

## **MOTHERS KNOW BEST: ANALYZING MATERNAL MEDIATION STRATEGIES FOR GUIDING CHILDREN'S MEDIA USE IN DAVAO CITY, PHILIPPINES**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the media mediation strategies employed by mothers in guiding their children's media consumption, focusing on how mothers' media literacy levels influence their practices. With the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing importance of digital engagement in children's lives, it is crucial to understand the strategies mothers use to protect and educate their children in this digital landscape. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. Ten mothers of children aged 6 to 12 years in Davao City, Philippines, participated in the study. The quantitative data was gathered using Renee Hobbs' Media Literacy Scale to assess mothers' media literacy, while qualitative insights were drawn from open-ended survey questions and follow-up interviews. The findings revealed six key themes in maternal mediation practices: proactive media management, interactive media education through parental dialogue, family bonding through media, discipline rooted in family values, prioritizing digital safety and privacy, and the influence of peer practices and virtual communities. The study found that higher media literacy among mothers positively influenced their ability to engage in more effective mediation strategies, emphasizing the importance of education, family values, and digital safety. These results underscore the role of mothers not only as supervisors but also as active mentors in their children's media consumption. This research highlights the need for continued support for mothers in developing media literacy to foster safer and more meaningful digital experiences for children.

**Keywords:** parental mediation theory, maternal mediation, media consumption, Davao City, media literacy

### **Introduction**

Parents have a crucial role in guiding and managing their children's media use, particularly during early childhood (Lee et al., 2022). As technology continues to advance in the digital era 4.0, parents' role in guiding their children is becoming increasingly vital. In this expanding digital environment, parents act as essential facilitators and companions for their children (Nababan et al., 2023). Parents significantly influence their children's media use because they spend a considerable amount of time with them and create the household environment related to media exposure. Specifically, factors such as parents' media habits, their attitudes toward media, and their parenting styles are identified as key determinants of how children engage with media (Lee et al., 2022).

While technology offers significant advantages for children's education and development, it also brings risks, including exposure to inappropriate content, unsafe online interactions, and digital insecurity. Thus, it's essential to recognize that parents are not merely supervisors; they also serve as mentors who play an active role in shaping a comprehensive understanding of technology for their children (Nababan et al., 2023).

Moreover, research has found that mothers are more consistently the primary decision maker pertaining to the infant (Moon et al., 2019). Additionally, mothers are more likely to engage in supervision compared to fathers (Nikken & Schols, 2015). A study revealed that children's media use is linked to their mothers' habits, with higher screen time in both being more common in children with behavioral issues (Poulain et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of understanding about the specific strategies mothers use to mediate their children's media habits and the factors that shape these strategies.

To address the gaps in understanding maternal mediation practices and their impact on children's media use, this study aimed to investigate specific aspects of how mothers guide their children in navigating the digital landscape. The research also assessed the level of media literacy among the

mothers to explore how it influences their mediation strategies. The following research questions were formulated to examine the strategies mothers use, the discussions they have with their children about media content, the socio-cultural factors that shape these practices, and how media literacy influences their approach. By answering these questions, the study aimed to provide a clearer and more comprehensive picture of maternal mediation in the context of children's media exposure.

## Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of media literacy among the mothers and how did it influence their mediation strategies?
2. What restrictive mediation strategies do mothers use to limit their children's media exposure?
3. How do mothers engage in discussions with their children about media content and its potential effects?
4. What motivates mothers to co-view media with their children, and what benefits do they see in this practice?
5. How do cultural factors influence mothers' media mediation practices?

## Limitations

This study had several limitations. The small sample size of 10 mothers may not fully capture diverse parenting experiences. It also excluded fathers or other caregivers who might play key roles in media mediation. Additionally, self-reported data could be affected by social desirability bias, with participants possibly portraying their practices more favorably.

## Theoretical Framework

Parental Mediation Theory suggests that parents employ various communication strategies to help manage and reduce the negative impacts of media on their children. Additionally, it posits that the interpersonal discussions about media between parents and children contribute to the socialization of children within society (Clark, 2011).

Over the years, various researchers have explored and described different types of mediation in a range of contexts.

1. *Active Mediation* occurs when parents provide safety information, discuss the dangers of excessive smartphone use, and explain safety concerns to help children recognize the potential risks and harms associated with unrestricted media use.
2. *Restrictive Mediation* is one of the most commonly used methods, along with active mediation, by many families. This approach involves setting limits on media consumption, such as restricting screen time, preventing unauthorized purchases, blocking access to inappropriate websites, and utilizing parental control apps designed to filter out unsuitable content.
3. *Co-viewing* refers to the practice where parents watch media alongside their children, typically on larger screens like televisions or computers, without criticizing their media usage. While co-viewing is feasible on larger devices, it is less practical on smaller gadgets like smartphones, which are primarily designed for individual use (Mathias & Singh, 2023).

## Methods

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the media literacy skills and the strategies for mediating the children's media consumption of 10 mothers with children aged 6 to 12 years old from Davao City, Philippines. Participants were selected based on the criteria of being mothers who had regular access to various media devices at home, including televisions, mobile devices, tablets, and computers.

For the quantitative part, the study employed descriptive statistics to analyze the survey results, specifically using the mean, mode, and standard deviation (SD) to summarize the mothers' responses to

Renee Hobbs' Media Literacy Scale. The mean provided an overview of the central tendency, indicating the average level of proficiency in each of the five categories of media literacy. The mode identified the most frequently occurring responses, shedding light on the common patterns of media literacy skills among the participants. The standard deviation measured the variability in the responses, highlighting whether the mothers' skills were consistent across the group or varied significantly in certain areas. These statistical tools allowed the study to effectively describe and interpret the mothers' media literacy levels, offering valuable insights into their abilities and potential areas for development.

Renee Hobbs' Media Literacy Scale (Hobbs, 2020) consists of five categories and 36 items designed to evaluate various aspects of media literacy:

1. *Access Skills* or the foundational abilities like listening and reading comprehension, as well as technical skills such as using a keyboard, mouse, and digital interfaces.
2. *Analysis Skills* or the ability to identify the author, purpose, and perspective of a message. At advanced levels, analysis incorporates understanding how power dynamics influence the circulation of information within economic, political, and social contexts.
3. *Evaluation Skills* or the ability to critically assess the credibility, quality, and bias of media messages, as well as recognize their underlying intentions and potential manipulations.
4. *Creation and Collaboration* or the ability to brainstorm, generate ideas, and work collaboratively to produce messages using diverse media, including language, images, sound, and digital formats such as curation and remixing. Skills in feedback integration and rhetorical strategy are crucial for crafting content that informs, persuades, or entertains across both online and offline contexts.
5. *Reflection and Action* or recognizing the power of media to maintain the status quo or instigate change. They include evaluating the potential risks and harms of media messages and understanding how values and life experiences influence media use and interpretation.

Meanwhile, data for the qualitative part were collected through open-ended questions administered via Google Forms, allowing mothers to express their thoughts and experiences regarding their mediation strategies in their children's media use. For some participants, follow-up questions were conducted via phone calls to clarify and expand on their responses, providing richer qualitative data for analysis.

Before participating, mothers were required to agree to a consent form, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their rights as participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with participants having the right to choose not to answer specific questions or withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. All information collected during the study was kept confidential, with responses anonymized to ensure that no identifying information was linked to the answers provided by participants. The data collected were used solely for research purposes and may be published in aggregate form, maintaining participant anonymity. Thematic analysis was then employed to interpret and analyze the data collected from the open-ended questions. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to systematically analyze data by identifying and reporting patterns within a given data set. This approach enables researchers to interpret the significance of these patterns and gain deeper insights into the subject matter (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Liebenberg et al., 2020; Xu & Zammit, 2020, as cited in Naeem et al., 2023, p. 2).

The study adopted the six steps in conducting a thematic analysis as identified by (Braun & Clarke, 2012). First, the study begins by familiarizing with the data through repeated reading and note-taking. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by identifying relevant features. Next, during the searching for themes phase, these codes were grouped into broader themes that highlighted important patterns. This was followed by reviewing potential themes, where the themes were refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. In the fifth phase, defining and naming themes, the essence of each theme was clearly articulated. Finally, in the last phase, which is producing the report, writing was integrated with analysis to effectively present study findings.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Quantitative Method Results**

Table 1 provides a summary of the survey results on media literacy skills among 10 mothers, with scores calculated for five categories. The purpose of the survey was to assess their media literacy levels

and understand how these influence their mediation strategies in guiding their children's media consumption.

The mothers in the *Access Skills* category scored very high, with a mean of 4.75, indicating they are proficient in foundational media-related skills such as reading comprehension and using digital tools. The median and mode of five (5) confirm that most mothers scored at the highest level in this area, with a low standard deviation (0.47), suggesting that most participants have similar levels of access skills.

*Analysis Skills* showed slightly lower scores compared to Access Skills, with a mean of 4.26. The median and mode of four (4) indicate that most mothers performed well, though there was some variation in individual scores. The standard deviation of 0.69 suggests more variability, meaning some mothers may find analyzing media messages more challenging than others.

*Evaluation Skills*, which involve assessing media messages for credibility, biases, and quality, received a mean of 4.16. The median and mode of four (4) suggest solid but not exceptional proficiency, with a standard deviation of 0.67 showing moderate variability in responses.

*Creation and Collaboration* had a mean of 4.23, indicating that while the mothers have solid skills in media creation and collaboration, there is room for improvement. The median and mode of four (4) confirm that most participants scored well, but with some variation. The standard deviation of 0.64 shows moderate variability, indicating that some mothers may find creating and collaborating on media messages easier than others.

*Reflection and Action* received the highest mean score of 4.47, suggesting that the mothers are relatively proficient in recognizing the ethical and societal implications of media. The median and mode of five (5) show that most mothers scored highly in this category, demonstrating strong reflective thinking and understanding of the role of media in societal change. The standard deviation of 0.64 shows some variability, but the overall trend indicates a higher level of proficiency.

**Table 1: Survey Results on Media Literacy Skills of Mothers**

<b>Media Literacy Skills</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Access Skills	4.75	5	5	0.47
Analysis Skills	4.26	4	4	0.69
Evaluation Skills	4.16	4	4	0.67
Creation and Collaboration	4.23	4	4	0.64
Reflection and Action	4.47	5	5	0.64

## Qualitative Method Results

Meanwhile, for the qualitative part, the analysis revealed six key themes that illustrated the strategies mothers employed in mediating their children's media consumption. These themes reflected the complexities of balancing control and guidance while fostering an environment conducive to safe media practices.

### *Proactive Media Management*

Mothers actively used strategies to manage their children's media exposure, finding a balance between freedom and limits to encourage safe media habits. They set clear rules about what types of media their children could watch and how long they could use devices. This approach helped create a safe environment for children to explore media while reducing potential risks. A mother said:

*When it comes to deciding what shows, games, or social media content are okay for my child, I always check the content first to ensure it's appropriate for his age. I also consider the personalities involved and their reputations. [Mother 5].*

Another mother said:

*“Using gadgets are only allowed during weekends and using them during weekdays are only allowed for school homework/assignments. [Mother 1].*

By taking these proactive steps, mothers not only ensured their children engaged with appropriate content but also taught them how to make responsible choices about their media use. A study by Poulain et al. (2019) emphasizes that parents frequently engage in active mediation, which includes discussing content with their children and providing context to what they watch or play. This strategy helps children understand media messages and make informed decisions about their consumption.

### *Interactive Media Education through Parental Dialogue*

Mothers engaged in ongoing conversations about media content, which helped educate their children about suitable media choices. One mother stated:

*Me and my husband let our child understand how social media works, the good and bad effects, when to believe or not believe on what he watches. We always remind him to not be hesitant if he has questions, confused or curious about. [Mother 4].*

These discussions encouraged children to think critically about what they watched and understand its effects. Another mother mentioned:

*Yes, conversing with my child about what content to watch is important because we live in a different world. I make him understand that my husband and I are doing this for his betterment. [Mother 2].*

Through co-viewing and talking about the media together, mothers invited their children to share their thoughts and feelings, fostering a deeper understanding of media messages. This open dialogue empowered children to make informed decisions and enhanced the communication between mothers and their children. Research indicates that technology can enhance parent-child interactions, particularly when parents are involved in their children's media use. Further, monitored technology use is not necessarily viewed by children as a means of parental intrusion but as part of expected parental monitoring (Patrikakou, 2016).

### *Family Bonding through Media*

Co-viewing media became a way for families to bond and connect. By watching media together, mothers created opportunities to discuss the content and guide their children in understanding it. One mother said:

*We stream movies during weekends. It's my way of giving them time and break from school. [Mother 7].*

Another mother added:

*Whenever I have some free time, I would usually join him while he watches something on the phone or TV, and he would start describing what the show means, or sometimes he would cover my eyes and start feeling awkward whenever I would react. [Mother 9].*

These shared experiences not only strengthened family relationships but also provided a platform for mothers to address any questions or concerns their children had. The enjoyment of media together helped families connect on a deeper level and encouraged a supportive environment where children felt comfortable sharing their opinions. In a study by Rasmussen (2020), family bonding, or connectedness,

is positively influenced when families engage in shared media activities, such as watching movies or playing video games together. This shared experience fosters communication and strengthens familial ties, ultimately promoting emotional health and resilience within the family unit.

### *Discipline Rooted in Family Values*

Mothers stressed the importance of instilling good values in their children's media consumption. They aimed to ensure that what their children watched aligned with the family's beliefs and morals. One mother said:

*I make sure that they don't watch videos that are against our religious belief like videos about evil, or monsters. I also make sure that they are not exposed to videos about violence. [Mother 6].*

This was also supported by another mother:

*I generally don't rely on advice from other parents, schools, or community expectations. What matters most to me is that our approach aligns with our family values and is appropriate for our generation. I believe in exposing my child to the realities of the world but only to the extent that he can process mentally based on his age. [Mother 5].*

By discussing the values related to different media, mothers helped their children develop a strong sense of right and wrong. This focus on family values encouraged children to think critically about their media choices and reinforced the idea that their viewing habits should reflect their family's principles. A study by Paulus et al. (2024) emphasizes that family factors, such as maternal media usage and education levels, are strongly associated with young children's digital media use. Parents who consume substantial media themselves tend to raise children who are similarly exposed to media, reinforcing the idea that parental habits directly shape children's media experiences.

### *Prioritizing Digital Safety and Privacy*

Mothers focused on teaching their children about online safety and privacy to protect them from cyberbullying and harmful content. They understood the importance of guiding their children through the digital world and emphasized the need to safeguard their online identities. One mother mentioned:

*Safety is also a top priority for us, so I take steps to protect them from harmful content, mean comments, and those creepy people you hear about online. [Mother 5].*

Another mother added:

*I also noticed that there are random chats in Roblox from other gamers and the chat asked my daughter's (our) home address. I told her not to give any personal information especially our address because it is too dangerous and we don't know if that gamer is real or just pretending. [Mother 3].*

By prioritizing digital safety, mothers empowered their children to make safe choices while navigating the increasingly complex online environment. A report by the American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes that active parental involvement in children's online activities can significantly reduce risks associated with internet use. Parents who engage in discussions about online safety empower their children to make informed decisions, reducing the likelihood of them becoming victims of cyberbullying or sharing personal information with strangers (Kiteworks, 2024).

### *Peer Practices and Virtual Communities*

Engaging with community resources and connecting with other parents improved mothers' media mediation practices. These interactions allowed mothers to share experiences, seek advice, and discover educational programs that aligned with their family's values and needs. By participating in virtual communities, mothers accessed a wealth of information and support, which helped them enhance their understanding of media issues. One mother said:

*I'm grateful for the support of other parents, school resources, and community expectations that help me stay informed about online safety and digital citizenship. While it's a challenge to find the right balance, I'm constantly seeking guidance and learning from others to ensure my kids are safe and responsible digital citizens. [Mother 10].*

Another mother added,

*I have joined several Facebook pages about moms sharing ideas about their kids to one another and I usually check what are the best educational programs that I can let my children watch. [Mother 6].*

This collaboration fostered a sense of shared responsibility among parents, empowering them to navigate the challenges of media consumption together. Ultimately, these peer practices contributed to more effective media management in their households. A study by Zhao and Shi (2022) says that a strong sense of virtual community significantly motivates members to participate actively and share knowledge. This sense of community can lead to increased collaboration and support.

### **Conclusion**

This study identified six key themes that describe the strategies mothers used to manage their children's media consumption: Proactive Media Management, Interactive Media Education through Parental Dialogue, Family Bonding through Media, Discipline Rooted in Family Values, Prioritizing Digital Safety and Privacy, and Peer Practices and Virtual Communities. These themes illustrate how mothers balance control and guidance while fostering safe and responsible media habits for their children.

Mothers in this study demonstrated strong proactive media management by setting clear boundaries and guidelines to control media exposure. These strategies not only create a secure environment but also help children develop critical thinking skills. The high scores in Access Skills among mothers reflect their proficiency in using digital tools to monitor and manage media consumption effectively. Engaging in interactive media education through parental dialogue further supports children's understanding of media content. These discussions enable mothers to engage their children in critical thinking, an aspect echoed in the mothers' relatively high scores in Reflective Thinking. By encouraging awareness of media's societal impact, mothers foster a deeper understanding of content beyond its surface level.

Family bonding through media consumption serves as both an opportunity for connection and a chance for mothers to guide their children in interpreting media content. This reflects the importance of nurturing relationships while teaching responsible media use, which aligns with the mothers' strong access and reflective thinking skills. However, their slightly lower scores in Analysis, Evaluation, and Creation/Collaboration suggest that while they are competent in guiding their children's media consumption, they may benefit from further development in critical media evaluation, content creation, and collaboration skills.

Additionally, discipline rooted in family values and prioritizing digital safety and privacy reflect mothers' awareness of the potential risks associated with digital media. These practices mirror the growing importance of teaching children about online safety, which is consistent with the mothers' proficiency in Access Skills and their capacity to evaluate the ethical and societal implications of media. The mothers' scores indicate a strong foundation in digital safety, but their lower scores in Analysis and

Evaluation suggest that there may be room for improvement in their ability to critically assess the media their children consume.

Finally, peer practices and virtual communities highlight the value of collaborative efforts among parents to share experiences and strategies, fostering a more informed and effective mediation process. This reflects an awareness that media literacy is a shared responsibility, which aligns with the mothers' generally high levels of media literacy, particularly in areas of access and reflection.

In summary, the mothers in this study demonstrated solid media literacy, with strengths in access and reflective thinking, alongside a need for further development in media analysis, evaluation, and content creation. Their media literacy skills directly influenced their mediation strategies, as they balanced control, guidance, and empowerment to promote responsible media consumption for their children.

## Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made for the improvement of this study and future research on maternal media mediation:

1. **Expand Participant Diversity:** Include a broader range of socio-economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds to explore different mediation strategies.
2. **Fathers and Other Caregivers:** Explore the role of fathers and other caregivers in media mediation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of parenting dynamics.
3. **Children's Perspectives:** Include children's views on their mothers' mediation strategies to understand their effectiveness from the child's point of view.
4. **Impact on Children:** Investigate how mothers' mediation strategies affect children's media literacy and behavior over time.
5. **Platform-Specific Strategies:** Examine how mothers adjust their mediation strategies to different digital platforms like social media and gaming.
6. **Media Literacy Training:** Investigate the impact of structured media literacy programs for parents to improve skills in media analysis, evaluation, and content creation.

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