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BLOCK 2: SHARING WITH SOCIETY

One of the main activities of any social media platform is sharing news, information, photos, videos, or similar content. Mobile gadgets have simplified this process, enabling social media users to share anything that interests them. In this Block, we explore the different scenarios of social media sharing patterns from professional and academic perspectives.

Unit 4: Journalism and Social Media— explores the unique relationship between social media and news entities. It explains how social media platforms have transformed news production, delivery, and consumption. The major topics covered include algorithmic influence, live reporting, journalistic autonomy, and fact-checking. This Unit also discusses the evolving practices and challenges that shape journalism on digital platforms.

Unit 5: Transmedia Storytelling—You will understand the dynamics of the new narrative style, which is unique across multiple platforms in coordinated and participatory ways. The Unit also examines the strategic use of social media systems, the importance of audience engagement, and the challenges of coordinating narrative storytelling. You will also learn more in-depth about managing complex, cross-platform storytelling experiences.

Unit 6: Theories of Social Media—Social media's three decades of existence have enabled thinkers, theoreticians, and scholars to map the communication process in these systems. This Unit critically discusses social media's functioning based on various debates and discussions. With the help of Network Theory, Media Richness, and the Public Sphere theories, this Unit explores the complex dynamics that shape communication in digital social environments. More specifically, it explains the network structures, user behaviours and societal impacts.

Unit 7: Celebrities and Social Media—Social media breaks the hierarchy of the top-down communication model and facilitates horizontal communication. This allows popular figures or celebrities to connect directly with their well-wishers and/or followers/fans through social media platforms. This Unit explores the various dimensions of the relationship between celebrities and social media functionalities.

Unit 8: Branding and Social Media—This Unit explores how corporations use social media to build identity, engage with the audience directly, and drive business growth. It also examines the major social media platforms, best practices, consumer feedback, and strategic choices in branding.

Block 2 is, in one way, an outlet for the learners to explore the world of social media and its relationship with the various stakeholders. This Block might definitely give you a new orientation on this matter.

UNIT 4 JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Learning Outcomes
- 4.2 Transformation of News
- 4.3 Journalistic Ethics Online
- 4.4. Live Reporting
- 4.5 Algorithmic Influence
- 4.6 Journalistic Autonomy
- 4.7 Role of Fact-Checking
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Keywords
- 4.10 Further Readings
- 4.11 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Social media has significantly influenced the practice of journalism and revolutionized how people access news. Shunning traditional media, an ever-growing number of people now rely on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and BuzzFeed, among others, to satiate their daily diet of news. Social media has transformed how journalists gather news and profoundly changed their mode of engagement with the audiences, shifting the process from one-way communication to a two-way communication model.

The lines between news producers and consumers have also been blurring along with this shift. While news organizations and governments had a stronghold over information delivery in the past, the advent of social media has led to a tectonic shift in this equation. The audiences now contribute to the journalistic content and share their opinions, shaping the news the public consumes and playing a part in the formation of public opinion. This has compelled news organizations worldwide to modify their functioning to meet the demands of a digital audience. Journalists are increasingly incorporating social media into their reporting, leveraging tools and techniques that resonate with modern audiences.

Social media has become an indispensable part of journalism today, as journalists need to integrate social media into their reporting processes in one way or the other. News corporations have roped-in strategies such as multimedia storytelling, personalized content, online video, and mobile apps to keep audiences engaged. Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, are also being explored as innovative ways to enhance news delivery. With social media growing leaps and bounds, its influence on journalism, news production and consumption will only intensify with time.

4.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After working through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the relationship between journalism and social media;
- Comprehend the challenges and issues associated with social media and journalism;
- Know about the influence of algorithms on news feeds: and
- Learn about the significance of fact-checking.

4.2 TRANSFORMATION OF NEWS

The history of media is the history of technology. With the advent of new technologies, different forms of media have taken shape. Internet and social media have significantly transformed our media landscape. From manuscripts - considered the earliest forms of interactive media – to social media with the highest interactivity, how news is produced, disseminated and consumed has witnessed structural changes and theoretical turns. Social media has been instrumental in shifting people’s media behaviour and has transformed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. Social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, etc. have enabled the masses to manipulate, respond, produce and reproduce the messages and news in their own way. The prosumers exert significant control over the media.

Social media journalism results in a shift from gatekeeping to nodes, and it also poses a significant challenge to modern journalists. They have to balance social media’s benefits of real-time reporting and user engagement with the problems of misinformation, algorithmic bias, and click-driven content pressures.

In the context of journalism, social media offers significant uses and democratizes information sharing. However, it also fosters misinformation, decreased media credibility, and ethical dilemmas.

Social media is a vital tool for information sharing and interactivity. It is also an important source of big data, and millions of conversations happen in real time, making it crucial for data and information collection and a news source.

New media offers several types of convergence, including technological convergence (multiple platforms), business convergence (concentration), professional convergence (polyvalence)—functional polyvalence (multitasking), thematic polyvalence, polyvalence of media, and convergence of contents (multimedia). Against this backdrop, the methods of news production and dissemination remain redefined with the highest levels of interactivity, multimodality, and hypermedia.

Social media has been instrumental in further converging the multiple digital media platforms by bringing them together in a single place. It has brought into discussion the concepts of ‘nodes’, hence reshaping the way media is produced and disseminated, encompassing the larger framework of ‘gatekeeping’ and ‘shelf-life’ given the nature and speed of these new media technologies.

Social media content, such as real-time breaking news, trending topics, on-spot incident reports, and eyewitness accounts in the form of images/videos, is freely available and updated. It is easier to monitor social media for updates and incidents than traditional media.

Unlike traditional methods, social media allows journalists and researchers to access multiple sources, monitor conversations, understand behaviours, track events, and find issues. The process of newsgathering, either through active or passive search (Monitoring), is more economical and timely. Social media journalists use these platforms effectively to monitor events and issues.

The social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram have specific provisions for journalists and have started platforms for breaking news in many languages. The popular messaging app owned by Meta, WhatsApp, allows broadcasting and community sharing, in addition to formal and informal discussions. For example, Twitter's advanced search allows for tweets, information, or particular handles or content to be searched for during a certain period of time. The TweetDeck, a dashboard owned by Twitter, helps navigate Twitter. It can help display several columns containing tweets from Twitter lists, searches, specific accounts, etc. Besides updating in real-time, it allows multiple filters to narrow the search further. In addition to searching, the dashboard also allows content to be monitored.

Monitoring

- Once lists are made on TweetDeck, their activity can be monitored.
- We can make a list of officials, celebrities, etc. and monitor accordingly.
- There are numerous ways to streamline feeds, alerts, filters, certain numbers of retweets, likes, language, videos, images, etc.

Some other tools for content and advanced search on Twitter also include *Tweetbeaver* and *Scoutzen*

- **Tweetbeaver** is a research tool that enables searching for common friends or conversations between two accounts. It also allows users to download their follower lists.
- **Scoutzen** allows making lists based on activity and interests and gathering information and insights from those automated lists.

Facebook also started Graph Search in 2013. With Graph Search, Facebook marked its entry into the search market dominated by Google. Tools and software like Stalkscan and Graph. Tips were given by the online intelligence community, investigative journalists, and criminal investigators to use the data through Graph Search. It would allow the use of filters and customization of the search according to date, location, type of media, etc. Public posts could also be searched on public pages and groups. Advanced Google search can be used to search for content on Facebook. However, Facebook shut down Graph Search in 2019.

Besides advanced Google search, many applications are instrumental in searching for data on Instagram. The content on Facebook and Instagram can also be monitored through CrowdTangle, which is owned by Facebook

and is free for journalists. To have access to data, one needs to set up a dashboard on all three platforms – Facebook, Instagram and Reddit – and then build a list of relevant pages and Groups on Facebook, public accounts on Instagram and subreddits on Reddit. There are many more Apps and pages like Storyful, TweetDeck, Facebook interest lists, etc., which are widely used for their ability to collect relevant sources on a topic in list form. Often, images and videos are uploaded by people on the scene before a local journalist arrives at an event to physically verify the story.

4.3 JOURNALISM ETHICS ONLINE

Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics declares four principles – Seek truth and report it, Minimize harm, Act independently, and Be accountable - as the foundation of ethical journalism and “encourages their use in its practice by all people in media.” Ethical journalism “strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough.” Journalists are expected to uphold the “journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity, giving no priority to commercial or political considerations over professional ones”.

When it comes to the code of ethics, all journalists are expected to follow it strictly. However, it is more challenging for a digital (social) media journalist to abide by the code of ethics, given the speed and nature of the new media technologies and social media platforms. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 recommends a three-tier structure with a focus on self-regulation to ensure observance and adherence to the Code of Ethics by publishers in relation to digital media operating in the territory of India.

Journalists face several ethical challenges online, including privacy, credibility, accuracy, validity, issues of copyright and intellectual property, identifying doctored content, deepfake, information overflow, lack of monitoring tools, abundant diversity of sources and perspectives, and challenges posed by AI. They have to face ethical dilemmas and be very cautious while analyzing the sources and content.

As online journalists are solely dependent on the Internet for information and data sources, it is at times quite a daunting task for them to maintain standards and credibility, as often the websites are unreliable and the sources of information anonymous. Often, social media posts and content lack attribution and citation, making it difficult to verify the original author's name and credentials to maintain research ethics.

Online journalists, like traditional journalists, must abide by all the professional ethics and core values of journalism and publish information that is accurate, factual, verified, impartial, and doesn't intend to harm others. They should also respect individuals' dignity, reputation, and privacy and consider the seriousness of harm social media has the potential to do apart from misinformation or sensationalism.

Social media journalists and digital media platforms must refrain from publishing content that is discriminatory, unlawful, third-party content, or that incites hatred or violence. Due care must be given to pictures or visuals and forums dedicated primarily to children, women, special-abled people,

and other vulnerable groups. AI-generated content must be explicitly specified, and journalists must ensure that hyperlinks embedded in the story do not direct users to websites containing harmful and false information.

While sharing information on social media, journalists must ensure that it doesn't contain balance sheets, private information, or account or contact details, which may result in cyber-bullying, digital frauds, hacking or digital arrests frauds. Social media publishers should work out effective mechanisms for reviewing public complaints or reports about the material and should follow a due process of notice and take-down procedures in this regard. While maintaining transparency, anonymity in case of special circumstances (children, for instance, or victims of violence or other vulnerable groups) may be taken care of.

Social media journalists look at automated content analysis to pre filter large volumes of social media content before more traditional manual verification techniques such as cross-checking and direct attempts to contact sources. At times, it is quite challenging for the journalist to scrutinize and verify the authenticity and truthfulness of the content, photographs, and videos taken from social media. The publication of images, videos or content on social media should not be taken for granted and must not lead to republication on other platforms without seeking consent from the original source.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. List some tools that facilitate advanced search for content on Twitter (now X).

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4.4 LIVE REPORTING

The convergence of high-speed Internet, smartphones and mobile technology, and social media has enabled journalists to file their stories from any location in real-time with minimum equipment. Armed with high-quality cameras in smartphones, in conjunction with live-streaming capabilities offered by social media, journalists are reporting events as they occur straight from ground zero.

This transition has led to a more democratized news dissemination process, providing audiences with a wider range of opinions. With the proliferation of social media platforms, live reporting has emerged as a new favourite among journalists and audiences alike. Reporters are utilizing Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to do live reporting, updating the content continuously and even responding to the audience's comments and feedback. This has ushered in an era of more participatory communication, with the audiences contributing directly to the reporting process.

In the world of social media live reporting, journalists work as multi-faceted content creators. They live-stream events, tweet updates directly from the field, capture and edit images using smartphone tools, and determine story length. They do it all on the go while operating on tight schedules to publish content online without awaiting editorial approval.

Journalists in the present social-media-dominated landscape often find themselves updating official websites and social media handles/pages with live videos or tweets. Furthermore, they manage their own social media profiles, communicating with audiences and initiating discussions and deliberations. The reporters thus assume the role of both official and unofficial representatives of the media organization they work for.

Audience engagement through comments, likes, and shares begins almost instantly during live reporting. This makes it a unique experience both for the reporter and the viewers. Moreover, journalists may include comments from citizen journalists to make their stories more interactive.

Live reporting has crossed all barriers in terms of immediacy and accessibility. Breaking news has the potential to go viral in no time, and detailed analyses are available from a host of sources online.

However, several challenges and concerns regarding live reporting on social media cannot be ignored. Some of them are listed below:

- **Misinformation and Fake News**

News stories can be easily manipulated on social media, intentionally or otherwise, and be disseminated rapidly. This may often lead to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. The overload of content may make it arduous for journalists and audiences to identify facts from fake news.

- **Speed over Accuracy**

Journalists face the pressure of time running out to file their stories instantaneously as they break. In the era of cutting-throat competition, uploading your content before others is crucial to staying ahead, and journalists often risk missing important details or distorting facts in this race. Striking a balance between speed and accuracy is a challenging task for journalists.

- **Technical Difficulties**

Despite all the advancements in technology, technical issues continue to pose challenges for journalists. Connectivity issues tend to disrupt live broadcasts, spoiling the entire experience and frustrating viewers. Several factors may be responsible for unstable connections, ranging from natural disasters to other major events.

- **Echo Chambers and Bias**

Social media platforms use algorithms to promote posts that align with users' notions and preferences based on online behaviour. Users see content that conforms to what they already think, creating a cycle where one does not get to see opposing views. This phenomenon leads to the creation of echo chambers, thus depriving the user of exposure to contrasting opinions. Algorithmic bias eventually has the potential to intensify polarization in a society. The following section will provide a more detailed discussion of algorithmic bias.

4.5 ALGORITHMIC INFLUENCE

As stated earlier, algorithms play a crucial role in the feed we receive through various internet platforms, including social media. Social media began utilizing algorithms in response to the enormous amounts of information available, making it difficult for users to make sense of everything and navigate through it. Algorithms guide users towards the content they find interesting, connecting them to others with similar thoughts and providing them with a chance to explore their preferences.

But first, let's try to understand what a social media algorithm is. An algorithm refers to a set of instructions formulated to solve particular problems, execute specific tasks, or make decisions. In the context of social media, algorithms pertain to complex mathematical formulas, signals, and data that determine the order and relevance of content presented to each user.

Algorithms achieve this by keeping track of users' online behaviour—the type of content they consume, the posts they like, share, and engage with, and their choices and preferences. Thus, algorithms influence users' content consumption patterns and inclinations and also shape their perceptions.

Overall, social media aims to enhance user engagement and keep users captivated. Algorithms help prolong one's interaction with the content since they offer a personalized feed tailor-made to an individual's taste, likes, and dislikes.

In terms of news media, the algorithmic influence can have far-reaching consequences. It leads to what we call 'filter bubbles' and 'echo chambers'.

Algorithms can increase the frequency of a specific type of content visible to the user, thus considerably limiting the window to a larger range of perspectives. Thus, a 'filter bubble' or 'echo chamber' is created where users only see posts or content that reinforce their preconceived notions, reducing their chances of encountering alternative viewpoints. An echo chamber is the result of the personalization of content that resonates with the user's existing biases and inclinations. The user is thereby pushed into a kind of 'intellectual isolation' without realizing it, and diverse perspectives are suppressed from his feed.

The algorithms often render social media platforms fertile grounds for polarization and sensationalism, as they prioritize content with high emotional appeal. Extreme and controversial viewpoints constitute such content, as they can stimulate users' emotions and fuel polarization.

Thus, online hate can proliferate via these enclosed spaces. Individuals freely share inflammatory opinions, discriminatory content, and hate speech, resting assured in the anonymity of the Internet. The environment that constantly validates their beliefs and behaviour also gives them confidence and prevents them from identifying the negative aspects of their actions. Filter bubbles and echo chambers act as modes of strengthening and reinforcing these dangerous perspectives.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. Examine how a ‘filter bubble’ is created by social media algorithms.

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4.6 JOURNALISTIC AUTONOMY

The idea of journalistic autonomy refers to the principle that journalism—an individual journalist as well as a news organization—should operate freely without any unwarranted influence from external institutions or actors. Journalists face enormous challenges on social media, too, when it comes to their autonomy and freedom.

Media ownership by corporations plays a role in this as well. Since the corporate world only worries about business, the ownership patterns can lead to a prioritization of profit over public interest.

The structure of the news organization and the kind of ownership have a profound impact on the integrity of journalists. Even in democracies, the political leanings of corporates may affect the information that reaches the public. With the news media outlets already reeling under financial pressures and facing a resource crunch, they are increasingly becoming more dependent on these corporates for funding, revenue generation, and platform access. Powerful corporations may control and govern the kind of stories told through the media, how they are framed, and to what extent influential entities are brought on the radar and scrutinized.

When a corporation sponsors a media outlet, it is likely to pressure the journalists/news organization to avoid reporting on issues that go against its political interests and leanings. It could also be seen the other way around when journalists try to avoid topics and issues that may turn their advertisers away. Such practices jeopardize journalistic autonomy and limit the news coverage window within bounds, stimulating a partiality in news reportage.

Sometimes, the corporations also leverage their political connections to lobby for policies and regulations that may align with their business interests, thereby affecting the larger media landscape. They may also force social media platforms to alter or modify their content and visibility to make it consonant with their political affiliations. Corporate control escalates the risk of biased reporting and deepening societal ideological divides. Eventually, such practices also lead to an erosion of public trust in journalism.

Journalists face a challenge in striking a balance between corporate pressure and journalistic freedom. However, they may strive to overcome this challenge by adopting strategies that help them navigate financial and institutional constraints while maintaining their journalistic integrity.

To address concerns regarding media control and preserve freedom of expression, news media outlets may need to adopt a multi-faceted approach. By being transparent about all sources of funding and corporate partnerships, a media entity may build trust with its audiences and safeguard its independence and accountability to a great extent.

By establishing clear editorial policies and upholding ethical standards, news organizations can define their boundaries and separate editorial decisions from corporate influence. This will also empower their reporters to work freely without pressure and maintain high standards of journalism.

Another way to tackle the menace of corporate control is to turn to public-interest journalism. Striving for a mission-driven model of non-profit journalism can help reduce news media's reliance on corporations with political standpoints. Such news outlets prioritize public-interest journalism over profit-making, thus freeing themselves from corporate agendas and commercial interests. Their focus remains on producing impartial, high-quality reporting in the larger interest of society. Crowdfunding or individual donor contributions from audiences who prioritize fair and independent journalism are also emerging as a popular source of funding.

Preserving journalistic autonomy in a market dominated by corporate control is an uphill task. However, the battle needs to be fought on multiple fronts. An unwavering commitment to democratic values, combined with alternative revenue-generating methods, can be the key to sustaining high-quality reporting practices and acting as a shield against commercial and corporate pressures.

4.7 ROLE OF FACT-CHECKING

Media outlets have been facing a dearth of revenue and resources, owing to which there have been job cuts and downsizing. Consequently, fewer journalists now face the task of producing more stories in less time, putting them under immense pressure. Unfortunately, this also negatively impacts the quality of journalism. There is the danger of broadcasting or publishing false information when reporters are pressed for time. Factually incorrect information has the potential to do more harm than good to the social fabric, contributing to an increase in misinformation and fake news. This is where the fact checkers play a pivotal role.

Though newsrooms conduct some level of internal fact-checking, it is mostly limited to ensuring that their correspondents do not misquote anyone or misconstrue facts presented through their platform. Therefore, dedicated, independent fact-checkers fit the bill in the larger interest of society.

Since accuracy is a fundamental principle of journalism, fact-checking has become indispensable to ensure accuracy in the age of social media. Though fact-checking is not a novel phenomenon, it has acquired a new meaning in a social media-dominated environment, which is a breeding ground for rumours, fake news and incorrect information. Indeed, modern-day fact-checkers can be considered flag-bearers of quality journalism, holding the powerful accountable in democratic societies worldwide. They bear the onus of safeguarding public trust in journalism and promoting media literacy by

creating a more discerning audience that knows how to distinguish facts from fiction.

Social media has changed the equation of journalism so that traditional media outlets have lost their clout as ‘gatekeepers’ in determining the news of the day. What constitutes the most important news is now frequently driven by social media and internet search ‘trends’. Some experts have even termed fact-checkers the ‘gatekeeper’s gatekeepers’, closely scrutinizing the information circulating through media channels and other platforms.

Time constraints and an overflow of information force journalists to evade ‘fact-checking’ sufficiently and be honest about their professional ethics. In this wake, fact-checking organizations have emerged as alternative actors, verifying the reliability and accuracy of content circulating on social media platforms, among other platforms. Their websites publish reports detailing the processes involved in assessing the content, lending credibility to their claims.

Fact-checking is responsible for fighting fake news by analyzing trending topics and viral content to identify potentially misleading and incorrect information. According to the organization’s approach, fact-checkers choose issues and execute research on related content using official data, experts’ opinions, and trustworthy sources to verify the truth and deliver verdicts. Based on these reports, the public gets the context of things, and misunderstandings are clarified.

To combat digital disinformation, various social media platforms collaborated with third-party fact-checking organizations to review and rate the accuracy of their content. Facebook was the first large-scale social media platform to launch such a programme with the aim of countering misinformation. Twitter (now X) also adopted a policy to flag malicious content by adding warning labels and restricting users from engaging in sharing, liking or forwarding posts violating the norms. The platform resorted to thorough verification processes to examine posts and recognize inaccuracies. This directly affects the algorithm and diminishes the visibility of misleading content.

Some popular fact-checking organizations worldwide include the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), Snopes, FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, Reuters Fact Check, and Logically. Major Indian fact-checking organizations include Alt News, BoomLive, Vishvas News, Factly, India Today Fact Check, Quint WebQoof, and Fact Crescendo. Some of these organizations offer services in English, while others cater to various Indian languages, fighting misinformation in the local context.

Fact-checking helps foster a healthier information ecosystem, thus enhancing media literacy in society. Nonetheless, several factors, such as public trust, ample availability of resources, and policies of social media platforms, determine its efficacy in the long run.

Check Your Progress: 3

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. List some popular fact-checking organizations operating in India.
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2. List two ways in which corporate sponsorship may result in compromising journalistic autonomy.
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4.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the key features of journalism and social media and their intricate relationship. We have tried to understand how news production and consumption trends are changing, with social media taking centre stage. We have also discussed the key issues and challenges faced by journalists and how they can strive to survive in the social media landscape. We learnt about the potential dangers of information overload on social media platforms and how the influence of algorithms on news feeds creates echo chambers and has the potential to deepen the ideological divide in society. The Unit also outlined how journalistic autonomy can be threatened in a corporate-driven environment where news organizations increasingly depend on them for revenues and funds. Possible ways to tackle this menace have also been discussed. We understood the need for fact-checking and its crucial role in promoting a healthy information ecosystem and helping establish truth against misinformation.

4.9 KEYWORDS

Echo Chambers– are created when users are exclusively exposed to content that matches their existing beliefs and ideology, thus limiting their worldview. This prevents them from encountering opposing ideas and reinforces their preferences.

Journalistic Autonomy–means the profession of journalism is free and independent from any kind of undue influence from external forces that may tend to undermine its integrity and standards. Media outlets need to fulfil their role as watchdogs and informants of society.

Nodes– refer to different entities that form part of a network. According to the platform and context, a node can be a user profile, an organization, a group, a page, or any other entity. Different nodes are connected to each other through edges, and their interactions define the structure and functions of the social media platform.

4.10 FURTHER READINGS

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4.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. A. Tweetbeaver is a research tool that enables searching common friends or conversations between two accounts and the ability to download a user's follower list.
- B. *Scoutzen* allows making lists based on activity and interests and gathering information and insights from those automated lists.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. A 'filter bubble' is created when users only see posts or content that reinforces their pre-existing notions, reducing their chances of encountering alternative viewpoints.

Check Your Progress: 3

1. Major Indian fact-checking organizations include Alt News, BoomLive, Vishvas News, Factly, India Today Fact Check, Quint WebQoof, and Fact Crescendo.
2. Two ways in which corporate sponsorship may affect journalistic autonomy are:
 - When a corporation sponsors a media outlet, it is highly likely that it will pressure the journalists/news organization to avoid reporting on issues that go against its political interests and leanings.
 - Self-censorship can also be seen when journalists themselves try to avoid topics and issues that may upset or repel their advertisers.

UNIT 5 TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Learning Outcomes
- 5.2 Transmedia Storytelling and Its Key Elements
- 5.3 Role of Social Media in Transmedia Narratives
- 5.4 Narratives Across Different Media Platforms
- 5.5 Role of Audience Interaction in Transmedia Storytelling
- 5.6 Challenges of Maintaining Narrative Cohesion Across Platforms
- 5.7 Learning Strategies for Managing Complex Transmedia Projects
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Further Readings
- 5.10 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces and develops the basic building blocks of transmedia storytelling and delves into the development of multimedia stories in a multi-planar form. An S-C-R-A-P approach is needed to develop a multimedia story. S-C-R-A-P stands for Story, Character, Resolution, Actuality, and Production. A basic understanding of multimedia story elements is also needed. Understanding different aspects of multimedia storytelling will help create powerful stories (Borum & Quinn, 2016).

“A listener must be led from the good to better by curiosity, liking and a growth of understanding,” John Reith (BBC: 1934).

21st Century media is all about personal, portable, participatory, connectivity, conversation, convenience, communities, creativity, convergence, content, and context. Any story combining these three Ps and eight Cs can influence public opinion and persuade them. Transmedia or multimedia storytelling is an approach where a story is written for different platforms in multiple media formats. This approach to a story is often more engaging and involves the audience directly in a story.

Society is driven by representation. If social machines manufacture representations, they also manufacture themselves from representations. The latter operates simultaneously as means, matter and condition of sociality: Jean-Louis Comolli (1980: 121).

Society or the social machine flourishes when producing and consuming images and depictions. Images, paintings, symbols, and visualisations are the binding factors of a society. Jean Baudrillard used hyperreality and simulation to support the idea that representation and reproduction are the key mechanisms in postmodern society.

According to Lindgren (2022), the visual turn in social and cultural sciences means that images and visuals, photos and videos, are having an increasing effect on the way we experience our culture and interact with each other. The 21st Century is also an era of visual explosion, where pictures and videos dominate.

Boyd (2009) discusses visual culture by stating that it refers to different ways the visual is part of social life. WJT Mitchell (1986) argues that images and language are intertwined, and modernity is ocular-centric. Visuals are at the centre of the postmodern world. Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998) claims that ‘postmodern is a visual culture’ and suggests that the relation between seeing and true knowing is broken in the postmodern world. In the postmodern world, we interact more with constructed visual experiences.

A story is an arrangement of words and images that try to recreate lifelike characters and events to gain the audience’s attention. To sustain the audience’s interest, stories are often presented as revolving around human needs such as feeling loved, being in control of one’s life and fate, avenging wrongs, overcoming obstacles, etc.

How to tell or narrate a story is as important as selecting a story topic. A good story goes beyond informing and adds value to the subject. Anything informative does not need to be relevant for a good story. A good story connects with the audience and impacts them, forcing people to take the time to watch the story due to its potential importance to them or their community.

5.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

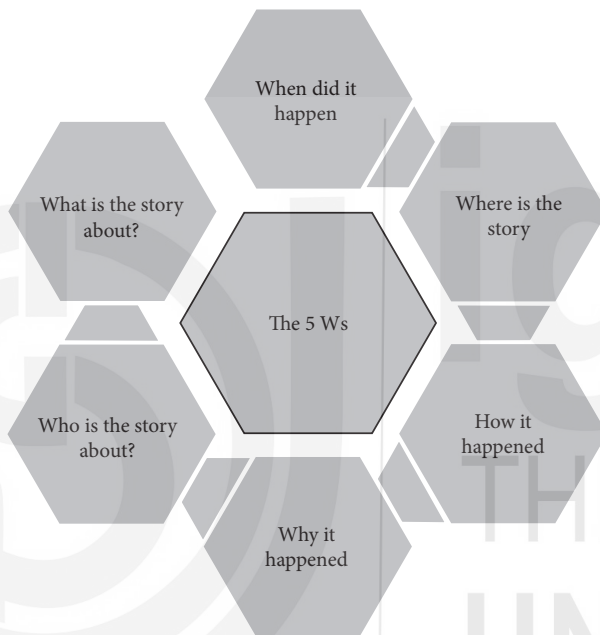
- Understand the importance of storytelling and the power of visuals;
- Identify the building blocks of storytelling to create multimedia stories; and
- Understand different aspects of multimedia storytelling to create impactful user-generated stories.

5.2 TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AND ITS KEY ELEMENTS

The SCRAP approach—Story, Character, Resolution, Actuality, and Production—is needed to develop a multimedia story.

	Five Ws	Description
Story	What is the story?	The focus of the study is the purpose of the story.
Characters	Who are they?	This is the starting point of a story. A storyteller needs to focus on characters, places, and events.

Resolution	Knowing the beginning, middle and end is knowing <i>why</i> .	If your story is current, it will evolve and take shape as you cover it. You can research a structure and provide the form and scope to plan the day. This will provide a flexible approach for the story to develop naturally.
Actuality	4Ws of the film, including where, what, when and who will I film?	Actuality means the story's development in its natural course on the site and cannot be set up. It helps in creating story dynamics.
Production	How will I make the story?	Know all the characters in a story, what needs to be captured, and when the deadline is.



Key elements of a good story:

1. Good stories capture emotions

Emotion commands attention and creates a relevancy of shared feelings between the character and the reader. Therefore, one must manage one's emotions objectively while integrating sentiment into a story and avoid excessive emotion or misinformation to produce a desired emotion. Emotions are important as they catch attention and help create shared feelings between the character and its audience.

2. Good stories provide context.

A storyteller must ask various questions, such as, What does my audience need to know? What background would a newcomer need to know? What do people need to know so that they care?

3. Good stories surprise the audience

Surprise in a news story can take several forms: information you did not know or something you did not expect. In a story, a storyteller plans and strategically places the surprise.

4. Good stories empower the audience

A good social story aims to inform people about an issue so they can make better decisions. Journalism, for instance, is supposed to empower the audience, and empowering the audience involves anticipating how the information might be used and what questions readers might have. A good storyteller must view their reader as a decision-maker instead of just a consumer.

5.3 ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES

Producing content in the social media landscape involves new processes that change how news stories are written and broadcast (from sourcing to distribution). Instant, interactive, and freely available production processes are evolving. The change in the output voice and construction depends on the producer's intent and objective.

Using social media's power in storytelling involves thinking creatively about news production by integrating broader voices and tools that are much needed now.

Social media storytelling

Storytelling in social media spaces has several characteristics. A single output created from a range of multimedia multi-voice elements becomes infinite. A storyteller's founding skills are very important.

Social media has added new dimensions and values to storytelling. Journalists must grasp these values to survive in the new media landscape.

The five I's of social-media storytelling that include the non-linear nature of content creation are:

1. Infrastructure
2. Inform
3. Immerse
4. Interest
5. Interact

1. Infrastructure

It is important to understand that journalism is a process, not a product (Cook, 2013). The content creation and distribution process is fluid. There are no boundaries to start the storytelling process, as it depends on the audience's needs. The audience's approach to consuming the story is based on the values in each part.

Journalists cannot decide the starting point for audience needs and wants. Users consume the content as they like, and the parts of the story that they consider valuable. However, as a storyteller, one must think about the trigger and explain why you are discussing it. The reasons are explained through analysis, the latest trends, public opinions, etc.

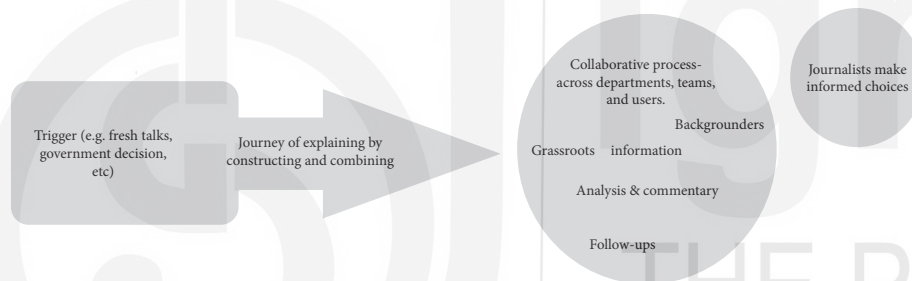
In present times, the Internet is the infrastructure that connects computers around the world. The World Wide Web technology interlinks hypertext documents. Therefore, storytellers must think about how to layer and chunk the content.

Layering is how stories are built on the web. It is a method that understands users' different start points and needs. Journalists, too, have a range of content. The story that is being read is called the top layer. Each time a link is added, it acts as an additional layer to the content.

On the other hand, the chunking approach or technique to storytelling is a non-linear way of storytelling. Chunking involves splitting the story to tackle different aspects of the issue. E.g. answer the who with the help of an image, analyse the big data with the help of a graphic, and describe the location with the help of a map.

Bullet points, sidebars, pull quotes, subheadings, images, maps, graphs, audio, comments, video, etc., help break long blocks of text.

Stories are created by building units together. A composite story comprises units; each unit works independently, and a whole piece can be repurposed to compose other stories.



2. Inform

The core of the reporting process is to inform or communicate with people about what is happening. This key role of a journalist is becoming complex in the social space. A social media storyteller must approach content to create rich content on social spaces that use various digital interactive media.

Therefore, a social media storyteller must know that a story's success depends on how viral it goes on social networks. The level of engagement and interaction between audiences also decides the success of a story. Besides, a social media storyteller always negotiates between being right and being fast, but accuracy cannot be compromised for speed.

In today's fast-paced world, future social media storytellers must quickly get a reliable story to their audience on time. A social media storyteller must be mindful of legal and ethical implications and attribute wherever necessary. It is important to produce balanced content that is objective in nature.

3. Immerse

The audience wants different experiences from each story. Some want full immersion in the ever-increasing sophistication of rich media. Some just want surface information. Unlimited space on the Internet offers deep and broad storytelling experiences. However, a deep understanding of the audience is crucial to produce an effective social media story. The vocabulary, phrasing

or length of the news story package will change due to the time spent. The active social media audience expects to participate, comment or discuss ideas to address them. According to Boyd (2009), social media audiences consume information peripherally, mostly in the workplace. Currently, news providers use gamification, which involves the integration of game mechanics, to offer a more immersive storytelling experience.

4. Interest

Interest is expressed in different ways. As a storyteller, one must consider the news story's reception from the consumers' point of view and how they will reach the story, whether through social media or a regular online search. Accordingly, a storyteller must adapt their writing and production techniques. In the age of social media, social stories are rated through web analytics, so journalists must understand how to drive search and social traffic to their stories. A social media storyteller must optimise articles with keywords and allow them to be shared on social media platforms such as Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Vimeo, etc.

Social traffic is the way social networks contribute to finding/ sharing content. A social media storyteller must consider what readers want to search for and use specific keywords or phrases that best summarise a story. They must be used in headlines, picture captions, subheadings, and introduction (the most read parts of the story). Tagging is the best technique for categorising content (broad topics) with keywords that help sort content as needed. When a tag is clicked, it will take the reader to all the content under that term. Hashtags are also a crucial part of social media ecology as they help in creating links around groups of threads or themes.

Visualising a news story for social media

Visualising a story using the latest media technologies will allow us to show that different stages of content production can be written and constructed in different ways. In the age of social media, a story can be built using different elements as mentioned below:

Instant updates and raw news coverage: Instant updates became popular due to the microblogging site Twitter. They are used across various outputs, like tickers (which appear as a rolling feed across broadcasts, text messages, status updates, alert emails, and feeds). A raw feed of an event or conversation across social platforms is simply the outpouring of data and material of events, unedited, unverified, and raw. At this stage, immediacy and audience participation are key.

Some Twitter jargon includes a post to Twitter, which is known as a tweet. An RT is a re-posting of someone else's tweet. To direct a tweet to someone, you use the @mention functionality. A DM is a private message exchange between two people who follow each other. Following people means their updates will appear in your feed. #ff is a recommendation of someone worth following.

Interpretations on how to use networks like Twitter are vast. From using it as a fourth broadcasting wire service, crowdsourcing, and curating content

to drawing journalistic stories around themes are based on the organisation's personal choice. Brevity and simplicity are the key factors. Be aware of mistakes, which can be recorded as a permanent snapshot.

Live reporting: A range of live reports can include streaming video/ audio, Q&A sessions, interviews, webinars, reporters on the scene or coverage of an event, and everything published live as it occurs. Several short updates can be combined to form a flowing commentary, e.g. court proceedings, an event, a press conference, or a crisis. Maintain elements of journalistic practice like verification of sources. Hyperlinks allow us to navigate around the web. There are two variables with links- words highlighted and the destination content you link to. The words you choose will become blue and underlined, so choose them carefully to maximise scalability and indicate what the hyperlinked page contains.

Live blogging is a record of an event published live as it occurs. It is a written commentary online, the textual equivalent of a radio report. A single automatically refreshing web page is created with material added to a running narrative. Journalists can add to the page as events progress, incorporating material from other sites or news organisations, comments, links, audio, and video.

Draft posts and blogs: You can write in draft form on social media and blogging sites. They include posts like articles, entries, and pages. At this stage in content production, output has moved from raw or short-form updates. It offers a development from unedited information flows, but lacks the formal structure of the news packages. It can be an overview or reflection on something that has happened- an interview, an event, a review, or a summary. A snapshot of incomplete or open discussions or open thoughts.

Basic news units: The news unit writing is the right choice when the voice becomes more formal. The journalist interprets events for the public. He/she may work within defined formats. The level of editing has shifted towards balance and objectivity with professional reporting. Many news consumers rely on formal news articles to help them understand what is newsworthy. Editorial decisions make a more formal output, distinguishing the topic from the infinity of the Internet. Verify the sources, give both sides of the story, etc.

In-depth packages in text and broadcast: Fully researched stories with comments and interviews from experts and bystanders. They are also called long-form journalism, features, or packages. They take time as they pull in a much wider range of voices. The in-depth package aims to offer a formal, objective voice, a combination of voices which explain and analyse. More scope to offer immersion or interactivity in the production process.

A broadcast package combines multiple techniques, such as a voice-over, images, a piece to camera, interviews, and graphics. Broadcast news packages work well to combine the visual stimulation and immediacy of video in a polished, more formal journalistic output. The technique is writing to pictures—adding information and context to what the viewer can already see, not repeating it. A slideshow of images combined with text can also provide a compelling story.

Features: There are specific writing techniques for reviews, travel, comments, and long-form features. A backgrounder develops the basic news units with more insight and analysis. What are the other angles, the areas of interest, the questions that need more reflection, etc.?

Usability refers to the ease with which your content can be consumed on different platforms. Consider breaking up an article into small paragraphs. A few paragraphs can be combined under a subtheme with bold subheadings, bullet points, or breakouts to make it easier to view on print, mobile phones, etc.

Echo chamber: The same vocabulary is repeated in different story elements. Story elements should be made to complement one another across platforms and not repeat themselves.

Social media has opened the production process and allowed creativity by including who and what can be included. Stories can be conveyed using short-form updates, drafts and packages, text, video, audio, images, blogs, microblogs, maps, infographics, and games, and this whole process is evolving. Good reporting will involve adapting to choices to best communicate events by selecting the right tool at the right time for the right audience.

Social media and online / mobile production allow limitless possibilities. Journalists must thus learn to navigate these new relationships and opportunities. Citizen journalism offers a rich and diverse addition to previous work. The foundational skills of a journalist’s work are as important as ever. Journalists must combine these elements to tell the story and add value.

The five ‘I’s of social media storytelling help embrace the non-linear nature of content creation - Infrastructure, inform, immerse, interact and interest.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

- 1. Define transmedia or multimedia storytelling. What are its key elements?

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- 2. What are the three Ps and 8 Cs of a story that hold the power to influence public opinion?

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3. What approach is needed to develop a multimedia story?

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5.4 NARRATIVES ACROSS DIFFERENT MEDIA PLATFORMS

“A story is not a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of anarchy of existence” (McKee, 1997).

BBC correspondent Alan Little emphasised that anything can be expressed properly with the help of the right selection of words. Print and video production have something in common, like selecting the right words and tone of the story, following a proper structure, and the script narration must be simple and clear. Similarly, writing for the web means the story’s main message must be conveyed in the first few paragraphs. The writer must begin by writing what they want to say, followed by knowing the media they must work with. Besides being clear about the story’s moments and key highlights, as a storyteller, one must be clear regarding the emotions, drama, information, and genre that the story belongs to. Narration will be the key to sync with the video that strikes an emotional or dramatic story appeal.

Journalists bring stories to life using a variety of production techniques. In present times, it is common practice to write instant updates followed by short-form storytelling and then edited packages in a non-linear way.

Importance of Narration

Media content is produced within a cycle of sourcing and distribution. Journalists must produce content for mobile and blogs, forums and social networks, TV, print and radio. New and social-media technologies have changed the format and shape of news. Changes are seen in pyramid-shaped stories and how TV journalists explain their Piece-To-Camera. Thus, producers need to adapt to the changing expectations and functions in the news environment.

Visual Persuasion in Advertising and Public Relations

Media critic Everette Dennis states that advertising is “any form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor.” He feels that advertising benefits society because it funds media, provides information to consumers through public service announcements, and thus stimulates the economy. Lester (2011) states that the average TV viewer spends three years watching commercials. Visual messages, therefore, are important communications. For an advertisement to be effective based on the words, images and situations, the consumers make assumptions about the impact the advertisement content will have on their behaviours.

5.5 ROLE OF AUDIENCE INTERACTION IN TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

From 1995 onwards, the Internet became a public tool for communication. Ordinary people could now easily tell and publish stories. Today, user-generated content producers are using digital tools to make their content. They are using smartphone technologies to create YouTube and other social media content.

The free and unlimited Internet space acts as a boon for user-generated content. With the miniature technology boom, with the help of smartphones, users can now record, edit and publish high-quality video and audio at a far greater speed at a lesser rate. Citizen storytellers find it tempting to use YouTube, a ready-made publishing platform. According to Professor Philip Napoli, head of Journalism at Rutgers University, “audience living in a multimedia world consumes a variety of content that promotes attention to a diversity of views. Media critic Robert McChesney, however, believes that new technologies are acting as the new central nervous system in a society that has been waiting to witness a change for a long time.

The art of story is the dominant cultural force in the world. Films largely serve as a dominant medium of this grand enterprise. Stories are all about originality and no duplication. Renowned filmmaker Ken Burns feels that how technology spreads and takes control of our lives means we are losing touch with the real story (Stubbs, 1989). With the expansion of media reach, we can share stories beyond borders and languages with millions of people across the globe. However, due to the availability of cheap technology, there are quality concerns regarding the craft and originality of stories (McKee, 1997).

Therefore, we must fully understand the potential of using technology, skills, and smartphones to tell more relevant and diverse stories.

5.6 CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING NARRATIVE COHESION ACROSS PLA FORMS

According to BBC correspondent Alan Little, all writing begins with saying something right with the right choice of words. In video production, one must be careful of the right modulation and tone, ensuring the structure and narration of the script are clear and simple. Web writing involves writing the main highlight of the story in the first few paragraphs so that the story can be used on multimedia platforms. The writer must begin by writing what they want to convey, followed by a thorough understanding of the media with which they wish to work. Besides, one must also be aware of the moments and bounce in the story. Is the story informative, dramatic, or emotional, based on which the script narration will be developed?

Narration is important in moving the story from one structure to another. It acts as a binding factor that brings together all the elements of a story to help create a bounce and sync.

A different technique is applied when writing a text story. One must leave gaps for quotes in the text. When writing for the video, one considers the

pictures or chooses sync voice grabs like quotes. Like a written script, video narration links the major story elements and drives the narrative. A good narration highlights major milestones in a story. Since mojo is a picture medium, the narration in the mojo script does not need to state the obvious. The narration script should be written in active voice. A voice is the form of a verb that can be passive or active. It is an indicator of the subject's performance and reception. Active voice helps in keeping the story less clumsy and quickly drives the reader into the story. When you want to emphasise the receiver, you can use passive voice.

5.7 LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING COMPLEX TRANSMEDIA PROJECTS

A transmedia story is shared across various platforms. Each time a new layer of content is added by the different platforms, including a comic script, novel, TV, film, documentary, social media, gaming or shared as an experience by people for interaction, it adds value to the entire content package. The beauty of this layering is that each platform adds a complete, independent self-sustenance to the story so that the audience can enjoy a complete package from whichever platform they pick up the story. Reading across the media provides depth to the story and thus enhances consumption. However, in case of repetition, the audience might lose interest and not consider that platform honest. Therefore, there is pressure on the platforms to add value to the content to retain customer loyalty.

A single company, with roots across different media sectors, dictates the flow of content across media. Each medium has a different type of audience. For instance, films and TV have a diversified audience, whereas graphic novels and comics serve the interests of a few. Popular artists working closely with the media industry understand that working in the new economic shift needs more ambitious content that can be developed in collaborative efforts with their customers.

Storytellers in present times are, therefore, developing collaborative models of content creation with artists from different backgrounds.

However, Jenkins (2008) argues that, so far, no aesthetic criteria exist to evaluate work shared across multiple media.

Immersive content

Any story can be depicted realistically. Immersive storytelling uses virtual reality and 3d technology. Virtual reality transforms the storytelling experience. The participants become part of the story content and better understand things.

Therefore, modern-day journalists need not use everything all the time or shout at everyone every minute. They must understand that in the new media ecology, they must adapt to social media culture and select the right tool at the right time for the right audience. Stories can be told using text, video, audio, images, blogs, microblogs, maps, infographics, etc. Therefore, the choice of a journalist plays an important role in integrating different voices. Gone are those days when journalists alone were telling stories. In the present

digital times, there is competition from the users as well. In the modern news ecology, online media, including social media, mobile production, etc., has expanded the possibilities of inclusion, and a journalist also needs to know what best to offer by combining elements from eyewitnesses and audience comments, sitting with experts in discussions or editing packages. Combining communication tools and methods and using different styles for different audiences can help build fluid content.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. Name the five ‘I’s of social-media storytelling.

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2. Explain the role of social media as a platform to distribute transmedia stories.

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3. Examine the role of audience interaction in transmedia storytelling.

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5.8 LET US SUM UP

Social media provides a new opportunity in the emerging media, where local is the new future, and attention is the new currency. The audience’s engagement with the content will decide its consumption, and conversations will decide its future course. Content will remain the king, and the user of the content will remain the emperor.

5.9 FURTHER READINGS

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5.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. Transmedia or multimedia storytelling is an approach where a story is written for different platforms in multiple media formats. This approach to a story is more engaging and involves the audience directly in the story. The key elements of a story are:
 - a. Good stories capture emotions
 - b. Good stories provide context
 - c. Good stories provide text
 - d. Good stories surprise the audience and empower
2. Media today is all about personal, portable, participatory, connectivity, conversation, convenience, communities, creativity, convergence, content, and context. Any story that combines these three Ps and 8Cs has the power to persuade public opinion.
3. To develop a multimedia story, a SCRAP approach is needed. SCRAP stands for Story, Character, Resolution, Actuality, and Production.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. The five 'I's of social-media storytelling, which include the non-linear nature of content creation, are:
 - a. Infrastructure
 - b. Inform
 - c. Immerse
 - d. Interest
 - e. Interact

Social Media and Society

2. Producing content in the social media landscape involves new processes that are changing the way news stories are written and broadcast (from sourcing to distribution). Instant, interactive, and freely available production processes are evolving. The change in the output voice and construction depends on the producer's intent and objective.
3. User-generated content producers use digital tools to create their own content. They are using smartphone technologies to create YouTube and other social media content. Free and unlimited internet space is a boon for user-generated content. With the miniature technology boom, smartphones allow users to record, edit, and publish high-quality video and audio at a far greater speed at a lower rate. Citizen storytellers find it tempting to use YouTube, a ready-made publishing platform.



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UNIT 6 THEORIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Learning Outcomes
- 6.2 Network Theory
- 6.3 Social Presence Theory
- 6.4 Media Richness Theory
- 6.5 Public Sphere Theory
- 6.6 Social Influence Theory
- 6.7 Media Dependency Theory
- 6.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.9 Keywords
- 6.10 Further Readings
- 6.11 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Social media has become omnipresent in the present times. Almost everyone has become a user of social media today. Social media usage has blurred geographic, social, economic and cultural boundaries to a large extent. It is also being put to varied uses, ranging from being in touch with one's friends to pursuing one's hobbies or interests or even self-expression. These varied uses by social media users result in equally varied effects on different domains of everyday lives. To better understand social media's use, effects, and other aspects, it would be beneficial to look at some related theories. Theories explain the concepts or aspects which are difficult to understand. In fact, "Theories are general statements that summarise our understandings of the way the world works (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 11).» McQuail (2010) defines theory as a set of ideas that help us to understand a phenomenon, guide action or predict a consequence. Theories are «organised sets of concepts, explanations, and principles of some aspects of human experience (Baran & Davis, 2012, p. 11). The goal of theories in communication generally remains to understand the use of different media, the effects of media and the learning from the media (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Hence, theories related to social media would not only help us better understand its uses and effects but would also help us effectively use social media.

However, when we talk of theories in mass media, we need to keep in mind that theories in mass communication generally do not take the form of if-then statements as explanations of processes of mass communication usually do not have absolute propositions; rather, theories in mass communication take statements which explains the phenomenon with propositions like <more likely> or <greater the A, greater the B> statements (Severin & Tankard,

2001). Baran & Davis (2012) say that mass communication theories are ever-evolving owing to constant changes in media and society which use these media.

6.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand different theories related to the use of social media; and
- Analyse the use or working of social media vis-a-vis social media theories;

6.2 NETWORK THEORY

The network theory traces its development to three threads of research traditions: sociometric analysis, interpersonal relations and structure of community relations (Liu, Sidhu, Beacom & Valente, 2017). All these traditions aim to understand how individuals in social networks get and process information right from the position of an individual in a social network to the closeness that an individual shares in various networks, which affects the acceptance and sharing of information. Gamper (2022) says that network analysis not only talks about personal attributes like age, gender, and income but also relational attributes like the position or status of actors in networks.

Homophily is an important aspect of social networks. Homophily is simply the similarity among individuals, which leads to connections (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). Homophilous characteristics among users establish connections. Two types of homophily can be noted: status homophily and value homophily (Gamper, 2022). Status homophily refers to similar characteristics like age, gender, income, and educational qualification, whereas value homophily means similarity in ways of thinking or attitudes. Homophilous relationships have higher chances of survival than non-homophilous relationships.

However, at the same time, we must consider that communication among homophilous bonds often restricts us to similar information, as all members share common attributes or interests. The members of homophilous groups would not usually allow new information to come in; hence, these groups tend to become strong-knit and close cliques. So, the concept that helps us understand the introduction of new information is the concept of weak ties compared to strong ties. The concept of 'weak ties' is discussed by Granovetter (1973) in his work 'The Strength of Weak Ties'. The concept of weak ties initiated an important discussion among network theories as weak ties aim to show the link between the groups of individuals and not within groups. The working of a group among its members is understood enough as all these members share strong ties, but how different groups that do not share strong bonds interact has not been studied much. Hence, defining the strength of a tie as a combination of contact intensity, intensity of emotions, intimacy and reciprocity among persons, Granovetter (1973) said that weak ties could reach more people. Strong ties would have high contact intensity, high emotional intensity, high intimacy and high reciprocity.

In contrast, weak ties would have low contact intensity, low emotional intensity, low intimacy and low reciprocity. However, weak ties are more likely to connect people from different small groups than strong ties (Gamper, 2022). Hence, weak ties would allow the exchange of more new information as people with different interests would come together, whereas strong ties would only reinforce the existing ideas. Family members and friends share strong ties, while acquaintances and colleagues share weak ties. The same concept can also be understood in terms of bridging social ties. Bonding happens in close relationships, whereas bridging occurs when individuals with few common interests come together for a common purpose. Both kinds of strong and weak were at work in society, but the spread of social media has given an even wider platform for these bonds to prosper.

Further, adding more understanding to the diffusion of new information, Burt (1987) notes that structural equivalence rather than cohesion is a stronger predictor of social contagion. Social contagion occurs when people who are socially proximate to each other can reduce the uncertainty of an innovation. Cohesion is defined as socialisation or social proximity, whereas structural equivalent people occupy the same position in the social structure and are proximate to the same patterns of relations. Structural equivalence overlaps, restricts, and extends the concept of cohesion. All these variables play an important role for media professionals as dissemination and diffusion of information need to be done while keeping in mind the effect of these variables on the acceptability of information by audiences. Social networks play an important role in all aspects of media work, whether it is the formation of public opinion or the success of marketing or advertising campaigns resulting in product buying (Liu, Sidhu, Beacom & Valente, 2017).

In fact, with the rise of digital media or social media, a research method called Network analysis has become all the more popular as this method studies the networks of social media users, their position in the network, and their influence in the networks, among other aspects (Delfanti & Arvidsson, 2019).

Sacks and Graves (2012) in their study associate different characteristics of social networks with different social networking sites, for instance, Twitter (now X) with network diffusion (quick and widespread dissemination) and network complexity (specific and factual information), LinkedIn with social distance (connections with friends of friends) and Facebook with network size and quality. Every social networking site has its dominant feature, and users need to be aware of these features so that these sites can be used for the user's desired purpose. The use of social networking sites does not matter only at the level of individual users but also sometimes at the level of countries or the world, especially in the case of social movements. While analysing social networks, Zhu (2015) concludes that the international network formed on Twitter is still arrayed along the core-periphery divide among countries of the world, with countries like the United States of America and the United Kingdom at the centre and less developed countries at the margins. To bring peripheral countries to the centre, internet connectivity can play an important role by giving equal chances to participate in digital interactions.

Activity - 1

Identify the social networking site you use most and analyse the networks you have developed. Develop the concept of weak ties.

6.3 SOCIAL PRESENCE THEORY

Social Presence Theory was developed by Short, Williams, and Christie in 1976 to understand how media affect communication among participants. They primarily studied the influence of telecommunications on communication. The theory discusses the salience of interactants and their interpersonal relationship (Oh, Bailenson & Welch, 2018). Bickle, Hirudayaraj, and Doyle (2019) say that social presence is the degree to which a person is perceived as an «asperson» in computer-mediated communication or virtual environments. The theory postulates that the salience of interactants would depend on two factors, namely, immediacy and intimacy. Immediacy is the psychological distance between interactants, whereas intimacy refers to the connectedness among interactants when they communicate. The theory states that every medium differs in its social presence; for instance, the medium using both video and audio would have more social presence than the medium using only audio. Hence, the more social presence a medium can offer, the more effective the communication, as commonness among the participants would increase, which remains the sole aim of every communication process. Further, the medium with a high social presence is considered more personal, warm and sociable, while the medium with less social presence would be less personal (Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017).

The theory has become all the more important in the present times as the concept of social presence is closely related to social media. Social media is also being used for learning purposes, and many studies (Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017; Kreijns, Xu & Weidlich, 2022) point out that social presence is an important factor in the online learning environment. Wang & Wang (2012) found that specific online tasks, relationships with fellow online participants and attitudes towards course subjects and participants and instructor's immediacy remain some of the factors affecting the social presence during online learning. Studying brand promotion on Instagram, Johnson & Hong (2020) found that social presence positively relates to social media engagement. Further, using human faces in images instead of images of only products (i.e., more social presence) leads to more social media engagement. Nguyen et al. (2022) found that engaging with digital media that offer less social presence, such as email or online games, is negatively related to a sense of connectedness compared to digital media with higher social presence, such as voice or video calls.

Activity – 2

Think of online media that you are using for online learning. Identify and discuss the medium you feel helps you learn more easily than other media.

6.4 MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY

Richard Daft and Robert Lengel gave the media Richness theory in the early 1980s. The theory postulates that information is an important construct in all organisations, and all organisations have to deal with two information-related tasks, namely interpreting the external environment and coordinating internal activities. The major aim of both tasks is to reduce equivocality through sufficient information processing. In this information processing, different media, according to their richness, should be used by managers to function in their organisations effectively. The richness of a medium is defined as the potential information-carrying capacity of data (Deft & Lengel, 1983). If the communication of data provides new understanding, it is considered rich, whereas if the communication of data provides routine information, it is low in richness. Face-to-face discussions are considered media with high richness, while memos, bulletins and reports are counted among media with low richness. When the environment in the organisation is uncertain, difficult and equivocal, rich media should be used. In contrast, when the conditions are stable and calm, media with low richness, like memos and bulletins, may be used (Deft & Lengel, 1983). Effective managers should know the use of both kinds of media, with high richness and low, and the situations in which they are to be used.

Information/Communication Medium	Information Richness
Face-to-face	Highest
Telephone	High
Written, personal (letters, memos)	Moderate
Written, formal (bulletins, documents)	Low
Numeric Formal (computer output)	Lowest

Figure 1: Communication Media and Information Richness. Source: (Deft & Lengel, 1983)

When media richness theory was proposed, two components, written and oral, were considered for communication. However, with the arrival of social media, the possibilities have increased a lot. For instance, several audio, video and text are available these days. According to their richness value, the media may be used in interpersonal or group communication and by organisations with their customers. While exploring the use of verbal (text) and visual (emojis) by travel brands, Wang et al. (2024) found that the combination of verbal and visual in social media content can easily convey complex information and further interspersing visual content with verbal content can enhance user engagement. Liu, Fraustino, and Jin (2015) found that during the initial phase of a disaster, people intend to depend more on interpersonal relations through telephone calls or face-to-face interaction (richer media) than sharing, commenting or liking on social media (less rich media). However, giving a word of caution, Ledford (2012), in a research article, concludes that social media do provide exciting opportunities. However, at the same time, communicators might weigh the potential of a medium to deliver messages, especially in the case of ambiguous or complex information. For instance, giving quick and timely updates on a particular

topic through digital media or social media would make it easy for a user to get new information. However, the bombardment of new information every time might also demotivate the user to be alert all the time.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. How do you define the richness of a medium?

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2. When should media that are high in richness be used in organisations?

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6.5 PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY

Public Sphere theory is primarily based on the <Public Sphere> concept by Jürgen Habermas. In this concept, Habermas emphasises the importance of the Public Sphere in the effective working of democracy, as this sphere would be accessible to all citizens and give them an open forum in Political Communication.

Public Sphere theory about the media presents social media as an emerging Public Sphere. As social media is becoming accessible to more and more people, the chances of people participating in online discussions are also increasing. Social media is being called a platform where many movements for political and social causes have been initiated. Mathe and Motsaathebe (2024) see social media as a digital public sphere, allowing citizens to share, discuss and deliberate on different issues or concerns. Social media has been able to blur many boundaries, including geographic, economic and social, to bring people together on some platforms, enabling the exchange of diverse viewpoints.

However, some studies do not agree that social media can be called a public sphere. Some researchers argue that limited access and a lack of digital skills among many to use social media hinder the equal participation of all citizens. Hence, social media cannot be called the Public Sphere. For instance, Fuchs (2016) says questions like whether the ownership of social media organisations is democratic or not, whether there is any social or economic censorship on social media, whether there is an over-representation of views of corporate elites or how inclusive, sincere or reflexive online political discussions need to be addressed concerning the public sphere. After analysis of Twitter (now called X), which is considered one of the most important social media platforms for political discussions, Fuchs

(2016) concludes that Twitter is not a public sphere as the author writes, « Twitter advances a class-structured attention economy that privileges economically powerful actors over everyday users (198).

Fuchs (2016) stresses that Twitter is an information-disseminating medium, not a communication medium where everyday users can send honest opinions. Delfanti & Arvidsson (2019) conclude that the online public sphere enabled by the use of digital technologies might not be called democratic per se, as the digital media might change hierarchies but might not be able to make them disappear altogether. Similarly, Fuchs (2016) notes that social media can serve as a coordination and organisation tool but cannot replace collective action involving ground-level participation of citizens with real-time and space presence. Sevignani (2022) suggests that though the rise of the antagonistic and networked individualistic flow of communications has weakened the hegemonic flow of communication to enable more democratic processes, the exchange of popular communications needs to be strengthened by increasing the competencies of citizens.

Activity– 3

1. Read any research article that discusses the concept of the public sphere vis-a-vis social media and summarise its main argument.
2. Think of any one recent social movement and discuss the role of social media in the public

6.6 SOCIAL INFLUENCE THEORY

Social Influence theory was given by Herbert Kelman in the early 1950s, as the name of the theory suggests, to understand the social influences that affect the attitudes and behaviour of individuals in society (Davlembayeva & Papagiannidis, 2024). Social influence is the change in an individual's behaviour due to a person or a group of persons. Kelman (1958) says that social influence or change in attitude works based on: compliance, identification and internalisation. Attitude change occurs due to compliance when an individual changes their attitude or behaviour, not when one agrees with the change, but because one gets some reward or escapes some punishment or disapproval. Identification is said to induce the attitude change when an individual accepts social influence or changes behaviour to establish or maintain a self-defining relationship with another person or group, while attitude change due to internalisation would occur when the content of the induced behaviour is in congruence with the value system of an individual and hence, is accepted or internalised by an individual (Kelman, 1958). This theory of Social Influence can also be applied to social media, as the change in attitude or behaviour is affected by social media platforms. Compliance, identification, and internalisation processes can explain social media users' attitudes or behaviour change very well. For instance, it is generally observed among social media users that selfies or photographs are uploaded to get a certain number of likes. Here, anticipating getting a certain number of likes can be termed compliance, i.e., a reward for a particular type of behaviour.

In contrast, certain photographs or selfies are avoided to escape disapproval or dislike. Similarly, Hwang (2014) found that all three factors affect the practice of knowledge sharing by email, especially in high personal goal groups. Zhou (2021) also found that all three factors influence the users' intention to share information in Online Health Communities. Mulcahy et al. (2024) suggest that to tackle the spread of misinformation, especially by social media influencers, awareness campaigns like <Question It, Verify It: Empowering Minds, Debunking Lies> or <Think Twice, Share.

Nice: Be Sure Before You Share should be run. Explaining the concept of scalability in terms of spreading content quickly and reaching much wider audiences, Delfanti and Arvidsson (2019) note that this spread works both ways. This quicker and wider spread can be of information or content one wants to disseminate, or it might be that one does not want it to spread.

Activity – 4

Observe your friend's behaviour and try to identify which factor influences your friend's social media use.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. List the three factors that influence the attitude or behaviour of individuals under Social Influence theory.

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6.7 MEDIA DEPENDENCY THEORY

As the name suggests, the Media Dependency theory, given by S.J. Ball Rokeach and M.L.L. DeFleur (1976), postulates that audiences depend on mass media for their information resources, and this dependency on mass media leads to alterations or modifications in the cognitive, affective and behavioural lives of audiences. Here, cognitive refers to changes in thinking processes; affective refers to changes in attitudes, whereas behavioural changes pertain to changes in the actions or behaviour of users. The nature of tripartite audience-media-society relationships determines the effects of media on people and society. Analysing the factors of an individual's dependency on media, Ball-Rokeach (1985) mentions that the focus of messages disseminated by mass media, the focus of interpersonal networks of an individual and personal goals remain some of the factors affecting an individual's dependency on media. All these factors might not align with others; for instance, the focus of mass media messages might not always align with the focus of interpersonal networks. Hence, the intersection of these factors decides an individual's dependency on media. This dependency on media becomes even higher in societies where media serves many unique and central information functions, and there is also high structural

instability due to pervasive conflict or rapid social change (Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Usually, three dimensions of human motivations or goals, namely Understanding (self and social), Orientation (action and interaction) and Play (Solitary and social), are fulfilled by media (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

Since social media is becoming an integral part of users' lives, users have become dependent on it for their different needs, from seeking information to making friends to participating in civil and social movements. As early as during the 2003 SARS epidemic in China, Tai & Sun (2007) concluded that as the socio-structural environment was not conducive to the free flow of information during a major public health crisis, users of the internet not only actively sought information from the internet but also attempted to create alternative sources of information for other users by becoming disseminators and producers of information. Similarly, studying the role of media during COVID-19 in China, Zanuddin and Xu (2022) found that media attention and media depy can lead to prosocial behaviour during the crisis, with self-efficacy acting as a mediating factor. With the increasing use of social media, the role played by mass media in fulfilling information needs is being taken over by social media (Kim & Jung, 2016). However, as mentioned, cognitive, affective or behavioural changes might not happen simultaneously, like online information-seeking and discussions on all topics might not always get converted into offline activities or participation. These changes might differ in activities or concerns; the changes that might take place in the case of leisure activities might not work in political activities. Kim and Jung (2016), in their study on social networking service dependency, found that there were fewer chances for online political and sports interactions to translate to offline activities than shopping. While analysing the use of YouTube after the death of public figure Michael Jackson, Lee (2011) found that the use of YouTube highlights the bi-directional dependency of media-audience society, where the platform acted as an online support system and helped connect a greater community-in-mourning.

Activity – 5

Which social media platform do you depend on most and why? Explain.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

Every concept related to human beings is developed into theories to understand the concept systematically; the workings of social media can also be understood and analysed better with the help of theories related to social media. This chapter has discussed the major theories related to social media. It may be noted here that most of the theories discussed in the chapter were propounded when the use of social media was not very popular. Most of the theories, whether the public sphere theory or social influence theory, were developed to explain the general workings of media. However, since the aim of every medium remains effective and efficient communication, these theories could be easily applied to the working of social media. For instance, in social presence theory, earlier, only media, such as face-to-face discussions or memos, were used to increase the presence of an individual in dealing with particular situations in organisations. However, these days,

even social media is being used to make the presence of an individual «real» even when the person is not present physically in a meeting. Another point we need to take into consideration is that no one theory necessarily would be able to explain the workings or influence of social media; we might need to combine the concepts from different theories to understand social media in a better way. Further, the theories discussed in this chapter are some of the major theories used to understand social media's use, nature, and effects. Some other theories, like the Uses and Gratifications theory, which was developed to understand the need for gratification of active audience from media, can also be applied to social media to understand and analyse the needs social media users have to gratify. Similarly, concepts like Echo Chambers or filter bubbles, which attempt to highlight the role of algorithms in social media, can also be useful in understanding the use and influence of social media. Therefore, as students of media, particularly social media, we need to be observant of the use and users of social media and explore the theories related to social media. Rather, as the use of social media is increasing, new theories related to social media might also be propounded.

6.9 KEYWORDS

Compliance—Compliance is one factor that influences an individual's attitude or behaviour. When an individual changes their attitude or behaviour because they get some reward or escape some punishment or disapproval, they are said to be influenced by compliance.

Homophily refers to similarities in the characteristics of individuals or groups that lead to the establishment of connections among them.

Social Influence- Social influence is defined as an individual's behaviour change due to a person or a group of persons.

Social Presence—Social presence is the degree to which a person is perceived to be “an actual person” in computer-mediated communication or virtual environments.

Strength of a tie-- Strength of a tie is defined as a combination of contact intensity, intensity of emotions, intimacy and reciprocity among persons.

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6.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. Media richness refers to the ability of a communication medium to convey information effectively, especially complex or ambiguous messages. A rich medium provides immediate feedback, supports multiple cues (such as body language, tone, and words), allows for personalisation, and facilitates the use of natural language.
2. Organisations should use high-richness media when communication involves uncertain, ambiguous, or emotionally sensitive issues. These include tasks like conflict resolution, performance feedback, negotiations, or strategic decision-making, where nuanced understanding and quick interaction are essential.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. The three key factors that influence the attitude or behaviour of individuals under Social Influence Theory are:
 - A. **Compliance** – when individuals conform to gain rewards or avoid punishment.
 - B. **Identification** – when individuals adopt behaviour to establish or maintain a relationship with a person or group.
 - C. **Internalisation** – when individuals accept a belief or behaviour because it aligns with their value system.

UNIT 7 CELEBRITIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Learning Outcomes
- 7.2 Evolution of Celebrity
- 7.3 Micro-Celebrities
- 7.4 Public vs. Private Life
- 7.5 Fan Culture
- 7.6 Celebrity Activism
- 7.7 Commercialisation of Fame
- 7.8 Let us Sum Up
- 7.9 Further Readings
- 7.10 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Social media has become more popular and powerful in recent years. The major motto of social media is revolutionising communication, connecting, and content consumption. A few decades ago, Internet users were more likely to communicate and access information using Internet technologies like websites, blogs, and search engines. Still, in today's era, the Internet and social media create celebrities who are common people more visible and have direct access to their audience, making them more valuable as influencers. These celebrities tie up with brands and turn social media popularity into economic capital. As of 2021, major brands pay Rs.850 (\$10) per thousand subscribers for an Instagram post that endorses a particular brand. These brands also benefit from celebrities' popularity through their subscribers buying the endorsed product. Social media popularity paved the way for influencers to embrace celebrity culture and traditional celebrities (from film, sports and media). This shift has led brands to adapt their advertising policies, focusing on Social media influencers and traditional celebrities. Tanya Khanijow (Travel), Savi Vid Couple (Travel), Manav Chhabra (Fashion and Lifestyle), Kritika Khurana (Fashion), and Kusha Kapila (Comic) are the most popular social media influencers in India as of 2023. According to researchers, influencers hold firm control over audiences' (Followers) decisions when choosing brands with intimacy and authenticity. They can craft their narratives, share behind-the-scenes glimpses of their lives, and showcase their talents without the filter of traditional media. The global reach of social media has amplified the influence of influencers, allowing them to connect with global audiences, spread messages, and mobilise support for causes and charity. The pandemic has accelerated this

trend as social media users grew, as influencers' audiences opened potential personal marketing for brands and celebrities. During the pandemic, people witnessed celebrities inside their homes, seeing their pets, home decor, and pyjamas, which is unlikely for them and created a personal connection between the celebrities, influencers and audiences.

7.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After learning this unit, you will be able to;

- Trace the evolution of celebrity culture from traditional to digital platforms;
- Discuss the concept of micro-celebrities and their influence;
- Analyse the complexities of public versus private life in the digital age;
- Explore fan culture and its implications on celebrity dynamics; and
- Evaluate the role of celebrities in activism and commercialisation;

7.2 EVOLUTION OF CELEBRITY

The word 'Fame' originated from the Latin 'fama', which means rumour. Fame and celebrity are related, as no one can be a celebrity without fame. There are arguments on the origin of celebrity culture; in Europe, the earliest celebrities were Athenian celebrities, politicians, playwrights, and philosophers like Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and Leonidas of Rhodes, an Olympic runner between 164 BC and 152 BC. The remembrance sought the fame of celebrities after their death. During the 1500s and 1600s, the most celebrated people were actors and playwrights; with the invention of the printing press, those celebrities earned loyal fans. During the 18th and 19th centuries, London newspapers published gossip sheets containing exclusive information on celebrities, exposing their private lives. Celebrity worship began in the late nineteenth century in the United States, with the nouveaux riches seeking personal publicity in society columns and magazines. It has evolved with radio and television programs broadcasting celebrities to reach wider audiences and raise their fame. Over time, newspapers also changed the nature of celebrity culture by offering lower prices to reach the common audience.

Thomas Edison used photography and the press to promote himself. Similarly, Hollywood stars like Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, and Paul Newman set the stage for celebrity culture, as they were controlled by studios when crafting their lives and images. Marketing departments and executives tutored celebrities on how to dress and appear, and helped them earn large followings with the help of the media. Technologies like flashing cameras and box cameras bought by paparazzi make celebrity life spicier and more accessible to the public.

Daniel Bootstin and Rojek defined celebrities as individuals who are known for their fame or influence on society. According to Rojek (2011), Celebrities

are categorised into three types: attributed, achieved and ascribed. Ascribed celebrities are celebrities by bloodline or biological descendants; normal people cannot achieve this status, e.g. Prince William, son of King Charles; Brooklyn Beckham, Son of David Beckham; Ivanka Trump, daughter of Donald Trump; Shweta Bachchan, daughter of Amitabh Bachchan. These individuals are famous because they inherited fame from their families, not because they possess talent; their lives are often scrutinised from a young age due to their family. Achieved celebrities have special talents, extraordinary skills, and their efforts and accomplishments. Lionel Messi, Oprah Winfrey, Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, etc, are good examples. Their success stories often inspire audiences, exhibiting the importance of hard work and perseverance. Attributed celebrities are famous through mass media promotions, coverage, publicity, or public relations rather than a specific talent or achievement. Kim Kardashian and their family, Bruce Jenner, are perfect examples of celebrities celebrated for their extravagant lifestyle, special appearances in shows and charisma. They sustain fame by maintaining constant media and social media visibility, regular appearances at public events and shows, and leveraging controversies and trending topics. They earn a large sum of revenue from fashion lines, endorsements and brands.

In recent years, reality TV stars took the concept of celebrity a step further, emphasising entertainment value as a key part of celebrity culture. Kardashians from America, Lilly Singh (Canada), Varun Sood, Rannvijay Singha, and Tina Datta from India cashed their Television fame into Capital. Social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram allow celebrities to market themselves online and directly interact with their fans. Microcelebrities are another term for people famous on YouTube with 10,000 to 100K followers, but unknown to the world, they have a moderately high reach and close connection with their audiences. Nano celebrities are individuals with 1000 to 10,000 followers with a very tight relationship between them, whose recommendations are taken seriously by their audiences. Mega celebrities or influencers have more than 1 million followers and are great choices for campaigns by multi-level brands to reach a large audience. Unlike traditional celebrities, these Internet celebrities wield influence over a niche or a specific audience on social media platforms, with an intense connection with their audience and expertise in a particular niche.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. Define a Social media influencer. How has the pandemic accelerated this trend?

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2. Discuss the evolution of celebrity culture.

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7.3 MICRO-CELEBRITIES

Micro-celebrities, Internet celebrities, or micro-influencers, have gained fame on social media. Theresa Sneft and P developed the concept of micro-celebrity—a Poitier in 2008. Micro-celebrities are present on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which rely on user-generated content. The contents include lifestyle, fashion, Film criticism, and other genres. Brands use these micro-celebrities as marketing persons to advertise their products to their followers. They are famous among a niche group of users on social media platforms. They often present themselves as public figures linked to their audience, expecting authenticity and transparency. The Internet has allowed the masses to create micro-celebrities with the click of a mouse, and social media has become a major participatory platform for individuals to express themselves through content. The attention economy has brought attention to building and maintaining relationships among social media users, and understanding this phenomenon has become increasingly important. The proliferation of user-generated content and applications has created an opportunity for ordinary people to achieve fame among a group of users. Social media has become a significant platform for micro-celebrities to express themselves and maintain relationships with followers through the content they create and collaborate on. These individuals use social media to build and maintain relationships, interact with new people, and improve their online status and popularity. They construct and manage their self-image and identity strategically by projecting highly desirable social traits to enhance their visibility and influence among the public. Providing user-generated content has led to the rise of micro-celebrities, as they are not famous in the offline world but are famous on social media. They appeal to their audience, which is their followers and individuals who view the content and command a fan base. Social media helps these celebrities bypass the traditional gatekeepers like editors and producers and provides whatever they like. YouTube has become a significant platform for launching micro-celebrities with creators like Pewdiepie and Chiara Ferragni, who generate large sums of revenue every month from video views and popularity. As of 2023, 27 million people were paid content creators in the US and 3 million from India, with an average monthly revenue of Rs. 25,000.

Internet celebrities can also influence fans by creating parasocial relationships with their audiences. For example, Kim Kardashian often creates the appearance of authenticity by harnessing her audience’s emotions. This has led to a growing interest in the Internet and its potential impact on the lives of Internet celebrities.

Self-made Fame

Self-made fame is when individuals exhibit their talents, ideas, and creativity on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc. These self-made celebrities specialise in unique or specific talents, attracting niche audiences. Consistent content creation and direct engagement with audiences increase their authenticity and help build a personal brand. These celebrities have creative freedom and monetising opportunities, fuelling the creator economy.

Niche Marketing

A minimum of 1000 followers is expected from micro-celebrities to initiate brand partnering with them. These audiences can be gathered on one platform or across multiple platforms. Audiences often view these celebrities as their peers, friends, or relatable experts, fostering a deeper sense of connection, trust, close-knit relationships and a community-like atmosphere. Their content builds a following around niche interests and personal experiences as stories and product reviews. They increase their audiences organically, drawing loyal followers who trust and value the opinions and content shared by them. They also share intimate aspects of their lives, involving audiences in their personal lives. A recent study by Expertcity found that 82% of their consumers follow recommendations by micro-celebrities.

Micro-celebrities' marketing is cost-effective with lower collaboration and the ability to scale campaigns across different niches. This helps brands to reach diverse audience segments and maximise their return on investment. By partnering with Micro-celebrities whose followers closely match the brand's target market, companies can ensure their message reaches the right people, leading to higher conversion rates and better ROI than broader marketing tactics.

Relatability

Trust and relatability are the standout attributes of micro-celebrities, making their endorsements more relatable and credible to audiences. They have a personal connection that fosters higher engagement and influences purchasing decisions more effectively. They offer stronger, cost-effective, affordable, and viable partnerships for smaller, growing brands. They can reach specific audiences like local farming communities or global gamers, ensuring the ad message reaches a target audience. Authentic content creation from micro-influencers allows brands to stand out from overpriced corporate campaigns and embrace a more relatable, human-centric ad approach.

Interactive

Interactive relationships are two-way connections between content creators and audiences through direct communication, engagement, and mutual understanding. Key features of interactive relationships include direct communication, accessibility, personalisation, community building, and feedback loops. Mutual engagement is a defining feature of digital platforms like Instagram and YouTube. They include enhanced engagement, trust, loyalty, authenticity and influence over audiences. The interactive practices

of micro-celebrities include live streaming, content collaboration, Q&A sessions, responding to comments and direct messages from audiences. The interactivity of these celebrities blurs the lines between them and their fans, reshaping traditional hierarchies of fame and influence.

Personal Branding

Personal branding involves showcasing skills, values, personality and expertise to exhibit talent and gain a memorable presence among audiences. It includes a unique identity, a target audience, consistent messaging, visual identity, content strategy, and engagement. Celebrities use a cross-platform strategy to represent strong identities and achieve deeper and more active interaction with audiences, allowing them to work on their 360-degree persona with their followers. Revealing personal lives has more power to resonate with audiences than traditional celebrities. Personal branding or self-branding is key to helping aspiring professionals to sell themselves in this competitive world. Social media technologies, like algorithms, can significantly boost the development of the attention economy, enabling ordinary individuals to gain fame and celebrity status. Branding in the affective economy benefits from emotional engagement, and personal branding is a new social arrangement that relies on different strategies, such as progressive ideals like capability, creativity, and empowerment.

7.4 PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE LIFE

The lives of celebrities can be explained in two ways: the private self and the public self. The private self is the original life of the celebrity without any intervention from the media and social media. The public self or life involves a series of staged activities curated by a public relations team or experts who help the celebrity build their image. The relationship between audiences and celebrities is built by the public self/life, creating a space between the private and public self. Celebrities can remain in the limelight only if they focus on positive media promotion tactics. There is a debate on the privacy expectations of celebrities and their family members on topics such as celebrity privacy, as controlled privacy and intrusion of paparazzi or fans, as well as the privacy of the children of celebrities. Jens Heffman argues that celebrities may lose legal protections if they sacrifice their privacy for publicity. Paparazzi, or freelance photographers, take celebrities' pictures for financial purposes, using techniques like stalking that can cause turbulence and harm. Elizabeth Hindman claims that selling exaggerated content without context has decreased credibility in the news industry.

For centuries, celebrities focused on portraying a positive public and private self before their audiences and kept their private lives private while discussing them before the public. To protect their personal reputation, maintain their personal boundaries, and preserve a positive public image by preserving their privacy. However, in today's social media world, most celebrities take control of the narrative surrounding their personal lives. Public display of affection (PDA) has generated significant media coverage,

helping celebrities to stay in the spotlight and gain more opportunities. Revealing their private life is seen as more authentic and humanising to gain fan loyalty through social media posts and paparazzi. Social media engagement of traditional celebrities helps internet celebrities get content on fashion reviews, gossip columns, lifestyle updates, replicas, etc. Similarly, the rise of social media has resulted in a new generation of celebrities attempting to control their image themselves, using managed exposure for various benefits and authenticity. According to Lomanowska and Guitton (2016), authenticity can be explained as the inner and outer selves. The inner self refers to the space of the self, creativity, and spirituality, while the outer self is about a performance or expression. Goffman introduces the term *belief* to explain these performances, stating that performers are sincerely convinced that their impression of reality is the real reality. This type of performance aims to achieve private gain by meeting audiences' demands.

Social media celebrities blur the lines between public and private life by creating a sense of intimacy with their audiences and followers. There is severe backlash in social media content, such as misinformation, hate speech, and privacy challenges. However, the platform's openness attracted millions of individuals to be content creators and audiences. Social media celebrities like Emma Chamberlain, Lilly Singh, and Huda Kattan faced many challenges managing their public and private lives. Selective sharing of content, balancing authenticity, and maintaining boundaries between personal and public life can help celebrities sustain a safe, private life despite being in the limelight. Indian micro-celebrities face challenges on the grounds of cultural expectations, trolls and cyberbullying, and fans' expectations of accessing their private life and relationships. Audiences and the public expect open statements on relationship status, separations, break-ups, engagements, and family dramas in events like weddings. Many micro-celebrities have faced burnout and overexposure due to the constant updating of their private lives, and they were forced to take breaks from social media after cyberbullying.

Some celebrities choose to shield their children from social media to protect their privacy. By balancing public engagement with privacy, celebrities can create a sense of intimacy and authenticity while addressing the risks of overexposure and mental health challenges.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. How do micro-celebrities use social media platforms to cultivate their personal brand and audience?

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2. What strategies do influencers use to establish boundaries between their personal and professional lives?

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7.5 FAN CULTURE

Fandoms or Fan culture gained significant public attention in recent years after the rise of social media, enabling the audience and fans to interact with their idols and plan various activities. This culture has opened doors for a variety of activities and the economy. Chinese scholar Li believed that fan culture would eventually become a kind of consumer culture. Fans and audiences fund their idols and purchase products endorsed by celebrities, which is called the fan economy. Fans also take on the role of producers, with many fan productions emerging on social media platforms. This shift has led to the development of a participatory culture, where fans form alternative media interpretations through productions. Before 2010, mainstream media traditionally limited fandoms and fan culture; after the widespread use of social media, fan culture evolved with platforms like Tieba, Wemedia, and Weibo, creating alternative spaces for fan culture and participatory culture.

Indians worship actors as demigods and idols, as fan culture in Bollywood is a deeply rooted phenomenon which extends beyond admiration of actors and characters. Fans show intense devotion, collective identity and active participation in shaping actors' narratives and their films. Bollywood stars are often idolised as larger-than-life figures; their birthdays are celebrated with grand festivities, campaigns, etc. Social media celebrities have vibrant fan communities on a small scale. They actively participate in live streams, tournaments, and online discussions and defend their idol/celebrity during controversies. Fan engagement affects content promotion. Both fans and celebrities face mental health concerns like burnout, anxiety, and cyberbullying. Fandom drives brand endorsements, product launches, and content monetisation. The fan economy is a key factor in influencing the stardom of social media celebrities, and many brands and product producers endorse celebrities to boost sales. The purchasing power of fans and their object of admiration creates new productions of music and films. In some cases, social media celebrities have collaborated with mainstream media programmes such as Big Boss, television serials, and small roles in films. The advent of social media has also enabled fans to voice their opinions unimpeded, breaking the mould of society and questioning traditional media values.

7.6 CELEBRITY ACTIVISM

Celebrities have been involved in politics since the 1920s. Al Jolson, the actor and singer, was the first celebrity to publicly endorse a presidential campaign in the United States. Since then, celebrity activism and advocacy have happened much more frequently after the 1960s. Celebrities Warren

Beatty and Jane Fonda spoke out against the Vietnam War, earning respect and criticism from political parties. Though they faced backlash and controversies, common people started trusting celebrities, and politicians faced a decline in trust. Today, celebrities increasingly use social media platforms for activism; posts often containing lines on social issues significantly impact the public's perception of celebrities. The growing use of social media has increased the influence of celebrities, paving the way to reach a wider global audience. Shifts in mainstream media content have made celebrities on social media more powerful as contemporary journalism focuses on celebrity news to gain a greater viewership. Over time, public and niche audiences have become increasingly frustrated with traditional news sources and have focused on alternative sources that report more on celebrities. This gives celebrities a spotlight for more audience reach and highlights their causes more widely.

In terms of spotlighting issues and raising money, many celebrities sincerely fight for causes with excellent networking capabilities.

There are a few examples of celebrities fighting for social and environmental causes:

1. Bestselling author Ishmael Beah has worked with the UN and created his own foundation to give children scarred by violence a voice.
2. Somali model Waris Dirie, who is a victim of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), has advocated against FGM and started her foundation to offer treatment and care for victims.
3. Camila Pitanga is a Brazilian actress who has long worked hard to spotlight the fight against climate change, child labour, and slave labour and support Indigenous communities' rights and gender equality.
4. Nigerian musician Femi Kuti has worked with UNICEF to draw attention to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa and to support children's rights.
5. Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour supports microfinance, healthcare, and internet cafes globally.
6. Indian tennis star Sania Mirza fights against female infanticide and supports gender equality in India.
7. Chinese actress Hai Qing promotes gender equality and ends discrimination against women.
8. Indian actor Aamir Khan lobbies the Indian government and European Parliament for climate change and drought management. Khan and his foundation train farmers in Maharashtra, India, using indigenous water management techniques.

Celebrity and brand activism emerged due to societal shifts and distrust in traditional politics. Brand activism involves companies aligning with societal causes to appeal to ethical consumers using social media to foster positive change and maintain credibility. Governments often work with celebrities and brands to involve citizens in supporting the government and effective, consumer-driven initiatives.

Celebrities may bring up issues once and never mention them, or discuss a topic without research. This can damage the cause. In 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black American man, was murdered by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer; the incident stirred global disruption and was called 'Blackout Tuesday'. Many celebrities posted a black square as a virtual protest against racism and police brutality and returned to their normal personal posts/updates immediately. Such a perception of activism is harmful, as it shouldn't end with a single post with ambiguous, sympathetic words without taking a stance.

7.7 COMMERCIALISATION OF FAME

Social media has become a significant tool for businesses to reach target audiences of specific age groups. Social media influencers have gained online fame by building attractive profiles on various platforms. They impact audiences' decision-making by promoting the buying of products and following brands and ideas. Researchers found that brands and small companies allocate more than half of their annual marketing budget to micro-celebrities and social media influencer marketing campaigns. The key avenues of commercialising fame are through

1. Brand Endorsements
2. Content monetisation
3. Subscription costs
4. Appearances in live events
5. Collaborations with brands

Celebrities and social media influencers can monetise their influence through the above-mentioned avenues, such as brand collaborations, sponsored social media posts, celebrity-backed product lines, endorsement deals, event appearances, and speaking engagements. Celebrities can drive sales and increase brand awareness by aligning with brands that resonate with their audience. Sponsored posts promote products or services to followers in exchange for compensation, ensuring transparency for their audience.

Kylie Jenner, Kaby Lane, CarryMinati, Charli D'Amelio, Prajakta Koli, Emma Chamberlain, Riyaz Aly, MrBeast, Komal Pandey, and PewDiePie have all used various strategies to commercialise their brands. Jenner owns Kylie Cosmetics, earning over \$1 million in ad revenue from Instagram posts. Lane collaborated with global companies and participated in events like the Cannes Film Festival. Koli partnered with brands like Amazon and Lenovo for paid promotions. Others have launched lifestyle businesses, music videos, and endorsed fashion brands.

Check Your Progress: 3

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

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

1. What defines fan culture, and how does it differ from traditional audience engagement?

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2. Discuss the role of celebrity activism in raising awareness about social, political, and environmental issues.

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3. What are celebrities' key strategies to monetise their fame through endorsements and collaborations?

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit explores the evolution of celebrity culture in the context of celebrities' public and private lives, fan influence and celebrity activism. Social media has transformed communication and content consumption, allowing ordinary individuals to gain fame as influencers. Influencers like Tanya Khanijow and Kusha Kapila significantly influence audience decisions, leveraging authenticity and global reach. Celebrity culture has evolved from ancient fame linked to achievements to modern fame driven by the media. Micro-celebrities gain fame through user-generated content on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, using self-made fame, niche marketing, relatability, interaction, and personal branding. Celebrities navigate dual personas, the private self and the public self, creating a blend of intimacy and authenticity. This approach humanises celebrities but raises concerns about misinformation, privacy, and hate speech.

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7.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. A social media influencer is an individual who has built a dedicated online following by sharing content in a specific niche, often leveraging platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok to engage audiences

and influence their purchasing decisions. The pandemic accelerated this trend as global lockdowns shifted attention to online platforms. With traditional marketing avenues disrupted, brands increasingly collaborated with influencers to reach digital consumers. Influencers gained visibility as they adapted quickly to the demand for relatable, real-time content, addressing audiences' needs for connection, entertainment, and recommendations during isolation.

2. Celebrity culture has evolved from traditional fame rooted in accomplishments like acting or sports to a multifaceted phenomenon where individuals achieve stardom via reality TV, social media, or viral content. Earlier, celebrities were distant figures admired from afar, while today, fans seek closer interaction through platforms like Instagram or YouTube. Micro-celebrities and influencers have democratised fame, allowing ordinary people to attain recognition. This shift reflects changing media consumption patterns, the influence of digital platforms, and a growing emphasis on personal branding and relatability over traditional talent.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. Micro-celebrities use social media platforms to build personal brands by consistently sharing niche content that resonates with specific audiences. They engage directly with followers through comments, polls, and Q&A sessions, fostering a sense of intimacy and authenticity. They expand their reach by leveraging trends, hashtags, and collaborations with other creators. Storytelling, transparency about their lives, and alignment with values make their brands relatable. Sponsorships and affiliate marketing further monetise their platforms, blending personal stories with promotional content.
2. Influencers establish boundaries by selectively sharing aspects of their personal lives while maintaining privacy for sensitive matters. Many create separate social media accounts for personal and professional content or curate posts to align with their public persona. Scheduling “offline” time and using tools like content calendars helps manage work-life balance. Setting boundaries with followers regarding invasive questions or oversharing ensures they retain control over their narrative. Legal agreements with brands often outline the scope of sponsored content, reinforcing professional limits.

Check Your Progress: 3

1. Fan culture is characterised by active participation, emotional investment, and community-building among fans who deeply connect with a celebrity, show, or brand. Unlike traditional audience engagement, which is passive and observational, fan culture involves creating fan art and fanfiction, organising meetups, or engaging in campaigns to support their idol. Social media amplifies this dynamic by enabling fans to interact directly with celebrities and like-minded peers. Fan culture blurs the line between producer and consumer, fostering collaborative engagement.

Social Media and Society

2. Celebrity activism leverages fame to spotlight societal issues, reaching vast audiences and generating critical discussion. Celebrities use their platforms to endorse causes, participate in campaigns, or collaborate with organisations to drive change. Their influence can amplify movements, attract funding, and mobilise followers to act. For example, figures like Leonardo DiCaprio advocate for environmental conservation. While impactful, critics question the depth of celebrity activism, urging consistency and genuine commitment beyond symbolic gestures.
3. Celebrities monetise fame by partnering with brands for endorsements, leveraging their reach to market products or services. They often co-create products, such as beauty or fashion lines, to align with their brand. Social media plays a significant role; posts, stories, or videos featuring branded content enable targeted marketing. Merchandise, licensing deals, and exclusive collaborations further expand revenue streams. Authenticity is vital; endorsements must resonate with their public persona to maintain audience trust and credibility.



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UNIT 8 BRANDING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Structure

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- 8.1 Learning Outcomes
- 8.2 Social Media and Its Importance for Brands
- 8.3 Dominant Social Media Platforms for Branding
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 - 8.5.1 Do's of Social Media Branding
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- 8.6 Choosing a Social Media Platform for Your Business
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- 8.9 Keywords
- 8.10 Further Readings
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8.0 INTRODUCTION

Consumers nowadays are bombarded with multiple messages from various directions across several devices. Brands are the major culprits for the onslaught of these messages. They have marketed their products and services to customers through diverse social media platforms. Facebook has accumulated a wealth of personal information from its users, reaching a point where it might better know your best friend's likes and dislikes than you. Brands are innovative and creative to compete for your attention on your Twitter feed or Instagram handle. Shopping sites and shopkeepers are ready to give away coupons and gifts in exchange for likes and comments. The review and rating sites have gained popularity. You should check the ratings before booking a movie, ticket, or visiting a new restaurant. A persuasive review on Amazon or TripAdvisor from a stranger might influence our opinion more than a friend or a family member. Social media platforms have given more options, freedom, and empowerment in many ways. With half of the world population on social media (approximately 4.62 billion), brands need to challenge themselves to seek attention. Brands get to achieve their commercial goals more effectively, efficiently, and innovatively, while consumers get genuine and useful content, products, or services through social media usage. This Unit will discuss how brands use various social media platforms.

8.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of social media for brands;
- Describe the strengths of various social media platforms.
- Use the right social media platform for brand-specific communication; and
- Analyse the impact of review and rating sites on consumers.

8.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR BRANDS

Social media is where your brand interacts with its online audience. It is also where your customers and fans introduce your brand to their friends and followers through their comments, likes, posts, retweets, reels, videos, and more. Thus, brands can receive rich, unmediated customer insights faster than ever. This action, initiated by customers, leverages their brand and adds credibility. The idea of the brands is to reach a considerable audience and create awareness about their brand. This will attract more traffic and engagement, which will help generate more leads. The objective is to bring customers to your website and encourage them to purchase.

There is also the negative side of brands' exponential exposure on social media- the trolls. Trolling is when you respond to online content or comments purposely disruptively. It happens when a brand puts up something controversial on social media intentionally or unintentionally, the post draws the same people's attention, and the brand gets beaten up. Brands also get bashed or lose followers when they start using social media for pitching and selling rather than interacting with their fans and followers. Worse is when brands lose a grip on their brand message, promise, personality, character and common sense; the backlash can be brutal.

Brands need to understand the social media dynamics and stay up to date with the trends popular amongst people. This is how they can use social media to their advantage.

How is social media useful for branding?

Social media has challenged brands to explore newer ways of reaching out to their prospects. Thus, it differs from the traditional approach of placing advertisements on mass media. It is not linear. Social media interaction is more divergent and two-way. The idea is to compete against multiple brands using social media platforms. However, the cost-effectiveness of social media compared to traditional media makes it more attractive. However, the volatility and short attention span pose a big challenge. To create customer connection, you must build relationships and open up, building trust gradually. You cannot buy authenticity; brands must win customers by reaching out to them.

Social media acts as an effective tool for promoting brands:

- Engaging content across various platforms to help attract and reach out to the new audience.
- Social engagement helps to reflect your brand personality. This helps build authenticity and thereby trust and authority.
- Endless customer service and support opportunities are provided, and other marketing activities are complemented.
- Platforms for networking are provided
- Feedback and engagement on platforms are encouraged
- Traditional and social media platforms may be rightly mixed to engage customers for contests and reward schemes
- Exclusive offers for fans on social media are provided in

Activity – 1

Review Coca-Cola's social media platforms and note their various customer engagement efforts.

8.3 DOMINANT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR BRANDING

Facebook

Facebook is the most used social media platform worldwide, with around 2.989 billion monthly active users across the globe as of the first quarter of 2023 (Statista Research Department, April 2023). You can advertise various kinds of businesses on this platform. You can also create a dedicated business page to engage with your existing and potential customers. Brands have a lot of opportunities on the Facebook page as they can share content and communicate easily and effectively with their audience or share an advertisement through a Personal Facebook page, Business Page, as a Facebook feed, a story or a video on Facebook Live.

Benefits to brands on Facebook:

- Encourage comments, likes, and shares from followers by seamlessly integrating text, image, and video posts in a user-friendly design.
- Promote their brand campaigns on the platform, which can go viral quickly.
- Generate feedback from fans, allowing two-way conversations with followers.
- Facebook Pages appear on Google during the search
- Effective for someone starting a small business
- Membership and usage are free of cost
- Increasing brand awareness as posts can reach nearly 2.9 billion monthly active users.
- Updates feed into your fans' newsfeeds as you post something, like, or comment.
- Effective for launching products

- Providing customer service: Customers expect brands to resolve their issues by contacting the company's Facebook page.
- Selling products and services using e-commerce applications on a Facebook Page.
- Attracting new fans who are friends of customers

Do you know?

Facebook owns Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. It was rebranded as Meta on 28 October 2022.

The idea behind rebranding is to leap ahead from social media positioning to Facebook's building a metaverse, thereby creating a metaverse. The company name is 'Meta'. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO and founder of Facebook, aims to build a virtual world where people can work, play, socialise, and do everything they do in the real world. He calls it a successor to the mobile internet.

Attending virtual concerts and events while at home is no longer a far-fetched dream. Recently, Fortnite and Roblox hosted a virtual concert. Besides, users can design their own avatars, meet people, and de-stress their virtual faces. This is possible due to the metaverse.

Due to brand social media marketing, social media platforms experience a lot of clutter. Conversely, TikTok has successfully lured young audiences to its platform. Thus, the metaverse shows potential in returning audiences to traditional platforms like Facebook.

Twitter (Now X)

Twitter is a news and social networking site where people communicate through short messages or tweets. You need to be brief yet clear by restricting your posting to 280 characters. Twitter is used to convey clear messages with a "no-filt" feel.

Benefits to brands on Twitter

Twitter can bring various advantages to a business: Encourage comments, likes, and retweets from followers.

- Add customised hashtags to reach fans, followers, potential customers, and audiences interested in a specific topic or location.
- Promote your brand identity on the platform, thereby creating a marketing pitch.
- Generate feedback from fans and followers.
- Membership and usage are free of cost. Brands benefited from organic posts and interactions, other than paid advertisements.
- Increasing brand awareness as a post can potentially reach out to nearly 229 million daily users
- Updates feed into your fans' newsfeeds as you post something, like, or comment.
- Effective for launching products
- Providing customer service: Brands can indulge in two-way communication with customers. Satisfied customers speak positively about the brand on the platform.
- Attracting new fans who are friends of customers

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional networking site. Brands create their company page on LinkedIn as they do for Facebook.

Benefits to brands on LinkedIn

- LinkedIn is one of the largest B2B lead-generation websites so you can reach out to ideal customers and potential business partners.
- You can easily feature job openings on this page to recruit new employees
- LinkedIn pages of brands rank well in Google due to LinkedIn's popularity and trustworthiness.
- LinkedIn's new header image shows who you are and attracts new followers and connections. It can increase your branding and visibility.
- Your company gets to highlight each time your company name appears in any LinkedIn search.
- You can create an advertisement that appears in a person's newsfeed, smaller advertisements that pop up around the site, or promotions for posts from your company page.
- You can send advertisements directly into other members' inboxes through sponsored InMail campaigns.
- Brands can also feature posts on their company page. This keeps the post at the top of your page for more visibility.
- Promote your product or service
- LinkedIn Pages can be seen easily on Google
- Membership and usage are free of cost
- People interested in your brand can follow you and get a notification whenever your post updates.
- Updates feed into your followers' newsfeeds as you post something, like, or comment.
- You can link your LinkedIn page to your website and vice versa.

Instagram

Due to its diverse content formats, Instagram is a popular and effective brand-building social networking platform. It reaches people through Feed posts, Stories, Live Streams, Reels, and IGTV.

It allows users or businesses to set up professional and business accounts. This transition provides many insights and tools to help brands and businesses better understand their target market and post-efficiency. Adding contact options on your business dashboard can enhance customer contact and reach.

Benefits to brands on Instagram

Insert hashtags with the post to add interest in related images. These hashtags make customer contact and reach easier, and can integrate seamlessly into other platforms.

- Promote your brand campaigns on the platform, which can go viral quickly.

Social Media and Society

- Generate feedback from fans, allowing two-way conversations with followers.
- Encourage comments, likes, and shares from followers by seamlessly integrating text, image, and video posts in a user-friendly design.
- Attracting new fans who are friends of customers
- Teaser advertisement to give the audience glimpses of new products available.
- To attract customers, you can display your product or service on Instagram Live, promote, hold contests, and hold charity events. Instagram reels are the newest feature on Instagram.
- Instagram is an ideal tool for brand building.
- Make it your goal to position yourself as a visual leader in your niche or industry.
- Post high-quality content with visuals in a new or unique way. Instagram builds a brand base by using Influencer marketing. Membership and usage are free.
- Increasing brand awareness, as the post can potentially reach nearly 1 billion monthly active users
- Updates feed into your fans' newsfeeds as you post something, like, or comment.
- Effective for launching products.
- Providing customer service: Customers expect brands to resolve their issues by contacting the company's Facebook page.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a messaging app, like Facebook Messenger or WeChat.

WhatsApp was launched in 2009 as an independent messenger company and was acquired by Facebook in 2014. You need an internet connection to communicate with other WhatsApp users. Users can make international calls or texts through WhatsApp at an affordable price.

WhatsApp is widely used for business or personal purposes:

- It supports all media voice messages, video calls, text messages, photos, vitexts, documents and even location.
- It's free to use if you have an internet connection. However, you must pay roaming charges if you use the internet outside the territory of your connection.
- It's available in about 180 different countries.
- You can build an intimate relationship with customers. You can then easily take feedback from them or ask for suggestions. Remember to reward the group's most loyal respondents by announcing coupons or special offers. This is important to build brand loyalty and encourage customer retention and future engagement.
- Use innovative ways to get reviews or ratings for your brand.
- You can also remind people about their due appointment, service, flight, etc.

- The WhatsApp status feature and WhatsApp story can be creatively used to leverage the brand.
- Share creative behind-the-scenes videos of your product, or maybe a teaser advertisement of an upcoming product or service.

Pinterest

Pinterest uses its platform to share visual content. The key to gaining more traction is to create outstanding content. This is how customers and followers will share your posts with you.

Benefits to brands on Pinterest

- Create your own unique Pinterest content.
- View and share images and pins by the people your brand follows on Pinterest.
- Quick and easy community building
- Discover new users to connect with. Use the “Explore” option to find brand-new pins from various Pinterest users.
- See what you are doing right with your Pinterest campaigns. Build relationships
- Curate your content by re-pinning interesting things for your followers. Geo-Tag your uploaded pins.

Pinterest is a terrific source of inspiration for creative professionals like photographers, artists, and others interacting on the platform. To be successful on Pinterest, brands need to reflect their personality through pinboards.

Blogs

A blog is a website that contains personal reflections and comments often integrated with hyperlinks, photographs, and videos. Its unique content can draw readers’ attention, which is why it is popular for marketing businesses.

Benefits of Blogs to brands

- It is inexpensive to start, and its unique content, web hosting, and readymade templates can draw readers’ attention to your brand.
- Blogs are good for conversing with people, building rapport, providing feedback, and providing customer service.
- You can generate additional revenue for your business by accepting advertisements for affiliate products or services and getting sponsors.
- The majority of the blogging platforms are user-friendly. To give a professional look to your blog, you just need to use simple functions like copy, paste, type, drag and drop, and upload.
- To generate traffic on your website, you need to post regular updates, tips, or the latest content on your blog. This will give people a reason to make new or repeated visits and provide an opportunity to buy.
- Novelty of the blog content gives them a better ranking in Google search results, which is good for business.

- Your write-ups, tips, comments, and valuable information on the blog add credibility and trust to your brand. Once satisfied, people feel good about spending money on a product or service.

YouTube

YouTube uses videos and advertisements to promote your business. It is a popular platform amongst people of all ages.

Benefits to brands on YouTube

- You can create your videos or advertise your content on other people's videos, attracting heavy traffic. YouTube gets about 30 million users per day.
- Membership and usage are free of cost.
- You can aim for higher visibility on Google by embedding your videos on another website, integrating your YouTube channel with your website, using distinctive video styles, and sharing your videos on other social media channels to engage more with your consumers.
- Software allows a signup form to be directly entered into YouTube videos, making it easy to prepare an email list on YouTube.
- Videos are dynamic and engaging, building trust and authority for better conversion.
- You can make a variety of educational, behind-the-scenes, funny videos, and take testimonials from customers.
- Videos are available on most of the topics. You need to optimise your videos to be picked.

Snapchat

Snapchat is an instant messaging app and service in which pictures and messages are available to the recipient for a short period of time.

Benefits to brands on Snapchat

- Messages and photographs or 'snaps', once read on the other side, disappear, thus creating a sense of urgency for the message receiver, who receives more attention and traffic.
- Snapchat is good for companies that organise events, highlight their company culture or use it as part of an integrated campaign.
- The option of on-demand geo-filters helps boost the engagement of Snapchat users.
- Big brands use Snapchat to promote their businesses through engaging audiences, humorous advertisements, or unmissable filters that enhance their reach.
- Build connections with the younger generation and win new followers.
- Snapchat users can connect with marketers on Snapchat through the "Discover" icon.
- Snapchat has distinct features. You can draw over Snaps, add music, and conduct polls on this platform.

- Brands can highlight their personality through Snaps. The audience engaged with your Snaps is more likely to make a purchase.
- You can build trust with your followers by sending personal responses through Snapchat to make them feel special.
- Potential customers relate well to those brands that understand their language and keep up with trends, in this case, using the same platform, Snapchat. They are more likely to buy from you.

Podcast

It is a pre-recorded audio program published on a website. Users can download it on personal computers or mobile devices and listen to it anytime. Due to less saturation, podcasts are pre-recorded audio programs published on websites. Users can download them. You can communicate with the audience through a story anywhere, at any time, and establish authority in the industry.

- Link podcasts with your social media channels or blog to increase reach and participation.
- Encourage engagement by asking the audience to comment on the email linked to the podcast.
- You invite a special guest to increase your audience base.
- You can associate with an already existing podcast to talk about your brand.

TikTok

TikTok is a social media platform that creates short videos using the power of content. It is dominated by influencers who often promote products and services affiliated with them or offer vouchers based on their referrals.

Benefits of TikTok

- TikTok has one billion monthly users, which is increasing with each passing day.
- It is international (around 150 countries) and, therefore, a reflective platform for connecting with audiences in other countries.
- Video marketing is a priority and is trending.
- Connecting with the audience by creating hashtag challenges and encouraging people to recreate and post with hashtags is easy.
- It is good for customer engagement and connection. TikTok advertising and influencer marketing can also be helpful.
- Brands can be highly creative on TikTok while designing marketing campaigns.
- Plan unique, branded challenges for users. This will garner you more publicity, and your post will have a high chance of going viral.
- Design content that provokes discussion and sparks conversation. TikTok is an excellent place to identify the latest trends that have yet to become popular.

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

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

1. List five ways you think social media is good for branding

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.....

2. List two benefits of having a LinkedIn Page for your business.

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8.4 REVIEW & RATING SITES

Customer feedback regarding reviews or ratings is a testimony to your brand. Brands need to manage their presence on review sites. TripAdvisor is the world’s largest travel site, enabling travellers to plan a perfect trip. Users get Trip Collective points in exchange for reviews, tips, comments, forum posts, and photos. You can earn badges at every level to showcase travel expertise and be more recognised in the travel community. As a brand, you need to:

Be abreast with the review sites related to your business. Learn which sites customers visit before making a purchase decision and claim your presence there. If you’re in the travel business, your customers or those who influence them most likely use TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.com).

Encourage customers to give their reviews by displaying review sites’ logos in your business and on your web pages, making it convenient for customers to share their experiences. Personally reach out to the best customers to share their opinions.

Be mindful that customers give reviews regularly. The spurt of reviews on the site creates doubt about the authenticity of reviews.

If you receive negative comments or poor ratings, do not get defensive or show displeasure on the site. It is wiser to find the truth in the complaint or criticism and try to fix it. You can also use your blog, review comment box, Facebook page, Twitter page, etc., to describe how you have addressed the issue and highlight the changes made. People are watching your behaviour on social media, so politely handle the disgruntled customer and show care for their comments. Try to negate one negative review or rating by earning several positive reviews and ratings.

8.5 DO'S AND DONT'S OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDING

Brands use different social media platforms based on their business and the platform's characteristics.

8.5.1 Do's of Social Media Branding

- Choose the social media platform specific to your business needs. Though you might want your presence on all social media platforms, you must see whether it caters to your business objective. Also, it is not feasible to manage all social media platforms and do justice to them.
- Evaluate from time to time which part of the content is helping you maximise your profits, or which part cannot pull in the expected crowd. Use social media tools to analyse it.
- You must use search engine optimisation (SEO) to your advantage. In simple terms, you need to be known by people if you wish to increase your sales.
- Post the right content at the right time. Find out your target audience and the time they are online; you can decide to post depending on this.
- Give your content a human touch. Engage with your audience at a personal level and build connections. They should feel that they are interacting with humans rather than robots.
- Images, Infographics, and videos are more appealing than plain text. Your social media accounts should look different and unique.
- Appreciate your followers for subscribing or following you, and incentivise them. Offer them rewards, discounts, lucky draw entries, and giveaways for joining.
- Maintain professionalism in your posts. Do not give individual opinions. Learn to face the trolls.
- Your followers must look forward to your updates.
- Make your content easy to share.
- Interact with users who share your posts
- Familiarise yourself with the platform guidelines.
- Go through all the content you have used before and, if possible, repurpose it. You must modify it to make it look like brand-new content and use it to your advantage.
- You must have customer involvement if you wish to become a popular brand. You must get customers to promote your brand and make them ambassadors. You must conduct competitions to get the customers involved in your business, and visit your pages regularly.
- Be prepared for the worst and have a plan that will allow you to act quickly and save the day.
- You must occasionally try to reinvent yourself and give your audience something new to experience. If you do all these things, your company will succeed in social media marketing.

8.5.2 Don'ts of Social Media Marketing

- Know your boundaries when interacting with your audience. Keeping it professional will help you connect with them better.
- Explore all the features of the social media platform and ensure you use every user advantage.
- Do not repeat the same content on all your different platforms. You must keep the same tone, but present the products differently.
- You must update your account from time to time.

Brands must be careful of their social media actions to avoid controversy, leading to Online vigilantism.

(Note: Online vigilantism started with doxing, which is publishing personal information on a particular subject on the internet (mainly on social media such as Facebook and Twitter) with malicious intent. The main idea of online vigilantism is to publicly shame their target to get a response from the authorities, or in the absence of any response from them.)

8.6 CHOOSING A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Brands need to know that each social media platform has its benefits, limitations, and how it interacts with content and users. Brands must consider the following aspects before deciding on a social media platform for their business.

It is based on the nature of your business, whether business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C). B2C companies can prefer Facebook and Instagram for visual engagement, gaining visibility, or customer interaction. LinkedIn is better for B2B companies as it helps reach current and potential clients and builds personal connections. YouTube can attract an audience irrespective of the nature of the business due to its audio-visual appeal. Secondly, it's Google-friendly and adds authenticity.

- Research to find out who your target audience is, i.e., their demographics.
- Research to find out on which platform your target audience will be available.
- Master the platform where your target audience is available.
- Research your top competitors to find out the social media platforms they are engaged in, the content they are posting there, the frequency of posting the content, and the number of users engaging with it. Based on this research, choose the social media platform for your brand that can yield the best results.
- Keep your website current, as you must direct traffic from all social media platforms to your website.
- Build a consistent strategy across the platform.
- Participate in discussions or forums, and engage with the audience.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

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

1. A customer has a bad review on your social media platform. How will you respond to that?

.....

2. You are a social media manager at a restaurant in your city. Which three social media platforms will you choose to popularise your business?

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8.7 SUCCESS STORIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRANDING

Nowadays, brands are primarily investing in social media marketing. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, and YouTube have grabbed a major share of marketing for brands. However, with increased social media applications, digital marketers seek different ways to broaden their marketing scope. Brands are also exploring ways to make their content unique.

Some companies have created quite an impression on a certain social media platform. Let’s learn about some brands that have used social media successfully.

TOMS is a shoe company that pioneered the “ give one, give one’ charity. Let’s set a goal: for every pair of shoes they sell, they will donate them to the destitute and needy children. This TOMS philanthropic campaign was showcased on Instagram. TOMS’s mission was quite noble. Whenever someone posts a picture of their bare feet with the hashtag #withoutshoes, TOMS donates a pair of shoes to people in need. They wanted to demonstrate their company’s dedication towards the cause they had committed to. They had managed to donate 296,243 pairs of shoes altogether.

IKEA is one of the best examples of a global company that has innovatively used social media to its advantage. They have established a global presence with 10 million monthly viewers and over 500,000 followers on the IKEA USA page alone. One example of a successful campaign by IKEA was the one that ran in 2019. IKEA furniture realised that returning to school was the peak time when students looked for furniture options. IKEA thought to address the requirements of the college-going students with a limited budget

and limited space in their dorm/hostel. They devised a compact, small-space-friendly design and floated it on Pinterest to keep the target audience in mind. They used Pinterest, Promoted Pins, and keywords like “dorm ideas” and “dorm room organisation” to push traffic in the right direction. As a result, their click-through rate increased by 72%, and the Cost Per Click decreased by 37%.

Starbucks dramatically launched a neon-colored pink-and-purple fruity drink, Unicorn Frappuccino, that changes colour as you consume it. Starbucks created hype and generated curiosity among the younger generation. Millennials experienced feelings of FOMO (fear of missing out) as this beverage was served for a limited time only. This attractive and colourful beverage was suitable for posting pictures on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter. The customers went ahead and shared their pictures with the drinks. With the marketing gimmick of creating a scarcity of the Frappuccino’s availability, a craze for the beverage was ignited. When paired with constant social media campaigns of the Unicorn Frappuccino and its hashtag #unicornfrappuccino, Starbucks attracted customers’ attention. The campaign went viral in no time. It was successful in generating a ‘Call to Action’. People queued up in large numbers outside physical stores to purchase the drink before it was out of stock.

8.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we discussed social media and its benefits for branding. We also discussed the strengths of dominant social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok, a Blog, a Podcast, and YouTube. We learned the importance of studying customer demographics and knowing the strengths of social media platforms before deciding to use TikTok, a Blog, as a social media platform for branding.

We looked at the role of review and rating sites and discussed the right things to do on social media platforms and things to avoid. Lastly, we reviewed the success stories of a few brands that have used social media to their advantage.

To sum up, social media platforms are the key to brand success, primarily for those working on a shoestring budget. The tip for learners is to explore each social media platform to understand its nuances before using it, primarily its workings

8.9 KEYWORDS

Geotagging something means adding an electronic tag (e.g., a symbol, set of letters, etc.) to a photograph, video, or other information on the Internet to show the exact place where it comes from.

Metaverse: The metaverse is a set of virtual spaces where you can create and explore with other people who aren’t in the same physical space as you. You’ll be able to hang out with friends, work, play, learn, shop, create, and more.

SEO stands for “search engine optimisation.” Simply put, it means improving your site’s visibility when people search for products or services related to your business in Google, Bing, and other search engines.

Trolling (somebody/something) means writing false or offensive messages on the Internet to anger others.

Vigilante: a member of a group of people who try to prevent crime or punish criminals in their community, especially because they think the police are not doing this.

8.10 FURTHER READINGS

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8.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. Five ways social media is good for brands: i. Engaging content on the platform helps reach out to the new audience. ii. Provides endless opportunities for customer service and support. Complements other marketing activities
 - IV. Provide platforms for networking
 - v. Encourage feedback and engagement on the platform
2. Two benefits of a LinkedIn page for business are:

LinkedIn pages of brands rank well in Google due to LinkedIn's popularity and trustworthiness.

- LinkedIn is one of the largest B2B lead-generation websites so you can reach out to ideal customers and potential business partners.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. If you are on LinkedIn. It is wiser to find out the truth first, reach out to ideal customers and potential business partners, and fix it. You can also use your blog, review comment box, Facebook page, Twitter page, etc., to mention that the issue has been addressed and highlight the changes made. People are watching your behaviour on social media, so politely handle the disgruntled customer and show care for their comments. Try to overcome one bad review or rating with several good reviews and ratings.
2. For the restaurant business, I will preferentially use the blog to write about various foods available at my restaurant, along with a few good photographs. I will use Pinterest to pin photos of different cuisines laid on the table. I will use Instagram to post videos or pictures of different recipes. I can also use recipe videos or videos with customer responses on YouTube or Facebook. Twitter can also be used.