

Research Article

Impact of Television on Children and the Need for Parental Involvement

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A B S T R A C T

Television reaches millions of people all over the world at the same time. The unmatched quality of television is reality and immediacy which is not found in any other medium. In the last three decades television has grown phenomenally both in technology and reach. In fact, television viewing has now become an essential aspect of everyday activity in any country. It is an important activity affecting the lives of all the viewers-adults as well as children. Television has a great impact on various aspects of a child's life whether physical, emotional, cognitive or social. It has become matter of immense worry for educationists, doctors, psychiatrist, planners, psychologists and pediatricians the world over. Many past researches have studied the impact of television on children. The impact is either positive or negative. This paper tries to find out the impact of television on various areas of children's lives and the need for parental involvement.

Keywords: Television, Children, Impact, Psyche

Introduction

Television has the potential of reaching millions of people simultaneously therefore its significance as a medium of mass communication has been universally recognized. The growth of television both in technology and reach in the last three decades is noteworthy. It has been recognized as an important communication medium for promoting the cause of national unity, developing economy and enriching the socio-cultural life of people. The incomparable quality of television is reality and immediacy which is not found in any other medium as it brings us into contact with live events in an exciting, thrilling and much illuminating way. Besides providing education the television also provides a range of entertaining programmes to people catering to all levels of society and has become synonymous to entertainment these days. It offers many kinds of amusements to the viewers, out of which the most popular are comedy,

action and drama. Action entertainment offers thrillers, suspense, crime, investigation and police shows. There are more entertainment programmes like musical shows and movies videos on MTV, VTV, UTV, Bindaas and others. Movie channels like HBO, AXN, Movies Now and Star Movies broadcast popular movies. Animated cartoon shows for children are very popular where famous characters make children laugh. TV has indeed occupied its place in every household by becoming the common entertainment.

Review of Literature

In a study conducted by *Singer (1983)*, it was found that children who frequently watch television programmes have poor vocabulary and use bad expressive language. This shows that television viewing is directly related to language impediment. *Healy (1995)* conducted an experiment on school going children to find out the impact of television viewing on language development. It was found in a research that children exposed to television viewing had

poor vocabulary and used lower expressive language in their daily conversation. *Rao (2001)* mentioned that most television programmes are designed so as to attract children. They may be entertaining and educating but they also have a negative impact on children. *Hofmann (1997)* stated that in the past or previous generations children were brought up with several traditional values set ups which gave ample opportunities to children in the process of learning. But the traditional family set up has been replaced by the nuclear family system, single parent family and double income family a result of which is that family members hardly interact with each other. Thus children imbibe information and learning through watching television. *Messaris (1987)* conducted an interview between children and their parents about television viewing habits. The interview revealed that mothers spend a lot of time with their children watching the programmes on the television.

Research Methodology

The research would be secondary in nature. It would include reviews of various research papers, articles and social networking sites

Television and Children

Today's generation of children is watching television for many more hours than ever before. Options on the television are rapidly increasing thus exposing them to new ideas, different cultures and a variety of information that was unavailable earlier. The television is also an influential medium in developing value systems and behaviour in children. It has brought about a substantial change in the experience of childhood in our culture. Any change in the behaviour and value systems of children will in turn, change the future of society. In this sense, it can be said that the television is shaping the values of society.

The television has a great impact on various aspects of a child's life and is a matter of immense worry for educationists, doctors, psychiatrist, planners, psychologists and pediatricians the world over. Many past researchers have studied the impact of television on children. The impact is either positive or negative. Impact can occur at different levels like; affecting knowledge and behavior, changing beliefs and attitude and shaping opinion and perception. Television viewing enhances mental and emotional development and imparts knowledge, education, skills and information to the child. It motivates learning and imparts general awareness promoting both conceptual and concrete thinking and helps in bringing change in the behavior and attitudes of the child.

Television viewing has negative effects too. It may place children in inactive roles. It may provide escapism from

reading, playing, exercise, study etc. It decreases actual social interaction and provides room for antisocial or aggressive and destructive roles that could be imitated by the child. Since it came into our homes, television viewing and its effects became the subject of many debates, citizen's actions and network responses because of the possible impact on the child's psyche.

However, there is a variety of other factors in evaluating the impact of television on children, like the family background of children, involvement of parents, past and present viewing experiences and their attitude as well as perception level towards TV programmes. The way children perceive and retain the information is also affected by already known information and also by what they feel or believe.

Over the years television viewing has become an essential aspect of everyday activity in our country. Television viewing has become an important activity affecting the lives of all the viewers, adults as well as children. It is a vital tool for learning and an important agent of socialization. Children are more influenced because they are at an impressionable age. It affects their daily routine, behavior, study habits, intellect and likes and dislikes. However, in a positive manner, television may be used as a tool in the building of aspirations, improving knowledge and developing ideas.

Most of us are aware that television viewing isn't a healthy activity. Most children spend long hours in watching TV. The TV is not a passive device we sit in front of with no ill effects. It was proved in several researches that watching television for more than 3-4 hrs a day affects the reading skills of children. Decade's worth of research have proved that television has harmful effects on the child's development. Most child psychologists and child development experts recommend that children should not be exposed to television watching before the age of 2.

Watching and understanding of television programmes by children depends on many factors:

- Their age.
- Duration of watching television.
- Way of perceiving the programmes and information.
- Mental efforts they use.
- Their own life experiences.

Television as an Agent of Socialization

Josephson (1995)¹ a child development expert states that the age and different stages of physical and mental development of child development makes a huge difference in the growth of the child. The Television introduces them to the world of music, colors and stories. A two year old child starts learning from the people around him and also from television programmes he watches by imbibing and

¹L. Josephson, W. (1995). Television Violence: A Review of the Effects on Children of Different Ages (pp. 1-51)

reacting to what it offers. It affects his thought process. He is not born with misconception so he starts asking how people are similar and different. The first two years of a child are vital in his cognitive growth and development. The repeated patterns experienced in childhood usually extend till teenage. Children of age 3-5 become fully fledged viewers and try to find meaning in the content of television programme. The television is not the only source of information but they also receive messages from the other agents of socialization like family, the peer group, neighbors and teachers. They can easily differentiate between right or wrong and good or bad. But, children under six years are not able to differentiate between fantasy and reality. They find a tough time in finding a difference between the reel and the real.

The duration of TV watching drops in the age group of 6-9 as children spend more time getting attuned to life in school. However, children of this age usually believe whatever they see in television programmes and find it difficult to work out the difference between fantasy and reality, particularly if it looks like the reflection of real life. They admire the characters shown on TV and want to be like their favorite hero or heroine. Surprisingly, in a study it was revealed that many children wanted to be like those unrealistic characters much more than real characters. This clearly indicated their lack of judgment between fantasy and reality.

Young children are inquisitive about the teenage world i.e the issues of sex, death, crime and fashion and do not fully understand them when shown on TV. Oftentimes they are guided and often misled by the way boy-girl relationships are depicted on the television. Many times television programmes are a driving force pushing children into a complex adult world making them inquisitive about it. The TV exposes them to the topics that the elders have hidden from them. They ask the meaning of actions and words they have not heard yet. Children are affected positively as well negatively by the television programmes in various ways. Many empirical findings have proved that children who watch Television excessively are introduced to many things that would be outside their experience in the real world and they get stimulated by it.

Role of Television in the Media Globalization

In the era of media globalization, television has made a remarkable impact and has acted as an eye opener to the viewers, negatively as well as positively. Today, accessibility to Television has increased and almost every household has a TV set. Globalization has led to a revolution of news, information, entertainment, reporting,

editing, communication and printing. It is only because of globalization that the spread and exchange of information has become possible which has led to an information revolution. People are aware about their own country and also about other countries. However there is another view to this. According to researcher George Gerbner the most popular television programs are no longer the ones made for the national consumption but are the ones made for international distribution. With further research he came to the conclusion that this was in order to increase the marketability of international television program distribution.² This has actually affected the culture and traditions which is generally focused on through the cinema, daily soaps, advertisements and reality shows.

A political economist and media historian named Robert Mc Chesney criticizes the multinational corporations for using the media as a platform to serve only their own interests. These companies create content and own those publishing companies and hence use them to distribute their own product.³

The presence of foreign channels in our homesthrough the TV has negatively influenced our culture rather than in a positive manner. Children imitate their favourite TV stars and copy their on screen behaviour and habits whether good or bad. Foreign shows are actually depicting their life style which is quite contrary to our Indian culture and traditions thus diverting the minds of the children and teenagers and they become addicted to such shows. They show no importance to their culture and try to adopt the western manner of life. Some Indian channels are also replicating foreign shows. There are several dubbed and imitated shows just for the sake of profit and entertainment. Though some shows are good and provide good entertainment, some are creating conflicting attitudes in the children. This is one of the reasons that children are getting distanced from their family.

Impact of Television on Various Areas

Learning

The television is a powerful teacher as it teaches children valuable lessons about life, communal accord, team spirit, cooperation, unity in diversity and kindness. It also teaches them about world cultures, the latest happenings and current affairs. Moreover, through educational television watching children learn rhymes, music and dance, art and craft, alphabets, colours and science. Some programmes encourage children to visit the zoos, museums, libraries, bookstores and other recreational places, along with their parents. But many researches and moreover parents believe that watching television snatches away time from

<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/media/effects-of-globalization-on-media-media-essay.php>

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schoolwork and physical activities and social interaction. Many studies have proved that even 1 to 2 hours of daily unsupervised television viewing has a significant negative impact on a child's academic performance but *technology is not always a curse*. Television viewing can be beneficial if children watch the right shows. There are ample shows that enhance knowledge like: Cosmos, Art Attack, MAD, How they do it, Planet Earth, History of Earth etc. These shows provide vast knowledge and learning in easy and fun loving ways.

Culture

Television has changed the life style of Indian people and has turned out to be a major influence on our culture. It has helped in creating awareness among people by giving all sorts of information. It has also helped in abolishing many social evils and breaking social barriers. It is also a platform for showcasing and grooming new talent. People know about different cultures of the world and other countries come to know about Indian culture. But as far as the negative effects are concerned, it can be motioned that the TV is an agent of cultural invasion. There is a loss of cultural values among the youth as many programmes contain obscenity and vulgarity. People are fascinated by the fashion, language, hair styles, cars, lavish homes and life styles of those people shown in television programmes. Many of them get frustrated for not being able to afford such a lifestyle and to achieve all this they start committing crimes.

Violence

The number of violent shows aired on television is increasing. Hence, violence on TV and children has become a matter of concern. Many studies reveal that extensive viewing of violent programmes on the television can have ill effects on young impressionable minds as they have not reached maturity. It may negatively affect their cognitive and emotional development, behavior and social interaction. They become aggressive, possess unstable behavior, are anxious and disrespectful towards parents, elders and teachers. Such children may even perceive the world as being full of hatred and violence. They also experience low self-esteem, loneliness and depression. Children usually like to act what they see on TV, regardless of whether it is good or bad. They also start reacting negatively over small incidents like slamming the door, throwing tantrums or not eating food when their demands are not met. One more aspect of TV violence is that a child may grow up having difficulty in trusting people as the programmes have negative characters in the television programmes.

Nutrition

Children who watch too much television are less physically fit as TV takes away much of their time from physical activities. Such children are more likely to consume a lot

of junk food which is high in calories - the main cause of obesity. Many researchers have proved that television viewing is a substantial contribution to obesity due to following factors:

- Less Physical Activity
- Sedentary behavior
- Increased junk food intake while watching TV
- Exposure to food products on TV tempts one to try out unhealthy foods
- Less sleeping hours

Having a television set in the bedroom is also a reason. Children are tempted to watch unregulated TV thus curbing their physical activities while consuming junk food and carbonated drinks while watching TV is harmful for their health. Children also fall prey to the commercials selling junk food like pizzas, burgers, wafers and carbonated drinks. According to Pediatrics Child Health, "healthy food commercials are only 4% of total food advertisements shown." Even parents fall prey to the brands that sell low fat food which is ironically selling enough calories than the normal variant.

Sexuality

Today, teens rank television as the foremost source of information about sex as the sex educator, next to sex education in school. The exposure to sexual content in the media has become quite evident and also unavoidable. According to a research, in the last two decades there is a 270% increase in sexual content in media through TV shows, crime shows, advertisements, movies, music and reality shows. Such messages affect children by portraying explicit and unrealistic sexual behaviour among teenage boys and girls rendering them susceptible to the ideas of trying to be attractive and admirable. Such modeling teaches techniques of affection; develop a sense of sexual identity, shape sexual attitude, reduces sexual insecurities and alters sexual behaviour.

Television exposes children to the illusion that sex is an essential ingredient in daily their routine and explicitly portrays sexual behaviour in a normal and risk free manner. A study of many daily soap operas revealed that sex between unmarried partners is shown many more times than between married partners. Even daily soaps show explicit romantic scenes just for the sake of TRP's. Thus, teenagers who see such acts of having casual sex without experiencing any negative consequences may adopt the behaviors portrayed.

Advertising

Television advertising can have positive as well as negative effects on children's behaviour. All the advertisers and marketers are aware of the fact that children are much faster at grasping and remembering information. This is the

reason why we see more television commercials based on children's products which target children. They promote all kinds of children's products; from toys, chocolates, wafers, stationery, clothes to eatables and health drinks. The age of the child plays an important role in the sale of products advertised since children only believe what they are shown. Though such advertisements are shown for hardly a few seconds their impact is huge. They begin to recognize the brands and also help their parents in making purchasing decisions.

There are many positive effects like many advertisements promote savings among children, some advertisements promote the respect of elders and many advertisements teach the spirit of cooperation, friendship, helping others and togetherness. But there is a negative aspect also. Many children become stubborn and force their parents to buy the advertised products. They also start comparing themselves with their friends if not allowed to use the advertised product and may develop an inferiority complex. Many advertisements use very difficult stunts which prompt many children to try and perform such stunts. Though such advertisements come with a warning of not performing the stunts at home but children's minds are vulnerable and they ignore such warnings. This is quite unsafe and they may get injured while performing the stunts. Not only this but the promotion of energy drinks, carbonated drinks, candies, wafers and junk food also poses a health risk for children. They fall prey to such advertisements and fail to realize the ill effects of such food items.

A number of studies has shown that most of the children fail to understand the difference between a program produced to entertain and an advertisement shown to sell the product.

Parental Involvement and Need for Discipline Among Children

Parents are the children's first line of defense, so good parenting becomes very important. It is the parent's responsibility to protect their children from the negative effects of excessive television viewing. Parents should control the exposure of television to their children. It is the responsibility of parents to check the television programmes that are restricted for viewing.

Many working parents have concerns about their child's television viewing habits as they cannot control it because of their unavailability at home and hence they feel guilty about it. But feeling guilty and doing nothing about it is not the solution to this problem.

Research has proved that good parenting plays a crucial role in preventing the aggression among children. Parents should control television viewing hours among children. They can also monitor the content their children are

watching and also suggest some educational or purely entertaining programmes. In fact, they should try to watch television programmes with them and help them to understand the content they watch. Parents can also develop the habit of sending children to playing outside. It is actually the duty of the parents to protect their children from the harmful effects of television and protect them from the problems that are the consequence of watching excessive television. As far as cartoons are concerned, parents must select the cartoons on the basis of its content which could have positive impact on their children. They should choose good and healthy cartoon programmes for their children. It would be even better if they regularly discussed the cartoon programmes with them.

It was also found in research that the parents' actions are also a major factor in shaping children's behavior. The aggressive and impulsive behavior of parents in front of children affects them in a negative manner. Incidences like throwing things in anger, shouting loudly, abusing or breaking valuables may impact children in a negative way and also in the long run.

So, monitoring children's viewing habits, keeping them away from inappropriate content, discussing the content they see on television, directing them in different activities and encouraging them to go outside to play can help children from lasting emotional, behavioral and psychological impact.

Conclusion

When it comes to solutions, children's counselors are divided into the various views they hold; many advice for more television viewing hours per week for educational programming while others stress that no TV is the best solution. Some are of the view that parents should control the use of TV and should teach kids that television is only for occasional entertainment, not for regular escapism. It is recommended that the parents monitor the content their children watch on the TV and limit the viewing time to ensure that their kids don't spend too much time in front of the TV. The Television is a strong socializing agent in a child's life and it affects the socialization process in a composite manner as it competes with the other agents of socialization as well as with the other activities. Thus, the role of parents is very important in providing alternatives to television viewing. Parents own perception about television is an important factor of the child's response to the television. The TV has a strong capacity in arousing an emotional attachment with characters by striking an emotional harmony in its audience. This deepens the involvement of the audience in television viewing.

To an extent the television, undoubtedly informs us about the language, culture, current events, values, fashion, economics, politics and many other things. But just as a coin

has two sides, it also teaches violence, impedes language, restricts from physical activities and affects behavioral development in children.

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