UNIT 3  THEORIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Mass Media and Society
  3.2.1 Functions
  3.2.2 Interactive Perspective

3.3 Hypodermic or Bullet Theory

3.4 Psychological or Individual Difference Theory
  3.4.1 Selective Exposure
  3.4.2 Selective Perception

3.5 Personal Influence Theory
  3.5.1 Two-step Flow
  3.5.2 Multi-step Flow

3.6 Sociological Theories of Mass Communication
  3.6.1 Cultivation Theory
  3.6.2 Agenda Setting Theory
  3.6.3 The Uses and Gratification Theory
  3.6.4 Dependency Theory

3.7 Normative Theories of Mass Media
  3.7.1 Authoritarian Theory
  3.7.2 Free Press Theory
  3.7.3 Social Responsibility Theory
  3.7.4 Communist Media Theory
  3.7.5 Development Communication Theory
  3.7.6 Democratic-Participant Media Theory

3.8 Some Other Theories of Mass Media
  3.8.1 Mass Society Theory
  3.8.2 Political Economic Media Theory
  3.8.3 Hegemony Theory
  3.8.4 Culture and Semiotic Theory

3.9 Let Us Sum Up

3.10 Further Reading

3.11 Check Your Progress: Model Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to familiarize you with some important theoretical issues that seek to explain how the audience uses media and the effects of mass media in society. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the relationship between mass media and society;
- identify the individual's reactions to mass media messages;
- detect the interpersonal influences as barriers to mass media messages' effects;
- discuss the sociological theories of mass communication;
- discuss the normative theories of mass media; and
- outline the alternative approaches to mass communication theories.
3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding Unit, we traced the development of Communication Models — from simple models to complex ones. We also presented some of the models evolved by distinguished scholars and discussed their distinct characteristics. In the present Unit, we describe some important theories of mass communication which will enable you to understand how mass communication operates in society. Having done that, in Unit IV our focus will be on areas and methods of communication research.

3.2 MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY

There has been enormous interest among social scientists to find out the effects of mass communication within society. This has resulted in a number of theories which essentially trace the relationship between mass communication and society. However, no single integrated theory of communication has yet emerged which is universally accepted. We describe here some important theories of mass communication to help you to understand how mass communication operates in society.

Please note that early theories were based on assumptions that mass media have enormous and direct influence upon society. But later researches provide evidence against any direct cause and effect relationship between mass communication and society; rather they underline the importance of individual differences and personal influences on transmission, acceptance and retention of message. Sociological theories portrayed mass media as an outcome of changes in society. There are other theories that express ideas on how the mass media ought to or can be expected to operate under prevailing political and economic circumstances. Some of the important theories discussed here will provide you insights into the role of mass communication in society and the way in which an audience utilizes different mass media.

Mass media today are inextricable form of modern society. Without these media, society probably cannot conduct its affairs effectively. On their part, mass media, in a bid to serve the people, play a significant role in spreading new ideas, new forms of behaviour and information about a variety of products.

Society, whether simple or complex, needs some communication system so that its various organizations may perform their designated functions. Mass media do what is demanded of them and while doing that they draw strength and support from...
society for their survival. This interdependence leads to some obvious questions of causes and effects between mass media and society: What do mass media do for the society? What is the relationship between mass media and society? Are mass media the outcome of changes in society? Or do they simply constitute a response to certain demands?

3.2.1 Functions

Mass media perform many functions in society. The most important ones of these are information, education, motivation, persuasion, entertainment, cultural promotion and integration. Harold Lasswell defines these functions as ‘surveillance of the environment’, ‘correlation of the components of society in responding to the environment’ and ‘transmission of social heritage’. Wilbur Schramm has used simple terms of watcher, forum, and teacher. For instance, mass media not only inform the members of society about the threats and dangers, good omens and opportunities but also provide forums where debates and discussions on relevant issues can give direction for change in society.

Another function of mass media in modern society is to provide entertainment. They are a source of personal and collective recreation and enjoyment. Newspapers, radio, television and other media help in promotion of cultural heritage and play an important role in integrating people, community and society for harmonious living. Mass media use subtle means and persuasive techniques to mould opinion and induce changes. The question of media effect on society has been dealt with in several studies and writings but not one of them provides a clear-cut view of media effects.

The information function of mass media has assumed a significant dimension at present. Society cannot survive today without being informed about international and local events, about political, economic, social and cultural affairs or even about weather conditions. People need varied information on practically all aspects of their lives in order to plan for the future. But the very nature of mass media being persuasive, it may result in the media transcending ethical codes within which they are expected to operate and they may become biased, manipulative and propagandist. The power of the media to control or manipulate has triggered off thinking on the possibility of their sinister effects vis-a-vis society.
Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) Mention three ways in which mass media can strengthen a nation.

.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................
they become manipulative and may be working towards the taming of mind and indoctrination. Mass media are powerful instruments. In the recent past, quite a few leaders of the Third World countries have used these instruments to attain their own personal goals.

Therefore, if mass media are to become credible instruments of social change, they have to function with restraint and responsibility in accordance with the changing modes of society.

Activity 1

List the various mass media you used yesterday, from the time you got up in the morning to the time you went to sleep at night. Figure out the amount of time you spent on each medium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Mass Media used</th>
<th>Programme Title</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 HYPODERMIC OR BULLET THEORY

This theory reflects the fear or awe of mass media being used for massive propaganda as during World War II when it was thought to have direct and powerful influence upon audiences. The media were seen as manipulating audiences at will. As the name "Bullet" theory suggests, the messages were thought to be like magic bullets that were shot directly into the receiver. It assumes that receivers are passive and defenceless and take whatever is shot at them. It also means that media are extremely powerful institutions and media consumers are naive and malleable.

If one believes in Bullet theory, one has to maintain that the audience is made up of an enormous undifferentiated mass of humanity and that each member of the audience would react identically to the mass mediated messages. If that is so, thousands or millions of people who receive messages by watching horror movies or about dreadful events like war, drugs, AIDS etc. would ultimately become potential victims of mass media. But researches and even our own experiences with mass media do not support this view of mass audience. And this jeopardises the validity of Hypodermic or Bullet theory.
3.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL OR INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE THEORY

The psychological approach to understanding communication effects gives rise to many theories among which an important one is individual difference theory. According to this theory, different personality variables result in different reactions to the same stimuli. In other words, an individual's psychological mechanism accounts for his reactions to media messages. In other words, the reaction to media content differs according to motivation of audience members, their predisposition to accept or reject a given message, their intelligence, beliefs, opinions, values, needs, moods, prejudices, perceptibility, etc.

From the voluminous psychological studies, two important concepts that have emerged — selective exposure and selective perception, need special consideration. Selective exposure and selective perception act as barriers between message and effect, thereby limiting the scope of direct impact of mass communication on people. Let us discuss these two concepts.

Activity 2

While reading newspaper or watching television, are your selective about what you need or watch?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

In the column given below, please list down the themes/items/incidents you were exposed to and state why you still remember them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Items/Incidents</th>
<th>Reason(s) for Remembering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.1 Selective Exposure

Selective exposure occurs when people tend to expose themselves selectively only to communications which are in general accordance with their established convictions and avoid communications which seem to challenge their beliefs. For instance, Communists are far more likely than Congressmen to attend Communist rallies, read Communist literature and discuss Communist policies. If, by chance, people are exposed to contrary opinions, they are able to perceive selectively in order to invest these hostile arguments with acceptable meanings, thus narrowing the gap between what they believe already and what they are invited to believe.

3.4.2 Selective Perception

Once the individuals have selectively exposed themselves to the messages in accordance with their preferences, they tend to “read into” the message whatever suits their needs. This process is called selective perception.

Selective perception also implies the tendencies of media audience members to misperceive and misinterpret persuasive messages in accordance with their own predispositions. The “Mr. Biggo experiments” are classic examples which show that prejudiced people twisted the meaning of anti-prejudice propaganda so it ended up reinforcing their existing biases.
Melvin L. De Fleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach have concluded that "from the vast available content, individual members of the audience selectively attend to, interpret and retain messages, particularly if they are related to their interest, consistent with their attitude, congruent with their beliefs and supportive of their values" (1981).

These studies, which tried to discover psychological characteristics as intervening (i.e., between media and audience), were admirable but they remained inconclusive. The possibilities of other specific traits of an audience which could serve as barriers between message and effects emerged from the political studies and gave rise to personal influence theory.

Check Your Progress 2

**Note:**
1. Use the space given below for your answer.
2. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the Unit.

1) Please write down five things which mass media 'can do' for society and five things which mass media 'cannot do' in the columns given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can Do</th>
<th>Cannot Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 PERSONAL INFLUENCE THEORY

This theory is the outcome of a classic study of the 1940 presidential elections in the United States by Paul E. Lazarsfeld and others in the book, "The People's Choice". The findings revealed that no voter seemed to have been directly influenced by the mass media. It turned out that the interpersonal relationships and not the mass media, had enormous influence on voters. Political discussions with other people, particularly political 'opinion leaders', had more influence on their decision making than their direct use of mass media. These informal communications' network, in which audiences talked to one another and sought advice from opinion leaders, had led to two-step flow influence of mass communication.

3.5.1 Two-step Flow

The above mentioned study of presidential elections revealed that many voters had limited exposure to the mass media. The information they received was mostly through other people, called "opinion leaders", who had first-hand access to mass media information. It was explained like this: the information often flowed from mass media sources directly to opinion leaders, who passed it along to less active sections of the population. Thus, the majority got information this way. The study revealed that the information received by the audience this way was secondhand and could be different from the original because the opinion leaders might add their own interpretation to it before conveying it to others.

The opinion leaders, therefore, form valuable links in the two-step flow of information. This led to many studies on opinion leaders: who are those opinion leaders? What do they do to get information? How are they important to the dissemination of mass media messages? And so on. Researches revealed that these
opinion leaders, although not elected members in society, were more knowledgeable, educated, influential both socially and economically, and more modern in outlook than other fellow members in society. They were held in high esteem by people who relied on them greatly for ideas, information and guidance.

Like other theories, two-step flow has its shortcoming too: first, it diminishes the original, direct influence of mass media; secondly, its effects are evident only in political studies that were conducted decades ago when there was no television influence and, therefore, may not be as applicable to the contemporary political scene.

Activity 3

Recall any recent incident of a major bomb explosion or accident in the country causing death and destruction.

Through which channel did you come to know about the incident?

Now interview ten persons at random to know the sources through which they received the same information.

Categorise the responses. Was it directly through one of the mass media or through some interpersonal channel?

Analyse the steps of the communication flow.

3.5.2 Multi-step Flow

Further studies on opinion leaders led to the modification and reconceptualization of the two-step flow concept into multi-step flow — because of the multi-directional influence of opinion leaders, not necessarily only downwards, when they interpreted the media messages for audiences. The influence was seen to be “upwards” or back towards the media sources, when they sought to tell gatekeepers (editors of newspapers, news editors of radio and TV news, producers, etc.) how to do their job. Also, the influence was “sideways” when they shared insights with other opinion leaders. Moreover, the multi-step flow concept was seen as having many relay points, i.e. information reaching a member of the audience directly or reaching him secondhand, thirdhand or fourthhand, and sometimes in a form considerably different from the original.

It is important to note that both two-step flow and multi-step flow theories clearly discredit the direct influence of the mass media because of extraneous influences, interpersonal channels and social relations of audiences which are often complex, multi-directional and multi-dimensional.

Check Your Progress 3

Note:

i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) Fill in the blanks choosing appropriate words from those given in the brackets.

In the United States of America, ................. studied the presidential election of 1940. He found that the ................. were not directly influenced by ................. . They were influenced by ................. 

(Opinion leaders, Paul Lazarsfeld, Voters, Mass Media)
The sociological approach to communication theory is based on the assumption that there exists a definite relationship between mass communication and social change (societal values, public beliefs and opinions etc.) Some of the relevant theories that are discussed here try to provide answers to questions like these: Do mass media cultivate common beliefs about the world or set an agenda for people? How do people use media and why? Do media have control over audiences? And so on.

3.6 SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION

The sociological approach to communication theory is based on the assumption that there exists a definite relationship between mass communication and social change (societal values, public beliefs and opinions etc.) Some of the relevant theories that are discussed here try to provide answers to questions like these: Do mass media cultivate common beliefs about the world or set an agenda for people? How do people use media and why? Do media have control over audiences? And so on.

3.6.1 Cultivation Theory

This theory, developed by George Gerbner (1967), is based on the assumption that mass media have subtle effects on audiences who, unknowingly, absorb the dominant symbols, images, and messages of media. He calls it "cultivation of dominant image pattern". According to this theory, a long, persistent exposure to TV is capable of cultivating common beliefs about the world. Gerbner and his associates are of the view that the messages of television do not portray reality in society; repeated exposure to such distortions leads to development of particular beliefs about the world; and these beliefs get reinforced once they are developed. For example, repeated viewing of glamorous locales, big houses, clothes, toys, chocolates, fast foods, electric and electronic gadgets may lead viewers to believe that they can expect such things in life but such messages are not beneficial for the poor and underprivileged majority. Gerbner also strongly suggests that the powerful effect of mass media act as moulders of society.

3.6.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

The term was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L.Shaw (1972) in the context of election campaign where politicians seek to convince the voters about the party’s most important issues. The Agenda-setting theory maintains that the media
are more successful in telling people “what is to think about” than in telling them “what to think”. This hypothesis is based on a whole series of studies showing a correspondence between the order of importance given in the media to ‘issues’ and the order of significance attached to the same issues by the public and the politicians. Over a period of time, according to this theory, the very priorities accorded by media to issues become the public priorities as well.

But the critics (McQuail, 1983) argue that the evidence is insufficient to show a causal connection between the various issue ‘agendas’ of the media and the public. They suggested the need for a study that combined analysis of party programmes, evidence of opinion change over time in a given section of the public; a content analysis showing media attention to different issues in the relevant period; and some indication of relevant media use by the public concerned. In the absence of such evidence, the hypothesis of agenda setting remains unproved.

3.6.3 The Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory arose out of the studies which shifted their focus from what the media do to the people to what people do with the media (Katz 1959). The question asked is: How do people use the mass media and why? The “uses” approach assumes that audiences are active and willingly expose themselves to media; and that the most potent of mass media content cannot influence an individual who has “no use” for it in the environment in which he lives. The uses of mass media are dependent on the perception, selectivity, and previously held beliefs, values, and interests of the people.

The term “gratification” refers to the rewards and satisfaction experienced by audiences after the use of media; it helps to explain motivations behind media use and habits of media use. Davison (1959) has shown that many research findings make more sense if communications are interpreted as a link between man and his environment. He suggests that communication effects can be explained in terms of the role they play in enabling people to bring about more satisfactory relations between themselves and the world around them.

Three distinct groups of uses and gratifications studies can be distinguished. The first of these groups conducts inquiries into the range of satisfaction derived from mass media material. The second group looks at the social and environmental circumstances that are responsible for people turning to the media in the first place. The third looks at the needs audience members are attempting to satisfy.

Activity 4

Recall the items you selected for watching, listening to and reading in the last 24 hours. List them down in the space provided below.

In which of these cases, was the use and gratifications theory possibly applicable?
Introduction to Communications

In case of items in which this theory was not applicable, what was the reason, motive, or provocation for you to expose yourself to those items?

3.6.4 Dependency Theory

Melvin De Fleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach have proposed an integrated dependency theory of mass communication in which they recognise various psychological and social factors that prevent the media from exercising arbitrary control over their audiences. De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach describe it like this: "Mass media not only lack arbitrary influence powers, but their personal lack of freedom to engage in arbitrary communication behaviour. Both the media and their audiences are integral part of their society. The surrounding socio-cultural context provides controls and constraints not only on the nature of media messages but also on the nature of their effects on audiences". In fact, communication in all its forms has a very important role in holding society together. The need to belong to the society, to understand the society, and to keep up with society has increased our dependency on media and, in that sense, media enjoy certain powers.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

Tick [✓] the appropriate answers.

1) The Cultivation Theory says that:

   □ a) repeated exposure to mass media for a long period of time makes the audience adopt the culture and values propagated by mass media;

   □ b) the audiences remain the same after having been exposed to mass media for a long time;

   □ c) inspite of long exposure to mass media the audiences are capable of cultivating their own values and culture.

2) According to Agenda-Setting Theory:

   □ a) the mass media always set the agenda for the people;

   □ b) the audience and the mass media have different agendas;

   □ c) the mass media influence the audience and, over a period of time, make the audience prioritise the issues/problems etc., in accordance with the mass media.

3) The gratification theory says that the people;

   □ a) use media selectively to satisfy their needs;

   □ b) are always used by mass media;

   □ c) have no use of media in their daily life.
3.7 NORMATIVE THEORIES OF MASS MEDIA

Normative theories explain how the media ‘ought to’ or can be ‘expected to’ operate under the prevailing set of political-economic circumstances. Since each society controls its mass media in accordance with its policies and needs, it formulates its own separate press theory. Therefore, each theory is connected with the kind of political system in which the society has to conduct its socio-economic political affairs. Siebert et al., in 1956, mentioned four theories, based on classification of the world's national media systems into four categories. Denis McQuail, in the 1980s, considered it appropriate to add two more theories to the original set of four. He concedes that these theories “may not correspond to complete media systems” but “they have now become part of the discussion of press theory and provide some of the principles for current media policy and practice”. In the following paragraphs we shall discuss these theories.

3.7.1 Authoritarian Theory

The term used by Siebert refers to an arrangement in which the press is subordinated to state power and the interests of a ruling class. The theory holds that press and other media should always be subordinate to established authority and should do nothing to undermine it. Media should avoid offence to the majority of dominant moral and political values. The Authoritarian Theory justifies advance censorship and punishment for deviation from externally set guidelines. Unacceptable attack on authority, deviation from official policy, or offences against moral codes should be criminal offences. The theory is easily identified in a dictatorial or repressive society. Under certain circumstances, media are subjected to authoritarian tendencies in democratic regimes as well, especially in times of war and during internal and external emergencies. For instance, in India, broadcasting is under direct control of government and works according to its guidelines. Other media like film, video, etc., are subjected to censorship. Even the press, which is free, lost its independence and freedom during the emergency (1975-77). The authorities can and do use the provisions of Officials Secrets Act to deny free access to information, thereby hampering the freedom of the press.

3.7.2 Free Press Theory

This theory, also called “Libertarian Theory”, (Siebert et al.) is based on the fundamental right of an individual to freedom of expression, which is regarded as the main legitimating principle for print media in liberal democracies. In its simple form, it prescribes that an individual should be free to publish what he or she likes; it is thus extension of other rights to hold opinions freely, to express them, to assemble and organize with others. The free press theory needs no elaboration as is evident from the First Amendment to the American Constitution which states that “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press. It is thus simply an absolute right of the citizen”.

But the application of press freedom has hardly been straightforward. Milton, Stuart Mill and many others argued that if freedom is abused to the extent of threatening good morals and the authority of the state, it must be restrained. According to de
Sola Pool (1973), "No nation will indefinitely tolerate a freedom of the press that serves to divided the country and to open the flood gates of criticism against the freely chosen government that leads it". Moreover, much difficulty has arisen because press freedom has become identified with property rights (private ownership) and freedom from interference in the market. The free press theory thus protects the owners of media but fails to give equal expression to the rights of editors and journalists or of the audiences.

3.7.3 Social Responsibility Theory

The 'social responsibility' theory owes its origin to the Commission on Freedom of the Press (Hutchins 1947), that was appointed in the United States. The commission's main finding is that the free market has failed to fulfill certain obligations to society. According to it, the press has not met the informational, social, and moral needs of the society. In fact, it has increased the power of a single class.

The Social Responsibility theory is based on the assumption that media serve essential functions in society. Therefore, it should accept and fulfill certain obligations to the society. These obligations are to be met by setting up high professional standards in communication of information: truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. In accepting and discharging these obligations, the media should be self-regulatory within the framework of law and established institutions. In the public interest, the media should underplay that news which might lead to crime, violence, and social tension or cause offence to ethnic or religious minorities. The media should be pluralist, should reflect the diversity of their society and allow access to various points of view, including the right to reply.

This theory has lead to the establishment of self regulatory bodies like the Press Council which is responsible for

- drawing up of statutes to protect editorial and journalistic practice;
- framing of codes of ethics;
- ensuring implementation of anti-monopoly legislation; and
- regulation of advertising.

3.7.4 Communist Media Theory

This is also known as the Soviet Media Theory. The Russian media were reorganized after the Revolution of 1917. This theory is derived mainly from the basic tenets of Marx and Engels. It envisages media to be under the control of the working class whose interest they are meant to serve. Private ownership of the press or other media is ruled out. The media must serve positive functions in society relating to information, education, motivation, and mobilization. The media must project society in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist principles. They must support progressive movements in the country and abroad.

The media, according to this theory, are subject to the ultimate control of the State and are integrated with other instruments of political life. Within these limits, the media are expected to be self-regulatory. They must

- act with responsibility;
- evolve and follow norms of professional conduct; and
- respond to people's needs and aspirations.

The media, as per this theory, are not subject to arbitrary interference as in the case of the authoritarian theory.

3.7.5 Development Communication Theory

The limited application of the four established theories of the press to Third World countries, which are vastly different from each other and western countries, and with
fast changing economic and political conditions, has led to the birth of a new approach whereby communication is used to carry out development tasks in line with nationally established policy — hence the formulation of development communication theory. The best source for information on this issue is the report of the UNESCO sponsored International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (McBride et al. 1980).

Some common conditions of developing countries that limit the potential benefits of other theories are:

- the absence of communication infrastructure;
- dependence on the developed world for hardware and software;
- the commitment of these societies to economic, political and social development as a primary national task; and
- the developing countries' awareness of their similar identity and interest in international politics.

Because of these differing conditions, the developing countries' overriding objectives would be to use mass media for nation-building. In the interest of this task of national development, the freedom of the media and of journalists needs to be curbed to an extent.

The major thrust of development communication theorists has been on the use of media as a support to national development programme — poverty alleviation, population control, literacy drive, employment generation schemes, etc. But the effectiveness of this 'theory depends on how governments exercise their right to restrict freedom or to intervene in media operations and how they use devices of censorship, subsidy, and direct control.

3.7.6 Democratic-Participant Media Theory

This most recent addition to the list of normative theories, is relevant to the developed liberal societies but has some elements of the development media theory. McQuail notes that it is most difficult to formulate this theory "partly because it lacks full legitimisation and incorporation into media institutions and partly because some of its tenets are already to be found in some of the other theories". In his opinion, this theory represents a challenge to the reigning theories and merits separate identification.

The main feature of the democratic participant theory relates to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the active receiver in a political society. It is concerned with the right to information, the right to answer back, the right to use the means of communication for interaction in the small-scale settings of the community. The theory favours

- multiplicity of media;
- smallness of scale, of operation; and
- horizontality of communication at all levels. It opposes uniform, centralized, high cost, highly professionalized and state-controlled media.

It is argued that the media should exist primarily for the audiences and not for media organizations and professionals.

Check Your Progress 5

We have just discussed the normative theories. You are now familiar with the basic characteristics of each of these. In the format given below, please fill in the boxes with appropriate words/ phrases describing each.
3.8 SOME OTHER THEORIES OF MASS MEDIA

There are other theories of mass media, like the mass society theory, theories deriving strengths from Marxist ideology. The cultural and semiotic theory, on the other hand, has emerged from the general sciences of signs and meaning by which we derive or transfer meaning in communication.

3.8.1 Mass Society Theory

Mass Society Theory, according to Denis McQuail, emphasises the inter-dependence of institutions which exercise power in the society and mass media are deemed to be integrated into the sources of social power and authority. The media content loosely serve the interests of those who wield economic and political power. People are offered the means of relaxation and diversion. This theory gives a primacy to the media as cause and maintainer of mass society. The theory invokes the images of control and portrays the vertical direction of influence — from above downwards.

3.8.2 Political Economic Media Theory

Of the several theories derived from the Marxist thought one is Political Economic Media Theory. This theory’s focus is on the economic structure of the media rather than the ideological content of the media. Here the ideology depends on the economic base and research attention is directed to analysis of ownership structure and operation of media market forces. Thus, the media institution must be considered a part of the economic system, though with close links to the political system. Economic interests of media owners, that is, the need for profit for media ‘operations’, are important. The consequences are:

- the reduced independences of media sources;
- concentration on the largest markets; and
- neglect of small and poorer sections of the potential audience.

One weakness of this theory is that the working of public media can not be analysed solely in terms of the free market.

The list of the theories are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Owner/Controller</th>
<th>Major Function(s)</th>
<th>One Advantage</th>
<th>One Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Press Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Media Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Communication Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8.3 Hegemony Theory

The "Hegemony" Theory, unlike the political economic, concentrates less on the economic system and more on the ideology itself. Here, a greater degree of independence of ideology from the economic base is emphasised. The relationships between the capitalist and working classes are legitimated by the media in terms of the voluntary consent of the working class itself.

3.8.4 Culture and Semiotic Theory

This theory is derived from Saussure's and Peirce's studies of signs and meaning and their relation to culture, people, and objects. Saussure (1935), a linguist, stressed on texts and its meaning in the light of the "host" culture. It is thus concerned with explanation of cultural as well as linguistic meaning. Semiotics is the general science of signs, developed by philosopher and logician Peirce (1931-35), which deals with how signs signify.

Deriving largely from both Saussure and Peirce, Fiske (1982), describes semiotics as having three aspects; the signs and the way they relate to people who use them; the codes or system into which signs are organised to meet the needs of a society or culture; and the culture within which these codes and signs operate. It is only when meaning is conveyed from sender to receiver, that communication has taken place.

Semiotic theory, thus, is not concerned with transmission of message as is the case in process approach, but with derivation or transfer of meaning in communication. The focus here is on the role of communication in establishing meaning and maintaining values and on how these values enable communication to have meaning. Any failure in communication is not seen as a barrier but regarded as indicative of social and cultural differences between people, culture or society. And this divergence of meaning, according to Semiotic school, can be minimized not by improving the efficiency of communication process but by reducing the social differences. "The determinants of communication lie in society and the world around us, not in the process itself". (Fiske)

3.9 LET US SUM UP

A variety of theories of mass communication have been presented in this unit to provide an understanding of how the mass media operate within the society and the ways in which audiences utilize mass media. As you must have noticed, there are many perspectives to study the possible impact of the mass media in society. The early theories were based on assumptions that mass media have enormous and direct influence upon society, but subsequent research showed that there are no such direct cause and effect relationship between the two.

The interactive perspective considers mass media primarily as moulders of society as well as the reflectors of it. The psychological approach held individual's psychological mechanism responsible for his reaction to media messages. The important concepts that arise from this perspective explain how selective exposure and selective perception limit the scope of direct impact of mass communication of people.

The two-step and multi-step flow of information theories also discredit the direct influence of mass media because of many other influences like interpersonal channels, opinion leaders, social relations of audience which may come in between mass media and audiences and may dilute the media messages and the desired effects.

The sociological approach to mass communication studies put greater emphasize on audiences and see them as manipulating the media more than the media manipulating them. The uses and gratifications theory assumes that people select media in their own way. The media dependency theory and the agenda-setting
theory explain the way audience choose media so as not to be controlled by them.

The normative theories of mass media highlight the restrictions and constraints within which mass media are made to operate under prevailing political economic conditions and thereby diminish their impact.

The theories in marxist tradition consider media as “class media” which operate under class dominance and serve both the economic and ideological interests of the ruling class. And, finally, the theories of culture and semiology demonstrate that it is the transfer of meaning and not the transmission of message that makes communication to take place.

3.10 FURTHER READING


3.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) Mass Media inform the people of a nation about the happenings within a country.
   b) Mass Media bring the people and the administration close, thus, help in giving and receiving feedback about the national policies.
   c) Mass Media propagate the national values and culture by projecting them in various forms in different programmes.

2) Mass media are powerful instruments. They can not act on their own. The people who use these instruments are responsible for the roles played by them. They become anti-people, manipulative, biased, and propagandist, when the owners of mass media choose to be so.

Check Your Progress 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAN DO</th>
<th>CANNOT DO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Can reflect certain aspirations of the people in a society.</td>
<td>1) Cannot reflect all the aspirations of all the people in a society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Can help people who like to use them for some purposes.</td>
<td>2) Mass media are instruments. They cannot act on their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Can help the members of a society to initiate interaction for a decision.</td>
<td>3) Mass media cannot take any decision on behalf of the society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Can only inform.</td>
<td>4) Cannot make the all audiences act in a similar way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Can perturb the audience to a certain extent.</td>
<td>5) Cannot make the audiences totally passive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check Your Progress 3

1) Paul Lazarsfeld
   - voters
   - mass media
   - opinion leaders

2) mass media
   - opinion leaders
   - audience

3) [Diagram of mass media and opinion leaders]

Check Your Progress 4

1) a)

2) c)

3) a)

4) b)

Check Your Progress 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Owner/Controller</th>
<th>Major Functions</th>
<th>One Advantage</th>
<th>One Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian Theory</td>
<td>Head of the State or government or the ruling class.</td>
<td>To propagate only what the owner wants to establish and sustain his rule.</td>
<td>Whatever the owner wants are disseminated for the consumption of the population.</td>
<td>The other voices/views can never reach the people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Press Theory</td>
<td>Private and Public Organisation</td>
<td>To let many voices/views/opinion find their ways for public consumption.</td>
<td>The fundamental rights of each and every citizen are safe guarded.</td>
<td>The freedom of expression may be abused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Owner/Controller</td>
<td>Major Functions</td>
<td>One Advantage</td>
<td>One Disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>Private and Public Organisation</td>
<td>To let all national voices/views/opinion find ways for accurate expression.</td>
<td>People get opportunities to know many alternative views/opinions etc. and thus society as a whole benefits.</td>
<td>General public who are less educated, less rational but has something to say may never find ways to express.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Media Theory</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>To safeguard and propagate the interests of the proletariat.</td>
<td>The society moves to one direction to achieve certain set values.</td>
<td>The other rational voices never find opportunities to express themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development communication Theory</td>
<td>Usually the State.</td>
<td>To support the policies of development of the government.</td>
<td>The limited resources are better utilised for nation building.</td>
<td>The culture of freedom of expression is not encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Participation Theory</td>
<td>State and Private Organisation.</td>
<td>To set the receivers of message interact with source and other relevant parties.</td>
<td>Encourages small scale operation of media. People may have a better chance to interact more on local and relevant issues.</td>
<td>National fabric may weaken.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>