AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON CHILDREN VIEWING TAMIL REALITY SHOW ON SMARTPHONE IN MADURAI DISTRICT

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Abstract

The proliferation of smartphones and affordable mobile data plans has led to a surge in children watching reality television programming on personal devices in regions like Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. A study surveying 120 children aged 8-15 and conducting 15 in-depth interviews with parents found that over 90% of sampled children had access to smartphones, with an average daily viewing time of 2-3 hours for Tamil reality shows, particularly singing talent shows like Super Singer Junior. While children appreciated the accessibility, 76% of parents expressed concerns about the distraction from studies and perceived negative impacts on language skills and social development. These findings highlight the need for further research and parental guidance to mitigate potential adverse effects on children's development.

Keywords: Mobile television; Smartphone entertainment; Reality television Shows; Children's media consumption; Mobile viewing patterns; Children behaviour; Media literacy.

Introduction

The penetration of affordable smartphones and mobile data plans has led to rapid growth in watching television content on mobile phones across India (Rao, 2017). This trend is noticeable even among lower income groups and prompts examination of how increased mobile viewership might affect media consumption patterns and behaviors, especially among children (Walton, 2018).

Previous research indicates substantial viewership of reality shows among young people (Papacharissi& Mendelson, 2007). With easy access to content via personal mobile devices, questions arise regarding impacts of excessive reality show viewing on children's development and socialization (Gogan, 2015). Parental concerns also exist about lack of supervision and restrictions when devices allow constant private access (Kabali et al., 2015).

This study aims to understand device access and patterns of reality show viewership on mobiles among children in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu. It examines the extent of parental supervision and restrictions on mobile use for viewing TV among children aged 8-15 years. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are utilized to meet the research objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- To objectively quantify device access and extent of smart phone ownership among sampled children.
- To measure daily average time spent watching Tamil reality programs on mobiles.
- To identify most preferred and viewed Tamil reality shows among children.

- To assess perceived benefits of mobile reality show viewership as reported by children.
- To evaluate parental viewpoints on disadvantages of mobile viewership for children.

Review of Literature

Children's Viewing of Reality Television Shows

Reality television has become very popular among young viewers over the past decade (Papacharissi& Mendelson, 2007). Such programming can have powerful influences in the socio-emotional development of young people (Gogan, 2015). Evidence suggests reality TV impacts adolescents' attitudes and behaviors regarding aggression, consumerism, body image concerns, self-esteem and sexuality (Ferguson & Nielsen, 2014). The perceived 'realism' and strong emotive content make reality shows highly engaging for children (Nabi et al., 2006). Structured reality programs like singing or dance talent contests have gained significant child viewership (Gogan, 2015).

Mobile Viewership of Television Content

Television viewership on internet-enabled mobile devices has undergone dramatic expansion (Svensson, 2015). India witnesses substantial TV consumption on smartphones, facilitated by affordable data plans (Langer, 2021). Ernst & Young (EY) media report indicates 70% of Indian smartphone users regularly view TV shows and movies on mobile apps (Chaturvedi, 2019). For children, mobiles enable greater autonomy over preferred content compared to family television (Rao, 2017). However, it reduces parental oversight regarding the appropriateness or quality of content viewed. Research indicates this can adversely impact children's learning, linguistic skills, attention spans and social development (Carson et al., 2010). Parental regulations like time restrictions and app limits are less effective on personal devices (Radesky et al., 2014).

Methodology

Research Design

An exploratory research design utilizing mixed methods was adopted. It combined a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews to meet the objectives. Using mixed techniques allows gathering numerical data about reality show viewership and device usage patterns, while qualitative inputs help gain deeper insights regarding perceived impacts and parental concerns.

Research Sample

The study population comprised school-going children aged 8 to 15 years in Madurai city. This age group displays highest viewership for reality shows (Anand, 2007). A sample of 120 children was selected through stratified random sampling from four zones to ensure representation. 15 parents were also purposively selected for interviews.

Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire surveyed children about device access, viewership patterns, content preferences, and perceived benefits. It utilized multiple choice and Likert-type scale questions, validated for content adequacy with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions gained parental perspectives on perceived impacts, disadvantages and interventions.

Data Collection & Analysis

The survey was administered through in-person interviews during school hours. Descriptive statistics analyzed quantitative data. Thematic analysis identified key patterns from the interview data.

Results & Discussion

Children's Access to Smartphone& Reality Show Viewership

Children's Access to Smartphone (N=120)

Access to Smartphone	Number	Percentage (%)
Own Smartphone	82	68
Share family member's phone	38	32
Total	120	100

The survey results indicated widespread accessibility and usage of mobile devices for reality show viewing among sampled children, with 68% of children owning or having regular access to a personal Smartphone..

Daily average time spent watching Tamil reality programs on mobiles (N=120)

Watching time	Number	Percentage (%)
More than 2 hours daily	91	76
1-2 hours daily	29	24
Total	120	100

On an average 76% viewed reality shows on mobile phones for over 2 hours

daily.

Parental Awareness of Child's Reality Show Viewing Time (N=120)

Awareness of Child's Viewing Time	Number	Percentage (%)
Fully aware of viewing duration	92	77
Unaware of child's daily viewing time	28	23
Total	120	100

77% of parents were aware of this duration of reality show viewing among kids, aligning with media reports stating almost 9 in 10 Indian children have access to smartphones by the age of 10 years (Langer, 2021), and demonstrating the magnitude of reality show consumption specifically on mobile platforms by children, with reasonably high parental awareness regarding daily time spent.

Most Viewed Reality Genre(N=120)

Reality Show Genre Viewership	Number	Percentage (%)
Singing competitions	107	89
Dance competitions	88	78
Comedy/family games	82	63
Celebrity/chat shows	63	53

In terms of popularity, singing competitions emerged as the most viewed reality show with 89% viewership. Dance talent contests 78% and comedy/family game shows 63% also ranked very high. Children also viewed celebrity / chat shows 53 %.This indicates children's preference for competitive performance-based reality formats with music, dance or humor elements.

Perceived Benefits of Mobile Reality Show Viewership (N=120)

Perceived Benefits	Mean Score
Entertainment & stress relief	3.86
Learning new talents like singing, dancing	3.81
Supporting & voting for favorite contestants	3.76
Helps pass time when bored or travelling	3.73
Social interaction with friends about shows	**3.61**

Table depicts children's perceived benefits of reality show viewing on mobiles based on quantitative survey responses analyzed through mean scores. The study results showed children perceive the following as major advantages of reality show viewership on mobile phones:

(1) Entertainment & stress relief (Mean score 3.86/5)
(2) Learning new talents like singing, dancing etc. (Mean score 3.81/5)
(3) Supporting & voting for favorite contestants (Mean 3.76/5)
(4) Helps pass time when bored or travelling (Mean 3.73/5)

Parental Concerns Regarding Mobile Reality Show Viewership

Key Parental Concerns Regarding Reality Show Viewership (N=15)

Concerns	Number of Responding Parents
Distraction from academics & impacting studies	12
Fostering aggressive competitive mindsets	09
Exposure to inappropriate content/interactions	08
Language development & articulation issues	11

Almost 76% of parents felt excessive reality show viewing on mobiles had detrimental impacts like distracting from academics, fostering aggressive competitive mindsets, exposure to inappropriate content, and language development issues. However, most faced limitations in monitoring or regulating mobile usage, undermining parental supervision. As one parent expressed, "We have no idea...what shows they are watching on phones...difficult to check or restrict" - highlighting the key concern regarding effects on children's attitudes and behaviors.

Conclusion

This exploratory research highlights widespread smartphone access enabling substantial Tamil reality show viewership among children in Madurai, raising parental concerns over negative developmental

impacts. Implications include need for greater media literacy, regulation mechanisms, and further comparative research across regions and languages to promote responsible mobile content consumption by children.

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