

# Youtubers' Effect on Children's Values: Parents' Views

*Cihat Yasaroglu, PhD*

Bingol University, Turkey

*Mehmet Ali Boylu, M.S.*

Ministry of National Education, Turkey

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Values are the criteria that affect a person's adequate knowledge, emotion, and behavior. Values education should include an effort to acquire values and prosocial behaviors in education. Role models are also an important resource in values education. Children's cognition, emotion, and behaviors are widely affected by YouTubers who are considered as symbolic role models. Parents, the other important figure in character education, try to mediate between family/social values and popular culture. This paper focuses on portraying parents' views on YouTubers' effect on children's values. **Method:** 365 parents participated in this research, and the survey research design based on a quantitative research was used. A questionnaire with three parts was developed by researchers, which is used for data collection. The first part is used to determine demographic information, the second part gathers information on parents' views about their children's daily routines and the time spend on YouTube, and the third part shows the effect of YouTubers on values. Based on the analysis carried out, the data collected by descriptive analysis such as mean and standard deviation were analyzed. **Results:** The findings reveal that YouTubers are not considered as role models. Parents have a negative attitude towards you tubers, and they worry about the time their children spend on YouTube.

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**Keywords:** Information, Prosocial Behaviors, Social Influencers, Digital Moral.

## Introduction

Value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973). The broad term "values education" encompasses and in practice often places a particular

emphasis on teaching civic and moral values. It is closely related to other terms in current use, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Halstead & Taylor, 2000), and also character education (Lickona, 1991). Someone cannot talk about education without also talking about values education. Values education is an integral part of the educational process.

As excellent learners, children learn values in different ways (Slavin, 2008). Bandura and Mischel (1965) asserted three types of models in Social Learning Theory: live, verbal, and symbolic. Live models demonstrate behavior in person. A verbal instructional model explains or describes the behavior. A symbolic model can be fictional characters or real people who demonstrate behaviors in books, movies, television shows, video games, or internet sources. According to Bandura (2001), learning directly from models is a more efficient way of learning than others. Modeling influences serve diverse functions—as tutors, motivators, inhibitors, disinhibitors, social prompters, emotion arousers, and shapers of values and conceptions of reality (Bandura, 2001). As children observe their behaviors, it is probable to behave like these role models. Therefore, the role models' way of conduct is effective in values education.

Since parents are accepted as live and verbal models, children begin to learn values very early in life, initially from their families (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Lickona (1991) accepted parents as children's first moral teachers and parents also have the most enduring influence. Supporting Lickona, Nursi (1995) claims the mother as "man's first master and most influential teacher." Learning and acquiring values go on with other sources like media, peers, playgroups, careers, local community and other agencies (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). In addition, children can take their role models from princess, heroes, and sports idols (Biskup & Pfister, 1999). Children can copy observed behavior. Bandura et al. (1961) found that children response aggressively to aggressive models.

Symbolic modeling provided by television, films, and other visual media is one of the most influential sources of social learning (Bandura, 1977). Human judgment, values, and conduct can be altered directly by televised modeling. The influence of models in activating, channeling, and supporting the behavior of others is abundantly documented in both laboratory and field studies. The types of models who predominate within a social milieu partly determine which human qualities, among many alternatives, are selectively activated (Bandura, 2001). In line with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, children's media skills and media activities, next to parents' attitudes about media for children, and several children and parent-family characteristics (Nikken & Schols, 2015) can be considered important in values education.

Symbolic modeling is central to a full understanding of the effects of mass communication (Bandura, 2001). By the age of knowledge, the interest in the internet has increased and consequently, the internet has become the main part of one's daily life and educational systems as well (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). The internet, computer games, digital video, mobile phones, and other contemporary technologies provide new ways of mediating, communicating, and representing the world (Buckingham, 2015). Due to their screen size, mobility, ability to stream content, interactive capability and decreasing costs, mobile devices are fast becoming the preferred media choice for kids (LeBlanc et al., 2012). Children use mobile devices to play games, watch videos, communicate, take pictures, and access applications (Kabali et al., 2015). Outside the school, children engage with these media, not as technologies but as cultural forms (Buckingham, 2015).

Today, the internet and its social websites and interactive media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube) have created the do-it-yourself (DIY) celebrity (Driessens, 2012). Nowadays, people can develop their content and engage in applications of weblogs, social networking, and online journalism. They share their experiences and opinions about everything. Often starting as a hobby, creating online content on a personal blog or channel can become a fulltime job. By creating content on a daily basis, large communities are built up with thousands of loyal followers. YouTube is one of the most popular platforms on which creators share their content (Westenberg, 2016). YouTube remains a firm favorite among children. 5- to 15-year-olds are more likely to pick YouTube as their platform of choice over on-demand services (OFCOM, 2020). A poll conducted recently reported that over half of 1,000 children and teenagers between the ages of 6 and 17 who participated in the survey wanted to be a YouTuber or vlogger when they grew up. Similarly, another poll of 3,000 kids revealed that America's youth would prefer YouTube stardom over being an astronaut, a teacher, or even a famous musician (Tenbarge, 2019).

While high-profile YouTube stars remain popular, children are now increasingly drawn to influencers who are often local to their area, or who have a particular shared interest – known as 'micro' or 'nano' influencers. Influencers are generally social media users with more than 1,000,000 followers. Micro-influencers, on the other hand, are considered experts in a particular niche, for instance, cookery, fitness or fashion and have between 1,000 to 1,000,000 people as followers. Nano-influencers are social media users with 1,000 to 5,000 followers, and they are influential at a local level (OFCOM, 2020). YouTubers are an integral part of the teen culture as influencers and protagonists help to initiate the teenager into specifically aimed multimedia products. Also, they are both commercial brands and role models at the same time (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2018). Social influencers like YouTubers are used to spread messages rapidly among their large-scale

networks of loyal followers against relatively low costs (Westenberg, 2016). As they affect their followers with online contents, YouTubers can be considered as symbolic models according to Bandura's theory. Since YouTube offers easy-to-use graphical user interfaces and short videos, even children 2-3 years old can activate the next video from the playlist. Preventing children from watching or listening to harmful content is vital for the safe psychological development of children because of the high plasticity in young brains (Buzzi, 2012).

Researches report the child and internet relationship and the effect of technology. LeBlanc et al. (2012) found a dose-response relation between increased times spent watching television and decreased psychosocial health or cognitive development. Another study assumes that increased levels of electronic media use predicted poorer well-being outcomes (Hinkley et al., 2014). Exposure to TV and video games has been correlated with concerns of more significant problems. When earlier attention problems and gender were statistically controlled, the correlation of television and videogames with attention problems remained significant (Swing et al., 2010). Nowadays, children prefer watching YouTube content instead of television (Martínez & Olsson, 2019). Teachers and students use technology more frequently outside school than they do during class time (Means, 2010).

However, this inevitably falls within the interests and responsibilities of parents. Parents often try to protect their children by critically supervising the child, talking to the child about media content, monitoring the child's digital whereabouts, or applying restrictions to the content accessed or the length of time of media use. In contrast, parents who feel that the media offer educational or entertainment opportunities more often co-use the media with their child or actively discuss the content. Both negative and positive expectations can trigger greater involvement of parents and therefore increase awareness of potential and actual problems (Nikken & de Haan, 2015).

Children might also benefit from the supervision as they attempt to evaluate the content of videos. Concerning young people carrying out personal or school research related to political or social issues, teenagers need to be mindful so as not to solely seek out the YouTubers who express opinions with which they agree (Preece, 2017).

Looking at the statistics, children's homes in 2019 are increasingly 'connected' and smart technology is becoming a more commonplace (OFCOM, 2020). Almost all children used mobile devices, and most of them have started using it before the age of one. Parents provide children devices when doing house chores to keep them calm, and at bedtime (Kabali et al., 2015). Barbovski et al. (2015) reported daily internet use at home as 67%. Most households had television, tablets, and smartphones. Content delivery applications such as YouTube and Netflix (Kabali et al., 2015) were popular.

Also, tablets are the most popular devices (OFCOM, 2020). Digital 2020 research indicates that 74% of the population of Turkey have access to the internet. These users spend an average of 7.5 hours on the internet, and YouTube is the second popular digital platform that they visit (Digital 2020 - We Are Social, n.d.).

Recently, more attention has focused on technology and its effect on children. Well-being (Hinkley et al., 2014), app economy and mobile parenting (Burroughs, 2017), negotiation of girls about YouTubers (Martínez & Olsson, 2019), the effect of video games on prosocial behaviors (Gentile et al., 2009), parenting mediation and support (Nikken & de Haan, 2015; Zaman & Mifsud, 2017), toddlers' online viewing (Elias & Sulkin, 2017), parents' views on children's media usage (Dinleyici et al., 2016), electronic media communication among opposite genders (Boniel-Nissim et al., 2015), video sharing web sites as an alternative educational environment (Ata & Atik, 2016), the influence of YouTubers on teenagers and children (Ramos-Serrano & Herrero-Diz, 2016; Westenberg, 2016), YouTubers' social functions and their influence on pre-adolescence (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2018), and YouTubers as role models (Alzara, 2019) are some prominent studies of the field.

Previous studies show that there is no data on parents' views about the effect of YouTubers on children values. As YouTube is the most widely used platform which children are exposed to in the world, its content is watched inevitably, and its content can shape children's values as well. Therefore, the effect of YouTubers on values is considered essential. As the effect of YouTubers has not been searched, it is hoped that this research would contribute to the literature and help policymakers, families, and educators.

### **The Aim of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to determine the view of parents on YouTubers effect on children's values. Survey research designs are quantitative research procedures whereby researchers survey a sample or entire population of individuals to describe population attitudes, opinions, behaviors or characteristics (Creswell, 2012).

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The study participants consisted of 365 student parents. The demographic distribution of the parents is as follows: 143 of the parents who participated in the research are male, and 217 are female. 88.6% of the participants are between ages 20-39, and 31.4% are between ages 40-64. Three hundred and seven (85.3%) participants stated that they are from middle socioeconomic status, 11 (3%) of the participants stated that they are from

high socioeconomic status, and 42 (11.7%) stated that they have low income. When the origin of the participants are taken into consideration, 12.7% (46 people) of the parents in the study group live in the Mediterranean Region, 18.8% (68 people) in the Eastern Anatolia Region, 13.6% (49 people) in the Aegean Region, 14.1% (51 people) in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, 11.9% (43 people) in the Central Anatolia Region, 6.9% (25 people) in the Black Sea Region, and 21.9% (79 people) in the Marmara Region. While the parents who affirmed using a family filter consist of 36.3% of the participants, and the parents who stated no using a family filter are 43.5%, the ratio of the parents who do not know what a family filter is consist of 20.2% of the participants. Also, 14.1% of the parents have one child, 49.9% have two children, 24.1% have three children, 9.7% have four children, and 2.2% have five or more children. Furthermore, 84 (21.5%) parents have children attending the first grade, 115 (29%) parents have children attending the second grade, 84 (21.5%) parents have children attending the third grade, and 114 (28.70%) parents have children attending the fourth grade.

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire with three parts was developed by researchers to be used for data collection. First part is to determine demographic information like gender, region, educational level of the family, and children's grade. The second part gathers information on parents' views about their children's daily routines and the time spend on YouTube. In order to determine parents' attitude about YouTubers' effect on children's values and character, the participants are asked to answer 23 items questions utilized on a 5-point Likert scale which is found to be highly reliable ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Examples of the items are "YouTubers positively affect the value of Love." and "YouTubers, positively affect the moral values." The mean score between 1.00-1.80 is accepted as "Strongly Disagreed", 1.81-2.60 "Disagreed", 2.61-3.40 "Disagree Moderately", 3.41-4.20 "Agree", and 4.21-5.00 "Strongly Agree".

### **Procedure**

Before undertaking the research, ethical clearance was obtained from Bingöl University for the present study. The study included an anonymous online survey administered. The survey link was sent to parents via cell phones and was posted on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Of the study population, 435 parents completed the questionnaire. After the answers were checked, 74 responses were eliminated because of missing data. Data management and analysis were performed using SPSS 25.0.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Parents' Views about their Children's Daily Routines and the Time Spent on YouTube**

When the parents' views on the use of YouTube by children are examined, it can be seen that the rate of parents who stated that their child spends 0-2 hours a day on YouTube is 71.5%, 19.9% for 3-4 hours, 6.1% for 5-6 hours, and 1.9% for 7 hours or more. The ratio of the parents who stated that they are concerned about the time that their children spend on YouTube is 51.1% (184 parents), the ratio of the parents who stated that they are partially concerned is 36.1% (130 parents), and the ratio of the parents who stated that they are not concerned is 12.8% (46 parents). 60.5% of the parents think that there is no change in the face to face interaction of their children with their friends, 35.2% stated that meetings are reduced, and 4.4% think that meetings are increased. While 29.6% of the parents stated that their children's emotional states do not change after spending time on YouTube, 25.4% stated that sometimes their children are unhappy, 7.4% stated that their children are mostly unhappy, 33.3% stated that their children are generally happy, and 4.3% stated that their children are always happy.

Regarding the question of whether they talk to their children about the YouTube content that their children watch, 4.7% of the parents stated that they never talk, 42.1% stated that they sometimes talk, 41.6% stated that they usually talk, and 11.6% stated that they always talk. Two hundred and nine (58.2%) parents think that sometimes YouTube content contradicts the values that they teach, while 27 parents (7.5%) think that the YouTube content always contradicts the values that they teach.

Parents were asked to indicate by making multiple choices who is the most important role model in shaping the values of their children. Accordingly, 95% of the parents stated that parents are the most important role models. In this question, where multiple choices are possible, 71.7% perceive teachers as the second most important role models. This is followed by the peer group with 56% and finally YouTubers with 16.6%.

Twenty-four (6.7%) parents would like their children to be YouTubers, and 331 parents (91.9%) do not want their children to be YouTubers. The number of parents whose children are already YouTubers is only 5 (1.4%). While the rate of parents who welcomed their children following YouTubers is 8.2%, the rate of those who do not want or do not support is 91.8%. One hundred and forty-nine parents stated that their children take YouTubers as examples, 152 parents put forward that their children do not take YouTubers as examples, and 59 parents stated that they are not aware whether their children take YouTubers as examples or not. While the parents who see YouTubers as the most important role models constitute the 16.6% of the total

parents, the ratio of the parents who do not see YouTubers as the most important role model is 83.4%.

### **Parents' Views about the Effect of YouTubers on Values**

Questions regarding the YouTubers' effects on the formation of students' values were asked to the parents. The answers given by the parents were analyzed using the 5-point Likert scale. It was seen that the parents' opinions regarding all the questions except one is averaged between 1.98 and 2.78 and were within the evaluation ranges of "Disagree" and "Moderately Agree". According to this, parents think that YouTubers positively affect children to behave positively ( $\bar{x} = 2.16$ ;  $sd = .93$ ), have a positive perspective on life ( $\bar{x} = 2.08$ ;  $sd = .88$ ), daily decisions taken ( $\bar{x} = 2.16$ ;  $sd = .88$ ), their values ( $\bar{x} = 2.01$ ,  $sd = 1.04$ ), and establishing positive family ties ( $\bar{x} = 1.99$ ,  $sd = .68$ ). The parents' opinions regarding YouTubers being a part of children's daily life ( $\bar{x} = 2.3$ ,  $sd = 1.14$ ), watching YouTubers broaden horizons ( $\bar{x} = 2.25$ ,  $sd = 1.01$ ), increase happiness ( $\bar{x} = 2.32$ ,  $sd = .97$ ), and making children gain new skills ( $\bar{x} = 2.16$ ,  $sd = .96$ ) are between "I strongly disagree" evaluation range. Parents only have moderately positive views about YouTubers affecting the children positively based on their profession choices ( $\bar{x} = 2.78$ ,  $sd = 1.08$ ).

Several statements were presented to parents to determine the effect of YouTubers on student values, and parents were asked to state the effects of YouTubers on these values. Nearly all the scores regarding the values are in the "I strongly disagree" evaluation range when the mean scores regarding the answers given by the parents were considered. The following are the findings based on the values: Respect ( $\bar{x} = 1.98$ ,  $sd = .87$ ), moral values ( $\bar{x} = 1.99$ ,  $sd = .93$ ), responsibility ( $\bar{x} = 2.03$ ,  $sd = .92$ ), righteousness ( $\bar{x} = 2.04$ ,  $sd = .89$ ), integrity ( $\bar{x} = 2.04$ ,  $sd = .92$ ), compassion ( $\bar{x} = 2.07$ ,  $sd = .87$ ), tolerance ( $\bar{x} = 2.08$ ,  $sd = .89$ ), self-control ( $\bar{x} = 2.08$ ,  $sd = .88$ ), charity ( $\bar{x} = 2.09$ ,  $sd = .91$ ), empathy ( $\bar{x} = 2.10$ ,  $sd = .88$ ), patriotism ( $\bar{x} = 2.10$ ,  $sd = .98$ ), friendship ( $\bar{x} = 2.19$ ,  $sd = .89$ ), and benevolence ( $\bar{x} = 2.19$ ,  $sd = .93$ ).



## **Conclusion**

This study was carried out to explain parents' views on the effects of YouTubers on the values of the primary school children. Nearly half of the parents use a family filter for the internet. Almost one-third of the parents stated that they do not use a family filter, whereas one-fifth of the parents stated that they do not know what a family filter is. Family filters can filter the content that the parents cannot control. OFCOM data indicate that nearly half of the parents use a family filter. Almost half of all the parents whose children use a tablet or a cell phone reported that they know how to use a family filter (OFCOM, 2020).

When the parents' opinions regarding the time that their children spend on YouTube were gotten, most of the parents stated that their children spend 0-2 hours on YouTube. However, the online time spent is 0-2 hours according to the parents' statements, and the internet surfing rate in Turkey is 74%. Users spend 7.5 hours online on average, and YouTube is the second most visited platform. American Psychiatric Association recommends that children aged 2 and under should not have more than 2 hours of screen time. When the parents' opinions are considered, it can be said that children's screen time complies with APA data. According to different results from other studies (Kabali et al., 2015), children under 1-year-old use telephones because parents let their children use smartphones before putting them to bed or while they are doing chores so that the children behave. However, OFCOM data (2019) pointed out in 2019 that houses with children are more "connected" and "smart." In another study, Gentile et al. (2014) reported that nearly half of the children in the sampling group have access to the screen time. Even though the screen time increased in Turkey due to the COVID-19 outbreak (BAU, n.d.), the time stated by parents can be considered normal. This fact can be regarded as positive for student development. Generally, there is a negative correlation between the time spent watching TV and success. On the other hand, there is a positive correlation between being introverted and ostracized, having social and attention problems, anger issues and crimes, and spending time in front of the TV (Özmert et al., 2002).

Another result points out that most of the parents are concerned about the time that their children spend on YouTube. Parents do not think that the time spent on YouTube seriously affects the time the students spend face to face with their friends. One-third of the total parents stated that the interaction between their children and friends decreases. In addition, nearly one-third of the parents stated that there are no changes in the emotional state after spending time on YouTube. One-third stated that they observed their children being happier, while the remaining one-third stated that they observed their children being sadder. This finding point out that YouTube content has different effects on the emotional state of children. In another study, Gentile

et al. (2014) stated that screen time (TV/film, video games, computer games) keeps children away from social and physical activities.

Half of the parents, who participated in the research, spoke to their children about YouTube content. OFCOM data reports that most of the parents spoke to their children about online safety (OFCOM, 2020). Parents must talk to and guide their children about the contents they watch since the family is the place where values are gained. Parental guidance is vital since children learn right and wrong from their families. For example, Turkmen Karaağaç (2015) states that parents should talk to their children about the interpretation of the advertisements and the content regarding watching TV. Furthermore, Turkmen Karaağaç (2015) stated that children should be guided so they can understand the difference between reality and fiction, and learn that problems can be solved without violence.

According to more than half of the parents, the values of the content that their children watch contradict their morals. This contradiction can be explained by the conflict between the priorities of parents and children, and parents' tendencies to protect their values. Preece (2017) put forward that teenagers and children prefer watching YouTube content that is coherent with their ideas. On the contrary, Westenberg (2016) stated that parents observe the online behaviors of children, and they do not know the Youtubers that the children watch. On the other hand, Youtubers can misbehave in some videos. Teenagers, who find misbehaving funny or cool video, may imitate the behaviors that can cause them to get into trouble, and it can be said that such situations cause problems between the parents and children.

According to this study, while parents regard mothers, fathers, teachers, and the peer group, respectively, as the most important role models, they also stated that Youtubers are the least important role models. Parents do not see Youtubers as important role models in the formation of values for their children. Stating parents as the most critical role model can be interpreted as the parents' being aware of the fact that parents are the most crucial value transmitter in values education (Lickona, 1991). Teachers were seen as the second most important role models in this study. The public expects teachers to assume a role that reflects moral values since teachers are effective in teenagers' and children's life (Lumpkin, 2008). However, some studies also point out different results. For example, Sanderse (2013) claimed that teachers misbehave sometimes. Bricheno and Thornton (2018) stated in their study that only 2.4% of parents take teachers as role models. The research of Christus Rex Information Service (Biskup & Pfister, 1999) pointed out that only 10% of the participants took pop stars as role models. Even though few of the participants stated that they took people who are in their close circle as role models, they do not count teachers among them. It can be said that teachers have higher values in Turkish culture.

Another result points out that parents do not want their children to be YouTubers. The ratio of the parents whose children take YouTubers as role models and those who do not are nearly similar. Besides, parents do not approve of their children to follow a YouTuber. When these three results are considered, while children have YouTubers in their lives, parents do not want their children to be like YouTubers or take them as examples. One of the reasons for this is that parents perceive YouTube contents as a threat to the family structure. It can be said that various YouTuber's behaviors or statements do not suit the value system of the families/viewers. According to Alzara (2019), not all YouTube content is entirely negative, but parents not being aware of this fact can have adverse consequences. In addition, as stated above, parents not perceiving YouTubers as the most important role models correspond to the study findings of Westenberger (2016). Although children try to be more like their favorite YouTubers, most of the parents do not approve of this tendency. Parents' negative perceptions of YouTubers can explain this finding.

Parents are concerned about the time that their children spent on YouTube. Very few parents are not concerned. There are studies in the literature that have similar results. For example, Alzara's (2019) study also found that parents are concerned about their children watching YouTube. In the literature, it is possible to see studies in parallel with this result.

Based on this study, parents do not believe that YouTubers have positive effects on children's values, are part of their lives, help children to gain positive perspectives towards life, help the children gain positive behaviors, make positive decisions in their daily lives, contribute to values education and family ties, broaden the children's horizons, and contribute to their happiness and in gaining new skill gain. The parents partially believe that YouTubers contribute to the profession selection of the children. Similarly, parents do not believe that YouTubers contribute to children's values such as respect, moral values, responsibility, righteousness, integrity, compassion, tolerance, self-control, charity, empathy, patriotism, friendship, and benevolence.

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