Chapter 1
Introduction

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1.1.1 Historical Perspective and Influence of Mass Media

Like the rest of the world our society is also influenced by the ideals of the Mass Media. The media has played a crucial role in shaping and modifying the life styles of majority of the people. Media has also been a major force in shaping the present culture. Unlike the print media; electronic media have shown an almost instantaneous impact on the culture. Television, for example, has come to the established an important entertainer in the homes. As a result it has made an indelible mark on the minds of individuals as well as the society as a whole. Technically, television has changed the tone and tenor of conveying new ideas to people. It has aroused the curiosity of quite a few researchers to study a person’s relationship with the television. There were days when people learnt about ‘life’ and the ways of living through experiences, experiments, logic, intuition and senses. Time has changed a lot and the coming generation doesn’t even like to depend on their friends and family. For them the magic is in the ‘ICE’ (Information, Communication and Entertainment) age and television is attracting their fancy now a day's.

Surely, the media (including print, electronic, and cyber media) has been serving the people well. It has informed them, educated them and improved their living standard, and off-course, entertained them also.

The proponents and opponents have held divergent views about the media impact whenever a new medium arrived, whether it was films in and around 1920’s or radio in early 1930’s or the TV in late 1940s. In India, the television was introduced as a medium of communication for development and quality knowledge. It ushered in a creative revolution across the globe by wrapping creative ideas in multiple variations of sight, sound and spoken world. The story of development of Television as medium of mass entertainment has many claimants but it was J. L. Baird who first recorded a mechanical television production in 1884, when Thomas Edison invented telephonoscope. This patented discovery, followed by many others, paved the way for future electronic inventions and creations. The numbers of antennas on the rooftop grew day-by-day all over the world and India was no exception. And then the satellite boom opened the flood gate for the transnational and world television service to begin capturing the international audience. It is pertinent to mention here that, India, traditionally labelled as the country of laggards, is now leading the world in the spread
of satellite communication. Today, one can sit at home and simultaneously watch the events that are taking place in the very remote corners of the world.

Media in all its manifestations has been the epicentre of unending discussions, debates and controversies since its very inception. More frequently, its role has been vividly described as dubious and condemned more than it has been appreciated. The issues raised by it have seldom found favour even with its most ardent audiences. Everybody, consciously or unconsciously, has been using media as a substitute for quenching one’s many types of thirst, to hog the limelight or to damage others, to meet one’s personal ends or motives.

Every new communication medium that has appeared and spread widely has made people express concerns regarding the effects of the medium, especially on children and teenagers. In the 1920s and 1930s, when motion pictures matured as a major mass medium and watching movies became a national pastime for family entertainment, questions were raised and change were put about the possible harmful effects of cinema on children.

### 1.1.2 The Advent of a New Media

Scientists have done experiments at various laboratories and university centres have contributed to the development of Television. NBC began a regular television service in 1939 in the US. Soon 10 commercial stations were licensed and quite a few companies were manufacturing home receivers. At the close of war more stations came up and in the ensuing competition there were around chaos in the broadcasting arena because of the intervention of one station's signal with another's. The federal communications commission in 1948 stopped further licensing of stations.

Following the elimination of barriers against the foundation of new TV stations, TV broadcasting stations proliferated. In 1952, there were 108 stations in the US to which another 200 were added by 1954 and yet another 150 by 1956. American television began with four networks but in 1955 it settled down to three: NBC, CBS and ABC. In 1970, there were 650 network affiliated stations. Today there are about 120 commercial stations and 360 public and educational stations in US. Broadcasts reach about 96 million households. In 1960; the Pilkington committee examined the output of commercial television projected a new channel to the BBC. This became then BBC-2.

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1. John Vivian, the media of mass communication, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 1995; p.193
2. Johnal Gilin, Television, Encyclopaedia Americana, vol 26, 1987; p 422
The era of satellite television was inaugurated in July 1962 when telecaster I satellite was launched. The first commercial communication satellite, Early Bird, was launched in 1965. This enabled the expansion of cable TV at fast pace. Cable TV had already begun its service in 1950 at Lansford, USA rapidly turned into an extensive and fast growing business. Since the era of satellite communication dawned, cable TV came to large cities. By 1965, an estimated 1.7 million homes in US were served by about 1600 cable TV systems. By 1996 there were about 11600 cable systems in operation in the US and two thirds of the TV homes had cable connections. The number of channels available in Europe currently stands at 80 national channels, 900 local and regional channels and 140 satellite channels. European TV audience, specially, adults are satisfied with their domestic channels. However children are the major viewers of cable and satellite channels. Almost half of their viewing time is spent on those channels, but viewing those channels decreases with increase in age.

India’s first television was inaugurated with an all-round development schedule on September 15, 1959 initially twice a week slot for an hour each. In 1975-76, SITE (Satellite Instructional television experiment) was conducted. It was an effort to use sophisticated technology of satellite broadcasting for social education. Early eighties saw the introduction of regular satellite links between Delhi and other transmitters for the launch of national programmes. In 1982, colour television was launched. Later 1991 saw the arrival of foreign broadcasters and soon there were host of foreign channels relaying their programmes in India. Since then, revolutionary changes have taken place in the field of media communication and also in the lives of the viewers. It was really the beginning of new India. With in progress of the new economic reforms Indian economy adopted the principles of liberalization, globalization and privatization in 1991. The Indian government followed a liberal policy in permitting the transmission or reception of foreign satellite channels. This led to an inflow of programmes with varied themes, stories and presentation formats. These programmes sometimes dealt with issues related to socio cultural fabric and sometimes completely alien to our value system. Doordarshan has been fighting hard to save the premise of television for social education and development.

Undoubtedly Television always has occupied a central place in lives of the people. Today it determines the rhythm of people’s life, not only in towns, but in

\[\text{3 ibid.}\]
villages as well. The ubiquity and the real or imagined power of this medium have drawn much attention. The world views television as an electronic magical carpet, the 20th century’s creation of the technological revolution, the great instrument of persuasion and the most powerful instrument of social change. Television is truly a mass media. It cuts across demographic, geographic and psychographic boundaries to reach an anonymous and heterogeneous mass. It naturally became a relative to all. The turn of the century has brought about specialization in TV content.

Post millennium, India witnessed a hoard of television channels catering to the individual varied needs of verified sets of audiences. The focus of T.V has been on designing specified content, exclusively for different classes of viewers. Viewers are segmented on basis of gender, age, occupation, language, lifestyle and interests. Each television network now offers a bunch of channels on different genres and entertainment is the unequivocal leader. All communication related needs of a human mind, are being satisfied by television creatively. Through developments in the technical features Television has widely and expansively added to the glamour aspect of screen. The popularity of this imperative media in our lives has increased to an extent that out of 24 hours of a working professionals life, an individual putting up in a metro city, devotes three to four hours in watching or better explaining phrase surfing this medium.

Whatever arguments are given for or against the media these, don’t really answer the question; ‘can we imagine or observe our lives without television now? Not as much as this medium, wouldn’t the world seem without life or a life without soul? Anyhow, pertinent aspect that needs to be considered about role of television in our lives is that television doesn’t have choices but the users or consumers do have. Television is simply a source, gadget to be exploited or manipulated for meeting specific, whimsical or idiosyncratic needs of the audiences. Such factors as market forces having established a strong hold on our lives, long subdued and suppressed desires, finding bizarre outlets as a result of 24x7 media exposure, have raised many a question marks for the media scholars and communicologists to deal with.

Entirely media have redefined and respell our lifestyle segmentations, demographic and psychographic profiles, behavioural and variegated thought patterns. The relationship between parents and children has perhaps been disturbed the most as a consequence of onslaught of media, especially in the wake of ‘invasion from the sky’. Although media does not differentiate between masses and classes, young and old,
literates and illiterates, rich and poor, males and females, yet the most affected societal section is considered to be that of children and teenagers, who are yet to reach that mental level so discern between ‘what is good and what is bad for them’. The impact cast by the media on to them is relatively straight, incisive, and intense, irrespective of their nature and quality as they are in.

This concern is more about the growing children. Little children whose basic personality structure is in the process of being formed spend a lot of time watching television. Television appears to compete with the traditional agencies of socialization such as family, school and religious organizations. The main socializing agency is the family which is supported by the school. Parents who are charged with the responsibility of socializing the young are naturally concerned over the impact television may have on their wards. Since the time television has become an advertising-driven medium. Advertising is a separate and distinct medium both as a commercial form of mass communication and as mass communication in marketing. This has direct bearing on the lives of children and their habit patterns.

Parents always want their children to understand the norms and values of the society and not to be influenced by ideas or ideals that go contrary to those values. This concern of parents is nothing but a reflection of the inclination of the society at large, to keep its cultural foundations intact. Thus along with parents concern about their children there is a social concern about the impact of television on culture. People are apprehensive that TV will undermine the culture of India and it is considered as a potential media invader of our privacies- physical, mental and psychological and has brought about and written a psychedelic twofold effect on minds of our ‘helpless’ children. Public television during early 50s was conceived of as “an extension of educational institutions”. Sarcastically notwithstanding, there were no educational TV stations on the air until 1954.

Undoubtedly television is the pervasively dominating medium of the day bringing in its ambit an ample measure of uncertainties, especially for the youngsters of the society. As a result, children today are caught in interplay of influences in a slightly complicated socio—cultural atmosphere. The New York Times study has revealed that children in general are excited more than adults about what they see, even eight times as much, in some cases; the numbers, the young members of the population make up a disproportionately large share of audience. Previously, television was used as a rendezvous and a focal point of conviviality.
Television’s ability of casting a “common influence” on the audience comprising children and teenagers cannot, by any means, is ignored. Television has now been recognized as a mediator, and not only as a medium between fact and fantasy; between our old cherished values and new emerging ideas; between our individual lives; between our desires to escape and our need to deal with reality and life of a nation and the world. The view that television should be kept away from children and that foreign TV programmes, should be banned may be held by only a few, but it will not find general acceptance. Such an approach is neither feasible nor healthy. But still, people are worried about the negative influence of TV on children particularly and also on society and culture. This necessitates scientific studies on the Impact of Television viewing on Children and Teenagers especially its effect on their health and behaviour. Television is exceptionally popular and its popularity increasing day by day. It engages the two most powerful senses of human beings: eyes and ears, but does not demand much effort from the viewers. For children, it serves as a window to the world outside. They begin to enjoy watching Television fantasy even before they pick up their mother tongue.

1.1.3 Expansion of Television Network in India

Television in India has got a history of about 55 years. In the first 20 years, it was confined mainly to the metropolitan cities like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Between 1980’s and 1990’s it reached out to all the regions and became a truly national phenomenon. An experimental TV station was started in New Delhi on September 15, 1959 with a grant from UNESCO and with equipment offered by the US and Phillips company. The objective was to discover what TV could achieve in community development and formal education. The emphasis of broadcasting in the beginning was on its public service function.

In 1961, Educational TV programmes began to be broadcasted from Delhi Doordarshan for the benefit of science teachers. But by 1965 entertainment programmes had to be introduced under pressure from TV manufacturers and the public. That year, TV service was regularized in Delhi with daily broadcasts of educational and entertainment programmes. In 1967, the Krishi Darshan programme for farmers was introduced. This programme, with its rural orientation, still remains a part of

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Doordarshan for all its centres. In 1972, the Bombay centre started functioning. By 1975 Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow, Pune and Amritsar centres also became operational. In the 1980s, India entered into an era of satellite communication. Communication satellites designed by India were put in geostationary orbits. Though the first satellite INSAT I-A failed to become fully operational, INSAT I-B began to provide communication facilities throughout India. In August 1982, Doordarshan started operating its first national channel. During 1984-85, 120 TV transmitters were installed to increase the coverage. By 1988, TV broadcast covered 500 million people which constituted 62 percent of the population.

The television found ready acceptance wherever it was introduced and spread far and wide in a short span of time. People were fascinated by this audio-visual medium and allowed themselves to remain under its "hypnotic" fascination.

In the US, after the depression of the 1930's and the World War II, people wanted to relax. Jeff Greenfield described the mood of the people at that time: "We took Television into our homes and closed the doors behind us". Young parents wanted shows that idealized the home and stimulated warm feelings for it. Teenagers wanted to see not just how to dance but also how to dress, how to behave, what to emulate. Young Children needed orientation. By 1960, virtually all Americans were watching television. "It was a national mania of a magnitude never experienced before". Gradually the quality of the shows came down. Producers wanted to reach the largest possible audience. For this they had to go down to the lowest common denominator. Action and Adventure became the hallmark of television. In 1961, the highest ratings went to ABC's "The Untouchables", a show awash in gore and mayhem. Though the content sank low, audience watched. It was as though TV had some hypnotic hold over the viewers. The issue that raised alarm bells was that children were also watching these shows.


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6 J.Fowles, op.cit; p.12
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
streets. Between 1963 and 1973 while the war in Vietnam was taking 46, 212 lives, firearms in America killed 84,644 citizens. On July 26, 1967 President Johnson established a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The commission which submitted its report in March 1968 laid much of the blame for the crisis on the media, on TV in particular. But the commission did not find a casual relationship between TV coverage and the disorders.\(^9\)

Then again in 1969, the chairman of the communication sub-committee requested the Surgeon General to appoint a committee to study the harmful effects of televised violence on children. Despite the pressure from TV networks and disagreement within the committee, the Surgeon general's scientific Advisory committee stated that television violence did have an adverse effect on certain members of society. But broadcasters continued to insist that research on the behavioural effects of TV violence was inconclusive.\(^10\) The globalization of media in the 1980's and 1990's perhaps changed the tenor and tone of the debate. America was fighting to maintain its dominance over the skies but the perennial problem of violence still ravaged its society as illustrated by the recent shoot outs on school campuses.

1.1.4 Growing Anxiety about Television in India.

If the concern of American society about TV was centred round violence shown on it and its impact on children, Indians have had varied concerns. Doordarshan, the largest TV network in India, with its wide reach in rural areas has always been under Government control. So there has always been an indirect control over violence shown on TV, for the producers could not ignore the sentiments of common people in this regard. But with the arrival of foreign and indigenous private channels, this control is getting diluted day by day.

Indian TV, both DD and private channels are much dependent on cinema. A good percentage of the programmes are film based. Thus violence and sex in films, to some extent, reach homes through the small screen. According to Leela Menon, children skip childhood to become instant teens because of Television Addiction. A regular diet of over Sexuality and violence targeting adults is avidly absorbed by children and teens. It adversely affects reading, alters family relationships and widens

\(^10\) Ibid
gender gaps. Children grow into passive observers instead of vibrant participants\textsuperscript{11}. Children would act out the scenes they saw on TV. A number of cases were reported during the broadcast of Ramayana. A popular serial, in which children's eyes got injured in their attempt to act out certain scenes of serial involving fights with bows and arrows. The broadcast of serial “Shaktiman” had to be suspended on complaints that children put their life at great risk imitating the superhuman feats of the hero of the serial.

In India advertising industry is increasingly targeting children in their pursuit of increasing sales. Many parents are worried over the demands children make for products they see advertised on TV. What impact advertisements have on children, whether these advertisements foster consumerist values at the expenses of human values? How Television is going to affect children's intellectual development, attitudes and values- these are some of the questions that are uppermost in the minds of parents and other concerned persons. Yet there is another larger issue: the issue of the impact of TV on culture.

**1.1.5 Impact of Television on Culture**

Television acquired global reach during 1980's to the 1990, the US becoming a key player. Especially in TV programmes, US companies were virtually unbeatable. Between 1987 and 1991, Hollywood's worldwide exports, including TV programmes, video tapes and films, doubled in value\textsuperscript{12}. American domination is reflected not only in American based global channels like CNN and MTV but also in indigenous channels which depend much on Hollywood programmes. India is no exception to this general trend.

Awareness of this domination is at the roots of the fear some people have in this country of cultural invasion. They feel that a steady flow of American or American styled TV programmes in the long run will undermine the foundation of Indian Culture. The world view underlying Indian culture is different from that of the western culture. In India, a person considers himself to be part of the cosmos. Ideally he does not strive to conquer nature but, instead tries to live in harmony with every creature. The emphasis is on participation and co-operation. In the West, man is supposed to conquer

\textsuperscript{11} Leela Menon, Kids Quantum Leap to Teenage, The New Indian Express, Kochi, Jan 1, 2000.
nature and by science and technology he tries to dominate nature. He strives for dominating results in competition and Success in competition becomes a value in itself.

An Indian who has a sense of participation in the cosmic process prefers to look at the underlying elements and hence at the unifying spirit, so the Indian culture can be considered basically spiritual. An all pervading religious element can be seen in life of people contrary to the spiritual and religious outlook of Indian culture, the western culture is predominantly secular and materialistic, at least in its outward manifestations. The tension between these two cultural approaches echoes in the letter written by Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmentalist, to Bill Emmott, former editor of The Economist. Vandana Shiva Writes:

“Your basic assumption is that greed is the predominant human trait and that profits are the prime incentives of human behaviour and allocation of resources. You have universalized your values and imposed them on all humanity even though most of us do not live guided by profits. We could not live in communities, we could not protect our forests and rivers if profits were the only calculus and competition our only logic”.

1.2 Television, Children and Teenagers

The generation of Children - infants, preschoolers, younger and the teenagers or any subset or subordinate class of these age groups who are neither very skilled at making sense of audio-visual medium content nor very knowledgeable about the so called real world that it seems to present - is obviously more prone to its airy effects. Sometimes, wise and disconcertingly like adults, children are nonetheless children. It certainly provides more than ordinary experience of routine life to the growing up children during what we call their “decisive years”. One important aspect of this age is that they have limited knowledge of virtually all aspects of physical and social world in which they live. All of us acquire knowledge throughout our lives but the most important learning usually occurs during childhood. It is television which is trying to create a loyal lobby of young audience. The most charismatic of all media vehicles, TV is wooing the future consumers with countless new programmed to lure them. Every network has a channel dedicated solely to children. Few popular ones are Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Pogo and Hungama.

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13 Cf. Genesis 1:26
14 Vandana Shiva, Is Development Good or Bad for the Third World? Tree India Environment Journal, Kottayam, Vol. 15/8, Jan/Feb., 2001
Apart from these exclusive channels some other entertainment channels also air programmes for children at specific time slots. They are trying to hook young minds not only through programmes but also through active and passive ad messages. Children are exposed to:

- Television content for mass consumption
- Television programmes made especially for children.

After childhood, the second sensitive stage which is affected most by the power packed flashy beams is the stage or period of life between childhood and maturity that is adolescence. These two age groups of young generation comprise nearly 50 percent of the Indian population, while proportion of good programmes designed especially for them is less than 5 percent, including the special Sunday morning transmissions. Children and teenagers constitute a major chunk of television audience in terms of number and time spent with it; the situation assumes more significance as programmes suggesting violence and immorality are on increase. Programmes which are unfamiliar, weird, bizarre end up in arousing and inciting confusion and dilemma as children and teenagers find it difficult to make a connection between the televised fiction and the real world situations. And this leads to certain kind of serious mental diseases among youth such as epilepsy, apoplexy, delirium, encephalitis, hysteria, insomnia, neurasthenia and such like.

On one hand television enhances passim and non-participatory behaviour, studies have shown that this medium has a vast scope of promoting informational and educational values also. It plays a big role in ensuring children’s active participation in the vastly widening canvas of “information explosion”. It makes them aware and provides them with the sense of discerning good from bad. They get a chance to be “choosy” and decide what is the best available for themselves. It is a device for expanding child’s consciousness, sharpening his cognitive faculties enabling him to design his individual worldview. Therefore, TV’s role in increasing social cohesiveness at a bigger level cannot be ignored as shared knowledge brings people nearer and closer to each other.

Children are exposed to many themes and different ways of life. Certainly no two children or persons are alike - neither physically nor psychologically. It has been found that certain children who do not find themselves fit in family environment, are coerced to adjust, and due to lack of alternative styles of living which can be provided by television comparatively much easily as compared to other media, there is every
possibility of their turning maniacs. Through TV, children are put right into the world of their own than with their own neighbours. It can teach a wide range of skills and behaviour, it can motivate and guide children as to what they need to know and learn, it can simultaneously entertain and educate. The gap between what TV could deliver and what does it provide is very wide in the field of children’s programmes despite its special niche that it has carved out on Sundays - it not only widens the vistas of their knowledge, vocabulary awareness, it teaches them, or at least the children can acquire the skill, how to express themselves in a better way and face realities of life making them less gullible to the oddities of life.

According to Barrie Gunter and Jill McAller, “Television is not a one eyed monster lurking impishly in a corner of the living room waiting to exert an evil influence over young members of the household. It is a channel through which a range of entertainment, drama and learning can be experienced and increasingly these days, under the control of the viewer.”

It is imperative to understand the format of TV programmes designed for children and teenagers or the television programmes especially designed for child audience. It includes Cartoon Series, Quiz Programmes, puzzles and Game Shows etc. Television for teenagers include Quiz Programmes, Chat Shows, Reality Shows, Game Shows, Film or Music based programmes, Sitcoms. Television for all: the programming content is broad based, meant for general mass consumption; for example: Daily Soaps, Films and Music based programmes, Reality Shows, Sitcoms etc.

It is important that a good children and teenagers programme must combine the three fundamentals of Information, Education and Entertainment. To increase the infotainment value of a programme some, commonly used strategies are:

**Humour:** - Depending upon the target age group, different forms of humour can be incorporated into programmes including slapstick, sitcoms, verbal humour etc.

**Visual Variety:** - Variations in visual and verbal contents as well as pace stimulating young minds.

**Repetitive messaging:** - To ensure optimal assimilation and recall of important messages, frequency of messages is increased to augment the opportunity to see.

**Indirect Instruction:** - Children can acquire desirable attitudes and habits through processes of modelling and imitation i.e. by emulating or empathizing with the protagonist on screen.
**Action and drama:** - Action helps in keeping the young audience hooked to the screen. Music helps to attract and sustain child’s attention. It is an effective aid to memory; children are generally able to memorize concepts or passages when they are set to a tune.

Use of child characters: - Child views like all others empathize more with the characters from their own age group. Stories revolving around children like themselves are their favourite.

**Use of live characters:** - Child viewing actors is unparalleled in forging an allegiance with the young viewers since they are spontaneous and smooth.

**Puppets:** - Puppetry is fascinating to everyone and so is to children.

**Animation:** - Animation is a very useful art by means of which real characters, real life situations can be brought before the viewers through duplicates or artificial portrays and children like it much.

### 1.2.1 Media Environment and Habits of Today’s Teenagers

There is no doubt that today’s youth are confronted with a media environment that is very different from the one faced by their grandparents or even their parents. Terms such as digital television and Google did not even exist 20 or 30 years ago. One of the most profound changes concerns the sheer proliferation of media outlets and technologies. Children today live in a “multi-device, multiplatform, multichannel world”. The advent of cable and satellite television has dramatically increased the number of channels available in most homes today. Digital cable is multiplying this capacity. Many homes in metros are equipped with CD Players, DVD Players, Personal computers, wireless internet access, and digital cameras. At a very young age children are learning about keypads, CD ROMs, mouse and remote control.

As these technologies proliferating, they are also changing the nature of traditional media. The TV screen, which once provided a way to watch broadcast television is now being used for much wider range of activities, including online shopping, video on demand and viewing digitally recorded photographs and home movies. Newspapers can still be delivered act the doorstep or they can be received online. in other words, old distinctions between the television screen and computer screen or between print and broadcast are becoming less meaningful or withering away with the time.
Television networks such as Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network are designed for young viewers and even websites are aimed specifically at children and teenagers. Nicktropolis, a new site developed by Nickelodeon allow young children to enter an immersive 3-D virtual world where they can design their own rooms, interact with characters, and chat with other kids in real time. Digital technology is altering the very nature of media experiences. Images and sounds are more realistic than ever, further blurring the distinction between real world and media events. Children can enter virtual worlds in arcades and even in their bedrooms, travelling to different places, encountering strange creatures and playing adventurous and often violent games. And these new media are far more interactive, allowing children and teenagers to become participants in their quest for information, action and storytelling.

Teenagers today are confronted with such a media environment which is hastily changing. Technologies are improving, merging and becoming more interactive. The content featured in these technologies is increasingly graphic, realistic, and commercial in nature. At the same time media use is at an all time high. Children and teenagers today spend from one third to one half of their active time with some form of media. Preteens and teens are frequently found engaging in more than one media activity at a time called “media multitasking”15. And much of this media use is becoming more private as children retreat to their bedrooms to watch TV, play videogames, or listen to music.

1.2.2 Variations among Children, Teenagers and Adult.

a) Children are different from Adults

Most of the adults believe that they personally are not affected much by mass media, In a well documented phenomenon called the “third person effect”, people routinely report that orders are more strongly influenced by mass media than they themselves are16. This difference in perceived impact gets larger as the age of other person decreases. In other words, adults perceive that the younger the other person is,

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16 Hoffner, C., Buchanan, M (2002). Parents responses to television violence; the third- person perception, parental mediation and support for censorship. Media Psychology 4(3), 231-252
the stronger the effect of the media will be\textsuperscript{17}. Interestingly even children endorse a kind of third person effect, claiming that only “little kids” imitate what they see on TV\textsuperscript{18}.

The lack of real world knowledge can also make children more willing to believe the information they receive through the media. It is difficult to evaluate a story for accuracy or truthfulness in the face of no alternative data. An adult watching a TV advertisement is able to evaluate that message in the context of knowledge about the television industry as well as vast array of personal experiences with purchasing products. A child on the other hand, rarely has this rich set of knowledge structure on which to rely. A second feature that distinguishes childhood from adulthood is the strong eagerness to learn that marks the early years\textsuperscript{19}. Parents experience this with exhaustion, sometimes, as their preschool child asks for twentieth time, “what is that?” or “why”? Such curiosity is a hallmark of childhood and is celebrated by educators. But it means that children are as open to learn from the mass media as from other sources, particularly in situation when firsthand experience is not possible. A third feature that characterizes childhood is a lack of relative experience with the media. Admittedly, these days some children are actually more media savvy than their parents. Indeed many children know how to surf the VCD, or programme LED, digital video recorder while their parents still fumble with these technologies.

Children differ from adults in a number of ways that have implications for responding to the media. Younger age groups have less experience with the real world and at the same time possess a strong readiness to learn about those things about which they are unfamiliar. They also tend to be less savvy about the nature, the intricacies, and the potential distortions of mass media. Such naïveté makes a preschooler and even an elementary scholar more likely to believe, learn from and respond emotionally to media messages than a more mature and discriminating adult.

b) Children are different from each other

It may be easier to recognize that children are different from adults than it is to appreciate how much children differ from one another. It is also unwise to label

\textsuperscript{17} Eveland, W.P.Nathonson, A.T., Detenber, A.I.,& Mc Leod,D.M.(1999). Rethinking the social distance corollary; Perceived likelihood of exposure and the third person perception. Communication Research, 26, 275-302

\textsuperscript{18} Buckingham.(2000).After the death of childhood: Growing up in the age of electronic media.Cambridge,U.K; Polity

children as of a particular type and misleading because it encourages thinking of fairly homogeneous group of human beings. Just possible that a 4 year old thinks and responds to the world very differently than a 12 year old does. But even a group of 4 year old children will exhibit marked differences in how they respond to same situation. In fact, sometimes, it is difficult to believe that two children are of the same age or in the same grade level.

On any elementary school playground, kindergartners can be readily distinguished from sixth graders; their weight is less and are shorter in height. Their heads are smaller, they dress differently and they tend to be more physically active. But even more profound difference exists in their cognitive functioning. Young children attend to and interpret information in different ways than their older counterparts do. Cognitive development is not the only factor that distinguishes children from each other. Personality differences also set children apart. For instance, some children are withdrawn or inhibited in unfamiliar situations whereas others are not. Children also differ in the degree to which they are capable of regulating their emotions, and the degree to which they enjoy novel or stimulating situations.

Research consistently shows sex differences among children too. For example, girls tend to prefer activities that are less vigorous than boys do and boys typically are more physically aggressive. In terms of cognitive skills, girls generally obtain higher grades in school and do better on tests involving writing, whereas boys do better on visual spatial tasks. The fact is that children, even those who are brought up in same environment, differ on many dimensions. And children themselves recognize these differences early in development; for example, children become aware of their own gender by around age 2 to 3. During the preschool years, they begin formulating mental conceptions of activities, norms, attributes and scripts that are associated with being male or female. Young children’s initial understanding of gender role information is the culture. They actively search for cultural meanings about gender in their homes, on

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the playground, and in the media; in other words, the unique characteristics that differentiate children in turn get represented and reinforced in culture.\(^{26}\)

All of these unique characteristics make it difficult to come up with a single prototype for what a child is like. Therefore, when we make generalizations about children and the media, we must be careful to take into account the developmental, personality and gender characteristics of individuals involved.

Teenager is often characterized as a time of challenge and turbulence. Along with bodily changes that can be quiet dramatic, teens are desirous of increased independence and growing self discovery. Scholars of teenager’s development refer to these changes as developmental transitions or passages between childhood and adulthood.\(^{27}\) In other words, the sometimes stormy periods are a necessary and normal part of growing up.\(^{28}\)

One of the main challenges a teen faces is identity formation. During the teenage years, boys and girls begin to ask questions alike about who they are and how they differ from their parents. This emerging sense of the self is fragile and malleable as teens “try on” different appearances and behaviours. There is growing evidence that adolescents use the internet to experiment with their identities. Teens also spend a great deal of time posting photographs, videos, and personal information on popular web sites such as you tube, my space, and facebook.

A second challenge of teens is more & more freedom. Parents naturally feel less need to supervise a 13 year old as, compared to a 5 year old child, and dress, study and even move to some places on their own. Time away from parents can provide teens with opportunities to make independent decisions. It can also allow them for experimentation with a variety of behaviours, some of which are not very healthy.

A third challenge of teens is risk taking. Today’s teens face tough decisions regarding a number of dangerous behaviours such as smoking, drug use, and sexual activity. And there is no doubt that adolescence is a time of experimentation with reckless activities.\(^{29}\) Some of this risk taking may be a function of “adolescent


\(^{27}\) Arnett, J.J. (1922a). Reckless behaviour in adolescence : A reply to Jessur, Development Review, 12, 339-373


In particular teenagers often seem preoccupied with their own thoughts and appearance and assume others are equally interested in their teen’s experiences. This view of self as unique and exceptional can in turn lead to feeling of invulnerability to negative consequences. In other words, self focused teens think they are different from everyone else and that tragedies occurring to others “won’t happen to me”. Risk taking can be viewed as an adolescent’s effort to assert independence from parents and to achieve adult status. However not all teens engage in risk behaviours, and even the ones who do seldom limit their activities to those legally sanctioned for adults. Some teens experience narrow socialization, which is a strong allegiance to the family and community, clear expectations and responsibilities, unambiguous standards of conduct. Other teens are raised in an environment of broad socialization where independence and autonomy are encouraged, standards of conduct are loose and enforcement of standard is lenient and uneven. In addition to parents, school, even media also contribute to these overarching patterns of socialization.

A fourth feature of teens is the importance of peers. Teens spend a great deal of time with friends and place a high value on these relationships. On an average teens spend up one third of their waking hours with friends. Peer groups certainly do make a difference during adolescence. Peer influence is not a straightforward and not necessarily as negative as some might assume. Friends actually can be a source of support for teens and also can increase self esteem. Puberty and sexual developments are hallmarks of teens. Body hair, acne, muscle growth, weight gains are only a few manifestations of dramatic physical changes that occur during the teenage years. Puberty typically begins during early adolescence, around age 9 or 10 for girls and roughly 1 to 2 years later for boys, although there are large individual variations. At the same time their bodies are changing, many teens experience an increased energy

level as a function of significant changes in their endocrine system\textsuperscript{35}. As might be expected, the hormonal and physical changes associated with puberty are accompanied by an increased interest in sexuality. In one study for example, 12 to 15 years old girls who were more physically mature reported a greater interest in seeing sexual content in movies, television, and magazines than did those who were less mature\textsuperscript{36}. Thus at some point during teenage most teens will become intensely curious about sex and will seek information about sexual norms, attitudes, and practices in their culture and society.

Whether the teenage years are characterized as tempestuous or transitional, there is no doubt that significant development changes occur during this period. Teens spend more time alone or with their friends and less time with family and parents. This growing independence comes at the same time when teens are exploring their own identities. The challenge is to provide these young people with enough latitude as well as guidance so that the decision they make will result in a healthy rather than risky lifestyle.

d) Young children versus older children

From perceptual to conceptual processing: preschoolers pay close attention to how things look and sound. This focus on salient features has been referred to as perceptual boundness\textsuperscript{37}. Perceptual boundness is defined as an over reliance on perceptual information at the expense of using non obvious or unobservable information that may be more relevant\textsuperscript{38}. For example preschoolers frequently group objects together based on shared perceptual feature such as colour, sound or shape. In contrast children in the age group of 6 or 7 begin sorting objects based on conceptual properties such as functions they share. It is younger children who pay strong attention to perceptually salient features such as animation, sound effects and lively music. On the other hand, older children tend to be more selective in their attention, searching for cues that are meaningful to the plot rather than those that are merely salient.


\textsuperscript{38} Springer. (2001). Perceptual boundness and perceptual support in conceptual development. Psychological Review, 108 (4), 691-708
From centration to decentration - children and even adults usually respond strongly to salient features in a message. But another characteristic of younger children thinking is that they often focus on single striking feature to the exclusion of other less striking features. This tendency is called centration. In contrast, older children are increasingly able to “decentre” their attention and take into account the full array of perceptual cues. Applying the idea of centration to the media, younger children are likely to respond strongly to a single feature in a television or movie scene, such as character’s red dress or hero’s car. The prominence of cues as well as the child’s own interest will help determine what is most salient. Other perceptual cue is the character’s hair colour, name, physique, and certain overt behaviours may go unnoticed. In emotional movies, television shows for example, character’s feelings are often conveyed by facial expression as well as situational information in the plot. Younger children will be more likely to fixate on one or other of these sets of cues, even when they conflict. Thus in some cases the centration will interfere with young child’s comprehension of the storyline.

From perceived appearance to reality - another important cognitive skill during childhood concerns the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality. Much to a parent’s amazement, a three years old child may attribute life to an inanimate object such as rock, have an invisible friend, and want cartoon character Bheem to come over the house and play. All of these tendencies reflect a fuzzy separation between what is real and what is fantasy.

Numerous studies have found strong development differences in children’s perceived reality of television. Very young 2 and 3 years old show little understanding of the boundary between television and the real world. In fact at this age children routinely talk to television set and wave at the characters. They try to mimic the favourite characters which they watch on television.

At the age of four, the young child begins to appreciate the representational nature of television but still tends to assume that anything that looks real is real. This literal interpretation has been called the “magic window” perspective, reflecting the idea that a young child generally assumes that television provides a view of real world.

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Gradually children come to appreciate that some of what is shown on television is not real, although most of this centres on perceptual cues. For example, above the age of 5 years, child typically judges cartoons are not real because they feature physically impossible events and characters. The emerging distinctions are initially quiet fragile. Young children may be able to report that an animated character is not real yet still become quite frightened of it. 

As children mature they begin to use multiple criteria for judging reality on television. Not only do they notice marked perceptual cues but they also take into account the genre of programme, production cues and even the purpose of programme. Older children begin to judge a situation as how similar it is to real life. Although they recognize that much of the television is scripted, older children are likely to judge a scene or a programme whether it is a fiction or reality to some extent. They can even depict characters and events that are possible in real world or it’s a fantasy.

From concrete to inferential thinking - a final cognitive trend during childhood that has implications for the media is the shift from concrete to inferential thinking. Young child’s thinking is very tangible focusing closely on what can be seen or heard for a 2 or 3 year old, this means that attention can be swayed by highly salient cues that might actually be extraneous to the plot. For example, a purple costume might get more attention than actions of the character who is wearing this garment. In four year age group can begin to focus more on information that is central to the plot than on incidental details. Younger children do best with age appropriate content, programmes that are relatively short in duration. With development, children become increasingly able to extract events that are central to the storyline in a programme. Yet the information younger children focus on is still likely to be fairly explicit in nature, for example 4 to 6 years old most often recall actions after watching televised stories whereas adults often recall information about characters, goals and motives.

A number of important cognitive shifts occur early and in middle childhood. A presholder watching television is likely to focus on the most striking perceptual features in a programme. In addition the presholder is likely to have difficulty in distinguishing reality from fantasy. The same child when enters elementary school, he will begin to focus more on conceptual aspects of the content such as characters, goals and motives. He will increasingly be able to link scenes together, drawing causal connections in the narrative. Thus judgment of reality will become more accurate and discriminating. Clearly, the overall understanding of media message is quite advanced compared to what he was capable of as a presholder. Nevertheless, skills continue to develop even later in elementary school years also.

e) Older Children versus Teenagers

From real to plausible - older children use a variety of cues to judge the reality of media content. One of the most important yardsticks for them is whether the characters or events depicted in media are possible in real life. Teens become even more discriminating on this dimension, judging content as realistic if it is probable or likely to occur in real life. In Dorr's research almost half of adolescents defined real television events as those that were probable or plausible in real life. For example in a movie featuring an evil stepfather who is trying to poison his stepchildren might be very upsetting to a 9 or 10 years old because the scenario could happen in real life. A teenager is less likely to be disturbed by such content reasoning vast majority of stepfathers in world are not murderers. It indicates that ability to differentiate probability from possibility crystallizes during early adolescence.

From empirical to hypothetical reasoning - a growth that occurs between late childhood and early adolescence is the shift from empirical to hypothetical reasoning. Adolescence becomes increasingly able to understand abstract concepts, use formal logic, and think hypothetically. Along with this abstract thinking comes an ability to engage in inductive and deductive reasoning. An older child is able to reason

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conceptually too, but much of this process is based on collecting empirical evidence. A fifth or sixth grader, for example, may watch a person’s behaviour across several situations and infer from these actions what the person’s motives are in contrast, an adolescent might begin with a history or hypothetical set of motives for a person and then observe behaviours to see if the theory is correct. In other words, the teenager is capable of more abstract thinking that need not be tied too closely to observable data. Adolescents also are increasingly capable of suspending their own beliefs to evaluate the reasoning of someone else\textsuperscript{51}.

The ability to think hypothetically implies that teenager can anticipate different plot events and predict logical outcomes as a storyline unfolds. The teen is also able to critique the logic and causal structure of different media messages. An abstract thought flourishing teen may consider the meaning behind the message--- who is the source and why the message constructed this way?

### 1.2.3 Two Overall Developmental Trends

Two other important trends which occur continuously throughout childhood and adolescence and are not specific to particular age group are: increasing knowledge about the social, physical and mediated world in which we live and increasing processing capacity.

Increase in domain specific knowledge: it is obvious that children gain increasing amounts of knowledge across different domains as they grow. With each new experience, a child stores more and more information in highly organized way in his/her memory. The resulting knowledge structures, sometimes called “mental templates or plan”, are powerful organizers that help children anticipate and assimilate new information\textsuperscript{52}. Young children also develop schemes for stories that include information about the typical structure and components of narrative\textsuperscript{53}. A well developed story plan can help a child to organize and interpret television programming\textsuperscript{54}. In addition, children can form plan about social and physical world in


which they live. These plans undoubtedly assist a child in making sense of an emotional scene on television.

Not surprisingly, children develop schemes about the media as well. Each form of media has its own special audio/visual techniques and codes, which at least in the case of television have been referred to as “formal features.” Television and film, for example, use production techniques such as cuts, zooms, fades and special effects to signal shifts in time and changes in setting. Video games and computers have their own technological conventions. For example, studies show that practising certain types of videogames can improve dynamic spatial skills in both children and adults. There is also evidence that videogame playing improves strategies for dividing visual attention, presumably because players must cope with events that occur simultaneously at different places on the screen. In addition, listening to a song seems to stimulate imagination more so than watching a music video of the same song does. It suggests a kind of interactive relationship between media exposure and schematic processing and development.

Having a great deal of knowledge and experience in a given area has all kinds of benefits for cognitive processing. Consider for a moment how a five year old might response to a cigarette advertisement as compared with a 16 year old would process the same message. The 5 year old has never smoked, has little knowledge of how the lungs work, is unaware of the legal battles ensuing against the tobacco industry, is not aware of who paid for the placement of the add, and has little experience with the cost of various products in a grocery store. The teenager certainly has less experience than an adult would have in this domain, but compared with the grade schooler, the teenager brings a much broader knowledge based from which to draw in interpreting and evaluating such an ad.

Increase in processing capacity: Regardless of age or level of development, all humans experience limits in the capacity of their working memory. When children

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mature, they are able to hold increasing amount of information in working memory\textsuperscript{59}. For example, a 5 year old is typically able to deal with only four or five bits of information at once (e.g. digits, letters), whereas the average adult can handle seven\textsuperscript{60}.

Younger children have difficulty in considering multiple pieces of information in working memory. As children mature and gain experience in certain arenas, they can quickly classify new information into pre-existing schemes. This schematization allows them to consider and inter relate more bits of information at once and to engage in concurrent cognitive tasks. In other words, they become efficient information processors.

Extending these ideas to newer technologies, we might expect that interactive media such as computer games will quickly tax mental resources of a young child because of the need to simultaneously comprehend content and respond cognitively and physically to it. As processing capacity increases throughout childhood and adolescence, thus very difficult types of media interaction will become increasing by routinized.

1.3 Why do children watch TV?

People rarely sit mindlessly watching just anything on their ‘box in the corner’; invariably some kind of choice has been made as to which programme they are going to watch. Children, as can be seen from the TV ratings, are no exception. They too, have their likes and dislikes. Television programmes can be divided into various categories or types, some of which are watched more often, and by large number of viewers, than others. Pattern of television viewing and programme preference are linked to the demographic and family characteristics of audience. Thus some children and teenagers have a taste of one type of programme and other has taste of another type of programme.

There is emerging psychological evidence that both transient and enduring motivations and temporary moods can and do influences the way people use the mass media. Children are no different. In the context of television viewing, their individual


\textsuperscript{60} Dempster,F.N. (1981). Memory span: Sources of individual and developmental differences, Psychological Bulletin, 89,63-100
personalities and current moods can affect how and why they watch television as well as the specific programmes they select to view.

‘Uses and Gratification’ research has described fairly generalized motives which predict in very general terms whether a person will prefer one mass medium over another, or one broad type of media content over another. Today’s media environment is complex and varied, and offers people opportunities to select environment and information from a large number of television channels, radio stations, print publications and new electronic media accessible through computer technology. This varied media technology provides every human being to watch and view specific programmes of their choice. These factors represent fundamental aspects of human character with a clinically and empirically demonstrated history of influence upon how people behave and why they behave the way they do.\textsuperscript{61}

Television viewers are therefore motivated to watch television in order to satisfy their various wants, needs and desires at the time. This does not mean that viewing behaviour is always pushed by strong psychological drives but, for most of the time, that people watch television and this applies to some extent even to the young, they do so for a reason. This reason may be as simple as “to pass the time”.

There is a belief among some scholars of media consumption that if the gratifications sought by the people are met by watching specific television programmes, listening to particular radio shows and reading certain newspapers, they will return to those programmes and reading material again when motivated to do so.

Thus, viewers may be drawn back to a television series for episode after episode not simply because by watching the series they are gaining some form of satisfaction which is important to them. Viewers may return to the news for information, magazine shows for advice on personal or social problems, soap opera for companionship, drama for excitement and escapism, comedy to be cheered up, or any of these to have something to talk about with others, the next day.

In the early 1960’s, Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues outlined three main uses of television by the child. The first referred to the positive pleasure of being entertained. Television offers a fantasy world in which the child can escape real life boredom and problems. Schramm observed that children and teenagers would sit with

\textsuperscript{61} E. B. and Corno, L., cognitive engagement variations among students of different ability level and sex in a computer problem-solving game, Sex Roles, 1985, 13, 241-251
absorbed faces when watching favourite programmes. Second was information, for example about how to dress, behave and so on. Third he identified social utility as a major function. Thus, children and teenagers have a variety of reasons for watching television.

1.3.1 Role of Television in Children’s Life

Nowadays, if on one end, the popularity of cartoon strip marks the increasing popularity of programmes amongst children; it also raises serious concerns on other hand. The future of television as a medium and an industry evokes a mixed response. Television has become a member of the family participating in all important events and decisions of human life. Riding on its charismatic audio visual feature, it is playing multiple roles in the system.

No one is indifferent to the charisma of the idiot box and the age group of 4-19 is most vulnerable. Ideally, television for children provides an opportunity to expose the children to infotainment but the reality paints a different picture. Influence of television content is intrusive and irresponsible. Child behaviour is now under scrutiny and the role of TV cannot be ignored. Television content affects the thought process of children clearly guiding him to behave in a particular manner through its content. There are loaded with social, economic, and cultural implications of it. Family (the primary unit) in the social structure is worst affected. Due to shift in roles adopted by the child (on lines with the characters they watch and follow), parents are confused about their role in child’s life. Mass media was slated to guide the transition in role play in a gradual manner.

| Friend | Motivator | Mentor | Director |

1.3.2 How Well Do Children Follow and Understand TV?

There are a number of ways children learn to understand television and make sophisticated judgments about programmes.

- Children’s understanding of the format features of programmes;
- Children’s abilities to follow television narratives;
- Children’s discrimination between what is real and what is fantasy on television;
- Children’s judgments about television characters and their actions;
Children’s attention to television varies with a variety of content and presentation format features.

The implication of this work is that children’s visual attention to the screen is largely governed by how much they understand what is going on. Two kinds of format elements have been investigated—visual and sound (or auditory) attributes. The major difference between these is the way in which they are able to affect and control attention. Clearly, visual ones can have influence only when they are seen; in other words when the child looks at the screen. Sound attributes, on the other hand, can draw the young child’s attention to the television even when he or she is not looking directly at it.

In one study, researchers observed children aged 3 to 5 years continuously while they watched a mixed compilation of programming over a three–hour period. Snacks and toys were available while viewing took place. The children were assessed, principally about the extent to which they looked towards or away from the screen, and how much attention was influenced by visual and sound attributes of the programmes. Which features of the programme made children look back towards the screen when their attention was diverted elsewhere? And which features could maintain the child’s attention while he or she was actually watching the screen?

Children may pay attention to the screen because of the physical stimulation caused by a programme, for example, because of significant voices they recognise, changes in the tone of the music or other sound effects. But how well do they actually follow what is going on?

**Children’s Abilities to Follow Television Narratives**

Most of the researches on children’s understanding of television focused on developmental changes with age. However the age trends are not the only important factor, however. It is important to look at the form and content of programmes and how they affect comprehension and growth of understanding. Evaluating the state of knowledge about these matters is not always easy. On others occasions, understanding has been indicated by the ability of children to place scenes from a programme in correct sequence. It is unlikely that such different methods measure the same thing.
1.3.4 The Child’s Attention to the Screen

Child’s attention is controlled by the formal features of television; that is by changing physical stimulation accompanying visual scenes changes, background music, sound effects, and so forth. Another view is that children themselves learn to control their attention in relation to things which happen on screen which have meaning for them.\(^{62}\)

1.3.4.1 Viewing as Reactive

Children’s attention to television involves looking and listening. Children’s visual attention to the screen have tied it on set and offset to specific events or happenings in programmes. When there is a sudden change in the pace of action, or the occurrence of funny voices, loud noises or appearances by children, young viewers are likely to turn their eyes towards the screen.

If a child’s attention is governed by the physical features of a programme, infants and toddlers would be the most tied to such control since they are recognized as being more “stimulus bound”. One noted researcher, Jerome Singer, has suggested that the ‘orientation reaction’ is the basis for television viewing.\(^{63}\) This is a natural response that we all make towards something new or different happening in our immediate environment. It stems from a primitive need to know what is going on. Since this response is already established in toddlers by about the age of three months, we might expect to find it happening amongst very young infants while they are watching television.

The length of visual looking at the TV set has been found to increase fourfold in infants aged between 12 and 48 months. This increase is partly connected with increase in the length of looks at the screen, but seems primarily to be due to dramatic increase, at about 30 months old, in the frequency of looking at the television. Children’s mode of response to television changes systematically as they grow up and pass through progressive stages of intellectual development. As infants up to age of 5, they are considered to be ‘perceptually bound’; that is, very young children are most likely to


have their attention drawn to the screen by overt visual or sound effects. As they grow older, those sorts of features, while not irrelevant, become only aspects of a programme’s content likely to attract a child’s attention. Young children tend to focus on concrete aspects of the programme, most notable changes of pace in physical action and the character types involved. Older children are more sensitive to abstract features of programmes, such as relationship between events and characters, whose meaningfulness derives from youngsters’ understanding and following of the storyline as it unfolds.\(^6^4\)

Proponents of the theory that children react to television, rather than actively seek to pay attention to those things which have meaning for them, also believe that it is sudden, often gimmicky changes in visual action or sound effects in programmes that really control children’s viewing behaviour. Thus, television which is rapidly paced with a lot of physical changes, visible or heard will gain and retain a child’s attention. However, this style of presentation is not conductive to learning and understanding. If the content is presented too quickly, very little of it will stick. Assuming that this explanation of how television grabs the attention of youngsters is correct, as attention gets greater understanding should get poorer.\(^6^5\)

### 1.3.4.2 Viewing as Active

An alternative impression of the nature of children’s television watching has emerged from other evidence. Some scholars have proposed that the degree of attention that children give to the screen is actively and strategically guided by their attempts to understand and follow programmes. They also propose that children begin to learn to do this before the age of 3, and that this process may occur almost automatically, purely as a function of their early experience with television.\(^6^6\)

As with adults, children rarely need to pay constant attention to the screen to follow what is going on- they are able to detect changes in serials or significant events

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in programmes even when looking away. Just listening to the soundtrack can provide clues that something important is happening and when they should look back at the screen. Even children as young as 3 have this ability to monitor the soundtrack on television whilst looking elsewhere, and have been observed to shift their attention back to the screen when appropriate.

Other studies point to young children’s motivation to understand television as a prime driver of their attention. In other words, there is increasing evidence to suggest that children actively direct their attention to television content that has meaning for them. It is known that as children mature, they acquire the intellectual skills necessary to organise specific elements of TV programmes into coherent and meaningful wholes.

During their primary school years, children are more capable of following dramatic plots. They become able to distinguish central from peripheral events in programmes. With such newly acquired comprehension skills, young viewer’s attention may be selectively directed towards what they perceive to be the more important story elements in a programme.

Children, then, learn to monitor the soundtrack of programmes and listen for things which mean something to them. They are already fairly active in this regard by the time they have started going to school. Anything they hear which is significant and has meaning to encourage them to look up at the television, while anything they cannot relate to inhabits attention. Children continue to look at screen as long as they can follow what is happening. The programme must not simply be meaningful, however, if it is to maintain their attention: there must also be a degree of unpredictability about it.

As children grow older, their dependence purely on sound effects starts to decrease. For instance, an eleven years old exhibits greater depth of understanding television programme than 5 years old, whereas the younger group follow a programme much better and looks at it more often when significant sound occurs. This difference is much less pronounced among the older children. Young children are very responsible for sound effects and other exciting events in programme. At this level of viewing, an attention grabbing event in a programme might consist of exciting changes of pace.

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event’s significance is only apparent to the child who has followed the storyline and is thus able to place what happens in a context which lends it meaning.

### 1.3.5 Programmes and Nature of Watching

Children’s viewing styles can vary with the types of programmes they are watching. Children have obvious programme preferences - some programmes are watched more often and liked more than others. Levels of attention vary; too, across different kinds of programmes, the role of parental influences cannot be ignored. The amount of television parents themselves watch, together with their reasons for doing so, can shape children’s viewing patterns. The extent to which parents and children view television together however does vary with programme type. Children will tend to watch programmes aimed at the children’s audience, they will tend to watch much more often on their own. When children watch on their own, however, there appears to be very little carry-over of this parental effect, and this is already true by age of 7.

Daniel Anderson and Elizabeth Pugzles Lorch have reported a wide variety of viewing styles among children on the evidence of videotapes of family viewing in the home. They speculate that style of viewing is a function of age, viewing environment, relevance of the programme to the viewer, and viewer’s intention.

Children’s attention to the screen is affected by the pace of a programme. Pace can be composed of several ingredients: changes to a new scene not previously shown in the programme; changes to a familiar scene; and changes in the cast of characters present. These changes are often marked by visual features, such as fades, dissolves, zooms or pans or by auditory features, such as changes in music, sound effects or speech. Changes of scene sometimes elicit attention from a child who is not looking but for a young viewer who is already watching the screen, scene and character changes can sometimes prompt a temporary interruption of looking. Older children presumably are better able to pursue the flow of a programme and, can use scene change points as the occasion for both starting and stopping to look at TV more so than younger children do.

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69 Ibid
71 Ibid
As they grow older, children become aware of formal feature cues marking breaking points in the programme. It appears that for school age children, the scenes and the character changes are points at which the young viewers decide whether to begin, stop or continue paying attention to a television programme.

The implications of this evidence for children’s programming are that fast pace does not often enhance attention and may interfere with young viewer’s abilities to understand and learn the content of a programme. Children attend to material presented in story format more effectively than in a magazine format.

1.3.6 Perception and Reality

People's conception of TV and its effect is a mix of reality, prejudices, impressions, and fears. The long and sophisticated research in the West on the effects of TV has not yielded definite conclusions. But yet one can state certain facts on which there may not be much dispute. TV is an audio visual medium that attracts all kinds of people to it. People all over the world watch TV every day for quiet some time. Children and teenagers spend more time in front of TV than elders. A 1996 survey of teenagers in TV owning households in 41 nations, finds that they watch on an average six hours of TV per day and nowhere it is less than five hours. Since children are in the formative stage and spend much time before TV, they will be affected by it.

But on the other hand, all the children are not affected by TV in the same way. One and the same programme need not elicit the same response from all the children who watch it. TV is not a 'hypodermic needle' injecting messages into the minds of viewers. Nor do viewers consume anything and everything that comes out of TV. Hence a stimulus response model of explaining TV effect is simply unsatisfactory. There are factors that come in between the stimulus and the response. In order to predict media effect, one has to turn one's attention to those intervening factors.

No child's mind is a tabula rasa, nor is his personality completely unstructured. By the time a child begins to meaningfully watch TV, his personality might have been formed to a considerable degree. That means the child must have learnt how to look at the world around him, how to evaluate it and assimilate it to himself. In other words, a child by the time he begins to watch TV, has already assimilated certain attitudes and values that underlie his environment. These attitudes and values are supplied by society; the process by which the child internalizes them is socialization.

72 E. Herman & R. McCheney, op.cit. p.4 ??
The traditional agencies of socialization are family, school and religious community. Hence family can be considered the first and foremost agency of socialization. Family transmits the ideas and ideals, attitudes and values of society of which child is a part from the moment of his existence. By the time child begins to take active interest in TV, his mind has already been structured and it is this structured mind that perceives reality, including TV reality. The child tends to reject whatever does not fit into his structure. That means the cognitive structure does have a major say in how the child perceives reality.

The conclusion one naturally arrives at is that a well socialized child is likely to reject TV messages that are not in consonance with his cognitive structure. On the other hand, a child whose socialization is in some way defective is likely to be more affected by TV.

In support of the validity of this assumption two observations have been made. Children whose home environment quality is high are generally found to be free from the negative influences of TV. One has to infer that such children have assimilated the basic value orientations of their society and culture. If the argument is sound, the local culture itself will keep those orientations intact. Certain contemporary trends confirm it. Edward S. Herman and Robert W. Mecheseney opine that although Hollywood fare in film, TV, music has considerable appeal worldwide, this appeal has its limits. In Western Europe the top rated TV programmes are nearly domestically produced. MTV global music television service has begun to differentiate its content around the world and incorporate local music. The present era may be one of the global media, but the programmes they dish out are becoming more and more culture specific.

1.3.6.1 Children’s Perception: Real and Fantasy

Are the events and characters depicted in programmes to be believed or taken for real? How well do children distinguish between reality and fantasy on TV? The reality- fantasy distinction is seen as an important issue. The effects of television on children’s subsequent attitudes and behaviour can be significantly modified by their perceptions of how real televised events are. In general, more realistic events have more profound effects. However, most children’s viewing is devoted to fictional

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73 E. Herman & R. McCheney, op.cit. p.42
programmes - there is relatively little attention paid to the news before the age of 10. It is cartoons, fantastic heroes and funny situations which attract most of the young viewer’s attention. But even amongst fictional programmes there can be considerable variation in how real different portrayed situations and characters appear to be.

For example, with a programme such as Tom and Jerry the characters are nothing more than animated drawings, and that when they hit each other, nobody really gets hurts. This realization develops quite early amongst children, or so it seems. Young viewers are able to enjoy such cartoons in a playful, make believe way. “Crayon Shin Chan” is a Japanese mega animation series written by Yoshito Usui. The series revolve around the life of 5 years old Shinnousuke Nohara (popularly called Shin Chan) and his interaction with the family, friends and kin in contact. It is dubbed in numerous languages aired in different countries. It is just an animation with colours and striking voices which fascinates different age group of children.

TV characters which appear in long running serials may become so familiar with the viewers that they are thought to be real people. However, the extent to which people- adults or children, are deceived by television depends to some extent upon how specific are the aspects of programmes we are looking at. At a superficial level, the ability to distinguish between types of programmes and their settings is something that develops early on. Even quite young children are able to make crude distinctions between programmes featuring animated and human characters, and quickly come to understand that many of the fantastic heroes they see on television are not real people. Considerable changes occur across childhood in the ideas young viewers hold about the reality television programme contents. Up to the age of 7 or 8, the distinction between fantasy and reality is often cloudy. By the middle of childhood, however, judgements about television’s realism become much more refined. News is perceived differently from drama; commercials are distinguished from programmes and so on. But as cognitive sophistication improves, certain other perceptions also develop. The news is categorized as depicting real- life events. But the critical viewer may come to consider ways in which TV news may be inaccurate, biased, misleading and in some ways ‘unreal’. By way of contrast, drama programming is recognized as being fictional, but viewers may come to consider ways in which, it nevertheless, reflects aspects of reality as well.

Different types of television characters improve with age; under age group of 4-5 years, children find it difficult to explain the differences between animated and
puppetry characters. At this early age, children are also uncertain about the mechanisms of television and this in turn affects their perception of what is real on television. One example of this confusion is their failure to understand how characters get inside TV. One belief is that TV people are made smaller than us. Older children aged 7-10 years may be confused about how certain characters are made. However they can, usually discriminate between human and animated characters.

Children become more sophisticated about television programmes as they grow in age, and this development occurs at more than one level. Deciding about the realism of television, it may involve comparing television portrayals with real life. Another feature of this area judgment, however, involves knowing how and why television programmes are put together or synchronised.

In making reality - fantasy distinctions, younger children tend to focus on physical features of a programme as cues to its lack of reality, including the presence of stunts, camera tricks, costumes, props and sets. Distinctions are also dependent on whether a presentation is acted, scripted, rehearsed, taken live or filmed.

Reality- fantasy discriminations are made frequently by reference to whether or not the televised content exists in the real world, with little apparent regard to fictional status. For instance, the child’s attention centres repeatedly on specific surface features of programming, such as the means by which programme portrayals violate physical reality. In the absence of such blatant cases, the reality of television is often accepted. But eventually, the scenes recorded with trickery lead to a more generalized realization that television is not real life, but rather a representation of it; at the same time, the nature of the television versus real- life comparisons also change. As children mature, they begin to search for more qualities in programmes, and make judgements about degree of realism.

Children and Adolescents can make distinction between television and real life even though their real- world experiences of certain objects or events may be limited. Children’s understanding of television and ability to discriminate between different types of television programmes can also be influenced by their co-viewers. Children do not always watch television with their parents.

Despite the fact that siblings may watch together frequently, the evidence on whether younger siblings can benefit from watching with elder sibling or vice-versa. When a child watches television with an elder brother or sister, their evaluations of
programme remains unaffected unless the eldest sibling is at least three years older than youngest one.

1.4 Children and Cartoons

Many children like watching cartoons. Cartoons on the television are fun to see, so most of the kids want to watch them all the day long because they do not like being bored. That is why many young people are also addicted to watching cartoons. Children can learn many things from cartoons easily because they are funny and not dull. Cartoons are fantastical, which means that they are not realistic. The following three reasons are representative as to why most children like watching cartoons:

The first reason why many kids like watching cartoons on television is that they are fun. Actually, most people do not want to be bored, no matter what is their age, but especially children because they always want to do something new and want to watch something fun. Typically, children tend to do many things at the same time. It means that they cannot concentrate on their homework or things that are hard to do. Of course, it is different with every child's individual personality, but almost all of them always want to do something fun.

The second reason is that children can learn many things from cartoons easily because it is easy for them to imitate. Most parents want to teach a lot of things to their children, but if something is boring, most kids do not want to do those, so a teacher or parent would have to think about easy methods to teach to their children. There are many creative inventions to teach children, but the most important thing is that parents should know what kind of things make children concentrate. One of the answers is a cartoon. The history of cartoons is very long, but the marriage of entertainment and education is quite short because traditionally children learnt almost everything in school. During the 1970’s and the early 1980’s, some educational cartoons started to teach many things like the country’s history, different languages, mathematics, and science to children. Children can approach the sea with knowledge by some cartoons, so cartoons are popular all over the world. Like this, we can teach some difficult subjects like history, mathematics and other languages by using fun cartoons.

The last reason for many children watching cartoons is that they are more fantastical, and less realistic. Sometimes everybody wants to escape from the real world. It is a desire within children to forget about boring things like homework, so they
usually try to find fun to do. No one wants to watch everything continue as usual including adults because things continuously as usual represent nothing out of the ordinary. People like to see something unrealistic and fantastical. In this field, children are more imaginative than adults. That is why many kids watch cartoons on the television more than adults because it is kind of like their dreams coming true. For example, The Little Mermaid (1989) cannot be a real story, but it is within a child’s imagination. Even though it has been seventeen years since the release of The Little Mermaid (1989), it is loved by many girls, while many boys like watching Superman (1978). Everybody knows that flying is impossible for humans, but most of children have imagined flying at least once in their life, so Superman (1978) is still one of the children’s favourite heroes. Another example is Tom and Jerry (1940), which is a cartoon about a little mouse named Jerry and a cat, Tom, who speak and tease each other like people. Tom and Jerry cause each other pain and it is fun because it is just the right amount of stimulation. The right amount of stimulation causes a child’s mind to recognize it as not real, so they recognize it logically that it is just a cartoon. That is why sometimes cartoons need to stimulate people more because it is simply not real and also it needs to be more emotional and entertaining. Even if most cartoons are not real and do not make sense, most children have fun watching cartoons on television.

It has been many years since cartoons have become one of the important visuals for the children. It would be better for the educational system to invent more cartoons for kids so that their parents would let their children watch cartoons without concern

1.4.1 Children’s Judgment about Television Characters and their Actions

When Children grow up in age they come to follow the plots in televised dramas more effectively and learn to grasp fundamental distinctions between reality and fantasy content. Another aspect of television comprehension relates to the way viewers evaluate characters in television programmes. Changes in children’s perceptions of television characters have been found to occur as the age advances. Although there is a tendency among children to ascribe more realism to specific characters with whom they are familiar than to the general category of ‘people on TV’, this perception tends to decrease with age.

Television characters have four major dimensions: the humour of the characters; the strength of the characters; the attractiveness of the characters and the activity level
of the characters. Reality factor may in fact colour children’s discriminations between television characters. As the children grow in age, they increasingly tend to organize pictures of television characters into discrete groups of human, animated and puppet characters. Before they are 10 years old, children seem to have an incomplete understanding of function of cartoons and puppet characters.

What kinds of inferences do children make about characters and their actions? Television programmes portray varied reasons, behaviours, roles, attitudes, situations and events. These portrayals provide examples of how to behave in different situations which children might on occasions emulate, and these are also a source of knowledge about the world. Another important factor, however, is the way young viewers judge the characters themselves and their actions.

The reasons for actions and their consequences for victims are potentially important modifiers of children’s judgements about an actor’s moral character and these depend upon young viewers being able to understand a character’s reasons for behaving in a certain way.

Children’s ability to follow and understand television is mainly dependent upon age. As their understanding of the world in general develops, similarly their understanding of television also develops. In the same way as they begin to make moral judgements about peer and adult behaviour in their own environment, similar judgements are also made by them about behaviour of television characters. But is it children’s “real-world” knowledge that is shaping these judgements of televised behaviours and beliefs, or is television itself having some kind of influence on their developing perceptions as to what is good and bad in their own environment?, it remains to be seen.

1.5 Media and Make Believe

Television and other entertainment media use such as video game playing; is sometimes blamed for stifling children’s creativity, imagination and make believe play. Since these are cognitive activities which are linked to language development critical thinking and abstract thinking, such as accusation should be taken seriously. Certainly, children’s imaginative play is influenced by their environment, including the presence or absence of electronic media, as well as their developmental stages. Valkenburg

(2001) suggests that there are contradictory opinions about the influence of media, in particular television, on play and creativity. Child viewers drive their magic story cars to play learning games which make believe narratives designed to strengthen specific emergent literacy and socio emotional skills.

**Media and Language Learning**

Another way in which media may contribute to children’s academic achievement is by acting as an “incidental language teacher”\(^{75}\). Programme complexity and age appropriateness of verbal content of media play an important role in language development. For example, if a child watches Dora the Explorer, Chota Bheem, Ninja Hathori or any other cartoon, we can observe change in his cognitive development which result, in greater vocabularies and higher expressive language scores and engage children in creative and imaginative play but keeps language fairly simple and straightforward.

### 1.6 What Parents are Looking for?

Good babysitters will be responsible. They will pay attention to the kids and put their welfare at the top of the list of priorities. Good babysitters like kids. They enjoy being with them and playing with them. Kids will often sense this, and as they get older, may even look forward to their visits. Good babysitters understand kids. Even without a degree in child development, they have a sense for relating to children. They know what kind of things they like and how to communicate with them.

Good babysitters model appropriate behaviour. They know kids will imitate what they see and hear so they are careful about how to act with kids.

A Study done by a leading specialist of non-verbal communications, Prof Donna Mumme, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Tufts University on “the infant as onlooker: learning from emotional reactions observed in a television scenario” reveals that 12 month old are able to draw implications for their own actions by observing televised emotional reactions of another person towards a particular object, such as a ball. Television is not just a useful and engaging medium; it also carries messages that can influence the behaviours of very young children. India has a rich tradition of

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\(^{75}\) Niagles, L.,& Mayeux,l.(2001). Television as incidental language teacher, In D. Singer & J. Singer (Eds), the handbook of children and media (pp.135-152). Thousand Oaks,CA;Sage.
enriching children with folk tales and grandma tales and imparting values, discipline and moral values in an entertaining format. When some of us advocated and argued a couple of decades ago for expansion of TV network in the country and for going for colour television, one hope was that children’s fare will get some priority and all that treasure of India gets a chance to figure. But what is happening now is contrary. The exceptions are only a few because; there is a decline in the extent of children’s participation even in national channels. The best specific examples of course are Malgudi Days, Panchatantra, Tenaliraman and the like. Realizing these strengths of Indian tradition, some foreign producers are scouting in India to capture talent for television, particularly in animation format.

**Our own Initiatives**

We do not seem to learn from our experiences. All India Radio in the earlier years has set good examples for children’s programmes, which are enriching as well as entertaining and supplementary to school education. In fact, the format of those AIR programmes was such that they were participatory and empowering confidence and courage building in children and respect for elders and environment. Today most of imported programmes for children are all out to promote materialism, selfishness, consumerism and “at any cost” approach to life.

**1.6.1 Television as a Babysitter**

Television today has become so significant that a third of young children has a TV set in his room, and many are in the habit to so for sleep with television on. Earlier, in 1990’s there was just one national network and few quality programmes for kids. But today, there are hundreds of shows as well as exclusive TV channels for little ones and it’s natural for parents and society to worry about the role and impact of television on children and teenagers.

Today the situation today has become little complex because mostly the kids have working parents who have got lesser time to spend with them. So parents now look for babysitters to look after their children when they are out for their work. Children and teenagers are like sponges, soaking up all they see and hear. So they want a babysitter to be responsible, caring and affectionate and someone who could keep their children happily pre occupied in their absence.
In the present era of Information Technology, a new baby sitter has arrived on the scene i.e. Television. This one is always available and is able to keep kids occupied for hours together. The convenience features are tremendous- no transportation needed no advance scheduling, no phone calls. Unfortunately, television doesn’t always match up very well with the needs for a good babysitter. While there are some excellent programmes for children, and too many are more interested in our kids as consumers rather than as learner.

Now a days, children are spending less time outdoors playing traditional pastimes, variations of make-believe, imaginative games or engaging in sports. Therefore, they are missing out on vital social interactions with parents, siblings and peers which are essential to forming a healthy sense of self. On the other hand parents are also spending less time with their children especially since it is now common for both parents in a household to work in order to feed the family properly. Even when parents interact with their child in their home, the television, even though only in the background, is still ever present. As shown by Kirkorian et al, background television can even affect interactions between parents and children with their results showing how both the quality and quantity of parent-child interaction decreases in the presence of background television.\textsuperscript{76} 14

Furthermore, studies by Schmidt et al highlight how background television also disrupts very young children’s play behaviour even when they pay little overt attention to it\textsuperscript{77}.\textsuperscript{15} However, parents are often exhausted after a day’s work so it is perhaps easier for them to get household chores done by switching on the television, DVD or computer to amuse their child and ultimately keep him quiet. As a result, such electronic media is becoming like an electronic babysitter for children.

1.6.2 Time Spent with Media and Academic Achievement

In addition, tracking the kind of media and media content to which young viewers are exposed. It is also clear that it is critical to track the amount of time they spend with media. Several studies have shown that over time, heavy media use is negatively associated with educational achievement and attention\textsuperscript{78}. Of course, a key

\textsuperscript{76} Kirkorian et al., (2003), the impact of background television on parent-child interaction. Child Development, 80, (5), pp. 1350 – 135
\textsuperscript{77} Schmidt et al., (2008), the effects of background television on the toy play behaviour of very young children. Child Development, 79, (4) pp. 1137 – 1151
question is this: what constitutes “heavy” media use? Most researchers have found that less than 2 hours a day is optimum. In fact, the relationship between television time and academic achievement might be characterized as curvilinear—with the greatest benefits seen between 1 and 2 hours per day. The relationship between media use and academic achievement is complicated by socioeconomic status. Children today watch as much television as children did two decades ago. In fact it appears that children who are heavy TV users are often heavy video gamers, computer users and music learners. However, if children use media so heavily, then it is obvious it can affect academic achievement.

In one version of an ideal world, children would spend their time with more high-quality, enriching media products and less time with entertainment. Content that, at best, wastes their time is detrimental to their cognitive development. Of course, in an ideal world adults would do the same - forsaking the fluff and junk for media designed to improve their knowledge of world and culture. But the fact of matter is that neither children nor adults always watch television, play videogames, or go online with such lofty goals. It would be unrealistic, if not unfair; to condemn the pure entertainment value the media play in our lives. Unfortunately, much of what is the “pure entertainment” is potentially deleterious for children.

Media makers have a belief that if children think that something is good for them, they will reject it. This is partly why so much educational media matter is devoted to preschoolers, to them all learning is fun! One very important job in the “work” of childhood, however, is developing a sense of how one could spend time; how much of it should be devoted to goofing off and how much of it should be focused on getting bigger, stronger, and smarter. Children always don’t make the healthiest choices when it comes to media. But they shouldn’t be expected to automatically do so or be expected to figure it out for themselves. Imagine, for example, if we leave to the child to determine what he or she would eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner (Chocos, French fries, Candy bars, Milk Shakes) we don’t let them make such choices because we know their choices wouldn’t be the best ones. Responsible parents offer children a variety of foods, encourage them to make healthy choices and teach them the benefits of consuming a balanced diet—whether it is a diet of food or a diet of media. Eventually, we hope children to develop a taste for “good stuff” so that they can grow up as smart and active adults.

Educational Media

Children spend more time engaged with media than they do with any other activity besides sleeping. Over the course of their childhood, they will also spend more time watching television than they do for any other activity.

1.6.3 Viewing Television as a Habit or as Time Filler

One of the most prominent reasons for watching television mentioned by most people is simply as a means of passing or filling time. In his work with British children in early 1970’s, broadly Greenberg found that this was the most important reason given, though its significance weakened with age. Thus, viewing out of habit or because there is nothing better to do is something children are less likely to say, they do at age 15 than at 9 or 12\textsuperscript{80}.

The particular reasons children give for watching television are related to the types of programmes they watch and what they think about those programmes. Children who say that they watch television out of habit or to pass time tend to be less likely to watch news and current affairs and more likely to watch comedy and light entertainment. There is some evidence also that children who claim to watch out of habit are more eager to talk about television.

Use of Television and other Film Related Media

Television has for many years accounted for a substantial proportion of the time expenditure of children and its prominence in their lives, reflected in increased household use of television and diminishing differences in children’s viewing associated with socio-economic status has increased. For most children it amounts to, an extensive consumption of undemanding entertainment including many portrayals of conflict and violence, which may have serious consequences on their, cognitions, and behaviours. There may be a loss as well as the benefit of foregone opportunities. Our present task is to examine the behaviour of children in their use of television and other film related media, by which we mean the videocassette recorder and movies seen in theatres or homes through playbacks.

There are very good reasons to give attention to children’s use of television and other film related media. These media certainly provide many moments of piqued interest and enjoyment for children, as they do for teenagers and adults. However, it would be a mistake to think of them as limited to such outcomes. There is ample evidence that for some children, either the amount viewed or what is viewed may have adverse consequences. The use of these media has also been associated with prosocial outcomes. They can contribute importantly through educational programming to children’s scholastic achievement.

1.6.4 Viewing for Escape

Television can offer fantasy world for the vicarious pleasure of viewers into which they can escape from everyday problems or the humdrum of ordinary living. The escapism function of television operates for children as well as adults, and is one of the central mechanisms of television’s entertainment functions. Television provides a source of distraction from every day’s realities through its fantasy material. More than anything else, viewers can become vicariously involved with the characters and events and act out in their minds ways of dealing with their problems. Television’s fantasy is also the stuff of dream which, though unlikely ever to come true, provide some temporary hope and respite from the less desirable daily realities with which many individuals have to cope with.

Various motives have been identified as underlying the need to escape through involvement in the fantasy world television can bring into the home. One idea is that children subjected to harsh parental discipline may use television to escape from an unpleasant home environment. Alternatively, the need to escape may stem from an unhappy experience in school. Early evidence indicated that children of lower intelligence and poorer educational performance sought out programmes through which they could forget about their problems.81

1.7 Making the Best of Television

Television is an inescapable part of family life- and this means of children’s lives too. We have presented a broad overview of what is known about children’s use

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of television, their understanding of what are broadcasts, and of the impact that it has on their lives. The television environment has undergone a period of rapid and unprecedented change in last ten years. The potential range of influences that television might have upon young viewers has expanded as the medium itself has evolved. As the television market has become a more competitive place, with more channels competing for viewers; the notion of centralized regulation of broadcast output has become increasingly problematic. Technological advances in communications and the marriage of television to the computer in particular, means that more and more control over reception is passing to the consumer.

Public discussion about children’s relationship with the small screen has been dominated over the years by the supposed harm it does to them. The daily press regularly abounds with stories which report on adverse influences of television portrayals of violence, sex, drinking, drug taking and affluence in programmes, and of uncontrolled consumerism in advertisements. Television has been accused of encouraging children and teenagers to become more aggressive. Television is also seen as undermining the educational development of young people by cultivating mental passivity and laziness and by keeping children up too late.

While it may be true that the overindulgence with television as with most other things can bring problems, it is equally true that when it is used properly and constructively television can have much positive influence on young viewers. Television can provide children with a breadth of experiences, not all of which can in any way be construed as bad. Indeed television can bring to children knowledge and other personal benefits which may be unavailable to them through any other source. People who dwell on negative side of television fail to do the medium justice in terms of identifying and elaborating the role it actually plays in children’s lives.

Moreover, the arrival of interactive entertainment technology has brought with it opportunities for viewers to make more active control over the nature of experiences they can glean through their television sets. Interactive game show allows viewers at home to compete on an equal footing with contenders in the studio. In near future viewers will be able to select, on a personal basis, the particular camera angle from which they wish to watch sports events.

Television is not invariably bad for children. In the past ten years; the balance of opinion has been redressed at least in part by evidence that emphasizes some of the good things that can happen to children contingent upon their sensible use of television.
In its more interactive form television has been shown to have the potential to help children with the development of important intellectual skills. Despite the concern about the prevalence of violence of themes, videos games for example, have been found to improve children’s spatial skills and their logical and strategic planning skills\textsuperscript{82}.

Television can and does influence children. Its effects can be either good or bad, depending on how the medium is used. Either way television’s effects on youngsters are rarely simple or direct. For a start, television’s influences can occur at a number of levels it can affect children’s knowledge, beliefs and values; it can produce shifts in attitude or feelings about things; and it can cause certain courses of action and changes in patterns of behaviour.

What children get out of television, however, can depend crucially on what they bring to it. Children do not simply sit passively and watch the images displayed on screen, absorbing anything that is presented without question or interpretation\textsuperscript{83}. Instead, they often actively select what to watch to satisfy particular needs or moods, and they place their own meanings on programming and advertising content.

Some programmes may indeed wash our children, leaving behind no clear trace of having been viewed. Others may have a profound impact on them, perhaps shifting a belief about or in something, or radically altering a particular view of the world. In the case of most programmes, however, their influence falls somewhere in between these two extremes, with the precise nature and strength of television’s impact being determined and limited by the reasons children have for watching it at all, and by their understanding and interpretation of what is shown.

The effects of television on children can also depend on what kinds of programmes they are watching. Another important factor is how the programmes are made. Some programmes are designed to inform and educate, while others are made principally to entertain. Programmes do not always fit comfortably in these convenient categories, nor do they always or necessarily attract viewers by their major functions. Entertainment programmes may excite, enthral, amuse or in other ways move their audiences but they also cultivate awareness of certain aspects of life, influence beliefs and values, or provide insights into how to deal with personal and social problems. In

\textsuperscript{82} Mandinach, E.B. and Corno, L., cognitive engagement variations among students of different ability level and sex in a computer problem-solving game, Sex Roles, 1985, 13, 241-251

addition to their entertainment function, these programmes also have an educational impact which may be perceived by viewers who turn to such programmes not simply to be entertained but also because they believe they can learn something of personal value from them. Television fictional narratives often contain elements of truth or insights into everyday reality which viewers: young or old: can pick up on and recall at some later date for their own use where ever relevant or appropriate.

Informative Programmes may also need to be entertaining in order to win and maintain their audience. It is becoming increasingly well established that children may learn from all kinds of television programmes, including ones not ostensibly designed to inform or educate. They may learn about science from studio based magazine programme, whether these are made especially for children or the general audience. In addition though, factual information can be picked up even from television game shows. There are two learning effects associated with these programmes:-

Active participation in a question -and -answer quiz format can lead young viewers to strengthen what they know already through the rehearsal invoked by answering a question posed to the contestant in the show.

New facts can be learned from the correct answers given to the questions either by the contestants or by the compare when the contestants themselves are enable to give the correct reply.84

Young viewers soon learn to make up their own minds about programmes. They learn to distinguish between different categories of programming by genre and in terms of kinds of functions of different programmes. Children come to recognize that some programmes are good for entertainment reasons and others are good as sources of learning- but learning which touches on issue of importance to them.

Although broad distinctions can readily be drawn by children between “reality” and factual programmes and fictional or “make – believe” programmes, there are subtler shades of realism where confusion can still arise. Children may not automatically believe everything they see in contemporary dramas, but sometimes preconceived ideas about aspects of real world may be shifted, albeit temporarily, by credible dramatized events which run counter to their beliefs.

Young children can benefit most from television if parents, or other adults watching with them, discuss what they have seen. Schools can also play their part.

Educationally oriented programmes when carefully integrated into a structured course framework involving input from other source material can have an influential television impact.

It is essential, however, that the television is used in a controlled and systematic manner rather than in a haphazard, hit-and-miss sought of way, in order to be effective in a formal education context.

At the same time as drawing attention to the good effects of television, a more considered and cautious appraisal is needed of the so called bad effects of the medium. Without diminishing the very genuine concern that exists among some critics about the possible harms of television we believe there is a tendency to make television a scapegoat for some of society ills. Television is often unjustifiably accused of misleading children on very flimsy grounds and a very poor understanding of how young viewers respond to programmes.

The fact that there is a great deal of research on the had effects of television violence which does not necessarily make the case stronger. Research techniques commonly employed by researchers in this field can be questioned for the robustness and veracity of the findings they produce. Research which takes place under artificial conditions may have doubtful relevance to what happens between children and television in a reality. Even when children’s use of television and its impact on them have been studied under real-world conditions, shortcomings on the part of respondents to supply accurate and complete information about their viewing and other social habits may often undermine the validity of the research findings.

1.8 Advertising

(Children’s social worlds are increasingly constructed around consuming as brands and products have come to determine who is “in” or “out”, who is hot or not, who deserves to have friends or social status.)


1.8.1 Historical Changes in Advertising to Children

Efforts to advertise products to children date back to 1950’s, the early days of radio. Companies such as general mills, Kellogg’s and oval tine routinely pitched food
products during child oriented radio shows. Household products such as toothpaste, oil and soaps were marked during children’s programming. In these earlier endeavours, Children were considered important primarily because they were capable of influencing their parents’ consumer behaviour. It was a kind of a baby boomer period.

The earliest television advertising looked very different than it does today. At first, programmers were more interested in getting people to buy television sets than in attracting advertisers. Some programmes were offered by the broadcast network themselves with no commercial sponsorship at all. Other programmes had a single sponsor or that would underwrite the entire cost of 30-60 minutes time slot. Consequently, there were fewer interruptions, and the sponsor sometimes pitched the company rather than any specific product.

In his book Out of the Garden: toys, TV and children’s Culture in the age of marketing, Kline (1993) argue that 1955 was a turning point in television advertising to children. That year marked the debut of highly successful TV show The Mickey Mouse Club. In great numbers, children rushed out to buy Mickey Mouse ears, guitars, and other paraphernalia, demonstrating their own purchasing power. Shortly thereafter, the toy industry moved aggressively into television.

In the 1970’s the broadcast networks, too, recognized the revenue potential of targeting children. However, adults continued to be the most profitable consumers to reach. So those children’s programmes still airing in the valuable prime time period were shifted to Saturday and Sunday morning when large number of children could be attracted effectively at lesser cost with cartoons. Throughout 1980’s, the network increased the number of Saturday and Sunday morning hours devoted to children’s programming in response to marketer’s increasing interest in young consumers.

The 1990’s saw the birth of toy based programmes. Toy based programmes are slightly different, however, because they are originally conceived for the sole purpose of promoting new toys. Hence the critics have charged that such shows themselves are actually half hour commercials.

In the 1990’s, the proliferation of cable and independent channels opened up new avenues for reaching children. Disney created its own television network, and

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some others such as Nickelodeon and cartoon network have been tremendously successful in targeting the child audience. Recognising the economic benefits, marketers are not segmenting the child audience into different age groups. Teenage consumers are widely recognized for their spending power, as evidenced by the creation of MTV, Channel V, the CW network and the other specialized channels devoted to attracting adolescents and young adults. And advertisers are responsible for coining the term teens, referring to 8-12 years old who are on the cusp of adolescence, are deeply interested in brand names and fashion, and spend a lot of time at shopping malls. Even the youngest age groups are being targeted.

Thus, the current market is far different than that in 1950’s when the broadcast networks dominated television and there were only few other media options. Today, licensed characters such as Dora the Explorer, Ninja and Sponge Bob routinely cross over from television to other media such as books, home videos, CDs film, and computer software. And numerous media outlets actually specialize in child and teen oriented content in an effort to attract affluent young consumers.

**Attention to Advertising**

One of the first questions to ask is whether children pay any attention to advertising. Marketers use sound effects, bright colours, animated characters, jingles and a variety of other production techniques to attract consumers. In fact, ads are typically louder in volume than accompanying programmes. All of these techniques are perceptually salient and likely to capture the attention of younger children in particular.

Younger children’s greater attention to ads may be due in part to attention getting techniques such as jingles, animation and slogans. Preschoolers and early elementary schoolers pay more attention to television advertising than older children do. In part, this may be due to the strong perceptual attributes commonly found in commercials. However, the relatively steady attention patterns during transitions from programming to advertising also suggest that younger children may not be distinguishing these two types of messages very clearly.

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87 De Mesa, A. (2005, Oct 12) Marketing and tie-ins: children in their middle years keep evolving into savier consumers: with the girls market saturated, brands are looking to boys as well
1.8.2 Television Advertising to Teens and Kids

Marketing strategies to put the brand at the top of the mind creating brand equity, maintaining the brand loyalty have extended their influence on the children to such an extent that it has lost its path and is walking on the unethical grounds, leaving our children in vulnerable conditions. Off all marketing weapons advertising has strong impact as its exposure is more, and is the more attractive media for children. The need of the hour is to establish certain standards to restrict had impact of advertising aimed at children, due to three concerns. First, it is believed that advertising promotes superficiality and values found in material goods and consumption. Second, children are considered inexperienced consumers and fall easy prey to sophisticated persuasion of advertisers. Third, advertising influences children demand for everything from toy to snack food. These demands create an environment of child-parent conflict. Parents find themselves in awkward position to say no over and over again to children whose desire is piqued by effective advertising.

Modern life style has frozen the family size in the Indian society. Nuclear family has taken place of the joint family. Lifestyle trends in urban India (rising incomes, longer working hours, more working mothers, time-poor/cash-rich parents) tend to support a 'convenience time pass and food culture; which leads the child to watching television and the increased consumption of HFSS food (High in fat, salt and sugar)? In addition the advertising industry making junk food seems irresistible, and it may well be, as recent research shows that children could become physically addicted to junk food. In a recent study, Dr. Robert Lusting from the University of California, San Francisco suggests that childhood obesity arises from foods that are high in fat and fructose and low in fiber. When children eat these “insulinogenic” foods, the insulin not only increases the effects of the pleasure-chemical dopamine (making the child want to eat more of the same food) but also reduces the effects of the hormone leptons, making the child want to eat more and be less active⁸⁸.

Kids and teens are a valuable market to advertisers. Helping them become more critical of marketing messages and can it help protect them from exploitation. They have money to burn, and the items they buy are largely “luxury” items, like clothing, electronics, and music. They make many, if not most, of their purchasing decisions independently. And they have significant influence on family purchases. Perhaps most

⁸⁸ Mass Media and Child Obesity-The Advertising Impact on increased weight gain Column Published by ‘Dr. Richard Visser’ in http://www.lafamily.com/display_article.php?id=1433
importantly, companies know that once they have “branded” a child, he or she is likely to be a customer for life, or from “cradle to grave.” Everywhere: Advertising is in the form of clothing, toys, and accessories, abound. Schools make deals with soda companies and sell naming rights to their gyms to the highest bidder. Companies glean important demographic info about kids spending habits from seemingly innocuous internet “quizzes” and “surveys”.

Marketing comes at kids from all directions, twenty-four seven. Marketers also often hone in on themes and attitudes that parents might find inappropriate or offensive, like sex or alcohol and drug use, further escalating the “coolness factor” of the product. Advertising works best when it creates insecurity about something; such as appearance. A successful ad convinces the viewer that they have a problem that needs fixing, and then proposes to offer the solution, which just happens to be the product they are selling. The message is that teens aren’t good enough the way they are. Many kids unwittingly buy into that message, and as a result, end up being hypercritical of themselves because they don’t fit in a certain “image” that what they believe is necessary for their happiness.

This generation of kids is growing up in what is perhaps the most materialistic society we have ever had. They are surrounded by images of excess and the idea that buying “things” will bring them satisfaction. They are given things easily and rarely have to delay gratification. Worst of all, many of the things that are advertised to teens do not promote good health or good culture and habits.

1.8.3 Persuasive Impact of Advertising

The most direct impact of an advertisement is to convince a consumer to purchase a new product. Advertisers and companies alike believe in the power of advertising to just do that. Whenever a child tries to get a parent to buy something or a parent tries to resist that effort, conflict can occur. In addition, extensive exposure to advertising may affect more general attitudes or values that youth hold regarding consumption, money and even physical appearance.

Brand Loyalty

One of the goals of advertising is to create brand loyalty. Creating branded characters that appeal to children is crucial component of successful marketing89. Tony the tiger was created in 1951 to promote Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes, and although he has

become slimmer and more muscular, he is still used in advertising today.

It is not surprising that children are highly aware of brand names, jingles and slogans associated with specific commercials and of celebrities who endorse certain products. Brand recognition seems to breed brand preference. It’s not only the teenagers who are aware of brand, product and content but even the preschoolers have knowledge about branded clothes, food stuff and such like to some extent.

**Desire for Products**

Advertising creates a desire for products. Children wear t-shirts emblazoned with Pokémon, Doremon, Ninja characters, and carry lunch boxes decorated with Disney images, wear designer jeans and athletic shoes. Adolescents seem even more conscious of brand names as well as the latest fads in clothing and technology. Where does all this consumer desire come from? When asked most children report that they bought something because “you see it a lot” or “everyone has one.” Advertising conveys the idea that a product will bring fun and happiness to youngster’s life. Images of other children playing with a toy or eating at fast food restaurant reinforce the notion that everyone else is doing it too.

(www.cartoonclothing.com)

(Figure1: A Product Advertisement)

There is a relationship between TV advertising and product desire, but it is difficult to establish causality. It is possible that youth who are eager to buy toys, clothes, games and snacks actually seek out television more often to find out about new products, a reverse direction in relationship. Although one ad can increase desire for a product, multiple exposures may be even more influential. Beyond repetition, there are

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92 Ibid
other ways to enhance the impact of an advertisement. One tactic is to include a premium or prize with the product. For example McDonald’s started with a toy in happy meal and that attracts kids a lot and ultimately desire for product is on the increase.

(https://longs-min.blogspot.in)
Figure2: Advertisements to attract kids.

Another strategy involves the use of celebrity or a popular character to endorse a product in an advertisement; for example, a kid (Pappu G) who is asking his father (Khan) why his friend, Vicky's gums were bleeding after he ate an apple. To this, Khan explains to him how Vicky's toothpaste must be working only on the teeth and not on the gums by metaphorically relating them to a tree and its roots. Pappu G understands the concept of strong roots/gums and happily agrees to brush his teeth with Pepsodent G. The idea of using 'Papa G' came from the fact that the product itself is called Pepsodent 'G'. It’s just to bring a break a bit of clutter.
1.8.4 Phases of Consumer Behaviour During Childhood

Valkenburg and Cantor in 2001 outlined four phases of consumer development in childhood. The first phase which they call “feeling wants and Preferences”, characterizes infants and toddlers. During this phase, young children show distinct preferences for smells, colours, sounds, and objects, which are important components of consumer behaviour. Still, at this young age children are primarily reactive rather than goal directed, so they are not capable of acting like true consumers.

The second phase, “Nagging and Negotiating”, captures the preschool children. Preschoolers have difficulty in distinguishing ads from programmes and do not fully comprehend the intent of commercials. Preschoolers are likely to gravitate towards products that are visually striking. They also want what they see immediately, so this age group is most likely to pester parents and to exhibit noncompliant and emotional behaviour when they are denied something.

The third phase, “Adventure and the first Purchase”, characterizes the early elementary school years, between the ages of 5 to 8. Cognitive abilities are in transition here as children gradually consider more conceptual information, and increase their attention span. But this age group can still be confused about the purpose of ads and can still respond strongly to perceptual cues. Children typically make their solo purchase during this phase, belonging to a bonafide consumer, independent of a parent.
Fourth phase, “Conformity and Fastidiousness,” comes the teen years from 8 to 12. The ability to critically evaluate information, compare products, and appreciate the selling intent of ads develops during this time. Because of their attention to detail and quality, many children become serious collectors of objects during this period. Teens show a strong sensibility to the norms and values of their peers, as well as to what older teenagers are buying and doing. Most teens regularly visit different types of stores, making independent purchases and influencing household buying practices. Valkenburg and Cantor argue that consumer skills continue to develop during adolescence, but by late elementary school, all the fundamentals of consumer behaviour are in place\(^3\) (i.e., child shows preferences, can evaluate options, and can choose and purchase a product).

**Children’s Reaction to Advertising**

Many early instances of advertising adopted a very simplistic understanding of the way advertising works. Where children are involved, for instance, there is assumed to be a straightforward cause and effect relationship between the advertised message and the behaviour it recommends. On watching an advertisement on television children may be directly encouraged to go out and buy the advertised or attempt to persuade someone else- a parent perhaps- to buy it for them\(^4\).

This view of the influence of advertising fails to take into account the full complexities of the process. It ignores children’s ability to process and evaluate advertisements just as they do with programmes, prior to deciding whether or not to believe the commercial appeal or to act upon it.

Although advertising is designed ultimately to manipulate consumer behaviour, this influence is mediated by what people think about advertising per se as well as about specific advertisements. Before advertising can affect young viewers, it must impinge upon their consciousness in some way. Although there has, in the past, been concern about the effects of subliminal advertising, solid support for the efficacy of this sort of advertising from research has failed to materialize.

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\(^3\) Valkenburg, P.M. & Cantor J.(2001). The development of a child into a consumer journal of applied development Psychology, 22(1), 61-72

1.8.5 Advertising, Children and Teenagers

On many television networks around the world a not insubstantial proportion of TV airtime is filled by advertisements. When children are concerned, for instance, there is assumed to be a straightforward cause and effect relationship between the advertised message and the behaviour it recommends. It ignores children’s ability to process and evaluate advertisements, just as they do with programmes, prior to deciding whether or not to believe the commercials appeal or to act upon it.

Advertising is designed ultimately to manipulate consumer behaviour; this influence is mediated by what people think advertising per se as well as about specific advertisements. Before a commercial can change people’s minds about what to buy or encourage them to favour one brand over another, its message must be taken in and examined. Viewers must pay attention to their TV sets for this to happen. They must pay sufficient attention so that they are able to remember the commercial or the elements of it that the advertiser hopes will make their product more appealing. However, the influence process also depends on what viewers know about the aims of advertising and or how much they believe what advertisements tell to them.

Thus, in the context of the impact of television on children and teenagers and particularly advertisements have several important questions needed to be considered.

- Are children aware of advertisements as distinct from programme?
- Do children understand what advertisements are about?
- Do children remember and believe what advertisements tell them?
- Are children likely to respond to advertising by wanting the things advertised for them?

1.8.6 Children’s Distinctive awareness of TV Advertising

Children’s attention to TV advertising can be measured in a variety of ways. Children can be asked directly whether they watch and remember advertisements, or parents about their children’s reactions to TV ads. Young children tend to pay less attention throughout the advertisements as compared to older children. Secondly the awareness can be measured by the recall ability of the child as well with the level of attention to ad breaks; children’s memory for advertising changes with age. As they grow in age, children become better at remembering adverts and are able to recall more about different TV ads. Young children seem to find certain features of advertisements more salient than others. In particular commercial slogans, jingles or unusual, humorous elements may stand out far more than brand names.
Children and teenager’s attention to advertisement or a programme may shift because of differences in certain physical features such as the kinds of images being shown, the background music and so on. It depends upon how interesting and boring they find what they are watching and not just because they know what is coming next (i.e. an add break) and therefore do not need to watch.

Children often monitor television advertisements via the soundtrack even when they are looking away from the screen. When their interest is triggered, they will turn to look at the screen again and maintain eye contact with it as long as the commercial engages their interest. Music plays a vital role in this process since it may equally attract and hold the young viewer’s attention, and increase the likelihood of repeat viewing and listening whenever the advertisement appears, enhancing its potential impact.

**Children’s Trust in TV Advertising**

Whilst understanding of the nature of TV advertisements appears to improve as children get older, belief in the truthfulness of advertising tends to decline. Before they begin school, there is widespread belief among young viewers that TV adverts tell the truth all the time. While few believe this at age 8, hardly any still do at age 1295. The Advertising Industry can therefore begin to suffer from a credibility gap among quite young children96. At the same time, children’s attempts to influence parents to buy advertised products seen on television show a marked decline. In general, it seems that as children grow older they letter understand the selling motive underlying television advertising and become less responsive to commercial appeals. Older children make more numerous and more refined judgments about television commercials and develop a cognitive mechanism against persuasion.

**Children’s Attitudes Toward Television Advertising**

Children’s attitudes toward commercials as a genre are negatively correlated with age; that is, the older child is the less likely that he or she will hold a positive attitude towards television advertising. This is logical given that older children are

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95 Gaines, L. and Esserman, J. F., A quantitative study of young children’s comprehension of television programme and commercials, in J.F.Esserman (ed.), television advertising and children, New York: child research service, 1981; Rossiter and Robertson, op. cit..

more likely to comprehend the persuasive intent of advertising, which provides them with the foundation for recognizing the manipulation inherent in advertising messages. However, the age at which children actually develop a negative attitude toward commercials, if in fact such a perspective evolves during childhood, has not been precisely defined.

Children find music, humour, and attention-getting production conventions that predominate in commercials, attractive and hence tend to respond to them quite favourably. Even for older children age 9 to 11, who generally have developed the ability to recognize persuasive intent in commercials and are therefore more likely to be cynical and suspicious about advertising, positive attitude toward individual commercials are a common response. Taken as a whole, the available evidence indicates that children do not react negatively to television commercials as a genre in nearly the same way the adults do (Barlinh & Fullager, 1983), although older children tend to hold less positive attitudes towards advertising than younger children do.

1.9 Television and Health

In the world of fast developing communication technologies, families will have access to greater amounts of information that will help them to get information. To some extent, though; it may already represent a source of influence through its factual programmes about health care, medicine and development of drama programmes centred on the work of fictional doctors and hospitals. In the pre electronic media era, medicine was generally family centred. Family folklore and recipes for medicinal compounds and remedies embodied preventive and curative practices.

Television has been acknowledged as an important source of information about health and medical matters for many years. In Britain, documentary and magazine programmes about health and medicine have been prominent in mainstream television schedules for the past twenty years. While television has been used as a channel

through which to direct communication to people on specific health topics, it also serves as a wider source of health information which viewers may acquire incidentally as a consequence of watching programmes that contain portrayals with health related implications. Portrayals of illness, the medical profession and patient behaviour in television drama can leave their mark. Indirect messages about health may also derive from portrayals of lifestyle behaviours such as eating, smoking; alcohol consumption etc. There has been concern in particular about television’s portrayal of certain kinds of behaviour which, although often socially acceptable, nevertheless is known to cause physical harm when indulged in to excess – as is often shown on television.

A variety of health and related issues are reflected on television. Coverage of health issues occur in specially produced factual programmes as well as those featuring as central or peripheral aspects of television fiction. Television can provide information about illness and the cause of ill health. It can portray health promoting and health damaging behaviours. It can also show how the medical profession works. Television has been used as a communication channel by health campaign and these messages often take the form of public service announcements; health campaigns can also be promoted through special television factual productions, advertisements and fictional dramatization. These vehicles have been used to convey messages about heart disease, sexually transmitted disease, smoking addiction and alcohol abuse, family planning and personal safety. Television has provided vital information about many types of diseases such as cancer, stroke, hepatitis, pulse polio, family planning, AIDS, and child-associated illness. Some diseases have clearly attracted more attention than others among broadcasters, and health campaign shave, more often than not, achieved mixed success in getting their messages across\textsuperscript{100}.

The source of concern relating to the possible effects of advertising upon children’s and teenager's diets, stems in the first instance, from the observation that young viewers may be exposed to thousands of commercials on television every year. Even twenty years ago, when there were far fewer television channels than today, it was noted that child might see 22,000 television advertisements each year, 5000 of them for food products, over half of which were high-calorie, high-sugar, and low-

\textsuperscript{100} Pearl, D., Bouthilet L. and lazar, J., Television and Behaviour: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties, Rockville, MD: NIHM, 1982
nutrition items. At least half of the advertising in children’s programmes was found to be for sugared cereals and sweets, usually present as snacks to eat between meals.

The kinds of products advertised in commercials in children’s programmes continued to be dominated by toys, cereals, sweets and snack food and fast-food restaurants. While toy commercials may dominate in the two months leading up to festivals, food commercials tend to dominate for the rest of the year. Very often, these advertised foods are highly sugared products such as pre-sweetened cereals, cakes, sweets, soda and biscuits, rather than healthy food such as fruits or vegetables.

The evidence about television advertising indicates that it presents a variety of food products choices to children, but hardly promotes a healthy diet. The food products which are predominantly advertised on television tend to be high in sugar and fat content and low in nutritional value. The question arises, therefore, as to what this kind of advertising teaches children about food and eating. Television advertising may affect children’s knowledge attitudes or behaviour.

Nutritional messages within television commercials are assimilated by children, who evaluate food products accordingly. One study experimentally manipulated the way a particular food product was extolled within a television commercial. In one version, the product was described as being ‘chocolaty, rich and sweet’, while in another version it was said to be ‘healthful, vitamins and nutritious’. Children’s ability to identify the health risks associated with certain food products varies with age. Younger children are less capable than older children, for example, of identifying that sugared food consumption leads to decay. Thus, advertisements for sugared foods are less likely to be critically appraised by younger children on the basis that such foods may cause dental health problems. Different kinds of advertising messages have different effects upon children’s food preferences and consumption patterns. Regular exposure to the advertising for sugared products was linked to greater consumption of these products by children. Exposure to advertising for healthy foods (or non-sugared foods) tended to dampen enthusiasm for sugared foods to some extent. Educational programmes which promoted nutritional food consumption were also found to reduce

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101. Pearl, D., Bouthilet L. and Lazar, J., Television and Behaviour: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties, Rockville, MD: NIH, 1982
103. Ibid
the impact of advertising for sugared foods. Television programmes may contain many subtle, indirect messages about health that derive from the lifestyles often depicted\textsuperscript{105}. Health portrayals embedded within the content of dramatic and entertainment programmes may provide important information to young people, and may play a part in shaping their early eating and drinking habits. The impact of general entertainment programs may be incidental and subtle compared to the effects of advertising, which directly promote certain forms of food products. However, programmes can also be utilised in a more deliberate manner to promote healthy eating.

**Child’s Attention to the TV Set**

Children start to pay attention to television from very early in their lives. The major bone of contention among researchers, however, has been whether children’s attention to the screen is mainly an ‘active’ or a ‘passive’ phenomenon. In recent years, there has been increasing support for the active notion, despite frequent adverse publicity which accuses television of turning children into mentally and physically lethargic ‘couch potatoes’.

Adherents to the passive view believe that much of television washes over children and disengages their minds and requires only shallow effort to follow what is happening in programmes. This impression of the way children watch television implies that programmes are more likely to be absorbed passively as a series of disconnected scenes rather than as events which link together to form a coherent whole.\textsuperscript{106} Increasingly over recent years, evidence has emerged to indicate that this impression does not reflect the real nature of children’s viewing.

### 1.10 Television and Motivation

Watching television has become such a popular pastime that many children have little time left over to practise and acquire most essential basic skills - reading - and writing, because television offers them a daily fare of different narrative discourses and they lack the incentive to learn in the first place. Television comes to displace reading. One explanation of this displacement effect is that television replaces reading because both activities satisfy similar needs, and television offers the most attractive


\textsuperscript{106} Children and television: The one eyed Monster?, pg-28
package. Thus, during the pre-television era, children sought diversion of excitement through reading light fiction, thereby practising their reading skills—even comic books provide some reading practice. In contrast, television provides entertainment with minimum of effort on child’s part\textsuperscript{107}.

The hours that are supposed to the used or spent for reading are now taken by television viewing. It seems that programme featuring fantasy, superhuman characters and fast moving action sequences, which children generally find highly enjoyable have come to replace adventure books, comics and other popular children’s reading material as a source of entertainment and satisfaction of their fantasy needs. This is not to say that there is no cause for concern, though; after all, passive viewing of fantasy television content does not stimulate the active, imaginative mental processes essential for advanced intellectual growth.

Reading for instance, requires and encourages mental effort on the part of the reader to examine carefully the context in which a word is used or to consult a dictionary to find out its meaning. Further, difficult or discriminating passages may encourage the reader to draw upon his or her own experiences, memories or fantasies to add meaning to the written material. According to some experts, however most commercial television programmes essentially train children passively to sit and watch rather than actively to think and do. The cognitive growth of child depends very much on how often and to what extent his or her imagination is exercised.\textsuperscript{108} Make believe play is one of the most important ways in which preschool children learn about their environment. It can help children to develop a large vocabulary, it may play a role in development of sequencing or ordering of events, and it may foster the capacity of concentration among them. Children can mimic the utterances or behaviours of fantasy television characters, but popular programmes broadcast on public and commercial networks rarely offer the opportunity to the child to engage in kind of creative imaginative play that is essential for advanced cognitive development. For one thing, the pace of commercial television programming may be too rapid for children, effectively, to assimilate the words, ideas and images it contains\textsuperscript{109}.

