Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the 21st century digital world, students are surrounded by, if not followed by, the 24x7 media. Regardless of their location, they are being constantly fed with media messages by traditional and new media. They are born in a technology driven and information drenched world. Students, unlike their parents, are closer to media, especially new media, hence, consumption and usage is more among them. Mobile phones have become an indispensible entity in their lives. They have been found spending considerable time watching television, using mobile phones, using computers and browsing social media and new media applications through internet on their mobile phones and personal computers. Among these applications most popular being Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and search engines. However, the present study found Facebook and WhatsApp more popular among school students. The study also found that students, who do not own personal mobile phones, make use of their parents’ mobile phones for various purposes, entertainment being the most common one.

Our education system also encourages students to make use of new media technologies for various purposes. One example of this is smart classrooms. The smart classrooms were primarily developed to aid teaching methodology, but apparently, the extended application of these classrooms required students to be digitally updated in order to make use of technology. The very nature of technology attracts and lures user to spend more time with it. New media offers an unimaginable array of utility and entertainment tools. Hence, students get hooked to media for longer period as they might accomplish multiple tasks using one device. For instance, they may play video games on their computers for some time, then shift to another window where they may have an e-book opened for reading, then in adjacent window they may have a movie queued for later viewing. This can happen only when there is an interface between students and media that is open and accessible. Media ubiquity has led to penetration of media messages into even the most personal space of individual lives of students.

Today, it is pertinent for people, especially students, to make optimum use of media in order to keep themselves abreast with the latest changes that the world is witnessing and the direction in which national affairs are heading. To be specific, media consumption and usage have become not only important but also vital for one’s self-development followed by growth. Growth can be in terms of academic proficiency and general awareness. As noticed in this study, there is a wide gap between the parents and their wards in terms of media usage.
and consumption. The primary responsibility of a parent is to take good care of his/her child, keep a close eye on the activities he/she is involved, his/her food habits and to take care of his/her needs that may be physical, social, mental/psychological or academic. In majority of the cases, parents do take care of these, but when it comes to the digital behaviour of children, there are very limited checks. When parents, who constituted the sample for the present study, were questioned whether they monitor their child’s/children’s media consumption and usage, merely 21.08% of the parents said ‘yes’. There is a dire need to sensitise parents on this matter. As advocated by many studies in the past, the present study also found that there are more chances that prolonged media usage and excessive consumption of media messages might affect physical, mental and social health of students. To sensitise students and parents about the ill effects of media usage and consumption is the need of the hour.

The data revealed that there is a wide gap between the children and their parents about their understanding of media. Based on their understanding, students and parents make decisions about individual media usage and consumption. It was found that a large number of parents (66.82%) were not even aware of their children’s social media presence. Moreover, the present study observed a wide gap between parents with higher educational qualifications and parents with lower educational qualifications, with regard to guiding their child/children about media usage and consumption. In India, rate of literacy is very low as compared to the rate of media and communication technologies and pace of media penetration. This, eventually, is widening the gap mentioned above and putting parents and students under pressure. Furthermore, media consumption and usage have results that manifest in the users’ behaviour, perception and attitude. Hence, it becomes critical that the users of media are aware of the ill effects of excessive usage and consumption of media on their health.

A coup d’oil into the history of media studies reveals that theorists, since the inception of media, have spent considerable time researching the effects of media on society as a whole and on individuals specifically. They came up with various theories and models that talked about media effects whether direct or limited. The present study focused primarily on the effect of media on health of school students. It has studied the time school students spent on using and consuming various media. The primary consideration during the research has been on physical, social and mental health for studying the effect of media on the health of school students.
For the purpose of this study, the researcher studied the media that school students are exposed to, consume and use; whether they spend time on outdoor activities; whether they are obese, overweight or underweight; the average time they spend with various media; whether they prefer mediated communication; the kind of programmes and channels they watch on television and whether they show prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress. Also, the present study gauged the views of parents of school students about media usage and consumption of their child/children.

In order to answer the primary research questions and to achieve the objectives of this research, the present study used DASS, which is a widely accepted scale for measuring mental health, and the survey method to find out the effect of media on physical, social and mental health of the students. The scale proved to be very helpful for the purpose of quantitative data collection. The quantitative data revealed interesting findings that added distinctive insights regarding media consumption and usage among government and private school students and views of parents on the same.

One of the intriguing inferences that this study found is that there is a gap between government and private school students in terms of their media usage and consumption. For an example, the present study observed that out of the total sample of 250 students from government and private schools, 125 each, 23.2% of government school students stated to have watched television for 2-3 hours whereas, 54% of the private school students reported to have watched television for the same amount of time every day on an average. This gap widens as students mature and reflects on all spheres of their life whether it is career, relationships, social conduct or any other area of importance.

8.1 Media Usage and Consumption

From the findings, as discussed in chapter 6, it was inferred that the present generation of students are exposed to, consume and use a variety of media and many a times more than one media at a time. It was recorded that all the sample units have at least one television set at home and some of them reported to have three. Majority of them have mobile phones and accounts on social networking sites. Those who did not have personal mobile phones they used their parents’ mobile phones depending upon their need and desires. The conclusion endorses the observation of Calvert & Wilson (2010) who mentioned that ‘children grow in front of screens’ (p.1). Media have become an integral part of the lives of school students.
Advancement in technology and proliferation of media industry has turned students into ‘digital natives’.

The study has mentioned that media usage and consumption have effects on its users and these effects depend upon the extent of time students spend using and consuming various media. This study has deliberated upon the effect of media on the health of the students. Media usage and consumption have caused physical inactivity among students up to a great extent. Majority of them reported low-involvement in outdoor activities whereas, time spent using and consuming media was higher. It was found that 79% of the government school students and 85.6% of the private school students reportedly did not play outdoor games on a regular basis. One reason for such low involvement in outdoor games can be the increase in the time students spend with media. 54% of the private school students and 23.2% of the government school students reported that they spend 2-3 hours watching television. 33.6% of private and 15.2% of the government school students reportedly spend 3-4 hours using Facebook. These alarming figures make it clear that media have become the main reason behind physical inactivity among heavy media users.

Moreover, the study has also observed that students prefer mediated communication over face-to-face/interpersonal interaction. These trends might have implications for health of children and youngsters in the near future. Many scholars and researchers have registered their concerns over reduction in communication within family members. Media have provided individuals with an opportunity to avoid or escape others.

The study also observed that media usage and consumption have minimal effect on the mental health as symptoms of stress were not found in a single student. However, mild and moderate levels of depression and anxiety were seen among them. Nevertheless, the prevalence of obesity, underweight and overweight was negligible among student respondents, but still, as the data revealed, students are turning physically inactive. It is established by scholars and scientists that physical inactivity breeds many ailments in humans. Prolonged media usage and excessive consumption of media content and messages may worsen the situation in the near future. If the users are not sensitised regarding the ill effects of prolonged media usage and consumption, the situation may go out of hands. Thus, every user must put in efforts to minimise media usage and consumption on his/her part and guide, monitor and sensitize friends and peers regarding the same.
8.2 Time Spent with Media

The findings of the present study indicated that after school hours the students preferred spending time with different media over outdoor activities. Time spent with different media varies according to the age group and media types. Reportedly, the higher age group liked to spend more time using and consuming media. Students spent considerable amount of time watching Television, using mobile phone applications including Facebook and WhatsApp and consuming media messages. As per the data, there are multiple purposes for which students use media. Primarily, these purposes include information, communication, education and entertainment.

Media bring most of the information that one seeks at one place. There are plethora of entertainment sources and channels that media offers. Thus, it is possible that the user sits at one place and fulfils all his requirements related to these three broad categories mentioned earlier, i.e., information, education and entertainment. This trend leads to the conclusion that the media limits user’s physical movement, absorb more attention for longer period and minimises the probability of face-to-face, verbal and interpersonal communication among human beings. Moreover, when one device/platform caters to all information, communication and education needs, users tend to spend longer time using media and the time user spends with media may replace the time that could be spent on outdoor/physical activities. Eventually, the user may develop the habit of spending more and more time with media that may lead to severe health hazards in extreme cases and negative effect on the health of the user in normal cases.

The amount of time that students reportedly spent with various media varied from 30 minutes to more than 4 hours per day. The virtual world offers unlimited scope of personalisation and that conflict with the real world situations. Students spent more and more time with media, they modify it as per their preferences and find this virtual world to be under their control. With extended media usage, they tend to seek modifications in their real world situations, which are not as convenient as they experienced in the virtual world, hence conflict emerges. Similarly, it is deduced from the findings that school students, when spending considerable time consuming and using media every day, live in a virtual world customised as per their individual preferences and choices.

Spending a large amount of time with media may affect health of school students in many ways. Students, who spend higher amount of time with media, may end up creating their own
virtual world and experience constant discomfort in the real world situations. The virtual world is largely customizable. The user chooses who to keep for a company and who to block or whom to share information with or keep secrets.

In addition, the stereotypes created by media are more likely to be accepted by the users as role models. Especially the reality shows, dramas and other such programs offer many concepts to the immature audience that tend to consume these messages and develop their worldview based on these. Once a person starts spending more time with media, the attraction of media tempts the user and may result in increased time spent with media. Students, owing to their tender age, comprise an audience that is gullible in nature. Media lures them with content that may not be fit for their consumption and may cultivate inappropriate attitudes and behaviours. Thus, many parents today are concerned with the increase in time their child spends using and consuming media. Many of them make efforts to guide and monitor their wards about media usage.

A considerable number of parents are not even aware of their wards’ social media presence and they are not literate enough to guide and monitor their media usage. In such cases the students become more vulnerable and may consume content delivered by media that is unfit for their consumption. Eventually, they have negative effect on their social, mental and physical health.

8.3 Physical Inactivity (Physical Health):

The present study attempted to study the effect of media on the health of school students. The study found that the majority of school students were neither obese nor overweight. As students begin to spend more time with media, the time spend on outdoor activities reduces and is replace by the time spent using and consuming media. This leads to physical inactivity and eventually students adopt a sedentary lifestyle. A number of researches have emphasised the fact that sedentary lifestyle leads to various illnesses like diabetes, obesity, cancer, cardiac problems and others. However, this study concluded that majority of school students consume fast moving consumer goods like Maggi noodles, sandwiches, chips/wafers, soft drinks, juices and energy drinks. The age group taken for the study was between 13 and 17 years. This age is considered the growing age and body demands more energy during this period of physical growth as compared to other age groups. This can be a reason why the negligible number of students was found to be obese and overweight. Nevertheless, if the trend continues, then many will become obese as they mature in age.
8.4 Mediated Communication (Social Health)

Further, the present research concluded that students prefer mediated communication with others over face-to-face interaction or interpersonal communication. Students have personal accounts on various social networking platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. They also make use of short message service (SMS) for communication. The study found negligible use of electronic mail among students. Students have parents, relatives, friends, classmates, and neighbours in their friend lists on social networking platforms. It was noticed that majority of the students used text messaging as a communication tool.

As mentioned earlier, students have started spending considerable amount of time with various media that has lowered personal interactions. This is obviously affecting the social health of students. Social health, as taken in this study, means ability to meet people, adjust in a group, cope with the environment and develop relationships. It is understood from the aforementioned facts that students eventually would lose the ability to adjust in a group. If they want to ask for an assignment, they just send a text message to his or her friend. ‘Discussions’ have been converted into ‘chatting’. Another reason that can be attributed here is the family structure. As mentioned, in chapter 3, families are converted into nuclear from extended. These days’ families consist of parents and a child or two. In metros and mini metros, in most of the cases both the parents are working hence, the social movement of a child gets restricted as there is no elder member in the family that will look after the child/children. Therefore, media have taken the role of a baby-sitter and moulding them.

8.5 Levels of Depression, Anxiety and Stress (Mental Health)

The fifth conclusion this study arrived at is that students have shown levels of depression and anxiety but not of stress. It is also concluded that students who spend more time with multiple media exhibited higher levels of depression and anxiety. DASS proved to be very helpful in gauging the mental health of the students. This 42-item scale carried statements related to depression, anxiety and stress. Depression and anxiety are interlinked. Sadness, loneliness, anxiousness are some of the reasons among others that cause depression among people. It is deduced from the findings that students like to confine themselves in virtual world. The age group taken for the study is prone to risk.

Though schools have changed their module of evaluating students as many school boards have adopted grading system, still competition prevails among students. They remain under
constant pressure to improve their performance. Most of the relationships they develop among themselves are maintained through virtual communication platforms. Moreover, the media messages they consume can act as catalyst to trigger their emotions. They tend to imbibe their role models after being exposed to media messages. Their cognitive level also does not allow them to comprehend the messages they consume in their intended sense.

This study also found that majority of school students preferred watching soap operas. As mentioned earlier, majority of the students do not spend time on outdoor activities, but spend time with multiple media. It is also observed that even social interaction is less among the sample. They have cocooned themselves into their personal sphere, start living in isolation and ultimately become more prone to developing various mental disorders.

8.6 Monitoring and Guidance by Parents

The study concluded that parents with higher educational qualifications guide their child/children about media usage and consumption more frequently, but the number of parents with higher educational qualifications is less. The literacy rate in urban areas is growing fast, but at the same time in rural areas the literacy rate is not changing very fast. Keeping in mind that the larger share of Indian population resides in rural areas, the situation is alarming as media penetration is on a constant rise in rural areas as well.

A larger number of parents, from the sample, admitted that they neither guide nor suggest their child/children regarding media usage and consumption. After analysing the data, the study concluded that fathers monitor media usage and consumption of their child/children more frequently as compared to mothers. A majority of parents believe that media have both positive and negative effects on their child/children. A large number of parents use Internet, but do not use social media. A majority of them are not even aware of the social media usage and consumption of their child/children. In addition, the present research noted that parents also admit that their child/children prefer mediated communication. They also admitted that they did not monitor media usage and consumption of their ward. Despite this realisation the parents do not know how to guide and monitor because they themselves are media illiterate.

It is high time parents take a lead and monitor the consumption and usage of media by their child/children. Parents should keep an eye on the routine of their wards and must make efforts to balance their routine by including sufficient outdoor and physical activities and social interactions. They need to keep a check on amount of time their child/children spend
with different media. It is required that parents keep a check on the kind of content their child/children consume through various media. Students must be guided in the process of selection of media content for the purpose of consumption and decoding media messages as per intended meaning.

8.7 Difference between Government and Private School Students

Four years back when the topic of this study was finalised it was assumed, keeping in mind the demography of Chandigarh, that there would be no difference between government school students and private school students. However, both the groups (government and private school students) have shown no association regarding media usage and consumption. The study revealed that private school students are exposed more to various media and spend more time with multiple media. On the contrary, government school students indulge more in outdoor activities as compared to the latter group. Prevalence of obesity and overweight was found in case of private school students.

The data collected for this research also revealed that the private school students spend more time using social media applications on their mobile phones as compared to the government school students. The gap between the haves and have-nots was observed at this level too. A large number of private school students owned mobile phones and in case of the government school students the number was too less comparatively. Keeping in mind the importance of mobile phone as a multipurpose device, this gap pushes the have-nots behind in this technology driven and information overloaded world. This was also observed during the research that private school students spend less time on outdoor and physical activities as compared to the government school students. In this case the private school students are more vulnerable to health hazards as compared to the government school students who spent more time playing games and engage in outdoor or similar physical activities.

In addition, the study noted that the larger number of private school students reportedly had three or more television sets at home, in some cases one in their personal room. In case of government school students, majority of them had one television set as home. It is apparent that the students of private school students have more chances that they can watch their preferred program on television and stay happy, whereas in case of government school students, in the family when there is only one television set, it is common that timings of the programs, desired to be watched by family members, clash. This clash may be extended to the respective family members and may raise the stress levels of the family members.
Recommendations

A rigorous study on school students and their media usage and consumption in India, similar to Payne Fund Studies, is the need of the hour. Though Payne Fund Studies suffered criticism for not adopting scientific methods to study effects of movies on adolescents, these studies acted as a trigger for further researches. India is witnessing a tremendous change in all spheres of the society. Media and entertainment industry is expanding, convergence is happening, and information and communications technologies are registering phenomenal growth worldwide. In such a scenario, a wide, longitudinal research work is required to study the effects of media on students.

Students, being crucial members of a society, need special attention. Media tentacles have gripped the society both at micro and macro level. We depend on media for information and for students the media are imperative too. They make use of media for diverse purposes including personal and academic. However, media literacy is yet to be a part of education curriculum in India. Therefore, students are not trained enough to use and consume media prudently.

Students fall prey to unconventional media messages that may not be fit for their consumption. Researches on effects of new media on adolescents/teenagers/youngster are available, but myriad effects of media on the health are yet to be explored at larger levels in India. Public health sector is contributing to the field by studying media as a cause of sedentary lifestyle among people (of all age groups), but the faculty of social sciences/arts has to take a lead to conduct a comprehensive study on media effects and health.

The western countries have initiated a lot of research work on students, teenagers, youngsters and adolescents. The governments there have issued instructions to the media industry not to relay junk food related advertisements during children related programmes. All efforts have been done to control obesity that is considered an epidemic there. In India, no such strict measures have been adopted yet. After years of consumption, we questioned the most famous noodles brand Maggi. Few months back just few newspapers reported that government has asked Delhi schools not to offer junk food to students. Governments, authorities and citizens need to be more sensitive to the grave issue. Combined efforts from the stakeholders would help address the problem in an effective manner.
There is a need to introduce media literacy programme in pedagogy of schools. Only Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has in 2012 had issued a circular stating the introduction of ‘Mass Media Studies’ as a subject in class XI and XII and other school boards should also take an imitative.

During data collection process, the researcher had interacted with school principals and found that the schools are fighting hard to curb usage of mobile phones by students. Principals, mostly of private schools, put forth that V standard students bring mobile phones to school campus even though they are not allowed. Sensitisation of parents and students is required. Parents should be responsible to monitor the media usage and consumption by their child/children.

During the data collection it was found that in some of the schools administrative staff and teachers were reluctant to help the researcher gather data from the school students. Teachers connect with students more as compared to the researcher. It would be encouraging for the research scholars if a system could be set in place where any research could be authorised to demand cooperation from the administrative staff at the respective institute where he/she wishes to conduct research. The staff should also cooperate voluntarily as the researches ultimately help society.