The Relationship between Maternal Media Literacy and Children's Media Literacy

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Objective: Since children and adolescents are one of the most important consumers of media and media play a significant role in shaping and influencing their behavior towards consumption patterns and daily life activities, this study aimed to elucidate the role of maternal media literacy in children's media literacy.
Methods and Materials: The present research adopted a descriptive correlational design. The population consisted of all male and female students attending public secondary schools in District 5 of Tehran city and engaged in studies during the academic year of 2022-2023. The sample size, determined using Morgan and Krejcie table, was 249 individuals, selected through multi-stage cluster sampling method. To measure the research variables, the Toman Media Literacy Questionnaire (1995) and a researcher-made questionnaire on media literacy competence were employed.
Findings: Content validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by experts, and their reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding 0.82 and 0.83, respectively. The results obtained from the structural equation modeling using PLS3 software indicated that children's media literacy can be predicted based on maternal media literacy ($p > 0.01$).
Conclusion: Considering the role of maternal media literacy in enhancing children's media literacy competence, it can be inferred that maternal media literacy has had a significant influence on the media literacy competence of adolescent students.
Keywords: Maternal Media Literacy, Children's Media Literacy, Critical Awareness, Selectivity, Responsible Usage

1. Introduction

Adolescents are among the most significant consumers of media, and media serve as one of the primary factors shaping their interaction and behavior towards consumption patterns and daily life activities (Montazer Ghaem & F., 2015). According to this premise, research indicates that increased awareness of individuals regarding

technology and the virtual world reduces the risks associated with norm-breaking and non-compliance with rules (Yang et al., 2016). Technology awareness has been defined as personal abilities in utilizing technology or technological competence, which encompass a set of skills, subject perceptions, and abilities that enable individuals to use technology effectively, appropriately, and normatively (Delfan Azari et al., 2022). Technological competence leads to a reduction in the risks of using information technologies (Parsakia et al., 2023).

Today, the family institution has become media-oriented, meaning that media have influenced the independent institution of the family in such a way that this institution cannot function properly without media (Bahadorikhosroshahi & Bargi, 2018). Since parents are the most influential individuals in children's lives and are among the determining factors in the relationship between children and television and children's susceptibility to the products of this medium, undoubtedly, parental media literacy will be decisive in achieving appropriate media consumption patterns and media usage competencies for children (Islam, 2023).

Media literacy, or the ability to examine, dissect, and analyze received messages, is defined as the ability to use critical thinking skills in relation to all media (Nasiri et al., 2014). In a study, it was found that users who employ media literacy in information production and processing activities become more active and capable in analyzing the content of political messages, social messages, and economic messages on social networks (Esfandani & Ali Miri, 2015).

Some researches indicate that media literacy can play an influential role in reducing virtual space harms and promoting critical and intelligent use of the internet (Fauziah et al., 2023). Additionally, media literacy can be effective in reducing internet harms. The results of studies have shown that information technology literacy can increase patients' awareness and consequently improve their health (Sadoughi et al., 2010). Other research findings suggest that the enhancement of technological capabilities and awareness of technology leads to a reduction in the negative effects of the internet (Drago, 2015). Advocates believe that individuals' utilization of technological capabilities and technological competencies can be helpful in addressing virtual space challenges (Mukherjee, 2013), and individuals' utilization of knowledge and technological capabilities leads to an increase in individuals' health level (Ortiz & Clancy, 2003).

Therefore, it can be implicitly stated that considering the positive and negative impacts of media and social networks in various areas such as cultural, ethical, familial, and psychological disorders, we are motivated to explore in this study the influence of maternal media literacy on the competencies or skills of adolescents. By providing feedback to media stakeholders and families, small yet significant steps can be taken towards changing or improving policies, planning, and producing appropriate content (Lin, 2005; Yang et al., 2016).

Since the family serves as the primary cultural socialization context in all societies and lays the foundational cultural groundwork for children, which then evolves upon entering society, attention to media literacy within the family, where children learn their first life principles, is of great importance. Undoubtedly, parental media literacy will be decisive in children's achievement of proper media use. Among parents, mothers play a more pivotal role in media literacy, shaping the fundamental cultural and cognitive foundations of their children (Fauziah et al., 2023). Maternal media literacy and their supervisory methods act as protective factors against some negative outcomes, such as substance use (Haryanto et al., 2022).

Through reviewing the literature and studies conducted, it is evident that the issue of maternal media literacy specifically regarding its lesser-explored and influential role in children's media literacy has received less attention and investigation, with more focus generally given to the shared role of parents, educational institutions, and other influential components that rank lower in importance. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the specific role of maternal media literacy in the media literacy competence of their children. Thus, it seeks to answer the question: Does maternal media literacy influence the media literacy competence of adolescents aged 14 to 17 in District 5 of Tehran city?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a descriptive-analytical approach using structural equation modeling. The target population comprised all male and female high school students in District 5 of Tehran city attending first and second grades during the academic year 2021-2022. Accordingly, a total of 249 individuals were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. Inclusion criteria included being within the age range under study (first and second grades of high school), absence of specific physical and psychological illnesses, providing non-contradictory responses in the questionnaire, willingness to participate in

the research, and no desire to discontinue participation. Sampling was conducted in a multi-stage cluster approach. Initially, five main clusters were randomly selected from the 49 neighborhoods in Tehran District 5, including South Shahr-e-Rey, Naft Shahrak, West Ferdows Boulevard, North Jannat Abad, and Sadeghieh. Subsequently, two boys' and two girls' high schools were randomly chosen from each neighborhood, totaling 20 high schools. In the next stage, five boys' and five girls' high schools (i.e., a total of 10 high schools) were selected as the research sample. Given that the unit of measurement was the school, a total of 249 questionnaires were distributed among students and their parents in these 10 schools. As this research essentially comprises two groups, the first being students and the second their parents, selecting each student as a sample in the first group corresponded to selecting one of their parents as a sample in the second group. In other words, parental selection was made through the selection of their children. Therefore, for every 249 students, 249 parents were also included in the study. Questionnaires were administered face-to-face by the researcher, and participants sequentially completed the media literacy questionnaire, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete, followed by the media competence questionnaire, which took about 10 minutes.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Media Literacy

To measure media literacy, the Taman media literacy standard questionnaire (1995) was utilized, which is a self-report scale. This questionnaire was adapted and validated in Iran by Sharbatian and Eskandari in 2017, consisting of 20 items. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The questionnaire comprises subscales including media consumption regime, message characteristics, and message criticism. The content, visual, and criterion validity of this questionnaire have been evaluated as appropriate. Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated in the study of Sharbatian and Eskandari (2017) yielded overall reliability coefficients of 0.83 for the media literacy questionnaire and 0.72, 0.73, and 0.74 for its subscales, respectively, which were statistically significant (p < 0.001) (Bahadorikhosroshahi & Bargi, 2018).

2.2.2. Media Competence

For assessing media competence, a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 7 items and 3 subscales of deep awareness (2 items), selectivity (3 items), and technological literacy (2 items) was employed. Content validity of the questionnaire was assessed by five experts in the field of social sciences, and the content validity ratio (CVR) values for all questions were obtained as 0.99 and above, indicating the acceptability and adequate validity of the questionnaire. For the reliability of the questionnaire, confirmatory factor analysis results demonstrated that the items of each factor could effectively measure the intended factor and were internally and externally consistent. To examine the goodness of fit of the factor structure of the questionnaire based on exploratory findings, confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation was employed. The fit indices, including comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), incremental fit index (IFI), parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI), parsimony comparative fit index (PCFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and chi-square to degree of freedom ratio ($\chi 2/df$), indicated an adequate fit of the model.

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis in this study was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through the SmartPLS 3 software.

3. Findings and Results

Regarding the age of mothers, 71 participants (50.28%) were under the age of 44, 153 participants (40.61%) were aged between 45 and 50, and 25 participants (10.10%) were over the age of 50, making a total of 265 participants. Concerning the gender of students, 143 participants (60.42%) were female, while 106 participants (40.57%) were male, totaling 249 participants. In terms of mothers' education level, 137 participants (51.70%) had a diploma or lower, 125 participants (47.17%) had a bachelor's degree, and 4 participants (1.51%) had a master's degree or higher, with a total of 266 participants. These data provide insight into the demographic composition of the study participants, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the sample characteristics.

Table 1

Descriptive Findings of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
Media Literacy	90.177	54.20	129	223	Above Average	D(248) = 595.0, p < .001
Media Competence	103.177	13.18	136	240	Above Average	D(248) = 616.0, p < .001
Deep Awareness	43.59	25.7	43	78	Above Average	D(248) = 12.1, p = .257
Selectivity	16.58	42.10	34	38	Above Average	D(248) = 388.3, p < .001
Responsible Usage	89.59	49.7	44	79	Above Average	D(248) = 550.2, p < .001

Table 1 displays the descriptive findings of the research variables in terms of mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores. The first variable, Media Literacy, exhibits a mean score of 90.177 with a standard deviation of 54.20, ranging from a minimum of 129 to a maximum of 223. Similarly, the second variable, Media Competence, indicates a mean score of 103.177, with a standard deviation of 13.18, varying between 136 and 240. The third variable, Deep Awareness, demonstrates a mean score of 43.59, with a standard deviation of 25.7, ranging from 43 to 78. Furthermore, the fourth variable, Selectivity, presents a mean score of 16.58, with a standard deviation of 42.10, fluctuating between 34 and 38. Finally, the fifth variable, Responsible Usage, illustrates a mean score of 89.59, with a standard deviation of 49.7, ranging from 44 to 79. Overall, these findings suggest that the participants generally exhibit above-average levels of media literacy, media competence, deep awareness, selectivity, and responsible usage, as indicated by the mean scores exceeding their respective midpoints. Additionally, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests confirm the normality of the data distribution for all variables, with significant p-values below the threshold of .05, indicating the appropriateness of parametric statistical analyses.

For this study, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed for data analysis. Prior to conducting the analysis, several assumptions underlying PLS-SEM were rigorously examined and confirmed. The assumptions include normality, multicollinearity, linearity, homoscedasticity, and the absence of outliers in the data. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which yielded significant p-values for all variables (Media Literacy: D(265) = 0.595, p < .001; Media Competence: D(265) = 0.616, p < .001; Deep Awareness: D(265) = 0.012, p = 1.000; Selectivity: D(265) = 0.388, p < .001; Responsible Usage: D(265) = 0.550, p < .001), confirming the normal distribution of the data. Multicollinearity was assessed through variance inflation factor (VIF) values, indicating values well below the threshold of 5 for all variables. Linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions were examined through scatterplots of the variables, revealing linear relationships and constant variance of residuals, respectively. Additionally, the presence of outliers was assessed using boxplots and Cook's distance, with no outliers detected. Consequently, the data met all the assumptions required for PLS-SEM analysis, ensuring the validity and reliability of the results.

Considering Figure 1, the t-values for the paths from maternal media literacy to children's media competence and its dimensions are greater than 1.96, indicating the significance of these paths at a 95% confidence level, and the adequacy of the structural model. Figure 2 illustrates the path coefficients determined in the model under investigation.
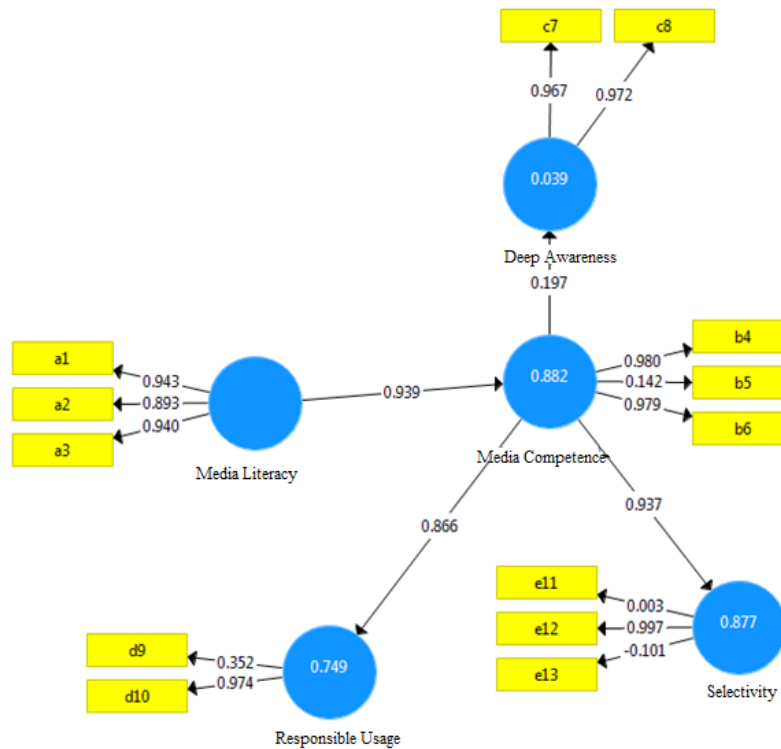
Figure 1

Model with T-Values
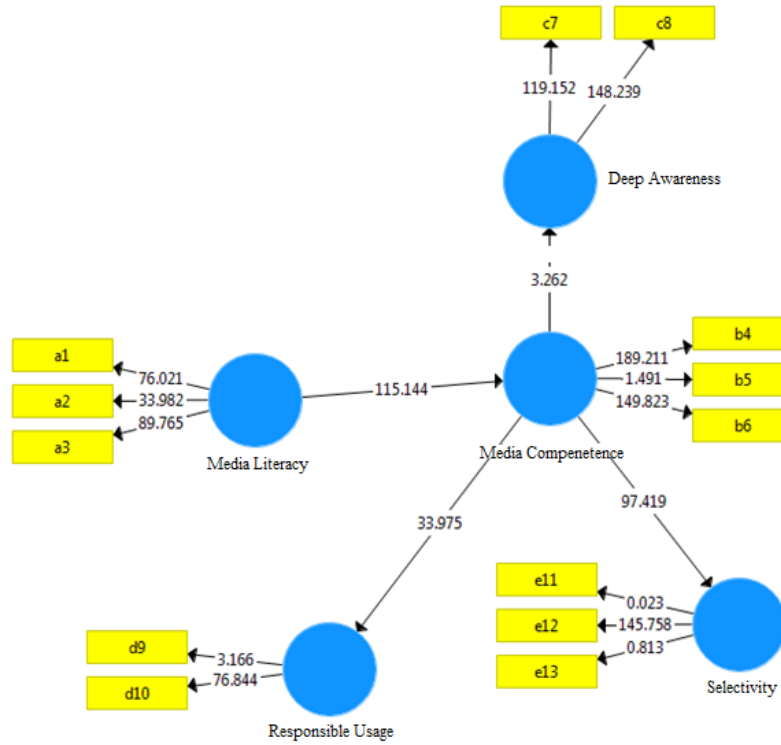
Figure 2

Model with Standard Coefficients

The path coefficient predicting children's media competence based on maternal media literacy is 0.94, with a determination coefficient of 0.89, indicating a high level of prediction. The path coefficient predicting children's media competence in the dimension of deep awareness based on maternal media literacy is 0.19, with a determination coefficient of 0.03, indicating a moderate level of prediction. The path coefficient predicting children's media competence in the dimension of selectivity based on maternal media literacy is 0.93, with a determination coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of prediction. Similarly, the path coefficient predicting children's media competence in the dimension of responsible usage based on maternal media literacy is 0.86, with a determination coefficient of 0.74, indicating a high level of prediction. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that maternal media literacy is highly capable of predicting children's media competence.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between maternal media literacy and its dimensions with the media competence of 14-17-year-old children. The findings of the present study indicate a positive pattern between changes in media literacy scores and changes in media competence. In other words, as maternal media literacy increases, the media competence of their children grows. The results of Pearson correlation test indicate the significance of this relationship. In this regard, other studies have also shown similar findings. For example, Haryanto et al. (2022) found that parents' digital literacy has a significant role in enhancing the critical thinking skills of elementary school students (Haryanto et al., 2022). Bahadori Khosroshahi (2017) concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between parental media literacy and social identity with media consumption in adolescents (Bahadorikhosroshahi & Bargi, 2018). Soltani et al. (2016) found that the higher the media literacy in mothers, the less their children use certain media (Soltanal-Qara'ee & Mola Ghalghachi, 2015).

In interpreting these findings, considering that the mothers in the study had a high average media literacy, it can be inferred that they are in a good position in terms of media literacy, which seems to have acceptable knowledge and skills for evaluating media messages. These factors can influence children's choices in selecting various types of video games, images, films, news, advertisements, entertainment, and games, thus contributing to their media competence. Therefore, as parents, especially mothers, actively engage in media familiarity and their purposes and functions, they will undoubtedly succeed in safeguarding their children in the virtual world of the current era that surrounds them. In line with Potter's opinion, media literacy or gaining media literacy will require mastery of several factors. According to Potter, media literacy is a multi-factorial pattern, and "knowledge structures," "personal sources," "information processing functions," and "skills and abilities" are the components of his media literacy model. According to Potter's perspective, the relationship between these factors is spatial and spiral (not superficial); in each cross-sectional, one of the factors of media literacy is present.

Therefore, it can be concluded that empowering parents in terms of developing media literacy in the era of information technology, especially mothers, can lead to the media competence of children. Moreover, modeling children's media use based on maternal media literacy patterns can act as a deterrent against cultural and social harms they may encounter.

The results of data analysis showed that media literacy is significantly associated with dimensions of media competence in students. This means that as maternal media literacy increases, the media competence of children in dimensions such as deep awareness, selectivity, and responsible use also grows, and vice versa. This finding is consistent with previous research. Asalani et al. (2019) found that parents' sincere interaction and appropriate control with their children fostered greater trust among family members. A child who feels such warmth is more likely to feel secure and comfortable in discussing their internet-related needs, events encountered while using the internet, questions, and problems faced during internet usage with parents, thereby gaining deeper media awareness (Aslani et al., 2019). Soltani et al. (2016) showed that the quantity and quality of mothers' media use with their 4 to 7-year-old children are related to the children's lesser use of certain media (Soltanal-Qara'ee & Mola Ghalghachi, 2015). Fauziah et al. (2023) demonstrated that the required level of technology literacy among parents could regulate children's digital consumption in selecting media content and tools. Brohl et al. (2013) found that providing media literacy education to mothers under the supervision of the Canadian Public Health Organization has led to meaningful and purposeful use of media in children (Fauziah et al., 2023).

In explaining this aspect of media literacy concerning the significant relationship between maternal media literacy and

children's deep awareness, it can be inferred that mothers' awareness of various media messages and their curiosity about the sender's intentions and the beneficial or detrimental nature of messages, as well as overall interpretation of media messages, contribute to their competence. This ability can play a significant role in deepening children's media awareness. According to the cognitive model of media literacy by Potter, media literacy is primarily focused on readiness and awareness in the process of receiving and interpreting messages (Haryanto et al., 2022; Islam, 2023), which, according to Elizabeth Toman and colleagues (1995), refers to the second layer of media literacy, namely message characteristics. At this level, the audience pays attention to the subtle aspects of the media and engages in deep questions and topics such as who benefits from sending the message and who is harmed, who sends the media messages, etc. (Hoseini, 2013). Toman (1996) has outlined four basic stages for achieving "media literacy," with the first stage involving acquiring alertness and sensitivity to the extent and conditions of individuals' exposure to various media messages. Activities at this stage include measuring individuals' media usage, identifying satisfaction gained from media messages, and acquiring necessary strategic learning for managing media usage. Therefore, attention to the characteristics of media messages and their reinforcement and development in parents, especially mothers, for the proper and rational functioning of children regarding the internet and its efficient use is effective because a significant portion of students' learning is taking shape through virtual space. Proper guidance and direction by competent parents toward information and communication technology can lead to its proper and optimal utilization, contributing to the development and better consolidation of children's learning. Confusion in the type of media utilization can lead to confusion in learning as well. Media-based educational processes, if not supervised, guided, controlled, and commented on by parents, can seriously harm children; therefore, parental media literacy, on the one hand, and media competence in educational processes based on various information technology by children on the other hand, are highly important (Hoseini, 2013; Mukherjee, 2013).

In explaining the significant relationship between maternal media literacy and children's media selectivity, it can be inferred that purposeful and intelligent media use by mothers, as their role models, can influence children's behavior and encourage them to engage in internet or electronic gaming activities in a certain manner. According to Elizabeth Toman and colleagues (1995), media literacy functions as a filtering arbitrator, whereby the dense world of messages passes through the layers of media literacy to encounter meaningful messages. Media messages operate at three layers. The first layer is the consumption regime or individual program planning in media usage, meaning that the audience pays more attention to the selection and viewing of various programs and engages in specific media consumption, reducing and controlling consumption (Hoseini, 2013). It seems that family media habits, especially those of mothers, have created a strong dependence in their children, which itself acts as a restraining factor for making choices based on individual will and discretion. This is because the level of media use and the type of programs are under the family's control, and children are usually forced to tolerate family choices, and media habits consistent with family norms become internalized in them, making it difficult and sometimes impossible for individuals to change habits in the future and adulthood.

By integrating James Potter's cognitive theory and the gap theory along with media literacy levels, the effectiveness of media message characteristics in mothers can be elucidated in their children. In other words, media literacy leads to acquiring awareness and understanding of media owners (managers) and their goals in producing programs and knowledge, critical viewing of media messages, analysis and processing of mass media messages, and acquisition of cognitive skills. It protects women, who comprise the majority of media audiences, users of media and social networks, against media messages, thus enabling them to make informed choices and constructive confrontation with various media messages to keep them safe.

Another finding was that maternal media literacy has been effective in the responsible use of media by children. In explaining this finding, it can be said that the alignment of family and maternal media habits with the media needs of children accelerates children's susceptibility and imitation of maternal behaviors and norms, leading them to use media in a more conscious and responsible manner. Responsible here means that they endeavor to consider family and societal norms in using various media contents and adhere to them. They will protect themselves more professionally and with greater practice against potential harms of certain media messages. This finding is explicable with the theory of media influence. This theory discusses the impact of media on culture, values, especially among children, adolescents, and young people, and how they infer from it. According to this

theory, the media, by embedding values, modeling, and shaping biased insights into social realities and creating limited and pre-selected mental frameworks, leaves a lasting and patterned influence on the audience. Based on this theory, a specific type of media culture (mostly in the form of films in cinemas or television) may create an illusion among young viewers that certain behaviors are effective and valuable in solving everyday life problems. Mimicry is also relevant in this context. Mimicry is one of the tools of socialization in society. Mimicry of parental consumption behaviors or media by children takes shape in their actions. In explaining this finding, it can be acknowledged that critical media use patterns in mothers have been successful in affecting their children's responsible use. The decision about receiving or not receiving a message, which aims to focus on the beneficial parts of the message and disregard the rest, with its concentration on examining the beneficial aspects of the received message, is included in this environment. This finding is consistent with Elizabeth Toman and her colleagues' theory (1995), which emphasizes the importance of media literacy in its third layer. In this layer, the necessary skills for critical media watching are provided. With these skills, the audience engages in analyzing and questioning the framework of the message and its embedded aspects. Understanding the message from the audience's perspective is contingent upon identifying the embedded dimensions of the message. Therefore, it can be concluded that maternal media literacy has a direct impact on responsible media use.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Limitations of the study include the reliance on self-reported data from mothers regarding their media literacy levels and their children's media use, which may introduce biases or inaccuracies. Additionally, the study focused solely on the relationship between maternal media literacy and children's media consumption behaviors, neglecting potential confounding variables such as socio-economic status or parental supervision. Moreover, the research was conducted within a specific cultural context, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations or settings.

Suggestions for future research could involve longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of maternal media literacy on children's media use patterns and outcomes. Incorporating objective measures of media literacy skills, such as media decoding tasks or media-related

problem-solving scenarios, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between parental media literacy and child outcomes. Additionally, investigating the role of contextual factors, such as family dynamics or media content characteristics, could help elucidate the mechanisms underlying the observed associations.

Implications of the study suggest the importance of promoting media literacy education programs for parents, particularly mothers, to enhance their ability to critically evaluate and manage their children's media use. Educating parents about the potential influence of media messages on children's attitudes, behaviors, and development can empower them to make informed decisions and set appropriate boundaries regarding media consumption. Furthermore, policymakers and educators should consider integrating media literacy components into existing parenting interventions or school curricula to support parents in fostering healthy media habits and promoting positive media experiences for children.

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