NEW MEDIA CHANGING DYNAMICS OF PARENTING

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Abstract - India has a dominant patriarchal culture. In Indian families father or grandfather are the decision makers. They take the responsibility of earning livelihood for the family whereas women are responsible for domestic duties. Both the parents have crucial role in the lives of their children. Majority of Indian families live in a joint family set up, with children living with their parents and grandparents. In India, both mother and father devote their whole life in giving proper brought up to their children by including good values and morals in them. But in this digital era, there is a shift occurring in parenting techniques. Now – a – days, with both mother and father working, the focus on children is not the prime concern. Young working parents are exploiting New Media especially mobile phones and laptops for parenting. With less time for children, they are using these smart gadgets for engaging children. This research paper focuses on how New Media is being used by the parents today in raising children. The researcher has explained the views of parents and grandparents regarding usage of New Media.

Keywords - New Media technologies, Parents, Parenting.

Introduction

In India, mothers are given the status next to god. For children, mother is like a personal property and for mother also children are the main focus of life. Her lifestyle revolves around her children and home. This kind of scenario was there as mothers were homely body, but now- a – days as women have started working, there is a change coming in most of Indian families.

Since, the start of 20th Century, more and more Indian mothers have started working. The major reason behind this is the desire to have a better lifestyle and also to give best of everything to children. This has reduced the quality and quantity of time parents spend with their children. Because the children get so less time with their parents, they at times become stubborn, aggressive and throw tantrums at the least expected situations just to get attention. Now parents are using New Media technologies like mobile phone to handle such behavioural pattern of children. This is further leading to a situation where children are getting addicted to these smart devices; further increasing the guilt level of parents.

But in an article published in Times of India on ‘Working parents, kids have little to say to each other’ by Mithila Phadke (2015).It is said that it does not matter whether both parents are working or mothers are house- makers, children today demand their own space. Parents neither can totally neglect them and leave them on nannies or media nor can be with them throughout the day. What is required is proper communication channels and also quality time. The trust factor is of utmost importance in parenting. Children should respect parents rather than getting scared. Parents also should trust their children but should have proper surveillance on them.

On the contrary, in an article published in The Washington Post (2017) by Stacey Steinberg on parents social media habits are teaching children the wrong lesson. Children today pick my many habits of using social media from the parents. As parents are in habit of using new media technologies, the automatically penetrate in the lives of the children. If parents are the heavy users of technology, so will be the children. The young minds learn to use or manipulate technologies basically from parents.

Thus, this research paper basically deals with explaining how parents are using new media technologies for handling children. The researcher has also explained the impact of these technologies on the relationship between parents and children. Infact, the researcher has also tried to elaborate on the role of grandparents in raising the children in the digital era. The paper explains how grandparents have changed with the diffusion of New Media technologies.

Significance of the study

This paper explains how parents for their own convenience are using New Media technologies like mobile phones or laptops to entertain, distract, inform, feed or even escape their children. The researcher has basically analysed how New Media technologies have changed the parenting techniques and its impact on the children and even on the parents.

Objectives of the Study

To determine whether the young parents are using New Media technologies as a parenting tool or not and if yes, for what purpose.

Time span of the Study
The research work started in the month of Feb, 2018 and completed by May, 2018.

Research Methodology
The study focused on the families either joint or nuclear with young children from middle class or upper class strata of the society. The researcher did a survey of a representative sample of 100. A structured questionnaire was drafted. For drafting the
questionnaire the researcher had interviewed and observed many young couples. The researcher had conducted in-depth interviews with the selected sample.

The study is based in city of Patiala, Punjab. Patiala is one of the prominent cities of Punjab. It is a royal city with a lot of prominent educational institutes. It has a literacy rate of 85.78% (Census 2011 report).

Data Analysis and Discussion

The researcher has conducted in-depth interviews with structured questionnaire as a research tool in the month of April 2018.

Table no. 1: Qualification of the parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Matric</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
<th>Post-graduation</th>
<th>M.Phil./Ph.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The maximum respondents were highly qualified. The table 1 shows that less than 50% of the parents were post-graduates. Infact 28% of mothers were highly qualified with M.Phil. or doctorate degrees. Thus, these young parents are skilled enough to use various new media technologies.

Table 2: Occupational Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Non-Working</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In majority of families both husband and wife are working. Only 32% of the mothers were house makers. Therefore, all these young couples have sound economic status to be able to afford technologies like mobile phones, tablets or laptops.

Table 3: Access to the technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technologies</th>
<th>Computer</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Mobile phone</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to data analysed laptops and mobile phones have high penetration in the young families. Mobile phone has 100% penetration. Infact even, Internet services also have 100% penetration among the young couples. Both mother’s and father’s believe that without internet these digital technologies are of no use. Therefore, it is concluded that in families where both the parents are working, technology has complete penetration. As, they have skill and money both for New Media.

Table 4: Time spent by parents on digital technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>1 hour</th>
<th>1-2 hour</th>
<th>2-3 hour</th>
<th>3-4 hour</th>
<th>More than 4 hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost half of the selected samples of parents spend about two – three hours on either mobile phone or laptops. They mainly use these technologies for work purpose and also for socializing and entertainment apart from professional usage. Some mother’s did complain of being addicted to social media. WhatsApp and Facebook are two social networking sites, which are very popular among parents.

Infact, the research also explained the penetration of technologies among grandparents as more than half of the young parents (52%) are living in a joint family setup. 52% of grandparents are using smart technologies like mobile phone. These old people are very happy with smart phones, as it keeps them entertained apart from TV and it also helps them in connecting with the world around (as said by many people). Few grandparents also revealed that mobile phones connect them to their grandchildren. If their grandchildren are residing abroad, these technologies give them an opportunity to see and talk to them daily and if grandchildren are living with them then spend time together on mobile phone either watching videos or playing games.

Therefore, it is concluded that today children are living in an environment well equipped with new media technologies, thus resulting in its diffusion at a very early age among children. It is clear from the data, that there is shift taking place in the
worldview of parents and also grandparents. They don’t have any issues with New Media technologies being used by young children.

Figure 5: Use smart technologies for parenting

Use of Smart phone technologies for parenting

Majority of young parents are using smart digital technologies for parenting. They said the mobile phones and laptops have become a good source of advice on various topics like child health care and hygiene. Apart from information they are using technologies in normal day life not very large extent but in activities like feeding or in case of infants- changing diapers.

Figure 6: Parents opinion regarding usage of New Media technologies in parenting.

Parents opinion regarding usage of New Media technologies

Regarding the opinions of the parents on whether new media technologies have made parenting easier. 32% of the parents said that mobile phones or any other technology have no impact on the parenting. According to some of them, they use technologies to feed or distract their kids, but it does not influence them as their children. Some percentage of parents denied that technologies help them in parenting. For them technology is need of the hour. It is must in today’s world. But for them it is not used in parenting. Even if they are using, it is for educating them. According to Ellen Wartella a national survey (2014) by centre on ‘Parenting in the age of Digital technology’ conducted by Centre on Media and Human development, School of communication, North-western University. Media is playing a significant role in helping parents to deal with their children. But media especially mobile phone has not as much impact on how moms and dads parent their young children. The vast majority of parents still rely much more heavily on television for spending quality time with children. Contrary to the popular notion that mobile phones are used by parents to feed, entertain or distract their bids, it is television which is frequently used as a parenting tool in majority of American households. Moreover, according to the data, parents do not see media as a harmful tool for their children. Very small percentages of parents feel technologies are used as a tool for parenting. They are bit worried about the fact that their children are being exposed to technology very earlier in life.

Table 7: Parents use technologies for feeding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half of the young parents use smart technologies to distract their children while feeding them. Mothers said that if their child is cranky while eating, they give them a mobile phone and then feed them. Just to save time they use technologies for
feeding kids. Though majority of grandparents object this habit, but for young working mothers, it saves time and effort. It also keeps children happy.

Figure 8: Parents use mobile phone for diverting their mind at a restaurant or some function.

Parents use mobile phone for diverting their mind at a restaurant or some function

More than half of the parents said that they use new media technologies especially mobile phones for keeping their kids busy in a restaurant or some function. According to the parents if the children trouble them or some kind of mischief, mobile phones are best way to distract them. Parents also said that by giving them mobile phone, they get time to converse with others. Few parents also said that mobile phones are best way to keep the children seated quietly while in a restaurant or some important function and even in cinema halls. For grandparents, mobile phone and laptops are the tools to attract grandchildren to them. By giving them these tools, they get to spend some time with them.

Figure 9: Parents use technology for keeping the child busy at home.

Parents use technology for keeping the child busy at home

60% of parents today are using either computers or mobile phones to keep their children busy at home. As majority of parents are working, by the time they came home in the evening they are too tired to play with their own children. Mothers have a lot of domestic chores to do, therefore, technology is the solution for keeping their children busy and happy. But for half of them using technology has nothing to do with parenting. For them it is the way of getting every job done in the home or outside.

Figure 10: Parenting tool to calm an upset child.
Majority of the young parents are today using new media technology for calming down their upset children. According to them, Mobile phone is the best way to distract a child. Parents say that whenever their child creates a scene in public by crying, they give him a mobile phone to play games and listen to songs. Mothers say that while shopping they keep their kids busy with tablets or mobile phones, so they don’t disturb or get cranky.

Even, the parents who have nannies, they still use mobile phones and laptops to handle their children as it is convenient and effortless.

Figure 11: Use technologies for educational purposes.

Almost all the parents are using new media technologies to teach their children rhymes or poems. They prefer to make their children watch bedtime stories, than to read them. These parents say that with technologies it is easy and attractive to teach their kids. The young children watch stories on mobile phones with a lot of enthusiasm which for parents is a good thing.

According to them, this is the positive use of new media technologies. They say there is nothing harmful in their young children using technologies. What is required is the control over the content being watched by children and also the time span for which they are using technology. Likewise in 1950’s television was considered to the future of education. This medium was expected to nurture children’s education developments. But contrary, it robbed the children from wholesome activities. (Sonia Livingstone and Leah A. Lievrouw, p. 75-76). The situation is today same for new media and its educational purpose for children.

Conclusion

New Media technologies are definitely influencing the parenting today. Young parents where both husband and wife are working depend more on these smart technologies for parenting. Even, if they are living in joint families, the exposure of children to technologies is there. Today, for fulfilling the professional demands and also for socializing both parents and grandparents are using various digital technologies. Little less than 50% of the parents are very good users of the new media technologies. Thus, it is concluded that today children are born and brought up in the environment laden with various new media technologies.

Also, parents are exploiting technologies like mobile phone or laptop in various activities related to children like feeding, distracting, keeping them busy and also to teach them. Media literate parents do not believe that new media is harmful for children.

These technologies are changing the dynamics of parenting, but parents do not agree to it. They are using these technologies for parenting, but with a view that these smart technologies use making their children smart and intelligent. So, for majority of parents are very confident that they will not allow their children to get addicted to technologies as they are controlling its usage. Also, parents believe the technologies are need of the hour and it is their moral duty to make their children walk with the world, rather to be a step ahead of the world.

References: