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## Parental Mediation Strategies in Mitigating the Effects of Media Violence on Children

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**ABSTRACT:** Since the advent of electronic media, particularly the Internet, media have surrounded children and adolescents and, thus, have become an essential part of their lives. Media provide children and adolescents with substantial opportunities to obtain a large amount of information and communicate with other individuals, thereby promoting their social and emotional development (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Moreno & Kolb, 2012). According to socialization theory (Maccoby, 2007), parents—the primary agents of children’s socialization—play crucial roles in the process through which children acquire and develop social attitudes and behaviors. They are also responsible for supervising their children’s media use to balance the opportunities and risks that media pose (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nathanson, Eveland, Park, & Paul, 2002). In communication research, scholars use the term parental mediation to describe the interactions between parents and children in regard to media use (Lee & Chae, 2012). Many scholars have defined parental mediation as strategies that parents adopt to mitigate against the negative effects of media on children and have examined the effectiveness of these strategies (e.g., Atkin, Greenberg, & Baldwin, 1991; Nathanson, 1999; Valkenburg, Krccmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999; Warren, 2001). However, few scholars have explored the effects of parental mediation on enhancing media benefits (e.g., Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008; McMillan & Morrison, 2006).

**KEYWORDS**-parent, mitigation, media, violence, children, mediation

### INTRODUCTION

The current media-rich environment may leave young individuals vulnerable to a larger number of media-related risks than in the past. Children and adolescents have been exposed to inappropriate content, undesirable contacts, and cyberbullying, which threaten their physical and psychological health (Livingstone, 2003; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). Numerous studies have explored how parents regulate their children’s media use to protect them from media-related risks and have examined whether parents’ strategies successfully reduce these risks and decrease children’s media use (Atkin et al., 1991; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Lee & Chae, 2012; Lwin, Stanaland, & Miyazaki, 2008; Shin & Kang, 2012; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren, 2001). However, this research has yielded mixed results. For example, Nathanson (1999), Lee and Chae (2012), and Lwin et al. (2008) reported that parental restrictive mediation reduces children’s exposure to media-related risks, whereas Shin and her colleagues (Shin & Ismail, 2013; Shin & Kang, 2012) indicated that parental restrictive mediation was positively associated with online risks. Thus, the entire range of empirical evidence should be systematically analyzed to understand the effectiveness of various parental mediation strategies on reducing harm from media and to identify the potential reasons for the mixed findings.

This study aims to systematically analyze the effects of various parental mediation strategies on reducing children’s media use and media-related risks as well as to examine the magnitude of the effects of various parental mediation strategies across 54 empirical studies. Furthermore, four potential moderators—age, risk type, medium, and



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culture—are selected and analyzed to explain the variance between the directionality or magnitude of the effects of parental mediation strategies across studies.[1,2,3]

## Parental Mediation of Children's Media Use

Since the proliferation of television and the Internet, children have been exposed to various media risks, including inappropriate content and undesirable contacts (Livingstone et al., 2012). Parents have engaged in various mediation strategies to support their children in becoming competent media users to maximize the opportunities and minimize the risks posed by media. Scholars have investigated how parents influence their children's adoption of new media technologies (e.g., McMillan & Morrison, 2006) and enhance their children's learning outcomes after they view educational programs (e.g., Kirkorian et al., 2008). However, the majority of parental mediation research has focused on how parents help their children avoid potential harm from media use. Many studies have explored how parental mediation affects the amount of time children spend on a certain medium (Desmond, Hirsch, Singer, & Singer, 1987; Kalmus, Blinka, & Ólafsson, 2013; Lee & Chae, 2012; Lin & Atkin, 1989; Vandewater, Park, Huang, & Wartella, 2005) or how different mediation strategies affect children's exposure to various media-related risks (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Lee & Chae, 2012; Lwin et al., 2008; Shin & Kang, 2012; Valkenburg et al., 1999). The current meta-analysis follows this harm reduction approach to examine the effectiveness of parental mediation strategies.

The theoretical framework of parental mediation is rooted in media effects and information processing theories, as well as interpersonal communication theories, and it explains how interpersonal communication between parents and children reduces the negative effects of media on children (Clark, 2011; Shin & Ismail, 2013). Based on different types of interpersonal interactions between parents and children, three broad strategies of parental mediation have been identified in the contexts of television viewing and Internet usage, that is, active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-using. Therefore, this meta-analysis explores the extent to which these three different parental mediation strategies influence the amount of media use and the incidence of media-related risks.

Active mediation, also referred to as instructive mediation, refers to parents' positive engagement with their children to discuss and explain media content and to talk to or guide them regarding appropriate media use (Nathanson, 2001b; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Valkenburg, Piotrowski, Hermanns, & Leeuw, 2013). Parent-child discussions on television content have been shown to help children cultivate a discriminating and critical stance toward media (Nathanson, 1999; Singer & Singer, 1986), which enhances the content that the children learn from media (Desmond, Singer, Singer, Calam, & Colimore, 1985; Messaris & Sarett, 1981), changes their attitudes toward media pornography and violence (Corder-Bolz, & O'Bryant, 1978; Rasmussen, Ortiz, & White, 2013), and lowers the levels of television-induced aggression (Nathanson, 1999). In more recent years, an increasing number of studies have been conducted to examine how parental mediation influences children's Internet use. These studies have indicated that active mediation is effective in decreasing the length of Internet use (Sasson & Mesch, 2013) and the likelihood of being engaged in online risks, such as contact risks (Shin & Ismail, 2013), privacy disclosure (Lwin et al., 2008), and cyberbullying (Chang et al., 2013). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), when parental mediation is active, children typically feel that their parents respect their perspectives and support their autonomy, which increases their sense of self-determination and fosters moral internalization. As a result, children tend to obey parental guidance and engage less in antisocial behavior (Grusec & Davidov, 2007; Valkenburg, Piotrowski, Hermanns, & de Leeuw, 2013). Based on these considerations, active mediation is negatively associated with both the amount of media use and the incidence of media-related risks. Restrictive mediation, also referred to as rule-making, refers to parental efforts to set rules to limit the time that their children



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are allowed to engage with media as well as restrict the content that their children are exposed to (Atkin et al., 1991; Lwin et al., 2008; Nathanson, 2001b; Valkenburg et al., 2013). For example, to regulate their children's Internet use, many parents have used parental filters or monitoring software to check and restrict the online activities and content that their children are allowed to engage with (Lee & Chae, 2012; Mesch, 2009). Parental restrictions have been reported to decrease the time that children spend with media (Kalmus et al., 2013; Lee & Chae, 2012; Lin & Atkin, 1989; Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts, 2010; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2008). Many studies have also suggested that restrictive mediation is effective in buffering against negative media influences on children (Lee & Chae, 2012; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Marcum et al., 2010; J. N. Navarro & Jasinski, 2012; Wolak et al., 2008). For example, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) reported that restricting online interactions could lower the likelihood of children experiencing content and contact risks online. Marcum et al. (2010) and Wolak et al. (2008) suggested that parental restrictions were negatively associated with children's exposure to sexual solicitations. J. N. Navarro and Jasinski (2012) determined that children of parents who used filtering software were less likely to be victims of cyberbullying. However, several studies have demonstrated that overly restrictive parental controls may boomerang. Research by Nathanson (2002) indicated that restrictive mediation was related to more positive attitudes toward television violence and sex as well as the viewing of such content. Shin and Ismail (2013) indicated that restrictive mediation was positively associated with risky social media behavior among children. Therefore, this study examines the extent to which restrictive mediation is associated with the length of children's media use and their exposure to media-related risks.[4,5,6]

Co-using, also referred to as co-viewing or co-surfing, refers to parents engaging in media together with their children, without actively engaging in discussions (Nathanson, 2001b; Valkenburg et al., 2013). Valkenburg et al. (1999) and Warren (2003) indicated that parents engaged in less co-using than active and restrictive mediation. Research on the effectiveness of co-using has produced mixed results (Nathanson, 2001b). Studies have demonstrated that co-using may enhance children's learning from media (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1989) and reduce children's exposure to online content risks (Kirwil, 2009). However, co-using has also been positively associated with the amount of television viewing (Vandewater et al., 2005) and levels of television-induced aggressive inclinations (Nathanson, 1999). Thus, this meta-analysis explores the degree to which co-using is associated with the time that children spend with media and the likelihood of children being engaged in media-related risks.[7,8,9]

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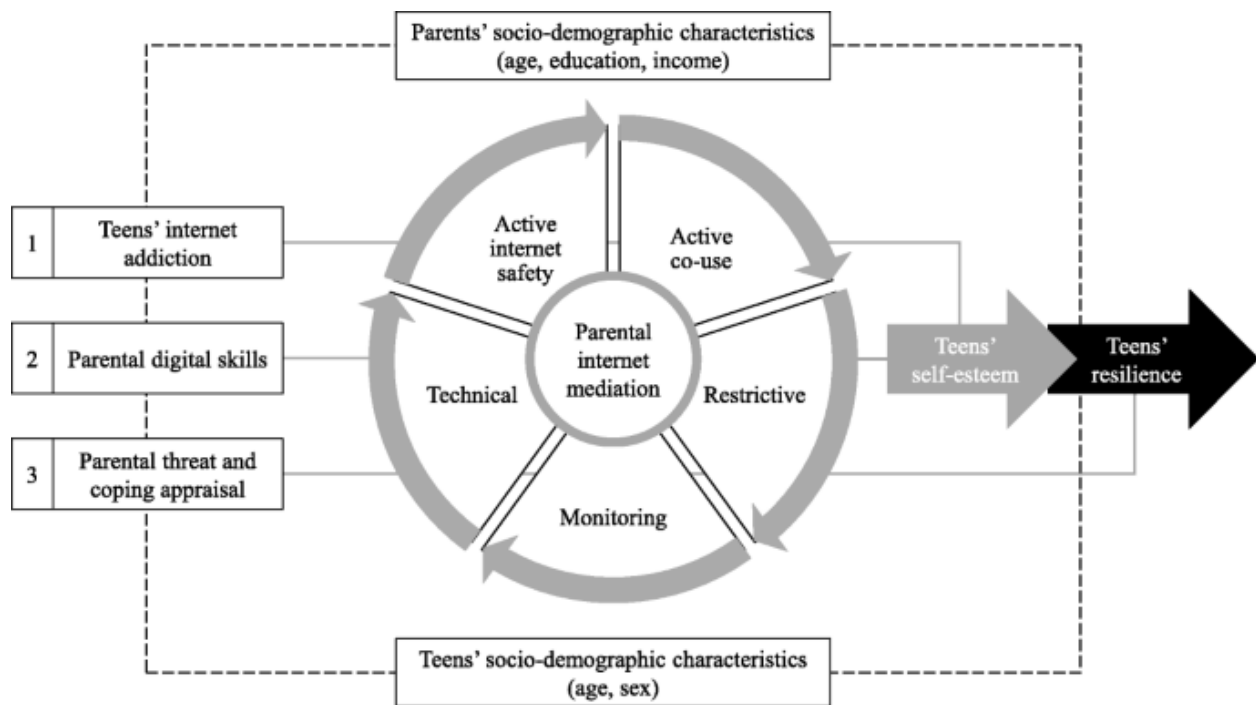
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## II.DISCUSSION

Pediatric health care providers should identify parental practices and reinforce active media mediation strategies.



According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American children and adolescents aged 2 to 18 years spend an average of more than 4 hours using electronic media daily, more than they spend on any other single activity except sleep.<sup>1</sup> Media exposure has been associated with aggressive behavior,<sup>2-5</sup> poor moral reasoning,<sup>6</sup> desensitization,<sup>7</sup> the conception of the world as a mean and scary place,<sup>8</sup> obesity,<sup>9,10</sup> and decreased attention span.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, it has also been associated with positive social interactions,<sup>12</sup> improved intelligence scores,<sup>13</sup> improved problem-solving skills,<sup>14</sup> accelerated language acquisition,<sup>15,16</sup> and enhanced school performance.<sup>17</sup> The difference exists in the content of the programming and the time spent engaged in media use.<sup>9,11-15,18</sup>

Owing to these facts, the AAP recommends limiting media exposure to no more than 1 to 2 hours per day of educational, quality programs for children older than 2 years. In addition, the AAP recommends that parents use the media's influence in a positive manner by helping their children to be intelligent media viewers, restricting their media exposure, watching with their children, explaining what the child sees, and creating an electronic media-free environment in children's rooms.<sup>19,20</sup> To have this effect, however, it is necessary that parents engage in some form



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of mediation, by setting limits on media exposure and discussing content with children. These behaviors have been found to mitigate some of the negative effects of media exposure on children.<sup>21,22</sup>

Research on mediation suggests that various types exist,<sup>23</sup> including (1) restrictive mediation, in which parents set rules or prohibit exposure to certain content, (2) instructive mediation, in which parents discuss certain portions of the programming they view together, and (3) social covieing, in which the programming is watched together. Social covieing is associated with overall heavier viewing patterns for parents and their children.<sup>1</sup> It is unlimited viewing that is perhaps most problematic and may require the greatest intervention.[10,11,12]

Active mediation, such as restrictive and instructive approaches, has positive associations with younger children,<sup>15,18-22</sup> mothers as media decision makers,<sup>21</sup> increased parental education,<sup>24</sup> and increased socioeconomic levels.<sup>23,25</sup> Several family variables still remain largely unexplored. For example, positive parent-child relationships have an association with increased effective rule setting in contexts such as eating and sleeping<sup>26</sup>; therefore the quality of the parent-child relationship might also have a potential association with increased media mediation. The influence of ethnicity or family structure on media mediation is not known. It is possible that in homes where 2 parents reside, mediation is more likely simply because 2 parents are available to provide mediation. It is clear that in parenting areas such as discipline, one's own experiences as a child influence current strategies.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, past media experience as a child could influence tendencies to provide mediation as a parent. It is important, therefore, to discern the effects of all these potential contributors on parental mediation strategies.

In a world where media burgeons and children's exposure is likely to grow, understanding how parents mediate their children's media use and the attendant associations becomes necessary. Information is needed to shape interventions suitable for the pediatric provider's office, a venue that children and their families routinely use.

Most surveys that purport to estimate the percentage of parents who use mediation<sup>21-24</sup> are limited by small sample sizes. In 1 of the larger samples, Cheng et al<sup>27</sup> reported a convenience sample of almost 700 parents. That study was limited in its assessment of various mediation styles. These authors found that female parents and younger children were more likely to be associated with limits on violent television viewing.<sup>21-24,27</sup>

Conducting a study with a national scope allows an assessment of an expanded model of potential influences on media mediation. The purpose of the present analysis was to explore how often parents mediate media, what strategies they use, and what variables predict active media mediation to inform the development of potential interventions based in the pediatric provider's office.[13,14,15]

## III.RESULTS

The internet has become the most widely used medium among the young generation in today's media- and technology-rich environment, particularly among teenagers, commonly known as 'teens'. Even at the beginning of the widespread usage of the internet, teens used it for more hours than adults [1]. Nowadays, teens have been born and raised in a digital era and, hence, are also recognised as 'digital natives' [2]. Online virtual environments stimulate teens' self-presentation and identity experiments, particularly through the sharing of their self-created content, posts and pictures online [3]. For this reason, they are considered more digitally literate than their parents – leading to a generation gap [4,5,6]. The increased use of the internet among teens, their concerns about online



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identity and privacy, and their strong association with peers, alongside reduced communication with parents, enhance their susceptibility to online risks [7].

Teenage years are coupled with developmental changes. Teens mostly devote their time online to using self-selected devices for recreational and social activities without any parental supervision [8]. These unsupervised activities have a long-lasting impact on them; therefore, parents apply multiple dimensions of mediation, particularly to promote positive outcomes amongst teens. Internet use has mounted over the past two decades with free web browsing, social networking, online shopping, gaming and instant messaging. Furthermore, the introduction of smartphones and multiple 'apps' has also fuelled internet use [9]. The internet provides numerous benefits in the areas of information, edutainment and socialisation; nonetheless, it also exposes users to a unique set of online risks, such as privacy invasion, cyberbullying and exposure to violent, hateful or inappropriate material or contacts [5]. Moreover, the effects of online risks, such as pornography, on teens and the adverse impact on youths' self-esteem is a matter for concern [10]. Therefore, high sensitivity and concern among parents about their teens' risks related to online addiction and victimisation are needed in order to protect teens from the negative aspects of internet use and to avoid harm [9].

Given this context, the concept of parental mediation (PM) has emerged. Parental internet mediation acknowledges that parents actively manage and regulate their children's internet use [11], while mitigating its negative effects amongst teens [12]. The notion of PM originated primarily in media studies, especially in the areas of television and video games, to comprehend the effects of media content on teens' or children's behaviour [13]. Researchers have demonstrated that young audiences adopt certain behaviours that are presented on television and in video games unless parents mediate [14]. Hence, parental involvement encourages the potential for positive outcomes, while also effectively neutralising the negative effects of the internet [15].

Previous studies on television and video games have categorised PM into three dimensions: instructive or active, restrictive and co-use mediation [16,17,18]. Furthermore, with the evolution of the internet and digital devices, for example, smartphones and tablets, different researchers have strengthened and refined the concept of PM over a period of time. Livingstone et al. [19] recently recognised that digital devices and the internet, being more technologically complex, personalised and portable than previous technology, were difficult for parents to manage. Hence, five dimensions of parental internet mediation were developed, keeping in view the specific attributes of the internet. These are: 1) active co-use or instructive mediation, where parents encourage, share and discuss mutually; 2) active mediation of internet safety, where parents guide teens towards safer online practices; 3) restrictive mediation, where parents set rules and regulations; 4) monitoring, where parents check the record available afterwards; and 5) technical mediation, where parents use software or control mechanisms to restrict, filter or monitor online activities [20].

Previous research suggests that parental preferences for applying these various dimensions of PM are subject to multiple predictors, such as the teens' online addiction and parents' own characteristics, including education, income and digital skills [21]. Moreover, parents' beliefs about risk and response appraisal, as well as their effect on teens, also determine the various dimensions of PM.

Giving due importance to parental beliefs and inputs, the theoretical foundations of this research lie in Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) to aid in understanding PM-related predictors. The PMT postulates that one's intention to adopt protective behaviour is linked to how individuals process threats and cope with adverse circumstances [22].



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Under the ambit of this research, PMT suggests that parents' own perceptions of threat and coping appraisal could be the predictors of PM. Severity indicates the seriousness of an online risk in threat appraisal, while susceptibility refers to vulnerability towards these risks. Furthermore, threat appraisal also considers the teens' (excessive) internet use. Parents, for instance, who found online addiction among their teens, perceived the online risks to be more severe and believed their teens to be more susceptible to them applied mediation. Under coping appraisal, response efficacy denotes effectiveness in preventing risks, while self-efficacy indicates the individual's ability to achieve optimal online safety behaviour. Parents mediate more often, for example, if they believe that their involvement enables teens to manage the online risks effectively and adopt online protection behaviour. Coping appraisal also highlights parents' own digital skills, which help them to evaluate their teens' responses and self-efficacy. Hence, taken altogether, PMT proposes that PM could be considered as self-protective behaviour against adversity and online risks [23, 24]. This adversity could be overcome through the teens' higher self-esteem and resilience. Resilience is defined here as a strength-based and positive outcome in the face of online risks or challenges [16,17,18].

Parental internet mediation is the concern of all parents and societies with the widespread use of digital technologies, regardless of background or culture. However, although there are multiple PM-related studies available for western societies and cultures [26], there is a dearth of comparable literature for eastern societies and cultures, such as Pakistan. The latter ranks in the top 10 among countries within the Asian region regarding digital growth [20]. There are currently more than 44 million internet users in the country [28]. Among them, a majority of young people and teens surf the internet for a minimum of 2 h a day, largely gaining access on tablets and smartphones [29]. There is a substantial cultural difference between eastern (Asian) and western parenting practices [30]. Moreover, the notion of parental internet mediation is quite new in the developing country of Pakistan. Notwithstanding the teens' increased internet use or addiction and their exposure to online risks, little is yet known about parental internet mediation or the factors influencing it in local settings.

Given the context above, this research is an attempt to fill the gap in the existing literature and seeks to understand the varied dimensions of PM to regulate the teens' use of the internet and their predictors in the district of Lahore (Pakistan), as illustrated in Fig. 1. These predictors include socio-demographic and teen-related characteristics, the teens' internet addiction, parents' own digital skills, parents' assessments of threat and coping appraisals, as well as the effects of PM among teens, particularly in nurturing self-esteem and resilience.[19]

## IV.CONCLUSION

Parental internet mediation is a multidimensional concept which is directed towards not only regulating teens' use of the internet but also augmenting their abilities to create resilient pathways to prevent online risks. Therefore, it is necessary to implement PM guidelines, e-safety resource material and local support networks to raise community awareness and promote positive outcomes among teens. Based on parents' perceptions, these findings also support the suggestion of launching government-supported initiatives and updating the curriculum module to raise awareness among parents, teachers, professionals and communities about potential online risks, online protection tools and safer internet best practices in order to cultivate a safe environment for children, teens and the young generation. It also highlights the social responsibility of internet service providers to block offensive and hate-filled websites/pages. Lastly, the research emphasises the need to initiate community-based programmes to educate parents, teachers and teens about online safety tools and mechanisms.[20]



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