

Influence of mass media on teenagers



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Mass media plays a significant role in today's world. It broadcasts information as fast as possible as well provides entertainment to massive audiences. Mass Media comprises of press, television, radio, books and the Internet. Media is one of the most influential aspects of our lives. By creating a certain type of message, media can manipulate people's attitude and opinions. Over the years, as technological advances have taken place this type of communication has become very easy and feasible to have. Almost every household now owns an internet connection, television or a cell phone etc. This has led to a widespread usage of mass media, especially among the teenagers.

The fact that there was a time when the internet, television and cell phones were considered a necessity but now they seem to be more of a commodity teenagers seem addicted to pretty much explains that there is bound to be a downside to the influence mass media has on teens. The teenagers of today seem too engrossed in watching their favourite shows on television or using social media applications on their phones or computers that they are slowly losing touch with reality. They have become addicted. There are many consequences to this unhealthy addiction. One becomes lazy and does not feel the need to get up and do something productive. It leads to obesity and tiredness. It also leads to unhealthy consumption of junk or fast food. I say this from my personal experience, as I always feel the need to have pizza or chips along with a beverage when I'm watching a show or a movie.

Teenagers also tend to spend hours over the internet interacting with strangers who could pose as a threat as it is easy to fake an identity over the internet. They would very much prefer using Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr

etc. instead of studying or doing an outdoor activity. Therefore, this addiction can be very destructive. “ A cross sectional study was carried out in Spain in 2003 to define mass media use in teenagers (television, mobile phones, computers, Internet and video games) and to examine its influence on teenagers’ health and development. The data collected was based on a sample of 884 teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18 years. The sample was retrieved from high schools residing in six towns in Cantabria (Spain). The results showed that all adolescents had a television at home and 24% of the families owned four or more TV sets. The presence of mass media in teenagers’ rooms was 52. 5% for TV sets, 52% for the internet, 57. 8% for computers, and 38. 7% for gaming consoles. The most frequently found media in their’ bedrooms were cassette/radio players and compact disks with percentages of 76. 8 % and 67. 4 %, respectively. Furthermore, teenagers spent on average 3 hours on television on weekdays and 3. 2 on weekends. They spent 0. 69 hours on average on weekdays and 1. 09 hours on the weekend. On internet they spent on average 0. 83 hours on the weekdays and 1. 15 hours on the weekend. Other results of the study showed that about 87. 2 % of the teenagers owned a cell phone. The average age at which they got their first phone was 13 years old. Almost half the teenagers (46. 4 %) took their mobile phones to high school and reported that they had an average of three mobile phones at home. Also most of them (82. 1 %) surfed the internet but boys preferred surfing and downloading games whereas girls preferred chatting and sending e-mails. Sixty-two percent of the teenagers had been to a cybercafé and 40. 8 % had visited a pornographic website, especially boys (33. 1 % of boys versus 7. 7 % of girls; $p < 0. 001$). Nearly two-thirds of teenagers (71. 5 %) owned a video console,

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especially boys (87 % of boys versus 57. 2 % of girls; $p < 0. 001$) and they started playing with them at an average age of 8. 8 years. Boys favoured playing video games with shooting, fighting, driving and sports, while girls liked adventure video games. Nearly a quarter (22. 2 %) spent money on video games and cybercafés (an average of 27. 06 3 a month in boys and 16. 81 3 a month in girls) with no significant differences between the sexes.” (Mass media consumption in adolescence, 2005). This study clearly shows the usage of mass media among teens is quite common.

Mass media is a very powerful tool to influence the minds of anyone, let alone a teenager. Teenagers are in that stage of growing up where everything around them influences them. The way they talk, dress and act depends a lot on what they are exposed to. For example, if a teenager sees his or her favourite celebrity endorsing a product which may or may not be necessary, he or she may want to buy it regardless of how useful the product is. This is a strategy many big businesses use to their advantage as they can easily sell products, even if they are of bad quality.

“ Advertising is a very manipulative technique to promote products. Special attention needs to be paid to advertising’s effects. Three product categories are especially important for teens’ health: cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, and food. According to the teen marketing experts, adolescents “ admit that advertising is a more important trend source than DJs, VJs, movies, celebrities, or the coolest and weirdest people at school” (P, 1995). We must be alert about the effects of advertising that deliberately exploit the insecurities of adolescents and attempt to “ sell” them the answers to their problems with an abundance of new products.

Television is a medium people widely now have easy access to. Nowadays, there are many shows such as Breaking Bad, Game of Thrones and Da Vinci's Demons etc. on television that glorify sex, drugs, alcohol and violence. Online streaming and downloading has made it even more convenient to watch shows and films which means that teenagers have easier access to their favourite shows that contain obscenity. This kind of exposure poses as a threat as many teenagers find sex, drugs, alcohol, smoking and violence to be "cool". As a result, many teenagers fall prey to problem of addiction. Drugs, alcohol, smoking and sex are all termed as things that are addictive and if one develops the problem of addiction, life becomes really hard to cope with. It's like you are moving towards your own destruction. It must be quite a challenge for adolescents not to see portrayals of alcohol in their everyday use of the media. Alcohol appears in more than 70% of prime-time television shows and in 90% of the movies" (Roberts DF, Henriksen L, Christenson PG, 1999). Greater than one third of all main characters drink alcohol, but fewer than 2% are shown as having a drinking problem (N, 1987). Advertising links alcohol with a variety of benefits that appeal to teenagers such as socializing, virility, sexual attraction, romance, escape, and adventure (Atkin CK, Strasberger VC, Comstock GA (eds), 1993), and few consequences (e. g., hangovers, accidents, violence, and embarrassment). Alcohol advertising also often represents slices of life that concentrate on the drinkers and the drinking occasions rather than on the qualities of the product itself, which may be particularly appealing to teens who are using the media for ideas about how to be in the world.

Video games are vastly played by the teenagers of today. The video games are highly addictive as well contain a lot of mature content. In US about 97% of the teens play video games. The local video game industry over there brings in nearly a revenue of \$12 billion a year. Many studies have shown that video games with violent content are associated with violent behavior. This concern is important because most of the popular video games contain violence. The increase in aggressive behavior is partly linked to the amount of time teens spend on playing video games. (Gentile & Anderson, 2003) have stated that playing video games may increase aggressive behaviour because violent acts are frequently repeated throughout the video game. This process of repetition has long been considered as an effective teaching method in strengthening learning patterns.

Another study carried out in 2008 took a nationally representative sample of 1, 102 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 and their parents. From the results, it was found that 97 percent of the young respondents play video games. Further divided on the basis of gender, 99 percent of boys and 94 percent of girls played video games. Half the respondents had also played a video game the previous day. This emphasizes on how frequently they are exposed to video games. Even though most parents checked the censor's rating before permitting their child to buy it, 50 percent of boys and 14 percent of girls preferred games with " Mature" (M) or " Adult-only" (AO) rating, which implies a high degree of exposure to obscenity. (Irvine, 2008) This preference is due to the impact of mass media. It is slowly becoming a norm that children are exposed to such stuff at such a tender when they are learning things that shape up their personality. This is why such exposure

can be damaging. I know people who like go to parties, and smoke just because it is something everyone does or something that you casually see on television or in video games.

Since media has the ability to manipulate people's mind and attitudes, it also influences gender stereotypes. Advertising, news industries and entertainment, usually portray men and women with stereotypes, in which women and girls are likely to be placed in disadvantaged situations, for example passive and submissive roles. This happens a lot in third world countries e. g. Pakistan. Several TV shows and commercials show women usually playing the role of a housewife while men are shown to be more career-oriented, focusing on their occupations. As a consequence, traditional gender roles and power relations have been deeply imputed in people's sub-consciousness through the mass media which limits the development of human personalities as well as social equality. When youngsters look at advertisements, TV shows or films, they are exposed to images of stereotypical representations. This stereotyping can be seen for all ages. For example, you can see little girls playing with Barbie Dolls and Teddy bears or having tea parties while boys are shown playing with action figures. Male teenagers are usually portrayed as sporty whereas female teenagers are shown as girls who have interest in fashion. Women are more often presented in commercials doing grocery because they are seen as responsible for making daily purchases. Men commonly advertise cigarettes, cars, business products or investments, while women are shown rather in the commercials with cosmetics, shoes, bags and clothing. Another important distinction is the face-ism phenomenon in the advertisements, which refers to

showing the entire figure in case of a woman and close-up shots in case of a man (Matthews, J. L, 2007). All of this indirectly injects the idea in the minds of the people that girls and boys should be educated differently. It is typical for girls to be tender and have concerns with being beautiful and popular, while boys are encouraged to be tough and consider more about their careers than appearance. Therefore, teenage boys and girls behave and reflect as the expectation of their society and culture instead of the way they really want.

If we look at the other side of the argument which talks about mass media as a positive influence on teenagers we can see that mass media is the reason why communication is now so much easier and quicker than in the past. The internet is one of the most widely used mediums nowadays. With the help of social media apps such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. one can communicate with friends and family easily, especially those who live far away at a cheaper cost in comparison to making phone calls or travelling expenses. Mass media also keeps people up-to-date on events happening around the world within a short amount of time. For example, if a famous personality passed away; you will hear this immediately. Media keeps you informed. It also helps in other things like entertainment and gaining knowledge.

Also Mass media is a good way to promote positive messages to teens. Since teens are immersed in media culture, it is wise to use that platform as a means to promote information and education about a variety of things that affect teenagers such as mental illnesses, sexually transmitted diseases, drug use or even suicide. “ The More You Know” is an Emmy Award-winning

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series of Public Service Announcements(PSAs) which broadcasts on theNBCfamily of channels in the US and other locations. Even though not all of the messages given out are geared towards teens, many of these short, 90 minute commercials give messages that educate and inform teenagers of the possible consequences of certain behaviours.“ The More You Know” has dealt with smoking, driving, suicide and even safe sex. Another good example is of Dove’s Real Beauty Campaign. With this campaign Dove has used their advertising for a greater good. Dove’s Real Beauty Campaigntargets self-esteem and has also been selecting real women and girls in their campaigns rather than super thin models. They’ve also have taken a multi-media approach using an interactive website and in-person education to encourage girls, particularly to feel good about their bodies and appreciate themselves the way they are (Delp). Yes, media helps us cause awareness quite easily and the “ The More You Know” and Dove’s Real Beauty Campaign are wonderful campaigns to raise awareness and help people with low-self-esteem but many teenagers are still widely exposed to ideal body types which are considered attractive therefore, it is hard to change their mind-set.

It is important to be aware of mass media and the impact it has on teenagers, especially for parents, because they need to be aware of how it is affecting their child. If parents are more aware, they can be more understanding and helpful towards their children. The disadvantages are rather more important than the advantages because if one does not think about them then one will also not be able to come up with solutions and there can be severe consequences. Parents firstly need to realize that it is

impossible to separate a teens' life from media, especially in today's world. However, parents can take the lead in restricting usage by spending more time with their teens and consistently discussing matters that are affecting mass media and teenagers. Parents should encourage their children for more outdoor activities as well limit the time their teenagers spend on the watching television and surfing the internet. Also since advertising is a very powerful tool, it could be used in a more positive way to put better influence on teenagers.

Mass media has both negative and positive influences on teenagers as it can be seen from the points mentioned above. While I do not deny nor disregard the fact that mass media has indeed made lives easier, its negative influences still outweigh the positive ones in my opinion. As the famous saying goes, that everything is good in moderation. Therefore the extensive usage of mass media is now leading to more problems than the benefits it is providing us with.

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