

Political Awareness, Political Interest and Mass Media Exposure among Youth

Abstract

A minimal degree of interest in politics coupled with possession of political information or political awareness is a basic requirement for a citizen's involvement and participation in politics. This will make them understand better and be aware of their political rights, of issues that are taking place in the political realm, who their representatives are, how the political institutions functions and the impact of public policies on their own interest. The study found that the respondents showed differences in their level of political awareness and these differences are produced by different influences. On examination it was found that patterns of media use and having an interest in politics have strong impact on the amount of political information that young people have.

Keywords: Political Awareness, Political Interest, Youth, Media Exposure.

Introduction

Among the voting age population worldwide, 49 per cent are between the ages of 20 and 39.¹ Many scholars, policymakers and other experts have pointed to the critical role young people play in the future democratisation and consolidation of democratic institutions. The democratic outlook of young people in today's societies is critical for understanding and predicting developments in the political sphere as well as for analysing a broad array of issues in the larger social and cultural domains.²

However, the young - the youth voters - as a political category has hardly been an issue of political interest and analysis till recent times. Young people, like women, are therefore a politically "excluded majority".³ Even in India it was only during the 2009 Lok Sabha election and in various assembly elections after the Lok Sabha election that there has been increasing interest in the youth vote in India.⁴ There were 200 million young voters in the 2009 election. And in the General Elections of 2014, for the first time in each Lok Sabha constituency almost 90,000 voters, between 18 and 22 years of age, became eligible to vote. What is therefore required is to acknowledge this section of the population as an asset. Keeping in mind the potential of youth in becoming key player in electoral politics, the National Youth Policy 2003 has underscored the role of India's youth in political decision-making, and has argued for greater representation of youth in appropriate bodies as well as more extensive youth participation in the design and implementation of programmes.⁵

While studying youth, it seems one cannot over emphasise the importance of studying their level of political awareness. This is due to the fact that the health of a democracy is enhanced by an informed, engaged and participatory citizenry. It is not necessary for them to have encyclopaedic knowledge about what is going on in the political realm. But certain level of political awareness is indispensable for a voter activity. Democratic citizens should have a minimum understanding of the political system in which they express preferences and elect representatives.⁶

Objective of the Study

The objective of the work is to explore the relationship between political awareness, political interest and media exposure among the youth. Therefore the study is conducted with the following objectives:

1. To study the level of political awareness among the youth
2. To examine the impact of patterns of media use and having an interest in politics on the amount of political information that young people have.

Review of Literature

The concept of political awareness is a broad term in political science literature. Political awareness refers to the knowledge about political phenomena, political institution and process and is a key concept in understanding of political system.⁷ The work of Delli Carpini and Keeter

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(1996) marks a watershed when it comes to political awareness and engagement in politics. Among their most important conclusions was that, less informed segments of the public are, in part because of their lack of knowledge, less able to discern their political interest, less likely to participate in politics, and most importantly, less likely to connect their political interests effectively to their political participation.⁸

Delli Carpini and Keeter defined political knowledge as "the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory".⁹ Other writers have also given a similar conceptualisation of the term. Robert C. Luskin defined political awareness as a function of three elements:

1. Level of exposure to political information.
2. Intellectual ability to retain and organize the encountered information
3. Motivation to obtain and comprehend the political information.¹⁰

John R. Zaller defined political awareness as the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered.¹¹ Political awareness also means access to political information, political participation, media exposure, interest in politics and education-with political information being the best indicator over all. Therefore, political awareness refers to how much factual information voters have about politics.

From the above definitions of political awareness, it thus appears that having awareness about politics influences how much and how well citizens will participate in the political process. Since people in a democracy are given the opportunity to exercise influence over public policy and those who formulate it, it stands to reason that people who are unfamiliar with the issues and politics will be less inclined to participate. Less informed segment of the public are - in part because of the lack of knowledge - less able to discern their political interest, less likely to participate in politics, and most importantly, less likely to connect their political interests affectively to their political participation.¹²

Given the fact that people get a lot of information about politics from the mass media, it is worth considering here what the literature on media effect on political awareness has to say. There is a great deal of academic research on how media affects political knowledge. According to McLeod J, *et al.* whether news media enhances or limits knowledge, there is extremely strong evidence from a variety of source that higher levels of exposure to news media correlate to higher levels of citizen participation.¹³ Studies of those with low levels of exposure to news media and higher exposure to light entertainment have less involvement in community and political activities.¹⁴

Since the mass media is considered to be an important source of political information, the pattern of mass media consumption by the youth becomes important. A study by Forrester Research found that "the youth incorporate digital media into their lives at a faster rate than any other generation. All generations adopt devices and Internet technologies, but younger consumers are Net Natives." Similarly, the Prime

Minister of India, Narendra Modi, during his visit to San Francisco on 26th September 2015 commented that, Youth, technology and innovation will shape India's future.

Even though large parts of Nagaland still remain outside the digital world, young men and women are creating new concepts of the 'public sphere' where views are expressed, ideas are debated, identities are explored, and in some cases, the established power structures are challenged. As an example, facebook group called 'The Naga Blog' which is a social media platform which allows its users to network, post and share content and create and gather support for various causes online, has initiated numerous campaigns in the past such as the Sikkim Earthquake Relief, Mon Fire Tragedy Relief Operation, Dimapur civil hospital renovation, etc. More recently 'Mission Potholes' was initiated by members of 'The Naga Blog' as a symbolic protest against the Government's apathy to the poor condition of roads in the State.¹⁵ This has resulted in one of the most important developments in recent years, ie, the ability of youth activism to achieve greater impact in society.

Political awareness for the study is taken as the degree to which the youth are knowledgeable about politics and related issues. Their level of political awareness is assessed by a knowledge scale which was calculated based on a number of questions pertaining to factual or current events knowledge pertaining to politics.

Research Design

Following the National Election Study 2014 (NES 2014) by CSDS, New Delhi, the selection of the sample is done using the Probability Proportionate to Size Method (PPS). PPS is a sampling procedure under which the probability of a unit being selected is proportional to the size of the ultimate unit, giving larger clusters a greater probability of selection and smaller clusters a lower probability.

Sampling of Assembly Constituencies (ACs)

Nagaland has 60 Assembly Constituencies. For the study, 18 (eighteen) Assembly Constituencies were sampled for the survey using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method. All the 60 ACs in the state were arranged in ascending order according to their AC ID numbers along with the total number of registered voters in each AC. The cumulative total of the total number of voters for each AC was computed.

Sampling of Polling Stations (PSs)

From each selected Assembly Constituency, 3 (three) polling stations has been selected. A comprehensive list of all the PS in the AC listing their number in ascending order was prepared. As it was decided to sample 3 PS in each AC, the total number of PS was divided by 3 to arrive at a Sampling Constant. Any PS with a number less than the Sampling Constant was randomly selected. The next PS was selected by adding the Sampling Constant to the PS already sampled. By repeating the same process, the third randomly sampled PS was selected.

Thus, 3 randomly sampled PS from the total PS in each sampled AC was selected for the survey.

This process was carried out for all the 18 sampled ACs.

Sampling of Respondents

As it is practically not possible to make direct observation of every individual in the population, a representative sample was drawn from each sampled PS to make inferences about the entire youth population according to the Systematic Random Sampling Technique with a random start. In order to generate the target sample for the study, the study sample has been drawn from the most updated electoral rolls of the selected polling stations. Twenty respondents were selected from each sampled polling stations.

After the selection of the sample trained field investigators were sent to conduct face to face interview of the selected respondents using a standard set of Questionnaire. The fieldwork for the survey was conducted by college graduate who were imparted a 2 day training in techniques of survey research and data collection methods. All the interviews were conducted at the voter's house or their places of work. A total of 1080 voters were randomly selected, of which 1023 voters were successfully interviewed.

Measurement of Level of Political Awareness

To measure level of political awareness respondents were asked questions pertaining to names of public figures, political institutions and public issues regarding Nagaland politics. These questions tap into different areas of political awareness. Knowledge of this sort demands a certain level of attention and absorption of what is going on in the political realm. A knowledge scale was calculated to place the respondents in one of the three levels of political awareness scale – high political awareness, moderate political awareness and low political awareness. This was calculated by summing up the number of correct answers based on political awareness questions for every individual voter. Based on the respondent's answers, each correct answer is counted as one (1) point. Those respondents who scored between 1-3 points were placed in 'low political awareness' category, those who scored between 4-6 were placed in 'moderate political awareness' and those securing 7-9 points were placed in 'high political awareness' category.

Although the questions do not cover all possible relevant issues and facts, they do include a wide range of questions covering different aspects of politics and related issues, which affect political awareness.

Table 1: Political Knowledge Scale

Political Knowledge Scale	Total	Percentage
High Political Awareness	555	54.25
Moderate Political Awareness	323	31.57
Low Political Awareness	145	14.18
Total	1023	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

As highlighted in Table 1, the number of youth falling at the highest end of the knowledge scale is high (54.25 %). The study reveals that majority of

young people in Nagaland have high political awareness about politics and related issues. On the other hand, 31.57 per cent of youth are at the moderate knowledge score and only 14.18 per cent of them are low knowledge scorer.

Youth and Mass Media Exposure

In considering differences in level of political awareness, patterns of media use is one critical area to consider. This is because voters' pattern of media use is likely to increase their level of political awareness.¹⁶ Knowledge of public representatives, political parties, and political issues, has become a cornerstone of democratic societies. Political awareness of the voters is mostly influenced by the information on political matters that voters get from different sources. People inevitably learn most of what they know about current events and political figures from the mass media. Therefore the media play a very important role in how much political knowledge an individual gain.

As discussed above, there is no doubt that media plays a very important role in guaranteeing access to political information to the potential voters. Ideally, media is expected to provide at least two sets of information. In the first place, it should try bringing the real issues of the contemporary society to the fore; and secondly, it should also try to provide information about the candidate's ability and credentials vis-a-vis- those real issues.¹⁷ This way the media ensures that the voters make responsible and informed choices rather than acting out of misinformation.¹⁸

While many young people feel excluded from formal politics, interestingly enough, social media, mobile technology and online sites have become platforms for young people to express their views on issues that concern them. Such platforms give them opportunities to have political voice, express and exchange their political ideas, engage in debates about politics and other issues and they have also used such platforms for social causes. These accounts provide evidence for how the Internet as well as the different media outlets has gained increasing importance in the everyday life of youth.

In order to assess how much level of political awareness can be accounted for by their usage of media, respondents were asked questions about their frequency of media consumption. Attention to politics in newspaper is captured by a question asking how often the respondents read newspapers, with five responses, "daily (everyday), frequently (several times in a week), rarely (several times in a month), never and 'no opinion'". Attention paid to political news on television is measured by a question about the frequency of viewing newscasts on television with responses, "daily, once in 1-2 days, 2-4 times in a week, 5-6 times in a week, and never. While attention paid to political news on radio is measured by question about the frequency of listening to newscasts on radio with responses, "daily, once in 1-2 days, 2-4 times in a week, 5-6 times in a week, and never.

Table 2: Frequency of Reading Newspaper (In Percentage)

Frequency of Reading Newspaper	Total no of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	404	39.49
Frequently	204	19.94
Rarely	199	19.45
Never	173	16.92
No opinion	43	4.20
Total	1023	100

Source : Field Survey, 2016

Figure 4.8 highlight the result of frequency of exposure to newspaper. Majority of the respondents read newspaper daily (39.49%). Those who frequently read newspaper constitute around 19.942 per cent. Those who rarely read newspaper constitute 19.45 per cent. On the other hand youth who never read newspaper constitute 16.92 per cent of the sample and around 4.20 per cent of the sample did not have any opinion on the issue.

Table 3: Frequency of Exposure to Television

Frequency of Exposure to Television News	Total no of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	167	16.33
Once in 1-2 days	219	21.40
2-4 times in a week	296	28.94
5-6 times in a week	94	9.19
Never	247	24.14
Total	1023	100

Source : Field Survey, 2016

It appears that television is not a popular medium for collecting news for the youth. Majority of them (28.94%) watch television news broadcast only 2-4 times in a week. They are followed by youth who never watch television news (24.14%), those who watch once in 1-2 days (21.40%), those who watch daily (16.33%) and those who watch 5-6 times in a week.

Table 4: Frequency of Exposure to Radio News (In Percentage)

Frequency of Exposure to Radio News	Total no of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	64	6.25
Once in 1-2 days	140	13.68
2-4 times in a week	145	14.18
5-6 times in a week	57	5.58
Never	617	60.31
Total	1023	100

Source : Field Survey, 2016

Similarly radio is also not a popular media outlet for youth. An overwhelming majority of them never listen to news on the radio (60.31%). 14.18 per cent of them listen to radio 2-4 times in a week, 13.68 per cent of them once in 1-2 days and 5.58 per cent listen just 5-6 times in a week. Only 6.25 per cent of youth listen to news on radio daily.

The young people use the Internet for a diverse range of participation activities. The internet facilitates activities which bring together the political, cultural, social and economic dimensions of young people's lives.

Table 5: Internet Usage (In Percentage)

Internet Usage	Total no of respondent	Percentage
E-mailing	47	8.12
Chatting/Social networking	295	50.95
For information and education	215	37.13
Gaming	16	2.76
Online transaction	6	1.04
Total	579	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

It appears that among the net users one of the main online activities is to log in for chatting and social networking purpose (50.95%). While around 37.13 per cent of them use the internet for information and education purpose, 8.12 per cent use it for e-mailing, 2.76 per cent for gaming and another 1.04 per cent for online transaction.

As per the response given newspaper reading is widespread among the youth in Nagaland. However, it appears that the youth are failing to avail themselves in sufficient numbers of the other available media resources, especially radio and television, to keep themselves informed about political events and issues. And though 56.69 per cent of youth use internet, majority of them use it for chatting and social networking purpose.

Political Awareness and Mass Media Exposure

Watching news broadcast on television, listening to radio news, reading a newspaper and internet use are likely to increase a person's exposure to political issues and events and thereby increase political knowledge. In fact, the literature review on media effects shows that all forms of media can significantly increase political awareness. Therefore, since people get a great deal of information on politics and related issues through the media, their level of political awareness would be closely related to the degree of media consumption. In other words, increased access and use of media are likely to increase youth level of political awareness.

Table 6: Political Awareness and Frequency of Exposure to Mass Media (In Percentage)

Frequency of Exposure to Mass Media	Political Awareness			
	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Newspaper				
Daily	3.45	45.20	45.59	404
Frequently	16.55	20.12	20.72	204
Rarely	35.17	17.03	16.76	199
Never	38.62	12.07	14.05	173
No opinion	6.21	5.57	2.88	43
Television				
Daily	2.07	4.33	27.03	167
Once in 1-2 days	4.83	22.29	25.23	219

2-4 times in a week	12.41	45.51	23.60	296
5-6 times in a week	2.76	6.19	12.61	94
Never	77.93	21.67	11.53	247
Radio				
Daily	2.07	2.79	9.37	64
Once in 1-2 days	16.72	16.72	12.25	140
2-4 times in a week	8.28	21.67	11.35	145
5-6 times in a week	7.59	310	6.49	57
Never	69.66	55.73	60.54	617
Internet				
E-mailing	18.18	9.84	7.13	47
Chatting/Social networking	59.09	16.48	47.59	295
For information and education	9.09	24.59	42.07	215
Gaming	13.64	3.28	2.07	16
Online transaction	0	0.82	1.45	6
Total	22	122	555	579

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Traditionally, individuals who read newspapers have higher levels of political knowledge than those who receive information only through television news because news that is read seems to be retained more easily than news that is heard or seen on television.¹⁹ This argument is also supported by another study which holds that people who turn to newspapers as their primary source of news know more than people who turn to broadcast media.²⁰

Reading data on exposure to newspaper, youth who have the highest level of political awareness are those who read newspaper daily (45.59%). They are followed by those who read paper frequently (20.72%). Those who read paper rarely and never are represented by 16.76 per cent and 14.05 per cent respectively.

A similar result is shown in the moderate level of political awareness. Those youth who read newspaper daily scored the highest (45.20%) followed by those who read paper frequently (20.12%). Those who read paper rarely and never are represented by 17.03 per cent and 12.07 per cent respectively. And as expected those who never read newspaper have the lowest level of political awareness (38.62%).

Those youth who watch television news daily are also the ones who have the highest level of political awareness (27.03%). However the top scorers in the moderate political awareness group are those youth who watch television news 2-4 times in a week. And those who never watch television news are the ones with the lowest level of political awareness (77.93%).

Radio is not a popular medium of mass media among the youth. Around 60.31 per cent of them never listen to news on radio. And it is this category of youth who also dominate all three categories of political awareness.

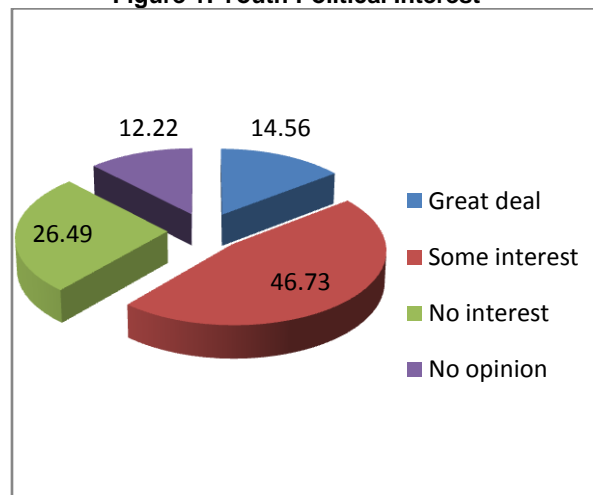
Around 56.60 per cent of the sample respondents use internet and amongst them 50.95 of them use internet for chatting and social networking. The highest level of awareness about politics has come from those who use internet for chatting and social networking (47.59%). The moderate level of political awareness has come from youth who use the internet for information and education purpose. The low awareness category is dominated by youth who use internet for chatting and social networking (59.09%).

Political Awareness and Political Interest

Another factor that has been considered to explain differing levels of political awareness is political interest. An individual's interest in politics is important because it is interest that motivates citizens to follow political events and acquire information. Political interest is also considered to be a consequence, as well as a cause of political activity.²¹ Level of political awareness may be related to how much of an interest the respondents have in politics. It is only when an individual is interested in politics that he/she may pay attention to political information and presumably will be more knowledgeable about politics. If they are not interested in politics, they may not be motivated to seek and acquire political information.

The respondent's level of interest in politics was assessed by using the standard question on political interest. "How interested would you say you are in politics and public affairs? With responses, "great deal, some interest, no interest and no opinion".

Figure 1: Youth Political Interest



Source: Field Survey, 2016

As highlighted in Figure 4.1 majority of youth have some interest in politics (46.73%). 26.49 per cent of them have no interest in politics, 14.56 per cent have great deal of interest in politics and 12.22 per cent of them have no opinion on the issue.

The young people had a lot to say about the various factors that turned them away from politics. Finding politics boring, irrelevant for them at present, their preoccupation with other interests was a consistently cited reason for not taking notice of, or being interested in, politics. While, for some, the mere mention of the word 'politics' was a deterrent. The

way in which politics was delivered had left some with the impression that politics is 'dirty, corrupt and violent'.

Table 7: Political Awareness and Political Interest (In Percentage)

Level of Political interest	Political Awareness			
	Low	Moderate	High	Grand Total
Great deal	12.41	11.45	16.93	149
Some interest	34.49	45.52	50.64	478
No interest	42.76	28.48	21.08	271
No opinion	10.34	14.55	11.35	125
Total	100	100	100	1023

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The relationship between level of political awareness and political interest is made clearer through further elaboration of Table.4.13. Youth who dominate the high level of political awareness are those who have some interest in politics (50.64%). The latter again dominate the moderate level of political awareness (45.52%). And as expected those youth who have no interest in politics dominate the category of low political awareness (42.76%). The above table reveals that having an interest in politics does lead to an increase in awareness about politics.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the relationship between political awareness, mass media exposure and political interest. The level of awareness about politics was assessed by a measure of political knowledge questions. The study found that majority of youth has high level of political awareness. The study found that the respondents showed differences in their level of political awareness and these differences are produced by different influences. On examination it was found that patterns of media use and having an interest in politics have strong impact on the amount of political information that young people have.

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Footnotes

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