

THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ECOLOGY ON PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOUR OF TERTIARY EDUCATION STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF NIMS UNIVERSITY, INDIA

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Abstract

India is a great nation with rich cultural and political history that span thousands of years. The country has been a major exporter of cultural products around the globe. But there is beginning to be a paradigm shift in recent time because of the massive influence of the mass media on the youth population of the nation. The study sought to access media ecology and its influence in redefining the attitude and perception of students of NIMS University, Rajasthan, India.

Participant observation and focus group methods were used for data collection. The participant observation span a period of 6 months, December 2016 - June 2017 while the focus group had 20 active participants drawn from among students, lecturers, parents and media experts.

The study revealed that the India is a large media market and the students and youths are major players in this dynamic market. It was noted that students are directly exposed to media environment and most have daily access to the media especially the social media.

This paper further confirmed that the interaction between the students and the media ecology has produced a significant measure of influence on the students' world view. Additionally, the research did identify the various areas media exposure is influencing the students and went ahead to highlight the psycho-socio-cultural implications of such influences both at the micro and macro level of society.

The researcher recommended for more extensive research on media ecology in India covering a wider geography, demography and time frame.

Keywords: Media Influence, Media Ecology, Students, Perception and Realities.

Introduction

The global media landscape has witnessed rapid turns and twists since its emergence more than 500 years ago. The arrival of the social media has added new dynamics and helped in strengthening the hold and influence of mass communication tools on humanity across the globe. Students are part of the group where there have been heated debates on the pattern, trend and extent of media influence. Many researchers have focused on their internet using habit, social addiction, social media influence on their health, relationship and academic performance (Choney 2010; Mehmood And Taswir, 2011; Owusu-Achew and Larson, 2015).

The global media wave has been in India for a while. India is a country with a huge population of 1.237 billion people. It's the third biggest country in terms of internet users in the world, thereby making it imperative for the psycho-sociological. Influence of media on the students to be empirically studied. There are 243 millions internet users in the country with the potential to increase to 500 million by 2018.

It was projected that by 2016 India will have more number of internet users than the United States. This prediction was made by Rajan Anandam, MD, Google India (Ajmera, 2014).

Livemint (2016) reported that there are 180 million internet users in India. In 2015, active mobile users were 1.31 billion, p 23 percent. Daily mobile users were 844 million, a 29 percent increase. There is a direct link between mobile usage and growth of internet active users (Naidu, 2015).

The commerce sector has recognized this development and has keyed into its leading to the fact that in 2012, India e-commerce market stood at \$14 billion USD and reached \$24 billion by the year 2015. For social media, it is reported that over 125 million users use Facebook alone, making it the most browsed social network on social media in India (Ajmer, 2014).

Worldwide, as at April 2016, there were 1.6 billion users, 1 billion WhatsApp users and 900 million Facebook messenger users (Statista, 2016).

The surge in the mobile usage, with the emergence of the smart phone generation did contribute tremendously in making this possible both in India and in other countries of the world.

In the backdrop of all these information it becomes more necessary to look beyond the statistics and focus on the implication of the data on the students who are greatly exposed to these social media and inclusively the tradition media television, radio, newspaper of which they can equally access via their smart phones with the recent advances in technology.

Frederick (1993), outlined the under listed as some major factors that show the growing importance of international communication:

- World Population Explosion
- From Geopolitics to Gaiapolitics
- Increased Cross-cultural Communication
- Changing Concept of Community
- Greater Centralization Of Control
- Information Explosion
- Changes In Technologies
- Greater Dependence on Global Communication
- Greater Interdependence And Democracy
- Impact of Communication On Peace And War

Statement of Problem

With the advances in information communication technology, the reach of the mass media has been massive. The media has aided in making the world a truly global village. These advances of media technology have greatly impacted on the way people communicate and perceive the world around them. The dynamics and ever evolving nature of the media environment in India cannot be overstated. In fact, India has the largest media industry in Asia. over the years students at all educational levels has increase access to the media and many researchers have published in their media usage, impact on their health and academic performance (Livemint, 2016; Owusu Acheaw And Larson 2015; camailia, Ibrahim and Dalhatu, 2013).

Due to the increase in popularity of the media, various stakeholders are worried that the impact of the

media on students can affect their perception and consequently affects the nation in the long term.

It is against this background that the research was conducted to ascertain the impact of media ecology on students and the effects of such influence, if any, on the nation.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted to undertake the analysis of various dimensions of the media including the study of influence on the student and the implications. For the purpose of this paper, the following objectives have been considered:

- To investigate how the media presents reality
- To examine how the media is influencing the students
- To ascertain the implication of the influence of media on students

Research Questions

To facilitate the study, the following research questions were formulated:

- Does the media environment influence students in India
- What are the implications of the influence of the media ecology on students

Methods and Procedure

The researcher used mixed approach

- Observation research also known as field research as a type of co-relational research was used whereby, the research observed ongoing behavior of NIMS university students for a period of 6 months (December 2016- June 2017). The participants' observation was adopted.
- Supplementing the observation research, a focus group involving 20 participants was set up. The members were made up of students, media experts, parents and behavioral analysts. They were all purposively selected in line with the objective of the study. A set of semi-structured questionnaire was used in modulating the discussions.

Theoretical Framework

Media Ecology Theory:- also known as Marshall McLuhan's theory of communication as he was responsible for popularizing the perspective. The theoretical concepts were proposed by Marshall McLuhan in 1964 though the term media ecology was first formerly introduced by Neil Postman in 1968 (Gencarelli, 1999). Marshall also produced the first synthesis of the media ecological thoughts. It is the study of media environment, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs (Strate, 1999).

Media ecology as an emerging meta discipline was broadly defined by Nystrom (1973) as the study of "complex communication systems as environments."

The theory is a preparadigmatic science and deterministic theory though Strate (1999) labeled McLuhan's view as "soft determinism" opposed to "hard determinism." Hard determinism holds that humans have no input or control over change in society while soft determinism argues that there is an interplay or interdependence between the human agent of the society and technology in affecting changes.

Similarly, Neil Postman (1970) added that media ecology "looks into the matter of how media

communication affects human perception, understanding, feeling and value, and how our media interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival.”

Literature Review

Today's generation is synonymous with the 'social media savvy'. Internet and mobile association of India (IAMAI) reported that there are 180 million internet users in India and that over 125 million users use Facebook. Of the above stated number of active social media users, college students form the largest demographic according to 33% (Livemint, 2016).

Media and University Students in India

Kavita (2015) in his scholarly paper “The Influence of Social Media on Indian Students and Teenagers”, noted that in India alone, more than 85% of college students and teenagers use social media. He went on to say “the main focus of students should be education but unfortunately today's students are emphasizing on such sites which can be a complete wastage of time. It has become an addiction for college students, teenagers and adult also”.

Though he didn't mention example of sites which he referred to as “a complete wastage of time,” he was actually reechoing the concern of government and parents. Another variable that is not addressed is whether the media content that these students are exposed to are generated in India or from overseas. The data collected during this research shows that more than 80% of the content are foreign or non-Indian generated.

It is worthy of to know that Kavita (2015) holds the view based on the outcome of his research “that social media networking websites are auditory and dangerous for Indian youth and teenagers”. This will be somewhat a bracket of statement giving a complete thumb down to all social networking websites and seeing no iota of good in them. This researcher calls for more objectives view and empirically based conclusion of the overall effects of the media on students.

Another researcher, Arora (2014) had earlier in his paper, social networking- A study of Indian youth revealed that the youth have been caught in the trap of social networking addiction thereby changing the way they live, socialize and share. This finding, does prove that there has been an initial change in perception because the state of our perception has direct impact on how attitude towards life, relationship and our environment. Meanwhile, none of the existing literatures looked at the multiplier effect or chain of effect that can result of this discovered addiction both at the university level and at the national level.

The Media Quest to Control Users

The media both traditional and new media is a big business and has been greatly commercialized and internationalized. A lot of conglomeration and mergers have taken place in the media industry. For example, all the media in the united states are owned by a mere owners, no matter which network one watches, reads or listens to, the same stories are told, with a slightly different spin depending on whether the network caters to democrats or republicans. None of them actually cater to libertarians, anarchist, agnorist and or voluntaryist. C-SPAN comes closest to providing news for these groups.

This example was necessary because all of these media are on social networking websites. Therefore, they have the access to influencing the perception of millions of viewers and audience across the world.

The process was intended to be a watch dog on government, to inform the people when the government is acting illegally, instead they have become the government lapdogs, promoting whatever stories and ideas the government wants publicized and hiding everything the government wants hidden from the people. Media merger have not profited the people much. Competitions among a hundred or so (or even more) owners of media would have served the people better. This few owners to an extent determine the content that media audiences around the world are exposed to increasing on social media platforms. The media exposes a morphological structure on its audience.

In view of the analysis and state of affairs with the global media landscape, can infer that the in media imperialism and that the international media are positioned to influence audience situated beyond the shores of the nations where the media outlets are incorporated. This is the media that Indian university students are daily bombarded with.

Depiction of Reality by the Media

It could be argued that humans have always occupied a pseudo-reality that is shaped by the media of a given society. The Plato of the allegory of the cave touches on this, and still lacks something. Channels of control take advantage of this similar lack of awareness of students of this inevitable dichotomy. Its more of an indoctrination than an educational experience that the new reality the media is trying to create. The thing to keep in mind is that these things represented in the pseudo-reality maintain no bearing on the actual things they appear to be. The altered perception thereof leads to disparity of realities (Webber, 2002; Mitterer, 2001 and Schmidt, 200).

We have witnessed a troubling shift the media paradigm engendered by:

- A modern scale (everyone is connected) which amplifies the width and breadth of this effect and virulence a particular memes
- A pretty clear effort from multiple entities to use this phenomenon to effect an outcome

Apart from the tertiary institution students that form the largest of this research, even a child is been influence by the media indirectly. They listen to the radio on the way to and from places, see snippets of news and stories on the news, and watch political commercials. A child's primary source to political and social influence is the adults in its life. We speak more on these matters, use them as influence, or make them points of conjecture in more everyday conversations that we have. Your prejudices, preference and points of view color the same of the child's who has to try and translate the information they get from us and the media into something their limited experience and processing abilities can make them understand. All these are covered by the theories of gate keeping, cultivation and social enforcement.

Interjecting this with that of the Indian university students, Kavita (2015) added that the media changes the mind of Indian students like imagination and demolishes his thoughts from education towards other activities and makes him to live inside delusion.

Except for the concept that there is a true reality which can be perceived is slipping. Media definitely stokes the zeitgeist of an era and region.

Human Psychology and the Media

Three factors have been identified:

- Genetics – which govern the physical/biochemical aspect of our being
- Astrophysics – which govern the metaphysical aspect of our being
- Experience – which govern the learning aspect of our being

The first two are effective before birth and have a declining effect throughout life, but establishes how everything else is perceived. The third has very limited effort prior to birth, but considerable effect throughout life. The influence of life's experience is largely governed by statistical interactions. With conscious influence, like what culture, media, and politics provide, there is the possibility of very significant influence on the individual, because the statistical interactions are human controlled. There is the need for more applied and experimental research to draw a conclusive conclusion whether experience outweigh genetics and metaphysical influence in long term behavior.

Robert Espstein (2016) wrote that:

“As we navigate through the world, we are changed by the variety of experiences. Of special note are experience of three types: (i) we observe that what is happening around us (other people) behaving, sounds of music, Instructions directed to us, words on pages, images on screen); (ii.) We are exposed to the pairing of unimportant stimuli (such as sirens) with important stimuli (such as the appearance of police cats); (iii) we are punished or rewarded for behaving in certain ways.”

New Media and Perception of tertiary Education Students

The influence of new media ecology in redefining the perception of tertiary education students

- **Embrace of the thin – ideal image of females** portrayed in the media: Many college and university students especially ladies are obsessed with the quest to achieve the media standard of beauty.
- **Sacrificing Privacy for the Sake and Search of Fame:** Many students are willing to trade their privacy on social media as long as it aids them in accumulating large followership.
- **Downplaying Societal Values for Search and Sake of Political Correctness:** Truth is now an endangered virtue as students want to appear appealing and embracing of all divergent views irrespective of the contradictory nature of some of the world views.
- **Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Post Modern World:** In our new media culture we are surrounded by images. Images have largely replaced words. Students feel more at ease with images than with words in this digital age.
- **Online Shopping Replacing Conventional Shopping:** Conventional shopping is fast phasing out as students find it more convenient and somewhat prestigious doing their shopping online. Amazon and Flipkart are big online stores in India.
- **Exploring Online Games Culture – Preference for Online Games in Place of Traditional Ones:** Video game culture is now a world wide phenomenon. As a result of this, students patronize traditional games less frequently. It is becoming more difficult to find students in sport centers as online games have become the preferred alternatives.
- **Media Seen as a Platform for Mainly Escapism and Entertainment:** Many students do not see the media as a fundamental source of information but merely a platform for entertainment. Most are more familiar with entertainment channels than news channels.

- **Sex in the Digital Age:** Technology is changing everything about our sex lives. India is a highly cultured nation and this aspect of the digital age is threatening the core values of the nation.
- **Globalization, Demography and Open Communication:** One of the most important implications of globalism is simply that there is no longer a space elsewhere. In line with this, Indian university students have become participants in the world of global discourse and ongoing communication on several issues beyond the shores of the nation.
- **Rewriting Literacy:** how contemporary media influence youth, adults interest in reading and writing. The media is fast expanding the understanding of the concept of literacy beyond the idea of reading and writing.
- **Post Feminist Representation:** The media is bridging geographical and ideological gaps from different parts of the world under the umbrella of a homogenised global culture. For instance, unlike in few decades back, emancipation of women is now more an illusion in the present dispensation.
- **Inter-cultural Communication Issues:** The media is aiding students to communicate across cultures easily. In this process, they are getting to appreciate and admire cultures other than theirs.

The Implication of the Media Ecology Impact

- Traditional and cultural transmission between the older generation to the new and as well as future generation is changed and threatened.
- Emergence of a new generation of Indian whose perception and lifestyle is at variance with the older generation.
- The arrival of domesticated internalization .
- Pleasure on the present political and socio – cultural structure and systems as some youth tend to be given to anarchist ideologies .
- An attitude of us and them within the Indian society creating a new cluster or strata.
- Demand for a change in the education philosophy and policy.
- Catalyst for economic and industrial revolution.

Conclusion

The study on the influence of media ecology on tertiary students perception and attitude in India have critically through in depth interview and phenomenological method shown that the media has come to stay in India and that its impact is real growing among students. The research has highlighted that the sphere of media influence goes beyond means of escapism, impact on academic performance to show that it is equally having a sway on their perception and worldview. If the extent and depth of the influence is not strategically managed by the various relevant national stakeholders, it might cause a major shift in the socio–cultural and economical configuration of the nation in few decades from now.

Recommendations

- There is need to increase the sample size and demography covered in subsequent research
- The government and the media of India will need to collaboratively create media content

that will create a balance between foreign media products and national needs

- Also, since media is a global phenomena, comparative analysis of students from within India and also of various countries can yield interesting findings
- Media, especially social media needs to be given a new lease of life by the education through separate curricula thus avoiding the fear and notion that it is just an entertainment tool

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