

Commonly used Media by Adolescent Girls to Seek Information Regarding Current Trends in Women's Physical Appearance

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Abstract- The aim of research study was to find out behavior of adolescent girls as influenced by or in response to the influence of 'commonly used media by adolescent girls, to seek information regarding current trends related to women's physical appearance'. Purposively, from three schools 120 adolescents (60 early adolescent girls and 60 late adolescent girls) were randomly selected for the study in Kanpur city of Uttar Pradesh. A self constructed questionnaire was used to find out the most commonly used media (television, magazines, cinema and internet.), among adolescent girls, to seek information regarding current trends related to women's physical appearance according to the *age and socio-economic status* of adolescent girls. In Data was analyzed in terms of percentage, frequency and chi square (χ^2). Findings reveal that commonly used media by adolescent girls were television (91.67%), magazines (89.67%), cinema (81.67%) and internet (25.83%) respectively.

Index Terms- Media, Media Portrayal, Adolescents, Socio-Economic Status, Physical Appearance

I. INTRODUCTION

The Media appears to play a significant role in our lives. It is all around us, from the shows we watch on television or the websites we browse on the Internet or the music, entertainment or information that we access on the radio, to the books and magazines we read each day. Media today, has a wider coverage and viewer ship than perhaps a decade ago. It has reached every home, town and country. Mass media essentially means dissemination of information, idea and entertainment on a large scale by various means. It plays a vital role in spreading information, conducting propaganda, educating and enlightening people, strengthening national integration and creating national identity. By creating awareness, reinforcing ideas and providing real or ideal model of behaviour, media becomes a powerful vehicle in molding belief, attribute, value and life-style that can raise aspiration and better the standard of living. Botta (1999) refers to "The Social Comparison Theory", which posits that "people will (at some point in their lives) compare themselves and significant others to people and images whom they perceive to represent realistic goals to attain". Thus, we look to the media to help us define, explain and shape the world around us. Without always knowing it, we make automatic comparisons of ourselves, those close to us, and situations in our lives, after seeing images in the media. And as a result, after these comparisons, we are motivated to strive for, and achieve newfound goals and expectations.

Media especially, television, cinema and more recently the Internet, that provide information along with audiovisual experiences exert a powerful influence on the users since they affect the eyes, ears and the mind simultaneously. The moving images on especially the television and the Internet exert a feeling that the things are happening in front of the viewers. Also, since repetition and frequent reiteration of programmes is possible, ideas/information propagated through programmes on the television or accessed on website on the Internet, get instilled in the minds of the viewers. Often, people believe that what is propagated by the media is fully correct.

Since media is a forum of expression, the responsibilities of media are the stronghold of a democratic setup. Media is often associated with some negative points particularly, its role in propagating baseless ideas, unrealistic aspirations, unhealthy stereotypes, distorted truth, vulgarity, etc. On the other hand, media has also adopted corrective measures to counteract these negativities by projecting pros and cons related to various issues and through expression of views of experts from different fields.

Child development psychologists have also explained the significance of media from the point of view of children's development. Hurlock (), explains that mass media provides models of socially approved personality traits, which, children can use as models for their own personality development. For example, in matters of appearance, Hurlock maintains that children learn concepts of culturally approved stereotypes of the "right body build". Further, according to her, children create aspirations of what they would like to look like, or concept of ideal self or the physical self-concept, on the basis of either direct or indirect contacts they have with real people they admire or from the characters they observe and admire in the mass media. Berk (1990) explains that children acquire knowledge of sex-appropriate behaviour, appearance, occupations and achievements by observing others around them. For instance, the term "fairer sex" alluded to women, has been persistently projected as a stereotype of women by the media. For instance, the results of a market survey reported in newspaper article, pointed out that the user profile of fairness creams had got younger (age bracket 12-15 years), which was much less than a few years ago (The Times of India, Kanpur, April 8, 2009). The cause for consumption of fairness creams by teenagers for enhancing their physical appearance, was attributed to the high exposure they have of various media that propagate standards of beauty and emphasis on "fairness" or fair complexion is one such standard of physical appearance that has particularly influenced young adolescents girls and even boys.

The period of adolescence, a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood, entails major interrelated physical, cognitive and psychological changes that can make adolescents susceptible to the influence of media. The biological changes of puberty that signal the end of childhood, result in rapid growth in height and weight, changes in body proportions and form and attainment of sexual maturity. These changes can cause adolescents to worry about their appearance. This concern regarding their physical appearance becomes greater when adolescents receive messages from the mass media about specific standards of physical appearance attributed to men and women. For instance, increased activity of the sebaceous gland during puberty may give rise to pimples and blackheads causing concern in adolescent boys and girls.

Girls are usually dismayed at the appearance of even a slight amount of hair on the face or around the nipples, though this is normal (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 1998). But as Tobin-Richards, Boxer and Petersen (1983) point out "Adolescent girls tend to be unhappier about their looks than adolescent boys, perhaps because of cultural emphasis on women's attributes. An early maturing girl may feel less attractive if her new curviness clashes with cultural standards equating beauty with thinness (Crockett & Petersen, 1987). She may feel dismayed if she sees herself changing for the worse, not for the better (Simmons, Blyth & McKinney, 1983).

Thus media portrayal of current trends related to men and women's physical appearances set up expectations about the way men and women should look that can either raise aspirations of adolescents to be as much as possible according to the cultural standards at a time when normal physical changes are taking place in their bodies or such portrayals lead them to feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that media portrayal of current trends related to physical appearance holds an awesome power to influence adolescents. The drive for thinness set off by media portrayal of 'size-zero' trend related to women's physical appearance is an example of how media influences adolescents. Current trends related to physical appearances of males and females keep changing from time to time and mass media keeps us abreast of such trends. Further the influence such current trends have on adolescents depends on the amount and kind of exposure that adolescents have of these trends. Many studies on the influence of media on body image of adolescents have been conducted. However, the influence of media on adolescents with respect to other aspects needs to be studied. Hence, present study was conducted to know most commonly used media by adolescent girls to seek information regarding current trends related to women's physical appearance.

II. OBJECTIVES

Commonly used media by adolescent girls to seek information regarding current trends related to women's physical appearance, with respect to the following –

- Age &
- Socio-economic status

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample comprised of 120 adolescent girls, were studying in different standards viz- IX, X and XI and were from different schools/colleges (R.B.R.D. Inter College, Nawabganj, P.P.N. Inter College Parade, & Swaraj India Public School, Kakadev) of Kanpur city of the Uttar Pradesh State. A *Random* selection of girls was done, ensuring that there were 60 early adolescent girls and 60 late adolescent girls. A questionnaire was therefore framed, to collect relevant information such as background characteristics of the respondents and most commonly used media, to seek information regarding current trends related to women's physical appearance according to the *age and socio-economic status of adolescent girls*. In order to analyze the data collected, *Percentage and Chi-square test* was used test the significance of association / dependency of attributes.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

As shown in below table 1 (a), out of the total sample of 120 adolescent girls, a majority of girls (91.67%) were using television to seek information about current trends related to women's physical appearance. Out of 60 early adolescence girls and another 60 late adolescence girls, a majority of both the early and late adolescent girls (93.33 % & 90.00 % respectively) were using television to seek information about current trends although the percentage of television users was higher in the case of early adolescence girls (93.33%) as compared to late adolescence girls (90.0 %). Further, the chi square value (0.0436 for 1 *df*) reveals that there is a non-significant relationship between use of television by adolescent girls and their age i.e. age of adolescence is not related or associated with girls' behavior of using television for seeking information about current trends. Both the younger and older adolescent girls were found to be using television for seeking the information. *Mahajan and Singh (1997)* studied the impact of media on lifestyle of adolescents in the age group of 12-18 years of age and found that media especially television and satellite channels certainly affected the lifestyle of individuals. They tend to buy the product advertised by media, irrespective of its cost. The way of presentation mattered in case of food items whereas in case of clothing, designer label mattered. The impact of television is vital because of its enormous potential as an audio-visual communicator. Television (T.V.) enables the creative man to communicate by combining motion, sounds, words, color, personality and stage setting to express and demonstrate ideas to large and widely distributed audience. T.V. advertisements usually play a role in either introducing a product reinforcing the familiarity to the product and also convincing to purchase the product. Advertisements are among the most visible of the marketing strategy and have been the subject of a great deal of attention in the last ten to fifteen years. Advertisement cannot only change emotions but give subliminal message. Advertising today seems to be everywhere and ever present exerting a far reaching influence on the daily lives of people. Advertisements develop self-concepts in order to induce purchase decisions. Television advertising employs attention grabbing trick such as catchy and pleasing music, lyrics, Jingles, humor and repeated messages. The impact of the advertisements is more on television than the print media or radio.

Table – 1: Percentage distribution commonly used media to seek information regarding current trends related to women’s physical appearance, according to the *age of adolescent girls* -

S.N.	Questions	Response	Early Adolescents n=60		Late Adolescents n=60		Total N=120		Chi Square
			f	%	f	%	f	%	
1 (a)	T.V.	Yes	56	93.33	54	90.00	110	91.67	0.0436 for 1 <i>df</i>
		No	4	06.67	6	10.00	10	08.33	
1(b)	Magazine	Yes	52	86.67	55	91.67	107	89.16	0.7764 for 1 <i>df</i>
		No	8	13.33	5	08.33	13	10.83	
		No	47	78.33	51	85.00	98	81.67	
1(c)	Cinema	Yes	13	21.67	9	15.00	22	18.33	0.8905 for 1 <i>df</i>
		No	13	21.67	9	15.00	22	18.33	
1(d)	Internet	Yes	10	16.67	21	35.00	31	25.83	5.2627** for 1 <i>df</i>
		No	50	83.33	39	65.00	89	74.17	

**significant at 1%

*significant at 5%

Table-2: Percentage distribution of commonly used media to seek information regarding current trends related to women’s physical appearance, according to the Socio-economic status of adolescent girls, -

S.N.	Questions	Response	Low Income n=35		Middle Income n=40		High Income n=45		Total N=120		Chi Square
			F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	
2 (a)	T.V.	Yes	31	88.57	37	92.50	42	93.33	110	91.67	0.2678 for 1 <i>df</i>
		No	4	11.42	3	07.50	3	06.67	10	08.33	
2(b)	Magazine	Yes	32	91.42	35	87.50	40	88.89	107	89.16	0.00575 for 1 <i>df</i>
		No	3	08.58	5	12.50	5	11.11	13	10.83	
2(c)	Cinema	Yes	21	60.00	33	82.50	44	97.78	98	81.67	18.794** for 2 <i>df</i>
		No	14	40.00	7	17.50	1	02.22	22	18.33	
2(d)	Internet	Yes	5	14.29	10	25.00	16	35.55	31	25.83	4.6704 at 2 <i>df</i>
		No	30	85.71	30	70.00	29	64.45	89	74.17	

**significant at 1%

*significant at 5%

As shown in table 1 (b), out of the total sample of 120 adolescent girls, a majority of girls (89.67%) were using magazines for seeking information about current trends related to women’s physical appearance. Out of the 60 early adolescent girls and 60 other late adolescent girls, a majority of both the early and late adolescent girls (86.67% & 91.67% respectively) were using magazines for seeking information about current trends, although the percentage of magazine users was higher in the case of early adolescent girls (86.67%) compared to late adolescent girls (91.67%). Further, the chi square value (0.7764 for 1 *df*) reveals that there is a non-significant relationship between use of magazines by adolescent girls and their age i.e. age of adolescence is not related or associated with girls’ behavior of seeking information about current trends. Both the younger and older adolescent girls were found to be using magazines to seek the information.

As can be observed from table 1 (c), out of the total sample of 120 adolescent girls, a majority of girls (81.67%) were using cinema medium to seek information related to current trends in women’s physical appearance. Out of the 60 early adolescent girls and 60 other late adolescent girls, a majority of both the early and late adolescent girls (86.67% & 91.67% respectively) were using the cinema for seeking information about current trends, although the percentage of cinema users was higher in the case of late adolescent girls (85.00 %) as compared to the early adolescent girls (78.33 %). Further, it can be observed from chi square value (0.8905 for 1 *df*) that there is a non-significant relationship between use of cinema by adolescent girls and their age i.e. age of adolescent girls is not associated with their behavior of using the cinema medium for seeking information about current trends. Both the younger and older adolescent girls were found to be using cinema for seeking the information.

As shown in table 1 (d), out of the total sample of 120 adolescent girls, a very low percentage of girls (25.83%) were using the Internet for seeking information about current trends in women's physical appearance. Out of the 60 early adolescent girls and 60 late adolescent girls, a low percentage of both the early and late adolescent girls (16.67% & 35.00% respectively) were using the Internet for seeking the information related to current trends although the percentage of Internet users was higher in the case of late adolescent girls (35.00%) compared to early adolescent girls (16.67%). Further, the chi square value (5.2627 for 1 *df*) also reveals a significant relationship between the use of Internet by adolescent girls and their age i.e. age of adolescent girls is associated with their behavior of using the Internet for seeking information about current trends.

As shown in table 2 (a), a majority of adolescent girls from the high income families (93.33%) were using television for seeking information about current trends related to women's physical appearance, followed by girls from middle income families (92.50%) and girls low income families (88.57%). Further, the chi square value (0.2678 for 1 *df*) reveals that there is a non-significant relationship between use of television by adolescent girls and their family income i.e. family income of adolescent girls is not related or associated with their behaviour of using television for seeking information about current trends. Rana (1995) undertook a study on T.V. advertisements and expressed that among the media, the impact of television advertisement on social behavior, including purchasing behavior was the greatest. The reason being that television has charm, instantaneous transmission capability and universality of appeal. Dhillon et al. (1997) investigated the factors affecting consumer behavior of durable goods and food items. Sample comprised of 150 females (75 each from rural and urban areas). The sources of information, the rural respondents gave primary importance were, advertisements through radio, followed by posters to some extent but were least affected by magazines. Urban respondents were affected the maximum by television and magazines.

The table 2(b), reveals that a majority of adolescent girls from the high income families (88.89%) were using magazines for seeking information related to current trends in women's physical appearance, followed by girls from middle income families (87.50%) and girls from low income families (91.42%). Further, the chi square value (0.00575 for 1 *df*) reveals that there is a non-significant relationship between use of magazines by adolescent girls and their family income i.e. family income of adolescent girls is not related or associated with their behavior of using magazines for seeking the information.

As can be observed from table 2 (c), that a majority of adolescent girls from the high income families (97.78%) were using cinema for seeking information related to current trends in women's physical appearance, followed by girls from middle income families (82.50%) and girls from low income families (60.00%). Chi square value(18.794 for 1 *df*) reveals that there is significant relationship between use of cinema by adolescent girls and their family income i.e. family income of adolescent girls is associated with their behaviour of using cinema for seeking information about current trends.

Table 2 (d), depicts that a low percentage of adolescent girls from all the three family income groups i.e. 35.55% from the high income group, followed by 25.00% from the middle income group and 14.29% from the low income group, were using the Internet for seeking information about current trends in women's physical appearance. Further, the chi square value (4.6704 for 1 *df*) reveals a significant relationship between the use of Internet by adolescent girls and their family income.

V. CONCLUSION

Media (television, magazines, cinema and internet) has become an integral part of modern society .It is the most convenient route to reach not only adult consumers but also the adolescents. Adolescents are manipulated by various means of media which promises that the product will do something special for them which will transform their life. The results of the study revealed that out of television, magazines, cinema and internet, T.V. was most commonly used media among adolescent girls to seek information related to current trends in women's physical appearance with respect to their age and socio-economic status.

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