

Television Content Preference Among School Children in Uyo Urban

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Abstract

This study investigated Television Content Preference among Children in Uyo Urban. The aim was to find out what programmes on television children in Uyo Urban preferred. A survey method was utilized, while the questionnaire served as the research instrument. The population of the study was 25,000 while the sample size was 250 selected the simple random sampling method. The study revealed the types of programme that children preferred. These include Ben 10, Sesame Square and Tales by Moonlight. It also revealed that some demographic variables such as age and gender influence the programme choice of children in which most children between the ages of 7 and 9 prefer watching cartoons, while children between the ages of 10 and 12 tend to watch more of educational programmes, action movies, news, home, videos, drama and comedies. It further revealed that children do not just sit in front of the television set, but do have their reasons for doing so. The study therefore recommends, among others, that producers of children's programmes should bear in mind that children have needs which should be gratified; therefore programmes produced should be geared towards their gratification.

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Also the amount of time children spend in watching television regardless of content should be moderated because it decreases the time spent on other beneficial activities.

Introduction

Communication is quite essential and important to man. Man realizing the importance of communication to his survival, had over the years developed various means of satisfying his insatiable communication needs. Similarly, the impact and effects created by modern communication media -the press, radio, television- and their importance to our society is enormous. DeFleur (1975, p.9) puts it thus; “Mass communication has become one of the most significant and inescapable facts of modern life.”

One hardly finds any home today that is not exposed to the mass media, especially the television or at least through “opinion leaders” that are directly exposed to the mass media. Television has grown from a small entertainment medium to become a huge industry, casting the single most dominating presence in our society. Children form the largest audience for television programmes all over the world. Television programme may be a one-time production or part of a periodically recurring series. A single programme in a series is called episode. Children get exposed to different kinds of programmes, ranging from those with adult content to those meant for them, depending on their ages.

Most homes in Uyo Urban can afford to own at least one television set and some have up to two or three. Ikafia (2009, p.3) in her work quoted Meyrowitz who observes that television has taken the place of parents, friends and relatives to become the most popular medium, the largest shared arena for families.

Children believe that what they are seeing on television and in the movies is real. They have no innate capacity to distinguish between real and unreal images, only as they grow older, after repeated assurances from their elders do they begin to understand that the stories and characters on the big and little screens do not exist in real life.

Key Words

Television Contents: These are segments of programmes scheduled for broadcast on television. These programmes were not limited to those in NTA and AKBC, but also the cable networks.

Preference: A greater interest in or desire for something than something else. It is a thing that is liked better or best.

Children: For the purpose of this study, children will be selected from the ages of 7 to 12 years.

Statement of the Problem

The expansion of the broadcast industry with television stations privately and publicly owned has created an environment for stiff competition for programme types and their content. Marshall McLuhan predicted that the mass media come true, because with the advent of satellite stations, the television audience, especially children, learn about the world in the comfort of their homes.

Television programmes are often claimed to be the most important contents on television. This is because the pictures or moving objects shown seems to appear real and they are accompanied with credibility. Children's judgment of the reality status of television programmes are not based solely on in companying specific programme content with their knowledge of the world. They also need to draw on their knowledge of the medium of television.

However, despite the important and vital nature of the television, it is seemingly difficult to predict if these television programmes are actually watched by children in Uyo Urban. Also considering the fact that though it is difficult to find a child sitting in front of a television screen watching all the programmes provided, they are mostly influenced by content importance and the individual (child's) needs. Thus, children tend to be exposed to certain aspects of television programmes while neglecting the others.

With the above in mind, this research tries to find out what television content children in Uyo Urban prefer and to what extent does this preferred television content influence these children? These and other issues are the concerns of this study.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were raised;

- i. Do school children in Uyo Urban have access to television?
- ii. How frequent is their television viewing activity?
- iii. What programmes on television do they prefer?
- iv. Why do they prefer those programmes?

Research Method

This study adopted the survey method since it involves studying a sample from a large population. Survey describes and explains why certain conditions exist. The research method was relevant in this study because it would bring to the fore, the television programmes that children in Uyo Urban prefer and why they prefer those programmes.

The population of this study consisted of children between the ages of 7 to 12 in Uyo Urban. Since the total number of children in Uyo Urban could not be clearly defined by the National Population Commission (NPC), it was therefore assumed that the population of children between the ages of 7 and 12 is 25,000.

The sample size was put at two hundred and fifty (250). Using the simple random sampling method, two nursery schools were selected from five major roads in Uyo Urban which included; Oron road, Ikot Ekpene road, Aka road, Abak road and Barracks road. Twenty five (25) respondents were drawn from each of these nursery schools selected and this number was considered good enough to represent the population.

The purposive sampling procedure was also adopted in administering the questionnaire as it allowed children between the ages of 7 and 12 years who had television sets in their homes to be administered with the questionnaire.

Theoretical Framework

This study has the theoretical backing from the following mass communication theories – the mass system dependency theory, the

individual differences theory, the cultivation theory, uses and gratifications theory as well as social categories/learning theory.

Media System Dependency Theory

This theory conveys the idea that the level of dependency by an individual on the media for fulfillment is directly linked to the value of the media in person's life. Consequently, "the more a person depends on having his or her needs gratified by the media use, the more important will be the role that the media play in the person's life and therefore, the more influence those media will have on the person." (Baran and Davis 2002, p.320).

The basis of this theory is that society has become so industrialized that individuals including children are becoming increasingly dependent on the media "to understand the social world, to act meaningfully and effectively in society and for fantasy and escape." (DeFleur and BallRokeach,1975 cited in Kwanseh-Aidoo 2005, p.53).

Individual Differences Theory

This theory has it that members of the mass media audience will react to the same media messages in different ways. This is because of the differences in their psychographic characteristics. "The psychological processes – selective retention, selective attention, selective perception and selective exposure, help an individual decide what to pay attention to, what he sees or perceives from that which he attends to." (DeFleur (1970) in Anaeto et al 2008, p.131-132)

In the case of children, they tend to perceive the same television content differently based on their attitudes, values and beliefs towards that content. This, therefore, shows that television content preference depends on individual differences.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory stipulates that television is responsible for shaping viewers' conceptions of social reality. The combined effect of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and ultimately for our

culture as whole. This means that children's viewing of television shapes their views of the world.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

This theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. It is concerned with what people do with the mass media, instead of what the mass media do to the people. The assumption is that people influence the effects that the mass media have on them. The people are not just passive receivers of the messages, but active influences of the message effect. This is because they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs etc.

The uses and gratifications theory takes a more humanistic approach to looking at media use. Blumler and Katz believe that there is not merely one way that the populace uses the media. Instead, they believe there are as many reasons for using the media as there are media users. According to the theory, media consumers have a free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them.

For children, the preference of particular programmes over the others is determined by what they gain from it or by how the programme is able to meet their needs.

The Social Categories Theory

This theory assumed that members of a given social category (determined by age, sex, socio-economic status etc.), often seek out similar communication messages which they will also respond to similarly. For example, most adolescents seek after hip-hop music as compared to the old folks. Although we still recognize the heterogeneity of the modern society, yet people with similar location in the social structure will have similar folkways. Likewise, a member of a particular category will select more or less the same communication content and will respond to it in almost the same way.

This can be seen in children whereby what interest the boys is not what is of interest to the girls, though they may be of the same age range.

Children's Exposure to the Mass Media, Functional and Dysfunctional Influences of Television on children

Children and the media is a growing concern. Media access and use is pervasive in our society. Even young children are heavily exposed to various mass media including television, videos, movies, comic books, music lyrics and computer games. Because of their colour, excitement and graphic images, media can have strong influence on children. Such media offer powerful tools for learning and entertainment while on the hand, violence in the media can be damaging to young children.

Children are now aware of things that are beyond their age. This is largely because they spend most of their time in front of the television set. The resulting effect is that these children are psychologically swamped with ideas that these television programmes feed them. Parents can limit young children's access to violent media and teachers can encourage families to take such steps. (An article by Kaiser Family Foundation: May 2006).

Television programmes are believed to be a double-edged sword. Television programmes may lead to aggressive behaviour and violent behaviour as children become immune to violence and they tend to imitate what is shown on television. Even though aggressive and violent behaviours are engendered through other channels, television is believed to be the main source which will lead to this behaviour. This is because, they spend most of their time on watching television compared to the others. They can easily imitate the violent behaviour due to the blur images of good and evil which have been created by television programmes. Since they watch more violent television programmes, they become immune to the horror of violence as they can always see violence in the television programmes that they are watching.

Children are very curious because they are still growing up and just about to see the whole world. So, they are more easily influenced to do either negative or positive things when they see something new or something that they can see often on the television. Children's mind cannot be controlled because they seem to keep it to themselves

and the difference in them can only be seen when they express it. Besides that, they do not know what the good and bad things are they are. So they will simply do whatever they like, which they have seen on television.

Violence on television can do one of three things. The first is making us more violent, the second is making us less violent and the third is to have no effect at all. Most evidence has supported the first which is that television does increase our own violent behaviour. There are four main effects that cause this violent behaviour when viewing it on television.

The first of these effects is arousal. It is believed that a violent programme increases levels of arousal and thus causes children to become more violent as they are not only excited by the programme but also agitated and nervous. This effect is not limited to violent programmes. However, as a comedy programme may induce arousal in the form of amusement in the same way a violent programme induces arousal in the form of anger. It is the type of arousal that occurs in the first place that determines the effect the programme has. Condry (1989,p.11) found that suspense programmes, comedy programmes and sport events (especially identifying with a team) are the most common programmes that cause arousal.

The effect of television violence may depend largely on the person's present cognitive state. If a person is already aroused, further television violence may cause no more arousal, however, if the violence is related to what originally aroused them, the arousal may become greater. "This evidence shows that the level of arousal is influenced by what the participant has seen on television, concluding that violence on television does in some ways affects our levels of arousal" (Gunter and McAleer 1990, p.102)

The second effect that violence can have on its viewers is that of disinhibition. This is based on the idea that if children watch a lot of violence, they come to see it as "a permitted or legitimate way of solving problems or attaining goals" (Gross 1992, p.456). This could quite easily lead viewers to accept that the behaviour on television is quite acceptable to be used in everyday life. This effect could have important consequences for young children who will accept this behaviour as being something quite acceptable in the real world.

The third effect that can occur in viewers who watch a lot of violence on television is desensitization. In a sense this is linked to disinhibition as viewers who are prone to seeing too much violence on television, become used to it and therefore accept it as being part of our everyday life. The repeat exposure to it reduces children's emotional response to it, increases acceptance and makes them more tolerant towards any subsequent violence that they see. "Violence on televisions teaches children to accept aggressive behavior 'as a way of life' as well as tolerate the behaviour" (Van Evra 1989, p.98).

The final effect that occurs when watching violence on television is imitation. This is when the viewers are likely to imitate what they see on television and re-enact the behaviour observed. This is particularly likely to occur with the young children who are unaware of behaviour that is correct and behavior that is wrong. "This is sometimes known as observational learning" (Gunter and McAleer 1990, p.103).

It has therefore been established that these four effects namely arousal, desensitization, disinhibition and imitation can occur when watching violence on television. Other factors however, may come into play that would mean that the results could not be conclusive evidence of television violence causing violent behaviour. The more mature an individual is, the less likely it appears they would be affected. The level of comprehension an individual has is therefore vital. Younger children are less able to understand what they should and should not do and what the harmful effects that may occur from watching television.

The demographic variables here can include age and gender and these can actually determine television programme preference and viewing habits. For example, within the female segment, there exists baby girls, toddlers, teenagers, young adults and adults who are all females. Therefore, within the large 'females' audience, there are other variables that will determine which group watches a programme and what gratification they will derive from it. It will also determine how long they spend watching television.

Quoting Gunter and McAleer, Ikafia (2009, p.32) states that "... patterns of television viewing and programme preference are linked to the demographic and family characteristics of audience numbers. Thus, some young people exhibit a taste for one type of programme and another sort." They go on to say that these relationships are interesting, because they show the relationship between pattern of television behaviour and the character of programme taste across the mass audience.

Although demographic variables such as gender and age clearly affect children's responses to television programmes, family communication and interaction have also been found to mitigate the effect of television on children. This mitigation can occur both directly, when parents actively mediate between television and their children and indirectly, through communication environment, wherein children learn to interpret and perceive their surroundings. These affect how they make sense of television.

In addition to greater attention to television, "these older children are more likely to identify with the characters they see on television, perhaps because of their greater cognitive sophistication and increased ability to understand the characters and plots they see on television" (Collins 1983, p. 125). This increase on attention and comprehension are likely to be related to changes in response to television programmes.

It is evident that parents and other adult interaction about television can impact the way children respond to it. However, parent mediation is only one way in which parents mitigate the effects of television. The broader communication environment in the home also seems to affect how children understand and are impacted by what they see on television. The family communication environment teaches the child how to approach the world. For example, a family where open communication is stressed and ideas are readily shared may convey to the child that his/her ideas are valuable and should normally be shared with others, even with those outside of family. In turn, that child may perceive others' views as potentially valuable. (McLeod and Chaffee 1972, p.50-59)

Considering the fact that some television programmes display a lot of violence, continuous exposure to such programmes by children may negatively affect their development. It is generally believed that teenagers spend twice more time watching television, than they spend reading books

or playing outdoor games. From what is known, there are several opinions about watching television; some say that it is very constructive, while others believe that it is harmful. It is definitely detrimental.

“Children with high Intelligent Quotient (IQ) tended to be heavy viewers when they were young but become lighter viewers as they grew older. Less intelligent children showed the opposite pattern.” (Dominick 2002, p.494). Children from dysfunctional families and those who had problems with their peer groups watched more, probably as a form of escape.

Television is accused of destroying virtue in children. The kids are influenced to learn about things that are not indispensable or appropriate for their age. For this reason, they tend to acquire more information than is commensurate with their age. Because of television, the innocence and “babyish” behaviour associated with children is lost, which is God’s gift to mankind. Innocence brings about cheerfulness to the world, but because of immense television viewing, children have become ‘endangered species.’

In a number of occurrences, television programming endorses off-putting behaviour. Violence can be taken as the best example. Even the shows that are dedicated to children at times promote violence. “It has been proved that children have a tendency to act rashly and violently depending on the extent of aggression and the overall number of brutal programmes that are watched by them.” (Sooper articles 2012).

Many researches have proved that there are more than a few ways in which television can be destructive to the psychological and bodily wellbeing of children. No more than a handful of programmes are good for the children who teach them skills such as arithmetic’s, reading and science or dilemma situations. More than half of the shows on television, together with cartoons are in no way functionally educational at all.

According to Akpan (1987,p.100), “Children love television because it provides them with pleasure, thrills them, shows them things, places and people they have never seen before. It keeps them from being lonely and cheers them up when they are sad. Television is successful at attracting children because it is an involving medium.”

This explains why children spend so much of their time in front of the screen. Researchers found that, on average; children began to watch television around age two and were regular viewers by age three. Three-year-olds watched 45 minutes a day, and viewing time increased until age 12, when kids were averaging three to four hours a day. They then tapered off in adolescent as social contacts became more important.(Rodman 2006, p.449).

Quoting Schramm, Rodman (2006, p.449) pointed out “from ages three through sixteen, children are likely to devote more time to television than to any other activity except sleep.” Basically, the more time a child spends watching, the more likely it is that the child would perform poorer at school and get lesser scores on consistent tests. This is true; because when you come to think of it, the time that a kid is spends on watching television is greater than the time given for homework or having interesting exchanges with grown-ups or other children. What is more is that watching television late at night makes children feel tired, which stops them from paying full attention in school during the day.

The most common problems surrounding television viewing involves children being frightened by what they see. Substituting television viewing for healthy interactions with friends and family, and viewing materials that is age-inappropriate (American Academy of Pediatrics(AAP) 2001, p.421).

Kidsource online (2010) has it that “Children over the age of eight spend on average more than seven hours a day consuming entertainment media. This can include DVDs, the internet and video games, using the phone, texting, or doing combinations of these and multitasking.” It is important for children to play, read, do homework without distraction, and have in-person conversations with other children and adults. These experiences are important for healthy social, brain and emotional development.

Children who watch too much television or are absorbed by screen time have less time for interactions and for free play, which are both important for healthy development. More so, children who watch more

television do not get as much physical activity and do not have time to explore new activities in the same way as children who spend less time in front of a screen. (Kidsource online, 2010).

Television viewing is a major activity and influence on children and adolescents. While television can entertain, inform and keep children company, it may also influence them in undesirable way. Time spent watching television takes away the time for important activity such as reading, school work, playing, exercise, family interaction and social development. Children also learn information from television that may be inappropriate or incorrect. Young children are impressionable and may assume that what they see on television is typical, safe and acceptable. As a result, television exposes children to behaviours and attitudes that may be overwhelming and difficult to understand.

Children, when very young, tend to imitate attitudes and behaviours that they witness. For example, a little girl may imitate her mother by pretending to cook dinner in her play kitchen, or a little boy may imitate his father by pretending to shave even without a beard. "Just as children are influenced by their parents and other role models, they can easily be influenced by the television programmes they watch." (From an article by Nanette, April 12, 2012).

Television violence is so prevalent in today's society that it is hard to shelter children from being exposed to it. When children are repeatedly exposed to television violence, most of them experience a desensitizing effect. This may explain why a boy may pull a girl's hair at a playground and laugh about it as she screams in agony. It is an example of children who watch a lot of television and becoming less sensitive to acts of violence they may have seen on television. "The fact of the matter is when a child witnesses a violent act on television, his/her skewed sense of reality may lead them to the misunderstanding that what happened was all right and they can act such a role in real life situations." (Nanette April 12, 2012).

"If children watch more violent television programmes, they will tend to have favourable attitudes towards aggressive behaviours. This will indirectly cause the child to become immune to the horror of

violence.” (American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry, November 2002).

There will be a lot of behavioural changes today in children if they are exposed to excessive violence shown on television. This kind of programmes will encourage these children to be aggressive in both their behaviour and in their thoughts. They will also be more likely to be influenced with what they have seen regularly, such as smoking and drinking scenes which are shown frequently in these television programmes and even commercials. This will encourage the development of such unhealthy habits at an early age. (An essay by Bora, 2009).

Review of Studies.

Professor Jeffrey Johnson (2002). The Effect of Television Viewing on Children. Published Research work, University of Columbia.

The research was carried out with the aim of seeking how television viewing affect children. Professor Jeffrey Johnson reported that children who watched more than 1 hour of television each day when they were teenagers were 60 percent more likely to be involved in assaults and fights as adults. A 2003 study led by *L.R Huesmann* and published in *Developmental Psychology* showed that early childhood exposure to television violence predicts aggressive behavior in adulthood. In this study, child subjects of a 1977 study on media violence were re-interviewed as adults. Results showed that adults who were exposed to television violence as kids were more likely to engage in verbal aggression, serious physical aggression and even criminal acts. (Retrieved from www.demand68117.com on Nov.12, 2012)

Gunter B. and McAleer (2007). Children and Television Programmes. Published in “Television and Children” by Gunter B. and McAleer (2007).

The aim of this research was to ascertain what programme children watch on television out of habit. According to findings of the research done by Gunter and McAleer in 2007, children who say they watch television out of habit tend to be less likely to watch news and current affairs and more likely to watch comedy and light entertainment. There

is some evidence also that children who claim to watch out of habit are more eager to talk about television, become self-absorbed and less likely to misbehave or require constant parental supervision. In their pioneering study of the role of television in children's lives, Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues reported that television is viewed predominantly for the simple pleasure of being entertained.

Albert Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961).The effect of the Media.Published in “The Dynamics of Mass Communication” by Joseph R. Dominck (2002).

This experiment was carried out to know if children will imitate the violent behavior they had just observed from films or television programmes. This was also done to explain the cultivation theory. Psychologist Albert Bandura and his colleagues during the 1960s indicated that, in fact, films and television might teach aggressive behaviours. Preschool children were shown films in which a model reacted violently to a large rubber doll (called a Bobo Doll). When children were placed in a play situation similar to the one they had seen they performed far more aggressively towards the unfortunate Bobo doll than did children who had not seen the film.

It further determined that children would behave more aggressively if they were rewarded for doing so or if they saw the model in the film rewarded. As a result, the researcher says there is a big difference between hitting an inanimate doll and hitting a human being. To account for this, more recent studies have substituted a human being dressed as a clown for the faithful Bobo Doll. Although more children were willing to hit the rubber doll, a large number also physically assaulted the human clown. This reaction did not occur among children who had not seen the violent film. The research simply showed that children, who watch more of violent programmes, tend to be more aggressive both in attitude and behaviour.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings.

This study set out to examine television contents preference among children in Uyo Urban. Two hundred and fifty (250) copies of questionnaire were distributed, but two hundred and forty six (246) copies were retrieved.

Data Presentation and Analysis**Table I: Distribution of Sample**

Areas and Adjoining Streets	No. of Questionnaire	No. of Respondents	%
Ikot Ekpene road	50	50	20.3
Abak road	50	48	19.5
Oron road	50	50	20.3
Barracks road	50	49	19.9
Aka road	50	49	19.9
Total	250	246	99.9

Table I shows that the questionnaire were distributed equally, but the number of respondents from each area differs.

Table II: Respondents' Gender, Age and Access to Television sets of Home

Gender	No. of Respondents	%
Male	113	45.93
Female	133	54.07
Total	246	100
Age		
7-9	118	47.97
10-12	128	52.03
Total	246	100
Access to Television Sets at Home		
Yes	238	96.75
No	8	3.25
Total	246	100

The table above shows that majority of respondents were females (133), while males were 113. Children between the ages of 10 and 12 years constitute the highest number of respondents - 128. Children who have access to television sets at home are of majority, only few claim not to have access to the television set at home.

Table III: Frequency of Television viewing, programmes watched and preferred Television Programmes.

Frequency	No. OF Respondents	%
Regularly	113	45.93
Weekly	45	18.29
Weekends	81	32.93
Not at all	7	2.85
Total	246	100

Programmes Respondents Watch on Television		
Television Programmes	No. of Respondents	%
News	25	10.16
Cartoons	63	25.61
Drama	21	8.54
Home videos	16	6.50
Action movies	24	9.76
Comedies	9	3.66
Educational Programmes	39	15.85
All the above	49	19.92
Total	246	100
Television Programmes Respondents Prefer		
Television Programmes	No. of Respondents	%
News	22	8.94
Cartoons	100	40.65
Drama	31	12.60
Home Videos	12	4.88
Action Movies	27	10.98
Comedies	12	4.88
Educational Programmes	42	17.07
Total	246	100

The table above clearly shows that most (113) children watch television regularly as against those who watch either weekly, weekends or do not watch at all. Children who watch cartoons on television constitute the highest number (63), also, a greater number of children (49) watch all the programmes on television and these were children between the ages of 7 and 9 years.

Respondents who preferred cartoon programmes were of majority (100) which shows that they watch more of cartoons than any other programme shown on television.

Table IV: Genres of Television Programmes Preferred by Respondents

Cartoon Programmes	No. of Respondents	%
Ben 10	48	48
Tom and Jerry	22	22
Batman and the Mask	13	13
Pinkie and the Brain	17	17
Total	100	100
Educational Programmes	No. of Respondents	%
Fun Bus	13	30.95
Sesame Square	15	35.71
Take a Step	6	14.29
Click Clap	8	19.05
Total	42	100
Drama Programmes	No. of Respondents	%
Superstory	9	29.03
Hills and Valleys	8	25.81
Tales by Moonlight	10	32.26
This Life	4	12.90
Total	31	100

Among the children who prefer watching cartoon programmes on television most of them (48) preferred *Ben 10*. Among those who watch educational programme, most of them (15) preferred Sesame Square to the others.

For those who prefer watching drama programmes, the table shows that Tales by Moonlight constitute the highest number of children (10).

Table V: Why Respondents watch their preferred television programme,received and willingness to forgo reading/other activities

While the watch their preferred TV programme	No. of Respondents	%
Topic Discussed	68	27.64
The Actors	89	36.18
The Presenters	50	20.33
The Channel it appears	39	15.85
Total	246	100
Whether Respondents Prefer Watching the Programme to Reading and doing other Activities.		
	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	63	25.61
No	183	74.39
Total	246	100
Whether Respondents Learn any New Thing from Watching Television.		
	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	233	94.72
No	13	5.28
Total	246	100
Other Benefits Derived from Watching Television		
	No. of Respondents	%
Pleasure	76	30.89
Entertainment	50	20.33
Information	22	8.94
Moral Lesson	66	26.83
Education	32	13.01
Total	246	100

This table reveals that most respondents (89) watch their preferred programme because of the actors involved.

Most of the respondents (183) preferred reading and doing other activities to watching television because the served as a distraction to them. Respondents who learn new things from watching television constitute the highest number (223) as against those (13) who do not learn anything from watching television. This table also reveals that most of the respondents (76) listed pleasure as other benefit derived from watching television. It also reveals that a greater number of respondents (66) benefit in the moral lessons portrayed in the programmes they watch on television.

Table VI: Distribution of responses on whether they watch television who parents and whether parents allow them to watch they preferred programme

Watching Television with Respondent's Parents.		
	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	232	94.31
No	14	5.69
Total	246	100
Whether Parents allow Respondents Watch their Preferred Programme.		
Responses	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	215	87.40
No	31	12.60
Total	246	100

This table shows that greater number of the respondents watch the television with their parents.

In response to whether parents allow respondents (232) to watch their preferred programme, majority (215) responded positively while few (31) responded negatively.

In response to whether respondents understand the programme they watch on television, the table reveals that those who responded positively formed the highest number as against those who responded negatively.

Discussion of Findings

The main aim of this study was to examine television contents preference among school children in Uyo Urban. The data are used to answer the research questions.

Research Question 1

Do school children in Uyo have access to television? If they do, what programmes do they watch?

The study reveals that most of the respondents agreed that they do have access to television and they also have at least one television set at home. But the few who responded negatively said they do have access to television only when they go out to visit their friends and relations. This is contained in table 2. This agrees with what Rodman (2006, p.284) said that “television is a victim of its own success. It is controversial because practically every home has at least one set and children usually have virtually unlimited access to it.”

For the kind of programmes they watch on television, the children listed them to include news, cartoons, drama, home videos, action movies, comedies and educational programme., Some of the respondents went ahead to specify other programmes including documentaries, music and sports. This study also revealed that most children between the ages of 7 and 9 watch more of cartoons than any other programme type on television.

Research Question 2

How frequent is their viewing activity?

Most children watch the television regularly as seen in table 5, 18.29% watch the television weekly, 32.93% watch only during weekends and when they were asked why, some said that their parents would not allow them watch the television during school days because it distracts them from reading or doing their home works. Few others do not watch at all

because they have been restricted from watching the television, but when a slight opportunity is given to them, they make good use of it.

This is in line with the assertion by Rodman (2006, p.449), that on average, children began to watch television around age two and were regular viewers by age three and from the ages of three through sixteen, children are likely to devote more time to television than to any other activity except sleep.” This corroborates Gunter and McAleer’s study which found out that children watch television out of habit.

Research Question 3

What programmes on television do they prefer?

The study shows that most children prefer cartoons as shown on table 3, mostly those between the ages of 7 and 9. It also shows that these groups virtually watch all the programmes on television. Children between the ages of 10 and 12 demonstrate a sense of selectivity in which programme to watch. This group prefers watching dramas, educational programmes, home videos, action movies, news and comedies.

A greater number of respondents who watch cartoon programmes prefer *Ben 10* as seen in table 8, followed by ‘*Tom and Jerry*’ with 22%, ‘*Batman and the Mask*’ with 13% and ‘*Pinkie and the Brain*’ with 17%. For those who watch drama programmes, most children prefer ‘*Tales by Moonlight*’, others prefer ‘*Superstory*’, some prefer ‘*Hills and Valleys*’ while a few prefer ‘*This Life*’.

For those who watch educational programmes, a greater number of respondents prefer ‘*Sesame Square*’. Some prefer the programme ‘*Click Clap*’, a few others prefer ‘*Take a Step*’. All these preference agrees with the individual differences theory that “help an individual decides what to pay attention to, what he sees or perceives from that which he attends to.” (DeFleur (1970) cited in Anaeto et al 2008, p.131-132). This also agrees with the findings done by Gunter and McAleer in 2007 which has it that children who say they watch television out of habit tend to be less likely to watch news and current affairs and more likely to watch comedy and light entertainment. This corroborate Gunter and McAleer’s study which revealed that children

manifested differences in their programme references. The finding of the current study has vindicated the Individual Differences Theory.

Research Question 4

Why do they prefer those programmes?

Some of the children said because of the issues or topics discussed in that programme (i.e. for those who preferred educational programmes), others said because they like the actors and actresses in the show like the drama, action movies, home videos and even cartoons. A few others who like watching news as seen in table 5 said they like watching news because of the way the presenters or newscasters read their news and that they (newscasters) inspire them. Some attributed their likeness of a particular programme to the channel or station in which it appears.

When asked if they prefer watching their preferred programme to reading and doing other activities, most children responded in the negative as seen in table 12. When asked why, some of them said because they want to pass their examinations and gain more knowledge, others said reading makes them happy and help them prepare for the future, while others said watching television distracts them. Those who said they preferred watching television to reading their books explained that doing so enabled them to get to know what is happening around them and in other countries.

This actually agrees with the observation made by Akpan (1984,p.100), that children love television because it provides them with pleasure, thrills them, show them things, places and people they have never seen before. It keeps them from being lonely and cheers them up when they are sad. This finding corroborates that of Jeffrey Johnson. The current finding also vindicates Media Dependency as well as Uses and Gratifications theories which provided the framework for this study.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This work set out to investigate which television programme school children in Uyo Urban prefer. To achieve this, two hundred and fifty copies of questionnaire (250) were distributed to children in Uyo Urban. A total of two hundred and forty six (246) copies were retrieved and the data analyzed and discussed.

- a. The findings revealed that most children who watch cartoons prefer watching '*Ben 10*', those who watch educational programmes prefer '*Sesame Square*' and those who watch drama programmes prefer '*Tales by Moonlight*'.
- b. It also revealed that some demographic variables such as age and gender influence the programme choice of children. The findings therefore show that most children between the ages of 7 and 9 prefer watching cartoons, while between the ages of 10 and 12 tend to watch more of educational programmes, action movies, news, home videos, drama and comedies.
- c. The study shows that children do not just sit in front of the television set, rather they have their reasons for doing so. They use the media in their daily activities and derive some gratifications from doing so. Children do recognize the need to be informed, entertained and educated and so, they look out for this need to be fulfilled by the media.
- d. Furthermore, the study revealed that there are some motivating factors that influence the choice of some programmes. Moreover, most children watch television regularly and this do have great influence in the lives of these children especially whenever they watch aggressive or violent programmes.

Conclusion

Children's programmes are produced for the children as a whole and little or no segmentation is done. There can be no doubt that television plays an important part in the leisure activities of every child. Consequently, it must have a significant role to play in their development. They are discerning viewers. They often actively select

what to watch to satisfy particular needs or moods and they place their own meanings on television programmes. They select a wide variety of programmes and although they do watch a substantial amount of television, other activities are not neglected.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- a. Parents should pay attention to the programmes their children watch and as much as possible watch with them. They should also discuss the programme with them and avoid exposing their children to adult contents
- b. The amount of time children watch television regardless of content, should be moderated because it decreases the time spent on other beneficial activities such as reading, playing with friends and developing hobbies.
- c. Parents should restrict their children from watching television programme contents that are violent or change the channel or turn off the television set when offensive materials come on, with an explanation of what is wrong with the programme.
- d. Parents should engage their children on activities that will help them develop their bodies and brains instead of watching television.
- e. Programme producers should bear in mind that children have needs which should be gratified; therefore, programmes produced should be geared towards their gratification.
- f. Producers must avoid focusing on or highlighting information that may be damaging to children. Producers must avoid using stereotypes, sensational or unrealistic visuals or situations on children to minimize harm and deception

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