Communication, New Media, and Popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s Books among Youth

Pooja Jayan

Department of Communication & Journalism, University of Kerala

ABSTRACT:

Books are a core part of the print media and are commonplace tools, accessed daily by millions of users. However, regardless of their popularity, we have only a little knowledge about why they are so appealing and what specifically they are used for - what are the needs they meet. Using a questionnaire survey, this study takes into account books as a source of communication and explores the popularity factors of the books of the famous Indian writer, Chetan Bhagat among youth. The study also investigates the uses and gratification of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth and the role played by new media in popularizing his books. The results of the study show that simple languages, the ability to connect with daily life and youth components made Chetan Bhagat’s books popular among youth. Study findings also highlighted the influence of new media in popularizing Chetan Bhagat’s books. Results suggest that the youth read Chetan Bhagat's books for pleasure, to satisfy their curiosity, to free them from the monotonous life and attain relaxation, to improve English as well as for diversion.

Key words: Books, Chetan Bhagat, New Media, Communication, Youth, Gratification

INTRODUCTION

Books are a part of the print media which play a significant role in our lives. Even after the onslaught of electronic media- like radio and television the print media has not lost its importance. Print media has the advantage of creating a longer impression on the minds of the reader with more in-depth treatment and analysis (Dhanshri M. Patil 2).

Books are a magic source that can recreate the events of the past and open up broad vistas for the future. Printed page reach millions, and it is an indispensable factor in modern life, interwoven with work, recreation, and other activities of young people and adults. Its great value lies in two facts; printed materials provide the most illuminating and various records of human experience that are now available, and they can be examined and restudied time and again at the reader’s convenience (William S. Grey and Bernice Rogers 8). The book, as printed speech, is, is a part of the communicative interaction. Thus, the author becomes a communicator; his work bridges him between the society, not only at a given point but across time and social divisions. The purpose of this study is to understand the popularity factors of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth and the role played by new media in popularizing his books. Books give different gratification to users such as entertainment, pleasure, deviation, personal identity, etc. Hence, the study also explores uses and gratification of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth.
Why Chetan Bhagat’s books?

Chetan Bhagat, the Indian writer, achieved a sort of cult popularity and had topped India’s bestseller lists with his books. He burst on the Indian literary scene in 2003 with his novel *Five Point some One* (2004), a remarkable story of some IIT students, which shook the nation with its iconoclastic information within India’s esteemed educational institute, IIT. Since then there was no looking back for the man, his books *One Night at the Call centre* (2005), *Three Mistakes of my Life* (2008), *Two States* (2009) and *Revolution 2020* (2011) became the hot picks of the readers. Nielsen Books scan India reported that the Indian book market grew by 45 percent in the first half of 2011 (Charlotte Williams). Adult fiction was the emergent segment, and Chetan Bhagat was the top player for fiction section. The vertical leap in the fiction market in the second half of 2011 is attributed to the sales of Chetan Bhagat’s novel, *Revolution 2020* (Deepanjana Pal). Indian Publishing shall now be divided into pre and post-Chetan Bhagat era (Ziya Salam).

Chetan Bhagat is often called people’s writer, one who writes with a style akin to Bollywood masala films and voice of young India (Mita Kapur). Chetan Bhagat with his witty narrative and contemporary Indian student argot topped the national best seller lists and attained a sort of cult popularity. His books carry a fun exterior and a dark interior (Mita Kapur). He was honored by Time Magazine for being one of the World’s 100 most influential people in 2010 (“The 2010 TIME 100”). The New York Times has called him the biggest-selling English-language novelist in India’s history which is a crowning achievement for Chetan Bhagat (Donald Greenlees).

According to the International Herald Tribune Bhagat has touched a nerve with young Indian readers and obtained almost cult status (Sandesh Sharma). According to the Bookaholics survey, the most popular author in India was Chetan Bhagat ("Most Popular Authors"). This shows the magnitude of Chetan Bhagat not only was a writer but as a person who has influenced a generation through his works. Chetan Bhagat is an efficient craftsman who is well versed in his communication tactics in such a way that he rose to the pinnacle of the most popular author in India. Hence, Chetan Bhagat's books are taken up for study.

**New Media and Chetan Bhagat’s books**

Evidence suggests that an increasingly social and interactive new media environment is impacting the diffusion of books in the marketplace (Anne Rogers Smyth). The new media is a convergence of computer technology and telecommunications technologies (Olise 237).

New media include the Internet, mobile phones, video conferencing, e-mail, chat rooms, and online newspapers/news magazines among a host of others. Chetan Bhagat has tapped the potential of new media in reaching wide audiences. He is not merely India's best-selling fiction writer; he is a marketing phenomenon (Ziya Salam). Presenting signed copies of books, t-shirts or offering an excellent opportunity to meet the author, and group video conferencing are unique ways of marketing adopted by Chetan Bhagat through online platforms. Chetan Bhagat is known for his ability to connect with the young people whether it is through his books or the internet or by public appearances.
For instance, Bhagat has launched t-shirts featuring famous quotes from his bestselling books, and people can obtain offers on these tees by following his Facebook page. Having an enormous social media presence, Chetan is followed widely on Facebook and Twitter; quintessentially being omnipresent on all mediums to voice his opinion and reach a wider audience. Bhagat’s Twitter account boasts of almost 1.2 million followers and counting, whereas his Facebook page has more than 2.4 million likes. He has an attractive official website that give his readers updates on upcoming books and provides links to his works and to sites where his popular books can be bought. His social media marketing campaigns are highly influential and feature regular updates from the author himself (“How Indian Authors are Marketing”).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ram Avtar and Pradeep Kumar Talan states that Bhagat considers literature as a strong stimulant that can affect the human mind. Bhagat motivates the youth to rinse out sterile dogmatism of the social system. According to their study, Chetan Bhagat has focused the interest of the youth and has written about their aspirations and for them. Vats and Rakhi Sharma (1) opines that that Chetan Bhagat exhibits uncurbed spirits of the young people of his nation and ignites the virtues of liberty in the youths. It proceeds to expound that Chetan Bhagat writes against the corrupt system prevalent in India and suggests how to wash out its impurities.

Niyati B Bhatt claims that Chetan Bhagat has tried to amuse the readers with his books that are written in a simple way with plain language. She further elucidates that Chetan Bhagat’s books rightly fall under popular fiction category as his books offer entertainment. Hemalatha K (21 ) opines that Chetan Bhagat’s writing is the outpouring of the anguish or the reflections of an individual or society onto a paper. The study also adds that Chetan Bhagat is the voice of a generation of New India.

Mridul Dora explores the portrayal of Youth in Chetan Bhagat’s novels and states that Bhagat's characters are real and breathing ones; it often deals with the crazy youth, the money-minded people, friendship, etc. Smita Ajgaonkar studies the characters in Chetan Bhagat's and finds out how the minds of modern youth are affected by some of the problems of the country and contemporary issues. Bhagat very comfortably depicts women empowerment as one of the positive effects of globalization, at the same time, consumerism, eroding values, and rising fears and anxieties of urban Indians as some of the negative offshoots of it cannot escape his piercing observations (Anil Kshirsagar et.al 7).

Prasun Banerjee (2) examines Chetan Bhagat’s status as an artist, probing into the narrative techniques used by him for effective story telling. According to him, Bhagat looks upon his books as products and takes care to package them in the best possible manner is evident from the very first page of his books. Bhagat utilizes new media to engage fan following and to build their brand and product offering (Mishra et.al 2 ).Suman Gupta (3) speaks of Chetan Bhagat’s role in the recent great leap forward of Indian commercial fiction in English.
Gupta states that the Chetan Bhagat "phenomenon," in brief, has something to do with middle-class youth in India and something to do with India's growing affluence and presence in a globalized world and consequently strengthened the sense of national/local identity. While a lot of research has been carried out on Chetan Bhagat and his style of writing, research on the nexus between among youth and the popularity Chetan Bhagat’s writings are scarce. This study focuses on factors that contributed to the popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth and new media as a key determinant of its popularity. The study also explores the uses and gratification of Chetan Bhagat’s books among the youth.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

An article in Open magazine points out that Chetan Bhagat matters precisely because he sells and why his books sell needs to be studied (Hartosh Singh Bal). In an era where youth stay astray from books why Chetan Bhagat’s books are getting popular is a topic worth studying. Chetan Bhagat is often claimed as ‘People’s writer’ (Mita Kapur). Therefore, the researcher would like to analyze the factors that contributed to the popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth. A book gratifies a reader in many ways, through this study the researcher would like to find out the gratification readers achieve through his books. The research also analyzes whether new media played an important role in the popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s books.

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to find out the popularity factors of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To analyze whether contemporary issues are communicated through Chetan Bhagat’s books
- To know whether simple language made Chetan Bhagat’s writings appealing and communicative
- To find out the kind of gratification that readers get through his books
- To determine whether youth component and common life situations make his book popular among youth
- To learn whether new media has helped in the popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s books

METHODOLOGY

The survey method was found to be more appropriate to study the popularity factors of Chetan Bhagat's books and the impact of new media. Research tool consisted of a well-designed questionnaire with close-ended questions in three categories. In the first part questions on Personal (biographical) data were asked.
In the second part, data was collected about factors that contributed to the popularity of Chetan Bhagat's books and the uses and gratification of Chetan Bhagat's books. In the third part, questions were designed to gather data about New Media and its influence on the popularity of Chetan Bhagat's books. The sample consisted of 100 respondents spread over Trivandrum district in the State of Kerala, India. The sample encompassed youth from the age group 18 to 25, who have read Chetan Bhagat's books and are pursuing their studies in various colleges across Trivandrum city. A purposive sample was selected by their familiarity with Chetan Bhagat's books and willingness to participate in the research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Seeking to understand the usage of books by readers, this study draws upon Uses and Gratifications' approach to understanding "why people use media" (E. Katz 6). Users are considered as active and purposeful, using media in goal-oriented ways as the focus of the theory is what people do with the media rather than the influence or impact of the media on the individual (E. Katz 19). Media consumption fulfills a multitude of needs, from fantasy-escape to information-education and people have the adequate self-awareness to identify and articulate their reasons for using particular media (Monica Ancu and Raluca Cozma 567). By considering the audience as keenly choosing and utilizing media in response to specific needs, the foundations for probing gratifications attained from the media are put in place. For instance, when a person has a need for diversion, he may read books to gratify this need in a satisfactory manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of the survey demonstrated that contemporary issues are communicated through Chetan Bhagat's books. In total, 72% of the respondents agreed that contemporary issues are communicated through Chetan Bhagat's books, which clearly testifies that Chetan Bhagat is a zeitgeist and through relevant themes he brings forth a large message in his books. Five contemporary issues communicated through Chetan Bhagat's books were presented, and respondents were asked to pick out one statement that they considered as a major problem to youth in India. Educational system (30%), the parental compulsion to join courses that they prefer (23%), religion and caste differences in the society (22%), corruption (16%) and job-related problems (9%) were the major challenges cited by the respondents.

Each book of Chetan Bhagat carries a message, rather than philosophizing much the author depicts the grim realities of society in an amusing manner. For instance, Chetan Bhagat’s novel Revolution 2020 brings up the issue of corruption prevalent in Indian society. The message of the book Revolution 2020 can be summed up in the Raghav’s words, a character in his book:

“Making a difference, changing India for the better. That is what we live for…. A society where truth, justice, and equality are respected more than power. Such societies progress the most.” (Revolution 2020 243). In Chetan Bhagat’s Five point someone the author delineates the frustrations of youth over the educational system. It can be clearly witnessed in this statement made by a character in the book.
“This system of relative grading and overburdening the students I mean it kills the best fun years of your life. But it kills something else. Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair.” (Five point someone 75)

The survey data also reveals that the most appealing factor in Chetan Bhagat’s books is its language. The study also enquired whether simple language made Chetan Bhagat’s books much communicative and appealing. Surprisingly, 91% of the participants responded with a ‘yes.’ As per the respondents, his language is so simple and easily digestible language. Chetan Bhagat achieved tremendous success for almost all his works due to his power to influence people with the magical spell of his words. His language is the language of Indian youth or the quick-fire campus idiom that today’s generation can easily identify or relate with.

A question was included in the survey to enquire whether the usages of tools like SMS language and online conversations in the Chetan Bhagat's books have made his language more simple and communicative. In total, 88% of 100 respondents reported that use of SMS language and 82% stated that use of online conversations has made Chetan Bhagat's language more simple and communicative.

In an interview with Raj Lalwani, Chetan Bhagat says that “the only function of language is communication. It is easy to impress someone by using multi-syllable words. It is much more difficult to write simply. Flowery language kills humour. Anyway, it is not my cup of tea” (“One night @ the call centre”).

The majority of respondents in the survey opined that Chetan Bhagat’s books give them pleasure. Out of the 100 respondents, 51% stated that the books were read for pleasure, 20% read to satisfy curiosity, 12% for relaxation, 11% to improve English and 6% indicated that they read for diversion. Popular fiction aims at the entertainment of the people in mass. The purpose is solely to amuse readers. By presenting the recent phenomena of day to day life of middle-class people in an engaging manner, Chetan Bhagat has made readers take pleasure in. The plot character, setting, theme and characterization all follow certain criteria designed exclusively to amuse the reader.

From the study, it can be interpreted that new media played a prominent role in the popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s books. In total 81% were of the view that new media played a prominent role in the popularity of Chetan Bhagat's books. To reveal further the relative significance of the New Media into the promotion of Chetan Bhagat's books, a question was asked to make out whether the respondents noticed the promotions of Chetan Bhagat's books on the internet. A yes or no was given as the option. 67 respondents gave their answer as ‘yes' while 33 participants responded with a ‘no.' Chetan Bhagat is active in Twitter and Facebook. Chetan Bhagat has effectively used new media for the marketing of his books. Several reviews of his books are available on the net by his readers.

From the study, it is evident that the portrayal of youth as a protagonist in his books made his books popular among youth. A question was asked to find out whether this trait made Chetan Bhagat’s books popular among them. A yes or no was given as an option. 84 respondents marked with a ‘yes' while the other 16 opted the ‘no’ option.
The youth today needs books, with which they can relate their life, and most of Bhagat's books are centered on life in college or life as working professional and they turn out to be a hit with the readers, as a good number of them can identify themselves with the writer's ideas.

Chetan Bhagat has focused on the interest of the youth. He has written about their aspirations and for them. Chetan Bhagat's novels touch an emotional chord of the generation Y. Chetan Bhagat’s books display the aspirations of the youth, mixed with fears and tinted with tears.

The study made an effort to find out whether youth protagonists in Chetan Bhagat’s books made his books popular among youth. 84% of the respondents considered that the use of youth protagonists in Chetan Bhagat’s novels made his books much popular among youth.

The survey made an effort to sort out whether the respondents related to any of the characters in his books. It was found that 79% of the respondents related to the characters in Chetan Bhagat’s books at some point or the other. The results from the survey duly acknowledge that youth component and common life situations made Chetan Bhagat’s books popular among youth.

The majority of participants of the survey stated that the reason behind their interest in Chetan Bhagat's books is the ability of his books to relate to life. Chetan Bhagat's stories are about reinforcing everything we already know about the world. From the survey analysis, it can be noted that majority of the respondents have identified themselves with the characters of Chetan Bhagat's books. The readers often seek comfort in the fact that there are others who may experience the same things we have. The characters in his books are common people as a student in Five Point Someone, a call center worker for One Night @ the Call Center, a simple shop-owner on a street-side from The 3 Mistakes of My Life or the well-educated MBA employee in 2 States or the corrupt director and enthusiastic journalist from Revolution 2020. Therefore, the readers find it easy to relate with Chetan Bhagat’s characters.

CONCLUSIONS

Chetan Bhagat has touched the hearts of millions through his book as a communication tool. This study presented an overview of factors that contributed to the popularity of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth. Chetan Bhagat’s books were popular among youth mainly because of its simple language, youth components and its ability to relate of life. The study reveals that Chetan Bhagat’s books communicate contemporary issues and through his simple language and sarcastic remarks he sketches contemporary India in his books.

According to the participants of the study, the simplicity of Chetan Bhagat's language makes him stand out as a better communicator. He has efficiently used modern tools of communication like SMS language and online conversations in his books that made his books more communicative. Books are treasure, which are beneficial to us in some ways. Chetan Bhagat's books too were no exception; they helped in gratifying the needs of the readers. Analysis of gratifications obtained from the survey revealed five key dimensions: for pleasure, to satisfy curiosity, for relaxation, to improve English and for diversion. This study also shows that Chetan Bhagat has tapped the potential of new media in connecting with the audiences. According to the study, new media has played a lion’s share in the popularity of Chetan Bhagat.
Chetan Bhagat's characters are real and can breathe. As per the study, it can be stated that Chetan Bhagat's stories are very much contemporary India, easily relatable and identifiable by urban youth. Chetan Bhagat depicts how the minds of modern youth are affected by some problems of the country and contemporary issues. The participants realize that characters in his characters discreetly become a part of our life. His popularity rests basically on the intimate understanding of human nature.

The study portrayed a clearer picture of reader’s interest and their needs. It will also aid the publishers of Chetan Bhagat’s books as the study is an excellent feedback of the readers’ suggestion, opinion and their needs. The findings helped in understanding the popularity factors of Chetan Bhagat’s books among youth in Trivandrum. Studies in other geographical and cultural contexts may enlighten diverse uses and gratification of Chetan Bhagat’s books and its popularity factors. The study was conducted in Trivandrum, the capital city of the most literate state in India-Kerala. Hence, this study may not be generalized for India. Future research should use data from a wider segment of the Indian population such as data from other cities and rural areas in India.

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