

Parental Mediation of Children's Video Game Playing: Active Mediation and Co-Playing Produce Positive Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Current studies show that video game playing results in negative impacts to children. These negative impacts include game addiction, online risks, and exposure to child-inappropriate content. Studies also show that parents play a significant role in mitigating these negative impacts by applying strategies such as monitoring and supervision of children in their use of video games. This case study aimed to determine specific strategies adopted by parents to mediate their children's video game playing and find out what their outcomes are. In-depth interviews with parents of children aged 7–14 revealed that they generally had negative perceptions of video games. These negative perceptions resulted to either restrictive or active mediation or a combination of both. Parents' time with their children and the place where their children played have been found as significant predictors of mediation. Moreover, the strategies informants used to manage their children's video game playing resulted in more positive than negative outcomes. Those who engaged in active mediation and co-playing established good parent-child relationship and led to children's obedience to rules. Restrictive mediation either had positive or negative outcomes. The most common negative outcomes were parent-child conflict and children's disobedience to the rules their parents laid out to limit their video game playing.

Keywords: parental mediation, video games, positive or negative outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Parents are concerned that their children's prolonged exposure to video games has led to game obsession or addiction (Valcke et al 2011; Hasebrink et al 2009). This addiction to video games leads to further negative effects, which have been widely documented and studied. Among these are exposure to violent, hateful, and sexual content; contact threats involving disclosure of personal information, being bullied, meeting strangers; commercial exploitation and unwanted collection of personal data (*ibid.*). It has also been positively associated with aggression, and negatively associated with academic performance in children (Anderson 2004;

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Anderson & Bushman 2001).

Because of these, researchers are now looking on how such effects can be mitigated by parents through monitoring and supervision (Mesch 2009). Parents' supervision is important for according to Cram and Ng (1999), they can influence their children's attitude, knowledge, and skills development. Therefore, they can greatly influence their children's exposure to video games. Researchers are now looking at using parental mediation techniques, previously used on television programs, on video game playing (Mesch 2009). According to Cram and Ng (1999) parental mediation could involve the following: 1) setting rules in order to regulate their children's exposure to media, guide their children's media use, and assess the media content; 2) talking with their children on how useful and relevant the media content is and what the undesirable features of the media content are and whether the media content is appropriate or not; or 3) sharing media experience with their children without purposeful instruction or critical discussion.

Presently however, the body of literature on parental mediation of new media, particularly in the area of video gaming, remains small (Zaman et al 2016). Existing research on parental mediation is focused on mediation of children's exposure to television. Thus, this study aims to add to the body of knowledge on parental mediation of new media by answering the following questions: 1) How do the parents of children who play video games perceive these games? How do they think these affect their children? 2) What strategies do they use in managing their children's exposure to video games? 3) Are these strategies effective in monitoring and managing their children's exposure to video games? Why or why not?

While parental mediation strategies may differ across households, this study could provide significant insights into the specific strategies that could help parents monitor and manage their children's video game playing effectively. Consequently, this could mitigate the risks children face as a result of prolonged exposure to video games.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Baybay City, Leyte where there are several Internet cafes, which are accessible to schools and homes. Preliminary surveys indicated that there are many children playing video games in these Internet cafes. Moreover, there are many households who have computers and access to the Internet. The researcher identified possible informants with the help of contacts in Baybay City. From there, more informants were determined using snowball sampling or chain referral sampling to enlist other informants from their acquaintances who also meet the criteria (Creswell 1998). Prior to beginning the interviews, they were informed of the purpose of the study, possible risks and benefits involved, and participant privacy and confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from all research participants prior to the conduct of the research.

Informants and Sampling Procedure

Parents of children involved in excessive video game playing were initially recruited through personal contacts. These same parents were requested to identify other parents who fit the criterion. They must be parents of children 7-14

years old who play video games. Having children ages 7-14 served as the key criterion for selecting informants because children of these ages become actively involved in diverse social interactions in a variety of new contexts, including the Internet. Moreover, parents of younger children tend to practice more parental mediation than those of older ones (Hoffner & Buchanan 2002). In the context of Internet use, Eastin et al (2006) found that parents placed more time and content restriction on younger teens' online activities than those of older teens. Thus, as children's age increases, the importance of parents as socialization agents tends to diminish (Maccoby 2007; Moschis & Churchill 1978).

To get the appropriate sample size, the concept of theoretical saturation was applied (Thomson, 2010). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained, theoretical saturation occurs in data collection when: 1) no new data seem to emerge regarding a particular category; 2) when the category is fully developed in terms of its properties and dimensions; and 3) the relationships among the categories are well established and authenticated.

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Data Gathering and Procedure

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews using an interview guide. The interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the informants. The first part of the interview guide was designed to get data on informants' demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, educational attainment, and occupation). The second part covered three key areas: 1) parents' perceptions of the video games and their impact on their children; 2) strategies parents use to manage their children's video game playing; and 3) outcomes of the strategies parents use to manage their children's video game playing. The interview guide was prepared in English then translated to Cebuano, the language used in Baybay City.

Data Analysis

This study used Grounded Theory Analysis to analyze the data. The researcher immersed into the data by following different stages of Grounded Theory Analysis developed by Gandomani et al. (2014). These stages include: 1) data collection; 2) transcription and open coding; 3) concepts; 3) axial coding; 4) theoretical coding; and 5) theoretical model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Informants' Socio-demographic Characteristics

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Table 1. Informants' socio-demographic characteristics

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Sex		
Male	10	50
Female	10	50
Total	20	100
Age		
Young (21 years old and below)	-	-
Middle age (22 to 45 years old)	9	45
Old (46 to 59 years old)	11	55
Senior Citizen (60 years old and above)	-	-
Total	20	100
Educational Attainment		
Elementary Level		
High School Level	4	20
College	9	45
Total	7	35
	20	100
Occupation		
Entrepreneur	6	30
HousekeeperDriver	4	20
Driver	3	15
Ukay-ukay Vendor	2	10
Construction Worker	2	10
Product Dealer	2	10
Nurse	1	5
Total	20	100
Household size		
1	-	-
2	2	10
3	3	15
4	3	15
5	5	25
6	3	15
7	2	10
8	2	10
Total	20	100
No. of children playing video games		
1	10	50
2	8	40
3	2	10
Total	20	100

Parents' perception of video games and their impact on children

During the in-depth interviews, majority of the informants revealed that they did not know what type of video games their children were playing. Computer illiteracy was the main reason why 13 out of 20 informants said that they were not capable of determining what their children played. Another significant factor is that their children played outside the house. In fact, 14 out of 20 informants said that their children played video games outside the house or in the Internet cafe.

Table 2 shows the number of hours informants' children spent playing video games. More than half (55%) of the informants did not know how much time their children spent in playing video games. Monitoring their children's video game playing was challenging for them because their children played outside the home, particularly in Internet cafes. Monitoring was also difficult for working parents because they spent most of the day away from their children.

Table 2. Hours children spent on video games per session

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1-2 hours	5	25
2-3 hours	3	15
3-4 hours	1	5
No idea	11	55
Total	20	10

Negative perceptions

Majority of the informants had negative perceptions of video games. Because of this, they believed that parents should play a primary role in monitoring and supervising children's video game playing. Fifteen (15) out of 20 informants indicated that parents should determine the amount of time children spend playing video games.

Most of the informants said that one of the serious effects of video games on their children was poor academic performance. Some informants indicated that their children cut classes and did not even do their homework just to play video games, leading to a decline in their grades.

They also perceived that their children were spending too much time playing video games than playing outdoors, thus making them socially isolated. Some informants shared that their children preferred staying home and playing video games rather than spending time with friends. According to them, their children were less likely to go out and get involved in extracurricular activities like sports, which would have helped them bond with friends and family.

Some informants noticed their children's aggressive behavior, especially when they lose in video games. Their children become easily irritated and hard to talk to. Moreover, nine (9) out of 20 informants also indicated that their children got in trouble with other players inside the Internet café when they lose in video games. According to Anderson and Bushman (2001), excessive video game playing can lead to children developing aggressive thoughts and tendencies which, in turn, can lead to impulsive behavior. Repeated exposure to violent video games can increase

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aggression by increasing aggressive thinking (*ibid.*). Some of the informants were worried that their children will pick up inappropriate language, behavior, and vices, such as smoking, from other players.

Majority of the informants believed that extreme gaming can have adverse effects on their children's health. An informant shared that her son gained weight because he spent more than two hours a day playing video games instead of participating in physical activities. Majority of the informants were also concerned that too much exposure to computer screens would lead to poor eyesight. Other concerns mentioned by the informants included lack of exercise, skipping meals, and neglecting personal hygiene.

All of the informants were concerned that their children were exposed to child-inappropriate content online such as pornography and violence. They were also concerned about the violent content of the video games. While some informants thought that the information available online can make their children better informed and more knowledgeable, they believe that not all information is suitable for children.

Informants who had small incomes were inconvenienced when their children ask for money to spend on playing video games. According to them, an hour in the Internet café costs P12. This significantly added up especially when they had more than one child who plays and when they play for more than one hour. Three (3) informants even shared that their children stole money from them just to play video games. They worried that this might lead to more serious problems in the future.

Some of the informants shared that their children experienced teasing/bullying from other players inside the Internet café. Because most of the games were played competitively online, other children make fun of those who lose.

Some of the informants shared that their children could not control the amount of time they spent on the computer. Their kids would go online with the intention of playing for just one, but they would end up playing for several hours. Three informants indicated that their children lie about how long they had been playing.

Overall, the informants perceived more negative than positive effects of video games on their children, and they were concerned about their negative impacts on their children's lives. Table 3 shows a summary of informants' perceptions of the negative effects of video games on their children.

Table 3. Informants' negative perception of their children's video game playing

NEGATIVE PERCEPTION	DESCRIPTION
Poor academic performance	Informants believe that playing long hours of video games have negative effects on their children's performance in school. The more time children spend playing video games, the poorer their performance in school.
Social isolation	Because children spend too much time playing video games, they may spend less time doing other outdoor activities, such as sports, and interacting with family and friends which may lead to poor interpersonal relationships.

Table 3. Continuation

NEGATIVE PERCEPTION	DESCRIPTION
Increase in aggressive behavior	Excessive gaming can develop aggressive thoughts and tendencies in children which can lead to impulsive behavior.
Negative peer influence	Informants believe that children can pick up inappropriate language and behavior while play with friends and other people inside the Internet café.
Adverse effects on health	Spending too much time playing video games could lead to poor eyesight and obesity.
Exposure to child-inappropriate content	Children might be exposed to inappropriate content such as violence and pornography.
Extraexpense	Children ask for money from their parents to spend on playing video games in the Internet café.
Bullying	Some children who played inside the Internet café experienced teasing and bullying from other players during the course of the game.
Children's uncontrolled video game playing	Inability of children to control the amount of time he/she spends in playing video games

Positive perceptions

Computer literacy is an increasingly essential skill. Playing video games can be an important building block to computer literacy because games teach children how to use and navigate a computer. Six (6) out of the 20 informants believed that playing video games had given their children the ability to use computers and related technology efficiently. Two (2) informants stated that playing video games had made using the Internet easier for their children.

According to informants who had personal computers and access to the Internet in their homes, their children played video games together, thus, video game playing can be a good activity for siblings. They shared that their children grew closer because they had the same interest in playing video games. However, informants whose children played in the Internet café did not experience this.

Some of the informants shared that their children liked to spend at least part of their free time playing video games. They let them play because it made their children happy. Table 4 shows a summary of informants' perceptions of the positive effects of video games on their children.

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Table 4. Informants' positive perception of their children's video game playing

POSITIVE INFLUENCES	DESCRIPTION
Computer literacy	Informants believed that playing video games introduced their children to computer technology and the online world.
Family bonding	Informants recognized that playing video games can be a good bonding activity for the family.
Source of recreation	Informants considered playing video games as an avenue for their children to have fun.

Strategies parents used to manage their children's video game playing

Active mediation

Parents' perception of video games and their effects determine the extent to which they supervise and monitor their children's video game playing. According to Nikken and Jansz (2003; 2006), the mediation strategy commonly used by parents is active mediation. This mediation strategy involves parent to child discussions about video games to stimulate the child's critical thinking and understanding. All 20 informants said they discussed with their children the negative aspects of video games, especially the relationship between playing video games and poor school performance. For informants who were too busy to monitor or supervise their children's video game playing, discussing about the negative aspects of video games was the only thing they could do.

Research suggests that active mediation works better than other types of parental mediation because it is based on conversation and critical discussion, which are more likely to cultivate critical thinking skills in children (Fujioka & Austin 2003). Laible and Thompson (2007) stated that through parent-child dialogues, parents can take children to 'a relational system of mutual reciprocity' where children experience positive responsiveness from their parents and vice versa. This system leads children to be more responsive to parents' initiatives and better internalize parents' expectations.

Restrictive Mediation

Another parental mediation strategy applied by most parents is restrictive mediation. This involves setting of rules to regulate and monitor their children's media use and to know what media content are viewed by their children (Clark 2011). Majority of the informants admitted that they just restrict their children from playing especially during school days to make sure that this does not interfere with their school performance.

Cho and Bae (2010) stated that parental perception of the negative influence of media, child's low self-control, and age of a child were significant predictors of restrictive mediation. Several parents also practiced behavior contingency

—allowing the child to play only after school-work or household chores were completed.

Informants indicated that they regulated when and how long their children could spend time online to mitigate the negative effects of video game playing. According to them, it is better to limit the time spent by their children on gaming to avoid online risks and addiction. Diverse forms of time restriction were imposed by the informants. While some limited the amount of time (e.g. '1 hour per day'), others regulated frequency (e.g. '2–3 times a week') or occasion (e.g. 'weekends only,' 'when parents are around in the evening'). Some informants had very specific rules about time (e.g. '2 hours per session, only during the school break or weekend'), whereas others simply told their children to stop using their gadgets or computers when they felt that children had spent too much time online.

Co-playing

Co-playing is a parental mediation strategy which involves sharing the media experience with children and playing together without critical discussion (Clark 2011). Only a few parents mentioned that if they had time, they sat beside their children while they played and occasionally asked their children to talk about the game. This is how they got more information about the game content. This mediation strategy was applied by informants whose children played inside the home because they have their own computer. Hence, this strategy cannot be easily applied by informants whose children played in the Internet cafe. Only six (6) out of the 20 informants had their own computers.

Outcomes of the strategies informants used to manage their children's video game playing

Positive outcomes

Informants revealed that the strategies they used to manage their children's video game playing resulted in more positive than negative outcomes. Majority of the informants noticed that they have established a good relationship and mutual understanding with their children. Through parent to child dialogues, informants observed that their children responded positively and that they did not argue with their parents.

Informants indicated that they regulated when and how long children could spend time online to mitigate the negative effects of video game playing. Using this strategy, some of the informants were satisfied that their children followed the rules that they laid out on video game playing.

Informants who engaged in active mediation and co-playing observed more positive outcomes in their children. Table 5 shows the informants' perceived positive outcomes of the strategies they used to manage their children's video game playing.

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Table 5. Positive outcomes of the strategies informants used to manage their children's video game playing

POSITIVE OUTCOMES	DESCRIPTION
Good parent-child relationship	Informants noticed that they have established a good relationship and interaction with their children
Children's obedience to rules	Children tend to obey their parents' rules and regulations on their video game playing

Negative outcomes

Informants who practiced restrictive mediation were more likely to experience negative outcomes. Among all the strategies applied by the informants, only restrictive mediation led to negative outcomes. To limit their children's video game playing, informants imposed various restrictions, however, six (6) out of 20 informants shared that their children disobeyed these rules, which resulted to parent-child conflict. This happened when they restricted their children from playing during school days. Moreover, five (5) out of 20 informants indicated that they got into arguments with their children because of their uncontrolled video game playing.

According to Beyens and Buellens (2016) forms of restrictive mediation were found to be associated with more family conflicts. Table 6 shows a summary of the informants' perceived negative outcomes of the strategies they used to manage their children's video game playing.

Table 6. Negative outcomes of the strategies informants used to manage their children's video game playing

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES	DESCRIPTION
Children's disobedience to rules	Children violated the rules their parents laid out to regulate video game playing
Parent-child conflict	Restrictions on video game playing led to serious arguments between parents and children.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Informants had more negative perceptions of video games than positive ones. This negative perception resulted to either restrictive or active mediation or a combination of both. According to Valkenburg et al (1999), parents who believe that media have negative effects on their children are more likely to implement diverse mediation approaches, especially restrictive mediation (Nathanson 2001; Shin &

Huh 2011). Furthermore, informants' time with their children and the place where their children played were significant predictors of mediation. Informants who had limited time with their children because of work and those whose children played outside the home in Internet cafes were most likely to employ either restrictive or active mediation or a combination of both.

Restrictive mediation had either positive or negative outcomes. The most common negative outcomes were parent-child conflict and children's disobedience to the rules their parents laid out to limit their video game playing. On the other hand, the positive outcomes included good parent-child relationships and children's compliance.

Informants' positive perception of video games, on the other hand, resulted to active mediation and co-playing. When informants have a positive perception of video games and have children who play at home because they have their own computer units, co-playing was employed. Therefore, the place where children play video games determined whether informants co-play or not. Active mediation and co-playing always resulted to positive outcomes.

The results of this study showed that informants who were not computer literate were more likely to not know what their children were playing in Internet cafes. Most of them did not have a college degree and had low-earning jobs. Those informants who had college degrees and could afford to buy computer units for their homes were the ones who could co-play with their children. This points out the necessity for parental computer literacy so that parents could understand and relate to their children's media experiences. Consequently, this would help them implement diverse mediation strategies, particularly active mediation and co-playing, which were found to result to more positive outcomes than restrictive mediation.

Hence, policy makers should conduct formal and informal media education programs to give opportunities to parents, particularly socially and economically disadvantaged ones, to learn how new media like video games work in order to better understand how children become involved in video game activities. These programs could be community-based to make them more accessible and responsive to the needs of parents, especially those who are engaged in livelihood activities and have low educational attainment. This would help them use effective strategies to manage their children's video game playing. Furthermore, media education programs for parents should be implemented not only to protect children from negative influences of new media such as video games, but for them to empower their children to practice critical thinking and take advantage of diverse online opportunities.

It was also found that some of the informants' limited time with their children because of work limits the degree to which they can mediate their children's playing. To help parents control their children from excessive video game playing, the City Government of Baybay should strengthen their rules and regulations requiring Internet cafes to prohibit children from entering during school hours, since parents could not control their children during this time. This would discourage children from cutting classes and would help parents mediate their children's video game playing and lessen the negative effects of video game playing on their academic performance.

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