

Youth Culture: Influence of Media and Globalization

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Abstract

The emergence of youth as a specific cohort of population is associated with industrialization and is linked with the need for extended training and education for entering the labour market. Rising prosperity, high educational demands of the economy and rapid social change have collectively contributed to the emergence of a stage of life called youth. The youth occupy the in-between space between school and work. Many of them enter college. The congregation of large number of similar aged people sharing the same position in the social structure heightens the generational identification. Generational consciousness also entails a feeling of psychological disconnection from previous generations, their life situations, and their ideologies. This creates ripe conditions for the emergence of youth cultures. Youth cultures are profoundly influenced by media and globalization. In this research paper describe the features of youth culture; and discuss the impact of globalization and media on youth culture.

Keywords: youth culture, generational consciousness, lifestyles, technology and consumerism

1. Youth Culture

Culture refers to the shared practices, values and beliefs. It gives a sense of belongingness. The youth can be said to have a culture of its own as it is marked by distinctive ways of dressing, using language, music preferences, engaging in sports and interests, typical behavior and life style. This collective expression of the social experiences of the youth characterizes it as having a culture of its own. For example, we have the college culture, the hippies generation, the motorbike gangs, working class youth culture etc. There are also subcultures within the youth culture. Researchers have debated about the existence of one uniform youth culture. For

instance, girls have a different way of socializing than boys. Slum youths have a different way of social interaction and functioning than their counterparts in urban or rural setting. Thus, to understand the youth culture, one needs to take into account the social context also. Age also plays an important role in the development of the youth culture. The youth marks a transition from childhood, adolescence to adulthood. As children and adolescents, being a part of the schooling process, they develop a shared meaning and experience. At this stage, they are still dependent on their parents and significant other adult members. But at the same time, they are also expected and required to be independent like adults. So, the youth relies on

the peers in this transition phase and tries to make sense of his self by being part of a youth culture. According to Erikson, the adolescents are faced with a major psychological conflict of identity versus role confusion. The youth culture can facilitate the identity development in the adolescents.

1.1 Features of Youth Culture

i) Generational consciousness — Youth cultures are marked by a sense of generational consciousness. It is a subjective awareness of having lived through certain sociopolitical events. For example, 'The children of liberalization' is a generation of Indian children born soon after the economic reforms of liberalization in 1991. They were born in an India which was to witness rapid economic, technological and social changes due to opening up of its economy to the world. These 'Liberalization Children' are different from those before them because they have not experienced the ideology of self restraint and policies of protectionism of socialism; the violence of Partition and political oppression of Emergency are alien realities for them. Instead, they have come of age at a time when their nation entered the era of market economy, coalition politics, technology boom, hedonist consumerism in a globally interconnected world. Living in times of a vibrant, growing and free economy and a global culture of innovation and initiative, they have seen Indians script success stories all over the world. These historical opportunities create a sense of generation, a sense of belonging to a cohort.

ii) Relationship of youth lifestyles with class, ethnicity and gender — Youth cultures are often expressions of resistance stemming from one class, ethnicity and gender location. Example of a class based youth culture is Larrikinism in 19th century Australia. Larrikanism refers to the culture of the working class youth much complained about by the Sydney Press and Police for their attacks on 'respectable citizenry' in the form of insults, assaults, loitering, riots, and resisting arrest. Larrikan culture was described by its contemporaries as culture of overt sexuality and high costume, drinking, dancing, gambling, violent sports and a quasi gang organization.

Smith (2005) pointed out that larrikins were not agitating for better wages and conditions and ameliorating the working experience in general.

Rather they were rejecting the capitalist work ethic in itself. Example of an ethnic based youth culture is Hip-Hop. It is a poetic-musical movement of the African diaspora and an articulation of afro-descendent youth against racism and discrimination. Youth cultures are also spaces of expression of gender based roles and values. For example, motorcycle gangs is an instance of how the use of motorbikes expresses a particular form of masculinity. There is very less work available on feminine presence in political-cultural youth groupings. Critics of subcultural studies have noted that the idea of "subculture" has become loaded with masculine connotations. Feminine participation in the subcultural practices requires one to broaden one's lens to include fans/audience. For example, most rock and roll band members in the 1950's were boys but girl participants in this culture became either fans or record collectors and readers of the 'teenagehero' magazines and love-comics (McRobbie & Garber, 1976).

iii) Counter culture — Often, youth culture is portrayed as a resistance against hegemonic (dominant) culture. It is seen as counter "establishment" and anti parental culture. Youth members of a particular subculture are seen as constantly striving for mechanisms to create a space for their own ways of being which are in conflict with the adult world. The hippies counter culture of the 1960's in America is one of the most iconic examples of youth culture. The hippies felt alienated from middle class society which they saw as dominated by materialism and repression. They were opposed to the Vietnam war and they took part in antiwar protests and marches. They developed their own lifestyle of which elements of dress and drug use stood out. The hippie men and women usually wore flowing, casual dresses with beads and sandals. Many males grew long beards. They had communal or cooperative living arrangements. Often, they tended to be dropouts from society, foregoing regular jobs and careers. Their expressed values were nonviolence and love. Their plea was "Make love not war". They promoted openness and tolerance as alternatives to the restrictions and regimentations they saw in middle class society. The hippies promoted the recreational use of hallucinogenic drugs as a way of expanding consciousness. In the post-Second World War America, the medium of rock music also allowed youths to express their sense of solidarity which was often in opposition

to adult society. Deadheads have been described as cult like members of a nomadic subcultural community consisting of supporters of the music of the Grateful Dead, a rock and roll band that formed in the early 1960s in America. Deadhead subculture does incorporate many of the lifestyle values associated with the bohemian youth movements of the 1950s and 1960s. These values include: passive resistance, particularly in the political arena; physical, psychical or existential movement; dissociation with the material comforts of their middle class origins; expressivity and subjectivity, as opposed to conformity and deferred gratification; individualism, in the sense of a freedom to “do your own thing”; and exploration, particularly in spiritual quests for meaning (Miller, 1991). At the heart of this value system is a set of values that has spiritual connotations.

iv) Lifestyle — The particular objects of consumption, like denim jeans or leather jackets or motorbikes are the central elements of the subcultural style of the youth cultures. These elements express a range of meanings and values of a particular youth culture. For example, motorbike represents male centered experiential sensibilities such as quest for freedom, recklessness, outlaw which are sought after by the members of motorbike gangs. The mechanical features of the motorbike also correspond to the features of the motorbike gangs themselves. Motorbike’s strength, roughness, fierce acceleration, the aggressive thumping of its exhaust matches and symbolize the assertive masculinity and the rough camaraderie of the gang members.

(Willis, 1978) **v) Impact of mass media, technology and consumerism** — Youth cultures are affected by the objects and ideas churned out by cultural industries like media, music and fashion. Communities which are cut off from the kinds of technology which can disseminate ideas and information widely will have less diverse youth cultures. The diffusion of cultural images (music, fashion, language, cultural practices) through technology has led to youth cultures becoming more heterogeneous and less static world over. There are exchanges amongst different styles, and coexistence of many different kinds of cultural practices. Young people do not generally identify with one style only. They may rather get influences from many and they often make up a style of their own. Youth are not just passive receivers of mass

media images. Rather there is productive reception. They take the concepts, images and ideas from media and mix and match them in the way they want to construct an identity.

vi) Help in evolving the dominant culture — The youth cultural practices, fads, language inevitably filter into the culture at large and influence the fashion and the life style in the general culture. What starts out as experimentation with new identities at smaller scale gradually become more common.

Mizrach (2006) pointed out that the cyber age is helping to create new identities for people, i.e., the cyborg, slacker, virtual, mutant and mediant. Many of today’s subcultures (cyberpunks, ravers, modern primitives, zippies) are experimenting with these new kinds of identities already, as a sort of rehearsal or practice for when they will be more common. As always, these subcultures are showing in microcosm where large sectors of society will be heading in the future. Thus, youth cultures don’t constitute only a rejection of the larger culture but a challenge for the larger culture to adapt to. They lead the society into new areas of growth.

1.2 Consumerism, Youth and Globalization

One of the shorthand ways of assessing the reach of globalization is to find evidence of global images, symbols and practices of consumption the world over. These pertain to fashion, music, sports, leisure, entertainment, food preferences, travel etc. Examples include spread of hip-hop music the world over, the popularity of McDonalds in China, and the high viewership of American soaps in India. Youth are typically seen as the vanguard of these practices and the first to bend to what is understood to be the homogenizing pressures of globalization, a globalization fundamentally tied to Americanization. A closer look at youth cultures, however, reveals that globalization is not straightforwardly a story of homogenization. Rather youth world over understand and negotiate with the forces of globalization in light of one’s local values, needs and priorities. The engagement with such forces is structured by the culture’s own preoccupations about tradition and modernity. A popular form of music amongst north Indian youth, Bhangra pop, is an instance of fusion music reflecting a blend of western and folk elements. Indo-western dresses are also popular amongst Indian men and women. A good example of global-local

combination can be seen in the way the international restaurant chains like Pizza Hut, Dominos, McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) had to “Indianize” their food items to suit indigenous tastes.

Blum (2009) suggests that societies use three strategies in dealing with globalization imperatives. They are — absorption, rejection and assertion. Absorption implies a mechanical and uncritical assimilation of globalization influences. Rejection occurs when societies appeal to nationalist sentiments and view globalization as a threat to the collective sense of identity. Assertion is a strategy that attempts to balance one’s sense of collective identity with efforts towards global integration. Globalization affects different sections of society differently which correspondingly employ different kinds of strategies. Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of a Hindu Nationalist organization called Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), has shot to prominence in recent times for opposing the Valentine’s Day celebrations in the Hindi hinterland on the ground that it is a western concept and it spoils the Indian culture because it promotes indecent expression of love. The outfit has vandalized restaurants, shops, hotels celebrating the day and also beaten couples who frequented these places and parks. Kakar (1995) stated that such a self conscious, fundamentalist Hindu identity is a consequence of global modernity which has led to migration from geographical regions and cultural homes and disappearance of traditional work identities. This has resulted in loss of familiar, stable community life and ancestral ideals and values. In a bid to reclaim a personal sense of identity and heal the feelings of loss, a sense of cultural identity is increased, restored or constructed.

Westernization is viewed as a threat and thus rejected. Nandy, Trivedi, Mayaram and Yagnik (1997) provided a brief analysis of the activities of this volatile group. The youth power of Dal is drawn mainly from the ranks of the poor, upper caste population of the smaller cities and semi urban areas. They are partly educated and socialized to enter the burgeoning modern sector of India but are often jobless. The VHP helps them to cope with their economic and social anxieties by handing them a cause to fight for and by persuading them that on their young shoulders lies the responsibility of restoring to the Hindus their lost honour and pride. As if out to prove their worth to society and themselves,

the Bajrang Dal youth have expressed their restlessness and frustrations through some of the more violent incidents that have taken place as part of the Ramjanmabhumi - Babri Masjid agitation.

1.3 Media and Its Impact on Youth

Media has a variety of forms — print media (includes newspaper, magazines, pamphlets, comics, books), electronic media (television, radio, films, laptops, tablets, cell phones, mp3 players, game systems, CD ROMS, DVD) and digital media (internet and social media, mobile apps etc.). These have pervaded the lives of human being extensively, affecting especially the youth in a significant way, in their daily activities, studies, work, social relationships and their worldviews. The current generation is often referred to as the “Net generation”, the “millennium generation”, and “digital natives”. These children involve themselves to a great extent in a media rich environment, using computers, playing online games, constantly communicating and connecting with their friends by electronic devices, right from their early childhood. As they grow up, they use more and more media tools, as part of their learning as well as leisure and entertainment. Youth are described as having created a bedroom culture that facilitates their media consumption without parental supervision or limitation.

Adolescence characterizes independence and autonomy from the parents and the family. They interact more with their peer group and extend their social relationships beyond the family. Media technologies (internet, messengers, WhatsApp etc.) play a major role here in communication, social interaction and relationship formation. Even after coming back from school/college, youth continue to be in contact with friends at school/college or remote friends through social networking sites or mobiles. This continuous contact provides a sense of co-presence, of being together with others in a virtual space. Social networking sites allow people to join up or invite others who are likeminded.

Media is also being employed for identity formation and expression by the youth. On social networking sites, users are required to present information about themselves such as age, gender, location, education and interests. This is often used by the youth to express the

unexplored aspects of the self and to create a virtual persona. This has the potential of turning maladaptive for the person who loses a sense of real self or when the contradiction between real and virtual self becomes too wide. On the other hand, playing with online identities allows acting out of conflicts, to work on significant personal issues. Being online detaches the individual from the constraints imposed on real self in terms of location and social roles. The youth have the opportunity to express online their “real” or inner selves, using the relative anonymity of the internet to be the person they want to be. Yet another opportunity that media offer is production of media content. In social media, user generated content flourishes. Bloggers post news, their personal thoughts and feelings and analysis of news, music and films, independent musicians distribute their music, amateur photographers post their photos, or distribute their videos. Through these ways, young people build their identities and socialize with others in an information based society. No longer are youth pawns in the hands of commercial companies that control media technology but they are also empowering themselves by using digital spaces to produce internet content and reaching out with their innovative presentations to large and global audience.

Immersion in the media rich culture influences the skills and interests of teens in important ways. Research suggests that that they think and process information differently from previous generations. They depend on media technologies for searching information, for learning and communicating with others. Thus, media is shaping their learning and social preferences. They also are eager to acquire skills needed to develop creative multimedia presentations. Media multitasking has become a way of life. Young are constantly switching between checking email, browsing the net, posting on Facebook and sending a message on their mobiles. The ever present perceived need of the youth to be in contact with peers coupled with the sense of curiosity and experimenting attitude of the youth sometimes expose them to risk of contact from strangers and exposure to harmful sites. Internet addiction is also emerging as a significant potential danger for the net generation.

Television has been another media which has come under scrutiny in relation to the impact it

has on the viewer’s mental health. A substantial amount of research has investigated the effect of television viewing on aggression. There are two kinds of offerings that television makes to its viewers — young or old. One is entertainment. The viewer takes a passive pleasure in being entertained, live out a fantasy through the characters on the television screen, identify with exciting and attractive characters, get away from real life problems and escape real life boredom. Second is information.

2. Sum up

In youth, the relationship between self and society is particularly tenuous. Youths are prone to creating and joining subcultures as a means of giving an experience of common belonging and at the same time a heightened version of their own innermost personal experiences, disappointments, dreams and desires. Musical taste, dressing styles, living arrangements often become symbols of affective sensibilities which are used by adolescents and youth to distinguish themselves from adults and from each other. Youth’s involvement in revolutionary movements like Chinese Cultural Revolution and Naxalism in India are further instances of youth’s efforts at changing the social system. Youth subcultures and activism experiment with consumerist and technological trends which are spread globally through media. The extent to which youth across the world are exposed to mass media, digital technologies and globalization differs. This differential access to media and technology impacts the formation of youth identity differentially.

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