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PARENTAL MEDIATION OF DIGITAL MEDIA AMONG NIGERIAN CHILDREN

By

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Abstract

This descriptive survey examined the media exposure of children aged 3-10 years and the parental mediation strategies employed by 100 parents from local primary schools in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The research sought to identify the prevalent media types accessed by children and the diverse parental styles used to regulate this access. Utilizing mean and standard deviation for data analysis, the study revealed that children are exposed to ten distinct media types, and parents utilize ten identifiable mediation approaches. The findings confirm significant media exposure among young Nigerian children and a variety of parental regulatory practices. The study concludes with recommendations for parents to establish clear media rules and actively monitor content to protect children's social, psychological, and physical well-being from potential media-related harms.

Keywords: Parental Mediation, Media Exposure, Nigerian Children, Parenting Styles, Media Types, Digital Regulation

Introduction

Parenting, the bedrock of child development, is a complex and dynamic process involving the nurturing, guiding, and supporting of children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth from infancy through adolescence (Hornby, 2015; Gaspar & de Matos, 2017). Parents are pivotal in shaping children's values, behaviors, and beliefs, thereby facilitating their successful integration into society (Agigwe & van der Walt, 2020). In the contemporary digital age, this role extends significantly to the mediation of children's media consumption, particularly within the digital sphere, encompassing television, radio, smartphones, tablets, and computers (Izrael, Karasova & Yang, 2020; Nikken, 2018; Izrael et al., 2020). Effective parental mediation necessitates setting clear boundaries, promoting responsible media usage, serving as positive role models, engaging in open communication, and prioritizing online privacy and safety (Rideout & Robb, 2019). Studies have shown that parental mediation strategies, such as active mediation (co-viewing and discussion) and restrictive mediation (setting rules and limits), significantly influence children's media behaviors and outcomes (Nathanson, 2001; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999).

Media use encompassing interactions with screen, digital, print, and audio media, constitutes a substantial portion of children's daily lives (Duek & Moguillansky, 2020; Waren & Aloia, 2019; Zhao, Zhang, Jiang, Ip, Ho, Zhang, & Hunag, 2018). The established correlation between media consumption and various facets of childhood development, including physical fitness, psychological well-being, and social behavior, underscores the importance of parental involvement (Limtrakul, Louthrenoo, Narkpongphun, Boonchooduang & Chonchaiya, 2017). Research has demonstrated the impact of excessive screen time on children's cognitive development (Madigan et al., 2019) and sleep patterns (Hale & Guan, 2015). Moreover, parental media habits, attitudes, and parenting styles have been shown to directly shape children's media engagement (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2022). For instance, parents who model healthy media habits are more likely to have children who do the same (Lauricella, Wartella, & Rideout, 2015).

In Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, children's media usage has experienced a dramatic surge due to the rapid proliferation of digital devices (Common Sense Media, 2017; Karasova, 2017). This digital immersion has equipped children with considerable digital literacy, but it has also exposed them to unprecedented online risks. Consequently, digitally literate parenting is essential, with each technological advancement requiring updated guidance and monitoring approaches (Adigwe, 2020; Livingstone & Byrne, 2018; Livingstone, Olafsson, Helsper, Folkvord, Villaneua & Veltri, 2017). Specifically, research by Ofcom (2021) highlights the growing complexity of online safety for children and the need for parents to stay informed.

Effective parenting in Nigeria is further complicated by cultural norms, beliefs, values, and parental literacy levels. Traditional parenting responsibilities, particularly those related to child rearing within the home, are often gendered, with mothers bearing a disproportionate burden. The perception of fathers as primary breadwinners limits their availability for daily guidance, particularly during after-school hours. Furthermore, the gendered nature of literacy rates in Nigeria, with males generally having higher rates of literacy, and presumed higher rates of digital literacy, raises questions about the digital preparedness of Nigerian parents to effectively guide their children (Adigwe & van der Walt, 2020). Studies on digital literacy in developing nations emphasize the disparities in access and skills, which further exacerbate the challenges of parental mediation (Selwyn, 2016). Additionally, socio-economic factors in Nigeria also play a significant role in access to digital devices, and the ability of parents to pay for internet access, and therefore, their ability to monitor media usage (Adomi & Anie, 2005).

Therefore, this study, "Parenting and Media Exposure of the Nigerian Child," is critical to understanding the specific challenges and dynamics faced by Nigerian parents in navigating their children's digital world. Focusing on children aged 3-10 years in primary schools in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, the research aims to examine the types of media these children are exposed to and the parenting strategies employed to guide their digital experiences.

Statement of Problem

The rapid proliferation of digital media in Nigeria has presented parents with unprecedented challenges in guiding and regulating their children's exposure. While children are increasingly adept at navigating digital environments, a significant gap exists in understanding the specific types of media Nigerian children aged 3-10 years are consuming and the effectiveness of current parenting styles in mitigating potential risks. This knowledge gap is particularly concerning given the potential impact of unregulated media exposure on children's social, psychological, and physical development, compounded by cultural norms and varying levels of parental digital literacy in Nigeria. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate the media exposure of young Nigerian children and the parenting practices employed to ensure their safe and healthy digital engagement.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the connection between parenting and media exposure of the Nigerian child. Specific objectives are to:

i. Identify the various types of media to which Nigerian children are exposed;
ii. Assess the parenting styles Nigerian parents can use to guide and regulate media exposure of their children.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. What are the various media to which Nigerian children are exposed?
ii. What are the parenting styles Nigerian parents can use to guide and regulate media exposure of their children?

Methods

The study used descriptive survey design. The area of study was Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The population was 100 parents with children aged between 3 and 10years living at Okpaugwu Layout, Abakaliki. There was no sample size as the whole population was used. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire containing two sections with 10 items per section making it 20 items. It was structured on a five point Likert Type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A),

Undecided (UD), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D).They were assigned weights of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The research questions were analysed using mean and standard deviation. 100 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents between September 20 and October 20, 2024. 100 copies were returned. The return rate was 100%. Analysis of the research questions were based on 100 copies. Criteria for accepting that respondents agreed on an item was that the calculated mean value should be equal to or greater than 3.00 while standard deviation score should be less than 1.0

Results

Research Questions 1: What are the various media to which Nigerian children are exposed?

Summary of Respondents' views and Mean Scores of Media Types to which Nigerian Children are Exposed in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

S/N	Media types Nigerian children are exposed to	SA	A	UD	SD	D	Total	X	SD	Rmk
1	Television	80	18	2	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
2	Internet	82	16	2	0	0	100	4.60	0.68	Agree
3	Social media	75	23	2	0	0	100	4.46	0.64	Agree
4	Video games	76	24	0	0	0	100	4.53	0.66	Agree
5	Movies	78	22	0	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
6	Music	72	26	2	0	0	100	4.40	0.63	Agree
7	Books	78	22	0	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
8	Newspapers	75	23	2	0	0	100	4.46	0.64	Agree
9	Magazines	78	22	0	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
10	Mobile devices	72	26	2	0	0	100	4.40	0.63	Agree
	Grand Total							**45.09**	**6.56**	
	Grand Mean							**4.51**	**0.66**	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 above is the summary of respondents' views and mean scores on various media types Nigerian children are exposed to in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. It shows

that there are ten of such media, namely: television, internet, social media, video games, movies, music, newspapers, magazines, books and mobile devices. Mean score for each media type was greater than 3.0 and were 4.56, 4.60, 4.46, 4.53, 4.56, 4.40, 4.56 4.46, 4.56 and 4.40 respectively. Grand mean value was 4.51. Standard deviation value for each challenge was less than 1.0. It ranged from 0.63 to 0.68. Grand standard deviation value was 0.66. The standard deviation values clustered about the mean, showing homogeneity in agreement by the respondents that there were ten media types to which Nigerian children are exposed to in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

Table 2: Summary of respondents' views and mean scores of parental styles parents can use to guide and regulate media exposure of their children in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

S/N	Parenting styles parents can use guide and regulate media exposure of their children	SA	A	UD	SD	D	Total	X	SD	Rmk
1	Authoritarian style involving strict rules and punishments	72	26	2	0	0	100	4.40	0.63	Agree
2	Authoritarian with balanced approach involving clear rules and nurturing	82	16	2	0	0	100	4.60	0.68	Agree
3	Permissive parenting involving few restrictions and leniency	75	23	2	0	0	100	4.46	0.64	Agree
4	Attachment parenting focusing on building strong emotional bonds through responsiveness and sensitivity	76	24	0	0	0	100	4.53	0.66	Agree
5	Positive parenting that encourages mutual respect, communication and positive reinforcement	78	22	0	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
6	Helicopter parenting that overtly protect and	72	26	2	0	0	100	4.40	0.63	Agree

	control children									
7	Free range parenting that encourages independence, self-reliance and reduced supervision	78	22	0	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
8	Mindful parenting that focuses on present moment awareness , empathy and self-regulation	75	23	2	0	0	100	4.46	0.64	Agree
9	Montessori parenting that emphasizes self-directed learning, hand-on-activities and independence	78	22	0	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
10	Democratic parenting that encourages child participation, mutual respect and collaborative decision making	80	18	2	0	0	100	4.56	0.67	Agree
	Grand Total							**45.09**	**6.56**	
	Grand Mean							**4.51**	**0.66**	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2: above is the summary of respondents' views and mean scores of parenting styles Nigerian parents can use to guide and regulate media exposure of their children. It shows that there are ten of such styles, namely: authoritarian style, authoritarian style with balanced approach, permissive parenting style, attachment parenting style, positive parenting style, helicopter parenting style, free range parenting style, mindful parenting style, Montessori parenting style, and democratic parenting style. Mean score for each parenting style was greater than 3.0 and were 4.40, 4.60, 4.46, 4.53, 4.56, 4.40, 4.56 4.46, 4.56 and 4.56 respectively. Grand mean value was 4.51. Standard deviation value for each parenting style was less than 1.0. It ranged from 0.63 to 0.68. Grand standard deviation value was 0.66. The standard deviation values clustered about the mean, showing homogeneity in agreement by the respondents that there were ten parenting styles parents can use to guide and regulate media exposure of their children in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

Discussion of Findings

The study's first finding is that children in Abakaliki are exposed to ten specific media types: television, internet, social media, video games, movies, music, newspapers, magazines, books, and mobile devices. The high grand mean value of 4.51 and a low standard deviation of 0.66 suggest a strong consensus among respondents on this point. The low standard deviation indicates that the responses were very similar and clustered closely around the mean, demonstrating a high degree of agreement.

This finding aligns with previous research by Common Sense Media (2017) and Adigwe (2020), which identified similar media types as being prevalent in the lives of children in other countries and Nigeria, respectively. The consistency across these studies suggests a universal trend in children's media consumption, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. The inclusion of traditional media like newspapers and magazines alongside modern forms like social media and mobile devices highlights a blended media environment for Nigerian children, where older and newer technologies coexist. This contrasts with some developed countries where print media for children may be less common.

The second key finding is that respondents identified ten parenting styles used to guide and regulate children's media exposure. These styles include authoritarian, permissive, attachment, positive, helicopter, free-range, mindful, Montessori, and democratic parenting, as well as a specific style combining the authoritarian approach with a balanced method. The grand mean of 4.51 and grand standard deviation of 0.66 once again indicates a strong consensus and homogeneity in the responses.

This finding is partially supported by the work of Lee et al. (2022), who found that seven of the identified styles were used by parents to manage their children's media use. The study's emphasis on a diverse range of parenting styles—from highly structured (authoritarian, helicopter) to more flexible or child-led approaches (free-range, democratic)—underscores the multifaceted nature of parental control in the digital age. The inclusion of educational philosophies like the Montessori parenting style as a method for regulating media exposure is particularly interesting and suggests that parents may be adapting broader educational principles to address modern technological challenges.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study provides valuable insights into the media exposure of young Nigerian children aged 3-10 years in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, and the parental mediation

strategies employed. The findings confirm that children in this region are exposed to a wide array of media types, including television, internet, social media, video games, movies, music, print media, and mobile devices. Furthermore, the study identified ten distinct parenting styles utilized by parents to guide and regulate their children's media consumption. These styles range from authoritarian approaches to more democratic and mindful methods. The homogeneity in responses, as reflected in the mean and standard deviation analyses, underscores a shared understanding among parents regarding both the extent of media exposure and the variety of available parenting strategies. Ultimately, this research highlights the critical need for targeted interventions and educational initiatives to support parents in effectively navigating the digital landscape and safeguarding their children's well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Comprehensive Parental Education: The government, in partnership with educational institutions and NGOs, should develop structured programs focused on digital and media literacy. These programs should offer practical guidance on setting media usage limits, monitoring content, and fostering open communication about digital experiences.
2. Community-Based Campaigns: The government should support and fund public awareness campaigns through local media and community centers to educate parents on the impact of media on children's development. These campaigns can establish parent support groups for sharing experiences and resources.
3. Integration of Digital Literacy into School Curricula: The Ministry of Education should mandate the inclusion of digital literacy and online safety education in primary school curricula. They should also promote parent-teacher workshops to ensure a consistent approach to media use between home and school.
4. Culturally Relevant Resources: Government agencies should commission the creation of parenting guides and educational materials that are culturally relevant to Nigerian families. These resources should be translated into local languages and made widely accessible.
5. Collaborative Research and Policy: The government should fund research on the long-term effects of media exposure on Nigerian children. This research can inform the development of national policies and guidelines that protect children online. The government should also foster collaboration among various stakeholders to address digital parenting challenges.
6. Empower Fathers: The government and civil society organizations should create programs and resources specifically designed to engage fathers in

media mediation. This initiative aims to challenge traditional gender roles and encourage shared parental responsibility in the digital age.

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