

Impact of Digital Television on Audience Especially Children

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Abstract

Communication can be as a sharing of meaning. Ethics, the right value given to that meaning and Culture, the means we use to share meaning. Earlier these were the products of our family and society. Their modes of transmission and interaction were the product of our need and our resources. Messages were often person to person, intimate, bound by local prejudices and customs. The mass media are a pervasive part of our life. Television occupies a major chunk of the 'leisure' time afforded by people all over the world and increasingly in India, has become an oft-quoted truism. But behind this common place assertion lies a host of issues - its long-term impact, particularly its role in the shaping of consciousness, its role as primary source of 'values', 'culture' and 'leisure'. Television's impact on society is often analyzed in terms of its negative consequences, that is, lowering of moral standards, increase in our threshold violence, its role in promoting ethics of consumerism, individualism etc. The problem that crept in was the picturing of morally objectionable motion pictures appearing on television. There are two angles to analysis the role of mass communication. One, by taking the sociological perspective and look through a wide-lens and consider the functions performed by the mass media for the entire society, called macro analysis. Second, by looking through a close-up lens at the individual receivers of the content, the audience, and ask them how they use the mass media called micro - analysis. The heaviest period of television viewing by children is during prime time. It should be noted that many reruns are programmed during prime time. Thus, children see more programmes designed for adults than those developed for the younger generation. These viewing experiences expose them to commercials that express a powerful set of values.

Keywords: Television, Mass Media, Leisure

Introduction

"In the intercourse of social life, it is by little acts of watching kindness recurring daily and hourly, by words, tones, gestures, looks that affection is won and preserved."

George Augustus Sala

Communication can be as a sharing of meaning. The above quote defines communication in an appropriate manner. Ethics, the right value given to that meaning and Culture, the means we use to share meaning. Earlier these were the products of our family and society. Their modes of transmission and interaction were the product of our need

and our resources. Messages were often person to person, intimate, bound by local prejudices and customs.

With the advent of the electronic media this scene has changed. Media is a highly specialized process. The media industry does wield considerable influence in our society today. Almost 60 million people work for media around the world. In developing countries around 60% of the population is involved in media related industries. Ethics and culture can be the losers, because in producing a programme the integrity of the same and its relevance to culture or the audiences viewing it is not of paramount importance.

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Television occupies a major chunk of the 'leisure' time afforded by people all over the world and increasingly in India, has become an oft-quoted truism. But behind this common place assertion lies a host of issues - its long-term impact, particularly its role in the shaping of consciousness, its role as primary source of 'values', 'culture' and 'leisure'. The problem that crept in was the picturing of morally objectionable motion pictures appearing on television.

The Cultural Indicators research group used as their definition of violence the overt behaviour of physical force (with or without a weapon, against self or other) compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing.

Communication is critical in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationship. Good communication or "openness" is always associated with positive mental health. Slightly over a decade ago the state of research on interpersonal conflict was severely criticized for relying on games played by the media other than family members. The game format simply did not capture the intensity or drama associated with actual conflicts, and the role of interpersonal communication was necessarily quite limited and superficial.

The best way to appreciate the role that mass communication plays in our society would be to imagine that it would be like if, all of a sudden, the whole system never existed. The mass media are a pervasive part of our life. There are two angles to analyse the role of mass communication. One, by taking the sociological perspective and look through a wide-lens and consider the functions performed by the mass media for the entire society, called macro analysis. Second, by looking through a close-up lens at the individual receivers of the content, the audience, and ask them how they use the mass media called micro - analysis.

Television's impact on society is often analysed in terms of its negative consequences, that is, lowering of moral standards, increase in our threshold violence, its role in promoting ethics of consumerism, individualism etc.

It is revolting to learn that the rulers of this country count only its pennies and totally lose sight of cultural and ethical values and the rights and wrongs while deciding on affairs that make or unmake future generations.

The heaviest period of television viewing by children is during prime time. It should be noted that many reruns are programmed during prime time. Thus, children see more programmes designed for adults than those developed for the younger generation. These viewing experiences expose them to commercials that express a powerful set of values. Siegal (1977) said that the profound significance of television is that as a source of general information it

may have a greater impact on a child's social development than school.

There can be little doubt that television occupies a special and powerful position in our society. It is a medium that carries messages and images that have significant supporters, but more often than not, its offerings have been perceived as having some negative influences. No area has commanded more attention than has the influence of television on the affective and cognitive development.

Socialization refers to the whole process by which an individual, born with behavioural potentialities of enormously wide range, is led to develop desired behaviour which is confined within a much narrower range - the range is customary and acceptable for him according to the standards of his- upbringing.

Most of the research on children and television is not based on any particular concept or theoretical framework. Other than television the other agents of socialization vary along three dimensions: their socio - economic and cultural characteristics, their content and their form.

Audience Characteristics

On every Friday 11.30 a.m. or 10.00 p.m., where do we find the maximum crowd? Yes, in front of cinema houses. This crowd is gradually reducing as people are glued to the television in their houses. Today television offers all what one wants in the house itself. Nobody is really interested in going to cinema theatres and sit and watch a movie for 3 hours, instead they do the same thing with much more comfort from their homes.

Stages of Audience Evolution

As communication media develop and evolve, audiences evolve them. The notion of the media and audience evolution has been suggested by several mass communication scholars.

In general terms, we can identify at least four stages in audience evolution:

- The elite stage
- The mass stage
- The specialized stage
- The interactive stage

In the first stage, the audience for the medium is relatively small and represents the more educated and refined segments of society. They are not representative of the average man and woman.

The potential audience is the entire population, with all segments of the society likely to be represented, is the second stage.

The third stage is typified by fragmented, special interest audience group.

Lastly, in this stage the individual audience member has some selective control over what he or she chooses to see or hear.

The Television Audience

Television passed through the elite stage in the 1950s when TV sets were very expensive and only the elite could afford them. The prestige dramas only enjoyed popularity during that period. As sets became less expensive and came within the reach of everyone, comedy shows started predominating. Television has now moved onto a specialized stage. Television is becoming more and more closer to the interactive stage. Pay-per-view allows viewers to choose their own programmes.

Dimensions of the Audience

The TV has become firmly entrenched in the life of every individual. Most of the homes have at least one TV set to be glued to. Roughly 85% of the households have cable networks.

TV rating services claim that in an average household the TV is on for at least 7 hours a day. The TV audience changes throughout the day, steadily growing from morning to evening. Preschoolers and women seem to dominate during the day on week days. On weekends it is the audience under 13.

It is true that everybody is not alike in their TV viewing habits. Various demographic factors such as age, sex, social class and education affect viewership.

The Context of Mediated Violence

Television viewers acquire lasting attitudes, emotional reactions and behavioural proclivities towards persons, places or things that have been associated with modeled emotional experience. There are seven important contextual variables:

- **Reward/ Punishment:** Rewarded aggression is more frequently modeled than punished aggression.
- **Consequences:** Mediated violence that is accompanied by portrayals of negative or harmful consequences produces less modeling.
- **Motive:** This produces greater levels of modeling and unjustified media violence results in less viewer aggression.
- **Realism:** Especially with boys, realistic media violence tends to produce more real- world aggression. Realistic media perpetrators are more likely to reduce inhibitions because their behaviours are more applicable to real

life situations that are unrealistic perpetrators such as cartoon or fantasy characters.

- **Humour:** As it reduces the seriousness of the behaviour, humourously presented media violence leads to a greater probability that viewers will behave aggressively in real life.
- **Identification with Media Characters:** The more the viewer identifies with the media character, the more he/ she will try and imitate the character in real life.
- **Arousal:** Emotional appeals can serve to increase the dramatic nature of the narrative, which is more likely to result in aggressive behaviour.

Television and Cognitive Skills

Television has been charged with producing a generation of couch potatoes who simply vegetate in front of the tube, showing very little signs of intellectual life. Heavy TV viewing children have a fairly low level of IQ. This does not prove that TV causes lower IQ. It may be that youngsters with a low IQ are drawn to the undemanding world of TV for entertainment.

The relationship between TV viewing and school achievement became hot news because of the decline in the competitive exams scores. The critics blame the TV for this. It is hard to summarise the relationship between reading achievements and TV viewing. Many researchers have found some negative relationship between entertainment viewing and reading skills, but these were influenced by factors such as IQ, social class, age and parental guidance towards reading.

Children and Television Advertising

Adults have little problem in distinguishing commercials from regular television programmes as they realise that the purpose of a commercial is to promote some idea, product or service. With children it is not the same.

Children are vulnerable. They constitute a special audience because of the Following reasons:

- Children are vulnerable audience and should not be exploited by TV advertising.
- Children, might be deceived by TV techniques that make products appear more desirable than they really are.
- The long term effects of exposure to TV ads might have a negative effect on a child's socialisation as a future consumer.

One influence of mass media that has turned up in many studies of mass communication is called the agenda setting effect. By this it means that the media has the ability to choose and emphasise certain topics, causing the public to perceive these issues as important.

Comstock's Psychological Model

Key Terms

- **Point of Entry:** It the level where the individual switches on the TV for an input.
- **TV Perceived Reality:** Portrayal of acts in the TV that are thought to be true to life.
- **TV Alternatives:** The variety of programmes available on other channels.
- **TV Perceived Consequences:** The sum of all + and – shown on screen.
- **P TV Act:** Probability of acting what is shown on screen
- **Opportunity:** Is the opportunity to enact what is shown on screen.
- **Display Behaviour:** Enacting what is seen on the screen.

Comstock explains that every individual is drawn to the television for entertainment. The entry level is the time when the television is switched on. Once it is done, the individual is exposed to the different acts that are shown as true to real life. If the individual is not satisfied with the programme, he or she will change the channel and the entire process will start again. The result of viewing that particular programme is assessed by the consequence it has on the individual. The consequence will determine if there is a probability of acting what was shown on screen. If the probability is less than zero, we go back to the entry level. Assuming that that the probability is more than zero then the individual identifies an opportunity to act out. If approved the behaviour is displayed, if not the process of communication begins from the point of entry all over again.

Media Effects on Behaviour

- Children started imitating violence shown on screen.
- Effected the values of children.
- Perceptions of the world were from the television's point of view for children.
- Exposure to obscene materials and pornography became a problem in abstaining children form the same.

Children and Media

Times have changed! Children regard television as a permanent fixture in their lives. The television sets are familiar to them as the faces of the family members or even more. Television sets are always present to give company

to children especially when everyone is not in the mood to play or interact with them. Small children love the way television responds to them, that is, how the television starts instantaneously with the press of a button. They feel that they are making the television set do whatever they want. For a child in this present age television represents a state of complete bliss.

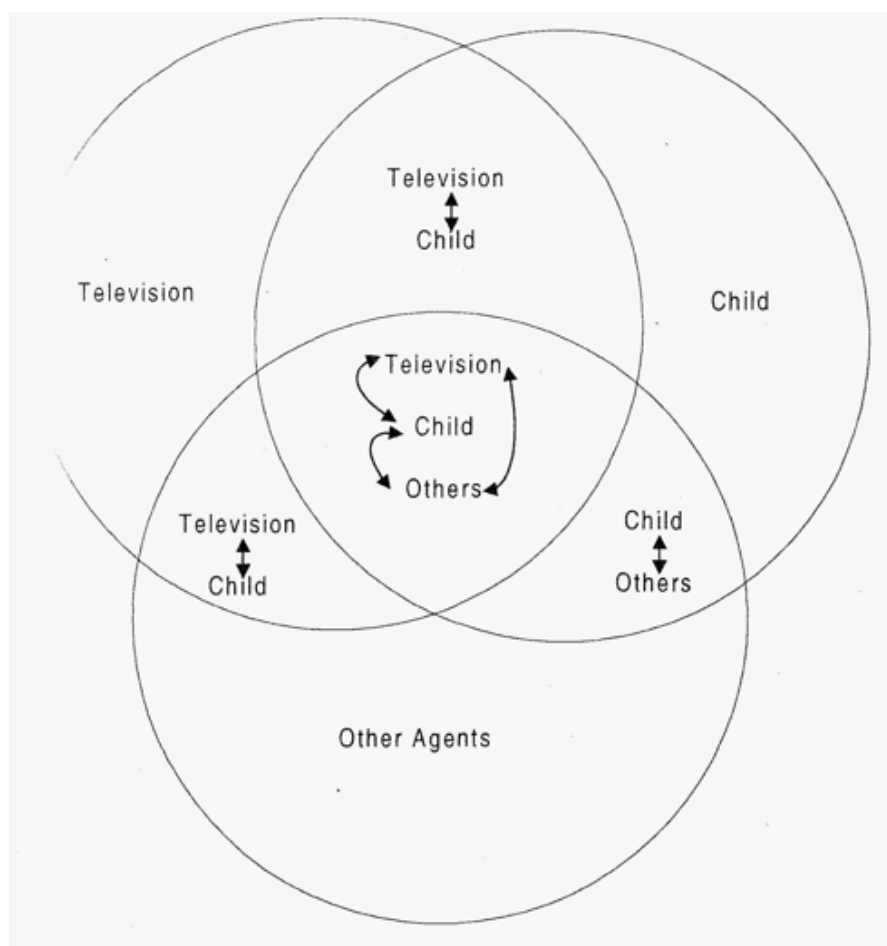
Exposure to television indicates a clear break with the past – a change in the attitudes, perception and lifestyle of the Indian child. Television in India played a second fiddle to the cinema. Children used to learn to imitate, idolize from cinema stars but today these stars have taken roles in the small screen that has led the children follow them her also. For example, Mukesh Khanna, a macho man with all his might was depicted as a villain fighting with the heroes, today he plays the lead role in Shaktimaan wherein children are lured by his performance. Although cinema continues to dominate public taste, its visual arena has shrunk from a panoramic screen to a 21- inch one, and today fewer and fewer people venture out to cinema halls.

The world has shrunk until it is possible to communicate over huge distances in a fraction of the time that it is used to take. Trans- nationalisation of the media is swiftly unifying the world by beaming the same programmes to people of different nationalities, races and cultures, thereby skipping over political, social and economic barriers that once etched boundaries between one country and another. For example the satellite TV service, like STAR TV is seen across the world.

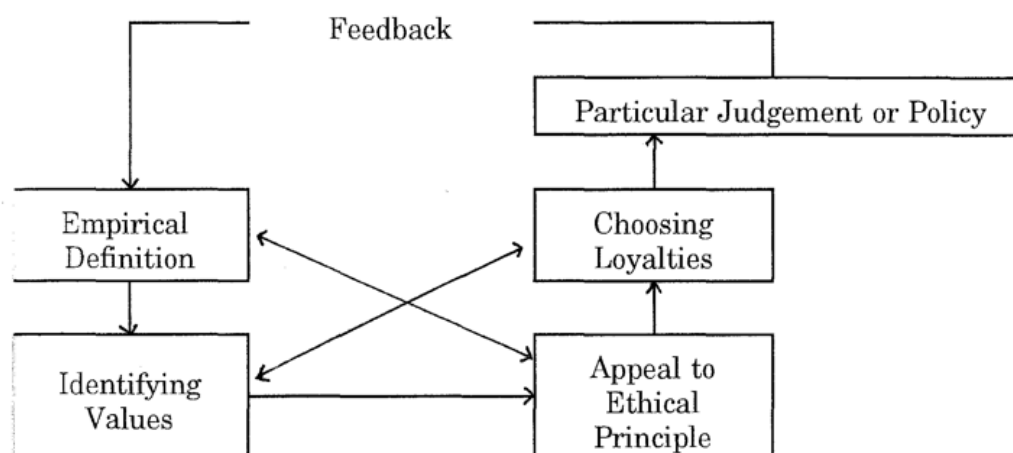
We are living in a world called "global village" according to Marshall McLuhan. Modern mass communication tools make it possible for us to shrink the world. Mass communication is the process by which media organizations produce and transmit messages to large publics and the process by which those messages are sought, used, understood, and influenced by the audiences.

Media organizations distribute messages that affect and reflect the cultures of society, and they provide information to large heterogeneous audiences, making the media a part of society's institutional force.

Media implies mediation because they come between the audience and the world. They are seen equivalent to interpreters for the public. The content characteristics of other agents may be similar to or different the content characteristics of television.



Mass Media and Attitudes

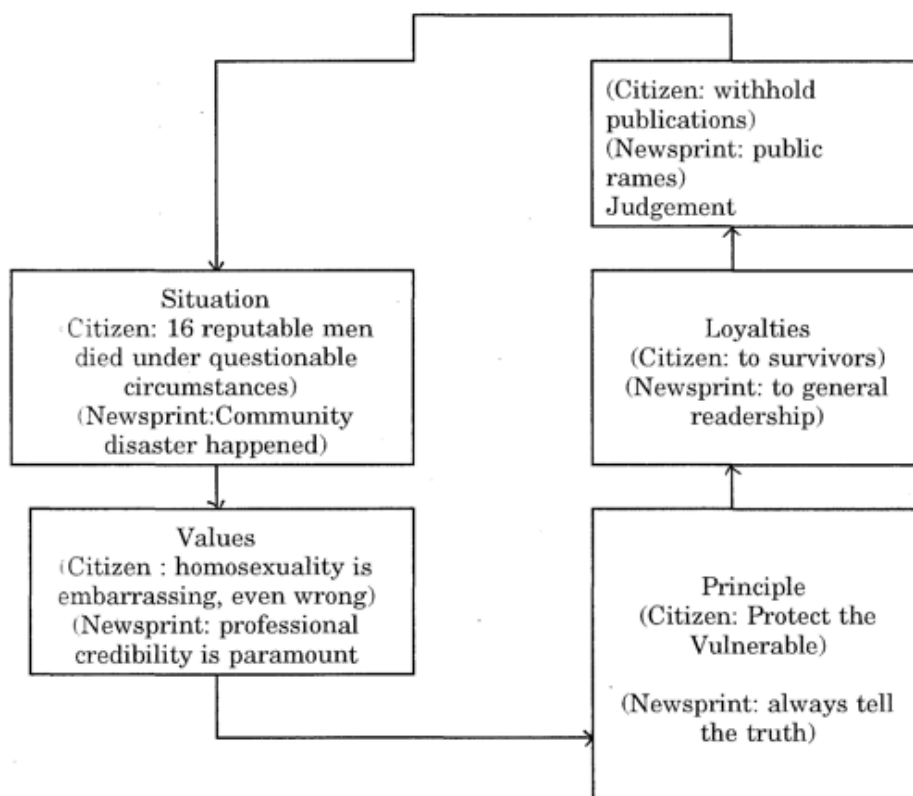


Ethical decision making - a process of adjusting to mores and commitments of a given community

It's an organic whole. It's not merely a set of isolated questions.

Mass media perform several functions but all of them may not be of equal importance to every individual among the recipients. The individual's perception is based on frames of reference. The frames of reference are comprised of the past experience, attitudes, beliefs and values of the individual.

The determinants of attitudes are genetic factors, physiological factors, direct experience with the stimulus object, individual's experience with total environment, social communication and of all the most important being the values of an individual.



Potter's circular model, with its potential expansion, takes mores and commitments

It is good to keep in mind that the battle for the hearts of people is not just in our own time but is as old as human history where there has been a constant effort to bring people together in communities through values and the available media. Value formation depends lot on the media programme loyalties.

Television and Sociability

Television viewing curbs socialising in the society. The more time spent with television the less time available for play

with friends, especially outdoor play.

Television Viewing by Young Children

By all accounts, children begin watching television as a steady habit at around the age of 2½, although there is some evidence that children are aware of some things about television and like it, as early as 6 months of age. Infants not only watch television but imitate them as well.

Percentage of children watching television regularly for ages 2-9 (information from Schramm, Lyle and Parker, 1961).

Age	Percentage Watching TV as a regular habit
2	14
3	37
4	65
5	82
6	91
7	94
8	95
9	96

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is qualitative in approach. A qualitative study refers to a study on behavioural aspects like attitudes, values and actions based on the former that cannot be quantified. The study is the objective assessment of values.

A percentile rating is given to the data collected to study the disparity between the respondent's opinions. The rating is also done to determine the ratio of the time spent by children watching television and involving themselves in other activities.

Conclusion

In our quest for ethnicity and the preservation of our values we will have to guard against producing an insularity which would be counterproductive. The genius lies in blending the traditional and the modern. We open windows and doors and allow the wind to breeze through, yet not allow ourselves to be blown off our feet.

In the fact that the present generation are gadgets bugs and lack social skills. To overcome the dependency on digital media especially the Television, so called "idiot Box", our socialization process must revert to the olden times where family quality time was observed, grandmother tales were told to children and their social skills were developed by the family as an agent of socialization, blending with modernity.

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