



**Research Article**

**NEW MEDIA AND ADOLESCENTS: PORTRAYALS AND PERSPECTIVES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present paper while discussing the offerings of the new media technologies and their effects on the adolescents has two fold objectives. Primarily it makes a literary attempt to understand adolescent as a category. Secondly, it makes a critically interrogation on the manner in which the adolescent are seen in communication studies. Therefore, the paper would analyze the existing scholarly literature pertaining to the field of adolescents and their engagement with the new media in order to outline the continuity, change and emerging trends in the traditions of communication research that help us to put in perspective our understanding on the leading discourse on adolescent and their interaction with the new media.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Today the world is unique in its own ways. We have entered a new century and with our entry to this new era we have been thrown into a new social and political arrangement such as deregulation, privatization and commercialization leading to technological advances. Central to all this is the process of globalization. National markets have become incorporated into a one single market structure, and boundaries are losing their significance in many respects. This process became chiefly prominent when it came to the media of mass communication, and now the new mass media technologies. Indeed, we have entered a period which threatens the earlier technical generations by sheer explosion in information, communication and entertainment. Communication today has the ability to embrace time and space by its speed and reach to any part of the globe, that too at any time. There is infact, a media abundance and saturation in the world.

But the sudden explosion in communication has received mixed feelings in society. While teenagers and adolescents are asked to engage with the modern mass media tools and new media gadgets in educational institutions has received respectability to be made a part of the curriculum; on the other hand, a large section in our society feels that the most defenseless and exposed section in globalized world of new media are our teenagers and adolescents. Ironically, while there is remarkable apprehension among parents, policy makers and educators with regard to the content available on the new media and demand for legislation against such

companies and the advertisers. On the other hand it has become a status symbol in educational institutions to introduce media laboratories, e-teaching and e-classrooms (teaching with the aid of media gadgets). In fact, schools and colleges have become the very place where the young and adolescents familiarize themselves and are exposed to the world of ICT through internet, multimedia and interactive media. Our understanding of adolescents becomes confused as on one hand the state wants to use them as future human resources and future manpower to compete in the global information economy while on the other hand the moral custodians think that they are vulnerable and easy prey to the influence of new mass media.

**Understanding Adolescents**

As a category, adolescents can be a little difficult to understand. But understanding how they are different from a child or the youth makes them easy to understand. Age is an important indicator of these distinctions, especially in their cognitive abilities, depending on how and when they develop them. Cognitive development, i.e. the ability to think clearly, comprehend and figure out things is not the only criteria to draw differentiation between children from each other. Different personalities is another important aspects to distinguish among them. For instance, Kagan (1997) argues that while some children are comfortable in unknown situations, others are introverted. This is substantiated by Eisenberg *et. al.* (1999), who demonstrate varying pro-social tendencies among children. Murphy *et. al* (1999:) believe that children possess differential abilities to regulate emotions and Zukerman (1994:) adds that there is a degree of difference among children to take pleasure in stimulating situations.

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Findings on this issue have not failed to demonstrate the gender differences among the young as well. Eaton and Enns (1996) for instance, write that boys prefer physically exhausting activities than their female counterparts and Parke and Slaby (1983) reveal that boys are generally more aggressive. Research by Halpern (2000) also establishes that in the performatory index boys fare better in visual-spatial tasks than the girls, who excel in verbal abilities.

Adolescence has been characterized an interlude wherein adolescents face not only physical changes but confront problems pertaining to increased independence and acquisition/assertion of self. According to Arnett (1992a) adolescence is a transitory period between childhood and adulthood. Ruth and Brook-Gunn (2000) write that this transient period is challenging as well as chaotic, while Gondoli (1999) accentuates on its normative aspects and feels that it's merely an indispensable and typical part of the process of growth.

Adolescence being the time of change and adaptability is the most vulnerable time for them. They can develop unhealthy habits that may lead to problems in their adult life. Adolescence is the time to start the journey to become a unique individual. This requires them to experience certain specific challenges and also have to go through the coping up process. The challenges that teenagers face during this time of transition are many. The important are identity formation, increased independence, risk taking, puberty and sexual development and the most significant is the importance of peers.

Brown (2000) writes that during teenage years, children face existential issues and start debating issues of difference. This feeling to identify the self is delicate and teenagers experiment with their looks and behavior. A news article published in a weekly news magazine provides a neat description of teen years like this: Adler (1994:) writes that "From who's in which clique to where you sit in the cafeteria, every day can be a struggle to fit in".

Due to the challenge of increased independence that adolescents experience, parents give less attention to oversee a teenager in comparison to a child. To further their sovereignty, teenagers are often found out of home and by a certain age demand to drive a car, even against their parents' wishes. In one study, Larson *et. al.* (1996) show how the percentage of waking hours that teens (between 5-12<sup>th</sup> grade) spent with their families declined from 33 to 14 per cent.

Accordingly, the time spent without the supervision and guidance of parents and family provides teenagers with a chance to make decisions independently, allowing them to take ownership of their decisions and actions, some of which may not be prudent and healthy. A study conducted on adolescents studying between grades 7-12 undertaken by Council of Economic Advisors in 2000 indicated stark differences among teenagers regularly consuming food with their families and those eating intermittently. In particular, teenagers spending little time or no time with parents and family are more at risk of being involved in smoking and drinking and also and involved in serious physical fights. A study by Farrington (1995) shows that while there is an increased tendency among teenagers to indulge in unlawful activities during adolescence, it is only a few among them that actually take to criminal activities. The corrective role of the family/parents in such a

situation becomes rather imperative according to Resnick *et. al.* (1997).

Modern day teenagers are exposed to a variety of situations wherein they are likely to make reckless or uninformed choices pertaining to substance abuse and sexual behavior. Research, for instance, by Arnett (1992a) shows that there is a probability among them indulging more in reckless behavior owing to a predisposition to experiment. While Elkind (1976 and 1985) attributes such inclination to adolescent "ego centricism", others such as Greene *et. al* (2000) point out to the vulnerability among teenagers to the preoccupation amongst them to be rather self-obsessive about their appearances and experiences. These self-engrossed teenagers assume themselves to be different from others and consider that what happens to others "won't happen to me." Research demonstrates teenagers as happy-go-lucky who more often than not do not realize the chances of them getting into a mishap when compared to others. Gerrard *et. al.* (1983:) have also indicated the manner in which sexually active young girls negate the probability of pregnancy from unprotected sex.

Though not all teenagers/adolescents have the tendency to be involved in risky activities, but even if they do, they hardly make an effort to limit their activities according to the wishes and demands of their parents, families or even law. Risk taking, therefore, is an important characteristic of teenage worldview. Jessor (1992) feels that risk taking among the adolescents is merely an attempt to be assertive and explorative wherein they seek to be independent and free from control. Arnett (1992a), similarly, contextualizes such behavior as an integral part of the adolescent's socialization behavior and patterns. Different teenagers undergo a different process of internalizing the norms and ideologies. There are those who experience socialization involving strong concerns towards their family values and parents with well defined expectations and a set of responsibilities with clear standards of expected behavior, and any departure from them is met with firm sanctions. There are others who are provided with an upbringing where freedom and self-sufficiency are considered more important, standards of expected behavior are flexible and practice of such expectations is not stringent. Arnett (1992a) concludes that risk taking has cultural attributes – the probability of it being higher in cultures, which are broad, is greater than those which are narrow.

Peers form an important part of teenage life as they contribute immensely towards each other's development than any other relationship. Berndt (1996) writes that adolescents place high value on peer group interactions as they tend to spend the maximum of their time with friends. The role of the peers, therefore is primary in initiating risky behavior among adolescents, be it related to substance abuse (smoking or drug consumption) as demonstrated by the studies by Chassin *et. al.* (1996) and Halebsky (1997) or pertaining to sexual indulgence (Whitbeck *et. al.*, 1999). Arnett (1992a) believes that peer group acceptance looms foremost in an adolescents formative mind and indulgence in risky behavior is undertaken merely to be accepted into a larger group, which the adolescents seeks membership into. Membership thus enables collective infallibility.

Peer group memberships are not always disadvantageous as a majority of research indicates. Hartup and Stevens (1999:) write that depending upon the type of friends, such social

behaviour could also lead to an increase in self-esteem among adolescents, which simultaneously can decrease their propensity to indulge in risk taking behaviour support shunning of bad habits. Further, the importance of peer group interaction and support has also been demonstrated by studies conducted by Dishon (1990), Arnett (1992a) and Resnick *et al.* (1997) who feel that adolescent susceptibility to risk taking behavior is directly proportional to their alienation from community support structures such as schools and in a situation where they have poor relationships with their parents. Strong peer relations also provide adolescents with appropriate environment for realizing and attaining the importance of good health and better academic results.

One of the most important characteristics of adolescence is puberty and bodily developments. Puberty is understood as a process of sexually maturing which symbolizes the start of youth phase. For 5-6 years that takes an individual to move through puberty phase, their body is completely altered with significant changes in their size, appearance as well as it's functioning. Puberty is characterized by the increased release of sex hormones, which are powerful signals to the body and brain to grow and develop. There is remarkable bodily growth with regard to weight, height, and muscles. Secondary sexual characteristics like body hair, acne, body odor are only a few signs of the remarkable bodily changes that naturally take place during this period.<sup>1</sup> Brooks-Gunn & Peterson (1983) have also stated that puberty in adolescence begins around the age of 9-10 for girls and approximately two years later for boys, while they may vary on individual basis. According to Petersen & Taylor (1980) simultaneously as they face bodily changes, teenagers also feel the occurrence of an amplified level of energy in their body and that is due to the changes their endocrine system. Furthermore, the growth of their reproductive organs is stimulated due to increased hormonal production of androgens and estrogens (Rekers, 1992).

The physical as well as biological changes that occur during puberty are also marked by inclination towards romantic and sexual relationship. Brown, White, & Nikopoulou, (1993) highlighting this in one study have confirmed, for instance, girls who fall in the age bracket of 11-15 year and were more mature physically, manifested an increased curiosity for sexual media content offerings. Thus adolescents are curious and compelled to share information about what they see/saw and also as to how would they prefer to see and also how they would like to be seen by the opposite gender and pursue information on/about standards, attitudes, and practices regarding sexual preferences. Then it not an accident that popular magazines covering issues related to adolescents dedicate a great deal of importance to issues of sex, sexuality and relationships (Walsh-Childers, 1997).

Adolescence period is typically viewed as turbulent but temporary and there is significant material evidence to state the teenagers witness some important and noticeable changes in their lives during these years. Being that stage of life and in the process of establishing their autonomy as well as themselves, they end up spending substantial time either alone or with their peers. In other words, they do not like to spend time with parents or spend minimal time in their company. This dire need to establish themselves and their independence coincides with their exploring themselves also establish their

new found identities. At this stage the parents need to remember that they are challenged with dual responsibilities of allowing independence while expecting corresponding accountability, staying empathetic during arguments and disagreements, and most importantly being able to provide soothing and clear advice/guidance about any significant risk they are likely to be involved in.

But it is very unfortunate that the transitional years of our young adults are monitored with a great fear and apprehension. The parents and the society view the teenage years with some trepidation, describing them "negatively, using terms such as irresponsible and wild" (Public Agenda, 1999). This public opinion is a possible outcome of mass media obsession for constantly portraying incidents involving teens with troubled background behave violently. But in contrast to this opinion, Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, (1996); Petersen, (1988) are of the view that though majority of teenagers are capable of handling their period of adolescence in a accordance with society norms and accountable manner they also make use of the opportunity by acquiring fresh competencies and responsible functions in the way to becoming maturing adults.

#### *Adolescent's association with the new media*

Academic enquiry concerning the association between portrayal of violence through media and resultant aggression among teenagers and youngsters tends to systematically deskill them. They often assume that this category cannot separate fantasy from reality. Before a certain age children are unable to differentiate between reel and real but adolescents and teenagers can easily make distinction between fact and fantasy representations of violence. Even the primatologists have noted that many mammals are capable of making distinctions between play violence and actual violence. Our children can surely make these distinctions.

Longitudinal, cross-sectional, and experimental studies on media effects confirm a causal relationship between the reactions measured in a controlled environment like the laboratory and ensuing behavior in the actual world settings. On the other hand, Hagell & Tim Newburn (1994) have noted "that prisoners serving time for violent crimes had, on average, consumed far less media than the general population." Most of the studies on media effects place media consumption in a laboratory where the researcher has an obvious agenda to investigate activities and reactions over them. But media does not function in the manner in which it is always assumed and portrayed. In reality, the pleasure(s) as well as the gaming experience(s) are completely different compared to playing the same game at your own home, at a friend's house or in a mall. The same difference can be experienced in the comparison of watching a movie at a theater and watching the same movie on television or even a mobile phone. The consumption of a type of media is closely associated with our day-to-day activities and the research on this topic has failed to demonstrate our consumption patterns and also how we interpret them. The weightage then is given to quantifiable reactions characterized by artificial elements where subjects are observed on replication of real world/life, essentially measuring the feeling of excitement or the rush of blood that occurs while facing an exciting content. However, sensory responses are only part of the whole story as the human body faces similar experience of neural stimulation in various activities it undergoes, yet some

<sup>1</sup> U.S. National Library of Medicine/National Institutes of Health, "Puberty."

are termed frightening and the other enjoyable as the actual difference rests with our interpretations of the experiences.

The complexity of the relationship between popular culture and its consumers cannot be simply summarized into lab experiments conducted on 'research subjects' and 'experiment results'. Even if considered true, media researchers and activists exaggerate their claim solely relying on the idea that subjects will not alter their behavior or responses. But even today limited work in this field of study examines new media content impact on teenagers and consequently it is unknown to us how pertinent such research on media and its impact is in relation to the consumer of interactive media.

Very few researchers on this topic support their findings and only few argue that there exist a co-relation between violent media consumption and performing real-world violence. If this remains to be an important catalyst, there exists no explanation as to why no acts of violence involving teenagers and adolescents have ever occurred where there is direct stimulus of such violent content. On the contrary, severe acts of escalating youth homicides and violence like murder, shooting, stabbing etc. have been reported to take place in schools/colleges/malls, and then it becomes imperative for us to identify and analyze those real-world factors that trigger such violence. A casual reading of this would lead us to believe that mass media and now the new interactive media as one such influence among many. Though all types of media affect the adolescents differently, but its impact cannot be said to be as sufficient as to provoke mentally healthy and well-adjusted adolescents to become perpetrators of violence. While the causes of mediated violence among adolescents are multifactorial, there is a need to protect those, who have faced/face poverty, psychiatric disorders family/community violence from the vulnerability of severe types of media violence. But this is not true for all adolescents as they do not face the risk of being affected from the media they consume. Today all houses have new media gadgets and all our children use these gadgets in private e.g. their bedrooms, without any parental supervision. Therefore, it is also the responsibility of the parents to monitor what kind of content their children are consuming.

The current research on media and its effects on adolescents offer a simple solution to a complex, multifactorial problem. The fact that violence is not new to our society and also that it is increasing in the modern society has been completely ignored by the researchers. Similarly in an attempt to explain the problem of increasing violence and attraction towards it in the modern society, researchers must begin by explain the presence of social violence and more importantly, its perpetrators. Even the criminologists in their efforts towards understanding the causes of crime, rely for answers on social factors like poverty, peer, family background, unemployment etc. here as researchers we should be more interested in the question of what environmental factors contribute to/influence aggressive and violent behavior. Rather than starting from the assumption what media content does with the children, we must seek answer to the question how are children consuming media and what do they do with it. The children/teenagers/adolescents of the modern society are inundated with violent media content in comparison to the earlier generations. In the present century there is abundance of new information, communication and entertainment technologies which have created an impact on all their aspects

of life. While they are the first ones to embrace the use of these new tools of technology, they also use them in their routine social life.

Violence is mostly referred to as physical and manifest violence. Much debate and research on media violence is based on aggression and violence, failing to address the complex human behavior. Though it is important to highlight and bring to light the portrayal of aggression and violence through media, but it is equally important to understand that all aggressive acts are not violent, whereas all violent acts are aggressive acts - especially those intended to cause grave physical harm. However, more importantly there are more latent forms of violence - mental and structural which have been ignored by the researchers. Such forms of violence are difficult to analyze and often leave a deeply rooted scar on the victim. Therefore it is safe to say that studies being conducted on new media content and its effects on consumers are incapable, till date, to highlight such effect in totality or as a whole. This is primarily due to the approach it adopts. As the effect model is grounded on the simpler stimulus-response model it does not focus on any theoretical reasoning for support. The current effects model therefore, ignores the meanings of media content within larger stories and forced assumptions are created removing the elements from their true context. Many research/studies force their subjects into watching violent content or violence in rapid succession, in an artificial setting, leaving no room for the subjects to (i) make a distinction between different contexts and (ii) not allowing them to draw their own individual meaning in the context.

Research on this subject also fails to offer an explanation as to the reasons why teenagers and adolescents are attracted towards violent content. Research conducted with a humanistic perspective, on the other hand, provides us with the opportunity to reason why adolescents are attracted towards media violence and what meanings they draw from them. But before we reach to any conclusion and begin to offer an explanation we should discuss with our children and make an attempt to understand their relationship with the new media culture. It is only then we can point to number possibilities on their appeal and fascination for violence or violent content.

Even after the impact of globalization, the access to all media remains unequal. The most significant and obvious question then, that needs to be answered is that what and which type of media is being used/consumed by the adolescents and in what manner. Research that addresses this question in an international perspective has been conducted in countries where there is equal access to media and its reach is wide-spread. Also the fact that such research is conducted in schools results in incomplete data as all adolescents do not attend school. Moreover in order to sell airtime to advertisers audience research is conducted by or at the request of the media agencies themselves. The purpose of this exercise then is to reach the greatest possible audience, that too, targeting certain groups or 'segments' of the population. These "audience ratings" mostly deal with the popular media sources, but they too are performed in areas where media are widely spread. Such audience ratings are therefore limited only to the bigger cities where accessibility of media is equal and even. This clearly implies that as rural areas and smaller towns are excluded in measurements, the data and the output are incomplete and are not applicable universally. As a result neither academic surveys nor audience ratings globally have

been able to provide an authentic representation of adolescent's media accessibility as well as their usage. Therefore it must be reiterated that the findings on the research mention nothing regarding a variety of adolescents such as those *living in rural areas, those living in areas where electricity is not or partly available, homeless adolescents and those who cannot afford such mediums of mediated message*. Another problem is that research methods in this topic of study differ sizably both, between studies and between the regions of studies. As a result, the methods employed by researchers for such studies become dependent on the regional cultures as well as their preferences for popular culture. Therefore it should be safe to state, as an option, that as uniform knowledge is lacking regarding adolescent's media access, preferences and usage, there is an immense need for researchers at the local as well as international level to gather, measure and compile data using consistent methods so that their findings can be compared globally.

The fact of the matter is that if humans' encounter *any* media content they must draw certain logic out of that content and accordingly interpret it. Just as adults do, a child or an adolescent are mentally capable in drawing their own stories or meanings of the media content they consume (Dorr, 1980). Assuming the degree of variances in personal experiences, confrontations and mental growth, it is important to appreciate that interpreting similar content will have different meanings across the life span, i.e., a child will derive a meaning from a media content differently compared to a teenager/ adolescent or an adult.

Different media consumers react to similar media content according to their understanding and experiences of the world, i.e., essentially in different ways. Therefore generalizing the findings of media usage and its impact is not only inadequate for its assessment but also inappropriate. New media technologies are such tools that are capable of being used for diverse purposes, productive as well unproductive. But before we set out for an analysis, it is important to recognize that it is us who consume media rather than what media does with us. Consumption of media content is assumed to be a continuous course of action as we allow that content to be part of our mental circulation and consumption for a prolonged period but our instantaneous sensory responses cannot be taken for quantification to understand the real concerns of consuming that content. Furthermore, reactions to content consumption are usually original rather than copied. We connect our own personal stories deriving meaning from the media content we confront, creating images that are personally meaningful to us as they are in line with our understanding and experiences of the world and we choose to use them as a medium to discover ourselves and know who we are, our desire and values and further use them to connect to other people. In whatever manner we may construct images and our craft stories based on media consumption, the fact of the matter is that real life has the tendency to overcome the reel life. The reality or the real life has the potency to exercise consequences for an action and it is only due to that exertion we can say that an individual perception of the actual world is based on his/her life experiences. For instance, most children in school are exposed to ragging or bullying from their seniors/classmates. This actual life experience provokes them for their future actions and its consequences but in comparison the media culture does

not have the power to exercise any such control over its consumers.

Media content consumption does have the tendency to influence but it merely reinforces our beliefs and experiences rather than fundamentally altering them. The entertainment offered over the new media offers teens a fantasy of empowerment. Much media content have become a subculture of young consumers who believe that violent media content as an opportunity to release their pressure and frustration by watching violent media content or playing violent games. Though these new technologies are now capable of making images look more real and richer and open to responsible supervision, still they do not carry the influence to basically alter the real life experience or for that matter an adolescents imaginations.

Due to its ability to come close to real life depiction and demonstration, violence in media entertainment proposes to its consumers the idea that the actual world is not what it may seem like. Bruno Bettelheim (1977), a child psychologist argues "that the violence and darkness of fairy tales is important for children to confront as a means of acknowledging the darker sides of their own nature". In the absence of such a portrayal, any innocent mind may understand his/her wild impulses as an indication to be "monstrous" instead of learning a way to diagnose and regulate such instincts of oneself. All over the world we can find teenagers/adolescents who come from disturbed families and have witnessed domestic violence, who have confronted poverty and live in an area where crime is normal a normal activity in their neighborhoods. Very interestingly not all of them become criminals and or Psychopaths. Though they could have been inclined towards representations of the dark, negative and a violent world, but somewhere, somehow they acknowledged the troubling times and world experiences, to move on and make a better life for themselves.

Often it has been seen that during this periods adolescents and teens face a lot of rejection which is a major cause for their injured self esteem. The adolescence period is a time of irresistible feelings. Through media entertainment they attempt at strengthening their emotions as well as justify the circumstances faced by them. In order to escape such feelings they seek help and rely upon different media cultures which are not only prominent and different but allow them to be visible and fulfill their fantasies. In other words adolescents and teenagers are drawn to violent media content because they feel empowered to fulfill their wild fantasies enabling them to counter weaker sides of their experiences and most significantly a medium for intense release from actual world stress.

Are adolescents more prone to the influence of media compared to adults? According to Buckingham (2000), at the extreme of it, there are two radically different positions on this issue. One observation sees children are immature and exposed and therefore need protection from those who are mature and sensible. This particular position makes the media as essentially a problem and in some cases evil because they offer material to children that is inappropriate for their consumption. Buckingham (2000) points out "that *media panics* have been with us a long time, especially those concerning the impact of sex and violence on children." "Such panics gain steam any time a public crisis occurs such as the massacre at Columbine

High School or any time a new and unknown form of media technology is developed” (Wartella & Reeves, 1985).

A contrasting view is that “children are increasingly sophisticated, mature, and media savvy” (Tapscott, 1998). Strasburger and Wilson (2002) framed the other point of view and said, “efforts to shield youth from media are too protectionist in nature and smack of paternalism. Instead, children should be empowered to take control of their own media experiences, negotiating and learning along the way”. On this Buckingham (2000) “argues that this position is widely shared among those who see children as independent consumers who should be able to spend their own money and buy what they want.”

But it is also true that the young are confronted with and derive meanings of the information differently compared to the older generation. This idea on a child’s development is supported by many dominant outlook which include the theory of cognitive development propounded by Piaget’s (1930; 1950) along with the more current models offered on information processing” (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993; Siegler, 1991).

## **CONCLUSION**

Today the adolescents and the teenagers find themselves engaged with media technologies which are increasingly improving by the hour and becoming better. With the merging of technologies (*Information and Communication Technologies*), the content available on the new media is not only realistic but interactive. Due to this unique ability of the new realistic and interactive media, the use of media devices and media technologies is at a boom and an all-time high. This use is becoming more and more personal as the users recede to more private places like bedrooms, to engage with their media, alone. Not only the adolescents and the teenagers, even the adults spend a considerable amount of their time with a media form.

In reality there are many aspects associated for the media content or its output to be what it is. Plainly it may be concluded that it is the adults preferences that construct the adolescent images in the media or adolescent images in the media are adult constructions. This view can be supported by the fact that when adolescents are projected in the media, the images reflect the desire of our adults as the way they want to see them. But it would only be unfair to say so and the real question that looms is who is responsible for such projections of the adolescents or such behavior. Even though every representation of adolescent in the media is different with its unique characteristics and even though every media content developed may have substantial purposes and meaning to it in benefit of the media objectives, it is the cultural orientation as well as the upbringing and restrictions of the adolescents that are essentially the factors contributing to shape the intermittent, recurring adolescent patterns in society, eventually reflected in the media. Unnecessary and excessive portrayal of adolescent in acts of violence, crime and non acceptable societal acts and incidents, especially in news and other infotainment programmes, and contrastingly the fact that all good looking teenagers and adolescents are considered more suitable for product promotion clearly highlights the distorted and dichotomous characterization of the category and is purely for the commercialization of media.

The earlier discussions suggest a fairly simple conclusion: there is no need for us to push the panic button and give up on our responsibility towards the support of free expression. Rather, there is a need to appreciate as well as create contexts which allow us to better understand the significance that new media play in the lives of the young and respect this relationship between them and the media culture. We must also reconsider the possibilities of addressing the emerging controversies over the effects of new media and its content.

Another possible objection to the explanation is, if at all any, that the portrayal of unfair images of adolescent’s behavior in media may be a reflection of the limitations or the restrictions faced by them. In this context, a reliable counter argument may be placed by suggesting that the role of media is not to emulate and reflect the reality. To put it simply, those who consume media or the consumers of media content should not plainly and blatantly see as well as follow what media represents through its offerings. We are expected to make sense of it on the basis of our understanding, the experiences and the social context. Needless to reiterate, that the fundamental role of media is to entertain. Moreover many a time’s fantasy and creativity play an important role in expounding reality in a better way. Similarly it is equally an important function of the media to inform and analyze the everyday social, cultural and political (national and international) events of the society. Further, it is also a fact that more often than not, it is the society elites who occupy maximum space on the media platforms and they may be considered as role models by many adolescents and other common people. Another significant observation in this regard may be that unlike adults the adolescents do not hesitate to encounter adults in the media. By means of our preferences and as consumers, we are active co-constructors of the media content and administer the very nature of the media and its content we consume, in whatever form it is presented to us. This is so, as the prime objective of media houses is to reach the maximum consumers possible and accordingly adapt to their needs for further higher circulation/consumption.

But factually, the association between media (content) and its users (consumers) is a two way relationship. Only to argue that media consumers are active co-creators and condemn the effects of the same media content on its consumers would be incorrect. It is a vicious circle beginning with what the media offers to its consumers, initially, and as that content gains the status of popular culture among its consumers, the consumers through that popular culture make choices and from them get ideas for improvement and consequent media content creation and circulation. Accordingly, in the end it is the content that media offers to the consumers that is vital in formation of adult ideas about the adolescents and vice-a-versa.

The media environment today is very different and complex as compared to the last 10-15 years. The youth today are engaged with a very complex yet comprehensible media environment. One of the most reflective complexities of the new media environment is its sheer affordability and simplicity of access (technology as well as its devices). The advent of new media technologies has radically amplified the viewing options or entertainment choices and is only augmenting this capacity. At a very juvenile age the adolescent are being introduced to these tools of new technology at home as well as schools.

With the flourishing of these technologies, the very nature of our traditional media has been altered. The use of television is no more limited to watch broadcast programmes. They can now be connected to any device and be used to for a variety of activities. Though the newspapers are still being delivered to the doorsteps but people prefer to read news online over the internet on their computers or their mobile devices. In other word, no distinction exists between a television screen, a computer screen or for that matter a mobile phone as interfaces are converging to denote common usage and with this convergence of media technologies the corporations that own them are forced to come together. Globally, and especially in India adolescents, teenagers and youth are a huge and a profitable market segment and in order to reap the benefits of this segment media corporations are more and more addressing as well as systematically targeting them as profitable consumers and content co-constructors. With the convergence of digital technology our media experiences have been altered fully and the content being offered over the new media is being amazingly realistic is ready to cross over the dividing lines that stood until recently between the real and the reel.

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