

Impact of Electronic Media on Reading Habits of Teenagers: A Pilot Study Done in Two Schools in Colombo District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract - The study aimed to discover the impact of e-media on reading habits of teenagers aged 13-19 in Colombo district, Sri Lanka. A questionnaire was distributed among two schools to find out the demographic information, the nature and extent of reading habits, the media other than books that they are interested in and the attitudes towards Reading and E-media. Main conclusions of the study are that both groups using e-media as well as books and having positive attitudes towards reading, books and e-media. Using E -media does not affect their studies or social life. Since the majority of teenagers are heavy media users, the researcher suggests using e-media to enhance reading habits among them and to improve the quality of reading.

Keywords: Reading Habits, Teenagers, Use of E-Media, Juvenile Readers, Reading Paper, Reading Screen

I. INTRODUCTION

It is accepted all over the world that reading is important in several ways for a person's life such as in education, getting better job opportunities, gaining knowledge, understanding of himself, other human beings and the world and using as a tool of overcoming loneliness. It will make a path to gain creativeness and enhance critical thinking capacities. The activity of reading becomes a habit when it is carried out repeatedly. It can be considered as a behavior in which individuals express their likeness and tastes for various types of reading. Naturally, there can be differences in the reading habit of individuals according to age, gender, environment such as home, school or libraries. Print media has prevailed as the only media for gaining, sharing and transferring knowledge for several centuries. Towards the end of the 19th century, as e-media such as radio, films, television and later video, computer with CD ROM, internet facility and various social media and finally mobile devices emerged, society presumed that the interest in reading printed material will decline. Some surveys have revealed that reading habits are not very influenced by e- media but, governments, librarians, book publishers and society as a whole are concerned about the reading habits of people, especially of children, because some of the research findings revealed that the reading habit of people has reduced because of e-media.

A. Statement of the Problem: Many reader surveys were done in various countries and the researchers paid special attention to examine whether e-media has influenced the reading habits of people in their reader surveys. In Sri Lanka, the National Library and Documentation Services

Board (NLDSB) and the Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs conduct various programs throughout the country to encourage reading habits of people- especially of children. Other than a readership survey conducted in 1997-98 (Hettige, 2000), no proper reader survey has been conducted to measure the impact of these programs on society. In Hettige's survey, from the nine provinces in Sri Lanka, the Northern and Eastern provinces were excluded in data collection due to the ongoing conflicts at that time as well as the researchers were not very concerned about the impact of e-media on reading habits of the people. However, the respondents listed watching television as one of the reasons for their decreased interest in reading, therefore, in this study, the researcher tries to examine the Impact of E-media on Reading Habits of Teenagers in Sri Lanka.

In a way, reading habits have become more complicated with various types of reading material such as fiction, nonfiction, textbooks etc. Reading can be differed according to the purpose of reading like for pleasure, study purposes or for gaining information. In another way, reading can be on paper or screen. In this study reading, print media was considered as Reading and reading the screen as using e-media. Radio, films, television, video, computer with CD ROM, internet facility and various social media and mobile phones were considered as Electronic media in this study. Teenagers aged 13 years to 19 years were selected because they are in a transition period in the context of reading, as well as in mind and body.

II. RELATED LITERATURE

A. Reading Habits and Teenagers: Since teenagers are in a transition period of their lives researchers in various countries were keen on doing reader surveys on teenagers. The Australian Centre for Youth Literature (ACYL) at the State Library of Victoria has surveyed Reading Habits of 10-18 years old in 2000. The main goal of the research was to gain an understanding of the reading habits and experiences of 10- 18 years old and was also intended to identify the factors that drive this behavior – including the underlying needs or desired states which cause young people to behave in a certain way or change their behavior as they age and to identify the attitudes, motivational triggers or influences which help to shape their reading behavior.

The study has revealed that “the Australian community, in general, agrees about the importance of reading for pleasure by young people, and would generally be supportive of any initiative designed to encourage their reading.” (Nieuwenhuizen, 2001, P.6) 79% of the respondents seemed positive about reading. Only 21% of 10-18 years old respondents see reading as a non-relevant leisure activity for themselves. From the 10-18 age groups, the primary school-aged children seemed to read more frequently and also to enjoy reading more, as well as to have a positive attitude. The survey revealed a difference in attitudes and behavior of reading among girls and boys too. It revealed that boys read less than girls.

The researchers provided several valuable recommendations. According to these recommendations the young people need to be reminded that continued reading can benefit them in life as well, by enabling them to acquire better jobs, be more proficient in using the internet and so on as a means of legitimizing for them the need for increased reading. According to the researchers “the use of mass media would play an important role in changing young people’s attitudes towards reading and in creating a fertile environment in which other school and library activities could then operate more effectively. (Nieuwenhuizen - 2001, pp. 8) They have recommended conducting a media campaign targeting young people via media such as cinema, television and magazines and that these media will be effective in giving reading a higher profile and in influencing young people through the media of most relevance to them.

The young people who said that they were now reading less than they used to, gave reasons for this reduction in reading. The main reason was that they have too much school work (33%). 29% of them stated that they have no time to read – have other tasks to do. The young people who gave spending time with their friends as the reason were 16%. 11% said that they were less interested in reading and found books boring. 13% stated other reasons. Among the respondents who gave reasons for the reduction in reading habits, none claimed that e-media influenced his/her reduction in reading.

B. Reading Habits, Electronic Media and Teenagers: Media Literacy Clearinghouse (MLC) in the USA has reviewed the researches, done in USA and UK, on the media usage of people. (Baker, 2012) It reveals that new media usage- such as cell phones, iPods, MP3 players and internet usage- has increased rapidly in the past few years. According to Mike Reynolds, one-third of US households watch TV and video via the internet (Reynolds, 2012). The younger generation watches TV more on mobile devices (Stelter, 2012).

In 2012, the trends in Television ownership in the US decreased for the first time in 20 years. In 2011, TV ownership was 115.9 million and in 2012 it has decreased to 114.7 million (Stetler, 2012). According to the analysts of the Nielsen Company which does Market Research

worldwide, there are two reasons for the decline, one being poverty. The households that do not have televisions at home have indicated that they have annual incomes under \$20,000. They are considered to be at the bottom of the economic structure. The other reason which was pointed out for the decline of T.V. ownership was ‘technological wizardry’. The younger generation, who in general, is more comfortable with laptops than remote controls are not motivated to buy T.V. sets when they graduate from college or enter the workforce, at least not at first. Instead, they watch T.V. shows and movies via the internet.

Nielsen Company reports that teens are the most digitally connected age group today (Anstandig, 2011). According to a survey report released at the end of June 2011, it is stated that teens are the heaviest mobile video viewers. In general, mobile subscribers aged 13 – 17 watched 7 hours 13 minutes of mobile video a month in 2010, compared to 4 hours 20 minutes of the general population.

A survey done by Kaiser Family Foundation in January 2010 reveals that the only media activity that has not increased among young people over the past 10 years is reading traditional print media (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). According to the survey, the time spent reading books for pleasure has increased slightly, but the time spent on reading magazines and newspapers, which held fairly steady from 1999- 2004 has declined in a significant amount since then. (In this study, time spent on reading print versions of books, magazines or newspapers was considered as print media use. It does not include time spent reading in school, or for schoolwork. It also does not include time spent reading on computers or mobile devices. Time spent reading newspapers or magazines online is considered as computer use.) The report of the survey also highlights some of the significant demographic differences. Reading for pleasure continuously declines as children grow older. Eight to ten-year-old spend an average of 46 minutes a day reading print media when compared to 33 minutes for 15 to 18-year-olds. Reading books for pleasure declines from an average of 33 minutes daily among 8 – 10-year-olds to 21 minutes a day among 15 – 18-year-olds. Reading is the only media activity that White youth devote more time than Black and Hispanic youth. Though the survey report does not indicate the overall difference in reading, it shows the difference in reading books. Reading is one of the two media activities to which girls devote more time than boys (43 min vs. 33 min).

Teens who spend an hour or more per day with print media are considered as heavy readers and it is more likely to say that they earn higher grades than those who report no reading on a typical day (light readers). 72% of heavy readers report high grades when compared to 60% of light readers. The study revealed that reading print media is one of the least multitasked media. When young people sit down to read print materials, they are not tempted to use other media at the same time. Only 27% of the entire sample says that they use another medium such as T.V. or radio (The

other less multitasked media is video games where only 22% say that they multitasked while playing video games). The analysts of the survey point out that it appears that time spent using screen media (i.e. T.V., video games and computers) does not affect the time spent with print media. 8-18-year olds who are classed as heavy screen media users (more than 10 hours daily) and those classed as light screen media users (less than 02 hours daily) report a significant amount of daily reading (41 minutes). They found similar results with T.V. viewers. The eight to eighteen-year-olds who spend more time watching T.V. spend as much time as the teens who spend less time watching T.V. But it indicated that the teens who do not have a T.V. in their bedrooms and those who live in homes that have T.V.s not left switched on in the background, do spend more time reading than other young people. The survey results showed that young people read on a screen for a substantial amount of time daily. It may have been the latest advice column on a fashion website or a classmate's posting on a social networking site. 10% of the sample reported that they read magazines or newspapers online on a typical day (21 minutes daily).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Aim and Objectives: The study aims to discover the impact of e-media on reading habits of teenagers. Main objectives of the study are to investigate the nature and extent of reading habits of teenagers, to examine the influence of e-media on their reading habits and to find out ways to improve reading habits through e-media.

To achieve the above objectives a survey was conducted consisting of both quantitative and qualitative components. A questionnaire was used as a basic instrument for data collection and it was constructed to find out the demographic information, the nature of reading habits, the time duration that they devote to reading, the media (other than books) that they are interested in and the influence of e-media on reading habits. The population of the study was the students aged 13-19 of Nugegoda/Lyceum International School (N/LIS) and Pannipitiya/Dharmapala Maha Vidyalaya (P/DMV). These two schools are situated in Colombo district of Western Province in Sri Lanka as well as N/LIS is a private international school and P/DMV is a government school. There were around 2000 students in N/LIS between 13 and 19 years old. From that study population, a random sample of 5% was selected. In P/DMV there were around 2500 students aged 13 to 19, and a sample of 5% was selected.

The questionnaire which was distributed among the sample of N/LIS was in English language since their medium of learning is in English and the language of the questionnaire distributed among the sample of P/DMV was Sinhalese because their main medium of learning is Sinhalese. Even though 100% of N/LIS sample have responded, only 89% of P/DMV sample have responded to the questionnaire.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Demographic Information

1. Gender & Age: From the sample of N/LIS, 49% were male and 51% were female as well as from the sample of P/DMV 47% were male and 53% were female. From the sample of N/LIS, 49% were between 13-15 of age, while 51% were between 16-19 of age. In the sample of P/DMV, 45% were of ages 13-15 and 55% were of ages 16-19.

2. Educational Qualifications: From the sample of N/LIS and P/DMV, the majority have studied up to G.C.E. O/L. These are respectively 74% and 39% of the samples. In the group of N/LIS, only 17% have studied up to A/L, but 38% of P/DMV has studied up to A/L.

3. The Number of Family Members in the Family: When the sample was asked about the number of family members in their families, 15 of the N/LIS sample have not answered the question, but from the sample of P/DMV, only one student has not answered. 43% of the sample of N/LIS has 04 members in their families and 48% of the sample of P/DMV has 04 members in their families. So that the majority of the students in both samples have 04 members in their families.

4. The Income of the Family: 90% of the families of the group from N/LIS have stated that they get more than Rs. 50,000/- p.m. as income, when only 25% from P/DMV have stated that they get more than Rs. 50,000/- as monthly income. Naturally, families of the N/LIS group get higher income because otherwise, they are not in a position to pay the school fees since the school is a private international school. The parents of P/DMV students have to spend a very little money as school fees and they can choose to which tuition classes they are going to send their children to get extra help which is not compulsory. But the parents who have their children in International schools like Lyceum International School have to pay a huge amount of money as school fees and it is compulsory. So that the families of N/LIS getting a higher income is not strange.

B. Nature of Reading Habits

1. Availability of a Collection of Books, Radio, T.V. Etc: When the two groups were asked whether they have a collection of books, radio, T.V., DVD player, satellite T.V., computer and internet facility at home, the majority of both samples have told that they have one or more of the items. Though 89% of N/LIS have collections of books at home, the number of students who have a radio (92%), T.V. (97%), DVD player (93%) and computer (90%) are higher. In this group, the same number of students (89%) has the internet facility. From the group of P/DMV, 93% have book collections and the number of students who have a radio (96%) and T.V. (99%) at home are higher.

From the two groups, N/LIS has more DVD players and computers. Though 80% of N/LIS have satellite T.V., only 21% of the P/DMV use it. Both groups have more radio and

T.V. at home than collections of books. From the group of P/DMV, who have collections of books, radio and T.V. the majority are the females.

2. *Reading Books, Magazines, Newspapers and the Internet:*

The two samples were asked about the number of books they read per year, magazines they read per month, newspapers (hours per week) and read through the internet (hours per week). Some have not mentioned the number of books or magazines they read, as well as the number of hours they spend on reading newspapers and internet, but they have indicated that they were engaged in above activities. From the group of N/LIS who read books, three of them read more than 50 books per year. All three are females and they each read 90, 620 and 750 books per year. The two students who read 620 and 750 books can be considered as exceptional cases. In N/LIS group the number of students who read on the internet (90%) is higher than who read books (79%) as well as in P/DMV, the number of students who read books (94%) is higher than who read on the internet (59%). So that reading on the internet of N/LIS (90%) is higher than P/DMV (59%). Reading newspapers of P/DMV (94%) is higher than N/LIS (55%).

3. *Reading Paper and Screen:* From both groups, the majority prefer the paper when reading books and newspapers. When reading magazines the preference of N/LIS has no significant difference while in P/DMV group more prefer paper (81%) than the screen (19%). When reading via a screen, the number of boys who prefer screen was higher than girls in N/LIS. When reading newspapers via the screen, the number of male participants is higher in N/LIS while the number of female participants is higher in P/DMV.

4. *The Difference in Reading Habits When They Were In Primary School and Secondary School:* 47% of the group of N/LIS has said that they have read more often when they were in primary school and only 34% of the P/DMV group has said that. 53% and 66% of the groups of N/LIS and P/DMV have claimed respectively that they read the same amount or fewer books when they were in primary classes. The reasons given by the researcher were as follows:

- a. Having more time for reading in primary school.
- b. Having a lot of homework at present.
- c. Having many extracurricular activities at present.
- d. Using other media such as T.V., radio, computer, internet etc. at present.
- e. Teachers' encouragement when in primary school.
- f. Social life taking more time at present.

Even though the students were allowed to mention any other reasons, they have not mentioned any additional reason other than the ones named by the researcher. From the N/LIS group who have said that they have read more often when they were in primary classes, 98% have accepted that they had more spare time to read than at present, but only 58% of the P/DMV group have accepted that. All the students in both groups who claimed that they read more

when they were in primary school, have given homework as less time on reason to spend reading when they have gone to secondary school. When 45% of N/LIS who stated that they read more when they were in primary school, say that they have more extracurricular activities to attend now, 47% of P/DMV stated that. When 77% of N/LIS say that their teachers have encouraged them more to read in primary school, only 21% of P/DMV says that. When 75% of N/LIS complain that their social life takes up their time now that they have devoted to reading, only 11% of P/DMV indicates it. While 49% of N/LIS say that they use other media such as T.V., radio, computer, internet etc. now and it takes some of their reading time, only 29% of P/DMV says that.

The majority of the two groups have stated that they have read few or the same number of books when they were in primary school (N/LIS - 50%, P/DMV - 66%). According to the data, being in secondary school or attending to other activities is not much of a problem to their reading for at least 50% or more of both groups.

5. *Parents Having Rules about Using E-Media:* Parents normally have rules about using e-media. When the children grow up and become teenagers, controlling them over e-media as well as in their social life become difficult. The samples of N/LIS and P/DMV were asked to indicate whether their parents have rules about what programs that they can watch on T.V. and how much time they can spend on watching TV. Out of the two groups, the parents of the P/DMV students have more control over their children's watching T.V. while 46% of the parents of N/LIS have rules about the programmes that their children are allowed to watch on T.V., 66% of the parents of P/DMV have control over it. When it comes to the time duration that the students are allowed to watch T.V., there is no significant difference between the two samples.

When the two groups were asked whether their parents have rules about the types of video games that they play and the time duration of playing video games, the students of P/DMV have indicated that their parents have more control over their playing video games. In general, the parents of both groups seem concerned about the time duration that they spend on playing video games rather than what type of games they play. Listening to music seems an activity that the parents of N/LIS students are least concerned. Only 13% of the parents of N/LIS group are concerned about setting rules about what music that their children allowed to listen and 23 % of them are concerned about the time duration that their children listen to music. They seem more concerned about the time duration that their children spend listening to music. When it comes to the parents of P/DMV, they seem more concerned about the type of music that their children listen to (43%) and the time duration that their children spend on listening to music (44%).

The parents are more concerned about how much time their children spend on the computer rather than what they are doing using the computer. The parents of P/DMV group are

more concerned about their children having profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. When the two groups were asked whether their parents have set rules about what websites that they can go, 57% of N/LIS and 81% of P/DMV students have indicated that their parents have set rules about what websites that they can visit.

C. Influence of E-Media

The researcher has planned to state two questions about academic performance and social life of the sample because when the children become teenagers, the social life seems to be more important than when they were children,

1. Influence of E-Media on Academic Performance: From the samples of both schools, the majority get over sixty as marks for subjects. From the students of both schools who get between 59 and, 50 are male. Only a few students from both schools get less than 50. (6% from N/LIS and 2% from P/DMV). When considering the students who get more than 80, they are N/LIS males (55%) and in P/DMV they are females (58%). From the students who get marks in between 79 and 60 are females in both groups.

2. Influence of E-Media on Social Life: According to the response, as a whole, the majority of both schools lead a happy life. When comparing the response of the two schools, the sample of P/DMV seems happier. While 90% of P/DMV students have lots of friends, only 82% of N/LIS have it. While 96% of P/DMV students have a good relationship with parents, only 74% of N/LIS students have it. Though only 08% of P/DMV students are not happy, 18% of N/LIS students feel that way. While 85% of P/DMV sample say that they are happy, only 63% of N/LIS students stated that. While 68% of P/DMV sample say that they get good marks in class, only 46% of N/LIS sample say that. From the P/DMV sample who says that they get good marks in class, the majority (56%) are female.

D. Using Interactive Media

The students were asked about the books that they wanted to read after watching the film or the title series related to those particular books and vice versa and the students of both schools have given several books and films that were interrelated. When Comparing with P/DMV students, N/LIS students have indicated more titles of books and films or television series that they have read or watched. The main medium of learning of P/DMV students is Sinhalese and their knowledge of English is not as good as the students of an International School. This may be the reason for the students of P/DMV for not reading international books or watching international films as many as the students of N/LIS do. The Survey results also show some of the reasons clearly.

The parents of P/DMV being stricter about their children's media use is also can be one of the main reasons for the

students of P/DMV not being exposed to the English books and films or television series as much as the N/LIS students. Monthly income of the families of the two samples has a significant difference. 90% of the sample of N/LIS having more than LKR 50,000.00 as monthly income can be one of the many reasons for the N/LIS students' heavy usage of e media. When compared to P/DMV students, usage of Satellite T.V., computers, internet facility and DVD players of N/LIS students are higher. Especially the heavy usage of satellite T.V. can be a very good reason for N/LIS students to get to know the international films and television series based on fiction.

E. Time Devoted To Reading

1. Time Devoted To Reading and Using E-Media per Week: From the N/LIS group, 83% and the P/DMV group 94% devote some amount of time to reading. Since 82% of N/LIS watch DVDs, only 64% of P/DMV watch them. When 87% of N/LIS use the internet, only 59% of P/DMV use it. When 84% of N/LIS use e-media, 74% of P/DMV use them. The number of students of P/DMV who read books, magazines and newspapers more than 08 hours per week, is higher than N/LIS. When considering the number of students who use e-media more than 08 hours per week, the usage of N/LIS sample is higher.

F. Attitudes towards Reading and Using E-Media

1. Reading Books and Watching Films/Television Series: Statements 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 23 try to get the information about the interaction of the samples with books and media. Majority of both samples seemed to read the book and they tend to watch the film/television series related to that specific book or vice versa. When the participants were asked about English books, films or television series, the percentage of N/LIS who agreed with the relevant statements was higher and when they were asked about Sinhalese books and films/television series then the positive response of P/DMV was higher. It may be because of the difference in language literacy. While the N/LIS students are more fluent in English Language, P/DMV students are more fluent in Sinhala Language. Either way, both groups are interested in reading books related to the films/ television series that they watch and vice versa.

2. Reading Books and Watching T.V.: Statements 04, 18, and 20 inquire about the preference of reading books to watching T.V. of the students. Majority of the two groups agree with statement 04: "I would like to watch T.V. rather than reading a novel." as well as with the statement 18: "I would like to read the book which the story based on, rather than watching the teledrama for weeks on T.V.". The first response shows their fondness towards T. V., but the response to the second statement shows that the majority prefer to read the book without watching the telefilms for weeks which based on that novel. Even though the majority of N/LIS agree with the statement 20: "I learn more from

T.V. than from reading books, magazines or newspapers”, majority of P/DMV disagree with it.

3. *The Attitude of Parents towards Reading and Using E-Media:* Statements 15, 16 and 17 were designed to test the attitude of parents of the two groups towards reading and using e-media. Even though the parents of the majority of both groups agree with statement 16: ‘My parents like me reading.’, only 69% of N/LIS agree while 81% of P/DMV agree with it. The statements 15 and 17 which states the disapproval of parents towards facebook and T.V., the response rate of the P/DMV who have agreed to the statements are higher. The results of setting rules towards e-media by the parents match with their attitude towards their children using e-media.

4. *Attitudes towards Internet:* Statements 19, 21, and 22 ask about the attitude of the participants towards the internet. The response to some of the previous questions already shows that N/LIS students use the internet more than P/DMV students.

5. *Attitudes towards Paper and Screen:* Statements 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 inquire about the respondents’ likeness to paper and screen. In the recent years, the children, adults and especially the young adults have become heavy screen readers with various purposes such as to find information, to be engaged in social media as well as to read books, newspapers and magazines. The young adults seem to prefer reading on the screen to paper. Therefore, in this research, the researcher tries to identify their preference of screen to paper. Even though both groups like the special features of the e-books, audio books or reading on the screen, the majority complain about not feeling the paper when they read on the screen.

6. *Attitude towards Books:* Statement 25 states about the attitude towards books. The majorities do not agree with statement 25: “I don’t think books will be important fifty years from now”, even though they are heavily engaged with e-media.

V. CONCLUSION

Having radio and T.V. at home is important for both groups as well as having book collections. Using Satellite T.V. is more important to N/LIS students when comparing with P/DMV. N/LIS group read more on the internet than P/DMV as well as P/DMV group read more books, magazines and newspapers than N/LIS group. Having higher income and fluency in the English language can be the reasons for more usage in Satellite T.V. and more reading on the internet of teenagers of N/LIS. Both groups use e-media as well as read books. Both groups have given e-media such as T.V., radio, computer and internet as a

reason for not reading as when they were in primary school. Having more homework is the main reason for not reading much in secondary school than when they were in primary school. Other reasons are extracurricular activities, other media and social life. But the majority has not complained that they have read more when they were in primary school. Even though they use Electronic Media, the results do not show that it affects their studies or their social life. As a whole, both groups have a positive attitude towards reading books as well as using e-media. When comparing the response of the two groups, the parents of P/DMV are more concerned about their children’s reading habits than the parents of N/LIS.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

A. *Use Electronic Media to Enhance Reading:* Since both the student groups are heavy e-media users, it can be used to enhance their reading habits in numerous ways such as giving publicity about books through media, encourage reading through various audiovisual programmes, making audio-video productions on popular fiction and to publish books of popular films, telefilms etc., producing e-books and e-book readers, publishing interactive books and integrate printed version and multimedia facilities. The government, especially the Ministry of Education should be convinced about the importance of enhancing the reading habits and the quality of reading of children and young adults in the country.

B. *Further Studies:* Since this is only a pilot study, further studies should be done by selecting more schools in the Western Province and as well as in other provinces in Sri Lanka.

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