



ISSN: 2395-7476

IJHS 2021; 7(2): 70-74

© 2021 IJHS

www.homesciencejournal.com

Received: 01-04-2021

Accepted: 03-05-2021

Dr. Ngurdingliani Sailo

Lady Irwin College

Sikandra Road

New Delhi, India

Engaging television content for children: A study amongst Mizo children

Dr. Ngurdingliani Sailo

Abstract

The emergence of media technology, especially television has been capturing children's lives as it is the most central and pervasive form of mass media which possess multiple qualities. The purpose of the study was to understand what television content captures children's magical mind. The study was carried in Mizoram, one of the seven sister states in the Northeast India. Keeping the identified stages of child development, 160 children were selected from early childhood and middle childhood groups. The study refers them as younger children (4-7 years) and older children (8-11 years). They were selected from willing private and government schools.

Within the action of collective viewing, children also have their own individual differences in choices of channels and programmes. Some variations in their choices were related to familiarity with local Mizo games, gender, age and seasonal cycle of a programme. Despite these differences, the perceptual features of animation and child oriented programmes ignite a child's interest. Cultural specific content and language familiarity engaged and enhanced both appeal and engagement for children. They were captured by the humorous absurd characters and behaviours, rhythm and rhymes and the extraordinary actions. The aesthetic ability in scenes and novelty in content also engaged a child's imagination and attention.

Keywords: content, channel and programme preferences, child oriented programmes, animation

Introduction

"Children today arrange their lives around the television set. They adjust the time spent on play, sleep, meals and homework according to their television viewing schedules and do other things with their eyes and ears glued to the box".

(Sevanti Ninan 1991, as cited in Sood, 2009)

Children are now born in homes with electronic media and this technology, especially 'television' has been capturing their lives as it is the most central and pervasive form of mass media (Signorielli, 2001) [6]. Children are attracted to a programme when they understand the concept and are excited by its forms. They seek content that they find entertaining and relevant to their personal experiences or current situations. Their choices of programmes or channels are likely to be affected by their ecological, socio-dynamics, cognitive abilities and interests (Huston, Bickham, Lee & Wright, 2007) [2].

Cultural familiarity also influences children's viewing. According to Hartley and Fiske (1978), television's content reflects the culturally dominating disposition. All content in television programmes were 'man-made', constructed under a popular culture. Since television programmes have been culturally constructed, 'viewing it' is one of the most enjoyable forms of consuming popular culture for children. They identify and relate to the content of the programme. They learn about different cultures and interpret its messages as part of their own while viewing (Gorman, 1992) [1]. The time spent on viewing television also differs depending on the child's social and cultural arrangements. According to Bickham *et al.* (2002), African American children spent more time watching TV than White children. Robert *et al.* (1999) also noted that, in a day older black children watch more television for around 2 hours than their younger ones, while older white children spent only around 1 hour more than their younger ones (as cited in Huston, Bickham, Lee & Wright, 2007) [2].

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Ngurdingliani Sailo

Lady Irwin College

Sikandra Road

New Delhi, India

Other researchers recognized that, 'age and sex of the viewer' affects viewing. Children enjoy the collective activity of viewing, but when they become older they start to have an isolated taste in viewing. Their personal interests, individual characteristics and their abilities to comprehend certain concepts influence their choices. According to Horsfield (1986), children began to become active in their viewing by the age of two and reached its peak around the age of twelve to thirteen years. Winick and Winick (1979) also found that regular viewing of television begins from around the age of three and remains relatively high till twelve (as cited in Gorman, 1992) ^[1]. Studies have also noted the age and gender variations in viewing behaviour and programme choices. Children have been shifting the programmes that they watch with age; they move from cartoons to comedy and then to violent content although there were individual differences. Moreover, the sex of the viewer's affects the amount of time spent on viewing and their choices of programmes. Girls tend to watch more TV when they were younger (2-3 years) but when they become older (3-5 years) boys spent more time with television (Gorman, 1992) ^[1]. Children quickly identified a content or character resembling their gender. Boys watch more of sports channels while girls enjoy the soaps, dramas and fairytale-cartoons (Huston, Bickham, Lee & Wright, 2007) ^[2]. The age of two to fourteen becomes a crucial window period for imparting positive learning as children becomes active in their viewing.

Family caters a social ecological climate, and this context of 'adult and peers' also influences children's choices. According to St. Peter (1988), parents influence children's viewing pattern as children accommodate themselves to their parent's choices of programmes, with majority watching regular programmes with their parents. Winick and Winick (1979), also found that the external forces of parents largely affects children's viewing pattern such as time spent on viewing. Parents of heavy viewers were more likely to have children with heavy viewing patterns (as cited in Gorman, 1992) ^[1]. However, children gradually develop their own interest in viewing. Palmer (1986) also found that children have their 'individual choices' and felt positive while viewing their favorite programmes. This individual interest leads to a decline in family co-viewing as parents tend to shut themselves from children's programmes. Since parents avoid child oriented programmes, children shift their viewing partners from parents to friends. Their programme preferences have been largely influenced by their peers. They converse the latest programmes amongst themselves, they are drawn to the dialogues, phrases, fashion, food and songs from television. Viewing a popular programme makes them feel as an insider of a group; else they feel disconnected and become socially isolated (as cited in Gorman, 1992) ^[1].

Methods

A mixed method research also known as "third methodological movement" (Teddle & Tashakori, 2011, p. 285) ^[8] was used. This method combines both qualitative and quantitative approach as human development occurs through connections between individual growth and change in social context, containing both individual behaviour and contextual characteristics that are difficult to be understood with either only quantitative or qualitative methods. It enriches the study of developmental sciences as it focuses on questions of what, where, when, why and how (Yoshikawa, Wisner, Kali & Way, 2008) ^[11].

Location of the study

This research was conducted in one of the Northeastern States

in India that is Mizoram. There are eight districts in Mizoram and amongst these districts four districts were selected using 'stratified sampling method'. The districts were divided into four zones; east, west, north and south. In this particular section the data was collected from child participants in Aizawl, the capital which is in the North, Lunglei in the South, Mamit in the West and Champhai to the East.

Sampling procedure

The participants of the study were selected within an uneven geographical and sociological-backgrounds. Willingness of the sample to participate was of vital importance so 'Purposive sampling technique' was used based upon the willingness of the participants to take part in the study. The sample comprised 160 children from different age groups: Early childhood (EC) and Middle childhood (MC) children. This study will refer to them as younger children (4-7 years) and older children (8-11 years). They were selected from both private and government schools who were willing to participate.

The sampling procedure was altered relying on purposive technique as implementing 'strictly' to other techniques was unattainable. Initially, renowned schools were randomly selected. They were personally contacted through the school principals. Some schools were enthusiastic to participate while some were reluctant as the research would disrupt student routines and curriculum. Some school principals seemed apprehensive as they thought the study was a part of evaluating the school system. Flexibility was needed depending on the willingness and availability.

Description of tools

The researcher observed locality and casually interact with the participants and some local people in their local dialect. Few games were played with children as an ice-breaker. Self-introduction game and musical chair was also played with children to create familiarity.

Semi-structure interview

Semi structure interview enables the researcher to ensure that the participants had understood the question or reframe if necessary. It was formulated for EC and MC children to elicit their responses on the following.

- Channel preferences
- Favourite programmes or programmes regularly watched
- Favourite characters
- Reasons for preferring such programmes and characters

Detailed information was asked if needed. The researcher probed related questions depending on the gesture of the participants like sudden smile, facial expression and other body language. There were some unfinished sentences amongst children and the researcher often reframed the questions.

Analysis of data

Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained. Qualitative data obtained were subjected to content analyses and the responses were classified into sub-categories and the emergent themes were listed. Data obtained in the local language were translated and transcribed verbatim for detailed examination and analysis. Appropriate software was used for the analyses of the data whenever necessary.

Results and Discussion

Children too had preferences and exercised their own choices. Each had some specific favourite programmes and gave different reasons for their choices. These variations in content preferences have also been noted by other researchers. Peer choices, gender, age and parental choices were some factors that influenced children’s choices. Cartoon Network and Pogo are channels that target child audiences with animated cartoons and is most sought by children. Language and cultural familiarity in the content by local channels also determines viewer’s choice which is supported by Hartely and Fiske’s (1978) theory of cultural viewing patterns (Gorman, 1992) [1]. The increased popularity of private channels, cultural and content unfamiliarity has led to loss of appeal of Doordarshan amongst Mizo children.

Children’s content preferences

Most children conveyed their choices with lots of enthusiasm. They articulated their excitement with facial expression and body movement as if they were really in character. Table below provides a glimpse of popularity of shows amongst children. Cartoon Network has the highest appeal with a viewership of 61 children. There were gender differences in selection of channels. Boys chose Sports and Disney channels while most girls liked Korean serials. The children believed that “Korean serials are for girls,” One boy was of the opinion that, “not only are Korean serials girly, even the men are dressed like girls” (unisex fashion) (Korean te chu hmeichhe en chi, a nu a, bakah an mipate hi hmechhia ang deuh deuh in an inchei a). It does not mean that boys totally avoid this channel but simply that Korean serials are feminine and boys

usually avoid visible connections. Some crossing of gender specific content takes place with family choices and the placement of the television. Boys cannot always avoid watching Korean serials and at times girls watch certain programmes associated generally with boys because of the appeal of the characters.

Table 1: Children’s favourite channels in Mizoram

Favourite Channels (n = 160)	No. of children		
	G	B	Total
Cartoon Network	24	37	61
Local (Animated cartoons in Mizo)	29	13	42
Pogo	13	8	21
Sports	*0	13	13
Local (Korean Serial)	12	*0	12
Disney	*0	8	8
HBO/Movies	*0	2	2
Animal Planet	1	*0	1

In the cosmopolite channels, that is, channels which are not locally televised, the child oriented channels of Cartoon Network and Pogo were popular and have higher appeal. In local channels, the child oriented programmes dubbed in Mizo like Snow-white, Cinderella, etc. were also popular especially amongst children from government schools. Dubbed Korean serial have higher appeal for girls because they were attracted by the physical appearances of the characters. The dubbed channels were popular as children were familiar with the dialogues that provides better understanding of the content.

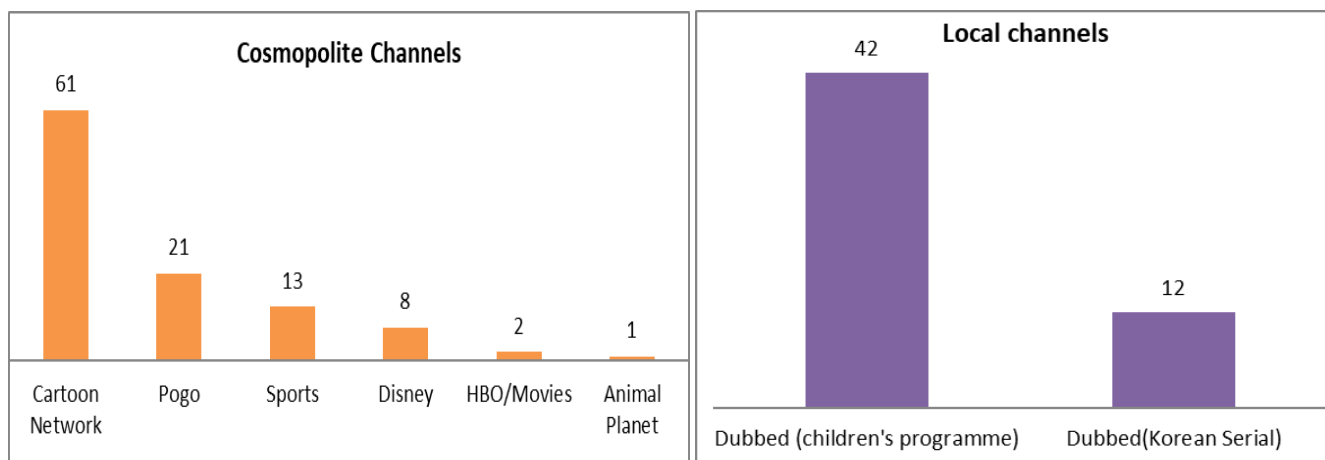


Fig 1: Cosmopolite and local channels

Choices and variations

Choices amongst boys and girls seemed to be based on their familiarity with “local Mizo activities.” Unlike other parts of India, the game of cricket was not a popular local game. There seemed to be better preference for football and wrestling. In different districts, children seemed to choose programmes which showed football and wrestling. “Football is everywhere in Mizoram” (Saxena, 2016) [5].

Children chose a programme that satisfies their visual imagination. Dubbing of child oriented programmes by local channel increased appeal for animated cartoons, especially amongst children from government schools as well as private school children from districts other than Aizawl. They used television for sheer entertainment where informative news programmes were viewed only as a result of parental restrictions. They seemed to be ritualistic viewers and chose

the most satisfying programmes over informative programmes (As cited in Mollick, 2006) [3].

Variations in choice of programmes were quite seasonal related to the calendar of broadcast of the show. At times, the local reality shows like Mizo Idol/Icon, Pro-fight (boxing) and Comedian Search were more frequently viewed depending on the season of telecast. Similarly, different Korean or Hindi serials (Dubbed in Mizo) were regularly watched when it was on TV (on air). These seasonal shows were soon forgotten after their ‘on air’ cycle, not because the viewer gets bored or loses interest due to lack of novelty ‘viewer’s fatigue’ (Turner, 2010) [9], but because of ‘absence of choices’.

Cartoons with slap-stick humour, engaging music, action-filled image, pronounced silent expression attracted children. Tom and Jerry, Oggy and the cockroaches remain constant as

all-time popular choices. Every episode in these cartoons has some unique feature and vigorous action in scenes which attracted and engaged children's attention. However, age of the viewer influenced choices. Older children start avoiding

short-clip cartoons but the medium of animation still grips their attention. They said, "Cartoon Network, Pogo, etc. are for children" but they enjoyed animations like Hotel Transylvania, Kungfu Panda, Minions, etc."

Table 2: Programmes regularly viewed by Mizo children (n = 160)

Favourite programmes (n = 160)	No. of children viewing			Brief description of programme
	Girls	Boys	Total	
1. Cartoons				*Animated cartoons based on stories in cartoon network or pogo
Oggy and Cockroaches	11	21	32	
Barbie	23	*0	23	
Tom and Jerry	7	10	17	
Ben-10	2	5	7	
Chota Bheem	4	2	6	
Mr. Bean	2	1	3	
Horrid Henry	*0	1	1	
2. Animax	*0	3	3	Japanese anime (Animation)
3. Disney (Rescue force)	*0	4	4	Real life characters having powers
4. Sports				
Football	*0	9	9	
Wrestling	*0	9	9	
Basketball	*0	1	1	
5. Local				*All programmes (Foreign or local) are in Mizo
Korean serial	19	*0	19	Different Korean serials dubbed in Mizo
Mizo Film/Local reality show or local competitions	4	4	8	Local films, singing, comedian a and boxing competition
Naupang Pual	5	4	9	Local children programmes, animations, films etc. in Mizo
6. Creative shows				Programmes which shows making, building and creating things
MAD (Pogo)	1	*0	1	
Pines and Ferb (Disney)	1	*0	1	
7. HBO/Movies	*0	4	4	All regular movies
8. Discovery	*0	1	1	
9. Animal Planet	*0	1	1	
10. Cooking (TLC) (Star World)	*0	1	1	

Favourite characters

Just as children had different choices for content, they also had favourite character for varied reasons. Older children had definite reasons for their choices. There were gender related features in choices of characters. Beauty and attractive clothing attracted girls while engaging and acts of gallantry, masculine features, physical strength, special and powerful abilities attracted the boys.

Hobbies, creative work and future goal oriented aspirations like becoming a great footballer, basketball player or a chef influenced their choice of programmes and characters. Isabella from Phineas and Ferb was chosen because she is creative. Boys chose Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo, Robin van Persie, Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez because of their excellent football skills. Children said, "Watching them play helps in learning new tactics which will help us become great footballer". One boy likes Michael Jordan because he likes playing basketball and wants to be an NBA (National Basketball Association) player. Another boy mentioned Jamie Oliver (TLC channel) and George Calombaris (Master-chef Australia in Star World) because he enjoys cooking and wants to be a chef when he grows up.

Young children in pre-operational stage were imaginative but did not have definite choices. They usually chose the most prominent character because "he/she is the hero" without any specific reasons. They also like animated fantasy characters or superheroes because they were 'real' in their world of magical belief. A 4 years old girl said "Mermaids are real, they even said it on TV" (Mermaid chu a tak a nia, TV ah pek an sawi). Researcher Woolley and her colleague also reported children's differentiation of reality from fantasy by 3-5 years

(UT News, 2006) [10]. But depending on individual circumstances or situations, some children still have difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from reality. Example: A 9 year old boy said with conviction "Superman is real; he wears a cape and flies". A 4 year old boy jumps out of his apartment window pretending to be superman and fly. In the mind of a 4 year old or a 9 year old boy, superheroes could be real. This connection with superheroes is more prominent in children who are fatherless or who have unstable household (North East Books & Publishing, 2014) [4].

Language and visual image plays an important role as children easily lose interest if the content is incomprehensible and unexciting. The use of tonal variations and voice modulation also captures children's imagination. Characters became popular with nonsensical clothes, make-ups, etc. as seen in Thai comedy. Absurdity heightens appeal with dubbing in Mizo. Mizo culture specific content also appeals to the children. Humorous behaviours in an old English dubbed comedy 'Crazy boys of the games, 1985' also caught children's attention (Mizo dubbed). Something out of the ordinary engages and sometimes displays an inherent appeal for learning.

Conclusion

Children were fascinated by the element of animation. "Animation matches a child's imagination for play within a world of fantasy" (Sood, 2009, P.56) [7]. Cartoon Network and Pogo remained the most common popular choice in all the districts. Child oriented programmes dubbed in Mizo were also popular especially amongst government school children. Language and cultural familiarity of the local channels also

enhanced viewer's choices. Children were also attracted to the dubbed comedy like Thai comedy or 'Crazy boys of the games, 1985' with content of cultural humour. However, increased popularity of private channels, cultural and content unfamiliarity gave low priority to Doordarshan programmes amongst Mizo children. Their choices of content were commonly based on gendered activities, age appropriateness, local Mizo linked activities or even seasonal cycle of programmes. For example, boys preferred Sports while girls liked Korean serials. Younger children were more attracted to Cartoons; they enjoyed slap-stick humour, engaging music and action-filled images. Older children start avoiding cartoons but still enjoyed animated shows like Hotel Transylvania or Minions. Unlike other states in India, the game of cricket is not as popular in Mizoram that affects children's choices in Sport programmes. They all preferred football and wrestling programmes rather than watching cricket. Some seasonal cycle of programmes like local reality show or the dubbed serials were quite popular when they were 'on air' but were soon forgotten after their 'on air' cycle, not because viewers got bored or lost interest due to lack of novelty 'viewers fatigue' (Turner, 2010) ^[9], but because of 'absence of choice'.

Children liked certain characters for varied reasons. Some choices were gender related as girls chose characters with visibly appealing physical appearances like attractive looks or clothing while acts of gallantry, masculine features, physical strength, special and powerful abilities attracted the boys. Hobbies, creative work and future goal oriented aspiration like becoming an expert footballer, basketball player or a chief also influenced children's choices of programmes and characters.

References

- Gorman RD. A study of children's viewing pattern. Bachelor's of education thesis, Australia, Edith Cowan University 1992. Retrieved April 16, 2015 from http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1252&context=theses_hons
- Huston AC, Bickham DS, Lee HJ, Wright JC. From attention to comprehension: How children watch and learn from television. In N. Pecora, J.D. Murry & E.A. Wartella (Eds.), Children and television: Fifty years of research. London: Lawrence Erlbaum associates, Publishers 2007, 41-64.
- Mollick SD. Teenagers and television. In V. Sunderaj (Ed.), Children and television. Delhi: Authorspress 2006, 163-183.
- North East Books & Publishing. Child Development stage-Teaching children to differentiate reality from fantasy 2014. Retrieved October 3, 2016 from http://northeastbookspublishing.net/ADHD_Books_Overcoming_ADHD.htm/blog/2014/04/12/child-development-stages-teaching-children-to-differentiate-reality-from-fantasy/
- Saxena S. How Mizoram became India's football factory. The Times of India 2016. Retrieved March 1, 2016 from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/deep-focus/How-Mizoram-became-Indias-football-factory/articleshow/51181367.cms>
- Signorielli N. Television's gender role images and contribution to stereotyping. In D.G. Singer & J.L. Singer (Eds.), Handbook of children and the media. United States of America: Sage Publication. 2001; 341-357
- Sood S. Aggressive cartoons: Influences on children's behavior. Unpublished master's thesis, Department of Human Development and Childhood Studies, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, Delhi 2009.
- Teddle C, Taskakori A. Mixed method research: Contemporary Issue in an emerging field. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds). The sage handbook of qualitative research. London: Sage Publication 2001, 285-299. Retrieved April 6, 2016 from <https://books.google.co.in>
- Turner G. "Choice Fatigue", Community and the mutation of television. Flow Journal of Television and Media Studies 2010, 3. Retrieved March 19, 2016 from <http://www.flowjournal.org/2010/10/choice-fatigue-community-and-the-mutations-of-television/>
- UT News. Young children learn to distinguish between facts and fictions. Research at University of Texas, Austin 2006. Retrieved July 3, 2016 from <http://news.utexas.edu/2006/11/27/psychology>
- Yoskikawa H, Weisner TS, Kalil A, Way N. Mixing qualitative and quantitative research in developmental science: Use and methodological choices. Developmental Psychology 2008;44(2):344-354. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.44.2.34