

# 3-6 Years Old Children's Media Use According To Social Learning Theory: A Focus Group Research On Turkey Sample

*Sosyal Öğrenme Kuramına Göre 3-6 Yaş Çocukların Medya Kullanımı:  
Türkiye Örneklemini Üzerine Bir Odak Grup Araştırması*

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## Özet

*Sosyal Öğrenme Kuramı'na göre insan davranışları kaynağını bilişsel, çevresel ve davranışsal etkenlerin etkileşiminden alır. Bir çocuğun en hızlı sosyal gelişim gösterdiği dönem 3-6 yaş arasıdır ve medya çocukların sosyalleşme kanallarından biri olması nedeniyle çevresel bir etki yaratmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı 3-6 yaş grubundaki okul öncesi çocukların, iletişim teknolojileri içeriklerinden en çok etkilenen grup olduklarını göstermektir. Medyadaki oyunlar sonucu ortaya çıkan daha küreselleşmiş bir kültür nedeniyle çocukların ünlü pek çok kahramanı bildikleri, bu kahramanlarla ilgili oyunlar oynadıkları, kıyafetler giydikleri ve sahip oldukları yerel özelliklerin küreselleştiği çalışmanın ilk varsayımını oluşturmaktadır. İkinci varsayım ise ebeveynlerin çocukları için kendi medya kullanımlarını değiştirmek istemedikleri ve böylesi bir medya kullanımına tanıklık eden çocukların olgunlaşma süreçlerinin zarar göreceğidir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Medya kullanımı, 3-6 yaş gelişimi; Sosyal Öğrenme Kuramı; Küreselleştiren medya kültürü; Medya kullanım alışkanlıkları*

## Abstract

*According to Social Learning Theory human behaviour arises from interaction between cognitive, environmental, and behavioural factors. A child has the fastest social development at the age of 3-6 and media creates an environmental influence as children's socialising channels. The study's aim is to show preschool children of ages 3 to 6, being the most affected group by communication technology contents. The first hypothesis is that as having a more globalised culture via games on media, children are familiar with most of the famous heroes, consume their plays, clothes and their locality have turned into globality. The second hypothesis is that parents do not prefer to change their media use for their children and children's witnessing of this kind of media use can disrupt their maturity process.*

**Keywords:** *Media use; 3-6 years development; Social learning theory; Globalisation culture of media; Media use habits*

## 1. Introduction

*Social Learning Theory* or *SLT*, one of the significant developmental theories, closely associated with Albert Bandura, explains child's media use and according to this theory human behaviour arises from the interaction between cognitive, environmental, and behavioural factors (Bronson, 2000:16; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2003).

A child has the fastest social development between the ages of 3-6. During this period with the media use practises, a distinctive social learning form takes place. Technological developments growing exponentially have started to affect the child when he is just in the womb. *Evolution* is described as a range of progressive alterations which appear regularly and connectedly to one another in an organism in consequence of interior and exterior agents. Media creates an environmental influence as being one of children's socialising channels. **Behavioural effects** of media use involve "catharsis, imitation, and sensitivity-insensitivity", **affectional effects** represent emotive transitions, fear, and anxiety and cognitive effects include beliefs, values, and idea contents that children are about to create. Parents usually think that technological developments affect child's natural development in a negative way; and they are not able to know how to manage it. Instead of being afraid of new technologies and media, the ways to benefit from them have been stated in the article Buckingham (2007) "*Beyond Technology: Children's learning in the age of digital culture*" and suggests in to construct, for example, a new design principle for the use of digital media in the 21st century teaching.

This article reviews *behavioural, affectional, cognitive* development with the role of media for children between the ages of 3-6. These study for media use in developmental features are limited with theoretical definitions within social learning theory.

### 3-6 Years Old Children's Affectional Development and Media Use

At this period, family is still the focus of life. Independence, personal control, and self care develop as well. Besides, creativeness and imagination become significant. Together with gaining language evolution at the age of 3-6, a child begins to prevail the language by learning new words each day.

Although there are some findings that media increases child's language and vocabulary development, if a child is exposed to media unrestrainedly then there will be problems in making a conversation with his relatives in his social adaptation. The child begins to meet and communicate with new people in this period. Morgan (1981:71) explains that children who follow screen behave more aggressively. That is why he reminds parents to pay attention to the contents which children are likely to watch. There is a strong relation between aggressiveness and con-

tents inclining towards violence.

New media usage includes watching TV, computing activities such as game playing and listening to music (entertainment activities), playing video games or playstations, and watching videos or DVDs. While traditional and newer forms of electronic media are considered, the impact of television on children's development needs particular attention ( Jordan, 2004).

The images in media which children come across at this age, can lead to emotional troubles such as anxiety, fear, tension, inclining towards violence, insomnia, not wanting to stay alone. At this age a child learns new things through playing games and media can affect the child's interaction with other children's games and can lead him/her to become isolated. However, there are some findings that when heroes of cartoon movies are taken into games children may be socialized by creating new constructs and becoming more participants of games (Belton 2001:817). Since preschool children are in concrete level in terms of cognitive development, they are not able to understand why heroes, which are supposed to get punished because of their bad behaviours, do not get punished. They can see these heroes as examples and can model their behaviours or can be anxious because of violent scenes. Some kinds of fears are formed as a result of contagions of a film or a fairy tale, whereas some fears stem from children's imagination. Children using media too much display more anxious and aggressive behaviours than those who use media less. However, in this period the child needs constructive and positive imaginations that accelerate his/her development.

### **3-6 Years Old Children's Cognitive Development and Media Use**

Piaget and his colleagues called this period at the age 2-7, "Pre-operational Stage" (Morgan, 1981). At this stage the child learns to use language and to present objects by images and words. He/she starts to classify objects by a single feature and uses symbols in a primitive way; but there is no operation in the real sense yet and concreteness is the most distinctive feature of this stage. At the age of 3-4, the child is able to perceive the outer world by conceiving as symbols. He/she can interact with adults and their experiences, but this interaction is ego-centric. He/she is not able to take viewpoint of others, which Piaget mentions this stage as pre-logic (Hargreaves & Hargreaves 1997:28). The child in pre-operational stage is deprived of the logical thinking for the reversal function (Morgan, 1981). As it is seen, the mental proficiency is not completed at this stage and unrestrained usage of media will be harmful to the child. It is emphasized that children's cognitive and language developments are directly affected by media (De Gaetano, 2003).

#### **3-6 Years Old Children's Socio-Behavioural Development and Media Use**

Learning to make friends as well as learning to be a good friend are impor-

tant parts of a child's social development skills. For their first few years, most children are exposed largely to family members and close family friends. Most of the learning that young children do is through play. Typically, 2-3 year olds will initially play side-by-side, rather than directly with one another, but as they observe each other and become comfortable, the little ones will begin to interact and share toys. By preschool, kids become even more interactive, engaging each other in simple conversation. They will talk about the things that they did after school or at the weekend and respond positively to the stories of their friends. This give-and-take is a great step in social development as they work from being self-focused to other-focused.

As friendships develop, children become increasingly aware of the feelings of other people, expressing happiness when their friends are happy and showing empathy for a friend's hurt feelings. They will also seek out their similarities, instinctively knowing that sharing common bonds is important to maintain friendships. They will focus on favourite colours, foods, or games, and delight in the fact that they are alike in many ways. Another common development as friendship capacity develops is a child's desire to protect their friends.

Early use of television and other media —such as video, computer programs, and CD material—can disrupt the development of social skills and behaviours of early childhood and media violence has a negative effect on children's moral reasoning and social skills (Krcmar and Vieira, 2005). Playing violent video games on Internet is associated with greater tolerance of violence, a lower emphatic attitude, and more aggressive behaviour (Wei, 2008).

### **Media Use in Social Learning Theory**

According to the social learning theory, behaviours of powerful models will be served or practiced or reproduced although there is no direct interaction with these models. According to the observational learning of modeling, children repeat occasions after the observations and learn the behaviours and values of parents. Values, attitudes and behaviours are transmitted through the parent-child relationship (Bandura, 1969:250). Cognitive processes are significant in terms of development and they create emotions which cause behavioural reactions as a result (Goldstein, 1981).

Moral thinking and moral behavior are influenced by observation and modeling which includes moral judgments. Aggression also can be learned through models. Many researches indicate that children become more aggressive when they observed aggressive or violent models (Ormrod, 1999). In this context social learning theory can explain media use, and today communication devices, and environments are included in the definition of social environment and they become effective factors in the social process. The interaction between television and computer has become an indispensable part in the lives of children, and in such



kind of learning environment, children and parents constitute models to each other.

Children's imagination at the age of 3-6 develops rapidly, and as a result they invent stories. They like listening to stories from adults and watching television and films. Children who watch violent films without control of adults behave more aggressively than those who do not watch. In 1961 Albert Bandura proved "learning through observing" with an experiment. The study has gained importance in terms of the effects of TV programmes on children.

### **Bobo Doll Experiment**

*In this experiment three groups of children saw a film which showed the adult attacking an inflatable doll with a stick. The doll was thrown across the room, sat on, punched and kicked. Bandura provided three alternative endings to the film: Group A - Saw only the doll being hit. Group B - Saw the adult being praised and rewarded for hitting the doll. Group C - Saw the adult being punished for hitting the doll. When the children had seen the film, they were given the same doll. Bandura observed their behaviour which showed that groups A and B imitated the aggressive behaviour they had witnessed, while group C were less aggressive. Bandura found that the children exposed to the aggressive model were more likely to act in physically aggressive ways than those who were not exposed to the aggressive model. The experimenters came to the conclusion that children observing adult behaviour are influenced to think that this type of behaviour is acceptable thus weakening the child's aggressive inhibitions. The result of reduced aggressive inhibitions in children means that they are more likely to respond to future situations in a more aggressive manner (Bopp, 2004; Bandura, 1969).*

Watching aggressive TV contents with heavy doses supports that television has a negative effect on viewers (Heath, Kruttschnitt, and Ward, 1986; Xtra, 2003). After watching cartoons with violent contents on TV, children behave differently (Kirsh, 2005). In a study (Meyers, 2002) children were observed before and after watching TV. It is stated that children watching violent contents fight with their peers, go against adults and behave impatiently more than the others. Violent characters in video games engage in aggression (Lachlan, Smith and Tamborini, 2001) which shows there is no difference between television and video game conditions (Silvern and Williamson, 2002). According to the findings of Valkenburg and his colleagues' (2000) even children older than seven are frightened by television although their television-induced fears and coping strategies to reduce such fears vary by age and gender.

The report of the Kaiser Foundation in 2003 (Rideout, Vandewater and Wartella, 2003) on electronic media use among preschoolers, reveals that 78% of children (4-6 year-old age group) watch TV in a typical day and the amount of time spend watching TV is one hour. While the results were shocking and amazing

for commentators and older adults, it was not the same for parents of very young children (Thorn, 2008). The study displays that a young generation has surrounded by media devices immensely at the moment they are born. Only after 3 years, another research by the Kaiser Foundation reported children are centered with a richly media life style, and often have their own media which can be used by themselves or can do daily activities at the same time while watching TV. In a typical day, 90% of children (4-6 year-old age group) use screen media for an average of two hours (Rideout and Hamel, 2006). The results show that only in three years, there has been an increase not only in numbers of children but also in the duration of watching TV and using media.

Researchers handled the phenomenon of socialization in the social learning process with its various sides. The process of socialization, for example, was surveyed thoroughly in these subjects: addiction, offensiveness, achievement motive, being taught of the roles, and morality. The modeling process in the development of personality constitutes a significant part of social emotional development. It is accepted that when hereditary faculties and skills unite with achievements which are gained later from the environment, the socialization process indicates the development of personality. Belton's study (2001:817) with focus groups stated that children were influenced by the television in various ways according to their personalities. While in some children imagination and creativity were constrained after the watching, in other children they were progressed. On the other hand Paik and Comstock (1994) emphasized that violence on the screen would cause different impacts according to personality of a child. These kinds of displays desensitize the child against violence or can cause the child to gain violent behaviours and attitudes with identification. When the child begins to perceive the world worse than it is, he will adopt offensive acts in order to protect himself or can become desensitized (Singer and Singer, 1998).

In "Stress-Causing Effects of Television News Covering Psychosocial and Environmental Disasters On Children" Erturk (2005) has studied with 7-12 year-old Turkish children which has the same findings with this study and a previous one (Erturk and Gul, 2006) with Aysen A. Gul. In the study, impacts of TV news on Turkish children are studied. This study underlines the fact that contents deploying psychosocial and environmental disasters reflected on TV screen affect the children's viewing circles and their cognitive and social perception developments.

Slater, Kimberly and his colleagues found that media with violence would lead to negative effects on children who lost their desire for school and felt themselves outsiders and downtrodden by their friends and family (2004:642). By emphasizing the importance of family, Krcmar and Viera asserted that parents who made a habit of thinking together with their children and talked to their children about how to behave in case they encountered violence reduced the negative effects of television on child (2005:267-268).

## 2. Aim and Method

This study shows that communication technology contents affected the children at preschool ages of 3 to 6 the most. In the study, response conditions from media communication technologies are examined by a regression analysis on a cross sectional focus group, considering cognitive, environmental, and behavioural developments of children at this age group. Within this general aim, the study has been examined in terms of these two hypotheses:

**H1.** Cultural symbols and life styles that are presented via games based on technology like cartoons on TV, game boys, PSPs, computer, and video games remove locality and lead a more globalised culture to expand.

**H2.** 3-6 years old child's intensive media use based on technology affects **behavioural, affectional and cognitive development** of the child, and family's media usage habits constitute a social learning model for the children.

**Research Model:** The research is a fieldwork with in-depth focus group.

**Respondents:** 3-6 years old children in a private preschool and their families have been chosen randomly. In total, 30 children together with their families have been evaluated. This number is adequate for a focus group work.

**Data Collection Techniques:** Projective techniques are used to search the effects of media use on children. The fact that children like fairy tales, narratives, and paintings increases the usability of techniques such as drawing, and completing sentences. For parents a question form is used to state media use habits of child and parents' manner for this point.

**Data Collection Means:** In this study, a projective evaluation media prepared by the researcher and an information form aimed to get information from parents were used to evaluate the results of focus group.

**Information Form:** An Information Form is a kind of form of which a father and a mother have to fill separately in order to get information about age, profession, education level, socio-economic level, marital status. There are also open ended questions and parents were asked to express their views about news on TV with their own sentences clearly.

**Drawing a Picture and Completing Sentences Form:** This form, being a projective technique was chosen as a main test in this study. Having children drawn pictures and having them completed sentences are the most ideal projective techniques to discover children's inner world.

With the application of drawing a picture of a hero you like most, the respondent was asked to draw a picture of the hero he/she likes most on TV prog-

rammes, on video films, on games such as computers, game boys on a piece of blank paper. In course of the evaluation of this projective drawing, the child was asked what he/she painted and was asked to tell about the picture. It was supposed that the child reflected his/her emotions and thoughts indirectly through his/her paintings.

**Completing Sentences Form:** There are uncompleted sentences which are supposed to be filled in order to designate the child and parents' media use habits. The implementer read those uncompleted sentences aloud, and wrote down the things the child said verbally.

**Process:** These data collection means are constructed and applied by the researcher. The data collection means are applied randomly to 3-6 year-old children in a nursery school and to their parents as a focus group work. Projective drawings, open ended questions and narratives are grouped into various themes; common themes and emotions are determined; and they are grouped according to ages; and percentages are attained by a frequency analysis. Finally, they are compared with the same and different findings and are commented accordingly.

### 3. Results

As a result, comments of the paintings made by children, and content analyses of tales narrated by children together with samples and resolutions in the research are attained. It is observed that media use of parents have been reflected after the evaluation of the paintings of the children. It is presented without any insertion and comment with an assumption that paintings reflect children's inner world and the environment at the moment. The contents are given by classifying the paintings and tales that they told. These results are compared with the question forms in which parents have filled for how parents' media use affect developments of 3-6 year-old children. The results are commented together with the evaluation of hypotheses and are argued with literature review.

According to the findings in the study, families spend an average of 5 hours (standart deviation: 1.95) by using media for watching TV/DVD, mailing, virtual socialization, following work etc. The parents have stated that children spend 2 hours in media use. The socio-economic level of the respondents in the focus group are middle and upper middle samples.

The channels preferred by parents for their children in top five list are: **Disney Channel** (67.14%), **Baby TV** (52.86%), **Cartoon Network** (45.61%), **TRT Cocuk** (40%) and **Nickelodeon** (30%). The channels such as **Jojo**, **Bayby First**, **Jetix Play** are under 30%. Parents state that they enjoy watching thematic channels like Discovery, National Geographic together with their children (see Figure 1 for an example in the drawings from *Animal Planet* in Discovery Channel). According to the types of programmes, newscasts come in the first row, soap ope-



ras are in the second, documentaries, sport programmes and magazine programmes come sequentially. 62.5% of the parents in the survey prefer a thematic children channel when they watch TV together with their children. The rest of them state that they make no special choice or no choice according to the children when they are together.

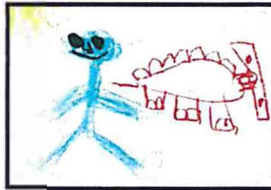
According to media use, the most spoken media is television (68.7%), then comes computer games and playstation games or game boys (51.4%). 20% of the parents have asserted that they prevent their children to use media all the time.

The children's answers to the open ended questions have been evaluated together with their drawings. 43% of the children in the study have said that they are afraid of some TV/DVD or electronic games' heroes. These heroes that children have mentioned belong to games for children 7 years old or older and to some children DVD films, and TV soap operas that also adults enjoy watching.

According to the heroes reflected on the drawings, the film Avatar and the hero of the game have been reflected on the children's drawings (40%) (Figure 2). Heroes like Avatar, Kayio, Winx, (%38) Barby, Tunder Mageu, (%27) Wody, Sherek, Barny, Spiderman, Superman (%15) have appeared in the drawings of the children (Figure 3, a drawing of Winx).



**Figure 1.**  
*Animal Planet* in Discovery Channel  
5 year-old male respondent



**Figure 1.**  
Avatar, 5 year-old male respondent



**Figure 2.**  
Winx, 4 year-old female respondent

#### 4. Discussion

Media has a significant impact not only on adults but also on children. Regarded as an important entertainment and relaxation medium, TV is watched and consumed by children as much as by adults do. Playing games is the point of entry for the use of media technologies (television games, computer games, net games, gameboys) for children (Heim, Brandtzæg and et al., 2004).

The colorful, lively, extravagant, enjoyable and fantasy-like world of cartoons and games such as game boy/play station entertain children very much and also

affect them seriously. As children's level of sense-making is far different from the one of adults', children regard themselves as part of the cartoons and online games while they are enjoying themselves. Media also play an important role in children's acquisition and observation of different settings. However, children who have not fully reached comprehensive reasoning and comprehension level may get affected adversely by a number of elements they have reached via media. As Hoffner (1997) states, in this virtual world, many events and characters gradually incorporate into the world of children. Unless some essential precautions are taken, children may affiliate themselves into this world and they can be lost between the reality and fantasy.

Three-year-old children who are highly developed in terms of creativity, dream world and emotions also imitate their parents. Studies upon effects of electronic toys on children's social development still continue. It is stressed that children at this age should play puzzle games, draw pictures with colors and brushes, and make form with play dough in order to develop their manual skills.

The findings of this study exhibit significantly the media use of Turkish children and their families. It is clearly seen that some images leave a mark on their brains so much that they draw their pictures and tell their stories (Erturk & Gul, 2006). Children who use media intensively are more aggressive, anxious and have more frightening imaginations (Krcmar & Vieira, 2005; Wei, 2008; Dill, 2007) and the relation between aggressive, anxious imaginations and habits of watching TV are underscored. Parents should focus on more creative situations to improve constructive imaginations instead of an intense use of media.

A study in Europe has handled the relation between life styles of families and their media use. Children and adolescents in Sweden spend less time than those in Belgium, and television comes in the first row, then music, telephone, books and computer follow it (Pasquier, Buzzi, and et al. 1998). In another study of the researcher and Gul (2006) with Turkish families about children's TV watching habits, it is reported that families (47.45%) watch TV together with their children. Only 12.46% of children watch TV alone and they are in search of social support when watching like hugging Barby doll, or a quilt (5%). The most significant point of the study is in the difference between families' thoughts and behaviours.

*The two hypotheses of the study were supported with the findings at the end.*

**H1.** Cultural symbols and life styles that are presented via games based on technology like cartoons on TV, game boys, PSPs, computer, and video games remove locality and lead a more globalised culture to expand.

3-7 years old children want to be heroes of cartoons and fairy tales they love most, or they tell events as if they have lived, or they invent things that have never happened. Since they have a rich imagination, their games, drawings, and stories

are becoming richer. It is observed that the children of the study prefer to watch international television channels and know the most familiar and famous heroes of cartoons. Also they consume their plays, books, and clothes as well as they identify themselves with these heroes. In the drawings of the children, the famous heroes that have been seen are Avatar, Kayio, Winx, Barby, Tunder Mague, Wody, Shrek, Barney, Spiderman, and Superman. The fact that local TV channels have global contents is an indicator of cultural dissemination. These global media contents from a television programme or a movie quickly diversify into trading cards, stickers, small toys, and ancillary products such as backpacks and T-shirts that all sweep across the globe (Feilitzen, and Carlsson, 2002; Bickham and et al.; Vandewater, E Ferguson, 2006). David Buckingham (2003) addresses the significance of dealing with post-modern media culture by outlining the nature of contemporary developments in children's media environments.

**H2.** 3-6 years old child's intensive media use based on technology affects behavioural, affectional and cognitive development of the child, and family's media usage habits constitute a social learning model for the children.

52% of the families in the sample have been using media and they do not prefer changing their media use for their children. However, they have their own media use plan for their children. Age, maturity, developmental level, and experiments of the child show us the child's preference for media use. When parents use media without considering their children, the viewing process may disrupt their maturity.

It is possible to say that media use of the child can affect his/her creativity, cognitive, affectional and social developmental process in a negative way. It will be easier and more effective to lead children to different solutions instead of depriving them of media use in order to prevent these negative effects. However, electronic games and films, which have negative effects on brain development, neural structure, and carefulness, can be harmful periodically. The parents in the study, are observed acting in a protective manner.

Media use is also a kind of modeling behaviour like many behaviours that can be learned through modeling. TVs, computers, and videos are now part of daily life and have become modeling devices for children. Helping children to learn to use media in an appropriate way and balance viewing process with physical and social activities are the new roles for parents. Statistics show that an average child watches TV 5 hours a day. This underlines the fact that parents' control in media usage is very significant (Lloyd and Tyner, 1991; The University of Iowa, 2005). The child, open to any kind of stimulus cognitively and affectively can be confused with complicated and unknown stimulus. Today children are forced to lead one way communication, and as a result they have trouble in the real three dimensional world. At this point parents have a great responsibility to be media literate models for their children.

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