

Child audiences in South Africa

ABSTRACT

The consumption of media – especially radio and television – by children has been a topic of research for decades now. Although extensive research has been published on the effects of the media, also in South Africa, very few (if any) publications address the issue of when and what children are viewing in South Africa, and if something should be done about this behaviour. In this article, specific examples of the viewing patterns of children between the ages of 7 and 15 are presented in the context of unacceptable material to which they are exposed. The different roles of parents, broadcasters and legislators are discussed, against the backdrop of recent literature, in an attempt to suggest a way forward.

INTRODUCTION

“ I multi-task every single second I am on line. At this very moment I am watching TV, checking my e-mail every two minutes, reading a newsgroup about who shot JFK, burning some music to a CD and writing this message” (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001:10).

This quotation appears in a chapter by Roberts, Hendriksen and Foehr (2003) in a recently published Handbook of Adolescent Psychology. The 17-year-old American youth quoted may not reflect the typical South African’s usage of the media, but it is not at all impossible that some of our children and young people will recognize this media usage behaviour.

Much has been written about the possible negative effects of the media on children and young people internationally and in South Africa.

In the international literature, Donald F Roberts (2003) writes about the concern of parents in the USA about the “stories” children encounter that influence their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Before the Second World War, American parents were aware of their function as gatekeepers, controlling much of the information reaching their offspring. This situation has changed dramatically with the new media (especially multi-channel television, videos, DVDs, home computers, the Internet and video games) threatening the parental information monopoly “almost by definition” (Roberts, 2003: 2). Ironically, more than 2000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Plato also warned against the vulnerability of children exposed to “any story anyone happens to make up” (Plato: The Republic).

In the rapidly changing and developing South Africa, young people eagerly consume the traditional mass media – both radio and television. Children’s programmes on television and radio stations targeting the “youth market” are very successful and boast large audiences.

The number of complaints received by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa reflects the concern of South African parents. Many broadcasts by radio stations and television channels are regarded as unacceptable to child audiences.

In this paper, the focus will be on audiences – more specifically child audiences – being defined as children and young people between the ages of 7 and 15 years. The context will be:

- How do we define audiences?
- Trends in audience research – specifically South African audiences
- Specific examples of South African television child audiences
- The use of this information by parents, broadcasters and legislators
- An attempt to suggest a way forward

1. HOW DO WE DEFINE AUDIENCES?

The concept of “audience” is not as clear as it might seem at first. Although it is seen by Webster and Phalen (1997) as “the foundation of the media’s economic and cultural power” (p. 1), it can be used in varied contexts. Originally, the word “audience” meant “giving an audience” or given a hearing (by a king or by the Pope). Today it also implies “people attending to or listening to a speaker or performer” (Alswang & Van Rensburg, 1995:45). The word was however easily adapted by the electronic media industry to include far-flung listeners of radio and television (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989; Webster & Phalen, 1997).

Although the audience is conceptualized by the electronic media (and by the print media) as a large, loosely connected mass on the receiving end of the media, criticism of this mainly statistical and empirical construction of reality has come from various sources (Webster & Phalen, 1997). The first proposes that the very idea of a “mass audience” is false because of various tastes in the audience. A second criticism is that the concept ignores the complex social relations that bind the members of the audience together. A third attack focuses on the business approach in audience measurement and purports that it is closely tied to a particular set of institutional interests (Ang 1991, Cantor & Cantor, 1986, Freidson 1953). The methodology used by many of these critics in their own research – semiology and other related qualitative approaches – is however such that “It cannot -and should not- give rise to prescriptive and legislative solutions to established policy problems...” (Ang 1991:166).

The concept of the mass audience, therefore, as measured by the quantitative methods used all over the world and also in South Africa, has been the standard operating procedure for many decades and will probably remain so for decades to come (Webster & Phalen, 1997).

The following table provides an overview of the South African television audiences for 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2004. It should be noted that these figures represent “average daily viewership” and are compiled from the database of the South African Advertising Research Foundation’s All Media and Product Survey (AMPS), a sample survey, based on personal interviews (SAARF, 1994 – 2004). In addition, only adults aged 16 years and older are included in the samples.

Table 1

Television audiences (adults), 1994 – 2004 ('000)				
	1994	1998	2002	2004
Any television	12123	13156	19767	20409
SABC television	11554	12188	17898	18173
SABC 1		8613	15027	15027
SABC 2		6199	8634	8400
SABC 3		2961	5517	5446
ETV			9719	11461
M-Net		2465	1989	1498
DSTV			1028	1270

(SAARF, 1994-2004)

It is not the intention of this paper to review or analyze the different viewership trends of the various channels. A recent discussion of these and other trends in audiences can be found in Van Vuuren (2004). Suffice it to mention that of the approximately 30 million adults in South Africa, just over 20 million watch television on a daily basis, a substantial growth from the 12-odd million ten years ago.

The estimated viewership or audience of children is more difficult to determine, because children under the age of 16 are not included in the AMPS survey. Taking other demographic data into consideration, for example census and educational statistics, a reasonable estimate of the children's daily audience in 2004 would be about 5 to 6 million – that is, excluding a very important group younger than seven, and an interesting group older than sixteen years.

The other methodology used to estimate the daily audiences, people-meters, excludes about twenty per cent of the adult population, and an unknown proportion of the child population. This will be discussed later in the paper.

Comparatively, radio audiences for adults are still larger than television in total, with approximately 25 million radio listeners tuning in daily to the more than 135 radio stations in South Africa. The last survey of child audiences for radio was in 1999. An estimated 6 to 7 million children between the ages of seven and fifteen are presently listening to the radio on a daily basis.

Some of the radio stations contained in the 1999 survey include the following:

Table 2

Radio audiences for selected radio stations: 1999: Children 7-15 ('000)	
Lesedi FM	422
Metro FM	306
Motsweding	152
Thobela FM	550
Ukhozi FM	1012
Umhlobo Wenene FM	765
Y FM	104
RSG	86
ALS Services total	2483
Total radio	3921

(SAARF, 1999)

The large proportion of African language listeners is apparent. Moreover, the importance of radio as a mass communication medium for children in South Africa is also emphasized.

With these large numbers of children being exposed to the electronic media, what is the impact of these media on them?

2. TRENDS IN AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Although the largest proportion of the published research on the media concerns the impact of the media (especially television) on children – the so-called effects studies – recent literature also addresses aspects such as time spent on the media, the new multimedia environment and parental control.

2.1 Effects studies

It is not possible to review the more than 4000 studies published thus far on the effects of television violence alone on children (Jensen, 1998) extensively in this paper, but three trends seem to emerge from the international studies. The negative effects are:

- Viewers (including children) become desensitized to the pain of others (Berkowitz & Rawlings, 1963).
- Viewers become more fearful of the world in which they are living: (George Gerbner's "cultivation theory", 1997).
- Viewers might become more aggressive towards someone else by imitating what they see on television (Bandura 1978, the social learning theory).

In South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and some universities have also conducted extensive studies on the impact of this medium on children and adults. A useful summary of the HSRC's research results can be found in Van Vuuren (1983). With regard to violence, the results can be summarized as follows:

- Violent television scenes do indeed influence some children negatively.
- Although this effect seems to be small, and the proportion of children affected is equally small, it is still problematic (Van Vuuren, 2004b).

Without delving into all the details of this rather fascinating discipline of effects studies, it is appropriate to mention the broad trends in thinking about the effects of the media. Initially (in the early thirties of the previous century), it was thought that the media (radio and movies) had a direct and powerful effect on those exposed to it. From the early sixties, this view was replaced with a "limited effects" model, claiming that the effects are not as universal as originally thought. The most recent research takes a more conditional approach. According to Roberts (2003:9), "It conceptualises responses to media as essentially constructive acts in which messages supply material out of which people construct meaning depending on individual attributes, social context and so forth. People's abilities, interests, needs, and expectations shape responses at least as much as message form and content". In the case of children, it is therefore far more complex to study the effects of the media, and each child's knowledge structures, variously labelled scripts, schema or mental representations – her total experience therefore – has to be taken into account when studying the media's effects on her. Roberts summarizes this as follows: "The question, then, is not whether media messages affect children but which messages under which conditions in which ways" (Roberts, 2003:10).

In this context, Wilson *et al* (1996), as quoted by Roberts (2003), studied a number of message-related contextual factors important to the exposure of media violence. Some of the interesting findings are:

- Attractive perpetrators increase learning.
- Showing violence punished decreases fear.
- Unjustified violence decreases learning and increases fear.

- All acts of violence influence how children incorporate media content into their knowledge structures.
- “Attractive actors or associated rewards increase learning of anti-social, pro-social or relatively neutral behaviors”(Roberts, 2003:10).

It is therefore evident that children are active consumers of media content in the context of their own development. From a very young age, they are able to explore and select television (or other media) content actively for attractiveness and understandability. Valkenburg and Cantor (2000) identify two main determinants of children’s likes and dislikes of entertainment programmes. These are cognitive developmental level and gender. “...(The research) suggests that boys and girls in various age groups have very specific preferences for different types of entertainment...” (Valkenburg & Cantor, 2000:149).

2.2 Time spent on the media

It is common knowledge that children spend a fair amount of time on the media – that is listening to the radio and watching television. With the new media: on the computer surfing the Internet, writing emails as well as playing games on both the cellphone and the computer, the hours spent on the media have become not a “fair amount”, but possibly “too much”.

The literature indicates that, as new media emerges in the lives of children, they spend more time consuming these media. For example, Schramm *et al.* (1961) estimated that in the early 1960s, a senior primary schoolchild spent about 35 to 40 hours a week consuming print, radio, film and television in the USA. In the late 1980s the viewing of television alone ranged 20 to 40 hours per week. Roberts (2003) estimates that if all the new media and music exposure are added together, the time a high school child spend on media could run as high as 70 to 80 hours per week. Of course, the definition of media now includes radio, recordings, music videos, using the computer, movie and video viewing, playing video games and reading. Most of these activities occur as secondary activities, as more than one activity occurs simultaneously: e.g. music listening accompanies doing homework, several activities are being done simultaneously on the computer, while television viewing consists of “monitoring” rather than active viewing.

The information we have for South Africa is not as extensive as that for the USA, but the indications are, at least for television, that the same patterns of time spent are applicable here. For example, the HSRC studies indicate that very young toddlers (from nine months old) spend approximately 40 minutes per day in front of the television set, with the amount of viewing gradually increasing to the age of about six, (almost two hours) then as they go to school a slight dip in the consumption of television as school activities take up some of their time. During the primary school years, a steady increase in the time spent on viewing television occurs, with a peak of about three hours

per day at 10 to 12 years. During adolescence, other interests take them away from the television set, and a dip in the time spent on viewing occurs, till after the age of twenty (De Beer, 1983).

Two years ago, the information was that the South African child, aged 7 to 15 years, viewed approximately two hours and 21 minutes (compared to two hours and 43 minutes for adults) of television per day. The most recent data indicates that these figures have increased: during the week of the 2nd to the 8th of May 2005, the figure for children was two hours and 30 minutes and that for adults was three hours and 18 minutes (SAARF, 2003, 2005).

2.3 The new media environment

For radio and television producers and programme planners, the new media environment poses new and daunting challenges. Not only do they have to compete with the new media for their main (adult) audiences, but they also have to contend with the logistics of having to take the children audiences into account. The new media have already been mentioned. But there is an additional and probably unique complication in developing South Africa: as the television network expands, thousands of new children are exposed to television for the first time, with the resultant possible larger effect on their attitudes and behaviour. The new media environment is therefore in a sense different for different children in different areas in the country.

2.4 Parental control

Indications are that parents use television (or at least buy or rent videos and DVDs) regularly as “baby sitters”. Much of the children’s programming on the South African television channels is focused on various age groups, and parental involvement is required for some of the programmes. As will be seen later in the discussion of the child audiences, parents are not always available to monitor what the children are viewing: many mothers are working full time. It would therefore be realistic to say that the responsibility of parents to control the media usage of their children is, at the very least, difficult.

3. TELEVISION AUDIENCES IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHILDREN (7 TO 15)

Information about television audiences in South Africa is collected daily, 24 hours a day, by the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF). The Television Audience Measurement System (TAMS) is an electronic system that collects the data from a sample of approximately 1600 households in South Africa. This meter in each household registers the number of viewers for a particular programme at a particular time.

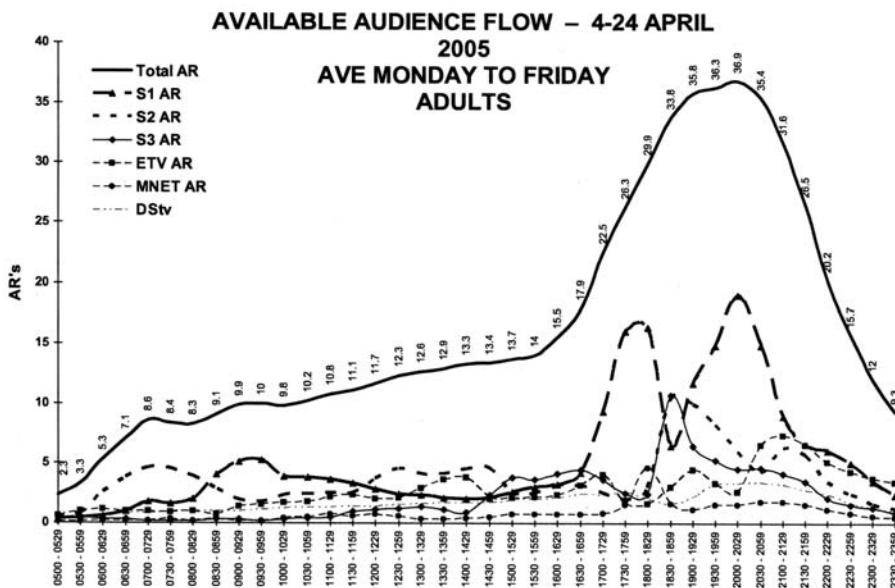
From this data, an AR (ratings point) is calculated, from which an estimate of the number of viewers is made. In the case of children, viewers from the ages of 7 to 15 are included. The research is conducted according to international best practice and is accepted by all users (many of whom are competitors) in the industry. The users are mainly the broadcasters and the advertising industry.

The information available is, to some extent, overwhelming. For each day of the week, the 24-hour period is subdivided into 15-minute segments for each of the six channels broadcasting in South Africa. In addition, the data on various demographic components is available for each quarter of an hour. For example, in addition to sex, age, income and language, marketers use the Living Standard Measure to calculate the segment of the specific audience in which they are interested. These data are all for adults (16 years and older). Fortunately, information on children (ages 7 to 15) is also available.

For the purposes of this paper, children's data on weekdays (Monday to Friday) are calculated together, and an average Monday to Friday figure from 05:00 to 23:59 is presented. Although the audiences vary from day to day and from programme to programme, patterns and laws emerge and are easier to understand in average weekday audiences. Moreover, Saturdays and Sundays are discussed separately. It was also decided to take the average figures for three weeks in April (from Monday 4 April 2005 to Sunday 24 April 2005). The data is represented by an AR (AMPS rating), which is a weighted percentage of the audience viewing in a particular 15-minute time segment.

The information is plotted on graphs, and three graphs per Monday to Friday, Saturday and Sunday are discussed.

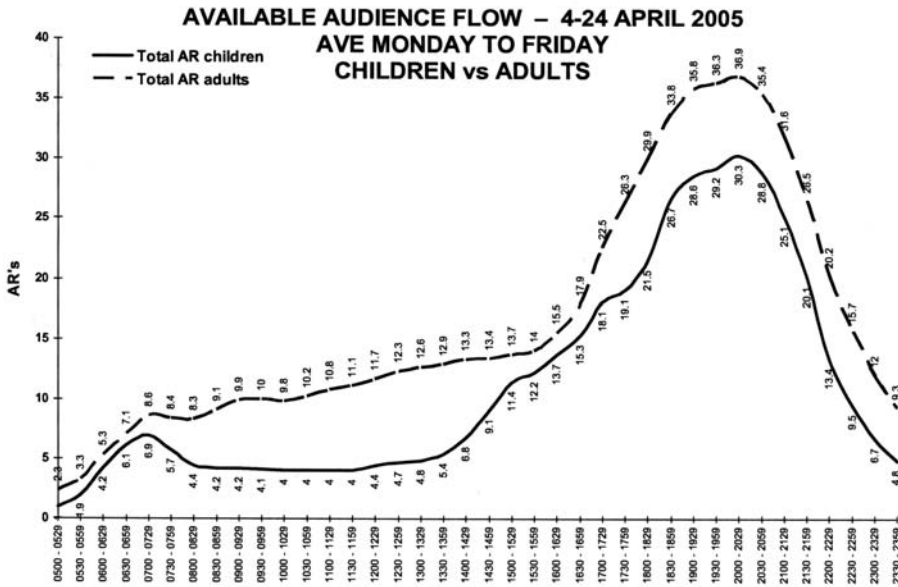
Graph 1



Source: TAMS

To contextualize the children’s information, this first graph illustrates the adult audience in South Africa in a typical weekday. The inverted U-shaped curve is evident – as found in most developed countries. This shape basically reflects the times during which viewers are available to view. The top of the curve represents some 5.46 million viewers. Three observations about the different channels: firstly, SABC 2 has the largest audience from 06:00 to about 08:30 (in the morning). Secondly, the strong performance of SABC 1 at about 18:00 in the afternoon and again at 20:00 reflects the power of the “The Bold and the Beautiful” and “Generations” soapiers. Lastly, most of the adult viewers go to bed after 22:00, with the total audience diminishing rapidly from 15.7ARs (2.32 million) to 9.3ARs (1.37 million) at midnight (which is still a large audience!). It must also be remembered that these audiences are shared between the six channels.

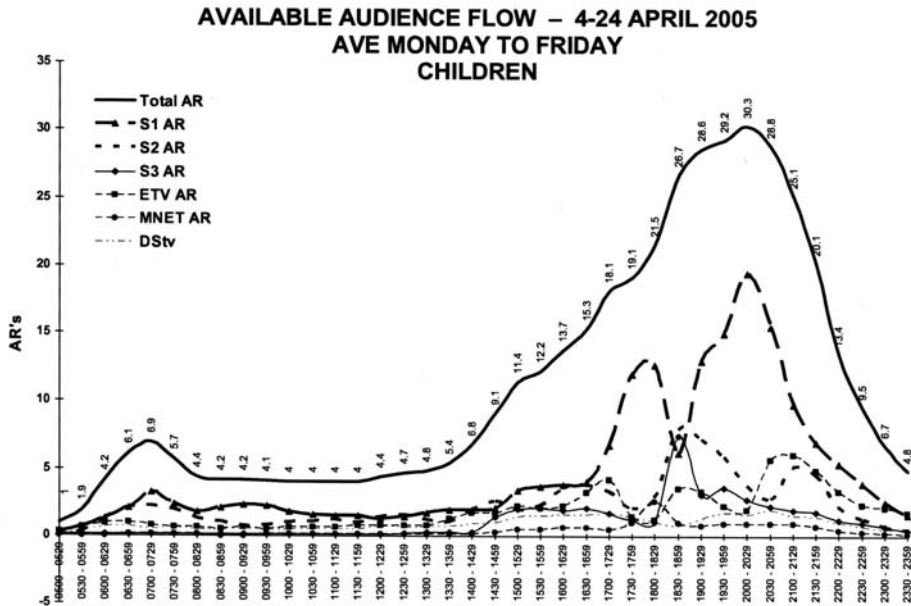
Graph 2



Source: TAMS

In this graph, the proportional audience of adults is compared to that of children. The first observation is the similarity of the general curves of children and adults. The perception that children watch only children’s programmes is therefore not true. A second observation is that the so-called “watershed time” of 21:00 is also a bit of a misnomer: at 21:00, the AR for children during weekdays is still 25.1 – a substantial 913 891 children between the ages of 7 and 15 watch television. Finally, it is difficult to understand how an estimated 145 640 (4ARs) children between the ages of 7 and 15 could be watching television at home in the mornings while they should be at school! (It might be that a proportion is in private schools with possible holidays, but all the state schools started their school term on 4 April 2005.)

Graph 3

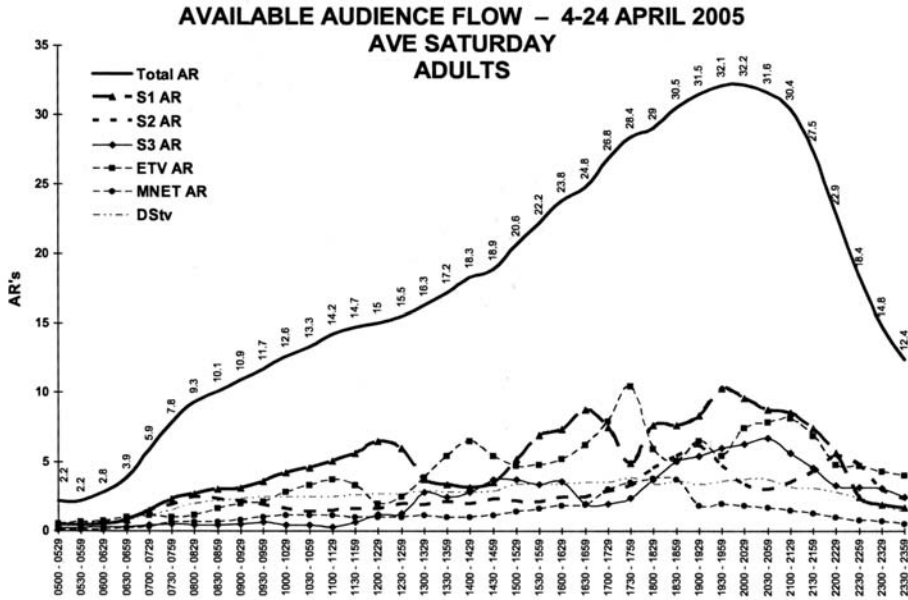


Source: TAMS

The third graph provides an overview of children’s audiences during the week. As mentioned earlier, the overall flow of the child audience is very similar to that of adults: a small peak in the mornings at 07:00, a drop when they are going to school, and then a build-up to a peak of 30.3ARs (approximately 1.1 million) between 20:00 and 20:30, and a steep decline as they finally go to bed. But, the data also suggests that at 22:00, some 487 894 (13.4ARs) children are still watching television during the week. In fact, at midnight, 172 800 children between the ages of 7 and 15 are in front of the television sets, and this during the school term - for most of them, at least.

In terms of children’s audiences, SABC 1 has the largest proportion right through the day, during the week. It is only between 18:30 and just after 19:00 that SABC 2 has a larger audience than any of the other channels. It is again a soapie, this time “7de Laan”, that pulls in the audience. The Battle of the Soapies is well illustrated in the early evening time slot, starting with “Days of our Lives” just after 17:00, and “Bold and Beautiful” on SABC 1 at 18:00, “Egoli”, the most popular programme on M-Net also at 18:00, and “Isidingo” on SABC 3 at 18:30 battling it out with “7de Laan” on SABC 2. “Generations” is in terms of audience size, both with adults and children, the most popular soapie in South Africa at present. For E.TV, the largest children’s audience is attracted between 20:30 and 21:30 with various programmes.

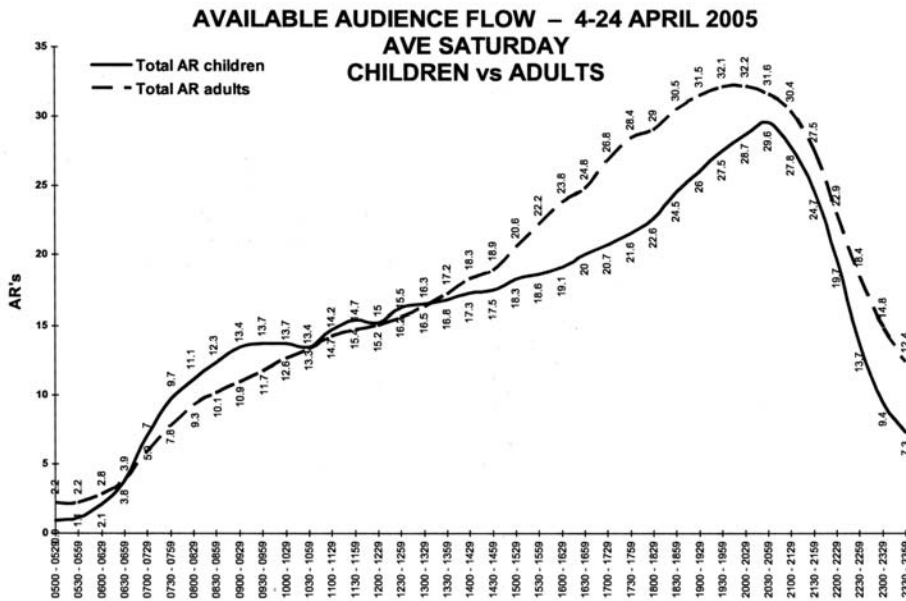
Graph 4



Source: TAMS

Moving to Saturday, the adult audience flow still resembles the “clock curve” of the week, except for the early morning start of the incline of the curve. Sports programmes tend to pull in the largest audiences, and it is interesting how the “International Velocity” sports programme together with “News Update” on E.TV at 17:30 had the largest adult audience on average for the three Saturdays included in the analysis. It is also noteworthy that the midnight audience on Saturdays is still about 1.83 million (12,4ARs).

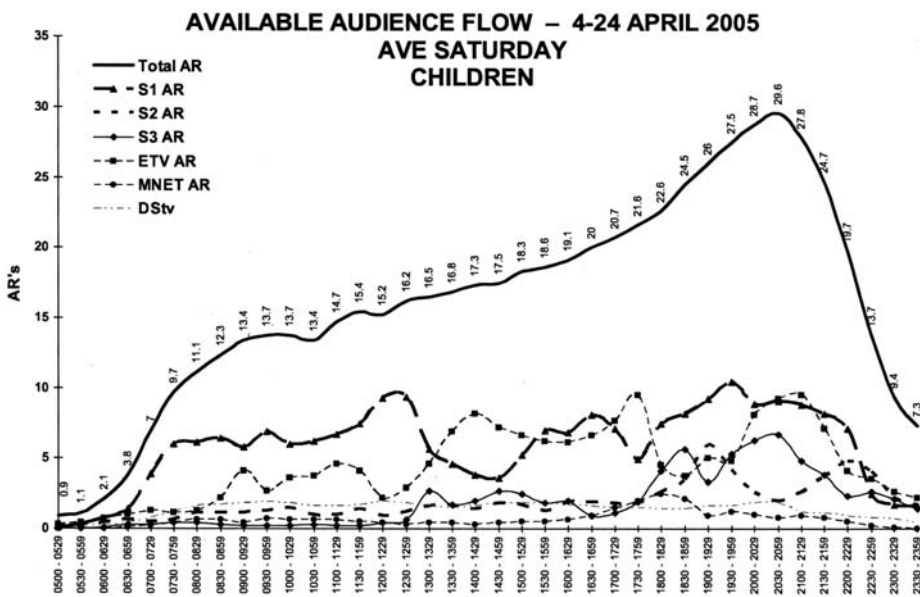
Graph 5



Source: TAMS

The comparison between child and adult audiences for Saturdays is interesting because of higher child proportions in the morning. This is because of the programming directed at children in this time (from about 07:00 to 10:00). The audience builds up to approximately 498 817 (13.7ARs) at roundabout 10:00.

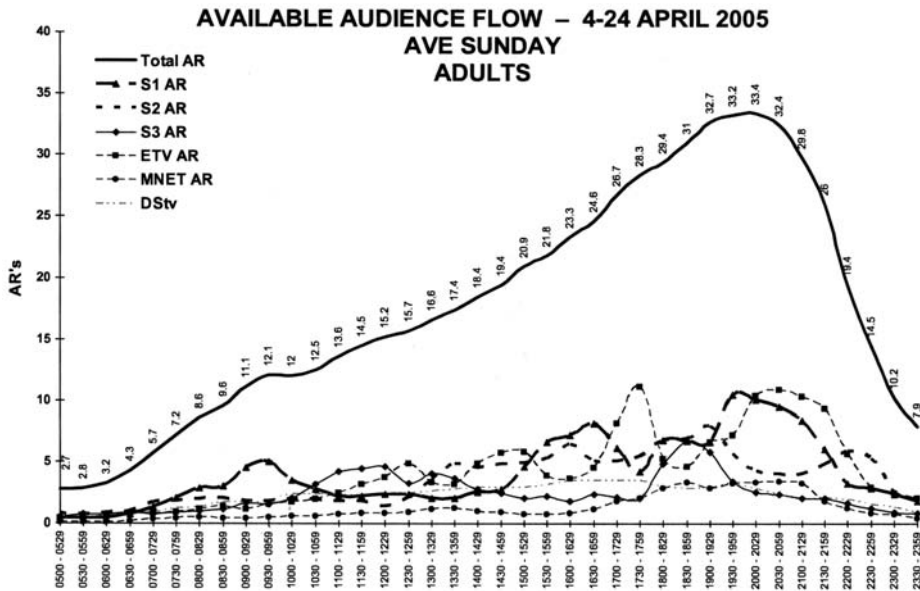
Graph 6



Source: TAMS

For children, as for adults, Saturdays are television-viewing days. The “clock curve” peaks again at about 20:00, but a large proportion of children watch television right through the day. Noteworthy is the battle between SABC 1 and E.TV for children’s audiences — as it is for adult audiences on a Saturday. Early in the morning, at about 07:00, the children’s programmes attract more than 65000 children. Thereafter, a rerun of the “Generations” soapie builds this audience to more than 313000 (8.6.ARs). The early afternoon movie on E.TV at about 14:00 moves the children’s audience to approximately 4.8ARs, winning the stakes for the biggest audience in that part of the afternoon. From about 15:30 to 17:00, it is a close race between E.TV and SABC 1 for the attention of the children, preferring the sport on SABC 1. At 17:30, the audience again moves to E.TV for the “International Velocity” sport programme. It is interesting that the 19:30 news on SABC 1 draws the largest single audience of all the channels in the evening.

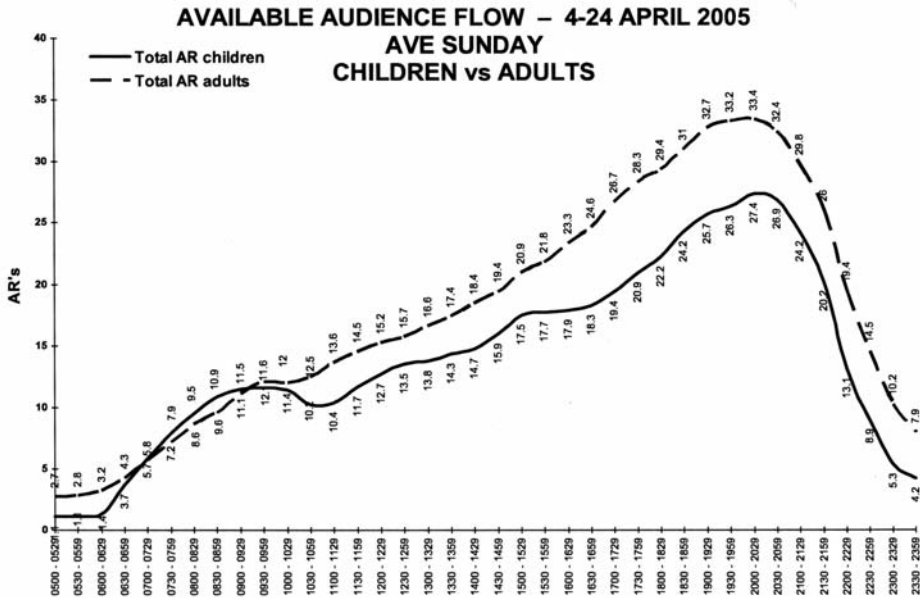
Graph 7



Source: TAMS

The adult audience flow for television in South Africa on a Sunday is remarkably similar to that of a Saturday, with the audience building up throughout the morning. Even the peak of 33.4ARs is very similar to that of Saturday (32.2ARs) — incidentally also both at 20:00 — which translates to approximately just under 5 million viewers. Comparing the various channels, two curves are notable: that of SABC 1 from approximately 09:00 to 10:00, and E.TV between 17:00 and 18:00. SABC 1 broadcasts a popular gospel programme in this time, and E.TV a sports programme called “International Raw” – a professional wrestling programme.

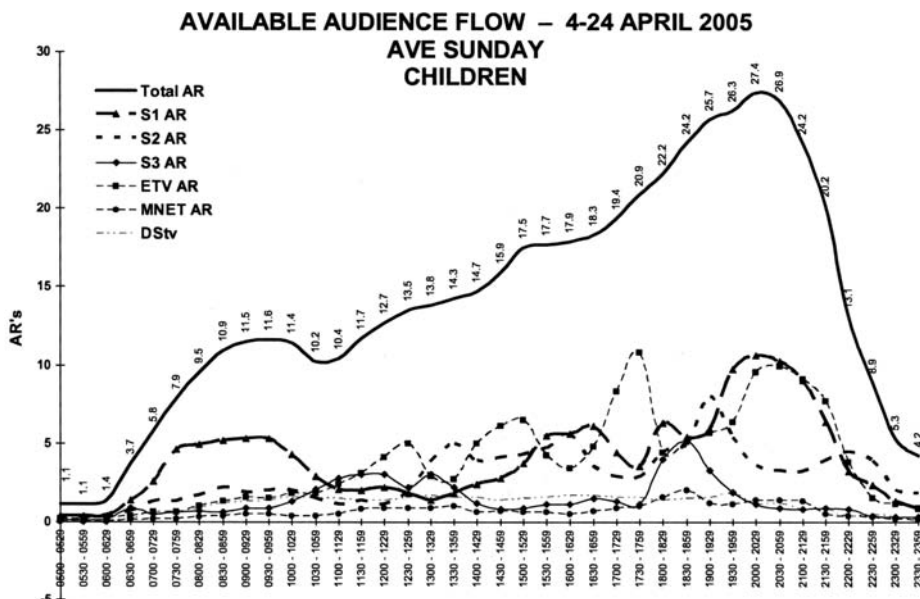
Graph 8



Source: TAMS

Comparing the child and adult audiences on a Sunday, the similarity is again apparent, except for a period in the mornings between about 07:30 and 09:30.

Graph 9



Source: TAMS

The largest child audiences on a Sunday seems to be attracted by youth programmes, gospel music, international wrestling, news and movies. SABC 1 provided the youth programmes, gospel music, news and movies, while E.TV provided the wrestling and movies. The youth programmes in the morning and the gospel music programme reach about 142 000 and 175 000 children between the ages of 7 and 15 on SABC 1. The wrestling reach about 466 000 (12.8ARs) and the movies on E.TV reach about 320 000 (8.8AR's), providing competition for SABC 1. The news on SABC 1's child audience is about 12 ARs (436 920). SABC 2 also attracts a fair amount of children on a Sunday, with the Sesotho/Setwana/Sepedi news attracting 60 204 (4.4ARs), "Fokus met Freek" attracting 192 973 (5.3ARs); the Afrikaans news attracting 229 383 (6.3ARs), and Gospel Time attracting 265 793 (7.3ARs) child viewers.

4. DISCUSSION

There are various trends that can be identified from the abovementioned children audiences:

- In the first place, it is interesting to note the similarity of viewing patterns between adults and children, with a few exceptions. Taking the viewing public (the audience) as a single entity in South Africa, the relatively small difference between adult and children viewing preferences can probably be ascribed to the large proportion of households with one television set, where the family is viewing together. A further factor refers to the sheer numbers of African language speakers in the audience. Lastly, the expansion of the television network into rural areas, where communal viewing is the rule rather than the exception, results in children and neighbours viewing together, and individual choices are not as easily made as in urban areas in homes with more than one television set.
- Secondly, the role of the soapie cannot be underestimated. It is clear that this genre of television programme is the most popular and sustainable in attracting both adult and child audiences. These are the "stories" that parents are so worried about. There is extended literature on why soapies are so popular, with both communication scholars and psychologists explaining the phenomenon (see for example Moores, 1995, Zillman & Vorderer, 2000, and Roberts, 2003). Some researchers mention man's need to understand and project himself into some of the characters (Noble, 1975, Van Vuuren, 1979). Others apply the so-called Uses and Gratification Approach to link certain needs to the selection of television programme (Blumler and Katz, 1974).
- Thirdly, the large numbers of children viewing after the so-called watershed time in the evenings, 21:00, are making it very difficult for all the role players: parents are concerned about the content to which their children are exposed, broadcasters feel that "stronger" programmes (that are pulling in the audience in a competitive environment) are under unnecessary scrutiny, and the legislator with its BCCSA arm finds it increasingly difficult to regulate the broadcasting environment.

What can therefore be done on a practical level to address the problem of excessive exposure to television? It must be remembered that in the South African context, at least for some children presently, but for most of them later on, the exposure to all the other new media will come.

In the context of the future, there are to my mind three areas where the action should be concentrated. These are the parents, the broadcasters/distributors/manufacturers of media content and the legislator (Van Vuuren, 2004b).

4.1 Parents

The data on child audiences suggests that in South Africa, a substantial portion of viewing occurs in a family situation. It is known that teenagers prefer to watch television alone. However, the younger children, the more vulnerable, are probably present in greater numbers with their parents, and this creates the opportunity for the parents to create a loving, intimate atmosphere around the television set. This situation of a caring, supportive climate could be a learning situation for the child to understand moral development in the context of “stories that anyone happens to make up” – to paraphrase Plato. Parents’ reactions to unacceptable material can be communicated to the child – even if it is only non-verbal behaviour. The possibility of suggesting guidelines on how to handle television viewing at home might include the following:

Parents could do the following:

- Assess the acceptability of the content that children are watching and if it is not acceptable, change the channel or switch off the television.
- When co-viewing with children, discuss the content with them. The context of violent scenes could be explained, and alternatives suggested.
- The process of acting and the unreality of the situation could be explained – especially to small children.
- Limit the amount of violence to which children are exposed – in terms of television, computer games, etc.
- Encourage the viewing of pro-social and educational programmes.
- Keep the child’s own room television free.
- Limit the time spent on television viewing to less than two hours per day.

(Van Vuuren and Kriel, 1996, American Academy of Paediatrics, 2001)

4.2 Broadcasting industry

Most broadcasters have internal mechanisms to select and monitor their programmes. The dilemma is not to “censor” programmes, as this is against the broadcasting codes of all broadcasters in South Africa. Some have published ethical codes and others have unwritten laws. M-Net has a

unique “parental control system” with which parents can programme levels of acceptability. A warning system, used by all broadcasters, also informs the parents of the programme’s level of acceptability. The watershed time (21:00) is in general use by all broadcasters.

4.3 Regulatory authority

In South Africa, the Independent Communications Authority (ICASA) regulates the electronic mass media, including radio, television and the new media. The licensing of all broadcasters is part of their mandate. With regard to the content of these media, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa manages complaints by the public about unacceptable material, but complaints usually occur only after a particular story has been broadcast.

The question is: how effective are these three elements in the orderly management of the content of the mass media? Is there an opportunity for communication between parents, the broadcasters and the regulatory authority to listen to each other and make decisions for an even more complex future media dispensation?

THE WAY FORWARD

Within the context of violence and crime in South Africa, the issue of what is shown on television is certainly not unimportant. Other contents such as gratuitous sex, blasphemy etc. are also issues with which the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa has to deal. Ultimately, it is the audience, and more specifically the child audience, that is the most important component in the circle of communication. Because of the reality of children’s viewing patterns as discussed in this paper, it is extremely difficult to “protect “ them completely. Moreover, the American example quoted in the beginning does not bring any comfort to those who are worried about their children, because the new technologies already exist.

Perhaps the approach should be, as Donald Roberts suggests, making media literacy skills an integral part of the socialization of all children (Roberts, 2003:17). This would entail wide-ranging media literacy programmes for schoolchildren. The approach should be to integrate parents, teachers and broadcasters in this effort – starting in pre-primary school.

The media can provide resources to facilitate media literacy training. They could provide material on how and why media operate, and how intelligent viewers should approach them (Roberts, 2003:18).

The so-called labelling of media content (currently only on television) should be expanded to all the other media: cellphones, video and computer games, and the Internet. This would help parents to make decisions about media content.

Finally, a more permanent communication forum where all the relevant parties: parents, educators, broadcasters and the regulatory authority — could meet regularly, should be established in South Africa.

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