

Parental Mediation of TV content—Perception of Young Indian viewers

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Abstract

Young people in India spend enormous time watching television. They occupy themselves in watching TV during day and night in order to escape from the pressures of daily life. Such exposure to TV raises concerns about its undesirable outcomes and entails the need for mediation of TV viewing habits. In order to explore the mediation strategies of TV content (programs and ads) followed by parents, the present study used a structure questionnaire distributed to 714 young viewers of age category 15-24 years to examine their perceptions about the type of mediation followed in Indian families. The sample has been drawn from schools and colleges in three cities of Punjab (India). The study also tries to investigate the differences between constructs of perceived mediation strategies for TV content across age. Data have been analyzed through descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings of the study revealed three mediation styles used for TV programs manifest as 'active mediation', 'co-viewing' and 'restrictive mediation' and two styles for TV ads viz. 'restrictive mediation' and 'active mediation'. More so, younger viewers perceived greater use of mediation for TV programs than their older counterparts. The implications of this paper are finally presented.

Keywords:

Perception, TV programs, mediation, India

Introduction

Children across the globe spend a lot of time watching TV. Gortmaker et al. (1996) revealed that children in America watch TV for more than 5 hours in a day. While Burdette and Whitaker (2005) reported that children watch TV for nearly 3 hours daily. Hesketh et al. (2006) in their study in Australia revealed that on an average children watch TV for 163 minutes daily and such viewership increases with age of children. Census of India (2011) reported that over 47% of Indians have television sets in their house and on an average a viewer spends around 130 minutes in a day watching TV. Likewise, other researchers have also reported that Indian children watch TV for nearly two hours

in a day (Ahluwalia and Singh, 2011; Mittal, 2009; Kaur and Singh, 2011). TV viewing is also seen to be the favourite activity of Indian children (Indiantelevision.com, 2006). Indian adolescents also report to watch TV for 2-3 hours daily (Phatak and Singh, 1986; Abrol et al., 1991; Verma and Larson (2002) and almost majority of young adolescents watch TV in the evening. Verma and Larson (2002) in their study also found that adolescents watch TV on an average for 12 hours per week. Therefore, marketers use television as a means of communication as it affords access to children at much earlier age than any other media (Kaur and Singh, 2006).

TV viewing has some desirable effects which manifest in various forms such as watching TV provides knowledge about different products/services available in the market, helps in knowing the latest life style trends, entertains the viewers in different ways, helps in academic activities of viewers, providing pleasure to the lives of viewers and also helps to relieve daily stress of viewers (Verma and Larson, 2002). Yet, growing exposure of TV to children has raised some issues and concerns. Watching excessive TV is seen to be associated with aggression (Paik and Comstock, 1994; Singer et al., 1998) violence (Gerbner and Gross, 1981), and sexuality (Brown, 1991) in children. Furthermore, excessive watching of TV causes sleep difficulties, sleep anxiety, and shortened sleep duration (Owens et al., 1999; Paavonen et al., 2006), leads to obesity in viewers due to eating disorders while watching TV (Strasburger, 2011), decreases the habit of reading among viewers, and reduces their physical activities (Gortmaker et al. 1999) such as indulging in physical exercises and outdoor games. So, this growing concern about effects of TV viewing entails that necessary steps must be taken to protect young viewers from such exposure to TV that affects them both psychologically and physiologically. The main responsibility lies with parents to regulate TV viewing of their children. So, the present paper aims to explore the mediation strategies followed by Indian parents with children in order to regulate their TV viewing habits.

Previous literature

Parental mediation

Parental mediation refers to the interactions that parents have with children and adolescents about their media use. In the literature, three types of parental mediation for TV are distinguished: a.) active mediation, which demonstrates deliberate comments and actively explaining the nature and selling intent of TV content by the parents; b.) restrictive mediation that denotes placing of restrictions on the part of TV viewing and c.) co-viewing wherein both parent-child watch TV together. Host of researchers argue that mix of these styles of mediation reflect the effective approach to guide, supervise and control the TV content (Austin et

al. 1999; Nathanson, 2001; Nathanson & Botta, 2003; Valkenburg et al. 1999). Valkenburg et al. (1999) conducted research in the Netherlands to analyze mediation styles of parents by randomly selecting 519 parents of children aged between 5-12 years. Their findings projected that educated parents, mothers, and parents of young children were more likely to use instructive and restrictive mediation than co viewing. The study concluded that out of three types of mediation styles: instructive, restrictive and social co viewing, social co viewing was most frequently used as a mediation style for parents. It was advocated that parents' own attitude towards effects of TV exposure on children determined the type of mediation followed by them. If the parents held positive attitude towards effects of TV on children, they applied active mediation and engaged more often in co-viewing (Austin et al., 1999; Nathanson, 2001; Van der Voort et al., 1992; Vankenburg et al., 1999). On the other hand, parents having negative attitude towards TV content used restrictive mediation more often (Wiman, 1983; Chan and McNeal, 2003), although they often also combined it with active discussions with their children (Nathanson, 2001; Vankenburg et al., 1999; Van der Voort et al., 1992). A few comparative studies also revealed the parental mediation strategies followed across different cultures. Rose et al. (1998) made a comparative study with US and Japanese mothers and found that American mothers held more negative attitude towards advertisements directed at children. Hence, they exercised more restrictions to control television viewing in children as compared to their Japanese counterparts. In addition to this, Mukherji (2005) in a comparative study on parental mediation with Indian, Japanese, and American mothers found that Indian mothers had the least negative attitude towards television advertising aimed at children. That's why they exercised least control over their children's television viewing and had more discussions with children than their Japanese counterparts. Warren (2001) studied the role of parental involvement in parental mediation of television viewing. He studied two dimensions of parental involvement: accessibility and engagement in childrearing and shared activities. The findings of his study revealed that parental involvement in the form of discussions about personal topics; expressions of affection for their children significantly influenced the pattern of television mediation. Also, parents who created an environment of warm and open communication in family were able to derive more meaningful content out of mediation. In contrast, parents who showed less involvement with their children in shared activities and created controlled/disciplined environment demonstrated low level of influence in mediation of television content. Further Warren et al., (2002) corroborated these findings. From the foregoing discussion, it has been seen that most of the previous research concerning parental mediation have taken the parents' perspective (Nathanson, 2001; Mukherji

(2005); Valkenburg et al., 1999; Rose et al. 1998) about mediation strategies used by them in order to mitigate the negative effects of TV viewing on their children age below 15 years. Also a few studies especially in India studied the concerned issue with mothers as sampling unit (Soni and Singh, 2012). But, there is dearth of research that has taken child's perception of parental mediation strategies used with them. Therefore, the present study endeavors to fill the gap in literature by examining parental mediation strategies in India through primary responses of children. The present also attempts to investigate differences in perception about mediation across age of young TV viewers.

Research hypothesis

Previous research reports that age of children predicts the type of mediation parents follow in order to regulate effects of TV on them. Some observers have hypothesized that parents of younger children engage in all types of television mediation more frequently (Lin and Atkin, 1989; Van der Voort et al., 1992) than their older counterparts. Valkenburg et al., (1999) argued that parents of young children were more likely to use instructive and restrictive mediation than co viewing. They argued that it is the concern of parents about the negative effects of TV on their children that forces them to engage in instructive and restrictive mediation than co-viewing more frequently. Barkin et al. (2006) also found that instructive mediation has been used more frequently by parents of younger children in contrast to the parents of older children. Most of studies documented in the literature also exhibit that older children were subject to fewer viewing rules as they were considered as more media savvy. On the basis of foregoing literature, the present study proposes to undertake this issue in India through the following hypothesis:

H1: There are no significant differences between young TV viewers of different age groups in perceiving parental mediation of TV content (ads and programs).

Research Methodology

The present study has been conducted primarily to get children's responses rather than their parents' responses because children's own perspective about parental mediation would better indicate mediation styles than parents' perspective (Rossiter and Robertson, 1975; An and Lee, 2010). A structured questionnaire was administered to 755 students of schools and colleges who were enrolled in classes ranging from matriculation (class X) to post graduation in three cities—Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana of Punjab (India) during the period of January, 2013 to June, 2013. These three cities were chosen to represent the three traditional regions of Punjab—Amritsar (Majha), Jalandhar (Doaba) and Ludhiana (Malwa) incorporating sample as per population proportion in age

category 15 to 24 years with respect to these three cities (Census, 2001). Judgment sampling has been used to select schools and colleges that enrolled students with various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Out of 755 students, 714 students responded to the survey (51.3% boys). In the sample, majority of respondents (51.40%) belonged to the age category of 15 to 19 years with pocket money ranging from INR 251—500 (46.8%), with monthly family income less than INR 50000 (59.8%). The respondents reported that mothers are their primary caregiver (61.6%). Also, 48.7% mothers of respondents were graduates while 44.4% fathers were graduates.

Data have been analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) through SPSS 19.0.

Operational measures

All measures were adopted from previous research and modified to achieve the objectives of this study.

Parental mediation of television programs

A fifteen item scale was adapted from Valkenburg et al. (1999) based on three dimensions of parental mediation strategies including active mediation, restrictive mediation and co-viewing. Specifically, active mediation style was measured by five statements on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The statements included: (AM1) 'My parent(s) try to help me in understanding, what I see on TV', (AM2) 'My parent(s) point out why some things TV characters do are good', (AM3) 'My parent(s) point out why some things TV characters do are bad', (AM4) 'My parent(s) explain reasons why TV characters do what they do', (AM5) 'My parent(s) explain what something on TV really means'. These five items constituted a reliable scale ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.67$, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.755). The higher score of active mediation indicates that parents often explain, discuss and interpret the content of TV programs.

Co-viewing style of parents' mediation was measured by five statements on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The statements included: (CV1) 'My parent(s) watch TV with me because we both like a program', (CV2) 'My parent(s) watch TV with me because of a common interest in a program', (CV3) 'My parent(s) watch TV with me just for the fun of it', (CV4) 'My parent(s) watch his/her favorite program with me', (CV5) 'My parent(s) laugh with me about things he/she see on TV'. These five statements constituted a reliable scale ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.59$, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.716). A higher score of co-viewing shows that parents often watch TV programs with children.

In addition to this, restrictive mediation was measured by using five statements on a 4-point scale ranging from 1

(never) to 4 (often). The statements included: (RM1) 'My parent(s) tell me to turn off the TV when I am watching an inappropriate program, (RM2) 'My parent(s) set specific viewing hours for me', (RM3) 'My parent(s) forbid me to watch certain shows', (RM4) 'My parent(s) limit the amount of time that I may watch TV', (RM5) 'My parent(s) specify in advance the shows that I may watch'. These five statements constituted a reliable scale ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.73$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.746$). A higher score of parents' restrictive mediation indicates that parents often restrict the amount of programs watched.

Parental mediation of television advertising (ads)

A ten item scale was adapted from Valkenburg et al. (1999). The scale consisted of two dimensions viz., active mediation and restrictive mediation. Active mediation included five statements: (am1) 'My parent(s) believes that advertising depicts products as better than they really are', (am2) 'My parent(s) says that advertising does not always tell the truth', (am3) 'My parent(s) argues that the purpose of advertising is to sell products', (am4) 'My parent(s) considers that all advertised products are not of good quality', and (am5) 'My parent(s) regards that some advertised products are not good for youth'. These five items reflect a reliable scale ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.55$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.631$). A higher score on this scale exhibits that parents use active mediation more frequently with children.

Restrictive mediation was measured by five statements and these statements are (rm1) 'My parent(s) turns off the television when I am watching commercials', (rm2) 'My parent(s) thinks that I should not watch commercials networks because advertisers broadcast too many commercials', (rm3) 'My parent(s) switches to a channel that broadcasts fewer commercials', (rm4) 'My parent(s) does

not allow me to watch television advertising at all', and (rm5) 'My parent(s) insists that watch specific networks that broadcasts relatively few commercials'. It constituted a reliable scale of five items ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.72$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.794$). Responses were drawn on 4-point scale ranging from 1 'never' to 4 'often'. A higher score on this scale means that parents restrict the amount of TV commercials more frequently.

Data Analysis

Factor analytical technique has been applied to the fifteen statements of parental mediation strategies for TV programs and ten statements of parental mediation strategies for TV ads in order to summarize the perception of young TV viewers toward parental mediation strategies used for TV content (programs and ads). Data for sampling adequacy has been checked (KMO value of parents' mediation for TV programs = 0.798 and for TV ads = 0.782). The analysis initially gave three-factor solution and accounted for 49.94 per cent of total variance explained in case of mediation used for TV programs. However, three statements—CV3, CV5, and RM1 were deleted due to communalities (Hair et al. 2003). Thereafter, the analysis gave a three factor solution with twelve statements and total variance explained equaled to 56.68% (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.781$). Similarly, a two factor solution was initially obtained in case of parent's mediation of TV ads explaining 48.058% of total variance. However, one statement labeled—am1 was deleted due to low communality (Hair et al. 2003). Factor analysis was run again with nine statements (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.719$) and analysis now gave a two factor solution and total variance explained increased to 52.57%. The statement labels, names of the factors, factor loadings and communalities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of factor analysis regarding perception of young viewers toward parental mediation of TV content (programs and ads)

Mediation for TV programs	Factor loadings	Communalities
Factor 1: Active mediation (eigenvalue=3.587, Variance explained=21.175%)		
AM2 My parent (s) point out why some things TV characters do are good.	0.792	0.635
AM3 My parent (s) point out why some things TV characters do are bad.	0.780	0.616
AM4 My parent (s) explain reasons why TV characters do what they do.	0.673	0.475
AM1 My parents (s) try to help me in understanding, what I see on TV.	0.609	0.436
AM5 My parent (s) explain what something on TV really means.	0.595	0.429
Factor 2: Co-viewing (eigenvalue=1.771, Variance explained=19.589%)		
CV1 My parents (s) watch TV with me because we both like a program.	0.851	0.737
CV2 My parent (s) watch TV with me because of a common interest in a program	0.819	0.679
CV4 My parents (s) watch his/her favourite program with me.	0.681	0.473
Factor 3: Restrictive mediation (eigenvalue=1.443, Variance explained=15.916%)		
RM4 My parents (s) limit the amount of time that I may watch TV.	0.819	0.687
RM2 My parents (s) set specific viewing hours for me.	0.786	0.644
RM3 My parents (s) forbid me to watch certain shows.	0.733	0.553
RM5 My parents (s) specify in advance the shows that I may watch.	0.612	0.438

Mediation for TV ads		
Factor1: Restrictive Mediation (eigenvalue=2.929, Variance explained=31.299%)		
rm2 My parents (s) thinks that I should not watch commercials networks because advertisers broadcast too many commercials.	0.814	0.667
rm1 My parents (s) turn off the TV when I am watching commercials	0.762	0.583
rm4 My parents (s) does not allow me to watch TV advertising at all.	0.748	0.562
rm3 My parents (s) switches to a channel that broadcasts fewer commercials.	0.678	0.467
rm5 My parents (s) insists that watch specific networks that broadcast relatively few commercials.	0.676	0.468
Factor 3: Active Mediation (eigenvalue= 1.803, Variance explained=21.275%)		
am3 My parent (s) argues that the purpose of advertising is to sell products.	0.734	0.543
am2 My parent (s) says that advertising does not always tell the truth.	0.722	0.523
am4 My parent (s) considers that all advertised products are not of good quality.	0.707	0.512
am5 My parents (s) regards that some advertised products are not good for youth.	0.574	0.407

As seen from Table 1, young TV viewers perceive that parents primarily mediate TV programs *actively* with them. They report that parents explain to them the purpose and intent of programs, the reality of TV characters and explain the reasons why TV characters behave in a particular manner. Nonetheless, their parents also *watch TV programs with them* whether of their liking or just for fun. Furthermore, young viewers opine that parents impose *restrictions* on them in order to combat negative effects of television programs on them. Conversely, Table 1 also shows that young viewers perceive that parents firstly use *restrictive mediation* with them in order to reduce the influence of ads by reinforcement of negative beliefs about TV advertising. At the second place they think that parents use *active mediation* and explain to them that ads do not rely on facts as well as do not tell the truth always.

A comparison of factor solutions of parental mediation used

for TV programs and TV ads reveals that respondents perceive that their parents primarily use *active mediation* for TV programs while *restrictive mediation* for TV ads with them. They think that parents consider that ads have some negative influences on them and shielding from these influences can be possible through imposing restrictions. Conversely, young viewers think that parents consider impact of TV programs positively and hence use active mediation with them at the first place. This suggests that respondents perceive that mediation for ads and programs happens through different parental strategies.

Hypothesis testing

In order to test afore stated hypothesis, ANOVA has been applied. Table 2 shows means, standard deviations and F-values for factors related to perceived parent's mediation of TV content (programs and ads) across age of young viewers.

Table 2 Means, S.D. and F-values for factors related to perceived parental mediation strategies of TV content for age

Perceived parental mediation	15-19 years N= 367		20-24 years N= 347		F-value	P-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
1. Active mediation of TV programs	2.65	0.64	2.48	0.69	11.313	0.001*
2. Coviewing of TV programs	2.78	0.50	2.68	0.58	6.956	0.009*
3. Restrictive mediation of TV programs	2.67	0.49	2.48	0.53	25.121	0.000*
4. Restrictive mediation of TV ads	1.89	0.70	1.86	0.73	0.495	0.482
5. Active mediation of TV ads	2.99	0.57	2.97	0.64	0.225	0.636

*Significant at 1% level

The results of F-values, as shown in Table 2, reveal that for mediation strategies used for TV programs viz. 'active mediation', 'co-viewing' and 'restrictive mediation', there are statistically significant differences in mean values of responses of TV viewers belonging to age category in 15-19 years and 20-24 years at 1% level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for these mediation strategies. It hereby means that TV viewers belonging to age category 15-19 years perceive higher parental mediation (in all three types) of TV programs in contrast to the viewers who are in age category of 20-24 years. Whereas, for the mediation strategies used for TV ads, the present study found no significant differences in responses of TV viewers in respective age categories. Therefore, it can be concluded from above analysis that TV viewers perceive that mediation strategies are used differently for programs but not for ads.

Conclusion and implications

The primary aim of the study was to examine the perception of young TV viewers towards mediation strategies followed by their parents. Based on the previous literature and effects of TV mediation, the study revealed three mediation styles used for TV programs which manifest as active mediation, co-viewing and restrictive mediation and two mediation styles for TV ads viz. restrictive mediation and active mediation. The factor structure as outlined in the study goes in line with Valkenburg et al. (1999) and Soni and Singh (2012). Another important finding of the study is that TV viewers belonging to age category 15-19 years perceive greater use of mediation for TV programs than in age category 20-24 years. This supports previous literature that parents of younger children engage in all types of television mediation more frequently (Lin and Atkin, 1989; Van der Voort et al., 1992). So, the present results reinforce that younger children perceive mediation strategies in a manner which is similar to parents. This also points to effectiveness of parental media mediation strategies. The present study purports that parents can play an effective role in protecting children from incessant marketing efforts directed at young media users.

Limitations of the study

The present study is confined to three cities of Punjab only. This may somewhat effect the generalizability of the findings. Also, the present study has been conducted with survey method. So, some of the drawbacks of this method may have affected the responses in the study.

Suggestions for future research

The present study has been confined to mediation used for TV content (programs and ads) only. Other media such as internet can be included and comparative study can be planned concerning parental mediation. More so, the

present study considered the perception of TV viewers toward parental mediation across age. Other demographic variables such as gender, income, education status etc. can be used in subsequent studies.

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