ABSTRACT

India has been the testing ground for many a communication theory, especially where the focus has been on the relationship between communication and development. In the belief that media potential can be successfully exploited to the society's advantage in fields such as education and social awareness, the most sophisticated and advanced systems of communication have been used. The early experiments of the Radio Rural Forums, the later SITE experience, the satellite based instructional television, the open university experiment—all seek to achieve the goal of educating vast and hitherto inaccessible populations.

Underlying the effectiveness of any such programme is the planning and execution of programmes, which in India, have sometimes been done without adequate research backing and little awareness of the interaction between media as instruments of change and the individual as user of media content. Paradoxically, educators, parents and social scientists alike have not hesitated to point a finger at the movie industry as the one responsible for producing socially deviant and aggressive behaviour, while at the same time, promoting media as channels of education.

Media effect cannot be assumed to be a unidirectional and simple relationship between the source and the receiver
more so when the receivers are the young in the country. Nor can we assume that the adolescents are like sponges, prepared to receive any and all media content in the same way. They are conscious users of the media turning to media to fulfill specific roles in their lives whether for entertainment or for information. The effect of any medium is equal to the function it fulfills for the individual receiver.

With this in view, and because of the paucity of research on media effect and adolescents, the present study sought to examine media effect on adolescents in India. Media effect is taken to mean the consequences of mass media operation, whether intended or not. Adopting the theoretical framework of the "uses and gratifications approach" to media effect, it was also assumed that the adolescents are active viewers, choosing exposure to media among all the competing activities to fulfill certain functions in their lives. Adolescents then use the various media, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, films, books and comics - for their own reasons.

The study was based on a survey of 1179 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 20 and scattered in nine schools and colleges of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The adolescents were in the last two classes of school, the two intermediate years of the 10 + 2 system and the first two years of
undergraduate study. The students were also well distributed across the socio-economic spectrum. Using a questionnaire for self-report data, information pertaining to patterns of media use and gratifications found from media was solicited.

A broad picture of the patterns of media access, exposure and preferences showed that the adolescents were well exposed to mass media and that with the exception of movies, parents normally approve of such media exposure.

Exposure to newspapers and magazines is high as it also is for radio, television and movies with exposure to one movie per week. The teenagers like to read national newspapers and magazines, crime and spy thrillers among books.

No consistent relationships between socio-economic status variables and media exposure were found for all the media under study, but patterns emerged showing that age, sex and parental approval of media exposure are important factors influencing regular exposure to movies. Parental approval and family viewing situation are particularly important for movie exposure among adolescent girls.

Media definitely provide gratifications for adolescents, sometimes more than one. Radio is the most versatile medium, providing information, education and entertainment.
Movies provide entertainment and serve as conversational topics for the adolescents while the teenagers turn to television for its principally informational and educational content.

The informational function is also provided by books, newspapers and magazines to which the teenagers report turning for advice about societal norms and customs and also about life-styles abroad.

The results also show that findings of Western studies are not universally applicable under Indian conditions. Further, the exposure situation, especially in terms of television and films, appears to play a significant role in media use.

In conclusion, by studying the self-report data from adolescents, it is possible to arrive at a picture of media effects in terms of "need fulfilment" and the "uses and gratifications" approach is generally applicable under Indian conditions. Data yielded by studies such as this can go a long way in providing the necessary inputs for programme planning and production.