

## MEDIA PLACEMENT IN BUILDING PERSONALITY OF A CHILD AND RAISING

HIM RELIGIOUSLY, CULTURALLY, AND SOCIALLY

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### ABSTRACT

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*As media play an increasingly important role in children's lives of worldwide, parents and authorities are alarmed by their watching content that compromises or damages personal development, and can affect religious commitment, cultural values and social attitudes. Today's mobile devices are powerful enough to surf the web, watch TV, talk to friends, play games, and read, but parents may be bewildered or frightened by this freedom, as they are responsible for children's upbringing. Undesirable content from foreign cultures with different moral values threaten to confuse or mislead young people. While parents demand their children carry their cell phones everywhere, they may be shocked by what else is going on with those mobile devices!*

*Mapping Parental Mediation implies mother or father will pay close attention to what the child sees and hears, and act as a censor if necessary. Indonesia is today facing the reality of heavy media bombardment on its children: how much parents and society react to monitor and guide their children's viewing?*

*As children are the leaders of tomorrow's world, our responsibility as adults is to mediate their heavy viewing and listening practices. Our success in doing this will be measured by how well-adjusted the child's personality emerges, and how dynamic and intelligent he or she will perform.*

*We strive to maintain moral and religious values, in a media-intensive society of change.*

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### Introduction

Few would deny that media – primarily electronic and cyber – play an increasingly important role in the lives of today's children around the planet. Homes worldwide are saturated with the media – the content of which might be compromising and damaging to

the development of young minds. The vast range of mobile devices which young people carry with them wherever they go allows them to surf the web, watch TV, stay in touch with friends, play games, and learn from print media. Much of this bewilders or frightens parents and authorities responsible for children's upbringing – particularly when undesirable content from foreign cultures with different moral values threaten to confuse or mislead young people.

### The Media and Children

Concerns related to media exposure become most acutely sensitive when children and adolescents are involved. It is often difficult to know how media affect them: while young children lack the physical ability, intellectual development and financial independence to determine their environment, they are in fact “mutants” who have grown up in a heavily technology-infused environment, from infancy. Today's children grow, develop preferences, and indulge their capacities to make independent choices based on their relation with media (which they can often master more thoroughly than their parents!). On the other hand, their immature emotional and intellectual abilities mean they cannot evaluate risks and benefits of the many varieties of media exposure they are bathed in. They may therefore become vulnerable to the impact of alluring (if undesirable) media choices. Moreover, because of the unique development sensitivities of children, their exposure may have longer-lasting effects than would be expected with adults – for better or worse, with subsequent effects on social skills, academic achievement and physical, emotional and spiritual health.

On the other hand technology is in fact unavoidable, as many strictly controlled societies are finding out, as they fail to control entering content. And because business, government,

banking and industry have become so heavily media-intensive, there is no way to “shut down the Internet” or other media without paralyzing society.

The history of mass media began in 11th Century China and 15th Century Europe with the invention of movable type for printing; while this was a “passive learning” medium, it was succeeded in the late 19th Century by early interactive technologies including the telegraph and telephone, which were introduced at widely differing times in different nations. Currently available formats for the dissemination of information include packaged and disseminated data from printed text, the radio, television and movies. Recently, however, the dramatically broadening use of the internet and wireless technologies (such as cellular phones), along with Web-enabled personal digital assistants, have had a tremendous impact on social development, with far-reaching implication for both individual and social change, with particular deep implications for children. Parents around the world demand their children carry their cell phones with them everywhere, and be “on line” at all times – but they don’t really know what else is going on in those mobile devices!

Parents or other authorities should not expect that they can have perfect control over the media their children access; rapidly evolving modes today include both mature technologies that have melded into people’s everyday routines, such as radio and television, and newly and possibly better ways to connect and interact, such as cell phones, and the internet. Kids everywhere love to acquire and experiment with new media.

Inasmuch as the human development process is greatly affected by interaction with the environment, children’s habits, tastes, and knowledge may be powerfully shaped through exposure to these far-reaching mobile devices.

Technologies are implemented with the expectation that they will benefit users, yet concerns are raised about children’s potential misuse of the media, poisonous effects of American consumerism, violence and sexual content on children, and the unknown impact of mass media on communities and families.

Pediatricians and child psychiatrists are the medical professional who expressed their concern most forcefully. Stars burger and Donne stein, in a comprehensive article focusing on children and the media, write that “television and other media represent one of the most important under recognized influences on the children health and behavior”. If they were to write today they would undoubtedly expand their focus to include the worldwide web: for many children Facebook has become infinitely more appealing than any TV show.

Research concerning the television programs watched by children indicates that parents are frequently unable to impose limits on their children or steer them toward recommended

high quality programming. The failure of “expert” warnings to resonate with the public, the overwhelming and pervasive impact of the media, and lack of time on the part of parents to monitor children’s programming also account for these findings.

There is also concern for the physical effects of exaggerated media exposure, as evidenced by reports of brain cancer from cell phones and potential eyestrain from television.

#### Parental Mediation and making connections with Media Literacy

Mapping Parental Mediation as a discipline of importance has arisen from our media-saturated societies. Today, there is no doubt that individuals (particularly young people) are inundated with media messages in their day-to-day lives. The effects of commercial enticement include dissatisfaction with one’s looks, body, living space or possessions and feelings of helplessness and depression.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (1999), in the United States children on average spend 5.5 hours per day outside of school work engaged with media (such as television, internet, radio, magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, books, video games). Children are increasingly likely to have a television and computer in their bed rooms (Bovril & Livingstone, 2001; Livingstone, 2002); they are entertained and informed by the media, but that’s also where they get information about social roles, ideals and values (MySpace, Yahoo Messenger, Facebook). Media may serve as a socializing agent, taking the place of schools, parents and religion in providing guidance about social roles, norms, attitudes, and behavior (Brown, 1998; Brown, Shaffer, Vargas, & Rookie, 2004a; Silverbatt, 2004; Thomas & Jolls, 2004).

Parents and authorities are coming to recognize the “Pied Piper Effect”; normally placid children can acquire negative behavior such as violence and aggression, a negative body image and low self-esteem, poor nutrition habits, substance abuse. Religious and uplifting programming, with popular role models as guides, can encourage positive behavior through cleverly crafted messages, such as how to be physically and emotionally healthy, and how become a good student, loyal friend and patriotic citizen.

We must seriously consider the extent to which parents, educators, media industry professionals, and government officials may expect to exert such positive influence through the media on the social, psychological and development of youth. As we witness the increase in media saturation in kids’ lives, we must consider mitigating the effects it might have on

them – often without their being aware themselves. (from an overview of media effects on kids, Strausburger & Wilson, 2002).

Parental mediation is an eminent solution; it focuses on combating negative effects, through communication between parents and children. Recent literature on mediation is reviewed and analysed, and a partnership between mediation and media literacy is suggested, providing insights on how media literacy can strengthen parental mediation. Browne mentions the importance of parents in playing a part in their child's media exposure: most young children's experience of viewing television and videos take place in their own homes and therefore parents are able to help shape young children's perceptions of the status, value and enjoyment of televisual text (Browne, 1999, p.31).

Researchers are exploring parental motivation for discussing media messages with their children and the result of such interactions (Fujioka & Austin, 2002). There are several factors that predict why parents mediate, including attitudes and beliefs, gender, accessibility and family communication style. However, some of these predictive factors reveal discrepancies in their research methods. The strongest and most consistent predictive factor of mediation is parental attitude towards television and the parent's beliefs about the negative effects of television (St Peters, 1991; Altenburg, 1999; Warren, 2001). Nathanson (2001b) found strong relationship between parental attitudes and types of mediations parents used. Parents with negative attitudes towards television more often resorted to negative active mediation and restrictive mediation, as "parents who enforce rules have an inherent dislike of violent content for themselves (Nathanson, 2001b, p.214). On the other hand, parents with positive attitudes towards television and those with more favorable attitudes towards violent television are more often found co-viewing content.

The affinity of Indonesian children to watch television  
and its impact on personality building

Travel reveals that the media perform strikingly different roles from country to country. While we tend to believe ethnocentrically that our particular model represents "media as they ought to be", close study will show that it may have varying applications.

As the fourth-most-populous nation in the world, Indonesia, an archipelago of some 13,500 islands and 230 million inhabitants, Indonesia was ruled for 32 years by an authoritarian government, which specifically exploited electronic media for state goals of "national development". Among notable projects were family planning, rehydration for infants, public health programs and agricultural modernization. Radio and television were both heavily

used as a resource to communicate and influence the masses, many of whom were at a low educational level. Radio and TV programmers were expected to conform to stated Government objectives in their program content, to unify the people and build the nation, which had suffered from colonial exploitation, the ravages of war, the lack of resources and political instability.

Like its Asian neighbours, Indonesia is “a nation of young people”, with some 40% of the population 15 years of age or under.

The results of surveys in Indonesia indicate a high level of television viewing hours. In 1997, according to the Foundation of the Welfare of Indonesian Children’s (YKAI), average elementary school students watched television for 22-26 hours per week, or 3-4 hours per day. In 2006, a survey by the Foundation of Development of Children’s Media (YPMA) revealed that on the average, elementary school students watched television for 30-35 hours per week, or 4-5 hours per day on weekdays and 7-8 hours on Sunday. Meanwhile, the maximum number of viewing hours which experts recommend is just 2 hours per day. Children have been watching all kind of television programs, including adult shows, so they become what is known as “omnivision viewers” (Khakis in Mulvane & Ibrahim, 1997).

Children and television are a powerful combination (Chen, 2005: xiii). For too many children, television is their “third parent” (Nesbit, 2001: 117), “the other parent” which has the power to shape reality, design expectations, direct behavior, create a self-image and dictate interest, choices and values (Steer, 2002: 7).

Children have high affinity for television. This affinity co-relates with their motivation to watch television. A study on affinity and motivation to watch television is in line with the idea of Uses and Gratifications (U&G). The U&G factor related with affinity and motivation is the level of media exposure (Conway & Rubin, 1991, McQueen, 1980: 134). In terms of television study, the factor is in the form of television exposure.

Children are “specific public” in media study, especially the ones related to television (Cartel in Without & Dieback, 1980, 2002: 701). Parents are often involved with children’s interaction with television, mainly out of concern about the impact of television. Such parental involvement is what is known as “mediation” (Nathanson in Schement, 2002: 701).

A study based on the U&G assumption observed how the motivation of watching television had influenced children’s television affinity by looking at the exposure level. The study tried to ascertain the relationship of the three variables with parental mediation.

Relationship among these variables is tested using path analysis. The objective of the research is to define the relationship between the motivation to watch television and television affinity related to TV exposure and parental mediation, as illustrated in the path model.

Academically, there has not been any research which links affinity, motivation, and level of media exposure (which is the focus of U&G) with mediation.

According to Ibrahim (2007: 297), communication study mainly focuses on mainstream media, with an emphasis on politics and media culture. Children's media has not yet been considered a challenging field of study. But the fact is that in most Asian countries, the number of children under 15 years old of age reaches 40% of total population. This signifies that by qualitative measure, children constitute a significant media public throughout the region.

This study socially describes how television affinity, viewer motivation, parental mediation and the level of television exposure on children will be able to bring awareness to parents, educators, and a public which cares to be more critical of the use of television by children and the form of mediation which should be adopted to resist and fight off negative impacts of television: easy sex, achievement without effort, violence to solve conflicts, rampant consumerism & greed, drug abuse – and an American world view and cultural attitude that may well not be appropriate for other cultures.

Rather, television, like travel, should emphasize cultural broadening, a bigger world view, mental agility and interaction, the stimulation of sensory & intellectual processes (Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, etc.)

The study by YPMA shows that half of the respondents name animated movies as their favorite television program, with Sponge Bob, Ida ten Jump, and Tom & Jerry at the top of the list. These three movies are not “safe” shows for children because they contain violence (Sponge Bob and Tom & Jerry) and depict the supernatural (Ida ten Jump). In the YPMA analysis, Sponge Bob and Idaten Jump have both positive and negative content for children while Tom & Jerry is “dangerous” because of the excessive sadistic violence continuously displayed ([www.kidia.org](http://www.kidia.org)).

Respondents react positively to feature programs for children such as Si Bolang, Surat Sahabat (A Letter from A Friend), and Laptop Si Unyil (Unyil's Laptop). These programs provide informational and educational content as well as entertainment. They are categorized as healthy and safe programs for children ([www.kidia.org](http://www.kidia.org)). Surat Sahabat, for example, has been recognized by the Commission for the Protection of Indonesian Children

as the best children TV program, received the Cultural Award 2005 from the Department of Culture and Tourism, and has been named a finalist for the ABU/CASBAA UNICEF Child Rights Awards (2005).

Mendoza (<http://www.mediaeducationlab.>) stated that mediation was a solution to block the negative impact of television on children. Children who frequently watch television have a higher risk of receiving a negative impact from television than those who rarely do so. However, parents can modify or even prevent the impact of television through parental mediation (Schmitt, 2002: 701). Parents “can shape the nature of media effects on their children.” (Nathanson and Boyar, 2003: 308).

Parental mediation is “the act of giving meaning, discussing, and recognizing the idea, image, and information regarding TV programs with children” (Prescott-Adams, 2004). Studies on parental mediation are focused more on children of elementary school age since the relationship between these children and their parents are generally strong. Many of the ideas and analyses expressed also apply to more contemporary media, such as video games and the Internet (rapidly becoming the most influential and catalyzing media for youth around the world, with an exponential growth of on-line users in Indonesia).

According to Nathanson, there are three kinds of mediation: active, restrictive, and covieing mediation. Active mediation can be further divided into three types. (1) Positive active mediation: when accompanying their children in viewing television shows, parents inform them of the positive aspects of the television program being shown. (2) Negative active mediation: parents inform their children of the negative aspects displayed on television. (3) Neutral mediation: parents do not provide positive or negative guidance, but provide additional information to their children.

In restrictive mediation, parents limit children’s access to television by controlling their viewing times, selecting the programs they can watch, duration of the viewing, etc.

Meanwhile in co-viewing, parents watch television together with their children but do not provide any guidance to them.

Based on a study by Austin (1993), not all parents play their mediation role. Impeding factors have to do with parents’ characteristics. The main factor is time available, especially when both parents are working. The variability of working hour outside the home affects parental mediation, because it influences the involvement of parents and children.



Another factor is who does the mediation. Of the two parents, mothers are the ones who often do the mediation, and tend to be stricter in controlling children's interaction with TV than fathers.

In Indonesia and many other parts of the world, the parents' education level is another important factor. Educated mothers usually apply restrictive mediation, while less educated mothers tend to apply co-viewing.

Finally, it is important that parents, many of whom grew up in much less media-rich environments, force themselves to learn and understand how media operate and control viewers.

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