

The role of cable TV in character identification among the children: A case study of Sindh province, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the trends in liking of national and international celebrities in the middle-school going children of Sindh province on the basis of differences in age, gender and cable availability. In a survey of more than 600 respondents findings show that age plays an important role in liking and gaining inspiration from the celebrities. The inclination for celebrities is more clearly visible in older children than younger ones. Additionally, this study confirms that liking for celebrities from various fields is different among children and depends on the accessibility to cable television. Children having access to cable television are more inclined towards foreign celebrities while children watching national TV channels like local heroes more. In the fields of sports, politics, and music, children have expressed their liking for local heroes.

Keywords: *Cable TV; Children effects; Sindh province; Character appearance; style – celebrities, heroes*

Introduction

During last decade, a great change in the television broadcasting area has been viewed across the globe, which has encircled the developed and developing societies. The rapid growth of Cable television networks has resulted in the availability of a number of television channels to the people round the clock. These new sources of media have provided enough space to various quarters of the society, especially in the third world to look for possible effects of this communication flood on various sections of society.

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Pakistan has also undergone a remarkable media revolution over the past ten years. These changes have intensive implications on the people of the countries of region. The choice proved the trigger for a media revolution throughout the region. This unprecedented increase has provoked a lively talk about the implications for nations, communities and cultures. Satellite TV respects no borders and it has lodged a major challenge to the nation, state and broadcasting systems.

The decade of 1990s saw a great change, both conceptual and actual in the use of satellite communications to broadcasting. Cable TV entered in Pakistani houses in this decade and then became the part of the lives of the people.

Pakistan has also undergone a remarkable media revolution over the past decade. The 24/7 hours availability of international TV channels has been spread not only cities but in small towns and remote rural areas as well. The availability of this choice has reflected its effects on the life style, attitude and mental level of people by large. Children are considered to be among a number of strong forces that may have a strong effect. It has been generally observed that most of the children are moved towards the Indian TV channels due to its language, which is similar to Urdu but it has geared a great shift in the culture and traditional values. Children are much attracted towards the glamorized and fashioned Indian programs. When they watch a totally different lifestyle and culture they become confused due to the difference between the environment in which they live and that they watch on television.

As a result, they start to adopt and utilize different things watched on television without knowing their impact. The language, dialects, dressing, way of talking, attitudes and behavior are changing among children. Children can be commonly found speaking in the style of Indian actors' dialects. Their choice of words is also changing. They easily use Hindi vocabulary in their day-to-day talks. And above all they become more familiar with Hindu rituals, customs and religious festivals.

Parents are not only concerned about the adoption of Indian culture by their children but they are also concerned about the effect of cable TV on academic life of their children. Having an opportunity of more channels, they consume most of their time in watching TV and neglecting their studies.

Literature review

Regarding social influence of TV, Minton (1975) summarizes the study of Joseph Klapper regarding social influence of television and suggested that existing inclinations of individuals are further bolstered by mass media. Studies about the effects of mass media were shifted towards television in late 1950s and early 1960s.

Researches conducted by CBS Broadcast Group (1974) demonstrated the pro social impact of television programs like *Cosby*, *Kids* and *Fat Albert* and discovered TV to be facilitating learning pro social guide to under aged.

Summing up the studies, Bryant & Thompson (2002) concluded that consumers react to messages according to their background and predispositions. The findings indicate that the impact of media can be cognitive, focusing on mind or affective focusing attitudes and behaviors, bring change that may be direct and indirect short term, long term, intermittent (e.g., sleeper effects) or gradually build up.

On the same way, two of major studies were conducted Martin-Barbero (1993) suggested that media has a great potential to shape perception and develop norms and values of people and concluded that life in urban and rural cities is life created by media Nestor (1993) also supports the observations.

Chong, Duryea and et al. (2007) observed that people in Brazil are naming their children after celebrities, which shows cultural impact on media.

In a study, Mitra (2005) observed 23 dress pattern changes in favor of western styles and consumers of TV gave up their traditional style and adopted exotic one.

Joshua (1985) said that face impression, dressing and the way feelings are conveyed, improved due to media as focus of media is on visual rather than the rational thoughts.

In a study on the impact of Cable on perception of female in Pakistan Zia (2007) has concluded that household activities have changed in terms of style and are adopting dress code foreign to their culture. Their priorities have changed as well women have

included watching cable in their daily routine at the expense of other activities; further she discovered that social interaction with family and with society has suffered as people are with their surrogate partner at home and dislike to be interrupted.

In another research by Chang R. (2007), a sample of rural and urban Girls Colleges of Hyderabad district was taken to observe the impact of TV commercials on girls of rural and urban colleges; it was discovered that that television influenced the living patterns and buying decisions and girls followed the information gained through TV advertisements.

Similarly, Dahri (2005) carried out another study on "The Impact of Star Plus Drama 'KiyoonkeSaasbhikabhibahoo thee' on the housewives of TandoWali Muhammad, Hyderabad". The study found that the drama affecting the housewives, motivated them for adopting new fashion and luxurious living leading to the destabilization of their normal spending behavior.

Chen (1994), in his article "The impact of TV on the Socio-economic conditions", concluded that it was very simple to make television responsible for adverse effects on children's academic abilities and performance. They are generally believed to pay less attention on their homework, reading and other healthy activities.

Hearold (1986) found in her study that pro social effects of television content were more lasting and more potent than antisocial effects. The results indicated that TV itself is not bad; its use as pro social content has led to less stereotyping and more positive social interaction by children and helped in discipline formation and altruistic tendencies as well but pro social program can backfire if it glamorizes violence throughout but ends with certain moral lessons. She indicated other factors like children's own abilities to get the message, watching with others, grade, age and gender were also contributing to shape their attitudes.

SaremOzdemir (2006) carried out a study on 'Effects of Television as a natural Educator.' The study was important in terms of finding the socialization effect of TV, it found that people spent most of time before TV and then they imitated the character they liked in their practical life.

Communication experts believe that media has a great power to influence public. The great potential of television on societal changes leads pros and cons. The pro views television as a means

of education and socialization of positive values among society. On the other hand, the cons views television as a dangerous threat, which decreases ethics and makes other destructive things. In general, those controversies can be classified into three categories; first, television programs can damage the existed moral values. Second, television strengthens the existed moral values, creates new values in society. Third, television creates new values in society including values for children.

Objectives of the study

- To find out the tendency of the children towards TV characters appearance and style.
- To determine the adoption of appearance and style of TV characters among children in Sindh.
- To search out the copycat influent among the children.
- To explore the difference between gender-wise TV characters manifestation and style.
- To explore the difference between age-wise TV characters manifestation and style.
- To search out difference in characters liking, for ethnic diversities in Sindh province.
- To find out the difference between national and international heroes.

Hypothesis

Children who watch Cable TV have a greater tendency with Television characters, their appearance and style than the children who watch terrestrial channel (PTV).

Theoretical framework

The researchers selected the Uses and Gratification theory because a cable television viewer has an opportunity of viewing a number of channels, including national, regional and international ones along with a variety of genre the viewers of non-cable television have an access to very limited number of state-owned TV channels. Therefore, the first part of the study tried to explore consumption patterns of television both by cable and non-cable viewers. The respondents' preferred channels, TV viewing habits,

time consumption and reasons for viewing justify the application of 'Uses and Gratification Theory'.

The theory of 'Uses and Gratifications' reflects the consumption patterns of television according to needs and pleasures (gratification) of the children. The gratification (Satisfaction) feature directs to the exposure of preferred television channels and programs that can produce effects.

The next aspect of the present research is related to the effects of television. The exposure to various indigenous and foreign channels provides ground to the possible effects of media content. This relates the study to Cultivation and Social Learning Theories.

Uses and Gratification

McQuail, (1993) said that in media research, the Uses and gratification approach is an effective tradition in media research. Originally concept of this approach is based on the research for explaining the immense appeal of certain media contents. The main question of this approach is: Why people use media and for what purpose they use media?).

Blumler and Katz' s perceptions are seen very clearly that media users can choose themselves the influence of media on themselves and users prefer one media alternative over the other as a means to an end. The theory opts the optimist's view of the media. The theory holds the possibility that the media have a silent influence on our lives and how do we view the world. This assumption that the consumers use the media to satisfy the given needs does not fully recognize the power of the media in society.

Katz, (1959) explained that under Uses and gratifications approach audience viewers determine the burden of link between gratifications and media choice. According to this approach, people's needs determine what media they would choose and how they use certain media and what gratifications the media provide them. This approach is opposed to other theoretical perspectives as it regards consumers as active media users while others take media users as passive receivers of information. Traditional media affect theories and uses and gratification have two opposed questions: "What media do to people?" and "What people do with media?" The first one focus on "what media do to people" and assume audiences are standardized, while uses and gratifications approach is more concerned with "what people do

with media" It admits consumers' personal needs to use and response to the media, determined by their psychological and social context.

In this context, the present study is an attempt to understand how the younger population of Sindh uses national and foreign channels on Cable/ Non-Cable television. This work also seeks to answer how the gratification in process; affects some of the activities of Sindhi children.

Methodology

As descriptive study the researchers used survey technique to collect the data from the respondents. By a questionnaire consisted of 76 questions data was collected. Sindh Province had been taken as universe of the study while the student of 5th and 8th were the population of the study. The data was collected through random sampling in 2008-09. Area was divided into two broad section i.e. Cable town and Non Cable Town respondents while 624 respondents filled the questionnaire. To find objective results the researchers use Statistical package for Social Scientists (SPSS Version 15).

Data analysis

The researchers analyzed the data in the following descriptive and inferential methodology;

Generally, the identification of children with television characters have remained a matter of interest for the researchers. In this regard, Schramm et al (1961) in their study indicated that all parents reported they witnessed their children act like their heroes.

The study further stated that the children can easily catch the beliefs and behaviors of the characters of television and identify themselves with those characters. Maccoby and Noble (1975) have also written about the great amount of this identification with young children.

In Pakistan, Zuberi (1992) observed that " With help of media, one might say, the children go on to reinforce their liking and disliking for certain personalities....And since television stands out in its far-reaching effect on children, the role of TV in fostering children's preferences in this respect is worthy of study."

In present study, this aspect has been checked in context of children having Cable Television, and with Pakistani channels. In this regard, children of both Cable and Non Cable Towns were asked about their favorite personalities in various fields, like drama, music, sports and politics. The findings were as follow:

The data in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, suggests that, on grade basis, senior grade children are more inspired by famous personalities in various fields. The Cable Town's' children like the personalities irrespective of keeping any distinction of nationality. In various fields their favorite personalities are non-Pakistanis, especially Indians.

On other hand in Non Cable Town's, children like the personalities of Pakistani nationality in all fields. Especially the show business personalities in Indian Movies and TV dramas have taken the place of heroes of Sindh Children.

However in the field of music, sports and history their heroes/ favorite personalities are still Pakistanis in Cable and Non Cable Towns both.

Among Indian showbiz personalities, Shah Rukh Khan (King Khan), an Indian film actor is the person having common popularity among children of Cable and Non Cable Towns in Sindh.

In sports, Shahid Afridi, a cricket player is the popular most personality of the young children in both Cable and Non Cable Towns. Children senior in age like him very much.

In the area of national history, Quid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan and Ms. Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister are the heroes of younger as well as older children in Sindh.

Table 1.1. Identification with TV characters (Cable Towns)

Cable Towns		Grade		
Category		V	VIII	
Film	Shah Rukh Khan	12	15	27
	Salman Khan	15	12	27
	Rani Mukharjee	9	15	24
	Others	31	35	66
TV Drama	Shabiran	21	21	42
	Komal	12	18	30
	Khanoo	12	18	30

	Asad Qureshi	21	12	24
	Others	12	09	21
	No reply	06	03	
Music	Ahmed Mughal	18	15	33
	Shaman Mirali	12	12	24
	Abida Parveen	15	12	27
	Others	21	37	58
Sports	Shahid Afridi	27	24	51
	Shoib Akhtar	15	18	33
	Others	30	17	47
History	Quide Azam	21	24	45
	Benazir Bhutto	21	24	45
Others	Others	15	27	42
	No reply			
Grand Total				

Table 1.2 Identification with TV characters(non-cable towns)

Non Cable Towns		Grade		
Category		V	VIII	
Film	Shah Rukh Khan	13	21	34
	Shan	13	7	20
	Reema	7	10	17
	Nadeem	6	9	15
	Others			
TV Drama	Aziz Solangi	5	18	23
	Saadia Imam	6	12	18
	Others			
Music	Ahmed Mughal	3	4	07
	Others			
Sports	Shahid Afridi	21	33	54

	Waseem Akram	10	8	18
	Shoib Akhtar	9	8	17
	Others			
History	Quide Azam	19	8	27
	Benazir Bhutto	4	11	15
	Others			
	No reply			
Grand Total				

*Question was open ended

Figure 1.1 indicates that on gender basis, in field of show biz Indian film actors Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan are more liked by girls than boys and Rani Mukherji is equally favorite among children of both genders in Cable Towns.

In Cable Towns, characters of TV plays Asad Qureshi, Khanoo and Indian television drama character Komal and are more like by boys than girls while a Sindhi character Shabiran is favorite to girls. Komal is a female character in Indian television plays.

In The field of sports, Shahid Afridi and Shoib Akhter, the cricket stars of Pakistan are slightly more popular among boys in Cable Towns.

In area of history, Quid-e-Azam and Ms.Benazir Bhutto and are more favorite personalities more among boys than girls.

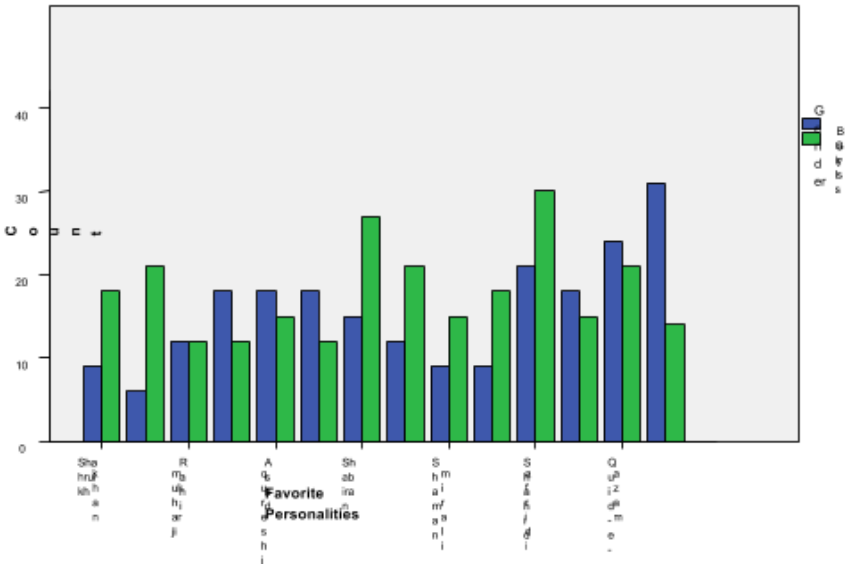


Figure 1.1.Cable Town: Gender wise distribution of the respondents for character identification

In Non Cable Towns, in the field of movies, ShahRukh(Indian film actor) Shan and Nadeem (Pakistani film actors) are the favorite actors of boys. Pakistani Film Star Reema is favorite among girls.

In field of Drama, Aziz Solangi was found more popular among boys, while Saadia Imam was the favorite television actress among girls in Non Cable Towns.

Among singers, Ahmed Mughal is slightly more favorite in boys than girls in Non Cable Towns.

In sports, Shahid Afridi, Waseem Akram and Shoib Akhtar are more popular among boys than girls in Cable and Non Cable Towns.

In the history, Quid-e-Azam is the favorite personality of girls, while boys like Benazir Bhutto, more than girls in both Cable and Non Cable Towns.

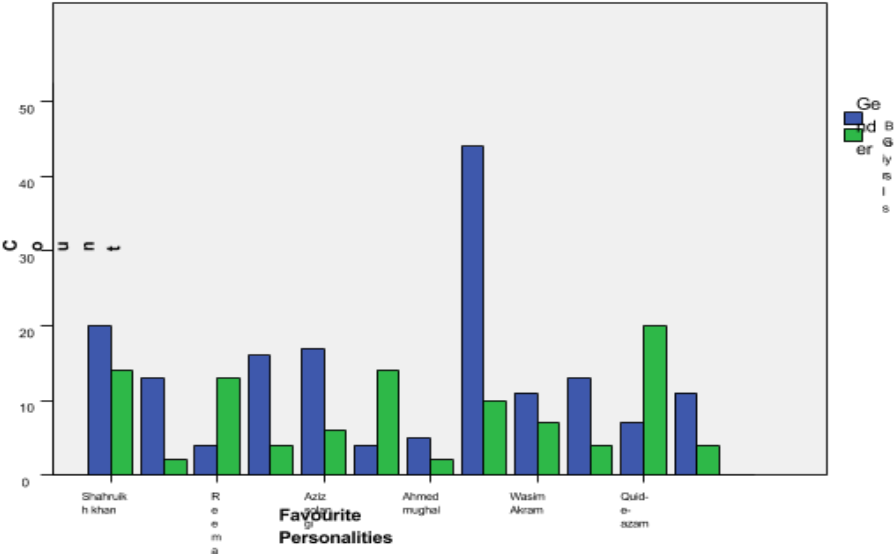


Figure 1.2. Non-Cable Town:Gender wise distribution of the respondents for character identification

Figure 1.3 shows that on ethnic basis, in Cable Towns, Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukharji are more favorite among Urdu Speaking children, while Rani Mukharjee is also linked by Sindhi Speaking Children.

The Sindhi Speaking Children in Non Cable Towns also like Shahid Afridi and Shoaib Akhtar more than girls in sports.

In history, interestingly Quid-E-Azam and Benazir Bhutto are more liked Sindhi Speaking children in Non Cable Towns.

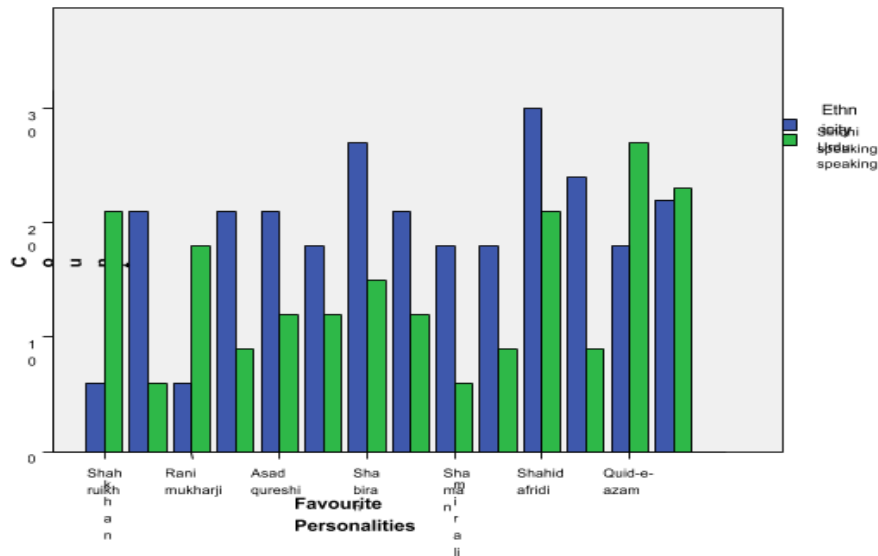


Figure 1.3. Cable Town: Ethnic wise distribution of the respondents for character identification.

In music, Ahmed Mughal, Shaman Mirali and Abida Parveen are also more liked by boys than girls in Sindhi Speaking children in Non Cable Towns.

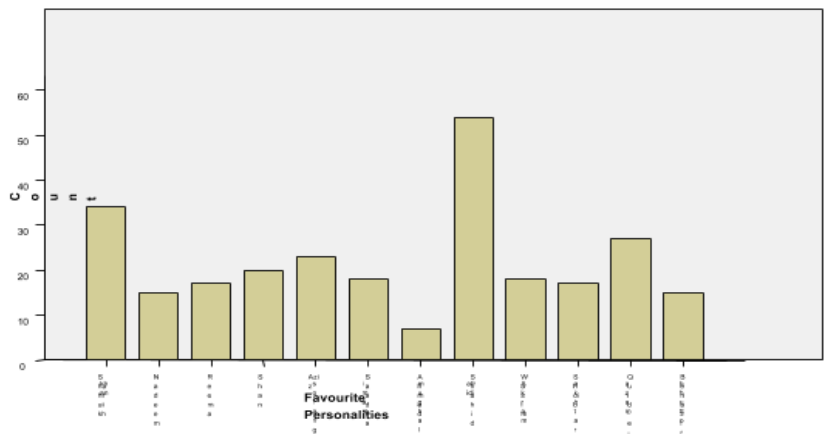


Figure 1.4. Non-Cable Town: Ethnic wise distribution of the respondents for character identification

Discussion

Children, in their surroundings, come across the heroes in different walks of life. Right from their family members to peer groups, they become acquainted with various leading personalities and determine some likings.

Dorr, (1986) said that the Cultivation Theory focuses on television content conveying ideas about social behavior, social norms and social structure and on the effects of such content on children's beliefs about their society. Liebert&Sparfkin (1988) said that Bandura and Walters' "Social Learning Theory" states that children learn regarding their individual personalities by experience and interaction with their surroundings, family, peers and other cultural environment.

It was also observed that when they watch the same personalities on television, they reinforce their favorites.

In this study attempt was made to assess that how cable TV viewing children differ in likings of their favorite heroes than their counterparts living with only Pakistani TV channels.

The results suggest that age plays an important role in these likings and inspiration and the trend of heroism is indicative more in elder children than younger. Another important factor was revealed that likings of heroes in various fields are different in Cable and Non Cable Town's children. Children in Cable Towns like the heroes of foreign nationalities especially in show biz fields. This suggests the possible role of cable television with foreign channels. The results further support this assumption, when the children are viewing only Pakistani channels. They like more local heroes. Mostly they like personalities of Pakistani nationality in show business especially in movies. It is also interesting that in the fields of music, sports and history there is some commonness in liking of Pakistani personalities.

According to Dorr (1986), Cultivation, Catharsis and Social Learning Theory, all focus on television content as the stimulus to which children are exposed. In present study, it appears that though the effects of cable television on the children of the region are not significant but intimate the induction of non-Pakistani national personalities in the scenario. Still it is believed that family, school and religious teaching are the powerful forces,

which play vital role in shaping the images in the minds of children but the introduction of new personalities through cable television, can be counted as one of the contributing force in reshaping the likings of young children in the region. Access to Indian movies is common in Pakistani society and it influences the young minds. The declining standards of Pakistani film industry has provided and opened field for the liking of Indian movies. In short it could be noted that heroes in native film, music, sports and national history areas stand as the heroes of future leaders.

Conclusion

The advent of Cable television affects its viewers in many other ways too. It intrudes the cognitive approach of the individual by different kinds of content regarding various walks of life shown on various channels. In Pakistan, where Indian movies have already superseded the local film industry, the foreign channels provided enough opportunities to its viewers to replace their national heroes with the personalities of alien countries. But it did not happen this way. The study found little support for this assumption. The majority of the junior graders, girls and Urdu-speaking children in Cable Towns have chosen Pakistani personalities and national heroes in different fields as their heroes and role models. Pakistani channels on Cable television have also been successful to *reinforce* the images of Pakistani heroes belonging to almost every walk of life. In sports, politics, music and many other fields, children have expressed their likings of local heroes in these fields. On the other hand Indian movie heroes have maintained their position of popularity. Obviously, the reason is an easy access to quality Indian movies in the local market. The uses and gratification theory seems to be effective in the case young minds for choosing their role models in different fields.

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