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Child engagement or engaging the child? Understanding child spectatorship on digital media platforms

Sakshi Kichlu[1]
Assistant Professor, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, Asian School of Media Studies, Research Scholar, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur, Rajasthan
Dr Govind Kumar[2]*
Assistant Professor, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur, Rajasthan
govind.kumar@jaipur.manipal.edu

Abstract

In today's digital age, young children are increasingly exposed to a variety of new media, yet there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how they access and utilize these digital platforms. This study seeks to uncover the viewing habits of children aged 0-6 years, delving into the types of content that captivate their attention. Importantly, the research also highlights the crucial role parents play in this dynamic. As primary gatekeepers, parents significantly influence their children's interaction with digital technologies. They often act as 'doorkeepers,' determining not only what content is accessible but also shaping their children's media experiences. The findings reveal that parents view digital technologies as both responsible entertainment options and valuable educational tools. This perspective directly affects the types of technologies they make available at home, ensuring that children engage with content that is not only entertaining but also enriching. By understanding these dynamics, we can better support families in navigating the complex landscape of digital media for young children, fostering an environment where technology serves as a beneficial resource for development and learning.

Keywords: Child Engagement, Media Consumption, Digital Media

Introduction

The data published in a report on Statista.com the most watched YouTube video of February 2023 was the “The Baby Shark Dance”- Pinkfong Kid’s Songs and Stories. These ratings are based on the global views of February 2023. This gives a whole new perspective on children’s spectatorship of the digital media content. A lot of questions do come to our mind like are the toddlers really watching these videos or their parents are making them watch it in order to keep them busy so that they can focus on their work. The study thus aims to find the spectatorship patterns of children aged between 0-6 years and which type of content do they find engaging. The focus will also be upon the parent’s perspectives as they have a major role to play in monitoring their children’s digital media access. Albert Bandura’s Social Learning theory says that the children observe and learn from the people around them. Now since, a pre-schooler spends his/her maximum time at home and observes what his family members

[1] Author: Sakshi Kichlu, Assistant Professor, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, Asian School of Media Studies, Research Scholar, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur, Rajasthan, sakshi.231251003@muj.manipal.edu
[2] Corresponding Author: Dr. Govind Kumar, Assistant Professor, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. Email: govind.kumar@japiur.manipal.edu

are doing so does the parents usage of digital device also alter their screen time? When Tech stagers like Sean Parker Author of Napster says how smartphones are affecting childhood development, you know a shift is coming. In 2017, Parker advised that social media "literally changes your relationship with society, with each other. God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains." The Council of Europe lately issued recommendations on children's rights in the digital terrain which establishes the limits of children's concurrence to use of their data. There needs to be further mindfulness than ever that technology during childhood needs to be policed duly, by both Governments and parents. As per an composition in World Economic Forum by Anna Bruce Lockhart the screen is reframing the children's lives in numerous ways which include Physical Changes and it's crowdsourcing their mental health as well. Another Composition in Huffpost by Len Hollie says that "Twenty three percent of children have had their pre- birth reviews uploaded to the internet by their parents and seven percent of babies have had an email address created for them by their parents. Numerous children these days have access to a multitude of digital devices from a veritably tender age. They're exposed to vulnerable digital options by their parents from a veritably youthful age. They also fleetly pick up skills from them. Devices generally penetrated by youthful children include large and small defences, Keyboards and control functions for mobile phones, laptops, tablets TV and desktop computers. According to a study of Children's Media use in America in 2013, the use of digital devices amongst children under two years of age had increased from 10 to 38 in just last two years. A huge host of serious issues around the content, ranging from those related to body image, to enterprises about overuse, comprehensions of violence, development of rotundity and sleep diseases, attention to difficulties and worries about online predators are amongst those most discussed in the media by experts. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding unresisting screen time for children less than two years, limiting screen time and stimulating conditioning for children can eventually be a challenge for parents. Suppose back on your childhood and you presumably flash back hours spent in active, imaginative and out-of-door play. It was difficult for parents to find out where their kids are playing but currently children are easily traceable around their digital devices. The 21st Century childhood is different. A 2010 Kaiser Foundation study set up that the average elementary school found that a child spent7.5 hours daily using entertainment technology and 75 of these children had a TV in their bedroom. Technology has always played its part in developing a child's behaviour.

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Before it was through Television and currently Internet and Mobile phones have replaced this. Children before were used to stick to the TV sets but now the screen has come indeed smaller in the form of Digital devices like mobile phones, iPads etc. Recent times have seen an explosion in electronic media retailed directly at the veritably youthful children in our society; a booming market of tapes and DVD's aimed at babies progressed 1 to 18 months, the launching of the entire television networks specifically targeting children as youthful as 12 months, the development of a variety of handheld videotape games players for pre-schoolers has become a multi-million dollar industry.

Despite this plethora of new media aimed at the veritably youthful children's use of similar media or the impact of similar media use on children's development. The rise of technologies brought about a new converse on generations. In this converse the youthful generations were frequently considered as constitutionally technology expertise and seminaries were depicted playing a pivotal part in icing equal openings for all children and

teenagers to pierce the benefits of computer technologies. Prensky introduced a distinction between digital natives and digital emigrants to describe the differences between those who were born with digital technologies and those who encountered them only at a after age. Prensky's approach is perceptive. It was one of the first attempts to conjoin the conception of generation and digital technologies in the environment of education. Like all stalwart abstract openings, Prensky's notion has been blamed. Critics have stressed that the bare possession and vacuity of the newest digital technologies doesn't automatically mean that the digital natives singly master the rearmost technological inventions. There's a little exploration on India's youthful children's mobile media use or play, which is in one sense surprising given youthful children's historically limited engagements with, or capacity to use, aged desktop devices and their associated interfaces. Still, wide mobile media penetration in the wake of Apple's launch of the iPhone and latterly iPad along with continuing developments in touchscreen interfaces are challenging these literal conditions, making digital media accessible to wider demographics of use, including youthful children. These conditions have urged arising beaches of exploration into youthful children's haptic media play, including exploration from social scientists working on media and dispatches to quantify the bias, conditioning and time spent by youthful children with mobile and touchscreen devices. Alongside this social and artistic exploration is a more political frugality-inflected exploration that seeks to review the design and marketing of children's mobile operation software products. At the same time, experimenters working in commerce design and stoner experience design are exploring youthful children's signalled capacities to interact with touchscreen interfaces. The part played by parents as intercessors of youthful children's access and engagement with digital technologies is pivotal. In Belgium, Germany, and Portugal, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 families in each country, including one child between 6 & 7 years old. The findings show that parents of youthful children substantially play the part of 'doorkeepers' when it comes to easing and constraining access to and use of digital technologies. Parents' perception of the effectiveness of digital technologies as responsible entertainment and as education tools impacts the technologies available at home and accessible to the child. These comprehensions in turn impact parent's agreement strategies with regard to children's factual knowledge.

According to a research article by the Pew Research Centre, the use of digital media in children has increased during the year 2021 as compared to the year 2020. The report also says that "During the first year of the pandemic, growing shares of parents of young tech users said their child was spending too much time on video games, smartphones." A shift in parent's outlook on their child's screen time could also be seen. The article also talks about the approaches that the parents have adopted to manage their children's screen time. They have set time limitations in a day to control the child's access to screen time, also as a method of punishment when the child exceeds the set time limit they take their smartphone away from them. In order to understand what their child is watching on smartphones they also check the history as well. According to a Research paper "Digital Technologies: Electronic Media and Technology Use amongst Infants, toddlers and Pre-schoolers 75% of kids watched television on a regular day, and 32% watched videos or DVDs for an average of 1 hour and 20 minutes. Young children are becoming increasingly exposed to new media: 25% of children aged 5 to 6 used a computer for about 50 minutes. A television is also present in many young children's bedrooms (one-fifth of 0 to 2-year-olds and more than one-third of 3 to 6-year-olds). The most often cited justification (54% of responses) was that it frees up

other televisions in the home so that other family members may watch their own shows. 70% of 0 to 2-year-olds did not meet the American Academy of Paediatrics criteria, whereas the majority of children aged 3 to 6 did. The above-mentioned data was collected in 2005 and hence there is no mention of the smartphones or the smart devices that children use nowadays. Benjamin Burroughs in his research paper YouTube Kids: The App Economy and Mobile Parenting says "Your 4-year-old may already be a swiping expert, but the app's design makes it even easier to find Pocoyo or the latest episode of Sesame Street's The Furchester Hotel. With larger images, bold icons and more, it's fast and simple for little thumbs to navigate . . . For years, families have come to YouTube, to watch countless hours of videos on all kinds of topics. Now, parents can rest a little easier knowing that videos in the YouTube Kids app are narrowed down to content appropriate for kids." The Application here is represented as a solution to parental problems where parents will not have to worry about what their child is watching because the content is specifically designed for the kids. Little are we aware about the fact that this app that we see as a solution is giving arise to a new problem which may be caused due to too much screen exposure.

Review of Literature

David Buckingham in his paper says that the relationship between childhood and the electronic media has often been perceived in essential terms. From this perspective, children are seen to possess inherent qualities that are somehow uniquely related to the inherent characteristics of particular communications media. In most instances, of course, that relationship is defined as negative: electronic media are seen to have a unique power to exploit children's vulnerability, to destroy their innocence and to undermine their creativity. More recently, however, a more positive construction of that relationship has begun to emerge, in which children are seen to possess a powerful form of media literacy, a spontaneous natural wisdom that informs their dealings with the media, and which is somehow denied to adults. Victoria J Rideout's research paper highlights the lack of knowledge about the media available to young children and their engagement with it, despite the abundance of electronic media aimed at them. The study surveyed over 1000 parents of children aged 6 months to 6 years and found that children spent an average of 2 hours daily with screen media, mostly watching TV and videos. TV watching began at an early age, before the medical community recommended it, and a significant proportion of very young children were using digital media, including half of the 4-6-year-olds who had played video games. Furthermore, one-third of children aged 6 and under lived in homes where the TV was on almost all the time, with children in these households reading less and being slower to learn to read. While many parents viewed media as an important educational tool beneficial to their children's intellectual development, their attitudes were related to the amount of time their children spent using each medium. Parents believed that their children's TV watching had a direct effect on their behaviour, with positive behaviours being more likely to be copied than negative ones. When parents select applications for young children (3-7 years), they have particular needs. However, it is unclear how these needs might be fulfilled. Uses and gratification theory predicts that specific features of an app can fulfil needs, but empirical evidence regarding the types of features that fulfil these needs in non-existent. To address this gap, a multi-methodological design was used. Qualitative interviews (n=20) revealed 23 features in children's apps that parents believe are important. A subsequent survey (n=59) showed that parents want apps with (a) clear design (b) tailorable, controllable, educational content; (c) challenges and rewards; and (d) technological innovation. Consistent with theory

analyses revealed that parents need to relate to these app's features but the child's age and gender play a key role in this relationship.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method approach where quantitative and qualitative both the methods were used. Through Quantitative Analysis a Survey was conducted and in Qualitative Analysis Textual Analysis of the most-watched Youtube video of February 2023, Baby Shark was analysed.

Sample Stratification

Purposive sampling was applied for choosing the participants of the study. Participants were selected purposively, only those parents (mothers) were chosen who had children aged between 0-6 years from Ghaziabad region. Purposive Sampling was used and schools of Ghaziabad were visited to distribute the questionnaire. The region was divided into 5 zones- North, East, west, central and south. One school from each zone was selected. The sample size was N= 100, out of which only 96 questionnaires were found suitable for the data analysis. The assessment measure taken for the study was self-developed and standardized tool, namely "Digital Childhood Questionnaire". The age of the respondents varied from 25-45 years.

Tools of the Study

The assessment measure taken for the study is the "Digital Childhood Questionnaire". It comprises of 22 items divided into various rankings and ratings scales. The results were drawn from coding the responses answered through the tool. For Qualitative methods, textual analysis of the Baby Shark nursery rhyme is done.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed and administered to various respondents. Each respondent was approached personally and was requested to fill up the tool. Respondents were given the liberty to take their time to complete their questionnaires. The confidentiality of the respondents was assured.

Data Interpretation

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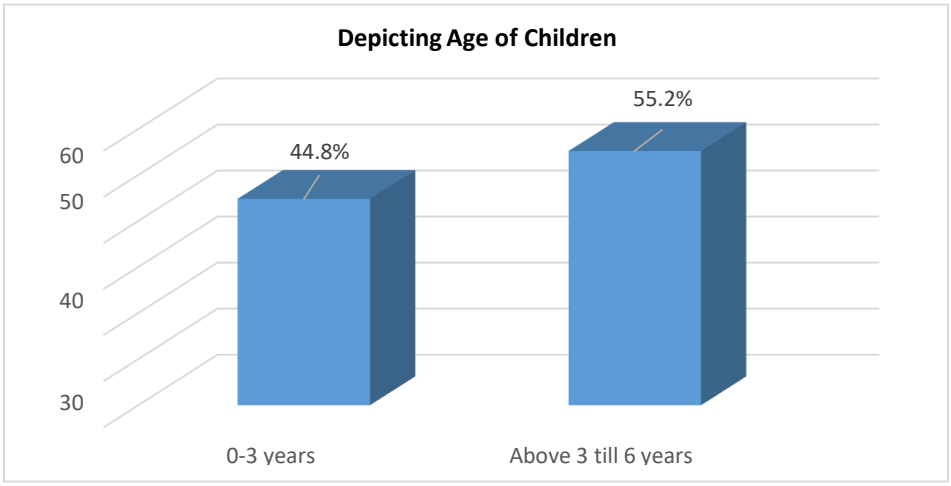
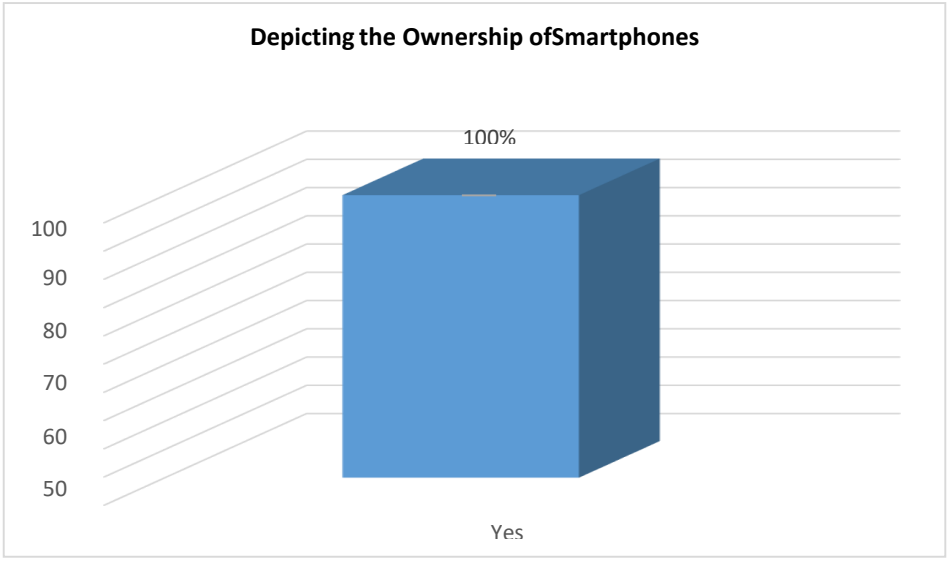


As per the data it can be observed that the children aged between 0-3 years have 44.8%, whereas the children aged between 3-6 years have 55.2%.



The data describes that 100% of the sample owned and used Smartphones. All 96 respondents owned at least 1 smartphone.

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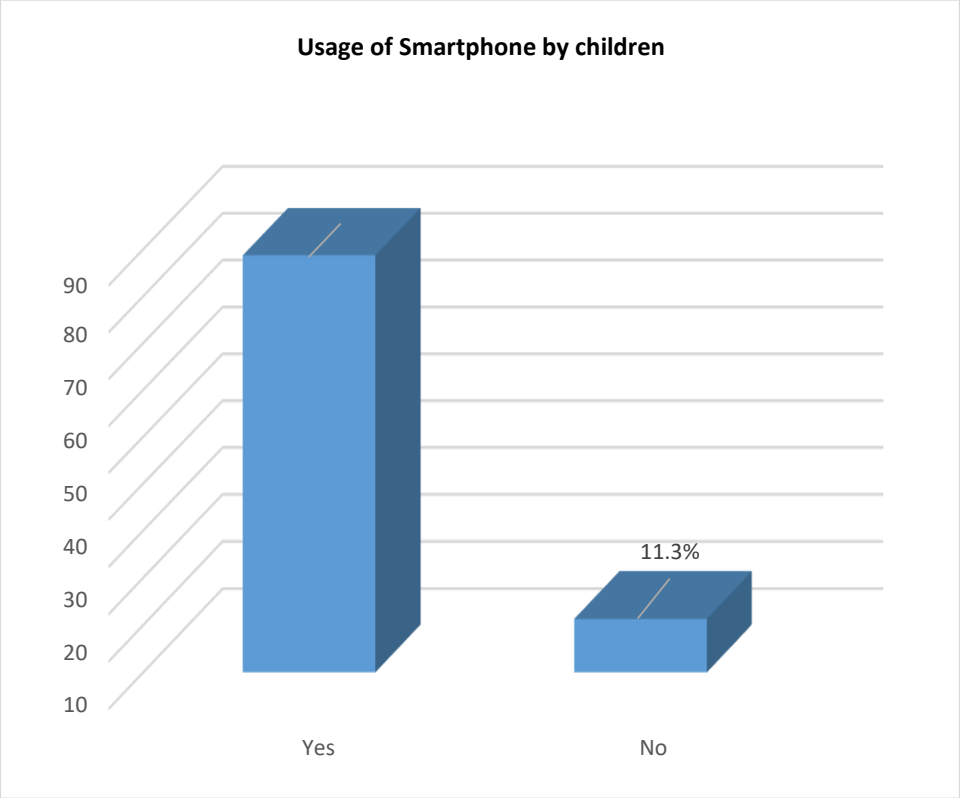
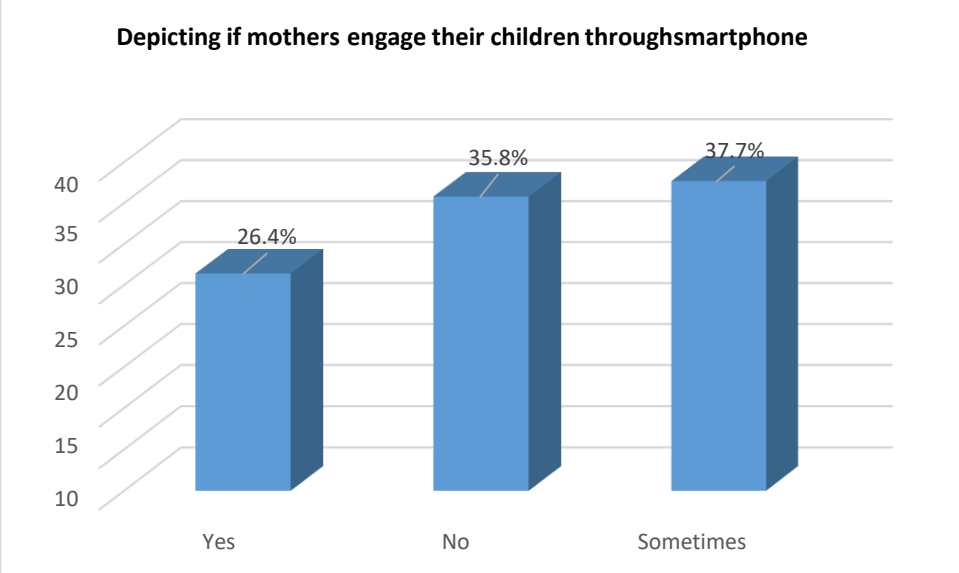


As per the data it can be observed that 88.7% of the children know how to operate Smartphones whereas 11.3% donot know how to operate a smartphone



As per the data it can be seen that 37.7% of mothers engaged their children sometimes by handing over cellphones to them. 35.8% of mothers decide to keep their children away from

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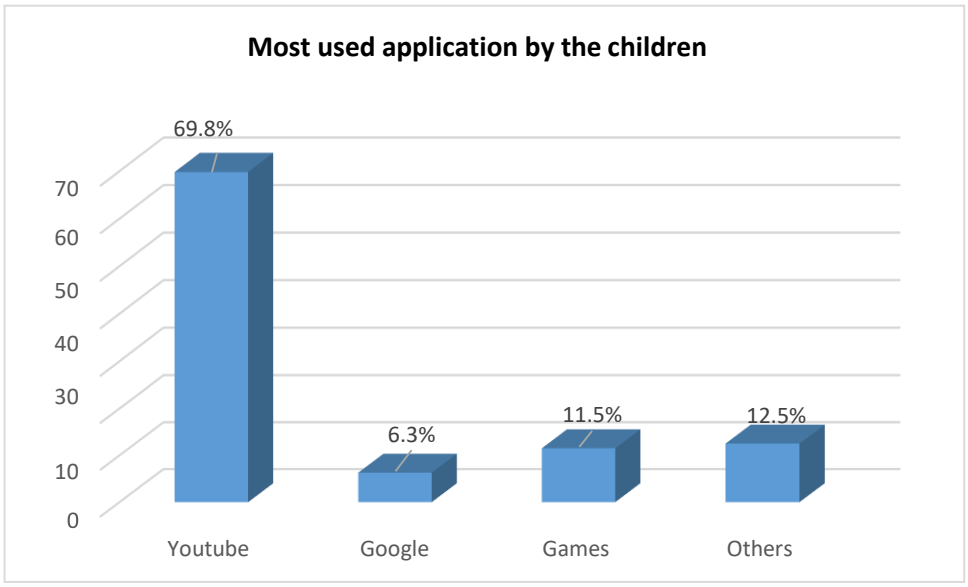
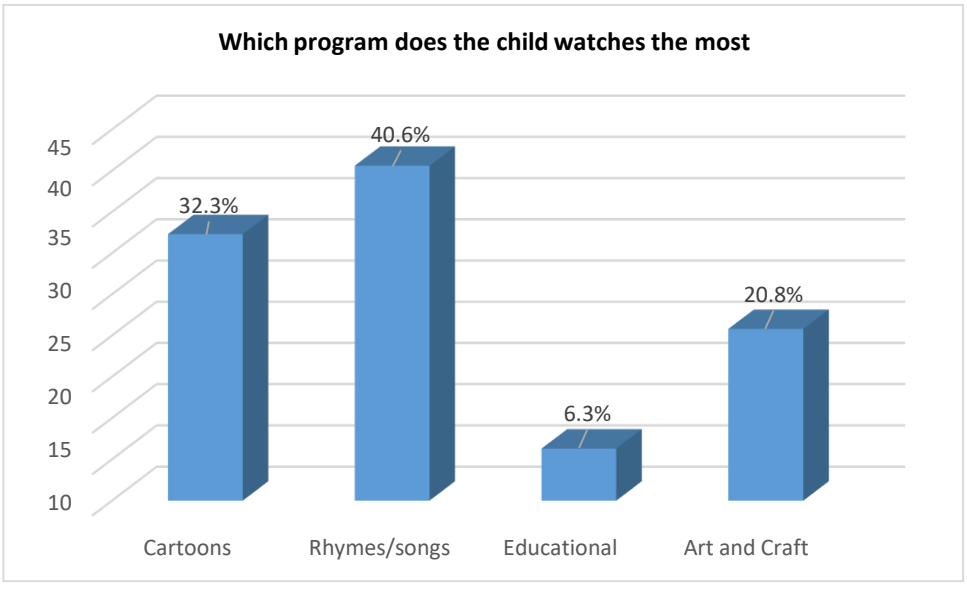
smartphones whereas 26.4% of mothers intentionally give their smartphones.



As per the data we can see that most of the children watch YouTube with 69.8% followed by Google and Games with 6.3% and 11.5 % respectively. 12.5% of children use other applications on the phones.



The data represents that majority of the children watch programs which include Rhymes and Songs with 40.6% Cartoons are the second most preferred program amongst the children with 32.3%. Arts and Crafts also seem to excite the children with 20.8% and only 6.3% of children are usingsmartphones to watch education related content.

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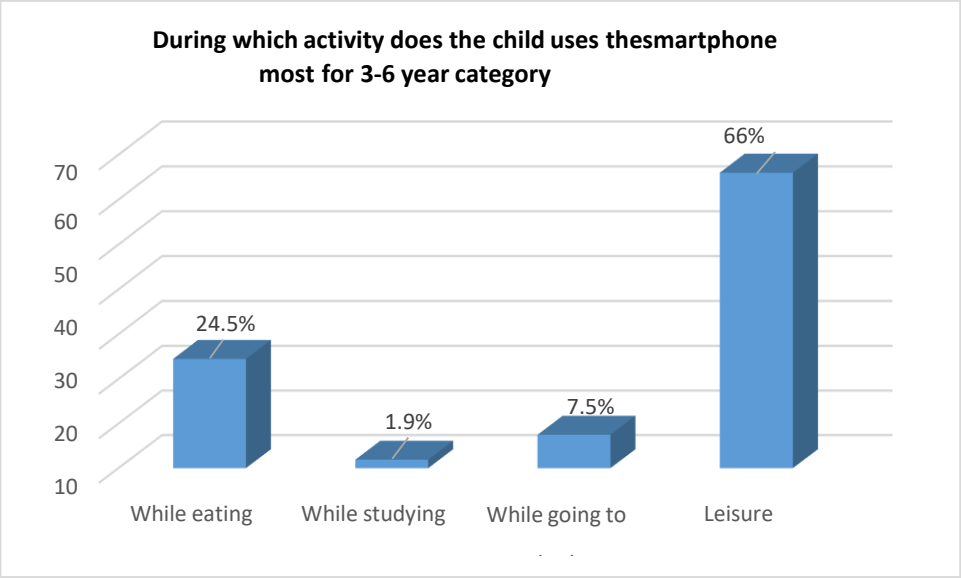
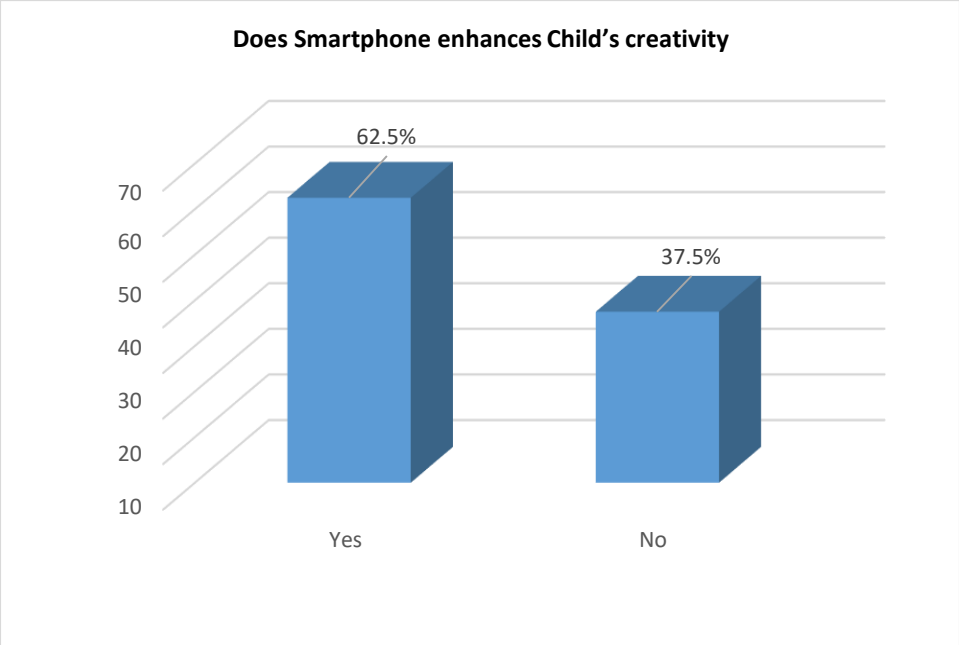


66% children use smartphones during their leisure time while 24.5% use it while eating food. 7.5% use it while going to bed and 1.9% uses it for studying.



When mothers were asked whether the smartphone enhances their child'screativity 62.5% said Yes it does and whereas 37.5% said No it does not.

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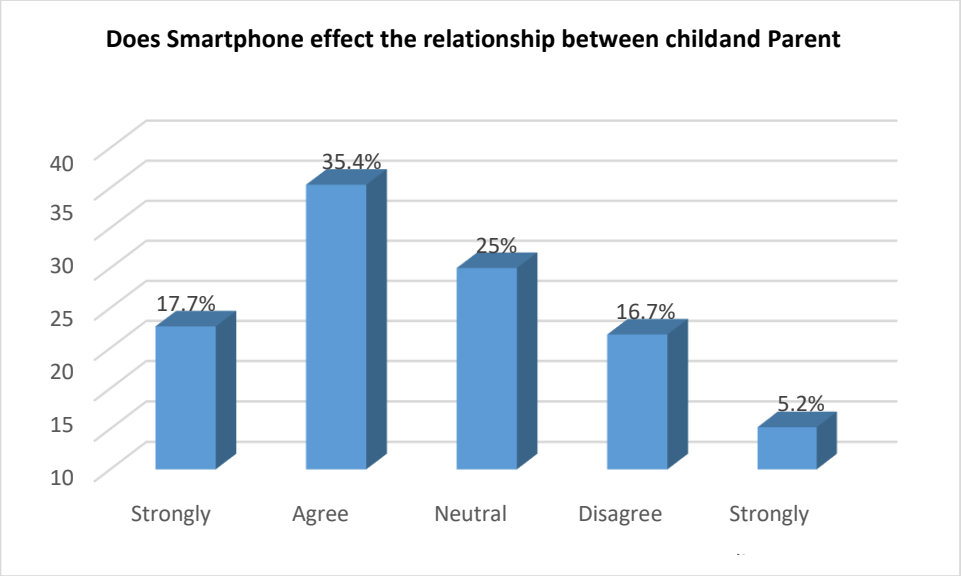
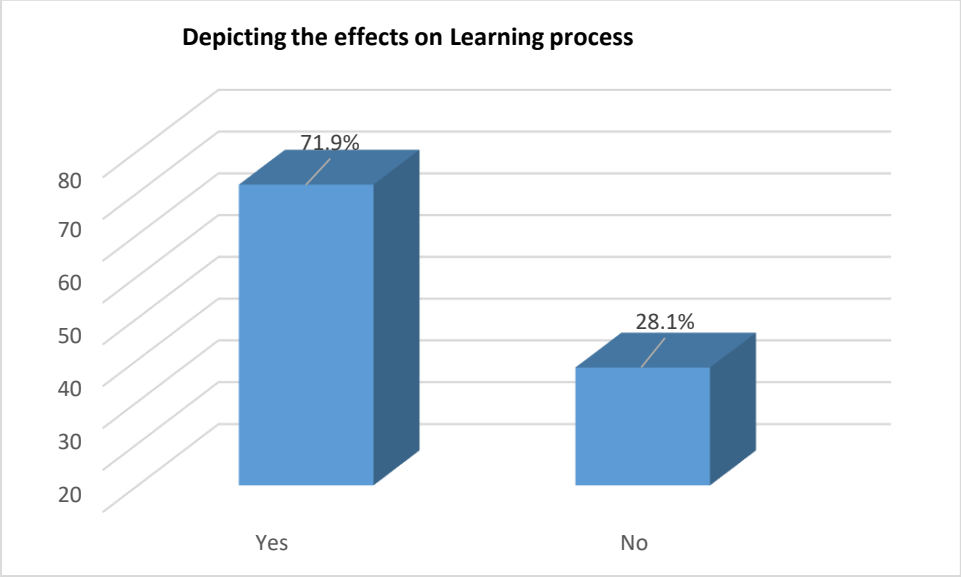


As per the data 35.4% of mothers believed that regular use of smartphone by children affect the parent child relationship. 17.7% strongly agree to thisfact whereas 25% remained Neutral. 16.7% Disagree to this notion whereas5.2% strongly disagree.



When asked about the effects on Learning Process 71.9% said that usage ofsmartphone does affect their child's learning process. 28.1% said that No itdoes not affect the learning process.

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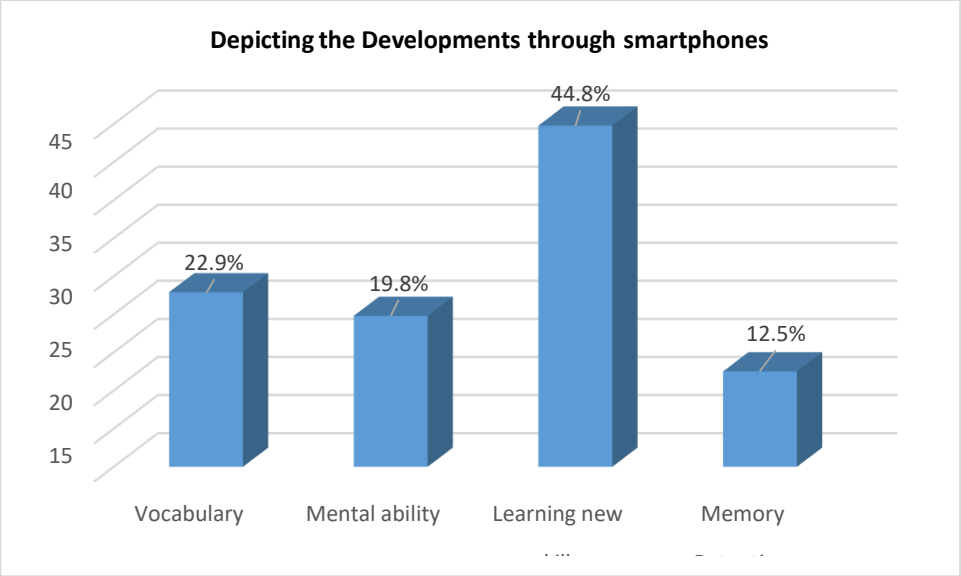

When asked about what developments do the mothers notice in their children through the use of smartphone 44.8% said that their child was learning new skills, 22.9% said that smartphones were increasing their child's vocabulary 19.8% said that it was helping their children in gaining mental ability and 12.5% said it was useful for their children to retain thingsfor a longer period of time.

Findings

The research found that most of the mothers surveyed were aged between 26-30 years, while most fathers were aged between 31-35 years. A majority of the mothers were service class workers, with a smaller percentage being homemakers. Almost all of the surveyed parents owned a smartphone, with most households having at least two smartphones. The average usage window of smartphones by mothers was 2-6 hours. Many parents gave their smartphones to their children to keep them occupied, with the average usage of smartphones by children being between 0-2 hours per day. YouTube was the most commonly used app by children, with nursery rhymes by CocoMelon being the most popular content. Parents believed that smartphones enhanced their child's learning process and increased their creativity, but also affected the parent-child relationship. The majority of parents believed that smartphones made their children more independent and improved their ability to learn new skills. Digital technology has become a ubiquitous part of modern life, including for young children. The study found that parents' use of mobile phones had a significant impact on their children's desire to use smartphones, particularly for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who look to their mothers as role models. Furthermore, households with more smartphones tended to have children who used mobile devices more frequently. The study confirmed that children aged 0-6 years had access to mobile phones, supporting the first objective of the research. When used appropriately and with proper guidance, digital technology can be a beneficial resource for children. However, parents' attitudes toward digital devices remain mixed, and Albert Bandura's Social Learning theory suggests that children are likely to mimic their parents' behaviour. Instead of keeping children away from digital devices, mothers should monitor their usage and regulate the content they are exposed to. Rather than using smartphones as a means of occupying children so that mothers can have

a peaceful time, parents should engage with their children while they use digital devices to strengthen their bond and aid in their learning process.

Textual Analysis of Baby Shark

The “Baby Shark song by Pinkfong” has astonished the world and has become an anthem of nursery rhymes for little toddlers. The video has become a viral sensation and a cultural phenomenon amongst the kids. The tune is very catch and the lyrics are simple making it children’s favourite. The song was first released in 2017 by The Pinkfong Company, a South Korean entertainment Company that deals in creating audio-visual content for children. It was only in 2020, amid the rise of the Covid-19 that this song became more like a chant of nursery rhymes for the children.

Lyrics:

The Lyrics of the “Baby Shark Song” are simple and repetitive, making it easy for children to learn and sing along. The song follows a family of sharks, with each verse introducing a new family member and their characteristic action:

- Baby Shark (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Mommy Shark (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Daddy Shark (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Grandma Shark (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Grandpa Shark (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Let’s go hunt (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Run away (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- Safe at Last (doo doo doo doo doo doo)
- It’s the end (doo doo doo doo doo doo)

The Chorus the same melody and lyrics, with each family member joining in and singing their part. The song ends with the family hunting for shark and swimming away.

Cultural Impact

The "Baby Shark Song" has become a cultural phenomenon, with millions of views on YouTube and countless remixes and parodies. It has been covered by celebrities, used in advertisements, and even performed at sporting events.

The song's popularity can be attributed to its catchy melody and simple lyrics, which make it easy for children to learn and sing along. It has also become a popular meme, with people creating their own versions and sharing them on social media..

Conclusion

In conclusion, the "Baby Shark Song" by Pinkfong has become a viral sensation and cultural phenomenon due to its catchy melody and simple lyrics. While it has received criticism for its repetitive nature, it has become a favourite among children and adults alike, with countless remixes and parodies created. The song's cultural impact is undeniable, solidifying its place as a beloved children's song for years to come.

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