

Perception of Parents/Guardians towards Media Policies Protecting Children against Harmful Television Content in Kenya

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Abstract- Television content is engineered primarily for these roles in society; information, agenda setting, entertainment and education among others. While people consume this content there are other effects that are reached consciously or otherwise. These effects are studied under theories and scholarly debates popularly known as media effects. Most media effects theorists point out that these effects will mostly affect children negatively as they do not have a well developed capacity to guard against harmful content. It is for this reason that media policies are put in place; to safeguard or protect children against any harmful content on television. This study therefore sought to look into the perception of parents on children media policy that protects them against harmful content on television. This study sampled 370 parents within Nairobi County with a view to evaluate their perception as their children have relatively more television content access compared to children in rural Kenya, using non-probability sampling method as the researcher hoped to involve some respondents according to their perceived usefulness to the study. Purposive sampling was therefore used. The researcher undertook data collection using self administered questionnaires. The study concluded that parents perceive implementation as inadequate, and that it is the role of the media. However, they indicated their participation in the implementation of these policies.

Index Terms- media policy, harmful television content, parents' perception, children

I. INTRODUCTION

Parents and guardians form a sizeable part of stakeholders in children media policy implementation process (Kombo 2011). It is believed that behind closed doors of a family set-up parents must become the mediating piece to obscure children exposure to harmful and inappropriate media content (Charren 2008). The question therefore should be are parents aware of their role in ensuring the implementation process does not falter in their court, are they even aware of this role and how do they view the media content effects on their children. In a study on the use of mediated television watching by use of parental control, the v-chip tool installed in all television sets, child lock and timing lock on programs identifies challenges of regulating new media technologies as that there is a widespread public anxiety on television content believed to emanate from three general assumptions as outlined by Livingstone (2009); the rapidity of

internet's development and its persuasive nature often causing difficulty to adults/parents/guardians to adjust.

Children today can catch up with programs online. This poses a challenge to the parents and guardians who practice mediated television viewing. It is defeating to learn that some programs are locked on the television sets yet children can watch them online even long after the programs have been aired (Sandra et al 2008). Parents and guardians also have been exposed to new technology as a never ending trail of new developments and therefore view them as 'uncontrollable beasts' and a threat to children's safety. And the last fear is constituted in the fact that children know more about technology than parents do and are thus able to avoid parental authority.

This discussion therefore leads to the question of parents' perception of their role in implementing media policy that protects children against harmful television content, how adequate or inadequate are the policies and how well have media content generators enacted these policies? This study seeks to look into these perceptions and give a conclusion concerning the parents' views thereof. In a study by Parenthood America the original TV Parental Guidelines were problematic for three primary reasons: they did not reflect the kind of television rating system that parents wanted, they were not likely to (and, in the case of violent content, they did not) clearly communicate the kind of content that programs contain, and they were likely to attract children to problematic content rather than repel them. Given these problems, it is likely that parents are still wondering what it is that they can do to protect their children from television they consider to be harmful as is the case of Kenya.

In a study by Huston et al (1989) it is generally agreeable from the Likert scale questions posed that it is the responsibility of adults and of public policy to protect children from unnecessary and potentially harmful exposure to violence through the media and to protect children from television content and advertising practices that exploit their special vulnerability (Huston, Watkins, & Kunkel, 1989).

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Parents and guardians form a useful group of stakeholders for determining the usefulness and adequacy of media policies that are geared towards protecting children from harmful television content. It is for this reason that this study focused on their perception towards these media policies. This was achieved by looking into three aspects; firstly, their view on their role in ensuring the implementation of the already existing children

media policies, secondly their perception on the role of media in implementation and thirdly, the adequacy or inadequacy of these media policies protecting children against harmful television content.

Nairobi was identified and used for study as most households and children have access to television sets and other devices that allow for the transmission of television content. Theoretically, this study was founded of the Theory of Implementation with complements from Cultivation theory. This is because the study was looking at the implementation of media policy in Kenya as well as the media effects of television viewing amongst children.

This study adopted the descriptive research design as it allows for the reporting of issues as they are Kothari (1990). The population for this study was all parents and guardians residing

in Nairobi who also have access to television sets in their households or other social settings.

A sample was derived using the non-probability sampling method as it aims to be theoretically representative of the study population by maximizing the scope and range of variation of the study (Kombo et al 2011).

III. FINDINGS

A likert-scale was developed to guide the respondents on various perceptual issues relating to the role of parents in implementation of children media policy, the role of media houses in implementation of media policy and adequacy or inadequacy of media policy on children programs.

Below is a reflection of their responses

Perception of parents towards children media policy implementation

	SD	D	N	A	SA
I participate in children media policy implementation	22	8	98	201	41
	5.9	2.2	26.5	54.3	11.1
Children media policy in Kenya involves all stakeholders	193	97	40	21	19
	52.2	26.2	10.8	5.7	5.1
Children media policies are implemented adequately	107	98	10	140	15
	28.9	26.5	2.7	37.8	4.1
Children media policy is effective in its objective	94	81	0	98	97
	25.4	21.9	0.0	26.5	26.2
Children media policy in kenya is adequate	8	90	14	99	69
	2.2	24.3	3.8	26.8	18.6
Children media policy implementation is a role of the media owners	72	42	16	106	134
	19.5	11.4	4.3	28.6	36.2

Where SD is Strongly Disagree, D is Disagree, N is Neutral or undecided, A is Agree and SA is strongly agree.

**the values below the shaded values are the resultant percentages*

Respondents accounting for 65% of the sample claimed to participate in children media policy implementation. This accounts for more than two thirds of the respondents. On the role of parents in implementation of children media policy, more than half of respondents reflected that they participate actively; 54%. However, just about the same figure strongly disagreed that children media policy involves all stakeholders in its implementation.

Concerning adequacy or inadequacy of children media policy implementation 50% felt that it is inadequate while the rest agreed to its adequacy. As a role of the media owners, 65% of respondents felt that implementation is squarely a role of the media owners while 35% disagreed. Notably on participation and on involvement of all the stakeholders in children media policy, the numbers of those that were neutral or did not have a view was at 26.5% and 11 percent respectively. This points on the

need to enhance participation and to educate the parents on their role as stakeholders as well in the media policy process.

According to Davis (1995) the primary caregivers to children are supposed to be parents/guardians. However due to the socio-economic settings of most households mostly a phenomenon in the urban settings like Nairobi, parents have passed down this role to other persons. Buckingham (2001) observes that children have been left at home on their own. She refers to this as the making of a social problem. Most parents have had little to no time to instruct, guide or even participate in media contexts. This study however depicts a picture contrary to that as most parents believe that they have been involved in the children media policy implementation process.

There also were mixed observations on the issue of who, relative to parents, is responsible for implementation of children media policy whereby, none of the covariate variables (government and its agencies, children rights bodies or consumer rights bodies) had statistical significant parameters. In other

words all parameters had significant values of more than 5 percent ($p > 0.05$). This can be interpreted to mean that it is the concerted efforts of all stakeholders with interest in child welfare (parents, the government, children rights bodies and consumer rights associations) to ensure that children are protected from harmful media content.

IV. CONCLUSION

As outlined earlier perception of parents/guardians was studied using the following outlines of perception; role of parents, role of media and adequacy or inadequacy of media policy protecting children against harmful television content. The findings can therefore be further summarized as follows; On parents' role, respondents felt that parents are involved in children media policy implementation up to 65.4%. There was however a large number of respondents that was neutral about this at 26.5% with only 8.1% disagreeing. Media owners were seen to possess a role in implementation up to 64.8% while 31% held a different view and 4.3% held no view. On adequacy of media policy 26.5% disagreed and 45.4% agreed and only 3.8% were without a view. On a screening question concerning the adequacy of implementation, 55.4% respondents disagreed, 41.9% agreed and 2.7% held no view.

This study recommends a clearly defined role sheet for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of media policies for children. It is also noteworthy that quite a number of parents and guardians have no view or are neutral about pertinent issues concerning this important issue. There is therefore need to educate them so that they can have a stand on matters that affect their children. There exists a gap in the understanding that the media are expected to implement these policies and the reality that media may not always produce television content that is safe for children. Parents need to play an active role in ensuring that media (business owners) ensure child safe content. Where these policies are seen to be inadequate, parents and other key players

in the media contexts should hold sittings to consult on this issues. Parents and guardians as well as the media may consider a channel through which they can communicate freely, raise issues/queries concerning television content and other programming issues relating to children.

This study also recommends a survey of other regions in Kenya and especially the rural areas of Kenya in order to establish how parents view their roles and that of other stakeholders on this issue.

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