



## **A STUDY OF CULTIVATION OF MEDIA HABITS AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN**

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*“It is no longer enough to simply read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage.” (Ernest Boyer, 2006)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The research on ‘A study of cultivation of media habits among school children’ is an attempt at understanding yet-to-be-comprehended segment of media and children. Children are today growing in the age of information and communication explosion. Television, movies, the Internet, magazines, newspapers, books, radio, computer games, billboards and videos are all a part of their world. Students draw a substantial amount of their knowledge about the world from the media around them. It is therefore essential to understand what and how they interpret the messages that informs, entertains and at times persuades them.

India is the second most populous country in the world, with over 1.21 billion people (2011 census), more than a sixth of the world's population. India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 which also means that it constitutes a large number of children. Students are really involved with the media. The average American watches between 24-28 hours of TV per week, and according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average U.S. child (ages 8-18) uses the media for about 44 hours per week.

It is not surprising that the Indian media and entertainment industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy. Media and Entertainment (M&E) industry in India was worth INR402.43 billion (USD9.12bn) in 2006 and has grown to INR 728 billion in 2011, says the FICCI-KPMG report.

## **Trends in media**

EMarketer predicts there will be a massive 1.43 billion social network users in 2012, representing a 19.2 percent increase over the figures collected in 2011. Social media usage varies from place to place and from one demographic to the next. A Pew Internet survey found that 65 percent of Internet users in the U.S. used social networking sites and this is from the previous year's percentage of 61. With technology allowing nearly 24-hour media access, the amount of time young people spend with entertainment media has risen dramatically

## **Significance of the study**

This study is probably the first of its kind in India. It is both qualitative and quantitative, done using questionnaires and group interviews of a big sample out of a big universe in a town with about 90 private schools and 15 government schools (2 senior secondary, 1 middle and 12 primary). At an average, 1000 students between the age group of 6-18 years were present in each school and therefore a total universe of around 1,05,000 students was considered for the study.

360 students from twelve different schools of a town (2 Government schools and 10 non-government or private schools) between the age group of 6 to 18 years, 60 parents and 60 teachers were involved in this pro-social study. A study of cultivation of media habits among school children as a topic of research is a multi and cross disciplinary research involving other areas such as education, sociology, psychology, economy and general health. Various media listed in the questionnaire and during the interviews were a sum total or generic name of a group as mentioned below-

1. Newspaper – Magazines, Pull-outs, Leaflets etc.
2. Radio – I-pod, car stereo, music heard on phone due to radio transmission etc.
3. Phone – Landline, Mobile phone, games played on phone, SMS, MMS etc.
4. Television – use of DVD's etc.
5. Internet / Computer - Net usage, computer usage, computer games etc.

## **Theoretical background of the research –**

**(1) The Agenda-Setting Theory by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw** This

theory explains why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues.

- (2) **Media socialization theory** posits media consumers learn certain behaviors by identifying with and modeling the attitudes and actions of television characters (Jeffres, 1986).
- (3) Blumler and Katz's **uses and gratification theory** suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. According to Derek Lane "**uses and gratification theory** suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media
- (4) **The Cultivation Theory of Mass Media by Gerbner** attempts to understand and explain the dynamics of media as the distinctive and dominant cultural force of our age.
- (5) The **five functional approaches theory** stated by Harold Laswell and Charles Wright states that media serves users: surveillance, correlation, transmission, entertainment, and mobilization
- (6) **Media Dependency Theory** by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur states that the more dependent an individual is on the media for having his or her needs fulfilled, the more important the media will be to that person.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Media creates its own habits among children but with permissive and non-permissive factors in and around, media results in the formation of media habits.
2. Children are impressed with media and spend time involved in Mass Media
3. The use pattern of media by Parents, Teachers and peer group helps the children in selecting the Media of Mass Communication
4. Children are shifting their communication media choice from print media to electronic media and they prefer GUI (Graphical user interface) to CUI (Character user interface) in context of digital media.
5. School atmosphere is conducive for all media adoption by children.
6. There is financial constraint in the use of media.
7. Parents do not support their children's excessive use of electronic media as compared to print media.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Use of mixed methods** - The research is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative because the structured group interviews helped to gather an in-depth understanding of parents, teachers and students behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what. The interview served this purpose and gave deeper insight on the topic. The where, when and all facets of research were dealt with care.

It is quantitative because even the number of people surveyed is not restricted or low. 360 students, 60 parents and 60 teachers constituted the sample taken up for the study. It is an all invasive research because it protrudes deep and poses various questions and after thoughts.

Two questionnaires were designed for students and they were asked to keep a **Media Log** for a period of one week and subsequently fill up the questionnaire -

1. Demographic Questionnaire - The questionnaire had questions on economic, social and educational profile. It was taken home and filled by taking parent's help.
2. Media Questionnaire for Students - This questionnaire had 57 questions to analyze and have a deeper understanding of their media habits.

### **Sampling**

The research had followed Stratified sampling where the population embraces a number of distinct categories, the frame can be organized by these categories into separate "strata". The study involved parents, teachers and students between the age group of 6 to 18 years. These were then sampled as an independent sub-population, out of which individual elements were randomly selected.

**Universe** - There are about 90 private schools and 15 government schools (12 primary, 1 middle and 2 senior secondary). At an average, 1000 students between the age group of 6-18 years were present in each school and therefore a total universe of around 1,05,000 students was considered for the study.

### **Sample size**

*The Sample size of the research was 360 students, 60 parents and 60 teachers.*

**Students** - A random purposive sample of 360 students, 180 from 10 private schools and 180 from 2 government schools was drawn. Two main categories of teens and preteens were decided as per the researched view of scholars. Preteens are individuals between the

ages of 8 and 12; adolescents or teens are in the 13- to 18-age range (Wilson, Strasburger, and Jordan,2009)

There were six groups demarcated with 60 students each. Out of these 60, 30 were from private schools and 30 from government schools. Since 10 randomly selected private schools were considered, 3 students per group were taken from each private school. In case of government schools, 2 government schools were involved therefore 15 students per school were taken.

**Teachers** – A total of 60 teachers were interviewed out of which five teachers were approached from each school (10 private + 2 government)

**Parents** – A total of 60 parents were interviewed out of which five parents were contacted from each school (10 private + 2 government)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Views about Phone**

- Telephone was available in all households. Mobile was more prevalent compared to landline. 100% students of age group 16-18 years in private schools had more than one mobile. It was observed that there was a gradual increase in number of students having personal mobile through lesser in government. A figure of 0% for age group 6-8 years finally ended with 100% in private schools and 93% in government schools. All students were using phone (100%) for less than one hour and in all categories usage was also reported for more than one hour.
- 100% students used phone for calling. As they grew in age their usage of different functions like SMS, Clicking pictures, Setting reminders, playing games and listening to music also grew. Teens showed a higher inclination towards talking to friends. From 10% in government schools students, it rose to 77% and in case of private schools students it increased from 17% to 100%.
- Landline was not present in all houses. The preferred area of its placement was drawing room or lobby.
- All age categories felt that phone was a source of entertainment not distraction. Higher teens in the age group of 16-18 years stated 97% for entertainment and only 3% for distraction.

- Phone was not used for study related activities in lower teens between 6-8 years, but gradually the use increased touching 100% for calling, 47% for calculations and 30% for internet in case of 16-18 year old private schools students.
- It was observed that the phone bill of the families of students from private schools was higher than that compared with government schools students. The families of private schools teenagers were paying more than 1000 rupees towards their phone bills.
- Preteens of age group 6 to 8 years did not feel any discomfort if the phone was not available for a day but 97% of the higher teens of age group 16 to 18 years missed phone within a day.
- 90% students from government schools and 97% from private schools engaged in other activities while using the phone. Also multitasking grew gradually from preteens to teens.
- Teens of private schools had 100% familiarity and government schools students had 90 to 93% familiarity with the functions available on phone.

### **Views about Television**

- All students under research had TV at home. LCD and more than one TV set was seen in homes of private schools students, almost 50% had LCD and about 20% had more than one TV set.
- All students were spending time with TV Some preteens were even spending more than one hour but none of the teens between the age group of 16 – 18 years were doing so.
- Majority of students in all the age groups were watching television along with their parents and gave ‘mostly’ and ‘sometimes’ as the choice. A narrow percentage of 3 and 7 was observed in preteens who were watching it ‘always’ and the same was observed in teens for ‘never’ as their choice.
- Movies were the first choice of all students except for preteens of age group 6 – 8 years. The second choice was music. Preteens gave discovery as the third choice followed by news as the fourth choice.
- All students could name at least one or more TV channels. Teens of both the schools could name five and more channels. Preteens between the age group of 6 – 8 years could list an average of 3-4 channels and their awareness grew with age.
- Multitasking was happening. 100% students agreed on eating while watching TV Students in the age group of 6 – 8 years did not engage in any other activity but a gradual

increase in multitasking was noticed in different age groups. By the age of 16 – 18 years, more than 30% students of government schools and 60% students of private schools were reading, using other media, packing their bags and doing home work along with TV watching.

- All students appreciated TV. 100% teens could list more than five benefits of TV
- It was interesting to note that while all students viewed and appreciated TV, they also had alternate activities which they would do instead of TV watching. The lower preteens between the age of 6 – 8 years could list 1-2 activities and the higher teens between the age of 16 – 18 years could list five and more activities.
- All students viewed and appreciated TV. The lower preteens between the age of 6 – 8 years could list 2-3 TV serials and 100% teens could list five and more serials.
- All students viewed and appreciated TV. The lower preteens between the age of 6 – 8 years could list 2-3 TV personalities and 100% teens in the age group of 16 – 18 years could list five and more TV personalities.

#### **Views about Computer / Internet**

- Availability of computer depended on the background of students. 100% students from private schools had a computer either personal or laptop. The computer was scarcely seen and was reported to be below 14% in houses of students from government schools.
- Availability of internet connection was high amongst the students from private schools, it varied from 77% to 99%. Internet connection was below 3% in houses of students from government schools.
- There was a marked difference between the usage of computer in government schools students and private schools students. In case of government schools students, usage was not more than 10%. In case of private schools students, maximum usage spotted in both the cases was playing games (83 to 90%) followed by listening to music and watching movies. Surfing net was higher among the teens and there was gradual increase in time spent on doing home work.
- Students of government schools stated 0% parental involvement, one reason for this was poor availability of computers at home. In case of private schools students the parental involvement was visible but there was a gradual decline from 83% in case of 6-8 year

olds to 10% in case of 16-18 year olds

- All students in general spent less than one hour on computer, private schools students spent upto two hours, 3% in case of lower teens and there was gradual increase moving as high as 53% in case of higher teens between 16 - 18 years. One odd 3% was spotted to spend 3 hours in the age group of 14 – 16 years in private schools category otherwise no other group spent more than two hours.
- All private schools students used computer in school and at home and little use was seen in cyber cafe and friend's place. In case of government schools students, 100% teens used computer at school and very few (3 – 7%) used it in cyber cafés.
- All categories except 6-8 years government schools students reported the usage for less than one hour. Some private schools students also reported higher usage(3 – 13%) upto 3 hours.
- All categories except 14 - 16 years of government schools students reported that web camera was not available. Private schools students reported presence of web camera between the range of 57% and 73%.
- All categories except higher teens between 14 - 18 years of government schools students reported that they had not seen video conferencing. Private schools students reported the use of video conferencing between the range of 33 to 50%. A small number of teens of government schools students reported the use of computer chatting but the preteens had not engaged in computer chatting. Private schools students between 8 – 18 years of age group reported the use of computer chatting between the range of 33 to 90%. A gradual increase was noticed in different age groups.

### **Views about Newspapers**

- Number of newspapers bought at home - All children from private schools were buying at least one newspaper. A small percentage between 3 to 10% were even opting for more than one newspaper. In case of government schools children, a large number of children did not respond. About 13 to 23% reported that no newspaper was bought and 10 – 43% reported that they bought one newspaper.
- Time spent in reading the newspapers - 90 to 97% children from private schools spent less than one hour reading the newspaper. A small percentage between 3 to 7% even spent 1-2 hours reading the newspaper. In case of government schools children, some



children did not respond. About 37 to 93% reported that they spent less than one hour reading the newspaper. Nobody reported spending more than one hour.

- Sections read in the newspaper - Age had a direct correlation with the sections read in the newspaper. As children grew there was gradual interest and awareness for different sections of the newspaper. Higher teens in the age group of 16 to 18 years spent time reading all the sections of the newspaper as compared to lower preteens who liked advertisements.
- Students' discomfort due to unavailability of the newspaper - The habit of reading newspaper was formed amongst the teens. None of the lower preteens between age group of 6 – 8 years missed reading the newspaper whereas higher teens between 16 – 18 years missed it by 50% and 80% respectively in government and private schools children. In general there was a gradual increase in the formation of this habit.
- Additional newsletters that come along with the newspaper - Newspaper influenced the teens. None of the lower preteens between age group of 6 – 8 years could list any newsletter but higher teens between 16 – 18 years could list 2 – 3 newsletters.
- Discussions with reference to the newspaper at home - Discussions with reference to newspaper were seen amongst the teens. None of the lower preteens between age group of 6 – 8 years had any such discussion whereas higher teens between 16 – 18 years reported it as 23% and 70% respectively in government and private schools children. In general there were more discussion in houses of private schools children.
- Name and number of newspaper - Awareness about newspaper was higher amongst the teens. The lower preteens between the age group of 6 – 8 years could name one newspaper whereas higher teens between 16 – 18 years could name 3 to 4 newspapers. There was a gradual increase in the awareness level in different age categories.

The overall interest in print media was found on a decline. The reasons for not reading were stated as lack of access to magazines, lack of time and not liking the content of children's magazines. Children also felt that there is a real need to increase the space devoted to stories in children's magazines, as that was their most preferred material.

### **Views about Radio**

- Radio or the broader definition which involves electronic transmitting of radio

frequencies was available in all houses. By and large students spent less than one hour listening to radio.

- The first preference of students was music, followed by cricket match. News and radio programmes were the third choice.
- Lower preteens between 6 to 10 years of age could recall just one jingle and one radio station but the higher teens between students of the age group of 16 to 18 years of age could recall 3-4 jingles and an average of four radio stations.
- Students did not associate too much with radio. Most of the students could not name a news reader, radio jockey except for private schools students between the age group of 14 to 18 years who could recall an average of half a name.
- Lower preteens between 6 to 10 years of age could not recall any advertisement or programme heard on the radio but the higher teens between the age group of 16 to 18 years of age could recall the name of an average of 3-4 advertisements and 2-3 favourite programmes on radio.
- Multitasking was happening. 100% students were engaged in some other activity while listening to radio. 100% teens wanted to see what they heard. This also justified that students preferred the visual media.

Multitasking was the language of yesterdays, Multitasking through multiprocessors dominates the scene and an all informed child is ready to face the world confidently. The present study has replicated the findings of some studies of children's and families' media habits, as well as the possible effects of those habits. It is unique in at least two respects. To my knowledge, it is the most comprehensive study of children's media habits conducted in India, as it measures multiple aspects of Parents, teachers, school, environment and child media habits. Furthermore, it provides a benchmark for future studies and for practical applications.

**In relation to the research conducted, we can conclude that -**

Media creates its own habits among children. The permissive and non-permissive factors play a role but clear preference was seen for TV and Internet with a percentage of around 90. Media saturated environment had helped in the formation of media habits and it was seen that almost all age groups were using media almost upto 100%. The results found were in complete agreement with the findings of Kaiser Family Foundation study that stated

that 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes (7:38) to using entertainment media across a typical day (more than 53 hours a week). There was a difference between the usage of media in the students of government and private schools. Exposure and availability was higher in case of private schools which lead to higher use and also at a younger age. All categories except higher teens between 14 - 18 years of government schools students reported that they had not seen video conferencing. Private schools students reported the use of video conferencing between the range of 33 to 50%.

Children are impressed with media and spent time involved in Mass Media. 100% students used phone for calling. All students could name TV channels. Teens of both the schools could name five and more channels. Preteens between the age group of 6 – 8 years could list an average of 3-4 channels but their awareness grew with age. All students viewed and appreciated Television. Movies was the first choice of all students except for preteens of age group 6 – 8 years. The second choice was music. The parents, teachers and students felt that resistance in use/ change of media for was around 20%. And there was little resistance seen in use of different media. Generation M<sup>2</sup>, A study by Kaiser Family Foundation also stated the increase in media use among 8- to 18-year-olds: from 39% to 66% for cell phones, and from 18% to 76% for iPods and other MP3 players. The findings also proved Media Dependency Theory by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur states that the more dependent an individual is on the media for having his or her needs fulfilled, the more important the media will be to that person.

The use pattern of media by parents, teachers and peer group helps the children in selecting the Media of Mass Communication. Teachers felt that parent's involvement and guidance was as high (around 80%) in case of TV and Internet. Peers had a strong and decisive role in cultivation media habits. All felt that peer pressure led to massive use of TV, Internet and phone which was higher than 90%. The above proved Blumler and Katz's uses and gratification theory that suggested that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. It also justified the Cultivation Theory of Mass Media by Gerbner that attempts to understand and explain the dynamics of media as the distinctive and dominant cultural force of our age. Gerbner's cultivation theory said that television has become the main source of storytelling in the present society.

Multitasking was happening. 100% students agreed on eating while watching TV and

listened to radio. Students in the age group of 6 – 8 years did not engage in any other activity but a gradual increase in multitasking was noticed in different age groups. By the age of 16 – 18 years, more than 30% students of government schools and 60% students of private schools were reading, using other media, packing their bags and doing home work. It was interesting to note that while all students viewed and appreciated TV, they also had alternate activities which they would do instead of TV watching. The lower preteens between the age group of 6 – 8 years could list 1-2 activities and the higher teens between the age group of 6 – 8 years could list five and more activities. It proved the uses and gratifications theory which assumes that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need.

Children are shifting their communication media choice from print media to electronic media and they prefer GUI (Graphical user interface) to CUI (Character user interface) in context of digital media. High preference was noticed for visual and digital media like television, internet and phone. Television was given 100% preference by age group 6-8 years. Students did not prefer radio and newspaper as much. The Office of Communications (Ofcom) found that 65% of kids ages 8 to 11 had Internet access at home in 2007. Among children ages 12 to 15, the percentage rose to 75%. Always Connected: The new digital media habits of young children by Aviva Lucas Gutnick et al., stated that children have more access to all kinds of digital media and they are spending more time with it than ever before. An article in Guardian also stated that children spend 6 hours a day in front of one screen or another.

School atmosphere was conducive for all media adoption by children. Teachers said that they were laying high emphasis (around 95%) on Print Media but Parents disagreed and said School's pressure to use internet was as high as 92%. It was clearly reflected that the school had a role in the development of media habits. The result is in agreement with Agenda-Setting Theory by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw that explained why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues.

There was financial constraint in the use of media. It was observed that the phone bill of the families of students from private schools was higher than that compared with government schools students. The families of private schools teenagers were paying more than 1000 rupees towards their phone bills. All students under research had TV at home. LCD and more than one TV set was seen in homes of private schools students, almost 50% had LCD and about 20% had more than one TV set. The finding completely agreed with the views

stated in *Always Connected: The new digital media habits of young children* by Aviva Lucas Gutnick et al. that family income continues to be a barrier to some children owning technology.

Parents do not support their children's excessive use of electronic media as compared to print media. Parents dislike was least in case of newspaper (24%) and 62% in case of TV and almost 90%, internet. Teachers felt that phone was disliked to about 65%, internet to about 47% and radio to only 20%.

**The major preferences of five media discussed under the study 'Cultivation of media habits among the school children' were as following -**

In order of preference, both internet and Television were rated the highest. TV was liked a lot, Students felt that they spent about two and a half hour every day with it but both parents and teachers felt it was about three hours. TV showed a downward trend and moved from four hours in classes 1,2 to three in classes 3,4 and finally two hours in classes 5 to 12. Internet was a big favorite. Students and teachers felt that about two and a half an hour were spent on it every day but parents felt it was about three hours. Internet showed a steady upward trend and moved from nil in classes 1,2 to one in classes 3,4. It further increased gradually from two hours in classes 5,6 to three hours in classes 7,8 and from four hours in classes 9,10 to finally five hours in classes 11 & 12.

Phone and radio were in the middle, Teachers felt that students spent about half an hour every day on radio but both parents and teachers felt it was about one hour. Phone was liked more than radio, Students felt that they spent about one and a half hour every day while both parents and teachers felt it was about two hours. Phone usage was nil till class 2 and then gradually grew from one hour in classes 3 - 8 to two hours in classes 9,10 and finally four hours in classes 11 & 12.

Radio listening was nil till class 6 and then gradually grew from one hour in classes 7,8 to two hours in classes 9,10 and finally three hours in classes 11 & 12.

Newspaper on low priority, though students said they spent half an hour every day while both parents and teachers denied it. Newspaper reading was nil till class 6 and then picked up and maintained to about an hour everyday from classes 7 to 12.

**CONCLUSION**

The research establishes that media was widely available and its use had percolated

across all the age groups of students from 6 to 18 years. The media habits of parents, teachers and peers influenced the selection and use of media by children. But despite their preference for print media and apprehensions for digital media, students preferred interactive, visual and electronic media like television, internet and phones. They spent over two and half hours daily with such media. Radio was used mostly for listening to music. The habit for use of print media like newspapers was low and children spent less than half an hour with it.

Financial status was the reason for disparity in the availability and correspondingly the use of media by students belonging to government schools as compared to private schools.

Children were media friendly and easily adjusted to newer versions of electronic media. They were into multitasking and used more than one medium at a time. Children enjoyed media but also listed alternate activities in the unavailability of their preferred media.

Media habits were gradually formed / cultivated starting from lower preteens to higher teens. Television was the only medium used in classes I and II but students from classes III to VI were using television, internet and phone. Teenagers from classes VII to XII used all media.

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