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Placement of television and children's viewing pattern: A study in four districts of Mizoram

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Abstract

Television industry has been reaching the tribal areas of Mizoram and undisputedly becoming a part of family lives. This paper reports the research findings of Mizoram, one of the North- Eastern dominant tribal States in India. In Mizoram, there are eight districts from which four were selected by stratified sampling. These include: East (Champhai), West (Mamit), North (Aizawl) and South (Lunglei).

The paper consists of children's viewing pattern and placement of television. There is an extensive presence of television and most families installed their TV set in the „living room“ as it seemed to influence the socio-viewing dynamics. Owning a television set represents an unstated social status and also served the social needs in a close knit Mizo society. Mizo children intensely consume television along with play. They watched TV for around 2 hours on an average during working days, this increases by about an hour during holidays. There was no significant difference in age, sex and income on hours of viewing by children. However, the duration of continuous viewing shows significant difference in age. Older children had higher duration for screen interest while younger children had shorter attention span and enjoy shorter duration clips. Children have been adapting their school tasks with daily routine of viewing. Their viewing schedule was mainly crafted by their parents in rhythms with academic demands. Some children viewed TV during meal time due to „personal habits“ and „particular programme preferences“. Some parents also used TV as a „condition stimulus for eating“. Television viewing, being a collective activity, there was co-viewing with siblings, friends or the whole family. There were some age differences as younger children spends more time watching TV with their mothers, families or siblings while older children spent more time with friends. The nature of fathers“ work and their role as a bread winner excluded fathers from viewing TV alone with their children.

Keywords: Television viewing, older children (8-11 years), younger children (4-7 years)

1. Introduction

In Mizoram, television has a permanent presence in the social fabrics. The general economic status and the close knit social lives of the people increase television viewing because it provides the easiest form of entertainment. In the present time, television seems to be a growing presence in Mizo homes. It serves as an ice-breaker, conversation generator and an entertainer for family guests. It also serves as a part of family entertainment as television viewing subsequently reduces the time spent on outing, shopping which reduce family budget (Mahajan & Luthre, 1993) ^[10]. Television viewing is a prominent activity in a Mizo family and children habituated themselves to the social parental viewing pattern. They intensely view television as a part of entertainment. The appeal of television serves as a medium of play for children which are an important element in their lives with universality across age groups, socio-economic backgrounds (Kapoor, 2005; Gupta, 2005) ^[7, 3].

So, what is television viewing?

Television viewing could be explained in various ways as it has a multifaceted aspect. There were several researchers who defined the term „viewing“ as a primary activity or a secondary activity. Viewing has many variations, some researchers confined the term „viewing“ only when the action of television viewing involves complete focus and is the first description of the child“s activity, that is „primary viewing activity“ (Huston, Bickham, Lee & Wright, 2007) ^[5]. Anderson and Field (1983) also state that, television viewing requires decision making, strategies in choosing a particular programme and interpreting its meaning.

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It involves the ability to ignore any disturbing circumstances in the viewing environment (as cited in Mishra, 2007) ^[11]. Curran (1990) supports television viewing to be an action that involves active attention with productive and motivating process rather than a mindless experience (as cited in Livingstone, 2000) ^[9].

Then, is it viewing, when a child mindlessly gazes at television while performing another activity? Other researchers address this thought and point the possibility of multi-tasking with television. They define this mindlessly gazing action as a „secondary viewing activity“ when children simultaneously perform other activities like playing, eating, etc. while viewing (Huston, Bikham, Lee & Wright, 2007) ^[5]. Bechtel, Achelphol and Akins (1972) also define that television viewing could take place when families or individuals carry out other activities and concurrently viewed a programme (as cited in Krugman & Gopal, 1991) ^[8]. Kubey and Czikszenmihalyi (1990) also confirm that, television viewing is an effortless and calming experience (as cited in Livingstone, 2000) ^[9].

In today's world, according to Nielsen Company, when we talk of television viewing, it could also mean viewing a programme or content on all different screen technologies like tablets, broadband, iPads, laptops, etc. and no longer confined only to the traditional watching of cable on a television set (Block, 2013) ^[1].

Viewing behaviour: Television viewing behaviour theories fall under different categories depending on the main emphasizes of the viewer; those who accentuate on the medium rather than the content and those who prioritize the content irrespective of the medium.

According to Comstock and Scharrer (1999), viewing behaviour can be ritualistic or instrumental. Ritualistic viewing occurs when the viewer gives priority to the medium over a specific programme. In this type of viewing, the person spends time on viewing without any specific preferences; the medium motivates viewing and the programme is chosen on the basis of the most satisfying ones. Viewing preferences are with non-demanding content, leading to light entertainment excluding informative programmes like news or documentaries. However, in an instrumental viewing, the viewer gives importance to the content of the programme rather than the medium. This type of viewing is mostly informational, serious entertainment and specific sports. Occasionally, ritualistic viewers also become instrumental viewers or vice versa when a particular programme provides interesting and exciting content (as cited in Mollick, 2006) ^[12].

Another theory of viewing behaviour is active or passive viewing which involves several conceptual and perceptual dimensions. Active television viewing occurs when the remote control is used to select a particular choice of programmes at a particular time, while passive viewing takes place when people simply views programmes chosen by others without concerning about what they might be missing (Mollick, 2006) ^[12]. According to Huston and Wright (1993), active viewing involves implicit information processing which refers to the abstract content about motives, causations, etc. at a conceptual level. Passive viewing, on the other hand, involves explicit information processing which refers to the concrete images and sounds at a perceptual level (as cited in Mishra, 2007) ^[11].

Children's viewing behaviour could be shaped by the families or individual preferences. They could be an active or passive

viewer depending on the programmes watched „by choice or by force“, placement of television and the family system „who controls the remote in the house“. They could also become ritualistic viewers if the family used television only as an entertainer or instrumental viewers if they have been habituated to the family viewing pattern of watching informative programmes.

2. Methods

This research used a 'mixed method research' also referred as the “third methodological movement” (Teddlie & Tashakori, 2011, p. 285) ^[14]. This method combines both qualitative and quantitative data into the study which can be an effective method for this study.

Location of the study

This research was conducted in Mizoram, one of the Northeast States in India. In Mizoram, there are eight districts with sub-towns and villages. The locale of the study was selected from these eight districts using „stratified sampling“ method. The population was divided into a specific set of strata where members within each stratum have similar attributes and members between strata have dissimilar attributes. In this study, the districts were divided into different regions - Aizawl, the capital in the North, Lunglei in the South, Mamit in the West and Champhai to the East. The data was collected from parents and child participants in these selected four districts.

Sampling procedure: Child participants and parents were selected from both private and government schools from the selected four districts. A probability sampling method with multi stage technique was planned for this research; however, willingness of the sample to participate was of vital importance in the study. Flexibility was needed as some schools and parents were reluctant to participate mainly because of time constrain and fear of being monitored and observed. So, a non-probability sampling method was utilized. The samples were developed through „purposive sampling technique“ based upon the willingness of the participants. 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). There were 120 parents with variations in occupation, educational qualification, skills and expertise

Description of tools: Pilot study was conducted using carefully created tools to understand the participant's world. The information obtained was used to create and modify the tools as necessary.

Questionnaire: Few carefully formulated questions related to placement of television and patterns of viewing were formulated for older children and parents. It was developed to document the dynamics of television. The tools composed of several questions to elicit the following information from parents and older children separately. The questions for parents and older children were similar with few alterations.

Questions

- Whether they own a TV set
- If not, where do they watch
- Number of TV owned
- Placement of TV.

- Children’s TV viewing schedule. Example- morning, mealtime, etc.
- Hours of TV viewing (average viewing in a day and duration of continuous viewing)
- Older children were asked who regularly accompanied their viewing.

Focus group discussion: Discussion points for younger children were similar with the question pattern in older children’s questionnaire. It was conducted to document the physical presence of television and viewing pattern. Discussion points for parents include reason for placement of TV in a particular room and for cross-checking children’s responses on hours of viewing. This technique provided detailed information and allowed flexibility depending on the participant’s expressions and response towards discussion points.

Response patterns of child and adult participants: During FGD with different groups, it was noted that there was a range in the conversation from being outspoken to being hesitant and in need of prompting. Some children and adults were more vocal while some were quiet. There seemed to be a tendency for the quiet ones to „echo“ or „agree“ with the responses of the vocally dominating persons in the group. All quiet individuals were persuaded for information to capture their views.

Analysis of data: Data obtained were both quantitative as well as qualitative. The obtained data in the local language were translated and transcribed verbatim. Appropriate software was used for the analyses of the data whenever necessary.

Results and Discussion

There is an extensive presence of television in the lives of children in Mizoram with varying dynamics of television viewing patterns. Television has been capturing children’s attention by multiple qualities of appeal such as musical melody and visual surprises.

Physical presence of television in the family dynamics: In Mizoram, a little more than half of the populations (55.1%) have television sets in their homes (Census of India, 2011) [2]. In this study, over 90% individual participants had their own TV sets. Only 15 participants from the four districts did not have their own television and these participants who do not own television set regularly watched TV for at least half an hour in their friend’s house, relative’s place and in any available nearby homes which suggested that everyone viewed television programmes to some amount.

Table 1: Ownership of television set (n=280)

	Having TV.		Not Having TV			Having TV.		Not Having V.	
	Govt.	Pvt.	Govt.	Pvt.		MC	EC	MC	EC
Children (n=160)					Parents (n=120)				
Aizawl (n=40)	20	20	0	0	Aizawl (n=30)	15	15	0	0
Lunglei (n=40)	17	20	3	0	Lunglei (n=30)	15	15	0	0
Mamit (n=40)	13	20	7	0	Mamit (n=30)	15	15	0	0
Champhai (n=40)	15	20	5	0	Champhai (n=30)	15	15	0	0
Total	37	40	15	0	Total	60	60	0	0
Percentage	81.25%	100%	18.750%		Percentage	100%	100%	0%	0%

Numbers of television set in one household: From the 280 individual participants, 228 participants owned one TV set while 31 participants were with 2 TV sets. 6 participants from

Aizawl had 3 TV sets and were families who sent their children to private schools.

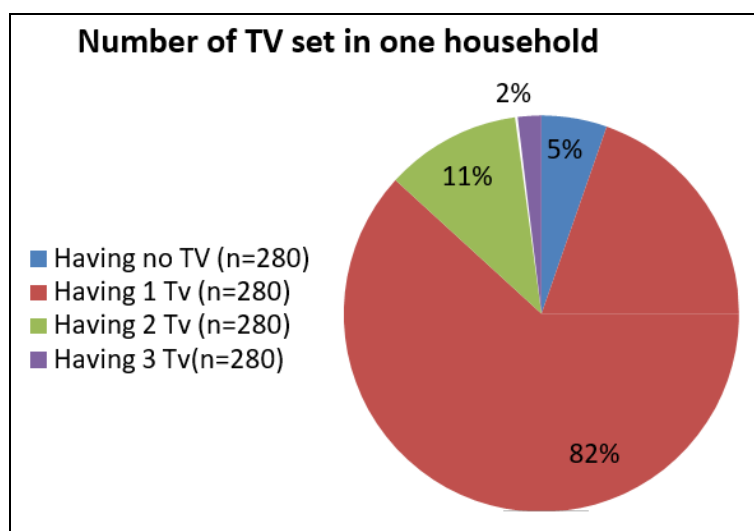


Fig 1: Number of television set (n=280)

Placement of television: The placement of the TV becomes an important factor in determining viewing patterns. TV viewing escalates in different ways when the TV set is in the living room. Children who do not own TVs also get easy access to friends’ or neighbours’ television if families use the

living room space. TV placed in the most central, high traffic and commonly used space in the house enhances and promotes passive viewing for children as it was constantly switched on for hours (Mollick, 2006) [12]. The shared bedroom also acted as a common viewing area for some

families. TV in the living room gave easy access to children; they could control the remote at their own pleasure increasing TV time as high as 4 hours or more.

The drawing room as a formal space and the privacy of parent's room reduced TV viewing to only 1-2 hours as availing television in these rooms required parent's

permission. The active social life of parents in the common space led children to exploit TV use in the formal-secluded area. They learned and got used to having control of the remote for their personal pleasure of viewing in isolation. For regulation of viewing patterns, parents need to review where to install the television.

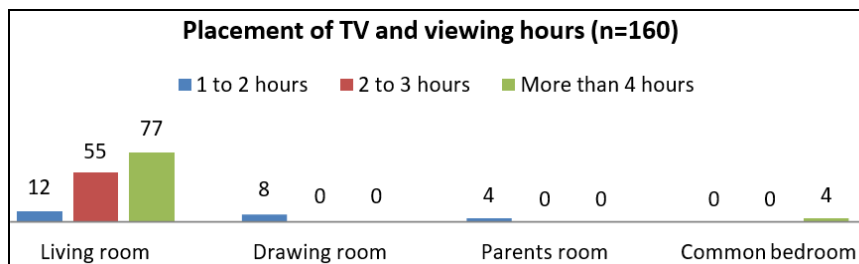


Fig 2: Placement of TV and viewing hours by children (n=160)

Families liked to install the TV set in a central place. 94.64% of the families owning television set placed their television in the living room where they spent time as well as entertained guests.

Families with more than one room homes also chose the living room. This was relatively higher than 45% found in a study by Mishra (2007) [11]. There were also 24 participants (8.57%) who placed their TV in the formal drawing room, a place used occasionally. These families had another set for daily viewership which could be in the living room or parent's room. 15 participants (5.35%) placed their TV in parent's room while 5 participants (1.78%) installed TV in the common bedroom shared between parents and children. Only one participant from Aizawl had separate TV room which was only used when guests visited as they routinely viewed the set in the living room. Among the Mizo families, TV was viewed as an object that needed to be displayed and shared. Television was not considered socially distracting.

Majority of the parents said that it is customary to place the TV sets in the living room. They said that "Almost everyone keeps their TV in the living room. It feels good to have something to entertain with or „show“ (*hmuhtir*) to friends

and guests". A common comment was that "television helps in striking conversation and opening discussions. One parent said, "Before we have TV, I felt reluctant to have friends over, but after we own a TV set, I enjoy entertaining friends at our home". Some parents said they placed their TV in the drawing room as it gives a complete look, a part of decoration and for entertaining guest. Families took pride in owning television as it boosted their social identity.

Placing TV in specific location serves certain family needs. One parent said, "Placing TV in living room is like having a companion. When I am alone doing household work I simply switch on TV which is comforting". Some mentioned that children or adults used TV in the drawing room if there was a clash in channel preferences. Some placed TV in their bed room because they enjoyed watching their own channels late at night without any distraction or the fear of inappropriate content for child viewers. Another parent with two sets of television stated the common bedroom to be feasible. "Our children could easily sleep watching television and we also watch and enjoy TV together as a family while lying on the bed". This was also because there was only one room and they had to adjust with the available space.

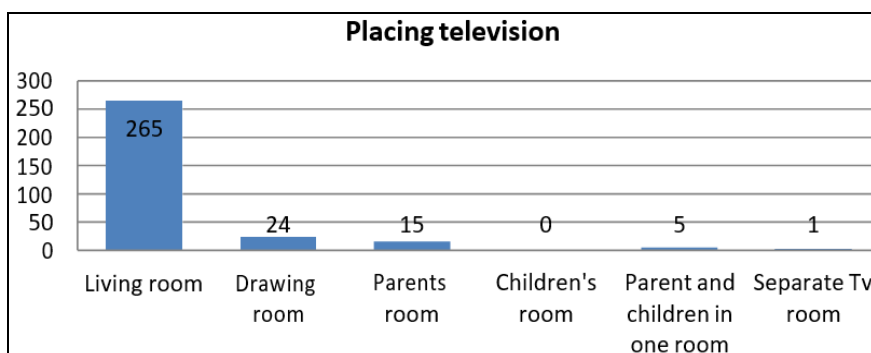


Fig 3: Placement of television

Placing of television in a central space served Mizo people's social needs. It was also placed in the most visible and accessible room as it was seen as an unstated symbol of social status for most families. In Mizoram, people are close knit and have a social practice of visiting nearby neighbours quite often and not just relatives. It is also customary to pay a friendly visit to new homes to welcome the new family into the community. It is common to have visitors who merge in with the host family's rhythms. This social openness brings about oneness and clansmen-ship for the people. Placing television in the living room or in some cases, the drawing

room helps in generating conversation over „tea“ with family guests, act as an ice-breaker between first time guests and also provides the cheapest source of entertainment for the family (Mahajan & Luthre, 1993) [10].

Viewing schedule: The most common viewing time reported by Mizo children was „during free time“ which implied the time when homework or household chores were over. Some reported TV viewing in the morning, but morning viewing was not a regular activity and happened only on holidays and not on school days. Pursuing academic skills seemed central

to all activities and all children's leisure activities were governed by school related tasks. Academic activities were primary to children's rhythms. Few children watched TV during meal time; this viewing behaviour occurred due to personal habits and particular programme preferences. Meal time viewing was a habit from

early years and had become part of their routine. Parents also joined their children in viewing TV with no apparent concern about consequences of external electronic presence. At times meal time viewing occurred when timings of a popular show coincided with eating time.

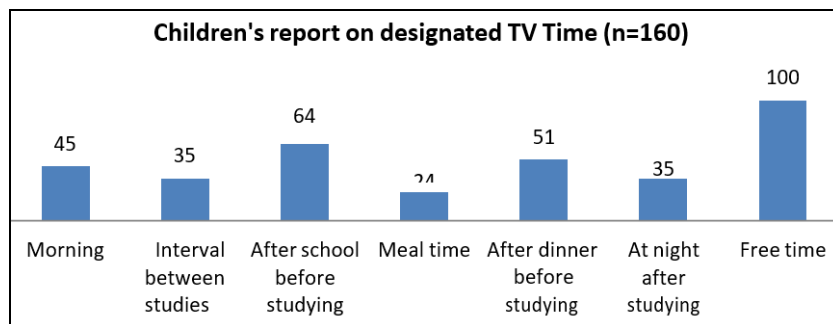


Fig 4: Reported viewing time by children (n=160)

Parent's consent on children's television viewing time

Parents' consent on TV viewing was shaped by children's academic needs. Among the families, the supremacy of academic rhythms was non-negotiable. Few mothers used television to engage children while they finished their daily jobs, especially when they got no household help. One mother of a young child said, "I do not have the time to watch my daughter go outside and play; with the rising crime and child abductors I do not feel safe. Television is my *house help* and my *baby sitter*". Television seemed to be a stimulant for promoting good appetite. Mothers allowed TV viewing during meal time as they felt with visual distraction feeding was easier. The appeal of television and the attractive visuals seemed to distract children leading to an increase in food intake as they were unaware of the food being consumed. Some mothers mentioned a clear choice for feeding their children while

viewing as it was convenient especially for children who were unwilling to eat. Meal time viewing was also driven by cutting out time for school-work. Some parents felt that combining eating and viewing left more time for schoolwork. However, research indicated that, watching TV while eating caused obesity. TV viewing disturbed the brain's ability to send signals to body's digestive system causing digestion problems. It also increased time spent on eating as they were more engaged to viewing than eating. Moreover, the amount of food intake also increases as one became unaware of the food being consumed (Temple, Giacomelli, Kent, Roemmich & Epstein, 2007) [15]. Amongst some of the Mizo parents, there was unawareness about digestion and electronic inputs or influences of over exposure and health consequences. The discussions seemed to interest the parents as part of the research.

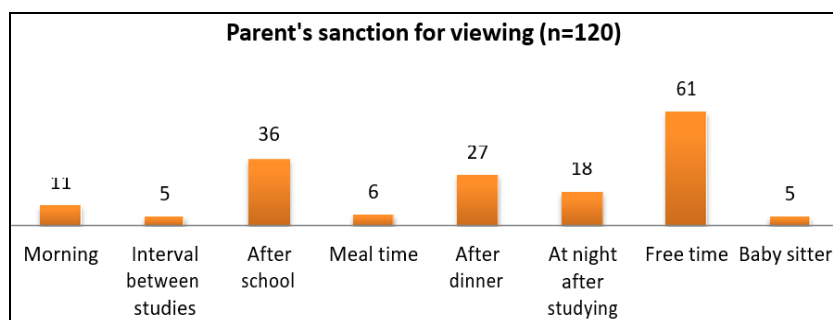


Fig 5: Parent's permission on children viewing (n=120)

Duration of continuous viewing: The duration of viewing a particular programme without children jumping to another activity helped in determining children's preferences in terms of content and time. Average duration of continuous viewing was nearly two hours (1:51 hours). Boys and girls watched TV for almost the same amount of time. Government school children could watch for almost two hours (1:52 hours) while private school children's time was 10 minutes less with 1:49 hours at a stretch viewing. There was no significant difference on sex and social groups at the 0.05 significant levels. However, there was significant difference in „age“ of the viewer at significant level of 0.05. Older children had longer attention span and had higher duration of screen interest. The average duration of

continuous viewing for older children was 2:34 hours and for younger children 1:07 hours. Older children „can“ and preferred watching longer programmes almost like regular movies while younger children enjoyed watching shorter programmes, clippings, serials, short animation, etc.

Table 2: Continuous television viewing on average

	Boys	Girls	Mean	Age mean
	(In hours)			
MC. Govt. (8-11 yrs)	2:39	2:27	2:33	2:34
MC. Private (8-11 yrs)	2:42	2:30	2:36	
EC. Govt. (4-7 yrs)	1:10	1:13	1:11	1:07
EC. Private (4-7 yrs)	1:04	1:03	1:03	
Mean	1:53	1:48	1:51	1:51

Table 3: Independent t-test on continuous viewing

Independent t-test on duration of viewing in one sitting				
Age	Mean	Df	T	P
MC children (8-12 years)	2:34 hours	158	14.95	.000
EC children (4-7 years)	1:07 hours			
Sex	Mean	Df	T	P
Boy	1:53 hours	158	0.62	0.53
Girl	1:48 hours			
Schools (SES groups)	Mean	Df	T	P
Govt. School	1:52 hours	158	0.29	0.77
Private School	1:49 hours			

Hours of television viewing in one day: During weekdays, children watched television on an average for 2:03 hours with a viewing range of half an hour to 5 hours per day. Boys and girls watched TV for around 2 hours every day. Younger children watched TV on an average for 1:55 hours while there were 16 minutes more viewing hours by older children, i.e. 2:11 hours. The t- test for comparing the means of variables on sex and age was not significant at 0.05 level.

Across age, children viewed more TV during holidays. Average viewing of television during holidays seemed varied; the range of active viewing was a little higher than during school days. Average viewing hours during holidays was almost an hour more than weekdays for around 3 hours (3:12 hour). Viewing time for younger children being 3:09 hours was quite close to the viewing hours for older children 3:15 hours. The t-test for sex and age was not significant at a significance level of 0.05. Children across different age and gender watched television for almost an equal amount of time. Older children watched focused programmes while younger watched unspecified programmes with different family members including siblings.

Table 4: Average hours of viewing in one day (weekdays)

	Boys	Girls	Mean	Age Mean
	(In hours)			
MC. Govt. (8-11 yrs)	2:22	2:06	2:14	
MC. Private (8-11 yrs)	2:15	2:03	2:09	2:11
EC. Govt. (4-7 yrs)	2:12	2:04	2:08	1:55
EC. Private (4-7 yrs)	1:48	1:39	1:43	
Mean	2:09	1:58	2:03	2:03

Table 5: Average hours of viewing in one day (during holiday)

	BOYS	GIRLS	Mean	Age Mean
	In hours			
MC. Govt. (8-11 years)	3:27	3:21	3:24	3:15
MC. Private (8-11 years)	3:27	2:45	3:06	
EC. Govt. (4-7 years)	3:18	3:06	3:12	3:09
EC. Private (4-7 years)	3:12	3:03	3:07	
Mean	3:21	3:03	3:12	3:12

Equal viewing time was an outcome of differences in viewing habits. There was no significant difference on viewing hours between children from government and private school during weekdays or during holidays at 0.05 significant level. Across social groups, there is no difference in the TV viewing hour. All children seemed to have equal access and time for television. Kaiser Family Foundation survey (1999) [6], on US population also reported no significant difference in hours of TV viewing between lower and middle income groups. However, in other States of India, social classes differences were present, middle-income group were light viewers while lower income group were heavy viewers (Muralini, 2008) [13]. In a study of north Indian States (Punjab, Haryana,

Himachal, Jharkhand, and Jammu and Kashmir), it was found that higher income group watched more television than lower income group (Gurleen & Sukhmani, 2011) [4].

Sociality in television viewing: Co-viewing with siblings, friends and whole the family was a common viewing pattern. Mothers were often viewing companions for children. Lack of TV set, parental restriction and mediation reduced individual viewing which created a positive and constructive TV environment. The nature of fathers’ work and their role as bread winners excluded fathers from viewing TV with their children.

Age influences viewing patterns and notably older children spent more TV time with their friends due to similar interests and preferences. They reported that parents were not interested in most of their choices, and said “Parents are the boss, they watch what they want”. On the other hand, younger children spent more time with siblings in viewing child related programmes and animated cartoons. They also usually viewed with mothers and were prone to viewing more of adult programmes like Korean or other dubbed serials.

Table 6: Whom children viewed television with

With whom television is viewed	MC (8-11 yrs) (n=80)	EC (4-7 yrs) (n=80)	Frequency	Percent
Only Mother	4	15	19	12%
Only Father	0	0	0	0%
Siblings	21	32	53	33%
Friends	33	12	45	28%
All Family	19	21	40	25%
Myself	3	0	3	2%

In India, television viewing has been a collective activity and children are accustomed to family viewing. They enjoy the company of others while viewing. Moreover, some children mentioned that viewing programmes with family is interesting and gives a sense of oneness, belongingness and family-love security (*Chhungkua* Thlamuanna).

Conclusion

Mizo society is governed by its own cultural and traditional ways of chivalry, *Tlawmngaihna* that unites the tribe socially. Mizo society has adopted television as a necessary element creating techno-sociality as natural to family life. Television being a part of a society enriches the socio-cultural life; it has been adsorbed to be instrumental in adding social interaction. Families feel television to be a valued asset and see its ownership as part of social inclusion. In the Mizo culture, it has become a customary to showcase a TV set as an unstated symbol of „social status“. Like other valuable collections, they placed TV in the most visible space in their homes. It created novelty and source of „social engagement“ in a socially close knit community. It merged with the Mizo rhythm of sociality and economic backgrounds as it serves a purpose as one of the most common form of entertainment. Children in the family were fascinated by this wonder box. They utilized television as an entertainer and as part of play. They enjoyed its presence and yearned for constant consumption, but regulation within the family prevents over-viewing. Just as Mizo families have accepted TV as techno-social element, they exercise their autonomy in the socialization of their children. They monitor children’s viewing and television interaction is largely crafted by parents in strict consonance with academic rhythms and

responsibilities. Pursuing academic skills is central to all activities for Mizo children. National literacy figures put Mizoram in the second rank as the most literate state (Census of India, 2011) [2]. However, pushing social boundaries is a common childhood feature. Children always find time for viewing between academic and household chores; they often intensely viewed television for hours within parental consent. They have been captured by the multiple qualities of television and across social geography children watched TV for almost the same amount of time irrespective of their age, sex or family economic background. They followed parental and societal viewing patterns which were also noted by other researchers (Gormon, 1992; Huston, Bickham, Lee & Wright, 2007) [5]. They found pleasure in the collective activity of viewing and just like parents they used it as a socializing agent with friends, siblings and families.

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