No
16%	84%

RQ 2. What are the television viewing time patterns of children in Pakistan?

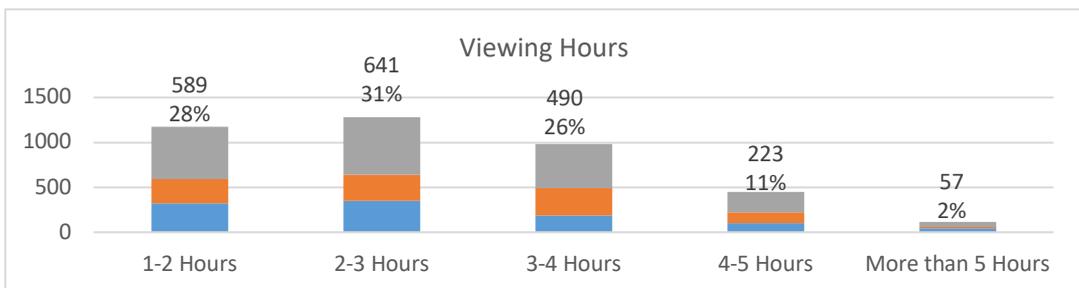


Figure 2: Daily Television Viewing Hours of Children in Pakistan

Figure 1.2 shows the daily television viewing hours of the children reported by their parents in the survey. The most frequently reported daily media consumption is 2- 3 hours 31% (n= 641) followed by 1-2 hours 28% (n= 589) 3-4 hours 26% (n= 490). The longest viewing time reported by parents is 4-5 hours 11% (n= 223) and more than 5 hours is 2% (n= 57).

RQ 4. What are the television co-viewing patterns prevalent in families in Pakistan?

Table 1. Family Television Viewing Patterns in Pakistan

Family Television viewing patterns	Mostly	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I try to watch television with my kids	20%	18%	35%	28%	0%
Families tries to watch tv together	14%	38%	41%	7%	0%
I plan to watch tv together on weekends.	4%	16%	29%	37%	13%
My children watch television alone.	0%	0%	13%	48%	38%
Children watch television with siblings.	21%	54%	24%	0%	0%
Children watch more tv on weekends	13%	40%	43%	2%	1%
Children watch more tv in long holidays	20%	29%	46%	3%	1%

Table no 1 explains the patterns of family television viewing in Pakistan. It shows that families in Pakistan do not encourage children to watch television alone and they watch it with family or siblings. Parents often try to make arrangements and watch television with their children. Children watch more television on weekends and during long holidays like summer and winter.

RQ 5. Why parents let their children watch television?

To know the reasons, why parents let their children watch television, seven options were provided in response categories including, to divert their attention, to do their work, to make the children peaceful, to entertain the children, to teach the children English, for knowledge gain and other reasons. Table number 2 shows the main purpose reported by the parents as to why they let their children watch television.

Table 2. Why I Let My Children Watch Television

I let my children watch TV	Mean	N	% of the Total Sum
To divert their attention	1.49	109	5.4%
To do my work	1.51	206	10.4%
To make them peaceful	1.52	264	13.4%
To entertain them	1.51	1042	52.4%
To teach them English	1.47	223	10.9%
For Knowledge gain	1.44	156	7.5%
Total	1.50	2000	100.0%

The most-reported purpose by the parents was that they let their children watch television to entertain them 52% (n=1042), the second favored option was to make them peaceful 13% (n=264), followed by to teach them English 11 % (n= 223), and to do their work 10 % (n= 206). Knowledge gain purpose scored 7% (n=156) and to divert their attention was at the lowest at 5% (n= 109) (Table.2).

RQ 6. How much have parents knowledge of the media content rating system?

Table 3. Knowledge About Rating System

Statements	Yes	Percent	Valid Percent
I know what PG stands for.	894	44.7	44.7
I know what 14 stands for.	634	31.7	31.7
I know what R rated means.	257	12.9	12.9
I know what 7 sign means.	413	20.7	20.7
I know what “L” stands for.	191	9.6	9.6
I know what “S” stands for.	220	11.0	11.0
I know what “N” stands for.	180	9.0	9.0
I know what “V” stands for.	446	22.3	22.3

Table 3 shows the frequencies and ratios of media rating system knowledge in parents. It shows that 45% (n= 894) of parents know what the PG or parental guidance sign stands for, 32% (n= 634) know about the sign for 14 and only 13 % (n= 257) know about R or restricted viewing signs. The sign of 7 shows this program is suitable for children above 7, 21% (n= 413) parents knew about this. L stands for strong language and only 9% (n=191) parents knew about it, the same was the case with the S sign that stands for sexual content, only 11% (n=220) of parents knew about it. The N sign shows nudity in media content and only 9% (n= 180) of parents knew about it. V shows the presence of violent content and 22% of parents were informed of this.

Hypothesis

Highly educated parents are more knowledgeable about Media Literacy and Rating Systems as compared to less-educated parents.

Table 4. Parents' Education Level and Media Literacy

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	df	Sig
Less Educated	916	1.64	.891	-42.011	1998	.000
Highly Educated	1084	3.57	1.125			

* $p < 0.05$.

An independent sample t-test was applied to compare the scores of parents' media literacy and knowledge of rating systems, specifically the lesser educated and highly educated parents. There was a significant difference in scores obtained from the independent sample t-test, for less-educated parents it was at ($M=1.64$, $SD=.891$) and for highly educated parents, ($M= 3.57$, $SD=1.125$; $t(1998) = -1.588$, $p= .000$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -42.011 , 95% CI : -1.842 to -1.843) was large (eta squared = $.47$). The results acquired from the independent sample t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference at an alpha level of $.05$ and it showed that highly educated parents have more media awareness as compared to less-educated parents, the test fails to reject the null hypothesis and supports H_1 .

Hypothesis

Fathers have more knowledge about media literacy and rating systems as compared to mothers.

Table 5. Parents' Gender and Media Literacy

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	df	Sig
Fathers	1000	2.74	1.435	1.719	1998	.086
Mothers	1000	2.64	1.374			

* $p < 0.05$.

An independent sample t-test was applied to compare the media literacy and rating system scores for fathers and mothers. There was no significant difference in the scores for fathers ($M= 2.74$, $SD= 1.435$) and mothers ($M= 2.64$, $SD=1.374$; $t(1998) = 1.719$, $p= .086$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = $.108$, 95% CI : $.231$ to $.231$).

Discussion and Conclusion

To date, no study has ever been designed to check the media literacy of parents in Pakistan. This study was intended to study media literacy and family television viewing patterns in Pakistan. This study focused on knowing the daily, weekends, and long holiday television viewing hours of children in Pakistan.

The main question was to know the fact that if either of parent allows their children to have separate television sets in their bedrooms or not? There is a difference between the results obtained from Pakistani parents, previous studies show that in America, children at 26% as young as 2 to 4 years old have direct access to media as they have separate television sets in their bedrooms and this ratio increases to 70% by the time they join the middle school level (Roberts & Foehr, 2004). This trend is not very popular in Pakistan and only 16% of parents confirmed that their children have television sets in their bedrooms and 84% do not. It shows that parents from Pakistan believe that children should not be allowed to have a separate television set in their bedroom. The findings are similar to those reported in the Indian study where it's been reported that the television set is placed in a common television lounge. The placement of the television shows that television viewing is considered a collective family activity and all of the family members are a part of it (Cardoza, 2010).

The most favorite programs watched by children at 96% ($n= 1915/2000$) in Pakistan are cartoons and animated movies 77% ($n=1548/2000$). Parents reported that their children also watch English movies at 33%, Indian movies at 45%, and dramas at 54%. Children also watch horror movies at 20%, sports at 33%, and animal shows at 28%. Several types of themes reside within television cartoons and animated movies; they're considered to be one of the primary sources of gaining information whilst also being entertaining during the early stages of child development. The widely regarded impression of children entertainment programs is that they're

considered harmless, as well as a safe and cheap mode of entertainment in the comfort of their homes. The production companies claim to be the harbinger of a safe and healthy mode of entertainment free from violence, obscenity, and mature themes. The critics are highly doubtful about these higher claims because the actual situation is significantly different from the statements they made.

Various similarities have been found in the responses of the parents when they were asked to explain a specific reason behind why they let their children watch television. There's a dual dilemma, on one hand, they want their children to get entertained and be well informed and on the other hand, they are fearful about the negative influences of media that might affect their children's cultural and moral values (Cantor, 1996). Parents in Pakistan were also asked to report why they let their children watch television and 52% of them replied that they want their children to be entertained.

The Other reasons reported by parents were that they want them to learn the English language through foreign cartoon channels, they want to do their work so they must divert their attention, they want them to gain knowledge and also want a peaceful house so they let their children watch television. If 96% of children are watching cartoons in the name of entertainment from foreign cartoon channels and their daily viewing time is 1 to 3 hours then one must know what they are watching?

Family binding in Pakistan and other Asian countries is much stronger than in western societies. Family is the foremost socializing factor in a child's early life so studying television co-viewing patterns in a traditional society is a matter of great concern (Huston & Right, 1996). Results obtained from family television viewing patterns in Pakistan are different from the results obtained from the studies done in a western context. Older children don't like to watch television with their family or siblings and children above 7 hardly watch television with their parents (Roberts & Foehr, 2004). European research studies have different results as compared to other studies. Children like to watch television with their parents especially with the company of their mothers although several children still want to watch television alone (Pasquier, 2001).

In most cases, family patterns in Pakistan are a joint system so children rarely watch television alone. They watch it with their siblings or with other family members. Families in Pakistan make no plans to watch television together on the weekends, they just randomly sit together and watch. Overall television viewing patterns in Pakistan are family-oriented and children don't have the privilege of private television sets in their room. Children watch television with their family and mostly watch excessive television on weekends and long holidays. The study conducted in an Indian context shows the same results regarding children's media exposure on weekends and long holidays. During weekdays children watch almost 3 hours daily but on weekends they watch more than 3 hours and the interesting fact is that their academic commitments don't compel them to reduce their daily viewing hours (Cardoza, 2010).

The results revealed the situation of media literacy in Pakistan and only 46% of parents have the slightest idea about the existence of rating systems of the shows produced in western countries for children. Highly educated parents have better knowledge about rating systems than less educated parents but there's no difference between fathers and mothers, they both are equally ignorant about the age-appropriate signs shown on screen in children shows.

So to conclude one can say that parents in Pakistan have little knowledge about the rating system of the content of the shows available on foreign children's entertainment channels but their children watch cartoons and animated movies in bulk on daily basis. The fundamental core of media literacy is to explore and analyze how media content is constructed. One should be able to evaluate implicit and explicit content against one's cultural, moral, and ethical norms. Most importantly media literacy is considered a substitute for accusing, prohibiting, and censoring the media (CML, 2014). The only main goal of media literacy is for people to make sensible and wise choices about media content and behaving actively in a global media environment.

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