

7th – Understanding Media



Understanding Media: Everything ranging from the stall at the local fair to the programme that you see on TV can be called media. Media is the plural form of the word ‘medium’ and it describes the various ways through which we communicate in society. Because media refers to all means of communication, everything ranging from a phone call to the evening news on TV can be called media. TV, radio, newspapers are a form of media that reaches millions of people, or the masses, across the country and the world and, thus, they are called mass media.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEDIA

To promote democratic values, the media need to keep the following essential objectives in mind.

- Keeping news and opinions separate from each other.
- Not mixing the news and business interests of media.
- Giving correct and impartial account of the events.
- Giving factual reports.
- Avoiding distortion of news just to make it sensational.

Changing Nature of Media: In the ancient days, people used drums to communicate over long distances, or runners carried the information. Then came the time when pigeons and men on horses carried messages over long distances. It used to take several days and sometimes months for letters to reach. Now, with the invention of the telephone, mobile and the Internet, people are able to reach others in seconds.

Media and Technology: Newspaper, television and radio can reach millions of people because they use certain technologies. Newspaper and magazines as the print media; and TV and radio as the electronic media. Changing technology helps media to reach more people; it also improves the quality of sound and the images that you see. It also changes the ways in which we think about our lives. It is quite difficult for us to think of our lives without television. Television has enabled us to think of ourselves as members of a larger global world. This allows us to view news and entertainment channels from other parts of the world. Most of the cartoons that you see on television are mostly from Japan or the United States. Television has brought the world closer to us.

Media and Money: The different technologies that mass media use are expensive. The technologies that mass media use keep changing and so a lot of money is spent on getting the latest technology. Due to these costs, the mass media needs a great deal of money to do its work. As a result, most television channels and newspapers are part of big business houses. Mass media is constantly thinking of ways to make money. One way in which the mass media earns money is by advertising different things like cars, chocolates, clothes, mobile phones, and etc. While watching a cricket match on TV, the same advertisements are shown repeatedly between each over and so you are often watching the same image over and over again. Advertisements are repeated in the hope that you will go out and buy what is advertised.

Functions of Media: The media performs a variety of functions. The most important among them are—giving information, shaping public opinion, allowing discussions and debates, analyzing information and offering valued suggestions.

Providing Information: If the media provides correct and unbiased information, it becomes easier to form right opinion about the happenings around us. Various





political parties take the help of media in informing us about their policies and manifestos.

The media also informs us about different policies of the government.

Media keeps track of everything that goes on around us in our country, as well as around the world. Media provides information about the policies of other countries towards our country

Forming Public Opinion: Public opinion about an issue is based on information given by the media. Sometimes the media gives biased or incorrect information. This affects public opinion. However, the media comprises various independent rival agencies which have the freedom to present an issue in their own way. This helps the people to gather information from various different sources before forming an opinion about an issue.

Providing Forum for Debate and Discussion: The debates and discussions on various social, economic and political issues are organised by media on television and radio. This provides a platform for people with different opinions to meet and share their view. People also publish their views in 'newspapers and magazines through letters to the editor.

Thus, the media provides a meeting place or forum for the people to exchange ideas and opinions with others.

Media Ethics: The media gives information on public interest the people. This information should be accurate, unbiased and unhampered. Some media firms may become too powerful and self-centered; they may place their private interests before public interest. In such cases, there is a need to regulate them so that they do not misuse their power. For this, the media must follow a code of ethics based on the following principles.

Being Accurate and Fair: The information that is incorrect or misleading should not be published. Different views on an issue should be presented. The information should be first verified and then made public so that it does not arouse any ill feelings later.

Correcting Errors: If the media have made an error in reporting some matter, then they should immediately publish an apology and broadcast the correct version without much deliberation.

Allowing Freedom of Speech: Freedom of speech should be given to people, Persons who disagree with the media report should be given a fair chance to publish or broadcast their views.

Respecting Privacy Of Other People: While giving information, the persona details of a person should not be divulged by the media unless it is necessary to do so in the interest of the Public.

Protecting Nation Interests: Any news or information presented by the media should be carefully scanned before its release if it threatens the security and unity of the nation or society.

Avoiding Plagiarism: Plagiarism is copying other people's works and calling them your own. This is an unethical practice and sometimes punishable by law.

Exercising Caution: The media should not publish reports which are bad taste. Rude, violent or obscene images or expressions which may offend people should not be published or broadcast.

Media and Democracy: In a democracy, the media plays a very important role in providing news and discussing events taking place in the country and the world. It

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is on the basis of this information that citizen's can, if they wish to, they can take action on the basis of these news stories the media plays in providing information, it is important that the information be balanced. A balanced report is one that discusses all points of view of a particular story and then leaves it to the readers to make up their minds. Writing a balanced report, however, depends on the media being independent. An independent media means that no one should control and influence its coverage of news. No one should tell the media what can be included and what should not be included in a news story. An independent media is important in a democracy. It is on the basis of the information that the media provides that we take action as citizens, so it is important that this information is reliable and not biased. However, the reality is that media is far from independent. This is mainly because of two reasons. The first is the control that the government has on the media. When the government prevents either a news item, or scenes from a movie, or the lyrics of a song from being shared with the larger public, this is referred to as censorship. While the government does continue to censor films, it does not really censor the media coverage of news. Despite the absence of censorship by the government, most newspapers now a day's still fail to provide a balanced story. The reasons for this are complicated. Persons who research the media have said that this happens because business houses control the media. At times, it is in the interest of these businesses to focus on only one side of the story. Media continual need for money and its links to advertising means that it becomes difficult for media to be reporting against people who give them advertisements. Media is, thus, no longer considered independent because of its close links to business.

Freedom of expression and public opinion: In a democracy, people have the right to express their views freely. These views form public opinion. The opinion of the public is mainly expressed through the media. Opinions of the people are greatly influenced by what they see and read in the media. Therefore, in a democracy, the media is expected to function with great responsibility. . .

Need for an independent media: A free and uncensored media has the responsibility of providing unbiased coverage of events. People have to be told the truth about the activities of the government.

An independent media also helps to keep the judiciary under check by reporting on the way the court decides case.

Media and access to information: Access to information is essential for the health of a democracy. The media also monitors whether the elected representatives carry out the wishes of those who elected them. Media helps proper governance by exposing corrupt activities of the people in power. It encourages the participation of citizens in policy process.

Media's Need to Serve Public Interest: One of the primary aims of the media should be to serve public interest. The media should cover as many different viewpoints as possible. For this, there should be many equally powerful providers of media. If controlled by a few powerful groups, the media coverage will be biased. It will only give the viewpoint which serves its own purpose, not the public's interest. If the media fails to cover different viewpoints and provide unbiased information, it will weaken the democracy.

Media and Accountability: The media, especially television and newspapers, 'is a very powerful medium of communication. Programmes shown on television and

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articles written in newspapers send strong messages that can influence the thinking of the public, 'especially the youth.

The media in a democracy is accountable to the government and the people. By misinformation by the media would weaken the mutual trust and cooperation among the people and threaten the unity of the nation. That is why a balanced reporting of news, keeping in mind media ethics, is crucial in a democracy. Media should be socially responsible and responsive.

Right To Information (RTI) Act: According to this act, a citizen of India has the right to demand information from any government body. The government body has to provide the information within 30 days. If it is a life-threatening matter, the answer should be provided within 24 hours.

This act has helped make the working of government offices more transparent and accountable.

Setting Agendas: The media also plays an important role in deciding what stories to focus on, and therefore, decides on what is newsworthy. By focusing on particular issues, the media influences our thoughts, feelings and actions. Due to the significant influence it plays in our lives and in shaping our thoughts, it is commonly said that the media 'sets the agenda'. There are several instances when the media fails to focus on issues that are significant in our lives. For example, drinking water is a major problem in the country. Every year, thousands of people suffer and die because they do not get safe drinking water. However, we seldom find the media discussing this issue. As citizens of a democracy, the media has a very important role to play in our lives because it is through the media that we hear about issues related to the working of the government. The media decides what to focus on and in this way it sets the agenda. The government can, at times, prevent the media from publishing a story and this is called censorship. Nowadays, media close relationship with business often means that a balanced report is difficult to come by. Given this, it is important for us to be aware that the factual information that a news report provides is often not complete and can be one sided.

