
THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON TEENAGERS

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Abstract

The media exerts an enormous, almost a normative influence, over the lives of men, women, adolescents and children. It influences, particularly among teenagers, the ways in which individuals and groups dress, talk, behave, and think. The media, in the forms of movies, television, radio, and print as well as the new electronic communications media of the Internet, helps to connect individuals to one another and to the world. Invariably, this powerful influence shapes the ways in which viewers or participants perceive the world and their own place within that world.

Given that teenagers are often highly impressionable and subject to such influences, this survey will consider the effects of media on this particular age group. Specifically, the survey will consider the ways of media influence on teens and at the end, solutions for the problems related to them.

Key words: The mass media, teenagers, influence, television, internet, facebook, shaping opinions...

REZIME

Mediji vrse ogroman, skoro normativni uticaj na zivote ljudi, zena, omladine i dece. To utice, posebno medju tinejdzerima, na nacine na koje se pojedinci i grupe oblace, razgovaraju, ponasaju i misle. Mediji u formi filmova, televizije, radija i stampe, kao i novi elektronski medij komunikacije na internetu, pomazu povezivanju pojedinca sa drugim u svetu. Bez izuzetaka, ovaj mocni uticaj oblikuje nacine na koje gledaoci ili ucesnici doživljavaju svet i svoje mesto u okviru tog sveta.

S obzirom da je tinejdzere veoma lako imresionirati i da lako podlezu uticajima, ovo istrazivanje ce razmotriti efekte medija na ovom uzrastu. Konkretno istrazivanje ce razmotriti nacine uticaja medija na tinejdzere i na kraju resenja problema vezanih za njih.

Kljucne reci: mediji, tinejdzeri, uticaj, televizija, internet, facebook, oblikovanje misljenja...

The mass media refers collectively to all media technologies which are used for mass communication, and to the organizations which control these technologies. Since the 1950s, in the countries that have reached a high level of industrialization, the mass media consisting of cinema, radio and TV has a key role in political power. The mass media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions on a variety of important issues, both through the information that is dispensed through it and through the interpretations it places upon this information. It also plays an important role in shaping modern culture, by selecting and portraying a particular set of beliefs, values, and traditions (an entire way of life), as reality. That is, by portraying a certain interpretation of reality, it shapes reality to be more in line with that interpretation. The mass media consists of the internet, television, newspapers and radio. The Internet is significantly more influential than any other media. It is nearly twice as influential as TV and eight times more influential than traditional print media. The mass media is good for socializing and important in reporting people essential information and news, but it very often wastes people time and distracts their attention.

The mass media has a huge influence on people of all ages but teenagers are exposed to mass media more than any other adults are. In lack of interesting places for socializing and leisure activities, teenagers turn to social networks which are more available and cheaper than other ways for searching companionships.

The internet is absolutely the winner when we talk about the influence of media on teenagers. The other media like TV and newspapers are less but also present in teenagers' proportion of daily activities. During this period of growing up, they try to talk, dress and behave like popular TV and music stars. They choose which group of people to belong to, and friends to hang out with. If you want to keep in step with modern technology, it is almost impossible to resist the need to join Facebook, Twitter or MySpace... Teenagers ignore their studying and sport activities in exchange for sitting in front of their computers. Their body does not develop and grow properly and they often have health problems.

Teenagers' views on things, attitudes and opinions change a lot too. They copy styles of famous people and sometimes forget who they really are. They try to look like celebrities but they do not know how to get good marks at school. The internet imposes a model of style, behaviour, attitudes and fashion and that makes children look alike and act similarly. When you walk down the street, you can see many teens wearing the same clothes. Rich children slur poor ones and that becomes very normal in teen societies.

As we can see, the influence of media on teenagers is very big and it probably goes in the wrong direction. What is more, it has a very painful and harmful effect on growing up... What should we do or better still, what is necessary to be done to stop the negative influence of the mass media on teenagers? Is it too late? We must do something before it gets too late. Sport and science must become our priorities and they must be promoted more than nowadays so that teenagers can become more interested in them... That will change their attitudes and the way of thinking and in that way their way of life will be changed a lot.



Everyone has their own entertainment

Every teenager has his own activities and things he loves doing in his free time. There are too many leisure activities and the choice is big. They can read, play computer games, watch TV, go for a walk, run, or surf the Internet. Their period of growing up is specific because every activity becomes boring to them after some time of doing it. Because of that, teenagers tend to do something new all the time. What they will choose depends on the character of each child.



The survey showed that:

Walking and sports are very good for children's health and proper physical and mental growth. In this respect, boys are better than girls are. Walking and sports are favourite pastime for them. 57% of them love doing sports and going walking. On the other hand, only 27.5% of girls prefer physical activities as their favourites. Every third girl and every fourth boy choose chatting on the internet or texting their friends as their free time activities. Also 24.5% of girls and 7% of boys like wasting their time watching TV. I must notice that it is too much wasted time and it is unhealthy, too. Chatting on the Internet and texting friends is never and can never be the same as hanging out with friends in the park or on the football pitch.

Reading, which should be the most popular, is the last on the teenagers' list in this statistics. Namely, only 13% of boys, the same as girls, like reading.

Everything is good, but in moderation. I strongly believe that parents must try to spend more time with their children and try to find what the best is for them.



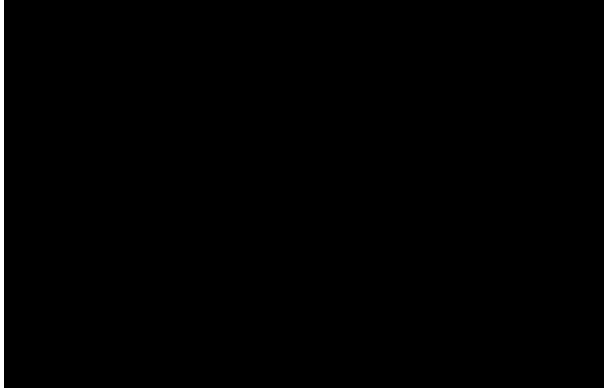
Teenagers' leisure time is stolen by the mass media

As it is already mentioned, the influence of media on teenagers is very big. They spend too many hours being entertained by the mass media. Today when technology has rapidly progressed an average student must use modern devices because if he does not do that there is no future for him.

Some boys and girls spend more than 10 hours per day being entertained by the mass media, which is, everybody agrees, too much. Some of them spend even more than 70 or 80 hours, which becomes their obsession. That might sound strange but examples like this really exist.



In my school more than 40 % of girls do not know how many hours per week they spend being entertained by the mass media. Statistically speaking "only" 17.5% of boys gave the same answer.



17% of girls and 16% of boys are entertained by the mass media less than 20 hours. Three of ten girls and one of five boys spend about 25 hours trying to find some fun on TV or surfing the net.... Merely 14% girls spend more than 35, but 47% boys spend more than 35 hours being entertained by the mass media.

In my opinion that is too many hours per week of “socializing” with the mass media per week.

Teenagers who waste their time doing stupid things can find something more useful for them and their surrounding. Certainly, there can always be something that they can do instead and that can be useful. For example, teenagers can organize an association for helping the environment, or some groups of support, or go out and help people in need.

The mass media’s effects



We live in a society that depends on information and communication to keep moving in the right direction and do our daily activities like work, entertainment, health care, education, personal relationships, travelling and everything else that we have to do. If we want to be well informed and have friends, we must be over exposed to the mass media. Unfortunately, that can make people do some things before they think about that and that can often change their life... How does the mass media affect teens?

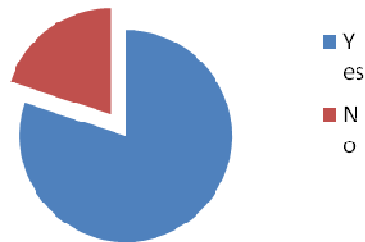
The media effects on teenagers can be different. Sometimes it can help us and give good advice, but I am afraid, there are more negative things that teenagers can adopt by spending too many hours entertained by the mass media...

In my research about half of the respondents answered that the mass media has more positive than negative effects on them. On the other hand 40 % of students said entertaining media causes more negative ones.

There are some positive and negative influences on young people.

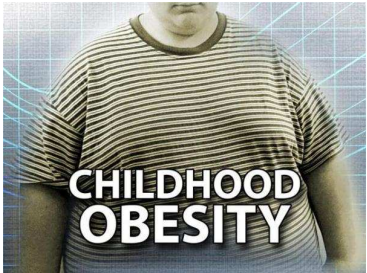
Here is a positive influence example: if there is a sport that is getting a lot of attention by the media and gains popularity among your friends and society, you will more likely want to practice that sport and be cool with all your friends. The result is that you will have fun with your friends and be healthier because of the exercise you are doing.

Teens become too lazy, skinny obese,...



One of the most positive effects of media today is the ease with which teenagers have learned to embrace technology – be it the computers, Internet or the ipods. The teenagers have no phobia for technology. Media has also contributed to increase the overall awareness of teenagers about their surroundings. In addition to this, media has also resulted in enhanced overall knowledge and understanding of curriculum subjects owing to the vast information resources that the media has to offer. If managed properly, media can be effectively used to

generate awareness amongst teenagers about issues like sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, drugs, alcohol and smoking.



These are the negative effects of mass media on teenagers - they buy what they see on TV, what their favorite celebrity advertise and what is acceptable by



society based on the fashion that the media has imposed on them. TV, newspapers or magazines promote bad ones to be products we can trust and also based on what everyone else that we know is buying, and their decision is mostly based on the media. In addition to this, one of the most profitable business is serving calorie food in the media, which is tasty and almost all of us love it, even though it can be very harmful to our health.

Another negative influence on teenagers that has grown over the last years are anorexia and obesity. There are millions of adolescents fighting obesity, but at the same time they are exposed to thousands of advertisements of junk food, while the ideal image of a successful person is told to be thin and wealthy. Moreover, more women are obsessive with losing weight even when they are not obese. There are many thin women that want to look like the super models and thin celebrities so they engage in eating disorders which leads to severe



health issues and even death.

The answer to my question about teenagers' becoming lazy, aggressive, too skinny or obese because of the mass media was not surprising - more than 85 percent declared that teens can fall under such an influence of the media. Apart from that, about half of respondents said the mass media does not influence their lifestyle in the sense of changing their eating habits and perception of the ideal body image. However, 80 % of the interviewed underscored the role of the media in changing habits in nutrition and their personal style, as well as the perfect body look.

Moreover, when we watch TV or a movie, we usually see many images of violence and people hurting others. The problem with this is that it can become a traumatic experience especially with our children, as we see it more and more. Our kids that are starting to grow and are shaping their personality, values and beliefs can become aggressive or they can lose a sense of reality. In the past years there have been some cases of kids carrying a gun at school and even hurting others with it. Those kids have been linked to excessive use of violent video games and war images.

In my opinion the way to stop or prevent bad and negative influence of the media is to learn how to use it safely.

Teenagers should set aside a part of their day for noneducational media, such as TV, and keep the rest of the day separate. They should also respect their limit and do not go over it. In my opinion, young people shouldn't spend



more than one or two hours in front of a screen — TV, computer and movies — each day. Everyone ought to be able to separate fiction from reality in the media and use their own judgment. Using knowledge about media will help teens to stay safe and healthy as well. And a message to all the young people: Just because you are growing up in the world run by media does not mean you have to be one of the media's statistics!

How big is the role of the mass media in shaping up your opinion?

Too many teenagers are exposed to the mass media. While they watch TV or spend time on facebook, they “absorb” other people’s opinions and start looking up to different ‘celebrities’. Teenagers change their attitudes and behaviour, too.

There are several more negative media effects on teenagers as well. The amount of excessive violence in media – be it the television, movies or the video games, tends to increase aggressive tendencies in teenagers. The amount of celebrities created by the media causes many children to make irrational demands for designer clothing, accessories and other perks of the celebrity life that they are exposed to. Glorification of unhealthy habits like smoking, drug abuse and alcohol can encourage these habits in teenagers, which can permanently scar their lives.



Only 2% of girls and 4% of boys admit that they surely shape up their opinions while they are exposed to the mass media. 29% of girls and 43% of boys disagree that they form opinions under the influence of the mass media. They say that there is no way that they do this. Every third girl and every fourth boy believes that the mass media play an important role in shaping up their opinion. In addition to this, some of them or 2/5 girls and 3/10 boys think that it depends on what kind of shows and programs they watch or sites on the Internet where they surf.

I am sure that it does not matter what people in the mass media say, every teenager ought to have his own opinion and attitudes and to be unique in everything they do. In my opinion, each person is individual and should not try to be someone else. Teenagers should believe in themselves because only in that way will they achieve what they dream about.

Homework is not as funny as the media is

The days of children coming home from school, eating homemade lunch and cookies and then going outside to play with their friends until it is time to do homework are gone. Today, older children are often home alone after school. As a result, they sometimes are tempted to spend their time being entertained with video games, watching television, downloading music and chatting on the Internet instead of doing their homework and more active leisure activities. These temptations are all competing for children's time at the expense of their education, health and well-being.

Teenagers spend about 6 hours at school. They should also study at home and do their exercises and practice. Their parents sometimes give them house chores so sometimes boys must mow the lawn or girls must do the washing up or iron clothes. Actually, do teenagers do their obligations and chores? Do they have time for any of their obligations and duties after the whole day spent in front of the TV or surfing the Internet?

The statistic is devastating. More than 60% girls and 50% boys neglect their studying in favour of being over exposed to the mass media. Every fifth girl and every fourth boy do not do what they should do almost every day and disregard studying. It is shocking to find out that only one of ten girls and one of five boys rarely waste their time being exposed to the mass media. Furthermore, 12.5 % girls and 11% boys neglect their studying. As we can see boys and girls have the same habits, which are, unfortunately, wrong. It should be clear to everyone that good results at school cannot be achieved without hard work and practicing at home. In my opinion, teenagers should try to realize what is more important, turn off their computers and TVs and start studying.

Face -to-face is not “cool”

Relationships with others are at the heart of adolescent experience. Young people are concerned with making and keeping friends, and they invest a great deal of energy in group social life in order to do so. They place a lot of importance on belonging, on being included

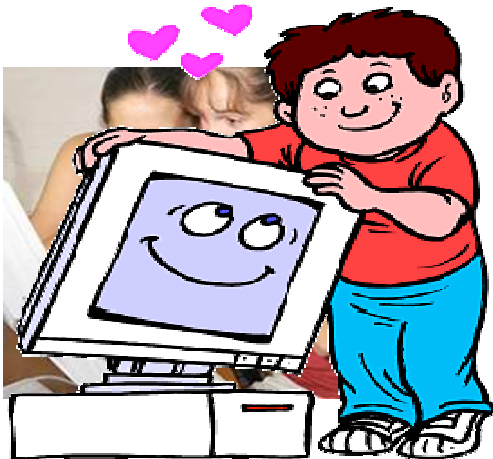


and on being part of a group. Group affiliation not only supplies emotional security, but also is a source of status and reputation with motivational properties. Thus the group context of social relations assumes a centrally important place in personality development during the adolescent years.

Due to the speed of life, the day of 24 hours is short and in the absence of time, young people, in order to meet their need for company of others, must find a way to keep in touch with the people around them. Social networks are an ideal solution for this problem, but in many cases that leads to the formation depending on the chat, and send messages with friends.

Also ignored are the "old" forms of communication and often face-to-face conversations are being neglected today. New media such as the internet and cell phones are not only easily accessible, but also "cooler" than for example writing letters. Sometimes you can hear from teens that that ways of talking are old-fashioned and not interesting.

Of all respondents 60% said that the popular media are better than those who are left behind. On the other hand, one of five teens thinks that the face-to-face communication is normal feature of the human race. However, when asked whether a conversation over a cup of coffee can replace the chat on the internet 4 / 5 students stated that this is impossible and it is better to talk about the problems 'live' with a friend or someone who will listen and understand you.



I do not know how this is possible, but it is obvious that teenagers grab these new media as a modern way of communication, but they still know that what they are doing is wrong. Social networks are increasingly spreading among the young ones, but I hope that they will soon realize what the best for them is.

Reading, who cares about that?

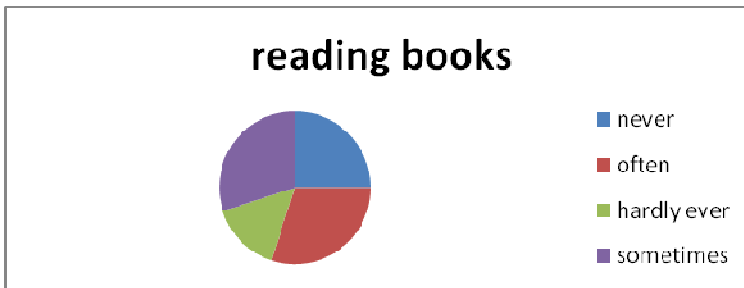
Reading books was very popular in the past... Students had to read school books and every child had to read books at home... There was no TV and reading was the only way to have some fun... "Romeo and Juliet", "20 000 leagues under the sea" and "Don Quixote" are some of the most famous books in the world... They were read a lot up to about 20-30 years ago, but now some children have never even heard of these books. This might seem funny, but when you ask a teenager about some famous writer and he does not know to tell you anything about him, you will realise how big this problem is. In addition, you should know that they will think you are crazy when you can ask something like that... That simply is not cool....

The survey conducted in my school showed that:

- 17% of girls and 33.5% of boys never read books recreationally which I think is so bad for them...Books are very important because by reading them we not only increase our vocabulary but also our knowledge and knowledge is the food for the mind and soul.
- Two of five girls and one of five boys read books often....and 21.5% of girls and only 10% of boys read books hardly ever read.
- 24% of girls and 37% of boys sometimes read books.



I wonder how students can improve their knowledge without reading. It is hard to say. When we read we learn new things and we find what we are interested in or what we would love to do. Reading also increases our ability to imagine and we become more creative. The statistics suggests that books are not very popular and interesting for children. I think teachers should talk to students and try to explain them that reading as well as travelling broadens our horizons. TV and the Internet can also play a great part in popularising reading among teenagers.



Playing sport is healthy

Many teens in high school go for sports. A lot of them try one sport or another because they think it will make them popular or get them more dates. While this may seem like a silly reason, there are lots of other benefits of sports that teenagers may overlook. Here are some reasons:

With TV, movies, computers, and video games becoming more and more popular, it has become so much easier for teens to be by themselves rather than going out with friends. Kids used to hang out in parks or drive around town; now they just sit at home. Getting teens into sports gives them the opportunity to go out and socialize. While they may not find a new best friend, they will learn how to interact and work as a team; something they will find useful later in life. One of the biggest problems in our society today is obesity, and it is not just a problem with adults. More and more kids are becoming overweight. Joining a team sport will help teens get out and get some exercise without feeling pressured to lose weight or get in shape. Plus, if he or she sees that their physical condition is causing them to under-perform, they may be motivated to do other activities to get healthy. By the time when children reach their teenager years they will know the direction and be encouraged to continue developing a healthy style of living.

In my school 3/5 of examined said that they play some sport and most of them are boys. It is a big problem because more than 60% girls do not love and play any. Most of the students who said they play sports emphasized that they do that because they love it and it is healthy



and helps them to stay fit and slim. This is good for their life and I think they should carry on and make their peers do the same.

Something about the most popular social network - Facebook

Facebook (stylized facebook) is a social networking service and website launched in 2004, operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. As of January 2011, Facebook has more than 600 million active users. Users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile.

Additionally, users may join common interest user groups, organized by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics. Facebook is the most popular social network in Serbia too.

Some kids spend more than 7 hours per day on Facebook. I asked pupils in my school what teenagers would do in case facebook stopped to exist. Most of them said that they would do nothing or would not know what to do. There are some students who think that it would be a very big, bed, global problem because millions of users would be disappointed, nervous and fall into depression. But, there are those who hope new "facebook" will appear soon so that they can move to other social networks. Some respondents said life would go on and they would study more, hang out with their friends, and pay more attention to reading. If this ever happens, young people will have a chance to turn to a healthier way of life and growing up.

Conclusion

How would teenagers imagine an ideal day without mass media? There is a wide range of activities they can do. Students said that they would turn to sport, walking around the town, hiking, having barbecues, reading, studying more and they were really creative while thinking about that. On the other hand, some of them answered that they would drink all day and get sousing. Simply, we must ask ourselves whether it is better with the media or without them???



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