

EFFECT OF TV PROGRAMME COMPREHENSIBILITY ON PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S VISUAL ATTENTION TO TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT: The society, in which we live plays an enormous role in shaping the attitudes and behaviour of all those who are a part of it. Humans, as social beings are constantly being bombarded with information from the environment which can influence the way we perceive the world and also shape our attitudes and beliefs, gradually moulding each and every one of us into an 'accepted' member of society. In the past these influences which dictate how we should behave in a 'normal' society have emanated from sources such as the community, family and school. However, in today's world, the influences these institutions have seem to be declining as our changing society adapts to a more 'technological age'. The growth of the mass media has had a significant impact on the lives of everyone, with specifically television becoming an enormously powerful medium. Television is the most powerful and exciting means of communication ever devised by man. It calls for the use of auditory as well as visual senses of the learners in receiving knowledge. With the help of it we can see and hear what is happening a thousand miles away.

KEYWORDS: Television, growth, mass media

INTRODUCTION

The advent of 'television' is one of the most significant changes in people's lives in the 20th century. Television was invented by Bayerd (U.S.A.) in 1944. 1946 was the important year in United States in the history of television, when there were 10,000 receivers; by 1984, there were 100,000 and in 1962, 49,000,000 house holds had television. One out of the seven homes had two or more sets, a total of 56,000,000 receivers. At that time , close to half of American homes had two or more television (Breckenbidge and Vincent, 1972) In India, television began as an experimental service in 15 August 1959, with limited transmission in Delhi. The regular service began in 1965. In 1972, television broadcast began in the second city- Mumbai and by 1975 in Calcutta, Chennai, Srinagar, Amritsar and Lucknow. In 1976, television set-up was delinked from AIR and given a separate status. August 15, 1982, saw another landmark in the history of television when color television was introduced in India. After INSAT-IA became operational, common national programmes were started for the entire networks. In 1984, a second channel was added to Delhi to provide an alternative viewing option.

Television is exciting. Its potential as a mass media is unquestioned. Sitting in Delhi, people can witness a war in the Gulf and feel that they are watching history unfold. Many writers appreciate the fact that TV is a 'Window to the world': it brings real life drama, action and happenings in to the home of the viewer who can, sitting comfortably and even alone, participate in real and imagined events without having to stir, talk, share or even explore. Many of them believe that the very technology of television determines the nature and impact of its influence on the individual viewer. In 'Television and Children', while emphasising the special qualities of television when compared with other media, Dorr,(1983) says", It is clear why television can be singled out. It presents life like experiences for viewers to enjoy and it presents them much more effectively and often than do such other communication media as radio, newspapers, books, magazines, computers, films and comics. Television stands out from other media because it can present more life like content than most other media and is generally used more than any other of them. These characteristics make this medium important for everyone especially for children."

SATELLITE TELEVISION

There is perhaps no parallel in human history to the speed and extent of spread that has been witnessed by satellite television in the last one decade. There has been a sea change in the reach and access to television with the spread of satellite cable operation since it made a beginning at the time of 'Gulf War' in 1991 (Jadav, 2000). With the opening of skies and breaking of national state boundaries for satellite television rapid globalization of television scheme is taking place. Satellite TV today has emerged as a new frontier in international relations and an important tool of marketing goods and services globally and regionally cutting across national boundaries.

With this invention, the expansion of television in India has got enormous boost. Estimates about the number of cable operators in India are from 30 to 50 thousand each having a clientele of about 200 to 500 households; with total reach to 15 to 20 million people. They are doing good business in information and entertainment. They are providing choice to their customers in variety of entertainment, such as Music TV, Sports, channel, Zee News, Hindi channels, News across the world through BBC, world service, CNN, Discovery and National Geographic channel etc. They, besides distributing programs received through satellite channels and video films, even live the local cultural activities and functions to their customers. Some of the political parties and the contesting candidates have also used cable and satellite television for campaign adding a new dimension in electioneering in India.

Thus, today, with doordarshan and other channels TV covers 85% of country's population. About 64.7 million television sets are estimated in the country. But the growth rate of TV sets is expected to be three million annually. Most of the TV sets are in metropolitan cities and towns. However, to facilitate viewing in villages and urban slums, community sets have been provided in villages and tribal areas. (Jadav, 1999).

GENERAL IMPACT OF TELEVISION VIEWING

Today, people of all ages spend a large amount of their time in watching television, the New York city library reported, that "since the advent of television there has been an increased use of good library materials at all ages. Since television does not necessarily require reading capacity, it can reach even illiterate slum dwellers, which can thus pick up advanced ideas and terminology," (Lewis, 1961).

It is said that, "One picture is worth a thousand words", is absolutely true in case of television. It offers a reality and a variety of experiences that are not being easily gained by other means. So, now it has made its reach up to most of the families and therefore, its impact on people is very deep and more permanent. (Sampat, 1990).

Television Journalist Nupur Basu's documentary on "impact of satellite television on social, cultural and political life in South Asia in the last ten years", shows that TV really is playing a responsible role. An hour-long documentary filmed in different parts of South Asia, from Pakistan to Sri Lanka, remote villages in Bangladesh, Nepal and India shows the TV has brought a great change in human life style. Through it people get latest information in any field and hence the world is contracting for them. They get same information as anybody else in any other part of the world. People are now ready to grasp and accept new knowledge and are trying to raise their standard of living.

In a Study in America (Kohut, December, 2000, Pew research center of the people and the Press), it was found that the most Americans interested in presidential tug of war (between Al Gore and George W. Bush) in Florida, were watching television to follow the developments. The study which tracked Internet use before and after election found that most of the people were using television than Internet (The new latest technology). Kohut comments on this, "We are surprised that people are not going to the new on line only site and prefer television to Internet," (Election Junkies prefer TV to Internet" a report Times of India, 10th December 2000).

Television's impact could be seen in capital Delhi in November 2000, when all cable operators in the capital went on a strike. The 72 hours long strike made people lonely, unhappy, depressed, bored uninterested and irritated. Psychiatrist Achal Bhagat said about it, "all this depression has got something to do with the break in continuity. TV was an important pivot in their lives. And, the interruption of something that has been constant for a long time can make people feel unusually bored and snap easily".

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING: SOME RELATED FACTS

The mind of child is like a blank paper the pages of which are in the process of being written/filled by the experiences and the knowledge and the knowledge, that its mind acquires from this world itself and this process gradually leads it to attain maturity as it grows up. So whatever they see in front of them has great effect on their minds. As the children grow up to in a social world, they must learn to use and understand the modes of communication in their culture. In many modern societies, television has become an important means of communication, the one used extensively by children, (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, Mc Combs and Roberts, 1978).

The child's exposure to TV is sometimes direct and early, as his mother or the baby sitter pushes his bassinet in front of the TV to keep him amused. This is more likely to happen in families where parents have had little more than lower grade school education, hold blue collar jobs and cannot afford baby sitters, (Schramm et al, 1961).

All investigators agree that children spend at least 2 or 3 hours a day watching television. In a comprehensive study of the United States, Schramm and his co-workers found that an average 3 year old viewed television for about 45 minutes per day. By the age of 4 the viewing time averages 1½ hrs per day. By the age of 5 the average was more than 2 hrs. per day. Everyday children under 12 spends some seventy million hours as television viewers, it is then evident, that television is one of the greatest source of common experience in the lives of children along with the home and later the school, in total.

It is proposed that young children look at television because of their cognitive involvement with and active comprehension of the content. Comprehension should dramatically increase over the preschool years as a result of increasing receptive language skills an expanded base of world knowledge and increased skills specific to interpreting the television medium, (Anderson and Lorch, 1981, Huston and Wright, 1983).

The result of a study indicates that low TV viewers were more responsive to the change in conditions. High viewers may have become accustomed to television since it's presence did not affects their level of distractibility. Low viewers may differ from high viewers in their reactions to stimuli, a difference which may have caused their low preference for the TV medium. Their high level of self stimulation may be related to their preferred level of sensory input (Berlyn, 1960).

It is found that television has great impact on children because it transmits ideas and experiences through eyes and ears and emphasizes the use concrete and non verbal experience in the learning process. It has specific advantages for children:

- Helps to learn more
- Helps to remember longer
- Helps in overcoming languages barriers
- Makes learning more concrete, meaningful, permanent and interesting.
- Fosters continuity of thoughts.
- Stimulates self activity

In fact, television has greatly influenced on children's mental abilities, their choices, their way of thinking and looking at things. It supplies a concrete basis for conceptual thinking and gives rise to meaningful concepts. Hence it offers the best antidote available for the disease of verbalism.

Almost as soon as television became a mass media, social critics expressed concern about its possible harmful effects on children. In a study it was found that violent programs affected child's behavior.

Children who saw violent programs decreased in tolerance for frustration, interpersonal aggression (hitting, calling names teasing and the like) was higher after violent programs than after the other programs.

REVIEW OF LITRATURE

Surveys (Hess and Goldman, 1962) have also found the utility of television for mothers. Mothers observed that their children were quieter and less bother some in the home while they were viewing TV. The implication was that the television could ease a substantial part of the burden of child care by reducing the need for parental control. The national society for prevention of blindness has stated that television does not usually affect child's eyes adversely if the rules of proper seating (not on the floor immediately in front of the screen, clear focusing of the set, and proper lighting in the room) are observed.

Hustan and Wright (1984) studied on children's comprehension of televised formal features with masculine and feminine connotations. In study, masculine and feminine content were presented on television with different types of formal production features (i.e. action, music and camera techniques). Children from grade 1 through 6 were presented with three typed of stimuli in which masculine and feminine formal features were varied. They were asked to judge whether each stimulus was better suited to advertise a feminine or masculine sex-typed toy. Children recognized the sex-typed connotations of the formal features presented in all three types of stimuli. The results demonstrated that children comprehend sex-typed connotations at the subtle level television formal features.

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