

READING HABIT OF INDIAN YOUTH IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract:

There is now Growing acceptance of the fact that a country's social and economic progress greatly depends on its people having access to the vast expanse of knowledge provided by the printed word. This is all the more relevant to a country like India where the youth constitute a sizeable portion of its total population. Economic planners in India have always focused on this vital constituency. Youth power can be harnessed for the country's development only by providing young Indian with the right dose of education, motivation and exposure to the outside world. In today's world, uneducated and malnourished workers find little place in productive employment. It is argued that there is little point in putting energy into teaching literacy if there is no follow-up programme to establish reading habits. The Extension Studies Book Programme has highlighted three needs in relation to this: 1) the need to take the books to the people rather than waiting for the people to come to the books, 2) the need to provide books that are easy enough for people to enjoy, and 3) the need for ongoing commitment to the programme. It is argued that the reading habit is not only a missing link between literacy and libraries, but it is a link so vital that at every level from village to university the people are drastically underachieving in their daily work.

Key words: Reading, Indian Youth, Digital.

Introduction:

The ability to read has long been recognized as essential to personal fulfillment and there is now growing acceptance of the premise that a country's social and economic progress depends in large measure on its people having access to the indispensable knowledge conveyed by the printed word. Removing the barrier of illiteracy, instilling the reading habit and providing an adequate supply of books - these are linked objectives which go to the heart of much of what UNESCO seeks to accomplish.

An examination of variations in reading habits from nation to nation demonstrates that the place occupied by books in the scale of values of those responsible for their promotion is of first importance: all State, community and school authorities, every teacher, parent and pedagogue must be seriously convinced of the importance of reading and books for individual, social, and cultural life if they are to work towards improvement of the situation. This conviction must then be transmitted to students of reading in a way appropriate to their stage of development.

The privilege of reading was reserved for the very few in ancient times before the discovery of printing, and even after the Age of Humanism it was accessible only to educated elite.

Only in recent decades, when technological and economic development makes continuous demands on the intellectual collaboration of a majority of people, has the question arisen, how the "right to read" for all can be made a reality. Reading research, one of the youngest branches of science, has thrown a new light on the significance of reading, not only with regard to the needs of society but also for the individual. The "right to read" also means the right to develop one's intellectual and spiritual capacities, the right to learn and make progress.

Amongst the various communication media, the mass communication medium like newspapers, television, radio, internet etc. play an important role in creating awareness and also up keeping the knowledge level of the audience / readers as they diffuse the message to larger sector within the shorter period. During the process of use of mass media, the use of printed materials or publications like newspapers, farm magazines, books, booklets, circular letters, leaflets, folders etc. emerged as an important means of communication system. It is

traditionally associated with the culture and carries higher prestige for people than do other media.

Reading:

Reading is a precise process. It involves exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and large language units. More simply stated, reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thoughts and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time. The ability to anticipate that which has not been seen, of course, is vital in reading, just as the ability to anticipate. What has not yet been heard is vital in listening. Today, the reading has social, academic, economical and survival significance, because democracy of a country can survive when people at large have reading competence. Reading is always a means to an end and not to end itself. Further, reading is the process of using over 'eyes', our 'mind', to understand the literal as well as the hidden meaning of what the writer was attempting to convey. Therefore, reading gives both power, and pleasure with understanding, by reading the material as a unified whole, by which one can expand the frontiers of knowledge and scholarship. Reading was once valued merely as a means of receiving an important message but, today reading research has defined the act of reading in itself as a multi-level mental process which contributes greatly to the development of the intellect. Great demands are made on the brain by the process of transforming graphic symbols into intellectual concepts; an infinite number of brain cells are activated during the storage process of reading.

Youths' Exposure to Mass Media:

- About 77 per cent of the literate youth population is interested in music & films, 72 per cent in news & current affairs, 59 per cent in religious and spiritual topics, 35 per cent in science and technology and 34 per cent in environmental pollution. More males than females are interested in news and politics, but the reverse is the case with fashion and religious and spiritual topics.
- Television remains the most popular source of information for the youth followed by newspapers. However, while 54 per cent of the youth view television for entertainment and 22 per cent for news and current affairs, about 63 per cent read

newspapers to gather news and information on current event and only 10 per cent reading for entertainment.

- Watching TV is the most preferred leisure activity, followed by newspaper reading. In fact, a literate youth spends on an average 98 minutes daily viewing TV, 32 minutes on newspaper reading, 44 minutes reading magazines, 70 minutes surfing the net, and 61 minutes per day listening to the radio.
- About 24 per cent of households have newspaper subscription (15% rural, 39% urban) and 8 per cent (5% rural, 12% urban) magazine subscription. Four out of every seven households of 'graduate and above' youth and three out of every eight urban households have newspaper subscription.
- Two out of every eight households of 'graduate and above' youth, one out of every eight households of 'higher secondary' passed, and one out of every 15 households of 'primary' passed have magazine subscription.
- More girls than boys show interest in reading books during leisure time but more boys than girls read newspapers. Readership of books, newspapers and magazines also increases with rising level of education but decreases with increasing age. The proportion of those reading books during leisure time declines with increasing age groups.
- Hindi, with 38.5 per cent followed by Marathi (10.5%) and Tamil (9%) have emerged as the three most preferred languages for newspaper readers.
- The literate youth had a higher level of confidence in newspapers than TV. However, about 75 per cent of Internet users expressed confidence in the Internet.
- Almost 65 per cent of the youth households in India own TV, 54 per cent own mobile phones, 27 per cent own radio and 5 per cent have own computers at home. About 86 per cent of the urban households own TV as against 52 per cent in the case of rural households.
- The internet is accessed by 3.7 per cent of the youth (7.7% urban, 1.3% rural), for e-mails and chatting in more than half of the cases. It is used for entertainment in 14 per cent of the time, for reading books online in 4 per cent of the cases and also to search for new book titles in 1.2 per cent of the cases. It is accessed at Internet cafes in 46 per cent of the cases, at home in 23 per cent, and at the workplace in 13 per cent.

Youth Readers: Their Reading Habits and Attitudes

- Of the 83 million total youth readers (25% of the youth population), about 39 million (47%) are urban and 44 million (53%) are rural; 53 per cent of the literate youth are males; frequency of readers amongst males and females is 24 and 27 per cent respectively; frequency of readers in rural and urban segments is 21 and 31 per cent respectively.
- With 58 per cent of the readers, the level of education attained is matriculation or below, only 42 per cent are above matriculation.
- The southern region has 24 per cent youth readers, followed by the eastern and western regions, both having nearly 22 per cent readers, the central region(12%), the northern region(13%) and the north-eastern belt having the least share of youth readers(7%).
- About 43 per cent of Christian and 25 per cent of Hindu youth read leisure books. Readership among the Sikh youth is 13 per cent. The Hindu readers constitute about 82 per cent of the total readers as against 12 per cent share of Muslims.
- Youth belonging to joint families and even those staying in hostels or other places of accommodation read more than those staying in nuclear families. Readership is closely linked to parents' level of education. While 49 per cent of youth with 'graduate and above' parents and 39 per cent with 'higher-secondary' parents read leisure books, it is only 17 per cent among youth with illiterate parents. However, youth with 'graduate and above' parents form only 12 per cent of the total readers as against 47 per cent in case of youth with primary-passed or illiterate parents.
- Readership is also significantly higher among youth with salaried (30%), retired (39%) parents compared to youth with agriculturist or laborer parents (22%). While 40 per cent of readers have salaried parents, only 32 per cent have agriculturist or laborer parents.
- About 25 per cent of literate youth read books for pleasure, relaxation and knowledge enhancement; more females (27%) read leisure books than males (24%).
- The reading habit is more among the younger generation compared to elder youth since many youth in higher age groups are likely to be involved with other activities to sustain their families. Readership also declines towards lower levels of education.
- Hindi is the most preferred language for leisure reading (33.4%) followed by Marathi (13.2%), Bengali (7.7%) and English (5.3%).

- Youth readers prefer to read leisure books mostly on holidays (36%) while only about 4 per cent read on working days; 75 per cent read books 'at least once a week', while 26.4 per cent read 'daily'; about 88 per cent read at 'home', only a miniscule reading in their schools/colleges or libraries.

Luring the Youth into Reading:

- Schools have emerged as the hotbed of readership development. About 59 per cent of the youth who had a reading habit said they were initiated into reading in their school, while about 20 per cent learned it from their parents.
- Asked whether their teachers encouraged them to read, 50 per cent of the readers and 19 per cent of the non-readers answered in the affirmative as against the overall percentage of teacher encouragement (27%).
- Almost 83 per cent of the youth with a reading habit found the reading hour in their schools interesting, while 65 per cent of the non-readers found it interesting.
- In the case of readers, parents' reading interest and involvement was comparatively more than that in the case of non-readers.
- About 28 per cent of the youth lend leisure books to friends and family members, 12 per cent have presented gifts to others while another 12 per cent received gifts.
- Peer influence on the reading habit was clearly visible when 74 per cent of the readers reported that their peers had interest in reading, while only 34 per cent of the non-readers did so.
- The majority of the youth agreed that students who read books beyond their syllabus become more knowledgeable and successful. About 75 per cent agreed that reading is more important than watching TV or surfing the net. Nearly 77 per cent also agreed that books were the most suitable medium for knowledge transmission.
- About half the respondent youth shared the perception that the reading habit was declining. Almost 48 per cent found the advent of the Internet and electronic media as the most important reason for the declining trend in reading.
- Three suggestions for promoting reading habit that found the maximum support of the youth are motivation and encouragement, compulsory leisure reading in schools, and easy access to libraries, with motivation and encouragement being supported by the maximum number of youth.

Reading In Computerized Library:

We are living in an era of instability, insecurity and constant change, the knowledge acquired by a person during the formal education becomes obsolete at a very rapid rate in the digital environment. Lifelong learning is the only way to service and thrive in the rapidly changing environment. Internet has revolutionized the concept of libraries and changed the way the information is processed, stored, transmitted, retrieved and disseminated. It holds large volumes of electronic information in almost all fields of human knowledge. The library environment is currently undergoing a rapid and dynamic revolution leading to new generation of libraries with an emphasis on e – resources – subscription is one of the emerging tool kits for libraries to survive in the present circumstances.

The gap between the expectations of the users, availability of users, availability of resources and capabilities of libraries are widening with each passing day. Therefore, the need to restructure the library services for enhancing the speed, quality and productivity of the library services. The growth of library networks and knowledge sharing activities are quite vital for the present day library and information service. Human knowledge is growing on hyper media exponentially. Here measurement of knowledge does not depend upon totality of printed publications available world over. It is internet which actually accounts the growth of knowledge. Knowledge grows in every nanosecond, exceeding the exponential growth value as considered in case of printed publications. The exponential growth of knowledge now is not applicable for measuring the growth of knowledge. This has brought major changes in our existing communication of data and information. All areas of human knowledge have been influenced immensely. “The increase in television viewing has affected the reading habit in India like in no other country”, according to Shri Phani Kumar, Commissioner, Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development. In this context Shri Kumar stressed upon the role of librarians, teachers and parents to develop reading habit among children. The publishing industry is booming in the country more than 70,000 new titles being published every year and lucrative career opportunities galore in the industry. While E-books might be hitting the market, paper books are still the cheapest storing information. Reading book is a sensory perception. It is engagement of mind and a lot of imagination takes place while reading a book and therefore “We should celebrate books and celebrate reading”. The growth and development of information technology will not pose a challenge to the publishing industry, but will be an added advantage. Publication of books will continue to be part of the knowledge industry and there would not be any substitute for books. Books give

us the knowledge and awareness to decide what is right and wrong in life. The good books bring out positive changes in the readers and in particular among children at an impressionable age.

Changing Role of Libraries:

To serve the mobile patrons remotely is no doubt a challenge for the library is vital for enhancing the quality of E – learning and distance education in all its aspects. Particularly a backbone in the form of digital library is needed where information resources are converted in the digital form, stored in multimedia repositories and made available through digital platforms and web – based services.

Further, the library will have to transform into E – mobile library providing services on the 24/7 basis and in the personalized manner say, on the PDA or mobile phone of the individual. Developing an exclusive Library Web Portal, building institutional repository and enriching them are thus important responsibilities for the library. Tools like Data Mining, Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 and their future versions will have to be routinely used for this purpose. In this context the library will have to prepare to start the ‘new age’ services encompassing the following facts

- * Instructing ‘invisible’ library users who remotely access information.
- * Developing best practices for Web and information searching to minimize the information overload and resulting anxiety.
- * Bringing the library contents in the work flow of the users through mobile services.
- *Imparting information literacy covering library literacy, media literacy, computer literacy, internet literacy, research literacy and critical thinking.
- * Managing man – machine collaboration.
- *Promoting E – Learning and E – Research.

CONCLUSION:

Information revolution is posing several challenges to the library and we are bound to change accordingly. Influence of electronic and digital technology may lead to “Less – Paper”

Society, but, “both books and electronics documents are going to stay side by side, and each has a definite role to play in ‘information communication’ thus spoke Dr. P. S. G. Kumar. Despite the global information infrastructure, Information High – ways, Optical technology, KNOW BOT, Multimedia, Hypermedia, Virtual Library, etc. The domain of print media do exists and with all advanced technologies peripherals, may further give a boost to reading and reading habit.

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