
SMARTPHONE AND THE INTERNET USAGES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: SIGNS OF CONVERGING AUDIENCE

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Abstract : With development in communication technology media convergence is emerging in many parts of the world. It is believed that for media convergence appropriate technology should be available to both the media houses and the audience. For any media organization knowing target audience, and its media usage and news consumption pattern is important. The audience, especially the young audience, is becoming more and more techno savvy. Along with the traditional media platforms such as Print, Radio and TV, it increasingly has more access to Smartphones and the Internet services. With this media usage and news consumption patterns of the young audience are changing very fast. This phenomenon, frequently referred as audience convergence, is providing impetus to media convergence and multi-media journalism. As part of the doctoral study, this researcher conducted an extensive survey of college going students in Pune city, Pimpri Chinchwad and Pune district of Maharashtra. The results reflecting the signs of converging audience are presented in this research paper.

Keywords: Media convergence, audience, media usage, news consumption

Introduction

With rapid development of technology, especially computing, the Internet and mobile telephony, the world is witnessing a communication revolution. Technological changes are impacting media usage and news consumption patterns of audience- especially the younger ones. In response to such changes in technology and subsequent changes in news consumption, many media organizations are embracing media convergence and multimedia journalism. This researcher studied these contemporary and interrelated trends in media in the Indian context. As part of the doctoral study, the researcher conducted an extensive survey of college going students in Pune district of Maharashtra. A part of this data is used for analysis

presented in this paper.

Audience studies are emerging as a new area of media research. Communication technology, its use by the audience and subsequent response from the media organizations are interrelated. Increasing access to Smartphones and growing Internet penetration, fast developing mobile telephony, availability of 3G/4G technology are providing more impetus to media convergence. In this context relation between technology convergence and audience convergence need to be explored.

2. Review of Literature

Scholars from advanced Western countries are studying media convergence and multimedia journalism from various perspectives; but there are very few studies on these topics in India.

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'Convergence studies' is becoming a major area in communication. McLuhan (1964), Nicholas Negroponte (1995), Manuel Castells (2000), etc's pioneering work foresaw the emerging era of convergence. Lawson-Borders (2003) made some fundamental observations about convergence in early period; while Jenkins (2004) tried to analyze it through the cultural logic. He says, 'We are entering an era where media will be everywhere and we will use all kinds of media in relation to each other'.

In present environment, there is continuous media exposure to the audience. Since various offline and online media are now available 24 x 7 and the younger audience is almost hooked to it, it has been described as the 'Always On' generation! There is a range of media choices available to this audience from traditional print media to live streaming on Smartphones. McQuail (2010: 398) asserts that 'Audiences are both a product of social context (which leads to shared cultural interests, understanding and information needs) and a response to a particular pattern of media provision'. Sandler (2009) points towards the invisible tension among the generations considered as audiences. He says, 'While past generations may remain locked in traditional viewing patterns and linear engagement modes, the current generation circulates and produces, timeshifts and placeshifts, blogs and vlogs television on their own terms: they engage with TV when they want, where they want, and how they want'.

Audience studies to assess the level of convergence are being done in various parts of the world. One such significant research has been done in Denmark by Schroder and Larsen. They have mapped the use and users of cross-media news landscape, as the everyday consumption of news across the range of

available news media and formats is shifting reflecting transformations of technology, culture and lifestyles' (2010). Similarly, Althaus et.al. (2009) tried to contour the geography of news consumption in the United States in balance with audience demand and proportional media supply. While Shehata and Strömbäck (2011) identified news consumption gaps in Europe in a comparative study, their focus was to explore media usage of the audience and corresponding supply of the news content. Hasebrink and Hepp (2017) used two perspectives 'media repertoire' and 'media ensemble' to study cross-media use of audience. According to them media repertoire refers to individual use of various media, while 'media ensemble' signifies media use in social domains of collectivities and organizations. Availability of the Smartphones and growing access to speedy Internet services are key pointers to understand these changes and its impact on news consumption. In this context, there is no significant audience study available in India.

3. Research Objective

As part of the wider objectives to study media convergence and multimedia journalism in the Indian context, the researcher first sought to study media usage and news consumption patterns among the young audience in and around Pune. Accordingly, the objective of this study is limited to understand Smartphone and the Internet usage of the college going students as the young converging audience.

4. Research Question

To fulfill this objective the researcher stated the following research question.

RQ1: Do the college students in and around Pune have significant access to

Smartphone and the Internet services as an indication of the converging audience?

5. Research methods and Sample

To assess media usage and news consumption patterns among the college going youth, the researcher conducted an extensive survey. The sample selected is purposive and convenient. Student volunteers went to 12 colleges in Pune city and six colleges in adjacent Pimpri Chinchwad area. Besides, one college each from all 13 tehsils of Pune district was selected for the survey. Respondents were from senior colleges and from various disciplines like arts, science, commerce, medical, engineering, and others. The sample represents the young audience in metro, semi-urban and rural area of the district. This audience has possibility of access to the Internet, Smartphone and other modern communication technology. Hence, it was selected purposively to assess the level of audience convergence in and around Pune. Survey was conducted in March-April 2018. Total 1213 responses (Pune city 493, Pimpri Chinchwad 285 and Pune district 435) are used for data analysis. Sex ratio is 51.7% female and 48.3% male. Almost all (98.8%) respondents are in the age bracket of 17 to 26 years.

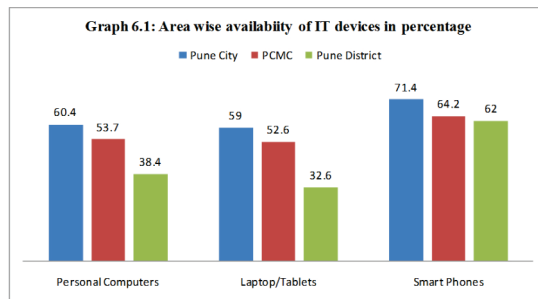
6. Data presentation and analysis

College youth generally have more access to modern technology and gadgets. They signal a change in the overall society. That's why this group was selected as the sample to represent new audience.

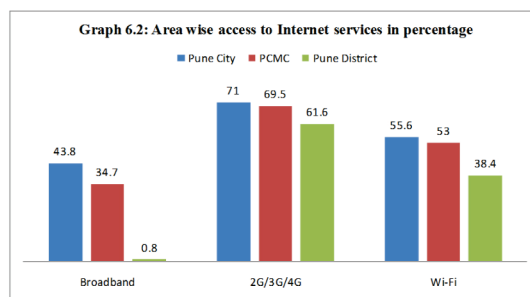
6.1 Access to broadband and mobile Internet services

The questionnaire progressively probed availability of different media platforms in the locality, possibility of access to media at home and in public

places (media ensemble), differential patterns of personal media use (media repertoire), news consumption on different platforms and multimedia exposure, etc. In the context of this research availability of IT devices and access to the Internet are used as key pointers.



Graph 6.1 shows availability of personal computers and laptops in higher percentage in both Pune city and PCMC area. But when it comes to the availability of Smartphones, rural residents (62%) seem to be catching up with the urban users (71.4 and 64.2%). When these figures are considered in tandem with the Graph 6.2 showing access to the Internet services, it provides a clearer picture.



The graph 6.2 indicates a near absence of broadband Internet services in rural area. While broadband access in Pune city is at 43.8% and in PCMC area 34.7%, the access in rural area is merely 0.8%. This may be due to lack of infrastructure and neglect by telecom companies to provide broadband services in rural parts. In contrast, mobile based 2G/3G/4G Internet services provides

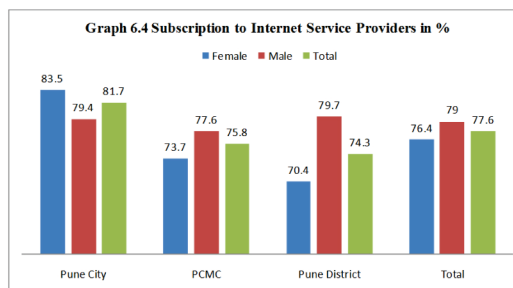
higher and near equal access to the rural youth at 61.6%. Pune city and PCMC youth enjoy 71% and 69.5% access respectively to these high speed mobile Internet services. The graph reflects that in comparison with broadband services, the rural youth have easy and wider access to 2G/3G/4G Internet services. In addition, the rural youth have access to Wi-Fi Internet services. Nearly 38.4% youth reported that they access Wi-Fi Internet mostly in colleges. With this the rural youth can access various multimedia platforms on their mobile anywhere, any time. It removes the disparity in broadband access and provides them wider access to multimedia services via Smartphone.

Ownership of IT Devices: Total 78% respondents own a Smartphone nearly double than ownership of laptops or personal computers. Table 6.3 provides more insight into the distribution of IT devices. It shows gradual increase in ownership percentage of Smartphone from rural area (70.8%) to the metro area of Pune city (84.6%). It should be noted here that the ownership of Smartphone is a key factor in multimedia consumption.

Table 6.3: Who Owns the IT devices?

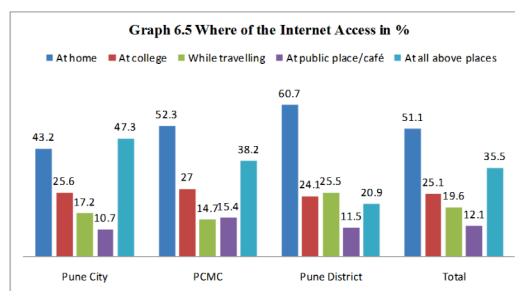
	PC	Laptop	Tablet	Smartphone	Simple Phone
Pune City	40.8	57.4	14.2	84.6	15.0
PCMC	38.6	45.6	9.1	77.5	16.1
Pune District	27.4	22.8	5.3	70.8	32.6
Total	35.5	42.2	9.7	78.0	21.5

The Internet Access: Easy and affordable access to the Internet is another important element in transforming media usage and news consumption. The respondents were asked whether they have subscribed to any Internet service providers. Their responses are shown in the Graph 6.4. Total 77.6% respondents have subscribed to the Internet service for the Smartphone. Area wise analysis shows gradual increase of the Internet subscription from rural area (74.3%) to Pune city (81.7%).

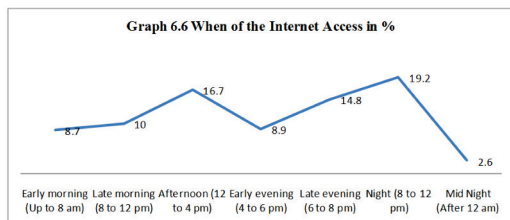


In response to other queries, total 55.6% respondents reported access to the Internet at the college computer labs and 42.5% respondents reported access to Wi-Fi Internet services in college campuses. In addition, 27.3% respondents have access to Wi-Fi Internet at their places of living or stay. This reflects growing Internet access to the youth through mobile Internet services and additional access in colleges, and nearby areas. Considering all the above responses, it can be said that the young audience has significant access to the Internet services. Besides, ownership of Smartphones, easy and affordable access to the Internet is considered essential in the new media ecosystem.

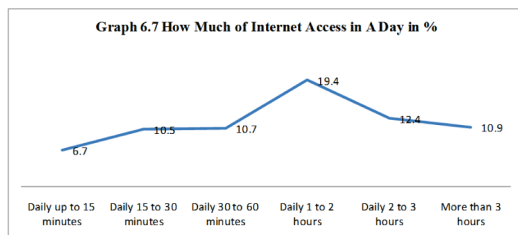
Use of the Internet: Nearly half the respondents (51.1%) access the Internet at home and around a quarter of respondents (25.1%) access it at the colleges. Flexibility of the Internet use is reflected in the Graph 6.5. It is highlighted by the figure that 35.5% of total respondents access the Internet at all the places.



Accessing the Internet seems to be spread all over the daily routine. The usage starts in the early morning and for some it continues even during the midnight. This is evident in Graph 6.6 of the Internet use. This trend is supported by the figure (not given in the graph) that total 42.4% respondents access the Internet all the time.



Similar to the evenly spread use of the Internet throughout the day, total time spent on the Internet during the day show compatible figure. It is reflected in Graph 6.7. The cumulative percentage of the respondents using the internet more than one hour stands at 42.7% (19.4+12.4+10.9%). In addition total 23.3% respondents reported that they use the Internet all the time. This reflects the heavy use of Internet as a medium and how it has become integral part of daily lives of the young audience.



In addition, a question was asked about how often you access the Internet in a day. Total 13.5% respondents said they access the Internet at least once in a day. The percentage of accessing the Internet two to five times in a day is at 31.1%. Those who access the Internet even more number of times is 24.9% and total 7.6 percent stated that they access the Internet all the time.

7. Conclusion

In the doctoral thesis this researcher compared the entire survey data related to where, when and for how much time different media platforms are used in daily life. This effort provided more insights into personal media use of the respondents as the media repertoire. In the context of this research paper only the results related to Smartphone and the Internet usage are given here. This comparison clearly shows that while the traditional media use is almost static and homebound, use of the Internet services, especially through Smartphone is more flexible and dynamic. Since the Smartphone and Internet usage does not have any time or place constraint, the young audience is increasingly using it for multimedia consumption.

As found in the analysis of other survey questions online news consumption of the young audience has significantly increased. With growing access to high speed Internet services, consumption of video content on Smartphone is rising. Web series, live streaming of sports events, movies are increasingly consumed on the Smartphone. Significantly, news video content is also on the rise and it seems that the young audience is consuming it in equal proportion. Social media or 'Social Network Sites' (SNS) are now integrated in the daily lives of the people, especially the young generation. It is becoming another avenue for news dissemination. All these are clearly the signs of converging audience. Smartphone and the Internet are key drivers of these changes.

In the context of the ownership of IT devices, Smartphone is emerging as the game changer. A high majority of the young audience own Smartphone and the percentage is double than that of laptops and personal computers. Easy and

affordable access to the Internet services via Smartphone and also in college campuses, provide opportunities to the young audience to access media all the time. More than 40% respondents asserted that they access the Internet all the time and their use is spread all over the daily routine. It can be safely said that the Smartphone and the Internet have become integral part of the young lives. This signals a likely shift in media usage and news consumption patterns of the larger audience.

In the light of the survey results, the researcher answers research question as following: The college students in and around Pune have significant access to Smartphone and the Internet services. This provides the young audience more opportunities to consume multimedia in convergent ways as reflected in the flexible use of the Internet and its integration into their daily lives.

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