



A Countermeasure Research on Guiding the Media Behaviors of the Left-Behind Children in Rural Areas

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Abstract

This paper mainly applies the relevant knowledge of communication science and sociology, uses the methods of combining questionnaires and interviews, conducts field surveys and interviews with the left-behind children in Kai County and Yunyang County in Chongqing City, masters the basic information that children contact televisions, phones, books and other media behaviors, explores the impacts of these media on the left-behind children in rural areas, and on this basis explores the feasible programs to guide the left-behind children’s media behaviors in different levels.

Key words: Left-behind children; Media exposure; Guiding countermeasure; Media quality;

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1. RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 Research Object

Referring to the family type of the left-behind children in rural areas of *China’s Sixth Census Data in 2010*, this research takes the generalized definition of “left-behind

children”, namely the children whose both parents migrate for work or only one parent migrates for work and are thus left behind at home.

In order to ensure the representativeness of the sample, this research uses a phased cluster sampling method. Specifically, the objects are classified into two levels of junior high school and senior high school, and samples are drawn proportionally but randomly from classes with a cluster sampling method. The randomly selected samples include both left-behind children and non-left-behind children in order to facilitate comparison. Based on the above, the research finalizes 330 people as the effective samples from various high schools in Kai County and Yunyang County in Chongqing City. Among them, 163 are boys, accounting for 49.6%, 167 are girls, accounting for 50.6%. Among all sample of 281 are left-behind children, accounting for 85.2% of the total samples. Among the 281 left-behind children, 143 are boys, accounting for 51%, 158 are girls, accounting for 49%. The sex ratio is roughly flat.

1.2 Research Content

This research classifies the relevant problems concerning left-behind children’s media exposure into six sections, so that the research can not only ensure the basic scientific validity of samples but also ensure the comprehensive diverge and connection of the problems. The six sections are: Firstly, basic situation of the left-behind children. Secondly, basic environment of the left-behind children’s media contact behaviors. Thirdly, left-behind children’s television contact behaviors. Fourthly, left-behind children’s cell phone contact and usage. Fifthly, left-behind children’s books reading situation. Sixthly, left-behind children’s social interaction situation.

1.3 Research Method

This research is mainly based on questionnaires and supplemented by individual interviews and literature, and on the basis of statistical analysis of questionnaire data and summary on individual interviews and literature, uses

relevant theories of communication science and sociology to conduct analysis.

This research uses the questionnaire of *Left-behind Children's Media Contact Behavior Questionnaire* and conducts individual interviews on the basis. In the data analysis phase, uses SPSS19.0 software to conduct descriptive analysis on the data, summarizes the current media contact behaviors of left-behind children in rural areas, classifies the sample data, observes the media impacts onto the socialization process, physical and mental development of the left-behind children in rural areas, and uses chi-square test to conclude the overall significant difference.

2. MEDIA CONTACT BEHAVIOR OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN

2.1 Basic Situation of the Left-Behind Children

Judging from the parents' situation, the households where both parents migrate for work account for 45.5% of the investigation objects. The households where only the father works outside account for 34.2%, and those where only the mother works outside are 5.5%. According to Lacan's theory, either the father's or mother's absence will cause the child's psychological desire a, which is forever a lost object, an impossible object, and is a deprived phallus. This is closely related with the children's purpose to select and use media. They always try to find a replacement from a possible environment to compensate for this loss.

2.2 TV Contact Behavior of the Left-Behind Children

That the left-behind children are exposed to television is the most common. In 330 samples, 95.8% of children regularly watch TV. The research finds that there is no significant difference on TV watching time frame between the left-behind children and non-left-behind children, and also no significant difference in terms of watching length.

The favorite television program type of the left-behind children are as follows: TV show, movie, talent entertainment, animation and performances. These five types of programs are all fantasy type of programs. As previously mentioned, because of parents' absence, the left-behind children have already had a desire in the heart. Therefore, the left-behind children cannot find other things to make up for this regret in real life, or any material comfort or other spiritual encouragement, so they can only focus on other media. Television media with its unique qualities conveys a lot of things which they lack in the reality, especially the fantasy type of programs allow them to build a world of their own.

2.3 Mobile Phone Contact Behavior of the Left-Behind Children

With the popularity of smart phones, opening-up of minds as well as the development of network, mobile phone

possession rate of children is increasing. In this survey, the ratio of students who have a mobile phone is 54.5%. In the group of left-behind children, the proportion is higher, reaching 64.3%. This shows that the left-behind children contact mobile phone more often.

In the using content of mobile phone, the left-behind children are mainly likely to use mobile phone to play games (30.0%), search information (26.2%), contact friends and students (15.6%). Compared to the fantasy nature of the television program, the left-behind children are more active in using mobile phones. In addition to a high percentage of playing games, searching information has become the second target for the left-behind children to use mobile phone, which has an important role in promoting their recognition to media. As a communication tool, mobile phone is used more frequently by the left-behind children to contact classmates and friends, rather than their parents, from which we can interpret the left-behind children's attention for the peer group.

2.4 Reading of the Left-Behind Children

The role of reading cannot be underestimated in children's growing process. Caring between the lines and warmth of beautiful pictures make the children temporarily forget the sadness and loneliness of departing from their parents, thus the children can feel the impacts of reading subtly, and will not become a problem because of the lack of parental care.

Because rural educational facilities are relatively backward, the convenience of after-school reading is lower than the towns. The proportion of all children who regard reading books is "very convenient" is low, which is 13.9% in the left-behind children and 12.2% in non-left-behind children. Most of the children say that reading is just moderately convenient. For reading location, the children usually read at home, accounting for 61.4%, followed by in school (18.9%) and the bookstore (17.5%). Due to the backwardness of public facilities in rural areas and imperfection of library construction, many children can only read at home.

2.5 Social Interactions of the Left-Behind Children

The socialization process of a child can be reflected in his social contacts, which is the combined result of accessing to and using the media. The survey finds that, the left-behind children who like companions account for the majority, with a ratio of 87.9%. In interpersonal relationships among the left-behind children, the peer group is the close object of their everyday communication. Peer groups can result in a higher psychological recognition and form a unique subculture. Because of the randomness, communication with the peer group is an irreplaceable channel to meet social, security and dignity needs of the left-behind children, and the process is relatively more natural. Another 8.9% of the left-behind children tend to invite companions to watch TV or play

mobile phones together. Although televisions, mobile phones and other mass media begin to grow with children, the research finds that these media can influence habits and socialization process of the left-behind children, and these effects are not unilaterally harmful.

3. COUNTERMEASURE OF GUIDING THE MEDIA CONTACT BEHAVIORS OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN

According to the relevant theory of foreign media comprehensive education, this research investigates and analyzes the media exposure of left-behind children from the four aspects of media using ability, media knowledge, media critical ability and media creative ability. By sorting out data, the countermeasures and suggestions regarding media contact behaviors of the left-behind children are mainly concluded in the following aspects:

3.1 Social Level: Genuine Empowerment

Empowerment is a concept of political science and sociology as well as a concept of communication. Canadian International Development Agency defines “empowerment” as, “Empowerment means that people can control their own lives, make their life agenda, acquire skills, build confidence, solve problems and be self-supporting. It is not only a collective, social and political process, but also a personal process. It is not just a process, but also a result. “From this definition it can be found that the core meaning of empowerment is “to have power”.

Based on United Nation’s *Convention on the Rights of Children*, Bu Wei, a Chinese scholar of media and children’s rights explains that children should enjoy the rights of accessing to media, knowing useful information, publicizing, resting and entertaining. Therefore, from the legal perspective, left-behind children have already enjoyed many rights associated with the media. Thus, from the whole social perspective, media rights to the left-behind children should be empowered in good faith. The new concept of “beyond protectionism” proposed by the British media quality educational expert David Buchingham has much to recommend: get rid of the passive, negative, condescending children protection awareness, keenly be aware of the time characteristics of the children protection issue in virtual world, provide multi-level, all-round conditions and opportunities for children protection and development, and focus on thinking about how to help children cope with, identify and use the virtual world. Only with a complete empowerment, an inclusive protection of children’s media rights can be achieved, such as enact relevant laws and regulations, pay attention to the popularity of the media, construct public facilities, especially rural libraries and so on. Simply isolating media violence from left-behind

children will increase the media quality gap between left-behind children and non-left-behind children. In order to avoid this result, we must change “indoctrination style” to “empowerment style”, and adopt a participatory learning method.

Only when the left-behind children fully enjoy the media rights, they will take the initiative to participate. In active participation, left-behind children’s ability to use the media, recognize, judge and create can be effectively improved. For the left-behind children in rural areas, the fastest and most healthy way to acquire media power is in the library. Scholar Yang Jing and Huang Jinghua once proposed to build a three stage support system to enhance the media quality of the left-behind children in western rural areas. In addition to public libraries and school libraries, they also actively promote the construction of community libraries. Rural libraries, car libraries, left-behind children’s activity rooms can ensure the left-behind children’s accessing to media from the base.

3.2 Guardian Level: Warm Concern

Gunter and Mcaleer (1997) believe that, most US studies have confirmed that parents’ clear requirement, limitation on watching time length and varying degrees of intervention help children understand the TV, and make them distinguish reality from fiction. From this perspective, the left-behind children need more warm concern. Due to a long-term absence of parental care, the left-behind children tend to have a worship or excessive involvement in the pseudo environment of media, so a proper guidance is particularly necessary. The guardians and parents can give a proper guidance only on the basis of a certain media quality, so those parents working in big cities should absorb the media knowledge from the surroundings; the actual guardians need to pay attention to the specific media contact behaviors of the children, and nip the bad habits which may occur in the bud. In addition, the family needs to create a better media atmosphere for children to enhance media quality. This does not require much time, the guardians only need to stop what’s in the hands and check the content when the children start watching TV or playing mobile phones, and make appropriate exchanges.

3.3 School Level: Integrated Education

Referring to the successful experience of the international media education, integrating media quality education into the school curriculum is an important step in the development of China’s media quality education. The first practitioner of this method is Communication University of China which has conducted media quality courses to the Black Sesame Alley Primary School.

At this stage there is no specific curriculum and teacher for media quality education in China. The majority of media quality education is overlapped inside the main subjects. This can also enhance students’ media quality,

because the key of media quality is to take media issues as the entry, namely to use media and information to help students learn basic skills, such as critical thinking, skills to identify media bias and implied assessment, etc..

In addition to integrating media quality education into the daily curriculum, schools can establish three stage libraries with government supports and dispatch officers for guidance, such as teach media knowledge to guardians, build reading organizations to regulate reading, go down maintain community libraries and so on.

3.4 Peer Group Level: Pure Interaction

The peer group plays an important role in children's socialization process. In this group, they try to determine their own positions, learn social norms and improve their cognitive abilities, which lay a foundation for the smooth realization of their socialization in the future. In the survey, we find that left-behind children's media use behaviors are influenced more by their peers than by guardians.

Tarde's imitation law and Bandura's social learning theory provide a perspective for understanding the interactions among peers. They both regard observation and imitation as important way and basic course for individual's socialization. "Two people with different personalities contact just as two different chemicals are put together; when there is a certain reaction, both sides will change." Under the impacts of external conditions, the internals among the peer group should also form an atmosphere of equality and mutual assistance to help each other to improve media quality. Their perceptions of each other will gradually form an evaluation to an individual, which will strengthen left-behind children's recognition, emotion and attitude toward society. The peer group's maintenance of a positive innocent interaction without other purposes fills the deficiency of emotional exchanges with the guardians, and to a certain extent also realizes the interactions of media quality in details, such as the news exchanges; besides, peers' interpersonal communication will produce their "little secrets", these little secrets are the performances of children's purity, which are needed by media creation of media quality. Because "electronic media is totally impossible to keep any 'secret', but if there is no such a thing as 'secret', childhood will certainly not exist."

3.5 Media Level: Professional Care

When the society, schools, families are actively looking for methods to help left-behind children enhance their media quality, as the main object, media should also seek a solution from itself. The existence of TV and mobile phones has no fault and should not be demonized. The role of this new communication technology in popularizing culture is self-evident, and it reduces the threshold for the media to transmit culture as the tool. Therefore, than regard TV and phones as the scourge

leading to disappear of childhood, we would make use of these media correctly.

Firstly, audiences should be classified carefully. Moreover, according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development stage, children of different ages have a big difference in viewing demand, viewing habit and acceptance psychology. Therefore, designing TV programs, mobile phone contents, communication forms and make arrangements based on the characteristics of children's age will be able to enhance the effectiveness of disseminating media information. In terms of television, audience classification has been implemented in children's channel, such as Hunan golden eagle cartoon channel. In terms of mobile phone, the society, schools and parents should make good use of new media to improve children's media quality. For example, there are many microblogs and WeChat public numbers which are proper to improve children's media quality, such as "Headmaster's Class", which mainly transfer educational methods, and push child rearing skills and little stories irregularly.

Secondly, in terms of content, there is a long-term habit of "enlightenment first" in China's children culture, which usually tries to transfer knowledge, thoughts and consciences by a program or a story, so children will gradually lose interests to these contents. A view of "edutainment" has risen in the West, which consists of education and entertainment, like the idiom of "educate through lively activities" in China, where the "fun" is the most important, and "learning" and "education" are just byproducts. Children have been left behind because their parents are not around, their hearts have been lonely and long repressed, and so we cannot simply preach but make them enhance media quality in happiness, only in this way the effectiveness can be improved.

Additionally, multi-channel transmission should be implemented. We now live in a "super media environment", a full-media age, wherein the importance of the channel should not be overlooked. Shanghai Haha Children's Channel is a professional children's channel which has been established early in China, and achieves significant development both in terms of channel visibility and brand awareness. This means that its influences to children have also been expanded. Meanwhile, with the development of science and technology, reading of traditional books can also be integrated into electronic media, such as producing e-books, or putting the electronic version of a book into an interactive format, which is convenient, novel, easily transmitted and suitable to spread out.

Finally, pay attention to media people's own moral qualities. In the mass media activities, in order to gain more profits, values and living spaces, media information producers and mass media operators' professional consciousness and morality as the "gatekeeper" gradually decay. They hover between morality and laws, striving

to find legal loopholes. However, legal supervision and management to the new media and new things are often delayed, in which case legal regulation is often in the absence. If there is a problem on the “gatekeeper”, the contents, platforms, channels will be contaminated.

CONCLUSION

The survey finds that there is a relatively optimistic attitude on the left-behind children’s use of televisions and mobile phones, rather than the significant negative bias as some literature hold. First of all, left-behind children are not passive, but active in the mass media communication process. Their choice on the media content is also in line with the theory of “use and satisfaction”. Secondly, left-behind children have a demand for the media, but due to lack of social concerns, insufficient compensation from schools and families and weak educational foundation with the peer group, their attitudes towards the media change from dependence into worship. Therefore, in the great background of gradual integration of the traditional

media and new media, a variety of multi-channel media is the best way to improve the media quality of left-behind children.

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