

# A Study on the Myth and Reality of the Channel Preferences of Children

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## 1. Introduction

“Children are unpredictable. You never know what inconsistency they're going to catch you in next”. Franklin P. Jones.

Children today grow up in a society driven by various forms of media. Although children face changes taking place around them, the media explosion today presents special challenges because television and its electronic relations seem to play a role albeit one sometimes difficult to identify, in the socialization process.<sup>1</sup>

Television provides children with a world populated by people or symbolic representation of people such as puppets and cartoon characters. This is true no matter what the program genre, the nature of the program content, the time of broadcast or the production unit creating the content. The society provides children with effective positive models of religion, gender, and inter-group interaction through television.

Children's television viewing has been of concern to parents, educators and health care providers for almost as long as the medium itself has been in existence. Although most studies have focused on children's exposure to potentially delirious content, such as violence, sex or food advertising, research suggests that the amount of time children spend in front of the television screen is an important predictor of cognitive, behavioral and physical outcomes of children, including school performance, bullying, attention and weight status.<sup>2</sup>

In India, a whole new generation of children watching TV is slowly coming of age. Children now are watching more TV than ever before. They also have much more to watch, with TV options growing and expanding rapidly on Doordarshan, cable and satellite networks and video. TV indeed has become a new member of the family. As viewers children are becoming part of a universal tribe of

human being for whom TV is as real and influential as parents or school.<sup>3</sup>

Television as a medium is rarely considered in the light of how viewers actually use it. Discussions of effects of television, its funding, its future or its programmes are seldom related to any real and detailed knowledge of people's patterns of viewing and programmes choice.<sup>4</sup>

This is true especially in the case of children and their preference on television. Recent ethnographic and semiotic studies of children's interaction with television suggest that children make for a 'lively audience' and are highly discriminating and critical viewers.<sup>5</sup>

## TV as a medium of communication

Without communication an individual could not become a human being; without mass communication an individual could never become part of modern society. A child learns to socialize from parents and other social groups he or she belongs to. He also comes into contact with groups other than those in school; for instance, through the mass media, which give him/her access to remote groups and cultures. TV is an important part of this process.<sup>6</sup>

The most influential and controversial theorist Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian literary scholar, became internationally famous in the 1960s for his proclamations about electronic media. McLuhan was not only the first well-known scholar of television, but he himself was a visible television personality. He saw television as the most balanced sensory medium and imagined that it would enable society to return to a tribal culture of shared values and experiences. But unlike local pre-literate tribes, McLuhan envisioned a "global village" joined by television's universal address and shared culture.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gordon L Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen, *Children and Television, Images in a changing sociocultural world*, Sage Publications Ltd, California, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Amy B. Jordan, James C. Hersey, Judith A. McDivitt and Carrie D. Heitzler, 'Reducing Children's Television-Viewing Time: A Qualitative Study of Parents and Their Children', *Pediatrics Journal*, November 1, 2006, pp.3-11.

<sup>3</sup> Sunitha Don Bosco, 'Impact of Conditional Access System on school children in Chennai' in *Children and Television*, ed, Victor Sunderaj, Authors press, Delhi, 2006, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Barwise and Andrew Ehrenberg, *Television and its Audience*, Sage Publications, London, 1988, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Keval J Kumar, *Mass Communication in India*, Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, 1982, p. 337.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 335.

<sup>7</sup> Jason Mittel, *Random thoughts from Media* (Blog), www.wordpress.com.

Today, with satellites and other technologies making it easier for television to cross borders, we are closer to that vision than ever. Our world is more and more a single “information society”, and television, the world’s most powerful medium of communication, is a key part of that society. McLuhan holds that television is the most appropriate media among mass medium for developing countries because of its involving and absorbing nature.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, television is unique media, as it combine audio and visual technology, and considered to be effective than other forms of media. It serves multiple purposes of entertainment, information and education. Because of its better accessibility, it helps learning materials reach the masses in more direct, effective and personal way than other educational media.<sup>9</sup>

TV the powerful medium of communication is a produce of the on-going modern communication revolution. It commands bigger influence of perceptions, emotions and the outlook of the masses than any other media. The impact of television on the society is often compared with the effect of “water dripping on a stone steadily and imperceptibly eroding old values and attitudes in favour of new ones.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, TV reaches both the literate and the illiterate audience and the distribution process is simpler. Thus it is superior to any other media. Also it has definite advantage over radio because of its mixed content which provides a great help is the trial period during the adoption of a new technique or an idea and can reduce the adoption time to a considerable extent.<sup>11</sup>

In judging television as a medium, we need to take into account what the viewers do with it. The evidence is that viewers differ greatly in tastes and preferences. Giving viewers what they want therefore depends on three factors: The range of programmes or different programmes that is provided, whether a program is good of its kind, and the choice of different programmes within each broad type.<sup>12</sup>

### TV programmes for children

The very inception of television in India was for ‘social education’. So in the past, the discussion on Indian television was on education and children. Doordarshan and SITE programmes are examples of this thought. Today in India, we can say both the rich and the poor have access to television. Even poor people in the slums invest their money not upon the improvement on basic needs but on television sets. With a sizeable population of India being

illiterate and living in poverty, television is a potential tool for education and development which were the reasons for introducing in India.

Nowadays there are a multitude of television channels and specific ones intended for children, for example; Cartoon network, Pogo, Chutti, Animax and so on. The irony is that, in spite of the proliferation of channels, there is hardly any specific program done for children in other channels, and most of what is available is done with market forces in mind.<sup>13</sup>

India has a rich tradition of enriching children with folk tales and grandma tales and imparting values, discipline, and moral values in an entertaining format. When some scholars argued a couple of decades ago for expansion of TV network in the country and for going for color 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.<sup>14</sup>

Children below the age of 16 comprise almost 40 percent of the population in India. Yet, barely five percent of total telecast time is directly aimed at children; this is equally true of radio, fiction, documentary, cinema, and the press.<sup>15</sup>

On television, a lot of time is devoted to programmes for children in the form of animated films and puppet shows. Several American animation series like ‘Spiderman’, ‘Heman’ and ‘Mickey and Donald’ have featured on Indian television. The advertisement that accompanies them relates to toys like G I Joe, Barbie Dolls etc. The producers of these toys sponsor these programmes to indirectly promote Western ideals of beauty and behavior.

The producers of Barbie, Mattels toys had set up a ‘Barbie friends club’, an interactive club where children could emulate the role model .The members of this club - over 12000 children between the ages of 6 and 12 years at a subscription fee of Rs. 95. They write letters to Barbie and she writes back to them. It is claimed that Barbie receives over a hundred letters every day. The Joshi committee report (1984) had warned against this ‘cultural invasion’, but Doordarshan did not take note of this warning.<sup>16</sup>

The Joshi report also noted that children’s programmes are the most substandard of all the programmes produced. Indeed, children’s programmes are considered child’s play. The producers who are underutilized at other work are allotted the children’s programmes section. Furthermore, the time slotted in Doordarshan for telecasting the children’s programmes is generally at the beginning of the evening’s transmission, when most children would be playing outdoors.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Mridula Menon, *Indian television and video programmes-Trends and policies*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, P.37.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sunitha Don Bosco, ‘Television exposure and its influence on children of Tamil and English medium schools’ in *Children and Television*, ed, Victor Sunderaj, Authors press, Delhi, 2006, P. 237.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Sridhar, ‘A serial effect’ ‘*Metroplus*’ The Hindu, January 24, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> N. Bhaskara Rao, ‘Whither children’s television’ ‘*The Tribune*’, June 26, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Keval J Kumar, *Mass Communication in India*, Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, 1982, P. 337.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, P.339.

Young children have the smallest attention span. However they are mesmerized by the programmes specially made for them. As they grow up, they have a tendency to be attracted for the programmes for adults; their interests drop as they get familiar with the conventions of television storytelling.<sup>18</sup>

More than half the television viewers in India today are children below 15 years. Yet, there is hardly any sensitivity about the relevance and impact of television channels which operate in a competitive mode for one-upmanship in the race for viewership. These channels are concerned more about “what interests or attracts” rather than what is “in the interest” of children. Neither the government nor parents or teachers seem to be bothered about this.<sup>19</sup>

The recent trend on the Indian TV scenario shows that more channels are going for “children’s programmes”. However, what is not taken note of is that (a) most of these programmes are of foreign origin and are reruns over the years (b) they do not have anything to do with enrichment or supplementary scope for school education or imparting moral standards (there are, of course, some good pre-school programmes) (c) some of these foreign channels are now entering their second phase in the country taking to marketing of toys and tools for children promoted in these serials.<sup>20</sup>

There is a decline recently in the extent of locally produced programmes for children in Indian channels. Therefore, the foreign programmes for children are dubbed into Indian languages. Moreover, the international lobbies are operating aggressively to thrust animation serials on Indian children. That is how today cartoons have become synonym for Children’s TV. Most of these serials are produced after so much research. But not for ensuring educational or general knowledge aspects but for capturing and retaining eyeballs of children again and again and to see their serials have certain “dope-effect” on children.<sup>21</sup>

The Government has not taken proactive initiatives in this regard, while we have a children’s Film society to promote films for children and a children’s book trust, but we have none for television despite the number of children who see television is several times more and even more critically, the frequency of their viewing television is more than a couple of hours a day.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike reading, there are few barriers of comprehension for young children to view programming aimed at older audiences. Television, because of its medium features of accessibility and emotional resonance, helps break down and shift social boundaries beyond just the content that it conveys.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Subha Das Molick, ‘Teenagers and Television’, P.167.

<sup>19</sup> Bhaskara Rao. N, ‘Whither children’s television’ *The Tribune*, June 26, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Cedric Cullingford, *Children and Television*, Gower Publishing Company, Hampshire, 1984, P. 44.

## Children and channel preference

Television offers children a great deal of what they want to see, and children spend a lot of time responding to this offer. They are very clear about their preferences. From a very early age itself they show themselves to be knowledgeable, accurate about what is offered on television, and is consistent in their tastes.<sup>24</sup>

Children, as babies, absorb new ideas and expressions about the world mediated by television long before they own thoughts. Born into homes in which the TV set is kept on for several hours a day, they start viewing as infants.<sup>25</sup> At about the age of two, a child takes his first serious look at the home TV set. By the time he is three he has some favorite programmes, knows how to ask for them, and spends about an hour a day watching them.<sup>26</sup>

A child’s earliest preferences are predictably animated cartoon shows with their fast action and broad comedy; for puppets, live animals, live storytelling and sing a-longs. Surprisingly, however the child develops a taste for the so called adult programmes and in early school years they view many more adult programmes-[largely], of course, because there are more of them available to the children.<sup>27</sup>

Children and adolescents prefer to watch television because watching TV requires little effort when compared to reading a book. The most potent single influence upon what a child watches on TV is what her parents watch. In homes where the parents take the trouble to offer attractive alternates to TV, the children watch less TV.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that children prefer certain programmes, and do so quite distinctly does not imply that they do not watch many others. Nor does it imply that they derive no pleasure from other programmes.

Children’s recall of programmes gets worse the more they watch, for they achieve a plateau of inattention and stay there. The information serious or trivial only stay in their consciousness if there is some personal association that makes it interesting. Only those items or images repeated often become remembered through recognition<sup>29</sup>

Some critics observe that the label, ‘children’ itself is misleading because it encourages us to think of a fairly homogenous group of human beings. For example a primary school student thinks very differently from a 12-

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, P.11.

<sup>25</sup> Sunitha Don Bosco, ‘Television exposure and its influence on children of Tamil and English medium schools’ in *Children and Television*, ed, Victor Sunderaj, Authors press, Delhi, 2006, P. 240.

<sup>26</sup> Barry Cole, *Television Today-A Close-up View* (Readings from TV guide), Oxford University Press, London, 1981, P. 276.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Sunitha Don Bosco, ‘Impact of Conditional Access System on school children in Chennai’ in *Children and Television*, ed, Victor Sunderaj, Authors press, Delhi, 2006, P. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cedric Cullingford, *Children and Television*, P. 181.

year old one. Research consistently shows that sex differences among children too impact their responsiveness. For example girls tend to prefer activities that are less vigorous however boys typically prefer activities that are more physically aggressive. In terms of cognitive skills, girls generally possess stronger verbal abilities, whereas boys do better on visual spatial skills. The fact is that children, even those born to the same biological parents and brought up in the same environment, differ in many dimensions.<sup>30</sup>

Earlier, it was noted that since children do not have any purchasing power, market researchers do not study children as television or radio audiences, or as readers. But all this has changed in the recent years with globalization and liberal economic policies. Today, children have the pestering power if not the buying power. Hence significant research on children's use of, or interaction with, the mass media is on the rise over the years.

These unique characteristics make it difficult to come with a single prototype for what a child is like. Therefore we cannot make generalization about the children and the media, without taking into account the development, personality, age, and gender characteristics of the individuals involved.<sup>31</sup>

Television, while different from any other medium, is an archetype of all kinds of stimulation, information and entertainment. The understanding of the nature of children's aptitude towards and the effects of television are the crucial means of exploring how children learn and form their awareness of the world. And the many literatures on 'effect' make it clear that the nature of response and their preferences are rarely explored.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the focus should be more on the preferences of children rather than the studies on the content and effects of television.

### Objective of the study

The study attempts to understand the channel preference of children with reference to the programmes specially designed for them.

### Specific objectives

1. To identify the kind of programmes preferred by children.
2. To understand whether children watch the programmes designed for them.
3. To find out whether children prefer any other channel/ programme in place of channels/programmes intended for them.

<sup>30</sup> Sunitha Don Bosco, 'Impact of Conditional Access System on school children in Chennai', P. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Sunitha Don Bosco, 'Television exposure and its influence on children of Tamil and English medium schools', P. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Cedric Cullingford, *Children and Television*, P. 188.

### Scope of the study

The study and its findings shall be useful to three different groups. They are, (a) producers of children based programmes (b) the channels telecasting children based programmes (c) the children as viewers.

The producers will benefit as they can understand the kind of programmes preferred by children and produce programmes in the guided lines in future. They can also understand the variation in gender in their preferred programmes and produce programmes accordingly in future.

Channels will gain as they understand the choice of children and modify the content and the time of airing the same. Also, it helps them to understand their channel in relation to their rival channels in catering the children as audience.

Children certainly will benefit as they will get to watch their preferred programmes at a time convenient for them.

### Limitations of the study

This study needs to be conducted at a national level since most children's channels and programmes are designed to cater the national audience rather than for any single state or territory. But due to constraints, samples were drawn from the schools in Kozhikode, Kerala. Therefore the results cannot be generalized to whole of Kerala or India.

In India, television reaches a large number of children including school dropouts and children who have never gone to school. This study has taken school children as its population for the survey. It has not taken into account school dropouts or those who were not enrolled to schools. So the opinions expressed in this study are to be strictly confined to educated school children.

An appropriate survey for this kind of a study should include children with different socio economic and educational status with relation to their ratio of the population in the country as a whole. So, this study should only be taken as an indicator for conducting further studies on a large scale.

### Operational Definitions

**Animation:** Animation is the representation of the movement through a sequence of still images, each slightly different from the other, projected at the rate of about 24 frames per second.

**Archetype:** An original model after which other things are patterned. It is a perfect example of something. In biblical studies it can be a person, event, a literary form, or the original manuscript from which other manuscripts are copied.

**Cartoon:** A humorous drawing, often with a caption or a strip of such drawings. In the context of this study, it means an animated cartoon.

**Culture:** It is the sum total of the ways of life of people and includes norms, behavior patterns, attitudes, and artifacts, traditions, habits and customs.

**Doordarshan:** The public television broadcaster of India. The term Doordarshan literally means Television.

**Ethnography:** A branch of anthropology that studies the origin, characteristics, and distribution of different cultural and ethnic groups.

**Global Village:** A term coined by Marshall McLuhan to denote the world as a single community of interdependent inhabitants who are interconnected by contemporary technology, especially television and the World Wide Web.

**Globalization:** Worldwide economic integration of many national economies into one global economy through free trade and free movement of capital by multinational companies. The concept of globalization can also be applied to cultural products like movies, music and values.

**Infant:** A child at the youngest stage of life, specifically before they can walk.

**Lobby:** A group of people who support some common cause or business or principle or sectional interest who actively try to influence the legislation by personal interview and persuasion.

**Marketing:** Marketing is a societal process which discerns consumers' wants; focus on a product or service to fulfill those wants and attempt to move the consumers toward the products or services offered.

**Media:** A means of communication, especially of mass communication, such as books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, motion pictures, recordings etc...

**Multimedia:** A combination of various types of media, including sound, animation, video and graphics.

**Prototype:** An original object or form which is a basis for other objects, forms, or for its models and generalizations. It can be an early sample or model built to test a concept or process.

**Semiotics:** Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and how meaning is constructed and understood as means of language or communication. It is derived from the Greek word 'semeion'.

**Socialization:** The term refers to the process of learning one's culture and how to live within it.

**Television:** Television is a widely used telecommunication system for broadcasting moving pictures and sound from over a distance. TV comes from the Greek 'tele' meaning 'far' and the Latin 'visio' meaning 'sight'.

## 2. Review of Literature

Television as a medium is entertaining and educational, opens up a new world for kids, giving them a chance to virtually travel around the globe, learn about different cultures, and gain exposure to ideas they may never encounter in their own community. A great deal is known about children and television, because there have been thousands of studies on the subject. Researchers have studied how TV affects kids' sleep, weight, grades, behavior, and so on. But there is no pioneering work in the direction on the underlying realities of the children and their channel preferences.

Victor Sunderaj (2003) studied *Television and Urban High school children*, which revealed a majority of school-going urban children in India do not watch television for more than three hours a day. They watch numerous programmes they do not care for, but continue to watch it in the absence of anything better.

'*Children's television viewing frequency; Individual differences and Demographic correlates*' a study conducted by Seymour Feshbach and June Price Tangney (1988), found ethnicity to be a strong determinant in viewing television in US. Afro-American children viewed nearly twice as much television as white children, independent of parents' level of education. For the individual child, viewing frequency was a stable behavioral trait, regardless of the fluctuation of the networks offerings.

An analysis carried out by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), "*Growing up with TV*" (2001) has revealed that, in India the total number of children's programmes in all channels is not even five percent. The study found that children belonging to the high-income group mostly watch Cartoon Network or programmes in satellite channels. This is because they can understand English or there is more than one television set in their houses, or the parents had alternative means of entertainment leaving the children by themselves. As expected, language and the lifestyle play a major role in channel preferences, but surprisingly serials stood out as the most popular content in all the channels.

In his study titled '*Children and Television*' Cedric Cullingford (1988), found that children watch thrillers especially American serials, such as *Starsky and Hutch*, *Kojak*, *Six million dollar man*, and *Charlie's angels* which are considered as 'adult' programmes. The study also revealed that apart from cartoons, children's interest in comedy is in tune with adult tastes. There is little evidence that children prefer the programmes ostensibly designed for them.

Usha Abrol, N Khan and Parul Shrivastava (1993) studied the '*Role of parents in children's television viewing*' which focused on the interaction and discussion between parents and children in watching television. The study found that in households where parents have comparatively higher levels of education, the children spent more time watching television. Because, educated

parents have more interaction and discussion with children about TV programmes.

Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill (1999), in their study on, *Children, Young People and the Changing Media Environment* presented a comprehensive account of leisure time and media use by children and the concerns of their parents. The study provided details of the way in which young people use the media, together with the impact upon them and their families. The study looks at the use of TV, video, books, computer games, music and personal computers. It found out that young people use the media for almost five hours a day. Television occupies half of this time. Its dominance rests heavily on the breadth of gratification it offers: for excitement, to overcome boredom, for relaxation and to overcome the threat of feeling alienated.

The research team of Amy B. Jordan, James C. Hersey, Judith A. McDivitt and Carrie D. Heitzler (2006), conducted a study funded by the American Academy of Pediatrics called '*Reducing Children's Television-Viewing Time: A Qualitative Study of Parents and Their Children*'. It explored how a recommendation to limit television viewing might be received and responded to by a diverse sample of parents and their school-age children. The team found that most of the children spent three hours per day watching television. They also found that the most frequently cited rules related to content. Nearly all of the parents of children in all age groups described similar concerns related to media content, particularly exposure to sexual content, violence, and bad language. Children in this study expressed that television as relaxing although they said they watch TV because they had nothing better to do.

Amar Jit Mahajan and Nirupama Luthra (1991), conducted a study on *Family and television ;A sociological study* which revealed that children of the upper social class watch television for lesser duration as compared with children of middle and lower classes. In case of children of the upper class, a vast majority watched television on an average of two hours or less per day. This is much lower in case of children of middle class and even lower for lower class.

'*A study on media preferences and its content popularity among high school students in Thrissur district*', a study carried out by Saritha K V found that most respondents especially girls love music programmes and phone-in programmes in various channels. However, when content preferences were analyzed among the respondents, it is understood comedy programmes have an edge over serials. Boys were found to be very much interested in watching crime thrillers.

June Price Tangney (1988), in her study on '*Aspects of the family and children's television viewing content preferences*' examined the relation of children's television content preference to children's perceptions of parent child conflict and parents' child rearing attitudes. Results showed that children whose parents reported more dysfunctional parenting attitudes tended to view more fantasy oriented content, more children's programmes,

violent cartoons and programmes than children whose parents reported adaptive parenting attitudes. Thus the results indicated that parental empathy, sensitivity and adaptive role expectations were inversely related to children's preference for fantasy oriented content and children's programmes, particularly among males.

'*Parental views on the usefulness of television programmes to children*', a study conducted by Suriakanthi A and Meenakshi D (1989), analysed the views of parents on the advantages and disadvantages of children's television viewing, the optimal time to be spent on television programmes suitable for children and suggestions towards minimizing the ill effects of television. The findings showed that parents did not have the opinion that TV is bad for their kids. A large number of parents said that it is desirable for children to see television for a maximum duration of two hours and minimum of one hour a day. Also most of the parents felt that TV has helped the language development in their children.

Anuradha K (1994), conducted a study titled '*Television viewing, its effect on children's personal and educational development*' revealed that significant gender difference do not exist regarding the viewing time of children per week. Both boys and girls had children's programmes as their favourite programmes. The study also found that irrespective of gender and socio-economic status, all children watched television for more time on weekends than on regular days.

A Cartoon Network survey called *New Generations* (2004) conducted among households in 14 Indian cities found that more than ninety per cent of them owned colour television sets. Watching cartoons topped the viewership of children with a majority saying that it was their favourite entertainment. The survey indicated that among kids Cartoon Network continued to be the leading channel, followed by Star Plus and Pogo.

The available review of literature reveals that a lot of aspects have been explored in the area of children and television. However, no significant study has so far been carried out on the myths and realities of the channel preferences of children. Hence, this study is a pioneering effort in this direction.

### 3. Methodology

Survey method is opted for this study in order to gather information in detail on the variables chosen. This methodology is opted successfully for data collection for several studies related to children and television in the past.

Since the number of studies in the area of children's channel preferences is very limited, a pilot study was conducted to finalise the objectives of the study. The pilot study, a trial run of the study, was conducted on a small scale to determine whether the research design and methodology are relevant and effective. Samples of 53 students were taken for pilot study with variables such as age, gender, education and socio-economic status.

This pilot study helped to understand the channel preferences of children. As most of them prefer to watch news programmes', followed by devotional serials, and soaps. A lot of them watched reality shows, which are designed for the general audience. Based on the findings of the pilot study, the objectives were framed.

**Sampling Procedure**

Random sampling method was used to draw the sample. A self administered questionnaire was distributed among the

children who constituted the population of this study. A sample of 160 was selected from the age group of 9-13 years. The samples were drawn carefully, so as to give equal representation for both boys and girls. In order to make it easier for the children to respond, the questionnaire was designed as close-ended.

Survey research studies large and small population by studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence distribution and inter- relations of sociological and psychological variables.

**Analysis and Interpretations**

The analysis, based on percentage and cross tabulation is as follows;

**Table 1: Gender wise breakup of the respondents**

Gender	No of respondents	Percentage
Female	71	44.65
Male	88	55.35
Total	159	100.00

The above table indicates that among 159 respondents 44.65% are female children whereas 55.65% are male children.

**Table 2: Class wise break up of the respondents**

Class	No of respondents	Percentage
V	57	35.85
VI	60	37.74
VII	42	26.42
Total	159	100.00

The above table shows that among the total respondents 35.85% are students of fifth standard, 37.74% are of sixth standard and 26.42% are of seventh standard.

**Table 3: Frequency of children’s television viewing with respect to class**

Class	Rarely	Regularly	Occasionally	Total
V	24.56	31.58	43.86	100.00
VI	28.33	16.67	55.00	100.00
VII	23.81	26.19	50.00	100.00
Total	25.79	24.53	49.69	100.00

The above data reveals that 31.58% of the fifth standard children and 16.67% of sixth standard children watch TV regularly. However, 28.33% of the sixth standard children watch TV rarely, whereas 23.81% of the seventh standard children rarely watch TV.

**Table 4: Duration of television viewing with respect to class**

Class	1-2 Hours	2-4 Hours	C 1/2 Hours	Others	Total
V	77.19	12.28	8.77	1.75	100.00
VI	66.67	15.00	15.00	3.33	100.00
VII	66.67	19.05	14.29	0.00	100.00
Total	70.44	15.09	12.58	1.89	100.00

The above data shows that 77.19% of the fifth standard students watch television for 1-2 hours per day and only 8.77% watch television for 2-4 hours per day, whereas 12.28% of the seventh standard students watch television for 2-4 hours per day and 66.67% of the sixth standard students watch Television for 1-2 hours per day.

**Table 5: Guidance for watching television with respect to class**

Class	YES	NO	Total
V	85.96	14.04	100.00
VI	76.67	23.33	100.00
VII	85.71	14.29	100.00
Total	82.39	17.61	100.00

Among the respondents of fifth standard an overwhelming majority of 85.96% receive guidance regarding watching television. However, 14.29% of the seventh standard children said that they make independent decisions with regard to watching television. Overall 82.39% of respondents receive guidance in watching television.

**Table 6:** Source of guidance for children with respect to class

Class	Parents	Parents & Grandparents	Brothers/Sisters	Parents & Brothers/Sisters	Others	Parents, Grandparents & Brothers/Sisters	Totals
V	77.55	6.12	10.20	4.08	2.04	0.00	100.00
VI	76.09	0.00	21.74	2.17	0.00	0.00	100.00
VII	61.11	8.33	11.11	5.56	11.11	2.78	100.00
Totals	72.52	4.58	14.50	3.82	3.82	0.76	100.00

From the above table, it can be inferred that almost 73% of respondents receive guidance from their parents, only a small percentage i.e. 3.82% receive guidance from others. From among the respondents the fifth standard students receive the most guidance from their parents, i.e.77.55%.

**Table 7:** Nature of guidance received by children with respect to class

Class	Time Preference	Program, channel & time Choice	Program & time Choice	Program Choice	Program & Channel Choice	Channel Choice	Others	Channel & Time Choice	Total
V	30.61	0.00	0.00	28.57	0.00	30.61	8.16	2.04	100.00
VI	56.52	0.00	0.00	19.57	0.00	19.57	4.35	0.00	100.00
VII	41.67	5.56	8.33	25.00	5.56	11.11	2.78	0.00	100.00
Total	42.75	1.53	2.29	24.43	1.53	21.37	5.34	0.76	100.00

42.75% Children receive more guidance with respect to time, program and channel choice, the respondents of sixth standard constitute 56.52% of it. Only 11.11% of children of seventh standard respondents receive guidance in case of channel choice.

**Table 8:** Children’s programme preference

Programmes	No of respondents	Percentage
Star Singer	55	34.59
Tom & Jerry	96	60.38
Mr. Bean	67	42.14
Others	37	23.27
Films	12	7.55

The above table shows that 34.59% of the children prefer to watch reality show, and 60.38% of them watch cartoon programmes. Only 7.55% of the respondents watch films. It is clear that 23.27% prefer other programmes.

**Table 9:** Channel preference of children

Channels	No of respondents	Percentage
Asianet	65	40.88
Cartoon Network	97	61.01
Surya	52	32.70
Others	62	38.99

Most of the children watch regional entertainment channels like Asianet (40.88%) and Surya (32.70%). A large number of children watch Cartoon network i.e. 61.01%.

**Table 10:** Children’s channel preference with respect to education

Class	Entertaining	Entertaining & Favourite programmes	Favourite programmes	Entertaining, Informative & Favourite programmes	Informative & Favourite programmes	Informative	Entertaining & Informative	Total
V	19.30	1.75	63.16	1.75	1.75	8.77	3.51	100.00
VI	28.33	5.00	38.33	5.00	1.67	20.00	1.67	100.00
VII	33.33	4.76	42.86	2.38	0.00	9.52	7.14	100.00
Total	26.42	3.77	48.43	3.14	1.26	13.21	3.77	100.00



From the above data we can see that children in general, prefer a certain channel because it has their favourite programmes (48.43%). Only 13.21% of children prefer a channel because of its informative programmes. 33.33% of seventh standard students prefer a particular channel because it has their favourite programmes.

**Table 11:** Children’s program preference

Type	No of respondents	Percentage
Comedy	93	58.49
Action	34	21.38
Sports	49	30.82
Music	61	38.36

Of the total respondents 58.49% like to watch comedy programmes but only 21.38% like to watch action oriented programmes. However, 38.36% prefer to watch music shows.

**Table 12:** Children’s favorite programmes and favorite channels

Class	NO	YES	Total
V	3.51	96.49	100.00
VI	6.67	93.33	100.00
VII	52.38	47.62	100.00
Total	17.61	82.39	100.00

The above table shows that a majority of fifth standard students (96.49%) agree that they watch their favourite programmes in their favourite channel however 3.51% of respondents opine that they do not get to watch their favourite programmes in their favourite channel.

**Table 13:** Children’s program preference and favorite channels

Class	More Comedy & Music	More Comedy, Music, & Thrillers	More Action	More Action & Music	More Comedy	More Music	More Comedy & Action	More Science Programmes	Total
V	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	0.00	50.00	0.00	100.00
VI	0.00	0.00	25.00	0.00	25.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
VII	22.73	4.55	31.82	9.09	13.64	13.64	0.00	4.55	100.00
Total	17.86	3.57	28.57	7.14	17.86	17.86	3.57	3.57	100.00

50% of class six students feel that more music should be added to their favourite channel and equal percent of class five students feel that more comedy should be added.31.82% of seventh standard children want more action in their favourite channel.

**Table 14:** Frequency of television watching and gender

Gender	Rarely	Regularly	Occasionally	Total
Female	35.21	18.31	46.48	100.00
Male	18.18	29.55	52.27	100.00
Total	25.79	24.53	49.69	100.00

Among the male respondents 46.48% watches TV occasionally and 18.31% of the female respondents watch TV regularly. But only 18.18% of the male respondents rarely watch TV.

**Table 15:** Duration of television watching and gender

Gender	1-2 Hours	2-4 Hours	C 1/2 Hour	Others	Total
Female	67.61	15.49	16.90	0.00	100.00
Male	72.73	14.77	9.09	3.41	100.00
Total	70.44	15.09	12.58	1.89	100.00

Majority of the male respondents i.e. 72.73% watch TV for 1-2 hours per day as does 67.61% of the female respondents. 9.09% of the male respondents watch TV for only half an hour while the percent of female respondents watching TV for one and half hours is 16.90%.

**Table 16:** Guidance on watching television and gender

Gender	YES	NO	Total
Female	73.24	26.76	100.00
Male	89.77	10.23	100.00
Total	82.39	17.61	100.00

The above table reveals that 73.24% of females and 89.77% of males receive guidance from home in watching TV while 10.23% of males do not receive any guidance.

**Table 17:** Parental / Others guidance

Gender	Parents	Parents & Grandparents	Brothers/Sisters	Parents & Brothers/Sisters	Others	Parents, Grandparents & Brothers/Sisters	Total
Female	67.31	5.77	21.15	1.92	1.92	1.92	100.00
Male	75.95	3.80	10.13	5.06	5.06	0.00	100.00
Total	72.52	4.58	14.50	3.82	3.82	0.76	100.00

Among the female respondents 67.31% receive guidance from their parents and 21.15% receive guidance from their siblings. A majority of males i.e. 75.95% receive guidance from their parents.

**Table 18:** Type of guidance with respect to gender

Gender	Time Preference	Program, channel & time Choice	Program & time Choice	Program Choice	Program & Channel Choice	Channel Choice	Others	Channel & Time Choice	Total
Female	42.31	3.85	5.77	32.69	1.92	11.54	1.92	0.00	100.00
Male	43.04	0.00	0.00	18.99	1.27	27.85	7.59	1.27	100.00
Total	42.75	1.53	2.29	24.43	1.53	21.37	5.34	0.76	100.00

43.04% and 42.31% respondents, both male and female respectively receive guidance with respect to time.

**Table 19:** Channel preference with respect to gender

	Entertaining	Entertaining & Favourite programmes	Favourite programmes	Entertaining, Informative & Favourite programmes	Informative & Favourite programmes	Informative	Entertaining & Informative	Total
Female	32.39	5.63	46.48	0.00	0.00	9.86	5.63	100.00
Male	21.59	2.27	50.00	5.68	2.27	15.91	2.27	100.00
Total	26.42	3.77	48.43	3.14	1.26	13.21	3.77	100.00

Both male and female respondents prefer a particular channel because it has their favourite programmes i.e. 46.48 % females and 50% males. Only 9.86% females and 15.91% males prefer a specific channel because it is informative.

**Table 20:** Children’s favorite programmes / favorite channels.

Gender	NO	YES	Totals
Female	19.72	80.28	100.00
Male	15.91	84.09	100.00
Total	17.61	82.39	100.00

Majority of respondents say that their favourite channel has their favourite programmes, i.e., 80.28% females and 84.09% males. However, 19.72% female and 15.91% male disagree.

#### 4. Summary of Findings

- Most of the children watch television occasionally, while some of them watch regularly.
- More than 75 percent of fifth standard students and less than 70 percent of seventh standard students watch television for 1-2 hours per day. Only a few respondents opined that they watch television for more than four hours a day.
- Majority of children said that they receive guidance for watching television. However, some respondents said that they did not receive any guidance.
- The fifth standard children received comparatively more guidance for television viewing.
- Most of the respondents received guidance from their parents for watching television. However, a few of them received guidance from others too.
- Children of fifth and sixth standard received more guidance from their parents than children who are older.
- Majority of children received guidance with respect to time. However, they received lesser guidance with respect to channel preference.
- Some of the respondents felt that they were not allowed to sit too close to the TV, which is the only form of guidance they get.
- Some of the respondents said that they receive guidance with respect to time as well as programmes and channel choice.
- Reality shows are hugely popular among children as most of them watch reality shows regularly.
- Majority of the respondents opined that they watch *Tom and Jerry* cartoon and *Mr. Bean*, a comedy series.
- Films are not so popular among the kids. Although some of them like to watch comedy films.

13. Most of the boys said that they prefer to watch violent cartoons like Dragonball Z, Ben Ten and Power Rangers. Notably a few respondents preferred to watch WWE matches.
14. Some respondents said that they prefer watching popular Malayalam serials and this include both boys and girls.
15. Environmental and informative channels like Discovery and Animal Planet are watched by some of the respondents. And a few more are interested in quiz programmes.
16. Surya, Asianet, Cartoon network and Pogo were the highest watched channels among children. In addition, sports channels like star cricket and ten sports are also the favourite channels of the respondents.
17. More than 90 percent of the children preferred to watch comedy programmes and a very low percentage preferred action, music and sports.
18. An overwhelming majority of children feel that they receive their favourite programmes in their favourite channel.
19. The study shows that boys watch TV regularly than girls. However, girls watch for longer duration than boys.
20. Boys received more guidance for watching television. However, girls said that they are independent in exercising their choice.
21. Both boys and girls prefer the channel which telecasts their favourite programmes.

## 5. Conclusion

The word Television is derived from the Greek word 'tele' (far), and the Latin word 'visio' (sight). Commercially available since the late 1930s, the television set has become a common device in homes, businesses and institutions, particularly as a source of entertainment and news.

Television is probably the most effective of all media that aims to create social awareness. Moderate amounts of television viewing may be beneficial for the child, depending entirely on the type of programmes the child is watching. It promotes creativity and critical thinking in children and encourages them to think and ask questions. Television inspires children to learn more and entertains them. They get exposure to a wide range of activities that they may not get a chance to encounter.

Television genres include a broad range of program types that entertain, inform, and educate viewers. Children's channels and programmes are a significant part of today's television. Research has shown that children between the ages two and eleven spend an average of one full day per week watching television. This is a very familiar scenario in many Indian homes today. Watching television is the preferred family pastime. Children absorb millions of images from the television set depending upon his/her choices. However, television is widely criticized for exposing children to violence, occupying too much of their time and introducing subject matter that is not appropriate for them.

Although numerous researches were conducted in the past in the area of children and television, not much has been done in the area of their program and channel preference. There is a general perception among parents and producers of children's programmes that children watch only programmes that are specifically designed for them. These include cartoons, puppet shows, serials and other programmes. It is evident from this study that most children watch programmes that are either meant for the general audience or for adults. This may be due to the fact that the programmes meant for them lacks quality. Most of the cartoons and animated movies are products from the western world which have nothing to do with our culture and heritage. Also, a lot of children's serials are reruns of the programmes shown in American broadcast channels.

Reality shows are highly popular among children and most of them watch shows like *Star Singer*, *Vanitha Ratnam*, *Thakadhimi* and *Junior Dancer* regularly. Comedy programmes are among the favourite for both boys and girls. Many are satisfied with their favourite channel but quite a few feel that they would like more comedy and action to the existing content.

Surprisingly some of the respondents agree that they watch Malayalam serials irrespective of gender. Many like to watch *Kuttichathan*, a magical and fantasy oriented serial for children. The regional malayalam channels like Asianet and Surya are popular among children. Also sports channels like ESPN, Star Cricket and Ten Sports are equally prominent among the respondents.

It can be noted from this study that the most of the children receive guidance from their parents with regard to television viewing. A majority of the respondents say that they have certain time limit in watching TV. They also agree that they receive guidance with the type of programmes they watched.

The findings of this study have evidently broken the myth that children watch only programmes and shows specially designed for them. In fact, they like to watch cartoons and shows but they also prefer news, serials, reality shows, quiz and other programmes made for the general audience as well.

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