

Print media holds its own among India's youth

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New Delhi *FE* presents a peek into the first-ever readership survey of literate Indian youth, commissioned by National Book Trust and conducted by a National Council of Applied Economic Research team led by senior fellow Rajesh Shukla.

A majority of the 333-million-odd literate youth in the country are religious, support the Women's Reservation Bill, evince little interest in politics or fashion, and are generally happy with their lot. Almost a fourth of them get a newspaper at home, and around one in ten subscribe to a magazine.

Even in an age of over a hundred 24x7 news channels, newspapers are seen as the primary source for news & current affairs, with television largely an entertainment medium. The Internet is still in its infancy, and radio is a bigger source of information compared to magazines, even in urban India. And just one in four read leisure (non-syllabus) books.

India's youth population grew at over 2% to 459 million in 2009 from 390 million in the 2001 census, while the literate youth population grew at a more rapid 2.5% to 333 million from 273 million. Growth was faster in urban India (3.15% a year) than in rural India (2.11%), according to findings of the National Book Trust-National Council of Applied Economic Research National Youth Readership Survey (NYRS) 2009, which has been shared first with *FE*.

The survey—with a sample of over 3,11,431 literate youth (1,02,021 rural and 2,09,410 urban) covering 432 villages in 207 districts as rural and 753 urban blocks in 199 towns as urban—is a first-of-its-kind exercise aimed at providing an objective understanding of the media consumption, reading habits and preferences of literate Indian youth.

The survey, conducted in November-December 2009, follows the National Youth Policy 2003's definition of youth: people in the age group 13-35 years.

Almost three-fourths (73%) of literate youth in the country are from schedule castes (22.7%), schedule tribes (9.8%) and other backward classes (40.3%), according to the survey. Currently, caste-based reservation in educational institutes stands at 15% for SCs, 7.5% for STs and 27% for OBCs.

Awareness of government flagship social schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is higher among rural youth compared to city dwellers. What interests most is music & films, news & current affairs and religious & spiritual issues, with under a third interested in politics, and even fewer in fashion.

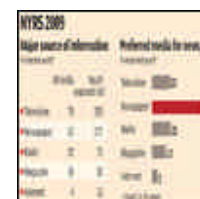
Of the country's total youth population of 459 million, literate youth constitute around three-fourths, numbering 333 million. Literate youth in rural India number 207 million (62.1% of the total) and 126 million (or, 37.9%) in urban areas. A large proportion, over 41%, is in the older 25-35 age group, followed by teenagers (36.7%), with the rest in the 20-24 age bracket (22.1%).

Television emerges as the biggest media, with over 77% of the 333 million literate, or 259 million, youth exposed to it. Newspapers too are able to maintain their dominance, with over half (53%) of all literate youth, or 177 million, exposed to them. But in terms of preferred media for news & current affairs, newspapers win hands down, with around two-thirds (63.4%) selecting them compared with just a third (22.2%) for television.

In fact radio, with 22.8% of youth preferring it for news & current affairs, still has a slight edge over television here. Radio, with a listenership of 71 million youth, also punches above magazines (52 million) and Internet (12 million). Book readers (non-syllabus) number around 83 million (25% of literate youth), of which 39 million are in urban areas and 44 million in rural India.

Time spent with different media makes for interesting reading. Television emerges the biggest engager, with average time spent a day at over 97 minutes. Radio (61 minutes), magazines (44 minutes) and newspapers (32 minutes) lag far behind. Though the Internet reaches fewer than 4% of all youth (8% in urban areas), time spent with the medium is proportionately higher at over an hour a day (70 minutes), reflecting the medium's stickiness.

Interestingly, newspapers and the Internet share a high out-of-home exposure. Around half of all youth get to read a newspaper outside their homes, with shops/cafes/restaurants and neighbours as chief access points. Ditto with the Internet, with around two-thirds accessing it at cyber cafes and/or the workplace.



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