The Role of Mass Media in Career Selection of Youth: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT: The present study is an attempt to examine the impact of mass media on career selection among the youths of Union Council 185, Faisalabad. The study used a qualitative approach and interviewed 20 young people aged 18 to 25 years. Thematic analysis of the interviews was undertaken. Participants often reported television, the internet and social media as useful sources of information on university admissions, jobs, skills and online earning. At the same time they were not dependent on the media. Family background, financial circumstance, education, personal interest and what they had seen in real life were often given a priority. The results indicate that media plays a role in career decision-making, but does not typically make the decision itself. Consequently, the study emphasizes the need for career counseling and more useful career media content for young people.

KEYWORDS: Mass Media, Career Selection, Youth, Internet, Faisalabad

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Introduction

Choosing a career path is a significant activity affecting not only someone's education, occupation, and income but also their lifestyle and future prospects. Nowadays, the choice is not necessarily limited to following someone's parents' occupation or what local job markets offer; thus, young people are exposed to a wide range of possible careers through various media, such as TV shows, web pages, and social networks. This opportunity can be overwhelming for young people, as they struggle to identify which media information is relevant and credible. Career planning is, therefore, associated with young people's aspirations and their social context (Arif et al., 2019). A comprehensive career plan helps young people match their interests and abilities with education and occupation opportunities, thereby preventing potential failures and negative experiences with a chosen profession (Zaidi & Iqbal, 2012).

Mass media refers to ways of communicating information to large numbers of people. It includes traditional media, such as TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines, and modern media, such as the Internet and social networks (Vivian, 2008). TV has long been considered a useful source for reflecting and reinforcing the world of work (DeFleur & DeFleur, 1967). For instance, DeFleur and DeFleur (1967) argue that a particular occupation's stereotyped images formed repeatedly on TV screens create a collective illusion about what people do for a living.

Similarly, Trujillo and Ekdom (1987) believe that TV contributes to the formation of specific occupational stereotypes, while Wroblewski and Huston (1987) consider TV a significant source of occupational information for young people. Found that with the rise of media, young people have more ways to get media information. This makes it harder to see what influences people's career choices. Apostol and Näsi (2013) and Chen et al (2023) claim that media stars, shows, and the online world shape people's career dreams. Intriguingly, Bandura and Walters' (1977) social learning theory explains how exposure to media can influence young people's career choices. The theory suggests that people learn by observing models' experiences, outcomes, and responses to various situations. For instance, an individual can learn about a specific occupation by observing the outcomes and rewards of that particular job through media. Therefore, it is argued that positive depictions of a certain profession can improve young people's perceptions of that working area, and vice versa. Moreover, career choice is closely related to individual identity, as suggested by Osipow (1986). While social learning theory and its application to career choices are not disputable, media exposure is not the only source of information for making such a significant decision. Thus, young people need professionals to rely on while making career-related choices (Amundson, 1984).

Given Pakistan's significant youth population, the issue of young people's career choice becomes even more relevant. With economic transitions, enhanced educational opportunities, and the explosion of digital and social media, Pakistani youth have more information and resources at their disposal to make a career choice, but it is also a more complex process than ever before (Arif et al., 2017). Pakistani young people use media like television and newspapers as well as new media such as the internet and social networks to learn about jobs, education, and current social trends. This raises a question: do young people rely on this information when choosing a career, or do factors like family background, financial situation, education level, and personal interests have a bigger impact? This study looks into this by focusing on the experiences and views of people in Union Council 185, Faisalabad.

Research Gap

A number of studies have looked into how media exposure affects people's knowledge, their dreams, and how they see different jobs. Most of these studies focused on TV. However, most of the studies were done in countries and used numbers to show how much time people spend on media and how that relates to their career goals. So there is a need to learn more about how young people take in media messages and how they think these messages are connected to their career choices. Also, even though researchers have found some things that affect career choices for people in Pakistan, like help from parents, how much money a family has, and chances to go to school, the way they make such a big decision within their culture is not studied enough. The influence of digital and social media on young people's identity and self-concept is an area that still needs more empirical evidence. This study wants to fill that gap by giving insights into how young people use different types of media and how young people see those media as relevant for career choice. The findings of this study can be useful for professionals working with young people, such as parents, teachers, and career counsellors, as well as media producers and policy-makers.

Research Objectives

The current study was guided by the following objectives:

- To find out the positive and negative effects of mass media on the career selection of youth.
- To determine the impact of mass media usage on youth.
- To study the youth's opinion regarding the effects of media on their career-related decisions.

Materials and Methods

Study Area and Population

This study was conducted in the Union Council 185 comprising Chak 117/JB Dhanola and Chak 196/R.B (East/West) in the district of Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. The population of this study comprised young people aged between 18 and 25 years residing in the targeted Union Council.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used as it focused on exploring the opinions and experiences of the young people. This method provided an in-depth understanding of how young people are affected by media, including the way they use it, what they learn from it, and whether it has any impact on the career options they choose.

Sampling

The total number of respondents was twenty, who were selected through a simple random sampling procedure from the target population of Union Council 185. The sample size was determined considering the fact that the study was qualitative and involved face-to-face in-depth interviews, which could be completed within the time frame and resources allocated to the study.

Tool and Procedure for Data Collection

An interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study, which consisted of both structured and unstructured questions, and was used during the face-to-face interview process. Prior to the actual data collection, the interview guide was pre-tested among five respondents to identify any unclear questions or problems with the flow of questions, which were modified based on the feedback received. Prior to the interview, respondents were informed about the objective of the study to help them feel comfortable about the process of the study in general and the questions in particular. The face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher personally, and the whole data collection process took around fifteen days to complete.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, which involved transcribing the interviews and identifying key points and recurring themes in relation to the study topic. The key points were then sorted and categorized to develop overarching themes, which were finally reported in the results section.

Table 1

Summary of Study Design

Parameter	Detail
Research design	Qualitative, exploratory
Study area	Union Council 185 (Chak 117/JB Dhanola and Chak 196/R.B, East/West), District Faisalabad
Target population	Youth aged 18-25 years
Sampling technique	Simple random sampling
Sample size	20 respondents
Data collection tool	Interview guide (pre-tested with 5 respondents)
Data collection method	Face-to-face, in-depth interviews
Duration of data collection	Approximately 15 days
Data analysis technique	**Thematic analysis**

Results and Discussion

The interviews yielded ten major themes, which included understanding of mass media, career planning, factors affecting career selection, and diverse impact of media on thinking; these are elaborated below alongside the inclusion of insights from previous studies.

Understanding of Mass Media

The majority of the respondents mentioned mass media as a means of relaying information to a broad audience, which encompassed television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, the internet, and social media. Besides being included in the daily routine of the majority, television, the internet, and social media were the most cited sources of media. Some respondents mentioned that extensive use of these media had deprived them of enough quality time with family and friends. Furthermore, the distinction was also drawn between traditional media and modern social media; according to the respondents, dramas, characters, celebrities, and influencers had the power to shape young minds and their vision of the future.

Career Planning

Respondents held the notion that career planning is a dynamic, multifaceted process as opposed to a distinct goal. They mostly associated it with setting goals and attempting to align their capabilities, interests, and resources with them. Moreover, several respondents mentioned having a vision for the next few years and being willing to sacrifice short-term gains for long-term rewards. Medicine, teaching and academics, engineering, law, and information technology were the fields of career mentioned by the respondents. While financial stability was a priority, a number of them also associated their career goals with recognition and elevation in society. The respondents mostly mentioned perseverance and resilience as essential components of a rewarding career, irrespective of initial failures.

Factors Affecting Career Selection

Apart from media influence, the majority of the respondents mentioned personal interest and capabilities, education, family background, and socio-economic status as impacting factors for career selection. Socio-economic considerations were viewed as potential barriers for furthering education, acquiring relevant skills, and obtaining the required training for a certain profession. In addition, political instabilities and the lack of consistency in government policies and youth development programmes were also mentioned as hindrances in career planning by some of the respondents. Similar to the abovementioned challenges, lack of self-confidence, parental authority, inadequate technical training, and unemployment were also cited as issues affecting young people's career decisions, hence prompting some to consider freelancing and self-employment as a viable option, although limited resources and digital literacy could also pose a challenge.

Real-life Experience Versus Online Influence

A major insight from the interviews was the fact that respondents mostly associated themselves with real-life experience as opposed to the influence of mass media. Although they acknowledged the merit of media in exposing them to various vocations, the majority also believed that it failed to capture the complete image of a certain profession. A career could appear glamorous on television and social media; however, there might also be monotonous or demanding aspects of the job which are not revealed. Similarly, Wright et al. (1995)'s results indicated that children could differentiate between the occupation portrayed on television and reality. Subsequently, the respondents of this study also seemed to draw comparisons between media influence and personal experience as well as the perceptions of friends and family members.

Positive and Negative Influence of Mass Media

Mass media was not viewed as an exclusively positive or a negative force by the respondents. They mostly associated it with mixed outcomes depending on the extent and manner of usage. In terms of positive influence, respondents mentioned that media exposure had enabled them to gain knowledge, acquire new skills, access information, and seek diverse means of livelihood, particularly through online job portals such as Fiverr and Upwork. Furthermore, a number of them mentioned using the internet and social media as a means of entertainment and learning during the COVID-19 period when educational institutions were closed. In contrast, excessive viewing of dramas, movies, or other telecasts without critical thinking was also cited as a major negative influence of mass media.

Types of Career-related Information Obtained through Media

The respondents mostly associated media with obtaining career-related information such as university admission requirements and guidelines, job advertisements, and tutorial videos pertaining to technical skills. The respondents also mentioned television advertisements and news channels as impacting factors in their awareness of employment opportunities and socio-economic trends. In addition, a number of the respondents mentioned using online tutorial videos for skill-building in preparation for a freelance career as opposed to technical training.

Influence of Mass Media on Personality and Career Selection

The influence of mass media on career selection was also linked with exposure to certain individuals such as celebrities, professionals, role models, and motivational speakers by the respondents. The majority of them associated media with inspiration as opposed to mere imitation, a viewpoint which could be substantiated by Bandura and Walters' (1977) social learning theory, which emphasises learning through observation. Although the majority of the respondents acknowledged the beneficial aspects of media, they also maintained that it failed to depict the mundane facets of a certain profession, only highlighting the exciting components.

Television's Impact

Television remained a popular source of entertainment as well as information for the majority of the respondents. They mostly watched it for two to three hours daily, consuming documentaries, reality shows, and news. The majority of the respondents also associated it with inspiration and learning about role models, current affairs, and employment opportunities. These results aligned with the findings of the previous study conducted by Wroblewski and Huston (1987).

Priorities in Career Selection

A personal interest and passion for a certain career were the most commonly cited priorities for career selection among the respondents. They also associated interest with motivation, especially when challenges were encountered; however, it was not viewed in isolation. Income, job security, education, and the opinions of professionals in a certain field were also considered equally important, and a number of the respondents mentioned consulting experts before finalising their career decisions. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents attempted to balance their interests and motivations with financial and educational considerations.

Sources of Career Information

Internet, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, television channels, news, and newspapers were the commonly cited sources of information about careers among the respondents. In particular, social media was considered a convenient source of self-learning as well as communication with peers about possible opportunities. They could

post comments, raise questions, share articles, and seek recommendations or engage in conversations with friends about their career prospects. The majority of the respondents preferred online sources of information about careers; however, traditional media had not been completely phased out.

Summary of Results

In summary, it could be concluded that mass media plays a role in influencing career selection among the youth, although it is not the determining factor. Television, internet, and social media were the most commonly acknowledged sources of information that provided the respondents with exposure to university admission requirements, job opportunities, skill-building, and role models. However, the respondents also prioritised real-life experience, family background, financial considerations, education, and personal interests. They also acknowledged the benefits and drawbacks of media, wherein it could be a facilitator or a hindrance in career planning due to its potential to provide relevant exposure and motivation or consume excessive amounts of time with entertaining content. Socio-economic factors, family dynamics, unemployment, and lack of public services were also viewed as more influential barriers to career development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that mass media contributes to career awareness among the youth in Faisalabad, but it does not solely determine one's career. Television, internet, and social media expose young people to diverse occupations, provide them with skill-building opportunities, and facilitate networking. However, the respondents also emphasised the necessity for considering real-life experience, familial expectations, financial considerations, educational background, personal interests, and qualifications. They were also aware that telecasts and social media might not provide a comprehensive image of a certain profession. It could be asserted that mass media serves as a viable tool for enhancing career awareness if utilised appropriately, whereas effective career counselling would allow young people to assess the feasibility of certain occupations based on their individual circumstances.

Recommendations

- Parents and educational institutions should conduct regular career counselling sessions in order to enable young people to discuss media-based career ideas and evaluate their viability.
- Television and print media should contain more informative content regarding education, employment, technical training, and career opportunities rather than entertaining content.
- Future studies should focus on assessing young people's needs for career information and job availability based on their level of education as well as consider the role of private career counselling agencies.
- The Government of Pakistan should consider career-planning schemes and technical or information-skills centres, especially in regions where young people lack educational and employment resources.
- Media organisations should develop more comprehensive content which encourages education, technical skills, self-sufficiency, and career planning amongst young people.
- Further research should focus on investigating the impact of media on youth decision-making in diverse environments and compare urban and rural communities.

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