



Decoding Media Consumption: Patterns And Preferences Of University Students In The Modern Era

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Abstract: In an era where media consumption is rapidly evolving, understanding how university students engage with mass media provides crucial insights into contemporary media trends. This study investigates the patterns and preferences of mass media usage among postgraduate students (N=354) at two prominent Indian universities: Central University of Haryana (a central university) and Maharshi Dayanand University (a state university). The aim is to elucidate the media consumption patterns and preferences across selected universities and assess how these trends align with broader societal shifts. Employing a quantitative research approach, this study utilized an online structured questionnaire distributed to 354 postgraduate students from these two selected universities. The data collected offers a comprehensive overview of students' media habits, including their preferences for digital versus traditional media, frequency of use, and the influence of media on their academic and social lives. The findings reveal distinct patterns of media consumption between students from selected universities. Central University of Haryana students exhibited a stronger inclination towards digital media, while Maharshi Dayanand University students showed a more balanced consumption of both digital and traditional media. This study underscores the importance of considering institutional and contextual factors when analyzing media consumption patterns among university students. Future research should explore the impact of emerging media technologies and socio-cultural factors on these trends. Understanding these dynamics can inform media educators and policymakers, fostering strategies that better address the evolving media landscape and its implications for student engagement and learning.

Media consumption, preferences, mass media, new media, traditional media

I. INTRODUCTION

Mass media, a collective term encompassing a wide range of communication channels reaching a vast audience, has become an integral part of contemporary society. It is a multifaceted tool, fulfilling many societal functions [1] [2]. As a watchdog, it scrutinizes the actions of those in power, holding them accountable to the public. Its ability to shape public opinion undeniably influences attitudes, behaviours, and societal norms on various issues. Beyond its role as a watchdog and opinion-shaper, mass media also serves as an educational tool, disseminating information and promoting literacy. It provides a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, fostering dialogue and understanding among different segments of society [3]. Furthermore, mass media plays

a crucial role in entertainment and cultural enrichment, offering a much-needed escape from daily life and exposing audiences to different cultures and viewpoints[4][5].

Contemporary mass media encompasses a diverse range of platforms. Print media, while declining in popularity, still holds influence through newspapers and magazines. Broadcast media, including television and radio, continue to reach large audiences, although their dominance is waning. Digital media, spearheaded by the Internet, has exploded in recent years. For many, social media platforms, online news outlets, streaming services, and search engines have become integral to daily life. Out-of-home advertising, such as billboards and digital displays, also constitutes a significant segment of mass media[6] [7].

Mass media, the conduit of information and entertainment to a vast audience, has dramatically evolved. Originating with print media like newspapers and books, it progressed to broadcast media such as radio and television. These platforms dominated the media landscape for decades, shaping public opinion and culture. However, the advent of digital technology revolutionized mass media, birthing the Internet and its myriad platforms[7]. This digital transformation has accelerated the pace of information dissemination, fragmenting audiences and challenging traditional media business models.

The influence of mass media is undeniable, as evidenced by its impact on society, culture, and economy. For instance, social media boasts billions of active users worldwide, shaping trends, influencing elections, and driving consumer behaviour[8][9]. Traditional media, while facing challenges, still commands substantial audiences. Television remains a primary news and entertainment source for many, and newspapers continue influencing public discourse. However, the digital revolution has led to a decline in print advertising revenue, forcing media outlets to adapt their business models. Mass media, once primarily a domain for adult consumption, has undergone a transformative evolution, profoundly integrating itself into the fabric of student life. Beyond its traditional role of entertainment, it has emerged as an indispensable tool for education, information dissemination, and social interaction. The digital age has accelerated this integration, giving students unprecedented access to vast resources. Online platforms offer educational content, from interactive tutorials and documentaries to virtual classrooms and online libraries. This digital cornucopia empowers students to learn independently, explore diverse subjects, and develop critical thinking skills. While often criticized, social media has become a platform for academic discourse, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning. Students can connect with classmates, experts, and like-minded individuals to exchange ideas, seek clarification on complex concepts, and build supportive learning communities. News and current affairs, disseminated through mass media, cultivate a sense of global citizenship and awareness. By exposing students to diverse perspectives and events, media fosters critical thinking, analytical abilities, and an informed outlook on the world. However, the pervasive influence of mass media necessitates media literacy. Students must develop the ability to discern credible information from misinformation, evaluate the biases inherent in media content, and consume media critically[10][11][12].

However, the potential for misuse, spread of misinformation, and commercial bias cannot be ignored. These challenges raise concerns about the impact of mass media on society, particularly its ability to create a distorted or incomplete representation of reality. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few powerful corporations can further exacerbate these issues, limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives presented to the public. Additionally, the rise of social media and digital platforms has blurred the lines between news and opinion, making it increasingly difficult for audiences to distinguish between fact and fiction. Despite these challenges, mass media remains a potent force capable of reflecting and shaping our world. It has the power to inform, educate, entertain, and inspire. However, it is essential to consume media content critically and to be aware of the potential biases and limitations inherent in the medium.

This article delves into the media consumption behaviours and preferences of postgraduate students (N=354) at the Central University of Haryana (a central institution) and Maharishi Dayanand University (a state institution) in India. The primary objective is to illuminate the variations in media consumption habits across these universities and to correlate these patterns with broader societal trends. A quantitative research methodology was employed, utilizing an online structured questionnaire administered to 354 university postgraduate students. The collected data comprehensively analyzes students' media engagement, encompassing their proclivity for digital versus traditional media, consumption frequency, and the interplay between media and their academic and social lives. The findings unveil discernible differences in media consumption patterns between student populations. While Central University of Haryana students demonstrate a pronounced preference for digital media platforms, Maharishi Dayanand University students exhibit a more balanced consumption of digital and traditional media. This study underscores the significance of recognizing the influence of institutional and contextual factors when examining media consumption trends among university students.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed offers a comprehensive exploration of the evolving dynamics of media studies, media consumption, and their societal impacts. Turner (2015) reexamined media studies in the context of the shift from traditional mass media to digital platforms, emphasizing broader transformations over the last two decades. His analysis underscored three key themes: the decline of the mass media paradigm, the restructuring of media-state relationships, and systemic changes within media practices[13]. These insights align with Funk, Nixon, and Rawal's (2016) exploration of the profound effects of technology on cognitive processes and daily life, where technological advancements have altered attention spans and task dedication, making media devices indispensable in modern life[14]. This pervasive role of media is further complicated by historical and cultural contexts, such as Ahmad's (2016) focus on how print culture in colonial India shaped gender relations through Urdu women's journals. Ahmad's work illustrates how print media served as a platform for negotiating gender issues within the Muslim intellectual community, revealing the broader implications of media in social transformations[15].

The resistance to media, as explored by Syvertsen (2017), provides a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse on media consumption. Syvertsen's historical analysis of media resistance highlights the motivations behind such actions and their potential to inspire collective movements, thereby influencing societal and cultural shifts[16]. This theme of media's influence on societal dynamics echoes Haider's (2021) investigation of the interplay between socio-political movements and mass media within political regimes. Haider's qualitative study in Bihar, India, demonstrated how media coverage of key political events shaped and reflected socio-political dynamics, offering insights into the role of media in shaping public perception and political discourse. The review further delves into the diversity of media consumption preferences and the importance of understanding audience demographics and motivations[17]. Studies by Robinson et al. (1997) and Liao (2023) highlighted the heterogeneity in media usage, with individuals displaying various preferences across different media platforms. This understanding is crucial for tailoring communication strategies to specific audience segments enhancing engagement and impact[18][19].

The dependency model of media effects, proposed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), provided a theoretical framework for analyzing the tripartite relationship between audience, media, and society. This model posits that audience dependency on media resources is pivotal for changes in beliefs and behaviours, particularly in societies where media plays a central informational role or during social change[20]. Narayanan and Sahoo's (2014) study of media preferences in rural India, particularly in government public service campaigns, identified television as the most effective medium for reaching rural audiences, underscoring the enduring influence of traditional media channels in specific contexts [21]. This finding is supported by research on the role of mass media in health communication. Grilli et al. (1996) and Acharya et al. (2015) revealed mass media's effectiveness in promoting health behaviours and service utilization. However, they also pointed to the need for further research on the composition and impact of media messages[22][23]. Educational media usage, explored by Abdelraheem and Al-Rabane (2005), emphasized the importance of integrating media into educational practices to enhance learning outcomes, with gender differences and educational levels influencing media usage and perceived benefits[24].

The role of media in public health was further highlighted by El-Gilany et al. (2005), who studied menstrual hygiene practices among adolescent girls in Egypt. Their findings identified the influence of mass media on hygiene behaviours and emphasized the need for improved health education programs[25]. As investigated by Edegoh and Asemah (2014), social media usage among university students revealed the prevalence of platforms like Facebook for entertainment, academic purposes, and information acquisition, reflecting the growing importance of digital media in educational contexts and its impact on academic performance[26]. Gutmann et al. (2015) also observed this trend toward digital learning resources among medical students, who preferred digital media during self-study periods, highlighting the increasing reliance on digital tools in education[27]. The impact of mass media on healthcare utilization was further examined by Wang et al. (2021) and Nyambura et al. (2017) in their studies in Malawi and Kenya, respectively. Both studies underscored the potential of mass media to improve health outcomes, particularly in disseminating information about maternal healthcare and emergency contraception[28][29]. Finally, Nyarko and Serwornoo's (2022) assessment of virtual learning in Ghanaian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic

revealed challenges related to technology connectivity and the shift towards digital education, reflecting broader trends towards digitization in education and the need for infrastructure improvements[30].

In summary, the literature collectively underscores the evolving role of media in shaping societal, cultural, and educational dynamics. The studies highlight diverse media consumption patterns, theoretical frameworks for understanding media effects, and the critical role of media in public health and education.

III. METHODS AND MATERIAL

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to investigate postgraduate students' media consumption behaviours and preferences at two universities in India: the Central University of Haryana (a central institution) and Maharishi Dayanand University (a state institution). The sample consisted of 354 postgraduate students, with participants evenly distributed across the two universities. The study's primary objective was to identify variations in media consumption habits between these institutions and correlate these patterns with broader societal trends. Data were collected using an online structured questionnaire to capture detailed information about students' media engagement. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to all participants through institutional email and social media platforms. The survey comprised multiple sections, each focusing on different aspects of media consumption, including the type of media preferred (digital versus traditional), frequency of use, and the relationship between media consumption and academic and social activities. The structured questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on media consumption and was tailored to address the study's specific objectives. It included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to ensure a broad spectrum of data was captured. The questionnaire was piloted with a small group of postgraduate students ($n=30$) to refine the questions and ensure clarity and relevance before full-scale data collection. The pilot study helped identify any potential ambiguities in the questions and allowed for minor adjustments to enhance the reliability and validity of the instrument.

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS) to identify patterns and correlations in media consumption behaviours. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the overall media consumption habits of the student population, including the frequency of use and preference for digital versus traditional media. Comparative analysis techniques, such as independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests, were employed to examine differences between the student populations of the two universities. Additionally, correlation analysis explored the relationships between media consumption patterns and academic and social factors.

The study was conducted using ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering the questionnaire, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The data were anonymized to protect the identity of the respondents, and participation in the study was voluntary, with students free to withdraw at any point without any consequence.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to capture the variations in media consumption and its impacts across different academic disciplines and university environments. From this stratified population, 354 respondents were randomly selected for the study. The sample size 354 was determined based on statistical considerations, ensuring that

it was large enough to allow for meaningful analysis while remaining manageable for data collection and processing. The respondents were drawn from all 29 programs across both universities, with each stratum (i.e., program and university) proportionally represented in the final sample.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse backgrounds represented in the participant pool. The age-wise composition reveals that most respondents (52.5%) fall within the 20-22 age group, typical of university students, particularly those amid their undergraduate or early postgraduate studies. This is followed by a significant proportion aged 23-26 years (28.2%), while smaller groups are below 20 years (6.2%) and above 26 years (13%). This age distribution suggests that the study captured insights primarily from students at critical stages of their academic journeys, potentially influencing their interaction with and reliance on mass media. The sex-wise composition indicates a higher participation rate among female respondents (58.5%) than males (39.0%). Additionally, the inclusion of intersex respondents (1.4%) and those who preferred not to disclose their gender (1.1%) reflects a commitment to inclusivity, recognizing the diversity of gender identities within the student population. This gender distribution may offer varied perspectives on how different sexes engage with and are influenced by mass media.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=354)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age-Wise Composition of Respondents	Below 20	22	6.2
	20-22	186	52.5
	23-26	100	28.2
	Above 26	46	13.0
Sex-Wise Composition of Respondents	Male	138	39.0
	Female	207	58.5
	Intersex	5	1.4
	Prefer not to Say	4	1.1
Religion-Wise Composition of Respondents	Hindu	238	67.2
	Muslim	44	12.4
	Sikh	34	9.6
	Christian	32	9.0
	Others	6	1.7
Family Residential Locality-Wise Composition of Respondents	Urban	118	33.3
	Rural	125	35.3
	Suburban	111	31.4
Annual Family Income (In Rupees) Wise Composition of Respondents	Above 30 Lacs	25	7.1
	Between 20 - 30 Lacs	64	18.1
	Between 10-20 Lacs	121	34.2

Accommodation Type-Wise Composition of Respondents	Between 5-10 Lacs	97	27.4
	Below 5 Lacs	47	13.3
	University's Hostel	179	50.6
	Rented Apartment/Flat	55	15.5
	Paying Guest	50	14.1
	Living with Parents/Relatives	70	19.8
	Total	354	100.0

Religion-wise, the majority of respondents identified as Hindu (67.2%), reflecting the predominant religious demographic of the region. Other significant religious groups included Muslims (12.4%), Sikhs (9.6%), and Christians (9.0%), with a small percentage (1.7%) identifying as 'Others.' This religious diversity highlights the multicultural environment of the universities, potentially influencing the varying ways religious groups interact with mass media. The respondents' family residential locality was fairly evenly distributed across urban (33.3%), rural (35.3%), and suburban (31.4%) areas. This balanced representation provides a broad perspective, capturing students' experiences from diverse residential backgrounds. It also suggests that the study considered the different socio-economic and cultural contexts that may shape students' media consumption patterns.

Regarding annual family income, a significant portion of respondents reported family incomes between 10-20 Lacs (34.2%) and 5-10 Lacs (27.4%). Smaller segments of the respondents came from families earning above 30 Lacs (7.1%) or below 5 Lacs (13.3%). This income distribution is crucial for understanding potential disparities in access to and interaction with mass media, as financial resources can significantly influence media consumption habits and preferences. The accommodation type-wise composition reveals that most respondents resided in the university's hostel (50.6%), indicating a substantial number of students living on campus. Others lived in rented apartments or flats (15.5%), paying guest accommodations (14.1%), or with parents/relatives as day scholars (19.8%). The variety in accommodation types suggests differing levels of exposure to mass media, as living environments often play a key role in shaping how students consume and interact with media.

Overall, the demographic data provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the respondent pool, ensuring that the study's findings on mass media's impact on university students reflect a wide range of student experiences. The diversity in age, sex, religion, residential locality, family income, and accommodation types lays a strong foundation for interpreting the study's results, allowing for meaningful conclusions about the relationship between mass media and university student's personal and academic lives.

Table 2 Usage of Type of Mass Media in Daily Lives By Respondents

Usage of Mass Media	Frequency	Percentage
Print Media (Books/Newspaper/Magazine)	258	72.9
Broadcast Media (TV/Radio/FM/Film/Internet)	60	16.9
New Media (social media)	36	10.2
Total	354	100.0

The distribution of media usage among respondents, as outlined in Table 2, reflects a predominant preference for traditional media outlets. A significant 72.9% of respondents primarily engage with print media, including books, newspapers, and magazines. This strong inclination towards print media suggests that despite the digital revolution, traditional formats remain highly valued among respondents for their depth of information, reliability, and educational content.

Table 3. Duration of Mass Media Engagement (in hours per day)

Duration (in hours per day)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 2 Hours	63	17.8
Between 2 to 4 Hours	59	16.7
Between 4 to 8 Hours	180	50.8
More than 8 Hours	36	10.2
Not Specified	16	4.5
Total	354	100.0

The data in **Table 3** presents respondents' daily media consumption time and explains how university students engage with mass media. Most respondents (50.8%) reported spending between 4 and 8 hours daily on media consumption, indicating a significant portion of their day dedicated to various media platforms. This level of engagement suggests that mass media plays a central role in the lives of these students, potentially influencing their perceptions, behaviours, and academic performance. A notable proportion of respondents (17.8%) reported spending below 2 hours daily on media, while 16.7% consumed media for 2 to 4 hours. Though not as heavily engaged as those in the 4 to 8-hour range, these groups still represent a considerable time commitment to media activities.

Table 4 Purpose of Mass Media Usage/Engagement Purpose

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
For Academic Activities (Such as Gathering Information About Any Subjects or Topics)	81	22.9
For Entertainment (Such as Watching Movies, Playing Games, And Listening to Music)	47	13.3
To learn new skills (such as dancing, singing, cooking, etc.)	62	17.5
For Recreation and Leisure Time	61	17.2
For Getting Motivation	54	15.3
For Seeking Information About the Career Opportunities	48	13.6
Other	1	.3
Total	354	100.0

Table 4 reveals diverse purposes for internet use among respondents. The majority, 81 individuals (22.9%), utilize the Internet for academic activities, such as gathering information on various subjects, highlighting its critical role in educational pursuits. Entertainment follows closely, with 47 respondents (13.3%) using the Internet for activities like watching movies, playing games, and listening to music, underscoring its importance in leisure time. Additionally, 62 respondents (17.5%) use the Internet to learn new skills, such as dancing, singing, and cooking, reflecting its value in personal development. Recreational and leisure activities are also significant, with 61 respondents (17.2%) engaging with the Internet for relaxation and enjoyment. For motivational purposes, 54 respondents (15.3%) seek inspiration online, while 48 (13.6%) explore career opportunities through internet resources. A very small percentage, just one respondent (0.3%), use the Internet for other purposes. The data illustrates that internet use spans various activities, including academic research, personal development, entertainment, motivation, and career exploration. The study's findings shed light on the complex relationship between demographic factors, media consumption patterns, and the impact of mass media on university students' lives across different academic disciplines and university environments. As highlighted in the demographic characteristics, the diverse backgrounds of the respondents underscore the importance of considering various socio-economic and cultural factors when analyzing media usage and its implications. The study reveals a strong preference for print media among respondents, with 72.9% engaging primarily with books, newspapers, and magazines. This finding is significant as it suggests that, despite the growing influence of digital media, traditional formats continue to play a vital role in students' lives. The preference for print media could be linked to its perceived reliability and depth of information, particularly for academic purposes. On the other hand, the relatively lower engagement with broadcast media and new media highlights the potential areas for further exploration, particularly in understanding why these formats are less favored among university students.

The duration of media engagement, with the majority of respondents spending between 4 to 8 hours daily on media, indicates that mass media is a central aspect of university students' lives. This significant time investment suggests that media consumption is not only a leisure activity but also an integral part of their academic and personal development. The study also notes that a smaller, yet notable, percentage of students engage with media for less than 2 hours daily, which could reflect either a conscious effort to limit screen time or limitations in access to media resources.

The diverse purposes for media usage, as detailed in Table 4, underscore the multifaceted role of media in students' lives. While academic activities are the primary reason for media engagement, the data also highlights the importance of media for entertainment, personal development, and career exploration. This variety in usage purposes suggests that mass media serves as a versatile tool for university students, catering to their educational, recreational, and motivational needs.

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the media consumption patterns of university students, emphasizing the influence of demographic factors, socio-economic backgrounds, and academic responsibilities on their media habits. The findings highlight the continued relevance of traditional media formats, such as print media, while pointing to digital media's evolving role in students' lives. The diverse purposes for media usage, from academic activities to personal development and entertainment, reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of media engagement among university students. The study underscores the importance of considering demographic diversity when analyzing media consumption patterns, as factors such as age, gender, religion, residential locality, and family income play significant roles in shaping how students interact with and are influenced by mass media. The findings also suggest that while mass media is a central aspect of students' lives, there are varying levels of engagement, with some students dedicating significant portions of their day to media consumption while others engage more selectively.

In conclusion, the study's results offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of mass media in the lives of university students, providing a foundation for future research on the impact of media on academic performance, personal development, and social interactions. As media continues to evolve, further studies could explore the shifting dynamics of media consumption, particularly in the context of digital media's growing influence and the potential for new media platforms to shape the future of educational and personal development.

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