Chapter 1: Exploring the Intricacies of Media- An Introduction

The power of media in today’s world is impossible to control. We have transcended the world of new media from traditional media. It is contended that expansion of media is critical in democracies. Since its origin, media remained a pivotal element for the smooth functioning of democracy and a non-ignorable crusader of a participatory form of government in a country like India. Words such as ‘click’, ‘share’, ‘post’, ‘trend’ ‘viral’ and ‘like’ have come to occupy a prominent place in the vocabulary of media. Media have become the backbone for the operations of markets and societies. Mediated world has left nations borderless and provided people with umpteen opportunities and platforms to communicate with one another. Furthermore, media enabled the users to share and enhance knowledge base and transact businesses with a great deal of convenience. Technology is making media usage and consumption easy for people, especially youngsters. Media are helping nations to accelerate on the path of growth and development. The world has turned into exactly what Marshal McLuhan once termed a ‘global village’. This comes at a cost and that may be in terms of effects. It is time to explore such intricacies of media in contemporary global scenario on a particular age group.

1.1. Media Pervasiveness

According to Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) website, the total number of registered publications in India till March 31, 2014, is 94067, of which 12,511 are newspapers and 81,556 are periodicals. The same year witnessed registration of 7,337 new publications and 8.43% growth of registered publications over previous year. The Census (2011) figures stated that in our country 47% household own television sets. Of this, 33% belonged to rural areas and 77% urban. Regarding mobile phones, the Census (2011) further stated that 51% people in rural area and 76% in urban areas have access to mobile phones. Similarly, Singh (2014) reported that in India, Facebook, the social networking site, has crossed 100 million active users.

Also, the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMA), in a research conducted in 2013, found that the Internet usage in India has gone up with more and more Internet users using the Internet on a regular basis. In June 2013, India had 190 million Internet users. In October 2013, the number of Internet users reached 205 million and was estimated to reach 213 million by December 2013. “The use of social media in rural India has grown 100 per cent in past year with 25 million people using the Internet to access Twitter and Facebook.
Accessing social media is one of the key reasons why people access the Internet”, mentions Bhargava (2015, p.1), in a news story quoting IAMA-IMRB report. These facts substantiate that media expansion and usage in India are on the rise. Both urban and rural areas are gradually acquiring access to different media. With such a vast media empire, anyone can consume and use media depending on his or her needs at any place, at any age and at any time. The size of media industry is growing. KPMG analysis, as shown below, substantiates this fact.

1.1.1. Youngsters and Media

Academes often regard children and youngsters as future of a nation. It is generally understood that they hold an important place in the human life chain and hence, demand a special attention. It is one of the reasons that governments every year introduce various schemes and policies for the well-being of the children. In India, according to the Census (2011), 20.9% of the total population constitutes adolescents (10-19 years) and 19.2% people are young (15-24 years). Moreover, it is predicted that by 2020 India will be counted as the youngest country. Not only state governments even United Nations (UN) is framing such policies since its inception. Despite all these concerns, it is believed that, family is the first institution any child embraces after birth. It is the family which is responsible for the
upbringing of a child, governs his or her behaviour and determines his/her outdoor and indoor activities.

Now, two pertinent questions that require answers are: what would be the results if role of a family get partially replaced by some other entity? Will there be changes in the upbringing of a child, food habits or behaviour? In the 21st century, one cannot ignore the power of media and other technological developments occurring in our society. This age is making us breathe in saturated media atmosphere. Media, along with other market forces, are playing multidimensional roles in structuring society and shaping individuals.

Scientific developments, technological advancements, job opportunities, scarcity of natural resources, rise in population, and efforts to sustain oneself in this competitive world have altered the roles of human beings and also that of a family as an institution. Keeping the periphery of this research intact, the focus here would be to understand the reach of media, their effects and testify them on school students.

With change in the family structure, media have taken a predominant place in every home. In many cases, if not all, media have become a baby-sitter too. Earlier, in a traditional family setup, elder members used to act as a guiding force in the lives of children. But the disintegration of the extended family structure has given rise to nuclear families and the said force has been diluted.

Even Janssens (1993), while talking about the process of industrialisation emphasises, “Industrialisation …resulted in the disintegration of the family groups into smaller units of nuclear families consisting of parents and their unmarried children.” (p.2)

Nuclear family setup has its own pros and cons. In addition to it, one cannot ignore the place of media in this family setup. Media not only have blurred the boundaries of interaction, but have also become a necessity for the survival of humans. Available literature documents in detail that in the current age of media technology children grow up in front of screens. It may be a television screen, computer monitor screen or mobile screen.

Earlier traditional media were altering the sense ratios of their users, but technological advancements have provided people, especially teenagers (students in this study), with more powerful tools of communication. The case in point is new media- the Internet, mobile and social networking sites- for their usage and consumption. With the passage of time, these options are expanding exponentially.
It is an undisputable fact that these days one can consume and use traditional media on new media platforms. For instance, anyone can read a newspaper on the Internet using either mobile phone or personal computer. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have just revolutionised the way we communicate.

Exposure to media can be productive for students; however, prolonged exposure can also have detrimental effects. Students can learn a lot by consuming media messages and may enhance their skills using different features of the media. While there is also a probability that students get swayed by the media messages and media victimise them with their negative effects. Here, the focus of the study is to find out such effects of media on physical, social and mental health of school students.

Considering the contemporary scenario, media consumption and usage has become a common feature in the lives of students. They make use of mobile phones and their various applications, including social networking sites, to send and receive messages, obtain information for personal and group activities, etc. They consume content delivered by newspapers, television, the Internet and social networking sites. They read newspapers online and listen to radio on their mobile phones. They do their assignments, projects and homework with the help of media.

The extent of media effects depends upon the nature of the content students consume and the purpose for which they make use of various media. Effects also depend on the proportion of time students spend with different media and on outdoor activities. Literature has acknowledged that children and teenagers do get influenced by the content they consume and use while spending time with various media. Whether this influence is progressive or regressive there is a need to study it. Spending time with various media has both positive and negative effects on the health of students as users. This research has tried to explore this relationship. If school students are spending considerable amount of time with media, it is evident that their social, physical and mental health would get affected.

1.1.2. Media and Changing Lifestyle

The Oxford dictionary (2010) defines lifestyle as: “The way in which a person lives”. There is a dire need to understand the contribution of media in altering the way people live. Different media are influencing the lifestyle of people, the young generation (here school students) being no exception. It is a known fact that the present generation is tech savvy. The
concept of playing with friends in parks and playgrounds after school hours is dying in the wake of media proliferation and their ubiquity. Eating habits are also witnessing a change as teenagers prefer consuming fast food and fast moving consumer goods while spending time with media. Companies are making optimum utilisation of media in order to sell their products. If one scans all advertisements, the observation would be that majority of the ads today, irrespective of the product they aim to sell, feature children or teenagers. This kind of lifestyle has both positive and negative effects.

Livingstone (2002) writes:

A group of boys go to play with the friend who has a new computer game. A teenager girl checks out the web site of her favourite band...Parents buy a computer to support their children’s education but are unsure how to use it...As we enter the twenty-first century, the home is being transformed into a site of a multimedia culture, integrating audiovisual, information and telecommunications services (p.1).

1.1.3. Media and Physical Health

Health as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1948) is: “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (p.100). Thus, for a person to remain healthy, he or she needs to take care of his or her physical, social and mental health, respectively.

This study considered physical health as overall fit condition of the body, lack of obesity, underweight and overweight. Media usage and consumption and physical health share a relationship. Various researches have proved that prolonged exposure to media leads to physically inactive and sedentary lifestyle. Both physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyle cause different ailments. “It is well known that obesity and sedentary behaviour coexist and both are associated with cardiovascular disease (CV) in women” (Barns & Coulter, 2012, p. 224).

Another research conducted by the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, and published by Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR) (2009) finds that 66% of the population in Chandigarh between the age group of 20 and 40 are adopting a sedentary lifestyle, hence, prone to CV diseases and diabetes. Though these researches do not talk about teenagers specifically, they have established the prevalence
of sedentary lifestyle and health ailments among people. Thus, it has been established that physically inactivity leads to sedentary lifestyle (pp. 506-514).

According to various studies, children, teenagers and adolescents (school students) are spending a large amount of time consuming and using different media, which is displacing the time they should spend on physical activities. “Prolonged TV viewing was associated with increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and all-cause mortality” (Grontved & Hu, 2011).

Moreover, excessive usage and consumption of media is causing teenagers to adopt unhealthy food habits, resulting into various ailments. Most of the researches focus on TV viewing and sedentary lifestyle, but it can also be validated in the case of other screen media. Extensive research, outside India, has recognised the power of media to make their users physical inactive.

A national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) finds:

> With technology allowing nearly 24-hour media access as children and teens go about their daily lives, the amount of time young people spend with entertainment media raised dramatically, especially among minority youth. Today, 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes using entertainment media across a typical day (more than 53 hours a week). And because they spend so much of their time 'media multitasking' (using more than one medium at a time), they actually manage to pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those 7½ hours (p. 2).

Whether it is the ‘two-minute’ Maggi noodles, ‘crunchy’ potato chips, chocolates or soft drinks, students prefer snacks at the time they use media. High consumption of such fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) too has undesirable effects on physical health of the consumer.

Robinson, Yardy & Carter (2012), in Foresight Tackling Obesities report, put forth:

> Child obesity is not only the product of biological and psychosocial factors, but of whole societal factors which include the media, the economy and the physical environment. Perhaps it is not surprising that some parents believe that their child’s size is their child’s destiny rather than being due to modifiable behaviours because there is an element of truth in it.
Andreyeva, Kelly & Harris (2011) also talk about harmful effects of soft drinks. They observe:

Higher consumption of soft drinks and fast food in children is due to increased exposure to TV advertising for Carbonated Soft Drinks (CSDs) and fast food. Findings suggested that children’s exposure to advertising for calorie-dense nutrient-poor foods is associated with increased overall consumption of the unhealthy food categories commonly advertised to children. This may contribute to poor diet in children in the short-term, with potential long-term effects on health, especially among the heaviest children. (pp. 221-223).

Interdependency exists between media and school students. In fact, it may not be incorrect to say that if students were clay, media would play the role of a craftsman shaping their characteristics by targeting them with deliberately chosen or framed messages. As an idea, we may interpret the situation like this – media today is putting in all the efforts to convert students into customers. Rather one can say media consume students.

1.1.4. Media and Social Health

The present research work has taken social health as an ability to meet people, adjust in a group, cope up with the environment and develop relationships. It is presumed that students, who spend a large share of their time with media, interact less with people surrounding them. The purpose of the study is to find if less interaction is affecting their social health and health as a whole.

Having access to various forms of media, students use different media to communicate with their family members, neighbourhood, friends and others. If they use mediated communication, then equal chances persist of having less face-to-face interaction. Less interaction can make students reserved or introverts; increase their loneliness as the students find themselves confined to the world of virtual reality, a world that lacks most of the features of the real world yet ensnares the young minds by augmenting certain features that enchant them. Adverse effects on social health can have repercussions on both physical and mental health. On the contrary, if a student is not part of any social group or if he moves out less, there is also probability that he or she is spending time on learning new things using media.
The study of Shields & Kane (2011) finds:

Internet use is associated with both positive and negative social and psychological variables. They found that in few cases where Internet use was related to the amount of face-to-face interaction, all of the relationships were positive and there were no negative effects.

Media usage in contemporary world has not only become easier but also a necessity. The visionary Marshall McLuhan foresaw this shape of the world way before in 1960’s and coined the term ‘global village’.

Media pervasiveness has transformed human activities radically, particularly of the students. An open and easy access to a wide range of 24X7communication media makes it easy for students to consume and customise media according to their needs. Studies have shown that students make use of different media at a single point of time. For instance, while watching TV, they check their electronic mails (in short e-mails), chat with their friends and update their status on social networking sites. It would not be an exaggeration if we term them as digital multi-taskers.

Besides, the traditional forms of media, i.e. print, radio and television, the Internet, specifically the advent of a large number of social networking sites in the first decade of the 21st century, has provided school students every opportunity to be with all forms of media.

Various researches have been conducted to study the relationship of media and social health and have notable findings to offer. According to one research, less interaction does affect our health.

Sigman (2009) finds:

Global alterations in human gene transcription, immune system cytokines and Natural Killer (NK) cells, narrowing of major arteries, incidence of stroke, early death, high blood pressure, dementia, Alzheimer, and even the common cold, can all be linked to changes in our social patterns. It has identified a dramatic decline since 1987 in hours per day of face-to-face social interaction as the use of electronic media dramatically increased.
Adding to it, Turkle, as quoted by Baumer (2013), writes:

    Digital media dramatically alter our social lives. We have become so wrapped up in
    the seemingly limitless possibilities of our digital devices that we completely
    overlook the decreasing standards of human interactions. We would rather text than
    talk and would rather break up a relationship by sending a text message than having a
    face to face interaction… (p.74).

1.1.5. Media and Mental Health

This study focuses on mental health as emotional well-being state of mind and lack of
psychological disorders. Disorders include depression, stress and anxiety. The question that
needs an answer is to find out the effects of media on the mental state or health of students.
Do they feel anxious, worthless, upset and depressed? Also, the kind of programmes and
content they consume while using different media. The present research work attempts to find
answers to all these questions. It is assumed that the kind of programmes students watch,
what their role models are up to, the kind of products they are exposed to, do affect their
cognitive and physical behaviour.

If a student prefers watching wildlife-oriented programmes, quiz shows or news-oriented
programmes over soap operas and melodramas, his or her cognitive behaviour will be
different from any other student who watches only soap operas. There is a chance that the
former will be stronger and rational as compared to the later or may be vice versa. Similarly,
if a student habitually watches too many horror or crime shows, he/she may develop an
erroneous impression of the extent, magnitude and nature of crime in the real world.

The field of Mass Communication and Journalism has witnessed a vast research on violence
shown in media and its effect on the behaviour of children. Anderson, Gentile & Buckley
(2006) in a research finds, “Repeated exposure to violent media can lead to increases in
violent behaviour. The newer interactive form of violent media (video games) had a larger
impact on violent behaviours than the older form (television and movies).” (p.76)

Also, Albert Bandura, who propounded Social Learning Theory, has found that behaviour is
learned from the environment through observational learning.
Saul (2011) writes:

Children pay attention to some of these people (models) and encode their behaviour. At a later time they may imitate (i.e. copy) the behaviour they have observed. They may do this regardless of whether the behaviour is ‘gender appropriate’ or not but there are a number of processes that make it more likely that a child will reproduce the behaviour that its society deems appropriate for its sex.

While studying media usage and consumption one cannot ignore Uses and Gratification theory. Uses and Gratification find, “Studies have shown that audience gratifications can be derived from at least three distinct sources: media content, exposure to the media per se, and the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974).

The fact that a growing number of school students are being exposed to numerous forms or channels of media at the same time and a majority of them blindly imbibing and religiously following the content, poses a grave threat to their health and well-being.

Keeping in view the cognitive perspective, students are always considered immature to understand and interpret media messages they are bombarded with; hence they remain vulnerable. Researchers like Potter (2008) have suggested that media literacy can help children and other age groups to reduce the negative effects of media.

Knowing the fact that media consumption can lead to devastating effects on health, it is pertinent for the parents to gauge the time their wards spend with media. Studies have shown that some parents bother about the media their children are exposed to and believe that their wards have become materialistic. Even doctors are concerned about the deteriorating health of students. Effects of food-related advertisements on the health of students are one of the basic concerns among the public health departments of many hospitals. Students and various forms of media have occupied the centrestage in social sciences research in Western countries. In India, studies pertaining to electronic media, media violence and children do exist. However, the area pertaining to effect of media on school students’ health is yet to be explored. Being a vital part of society and human cycle, students need special attention.
1.2. Rationale of the Study

The topic selected and formulated for the study is of utmost importance because of the age group selected for the research and issue taken for the study. Media penetration in our lives is irresistible. To be abreast with happenings around, one is required, if not compelled, to use and consume media. Now, it depends upon the user as to how much time he or she spends with different media. The present generation is growing in front of screens. We are moving towards a world where everything is connected and expected to be hi-tech, starting from a living space to a classroom.

Media have not only brought the world closer but it has also brought many challenges before their users. The generation of the 21st century is tech savvy. Various researchers have found that teenagers (some researchers have used adolescents and children) spend maximum time with different media. Psychologist Dr Aric Sigman (2012) says, as mentioned by Hannah Richardson in his new story published by the BBC, ‘Children of all ages are watching more screen media than ever, and starting earlier’. Concern over impact and effect of media is always there among researchers. Wimmer & Dominick (2011) write:

Concern over the social impact of the mass media was evident as far back as the 1920s, when many critics charged that motion pictures had a negative influence on children. In 1928, the Motion Picture Research Council, with support from the Payne Fund, a private philanthropic organization, sponsored a series of 13 studies on movies’ influence on children (p.2).

Health is always of paramount importance. Keeping this in mind, an attempt has been made to study the effect of media on health of school students. Students use and consume media for various reasons, mainly for academic purpose, for entertainment, as a stress buster, to gratify their needs and others. Spending a large share of their time with media leads to sedentary lifestyle that further escalates health problems and also limits their social interaction. Where the mental state of the children is concerned, media might have both positive and negative effects.

1.3. Scope and Significance of the Study

The contribution of this research would interest academicians, policy makers and public health experts. This study would contribute to on-going work in the area of mass communication and journalism. The ‘impact’ and ‘effect’ media studies always refer to
researches documenting the power and vastness of media. The present study has focused on media ubiquity and its presence in the life of students. This study, of course, would contribute to the kind of literature dealing with this feature of media.

The issue taken up here for the study is of extreme importance and requires immediate attention. Already, there exists, many research studies pertaining to the effect of media violence on behaviour of teenagers (adolescents and children). However, this research would be beneficial for those studying media and health aspects. Literature says that there are usually five categories of health- physical, social, mental, spiritual and emotional health. “Health composed of physical health, mental health, emotional health, social health and spiritual health” (Greenberg, 2014, p.3).

Though the present study has undertaken three categories of health - physical, social and mental, it can be used as a reference by the researchers studying any of these. Moreover, the study is also significant for medical practitioners studying causes of sedentary lifestyle. It is considered that media is one of the reasons leading to a sedentary lifestyle.

Wright, Sparks, & Hair (2012) mention:

Spending too much time using passive media like television may lead to a sedentary lifestyle in which people limit their physical and mental activity. Sedentary lifestyles have been linked to obesity and other health problems, and there is some evidence that choosing to watch television over more mentally challenging activities (e.g. reading) on a long-term basis may lead to cognitive problems over time.

Moreover, the study has touched upon the points that how media have changed the lifestyle of students. Media exposure has changed the behaviours and food habits of the students. Besides, the study has made an attempt to find out the level of depression, stress and anxiety among students with respect to time they spend using and consuming media. The study has also taken into account whether parents monitor media usage and consumption of their child/children. Even sociologists are witnessing a paradigm shift in the society, in the family structure and behaviour of children. Hence, this work can contribute to the field of Sociology and Psychology too.
1.4. Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has highlighted the role that media played in knitting together societies vis-à-vis changes they are enforcing in those societies. The vastness and the power of mass appeal has entrapped all age groups and the most sensitive is ‘teenage’ (here school students). Media has brought changes in lifestyles, including eating habits, behaviour, and preferences. All this affected the health of the school students. The researcher, for the purpose of this study, has taken three categories of health- physical, social and mental. The researcher has tried to study the repercussion of media on them.

The topic is of importance because of the issue and the age group considered for conducting the research. This research, apart from Mass Media and Communication, might be useful for various disciplines like Medicine, Psychology, Sociology and Public Health. This research could be a reference point for the above mentioned disciplines. In the next chapter, the researcher has tried to build an understanding why students are hooked to various media. The chapter consists of various theories that provide answers to the very basic question- why do students consume and use various media? The researcher has studied media and child interface in the next chapter.