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Patterns of YouTube interaction among Emirati children: A Study of Media Engagement and Influence

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study scrutinizes the increased gravitation of children towards YouTube and assesses the subsequent effects on their viewing behaviors. Parental mediation emerges as a critical factor within the digital setting.

Materials/methods. Case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study as a research model. This study involved ten Emirati parents who actively participated, shared viewing experiences, and implemented viewing boundaries to navigate their children's digital engagements. Data was analyzed by the exploratory analyzing and word clouds.

Results. The findings of this study enhance the dialogue surrounding digital parenting, emphasizing the necessity for context-aware mediation practices. It proposes a nuanced understanding of parental roles that reconcile cultural values with the imperatives of digital safety, aiming to enrich the digital experiences of children in a protective and constructive manner.

Conclusion. These approaches are contextualized within the cultural framework of the UAE, delineating the specific concerns and strategies parents employ in response to the digital challenges faced by their children.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of the Internet and the widespread availability of technological devices have led to a significant increase in children's use of social media, video streaming, and other online platforms, capturing their attention dramatically (Badri et al., 2017). This trend has notably transformed the landscape of children's video content, shifting from traditional instructional television to mobile devices and online platforms like YouTube and YouTube Kids, which serve both educational and recreational purposes (O'Connor et al., 2023).

According to recent reports, YouTube and YouTube Kids have become dominant platforms for children's video consumption, offering a diverse array of content, including educational materials, entertainment, and gaming-related videos (Ofcom, 2023; Rideout, 2017). The platforms' popularity is underscored by their ability to cater to a wide range of children's preferences, from cartoons and animations to tutorials and music videos (Konca et al., 2024). Research shows a high level of engagement with YouTube among children in the United States, with a significant proportion—specifically, 65%—using the platform multiple times daily (Smarty Pants, 2017). Reports indicate that while children spend 23% of their screen time on traditional television, they allocate 37% to watching online videos on platforms like YouTube. The most recent data from the United Kingdom, from a 2023 study by the Office of Communications (Ofcom), shows that YouTube has become the most extensively viewed channel among young viewers. Additionally, children are reported to spend about one hour of their daily routine engaging with YouTube and YouTube Kids. Similar findings have been observed in studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Turkey, India, Israel, and the UAE, highlighting YouTube's widespread popularity among children and its integration into their daily routines (Alqahtani et al., 2023; Ellias & Sulkin, 2017; Izci et al., 2019; Konca & Koksalan, 2017; Yadav et al., 2018).

YouTube stands as a dominant force in social media, attracting a vast global audience that not only consumes but also shares, uploads and engages in discussions related to video content (Konca, 2022). Perez (2018) and Neumann and Herodotou (2020) have noted that YouTube provides a diverse range of channels that cater to the educational needs of children. For instance, the YouTube Kids Channel features a multitude of videos including comical cartoons, amusing clips, nursery rhymes, and more, thus garnering a global audience. Ceci (2023) conducted a study finding that channels such as Cocomelon - Nursery Rhymes and Kids Diana Show have experienced significant growth in subscriptions and viewership, attributed to their provision of targeted educational programming. As a result, children worldwide exhibit a greater affinity for YouTube than conventional television. Furthermore, Tariq et al. (2020) reported that YouTube is accessible in 76 different languages, showcasing the platform's vast linguistic reach and making it a valuable tool for bilingual individuals or those learning a second language, irrespective of their geographic location. A significant factor contributing to the popularity of YouTube in the United Arab Emirates is its role in promoting English language acquisition among children. According to Alqahtani et al. (2023), children increasingly utilize this platform not only for educational purposes but also for watching cartoons, engaging in gaming, and participating in various other activities.

2. Literature Review

The Harmonious Ambassador program not only targets the interactions within the school's microsystem but also seeks to influence the broader mesosystem by involving teachers, parents, and school administrators in supporting these student ambassadors. This holistic approach ensures that the ambassadors' efforts are reinforced by the entire school community, enhancing the sustainability and impact of the initiative. By creating a network of support that transcends the student body to include all stakeholders within the educational ecosystem, the program aims to instill enduring change that can effectively reduce the prevalence of bullying. This approach aligns with ecological

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systems theory by addressing the multiple layers of influence that affect students' behaviors and interactions, ensuring a comprehensive strategy against bullying that is embedded in the school's structure and culture.

The widespread popularity of YouTube among young children has raised significant concerns about its impact on their cultural, linguistic, and cognitive development. The proliferation of videos on YouTube and YouTube Kids, combined with increasing viewership among children, has sparked apprehensions regarding algorithm-driven digital content that commodifies young viewers for monetization purposes (Burroughs, 2017; Konca & Erden, 2021). Critics, including Abdul Ghani and Cambre (2020), argue that YouTube Kids is designed to mold young children into consumers, promoting values centered around consumption, competitiveness, surveillance, judgment, and reward. The manipulative nature of the popular 'kidbait' genre on YouTube, which features peers engaging in unboxing and playing with toys, has been specifically highlighted by Jaakkola (2020) for its appeal to young viewers.

Amid the evolution of children's media consumption in the digital era, there are both benefits and concerns, particularly regarding the potential negative impacts of excessive screen time on children's well-being (Akulwar-Tajane et al., 2020; Konca et al., 2022; Oswald et al., 2020). It is widely recognized that parents play a pivotal role as primary role models, facilitators, educators, and guardians in how their children use digital technology (Yaşaroğlu, 2020; Judge et al., 2015). Recent research underscores the linkage between parents' and children's screen time, highlighting parents' crucial role in their children's interactions with digital technologies (Konca, 2022). As such, the importance of parental mediation in overseeing children's online activities has gained prominence (Almogbel, 2019).

Parental mediation involves a variety of deliberate interventions by parents to manage their children's engagement with technology. These interventions include setting usage limits, employing technical monitoring measures, fostering open communication, and dedicating time to interact with their children. Livingstone et al. (2015) categorize these strategies into three types: active mediation, which involves negotiating the content consumed; co-viewing, where parents are present and engage with the technology alongside their children; and restrictive mediation, which sets specific rules about the content, setting, and timing of digital technology use.

Cultural nuances significantly influence parental mediation strategies, with varying degrees of regulation observed in different societies, affecting children's online experiences (Agbaria et al., 2016; Mannan, 2017). In the Arab region, parental mediation is crucial for protecting children against online hazards. Guardians are expected to be well-informed about legislation and actively monitor their children's digital activities. Almogbel (2019) notes that in Arabian societies, parental influence profoundly shapes children's internet behavior, with motivations including adherence to Islamic teachings and societal norms, child safety, and concerns over misinformation. The study by Agbaria et al. (2016) found that parents employ strategies that may restrict the duration, content, and purposes of internet use.

Similarly, in the United Arab Emirates, Mannan (2017) highlights parental concerns about the negative impact of children's exposure to age-restricted content on YouTube. Badri et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of parental involvement in monitoring the adverse effects of YouTube and social media use among youth in Abu Dhabi, noting that children often engage in discussions about questionable behaviors on these platforms, which could lead to negative outcomes or expose them to inappropriate content.

The exponential expansion in the production and consumption of digital content by young children has become a significant focus in early childhood studies (Ruiz-Gomez et al., 2022). Previous research has explored various aspects of children's viewing habits, including assessing the suitability

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and quality of YouTube videos for young audiences (Neumann & Herodotou, 2020), examining YouTube's role as a platform for engagement (Chau, 2010), and investigating the educational implications and applications of YouTube and YouTube Kids videos for children's learning (Izci et al., 2019).

In the context of this research, which focuses on the patterns of YouTube interaction among Emirati children, the Ecological Techno-Microsystem framework proposed by Johnson (2010) serves as a crucial theoretical underpinning. This framework enhances our understanding of how digital environments, specifically YouTube, interact with various elements of children's microsystems. By examining how digital technologies like YouTube fit within the broader ecology of child development—including aspects such as social development and the socio-economic status (SES) of the family—this framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis of parental mediation strategies. It underscores the dynamic interplay between children's engagement with digital media and the influence of family context in shaping these interactions. Therefore, adopting this framework allows for a deeper exploration into how Emirati parents utilize digital mediation as a tool to manage and enhance their children's digital interactions, aligning with cultural values and developmental priorities.

The aim of this study is to explore the mediation strategies employed by Emirati parents to regulate and guide their children's YouTube usage, examining how these strategies are influenced by the broader digital and socio-cultural environment. This investigation seeks to understand the interplay between parental mediation, digital technology, and child development within the Ecological Techno-Microsystem framework. Within this context, the research questions are mentioned below;

1. How do Emirati children engage with YouTube in the home setting?
2. What are the mediation practices of parents for their children's YouTube usage?

3. Methodology

The study conducted in-depth interviews with ten female Emirati parents. The choice of interviewees stemmed from the personal networks of the researcher and the observed reluctance among Emirati parents to participate in this segment of the study due to privacy concerns.

The case study method, as outlined by Eisenhardt (1989) and Çepni (2009) among others, combines various data collection techniques to comprehend contemporary phenomena. In the current study, the case study research method was employed to explore the views of parents regarding their young children' YouTube usage. The purpose was to directly uncover the individual perceptions and opinions of the participants related to YouTube usage at home and to gain insights into the current situations. Case studies, as described by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013), aim to deeply explore real-life situations such as YouTube usage and time spent on screen. In this study, different types of codes and themes were derived from the responses of parents, providing a means to identify the participants' perspectives and opinions about their children's YouTube use.

3.1. Study group

According to qualitative research, a greater sample size does not necessarily imply that more data will be gathered. In this case, sampling should be done with a specific aim such as having young children at home and use technological tools (Baş & Akturan, 2008). Consequently, the study group was appointed with the purposeful sampling model and the working was composed of participants based on volunteering and having young children. The participant pool for this research comprised 10 mothers with young children in their households.

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3.2. Data Collection Tool and Process

To discern parental perspectives on their children's YouTube usage at home, a set of twelve semi-structured open-ended questions was meticulously created. The development of these questions was informed by expert consultation to ensure content and linguistic validity. The interview instrument encompassed nine inquiries regarding parental interactions with YouTube and technology in the home setting, and six questions probing children's engagement with these platforms. Responses were elicited from parents and diligently captured via audio recording. Prior to analysis, the collected data underwent a thorough transcription process and were translated into English to facilitate comprehensive examination.

The data was gathered from carefully designed interviews supplemented by relevant follow-up inquiries. The study conducted the interviews at different lengths to delve into the nuances of the participants' perspectives and experiences. The demographic and primary queries provided a detailed profile of the participants. The findings captured essential information about the mothers' identities, their professional roles, and educational backgrounds, providing a richer context for interpreting their responses.

The procedure was meticulously designed, involving a set of 13 primary interview questions and seven demographic queries. The research showed careful consideration of cultural sensitivities and ethical standards. A question regarding participants' social status and income was initially included but later removed. This decision was made in response to feedback from participants who felt the inquiry was overly intrusive. By excluding this question, the researcher upheld a commitment to participant privacy and comfort, reflecting a respectful approach to data collection that honors the dignity and preferences of the individuals involved.

3.3. Data Analysis

The current study employed two distinct data analysis methods to address the research questions. Creswell (2012) emphasized the need to segregate data transferred to the electronic environment into essential concepts, sentences, and quotations during the data analysis process. This separation is crucial to elucidate the participants' perceptions regarding relevant phenomena. The responses provided by parents to specific questions were digitized and subjected to content analysis using the NVivo11 software in this study. Employing the case study research method, participants' answers to each question were meticulously analysed. Additionally, it was stressed that data sharing similarities should be amalgamated under specific codes and themes. This systematic organization aimed to enhance the comprehensibility of the data, as highlighted by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013). From this perspective, significant and recurring expressions extracted from parents were categorized, and structural and tactile descriptions were organized under distinct codes. These calculations were intended to provide a more detailed and profound explanation of the viewpoints held by parents of young children on the subject matter. Furthermore, generating a word cloud based on the words found in parents' responses allowed for the identification of the most influential word clusters within the answers.

A word cloud is a visual representation that illustrates the frequency of words in the analysis of research studies (Atenstaedt, 2012). Furthermore, researchers have noted that regardless of the complexity of the data analysis techniques used to create a word cloud, it effectively communicates the simplicity and clarity of word frequency in a study. Atenstaedt (2012) also affirmed that the words displayed in the word cloud represent the words that appear most frequently during the analyses. While analyzing the present study's data, a word cloud was generated to display the frequency of words in parents' responses. This visual representation highlighted the most significant concepts that emerged from their answers. While creating the word cloud, one of the free online word cloud websites, https://www.wordclouds.com/, was used.

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4. Results

The participants' demographic information shows that most of the parents were mothers (N=7). Most of them had middle-class socio-economic education levels (N=6), and most of them had more than four children (N=4) at home. Data results also showed that most of the young children at home were girls (N=6) and were 6 years old (N=5) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information of participants.

Participants	Relation to Child	Education	Work	Number of Kids	Socio Economic Level	Gender of Young Kid	Age of Young Child
P1	Mother	Master	Education	4	Middle	Girl	6
P2	Mother	Bachelor's	Nanny	4	Middle	Boy	9
P3	Mother	Bachelor's	Teacher	3	Middle	Girls	3 and 5
P4	Mother	Master	NA	3	Middle	Girl	6
P5	Mother	Master	Lecturer	2	Middle	Boys	6 and 7
P6	Father	Master	Engineer	1	High	Boy	5
P7	Mother	Bachelor's	Teacher	4	Middle	Girl	6
P8	Caregiver	Highschool	Caregiver	4	NA	Boy	7
P9	Mother	Bachelor's	Teacher	5	NA	Boy	3 and 7
P10	Aunt	Bachelor's	Caregiver	1	NA	Girl	6

The first question of this research was `How do Emirati children engage with YouTube in the home setting?` Answers to this question included sub-themes as types of devices, duration, content, and time & place. The findings for each sub-theme are presented below.

4.1. Types of technological tools at home

The study reveals a diverse array of technological devices within domestic settings, with families reporting ownership of multiple gadgets ranging from televisions and gaming consoles to laptops and tablets. A significant number of homes possess multiple units of the same device category, with gaming systems like PlayStation or Xbox being commonplace. Smartphones emerge as a ubiquitous presence, with ownership extending to nearly all family members, children included. This proliferation of personal devices underscores the depth of technology integration into the daily lives of families. In this case, P10 stated, *"We have TVs and tablets such as iPads and smartphones. But usually, she uses her iPad for watching YouTube and TikTok."* Similarly, P2 stated, *"There are different kinds of laptops we have at home. Actually, we have maybe five computers and three Tablets/iPads. And we all have PlayStation and Xbox for kids."* This is an example of the point that there are many technological devices at home. Indeed, this scenario reveals the deep entanglement of children with

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technology in their daily lives. Upon inquiring about children's personal technological devices, it was reported that a significant number of them possessed their own tablets/iPads, PlayStations/Xboxes, televisions, and smartphones. When P1 said, *"My child has his own smartphone and computer/laptops obviously. You cannot imagine them, you know, not having an internet connection at home."* about this situation, she stated how disturbed she was about this situation.

4.2. Spending time on watching YouTube

Having too many technological devices at home has started to make us think about children using YouTube. In this regard, parents were asked about the amount of time their children spend watching YouTube. Parents gave different answers on this issue. P10: *"She keep(s) watching it till I stop her or my parents stop her. So it's unlimited."* In this response, while it is revealed here that children have no control over time, some of our parents stated that *"They would watch it, for example, for two hours or three hours a day, that's during the weekend. However, it changes during working days. They watch it about 30 minutes or something like that."* (P2). In this case, some parents tried to control their children by setting a time limit such as 2 or 3 hours. However, no matter how much this situation is tried to be controlled, it has been stated that in some special situations (weekends, national and religious holidays, parents' unavailability, etc.), children spend more time in front of the screen. P1 responded that *"It all depends on whether they are at school or home when they're at school. Obviously. They don't use smartphones as much, but during the weekends. Well, I will be honest. Sometimes, it reaches about seven hours a day. Especially during Ramadan."* Likewise, P3: *"It's like either break time, or my nap time, or when I want to cook something for them. So they're busy with their iPads for watching YouTube videos."* In this case, it can be said that the time children watch YouTube in special situations increases.

4.3. Parents' and children' watching content in YouTube

Parents were asked questions about the content they watched and the content their children watched on YouTube. In this case, P1 said *"I do use YouTube, but only if needed. Like, if I need to research something, I don't know. Get quick dinner ideas, recipes, and sports; I don't know. I will not say that I'm like hanging on YouTube, for our more know, it's less than an hour a day."* Likewise, P3 said, *"Well, I use YouTube only for two things. I don't know if it's a long way and I listen to some music during work, like calming music."* Interestingly, P4 stated, *"I used educational content for my students, and sometimes I might choose to learn new cooking recipes."* From these views of parents, it can be said that parents use YouTube to meet their different needs.

Parents also provided information about the content their children watched. P6 said, *"Watch, Nikki and flat those brothers who like to open like unbox unboxing toys, but really, it's nice. Okay. It is nice. But I noticed it affected his behavior negatively, so whenever we go out, he wants exactly like to buy like Nikki."* The parent stated that the child was negatively affected by the content she watched on YouTube. On the other hand, P3 stated that *"Watching this family channels, die-cutting Camaro, and roma. these types of family shows. Like, dad, mom, and kids are doing an activity or doing a challenge together."* In this case, parents thought that their kids watched YouTube to have fun.

Nevertheless, some parents have concluded that their kids use YouTube for their education. P4 stated that *"He watches Zajac, Diana and Justin. Mostly, he watches educational content. Like, you know, about solar system, chips, shapes or about colors. Something about educational and for his education."* Likewise, P3 specified that *"they were asked to code a robot and creates a robot, and you know, ask him to do certain functions. There are tons of people who do that on Tik Tok like. I'm not really an expert in to when it comes to that I can help them. I can't YouTube it and I can Google it for them, but it's best. So, I did personally direct him to go to YouTube and detective to find answers for their assignments."* This shows that YouTube can be used for educational purposes if desired.

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However, parents need to guide their children correctly in using YouTube for their educational support.

4.4. Children's watching time and place

Parents were shared their thoughts about their children's patterns of YouTube consumption, including the frequency and locations where their children engage with YouTube content. A thematic analysis of parents' responses unearthed recurring contexts. Many parents noted that their children watch YouTube during their free time, at mealtimes, and while preparing to go to school. Below are illustrative excerpts from parents' remarks regarding this topic:

P1: "Well, in the morning, the first thing he does, he takes his phone, and it's killing. We always, you know, go into not fights but I must put it down all the time. But yes, while I'm preparing their lunchboxes, he eats, and he watches."

P2: "When he is back from school, he has some, you know, like 15 minutes time to eat. Eat and change before he goes to his football. So, he also watches YouTube".

P3: "They're just only allowed to watch at the center of the home. Yes. Sometimes I just take a nap. They don't have anybody to supervise them. There is a nanny, but she doesn't know about what they're watching."

P7: "She's using her iPad for watching YouTube when she is eating. At lunch, I allowed them because they had just come from school. We are so tired. They and I want to take a rest. So, I give them like kind of entertainment. Okay, till they finish their lunch."

In this case, it can be said that children watch YouTube when they are free. In addition, parents think that watching YouTube while eating is so that children can eat their meals more comfortably. Likewise, most of the parents also stated that they found an opportunity to rest and eat comfortably during this process. For example, P3 concluded that *"It's like either break time, or my nap time, or when I want to cook something for them. So they're busy with their iPads for watching YouTube videos."* While her children watch YouTube videos, she takes a nap or does some household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and preparing kids for school.

Our second research question was'What are the mediation practices of parents for their children's YouTube usage?` This question includes sub-themes of parents` mediation strategies, children's first encounter with YouTube, and perceptions.

4.5. Parents` mediation strategies for children's YouTube consumption

Parents were asked how they control their children's watching time and content on YouTube. One of the parents stated that she uses religious beliefs to control her child to watch inappropriate content. She stated that *"You should be scared of God if there are things that you didn't tell me, he would know about them. You don't have to open a door to be scared of what people might think about you, but you should be ashamed of what God would think about you"* (P2). Moreover, one of the mothers highlighted that she needs some help with how she can give balance to children for using iPads for watching YouTube. She stated, *"So even when we limit the screen time to one or two hours per day, when they come back, when it comes to their studies, we allow them to use, you know, these digital tools for more than the limited time. So, I honestly don't know how to have a balance when it comes to end time"* (P3). Similarly, another parent stated that she likes to set time limits for her children. She also concluded that, even if she does not use any apps for limitation, she uses Ipads time limit controls. In this case, she responded *"Well, I usually monitor the use of technology by the time, like with the specific time that I give this to their kids to watch. Like, let's say one hour a day hours a day like maximum of 3 hours. I don't have any apps that monitors kids time but usually like India iPads they have this, you know, I chose like How much they watch screen"* (P4). Interestingly,

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one of the parents stated that *"Actually, sometimes I sit next to him and use my phone or maybe I just watch with him"* (P.8). Even without utilizing timer apps, she actively participates by watching alongside her child. This may indicate a lack of awareness about how to regulate her child's viewing digitally.

Using a premium account on YouTube can be considered as an application used to control inappropriate ads and topics that appear on YouTube. Our participants were asked whether they had this application, and they stated that no parent had this application and that the reason for this situation was that they did not want to pay any money for it. Here are sample parent opinions on this subject:

P1: "No, I'm always keeping that advertisement on YouTube. I don't understand why should I pay YouTube?"

P5: "I'm sitting with them and watching TV, or I might feed my kids while they are watching YouTube. Although I have my YouTube account but it's the free account. Why I should pay money for YouTube."

P9: "I don't use a premium account. I think I am an adult I can stop advertising or close inappropriate videos. But for teenagers, I think this would be beneficial because it cuts the inappropriate advertising, something relevant to them."

4.6. Children's introduction to YouTube viewing

Parents were asked when their children watched a YouTube video for the first time and why they opened it. In this case, most parents opened videos when their kids were young. Most of the reason for the opening first video was to make them quit or eat their food. For example, P10 stated that *"I opened the video when he ate. Because at that time we can stay quiet, sometimes, we need them to stay in their places because we need to feed them or something, so they still us think that other places by opening a video. So he was almost 1 year old when I opened the video."* Similarly, P5 also stated that *"for the first time when my son was 18 months old, I opened him, you know, the Coco Melon, videos to let him sit and eat. And then when he was two years old, he could open YouTube by himself and find videos, you know, which shows on the first screen from the history of this is for those."* It has been observed that one of the main reasons why parents open their children YouTube videos for the first time is to get them to eat.

Interestingly, one of the parents open first YouTube videos for teaching educational rhymes or alphabet. P1 responded that, *"Well, obviously, the first always with all the kids, the first YouTube video is what rhymes songs, some educational channels. I opened rhymes song for her."* Likewise, P3 also highlighted the use of YouTube for educational content and stated that *"the first video was related to an English class that she must do things online lesson. But whatever is like about five years old."*

Apart from these, parents also stated that they opened a YouTube video to their children for the first time in order to control and make quiet their children. In this case, P6 stated that *"I opened the video when he was very young. Maybe one year. We were traveling in an airplane. He was crying all the time. So I had to, like, I got It's with me, but he just started throwing the books at me. So I have to throw something so people can sleep."* In another example, P7 responded that, *"You know when we take care of appointment, okay, Doctor you recruited a stroke during traveling, I want her to become not making any annoying things. So, I give her this tip to drag her attention on for a serious reason. Yeah, I opened the YouTube. She has to watch about two years old to understand the colours to pronounce the names."*

4.7. Parents` Perception

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The word cloud is obtained by looking at the word analysis of parents' answers to all questions (see Figure 1). It has been found that the words used most in the clouds are "YouTube," "Watch," "Like," "Control," "Advertisements," "IPad," and "Time." It could be said that these words were the main focus on the parent's responses to related questions.

Figure 1. Word cloud of the responses of children

It is striking that the most prominent word among these is "YouTube." It could be said that "YouTube," "Watch," and "Like" may influence parents' thoughts about their kids' watching. Likewise, there also some words such as "time," smartphone," "control," and "technology and devices" have been used many times in parents' responses. Sample sentences for the answers given by children are as follows:

P5: I might feed my kids while they are watching YouTube.

P3: I usually monitor the use of technology by the time, like with the specific time that I give this to their kids to watch.

P1: If I'm in the kitchen for cooking, he's watching his YouTube in the living room. So, I'm very much aware of what he's watching. But I don't know how I can check YouTube to see what he is watching."

5. Discussion

Various studies have been conducted in different countries on numerous aspects of YouTube usage (Chau, 2010; Izci et al., 2019; Mannan, 2017; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020). This study focuses on the use of YouTube by children and aims to explore the perspectives of Emirati parents on their children's YouTube usage at home. It thoroughly examines the content consumed by both parents and children, scrutinizes parental control mechanisms, and investigates the timing and locations of children's engagement with YouTube alongside the technological devices used during viewing.

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Additionally, a word cloud was generated to visually represent the most prevalent themes from the parents' perspectives, providing an illustrative summary of the key topics discussed during the interviews.

It was found that the majority of parents reported having several types and numbers of technological devices at home, such as TVs, iPads/tablets, PlayStations, and smartphones. Notably, some parents mentioned that their children possess their own smartphones and tablets, which are used for watching YouTube and for educational purposes. The presence of numerous technological tools is linked to the family's socio-economic levels (Alashwali & Alashwali, 2022). Most parents surveyed classified themselves as being in the middle tier of socio-economic conditions, a self-assessment that can vary widely depending on a country's socio-economic landscape. Nevertheless, these parents believe their socio-economic standing adequately supports the acquisition of various technological devices, suggesting a connection between a family's socio-economic position and the array of technological tools they possess.

The availability of technological devices at home and children's interest in YouTube also influences how much time children spend watching YouTube. Some parents set specific times for their children to control usage, while others noted that their children's viewing times vary depending on availability and special occasions like holidays. Consistent with findings from Smarty Pants (2017), most participants stated that they used YouTube several times each day. It was also found that children allocated 23% of their screen time to conventional television and 37% to watching online videos on platforms such as YouTube. Some children were noted to spend time watching YouTube videos in the morning while preparing for school, during lunch, after school, and at other times, indicating that parental concerns about technology use may influence these habits. Similarly, Alashwali and Alashwali (2022) noted that Saudi parents often lack sufficient knowledge about the technological applications appropriate for children aged 6-7 years, resulting in children being left alone with technology at various times.

Furthermore, the prevalence of YouTube among young children and its impact on their cultural and linguistic development raises important questions (Iivari et al., 2020; Konca et al., 2024b). YouTube offers various channels and videos for adults and children (Ceci, 2023; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020; Perez, 2018). A recent study by Ceci (2023) revealed substantial growth in subscriptions and viewership for channels like Cocomelon - Nursery Rhymes and Kids Diana Show. This study revealed that while parents, like their children, use YouTube for recreational purposes, they also utilize it for practical tasks such as learning new recipes, engaging in sports, and researching professional topics. Additionally, a parent who is an educator mentioned using educational videos on YouTube in her classroom. Although this does not indicate that the content watched by parents and children is similar, it suggests that both groups use YouTube for diverse purposes.

In the Arab region, parental mediation is recognized as a crucial element in protecting children from online risks. Parents need to be well-informed about relevant regulations and actively supervise their children's online activities to ensure safety. Agbaria et al. (2016) discovered that parents employ various strategies, such as setting limitations on the duration, content, and underlying purposes of their children's use of technological devices. Cultural differences significantly influence these parental mediation strategies, affecting children's online experiences. In this study, it was found that some parents use religious principles as part of their mediation strategy, with one parent noting, "You should be scared of God if there are things that you didn't tell me, he would know about them. You don't have to open a door to be scared of what people might think about you, but you should be ashamed of what God would think about you" (P2). This indicates the role of cultural and religious values in shaping parental mediation practices.

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Moreover, children's interactions with technology are related to their parents' involvement. Parents often fulfill roles as facilitators, educators, and protectors in their children's digital lives (Judge et al., 2015). While some parents do not utilize technological tools like app restrictions, they recognize the need for support in managing their children's digital consumption. For example, one parent preferred direct supervision to ensure her child was only exposed to appropriate content. Research involving parents in the UAE underscores the importance of active parental involvement in mitigating the negative impacts of YouTube and social media, as parents in Abu Dhabi expressed concerns about their children engaging with content that could lead to harmful behaviors or expose them to inappropriate material (Badri et al., 2017).

To foster strong cognitive and intellectual abilities in children, parents play a pivotal role by serving as role models and imparting values education. They are responsible for supervising their children and instilling moral values at home. Mannan (2017) emphasized that parents should educate their children about responsible gadget usage and protect them from inappropriate content encountered on platforms like YouTube. In this study, it was found that parents typically introduce their children to YouTube videos at an early age, and they usually watch educational content such as rhymes and other videos. One parent used YouTube to keep their children occupied while in doctors' offices, on airplanes, or in other public places.

This study has provided detailed insights into parents' thoughts, revealing the words that parents emphasized most in their responses. The word cloud created from this study highlights that children mostly watch YouTube videos on iPads and smartphones. Additionally, "mother" was one of the most important words in the word cloud, suggesting that mothers play a crucial role in shaping children's behavior. Similarly, Simsar (2021) noted that mothers were often more prominent in children's responses, emphasizing the significant role mothers play in the behavioral development of children in early childhood. This study further confirms that mothers actively try to control their children's YouTube viewing, demonstrating the comprehensive nature of parental mediation in digital consumption.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed examination of YouTube usage among Emirati children, revealing that a diverse array of digital devices are prevalent in their homes, significantly facilitating access to the platform. It was found that Emirati parents are actively involved in managing their children's interaction with YouTube, employing a range of mediation strategies that reflect their deep-seated concerns regarding the content viewed and the amount of time spent on the platform. These strategies are not only a response to the potential risks associated with digital media consumption but also an attempt to leverage the educational opportunities it offers, highlighting a nuanced approach to digital parenting.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the influence of socio-economic factors and cultural values on the mediation practices adopted by parents. These factors often dictate the availability of technological resources in homes and shape parental perceptions of digital media’s role in child development. By illustrating how Emirati parents navigate the challenges and benefits of YouTube within a culturally and economically influenced framework, the study confirms the essential role of parental involvement in guiding children’s digital media interactions. This balanced approach aims to harness the educational benefits of YouTube while mitigating its risks, demonstrating a comprehensive strategy that other regions might emulate or adapt based on their unique cultural and socio-economic landscapes.

7. Limitations

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This study's limitations warrant careful consideration. Firstly, the participant count presents a possible constraint. While the data procured from the participating parents were adequate, a larger pool might have introduced a richer diversity of insights. Secondly, the predominance of mothers over fathers among the participants limits the scope of our understanding to predominantly maternal perspectives. Future research that aims to balance the representation of both mothers and fathers could yield a more nuanced understanding of parental attitudes towards children's YouTube consumption. Lastly, the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of the parents are factors that likely influence children's engagement with YouTube. This dimension of the research requires further exploration to ascertain the full extent of its impact. In this study, many parents describe themselves as middle class or higher. This situation will make a difference in the control/mediation issues of parents towards their children. Therefore, a study to be conducted with parents at different socio-economic and educational levels will reveal the different needs of parents in this regard.

8. Suggestions

In this study, our aim was to reveal parents' opinions about watching their children's YouTube videos at home. In the study, it was observed that parents had a sufficient number of technological devices in their homes and that children and parents used YouTube for educational and entertainment purposes. It was also determined that parents needed support in using technology while applying different mediation techniques. In addition, it was observed in the study that parents' cultural structure was effective when controlling their children during the YouTube viewing process. Similarly, it has been observed that among parents, mothers have a very important place in shaping their children's behavioral acquisition. In line with the findings of the study, we can recommend the following to parents with their children, educators, and policymakers;

- Parents can use schedulers, content restrictors, and programs to remove advertising content on the technological devices their children will use.
- If parents have problems with the use of technology, they can use the mediation technique of sitting with their children and watching together.
- Educators can share educational content with parents that children can watch.
- Educators can also organize activities for children to use technology correctly.
- Among the findings of the study, it seems that mothers are important. Educators can support mothers in using YouTube correctly by organizing family participation events for mothers.
- Policymakers can develop programs for children to support their technological development.
- Policymakers can also collaborate with content creators to develop educational videos on different cultural and social values and make them available to families and children.

Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.
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Ethical Approval. Written ethical approval was gathered from Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Erciyes University (No: 2022/176). All data collection procedures performed in accordance with the ethical standards.
Data Availability Statement. The data required to reproduce the above findings cannot be shared at this time as the data also forms part of an ongoing study.

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