UNIT 3 ACCESS TO MEDIA

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The details presented in this unit discuss various dimensions of media access. At the end of your study, you will be able to

- explain what media access is
- analyse how media access leads to participation
- explain the concepts of right to opinion, expression, and information
- discuss the Indian situation with regard to mass media access; and
- point out the greater degree of free expression in print media in the private sector vis-a-vis electronic media controlled by the Government.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss some special characteristics of mass media such as geographical reach, psychological impact and feedback. It explains the need for community participation in media programming and the obstacles encountered in relating content to the audience. Lastly, the Unit describes the psychological and legal limitations to free expression of views.

In this introductory block, so far, we have discussed the historical and sociological growth and development of Indian society, and the complex relationship that exists between it and the mass media.

Having grounded ourselves on the basics of Indian society in general, we shall discuss particularly the issue of ‘Access to Media’ in this unit. We shall consider the various concepts of access to media and their implications in Indian society.

After this, we shall discuss the mass media policies in India in the last unit of this introductory block.
Activity 1

Before you proceed further, pause for a while. Take a pencil and list down the means such as newspapers, radio etc. which you have used to inform yourself about the happenings in your region, country, and the world. List down also the means which might have helped you to receive more information or quick information (e.g. fax machine) etc. Find out what are the things which are available to you and what are the things not available to you for better communication.

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3.2 COMMUNICATION AN INTEGRAL PART OF HUMAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

I am sure, there are quite a few sources and means which you use to receive information. And there are some, which you have listed above, to which you would like to have access to, receive or give information.

Technologies, and gadgets may be existing in the market but they may not be available to a large section of the population. It is this availability or access which makes a difference in the life of an individual or society. It is said that the reach of Doordarshan covers 80% of our population but access to it is only 25%. Similar statistics can be given for the newspaper, radio, and cable. We shall proceed now, keeping in mind this concept of access.

Human civilisation is passing through a crucial phase of its existence and survival. Mass media as purveyors of news and views, have a decisive role of preparing the human race for the 21st century. Due to the primacy accorded to information as a social input, many developed societies have become information societies. The rest are on the verge of becoming so. With the growing importance of communication, the societies are racing against time to be in the mainstream of the communication revolution.

Let us take a glance at the past. The process of communication started with travellers and letters, but due to various reasons such as physical inaccessibility, restrictions imposed by kings and emperors it was often incomplete or distorted. The kings and the emperors permitted only such information which helped them. Governments of the day deliberately encouraged preservation of the traditions of social systems that adhered to fatalism and submission since it suited them. The transformation in European societies following the Renaissance, Reformation and Industrial Revolution, resulted in a sea change and the modernisation process began spreading to newer areas beyond Europe.

The rapid development of industrialisation gave rise to new technologies which were instrumental in bringing about a change in the process of communication. The process of communication was fast and receipts of communication and the feedback were ensured. After World War II there was a tremendous growth and development of communication technologies which changed the very nature of our society. What we call mass media today, are the product of technologies operating directly in our society. Just close your eyes, and think of your life without newspaper, radio, TV, telephone and probably fax machine. Mass media and communication technologies have become integral parts of our life and our society. Like other institutions, mass
Relations between
Mass Media and Society

Media also perform definite functions, the major ones being the supply of news and views, education, entertainment and socialisation.

3.3 FUNCTIONS OF MASS MEDIA

In the following paragraphs we shall discuss these functions and try to understand how access to media help in multiplying the effects of these functions.

Education

Media are used to add new information to human knowledge and keep on upgrading it. This has an educative value since education depends upon methodical organisation of information. Ignorance cannot be eradicated without adequate information supply. Think of all those radio and TV programmes, articles in newspapers, magazines, journals and films which have enriched you.

The overall human development is directly related to education. Media enable the spread of education through conventional as well as unconventional methods.

We can safely assume the reciprocal relation between media and education, for any increase in educational level increases the consumption of media content. An educated or literate person will read books, journals, magazines, newspapers etc. This increase in consumption of media product is related to their availability and easy access to them. And generally, the route to one medium permits extension of interest to another medium. Normally, an educated man is not satisfied with access to only one medium. He may become a consumer of other media as well. This desire to have access to media increases the level of education and knowledge among the population.

Economical Growth

Therefore, increase in media use increases the level of education. The expansion in the level of education among the population has given rise to the need for greater access to information. The demand for information has boosted the media hardware production causing an unprecedented growth in the economy. This, in turn, has stimulated the expansion of communications industry including media industries. It is said that the level of media use is an indicator of the overall national development. But this assumption may not hold true in all cases. According to experts, levels of efficiency will increase with increased media use in the service sector in particular. The communication sector itself reflects efficiency by its non-stop and speedy collection and transmission of information.

Let us go back to education. Effective media use is generally aimed to achieve two important positive results:

- Standardisation of education, and
- Change in people’s lifestyle.

Entertainment

The mass media has monopolised the leisure industry. Transactional media giants have started invading the continents via the sky, using satellite slots. Our own Doordarshan has expanded its services manifold. The competition for audience attention has become fierce.

Public Watchdog

Mass media have also played a leading role in shaping, guiding and reflecting the public opinion. These functions of media help to establish democracy. Use of media in a democratic polity creates critical awareness among the people, and so it becomes an essential component of mass vigilance to keep authorities tenterhooks. The media may not be able to perform these functions unless the access to them is ensured to a large section of our population.

Information

Access to media means access to facts and documents which help one acquire information and knowledge. Media organisation and communication hardware expand access to information. In comparison with individuals, media have more access to sources of information due to their reach and institutional character. Media power makes access easy.
Modernisation has converted media use into a daily feature of human activity. However, factors like age, education, economic status, personal needs, and availability of proper gadgets, decide the quantum and frequency of media use. The higher the education and income, the higher the media use. You must have noticed that most of the media organisations/centres are situated in the urban areas. The consumers of media products are also concentrated in the urban areas. It is a sad reality that the majority of our people do suffer from not having adequate access to media.

Safeguarding Democracy

Media access is important in the political sphere. Access to media is access to public opinion, so essential to protect and preserve democratic institutions. It is advantageous to both the leaders and masses. Leaders can address masses depending upon their convenience. They reach widely dispersed masses simultaneously, through the electronic media in particular. One of the chief advantages of media access is that it helps correct distortions in facts, views and attitudes. For radio and TV, distance is not a barrier. For instance, the Press conference address by the UN Secretary-General in New York can be watched by the Indian people through satellite.

‘Access to Media’ and ‘Access for Media’

The question of access to media has to be understood clearly. What needs to be clarified are the terms “access to the media” and “access for the media”. The former relates to the availability of media to audiences and the access that various audience segments have to media. However, the latter term denotes media’s access to news sources, to people, places and stored information not easily available.

In the Indian context it has to be understood with reference to the reach that the media have in making themselves available to the audience. Here, the interplay of various factors like illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, caste, occupation, economic hierarchy, political socialization, all have a direct bearing on the kind of access people have to the media.

On the question of media’s access to information, the issue is regarding the degree of access to be allowed. Governments in their eagerness to regulate accessibility to media have fumbled—repeatedly. They have not been able to channelise the positive effects of media access which could induce public debate on public issues—the lifeblood of democracy.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.
   ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Mention three functions of mass media which help in educating a large number of people.

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2) ‘If all the people of India have access to TV and radio, then the government will be able to solve many major problems of the nation’ Do you agree with this statement?
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   If Yes, why? If No, why not? Give two points for or against your argument.

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3.4 MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Let us now explain what we mean by media availability. Modern society is participatory in nature. Consensus is its hallmark. Individuals make their own decisions on public issues and the public expression collection of common individual decisions is necessary for stability and common governance. A participant society is characterised by several common factors. Some important ones are: people go to school, read newspapers, receive salaries for the jobs they do, change jobs freely, buy goods by making payments in the open market, vote in elections with a free will and express uninhibited opinions on public issues. Media availability is an indispensable element for a participant people to shape and express their opinions. By using mass media for such expression, the participants believe that their opinions do matter in decision making and policy formulation. Such a reciprocal relationship is required for societal development.

Some experts say that there are three vital areas of development. These are literacy, urbanisation and media participation. The interrelated development these three aspects helps to achieve better living conditions. The mutual impact between literacy and media participation is interesting as the increase in literacy level leads to the increase in media participation. Urbanisation, at the outset, helps the growth of literacy and media participation. The literates, on their part, support and develop mass media and in turn media help the growth of literacy.

In this context, the assumptions just made, this argument may be debated upon after examining the reality of urban India. You must have visited some of our cities. The living conditions for the majority of the inhabitants are for below than the minimum facilities that should be available to them. There are vast slums in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi—causing all sorts of social and human problems. Consider the literacy aspect, it is neither bright. And surprisingly, a lot of people living in these slums do have access to radio, TV and cable.

Let us explain the term ‘media participation’ and “mediation availability”. Media participation in simple words means the number of people buying newspapers, owning radio and television sets and watching movies. In the communication market, literacy and media participation have supply-demand reciprocity that is directly connected with the web of desires and satisfactions of the public. We are well aware that modernisation prompts mobility. Mass media provide the participants with new experiences and insights into new skills. Naturally, the curiosity of the people is aroused which can be quenched only through greater access to media. It means that media must have greater access to information to meet the participants’ needs. As a corollary, greater access generates greater participation in a democratic society. The increased participation is sustained by making media available and it accelerates supply and demand for media products. Pocket radios, portable TV sets and roadside news-stands have provided greater media availability. Increase in media participation and access to information will increase participation in all sectors of the social system.

3.5 CONCEPT OF RIGHT TO FREE EXPRESSION

To understand mass media, we must know the degree of freedom they enjoy. An ideal relation between a citizen and the government is found in the media system. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, in Europe earlier days, much emphasis was placed on freedom of ‘thoughts and opinions’. This Libertarian was a sequel concept to the licensing system of the press in the West by the Church as well as the rulers. John Milton, Isaac Newton, John Locke, William Blackstone, Lord Mansfield, John Stuart Mill, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and a host of others espoused the cause of freedom of the press, which has now been equated with the right to communicate.

As technological innovations improved, as the spread and reach of the press expanded, attention was focused on diffusion of information upholding the right of the public to the freedom of information. Originally freedom of information meant the people’s right to information. In simple words, it was the right to know whatever affected the individuals themselves. The ever-expanding technologies enlarged the scope of this right by providing more and more access to information. New information technology has posed new dangers to the freedom of media persons as
well as media consumers. In theory, everybody enjoys the right to freedom of expression, but the huge capital needed for investment in new media of mass communication, for example radio and television, has negated the whole concept since only the very-well-to-do, the elite, can afford to launch media ventures. Others in the race are left behind. Since they have control over enormous public funds, governments wish to harness the new technologies for their own purposes. The freedom of expression that has ultimately been redesignated as right to information, has acquired sharp political, social and economic overtones. A stunning paradox is the demand for information by the ever-burgeoning audiences on one side, and the concentration of media control either with the governments or few elite individuals, on the other.

Activity 2

In India, for the sake of development, we need to ensure that the mass media reach every corner and each Indian has access to them. But, in reality, the mass media are concentrated only in the urban centres. The villages starve from not having access to mass media. Hence, the ever widening gap between the urban and rural centres exist in the areas of literacy, education, health and hygiene, etc. In the outline map of India provided below, locate the centres of mass media (newspaper, TV and radio). Make an attempt to identify two major newspapers, published from each of these centres. This will help you to discover the centres and see how they are over-crowded with media organisations.

Having done this, identify and list down the owners (e.g. Goenkas) of the newspapers, TV and radio. Use colour pencils to indicate their centres of operation (e.g. The Indian Express from Delhi).
Free access to media and social change

Mass media are a mode of social interaction. They facilitate interaction among individuals, between individuals and institutions, and finally among institutions themselves. Social interaction of any type is characterised by transfer of meanings, customs, beliefs and values. The media are also products of social ethos and orders. They reflect both these elements in their functions and contents. Media also belong to social institutions. In the normal course of interaction, media influence other cultural institutions and get influenced by them in return. Wittingly or unwittingly, the dominant social institutions will make use of the media, to stabilise the existing social order.

Mass media are supposed to act as agents of social change, especially in developing countries like India. An immediate change in any social system is a difficult proposition. Social change is a process that demands alterations in structure and functions of society. Media normally reinforce the existing values and beliefs in a given system. Access to information may, on the other hand, alter the social structure. Hence this dual of contradictory interaction occurring between media and society. Several institutions and factors can, with the help of mass media, bring about changes. For instance, the creation of mandal, panchayats, invention of new industrial technology, improvement in the public transport system and even the formation of a ministry can be responsible for effecting social change.

Social change and economic change are linked, because economic development programmes, such as improved methods in agriculture, health, industry and education are all aimed to induce changes in a specific social structure. The mass media aid this process of economic advancement directed towards social change.

3.6 THE INDIAN SITUATION

We shall now look at the situation of media availability and access in the India context. India is a classic example of communication contradictions. Certain media are allowed in the private sector while others are controlled by the Government. For example, the print media and feature film production are in the private sector while radio and television are wholly owned by the Central Government. Even the state governments have been denied the possession of electronic media. When the government made allegations against some industrial tycoons for monopolising the press in India, well known Journalist, Frank Moraes, countered by accusing the Central Government of having the monopoly over electronic media. He challenged the right of the government to call others monopolistic when the government itself was a monopolist.
Newspapers in India have traditionally upheld the freedom of the press. From the day of the appearance of the first newspaper in 1970 the Bengal Gazette published by James Augustus Hickey, the Indian press has been fighting against the government control. The Indian press during the freedom struggle was up the forefront. The sacrifices made by journalists of eminence for a free press and the liberty of the country is worthy of emulation. The Indian press has traditionally been in the private sector, being a powerful tool of free expression of opinion. Before Independence, the press was pre-occupied with political views and the trend continued even after independence. The electronic medium of radio was under the control of the British Government which made use of it for propaganda purposes during World War-II. While the print media continued to be in the private sector after independence, radio remained with the government. The reason offered was that since radio was a powerful mass medium it should be used for education and development. People may point out that with such reasoning, the Government is giving a wrong impression of print medium. Print medium does not have any educative value.

In India, with a low literacy level, the influences of print media are limited to the urban centres. Therefore, probably, the government can take the risk of freeing the print medium. But it may be a risky proposition to privatise the electronic media.

Indian newspapers, in the real sense of the term, are not mass newspapers for the following reasons:

- The newspapers are largely published from urban centres, making them an urban phenomenon. This is evident from the fact that the largest circulated newspapers and magazines are situated in metropolitan cities or State capitals. The rural hinterland is thus denied the availability of the newspapers. Some of the towns which do get newspapers, receive them because of their proximity to railway stations or motorable roads and national highway.
- The question of widespread illiteracy, with the rural populace having at many places less than 20-30 per cent literacy, has made newspapers totally irrelevant. Just 15% of our total population of 873 million people read newspapers.
- The stark poverty of the rural illiterate masses prevents them from buying a newspaper whose cost has escalated 200% over the last 20 years.
- It is for these reasons that it would be a misnomer to call newspapers a mass medium.

Further, most Indian newspapers being privately owned, are supposed to guarantee free and unbiased reporting. Several defects have been identified. Most of the largely circulated newspapers are owned by big business and industrial houses. Theoretically, the press is assigned the dual role of unbiased transmitter of information and ideas and as profit making agency by functioning as an industry as the Indian constitution guarantees the freedom of expression and business. However, print media ownership is a cause for concern. The newspapers are owned mostly by the elite business tycoons and political interests take precedence over any other human interest. Professionals have debated the issue, but a solution has eluded them. Even the Second Press Commission has pointed out this anomalous trend. A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, Delhi revealed that out of 54 dailies selected, 27 newspapers were owned either partially or totally by business and industrial houses and controlled about 50 per cent of the total circulation. For the purpose of unbiased and objective performance, delinking the ownership of newspapers from large industrial houses was suggested.

However, with all drawbacks it has, the performance of the Indian press since Independence has been admirable. It has been claimed that it enjoys credibility with reading audiences. This superiority of print media over the electronic media is attributed to the former being more influenced by a critical reading public while the latter provide only the litany of the government views. Public opinion is reflected either in the editorials or letters to the editor published in newspapers, it is claimed. But, with 85% of the population totally unexposed to the press and its accessibility limited to just the elite, it is questionable how accessibility to the media can be a criteria for its high credibility. Further, how can editorials or letters to the editor from the literate few, constitute feedback of the entire nation. These are moot questions about media availability and access in the context of Indian newspapers.

Now, let us examine the position of radio and TV in terms of access and availability in India. Government controlled electronic media are anathema to the very concept of
an open society. Frequent political interference has eroded the credibility of both AIR and Doordarshan. Added to this, bureaucratisation has affected professional aspects of their functioning. Several Committees and study groups that went into the question suggested autonomy for the electronic media in order to make them more accessible to the public. These two powerful media that can cross the barriers of illiteracy are destined to become partners in developing Indian society. If they are to serve public interest, they should be owned directly by the public, not by the political party in power which denies or limits their access to the public. It is estimated that by 2000 AD, radio will cover almost 90 per cent of all households in the country. The reach of electronic media is the reason why political authorities keep a stranglehold on them. The government monopoly will not so easily be replaced by autonomy even though Parliament has approved the Prasar Bharathi Bill for setting up an independent and autonomous authority for the electronic media. We should remember here that where there is a monopoly neither any evaluation of performance nor accountability is possible. To be accountable to the public, the latter’s access to electronic media is doubly essential. A comprehensive communication policy to allow unhindered public access is the need of the hour. Public access leads to public scrutiny. In turn, it will lead to professional excellence and standardisation.

**Media Control Vs Media Access**

Media control not only determines the character of ownership, information slant and selection, but also the extent of access that its consumers enjoy. In the case of media, the question arise whether the control should only be on the management or on the principles and output of these media organisations?

Control also determines the pattern of growth of a medium. Government control over television has resulted in a highly centralised bureaucratic setup. Control also determines the choice of technology. The establishment of High Power Transmitters (HPTs) in a few selected places, and relay centres in the form of Low Power Transmitters (LPTs), is a function of control. The case of newspapers, though different from that of television, also serves to highlight the overriding importance of proprietary control. To illustrate, publishing of a chain of newspapers by leading newspaper houses not only standardises editorial opinion but also acts as a deterrent in fostering local intellectual creativity. In other words, a level of technology that enabled the nation to develop a sense of unity, has now recoiled on it to perpetuate unanimity. Diversity has been the first casualty of the national endeavour to import latest technology.

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**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:**

i) Use the space below for your answers.

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

1) "Literacy, urbanisation and media participation are the 3 major areas of development." Do you agree with this statement?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

If Yes, why? If No, why not? Give one reason for your answer.

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2) Mention two reasons why a newspaper may not be considered a mass medium.

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3.7 MEDIA REACH

The term "media reach" is used to describe the number of individuals or homes exposed to a specific medium or a combination of media within a particular time frame. It can be expressed either in numerical frequencies or percentages. Duplication in assessing the reach of a particular medium is different to avoid. If it is television, generally the number of households owning television set are taken into account.

The vast geographical reach at the command of mass media has made it possible for them to envelop urban and remote rural areas, in addition to national and regional centres owing to the diversity of audiences. The expansion has changed the nature of the message transmitted by the media. The geographical and demographic reach of TV has forced the press and radio to re-orient their contents. Unfortunately, in India the growth of TV has been at the expense of the radio. Unless the trend is checked by introducing innovative programmes, All India Radio stands to lose its traditional pre-eminent position.

The mass media have brought distant events into the homes making their audiences a part of national and global communities. The expansion of mass media meant expansion of allied sectors such as news agencies and syndicates. The fact that more than 100 countries in the world have their own news agencies is a testimony to their rapid growth. The reach of print media can be gauged by the circulation of newspapers in the world, which is 400 million copies, averaging 130 per thousand inhabitants. The advent of TV has had an adverse impact on the press in terms of circulation and revenue. Yet, the press has survived this onslaught because of its interpretative and editorial functions.

3.7.1 Psychological Penetration

The expansion of mass media has added a new dimension to the art of persuasion. As carriers of commercial messages in the form of advertisements, mass media have made the technique more sleek and sophisticated.

Mass production of goods for mass consumption necessitated the trend towards persuasive sales. In reality, the advertising industry has sustained the information industry. And mass media have not only survived but have also become stronger because of incoming revenue from advertisements.
Another area of psychological penetration has to do with stimulating the faculty of cultural awareness among the public. The opinion impact is in the form of editorialisation through analysis, interpretation and inference. Though not blatantly persuasive, editorial writers sometimes employ language in a subtle manner so as to influence public opinion. Political newspapers and official organs are examples of the efforts to influence public opinion.

The psychological penetration of media messages depend on individual responses rooted in social attitudes, needs, values and other personal as well as collective factors. People do not generally accept any information which seeks to challenge their opinions and values. They tend to select and retain what agrees with their own views and avoid what does not agree with their values and opinions. Stonewalling of any persuasive information is not uncommon. In fact, personal contact has a stronger influence than do mass media in matters relating to politics, shopping, fashion etc. Many studies have found that mass media can utilise the services of those people who can influence the opinions of others. Such people are called Opinion Leaders. They can mould the mindsets of people. Personal contact mitigate resistance. A link between mass media and interpersonal networks is essential for acceptable psychological impact.

### 3.7.2 Feedback Facility

The functions of communicators are complete only upon obtaining reactions to their efforts. The audience reaction is known as ‘feedback’. In other words, it is the communication process in reverse. Feedback may be manifest in any form such as reporters informing their original news source; or editors to reporters; or members of the audience to editors, reporters, news sources, or even among themselves. Feedback is quick and discernible in person-to-person communication, helping the communicator to modify the message to make it more convincing. Feedback is slightly delayed in mass media communication. It will generally be in the form of letters or talk-back facility as the case may be. Many communication research studies have been conducted on audience feedback. A communicator who understands the audience feedback can make appropriate changes in the message for its eventual acceptance. Thus, receipt of audience reactions and consequent replies create a broader public access to mass media.

### Check Your Progress 3

**Note:**

i) Use the space below for your answers.

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

1) Indicate whether the following statements are true or false.

   a) Media reach means the total number of TV sets in the country [ ] True [ ] False

   b) The percentages of ‘media reach’ in a country may not be equal to the ‘access to media’. In reality the latter is always less than the former.

   [ ] True [ ] False

   c) ‘Geographical reach’ and ‘demographic reach’ of media are one and the same.

   [ ] True [ ] False

2) ‘Psychological penetration’ is the major aim of all the media messages. Do you agree with this statement?

   [ ] Yes [ ] No

Give 2 reasons for your answer.

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A community is an assembly of people in an identified geographical area. Every community consists of groups with diverse backgrounds of social class, economic status and political or religious affiliations. Communication, either personal or mass or both, holds them together. A community’s development hinges on effective communication. Media can be used for negative purposes also. At the community level, many issues need media attention or intervention for immediate solutions. Issues like community development, sanitation, public health, literacy, the welfare of women and children etc., can be resolved through local participation. This requires communication resources, in addition to economic resources. It also demands collective initiative and support. Optimum utilisation of media resources is possible when media programming not only invites community participation but includes inputs from the community for its upliftment.

Mass media generally seek to attract large groups concentrated in big cities and towns. However, their reach amongst the people in small communities and their reactions to it are equally important for effective communication. For the purpose more emphasis is now laid on small media and local issues for the purpose. In some countries the small media are neglected in favour of big media resulting in the wastage of limited resources besides the usage of inappropriate channels to reach a distant audience. The remedy is to combine big media with small media. This exercise has enormous potential in redefining development strategies. In the changing scenarios, the top-down model of media communication is being replaced by a multiplex model in which communities participate vigorously in framing policies, and plans, and in implementing them. This model has helped familiarise to the audiences.

The increased use of local media makes communication a vital input of every community development programme. Community participation in media programmes accentuates free flow of information. Consequently, the democratic process acquires more meaning and relevance. The involvement of independent groups, voluntary organisations and non-governmental agencies in the community programme stimulates socialisation and makes it more purposeful. Community involvement in mass media has a tremendous bearing on social decisions. We must note that several organisations like political parties, religious groups, labour unions, and youth and women’s organisations, besides professional associations, are a permanent feature of any given community. These groups generate and promote action for changes in the law, protection of the environment, freedom of the media, besides other activities on their agenda.
Communities generate and publicise alternative ideas, and provide a forum for debates and discussions on current issues. The minority viewpoints, hitherto unheeded by the mass media, become public once they get a hearing. This collective pressure ensures a reappraisal of the priorities of mass media. Community participation is further strengthened when reputed local organisations launch and run their own journals.

Community participation in mass media can be both at the level of decision-making and management. It can also mean the setting-up of regional or local radio stations, decentralised programme production centres and launching of Cable TV. Several recent examples highlight the increased community participation in mass media. A television station in Germany encourages social groups to make films about themselves which are then telecast. In former Yugoslavia, information centres at the community and regional levels published newspapers and broadcast radio programmes reporting local events. In some countries radio and television stations publish programme proposals for audience scrutiny and the consequent feedback is transmitted to the programme councils.

Two-way Cable TV, portable video cameras, satellite reception antenna, Pay TV, electronic data transmission, citizens' radio and home video recorders have stimulated community participation in mass media activities. Individuals and groups take part in the communication process through official media. With abetment from alternative media, further development and democratisation of the societal structure should be possible. We find that grassroots groups are vocal in demanding access to and participation in the communication system. The formation of citizens' committees in many countries to forward their reactions to communication managers has resulted in a salutary expression of cultural diversities besides making social participation in media a reality.

Check Your Progress 4

Note:  i) Use the space below for your answers.
      ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Mention 3 positive ways in which a community may develop as a result of
   community participation in media programmes.

2) In India, as a result of community participation, there may be some negative
devolution in our society. Mention 3 such negative developments.

Restrictions—How and Why?

Theoretically, community participation in media programming is ideal. In practice, however, it is not easy. Governments all over the world, realising the potential of mass media, besides wanting to contain threats from them, have resorted to direct and indirect regulations. Media laws that prescribe specific dos and don'ts have adversely affected people's participation. Moreover, the proliferation of media networks and concentration of multimedia ownership have brought uniformity of control. To be precise, networking technology has effectively blocked the community participation in programme preparation. National advertising, national news and national hook-ups have contributed to diminished media access.

In India, the network of low power relay transmitters linked by satellite to the central station of Doordarshan at Delhi, has made community participation in any manner impossible. It has resulted in one-sided vertical communication. The regional services, with their limited durations, are not of much help in this respect.
If you are interested in this aspect, then you may watch Doordarshan and AIR programmes for a week or so. Assess for yourself the element of community participation in them. People in power decide for the rest of the country both the content and the form of the programme. Do the Nagas, the Keralites, the Kashmiris identify themselves with their programmes?

Another prohibitive factor is the dominance of professionals in mass media. Unchecked professionalisation and pre-set standards of excellence have obstructed community participation in media programming. Whose professionalism is it any way? Who defines that and for whom? It is particularly true in the case of Indian TV which, instead of democratising programming, has bureaucratised it furthermore. Over-bureaucratisation breeds red tape, inefficiency and corruption and in a very short period affects negatively the creativity and talent available among the residents of a community. Experience in many Asian and African countries shows that governments have deliberately ignored the participatory aspect, and manipulated the media messages, to the detriment of their own interests. In effect, community participation promotes liberal attitudes in the long run.

3.9 PSYCHOLOGICAL, OFFICIAL AND LEGAL LIMITATIONS

Though the media impact on an audience is limited it is generally exaggerated. Media can only be hidden persuaders. The process of impact starts with perception. Media influence depends upon the perception of the message by the audience. Individuals have their own perceptions of persons, events and environment. Cultural institutions, peer groups and the social public of which they are members influence their perceptions. Thus individual perceptions vary and are limited. When different groups and institutions vie with each other to influence individuals in society, the impact of mass media is reduced. Studies have found that peer groups, opinion leaders and, on occasions, even religious institutions, have more influence over individuals than mass media. In reality, attitudes of the people towards media are influenced by these groups. The audience has a tendency to accept the message according to individual needs and affiliations. The next psychological stage is of retention. Here too the message retention is selective.

Media must exercise care while attempting to influence the beliefs, customs and attitudes of individuals. If strongly held beliefs, customs and attitudes are challenged. The rejection of media message is outright. Media can influence only those who are receptive and willing to change. Loosely held beliefs and attitudes can be, at the most, channelised. Several psychologists have recognised the importance of gratification as an influential factor. Reward, whether delayed or immediate, decides the acceptance of media messages.

Another curious psychological phenomenon that affects media impact is the ‘sleeper effect’. Repetition of the message is resorted to by communicators to have a positive impact on the audience. But data on the frequency of repetitions is not available. Advertisers in particular are a harried lot in this regard since over-repetition may prove counter-productive. Another psychological limitation is that interpersonal networks have more credibility than mass media in traditional societies.

Legal limitations generally originate from the government. History provides us with a lot of examples of intolerance of independent opinions. Free expression of opinion is the main worry of all governments. Dissent is a bugbear for authorities and, in order to retain power devoid of public consternation, the governments attempt vigorously to stifle the counter viewpoints.

Nonetheless, governments are responsible for ensuring media accessibility and for channelising communication for collective welfare. However, direct control of mass media is a much debated issue. Government control may check the effects of commercialism, but its record in providing access to balanced information is not enticing. The flow of information is filtered and transmission norms are one-sided-favourable only to the party in power.
Censorship is a powerful restriction to curtail independent opinion. Physical violence and threats against media persons are evident forms of restrictions. Governments resort either to censorship or repressive statutes, and sometimes both. Particularly in the case of the press, the circulation of printed copies is either banned or confiscated. Not only the executive, but even the legislature and the judiciary can curtail media. The officials, on their part, may try to influence middlemen by suggesting what is news and what is not, in addition to what should be discussed.

The Official Secrets Act can be a real threat to media persons. The sweeping powers under this statute are such that their detention under any pretext is possible. Besides these limitations, official pressure for suppression of views can be in the form of patronisation. Distribution of government ads as largesse is a common practice in several states of India since state governments are the largest advertisers. The carrot and stick policy is being diligently practised by authorities to keep the press at a distance. The moot question is: how far should the media be free? And the debate has remained inconclusive not only in India, but elsewhere too.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.
     ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) How is the participation of the ordinary people restricted in Television? Mention three ways.

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2) How do governments restrict the operation of mass media? Give two ways.

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3.10 LET US SUM UP

Mass media play an important role in a free society. Now, after reading the unit, you have been able to identify how media use and access have accelerated the spread of information in the world; as social beings humans are sustained by the exchange of ideas, information and views with fellow-beings. Media bring people and culture together. Ignorance of information is a stumbling block for any type of development—social, political, cultural, economic and even spiritual. Thus communication media have become vital for the supply of information, education, entertainment and socialisation.

You have also understood that media use is an index of development. The greater the media use, the greater will be the level of education. Similarly, increased access connotes increased people’s participation in societal activities. Likewise, you are also now aware of the need in democratic societies for freedom to express views as well as to receive and transmit information. Right to free expression of views is the hallmark of an open society. Free access to information also brings about desired social changes.

Subsequently, you have also learnt how far the print media are free in India, and how the electronic media are used for government publicity. Feedback is necessary for community participation in media programming and is gaining currency and popularity as a means for effective communication. Ultimately, the psychological and legal limitations are also discussed.
Thus, in this unit, we have discussed:

- the necessity for media use
- access to media and right to free expression for social change and development
- the Indian media situation in terms of reach, penetration and limitations, and
- the new concept of community participation in media programming.

### 3.11 GLOSSARY

**Media use**: Using media for information, education and entertainment.

**Empathy**: To be one with a person or persons.

**Oligopoly**: Producers of media contents affecting the media market, but not full control of it.

**Social change**: Change in the structure and functions of a society.

### 3.12 FURTHER READING


### 3.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

**Check Your Progress 1**

1)  
- Media inform audiences and update their level of knowledge.
- Media entertain people by presenting various cultural shows.
- Media focus on the activities of public figures, and thus help people to choose honest and hardworking candidates to offices and reject those who are dishonest and corrupt.

2) No.
- Access to media may not ensure the usage of media for education, literacy, health etc.
- Access to media will help people in power to propagate whatever policies they like—these may not always address the needs of the people.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) No.
- It depends on how one defines 'development'. Assuming that 'development' here means overall economical and social development, it may not be correct to say that urbanisation and media participation would lead to such development.

2) The newspapers are urban centered. They serve a very small segment of our population.
- India has a problem with illiteracy. This problem limits the spread of newspapers.

**Check Your Progress 3**

1)  
- a) False
- b) True
- c) False

2) Yes
All the media products have some aims and objectives. And the producers of these programmes would always like to communicate these messages to the target audience.

- The producers would like to perturb the audience and expect them to act according to the messages.

Check Your Progress 4

1) The community will be in Control of mass media and as a result will be able to set social agenda to be addressed by media.

- The community will be able to see its own reflection in the programmes.
- The local talents will be given impetus and nurtured.

2) The community may become very parochial in its approach. And thus, may not be able to identify itself with the national issues.

- Local elite may rob the community of such a golden opportunity.
- Local political parties and religious groups may exploit the media for their own narrow gains.

Check Your Progress 5

1) The television in India is managed by people who generally do come from an elite background. These government officials formulate various policies on the content and form of the programmes.

- Sophisticated people with urban background are encouraged to be TV personalities, script writers, managers, etc.
- The people from economically and socially well-to-do background have a culture of their own and by being in television, they find it compelling to propagate their own culture which is not of the toiling masses.

2) By controlling and owning mass media organisation.

- By promulgating various restrictive law.