CHILDREN HABITS IN READİNG FILM
AND OTHER MEDIA

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Çocukların Film ve Diğer Medya Okuma Alışkanlıkları

Çok genç bir nüfusu olan ülkemizde genel iletişim tutum ve politikaları son derece önemlidir. Televizyon yayınlarına ve genel iletilerine bakıldığında, çocuklara gerek içerik gerekse biçim açısından uygun programların azlığı hemen dikkati çekmektedir. Günümüz yayıncılığı nedense, çok genç bir nüfusa sahip olduğumuzu yadsırcasına kaliteli ve uygun yayınlar açısından son derece kısıtlıdır. Toplumda genel izlenirlik oranları son derece yüksek olmasına karşın, çocuklara yönelik programlar yalnızca birkaç çizgi film ve sözde eğitim programları ile kısıtlıdır. Bu nedenle çocuklar daha çok kendilerine yönelik olmayan diğer programları izlemekte ve bunların olumsuz etkileri altında kalmaktadırlar. Onların bilişsel, duygusal gelişimlerine uygun olarak hazırlanmamış olan bu programlar, ayrıca yanlış okumalara da neden olarak kaygılı bir tutuma girmelerine de neden olabilmektedir. Yanlış okumalar ise, yanlış ekimlemelerle sonuçlanmakta, medyanın bu sessiz izleyicileri kendilerine yönelik

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olmayan iletilerin sessiz kurbanlarına dönüşmektedir. Çalışma, çocukların filmleri ve yazılı basını okuma alışkanlıkları ile ilgili bir araştırmayı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

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Having a very young population, Turkey is one of the countries that should give importance to the broadcasting policies for the younger generations. When we look at the type of the television programs and their messages it is easy to see that the children are usually neglected in today's broadcasting policies. Even if they have a high proportion in the society and in the television watching audience, the programs for them are usually limited to some cartoons and pseudo-educational programs. Due to the limitation of the programs targeting the children and the side-effects of the other programs watched, children usually have a different tendency towards reading film and other media. Their uneasy nature rooting from their physical and emotional reactions added to their underestimated importance in the society and in the audience proportion they seem to be affected rather negatively through their film readings. Through the implications of the cultivation theory put into action, the children get rather a negative view of the world they live in. Their reactions and expectations are higher than it is estimated. So, they develop new habits such as negating the news gathered through the TV films and the other media, using cyclical approaches to the media messages, becoming more elective in the choice of the messages

and choosing the ordinary ones rather than the most repeated ones.

Television has a very important place in today's children. Through the cartoons the children like most and the educational material the adults approved the programs are not as many as they ought to be. Many films and other type of programs used to be classified as not appropriate under certain ages. This brings a limitation for the child who is constrained within a certain cycle. The given space and time, the density of the programs are usually not enough for the capacity of the child. Considering the requirements of such a quick development phase, a child needs more than that is given by the society.

Most of the television channels plan to give children a 6 –10 % time in their whole overflow of other programs. Their target is not the children. Stemming from the countries abroad applying pay tv approaches, our country has also such attempts to make the children television addicted. Examples of foxkids tv or maxi-tv are very well known ones. These channels give importance to the cartoons which have been repeated for millions of time to make the audience get the messages. It is interesting to see that most of the children who has access to these channels show no signs of boredom even if the programs were repeated for a hundred times. Considering the visuals, it might be easy to claim that seeing the same scenes in the same order could cause a kind of familiarity and the children watching these could form a kind of televised reality of their own.

In order to find out how the children react to certain media factors they were observed frequently in their natural

course of watching and discourse. In order not to be affected by the information given the observations are done by different people. And these people were not given a handout or anything else to guide to them. The time of the observations changed between 15-30 minutes and different times of the day, i.e. not in the mornings all the time. The underlined points below were just the statements of different observers overlapping with each other. After about three months observation of the children of 5 and 6 years, attending to three different kindergardens the following habits were noticed.

1. During their watching they devote all their attention to the film and that is why they could remember all the details.

2. The duration of the action could change from half an hour to higher clusters.

3. Although they watch all the film in full attention, they might not understand or reflect the necessary relationships or functions in the film.

4. If they are watching something known to them, the specific details are considered to have a primary importance on them. They wait for the scenes to re-appear and satisfy their expectations.

5. The real and unreal are sometimes mixed in the watching activity. Although they believe that some of the programs they watch are imaginary and not related with the situations they are in they act as if they are real.

6. They could make use of the whole to describe a certain frame within it or they could easily use the frame to describe the whole.

7. The visuals are seen as a kind of clue for the associated message.

8. The visuals are seen as a part of the whole

9. The visuals are regarded as the whole to reach to the particulars

10. The audio codes accompanying the visuals are learned easier and repeated several times even long after the watching.

11. The audio part of the watched items are recorded into the long term memory and could be repeated any time they want.

12. The audio part of the watched items are used for communicative purposes and establish a new context for communication.

13. Friendship and communicative environment activities among the children mostly depend upon the shared interests of the same characters and same cartoons.

14. Performing most of the actions seen in the films, the children mostly act like a scenario writer or film producer giving instructions about what to do and how to do.

15. For the distribution of the roles they compete with each other to be the active ones rather than the passive ones.

16. They give importance to the minute detail in their own recomposition to act like the characters in the cartoons or to create the situations they were in. It takes a long time to decide the role distribution and the other details.

17. They associate all the toys to the cartoons and all the cartoons to their toys. This makes them create their own situations and adventures using their toys.

18. The programs are somehow related to the advertisements and the brands are all important for them even if they are completely illiterate.

19. They give importance to the sign language and develop their skills to imitate certain behaviours they observe in the films.

20. They have a feeling of what is appropriate and what is inappropriate for them. For some of the programs they have a kind of sincere attachment being sure that they are for children and for some other programs they do not want to reflect their attachment even if they feel deeply, believing that they are not appropriate for them.

21. They remember the most important parts of the programs. For example the winners but not the competition itself or the dialogues they like but not the whole topic.

22. Most of the children are successful in developing emphatic behaviour. They imitate the characters very well and they can easily change or switch their roles from one character to another.

23. Most of the children are capable of creating their own scenarios for the characters watched on television programs and they develop new dialogues for these situations.

24. The child has a collection of different inputs s/he got and each new program is added to this input reshaping and re-evaluating all the others. All the messages have a high possibility of being recollected any time they are required.

25. Individual films has an importance but rather they prefer following the serials. It is the feeling of attachment to a certain program that they like most. They have the right to own their own programs, their own material and their own watching hours.

26. They all have a high frequency of remembering the dates of the programs they follow.

27. They all have a high frequency of remembering the events of the last program to guide the others. In the most important scenes they could say: "Look what's happening now...." "Let's see how s/he solves the problem..." etc.

28. If the pre-watched programs include some scary scenes they could warn the others not to be frightened.

29. The line between the real and unreal is a very thin one and there could always be some interchanges between the two. They could easily switch the codes for the real and unreal world.

30. Considering the roles played there is no specific discrimination between the role associated by the boys or the girls.

31. The children have the habit of recycling the dialogues in the films for their daily life situations. These could recycle sometimes with reference to the origin but usually without any further reference. These dialogues are accepted by the senders and receivers as a secret code and as if through a mutual agreement are kept apart from the other messages.

32. The viewers have a wide variety of characters easily applicable to any situation. These characters, their names and functions within the whole are known and accepted by the others playing.

33. Some of the scenes could be described in detail but some of them are just blurred ones. The ones that could not be remembered are just mentioned as a function.

34. The ads inserted into the cartoon serials are very interesting for them and sometimes are regarded as a part of the program.

The ads also affect their dialogues and speech acts, i.e. whenever they want to stop the activity and say something different they say that it's time for an ad or the ads are inserted. After finishing their words whenever they would like to continue to play again they say that the ads are over.

The children show no reluctance in sharing their watching experiences, instead they volunteer for it and look for their time to come to talk about it. They could easily picture what they see in the films and they could think of the details to be added to the picture. Not only the actions that would be easy to remember accompanied the drawing but also the abstract concepts they tried to put into. Whereas their drawing is inefficient they begin to talk about the picture to explain it in detail and orally add to the ones they could not draw. It is easy to say that the children usually imitate what they see. This imitation could be only in the action form, or in the dialogue or drawing form.

The children were not taken to the cinema as a group, at once. Just a few of them could take part in the cinema for some economical reasons. In order to record their reaction in a similar way, a cartoon is chosen again. Atlantis - The Lost Continent was the film. Although it was not exactly appropriate for the children bearing so many adult matters and informativity, the actions, the colours and the language were still interesting for them. It is obvious that for the children cinema films are a bit different from the TV serials taking only 10-15 minutes to continue. But having a larger cluster to be watched could be boring for the children. The children have the tendency of talking with each other or to their parents. The most important reaction while they are watching

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cinema film was the questioning or reduplication. They usually repeat the actions they see in the visual form by accompanying them orally or through body movements. Since the film is longer than the television programs they frequently ask the question of when there would be a break for the ads, what does the main character do, what does he mean, where does he go, etc. They openly share their feelings and ideas about the films emphasising the parts they didn't understand. The whole story was grasped by all the attendants but the bits and pieces were missed and some of parts had no connections with each other. The children having the same messages repeated in the same form in the television programs or the same video cassette played for them several times establish a kind of familiarity with the film and in each repetition they feel so eager as if they are watching it for the first time. But in fact, this might be the case. At each viewing they concentrate on a different aspect of the film. So, they get the messages together during and after the watching activity, combining the old information with the new one. This could be the case in television or video watching but the long run of the cinema film which they have no familiarity neither with the visual part nor with the audio part is a bit too much for them to remember and to imitate. Though the characters in the film could only be classified as "good" and "bad" ones, they could not make up dialogues for the characters or the watched situations. Here the familiarity factor plays an important role again. The familiar characters of the television serials make the children guess some of the actions or dialogues. But not being familiar with the cinema film characters prevents them to establish the situational exchanges. One other

factor is that, the children could easily attach themselves to the television serial characters and change their roles whenever required. But it is not the case with the cinema film characters. They could easily associate themselves with the "good" ones in the film, but not change their roles. This might be because they could not figure out all the qualities of the given characters within their quick show. Although the cartoon serials of the television seem to be in shorter periods of time, they cultivate their characters and functions gradually to establish a kind of a world in children. Having a longer sequence of time the cinema film lacks this kind of a cultivation opportunity. If only they were emphasised before and after the watching through the outer ads, readings, objects and toys, the result could be different. As for the role distribution concerned, the cinema film characters barely divided into two as "good" and "bad" has the participants only from their own sexes. Although in the television serials the children used to attach themselves to the roles of both sexes, in the cinema film occasion they attached themselves only to the related sexes.

Considering the two different viewing habits, it could be argued that the children could feel more comfortable, flexible and creative with the television serials rather than the cinema films. This means that certain repetitions and familiarity, cultivates certain messages to the children. The way they handle the messages in the television serials seem to be more effective. Considering the wide angles of the cinema film perhaps they have a kind of difficulty of seeing the whole there. Being nearer and smaller the television is much more easier to follow. With the video they seldom show the tendency of rewinding the film and

watching the same scenes. But if it is a very funny one everyone asks it to be watched again and again. For example, Robinson was washing the dog and hanging it as if it is a pullover, and this scene makes everyone laugh so whenever they watch the film, they laugh at it, asking for rewinding it again and again.

The reactions of the children for the other media is almost wholly different from the visual one. They are fond of music channels considering the radio. They do not have any specific content choice but they like popular music more than the children songs. Again the impact of the television could be seen widely. They listen to the music if they have watched the clip of it on the television. Compared to the television, the radio does not seem to be a challenging media for the children. But the parents interviewed about the media habits insisted that their children like to listen to the radio, discriminate between the radio channels leading to say "let's change the music" whenever they come across with an unknown or disliked piece of music. Especially they like to listen to the radio in the morning, during they get prepared for the day and on the way to school or home. The time devoted to listening could be changing from 30 minutes to higher clusters. The school drivers have certain favourite music cassettes for them to be played every day. When interviewed they recalled some of the days that the children refused to get off without listening to their favourite songs. There seems to be the repetition factor involved again. The songs frequently met were considered to be valuable enough to learn and are listened to over and over, and the ones learned better, are repeated more.

For the printed press, the children have no preferences. The only thing they mentioned was the long hours devoted to newspaper reading by their parents. Some of them feel neglected and offended during these long hours, some of them evaluate it as a necessity of being an adult. They usually mention the fathers as reading and the mothers as cooking in the evening. Some of them mention the grandparents reading newspapers all the time. When they are asked to play roles related to the newspapers or magazines. Some of them prefer to sell them and some of them prefer to buy newspapers and magazines. The interesting point appearing in many conversations was that they tend to buy more newspapers claiming that it is the weekend. They also ask for the additional papers or children magazines when they want to buy a newspaper. Some play the adult roles, some other play the role of a child sent to buy a newspaper for the parents or grandparents.

When they are given a chance to look at the newspapers it takes only five minutes to look through the whole or part of it. They usually tend to sit like an adult and make a serious face accompanying their readings. They sometimes share the information they get and say that they know some of the figures on the pages. Most of them could not remember the names but the actions of the related people are easily recalled. "These are the ones playing in the .... serial or the girl singing .... song." The visuals are not so interesting. Seeing two people in the photograph on a newspaper, they are forced to figure out what these could be talking about. They usually try to attach the themes and topics from television cartoons to these characters.

Newspapers and reading habits are usually a part of an adult life for them.

Computers are interesting for them and they can easily get used to the computer skills. They are proud of themselves when they talk about these skills. They find it quite easy to handle the computer, even they could easily get connected to the internet. But the impact of the television is overlapping the computers as well. Usually they insist on getting a connection to the web sites of one of the cartoons or they try to use it as a tool to play or to watch the cartoons. They usually put the computers as an enjoyable material but when it comes to education, they could not spend more than 30 minutes in front of it. As the educational material the popular foreign language series or the colours, spatial concepts or order of the actions were introduced to them. They do not want to share it with anybody, not even with the parents or teachers. They like it when a chance is given to watch the cartoons in computers. For most of them these have the function of a television. Even they ask for where the remote control is. For most of them the computer belongs to the children's world, for some of them it belongs to the adult world but they could use it as well. There were only 3 out of 50 children who rejected to play with the computers.

To sum up, the children watched over a period of time, by different observers showed much more dependency for the television. During the observation only the question answer techniques were used and from time to time the children were asked to play roles. These were observed to be somehow bounded to the serials they are keen on very much and the impact

of the audio-visuals could easily be seen on their behaviours and habits.

The imitation factor is seen as one of the main impacts of watching television. But it is not something related with the time devoted to the watching activity. It appears rather as a side effect of communication and role play in the social situations. For most of them it is a habit to imitate the televised cartoon characters and most of the sentences, the actions they use in general are somehow related to what they watched. When given the remote control they could easily and consciously swap the channels, zapping from one channel to another until they find something more interesting. When there is no children programs, they could either choose not to watch television or sticking on television they choose anything interesting for them at the moment. Usually they think that there is nothing wrong with their television habits and it is one of their toys. Most of them could not resist watching television as a group but some of them could prefer watching and playing with their toys at the same time. These bored ones, developing a negative attitude to the television have the habit of negating what is said on the television. For example some parents talk about their negation when they are watching the news on television. They repeat the things just after the speaker but in a negative way. As a conclusion it could be said that, television, rather than the radio, printed press or computers has a wider affect on children. Either developing role plays or putting the unreal to the real world they reflect the impact of television but show no signal of giving it up.

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