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An Empirical Study of Parental Mediation in Islamabad, Pakistan

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Abstract: *This research aims to enhance knowledge of children's media usage on daily basis, their parents' perspectives and mediation regarding their children media usage activities in Islamabad, Pakistan. A better understanding of the experiences of children's media usage provides the necessary context for all the stakeholders to judge whether children use media devices critically or they get more exposure towards harmful impact. The finding suggests that with the growing possibilities of media among children, to control or restrict their media related activities is not sufficient rather children need to be prepared to critically analyze the media. Thus, this study proposes the need of media literacy for children empowerment at primary school level. Therefore, this study can contribute the literature in terms of what mediation strategies are adopted by the parents in Islamabad, Pakistan to monitor their children's media related activities at home.*

Key Words: Children, Empowerment, Media Literacy, Parental Mediation

Introduction

This research aims to enhance knowledge of children's media usage on daily basis and their parents' perspectives and mediation regarding their children media usage activities in Islamabad, Pakistan. An understanding of the experiences of children's media usage provides the necessary context for all the stakeholders to judge whether children use media devices critically or they get more exposure towards harmful impact. During the past few years, in Pakistan children spend more time in front of TV, computer, Internet, smart phone, and other electronic gadgets. Concerns related to children's inability to critically evaluate media messages have stimulated the need of media literacy in

Pakistan. In order to encourage the beneficial effects and minimize the harmful influence of media on children, media literacy is extremely important to prepare children who are the most vulnerable /group of media influence and enable them to distinguish between reality and fakeness created by media. Moreover, it is significant to teach media literacy to school age children, especially now with more children being exposed to media at a younger age. This study results surely provide information to all stakeholders including parents and teachers about the possible harmful effects of media on children in the current situation. This research can become a source of information for educators who receive

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high amount of hesitancy from parents and teachers to permit their children to get access to different media technologies by providing the justification of their reluctance.

Literature Review

Parental concerns regarding negative effects of media on children were more likely to be engaged in parental mediation (Nathanson et al., 2002). Parents believed that engaging in parental mediation activities would result in the decrease of media impacts on their children (Rasmussen, 2013). Vittrup (2009) mentioned that some parents are unable to spend enough time with children and for that reason, they are quite unaware of their children's television viewing patterns and exposure. Therefore, they preferred to do some restrictions and set rules, fix time for television viewing instead of negotiating talks, and discussions with their children's media-related activities. Livingstone and Helsper (2008) indicated four factors related to parental styles of mediation regarding Internet usage among teenagers, "active co-use", "interaction restrictions", "technical restrictions", "monitoring". Carlsson (2006) stressed parents to protect their children who were "more impressionable, less critical" from the harmful media content until they reached the level of maturity.

Hogan (2012) highlighted that parents are responsible to have major impacts on their children's media-consuming pattern as children mostly used media devices at home in the presence of their parents. Likewise, Browne (2005) urged the importance of parents' intervention with their child's media use. In America restrictive mediation was the most frequent used mediation practice among parents that was effective and beneficial in mitigating the diverse impacts of media usage during childhood (Rideout et al., 2010). Nolan (2012) claimed co-viewing mediation as an effective style in reducing the impact of television on children. Collier (2015) emphasized that media had become an integral and essential part of children daily lives, but parents had the ability to mitigate some of the adverse effects on children through parental mediation styles. In today's mediated

world parents had been facing the fast-growing challenges in managing and controlling their children's "fast-changing" and more increasingly mobile media (Roberts et al., 2005). Buckingham (1993) found that most parents had an "anti-television" stance and felt their responsibility to do restriction and regulate their children's viewing pattern. Another study conducted by Pasquier (2001) found that parental restrictions were mostly applied with the usage of TV and telephone. Nathanson and Cantor (2000) observed that parents' restrictive mediation was actually "doing more harm than good" with their children. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) found that restrictive mediation was ineffective for the empowerment of children and failed to develop critical thinking skills among children as compared to active mediation. Steyer (2003) encouraged the involvement of parents in children media experiences and recommended to "set a media diet and stick to it, set clear rules regarding your child's media use in other homes, and switch the dial to 'off'".

Walsh (1994) suggested parents to develop strict strategies and rules to limit the television usage among children. Parents who had shown more fear and concern of the popular culture were more drawn to protectionism and hence, it would be easier to educate them about media literacy to overcome their concern (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001). The different past studies revealed the co-viewing mediation strategy was adopted by the parents with their children's television viewing (Strasburger, 1992; Valerio et al., 1997). Parents while co-viewing might come across any inappropriate content such as violent or sexual content. Therefore, with proper discussion and explanation regarding such content proved useful results and protective for teenager's well-being (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002).

Co-viewing mediation was helpful in stimulating and encouraging learning among pre-school children (Rice et al., 1990). The term "co-viewing" referred to the context where parents watched television with their children and contributed to sharing and distributing their interpretation and evaluation of the content and programs with their children (Austin et al., 1990).

Nathanson and Cantor (2000) expressed the usefulness of parental mediation that yields positive results among understanding of children. Gunter et al. (1991) noted that it was difficult to co-view during the single viewing session as several different programs could be watched and might include different contradictory messages. Paavonen et al. (2009) mentioned that "Solitary viewing" had been considered a significant pedagogical concern as it increased the risk of children encountering inappropriate program or content at an early age.

Children being fearful from the horror or frightening scenes shown in movies tend to seek their "parental support" while exposing to frightening content or scenes on TV ((Valkenburg et al., 2000; Cantor, 2009; Korhonen & Lahikainen, 2008). According to Heim et al.(2007) children who received higher degree of parental monitoring were more likely to be "well adjusted, taking fewer risks with adverse health outcomes and seldom participating in anti-social activities". Roberts and Foehr (2004)mentioned that much of the media consumed by children was mostly unsupervised. Staksrud and Livingstone (2009)urged parents to have close understanding of their child's Internet usage and online risks. Parents were responsible to inform and do close monitoring of their children to ensure that cartoons were appropriate of their age level (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014). Wilson and Weiss (1993) indicated that pre-school children watched suspense movie with their older siblings were less emotionally aroused and liked the movie as compared to those who watched alone. In order to be ensure children safety from the possible harms of digital technology, parents need to be "supported and empowered" to learn about their children digital technology practices and experiences (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003).

Research Question

The present study in the light of previous literature aims to answer regarding media usage patterns of school going children in Islamabad and what parental mediation strategies applied by their parents for their media usage at homes.

Method

Six schools were randomly selected from Islamabad that includes three private and three public schools. A voluntary eighteen parents, three from each school participated in the study. Qualitative data collection method includes semi-structured interviews conducted from parents regarding their children media usage and their mediation strategies at homes.

Findings

Regarding parental mediation and media usage of children, interviews were conducted with parents of school going children. The sample is composed of slightly more mothers than fathers. The demographics of parents participated in the interview reveal that all the participants are relatively well educated. Among the mothers, five mothers hold bachelor's degree, three mothers hold master's degree, and three mothers hold MPhil degree. Nearly half of the mothers have represented the profession of teaching in a good-reputed school of Islamabad whereas, some are mentioned as housewives. Their ages are between 32-41 years. All the parents have more than one child studying in primary school. Likewise, one participating father has been working in a company based in Islamabad. He is 42 years old and holds a master's degree. This demographic information reveals that mostly parents belong to the respectable profession of teaching. This shows that participants enable to give clear picture of their children media usage at home and mediation strategies adopted at home.

According to the interview responses of the parents, it was observed that some parents do not have much discussion and conversation with their children regarding mediated content. Parents being busy in jobs are unable to spend time with their children. Due to this inability to spend time with children, they have no idea of which programs on TV and what activities their children are engaged in. The parents said:

"Normally, I hide the device before children wake up in the morning and later, I give the device to the children. I allow my son to watch TV not more than one hour. I usually permit him to watch TV for one hour" (P6)

"I always monitor my kids' activities regarding what they watch or download from YouTube or any App they download. I prefer myself to download videos for them so they may be protected from any harmful contents." (P8)

Mostly parents mentioned that they adopt restrictive mediation at home. Most parents whose children play games on a gaming device say that they have rules or restrictions about the games their children play. Parents usually set the time limitation for the device usage among children to avoid the extreme exposure. Moreover, some parents set the password to various devices such as computer, Internet, smart phone, and iPad so that children cannot use the device without their knowledge. The parents said:

"When I want my child to focus on the studies, I put some restrictions on television watching, Internet, and videogames. After this I have seen that my son pays attention to his schoolwork" (P6)

"At home my child started spending more time with the devices so his study time was badly affected. So, with my restrictions on his device usage enable him to be more focused and attentive" (P10)

Some parents adopt active mediation in home and more often engage in discussions with their children-viewing pattern. Parents often discuss with their children regarding different TV programs including movies, and cartoons. Parents stated that children might come across some issues and difficulty in understanding media content. The children do not easily understand some programs; therefore, children need parents' help and guidance. Thus, parents sit with their children and watch the programs together and share things with each other so their children would be better able to understand the programs.

Some parents adopt co-viewing mediation strategy with their children at home. Parents and children watch television or other media related activities together. Parents mentioned that parental involvement with children viewing patterns and activities would enable parents to understand the content their children are exposed to. With this mediation strategy children learn

lots of things from parents' point of view and become active users of media and get motivated to ask several questions which they do not understand while watching.

Discussion and Conclusion

Parents are often working and do not spend much time with their children. As a result, children have more unsupervised time and develop trust on media. The constant media exposure of children makes them to believe that whatever shown on television or any information available on Internet is actual and real. Media exposure affects the academic achievements of the children. Children do not spend quality time with their studies, which results in their poor academic performance in the school. However, parents are concerned if children are alone at home and using the Internet, therefore, parents try to be at home to monitor their children Internet activities. It is understood that growing possibilities of media usage among children would increase the media risks among them. Consequently, this finding suggests that with the growing possibilities of media among children, to control or restrict their media related activities is not sufficient rather children need to be prepared to critically analyze the media. In the current situation of children media using habits, this study urges to prepare children through media literacy education. Children need to be well prepared to use media actively and sensibly. Thus, this study proposes the need of media literacy for children empowerment at primary school level. This study insists the need of media literacy for children to learn more about media rather than more focus on learning with media technology.

Based on parents' responses, parents use different mediation strategies and frequency of these strategies also vary as well. Parents mainly adopt restrictive mediation style at home and control TV viewing among children by setting the time limit for watching. For the Internet, the most common rule applied is to restrict the number of hours when children are online. Parents have imposed various restrictions on the technology to monitor children usage and progress. Parents mostly restrict children's media usage through

establish rules for their children television time and for internet usage. Some parents take technical precautions such as hiding the device or through password to limit their internet usage from potential inappropriate contents or exposure while some take psychological precautious such as counselling like suggestions and to control activities. All parents mentioned to limit children's computer, Internet, and TV usage in private spaces as a strategy to monitor content, keeping computers in family common rooms where parents can easily keep an eye on what their children are doing. The second most common rule is related to adult supervision where children are allowed to use media devices under the supervision of parents. Parents revealed that their supervision and monitoring would be effective for the children so that they can make healthy and accurate decisions related to media. Parents believe that they need to teach children not to believe everything they watch on TV, as it does not portray the reality each time. Therefore, parents need to limit their children viewing patterns and monitor their activities on regular basis. Therefore, this study shows that parents generally adopt restrictions may be because they do not know much about Internet or technicalities of computer so they consider restricting children a better practice. Parents generally set password to restrict children access. The lack of parental guidance and assistance is not considered appropriate as later children can use device in other place without having the knowledge of parents. On the other hand, some parents often discuss with their children and keep on asking their media related activities. This is because parents at work are always concerned for their children activates both in schools and homes whereas; some parents do not involve in any kind of discussion with their children's media related activities.

Furthermore, some parents adopt co-viewing mediation style and engage and participate in discussion while watching TV with their children, whereas; some children informed that their parents do not involve in their media related activities. Some parents are still not actively engaged with their children viewing patterns. In stark contrast, only 19% of parents use the Internet with their children and a mere 40% play computer or video games together with their children. Children more often discuss and share Internet related activities with their parents. It clearly shows that majority parents do not seem to be mediating or participating in their children's media usage activities other than television, which can be dangerous as the Internet and video games frequently expose children to violent and aggressive content. Due to this lack of parental involvement with their children get them more engaged with media devices. This study suggests that a high level of parental monitoring should occur when children use devices. Parents themselves should monitor their children device usage. At least, parents should keep devices such as television, computer or laptop and Internet in common room so that they can provide them better guidance and mediation regarding media devices.

In addition, overwhelming desires among parents to have control over their children's device usage, including the content their children have access to. Whereas children informed that parents mostly do not permit their children to share their own personal information on Internet to others. Children are not permitted to have social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter. Parents do not allow them because they are worried that how their children will use Internet in their absence. In this context, this study suggests that it is imperative for parents to be aware of the latest technology usage among children to enhance their understanding. Therefore, parents should tell their children in very simple and clear language about rules and regulations and would be results if their rules are violated by their children. Parents can restrict their children media activities through proper time limits. On the other hand, some children complained that their parents do not permit them to use media devices and some parents are unaware of their media activities. Therefore, it is very important for parents to know and monitor the media activities of their children. Even sometimes children hide their media activities from their parents. Parents need to be informed about potential risks of media contents for their children and how their children can use media

wisely. Parent-child interaction related to media should be encouraged so that both parents and children know about risks and advantages of media. It is shared responsibility of all stakeholders to bring media literacy awareness among parents for their children empowerment through proper parental mediation.

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