

CYBER MEDIA, SELF PERCEPTIONS, BODY IMAGE AND FASHION CONSUMPTION (A STUDY OF FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES IN HYDERABAD)

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Abstract

The Cyber media have not left the India untouched though the latter continue to operate within the broader legal, cultural, political framework and as per the Islamic tenets. As a result, there is a decisive change in the programming and formats and the Arabic media products are going through a transition. The cyber media and the global corporate media have reached unprecedented levels of saturation around the globe and it is impossible to be "outside" this wired media system. The cyber media carry with it the values of the US and western cultural principles, in particular: consumerism, individualism and free-market ideologies. The type of cultural material that they provide is significant. What, for instance, is the consequence of advertising images celebrating materialism and consumerism being put on the internet, broadcast/telecast in so-called traditional societies? The debate on the impact of western cultures on the non western culture continues without substantive conclusions. Many researchers argue that the western cultures dilute or change non-western cultures for the worse. They argue that consumerist western values tear apart the fabric of local societies.

Introduction

On the other hand, accepting the fact that the flow of global culture is complex, there is evidence that regional, national and local flows of media are highly significant, and often, more popular than global ones. Similarly, there is much evidence that local audiences prefer the products developed within their own nations and in line with their own cultural values.

In general, however, a key area of concern is the effect of European and American cultural forms on the rest of the world. Effects research is an attempt to study.

the impact of global media on local communities around the world. Just like every other type of media effects research in Theories of Media Communication, the effects of the new media and the global media are controversial and involve many different strands of research.

Body Image

The media can affect a wide variety of groups, but have the most influence on women, including young girls. The way media portrays women in television, movies, and advertisements and in the cyber space make an indelible impact on the physical and psychological dimensions of women/ college girls. The popular media (television, movies, magazines, etc.) have, since World War II, increasingly held up a thinner and thinner body (and now ever more physically fit) image as the ideal for women and the trend continues in the new media, The ideal man is also presented as trim, but muscular.

Today's advertisers go to huge lengths to sell products and to convince women that their bodies are never good enough. Female models are typically tall, thin, young, white and appear "perfect" while more and more, male models are lean, very muscular and equally "perfect" in their appearance. Body image is the way people perceive themselves, and the way they believe others perceive them (Cash, 1990). Why is "the

thin ideal” so sought after? Why does society perpetuate this unrealistic body type? What effect is this ideal having upon women today?

There seems to be a trend between the thinness of models, and the desired thinness of today's society of women. The thinner models get, the thinner women think they have to be. This shows that the media, including the cyber media are setting a standard that women believe they have to follow in order to be attractive. By using such tall, thin, and beautiful models, the media is sending out a message that in order to be beautiful, you have to be tall, thin and look like those models.

Table: 1: A peek into the past

| The Era | The Look of the Day for Women |
|---|---|
| 1800's | A large body is a sign of health and fertility. Corsets narrow the waist and enhance the bust. |
| 1890's | Actress Lillian Russell at 200 lbs. or 91 kg. is the most celebrated beauty of the time. |
| 1910's | Paris designer creates slim sheath dresses, declares that breasts are “out”. |
| 1920's | Era of the flat-chested, slim-hipped flapper. First dieting craze of the 20th Century begins. |
| 1950's & 1960's | Voluptuous full figured shapes of Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield are popular. |
| 1967 | British model Twiggy (5'6 or 168 cm. and 91 lbs. or 41 kg.) arrives on the scene – and the diet industry explodes. |
| 1970's & 1980's | Models gradually become taller, thinner and begin to show toned muscle definition. Breasts make a fashion come-back. |
| Early 1990's | Waif-like figure of Kate Moss presents a wasted “heroin chic” look and a pre-teen body. |
| Late 1990's | Tall, very thin models with no visible body fat and muscles highly toned by hours of working out. Large breasts remain in style – but are rare in this body type without the help of breast implants. |
| The average North American woman is 5'4 or 163 cm and 140 lbs. or 64 kg. Models in the 1970's weighed 8percent less than the average woman. By the 1990's models weighted 23percent less. | |
| 2000 and beyond | Real bodies come in all shapes and sizes. ...Set your own trend!!! |

The Omani society seems to be fast catching up with this fad for thinness and being fair as they are being exposed to global media messages and cultural inputs. With wealth accruing from abundant oil resources and with the welfare state taking care of all the needs of the citizens, the expanding media outlets, the advent of the new media and

affordability has made access to media and global brands much easier.

The present study examines the influence of cyber media in particular, and media in general on the body image and several other aspects among female undergraduates studying in a select college in Hyderabad. The study assumes significance as there is a paucity of research on the subject of media consumption in the Hyderabad context as also because this crop of youngsters are born into a world dominated by media messages crossing the world moving towards consumerism.

Review of Literature

A literature search revealed that there is a substantial research in the Western and European societies. While some looked at the socio-cultural factors, influence of mass media, research from a health perspective examined eating disorders leading to anorexia. But there is a dearth of studies on media influences, particularly, cyber media on body image and other aspects in Arab societies including in Oman. These societies have a relatively short media history and have been exposed to media images coming from the West and also from other Muslim nations, some of which are liberal in their approach to media. What follows is a review of the available literature which are mostly done in the West.

Silverstein & Colleagues (1986), observe that as female models have become thinner, women in society have tried to follow the trend. The media is likely to be among the most influential promoters of the thin ideal for women”

Wiseman (1990) points out that the studies presume that the media promotes a body shape standard for a woman that is unrealistically thin. Furthermore, as the body shape for women in the media has progressively become thinner, the correlation between thin body shape and perception of attractiveness has increased.

Pipher (1994) posits that Media's Portrayal of this "ideal" thinness can create eating disorder among young girls. As a result of the media's definition of beauty, most women try to mimic this "ideal" thinness even though it may be impossible. When the unnatural thinness became attractive in the media, girls then did unnatural things to become thin.

Hesse-Biber (1996) observes that from Miss America to Playboy centerfolds, the ideal female has become thinner while the average American woman has become heavier over the last forty years. In the 1960s television and fashion magazines became the authority upon image. Fashion photography wanted stick thin models that did not compete with the clothing. This emphasis upon thin has led to an extreme increase in diet articles and advertisements which all encourage weight loss. This weight loss is not promoted for health reasons but rather for aesthetic purposes.

Smolak & Levine, 1996 Thompson et al., 1999; Harrison & Hefner, 2006; argue that during childhood, adolescence, media exposure is part of a constellation of sociocultural factors that promote a thinness schema for girls and the muscularity schema for boys. A child's body image develops as the result of many influences:

- A newborn begins immediately to explore what her body feels like and can do. This process continues her whole life.
- A child's body image is influenced by how people around her react to her body and how she looks.
- A pre-adolescent becomes increasingly aware of what society's standards are for the "ideal body."

Henderson-King's (1997) study on "Media Effects on Women's Body Esteem" found that identification was an important factor when studying if media images have an effect upon body image. Henderson-King researched whether or not social factors of individual factors were related to a woman's body esteem. They found that media images do not similarly affect a woman's body esteem. When exposed to media images, they found that women who matched "the thin ideal" media image had a more positive self image. Women who did not match "the thin ideal" reported a more negative self image. Participants either overheard a conversation about people judgmental about a person's weight or about a friend's move. Then the participants viewed slides of either neutral or "ideal" images of women. Their research found that the women were not influenced by a conversation about weight before viewing media images. Their research found that body image was related to how closely the participants' body image matched the ideal.

Kristen Harrison (1997) in a survey of 232 female undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university in 1994, found that magazine reading and television viewing, especially exposure to thinness-depicting and thinness-promoting media, significantly predict symptoms of women's eating disorders. About 15 percent of the women met criteria for disordered eating--signs of anorexia or bulimia, body dissatisfaction, a drive for thinness, perfectionism and a sense of personal ineffectiveness

According to the study, women who frequently read fitness magazines for reasons other than interest in fitness and dieting display greater signs of disordered eating than women who rarely read them at all. Further, reading fashion magazines in particular is significantly related to a woman's drive for thinness and her dissatisfaction with her body, although magazine reading, in general, has little effect on body dissatisfaction.

Harrison says that the relationship between mass media consumption and symptoms of women's eating disorders appears to be stronger for magazine reading than for television viewing. However, watching "thin" shows is a consistent predictor of a woman's drive for thinness and viewing "heavy" shows is significantly related to body dissatisfaction.

Why does body dissatisfaction appear to be more strongly related to television viewing than magazine reading, whereas drive for thinness is more strongly related to magazine reading than television viewing? Similarly, why is body dissatisfaction related to viewing "heavy" shows and not "thin" shows? Harrison believes that the drive for thinness is a learned behavior that sources such as magazines explain how to achieve (e.g., dieting and exercise). Body dissatisfaction, on the other hand, is not associated with a particular action or behavior but is, instead, a set of attitudes, not intentions.

In a related study using the same sample of women, Harrison found that an interpersonal attraction to thin media personalities is related to disorder eating above and beyond the influence of mere exposure to media, even those that depict or promote thinness. She defines interpersonal attraction as a perceived similarity to a female celebrity, and a fondness for and a desire to be like the famous woman. Being attracted to "thin" characters in shows like "Melrose Place" and "Beverly Hills 90210" positively predicts general eating disorder symptoms--anorexia, bulimia, drive for thinness, perfectionism and ineffectiveness--whereas attraction to "average " and "heavy" media personalities do not.

"It seems clear that young women's patterns of disordered eating, including both attitudinal and behavioral tendencies, are related not only to the types of media they expose themselves to, but also to the way they perceive and respond to specific mass media characters," Harrison says. "This relationship may seem obvious to readers who are concerned with this issue and openly acknowledge the possibility that the media operate as transmitters of potentially dangerous socially desirable values and norms."

"Nonetheless, it bears restating for the benefit of any members of the research community and the general public who still believe media messages to be largely ineffectual in the lives of young people."

Rabak-Wagener (1998), in a study done by the Journal of American College Health found the media to be a mass marketer of the female body image. It has been proven that it is a strong force in creating the stereotype of the tall and thin women as the "ideal" beauty type. The Stereotype of the "ideal" woman is created by the extremely thin and beautiful models. Companies use this look to represent their products in advertisements. In our society women and girls tend to compare themselves to the models seen in the media.

Jean Kilbourne, (1999) a popular advocate for the prevention of negative portrayals of women in the media, says that many females spend time, energy, and money trying to look just like the perfect images of women that they see in the media. It is almost impossible to look completely flawless like they do.

Field et al. (1999) reported that the majority of nearly 550 working class adolescent girls were dissatisfied with their weight and shape. Almost 70percent of the sample stated that pictures in magazines influence their conception of the "perfect" body shape, and over 45percent indicated that those images motivated them to lose weight.

Further, adolescent girls who were more frequent readers of women's magazines were more likely to report being influenced to think about the perfect body, to be dissatisfied with their own body, to want to lose weight, and to diet.

Rumble, Cash, and Nashville 2000; cited in Klein & Shiffman, 2006 found that the schematic association of attractiveness and thinness with goodness was present in over 100 female characters appearing in 23 Walt Disney animated films produced over a 60-year period.

Fouts and Burggraf (1999, 2000) observed that thin female characters in television situation comedies were more likely than heavier female characters to be praised by male characters, and less likely to be insulted by male characters in ways deliberately tied to evocation of "canned" and supportive audience laughter.

Wilcox and Laird's (2000), "Impact of Media Images of Super-Slender Women on Women's Self-Esteem" concluded that those women affected by facial cues had a negative body image when exposed to super slender media images.

Wilcox and Laird studied the reactions of forty-one women exposed to images of normal weight models. These reactions were recorded on scales measuring body image and self esteem. The researchers also had the women adopt different facial expressions of emotion to see if their feelings were influenced by the facial expression of emotion. If the woman was more responsive and influenced by the facial expressions they were told to adopt, the images of slender models produced feelings of lower self-esteem and body

dissatisfaction. If the woman was unresponsive to these facial cues, the images of slender models increased the woman's self-esteem and body satisfaction. Those influenced by facial cues were similarly influenced by super slender media images, and exposure to the super slender media images produced a negative body image.

Jung et al. (2001) studied the Self-Schema or Self-Discrepancy? Found that for some types of women, exposure to thin media images produced a negative body image. They explored if self-schema or self-discrepancy explain body image. Self-schema is a generalization about the self. It is the traits that make a person an individual. These individual characteristics are developed from observations of their own behaviors, reactions of others to the self and social cues. Self-discrepancy is the finding of traits possessed by the ideal self and not the actual self. The researchers used a convenience sample of 102 college women. The participants were exposed to 40 media images and then responded to questionnaires. A two week interval was used between sessions. They found that women with higher self-discrepancy had lower self-esteem and body satisfaction.

Body image and self esteem has been measured by a number of scales. Franzoi's Body Esteem Scale, The Feel-Ideal Discrepancy, The Body Shape Questionnaire, and The Shape and Weight Based Self-Esteem Inventory are all scales used to identify the increasing dissatisfaction among women about their body image and self esteem. This dissatisfaction comes from a combination of internal and societal influences because the societal image of "the thin ideal" has become internalized. (Dorian, 2002).

Social Comparison theory claims that people compare themselves and their significant others with other people and images that they see as being representative of realistically attainable goals. What happens when the influence of media images has women now making the comparison of themselves and unrealistic goals? Why has society placed such importance upon physical beauty so much so that women begin to see their self worth as dependent upon the physical (Dorian, 2002)?

Societal values changed drastically in Fiji when satellites and television was introduced. After 38 months of exposure to these media images, females, of average age 17, changed their societal values and body image to reflect the western values of which they had been exposed. The girls were now more body conscious and more into dieting whereas before there was little talk of dieting and body satisfaction was much higher. Similarly, the same effect was found in Iran where western television was banned. Women were only shown on television with almost all of their bodies covered. It was found that Iranian women had higher body satisfaction than their American counterparts. (Dorian, 2002).

Other studies have found an effect of media images upon body image. Lin and Kulik's (2002) Social Comparison and Women's Body Satisfaction, found that social comparisons and exposure to thin model media images did have a negative effect upon body satisfaction. They researched how social comparisons affect self-esteem, body satisfaction, confidence, and anxiety. Participants were shown computer manipulated images of the same woman with either a thin or oversize body shape. The results found that this did not affect general self-esteem, but for those exposed to the thinner shape, it did negatively affect body satisfaction, confidence, and anxiety for those without a boyfriend.

Hargreaves (2002) found that teen-age girls who viewed commercials depicting women who modeled the unrealistically thin-ideal type of beauty caused adolescent girls to feel less confident, angrier and more dissatisfied with their weight and appearance.

Mundell (2002) , in a study on fifth graders, 10 year old girls and boys told researchers they were dissatisfied with their own bodies after watching a music video by Britney Spears or a clip from the TV show "Friends" .

Hofschire & Greenberg (2002), in another recent study on media's impact on adolescent body dissatisfaction, found that:

1. Teens who watched soaps and TV shows that emphasized the ideal body typed reported higher sense of body dissatisfaction. This was also true for girls who watched music videos.
2. Reading magazines for teen girls or women also correlated with body dissatisfaction for girls.
3. Identification with television stars (for girls and boys), and models (girls) or athletes (boys), positively correlated with body dissatisfaction.

Shelly Grabe, postdoctoral researcher and Janet Hyde, psychology professor, in the May issue of Psychological Bulletin, University of Wisconsin-Madison describe a sweeping analysis of 77 previous studies involving more than 15,000 subjects.

They found that exposure to media depicting ultra-thin actresses and models significantly increased women's concerns about their bodies, including how dissatisfied they felt and their likelihood of engaging in unhealthy eating behaviors, such as excessive dieting.

Although on one level the results seem obvious, Grabe believes many people still resist the idea that a societal influence, like the media, can have a real impact on how women view themselves. When individual experiments have found this relationship in the past, she explains, critics have often dismissed them for focusing on groups of particularly body-conscious women, such as college students, or exposing test subjects to unusually racy photos.

Grabe and Hyde, in contrast, analyzed data from every well-designed study on the topic they could find, thus avoiding much of this criticism. "We've demonstrated that it doesn't matter what the exposure is, whether it's general TV watching in the evening, or magazines, or ads showing on a computer," says Grabe. "If the image is appearance-focused and sends a clear message about a woman's body as an object, then it's going to affect women."

The researchers' analysis reveals that, on average, studies conducted in the 2000s show a larger influence of the media on women's body image than do those from the 1990s, says Grabe. The effect also appears to be growing. "This suggests that despite efforts to teach women and girls to be savvy about the media and have healthy body practices, the media's effect on how much they internalize the thin ideal is getting stronger," she says.

Recent research has established body dissatisfaction as a major risk factor for low self-esteem, depression, obesity, and eating disorders, such as bulimia. At the same time, women's displeasure with their bodies has become so common that it's now considered normal, says Grabe. She hopes that wider recognition of the media's role will encourage people to see the issue as a societal one, rather than as a problem of individual women as

it's viewed now. "I think we need to consider how we're using media images as a culture to share the values we think are important, and the effect that has on our well-being," she says.

The approach Grabe and Hyde took in their study, called meta-analysis, and offers a way to quantitatively examine an entire body of research at once. In their case, this meant 77 carefully selected studies of the effects of appearance-focused media images on women's body dissatisfaction, investment in their looks, adoption of the thin ideal, and eating behaviors and beliefs. The analysis also included controlled, experimental studies, in which these effects were tested directly, and investigations that correlated body concerns with women's self-reported consumption of media.

In simple terms, the meta-analysis placed test subjects from every study into two groups: those who were exposed to media images portraying women's bodies and the thin ideal, and those who weren't. It then asked whether differences existed between the two and the magnitude of the differences.

The researchers did find a significant difference, with women who were exposed to media reporting less satisfaction with their bodies. Notably, this difference was also seen across all four measures of body image concerns.

Grabe argues that the issue lies not with attraction to images of beauty or with women's desire to emulate them, but with what people have come to define as beautiful: bodies that are unnaturally and unhealthily thin.

"I want to stress it's totally normal for women to want to be attractive," says Grabe. "But what's happening in our society is that many women are striving toward something that's not very realistic or obtainable, and that leads to a lot of health consequences" (<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/107269.php>).

Bissell, K, (2002) found that that adolescent girls, and college women's impressions of their own bodies are influenced by the mass media portrayals of "ideal" body type."

It is easy to see that through advertisements and the use of perfect models, the media is portraying an "ideal" body type. Therefore, adolescent girls' perceptions of their own bodies are influenced by the perfection of these models.

Miguel Angel et al (2003), conducted a study on Parental Factors, Mass Media Influences, and the Onset of Eating Disorders in a Prospective Population-Based Cohort in Spain. The community cohort study sought to identify factors for eating disorders among 2862 girls who were 12 to 21 years of age through an Eating Attitudes Test (40-item version) and other questionnaires in 1997.

Heavier use of the printed media, in a earlier study was found to be associated with a higher propensity to weight concerns in a cross sectional study. Likewise, music videos (but not amount of television watching) predicted drive for thinness in another cross-sectional study. Therefore, there is ground for our data to support the influence of mass media on a higher risk of developing an ED. The likely explanation is that these media are transmitting to young girls an exaggerated pressure to be thin. An obvious consequence is the recommendation that the messages transmitted by images of actresses and models in printed media must be subjected to realistic standards of body size.

Media's Effect on Gender Identity

Many children watch between two and four hours of television per day. The presence or absence of role models, how women and men, girls and boys are presented, and what activities they participate in on the screen powerfully affect how girls and boys view their role in the world. Studies looking at cartoons, regular television, and commercials show that although many changes have occurred and girls, in particular have a wider range of role models, for girls "how they look" is more important than "what they do."

- Thompson (1997) in a study designed to examine how children described the roles of cartoon characters, children (ages four to nine) "perceived most cartoon characters in stereotypical ways: boys were violent and active and girls were domestic, interested in boys, and concerned with appearances."

- In another study, three weeks of Saturday morning toy commercials were analyzed. Results found that

1. Fifty percent of the commercials aimed at girls spoke about physical attractiveness, while none of the commercials aimed at boys referenced appearance.

2. Boys acted aggressively in 50percent of the commercials aimed at them, while none of the girls behaved aggressively.

3. With regard to work roles, no boys had unpaid labor roles, and girls were mainly shown in traditional female jobs or roles of unpaid labor (Sobieraj, 1996).

Dr. Nancy Signorielli, Professor of Communications at the University of Delaware examined the types of media most often viewed by adolescent girls: television, commercials, films, music videos, magazines and advertisements. While the study did find positive role models of women and girls using their intelligence and acting independently, the media also presented an overwhelming message that girls and women were more concerned with romance and dating (and it follows how they look), while men focus on their occupations (Signorielli, 1997).

The literature survey found some correlation between media images and a woman's body image and self-esteem. Media images have been shown to produce a great effect upon a woman's self worth. All of the studies used convenience sampling and studied available college students. Were these studies generalizable? If a woman was exposed the media images containing "the thin ideal", there would be a negative effect upon a woman's body image as opposed to women exposed to media images of average, normal sized models.

Methodological framework Aim

The broad aim of the study was to find out: what are the self-perceptions of female undergraduates in Hyderabad on body image, personal grooming products, food, music, lifestyle and their use of Cyber media, in particular and media in general.

Research questions

- Do female respondents use cyber media?
- What is the quantum of time spent on media by the cyber media users?
- Do the cyber media, among other media, promote the idea that slim and thin is beautiful and that being fair is beautiful?
- Do the respondents use cyber media to search for information on personalgrooming products and the amount spent on such products?
- Are the female respondents influenced by ads on purchase of personal grooming

products?

- What is the spending pattern among cyber media users on personal grooming products?
- What kinds of products do Cyber media users prefer-branded / local goods?
- What is the response pattern of the different types of media users in relation to- purchase of personal grooming products and amount spent preference for branded / local goods?
- Does the media hype influence the respondents to lose weight?
- What are the respondents' views on fashion?

Method

The quantitative survey method was adopted for the study and the universe comprised all the undergraduate female students in a select co educational college in Hyderabad. A convenience sample of 102 female undergraduates with an average age of 22 years was included. They included students from design, communication, and information technology and business disciplines.

The students were explained the objectives of the study and the questionnaire were administered to them after obtaining their consent. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire only if they found the questions comfortable to be answered.

The questionnaire had questions on media habits, time spent, purchases and whether they promoted the idea of thinness to be ideal and beautiful as also on fairness.. Most of the questions were dichotomous. The rest-retest method was employed to check the reliability of the questionnaire and the coefficient of correlation was 0.96. Also, the questionnaire had some open ended questions on media, cyber media influences on food, lifestyle, music and movies.

The data has been presented in tables using frequencies and percentages.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the study is that the sample was drawn from a select college and is not representative of the females in that age group. Also, the sample included Bilinguals- English and Telugu speaking leaving out a large chunk of females who knew only Telugu. The generalizations/conclusions drawn should be viewed against this background.

Data Analysis and Findings Table 2: Cyber Media Usage

| Cyber medi use a | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes No | 100 | 98.0 | 98.0 | 98.0 |
| Total | 2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 100.0 |
| | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Ninety eight percent of the respondents said that they use cyber media while a negligible two per cent said that they did not use cyber media.

Table 3: Cyber Media and Type of Users

| Type of user | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Heavy user 4-6 hours | 26 | 25.5 | 25.5 | 25.5 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| Moderate 2-4 hours | 59 | 57.8 | 57.8 | 83.3 |
| Light less than 2 hours | 17 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Respondents using internet were asked on the quantum of time spent on various media. Data in the table indicates that nearly 60 per cent of them used media for 2-4 hours – moderate users, while a quarter of them were heavy users spending 4-6 hours,

Table 4: Cyber Media Promoting the Idea of "Thin is Beautiful"

| Thinness | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 76 | 74.5 | 74.5 | 74.5 |
| No | 26 | 25.5 | 25.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Respondents were asked whether the cyber media promotes the idea of “thin “being beautiful”, nearly 75 per cent of them said “yes” while a quarter of them said ‘no’

Table 5: Cyber Media promoting the idea of "Fair is Beautiful"

| Fairness | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 75 | 73.5 | 73.5 | 73.5 |
| No | 27 | 26.5 | 26.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The response pattern was similar to the earlier question whether the cyber media promote the idea of being fair is beautiful. Nearly 75 percent of them said yes while just over 25 percent said “No”.

Table 6: Cyber Media and Search for Information on Personal Grooming Products

| Search | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 83 | 81.4 | 81.4 | 81.4 |
| No | 19 | 18.6 | 18.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Over eighty per cent of the respondents said that they searched for information on personal grooming products on the cyber media.

Table 7: Influence of Ads on Purchase of Personal Grooming Product

| Ad influence | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Yes No | 60 | 58.8 | 59.4 | 59.4 |
| Total | 41 | 40.2 | 40.6 | 100.0 |
| Missing System | 101 | 99.0 | 100.0 | |
| Total | 1 | 1.0 | | |
| | 102 | 100.0 | | |

On whether the advertisements influenced their buying decision with regard to purchase of personal care products, nearly 60 percent of the female respondents said that they

bought shampoos, deodorants, soaps and perfumes under the influence of advertisements on television.

Table 8: Cyber Media Users and Money Spent on Personal Grooming Products

| Amount Spent | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 100-500 | 37 | 36.3 | 37.8 | 37.8 |
| 500-1000 | 33 | 32.4 | 33.7 | 71.4 |
| 1000-1500 | 19 | 18.6 | 19.4 | 90.8 |
| 1500 and above | 9 | 8.8 | 9.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 98 | 96.1 | 100.0 | |
| Missing System | 4 | 3.9 | | |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | | |

The above table indicates that nearly 70 percent of the cyber users spend between 0-500- 1000 rupees per month on personal grooming products, A meager percentage- less than 10 percent of them spend above 1500 rupees

Table 9: Cyber Media Users and Preference for Branded / Local Goods

| Product | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Branded | 75 | 73.5 | 73.5 | 73.5 |
| Local | 27 | 26.5 | 26.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

On whether the female respondents preferred branded or local products, nearly 75 per cent said that they preferred branded products.

Type of Users

Respondents were categorized into heavy , moderate and light users depending on the time spent with various media- watching television, reading newspapers and use of cyber media. Heavy users were those who used media for 4-6 hours, moderate users used media for 2-4 hours and light users used media or less than two hours. The analysis below examines the responses of different users.

Table 10: Type of User and Purchase of Personal Grooming Product

| Type of User | Buy | | Total |
|---------------------|-----|----|-------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Heavy media user | 16 | 10 | 26 |
| Moderate media user | 37 | 22 | 59 |
| Light media user | 7 | 10 | 17 |
| Total | 60 | 41 | 102 |

Cross tabulation of the data indicates that over 60 per cent of the respondents buy personal grooming products-shampoos, deodorants, soaps, perfumes, lipsticks etc under the influence of the media. Thirty seven percent of the moderate users purchase personal health care products under the influence of media.

Table 11: Type of Users and Products Preferred

| Type of User | Products | | Total |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|-------|
| | Branded products | Local products | |
| User Heavy media user | 18 | 8 | 26 |
| Moderate media user | 47(47.94) | 12 | 59 |
| Light media user | 10 | 7 | 17 |
| Total | 75 (76.5) | 27(27.54) | 102 |

Over three quarters of the respondents purchase branded products while just a quarter of them prefer local products. Nearly 50 percent of the respondents who are moderate users of media said that they buy branded products.

Table 12: Type of Users and Amount Spent on Personal Grooming Product

| Type of user | Monthly spend in Rs | | | | Total |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|------------|
| | 0-200 | 200-1000 | 1000-1800 | 1800 and above | |
| Heavy mediauser | 9 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 26(26.5) |
| Moderate mediauser | 22 | 22 | 8 | 7 | 59(60.8) |
| Light media user | 7 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 17 (17.34) |
| Total | 38(38.76) | 33(33.66) | 20(20.4) | 11(11.22) | 102 |

The above table indicates that 60 percent of the respondents are moderate media users while just over a quarter of them are heavy media users. On the amounts spent for personal grooming products, it is evident that nearly 40 percent of them spent 0-5 Omani riyals, 33 percent spent 6-10 riyals, 20 percent spend 11-15 riyals and just above 10 percent spend more than 16 riyals a month.

Table 13: Type of Users and Losing Weight

| Type of User | Weight | | Total |
|-----------------------|----------|------------|------------|
| | Yes | No | |
| User Heavy media user | 9 | 17 | 26 (26.5) |
| Moderate media user | 23 | 36 | 59(60.18) |
| Light media user | 4 | 13 | 17 (17.34) |
| Total | 36(36.7) | 66 (67.32) | 102 |

Two thirds of the respondents- 66 of them said that they were not influenced by the media hype on losing weight while nearly 40 of them said they were influenced to lose weight

Table 14: Media Promoting the Idea of Thinness and Fair being Beautiful

| Medium | Yes | No | Total |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| Magazine(Thin) | 84(82.4) | 18 (17.6) | 102 |
| Magazine(Fair) | 71 | 31 | 102 |
| Television(Thin) | 82(80.4) | 20 (19.6) | 102 |
| Television(Fair) | 77 (75.5) | 25 | 102 |

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----|
| Internet (Thin) | 76 (74.5) | 26 (25.5) | 102 |
| Internet (Fair) | 75 (73.5) | 27 (26.5) | 102 |

The mainstream media - magazines and television also promote the idea that being slim/thin and being fair is beautiful, just like the cyber media going by the data.

Sixty nine percent of the female respondents said that the magazines promote the idea of being fair is being beautiful while 82 percent of them said the magazines upheld the idea of being thin /slim is beautiful. Seventy per cent of them said that the visuals in magazines influenced their thinking that being thin / slim is beautiful.

Eighty per cent of the female respondents said that television supported the idea of being thin is beautiful while a three quarters of them said that television promoted fairness as being beautiful.

Among the female respondents, nearly three fourths of them said Internet promoted thinness and being fair as beautiful

Though the media habits are on the positive side, and a majority of them agree to the fact that the media- newspapers, magazines, television and the internet promote the idea of being thin and being fair is beautiful, the messages do not seem to have any impact on the college graduates as over 60 per cent of them said that they have not been influenced by the media hype to lose weight.

Table 15: Media Influence on Losing Weight

| Media influence | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Yes | 33 | 32.4 | 33.3 | 33.3 |
| No | 66 | 64.7 | 66.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 99 | 97.1 | 100.0 | |
| Missing System | 3 | 2.9 | | |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | | |

Nearly two thirds of the respondents said that they were not influenced by the media on losing weight while 33 per cent said they are influenced by the media. It is to be noted that though the usage of all the media is high and all media promote the idea of thinness and fairness, respondents are not influenced in their thinking to lose weight.

Qualitative Data

The interviews focused on four aspects

- Food- preference for burgers, pizzas, coke, pepsi, sandwiches, French fries to traditional food.
- Western clothing, lifestyle, personal health care products like perfumes, gels, does etc.
- Western pop culture influencing music listening habits.
- Hollywood and Indian movies attracting greater viewership.

The data has been discussed under the broad following sub themes and categories.

Food

Respondents said that they prefer anything western, especially fast food- “burgers and pizzas which are not healthy”. It is a ‘passion for change’ and ‘lack of time for cooking’ and the ‘good and service’ provided at the restaurants. Some respondents said that it could be because consumption of these products adds to their ‘prestige.’ Fast

food consumption among youth is also linked to youth staying away from their families “studying or working.” Time factor and the media in general were cited by some respondents who said that it is “easier and faster to prepare” fast food which is “delicious”. Media seems to be influencing the youth to prefer fast food to traditional food, particularly the advertisements and promotional activities which is causing youth to neglect traditional food.

However, there is no unanimity as a few respondents felt youth still like traditional food for its nutritive value and taste and abstaining totally from traditional food is unheard of.

Clothing and lifestyle

Though Hyderabad youth wear the traditional dress, winds of change are blowing across. A section of the youth - boys and girls alike prefer wearing jeans and adopting a western life style and anything which is fashionable, choose branded products -Gucci, Avon, Adidas, Puma, Nike, Dior. Media portrayal of the western life style as elite and high class using models is prompting people to swing towards a material world. Boys want to imitate their friends or models projected in the media. The clothing makes them look “stylish,” “fashionable” and “confident about their looks”. Youth are “trying to be like others,” “they don't want to be different”.

In makeup, female respondents said that they prefer to use max factor which is desirable and also brands used by celebrities and stars. The hair styling is also coming under the influence of media.

Not all females subscribe to the views mentioned above as most of these are not accepted in society. Some respondents with a conservative outlook said that “they care what they wear” and are critical of the youth aping the west describing them as “youth who do not know anything about their own culture.”

The following results indicate the consumerist lifestyle of the undergraduates

The results of the interviews reveal some similarities. The respondents are between 20-24 years of age and all are in their third or fourth year of study. While some of them are from the middle and the upper middle sections some come from well-to-do families where their parents run their own businesses and hence have relatively strong purchasing power as their parents support them financially. Also, most respondents are also supported by their parents Many students seek additional financial help from their parents for shopping or for other miscellaneous expenses as some of them stay away from their homes and live in hostels.

In terms of consumption, almost all respondents admit that they spend most of their leisure time watching television, shopping, and window shopping in malls and other commercial areas and along with their friends. Most of the respondents go shopping at least once a week depending on their free time and many would spend money on provisions and fashion accessories. The amount spent on shopping by the respondents is quite large compared to their monthly income .

The interviews revealed that students are fond of buying and perhaps collecting fashion clothes and accessories. Eight respondents revealed that they don't like to wear the same tops for too many times. They get bored of their clothes easily and prefer to buy new clothes, especially tops. Since respondents share rooms, they prefer to buy

imitation jewelry and sometimes fashion shoes bearing no particular brand. One respondent said she does not like to wear the same clothes and gets bored of them easily, hence, the purchase of new clothes. (It must be noted here that this is despite the fact that the ladies have their traditional dresses. They are not supposed to be in any other outfits other than the traditional dress.

The results indeed indicate that the students are shopaholic and consume more than necessary, which is rather surprising for students to own and invest in so many fashion articles even though they are purchased at very low prices.

Views of Fashion and their Consumption

The respondents may be on a purchasing spree of clothes and accessories and most agree that they spend too much on shopping and food. However, they find it hard to curtail their shopping instincts as it has been internalised in their lifestyle. Several respondents corroborate the quantitative data and say that physical appearance is very important in creating the right image they need to dress right. All respondents enjoy dressing up as they like to look good, beautiful and fashionable. They just simply find pleasure in shopping and adorning themselves in beautiful fashion clothes, hence creating a good image of themselves. A few mentioned that peer influence is also important in encouraging them to shop and dress up to look pretty and not outdated from the trends. Friends also have an influence on consumption and the desire to buy fashion clothes.

If clothes are the basic essential for humans, then fashion clothes are also a necessity in today's consumer society. Over 75 per cent of the respondents suggest that fashion clothes can be both necessities and luxuries depending on how a person spends on them as over-consuming can be unnecessary. Also, clothes may be used for protection but choosing to wear suitable clothes at the right time also increases a person's credibility. People develop a taste for new things and changes occur all the time and so do clothes and the way people dress, they point out A few argue that it is necessary to buy and wear fashion clothes due to proper physical appearance, image, social aspect and modernity, whereas a few argues hold a contrary view that the same money could be spent more meaningfully .

An overwhelming majority of the respondents agree that female graduates are more fashion conscious and spend a lot of money on buying fashion merchandise than the past five to ten years. Many respondents have accounted the phenomenon to the increase in consumer choices and the availability of cheap fashion merchandise in major towns and cities. Many respondents also considered the media, especially overseas media, fashion advertising on television and women's magazines as having a great influence on young people and their fashion consumption. Designs and styles are made available at the very low price at numerous shops and these choices allowed women to be more fashion conscious and spend more money on shopping new clothes than in the past as the climate allows them to do so.

Although most respondents admitted that they spend too much money on shopping and find it a great pleasure in beautifying themselves with fashion clothes, they argue that they are not obsessed about fashion. They commented that they dress according to fashion sometimes but they have to see what suits them and what not and they prefer to mix and match to suit their own style.

Fashion Shops

Hyderabad is a good place for shopping as the country is scattered with numerous shopping centres, retail outlets, open markets and various other fashion malls, large and small. Fashion outlets and shopping malls tend to cluster in the malls with retail outlets. The respondents normally shop at Big malls which have exclusive designer shops, a wholesale and retail fashion area, followed by other open markets. Many respondents prefer to buy clothes from open markets bearing no particular brand names as they are cheap. Fashion and trends are short-lived so many of these young women prefer to buy affordable fashion clothes and accessories instead of expensive ones bearing brand names at the shopping malls. There are also various other discount stores across the cities not to mention numerous other stalls and outdoor markets that scatter along the streets and footpaths. The accessibility and availability of fashion merchandise along with low price facilitate the consumption of fashion and thus consumerism among young women in Hyderabad.

The media also plays a significant role in facilitating consumptions among the young college girls, thereby promoting consumerism. All respondents are familiar with fashion and women magazines. The respondents prefer to read international magazines than local magazines. When browsing the magazines, all respondents agree that the first things they look at are the fashion sections and how-tos. Most respondents agree that the contents and fashion advertisements in magazines have more influence on their fashion consumption and create the desires to shop and dress up than advertisements in other media types such as Television. This is because fashion magazines tend to portray the latest trends as well as demonstrate how to wear certain styles of clothes to create certain looks.

In addition to fashion magazines, people and the environment can also be the informants of trends and fashion. As trends are everywhere, women loitering along the streets in long heels indicate the latest trends. Many respondents agree that seeing people dressed up in shopping centres, fashion areas or elsewhere in the city can also create desires to have the similar looks. Also store displays trendy and beautiful designs on the mannequins seem to entice a lot of shoppers to browse the store and eventually purchase.

Celebrities also have some influence on the respondents' fashion consumption. Many have agreed that soap operas tend to have an influence on their fashion consciousness and consumption as well as create the desires to have similar looks as the female characters in the Arabic soaps tend to clad themselves with the latest fashion outfits, accessories and hairdos. Although many students argue that they do not copy the exact costumes and styles from the TV soaps due to their lack of confidence in body shape, but many would try to buy similar looks because what is shown on TV is the trend at the moment.

Eleven respondents occasionally check fashion news on the Internet but with no particular websites, while the majority claims that they do not browse the Internet much. None of the respondents buy fashion goods from the Internet and all of them prefer to browse the clothes at the shops and try for themselves before the actual purchase.

Although the young respondents may reveal on how different types of media can have different impact on their fashion consumption as well as shopping behaviour and

sense of fashion, all agree that the media in general has a great impact on the society, especially young people in terms of their consumption behaviour in the globalized and informative consumer society today. The media and its effect on consumerism is most obvious in the city, where urbanization and commercialization take place and where most of the city dwellers are young urban professionals. The results indicate that the students are consumerist and spend a lot of money on shopping. They find great pleasure in buying new clothes and making themselves look fashionable and appealing to the public and shopping becomes naturalized in the lifestyle of these young women. Apart from the media that creates desires and influences these young women to shop and dress up, other elements such as peer groups, families, store displays, streetwalkers and the environment in general also encourage consumption among these young women in the new consumer society.

Influence of Western Music and Listening Habits

Traditional music is being impacted by western music as there are a lot of instances where mixing is taking place alongside use of English words in traditional songs and rap music to cater to the tastes of the youth. Several new songs are affected by pop culture in their format, and tunes. Respondents said, traditional music is ‘not so good’ and it is for an ‘older generation’ as there has been ‘no improvement’ for the ‘changing tastes of youth.’

According to some respondents, the shift towards western music is ‘not happening’, as a section of the youth still prefers traditional music. The trend, if it is discernible is not good for identity of the country. Some take a different view and said that in fact music is a distraction.

Hollywood and Indian Movies Attracting greater Viewership

Viewership for mainstream movies made overseas- Hollywood and Bombay in India, is on the rise for their ‘plot lines’, ‘romance’, ‘adventure stories’, ‘portrayal of other cultures,’ songs, production values, etc. Also, other factors cited were lack of production of movies in Tollywood, boring ‘dramas.’ Most of them watch overseas movies as a leisure time activity trying to pick up other languages.

Some respondents felt that watching western movies could trigger the imagination of local youth to produce movies. Respondents felt that some youth are attracted to the objectionable scenes.

Conclusions

Cyber media usage is very high among the female undergraduates in the college and a vast majority of them are moderate users of cyber media and media in general. Cyber media promote the idea of being thin and fair as beautiful and they play a complementary role to the mainstream media- television, newspapers and magazines. The respondents search for information on personal grooming products and a vast majority of them are influenced by advertisements in the media and the cyber media in their purchase decisions with respect to the personal grooming products. Most of them prefer branded to local goods.

Despite the hype in various media and the advertisements, cyber media users and those consuming other media are not influenced in their thinking on losing weight.

Respondents said that there is a perceptible change in the food habits of the youth

tilting towards fast food for various reasons- fast service, taste, lack of time for cooking, adding to the prestige” etc. Similarly, youth are taking to western lifestyle and clothing and for branded products under the influence of media as them make them “look stylish’,” fashionable, confident about their looks”. Also, there is a perceptible shift towards listening to western music and Indian music has not changed over the years and the liking for Hollywood and Indian movies.

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