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**Role of Digital-Mass Media on Psychology and Behaviour of the Society: A Critical  
Study**

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### Abstract:

The modern generation of 21<sup>st</sup> century is exposed to the variety media like never before and the amount of time that they spend in front of screens is unprecedented. For the generation of previous century, the source of mass media (audio-visual) was limited to television. Such a generation that was spending excessive time before the screen was referred to as a 'couch potato' generation, however, this couch potato generation was limited to a minority section of a 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, in 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially after the invention of internet and smart phones, the mass media is made available to the masses all planet with unprecedented portability and mobility. This excessive exposure to the mass media has led to a variety of reactions to the end users, specially the younger users of such media. The present paper aims at exploring the impact of Mass Media on Human Behavior in general children and young adults in particular. The paper will also look into the aspect of adverse effect of social media on children and young adults.

### Lead in:

We are living in an exponential age. For instance, it took 38 years for a transistor radio to reach to masses i.e. to a market audience of 50 million people after being invented. Whereas it took just 13 years for television to reach to the masses. For internet it took 4 years and for *facebook* it took just 2 years. In the year 1984 there were only 1000 internet installed devices in the world. Today the number of devices with internet are 1000 times more than that. This data shows that the availability of mass media is phenomenal. It has been proved by many previous researchers, that the media affects the human lives more than anything else. It has become a tendency of modern human being to be in constant touch with everything that happens around the world. This tendency is facilitated by mass media, internet and smart phones respectively. It is needless to say that the amount of exposure a human being has, affects his/her behavior and thinking. The present paper aims at exploring the impact of mass and social media on children and young adults.

### Impact of Mass Media on Behavior of Children:

For the mind of children there is a term used by Plato: 'Tabula Rasa' which means 'blank slate'. Children, even adults learn by imitating. In olden days the sources of imitation for children and adults was their fellow human beings whose behavior was natural and true to life. There were fewer instances of human being expose to the unnatural and inhuman behavior by the fellow human being. After the invention of the audio-visual media mankind is exposed to a huge variety of unnatural and at times inhuman display of human behavior. It is proved psychologically that children, who observe, in the media or in the environment around them, the exhibiting a certain kind of aggressive behavior, e.g. shouting or hitting, they are more likely to



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perform the same aggressive behavior immediately. Thus, exposure of aggressive behavior or violence leads to aggression and violence among children from very young age. Further, the children who are exposed to excessive aggression and violence through media are seen performing poorly in their academics. Their poor academic performance leads to social and familial rejection of the children which results into many fold psychological adverse impacts on children.

Another study from India proved that exposure to incidents of real life violence through media, such as 9/11 or 26/11 terrorist attacks on Twin Tower in New York and Taj Hotel in Mumbai respectively, leads to increasing stress among teenagers. The feelings of increasing worries, anxiety, nightmares and leanings towards misbehaviors of children are the consequences of recurrent and regular introductions to news coverage of some murder-mystery or movies related to such mysteries, violence and torture. An American body of the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee of Television and Social Behavior opined as early as in 1972 that "...a steady stream of brutality on television can have a powerful adverse effect on our society – and particularly on children." It is a saddening fact that children are exposed to such content on television and movies more frequently than ever before. There can be seen a small body of research that could establish the correlation between exposure of excessive television viewing and increasing suicidal behavior among the children. Further, excessive time spend before the television or mobile screen among the children also increases the risk of developing the depression during their young adulthood.

Furthermore, excessive time spent before television or mobile screen has also been playing a significant role in the development of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This cause and effect logic can be seen consistent with evidence that concludes that children who spend more time before television or mobile screen are suffering from ADHD much more than their those children whose exposure to screen was made limited. Acevedo- Polakovich, *et al.* (15) proved many harmful relationship between the time spent by children before screen and cognitive outcomes may be more salient among children with ADHD. Nevertheless, a deeper examination of the relation between time spent by children before the screen and cognitive abilities of children are desirable.

### Impact of Mass Media of Young Adults

A Study conducted on the Impact of Social Media on Adolescent behavioral Health in California concludes that young adults throughout the United State of America were found excessively using internet, cell phones, and video games in order to gain information and communicate with each other. The invention of social media has provided an unprecedented and unique feature which is the ability to interact among young



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adults from anywhere to any at any time. This ability enables young adults to interact with each other and navigate their social environments. The use of social media among the young adults takes place along with their evolving personality, developing sexuality, bodily growth, and moral perceptions.

After 1960s, America show the first generation that was raised before television. The social theorists provides the statistics that there can be seen a rise in crime and law and order situation getting worse to worst after 60s and 70s in America. It is the increasing effect of media on human behavior. In the later decades there can be seen in the increase of television viewing and consequently in law and order situation in America. It is needless to say that most of the accusers and victims were young adults who were either influenced by some violent and sexual content of were harassed due to such contents.

In India, the era of Television started somewhere in late 80s and early 90s of last century. Unlike in America, the television was controlled and censored by Doordarshan that kept most of the content on national television under the purview of 'family and educational viewing'. In late 1990s, private channels started being introduced in India. The contents on such private channels were on the similar lines as of American channels in 60s and 70s. As a result there can be seen a rise in crime and violence in India after the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century. And it is needless to say that most of the accusers and victims, as in America, were young adults.

### **Social Isolation and Watching Television:**

There is a correlation between the time spent before the screen of television or mobile (including content and context of viewing) and peer assimilation. The more time children and young adults spend before screen, the lesser time they spend with friends and family. Hence, excessive time spending before television or mobile screens results into poor social relationships among the young users. This poor relation increases the risk of social isolation, mental disorder and various kinds of phobias. Further it also increases antisocial behavior among the young adults. Rather than facing the real world, they consider the world of imagination that is controlled and managed by them with remote control or by merely swiping the screen of their smart phones. They could see that they cannot change the unwanted person or situation of their lives the way they change a channel or program on their television or smart phones. This leads to their frustration.

Many researchers found that the more time children and young adults spent before the screen, the lesser time do they spent with their families. The excessive time spent before the screen may isolate children but the reverse scenario too can be seen. There are many lonely children and young adults who may turn to television or mobile screen for socialization and amusement. In such situation, parental guidance and



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support can be proved very vital and encouraging. India, in this context had shown that if parents also join viewing along with children, it can enhance and enrich television viewing. There can be seen a variety of learning outcome from it. Anuradha, *et al.* reported significant development in learning ability of children appropriate learning reinforcement and positive motivation by the parents. The study also showed that active participation of parents resulted into substantial improvement in academic achievement of children. Thus, parents need to be educated about the adverse effects of excessive time spent before the screen. However, the means and mode to communicate the message to the parents. Pediatricians can be encouraged to inculcate awareness about the mass media and its positive and adverse effect.

### Mass Media: A Medium and not an End:

There are many studies undertaken by the researchers that show that there can be both positive and adverse effects of mass and social media on human being in general and young adult in particular. There are many case studies that proved that the violence that are being displayed on screen – big or small – promotes violence among the young viewers. It is among the leading causes of increasing criminal activities among the adolescents. However, it should not be forgotten that the screen be it of a television or mobile phones has no life or logic of its own. It is just a means and not an end in itself. There are many benefits of judicious use of these screens and content provided by these means can be extremely useful. Thus, the key is to remember the difference between a means and an end.

### Summing up:

In order to fulfil the aforesaid objective, funding must be made available, and efforts must be undertaken to create awareness among the parents and teachers. These are simple and viable actions that can be undertaken by most parents or caregivers and reinforced by pediatricians. As the availability of media screen has evolved from 10 feet television screen to 2 feet personal computer screen to now 10 inches screen of smart phones, the aforesaid measures may generate a temporary mediation. The newer invention of technology will keep on presenting new media exposure to its young viewers. The guidelines provided by American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for the judicious use of media in children can be best to conclude the present paper. AAP recommended the following measure to present the exposure of excessive screen among the young views:

- 1) Do not allow the bedroom to be a media center with TV, video games, and Internet access.
- 2) Limiting media time to 1 to 2 hours of quality programming.



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- 3) Discouraging TV viewing for children younger than 2 years.
- 4) Inculcate the habit of viewing and discussing content together.
- 5) Turn off the TV when no one is watching and during meals; and
- 6) Be the change you want to see in your children: a good media role model user.

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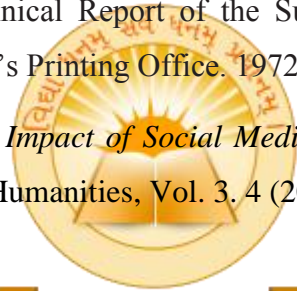
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