

## Journal of Peace, Development and Communication



Volume 04, Issue 2, July-September 2020  
 pISSN: 2663-7898, eISSN: 2663-7901  
 Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V04-I02-03>  
 Homepage: <https://pdfpk.net/pdf/>  
 Email: [se.jpdc@pdfpk.net](mailto:se.jpdc@pdfpk.net)

<b>Article:</b>	<b>Children Empowerment Through Media Literacy: An empirical study of primary school going children media usage in Islamabad, Pakistan</b>
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<b>Published:</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> September 2020
<b>Publisher Information:</b>	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
<b>To Cite this Article:</b>	Munawar, Rehana, et al. (2020). "Children Empowerment Through Media Literacy: An Empirical Study of Primary School Going Children Media Usage in Islamabad, Pakistan." <i>Journal of Peace, Development and Communication</i> , vol. 04, no. 02, 2020, pp. 43–63, <a href="https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V04-I02-03">https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V04-I02-03</a> .
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### **Abstract**

The vast majority of children spend the significant amount of time using media devices in order to gratify their social needs and to gain information and entertainment, but its impact on young children is certainly undeniable. Keeping this perspective in mind, children are required to be attentive to use media wisely and appropriately and this can be possible by providing them proper teaching of media that is called “Media Literacy” which is unfortunately an “alien concept” in Pakistan. This study conducts survey with the primary school going children between the age group of 8-13 years. The findings suggested that children have an easy access to different media both at school and at home from very early age. The only way to empower children explore their media world positively is to impart the media literacy skills to them.

**Keywords:** *children; media literacy; empowerment; media usage; Pakistan*

## **Introduction**

This study is primarily focused on primary-school going children who are not only use variety of media, in fact it has now become a regular component of their daily lives. Over the past few years, media existence in homes has been increased intensely. In this media-saturated world children are now widely use different media devices at home. Their leisure time is varied but children on average spend more time with different media than they frequently use in any other activity. Now children have various opportunities to access to a home computer, Internet, video games, game consoles, and smart phones. The vast majority of children spend the significant amount of time on media to gratify their social needs mainly information and entertainment, but the impact of media on young children is certainly undeniable. Children until reach adolescence are incapable to view mediated content in a critical light. They are considered more susceptible and helpless while being exposed to media. Likewise, the cognitive capabilities of the children are not sufficient enough to recognize the persuasive intention of advertising, marketing and media industries.

Today, technology has changed the world, hence, there is need to move forward in the age of technology. Also, schools are using these media technology as a teaching tool as well. Thus, it must be imperative to analyze and evaluate the media's influence that "shapes the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes" of young generation. Under such circumstances, if children are not taught how to critically analyze, evaluate and interpret media, consequently, they will seriously lacking the skills needed to live in this media world. Hence, literacy through media has become an important factor in raising the level of understanding and knowledge among children of all ages. Pakistan is in the process of rapid progress towards media technology. This rapid expansion of technology grasped the attention of majority children which becomes helpful in the development

of their cognitive, social and learning skills. The constant exposure and engagement of children with media devices would not let them called media literate. The prolonged device use such as TV viewing, Internet, computer, smart phone and video games may have a great influence on children's personality. This impact can only be minimized by providing children the proper teaching regarding practical aspects of media technologies and develop their critical thinking skills. The early supporters of media literacy maintained that children grow up in this technology world should be well prepared to learn and grow intellectually. Media literate children would be better able to understand and evaluate various manipulative media messages.

### **Literature Review**

To understand the impact of media on children's lives around the world in, there must be severe efforts to identify the influence of "diverse cultural norms" on the possible media effects and the difference between world regions with a highly developed media landscape and those with only a few basic media available (Groebel, 1998). Young children extreme exposure to violent programs would affect their cognitive development, language attainment and socialization. This long-time exposure would have long lasting and vivid effect on young children specially boys. He further revealed that violence-based programs for boys tend to invoke "aggressive behavior, antagonistic thoughts and feelings" among them which further caused the development of unsocial and unhelping nature towards others. Therefore, the effects of such violent programs could be reduced by decreasing the frequency of their exposure (Warburton, 2013). Children being the biggest factions of the community played a vigorous role in the development of society. Their continuous participation and engagement with these media technology served them as a "market segment for the business sector" (Daramola, 2015).

In this technology driven world the usage of technology has been increased among “digitally minded” children. They spent great deal of time with watching television and videos. Moreover, preschool children spent almost 3 hours a day in front of televisions, laptops, tablets, and smartphones (Genc, 2014). Blanchard and Moore (2010) found children today have been access to numerous opportunities to play, observe, explore and learn from digital media such as television, DVDs, MP3s, Touch/iPhones, computers, videogames, cell phones, smart toys (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2009; Drotner, 2008). TV had been the most frequently used medium among children. Television had been playing an important role and provides entertainment to children. Children got more easily attracted towards smart phones and tablets (Lauricella, Wartella, & Rideout, 2015; Genc, 2014). Young children of 4-5 years were unable to discriminate between imaginary and realism. Therefore, majority got afraid from the “fake created characters” such as witches, monsters and dragons. Moreover, children exposure to violence led them towards aggression, desensitization, and arise fear among them (Wang, 2005). The study of Hassan and Daniyal (2013) found that children spent majority time in front of TV watching their favorite program cartoons which greatly affect their lifestyle, language, dressing and invoke aggressive and violent behavior among them. Another study by Khan and Manzoor (2013) found that young girls fulfilled their desire and needs by exposing to different television programs. The schoolgirls watched television in order to pass time and some were habitual viewers. Thus, television has been a part of almost every household which had positive as well as negative effects on young children.

Now a days these media devices have become more “popular gadgets” and an essential part of children’s life and this consumption had been increasing with the passage of time. It was also observed that many children had been replaced sports activities and physical exercise for

these media devices (Ruzic-Baf, Strnak, & Debeljuh, 2016). Arslan, Umair, and Zaman (2015) found that children of today's technology age have been referred as "digital natives" because their lives have been constantly surrounded by digital technologies from the time of birth. Children had been taking more interest in the "quick revolution" of technology (Qayyum, Mahmood, & Rasool, 2015). Children of 7-12 years old are considered important due to their increasingly usage of complex media landscape which became the challenging task for elders to interpret their usage styles. Therefore, due to their different using styles and choices in new media activities, four distinct user types were identified as "Low Users, Offline Gamers, Instrumental Users, and Advanced Users" (Endestad, Heim, Kaare, Torgersen, & Brandtzæg, 2011). With the rapid advancements in technology "media is one of the inventions which aims at capturing a countless group of viewers specially children and transmit information via various mediums" (Begum, Khowaja, & Ali, 2012, p.1338). A study conducted by Lee (2016) revealed the effective usage of IT tools such as computers, iPads, among primary-school going children which depicted great interest in "student-centered and inquiry-based learning mode".

Deal, Koulish, and Sears (2010) findings explore teachers' understandings and classroom applications of media literacy education after completing the required media literacy education course. The authors stated "Understanding of the subject matter is critical as it impacted not only how the participants interpreted media literacy and the value placed on it, but also, how it was implemented" (p. 129). Similarly, Rheingold (2009) urged the school curriculum needs to be revised with more concentration on exploration and discovery along with the incorporation of mass media in the educational settings. The implementation of other alternative sources and social networking sites would be the need of time in order to provide students with vast

understanding of different media technology functioning in today's information rich environment.

Buckingham (2005) mentioned that children have the ability to learn different media languages in a natural setting and environment due to the observations and exposure of their media saturated environment and their usage of different devices related to the same environment. Children start understanding the language of television from the early age of their life. By the age of four or five majority of the children developed better understanding and awareness of the basic vocabulary of “camera movements and positions, shot transitions and editing conventions”. He further highlighted the significance of media education in school curriculum that helps to promote, encourage and provide assistance in “self-directed learning” among children. Moreover, students related to media productions significantly develop “in-depth critical understanding of the media as well as an exploration of students’ emotional investment in the media”. Media literacy as a “legitimate subject” has become considerably important in the educational institutions for the “responsible citizenship”. In Turkey media education had been incorporated into educational curriculum at primary schools’ level to encourage and promote media literate society (Zettl, 1999).

Grace and Henward (2013) urged the implementation of media literacy in the primary educational curriculum. The curriculum must aim at the active participation of the students, by making the lessons “functional” and would provide students with the abilities to critically analyze interpret and evaluate the media messages. Moreover, they suggested a need for bringing critical media literacy into the early childhood classroom “as a means to question assumptions about gender and problematize the ways children use these understandings to define themselves and their place in the world. Young children can and do learn about the workings of the media

through their interactions with others in the home, school, and in their everyday social worlds” (p. 151). Kellner and Share (2007) recommended the incorporation of media education as a “regular practice” in K-12 classes. The standards set for media literacy programs must include “criticizing how media reproduce racism, sexism, homophobia, and other prejudices and encouraging students to find their own voices in criticizing media culture and producing alternative media” (p. 19). Similarly, Torres and Mercado (2006) recommended making media literacy as an important part of teacher educational curriculum. A study conducted by Sur, Ünal, and Şeri (2014) found the formal media education program more effective and significant for children. Students were encouraged to use newspaper and radio in their media literacy lessons. Different subject teachers in different schools provided Media literacy lessons. Considering students’ interests and attitude level and the activities that could attract their attention appropriately must develop Media literacy education program. Moreover, teachers were not well aware of the concept of media literacy education program and they delivered media literacy course through “rote learning” by using traditional method of discussion in the classroom. The teachers further revealed in interviews “media literacy lessons are adequate in terms of content, but the activities are inadequate”. Teachers were not provided any “in-service training” regarding proper implementation of media literacy classes and they were not aware of the “constructivist teaching method”. Bingimlas (2009) maintained that in Pakistan teachers and students used computers and internet in their personal lives but the implication of integrating ICT in schools in the classrooms for teaching and learning purposes was beyond satisfactory due to the hesitancy of teachers and other factors such as lack of hardware and software, lack of confidence, attitudes of teachers towards technology, lack of competence plays a very pivotal role to undermine the effective integration. Ahmed (n.d.) mentioned that in Pakistan education hasn’t got the best



reputation, especially when it comes to teaching practical skills in the fields of Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, generally referred to as STEM. The methods of teaching haven't changed much despite the influx of modern technology. Even now, the instruction methods are mostly based on instilling information in the minds of children through repetitive learning rather than actually imparting any useful knowledge. Hardy (1998) highlighted the obstacles and problems such as funding, equipment, lack of time, and knowledge for the successful integration of technology in the schools (Lam, 2000; Simonsen & Dick, 1997).

### **Research Question**

The present study is designed to find out the experiences of media usage of primary school going children in Islamabad, Pakistan and how to make them media literate in the existing mediated environment in Pakistan?

### **Research Method**

A survey questionnaire was designed to examine the experience of children in terms of their media usage activities to perform the quantitative phase of the study. Three hundred and fifty-two primary school children of class three and class five were selected from three private and three public schools in Islamabad. Schools were randomly selected from one hundred and eighty-six public and two hundred and seventy-four private schools. The data of schools were collected from the federal directorate of education for public schools, whereas private schools' data were taken from Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA). Quantitative data was collected from the children through survey related to their media usage experiences at home and school. Before collecting the quantitative data, the researcher had acquired the verbal permissions of the Principals of each school. After the verbal permissions were received from the Principals for conducting the survey, parents' consent forms were

distributed to children to take permissions of parents since the children’s ages were under eighteen. When the survey completed in one school, the researcher switched to other school. The average duration of the completion of the survey instrument was about thirty minutes, and the researcher spent almost more than an hour in each school for administering the survey.

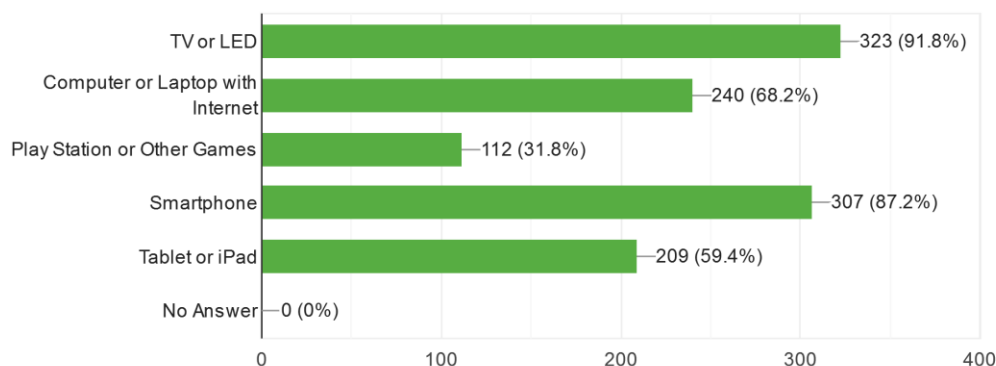
**Findings and Discussion**

The total number of children that completed the survey questionnaire was 352. The data was collected from boys and girls of each school between the age group of 8-13. There is fairly equal representation of genders in the total sample of children, 198 (56.3%) girls and 154 (43.8%) boys. The data represents 50.3% children are from grade 3 whereas, 49.7% are from grade 5. The demographic information of the children shows the balance strength of boys and girls from each school. Likewise, this information shows the balance strength of children from each grade.

To understand the media usage by children and their media usage experiences, children were asked variety of questions about their media environment both in schools and at homes.

**Home Media Environment**

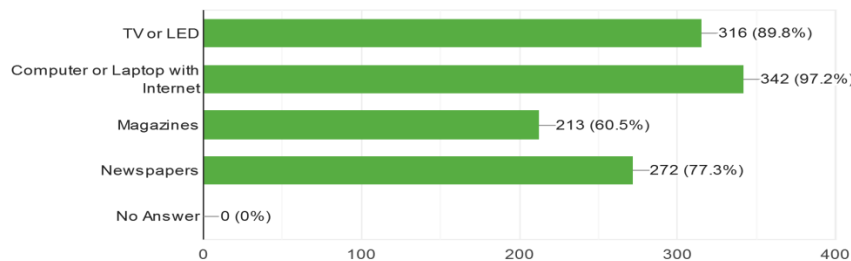
352 responses



This shows that all the children belong to households where media devices in any form are readily available. Some responded that they have access to LED, smart phone and computer whereas some said they have laptop, Internet, computer and TV in their homes. Some indicated the presence of tablets and computers whereas some mentioned iPad and play station. Moreover, children revealed the availability of game consoles such as play station or Xbox at home. Thus, this result shows that in each household more than one form of media devices are more readily available and accessible for the children.

**School Media Environment**

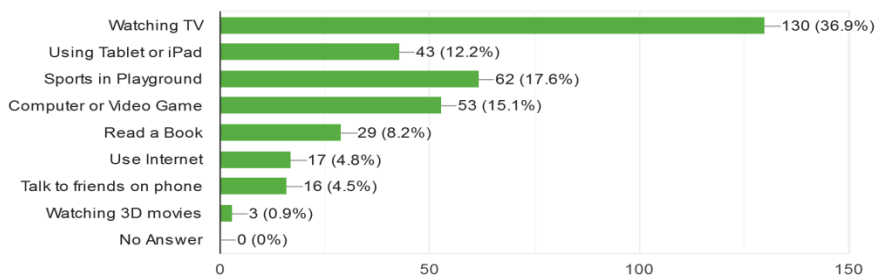
352 responses



The data shows that today each school is equipped with diverse forms of media devices for the children to use in the classroom. Children responded that TV/LED is mostly present in the classroom whereas, huge numbers of computers are present in the computer lab. Thus, the result reveals that all the children have access to media devices and use them for schoolwork.

**Leisure activities at home**

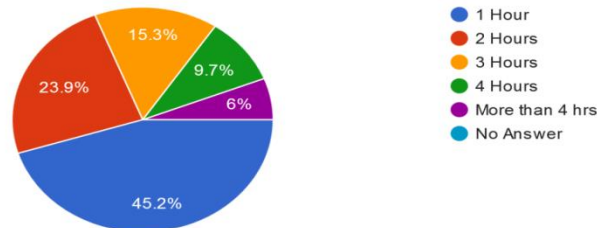
352 responses



The data shows that comedy and action movies are the most frequent watched movies at home by majority children.

**Frequency of cartoons watching**

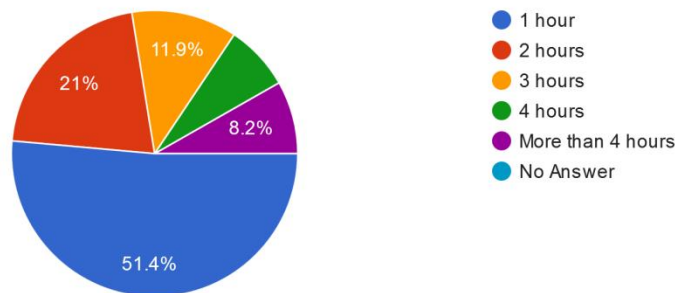
352 responses



The data shows the highest response rate of the children watching cartoons per day. The result indicates that the mostly children watch cartoons for 1 hour as compared to other age group.

**Frequency of Internet usage**

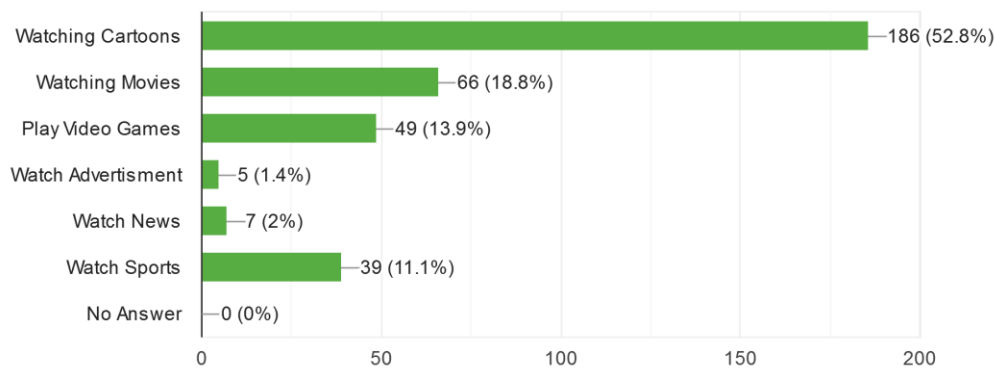
352 responses



This displays that majority of the respondents use Internet for one hour at home. Moreover, the result shows that the Internet usage for more than one hour at home is quite common among the children of 8 years, 10 years and 13 years.

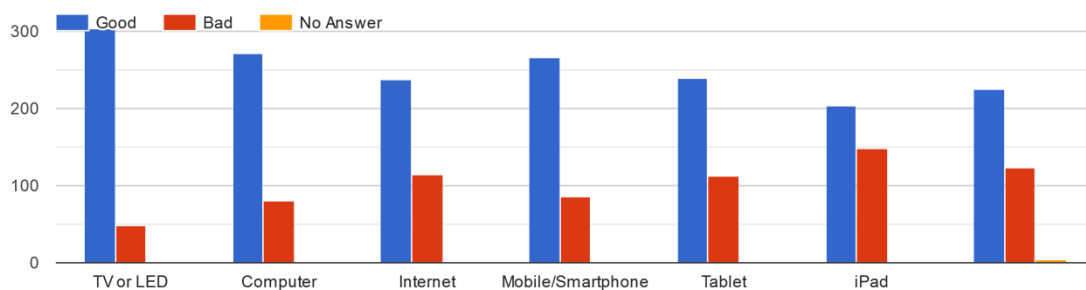
### Purpose of TV watching

352 responses



Children watch TV for multiple purposes. The result shows that cartoons, movies and video games are the topmost three main purposes of TV watching among the children. On the other hand, the least purpose of watching TV among children is the news and advertisements. Regarding Internet, the data shows that children connect to the Internet for various purposes. This shows that majority children connect Internet for the chatting purpose. The other two most frequent purposes are the gaming and downloading games, movies and songs from the Internet.

### Attitudes towards media devices



Children were asked about their attitude towards different media devices such as TV/LED, Internet, computer, smart phones, and tablet, iPad and game machines. Children were

asked to select one option from the given options of “good” or “bad”. Hence, this result indicates that majority children do not have their own smart phone and their parents may not permit them to keep the smart phone. This result suggests that in Pakistan the parents of such children may allow them to own the smart phone for their personal use although the response rate is less. Moreover, the small response rate of children indicates that they have their own set of smart phone for their personal use.

The survey findings demonstrate that majority children started using media from an early age. Children started watching television, cartoons, and playing video games on Internet and smart phone from the very young age. In this study mostly children started using Internet at the age of eight on average. It shows that media culture is a part of their daily lives from the very earliest age. Hence, it can be said that the media technology takes place in children’s early age. For that reason, the findings suggest that media has surrounded Pakistani children and it has become important part of their lives. Over the last few years there has been a substantial increase in media usage by children. Owing to this fact, all the children in the said study have been occupied by diverse media in their everyday lives. It reinforces the fact that with the growing advances in technology, the device usage among children has been increased with the rapid pace in Pakistan. Hence, this study advocates introducing media literacy in the educational curriculum. Due to constant engagement and involvement of children with these media devices, the protection of children from the harmful effects of media is not sufficient. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid on empowering children in their daily media usage. Children need to critically evaluate, interpret and analyze the media content.

In recent years the usage of smart phone among children has also been increased extensively. The study findings revealed that the great number of children use their parents’

mobile phone, whereas, one fourth of children have their own set of mobile phone for individual use. Although the response rate of mobile phone possession among children is found low but still this small percentage cannot be ignored. It is predicted that the number of children using their own mobile phone is likely to be increased in the coming years. Besides, when children access the Internet through their personal device (mobile phone, tablet and iPad), parents may not monitor their children Internet related activities. Therefore, this study suggests that the children's ownership of such small devices may create difficulties for their parents in monitoring their media related activities. Consequently, parents are unaware of what activities their children are engaged in and which programs and games they are more exposed to. The individual usage of such devices may not be allowed among children, as they are not mature enough in this age group to fully understand the media content and its messages properly. Therefore, the study proposes that children should use such devices under the supervision of parents. Parental guidance and supervision are considered highly important for their children wellbeing.

The survey findings indicated that children use media devices for multiple functions. Majority of them watch TV mainly for entertainment such as watching cartoons, music, comedy shows, movies, sports and to play video games. For them it is as a leisure activity and a good way to relax. Watching cartoons is the common favorite hobby among children. It is regarded as a primary source of entertainment for them as well. Mostly children use their parents' smart phone for different purposes such as to make calls, to play games, chatting (talking with friends) and send text messages and using Internet. Furthermore, children use Internet for chatting, online gaming, downloading games, and movies, and for education purpose. Children spend lot of time playing games and download games from the Internet. The survey also shows that children use computer and Internet for the academic purpose as well. Children prepare assignments and

projects on computer and search information on Internet as well. Likewise, children feel that the computer connected to the Internet is not only good source of information but also as a good source of entertainment for them where they can download games, latest songs or movies and information. Thus, this study shows that children use television and Internet for entertainment and learning purposes. Additionally, the small devices including tablet, iPad and smartphone have quickly become an essential part for their daily lives. Children use these small devices to perform multiple tasks such as chatting with friends, surfing Internet and playing different sorts of games on smart phone and computer. Children need to know how media produces the messages, how the content is developed and what persuasive tactics are adopted by the advertisers to influence their buying habits. About advertising tactics among children requires media literacy education.

The present study shows that children's knowledge of the glamorous world of advertising is very limited. They only pay attention to the music, graphics, actors and products being advertised. They are unaware of the hidden purpose of creating messages in advertising. Therefore, the above findings suggest that if a child's critical thinking skill is enhanced, it will help in mitigating the effects of advertisements on them. Thus, in this consumer-driven age, it becomes necessary for the young children to be able to process advertising consciously and critically. Children through media literacy prepare in such a way so that they can easily understand the hidden persuasive influence behind the advertised products. They need to be taught to recognize and comprehend commercial messages. Children need to know how media produces the messages, how the content is developed and what persuasive tactics are adopted by the advertisers to influence their buying habits. About advertising tactics among children requires media literacy education.



## **Conclusion**

This study found that children in Pakistan have exposed to all types of media. The findings suggest that children use different media regularly and consumption of media increases gradually. Children are using different media at one time. They mostly free time spend on electronic media; however, the usage hours may increase on weekends. Likewise, the findings confirmed that television is the medium of masses and continues to dominate children's media use. TV is the most common form of media found for children in this study. Over the years, the usage of media among children has been increased considerably. In addition, children spend a great deal of time watching cartoons and movies by using diverse media devices. Average screen time of children about three hours which includes all kind of media devices, but still it is quite high on daily basis. Children today access the Internet from computers, laptops, smart phones, and tablets. With the increased availability of media devices, children have fairly high level of exposure to the mass media and it can be assumed that this trend will continue to grow in the future. Thus, children require media literacy education to critically understand the media messages and make wise decisions regarding information available to them through media. Rules and regulations have been set for the children to follow. In the digital or online media, where rich information available for children, Children need media literacy education to protect themselves from this porous world and empower them to get advantages as well.

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