PERCEPTION REGARDING SCREEN TIME: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

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Abstract

The current study was conducted with the aim to explore participants' perception regarding screen time. Semi structured interviews were conducted with parent- children dyad. Total of eight interviews were conducted with four children and one of their parents. Participants were approached through purposive convenient sampling. After conducting interviews data was analyzed manually. Findings of the study revealed that participants have positive as well as negative perceptions regarding screen time. Further consequences of restricting screen time were also revealed. It was recommended that children should be given maximum 2 hours for screen. Findings also revealed some interesting themes regarding recommendations to restrict screen time.

Keywords: *Screen time, Thematic Analysis*

Introduction

In the modern world of technology children spend most of their time in front of digital media. According to Canadian Pediatric Society (2017) screen time refers to time spent with any screen, including television, tablets, computers, smart phones, video games, or wearable technology. The screen, whether it is television, computer, tablet or mobile, is a symbol of the modern age. For the children today screen time is a major part of their modern life. However, there has been rising concerns about the impact of screens on children and young people's health (Stiglic & Viner, 2019).

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Particularly television viewing among children has been a source of different researches and, debates relating the type of programming and the amount of television to the physical health of the children, their mental growth and their mental health (Sajjan, 2013).

Parents are an important influence on their child's, screen viewing behavior acting as the 'gatekeepers' (Knowles, Kirk, & Hughes, 2015). According to a study conducted by Jordan, Hersey, McDivitt, and Heitzler (2006) parents are interested in taking steps toward reducing children's television time but are not certain of the ways to do this. Solomon-Moore et al. (2018) conducted interviews with 51 parents of children age ranged from 8-9 years. Findings of the study revealed that as screen viewing is a norm in today's modern world so most of the parents find difficulty limiting this behaviour. Further it was found that parents are having both positive and negative perceptions regarding screen viewing.

Screen time may influence a child positively as well as negatively. In the modern world where children are exposed to screen excessively this can be detrimental to the well being of a child and most of the time the negative outcomes surpass the positive consequences. Keeping the negative consequences of screen time and importance of parental perception in view it is very important to conduct the present study because it will help us to explore the perception of parents as well as children regarding screen time. This study will specifically help us to explore the perception of parents regarding screen time in the family context and will be able to identify the possible ways to reduce screen time as well.

The Current Study

Effect of Screen time on children has been of concern for researchers in different cultural contexts. The current study is an attempt to explore perception of parents in particular and that of children in general regarding screen time in order to understand the positive as well as negative consequences related to the screen time. This study is qualitative in nature as it helped us to explore the perception of the participants. The findings of the study will also help us in providing the strategies to restrict screen time.

Method

The present study based on a thematic qualitative approach aimed to explore the participant's perception of screen time. Thematic analysis has been selected for the current study because of its flexibility and adaptability to suit a wide range of data types and aims of research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Another reason for selecting this method is that it is a useful way to examine the perspectives of various research participants, highlighting the differences and similarities (King, 2004). Furthermore, thematic analysis

allows the researcher to identify and interpret themes by actively taking part in the analysis, guided by the research question (Maulana, Obst, Khawaja, 2018). In addition to this, thematic analysis was selected because it helps researcher to move toward discovering patterns from broad reading of the data. Another reason for choosing thematic analysis was that this is highly inductive: themes are not predetermined nor imposed by the researcher but emerge from the gathered data (Keene,n.d.).

Objectives

1. To explore the participants perception regarding screen time.

Participants

Total of 4 children and 1 of their parents participated in the current research. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used to approach the participants. The age group selected for the present study was 9 to 10 years old children and one of their parents. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Percentage (%)
Age (Children)	
Range	9-10
Mean	9.5
Age (Parents)	
Range	29-49
Mean	39.5
Gender (Children): n (%)	
Female	3 (75%)
Male	1 (25%)
Gender (Parents): n (%)	
Female	3 (75%)
Male	1 (25%)
Education (Children)	
Class 3rd	1 (25%)
Class 4th	1 (25%)
Class 5th	1 (25%)
Class 6th	1 (25%)
Occupation (Parents)	
Assistant Professor	1 (25%)
Lecturer	1 (25%)
Business man	1 (25%)
House wife	1 (25%)
Family System	
Nuclear	1 (25%)
Joint	3 (75%)

Operational Definition

Screen time. In the current study screen time refers to the time spent with screen i.e., television, computer, laptop or mobile.

Procedure

For the purpose of data collection a semi structured interview guide along with a demographic sheet was prepared. Purposive convenient sampling was used in order to approach the participants. Four families from Mardan were approached in order to conduct the interviews. After taking the permission from participants in depth interviews were carried out with the participants in Urdu. All the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The time duration ranged from 20-25 minutes. The initial analysis of the data was carried out and a summary table of initial themes in English was created.

Analysis

The data analysis was started after conducting first interview. The analysis was done manually. As the analysis was done through thematic analysis so the following steps were undertaken. Firstly the researcher read all the interview transcripts and did the initial coding in English language via semantic approach, as this approach focused on explicit meanings of the text. In order to identify the low order themes participants' comments were used as ground for the identification (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After getting the low order themes, these were combined to form high order themes. So in this way themes were generated from all the interview transcripts. The main objective of identifying themes in this manner was to make sure that themes were derived from actual respondent's point of view without making any attempt to fit to any early theoretical framework or researcher's preferences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes identified describe the participant's initial perception of the screen time. The related quotes presented in the result section have been translated in to English and are presented in Italics followed by the participant's age, gender, education status, or employment status (e.g., 45 years old mother, Assistant Professor).The original quotations under each theme are given in Annexure-B.

Research Settings

Interviews of the two families (Parents, Children) were conducted in the home settings of respective participants while two of the interviews were conducted in the office of the researcher as the mothers were the colleagues of the researcher so they were requested to bring their daughters for the purpose of interview as it was convenient for the researcher.

Results

Initially the data was analyzed for the demographics as well as for media availability and use.

Media Availability and Use

Families in the current sample had one television set with three of the families reported the availability of computer as well as mobile phones. All of the families had television sets in their living room. Regarding the time spent in front of the screen it was reported by almost all the parents that their children can spend entire day in front of the screen until they are restricted from doing so. The time recommended by the parents was maximum 2 hours for a child to watch television or use mobile phone.

The Participants Perception of Screen Time

Four key themes emerged from the data that reflect the participants' perception regarding screen time as well as the recommendations and consequences of restricting screen time. The themes that emerged were: Perception regarding screen time, Recommendations to restrict screen time, Consequences for restricting screen time, and existence of rules regarding screen time. The themes are presented in the figure below:
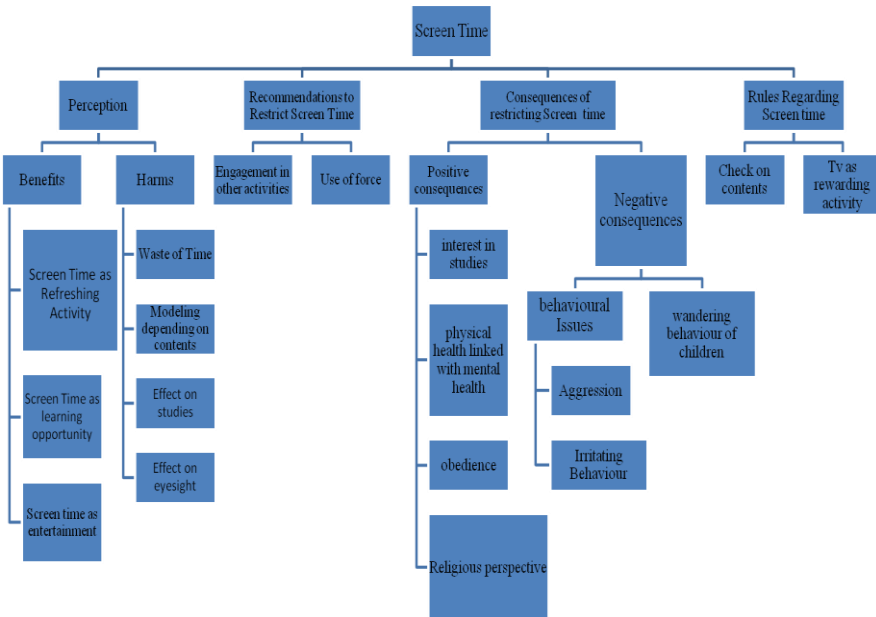
Figure 1: Thematic analysis result map

Perception Regarding Screen Time

The first key theme that emerged from the data was perception of the participants regarding screen time. Under the perception, participants further expressed the benefits and harms associated with the screen time. Some of the participants stated that it is refreshing for a child to allow them to watch television or use mobile. So, the first element under the subtheme of benefits associated with screen time is that it is a refreshing activity for the child. As one of the participants stated that:

"I think for relaxation it is necessary that a child be allowed to watch TV for one hour as it will be refreshing for them"
[45 years old mother, Assistant Professor].

The same benefits were reported by other participants as well. Further screen time was perceived as beneficial by participants because it was considered as an activity of learning. This is the second element under the subtheme of benefits associated with screen time. e.g.,

"I think she is becoming sharper, while using tablet or watching TV she learns a lot of new things"
[45 years old mother, Assistant Professor].

Another benefit that is reported specifically by children is that watching is an enjoying activity e.g.

"I love to watch TV because I enjoy it a lot"
[10 year old girl, student of class 5th].

Second sub theme under the theme of "perception regarding screen time" was focused on the harmful effects of screen time.

One element under this subtheme was wastage of time. Participants reported that children are wasting their time while using mobile or watching television. For example one of the participants reported that:

"TV viewing is just the waste of time. My daughter can spend all her day watching TV until I get angry at her"
[38 years old mother, Lecturer].

Another element under the subtheme of harms associated with screen time is modeling of negative behavior depending on the contents. As parents reported that their child learn to act in a way they watch on TV and start modeling the behavior they observe e.g.,

"Then mostly children act out whatever they watch on TV. This is the reason they learn a lot of negative things"
[29 years old mother, housewife].

Additionally another harm reported by parents as well as children was that screen time can affect the study and exam performance of the child. For example

"Due to use of tablet our studies get effected and we get low grades in exams"   [9 years old girl, student of 4th class].

A similar report was given by the parents regarding the harmful effects of screen time for example:

"When children watch TV they don't give time to their studies"
                                                      [37 years old father, Businessman].

A final element under the sub theme of harms associated with screen time that was reported by the participants was effect on the eyesight. Parents as well as children reported that watching TV or using mobile can affect the eyesight because of continuous exposure to the screen. Report by one of the participants was:

"I am very upset about the screen time of my daughter because I am afraid that her eyesight will get weak due to continuous exposure to the mobile"   [45 years old mother, Assistant Professor].

Interestingly children were also aware of the fact that using mobile or watching television can affect their eyesight as reported below:

"TV can affect our eyesight as well as affect our studies"
                                                      [9 years old girl, student of class 3rd].

Recommendations to Restrict Screen Time

The next key theme to emerge from the data was regarding recommendations to restrict screen time that appears as the concern of the participants. This concern was expressed through participants' comments indicating the need to restrict screen time through different activities. One subtheme that emerged from the key theme of recommendations to restrict screen time was engagement in physical activities. Participants felt that by allowing children to involve in physical activities or by providing them opportunity to be physically active could restrict the screen time. As one of the participants reported:

"We can reduce the timings of TV watching of a child by engaging them in other activities like games but the matter of my daughter is a bit different as I do not allow her to play outside home as well as she is alone in the home there is no one to play with her so the only option is to watch TV"   [38 year old mother, Lecturer].

The recommendation to restrict screen time by involving a child in other activities was indicated in the comments of the other participant as well. For example:

*"My daughter does not watch TV with interest, yet she **use** to play games and watch cartoons on mobile and we can reduce that time by providing them opportunities for physical play and by involving them in other activities"*   [45 year old mother, Assistant Professor].

Another interesting element that emerged under the key theme was restricting screen time by the use of force e.g.:

"The only way to reduce screen time is by snatching the laptop and mobile from the child to restrict her"
[30 years old mother, housewife].

A similar recommendation was given by the child as well, as she reported that:

*"The only thing that my mother **use** to do to restrict me from television viewing is by dysfunctioning the dish antenna or taking the remote away"*   [9 years old girl, student of class 3rd].

So the point of view of the children was that they can only be restricted from watching television or using mobile by their parents is through use of force.

Consequences of Restricting Screen Time

Another theme that has been emerged from the data is consequences of restricting screen time. As participants reported that limiting screen time can both be beneficial as well as harmful for the child.

The first sub theme that emerged under this key theme is benefits associated with restricting screen time. As most of the participants reported that if the screen time of a child is restricted, it will save their time and they will develop interest in their studies. For example one of the mothers reported that:

"If I restrict my daughter from watching television then it will save her time ad she will develop interest in her studies as she will be having a lot of time to study"
[38 years old mother, Lecturer].

Similarly a 9 year old girl reported that:
"We will give more time to our studies if we are restricted to use mobile"   [9 years old girl, student of class 4th].

Another benefit reported to be related with the consequences of restricting screen time is involvement in physical activities. As the participants stated that if they restrict their children from using mobile phone or watching television they will be having time to play games and will be involved in physical activities which are very important for the mental health of a child. For example:

"If the time is reduced for the usage of mobile then my daughter will take part in physical activities which I think is very beneficial for her mental growth" [45 years old mother, Assistant Professor].

So participants reported that reducing television viewing can be very beneficial in terms of the mental health of a child .As another statement was:

"If we reduce screen time of a child then they will spend more time in physical activities that are very important for the mental development of a child"   [29 years old mother, house wife].

One of the benefits reported specifically by the parents of the children was that by reducing the screen time of the child they would become more obedient. As most of the time children are not listening to their parents because they are over involved in watching television or using mobile phone but if we restrict them from such activities they will become more obedient. For example one of the parents stated that:

"If we restrict the television viewing time of our children then they will listen to their mothers as most of the time mothers use to say that the children do not listen to them while watching television or using mobile so if we restrict them they will become more obedient"
                                                        [37 years old father, businessman].

Another interesting element reported by the children regarding the benefits of restricted screen time was religious perspective. As they reported that if they are restricted to watch television then they would be away from sins. One of the child statements was:

"If my mother restrict my television viewing time then it will save me from gunnah (sin)"   [9 years old girls, student of class 3rd].

Another subtheme reported under the key theme of consequences for restricting screen time was negative consequences reported by the participants related to restricting screen time. One of the elements reported by the participants was behavioral issues raised when a child is restricted from using screen. Participants reported that children behavior become aggressive and irritating towards others when they are restricted from watching TV or using mobile for example:

"If screen time of my children is restricted so they start irritating and fighting with one another"   [29 years old mother, house wife].

Another element linked with the subtheme of negative consequences related with restricting screen time was wandering behavior of children. Participants reported that if children are restricted from watching TV or using mobile then they will try to move out of home and that is not acceptable specifically for the girls in our society as reported by the parents. For example a mother reported that:

"If I restrict my daughter from watching TV so she will try to move out of home and you know that is not at all a better option"

[38 years old mother, Lecturer].

Rules Regarding Screen Time

While exploring the perception of the participants related to screen time another theme that emerged from the data was linked with the rules regarding screen time. As analysis of the data showed that mostly parents use to check on the contents of the children in order to reduce the negative consequences associated with the screen time. So one of the element of rules regarding screen time was check on contents. For example

"In order to minimize the harmful effects of TV watching I have developed the rule to keep a check on the content my child watches. For example they are not allowed to tune one music channels"

[29 years old mother, house wife].

Another rule that was reported by the parents to reduce screen time was to use TV time as rewarding activity. As parents reported that the only way through which we can reduce the screen time of our children is to ask them to complete their homework otherwise they will not be allowed to watch TV. For example

"You will not be given mobile or will not be allowed to watch TV until you complete your home work"

[29 years old mother, house wife].

Additionally one of the mothers reported that she did not determine any rules for children regarding screen time for example she said:

"I have not determined any rules for my daughter regarding TV watching as I do not have enough time to have a check on her and as a single mother I have to manage a lot of things so in this situation I have no other option but to allow my daughter to watch TV"

[38 years old mother, Lecturer].

Discussion

The current study explored the perception of parents regarding the screen time of children ranging from 9-10 years. Data was collected from

parent-children dyad through semi structured interview. Data was initially analyzed for media availability and use. The availability of different media at home is the indication that children are living in a multimedia environment now a days. It was recommended by the parents that 2 hours is a reasonable screen time that will have a positive effect on children as recommended by American Academy of Pediatrics. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data further. Following themes emerged from the data: Perception regarding screen time, recommendations to restrict screen time, consequences of restricting screen time, and rules regarding screen time. The perception of the participants revealed through two major subthemes that were benefits and harms associated with the screen time. Screen time was reported as a refreshing activity as parents reported that watching television or using a mobile phone is a good activity for relaxation. These findings are in line with Sjoberg, and Magneberg (2006) research which reported watching television as a relaxing activity. Further, participants reported that watching television can be a learning opportunity for children because they become sharper and learn a lot of new things while using mobile or watching television. These findings are in line with the previous research (Solomon-Moore, et al., 2018). Additionally children also reported that watching television is an entertainment and they enjoy a lot, watching cartoons or their favorite dramas. Similar findings were reported by Jordan, Hersey, McDivitt, and Heitzler (2006) as they argued that if children are restricted from watching television they would be provided with some entertaining non screen activities because children find entertainment in watching television. Along with the positive perception of participants regarding screen time a subtheme of harms associated with screen time also emerged from the data. One of the negative effects of using mobile and watching television reported by participants was wastage of time. Participants reported that children can spend entire day watching television or using mobile if not restricted in this way they are wasting time because they are not getting anything from this activity. These findings are in line with the research conducted by Sjoberg, and Magneberg (2006). As reported by these researchers that watching television is wastage of time because children are getting entertainment temporarily so in the longer run it is wastage of time. Furthermore it was reported by the participants that watching television or using mobile influence a child to model the behaviors they watch on television so in this way they are learning a lot of negative behaviors. Participants reported that modeling of behavior depends on contents. Participants reported that children who are exposed to contents showing aggressive acts as a result children also model that behavior and start acting like them. Modeling of behavior by watching inappropriate contents is in line with Rothenberg (1983).

Another important element of harmful effects reported by the participants both by the children as well as their parents was effect on

studies. Analysis of the data showed that participants reported that screen time can impact the study habits and as a result the academic success of a child. Similar findings were reported by other researches as well (Milmine, 2015). Effect on eyesight was also a harm associated with screen time reported by participants. It was reported that excessive use of mobile phones and television can negatively affect the eyesight of a child and this was a point of concern for the parents. These findings are in line with Solomon-Moore, et al. (2018).

Apart from the perception of the parents and children regarding screen time the other theme that emerged from the data was regarding recommendations to restrict screen time. As parents mostly perceive screen time as negative so they were interested to recommend some strategies for restricting or reducing screen time. One of the recommendations given by the participants was to provide opportunities for involvement in other activities like games or any other physical activity so as a result they will have time to enjoy and will be involved in activities other than using mobile or watching television, a similar recommendation was given by a study conducted by Kara (2018). Another interesting recommendation given by the participants was that the only way through which screen time can be reduced is by use of force. This finding can be explained through the parenting styles of the parents in the current sample. There are chances that parents may have no control over their children so the only way they think to reduce screen time is by use of force.

Furthermore, a theme emerged from the current data was consequences of restricting screen time. Parents were interested to reduce screen time of their children due to its positive consequence yet they also perceived some negative consequences as well. One of the positive consequences linked with reducing screen time was increase in interest in studies. As children also reported that if they are restricted to use mobile phones or watch television they will have more time and interest in studies. Similar findings regarding the benefits associated with reducing screen time were reported by Jordan et al. (2006) research. Improved physical health linked with mental health was another benefit reported by the participants to be associated with reducing screen time. It was reported that children's physical health will be improved if they are restricted from watching television because they will be involved in physical activities which in turn will improve their physical as well as mental health. These findings are in line with Stiglic and Viner (2019) systematic review. Another element related with the positive consequences of reducing screen time was obedience. This is interesting and culture specific finding because parents in our culture demand obedience from their children so they think that if children are not allowed to watch television or using mobile phone so they will be obedient towards them. Another interesting element related with the subtheme of positive consequences is religious perspective. This finding is particular to the cultural context as

children are taught in our culture that it is a sin when one listens to songs etc so children also perceive the screen time as a sin and they think that if they are restricted from watching television then they will be away from sins.

Along with positive consequences of restricted screen time parents were also of the view that reducing screen time can also be negative as they think that by restricting screen time children will behave aggressively and will irritate others in the family because if they are having no other alternative activity so they will irritate others similarly if they are prohibited from the activity they enjoy more so as a reaction they will be aggressive. These findings are in contrast with that of Jordan et al. (2006) as it was reported that limiting screen time for a child of 6-7 years would make a child calmer but these findings can be specific to the current study because the age limit in the current study is 9-10 years and children of this age range may perceive this restriction more negatively as compared to the other age ranges. Similarly if they are having no screen time or restricted screen time so they will search for other alternatives outside homes. It is desirable for children as reported by Jordan et al. (2006) but for parents this was a concern because they do not want their children to go outside as for them television or use of mobile phone is a secure and safe activity at home.

The final theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was rules regarding restricting screen time. Interestingly some of the participants in the present study reported lack of particular rules yet the subthemes that emerged related with the key theme of rules regarding reducing screen time was check on contents. As participants reported that they don't allow their children to watch certain shows or music channels. Further parents also reported that one of the rules they used to restrict their children from screen time was using it as a rewarding activity. For example they are not allowed to watch television or use mobile until they don't complete their home work. Rules similar to that reported in the current study were reported by Jordan et al. (2006). By integrating the findings of the current study with the previous literature it can be inferred that the present study is helpful in understanding the parental perception regarding screen time as well as their recommendations and consequences of restricting screen time. Most of the findings are in line with previous literature yet some findings specific to the current study revealed that participant's perception depends on the cultural context as well.

Conclusion and Limitations

Although the study provided valuable insight regarding participants' perception of screen time along with the consequences and recommendations to restrict screen time as well as rules related to screen time yet there are limitations of the study. First of all the sample of the current study is limited as 4 dyads were selected for the current study so a

larger representative sample will provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Further the age range was limited; other studies with different age ranges can provide us with the data for comparing the participants' perception across different groups as well. Additionally the analysis was done manually, for getting more accurate results analysis can be conducted with some softwares. Group discussions and focus groups can also be effective methodologies to conduct the research on the same topic.

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