

Effectiveness of New Media as a Tool of Edu-Entertainment among School Children

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ABSTRACT

In this era of technological revolution and changing patterns of family life, children's favorite pastime has gone beyond outdoor activities or reading bed time stories. Like any other age group, media and children are dependent mutually for their existence. While a majority of children are found watching Television, surfing internet, playing video games on smart phones or on computer, or watching their favorite cartoon/videos online media, we also have children being seriously considered as their prospective customers. We have an influx of Kids channels on Television, comics, VCD's/DVD's and New Media in its various manifestations are available in abundance. Childhood also refers to education and children spend a quality time in schools. Thanks to the concept of globalization, technological revolution has made their presence in many international schools that have mushroomed in many big cities. New Media which has found its niche in all fields has not spared education field also. Bangalore being an IT hub hosts innumerable types of educational franchise catering to the needs of customers. One of the most defining factors as observed in these schools is their extensive usage of new media tools as part of their system. In these schools the children are not only being exposed to new media as an educative medium but also for entertainment purposes, thus providing an impetus for better learning and understanding.

I. Introduction

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family. Kofi Annan

Wake up to tweets of your favorites and follow it up with a status update on Facebook via Smartphone. Google the content for the class assignment and Email it to the teacher. Shop online to get the best deals for your needs. This is a sneak peek into the lifestyle of GenY kids irrespective of age. Welcome to the age of digital revolution which has brought in dramatic changes in our lifestyle.

Revolution in information technology has affected to transform every aspect of our lives. Be it the socio-cultural or the economic or even the political identity of an individual has been touched by the magic of new media. Interpersonal relations are going through a sea change. Interaction between parents and children, friends, husband – wife, teacher-student are assuming different forms. A teacher might learn her wards activities from the latter's Facebook updates, wife might express her feelings/emotions towards her spouse on her blog and so on. Not to mention revolutions triggered and accelerated via new media. New Media has made its presence felt ranging from individual micro level to global macro level. Marshall Mc Luhan's concept of global village has never been as appropriate as it is today. Our children are truly global citizens. Children today are exposed to various outlets through which they get myriad encounters with new experiences. Mass Media offers them both quantitative and qualitative choices.

II. Inevitability Of New Media Driven Education

In this era of technological revolution and changing patterns of family life, children's favorite pastime has gone beyond outdoor activities or reading bed time stories. Like any other age group, media and children are dependent mutually for their existence. While a majority of children are found watching Television, surfing internet, playing video games on smart phones or on computer, or watching their favorite cartoon/videos online media, we also have children being seriously considered as their prospective customers. Along with comics, VCD's/DVD's, the influx of Kids channels on Television, New Media in its various manifestations are available in abundance. Even toddlers utilize multimedia devices and the Internet with tools such as handheld video games like Leapster and interactive web sites. Even a 2 year old child easily navigates through these electronic and multimedia resources for games in which they learn colours, numbers, letters, spelling, and more complex tasks such as mixing basic colours to create new colors, problem-solving activities, and reading.

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field also. Bangalore being an IT hub hosts innumerable types of educational franchise catering to the needs of customers. One of the most defining factors as observed in these schools is their extensive usage of new media tools as part of their system. In these schools the children are not only being exposed to new media as an educative medium but also for entertainment purposes, thus providing an impetus for better learning and understanding.

Digital Natives Vs Digital Immigrants

The convergence of computer, communication and content technologies, being known as ICT has transformed India taking it to an entirely different level. ICT has not just made its presence felt but changed the dynamics of each and every sector in the country. Education is one of the most ICT influenced sectors. In fact ICT has brought in revolutionary changes to the Indian Education scenario.

Students are referred to as 'digital natives', and today's educators as 'digital immigrants'. Teachers are working with students whose entire lives have been immersed in the 21st century media culture. Many are multitasking – listening to music while surfing the Web or instant-messaging friends while playing a video game. One of the most defining features of International schools, as claimed by them is their extensive use of information technology. ICT is being used in the classroom pedagogy, parent interactions, faculty development and the overall organization's communication activities.

Educational institutions have been extensively using ICT in its various forms to improve the quality of education. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) has also highlighted the importance of ICT in school education. Government of India has announced 2010-2020 as the decade of innovation. It believes that Reasoning and Critical thinking skills are necessary for innovation. Foundation of these skills is laid at school level. It is desirable that affordable ICT tools and techniques should be integrated into classroom instructions right from primary stage so as to enable students develop their requisite skills.

The aim is to bring the immense benefits of ICT and computing technology to every classroom across its fraternity of affiliated schools to improve academic outcomes of learners and to enhance the productivity of teachers in classrooms. ICT in classrooms can be manifested in these forms- a. A projection or display device b. An interactive system /Smart Class c. Computer with UPS System

Objectives of the Study

To do a qualitative analysis of the usage of new media as an edu-entertainment tool in the schools by reviewing literature.

III. Literature Review

There has been considerable research works carried on in the field of Media and Children. The focus of research in the area of new media and children has been shifted away from effects on children's use of time and preferences to issues of content. The quintessential element of new media that is interactivity expands the scope for better socialization and learning for children. Interactivity is a key feature of all the pedagogical devices used in schools. Interactivity, at an inter personal and group communication level triggers the cognitive and logical thinking among children. It is therefore relevant to understand the how New Media interactivity enhances better learning among children. (Wartella and Jennings 2000)

It may be noted how Studies of media effects on children is grounded in an understanding of the dramatic development that occurs during childhood, encompassing phenomenal biological, physiological, psychological, and social growth.

Interactive communication integrated in the pedagogy triggers children's interest in the concepts and ideas further enhancing their cognitive and logical thinking abilities. The responsive behaviors have become an integral part of many educational and entertainment related content.

This is more extensively practiced at the interpersonal and group communication level in classroom teaching. It becomes relevant for us to understand how and to what extent new media triggered interactivity contributes in the classroom learning of children.

One of the earlier studies points out that New Media produces far more active, positive, and emotionally varied facial expressions, and more vocalizations and smiling, compared with children's reactions when viewing television. (Clements, 1987).

In addition, studies suggest that strong educational benefits can result from the use of quality interactive software. (Wartella and Reeves, 1985). Internet and computer use among young children has increased in recent years (Feller, 2005; Findhal, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Livingstone et al. 2011) Children use computers for various activities. For example, 7-year-olds perceive the computer as a tool: a source of information and fun (Hayes, 2006). However, Zevenbergen and Logan (2008) claim that the majority of children use computers to play games, and Holloway and Valentine (2003) conclude that children view ICT as a social and leisure means rather than an educational tool.

IV. Theoretical Framework

Rogers Diffusion of Innovation can be laid down as the theoretical framework of this research. Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory is the most appropriate for investigating the adoption of technology in educational environments (Medlin, 2001; Parisot, 1995).

New Media Usage in Educational Institutions

It may be observed that there is a significant departure from the traditional classroom set up to the new age classrooms. The traditional classrooms were primarily teacher centric, much focused on chalk and talk method. The curriculum was also fragmented with little student freedom. The present scenario is leapfrog from this stage. We have digital classroom which is student centric. The role of a Teacher is limited to that of a facilitator. With an integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum, students enjoy a great deal of freedom. Further, Curriculum is connected to students' interests, experiences, talents and the real world. Students and teachers have mutually respectful relationship as co-learners. Literacy goes far beyond the 3 R's [reading, writing and arithmetic] to incorporate multiple illiteracies of the 21st century – aligned to living and working in a globalized new millennium.

The digitally transformed India has proved to be a land of opportunity to explore and exploit the best of the resources. Education sector is one of the opportune areas where we notice digital outlets flourishing. The last 3 years have witnessed tremendous growth in the penetration of digital learning solutions in schools. Increase in the internet penetration, huge untapped market, growing income, raising standard of living and aspirations have facilitated the emergence of global education companies like Pearson, McGraw Hill in the Indian market. We also have the local players who are providing considerable competition in the digital education market. Both the National and International companies have been developing technology to support better learning process through digital media. The predominant players in this segment are (Sandhya and Suganth. 2014) –

Sl No	Product Brand	Company
1.	Smartclass	Educomp Solutions
2.	Digiclass	Pearson Education
3.	Digischool	HCL Learning
4.	Teach Next	Next Education
5.	SmartLearnClass	Extra Marks Education
6.	Classteacher	Shaper Technologies
7.	Nguru	NIIT
8.	Class Edge	Tata Interactive Solutions

As of 2014, these digital education companies have penetrated almost 37% of the private schools of 80,000 schools.

V. The Pastures Of New Media Driven Classrooms

Visual accompaniments and aids have for long been proved to be the most effective methods in teaching. If visual can be made more interesting by harnessing the best of the new media, it could create a lasting impression in the learners. Teachers can use videos, animations, live images, and while teaching subjects such as Math, Science, Social Studies and English right inside their classrooms.

Digital interactive education focuses on using all interactive modules like videos and presentation. This indeed would appeal students who are already exposed to new media in their everyday lives. They would connect to the new media based teaching. Students who are used to play stations, iPods and other new media devices can easily relate to the animated visuals in the classes. This mode of new media interactive learning has been extensively used across all age groups in school, in other words, it facilitates K-12 learning i.e. Kindergarten to class 12. Some of the solutions that are in the offering are Digital White Boards; develop and introduce digital content and Classpad Tablets, Digital Interactive Classroom, Classpad, Assessment Program, Digital Math Program, Digital Science Program, Online Program and Digital Language Program and so on.

The fundamental principles applied while using digital learning solutions are

- Voluntary learner participation
- The teacher plays a pivotal role as a mentor, facilitator and interpreter of reality
- Technology and tools must support the primary pedagogic agenda and not vice versa

The qualitative analysis of the literature in this area has identified the following advantages of digital learning solutions

- It is perceived as an alternative to the traditional rote learning and chalk and talk method that is practiced across schools in India.

- It encourages students to learn beyond textbooks
- It focuses on understanding concepts.
- Improves productivity of teachers who by using various tools could create lesson plans, quizzes and question banks. Further, it eases the task to drawing or preparing diagrams, on board. Digital learning solutions have all these information in memory and can be presented during the time of class lectures and save time.

Bridging the Digital Divide – Government efforts

The digital classrooms are no longer restricted to the affluent private schools. Various state governments are taking initiatives to extend the advantage to digital classroom to government schools as well. The objective is to create an all inclusive digital platform for children across different economic and social strata. The Orissa Government in 2014 has proposed to take off its ambitious e-vidyalaya project to provide ICT-based education in schools. The facility of smart classes with internet facilities will be launched in 6,000 government schools across the state. According to sources, each of these schools would have an ICT lab that would have 12 computers, an interactive board, a high-end integrated computer with projector, television and audio-visual facilities. Odisha Knowledge Corporation Limited (OKCL) has been preparing e-content in various subjects for the programme for Class VIII and IX. OKCL intends the Students and teachers to use these e-content from 2015. Companies are playing an active role in partnering with the state government to reach out to more and more government schools as well. One of the key players offering digital solutions, Edureach, a division of Educomp, has partnered with 16 state governments and more than 30 education departments and boards in the country, covering over 36,000 government schools and reaching out to more than 10.60 million students. They have also created digital learning content in more than 14 regional languages for these projects.

Challenges - The road ahead

- It is a challenge for the school/ head of the institution to ensure the continuous usage of digital solutions.
- Some of the teachers, who might be technology resistant might feel compelled and forced to use technology which might deter the optimal utilization of the product. Some of the teachers might resist the usage itself for the fear of being considered redundant.
- Cost of technology is definitely passed on to the parents. It might be a challenge for the schools to justify the incremental fees.
- Another major challenge is the infrastructure - availability of uninterrupted power, internet bandwidth in semi urban and rural areas.
- From the students' point of view, since all the learning is through already created audio-visuals, it could deter their spirit of freedom and creativity. Further students might be carried away by the entertaining elements of the new media and lose focus and concentration on the primary purpose of learning itself.

Schools while actively integrating digital solutions in classrooms are also preparing themselves to mitigate the challenges. In an interview to The Times of India, Sarojini Rao, principal of Indus International School in Bangalore, has said "Today, a teacher's job is to focus on concepts rather than content. He should be able to teach more than what Google has to offer. However, while we embrace technology, we have to be extra cautious as kids are highly vulnerable to cyber crime." In this school every Class VI student and upwards has a laptop but it can be used only under strict vigilance. Workshops on cyber crime are organized to create awareness about the medium and its misuse.

VI. Conclusion

The success of usage of new media in classroom lays in the effective collaboration of all the stake holders – teachers, students, school management, parents and the companies. At the micro level teacher should act as an active facilitator to ensure the maximum utilization of the technology. The onus is on the school management to provide ample training to the teachers regarding usage of digital solutions. We have come of age where the focus is on learning more than teaching. That does not mean technology replaces the teacher. But instead has widened the role of the teacher to be a facilitator and mentor in bringing about the holistic development of the student. New media is seen as a tool, the effective usage by the facilitator can ignite the scientific temperament and logical reasoning of the child in turn strengthening and harnessing their skill set. It is important for the teacher to realize the underlying principle and purpose of using new media in the process of learning. The teachers should focus on achieving the right blend of education and entertainment without compromising on the quality.

The fountain of information lies at your fingertips and is accessible anywhere at any time and schools need to emphasize this. We are no longer in a world where you need to go seek enlightenment, it is everywhere.
Christopher Myers

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