

New Media Practitioners' Identity Parameters and New Media Usage

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ABSTRACT

This study of new media user-practitioners (agency) among Delhi-NCR university students is based on new media engendered traits and dispositions on the agency. This research was conducted on 300 students and the information was collected through using convenience sampling by administering a schedule by the researcher. The study involved assessing the volume and nature of indulgence of the participant-students' with the new media enabled smart devices and the different internet platforms offered by them. It also involved assessing the identity of the practitioners in terms of their family, type, locality and family income, among others. The goal was to understand the variation of new media usage volume with the above-mentioned basic identity parameters. The results revealed certain parameters are positively associated with heavy media usage in varying degrees.

Keywords: New Media, Consumption patterns, identity parameters, family, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Recent advancements in technology challenge our fundamental notions of human power and agency. In the study of media effect, communication takes centre stage where agency takes crucial position (Lister M. et al, 2003). Given the ascent of new media, the significance of agency is reinforced as it gained higher level of empowerment. Further, the concept of agency involves not only the causing of an action but the desires, purposes and intentions behind it. Agency, on such a view, is therefore exclusively the property of socially interacting humans (Lister M. et al, 2003).

Both communication and sociological scholars have shown how agency is embedded in a broader socio-cultural landscape. Agency can mobilize people to reflect on their experience, adapt to their surroundings, and affect the socio-cultural context that in turn sustains them (Jenkins, 2008). This way, in the changed technological circumstances, it is better to make use of the term 'agency', and not simply 'actor'. Hence the researcher designated the new media practitioners a status called agency, providing a place in this thesis as a separate unit.

This unit is organized around the real-life construction of agency of new media practitioner students of universities (as a category) in Delhi-NCR. The authors who have developed on the concept of agency, from both social science and communication discipline, have commonly agreed that the human agent is the location of human agency. The concept of agency stretches from individuals to group category, but its core value of subjectivity sustains everywhere.

Bourdieu (1977:72), in his concept of 'habitus', emphasized upon a correlation between social position and dispositions within the social system. And he specified dispositions as a set of acquired thoughts, behaviour, tastes, cultural representation in human habits through practices of one's history, which is a psycho-cultural aspect. On the other hand, identity comprises both congenital and acquired attributes. Althusser (1971) proposed the term 'interpellation' for the phenomenon of acquiring identity by agents, through self-awareness, skills and other purposeful attributes.

The above ideas and discussions led to attempting this study. The researcher got rationale for exploring practitioners' social background of the respondents, from Dewdney & Ride (2006: 108-109). Also, from Mytton et al, (2016) who deemed 'who is listening, who is watching, who is messaging and who is online', as remarkable questions to ask. The responses collected are arranged in the tables for analysis.

Research Objective

This study seeks to understand the variation of certain identity parameters with new media usage volume and the resulting situations of the NCR families and parents, in whose relation the new media agency located in respondents/actors operates. The study involved assessing the volume and nature of indulgence of the participant-students' with the new media enabled smart devices and the different internet platforms offered by them. The objective is to understand the variation of new

media usage volume with the above-mentioned basic identity parameters of the new media practitioners, like family type, family income and the locality they live in.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory study based on the survey of 300 new media user/practitioner students of the national capital region (Delhi-NCR) universities (eight). Questions were asked to seek information regarding the daily consumption volume of new media, types of new media gadgets owned, platforms being accessed, content being consumed and so on. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the respondents, under mixed method approach to research.

The unit of the study is the student, who owns a smartphone. Convenience sampling was deployed 'to find the research subjects quickly and easily seeking information whatsoever available' (Judith M, et al., 2005:75)¹.

KEY CONCEPTS

New Media

The new media communication technologies use computers and telecommunication as mediums for information dissemination to a scattered and heterogeneous audience defying space, time and distance. Different tools of new media have emerged, like the internet, mobile phones, videoconferencing, e-mail, chat apps, online newspapers, magazines and many others. The term digital media, is often used interchangeably with the new media, since new media runs on digital technology.

New Media Consumption

M. Lister (2003/2016)² defined consumption as thus: 'Consumption is browsing, surfing, watching videos, and we may consume so much as we are 'immersed'.' Of course, now, chatting, video calling and posting can be added now as the popular activities on the new media platforms. The consumption includes both the volume and frequency of usage. The researcher utilized these while presenting the position of new media practitioners as producer and consumer simultaneously.

The Family

The family organization has been very fundamental and universal in human civilization. A lot of definitions have been propounded by various social scientists. Giddens (1984) defined family as thus: "a group of individuals related to one another by blood ties, marriage or adoption who form an economic unit; the adult members which are responsible for the upbringing of children." This definition is good representative of broad base of definitions of family. However, Thomas & Znaniecki (1918:21) have added had a relevant note to this context as they stated- "Fundamental familial connection is one and irreducible; it can't be converted into any other type of group relationship nor reduced to a personal relation between otherwise isolated individuals. It may be termed familial solidarity."

The general characteristics of the family as an organizational unit may be deduced from the work of western or Indian thinkers, as it entails- 1. Blood and marriage ties, 2. Mutual responsibilities of members, 3. One collective economy, 4. Duties and rights of members, and 5. Discipline and socialization of its kids along with rearing them, constitute basic familial functions across all the populations and publics.

DATA INTREPRETATION & ANALYSIS

Extent of use of the new media gadgets

Ascertaining the level of preoccupation of the respondents with new media is crucial to gauge their level of indulgence. More indulgent users are likely to devote less time to other activities, including conversing with the family members. While the lack of appropriate communication motivation or lifestyle and personality of family members are important factors affecting communication, but the use of new media may amplify the opportunities and motivation of the respondents to evade conversations. Therefore, the amount of time spent on new media devices has a direct bearing on the volume and

¹Judith, Espinosa, Valencia, DeAnza, Jensen, Michael, White, Mary, (2005). Regional Transportation's Consensus Building Between Local and Tribal Governments in New Mexico: A Case Study. Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, 1924, pp 75.

²² Lister M. et al. 'New Media: a critical introduction', NY: Routledge, 2003.

quality of communication with the family members. The below table assess the total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents.

Duration		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Upto one hour	25	8.3	8.3	8.3
	1- 2 hours	102	34.0	34.0	42.3
	2-3 hours	43	14.4	14.4	56.7
	More than 3 hours	130	43.3	43.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Nearly 43% of the respondents use digital gadgets for more than 3 hours per day, apart from telephonic conversations. 145 (48%) respondents use smartphone for 1-3 hours. Also, around two third respondents (173) use digital gadgets for at least two hours a day. For the matter of classification, up to one hour daily users are ‘Light Users’, 1-3 hours are ‘Medium Users’ and more than 3 hours are ‘Heavy Users’. The significant number of ‘Heavy Users’ indicate high level of indulgence of the respondents.

The Family-type of the practitioner-students

The family structure in general has changed quite a bit in the last generation. Even in rural areas, lot of nuclear families are originating. Family type- joint/nuclear, implicates behaviour and communication between its members, as it provides heterogeneity as well as time and space constraints. The type of family also impacts the value system, and the degree of freedom that it imparts to its members. The family type distribution is given hereunder:

Family Type		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Joint Family	103	34.3	34.3	34.3
	Nuclear	197	65.7	65.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Nearly one third of the respondents (103) belong to joint families and the rest two-third (197) belong to nuclear families. The socio-economic conditions and migration have necessitated the division of families. Traditional joint families are on decline world over, as people migrate to different places for job opportunities and also as young generation seeks autonomy and independence; hence the differential in the sample.

Residential locality of the practitioner-students

Rural/urban locality differences generally matter, affecting the modes of behaviour, lifestyle and social conditions. The data collected in this regard is as under:

Locality		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Urban	260	86.7	86.7	86.7
	Rural	40	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Most of the students (260) hail from urban localities and rest from the rural localities (40). As we have witnessed in the last three of decades (post liberalization), more and more people are migrating to cities and metros for better career opportunities. The proportion is therefore, naturally skewed. Most rural students in this study hail from the nearby villages.

Family Income of the practitioner students’ parents

Income level and living standards also visibly affect the economic capacity, resource availability, social/life world, which seems to impact the need and usage patterns of new media devices. The family income of the respondents is given as under:

Income		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Upto 3 Lakh	79	26.3	26.3	26.3
	3-5 Lakh	89	29.7	29.7	56.0
	5-10 Lakh	71	23.7	23.7	79.7
	10-20 Lakh	39	13.0	13.0	92.7
	Above 20 Lakh	22	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

A considerable chunk of respondents, around one-third (89), lies in the annual family income bracket of 3-5 lakh. Around one fourth of the respondents' families (79) have annual income of below 3 lakh. Only 7% of the families (22) have annual income of above 20 lakh. It looks reasonable as out of eight universities that have been chosen for the survey, five are government universities, with higher affordability as against the private universities. There are, therefore, majority of students who belong to the below '5 lakh per annum income' households.

New media usage variation with the locality of the respondents

The below table depicts the variation of residential locality (urban or rural) of the respondents with the total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents. This is important since the social situations are different for the rural and urban users in terms of time, space, affordability, ambitions and rate of adoption of technology (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). The relevant data is presented hereunder.

Total Daily Average Usage of New Media		Residential Locality of the Respondents		Total
		Urban	Rural	
	Less than 1 hour	18	7	25
	1- 2 hours	88	14	102
	2-3 hours	38	5	43
	More than 3 hours	116	14	130
	Total	260	40	300

45% (116) of the respondents who live in urban localities (Total 260) are heavy users, while 35% (14) of the rural residents (Total 40) are heavy users. On the other hand, only 7% (18) of the urban respondents are light users and 17% (7) of the rural respondents are light users. This implies that there are more heavy users in the given set of urban respondents, than there are in the rural respondents. A study by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), India Internet (2019), noted that nearly one-third of users access internet for 'More than one hour' in urban areas, whereas in rural areas, similar proportion of users access internet for 15-30 minutes. Clearly, this research's finding also corroborates the fact that the volume of new media use is more for urban users than the rural ones. However, collective viewing could be spotted easily in rural areas, with youth getting into huddles for common entertainment on smartphone.

New media usage variation with the type of family

The following table depicts the association between the type of family of the respondents (joint/nuclear) and the total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents. Joint families, by its very definition, means that there are more family members in such households. This could alter the family situation in terms of time and space availed by the respondents to indulge in new media.

Total Daily Average Usage of New Media		Type of Family of the Respondents		Total
		Joint Family	Nuclear	
	Less than 1 hour	11	14	25
	1- 2 hours	41	61	102
	2-3 hours	13	30	43
	More than 3 hours	38	92	130
	Total	103	197	300

Around 37% (38) of the respondents, who live in a joint family (Total 103), are heavy users (total daily average usage of new media of more than three hours), while 46% of the respondents (92) who live in a nuclear family (Total 197) are heavy users. Conversely, around 71% (92) of the heavy users (Total 130) live in nuclear family. On the other hand, around 11% (11) of the respondents, who live in a joint family, are light users (total daily average usage of new media of less than one hour) and 7% of nuclear family inhabitants are light users. The high level of concurrence between heavy users and nuclear family inhabitation confirms that nuclear families have more space and situation for high use of new media.

New Media usage variation with annual family income

New media allows people to connect and communicate irrespective of the physical distances and economic barriers. Researchers have found that internet use and adoption vary across demographics such as age, income, race and ethnicity, as well as community differences such as urban, suburban, and rural areas (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). Further, they found that young adults with high levels of education, and those in more affluent (high income) households were the groups that came closest to full penetration and saturation levels of internet adoption and use. The below table draws connection between the annual family income and total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents:

Total Daily Average Usage of New Media		Annual Family Income					Total
		Upto 3 Lakh	3-5 Lakh	5-10 Lakh	10-20 Lakh	Above 20 Lakh	
	Less than 1 hour	10	10	4	0	1	25
	1- 2 hours	36	31	20	11	4	102
	2-3 hours	11	13	12	4	3	43
	More than 3 hours	22	35	35	24	14	130
Total		79	89	71	39	22	300

Source: Investigator’s own survey

Only 28% (22) of the respondents, who have annual household family income below three lakh, are heavy users. The number of heavy users increase as the income increase, with 39% (35) for 3-5 lakh income, 49% (35) for 5-10 lakh, 61% (25) for 10-20 lakh and 64% (14) for the income of upward of 20 lakh per annum. The financial background can impact the means and scale of digital gadgets that the respondents have access to. The financial background also implies certain aspects like leisure, ambitions, exposure and affordability, both for the respondents’ and their family members.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

One of the purposes of the research was to understand the construction of real life new media practitioner-students’ agency, and one of the ways was to understand the social background. In this research, most of the respondents reside in urban localities (that’s where the internet data and network is superior); two third hail from nuclear families; more than 2/3rd belong to middle and upper middle class.

While assessing the volume of new media use by the respondents, the researcher found that nearly 43% (130) of the respondents use digital gadgets for more than 3 hours per day. 145 (48%) respondents use smartphone for 1-3 hours. Also, around two third respondents (173) use digital gadgets for at least two hours a day.

The volume of new media use seems to be associated more with the urban resident respondents. There are more heavy users in the given set of urban respondents, than there are in the rural respondents, by 10 percentage points (Table 2.7). Also, there is high level of concurrence between heavy user and nuclear family inhabitation since nuclear families have more space and situation for high use of new media (Table 2.8). The number of heavy new media users also increase as the family income increases (Table: 2.9). It implies that there are certain demographic traits which are positively associated with heavy new media use, like urban locality type, nuclear family, and high household income.

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