

Full Length Research Paper

Media preferences of the net generation college students

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The present study aims to identify the preferences of the net generation college students in print and electronic media activities and to investigate how these students allocate their time across these activities. The survey method of research was applied to conduct the study and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. The stratified random sampling technique was employed for selection of students. The results reveal that there is a strong competition between print and electronic media in attracting students' time and attention. Comparing students' preferences between reading and electronic media activities, reading proved to be one of the top most activities only defeated by watching television and listening music. The results also depict that the electronic media is competing with traditional media on different fronts as activities like Internet surfing, online chatting and electronic games are also preferred by a good number of the net generation students over reading. On the time allocation, reading surpasses all activities including watching television and listening music as well. In general, the findings of the study should assist the media professionals and library/ information managers to adopt the technologies as per the changing preferences of the net generation students.

Key words: Media preferences, electronic media, print media, reading habits, college students, Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of present media is quite complex and changing at a rapid pace. The electronic media spreads rapidly in our daily lives and people quickly migrate towards this media. The new generation embraces this new media very quickly (Bruner, 1997) and are popularly called *net generation*. This generation is more than just a demographic group. Tapscott (1998) summarized the characteristics of the net generation as follows:

1. The generation born roughly between 1977 and 1997;
2. They emphasize the right to information and learning; and
3. They are technology savvy.

This generation students often consider themselves to be more expert on Internet than their parents (Livingstone and Bober, 2003). The creation of the net generation was natural in present networked society due to the exponential growth of the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW). The college students are the major share

holders of the net generation as almost all the college students' belong to the same age group and grow up with emerging information and communication gadgets like television, radio, cinema, CD/DVD players, electronic games, mobile phones, computers and Internet.

The introduction of new media brings an intense competition between print and electronic media for capturing students' time and attention. The new players of electronic media have become the time eating machines and all are thrilling with one another for their supremacy (Loan, 2009). Therefore, it is time to update the knowledge about the time management of students. Moreover, Internet is the most formidable challenge to the print media like print sources, print reading and libraries. The researchers have discovered that use of the online sources is increasing at a rapid pace and at the same rate the use of traditional sources is decreasing (Rogers, 2001; Pierce, 2009). The newer forms of online sources like wikis and blogs which are written and updated daily by worldwide readers catch the attention of

readers more frequently. In this media mix, the survival of traditional reading is considered in danger. Furthermore, the Internet introduces a galaxy of new services like chatting, electronic games, social network services etc. There is now a strong competition for survival and supremacy between reading and these online services. Lancaster and other advocates of the paperless society from different parts of the globe have already predicted about death of print culture. This is challenge for the reading and the traditional print culture to survive the onslaught of new technology.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Every new media of mass communication is considered threat to print media. When radio was launched, Lazarsfeld (1940) studied its impact on print media. After a decade or two, when television came into picture, the same voices were raised and researchers like Belson (1961), Anthony (1980), and others studied its impact. On the same lines, when the cable television came into forefront, impact was researched by Kaplan (1978), Sparkes (1983) and others. Likewise, impact of the video cassette reader (VCR) was studied by Henke and Donohue (1989) and others; more recently the impact of computer is researched by Robinson et al. (1997). With the birth of the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW), researchers again doubt that print media would disappear. The researchers across the world like Van Der (2005) and Filistrucchi (2007) trace out the impact of Internet on newspapers. For almost every new technology that came into market, the same pursuit was continued that the print culture will die as more and more people are engaged with new media. Particularly, the net generation students, who have opened their eyes in the full bloom of electronic revolution, have taken the attention of many scholars worldwide. The educators across the globe have consistently proclaimed that students of present generation are more engaged with the electronic media. Now, many questions emerge: Will the print culture survive? And will the net generation students prefer change? Therefore, researchers all over the globe have started to study impact of electronic media and the present study focuses on the user preferences in electronic versus print media is a step forward in this regard.

Related studies

Reading habits among children are on the decline and the reasons for decline in reading habits among children are offshoots of technological advancements (CopperWiki, 2008). Pivec (1998) investigated teenagers about their surfing habits and reported that the main rivals for attracting interest of teenagers are television

and Internet. Schramm et al. (1961) revealed that television has had a bigger impact than any other leisure-time pursuit on the amount of reading. Hastings and Henry (2006) depicted that 85% of children prefer watching television over reading. Gentile and Walsh (2002) reported that children in low income families watch more television, watch more movies, play more video games, listen to the radio and CDs more, read less, and use the computer less than children in higher-income families. Korzenny and Korzenny (2007) conducted a study on media use in five cultural groups and reported that each of these five groups enjoyed old as well as new media and spent close to 20 hours a week on television, and yet another 20 hours on surfing the Internet. Livingstone and Bovill (2001) found that time spent on television and audio media was significantly higher among respondents than that spent on electronic games, video and books. Graham and Kingsley (2005) estimated that on average young people spend 3.51 h watching television and videos, 1.44 h listening music, 1.02 h using computers (0.48 online, 0.14 offline), 0.49 h playing video games, 0.43 h reading, and 0.25 h watching movies per day. Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) declared television as the king; accounting for 4.5 h of viewing daily by students. Finn (1980) calculated that the average child entering first grade spent 5,000 h watching television and the same child by age 18 will have spent more time on watching television than in school. Holme (1984) reported that a student spends about 10,800 h in class-rooms by the time of final years in high school and more than 20,000 h in front of the television screen in the USA. Television's impact on reading and other academic skills depends not only on the amount of television watched, but also on what is being watched (Reinking and Wu, 1990).

Compared to television, the Internet is a plastic technology, amenable to a wider range of uses. According to data from the Pew Internet and American Life project (2003), Americans used the Internet most for sending electronic mail, using search engines, researching products and services before buying, and looking for information for hobbies and leisure activities. However, the range of use is very diverse, and includes playing online games, listening to music, downloading pornography, developing and displaying photographs, gambling, taking a class, and seeking dates. La Ferle et al. (2000) found that respondents spent more time surfing the Internet at home than watching television and most of the respondents preferred to use the Internet, instead of magazines, newspapers, radio and television in USA. Canadian Newspaper Association (2006) cited the finding of the study *Reading between the Lines* as- the time youth spent on surfing surpassed the time they spent watching television, listening to radio or reading magazines and newspapers. According to this national report, youth spent 3.5 h surfing the Internet, 3.1 h watching television, 2.4 h listening to radio, 1.5 h reading

a book, 0.7 h reading a newspaper, and 0.6 h reading a magazine in a day. Majid and Tan (2007) found that 57.6% of the children in Singapore prefer playing on computer or surfing the Internet whereas only 44.1% prefers reading as their leisure time activity. Kamalipour et al. (1998) revealed that students spend 45.05% of their waking hours per week attending to both electronic and print media for study and leisure reading activities. On division, it is apparent that college students use print media (11.09%) more for study related activities whereas regarding the leisure use of media, electronic media far outdistanced print media (27.83% compared with 3.84%). Ghimire (1999) collected the information from teachers, intellectuals and guardians of the students about the effects of multi-media on children's reading habits. The findings indicated that 56.25% of the persons ranked it a 50 to 75% decrease and 43.75% of them reckoned between 15 to 50%. Many studies have been conducted worldwide especially in the developed countries in which some focused on the impact of new media on existing ones while some others trace out preferences of users particularly students among old and new media. However, the present study not only compares the old competitors like listening to music and watching television with reading but also add new activities associated with electronic media like Internet surfing, electronic games and online chatting. Moreover, the study discovers the gender and regional differences in user preferences. Hence, the study is a step forward in the field of research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research objectives

The current study focuses on the following research objectives:

1. To identify the preferences of the net generation students in print and electronic media;
2. To investigate how the net generation students allocate their time across traditional and electronic media activities; and
3. To examine how media choice vary among students of different genders and regions.

Scope of the study

The scope of the present study is limited to the degree college students of the Kashmir Valley covering the faculties of general sciences, social sciences, humanities, business and commerce and computer science. The students belong to age group of 18 to 25 years.

METHODOLOGY

The survey method of research was applied to conduct the study

and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. Before drafting the questionnaire, the relevant literature was reviewed and analysed which provided some directions in drafting questionnaire. After the survey questionnaire was drafted, it was pre-tested with 30 students to ensure that it is understandable. The questionnaire was then modified according to the result of the pre-test. Later, the data was collected from the college students during classes and the questionnaire was administered personally to ensure the excellent response rate as well as to avoid any misunderstanding while providing responses. The stratified random sampling technique was employed for selection of students. The students were selected from different strata based on gender, region and faculty. Finally, the quantitative statistical techniques were applied for analysis of data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Internet surfing versus reading

Majority of students (55.63%) prefer reading to surfing and little less like Internet surfing to reading (44.37%). The gender ratio depicts that Internet surfing is more preferable among males (46.15%) compared to females (40.43%) and among urban (46.99%) than rural (40.34%). However, the overall trend shows that below 50% of students prefer surfing over reading (Table 1).

Electronic games versus reading

The data shows (Table 2) that only 42.05% students prefer electronic (computer/cell/video) games over reading with slight gender variation. The area wise break-up of data shows that urban students prefer electronic games more than rural students (43.72% versus 39.50%).

Online chatting versus reading

The data shows (Table 3) that male students (34.62%) prefer online chatting more than females (27.66%) and urban students (36.61%) more than rural ones (26.05%). However, the overall trend shows that majority of students prefer reading (67.55%) over online chatting (32.45%).

Listening music versus reading

As shown in Table 4, 56.95% students favour listening to music whereas 43.05% find taste in reading. While breaking down the data, it is clear that males (58.65%) prefer listening to music more than females (53.19%) and rural students (62.18%) more than urban students (53.55%).

Watching television versus reading

The comparison of user preferences between watching television and reading (Table 5) disclose that above 58%

Table 1. Internet surfing and reading (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Surfing	134/302 (44.37)	96/208 (46.15)	38/94 (40.43)	48/119 (40.34)	86/183 (46.99)
Reading	168/302 (55.63)	112/208 (53.85)	56/94 (59.57)	71/119 (59.66)	97/183 (53.01)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 2. Electronic games and reading (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Electronic games	127/302 (42.05)	89/208 (42.79)	38/94 (40.43)	47/119 (39.50)	80/183 (43.72)
Reading	175/302 (57.95)	119/208 (57.21)	56/94 (59.57)	72/119 (60.50)	103/183 (56.28)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 3. Online chatting and reading (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Online chatting	98/302 (32.45)	72/208 (34.62)	26/94 (27.66)	31/119 (26.05)	67/183 (36.61)
Reading	204/302 (67.55)	136/208 (65.38)	68/94 (72.34)	88/119 (73.95)	116/183 (63.39)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 4. Listening to music and reading (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Listening to music	172/302 (56.95)	122/208 (58.65)	50/94(53.19)	74/119 (62.18)	98/183 (53.55)
Reading	130/302 (43.05)	86/208 (41.35)	44/94 (46.81)	45/119(37.82)	85/183(46.45)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 5. Television and reading (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Watching TV	176/302(58.28)	124/208 (59.62)	52/94 (55.32)	72/119 (60.50)	104/183 (56.83)
Reading	126/302 (41.72)	84/208 (40.38)	42/94 (44.68)	47/119 (39.50)	79/183 (43.17)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

of students prefer watching television to reading in which males are more than females (59.62% versus 55.32%) and rural more than urban students (60.50% versus 56.83%). Reading is more preferred over watching television by females to males (44.68% versus 40.38%) and urban to rural students (43.17% versus 39.50%)

Internet versus library

The data in Table 6 shows that students prefer to use Internet and libraries almost equally (50%: 50%). However, male students prefer to use Internet (52.40%) more than libraries (47.60%) whereas females like to use

libraries (53.19%) more than Internet (46.81%). The rural students make more use of libraries (57.14%) than Internet (42.86%) and urban students use Internet (55.74%) more than libraries (44.26%).

Cyber cafes versus bookshops

Comparing the students preferences in visiting cyber cafes and bookshops reveal (Table 7) that 67.88% students like to visit bookshops whereas only 32.12% prefer to visit cyber cafes. The gender wise data depicts that less number of females (25.53%) prefer to visit cyber cafes than males (35.10%). The data further disclose that

Table 6. Internet versus library use (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer using	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Internet	153/302 (50.66)	109/208 (52.40)	44/94 (46.81)	51/119(42.86)	102/183 (55.74)
Libraries	149/302 (49.34)	99/208 (47.60)	50/94 (53.19)	68/119 (57.14)	81/183 (44.26)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 7. Visiting Cyber cafes and bookshops (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer visiting	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Cyber Cafes	97/302 (32.12)	73/208 (35.10)	24/94 (25.53)	33/119 (27.73)	64/183 (34.97)
Bookshops	205/302 (67.88)	135/208 (64.90)	70/94 (74.47)	86/119 (72.27)	119/183 (65.03)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

Table 8. Buying CDs/DVDs and books (Gender and region wise).

Students prefer buying	Total	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
CDs/DVDs	92/302 (30.46)	69/208 (33.17)	23/94 (24.47)	37/119 (31.09)	55/183 (30.05)
Books	210/302 (69.54)	139/208 (66.83)	71/94 (75.53)	82/119 (68.91)	128/183 (69.95)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

Table 9. Time spent on different activities (Gender and region wise).

Time spent per week on	Total time spend (T)	Average time (Mean)	Male (Mean)	Female (Mean)	Rural (Mean)	Urban (Mean)
Internet surfing	1624	5.38	5.65	4.77	5.02	5.61
Watching TV	2812	9.31	9.59	8.68	9.56	9.15
Watching CDs/DVDs	1260	4.17	4.50	3.44	4.28	4.10
Playing electronic games	1540	5.10	5.29	4.68	4.42	5.54
Listening to music	2236	7.40	7.08	8.12	7.61	7.27
Reading	4354	14.42	13.92	15.51	14.26	14.52

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

more urban students (34.97%) prefer to visit cyber cafes than rural counterparts (27.73%).

CDs/DVDs versus books

It is revealed from the data (Table 8) that almost 70% of students like buying books and 30% prefers buying CDs/DVDs. However, male students (33.17%) prefer to buy CDs/DVDs more than females (24.47%). The region wise data shows slight variation in preferences of buying CDs/DVDs (31.09% versus 30.05%).

Time spent on print and electronic media

In order to know the average time spent (mean) on performing different activities related to print and

electronic media, the statistical technique was applied. The information available in the statistical data read that on average students spend 9.31 h on watching television, 7.40 h on listening to music, 5.38 h on Internet surfing, 5.10 h on playing electronic games, 4.17 h on watching CDs/DVDs and 14.36 h on reading in a week (Table 9). The gender ratio shows that male students spend 9.59 h of their time on watching television, 7.08 h on listening to music and 5.65 h on Internet surfing whereas female students spend 8.68 h on watching television, 8.12 h on listening music and 4.77 h on Internet surfing in a week. Comparing the time spends on print media, the female students spend 15.55 h and male students spend 13.92 h on reading per week. Comparatively male students spend more time on Internet surfing, watching television, watching CDs/DVDs and playing electronic games than female whereas female students spend more time on

reading and listening to music than males. The region wise data shows that rural students spend 9.56 h per week on watching television, 7.61 h on listening to music and 5.02 h on Internet surfing whereas urban students spend 9.15 h on watching television, 7.27 h on listening music and 5.61 h on Internet surfing. The rural and urban students spend 14.01 and 14.05 h of their week's time on reading. Comparatively, rural students spend more time on watching television, listening to music and watching CDs/DVDs and urban students spend more time on Internet surfing, playing electronic games and reading (Table 9).

DISCUSSION

Comparing students' preferences between reading and electronic media activities, reading proved to be one of the top most activities only defeated by watching television and listening music. Hence, reading habit will survive in the present media mix and no prophet can predict that the death of reading is certain. The preferences and tastes of the net generation can change but reading will continue to maintain its unique and indispensable position alongside with the electronic media. However, the results also indicated that the electronic media is competing with traditional media in different domains as activities like Internet surfing, online chatting and electronic games also are becoming the favourite preferences of the net generation students in developing countries (like India) over reading. On the time allocation, reading surpasses watching television and listening music as well. However, the time spend on reading includes time spend on all types (academic and non-academic) and sources (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.) of reading. The overall analysis of results depict that a student spends 31.36 h on electronic media like watching television, listening to music, surfing the Internet, playing electronic games and watching CDs/DVDs and 14.42 h on reading per week. Excluding the time spends on sleeping, the electronic media is perhaps the most time consuming machinery of students and television is the medium which receives the most attention. While comparing the other players of electronic and print media; the print media is more dominant as the students prefer to use Internet and libraries almost equally and majority of them prefer to visit book shops and buying books compared to visiting cybercafés and buying CDs/DVDs. All the findings are similar with some previous students (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001) and (Graham and Kingsley, 2005) and contradict with few others (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2003). The variations are mostly found between developed and developing countries. The factors possibly responsible for variations are that in developed countries like USA, Information Technology sector is well developed whereas as in developing countries like India, yet it is not so

advanced. Comparing the gender preferences, the male are more inclined towards electronic technologies than females and females are more associated with print culture than male counterparts. Bimber (2000), Bernt et al. (2003), Gross (2004) and Mishra et al. (2005) also reported that 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. The factors possibly responsible for variations are lack of adequate Internet facilities, cable television facilities, computer education facilities and the like in far-flung rural areas. The progress and development of the information and communication technology sector in developing countries will not only narrow the gaps in media usage between genders and regions (e.g. areas) but also will increase the usage of electronic media in future when the cable television, wireless television, computer with Internet facility, wireless Internet, portable Internet gadgets will become the household facility in developing world as well.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The study was conducted in one of provinces (that is, Kashmir) of the developing countries (that is, India) and therefore, its results can not be generalised on the whole world especially developed countries. Moreover, the study deal with the college students and therefore, it is not projectable to the entire population. Further, the information collected is based on a small group (n = 302) of the net generation college students and hence the results cannot be applied on entire new generation. Future research could be conducted using a larger sample to include students of schools and uneducated youth. Moreover, a longitudinal study to examine whether changes in media habits are occurring over time, particularly when the Internet will become more accessible, would be another avenue for future research.

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