

High School Students as Media Consumers (Cases in Urban Areas of Hanoi)

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Abstracts: According to Vietnam Internet Network Information Center (Ministry of Information of Communications), up to November of 2012, more than 1/3 population of Vietnam is using the Internet (35.58%) [1]. Despite the fact that a majority of these people are of young age there have been just a few behavioral studies on the way young audience receive and react to the media. Recent development of the Internet in the world generally and in Vietnam particularly has created a number of new platforms for this audience to get information and to interact with each other on the cyber space. Thus, it is right time to put forward a question that is how are priorities of the media among Vietnamese young persons in terms of collecting information and getting recreation? Another question that should be brought about is how does young people interact with the media? This study employed two methods in investigating the enquiries. They were survey and focus group. Major findings included considerably high level of the Internet and television consumption and considerably low level of radio and newspapers consumption among investigated young audience. And both the survey and focus groups showed that the respondents had a habit of multi-tasking with different media simultaneously. By and large, high school students investigated had pretty high level of media exposure.

Keyword: Mass media, communication, media consumers, audience, internet, broadcasting, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, students, Hanoi.

1. Introduction

This research aimed at investigating the two above questions, about the priorities of the media among Vietnamese young persons in term of collecting information and getting recreation, and about the interaction of these persons with the media. This research limitedly investigated cases of students at two high schools in urban areas of Hanoi in the year of

2011. These two high schools were Việt Đức high school, located in Hoan Kiem district and Chu Văn An high school, located in Ba Đình district. The two high schools were conveniently selected instead of others because the students of these schools were expected to have media exposure at common level for such an urban school in Hanoi. Then, there were two research questions for this study to answer: 1. How were priorities of the media among students of Viet Duc and Chu Van An high schools? 2. How did the students of the

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two high schools interact with the media? Results of this study would reveal patterns of choice and interaction with the media among urban high school students in Hanoi to some degree. This would enhance the knowledge of the young audience in urban areas of Vietnam.

2. Methods

In order to answer the research questions, there were two methods employed within the study. Firstly, a survey was conducted on a convenient sample of 252 students of the two high schools. The percentages of male and female students of the sample were equal (50%). The respondents ranged from 10th, 11th to 12th grades. Most of the respondents were at 16 years old (51.2%) and 17 years old (34.9%). The data from the survey was analyzed by computer program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Based on quantitative analysis from the survey, two focus groups were conducted, in each of which 7 students were recruited. The survey provided general information about habits of the students as media consumers while focus groups suggested explanation for some noticeable points withdrawn from survey results.

3. Literature review

Firstly, high school students belong to young audience of the media. According to John Hartley (2004), the term audience is used to describe a large number of unidentifiable people, usually united by their participation in media use. Naming an audience usually also involves homogenizing it (such as “young audience”), ascribing to it certain characteristics, needs, desires and concerns. Audiences enable media organizations to sell advertising or to fulfill their public and statutory obligations. Then, it is important to know the size, quality (demographic

composition) and characteristics of audiences for this purpose [2].

There have been countless studies on young audience so far in the world, especially since the bloom of the Internet. The most obvious distinction between this generation of audience with the previous generation is the fact that most of the young have grown up with rocketing development of technologies in the world. The development has brought about the transformational Internet, which has made the so-called “information era”.

From technological point of view, there have been a number of terms coined to name the young audience born in, or grown up in the Internet era, including Millennials Generation (Howe and Strauss, 1991), Net Generation or Net Gen (Don Tapscott, 1999), Generation Y (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005) and Digital Natives (Marc Prensky, 2001), each of which indicates the researcher’s approach in scrutinizing the young audience. While Howe and Strauss focused on the intersection point of two millennia when a new generation was born, Oblinger and Oblinger centered the continuance of the new generation to the previous ones, Don Tapscott and Marc Prensky focused on the impacts of digital era on the young audience [3,4,5,6]. Looking back over the last 20 years, it is relatively apparent that among the most significant changes affecting youth has been the rise of the computer, the Internet and other digital technologies. This is why Tapscott labeled the people who had grown up during this period the Net Generation, the first generation to be bathed in bits. Tapscott also described the first American generation since 1946 as “the TV Generation”, which reminds us of one of the most noticeable points by Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan considered the first generation affected by television in 1950s as the first “post literate” generation of the world [7].

A worldwide research by Tapscott and colleagues in 2007 revealed that there were surprisingly similarities among young persons in 12 countries under the investigation [8]. For instance, they watched less television than their parents did, and they were more likely to turn on the computer and simultaneously interacted in several different windows, talked on the telephone, listened to music, did homework, read magazine, and watched television. The TV became like background muzak for them. They also loved to customize and personalize. The need to customize was extending beyond the digital world to just about everything they touched. They also wanted freedom in everything they do, from freedom of choice to freedom of expression.

Remarkably, Tapscott argued this generation of young audience was the first global generation in the world. And this was mainly due to the Internet and its global reach. With the rise of the Internet, the distinct localized characteristics specific to young people were somehow fading. Although countries and regions still had unique cultures and independent features, increasingly young people around the world were becoming pretty much alike, in terms of generational attitudes, norms, and behaviors. And, although the demographic epicenter of the global generation of young audience was in Asia, the driving forces that influenced the generation, worldwide, came from Western popular culture exported through the media.

Marc Prensky (2001) shared Tapscott's points of view. Prensky also emphasized the impacts of technologies on young audience's lifestyle. He believed that usage of new media had become a characteristic of the young, through which changes in their communication, social integration, creativeness and study were predicted.

On the other hand, Carmel McNaught, Paul Lam and Annisa Ho (2009) argued that

there were not simply homogenous characteristics among young persons. They had actually distinctions in several aspects such as in utilizing technologies and new media [9]. Gregor Kennedy (2008) confirmed the findings [10]. Meanwhile, Rolf Schulmeister (2008) suggested the existence of sub-groups among European students, especially in terms of ways of using digital media [11]. In addition, Chris Jones and Anesa Hosein (2010) believed that the impacts of the media on young people were very complex which were affected by not only age but also nationality, gender or affiliation [12,13].

While there have been countless studies investigating young audience in the world, there have been a number of studies focusing on Vietnamese young audience. Some of reliable studies have been conducted by Vietnamese Institute of Sociology with sociological approach for the last decade. Among these are the study on cases of students in Hanoi in terms of their mass communication (1998) and the study on cases of Hai Phong city's young audiences with their interacting with the media (2001) [14].

Besides, some others worth mentioning here includes a study by Nguyen Thu Giang (2007) which made comparative analysis between print - newspapers and online - newspapers reading patterns of readers in urban districts of Hanoi [15], or a study by Phan Thi Diem on the impacts of the Internet on the social networks of students in An Giang province. One of the most recently released reports with reliable findings on Vietnamese audience is by Kantar Media (2011) which examined the Internet consumption in four largest central cities of Vietnam including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang and Can Tho [16]. This project employed face-to-face

interviews conducted on 1500 15-to-54 year-old persons who were selected by multistage probability sampling. Some notable outcomes included continuously increasing percentage of Internet consumption in the four cities, peaking at the group aged from 15 to 24 years old; and the rapidly growing percentage of those who used social networking sites which increased by 14 per cents from the previous year's figure.

Case-study of Hai Phong city's young audience pointed out that 51.1% of respondents were not using the Internet as a source of information (2001) while a decade later, Kantar Media's study conducted in four cities revealed a totally different landscape of 91% of respondents aged 15-19 years old using the Internet. Figures demonstrate major changes in patterns of behaviors and attitudes of young audience to the media, under the crucial influence of the vigorous development of the Internet in urban areas of Vietnam during the past ten years. This research on cases of students in two high schools of urban Hanoi disclosed some details about the changes and some explanation as well.

4. Results

The following is noticeable data from the survey. The data is discussed and explained in the next part, together with what was withdrawn from the two focus groups.

Table 1: Internet ownership

	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Yes	242	96.0
No	10	4.0
Total	252	100.0

Table 2: Frequency of using the Internet

Frequency	Count (person)	Valid percent (%)
Almost every day	168	66.7
One to several times per week	70	27.8
One to several times per month	14	5.6
Total	252	100.0

The above table shows that all of the respondents were internet users at the time of the survey. And a majority of them were using the Internet almost every day.

Table 3: Amount of time per day
of using the Internet

Hours per day	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Less than 3 hours	141	56
From 3 to less than 4 hours	55	21.8
From 4 to less than 5 hours	26	10.3
5 hours or more	30	11.9
Total	252	100.0

Table 4: The most frequent activities
when using the Internet

No	Activity	Count (person)	Percent (%)
	• Surf websites	191	75.8
	• Listen to online music	174	69.0
	• Read online news websites	172	68.3
	• Chat	157	62.3
	• Check social networking sites	127	50.4
	• Play online games	76	30.2
	• Watch online movies	61	24.2
	• Send/ read emails	47	18.7
	• Blogging	28	11.1

Table 5: The most visited news websites

No	Website	Count
•	Kenh14.vn	137
•	Vnexpress.net	89
•	Dantri.com.vn	76
•	Zing.vn	63
•	24h.com.vn	26

Table 6: Activities done at the same time with using the Internet

No	Activity	Count	Percent (%)
•	Listen to music	145	30.1
•	Eat/ drink/ sleep	114	23.7
•	Watch television	84	17.4
•	Others	56	11.6
•	Do homework	40	8.3
•	Use mobile phone/telephone	22	4.6
•	Read books/newspapers	21	4.4
	Total	482	100

As can be seen from table 4 and table 6, music (online and offline) is always among the most favorite by the respondents.

Table 7: Frequency of watching television

Frequency	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Almost every day	223	88.5
One to several times per week	22	8.7
One to several times per month	4	1.6
Rarely	3	1.2
Total	252	100.0

Table 8: Amount of time per day of watching television

Hours per day	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Less than 3 hours	115	46.0
From 3 to less than 4 hours	74	29.6
From 4 to less than 5 hours	31	12.4
5 hours or more	30	12.0
Total	250	100.0

Table 9: The most watched television programs

No	Program	Count	Percent (%)
•	Soap opera	174	25.9
•	Music	144	21.5
•	Game show	111	16.5
•	Cartoon	87	13.0
•	News	49	7.3
•	Other	49	7.3
•	Education	29	4.3
•	Sport	28	4.2
	Total	671	100

Table 10: Frequency of reading newspapers

Frequency	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Almost every day	39	15.5
One to several times per week	82	32.5
One to several times per month	54	21.4
Rarely	77	30.6
Total	252	100.0

Table 11: The most read newspapers/ magazines

No	Newspaper/ magazine	Count
•	Hoa hoc tro	88
•	2!	66
•	An ninh the gioi	47
•	An ninh thu do	38
•	Thanh nien	33
•	Bong da	29
•	Cong an nhan dan	20
•	Ha Noi moi	19
•	Tien phong	18
•	Tap chi truyen hinh	17
•	Tuoi Tre Tp. HCM	14
•	Tra sua cho tam hon	14

The two most read newspaper and magazine (Hoa hoc tro and 2!) were specialized for high school students while the next two (An ninh the gioi and An ninh thu do) were specialized on security news.

Table 12: Frequency of listening to radio

Frequency	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Almost every day	33	13.1
One to several times per week	29	11.5
One to several times per month	56	22.2
Rarely	134	53.2
Total	252	100.0

Table 13: The most listened radio channels

No	Channel	Count	Percent (%)
1	VOV3 (music, news and entertainment)	113	59.8
2	VOV GT (traffic news)	62	32.8
3	Others	14	7.4
	Total	189	100

Table 14: The most listened radio programs

Program	Count (person)	Percent (%)
Music	116	87.9
Traffic news	10	7.6
General news	4	3.0
Others	2	1.5
Total	132	100.0

Table 15: The media as “the first choice” to follow news about an important event

Medium	Count (person)	Valid Percent (%)
Newspaper	8	3.2
Radio	2	0.8
Television	89	35.3
The Internet	153	60.7
Total	252	100

Responding to the question “Please rate your preference of the media in case you want to follow news about an important event for several days”, the respondents made their priorities of the media (newspaper, radio, television and the Internet) as the above.

5. Discussion

Considerably high level of Internet and television consumption among investigated young audience

High school students under this study in urban areas of Hanoi had very high demand on using the global network, with 94.5% of respondents using the Internet “almost every day” and “one to several times per week” (table 2). The percentage of population having network access at home was 96% (table 1). And according to other results of the survey, these people used the network more frequently than those who did not have. Internet coffee bars were becoming less and less used as places for accessing to the Internet by these students. Besides, mobile phones ranked the second among the most - used media to access to the network.

As can be inferred from table 3, 44% of the respondents spent at least 3 hours per day on using the Internet which was remarkably high. Focus groups showed later that students might even use the network more often during holidays or school breaks. A majority of respondents usually multi-task when using the Internet, including listening to music, watching television, chatting on the telephone and doing homework (table 6). The following were the most frequent activities with the Internet by respondents (table 4).

- Surf websites
- Listen to online music
- Read online news websites
- Chat
- Check social networking sites

Focus groups revealed that for these students, almost any website could be a source of information and news including online newspapers, news websites, Facebook,

Youtube, Wikipedia and online forums. The five most popular news websites among these students were Kenh14.vn, Vnexpress.net, Dantri.com.vn, Zing.vn and 24h.com.vn. At the highest ranking was Kenh14.vn (which means Channel14.vn) (table 5). Among the most attracting topics were celebrity, music, technology, fashion, movie and popular science. Other results from the survey also showed that celebrity was considered as one of the most fascinating topics across many other news websites including Ngoisoi.net, Vnexpress.net or Zing.vn. In focus groups participants' opinion, celebrity could be singers, actors/ actresses, models, masters of ceremony (MCs), TV anchors, or just "hot" boys/ girls who were popular on online forums and social networking sites. Don Tapscott (2009) made a comment that the democratization of content creation gave a platform to anyone to wanting their 15 minutes of fame. And there was certainly a celebrity culture pervasive in all of society, created primarily through TV reality shows. News on celebrity was the most demanded among the young audience though these students did not consider any of celebrity as "idol".

Another revelation by the research is that 66.7% of those who answered used the Internet 'everyday' and these persons also had the highest frequency of reading news, chatting and visiting social networking sites with 68.3%, 62.3% and 50.4% respectively (table 4). Focus groups also revealed that Facebook was the most popular social networking site among the participants. Facebook was preferred over any other social networking sites (including Twitter, iFace, and Zing), blogs or any online - forums. Focus groups explained why social networking sites such as Facebook attracted numerous young persons. This was likely due to special applications of

Facebook that enabled users to make friends with thousand strangers, find out old friends, organize groups of friends based on different criteria, update friends' posts, comment and share with others. The social networking site of Facebook became the first choice for many students when looking for information and also the first choice when sharing news such as the earthquake in Hanoi in March, 2011. In fact, Facebook was believed to be the quickest and most reliable channel for the news of the earthquake. There were a large number of statuses by Facebook users describing their experience through the flash earthquake which had been rarely observed in Hanoi. News about the earthquake appeared on Facebook before on news websites, which hardly occurred before the era of social media.

On answering the question "When looking for important information or breaking news, what do you often do?" all of participants in focus groups said that they would use Google search engine and go to websites included in very first results returned by Google. These students used Google almost every time they got on the Internet to search for video clips, songs and other kinds of information including technologies, clothes, and accessories or learning related information. It is obvious that Google was inducing visits to other websites with its ranking search results. In a well-known study project titled "State of the news media" by Pew Research Center, America (2011), it was also highlighted in results that in the digital space, the organization producing the news increasingly relied on independent networks to sell their ads. They depended on aggregators (such as Google) and social networks (such as Facebook) to bring them a substantial portion of their audience. And now, as news consumption has become more mobile, news companies must follow the rules

of device makers (such as Apple) and software developers (Google) to deliver their content.

Focus groups also disclosed attitudes of participants to sensationalism and plagiarism which was currently prevalent in many online news websites of Vietnam. Although all of them criticized this prevalence of sensationalism, they chose to keep on reading because of the fact that they “would have nothing to read” otherwise. Accordingly, sensationalism was considered as a problem of Vietnamese contemporary media.

At the same time, the result showed another high level of consumption for television among the high school students under investigation. It was indicated in the result that there was an absolute percentage of TV ownership at home by all of respondents, which made television the most popular medium among these persons.

While 88.5% of those who answered said that they watched television almost every day, 54% of them spent at least 3 hours per day on watching television (table 7 & 8). Focus groups also disclosed that the amount of other family members’ television consumption could stimulate habits of watching television. The students sometimes enjoyed discussing with their parents on what they got from TV news, mainly, during dinners.

Recent development of Vietnamese television had been providing young audience with variety of programs, out of which soap opera, music, game show and cartoon were the most favorite of respondents (table 9). Further results from the survey also revealed that YanTV, the first national music channel for the young in Vietnam which was just established 2 years before, was the most prevalent entertainment TV channel of respondents. Meanwhile, VTV2, the oldest national TV channel for education and science, was ignored by almost all respondents, which was

remarkable. And it was also recorded that VTV6, the oldest and first national television channel specialized on the youth, received rather modest attention from respondents. The focus groups showed that it was probably due to boredom and stereotypes found in a great deal of programs of the two channels. On the other hand, a number of respondents listed foreign TV education channels in survey such as Discovery Channel and Animal Planet. Some programs of these channels were among the favorite, such as Man vs Wild.

Considerably low level of radio and newspapers consumption among investigated young audience

On contrary to high level of consumption for the Internet and television, consumption of radio and newspaper were much lower.

Up to 53.2% of respondents said that they rarely listened to radio (table 12). Focus groups later revealed that among those who listened to radio, many of them often listened to radio when travelling by bus or car. The most favorite radio channels among these students were VOV Traffic which was specialized on traffic-related content and VOV3 which was about music and entertainment (table 13). Additional data from survey indicated that XoneFM, a music program on VOV3, targeted at 16 to 30 year-old listeners, was the most favorite program among the listeners. XoneFM played a “mix-up” of Vietnamese and foreign songs in addition with themes such as Hot 10@10, Top 40, Movixone, My Playlist, Breakfast Show or talk shows. Radio anchors such as Nguyen Khang, Lan Trinh, Neo and Ngoc Bao were the most popular with participants of focus groups. It was all agreed among these students that the style of the anchor played a very important role to the success of a radio program.

Further results from the survey also showed that 31.3% of the radio listeners did

not really pay attention to what kind of program they were listening to. They just listened, no matter what program it was. Focus groups revealed that many of these students were “passive” listeners who accidentally listened to radio on bus, car or at home. Focus groups also showed that frequency of radio listening among these students was not stable. The habit of listening to radio was interrupted now and then, for example, changing from “almost every day” to “several times per week” or “several times per month”, even “rarely”. This was partly due to changes in leisure time budget of the audience.

With regard to newspapers, although 69.4% of respondents were newspaper readers, only 15.5% out of them read newspapers “almost every day”. Noticeably, up to nearly 1/3 of the students under investigation rarely read newspapers (table 10). “Hoa hoc tro” and “2!”, two publications specialized for students, were the most prevalent among these students. The others included “An ninh the gioi” (World Security), “An ninh Thu do” (Capital Security) and “Thanh nien” (Youth). Focus groups discussion revealed that while parents rarely read teenager - targeted newspapers and magazines, these students easily found tempted to variety of adult publications which parents often brought home, especially security - related newspapers. The availability of publications at home might be an important factor in establishing reading habits of young people.

6. Conclusion

Responding to the first research question, by and large, high school students investigated had pretty high level of media consuming, with their most attention paid to the Internet and television. As can be inferred from survey

results, in general, the respondents consumed the Internet and television at much higher level than radio and newspapers. It seems that leisure time was rather equally allocated to the Internet and television, which made these students little available for newspapers and radio. Night hours were at that present golden hours for both television and the Internet.

When asked “Please rate your preference of the media in case you want to follow news about an important event for several days”, the respondents made their priorities of the media. As can be seen from the table 15, the Internet was the first choice to follow news about an important event by 60.7% of respondents, which is nearly twice the percentage that television got. It seems that the Internet was the most favorite medium among the high school students, followed by television at the second, and newspaper and radio as the least favorite.

Responding to the second research question, the way the young audience interacted with the Internet was far more complicated than the way they interacted with the traditional mass media, namely, newspaper and broadcasting. The main reason lies in the high ability of interaction of the Internet. Both the survey and focus groups showed that the respondents had a habit of multi-tasking with different media simultaneously such as reading news on news websites, chatting on Yahoo, checking Facebook, listening to television. Thus, watching television was then narrowed down to listening to television for many respondents. And many of the audience only stopped other tasks to listen and watch television when something interesting accidentally got caught in their ears. And it seems that these young persons were more proactive in developing their habit of using the Internet than viewing television, reading newspapers or listening to the radio. Besides,

the students frequently used the Internet with a variety of purposes including collecting information, communicating, learning, purchasing and entertaining. The three most popular purposes were collecting information, communicating and entertaining.

Finally, this study might provide suggestions for further studies on sub-groups within young audience living in urban areas of Vietnam, specialized broadcasting channels for young audience and development of online-television or online-radio (radio on-demand) which have been underdeveloped in Vietnam so far.

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