A STUDY ON THE NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHENNAI

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Abstract

The news consumption habits are undergoing a rapid change as the young generation is in the midst of hundreds of competing news media. Both national as well as regional news media organizations are trying to reach the youth of the nation. The current study understands the importance of finding the news consumption habits and their preferences when it comes to the selection of news media. Media dependency theory formed the theoretical base for the study. Quantitative survey method was undertaken. The study found out that the college students in Chennai are regular news followers. Entertainment, politics, crime etc constitutes their most followed types of news. The majority of the students get news alerts mainly via social media specifically Facebook. News mobile applications are the most favored news media among the students. Though newspapers are not pacing up with the youth still holds strong position when it comes to news in detailed manner. Accessibility, accuracy, separation of facts from opinion, immediacy, exclusion of sensationalised content, news presentation etc are the main factors which alter their media choices.

Keywords: News, Social media, traditional media

Introduction

Development of a country largely depends on the responsible and better educated young adults who can lead the country and the world for decades to come hence, keeping themselves informed and shoulder to shoulder of news and information is vital in making informed decisions. Today news consumption has gone through a vast change in the internet era as people tune in to events happening around the world through 24-hour television news
channels and the World Wide Web around them. More recently, a growing number of readers, viewers and listeners are going online for their news. Television, newspapers and radio are still here but there is a growing competition from interactive online media. Simply making information available is not enough for today’s public. Today’s audiences expect to be able to choose what they read, and most believe they should be able to contribute content and opinions, too. The news platform preferences refer to whether one prefers news online and/or offline, distinguishing those who prefer entirely traditional offline use of the newspaper and TV news from respondents who prefer online platforms for news consumption or those who use multiple media platforms.

**Review of Literature**

From breaking live news to daily news summaries, people want to be well informed on what is going on in their town, city, country and world (Bolalek, 2013). Habits, an activity that is routinely performed, are often formed early on in one’s life. According to Stone & Wetherington (1979), for example, newspaper-reading habits are often fixed by the time a person reaches late teens. The study argues that people’s news consumption patterns are determined by the habits they developed during adolescence and young adulthood. These habits are not only determined in part by personal and family factors, but also by the larger media environment in which they grew up (Stone & Wetherington, 1979). The role of media has become so all-pervasive that it has become an integral part of the fabric of society and whether we acknowledge it or not, it plays a very influential role in shaping our thought processes and attitudinal patterns (Sachin Sinha 2013). When users are given the choice, they access more entertainment and odd news stories online than they might find in their daily newspaper (Curtain et al., 2007). However, users also want hard news stories on important topics such as national, political, and world news (Curtain et al., 2007).
Media use (or media exposure) is always related to media credibility (WokandTamam. et.al, 2010). Comparing the gender preferences, the male are more inclined towards electronic technologies than and females are more associated with print culture than male counterparts. Males are actively involved in electronic media like Internet than females and the prominent reason behind the variations is lack of exposure/ awareness of electronic media in females. The area wise results confirm that the rural students are more associated with print media than urban and urban students to electronic media than rural counterparts (Loan 2011).

People normally consume different types of media indistinctly, whether it is traditional print or broadcast or via digital means. Arguably, the different preferences could help explain how much people engage in the democratic process and how they get involved in the political realm, even when controlling for different age groups (Bachmann and Kaufhold et. al, 2010). Young adults in the 21st century are less inclined than their parents or grandparents to read newspapers and less interested in public affairs or to participate politically. Young, urban consumers pay more attention to entertainment-based media programs and neglect the information-based media programs such as news programs (Freeman 2013). Bolalek (2013) found that television was the most frequently selected source of news for local, national, and international news. Consumers do not see a big online/offline difference. They view online and offline properties as being complementary rather than competitive. Young people use a fairly wide range of mass media to get information; they frequently use two to three different media to access news (Casero-Ripolles, 2012). The range of media used by young people to access news is related to drastic changes in the way they process information. The habit of channel-surfing acquired from TV watching is applied to news consumption in order to get a general impression of current affairs. Young people not only fail to see themselves reflected in newspapers or conventional media, but feel that they are marginal to their agenda setting.
They are more sensitive to information posted on social media, with the impact on them being twice as high as the impact on older people. Facebook alone reports that it now has 500 active million users, 50% of whom log on every day. (Rajendran and Thesinghraja, 2014).

**Objective of the study**

The objective of this study is,

- To find the pattern of news consumption habits of youth in Chennai.

**Theoretical perspective**

Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur proposed the “Dependency theory” in 1976 which regard audience as an active part in communication process. The dependency theory is expanded from the theory of Uses and Gratification. Uses and Gratification theory says mass media is used by the audience to gratify their needs. According to dependency theory, there is an internal link between media, audience and large social system. The audience learning from the real life is limited, so they can use media to get more information to fulfil their needs. An extensive use of media generates dependent relation in audience and also Media can able to creating dependence relationship with target audiences to achieve their goals by using their media power. Individual chooses their preferable media which satisfy their cognitive needs and if the media don’t satisfy them then the dependency over that particular medium decreases and choose another one. This theory addresses the audience as active audience who is capable to choose the best media.

**Research Methods**

The study is undertaken descriptive research design in order to analyse the news media preference or choice of youth specifically the media students in Chennai. Quantitative approach has been chosen. A survey among the media students in the top four colleges in Chennai was done using Multi stage sampling. Purposive sampling method was used in the initial stage to segregate the samples from the population. The selection of institutions which
offers media courses was based on the ownership pattern categorized as private college, aided college, deemed university and university. Co-education colleges, proximity and convenience were also crucial in selecting the four colleges. The four selected institutions are Asian School of Journalism (Private College), Madras Christian College (Aided College), SRM University (Deemed University) and Madras University (Government University). Proportionate stratified sampling was administered in the second stage to select the respondents. Out of the total population 10% of each course of Mass Communication, Visual Communication and Journalism students of the selected colleges was surveyed. The total surveyed sample from the four institutions is 120. Questionnaire consisting of close ended and few open ended questions was used. The secondary means of data collection were books and web resources. Data analysis of the current study was accomplished with the help of the software IBM SPSS Statistics 21.

Results

This section discusses the results.

Demography

Among the respondents, as much as 83 respondents belong to the age group of 18-20, 31 belong to 21-23 and 6 is above 23. The majority respondents are under the age group of 18-20 as the survey sample were mostly undergraduate media students. A small portion of respondents were belonging to post graduation courses as well. The second majority comes up to 29% (21-23) and the least is 6% i.e. those who are above the age of 23. The surveyed samples constituted total 55 female and 65 male students. They have responded positively to the survey making the percentage to 45.8% and 54.2% respectively.
News Consumption habits

The result shows that as much as 82 respondents out of 120 seek news on a daily basis. 19 respondents said they search news occasionally only, followed by twice a week (14) and weekly (5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWS TYPES</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>120</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPORTS</td>
<td></td>
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<td>HEALTH/LIFE STYLE</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Popular news types

As the figure 1 explains, entertainment found to be the most followed news type with a leading majority of 109 respondents saying ‘yes’ to it followed by politics (105), Crime news (92) health, lifestyle and sports news (69) on a regular basis. Business was preferred as the next followed news type with 67 ‘yes’, followed by environmental news (51) and weather (34).

The students prefer social media for the news alert. As much as 55 respondents out of the total 120 said they get news alerted mostly via social media. The second medium which is very popular is news mobile applications. Total 46 respondents marked news mobile applications as the first medium to alert them breaking news followed by television and television websites with 17 and 2 respectively. According to the survey responses none of the respondents receives news alerts via newspapers and newspaper’s websites. Newspapers and newspaper websites gets the last position.

Out of the total 120 respondents 48 people depends on news mobile applications for detailed coverage of news. Newspapers are preferred by 37 people followed by television, television website and newspaper website with 19, 9 and 2 respondents rating as their first
preferences respectively. Though social media was the most preferred for breaking news alert, it is least preferred as the source for detailed news coverage with 5 people marking it as the first choice.

![Figure 2 Favorite news media](image)

Aggregating the ratings given by the respondents for each medium in the order of their preference, newspaper top the list as the most relied news media with 285 point. Among the six media, the least aggregate will indicate the popular news medium as one was given for the most preferred one and then follow like 2, 3, up to 6. Newspapers are followed by news mobile applications, television, television websites, newspaper websites and social media with 292, 419, 471, 499 and 537 points respectively.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of the respondent * the most preferred medium</th>
<th>Cross tabulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>The most preferred medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of the respondent female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of the respondent male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table 1](image)
The table 1 indicates that both female and male respondents’ first choice of media for news seeking is news mobile applications. Out of the 49 respondents whose first preferred news media was news mobile applications, a majority of 26 are females and 23 are males. 21 male respondents prefer newspaper as their favorite media choice whereas 15 female marked their preference as newspaper. While 5 male respondents preferred social media none of the female respondents preferred that option. In the case of television, 11 male respondents were in favor and the female respondents were total 8 in number. 5 female respondents preferred television websites where as the male respondents were 4. Newspaper website was preferred by one each.

Among the popular news media outlets, NDTV (37), TIMES NOW (30), CNN IBN (22) and BBC (3) are the most followed national television channels and PUTHIYA THALAMURAI (52), SUN NEWS( 35), THANTHI TV( 26) and ASIANET NEWS (6) are the regional television news channels which are popular among the surveyed sample. In television websites NDTV (20) BBC( 15), TIMES NOW (14), ALJAZEERA(5), PUTHIYA THALAMURAI (8) and NEWSTUDAY (2) are preferred ones. THE HINDHU holds the prime position in the list of newspapers preferred by the media students in Chennai with 70 respondents opting for it. TIMES OF INDIA (58) holds second position followed by DINA THANTHI(30), DINA MALAR (28), INDIAN EXPRESS( 25), HINDHUSTHAN TIMES (6), and DECCAN CHRONICLE(3). In Newspapers website THE HINDU and TIMES OF INDIA hold the majority with 26 and 22 respondents respectively opting for it.

FACEBOOK is the most popular social media with 114 respondents out of the total 120 opting for it. TWITTER is used by 46 respondents followed by HIKE (26) and WATSAPP (18). Though twitter is turning out to be leading news source it is yet to make a leap among the media students in Chennai.
NDTV news mobile application is very popular among the respondents with 64 of them marking it as their preference. IN SHORTS is preferred by 50 respondents closely followed by daily hunt by 46 respondents. THE HINDU (44), TIMES OF INDIA (40), and SCROLL (22) are the other popular choices in the list news mobile applications.

As much as 43% respondents said they spent 1 hour usually with their chosen media on a daily basis. Out of the 120 respondents 31% spent only less than an hour to seek news. 16% of the respondents spent 2 hours with news media of their preference followed by 9% saying more than 3 hours and only 1 person marking 3 hours.

Table 2

**Extent of use of the medium of choice to explore news**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headline</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle paragraph</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete story</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table 2 show that leading majority of 64% said they go through complete news stories. 23% of the respondents said they go through only the introduction of the news stories. The option of headlines was marked by 8% of the respondents and 3% said they go for middle
paragraphs to understand news stories. 2% of the respondents said they skimmed through only photographs than going through the complete story.

**The major findings are,**

- News seeking is a daily activity for the majority of media students in Chennai.
- Entertainment news is the mostly followed news type among the media students while environment news was the least followed.
- Politics, business, crime, sports, health and lifestyle are other popular news types.
- The media students prefer to go through the complete story followed by, introduction, headlines and photographs.
- Majority of media students spent an average of one hour with their preferred media choice.
- Majority of the respondents use more than one medium to satisfy their informative needs. Social media are quicker in reaching the media students with news updates. Facebook updates the news first.
- Though social media alerts breaking news first when it comes to extended news coverage social media is left far behind.
- News mobile applications are very popular among media students in Chennai in terms of both breaking news alert and extended news coverage. Among news mobile apps NDTV, In Shorts, Daily Hunt, The Hindu and Times Of India are the most popular ones.

**Conclusion**

The media students are active news seekers as they are exposed to a news source of their choice on an everyday basis. News media applications are at the top of the preferred
media choices. The respondents are found to be very critical and active about the media choices they make. They understand news and the media in a better way rather than just skimming through it. Online media and offline media are complimenting rather than competing with each other.

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