

## **Parental Control and Teenagers Television Involvement in a Developing Country**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to determine how developing country parents control their teenaged children's TV involvement and whether they make any discrimination between their male and female children in applying such controls. The paper reviews the current literature underpinning the concept of parental control on TV involvement of teenagers and develops hypotheses. These hypotheses are then tested using data collected from 400 Bangladeshi teenagers. Findings of the research show that Bangladeshi parents maintain a close supervision and control on their teenaged children's TV involvement. They do that through co-viewing and different kinds instructive and restrictive mediations. However, this is more common in case of teenaged female children than their male counter parts.

Keywords: Parental control, TV involvement, developing country teenagers

# Parental Control and Teenagers Television Involvement in a Developing Country

## Introduction

It has been found by various researchers that parental control and mediation with teenagers regarding their media involvement, particularly in Television vehicle and content selection, plays a great role in their consumer socialisation process (Bakir, Rose and Shoham 2005; Odland 2004; Vandewater et al. 2005). However, the response towards the parental media mediation and control is varied by the gender differences of teenagers (Bulck and Bergh 2000). Further, various researchers have found variations between developed and developing countries on the issue of parental control on teenager's media involvement (Cardoza 2002; Kuhl 2006). However, not much research has been done in developing countries regarding parental control on teenagers' media involvement depending on their gender difference. This paper will contribute towards plugging that gap. Particularly, this paper will address the following research question:

*How, if they do, developing country parents control their teenaged children's TV involvement and does teenager's gender play a role on the level of parental control?*

## Current Literature

These days, teenaged children love to explore their informational and entertainment needs by electronic media. Though, teenaged children have variety of media involvement still parents play significant role to influence teenagers' media consumption habit (Hennessy 2006; Shifrin 2006). The basic norms of parental communication styles also affect the teenagers' media consumption habit. Parental communication pattern is measured by "socio-orientation" and "concept-orientation" and these two can be expanded into four dimensions (e.g., protective, pluralistic, consensual, laissez-faire) of family communication pattern (Bakir, Rose and Shoham 2005; Fujioka 2002). Pluralistic (low socio-oriented and high concept-oriented) and consensual parents (high on both orientations) discuss with their children regarding various TV shows and content (Chan and Mcneal 2003), whereas, protective (high socio-oriented and low concept-oriented) and laissez-faire (low on both orientations) do not. In the various researches; it has been found that parents play most important gate keeping role regarding the time, content, and program of TV (Carlson, Laczniak and Walsh 2001; Chan and Mcneal 2003). Barkin (2006) suggests that parents have four major routes by which they modify the effects of television messages: (a) restrictive mediation, in which parents are concerned about the negative content of TV and control is imposed on TV viewing, (b) instructive mediation, in which parents discuss certain portion of programming they view together, (c) social co-viewing, in which the programming is watched together, and (d) multiple approaches, in which parents follow no particular approach rather combine all. Parental mediation of TV viewing is measured by co-viewing, discussion about TV commercials, control on TV viewing including recommendation and prohibition to see certain programs and content (Chan and Mcneal 2003; Sook-Jung and Young-Gil 2007). Through co-viewing, parents can also control zapping behaviour and solitary viewing by the

teenagers (Kim Jinho. and Shin 1996). Carlson et al (2001) noted that co-viewing affords parents the opportunity to provide immediate reaction about TV content. Moreover, parents often attempt to directly monitor and control their teenaged children's TV viewing behaviour. However, research findings on parental control on TV involvement of teenaged children vary between developed and developing countries (Cardoza 2002; Kuhl 2006). Parents in developed countries consider TV as one of the affective academic and entertainment tools for their children (Kuhl 2006). Further, parents give fair amount of freedom to their teenaged children regarding TV program selection; even allow personal TV set at children bed rooms (Kuhl 2006). On the contrary, in developing countries, parental control on TV is measured by encompassing mediation, regulation, restriction, criticism, reinforcement, rules (explicit and implicit), and censorship (Cardoza 2002). Accordingly, based on the above discussion, for this research we can hypothesise that:

*H1: Parents in developing countries maintain close supervision and control on TV viewing by their teenaged children.*

Various researchers (Bulck and Bergh 2000; Kim JL. et al. 2007; Wolin 2003) have reported that parental mediation towards the media varies between boys and girls. Parents in developed countries show different attitude to their boys and girls regarding TV program and content selection (Bulck and Bergh 2000). However, parents in developing countries also show negative attitude towards the TV content that harm the values and norms of their boys and girls equally (Cardoza 2002; Kamaruddin and Mokhlis 2003). Teenagers' response towards the parental media mediation is varied by the gender differences of teenagers, as well (Bulck and Bergh 2000). Jung and Peterson (2007) found that 68% of the girls and only 41% boys obey the parental instruction regarding the media consumption. Boys are less likely to change their media consumption in response to parental verbal cue (Bulck and Bergh 2000). Accordingly, based on the above discussion, for this research we can hypothesise that:

*H2: There is a significant difference in the level of parental control on teenagers' TV vehicle and content selection, between male and female teenagers in a developing country.*

## **Methodology**

For this research, data has been collected from Bangladesh, a typical developing country, using a structured survey instrument that was developed using a multi-item measurement scale for the construct 'parental control' based on the current literature. A pilot survey was conducted using the draft survey instrument among 20 Bangladeshi teenagers to establish content validity of the survey instrument (Kamaruddin and Mokhlis 2003) and was focused to evaluate and determine the applicability of questionnaire in Bangladesh. The final instrument was developed in English, which was then translated to Bangla (local language) and retranslated to English. The Bangla version was administered for data gathering purposes (Shoham and Dalakas 2003). All questions were closed ended using 7 point likert type scale. Fieldwork for the study was carried out during June-July 2009. The questionnaire was administered among 400 Bangladeshi teenagers of both genders, with 50% representation of each group. Two schools were randomly selected. Respondent

teenage children were than randomly selected from those two schools. Age wise, 25% of the respondents were younger teenagers (less than 16) and 75% older teenagers (16-18). Considering the age of the respondents, survey instrument was administered face to face. The data gathered was coded and analysed using SPSS version 17.0. Data has been analysed calculating frequencies, mean scores, t-tests and one way ANOVA.

## Research Findings

In this section, the results will be reported based on the two hypotheses for the study.

*H1: Parents in developing countries maintain close supervision and control on TV viewing by their teenaged children.*

Results show that, Bangladeshi parents do maintain a close supervision and control on their teenaged children's TV viewing. They do that through co-viewing and different kinds of instructive and restrictive mediations. Factor analysis was conducted on the data collected to see whether there was any pattern of underlying factors on the basis of the way the ten items that were rated by the respondents as parental control measures. Table 1 shows the factors extracted with the variables that explain each of those factors. Overall, factor analysis has resulted into two distinct factors based on ten underlying variables. All of the individual variables within the two factors have a factor loading of more than .5 indicating a strong agreement among respondents that they see these two as different underlying factors. The first factor may be seen as the 'co-viewing and instructive mediation factor', where the different TV programs are watched together by the parents and teenagers; and parents discuss with their teenaged children the contents of the programs that they view together. The other factor may be termed as the 'restrictive mediation' factor where parents are concerned about the negative content of TV and imposes control on teenagers' TV viewing.

However, t-tests indicate that, Bangladeshi teenagers do not always agree with all the ten variables that are indicators of 'parental control on TV viewing'. They agree most with items like, 'my parents know what I watch on TV' (mean 5.17, sig .000); 'my parents and I watch TV during weekends' (mean 4.98, sig .000); 'my parents turn off channel while unsuitable contents are shown on TV' (mean 4.77, sig .000); 'my parents think some content on TV are really bad for teenagers' (mean 4.48, sig .000); 'my parents prohibit me to watch certain TV shows' (mean 4.34, sig .004); 'my parents and I discuss about TV show selection' (mean 4.29, sig .007); but not so much with 'my parents restrict time of my TV viewing' (mean 4.19, sig .080); 'my parents and I mostly watch TV together' (mean 4.12, sig .234); 'my parents and I watch TV on weekdays' (mean 4.07, sig .529); 'I talk to my parents about TV content' (mean 3.81, sig .077). Overall, it appears from the results that, Bangladeshi teenagers do not always watch TV together with their parents. They are most likely to co-view TV with their parents during week-ends rather than week days. However, the teenagers generally perceive that their parents are aware of what they are watching and are concerned about the effect of some of the TV show contents on teenagers. While parents prohibit their teenaged children to watch certain shows, they do not restrict time of their TV viewing. However, they do turn off the TV if and when perceived unsuitable contents are shown.

**Table 1: Variables, Factors and Factor Loadings**

Variables	Factor1: Co-viewing & Instructive Mediation	Factor 2: Restrictive Mediation
I talk to my parents about TV content	.739	
My parents and I discuss about TV show selection	.839	
My parents and I watch TV on weekdays	.787	
My parents and I watch TV during weekends	.822	
My parents and I mostly watch TV together	.757	
My parents know what I watch on TV	.560	
My parents think some content at TV are really bad for teenagers		.644
My parents turn off channel while unsuitable contents are shown on TV		.725
My parents restrict time of my TV viewing		.724
My parents prohibit me to watch certain TV shows		.732

*H2: There is a significant difference in the level of parental control on teenagers' TV vehicle and content selection, between male and female teenagers in a developing country.*

Table 2 shows the comparative results on parental control based on gender difference of the teenagers.

**Table 2: Parental Control vs. Teenagers Gender**

	F	Sig.	Mean	
			Male	Female
I talk to my parents about TV content	13.106	.000	3.41	4.20
My parents and I discuss about TV show selection	12.183	.001	3.92	4.66
My parents and I watch TV on weekdays	1.718	.191	3.92	4.20
My parents and I watch TV during weekends	7.918	.005	4.69	5.26
My parents and I mostly watch TV together	11.121	.001	3.78	4.46
My parents know what I watch on TV	12.604	.000	4.81	5.53
My parents think some content at TV are really bad for teenagers	.536	.465	4.40	4.57
My parents turn off channel while unsuitable contents are shown on TV	.781	.377	4.65	4.87
My parents restrict time of my TV viewing	1.077	.300	4.37	4.08
My parents prohibit me to watch certain TV shows	1.263	.262	4.20	4.47

Results indicate that there are significant differences between the teenagers of the two genders on different parental control measures. Teenaged girls are more likely to talk to their parents about TV content and perceive that their parents are aware of what they are watching. They are also more likely to watch TV together with their parents and discuss about TV show selection. Overall, there is significant difference in social co-viewing and instructive mediation by parents while dealing with female teenagers as opposed to males. Bangladeshi parents tend to apply this type of control and mediation more in case of their teenaged girls than boys. This difference is also evident with younger teenagers (13-15) compared to their older counterparts irrespective of their gender. However, same can not be said when the question of restrictive mediation comes. Bangladeshi parents are likely to be as restrictive with their male teenaged children as they are with their female ones irrespective of their age.

### **Conclusions, Implications and Future Research**

Parents in developing countries like Bangladesh do maintain close supervision and control on TV viewing by their teenaged children. Previous research literatures indicate that family communication patterns are related to the parental control about media. Findings of this research show that, Bangladeshi parents generally maintain a high socio-oriented but low concept-oriented protective communication pattern. Parents play an important gate keeping role through co-viewing and instructive mediation. However, this is truer in case of teenaged female children than their male counterparts. This indicates that parents in developing countries like Bangladesh are likely to be more protective of their daughters than their sons. However, they are also more likely to spend more time with their teenaged daughters in home based activities like TV watching. Parents in developing countries like Bangladesh also likely have a strong opinion about the contents of various TV programs and their effect on their teenaged children. They are generally more likely to be restrictive of the program contents that they view are negative. If they view particular program content as negative, they are likely to restrict their teenaged children access it and in that case they are not likely to differentiate between their daughters and sons. Marketing practitioners in general and TV media providers in particular in Bangladesh targeting the teenaged market and communicating through TV need to be aware of this parental mediating role while developing and delivering program contents. Not only the teenaged target audiences entertainment and information needs will need to be addressed but their parents concerns about any negative contents will have to be taken care of. Otherwise, the program may not have its intended audience.

This research has some significant limitations. Firstly, it was conducted among Bangladeshi teenagers only. As a result its findings may not be generalisable to other developing countries. Secondly, this research has taken a monadic approach to test the research issues on hand. A triadic approach taking views of both parents and child is likely to provide a more holistic understanding of the research issue. Future research may be conducted to get the views of the parents. Also, this research primarily looked at the differences in the level of parental control between male and female teenagers. Further research may be conducted to find out whether the level of parental control on TV vehicle and content selection is more pronounced with the younger teenagers or for that matter with the 'tweens' aged 10-12.

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