

TITLE OF THE PAPER: - MEDIA PERCEPTION OF ADOLESCENCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENCE ISSUES IN THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS-THE TIMES OF INDIA and THE HINDU

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ABSTRACT: - Adolescence refers to the category of the lifecycle of a person after childhood followed by mid-life, old age and death. Sociologists have argued that the notion of a separate and specialized age group called adolescence is the product of the late nineteenth century

Traditionally in the Indian context, adolescence as a category has been missing from the general vocabulary. The term largely used to refer to this category has been youth. Youth refers to any person between the age group of 12-13 years of age to 30-35 years of age.

According to WHO adolescence refers to children in the age group of 10 to 19 years of age. In developing countries like India there is a “youth Bulge” due to the low mortality rate and high birth rates. This ensured that India’s population is young and the percentage of adolescence is relatively high. According to an UNICEF estimate there is about 1.2 billion adolescence in the world out of which 243 million are in India. Nearly one-quarter of the population of India comprises of adolescence.

The literacy rates have risen from 65% in 2001 census to 74% in 2011 census. The literacy rate takes into account people who are above 7 years of age. The increase in literacy is largely among the younger population. One of the reasons attributed to the growth of media in India has been the rising literacy levels and the young population. The print media in India has registered a growth of 9.8 % in the year 2011 and is expected to grow at the rate of 9.6 % in the next five years i.e.2011-2015(PWC-FICCI report 2011)

The media which comprises of newspapers, magazines, television, radio, films etc has adolescence as their consumers. The media has been targeting adolescence to capture their consumers of the future. A number of studies in the late nineties have been focussing on the effect of television and other media on adolescent’s health and behaviour. The focus about media consumption or how media perceives the adolescence is lacking in the studies. This study would try to fill this knowledge gap.

This study seeks to analyse two newspapers-The Times of India and The Hindu for a period of three months i.e. from 1May 2012 to 31 July 2012 and find out the percentage of space allotted to adolescence issues .It also seeks to identify the issues focussed in the newspapers and how the newspapers treat adolescence as a subject while reporting about them. In order to do understand the issues addressed in the newspapers content analysis of selected news items will be done. A comparison of the issues highlighted in the newspapers will be made. Finally the paper seeks to recommend ways by which the newspaper could give importance to adolescence issues.

KEY WORDS: ADOLESCENCE, NEWSPAPERS, MEDIA PERCEPTION,

INTRODUCTION:

Adolescence refers to the category of the lifecycle of a person after childhood followed by mid-life, old age and death. Historians claim that in the sixteenth century in France there is evidence of mention of specialised youth groups. Sociologists have argued that the notion of a separate and specialized age group called adolescence is the product of the late nineteenth century

Traditionally in the Indian context, adolescence as a category has been missing from the general vocabulary. The term largely used to refer to this category has been youth. Youth refers to any person between the age group of 12-13 years of age to 30-35 years of age. According to WHO adolescence refers to children in the age group of 10 to 19 years of age.

Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg have described the characteristic of adolescents. The three authors have varied views but that help us in indentifying the characteristic of adolescence. The period of adolescence is viewed as a period of human growth as a stage of complex transformation, from relative dependence to relative independence. A period in which the individual is constantly perplexed with the question, “Who am I?”Erikson identifies eight critical stages of personality and character formation. He describes the period of adolescence as one of identity versus identity diffusion. This is a period in which the adolescence is trying

to gain control of their environment in order to develop a unique identity. According to Piaget (1972) it is during adolescence that an individual achieves formal operations. Kohlberg (1976) focussed his attention on adolescence as a period of moral development in which the youth attains the ability of autonomous moral reasoning.

Therefore adolescence is a stage when tremendous intellectual development, a period of physical maturation and a pre-occupation with personal appearance and projected body image. These characteristics collectively provide a rationale for the study of adolescence as an important stage in the life cycle, as well as the importance of mass media for them.

Studies have shown that there is a marginal increase in the consumption of print media during the senior high school years. The younger teens are more interested in the comic section of the newspaper. The newspaper's utility as a socialization agent was present in the study conducted by Adoni (1979) in USA, she found that amongst all the media, only the regular reading of the daily newspaper was positively related to the importance attached to voluntary and political activities of teenagers.

In developing countries like India there is a "youth Bulge" due to the low mortality rate and high birth rates. This ensured that India's population is young and the percentage of adolescence is relatively high. According to an UNICEF estimate there are about 1.2 billion adolescence in the world out of which 243 million are in India. Nearly one-quarter of the population of India comprises of adolescence.

The literacy rates have risen from 65% in 2001 census to 74% in 2011 census. The literacy rate takes into account people who are above 7 years of age. The increase in literacy is largely among the younger population. One of the reasons attributed to the growth of media in India has been the rising literacy levels and the young population. In spite of the death of newspapers in the west, the print media in India has registered a growth of 9.8 % in the year 2011 and is expected to grow at the rate of 9.6 % in the next five years i.e.2011-2015(PWC-FICCI report 2011)

The media has also been targeting adolescence to capture their consumers of the future. A number of studies in the late nineties have focussed on the effect of television and other media on adolescent's health and behaviour, especially the effect of television on children, the effect of films on violent behaviour and the likes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Mass Communication plays an important role in our society its purpose is to inform the public about current and past events. Within this process the media, which can be a newspaper, a book and television, takes control of the information we see or hear. The media uses gate keeping and agenda setting to "control our access to news, information, and entertainment" (Wilson 14). Gate keeping is a series of checkpoints that the news has to go through before it gets to the public. Through this process many people have to decide whether or not the news is to be seen or heard. Some gatekeepers might include reporters, writers, and editors.

Agenda setting as defined in "Mass Media, Mass Culture" is the process whereby the mass media determine what we think and worry about. Walter Lippmann, a journalist first observed this function, in the 1920's. Lippmann then pointed out that the media dominates over the creation of pictures in our head; he believed that the public reacts not to actual events but to the pictures in our head. Therefore the agenda setting process is used to remodel

all the events occurring in our environment, into a simpler model before we deal with it. “This impact of the mass media- the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking- has been labelled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lay the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.” (McCombs and Shaw, 5)

Agenda Setting has two levels, the first level enacts the common subjects that are most important, and the second level decides what parts of the subject are important. Agenda setting as a process is divided into three parts according to Rogers and Dearing in their book *Agenda Setting Research*. The first part of the process is the importance of the issues that are going to be discussed in the media. Second, the issues discussed in the media have an impact over the way the public thinks, this is referred as public agenda. Ultimately the public agenda influences the policy agenda. Furthermore, “the media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda.” (Littlejohn, 320)

This theory of agenda setting has many useful uses in our society. First of all it gives the media power to establish what news we see or hear and what part of the news is important to see or hear. Therefore agenda setting is used for many purposes to establish the media agenda and to retrieve the opinion of the public.

A number of studies have been carried on adolescence, most of the studies mentioned below focus on the effects of electronic media on the adolescences.

In a report by UNICEF on adolescence it is described as an age of opportunity and it highlights the different strategies adopted by UNICEF to empower the adolescence both in terms of life skills and their basic health education.

In an article titled, “Adolescents and electronic media: growing up plugged in” the authors discuss the impact of the electronic media on children in America and how the growth of television and other information and communication technologies is going to impact the life of children. They have studied the impact of electronic media on the social development, educational development etc of the child.

Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) in an article emphasis that television and other media represent one of the most important and unrecognized influences on children and adolescents health and behaviour in the 1990s. They have quoted a number of studies which highlighted this serious problem in USA.

Norval.D.Glenn (1994) in their paper “Television watching, newspaper reading, and cohort differences in verbal ability” conclude that there is a decline in vocabulary which is closely related to decline in newspaper reading

Sociologist Donna Gaines(1994) claimed that it was not unusual for press coverage of youth to include “images of kids as thugs, animals, drive-by shootout, gangsters and teenagers crack moms rocking in the free world, jock gang rapist, parricide peaps, low maths and science scorers, zombies without morals”. By 1990’s a wave of scholars had begun to examine what Giroux defines as the “representational politics” behind media construction of youth. In addition to Gaines, other scholars including Henry Giroux, Henry Jenkins, Larry Grossberg

and others have turned their attention to their press coverage of youth which is a part of the larger crisis discourse that dominates studies on youth.

Abowitz (in Mazzarella&Pecora,2007) argues that the discourse or cultural conversations about youth found in newspapers, "range from , "youth in trouble "to "youth as Fun" to "the moral crisis of youth" but whatever the particular slant of the discourse, these discourses on youth have been pervasive and powerful"

According to Edwards (2005), newspapers frame girls "as victims who need protection from cyber-predators and from the technology itself.

John Hartley (1998) has studied the coverage of girls in the news in United States and Australia. The interest of the Press in young girls is not unique to United States. This is one component of a phenomenon he labels *juvenation* — an extensive, almost bipolar, news media emphasis on youth, whereby visual images of youth (particularly female bodies) are celebrated and used to attract adult readers, whereas stories of youthful transgressions, flaws, and controversies demonize these same youth. His most compelling argument is that "children have become so caught up in the rhetoric of foe-creation in the hard-news media that they now occupy the structural position of 'theydom'" — the other, something

to be feared, protected, and/or saved.

This study would analyse adolescence issues highlighted in the newspapers as most studies have studied the impact of mass media especially television on adolescence. Through this study the researcher seeks to analyse the various issues related to adolescence which are covered in the newspapers.

METHODOLOGY:

National English dailies were chosen for the study. The dailies were identified on the basis of readership, reach etc. The Times of India was the first newspaper to start the Newspaper in Education (NIE) programme followed by The Hindu in south India. The Times of India has the largest circulation in India among the English newspapers, hence it was chosen for the study. The Hindu was chosen for the study since it is considered a traditional newspaper and is the largest circulated English daily in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and is also among the leaders in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

For a period of three months the contents of the newspapers was analysed. From 1May 2012 to 31 July 2012 the whole newspaper with their supplements were taken up for content analysis. A comparison of the issues highlighted in the newspapers was also made.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION:

For the purpose of this research study some of the key concepts used have been defined as follows:-

1. **ADOLESCENCE:** Any child in the age group of 6 to 19 years i.e. basically children in the school -going age and the first two years of their undergraduate education. As per the NCERT guidelines a child of six years is supposed to be studying in class one.

2. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES: All the issues related to education of a child like infrastructure in schools and colleges, teachers, books, mid-day meals, results, coaching classes, counselling for admission and other issues.

3. HEALTH ISSUES: Issues related to vaccination, vulnerable diseases like HIV, encephalitis etc among adolescence and also alcohol, substance abuse etc which affects the health of the child.

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS:

On looking at the content of the newspaper from 1May 2012 to 31 July 2012 for news and reports related to individuals between the age group of 6 to 7 to 19 years of age. The issues on analysis were grouped into the following 9 categories and one category was added for the photographs which were being carried in this newspaper.

The broad areas are:-Educational issues, health issues, safety related, achievements of students or adolescence, child abuse, child labour, crimes committed by adolescents, government policies regarding adolescence, new trends among adolescents.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS:

A total of 276 articles were found to be related to adolescents in The Times of India; in The Hindu total of 411 articles were found in the same period.

Table 1 and Table 2 depict the various issues covered in both the newspapers.

TABLE 1

ISSUES COVERED IN THE TIMES OF INDIA

S.No	ISSUES	Number of articles
1.	Educational Issues	134
2.	Health Issues	18
3.	Safety Related	38
4.	Achievements	26
5.	Child Abuse	28
6.	Child Labour	2
7.	Crimes committed by adolescents	7
8	Government policies	13
9	New trends in Adolescence	7
10.	Photographs	3

11	Total	276
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TABLE 2

ISSUES COVERED IN THE HINDU

S.No	ISSUES	Number of articles
1.	Educational Issues	224
2.	Health Issues	16
3.	Safety Related	42
4.	Achievements	34
5.	Child Abuse	16
6.	Child Labour	10
7.	Crimes committed by adolescents	4
8	Government policies	37
9	New trends in Adolescence	12
10.	Photographs	16
11	Total	411

In both the newspapers educational issues were given the maximum coverage, the reason for that being that in the months of May and June the results of class ten and class twelve of various boards are declared in India. This is also the time of admission to colleges and the schools are also to begin a new academic year.

The second issue of importance in both the newspapers was related to safety i.e. news related to accidents, unnatural deaths like suicides, death of children by falling into manhole and similar stories. It is also a coincidence that suicide by students during the period when results are declared, which happens to be the month of May and June; is comparatively greater in number.

Stories of abuse of children were reported more in the The Times of India than in the Hindu. The number of photographs showing adolescence was more in the The Hindu in comparison to the Times of India. Some of the photographs used children to depict the impact of disasters or civil unrest like the flash floods of Assam as well as the mass exodus of people from Somalia. In some instances, the photographs had no relation to the news covered on the page especially on the International page of The Hindu.

TABLE THREE

LOCATION OF THE NEWS IN THE TIMES OF INDIA

SNo	Page of the Newspaper	Total number of stories covered
1.	1	45
2.	2	50
3.	3	48
4.	4	31
5.	5	35
6.	6	17
7.	7.	15
8.	8	7
9	9	3
10.	10	5
11.	11	8
12.	12	1
13.	13	2
14.	14	3
15.	15	2
16.	18	1
17.	supplement	3
	Total	276

TABLE FOUR

LOCATION OF THE NEWS IN THE HINDU

SNo	Page of the Newspaper	Total number of stories covered
1.	1	23
2.	2	57

3.	3	60
4.	4	43
5.	5	53
6.	6	17
7.	7.	40
8.	8	10
9	9	18
10.	10	10
11.	11	10
12.	12	13
13.	13	12
14.	14	4
15.	15	6
16.	16	5
17.	17	4
18.	18	5
19.	20	6
20.	21	2
21.	22	5
22	24	2
23.	supplement	6
	TOTAL	411

On looking at the page on which the news/ reports appeared it was seen that maximum news/reports appeared on Page two and three in both the newspapers. In The Times of India ,the news/reports in terms of numbers maximum news/reports appeared on page2, followed by page3,page 1,page 5,page 4,page6,page 7 and page 11.The other pages carried very less number of articles i.e. 5 and less than five in92 issues. Since the Mangalore edition of Times of India has 18 pages and the supplement pages differ on a daily basis .There were three reports in the supplements also on adolescence on Doctors' day.

In the Hindu the news reports in terms of number appeared, it was seen that maximum news/reports on Page 3, followed by page2, page5, page4, page 7 and page1. Pages which had more than ten stories during the period are page9, page6, page12, page 13 and page10, page11. The other pages had less than ten stories during the period. The Hindu has 24 pages in the main newspaper and additional supplements. About six stories appeared in the supplement of The Hindu.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS:

For qualitative analysis articles which appeared on the editorial page of both the newspapers were selected. The editorial page has articles on issues which are considered important for the period. The articles are analytical in nature, and carry the views and opinions of the expert or the editor of the paper.

In the Times of India in May two articles appeared on the editorial page regarding the bill which is being introduced in Parliament on the age of consensual sex in order to prevent sexual abuse of young girls. Both the articles had a positive tone and argued against some of the features of the bill which are Victorian in nature. The article suggested that by passing such a law. The government would be criminalising teenage sex. It suggested that there should be a way forward by providing smart and sensitive sexual education, liberal environment and provides real safeguards from sexual abusers. If the bill is passed in its present form it would criminalise teenage sex; which are already accepted and prevalent in the various tribes of central India.

An editorial in the month of June was written about young Muslim girls. As per Delhi High Court judgement order a 15-year old Muslim girl's marriage is considered legal but she cannot seek for divorce till she is 18 years of age. This has sparked off a debate among the Muslim clergy and other intellectuals. This article relates this issue to the Bill on age of consensual sex, and the need for government to formulate a law on the issue after weighing all the pros and cons.

An editorial in June was written on the issue of increasing number of deaths of children by falling into bore wells and uncovered manholes. About twenty children had died under similar circumstances. It tried to bring the apathy of public authorities towards the citizens of the country. This article was basically highlighting a problem which is prevalent in every part of the country due to the apathy of the public officials and has become the cause of deaths in some cases.

Another article in June highlighted the problem of falling standards in the quality of our education. Though students get perfect scores in subjects like English as there is only rote-learning to do, but their creativity is lost. At the school level there is compartmentalisation into disciplines and there is a hierarchy among the science-commerce and Humanities. This has aptly highlighted some of the problems which plague our educational system in schools and it has an impact on the quality of education in the higher education system.

In July the Times of India carried an interview of Mr. Siddhartha Kaul, who is the first Indian to be appointed global president of SOS Children's Villages International, supports children in need. He said that due to poverty about 20 million children need help in India. Most of the help comes from European countries. Recently corporates like Azim Premji have started supporting such ventures. They help the educational needs of the child so that they are financially independent. Child abuse in India is also

high and it is not reported because in most of the cases the perpetrators are related to the victim.

The Times of India in its editorial tried to highlight some of the burning issues which adolescence face like teenage sex, education, child abuse and accidental deaths.

The articles had a positive note they wanted the authorities to act in favour of the adolescence and these are issues which the parents and society has to set guidelines for them to follow.

In The Hindu six articles appeared on the editorial page. All the articles were related to education. One of the articles focuses how the education system can bring about peace between India and Pakistan. Through the years the Indian textbooks have undergone transformation and allow for some amount of discussion and discourse .On the other hand, the Pakistani textbooks have not undergone any change. This results in creating a bias especially with regard to the Partition of the two countries. In another editorial the removal of cartoons of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was discussed. The author who happens to be the chief advisor to NCERT is of the opinion that by designing such textbooks they were trying to make the young students think about politics seriously but the politicians are not ready for it. The idea of accepting cartoons as an art form in education has not at all been accepted by the politicians cutting across party lines.

In an article “educating students for free” deals with the free online courses being offered by universities in the U.S.A for developing nations. There is a demand for this kind of education. The students would be given a certificate at the end of the course but no grades or marks would be allotted. Another article discusses about the use of mobile devices for advancing education by improving access to education and reducing costs .It gives the example of Ghana. The low cost Akash Tablet was one such indigenous device but that needs further development before it can be launched on a large scale.

In an article on increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio in universities it was discussed that even though it has increased over the years but much needs to be achieved. Through the twelfth Plan remedial action needs to be speeded up. A number of universities have to be opened and provided with the requisite infrastructure. Scholarships need to be provided to the students and a lot of other amenities need to be provided.

In The Hindu also an editorial article discussed The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012.It brought out both the positive and negative aspects of the act. Like the articles in the Times of India this article also highlighted the problem of consensual sex below the age of 18.The age of 18 is in contradiction to other laws prevalent in the country.

In the Times of India though the number of articles related to adolescence on the editorial page was less compared to The Hindu, but it covered a variety of issues. The articles in The Hindu were more in number but most of the articles were related to education and education system.

CONCLUSION:

On analysis of the two English national dailies for a period of three months the following conclusions can be drawn:-

- The term adolescence is not used by the media
- None of the article was directly addressed to adolescence
- Most of the news related to adolescence is found on Page two and three, where local issues are reported.
- On the sports page –only when some under-19 individual wins a medal or prize at the national or international level then there is mention of it.
- Majority of the news related to adolescence was on educational issue.
- Accidents, deaths, suicides by adolescence were reported, though as a small news item.
- Most of the photographs used children to depict the impact of an event like flash floods, exodus of people from Somalia.
- Initiatives like YOUNG WORLD of The Hindu are meant for the school children; it only provides an opportunity for children to get their stories or drawings published. In no way it induces the children into the habit of reading.

Some of the recommendations made by this study are as follows:-

- The newspaper should have certain articles of interest to the adolescence so that they get induced into the habit of reading newspapers.
- There have been studies carried out in USA to prove that reading of newspapers contributes to the vocabulary of the individual.
- With the media economics in mind also since adolescence constitutes 243 million of population-giving some space for adolescence will not affect the advertising revenue of the newspaper as they are the major influence on the buying behaviour of the household.
- Other than education issues like how to deal with stress, loneliness, peer pressure, substance abuse, pre-marital sex, safe sex habits etc should also be discussed apart from other health issues like obesity, diabetes and other life-style related diseases, which strikes people at a very young age now.
- Child abuse especially of the girl child is still prevalent in spite of stringent laws; the newspaper can use their space to create awareness about how to deal with these issues. Most of the news related to such thing is about an event and the punishment given to the perpetrator but no concrete step is taken to create awareness and also prevention of such activities.

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