

Patterns of Television Viewing by Malaysian Children in the Urban District of Petaling Jaya

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the television viewing patterns of the 513 Malaysian children in the urban district of Petaling Jaya. The results of the study showed a little variation to the previous studies in the western countries with respect to the total weekly hours of viewing television by the children. However, their favourite viewing time and program was similar i.e. cartoon shows. The educational programs were found unpopular among the Malaysian children and thus it was suggested that they should be reviewed to ensure a successful positioning in the children's program.

ABSTRAK

Rencana ini meneroka pola-pola menonton televisyen di kalangan 513 orang kanak-kanak di dalam daerah Petaling Jaya. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa hanya terdapat sedikit perbezaan dengan penemuan kajian-kajian yang lepas dari segi jumlah jam menonton televisyen setiap minggu oleh kanak-kanak. Walau bagaimanapun, waktu menonton dan program-program yang diminati adalah sama dengan penemuan kajian di negara barat, iaitu siri kartun. Program pelajaran didapati tidak diminati oleh kanak-kanak dalam kajian ini.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of studies in the western world about the importance of television in moulding the behaviour of children. Scammon and Christopher (1981) explored the possibilities for nutrition education for children via television. The result of their study suggested a continuum of impacts on children's nutrition habits and knowledge resulting from different types of messages. Other researchers explored the various aspects

of television influence on children as consumers. These includes Heslop and Ryans (1980) who focussed their study on the mother-child consuming unit and the impact of advertising directed to the child on the decision making by this dyad. The results of their study supported that of Shimp, Dyer, and Divita (1976) which suggested that the effects of emphasis on premium in advertising were minimal on purchase behavior.

In Ward and Wackman's (1972) study, a modest correlation was found between the frequency of children's asking for products and the patterns of intra-family conflict. However, there is only limited evidence of a link between medicine advertising and a child's use of proprietary medicines (Robertson, Rossiter, and Gleason 1979). Meringoff and Lesser (1980) disclosed the fact that children as young as four exhibit high familiarity with animated characters appearing in commercials and associate these characters with the products they promote. A similar study by Butter et al (1981) reported that preschool children are able to distinguish a program from a commercial.

While research on children and television has been extensively conducted in other parts of the world, virtually no similar empirical research has been conducted in Malaysia. As such, this study attempts to explore the viewing patterns of the Malaysian children in the urban city of Petaling Jaya. Among other information this study hopes to provide answers to questions such as:

1. How much TV advertising are urban Malaysian children exposed to?
2. What kinds of programs and advertisements do they prefer?
3. Who decides which programs to watch?
4. What is the level of recalls on certain advertised products?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to the 1987 Petaling Jaya Education Office's list, there were 155 primary and secondary schools in the District. However, only 35 of these schools gave the authors the permission to conduct this study on their students. Using a random table as a guide, the children were selected based on the sitting arrangement in their classes. From this selection procedure, a total of 373 respondents were obtained. In addition to these, 20 pre-school organisations in the district allowed us to conduct the study with their pupils. Using a similar approach as to the schools, seven pupils were chosen from each of the 20 pre-school which produced 140 respondents. Thus, the total sample size of this study was 513.

The research instrument consists of structured questionnaire which was divided into two parts. The first part consists of questions concerning personal background of the respondents. Part two of the questionnaire

attempts to gather information regarding the respondent's television viewing behavior. Each questionnaire was completed by a trained group of enumerators who personally interviewed the respondents at their schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The biodata of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Out of 513 respondents, 52.9 percent were male. The age grouping was based on categories such as kindergarden (preschool), primary school, and secondary school level. The result of the survey showed that 24 percent of the respondents are comprised of those in the kindergarden level, 48.1 percent in primary schools, and the balance in secondary school level. From the ethnic perspectives, 37.6 percent of the respondents are Malays, 13.8 percent Indians, 46 percent Chinese, and 2.5 percent others. These ethnic proportions of the respondents may not represent that of the population because ethnicity was not included in the sampling frame of this study.

TABLE 1. Respondent's biodata

Male	52.9%
Female	47.1%
Age	
6 years and less	24.0%
7-12 years	48.1%
13-17 years	27.9%
Race	
Malay	37.6%
Indian	13.8%
Chinese	46.0%
Others	2.5%

Majority of the Malaysian children in this urban district viewed television up to 4 hours daily. Table 2 shows that during weekdays they spent lesser hours viewing television. About 55 percent of the respondents viewed television for about 2 hours of less daily on Monday through Friday. However, on Saturdays and Sundays the percentage of respondents spending more hours of viewing television increases, where 42.5 percent of them spent 3 to 4 hours of viewing television, while 25.2 percent spent about 5 to 6 hours. The lesser hours devoted to television viewing by the respondents during the weekdays was due to the restricted number of hours they were at home. On weekdays, children spent more than half of their daytime at school.

On the average, the Malaysian children in this urban district spent about 16 to 25 hours of viewing television weekly. Previous study reported

that an average child watched 21 to 28 hours of television weekly (Adler & Faber 1980). They also claimed that the number of hours vary from year to year but showing a gradual upward trend. The present study showed that slightly more than 31 percent of the children spent between 16 to 20 hours weekly viewing television while about 19.2 to 19.7 percent of the children spent between 21 to 30 hours of viewing television weekly (Table 3). Thus, the results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Adler and Faber (1980) in terms of the number of viewing hours weekly by children.

TABLE 2. Daily hours of viewing tv by children

Hours Daily of Viewing TV	Mondays Fridays %	Saturdays & Sundays %
2 hrs & below	55.5	21.3
3-4 hours	37.4	42.5
5-6 hours	6.8	25.2
7 hours & above	0.4	11.0
Total	100.1*	100.0

*The total may not be 100 percent due to rounding error.

TABLE 3. Total hours of weekly viewing tv by children

Total Hours of Viewing TV Weekly	Age Group			
	6 yrs & below	7-12 yrs	13-17 yrs	All
10 hours & below	3.6	1.7	2.7	8.0
11-15 hours	2.5	9.5	2.8	14.8
16-20 hours	5.5	17.8	7.8	31.1
21-25 hours	4.8	9.5	4.9	19.2
26-30 hours	5.7	5.7	8.3	19.7
31 hours & above	1.7	3.8	1.7	7.2

Chi-square value = 41.14 df = 10 Prob = 0.000

Table 3 also shows the total hours of viewing television weekly by various age groups of children. The Chi-square test shows that there is a significant difference between the weekly viewing hours and age groups of the respondents. About 17.8 percent of the children in the 7 to 12 age group viewed television for a total of 16 to 20 hours weekly, while lesser percentage of children in this group either viewed less than 16 hours or more

TABLE 4. Among the children's favourite day and time chosen to watch TV

DAYS	Monday - Wednesday %				Thursday & Friday %				Saturday & Sunday %			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
PERIOD	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
0-4.59 pm	2.2	2.6	1.0	5.8	1.0	3.4	0.4	4.8	8.0	16.3	6.9	31.2
5.00 pm-6.59 pm	19.3	25.3	5.0	49.6	19.2	25.3	6.1	50.6	12.0	17.8	6.7	36.5
7.00 pm-8.29 pm	1.4	9.2	11.5	22.1	2.2	9.1	11.1	22.4	1.3	5.2	5.9	12.4
8.30 pm-9.29 pm	-	11.0	9.9	20.9	0.4	9.7	9.1	19.2	1.6	6.5	5.6	13.7
9.30 pm-10.59 pm	0.2	0.6	0.6	1.4	0.0	1.4	1.0	2.4	0.0	2.7	2.1	4.8
11.00 pm-program closes	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.8	1.0
Total ^a				100.0				99.8				99.6

Chi-square Value df prob. Value df prob. Value df prob.
 139.818 10 0.000 121.075 10 0.0000 48.852 10 0.000

^a 1 = Age 6 years and below
 2 = Age 7-12 years old
 3 = Age 13-17 years old
 4 = Total children in the study
^b The total may not be 100 percent due to rounding error.

than 20 hours. The intra-group comparison of the percentage of children in the 13 to 17 and the 6 years below age groups do not differ much in terms of their weekly viewing hours, specifically with respect to the 16 to 20 hours and the 26 to 30 hours ranges. The overall percentage of children viewing television weekly decreases after the 26 to 30 hour viewing period.

Table 4 provides information on daily viewing of television by the Malaysian children in the urban district of Petaling Jaya by the hours of a day. Although schools are closed on Saturdays and Sundays, the percentage of children viewing television is comparatively low except for the daytime viewing. The percentage of children viewing television is highest daily during the period 5.00 p.m to 7.00 p.m. This percentage, then, decreases after 7.00 p.m. Only 0.2 percent of the children age 6 years and below continued to watch television till 11.00 p.m. And less than 1 percent of the children from the other two age groups watched television after 11.00 p.m. The Chi-square results of $p < 0.000$ showed that the relationship between the favourite day and time chosen by the children to watch television was significant. This information indicate that variable time and day are independent.

There are three Television networks in Malaysia namely, RTM1, RTM2, and TV3. TV education is shown through channel RTM2 during the week days. Irrespective of age, more than 86 percent of the children in this study chosed TV3 as their favourite channel (Table 5).

TABLE 5. The TV channel chosen

TV Channel	Age Groups in Percent		
	6 yrs & below n = 123	7-12 yrs n = 247	13-17 yrs n = 143
RTM1	8.2	3.7	2.1
RTM2	6.5	7.3	2.1
TV3	77.9	87.0	94.4
No Preference	7.4	2.0	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi-square value = 22.125 df = 6 prob = 0.001

On the choice of program to watch, 62.4 percent of the children claimed that they themselves chose what program to watch. The other persons that decide the choice of program for the children to watch are the mother (15.2 percent) and the father (13.1 percent). Table 6 showed the information on who choose the program for the children in the study. It

is interesting to note here the role played by parents in choosing the television programs for their children. Previously, Lyle and Hoffman (1976) reported in their study that the majority of children (39.2 percent) in the 3 to 5 age group made their own choice on what television program to watch. In the present study, the intra-comparison of the data in the pre-school-age group is almost similar to Lyle and Hoffman's study, that is, about 40.7 percent of the children in this age group select their own television program (Table 6). As for the next two age groups, the majority of the children also chose their own programs.

TABLE 6. Who choose the TV program

Who Make The Choice?	Children's Age Groups							
	6 Yrs & below		7-12 Yrs		13-17 Yrs		All	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Respondent him/herself	50	40.7	168	68.0	102	71.3	320	62.4
Father	22	17.9	33	13.4	12	8.4	67	13.1
Mother	33	26.8	30	12.1	15	10.5	78	15.2
Other family members	18	14.6	16	6.5	14	9.8	48	9.3
Total	123	100.0	247	100.0	143	100.0	513	100.0

Chi-square value = 36.422 df = 6 prob = 0.0000

The TV programs are grouped into nine major headings namely Series & Serials, Movies, Children's Program, General Entertainments, News, General Documentary, Sports, Religion, and Arts & Cultures. However, only three program groups were chosen by the children as their most favourite programs. The Chi-square test could not be used to determine whether there existed any significant relationships between the program groups and the children's favourite program titles, because 69 percent of the cells have expected counts of less than 5.

Table 7 shows that the children's three most favourite program groups are the Series & Serials (47.3 percent), Children's Program (43.36 percent), and Movies (9.4 percent). Although the percentage of preference for Series & Serials was the highest among the three chosen program groups, the individual program in this program group received a very small percentage except for the Action Drama (29.86 percent). The Action Drama programs include those like "A Team", "Knight Rider", and "T.J Hooker". From the age perspectives, about 43.6 percent of the children in the 13 to 17 age group favoured the Action Drama programs. In comparing each individual program (Table 7), one would notice that the cartoon program was the children's most favourite program. The cartoon series were the favourite among the children with the age of 12 years and below.

TABLE 7. The children's most favourite TV programs

Program Headings	%	%
1. Series & Serials:		
(a) Western	1.64	
(b) Action Drama	29.86	
(c) Situation Comedy	5.93	
(d) Foreign Soap Opera	1.84	
(e) Local Drama	5.11	
(f) Mini Series	2.92	
		47.30
2. Children's Program		
(a) Cartoons	40.70	
(b) Educational	1.02	
(c) Documentary	1.64	
		43.36
3. Movies		
(a) Malay	6.13	
(b) Chinese	1.02	
(c) Hindi	1.02	
(d) English	1.23	
		9.40
	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8 indicates respondents' preference on two Children's Programs namely cartoon shows and the educational program. The most popular of the cartoon type show was Mickey & Donald (80.0 percent), followed by Woody Woodpecker (78.9 percent), Smurfs (70.7 percent), Transformer (70.0 percent), and Silverhawks (65.9 percent). Based on the order according to popularity, it is interesting to note that the result of this study confirmed that of Lyle and Hoofman's (1976) who reported that almost two-thirds of the pre-school children in their study favoured cartoon shows.

The children in this study favoured less educational programs compared to cartoon shows. The highest percentage response from those children who really like educational program was 25.8 percent (i.e. the local Trek Tek Tek program). The Sesame Street series which was popular among Western children, was favoured by only 17.4 percent of the children in this study. The low percentage of popularity of this series could be due to its medium of language which is English, while majority of the Malaysian children understand only their mother tongue.

TABLE 8. Popularity of programs in the children's program

TV Program	Do not watch this program	Watch only when no other favourite program	Watch only because other family member like it	Really like the program
(in percentages)				
Cartoon Shows				
Mickey & Donald	11.4	4.7	3.9	80.0
Woody Woodpecker	9.9	6.1	5.1	78.9
Smurfs	13.8	8.5	7.1	70.7
Transformer	18.1	6.7	5.1	70.0
Silverhawks	17.7	9.1	7.3	65.9
Ghostbusters	19.0	8.1	7.9	65.0
Voltron	20.9	7.9	7.1	64.2
The Wilfire	33.5	9.3	7.9	49.3
Snorkels	38.1	8.7	6.1	47.0
Care Bears	40.8	7.9	6.1	45.1
Alvin & The Chip Munks	42.5	7.4	6.2	43.9
Dr UHO: Art in Space	58.5	7.3	5.1	29.1
Fraggle Rock	59.8	11.4	6.9	21.9
Educational Programs				
Trek Tek Tek	61.4	9.1	3.7	25.8
Dengarlah Sayang	69.4	6.7	2.4	21.5
Sudut Kanak-kanak	70.6	5.7	3.2	20.6
Kid's TV	66.4	8.7	4.2	20.6
Sesame Street	71.1	8.7	2.8	17.4
The Book Tower	77.9	7.2	4.2	10.7
The December Rose	82.7	5.4	4.2	7.8

The unaided recall of a particular advertisement would indicate the extent of interest a person puts to remember the advertisement, especially in the case of children. Table 9 shows the percentage of recalls made by the respondents to related advertisements. It seems that Maggi Mee has the highest percentage of recalls by the children (79.9 percent) followed by Colgate (57.9 percent) and Dutch Lady (44.8 percent).

TABLE 9. The advertisement recalls by the children in the urban district of Petaling Jaya

items	Unaided Recall of The Ads. (X = 513)	
	N	%
<i>Snack</i>		
Wise	102	19.9
Ding Dang	160	31.2
Double Decker	62	12.1
Kum Kum	30	5.8
Sumi Jelly	16	3.1
Walls Feast	196	38.2
Pop Ice	165	32.2
Magnolia Ice Cream	67	13.1
Maggi	409	79.7
Mamee	47	9.2
Sugus Candy	205	39.9
Hacks	141	27.5
<i>Dress</i>		
Kiko	218	42.5
Anakku	15	2.9
<i>Toothpaste</i>		
Sparkle	119	23.2
Colgate	297	57.9
Pepsodent	38	7.4
<i>Drinks</i>		
Nestle	154	30.1
Dutch Lady	230	44.8
Klim	23	4.5
Sarsi	188	36.6
7UP	100	19.5
Schweppes	48	9.4

CONCLUSIONS

Watching television has become a nearly universal experience for growing up children, be it in the USA, Britain, or Malaysia. The Malaysian children in the urban district such as Petaling Jaya spent, on the average, about 16 to 25 hours of viewing television weekly. This amount of weekly viewing hours was a little lesser than that experienced by western children. However, with stiff competition in the programs that exists between the present television channels in Malaysia, one can expect an increasing trends in the television viewing hours by children.

The favourite programs of the Malaysian children in the urban district was, in general, similar to those children in the west, that is, cartoon shows. Because these programs are shown in the evening, around 5.00 to 7.00 pm., these viewing period has attracted the highest percentage of children viewer, irrespective of their ages.

The major implication of this study was to the television programmers. The local educational programs like 'Trek Tek Tek', 'Dengarlah Sayang', and 'Sudut Kanak-kanak' should be reviewed. Some modifications on the presentations of these programs would be helpful in an effort to increase viewers. An local educational program similar to that of the "Sesame Street" standard should be developed. The Malaysian television should consider choosing a special day, such as the non-schooling day, to devote totally to children.

Although, this research has its limitation with the nature of its sample, its information would still be of significance to the marketers of children-related products. The results of this study could assist these managers in planning their promotional programs using television as the medium. Here, the study suggests that marketers should consider sponsoring programs like Mickey & Donald, Woody Woodpecker, Smurfs, and Transformer to advertise their products to children.

This study also depicts high percentage of recalls for a particular product advertisements that involve children as actors. The advertisements on Maggi mee and Dutch Lady milk, for examples, used children to present their products.

Finally, this study hopes to initiate further research on the similar subjects extending to other urban districts or cities of Malaysia in order to offer a better generalisation of the urban children's television viewing patterns in Malaysia. It should also includes the parents to validate certain responses of their children.

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