

Usage of mass media by youth

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Mass media influences youth culture: it is an axiom that ingrained in the popular imagination over three generations since World War II. It is alternatively praised and derided for the positive and negative influences that images, words and music flowing from various media outlets create in the young mind.

For media owners, the youthful segment of the world population is an irresistible target. Its sheer size and homogeneity in terms of basic tendencies makes young people the primal focus of television, print and Internet strategies. Along the way, the media promotes idealistic paradigms of politico-socio-economic behaviour, and also shapes popular youth choices.

The Indian youthful respondents were asked in The National Youth Readership Survey (NYRS), 2009, to select their three most-preferred activities from a list of nine. Considering only the first choices, 'TV watching' topped, with about 28% declaring it as their favourite pastime. 'Newspaper reading' came second with 14% support.

An investigation into the leisure activities of primary and middle school students in China found that 'watching TV' was the most preferred way of passing time (Liu, 2000). A survey in Britain also concluded that young people aged between 11 and 18 were more likely to watch TV or use the Internet than picking up a book (Mori, 2004).

Surprisingly, while 59% were keen on 'religious and spiritual' topics, only 35% and 34% showed interest in 'science and technological discovery' and 'environmental pollution' respectively. Politics fascinated 30% and fashion, a high 29%. In female-dominated 'cooking', there is 39% support from the entire youth population whereas in 'sport', considered a male domain, support came from 55% of the literate youth.

Television is the most popular source of information with 78% youth following, relegating newspapers, with a dismal 7.5% rating, to the 'leisure activity' status. Books, newspapers and magazines are read as the level of education increases. However, their popularity decreases with age.

Why do the youth access print and electronic media? Through NYRS, 2009, an attempt was made to find out from the literate youth their reasons for accessing different mass media. Of all the youth literates who read newspapers, 63.4% reported that their most important purpose was to gather information about current events, while 9.4% and 8.1% respectively indicated 'entertainment' and 'sport'. Coming to magazines, 33.2% of youth read them primarily for entertainment, 16.9% for 'news and current events', 10.6% for information on 'health' and 8.3% for 'sport'.

About 54% of youth said they watched television chiefly for entertainment, while 22.2% indicated 'news & current events' and 8.1% 'sport' as their *raison d'être*.

The Internet is primarily used for 'e-mails and chatting'. This view emerges from the responses of 50.4% of our literate urban youth. For 14.5% of Internet users, the chief purpose of visiting cyberspace was

entertainment.

The tendency of contemporary youth to turn to the media more for entertainment than information is confirmed by the finding that 54% watch TV for song-and-dance and 22% for news and current affairs. Compared to watching television, newspaper reading is a much more serious exercise.

Of all those who reported reading newspaper regularly, about 63% of the youth did so to gather news and information on current events, while only 10% read for entertainment. Only 21% of youngsters listen to the radio and a meagre 3.7% surf the Internet. As for credibility, literate youth by and large prefer print over TV, and 70% expressed confidence on the Internet.

Mass media disseminates information on science , technology, economics, politics, fashion, health and virtually everything else, but is also blamed for most societal ills. It is charged with glamorising crime, violence, drug abuse and alcoholism (Brown and Witherspoon, 2002). It allegedly extends a veneer of respectability to sexual promiscuity and licentious behaviour, gives the nudge to irreverence towards old mores and so on.

Research shows that there is an overwhelming presence of wine, tobacco and dangerous drugs in mass media targeted at youth (Thompson, 2005). In a nationally-representative , random-digit telephone survey of 10-14 year olds, Sargent, et al (2006) found a disturbing positive association between increased exposure to smoking in movies and smoking initiation.

Similarly, Ellickson, et al (2005) who studied exposure effects of alcohol advertisements on television , magazines and in-store displays found a coincidence between heightened exposure to alcohol advertisements in the VIIIth grade and alcohol initiation in the IXth.

In fact, it is believed that mass media 'influence' has engendered irresponsible consumption, materialism and individualism in today's youth. Sociologists refer to this as a 'mediated' culture wherein the media both reflects and creates a definitive way of life. In his highly-acclaimed *Four Arguments For The Elimination Of Television* (1978), Jerry Mander wrote, "Television is a form of sense deprivation, causing disorientation and confusion.

It leaves viewers less able to tell the real from the non-real , the internal from the external, the personally-experienced from the externally-implanted . It disorients a sense of time, place, history and nature."

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