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## **ASPECTS OF EARLY FAMILIARIZATION OF CHILDREN WITH MEDIA CONTENT IN THE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT**

### **Introduction**

Reality imposes newer and newer patterns and different ways of understanding and interpreting the world. Today, children grow up in a completely different media space, since recently there has been quite a sharp change significantly related to the presence of audiovisual media in children's cultural contacts. Unconventional ways of transferring and receiving information and using them are becoming more and more fashionable and widespread due to the achievements of modern technologies. Formerly, the space of one's growing up was completely different. At that time, the family was a kind of medium of transfer of cultural patterns to the next generation. The process of "transmission and inheritance of a stable hierarchy of values in the era of intense change loses the scope and strength of impacts mainly for the benefit of media and peer groups" (Dobrołowicz, 2011, p. 288). In the times of globalization, the surrounding world of people has taken on a different dimension, and the world of modern children is dominated primarily by television and the Internet.

1. As Borawska-Kalbarczyk (2017) notes, immersion into the world of digital media caused students to feel a big dissonance between the attractiveness and pace of what they do in their free time, and the slowness and uniformity of what teachers tell them to do while studying at school. What is more, at school, they are also often deprived of the possibility of using new information technologies.

2. We are facing a change that is closely related to the growing up of the young generation educated in the culture of the new media and information society, which is why constructive education in the reception of media messages is an extremely important matter.

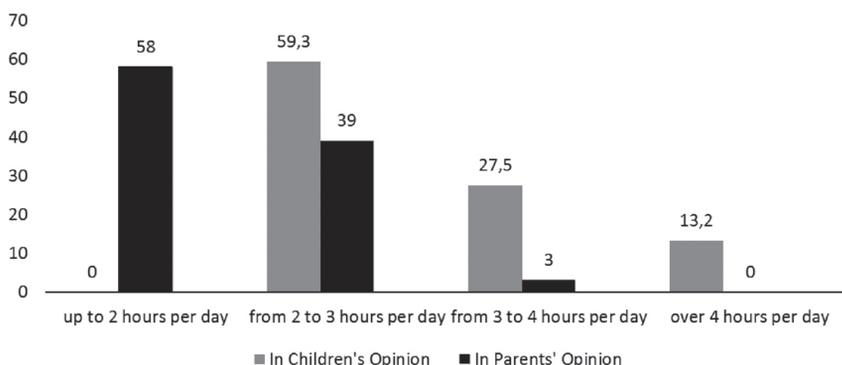
### **Dilemmas of the relationship of parents and children with the media**

In times of the permanent development of the technological revolution, children, especially in the period of decisive development, are extremely susceptible to the stimuli that are provided to them. Early school age is the period in which one's character and personality are shaped. In an extremely intense way, through interaction, children learn about the social environment and mutual relations taking place in the process of interpersonal communication. The TV and the Internet, which are often the first interlocutor of a small child, become the source of such experiences. There is no doubt that the media is transforming the world, unfortunately replacing the culture of the word that has lasted for centuries. It performs indirectly an educational function, most often becoming the intended impact on the personality of the recipient who changes and develops under the influence of these activities. Most often we can observe this in the family circle when access to the media takes place outside the control of parents. "The revolution, the computer, the Internet, the virtual world have made changes for the entire generation, to the bigger extent than inventions such as the printing press, the radio, the car or television, have changed the previous ones" (Dryden & Vos, 2000, p. 91). According to Jolanta Zwiernik (2005), the contemporary X and Y generation should be complemented with the generation Z, i.e. children at the age of 3 to 13, because now each child is a resident of a "global village", in which the process of building the world is saturated with pop culture and consumption. They usually attend a renowned kindergarten or school, where they learn English, go to the pool after classes (at best) or do lots of other extra things. It is very possible that the kid from the "Z" generation chews gum during breaks, crunches crisps and plays with gadgets from the well-known "Mc Donald's" network. At the same time, they freely use electronic toys and spend a few hours each day in front of a television or computer screen (Zwiernik, 2005, p. 181–188). At home, a large part of our society watches television in a passive way. This unwanted reception is quickly learned by children. Children begin their life education sooner than they get into the modes of educational structures. In the first years

of their life, they learn unintentionally, acquire various competencies, learn about the world. Often, this education is largely based on the most popular medium, namely – television. Contact with the world through the media leads to the spontaneous creation of media knowledge.

The review of previous studies shows that both children and the average adult television viewer spend a lot of time watching television during the week. The results obtained in the author's own research conducted among third-grade students of integrated education show that the amount of time they spent in front of the TV is similar (Kłosińska, 2003, p. 291–304).

Over half of the surveyed children (59.3%) stated that they spend between two and three hours a day in front of the TV, 27.5% of the respondents watch TV from 3 to 4 hours, and 13.2% of children indicated they do that for more than 4 hours. It is worrying that almost every second child (48.3%) can sit in front of the TV after a bedtime cartoon is over when television channels show programs that are not appropriate to children. The results of the research indicate discrepancies in the perception of the child's free time management because the parents of these children see the problem in a slightly different way. Children, when determining the time they spend watching television, indicated over 2 hours. However, their parents (58%), considered the time frame up to 2 hours daily as the most frequent. The same thing happened with extreme parameters, just like in a mirror reflection, children said they can watch TV for over 4 hours (13.2%) per day, but parents did not take this option into account.



*Figure 1.*

Time spent in front of the TV in the opinion of children and parents.

Source: the author's own research material.

Kossowski's (1997) research also confirmed the above results. Almost 90% of the respondents surveyed by the author, admit that they watch TV every day – 3 hours on an average weekday, and almost 5 hours on Saturdays and Sundays (Kossowski, 1997, p. 9–12). The impact of television is the highest among younger recipients. Television makes us live in an “electronic bubble” and we experience a variety of audiovisual experiences, which can frighten and become a cause of deep frustration (Anderson & Wilkins, 2000). Children are usually not prepared for this type of contact. Their intellectual, social and moral immaturity requires an immediate explanation of incomprehensible concepts, events and relationships. The influence of the media on the child is so big because of the so-called “modelling” phenomenon. Computers, tablets, mobile cell phones, telephones have become the most common and easiest form of such contact, and this, in turn, complements the accessibility of the TV set, which, as the research shows, is also very large. Almost half of the students (48.9%) said that they have a TV set in their room and they have complete freedom to choose the content and time of watching it without restrictions.



*Figure 2.*

Conditions of watching TV by the surveyed children.

Source: the author's own research material.

Other surveyed students said they watch TV:

- 11.3% – after doing homework,
- 12.5% – as a reward for polite behaviour,
- 21.3% – watch TV with parents/adults,
- 24.7% – watch TV with siblings.

The presence of television in the child's life fills up a significant part of the free time. The switched-on TV set accompanies the family during meals, during family celebrations or holidays. It is a situation in which possible talks are accompanied by a "disruptor" of communication, or there is no talk at all. Sitting together at the table, therefore, remains only a "sitting at the table" deprived of the culture of communication and the culture of media reception.

### **The role of the educating environment in the child's contact with television**

We can think about the future of the child and wonder who will the today's maniacal *homotabletis* be? Laboratory and natural experiments have shown that subjecting children to the influence of aggressive behaviour in television projections immediately strengthens in them the probability of aggressive behaviour. This rule applies to all children, regardless of gender and cultural background, those aggressive by nature as well as those non-aggressive. Since children learn intellectual and social skills by observing how other people do different activities, they also learn violent behaviour while seeing such behaviour in other people. Researches have also confirmed that children can learn less aggressive behaviours by showing them the right films and pro-social role models (Pielachowski, 2002, p. 270).

It has been also found that children exposed to greater screen violence became more aggressive adults. Above all, these considerations draw attention to the need to put great emphasis on equipping the young generation with the ability to properly receive, select and evaluate media content.

Today's school is an area of intersection of various external influences. Teachers, when working with parents, recognize that social isolation is undesirable because the modern world affects the child with so many channels that only the interest of the whole society (formal and informal interactions) can meet the requirements of accepted social norms (Reczek-Zymróz, 2018, p. 109–110).

This means that the child must be prepared to receive information transmitted by all mass media. It should be remembered that

parents should be for their children the most important models of conduct, because the mechanism of the process of cultural socialization in the home environment focuses on inculcating a certain system of values, imitating behaviour and social control by rewarding desirable behaviour and repressing undesirable behaviour. (Adamski, 2010, p. 9)

Television is certainly a very attractive world for every child, therefore it is necessary to protect them with rational contact with television. The problem of watching TV together with other members of a family has been examined. Only every fifth of the surveyed children (21.3%) stated that they sometimes watch television programs together with their parents. Simultaneously, the parents did not admit that they did not have time to sit in front of the television with their child. The continuation of this problem is to find out whether children have the opportunity to share their comments about the watched television programs. Almost half (47.4%) of the children denied this, arguing that:

- I do not talk about it with my parents (52.4%),
- parents do not care (23.9%),
- parents do not have time to talk with me (21.7%),
- I prefer to go to the room and play computer games rather than to talk (9.9%),
- I do not care what parents think (6.8%).

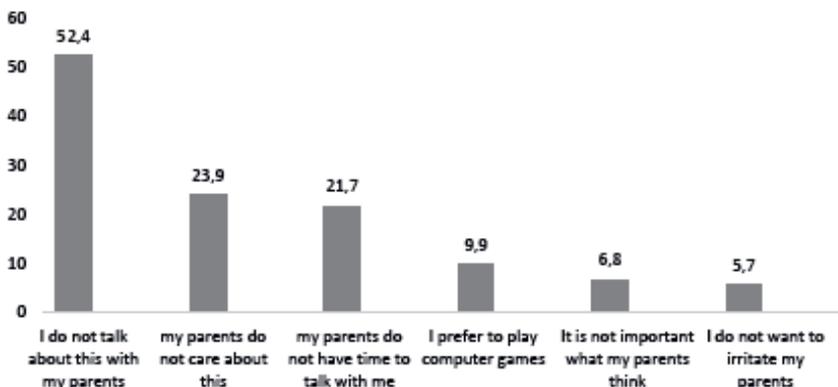


Figure 3.

Sharing emotions about watching television programs with adults in the opinion of children. Source: the author's own research material.

An important role in preparing the child for media reception is performed by the family who is the first to provide the child with patterns of proper media use and can guide their actions. The child must learn rational use of television and to properly receive the content offered by it. For parents who want to get the most out of the programs watched together with the child, it is advised, among other things, to: watch the programs in an active way,

sometimes explaining something, recalling fragments of the story plot, hug children, when they are scared by something, accustom children to watch programs designed for them and comply with the hours of their broadcasting, initiate and encourage children to speak about and stage the contents of the watched programs, and above all to talk about what they saw and encourage to express their own opinions and judgments. Parents should also choose cyclic programs, set rankings for presenters or characters, which will allow them to preserve meanings of words describing phenomena and people, translate television programs into action, i.e. cut, model, paint, teach and repeat songs and rhymes, etc., and above all parent should turn off the TV when guests come, especially if it's someone from the family. Meeting such conditions will be beneficial for both parties, causing the child to feel happy, because their need for closeness and cognitive curiosity will be satisfied, while the adult will have the opportunity to observe the child's various reactions, and exclude the possibility of misinterpretation of facts, giving an opportunity to clarify any problems in understanding the media world.

Sitting in front of the TV, treated as an ally in upbringing, is typical of many nations and generations. It was perfectly observed and described by William Wharton when he was visiting friends in Philadelphia. Describing the observed situation, he reflects on and draws the right conclusions about the behaviour of parents who love television and treat this medium as a babysitter, criticizing adults who prefer education in strict electronic space:

[...] We enter and Peg immediately seats the child in front of the TV [underlined by T. Kłosińska]. I'm sure the TV is watched for 16 hours a day here. Even if this device does not serve any other purpose, people still buy millions of TV sets, specific "babysitters". It is exactly the same with schools. [...] I am sure that even if it could be proved that children, using computers, VCRs, tape recorders and various didactic aids, would learn more effectively at home than at school and that they would learn more in this way and would also be more successful in life, parents would not agree to change their children's education mode. The reason is simple: most parents send their children to school to get rid of them from home. If they learn something, by the way, it's great, but the main function of school is to take care of children. Teachers would have been much better off if they were paid as much as babysitters. [...] They should be paid for every hour they spend with children. And so [W. Wharton continues his observation] – Peg's little son is sitting in front of the TV. He will probably grow up to be a typical

member of the great “passive majority” who is looking for, even expecting, pleasure in life as a basic sense of life and something that belongs to them. For most, artificially crafted television personalities are more real than their own family, than the people who surround them. When they start a kind of conversation, it will invariably go down to a sitcom or a TV series. One of the main reasons why we moved to France was that we wanted to protect our children from the devastating influence of American television. [...] So I look with a certain compassion on this child – potentially capable of experiencing true joys, potentially so creative – as stuck in front of the TV, he is staring at the flickering screen... (Wharton, 2000, p. 35–36)

The bitter reflection of the author of the cited text correlates with the problems of contemporary dilemmas of educating about the media. As we can see, which is also confirmed by the results of the author’s research, it is also necessary to constantly educate parents in the field of pedagogy.

### **Children as the recipients of TV commercials**

Considerations on the impact of television on a child recipient would not be complete without the exposure of a new phenomenon also appearing on television, namely commercials. The task of commercials is to activate the customer, hence they use a wide range of stimuli: from a catchy slogan, through music and showing the behaviour of others, to associating shopping with something pleasant.

For most children, commercials are always credible. It is important that no sooner than at the age of eight a child can critically address commercials and can justify their opinion. Until then, the young viewer does not pay attention to the commercials’ one-sidedness of argumentation, and therefore often becomes an intermediate link on the way to an adult customer. For these reasons, the child recipient becomes an unconscious victim of many persuasive techniques used on television. Most parents admit that they make purchases based on the wishes of a small child. Parents more and more often try to invest in children at all costs to meet their needs assessed according to their own ideas of life success, or models suggested by the media or Western patterns. Thus, most often these are consumer needs, depending on the possibilities of the child’s civilizational environment (computer, audio-video equipment, mobile phone) (Kiełb-Grabarczyk, 2013, p. 323). Polish children are loyal recipients of TV commercials. Every young viewer, as experts say, can

see up to a thousand commercials during the year. The absorbency of advertising images by a child is significant. Many researchers deal with this issue paying attention to the different levels of its impact. Doliński emphasizes that today we have ads on everything that stands, rides and flies. The ads attack us from walls, advertising columns, newspapers, magazines and websites. They break into our ears between songs broadcast by radio stations and to our eyes between successive scenes of films shown on television (Doliński, 1998, p. 8).

Providing the child with indirect, media, repetitive experiences, undoubtedly teaches them something, suggests a world of values. Researches prove that the world of advertising shapes in children a conviction that they have to buy and possess things so that all their worries will disappear, they will be happy, loved, accepted.

Commercials most often represent the ideal family lifestyle and promote a simplistic vision of the world. Such a "slogan vision of the world" causes that television standards shape in children certain requirements and desires in relation to their friends, and above all to their own family and the state of their assets. Advertising images transferred to their own lives often cause frustration, aversion, envy and aggression towards those who have a particular product. Commercials evoke previously unconscious needs in children. Based on the sense of deficiency developed in the child, they arouse the desire to have fashionable, attractive things in order to satisfy curiosity or desire to stand out from the peer group, impressing, and satisfying the necessity of owning things. This usually leads to internal conflicts and misunderstandings with the environment.

Family disputes are mainly caused by children's attempts to influence the purchases made by their parents and can be strengthened by the gullibility of a child who believes in all the product advantages suggested by the advertisements. Bromboszcz (1993) quotes Atkin's research results, which showed that young viewers, often watching TV commercials, more often argued with their parents than those who did not watch TV. Commercials, as the research has shown, fueled conflicts, providing inaccurate information, and by exploiting the gullibility of children they manipulated their behaviour. Unmet needs, most often related to family economic hardships facing fueled desire to own the advertised product, may cause frustration in children, rejection of their own family or a clear dissatisfaction with it (Bromboszcz, 1993, p. 61). The child's response to advertising depends to a large extent on the upbringing and values preferred in a given family.

It is known that not all parents are able to fulfil their children's requests. A refusal to buy can become a cause of conflict in the family. This was confirmed by 83.9% of the parents of third-grade children surveyed by the author. It is usually explained by a high price, lack of money, unsuitability or poor quality. Only every fourth surveyed adult tried to convince the child that not all advertisements tell the truth, and that we should not blindly believe them, because, for example, other goods, although not advertised, are equally good. This group of people is also trying to show the child other, more important at the specific time needs, teaching valuation and making choices, but not always such arguments convince the child. The search for a way to overcome adult dislike with the help of various means begins. Those means include crying, screaming, nervousness, whining, blackmailing, sometimes they get the effect of a compromise, etc. However, the obtained research results indicate that the parents of the surveyed children are the "sponsors" of the purchased product advertised on TV. The vast majority of students (82.7%) confirmed this fact. Children can perfectly, manipulate parents' feelings, effectively convince, take parents for pity by comparing themselves to other peers who already have the advertised product and are perceived as better among other children, and no one wants to be worse.

### **The peer group and the world of values**

Commercials become an indicator of the standards of what one should have, collect and how to behave. The lack of respect for these requirements creates cleavages, conflicts, becomes a source of isolation. Currently, children want to have certain products mainly because of their prestigious values, because having them gives a new identity, allows to gain appreciation in the eyes of their peers, opens the way to a "cool" environment. The phenomenon of the "screen generation" is the inevitable process of the ubiquity of media, still expanding its scope and reach into the daily lives of children and adults. The image emerging from advertisements, especially TV commercials, makes that in children's visions and feelings owning things appears to be the highest value, shaping the direction of their life aspirations. In the child's consciousness, there consolidates a lifestyle, in which a particular material standard is treated as a determinant of one's value, and competition becomes the main mechanism of forming interpersonal relations.

As a result of advertising, children show a materialistic attitude towards life. However, despite many negatives, commercials can become a source of inspiration for creative actions. The educational influence of films and television programs on the child is also noticed by the parents of the surveyed children. 67% of parents are convinced of the possible positive impact of television and the valuable impact of advertising in terms of educational values. What is disturbing, however, is the low result concerning the parameters regarding inspired by television reading process, as well as the parameters showing the child in the role of a person telling about the programs watched. This is also evidenced by the cited earlier arguments concerning conversations at home about watching television programs present in children's responses to the survey questions regarding talking about TV content. This should lead to deep reflection, especially in parents.

The situation is not straightforward, because

in a competitive culture, where every aspect of childhood is taken under the proverbial magnifying glass, the natural instinct is to act at the highest speed so that the children have everything the best. Children are enrolled in various additional activities. It fills time to the limit, you can say that today's children are busier than they have been ever before. We bring up the most wired, monitored and spoiled generation in history. Maybe this micromanagement will finally pay off? Maybe we are bringing up, the most talented, healthiest and happiest children the world has ever seen? [...] And yet today's childhood is by no means like a "carefree nest" in the vision of Lewis Carroll. And parenting is also not a piece of cake. In many areas, a modern approach to children gives the opposite effect. (Kiełb-Grabarczyk, 2013, p. 326)

Toffler in the 1970s stated that "machines will change the entire intellectual environment of man – the way he thinks and looks at the world around him" (Toffler, 1974, p. 46).

Meanwhile, the media reality is very attractive for a child. Adults should be aware of the impact of advertising on children. Parents are not aware that the child should not watch TV until the second year of life. Adults mostly believe that commercials do not harm children and that there is no reason to protect them somehow especially against advertising. Meanwhile, children's dreams were captured by advertising, it dominated them. The bad powers of advertising transform their creative thinking into consumer

thinking. This intentional action brings concrete results. Marketing specialists know that their survival depends on the consumer's attachment to a specific brand or place of shopping. So from an early age, they attack the least resistant minds with advertisements, bringing up a generation of consumers.

British researches show that childhood is threatened by the flood of marketing and advertising addressed to them. "The Guardian" and "Daily Telegraph" referring to the report "Commercialization of childhood" wrote that

the result of educating the consumer society is a disturbing phenomenon. 70% of three-year-old children easily recognize the McDonald's logo, but only half of them know their own surname. Children are often attacked with images of the suggestive character that show them how they should look like or what they should have. The average British ten-year-old knows about 400 brands of different advertised products, that is 20 times more than the names of birds living in the wild.

According to the authors of the report, British children are among the most materialistic ones in the world.

The style and ubiquity of marketing pressure exert damaging influence on children. Compass refers to Harvard psychologist Susan Linn, co-founder of the coalition Campaign for Non-Commercialized Childhood, author of "Consuming Kids", in which she showed the impact of consumer lifestyle on children. The report gives examples of dolls, for example, a set from the line "Bratz Secret Date Collection" with champagne glasses and various "dating" accessories. This set is officially intended for 12-year-old girls, although the distributor knows that much younger girls dream about having such dolls. Last year there was sold over a million of such dolls in Great Britain. The leading personalities of British public life are concerned that such phenomena as elevated levels of stress, greater depression and lower self-esteem among children are the results of rampant marketing. The Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, described the report as "very up-to-date" expressing satisfaction with the growing political and social awareness that "something must be done to protect children from the worst excesses of direct marketing and the pressure of commercialization" ([www.gbritain.net/news/](http://www.gbritain.net/news/)).

The study includes information that bombing children with images of what is "cool" and "awesome" antagonizes them and sets them against

parents. The British newspaper *Daily Telegraph* (20.12.2006) describes, for example, the marketing steps taken by the Wal-Mart chain of stores, which initiated the specific idea of writing letters to Santa Clause. Children, and consequently parents, become an easy prey for forced shopping. On its website, Wal-Mart encourages children to choose the desired “gift”, they dream about from the products appearing on the screen and enter the parents’ e-mail address. It is obvious that the company gains the possibility of indirect, but persistent solicitation of parents with specific requests of children. However, the spokesperson of this network sees nothing wrong in such action. He answers that

Children write letters to Santa for several hundred years. Everything we’ve done, we’ve just added a bit of technology to the tradition. Millions of pounds are spent to make children become young consumers. The authors of the report ask important questions: Who shapes our children – parents, friends, family, teachers, social workers, or perhaps an army of psychologists, brand image specialists, marketing experts, advertisers who spend billions on forming young minds in the name of profit. Can children be still children before they become consumers? ([www.gbritain.net/news/](http://www.gbritain.net/news/))

## Conclusion

The media has a pedagogical dimension, and shaping attitudes is the main direction of activities within the framework of educating about the mass media. It is important not to teach your child to combine watching TV with other activities. It would be best if adults review a TV program, in terms of its educational usefulness, then they will be able to prepare the child for its proper reception. Watching media messages together and talking to your child about broadcasted TV programs leads not only to the adoption of certain information but also provides the development of the ability to adequately address the content. Media education should also shape the information maturity of the child, but also adults, because as you know – the example goes from the top. In the light of the above presented information, the importance of educating a young recipient in conscious, critical media reception, as well as in using the media as tools supporting the education and upbringing process is of considerable importance. Hope for the fulfilment of such skills lies in the broadly understood media education and in the support of the educating environment, as well as the parents’ education.

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## ASPECTS OF EARLY FAMILIARIZATION OF CHILDREN WITH MEDIA CONTENT IN THE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

**Summary:** In the modern schooling system, at the first stage of education preparation for challenges of the future should perform the key role. In the face of civilization changes, education faces many new demands it must cope with. However, implementation of this project raises some dilemmas verified by reality. Therefore, parents should be engaged in the process of education in the media.

**Keywords:** media education, familiarizing the media, bringing children up to the media, adult, child

## ASPEKTY Wczesnego OSWAJANIA Z PRZEKAZAMI MEDIALNYMI W ŚRODOWISKU WYCHOWUJĄCYM

**Streszczenie:** We współczesnym szkolnictwie, w obszarze pierwszego etapu kształcenia, niepoślednią rolę odgrywać powinno przygotowanie do wyzwań przyszłości. W obliczu zmian cywilizacyjnych przed edukacją stoją wyzwania, którym musi ona podołać. Realizacja tego przedsięwzięcia rodzi jednak pewne dylematy weryfikowane przez rzeczywistość. W proces wychowania do mediów zaangażowani powinni być także rodzice.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja medialna, osvajanie medialne, wychowanie do mediów, dorosły, dziecko