Effect of Media Consumption and Usage on the Health of School Students:
A Chandigarh based study

Executive Summary

The society is enthralled with the media. Owing to its ubiquity, youngsters are virtually gripped by the 24x7 version of the media. Media consumption and usage have become a necessity than a need. Proliferation in media, due to technological advancements, has changed the way society used to operate and function. The advent of new media has provided an impetus to such change. Media have taken a predominant place in the modern day nuclear family. And in many cases, if not all, media have become a baby-sitter too. Numerous scholars have highlighted the fact that 21st century children grow up in front of screens. Unlike their parents, who belonged to the senior generation, youngsters do not need lessons regarding how to use technology and various media. There are various reasons for which youngsters consume and use media. These reasons are considered as entertainment, empathy, social learning, dependency on media for information, etc. The present generation constitutes an active audience. They consume and use media depending upon their needs and desires. Literature has documented that youngsters, these days, spend considerable time with various media, hence, there are effects that are being studied and measured by media researchers across the globe. Researchers have established that media consumption and usage have both positive and negative effects on their users. The kind of effects depends on the extent of time one spends consuming and using various media for diverse purposes.

The present research focuses primarily on the effect of media consumption and usage on the health of school students. The researcher has studied the physical, social and mental health of students in relation to their media consumption and usage. The objectives of the study are; i) to find out the media that the school students are exposed to, consume and use; ii) to find out the time school students spend on consuming and using different media; iii) to find out if media consumption and usage by school students affect their physical health; (a) to find out if the time spent with media displaces the time school students could spend on physical activities; iv) to find out if media consumption and usage by school students affect their social health; (a) to find out if the time spent by students with media displaces face-to-face interaction with others; (b) to find out if students use multiple media to communicate with others; v) to find out if media usage and consumption affect the mental health of students;
and v) to find out if parents monitor and guide media consumption and usage of their school-going child/children.

The researcher has used primary data for the study that has been collected after conducting two surveys. One survey was conducted among school students between the age group of 13 and 17 years. Second survey was conducted among parents of the school students. As far as methodology is concerned, two kinds of questionnaires, one for school students, and one for parents, were developed and used for the purpose of data collection. In the case of students, self-administered questionnaire was used as a technique for the collection of responses. For the purpose of measuring the mental health of students the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales-42 (DASS-42) was used. The universe for the study was Chandigarh. The population for this study consisted of students between the age group of 13 and 17 years, studying in 73 senior secondary schools (as per the website of the UT Education Department), and one parent of each sample unit. The total sample size was 473, of which 250 were school students and 223 were parents. Using stratified sampling procedure 10 schools were selected. Further, using simple random sampling from grade VIII to XII five students from each grade were selected for the study. One parent of each chosen sample unit was taken for the purpose of the study.

The main findings of the study are:-

- Students are exposed to, consume and use traditional and new media.
- Television is still a popular medium among school students.
- None of the school students reported of having ‘no’ television set at home.
- Majority of students own personal mobile phones and those who do not own one, use their parents’ mobile phones.
- Majority of students reportedly spent more than 4 hours per day with various media.
- Majority of the students have accounts on various social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp. Twitter and emails are not much popular among school students.
- Students use search engines for academic purposes, entertainment (to download songs), for shopping and to know about technological innovations.
- Majority of students are physically inactive. They spend more time with media as compared to outdoor activities.
• Majority of the students prefer mediated communication as compared to interpersonal communication/face-to-face communication. Students prefer communication through text messages followed by Facebook and WhatsApp.

• Depression and anxiety are prevalent among students whereas stress is not present among students.

• Some parents guide and monitor media usage and consumption of their child/children. Majority of them believe that media have both positive and negative effects on their children.

• Parents with higher educational qualifications guide and monitor their child/children more as compared to those with lower educational qualifications.