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## UNIT 6 RESEARCH FOR JOURNALISTIC WRITING

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### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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Research is known as the systematic way of inquiry that includes various steps involved to achieve the predetermined goals. Research reveals truth in a logical manner. Research is not limited to finding answers of the questions only and it raises or generates questions on which further researches are conducted. Research always gives new insights and fresh directions to the problems undertaken by researcher. Research systematically unfolds the truth by using system or method and by manipulation of concepts, symbols or by establishing and explaining the phenomenon.

Journalists have been using research to generate various stories and such stories have grabbed good amount of public attention. For a journalist research is one of the basic qualities which is associated with their key character 'nose for news.' You can mention investigative stories as one of the best examples of effective use of research in journalism. Research and journalism both require some special components to reach a meaningful conclusion i.e. observation, exploration and examination. Journalistic research is purpose-oriented and by adding value judgement a journalist often provides unique and appropriate solutions to the existing problems.

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## 6.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- distribute meaning and importance of research for journalists;
- use various methods and tools of research used by journalists for presenting a story;
- identify various aspects of research in media industry; and
- differentiate between academic and journalistic research.

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## 6.2 RESEARCH: MEANING AND IMPORTANCE

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P.V. Young, a great Social Scientist in his book *Social Survey and Research* has defined research as “the systematic method of discovering new facts or of verifying old facts, through sequence, interrelationship, casual explanations and the natural laws which cover them”.

J.W. Creswell defines research as a process of steps used to collect information and analysis of that information which increases our understanding on the subject. On the website of Western Sydney University research is defined by its Department of Education as ‘creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings’.

Though many other scholars, institutions, reports, encyclopedia, dictionaries have also defined research with different words but establishes same meaning. If we conclude we can say that research in systematic and logical manner tries to discover truth. Research finds answer of the questions with the help of scientific method and in this process many new theories and principles are formulated, many existing theories and principles are modified or rejected and many set of principles are verified and validated.

Research is important for human society as it brings in new knowledge. It happens by putting forward an entirely original idea or theory and by exploring new horizons of knowledge. It gives new insight to the subject and new direction to human thinking and action. Research defines and explores interrelationships between different variables and thus establishes new theories and principles. These theories and principles work as the foundation and influence the development of society. Research makes meaningful contributions by resolving contradictions in the field of knowledge. This is also true for mass communication. Different paradigms of understanding and explaining mass communication have been established, challenged, modified and replaced by great research works. Research is the foundation for all disciplines, development and structural changes and logical answers to questions which are raised in the quest of knowledge.

### 6.2.2 Research in Various Disciplines

Research is essential in all discipline. You cannot find any stream of knowledge which undermines the research and achieve progress. From academics to industry, from art to science, from beneath the earth to the galaxies scientists and scholars explore various facts and find the answer of questions. Basically research is

divided into two sections- theoretical and applied. Theoretical research deals with theories and concepts which are abstract in nature where as applied research deals with day-to-day problems and gives solutions to our practical problems. Research is also divided in physical and social science research. Physical science research is concerned with pure science subjects such as biology, physics, chemistry etc., and subjects of social science research come from society, culture and literature. Journalism is also one of the established discipline of research where both theoretical and applied researches are performed.

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### **6.3 NEED OF RESEARCH IN MEDIA**

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Media is a holistic term comprising of print media, electronic media, cinema, traditional folk media and new media or digital media. Media has influenced the thinking, opinion and perception of human society and is considered as one of the vital institutions in democratic structures. It performs the functions of a watchdog and agenda setter.

Since it is an important discipline to study, media research has become indispensable for all academics, society and the industry itself. Besides communication scholars, scholars from Sociology, Political Science and Psychology and also interested in media and communication research. Interrelationship of media and society are prime focus of these disciplines. Academic media research is performed with various approaches. Effect of media on people, analysis of interdependence of cause-effect relationship between media and society, sociological analysis of mass communication or mass media, semiotic analysis of content and social media communication are some of the areas of interest of academic research in media studies.

Applied part of media research is also used extensively. Research is essential for journalistic practices too. Now days screen presentations, lay-out and design of media products are finalised after receiving research based inputs from marketing sections. So many good stories need research support for logical and objective presentation of facts. You might have seen numerous news items based on facts, figures and data. These stories analyse some of the important issues which need research inputs to get meaningful and interesting shapes.

#### **6.3.1 Research in Media Houses**

The reach of any media in the primary consideration for advertisers to put their monies for product/service promotion. There are various agencies that measure the reach of different media. For eg. Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) is an industry body founded by stateholders of advertisers, broadcasters and advertising and media agencies. It is set up for measuring the TV audience in India. Simmilarly, Media Research Users Council (MRUC) which was set up in 1994 is yet another not-for profit industry body that berings out many research reports regularly. These include the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) which is a study of reach of print media, Indian Outdoor Survey which is a measurement system on outdoor media and Indian Listenership track which is a day after recall study of radio listenership. Various marketing research methods are used by media houses to analyse their market presence and develop, change or modify marketing and sales strategies.

Digital media technologies have enabled journalists to present stories by using big data and information available on the web. Term precision journalism and data journalism indicate the practice of developing stories by exploring data base available in digital formats and over Internet Availability of open access software, apps, exposure of social, economic, demographic, political, geographical information to everybody has influenced the journalistic practices and many organisations prefer to have stories based on analysis of these data in their news basket. So many news organisations have established separate wings to analyse information available on the net and follow the trends and perspectives presented on such platforms of digital media.

### 6.3.2 Research as a Tool for Journalists

Journalists are people with excellent common sense. They are keen observers and trained to find the truth behind what is being portrayed. Although common sense of journalists often leads them in the right direction, it is not enough to draw conclusions in important and sensitive cases. They need accurate and objective facts, data/information to understand and write on important and sensitive issues. Journalists are considered good researchers because they have some integral qualities such as imagination capability, analytical ability, skills, resourcefulness, independence, persistence and acquaintance with the field of investigation like any sincere researcher should have.

In media world some stories cannot be developed appropriately if research is not used. You might have seen stories on budget, major policy changes, mega events, poll surveys, opinion based stories, analytical reports on increasing or changing phenomenon like increase in crime rates in the cities, changing demographic characteristics, stories based on statistical facts and figures etc. These stories are based on the inputs earned by applying research tools.

When a journalist takes opinion of different sections of people, asking them how far budget provisions of government will affect their monthly expenditure; he or she is doing research to develop meaningful and interesting story out of unexciting, tedious and complex facts and figures of budget statement.

These stories use research tools like any other research work. Journalists, when they are doing a story on budget, for example, need to collect opinion of public on select issues. Their topic or subject may be treated as research question. Since their motive is to reveal and analyse public opinion on the budget statement they use survey research method with predetermined questions. At the end they come with the description of the situation and explain how and why the things are happening in a certain way. Here when reporters develop stories based on public opinion formally/informally they use purposive sampling and experience survey. Experience survey is a type of survey which measures the overall satisfaction of a group of people who have shared a common experience.

In recent years research based stories got fillip in Indian media industry. Conventional mass media has lost its position of primary source of information after arrival of digital media. In the age of MOJO (Mobile journalism) people immediately and sometimes simultaneously get the information as events are happening. This change has influenced conventional mass media such as Television, newspapers and magazines to be analytical in the presentation of news to the audience. This change has influenced them to look at unexplored areas and research based stories that have emerged as one of the major choices.

You can often find special or short interval volumes of magazines publishing lead stories which are outcome of research. During the time of elections opinion poll based stories get popularity. Such stories are examples of well-planned research work specifically conducted by journalists and research teams of the channel or newspaper. Popular taglines are highlighted and comparison approach is used to present the story. Audience prioritise these stories when they get to read or see who all stand in the race for prime ministership or which party is predicted to perform well or poorly in which area. General elections are celebrated components of our democracy which are awaited by media industry eagerly. You can observe the increasing presence of these survey based stories in news media well ahead of the actual election.

Another kind of research based story published during election time is exit poll survey. Exit poll is conducted on the election day and mostly just after the electorate has casted the vote. The preferred place to conduct exit poll is the polling station area. Exit polls have helped newspapers and other news organisations to gain viewership/readership and revenue through advertisements. Exit poll is conducted in most countries where democratic election process takes place. News stories based on the exit poll results and associated analysis sometimes influences the voter's decision. This is considered as unethical manipulation by Election Commission of India and they have imposed ban on publishing such analysis unless the last vote is casted. In the past elections many exit poll predictions have failed to present correct figures and faced public criticism. It happened because of methodological errors, willful manipulations by researchers or because of social desirability bias. Such biases can be minimised by taking appropriate and sufficient samples and applying objective analysis to the data. Now a days most of the exit poll survey researches are conducted by professional organisations in collaboration with media houses.

Research is used by journalists to develop stories from the subject of lifestyle journalism too. These stories dealing with subjects like satisfaction with married life, fashion, tour and travel, voting for favourite destinations, role models always get vast public attention. Most of these stories are based on survey research and findings are interpreted as per requirement of the media houses. You might have seen famous survey based stories on lifestyle component in some popular magazines of our country. Started with a view to give variety to the readers, these stories and issues have become a regular part of the publication.

In recent years' media houses have started giving ranking to educational institutions which is based on research inputs. For example, India Today group is conducting ranking survey research since almost last two decades. To prepare the list of best colleges from the list of cities they select with the help of experts and market size. To conduct this survey five-step methodology is used. Research team uses secondary data from multiple sources to finalize the list of colleges in its first step. In the second and third steps with the five-point scale based set of questions expert opinion is collected by using variables like reputation, quality of academic input, student care, infrastructure and job prospects. This perceptual score is used to derive perceptual ranking. In the fourth step factual scores are calculated and in fifth and last step after adding perceptual and factual ranks, the final ranking is prepared. Same kind of research based stories are done by many other media houses and are very popular among students and parents which constitute huge clusters of audiences. Such stories suitable for advertising and marketing strategies of the media houses help to boost the seasonal advertising market also. But, use of research is not limited to these mega survey researches only.

You will find a number of news items in news media based on research works done by researchers, scientists, research institutions and labs. These research works are of vital importance for society as well as help journalists to write stories which are mature and complete. Research findings on health, sanitation, medicines, technological advancements, agriculture and other issues of public interest help journalists to cover these issues more significantly and full of relevant information.

Environmental issues are now top concern for everybody. You must have observed many stories on subjects like climate change, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity, waste management frequently appearing in news. People carefully read these stories and make their opinion for contributions or corrective actions. Most of these stories are developed on research finding and journalists convert or interpret these findings into interesting pieces of writing. Since last few years we have been witnessing lead stories on the pollution index and ranking of most polluted cities of our country. This is a fine example of research based story where figures are turned into interesting, thought provoking journalistic writings. Such findings provide ample scope to journalists to use statistical tools like graph, diagrams, animations, tables and make story understandable, interesting and graspable.

Development journalism is that area of journalism where research helps journalists to present meaningful reports. Research in development journalism is used for both telling the readers latest developments as well as investigating and presenting clear picture on the credibility and usefulness of the development. True development journalism is not limited to describing the happening or narrating the version of others with journalistic flair. It includes researching the elements of story including background, exposing if anything unusual or odd is happening and decode the meaning, motives and perspectives of the communication. Research is the key component to present a meaningful and substantial report on the subject.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

1. Comment briefly on the unit poll survey.

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## 6.4 SCOPE OF RESEARCH BASED STORIES

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Research is the primary and necessary element of journalism. If you look at the process of developing news stories, then you can easily understand this necessity. There has always been a research and reference section in newspaper offices where important information and references are stored. When required, such data base is used by journalists to make their story effective and complete. Normally developing a story starts with collection of information. This collected information is analysed and reduced by journalist according to need and then communicated to the audiences. This process of developing a story is similar to the process of doing research in social and behavioural sciences.

**Reporting Techniques**

In the age of digital technology and availability of huge data the use of research techniques in journalistic writings has re-emerged. Philip Meyer in his work Precision Journalism coined the same term (precision journalism) to describe the use of social science tools and techniques to present in-depth and accurate stories. Digital media has enabled journalists to gather information with the help of digital media tools. Use of digital technologies to analyse huge data and explore socio-cultural, demographic, political and geographical perspectives behind the issue has increased the quality, intensity and effectiveness of the reports presented to the public. The use of social science techniques to gather and analyse data has transformed the investigative journalism by making it more concrete, precise and comprehensive.

With increasing presence of multiple digital platforms of news dissemination, journalism has turned to be more analytical in nature hence research has become an important tool to develop stories which are fresh, meaningful and exposing new dimensions of the issue. The process of globalisation and economic liberalisation has also asserted the need to use research in journalistic practices. Segmentation and customisation strategies also refer to use of research inputs to develop news stories which are suitable for niche audiences.

Now a days, in the age of big data and internet based information paltforms the term ‘Data Journalism’ has also become prevalent which indicates a process of developing stories with the help of technology by monitoring, compiling, analysing data through software and apps and journalistic creativity. The journalistic ability of storytelling interestingly is used to visualise and illustrate is the findings and perspectives of data. This blend of technological sharpness and journalistic skills have transformed the numbers, and statistical findings into certifiable, reliable, relevant and interesting news stories.

Research is not a new component of journalism. If you ask your parents, they will tell you about analytical stories which have been published in the newspapers since past many decades. On city page of the newspaper you might have seen news reports narrating rise in the graph of crime in the city. The reporter collects data for the crime reported in a specific period. This crime data is a further divided into categories such as murder, attempt to murder, robbery, crime against women etc. and often shown with the help of graphics or table. The numbers are analysed qualitatively and the reporter ends the story with remarks. The same pattern of developing a story can be seen on many other subjects like pollution level, weather news, economic news, sports news etc. The research tools and procedure followed are almost the same as applied by any researcher to find answer of his or her research question.

**Check Your Progress 2**

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

1. What is data journalism?

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## 6.5 RESEARCH TOOLS USED BY JOURNALISTS

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Journalists and news organisations have understood the importance of research in developing major stories and stories based on predictions. Numerous research tools are used by news persons and news organisations for reporting and writing news. As we have mentioned earlier most frequently used tool is survey research. Survey research is conducted both in structured and unstructured way by news organisations. When poll surveys, ranking surveys are conducted, a well-planned survey methodology is used. The research team first defines the population and then a rigorous sample selection method is followed. A questionnaire is developed in accordance with statistical scale. Normally four measurements scales- nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio scales are used in creating multiple-choice questions in the survey research. Open-ended questions are also used to collect in-depth qualitative data.

Vox-pop survey is another popular method frequently used by journalists. Vox-pop or Vox-populi is the Latin phrase meaning voice of the public or sentiment of the public. You must have seen on TV screens a reporter in the field is asking people questions about some issue. Only one or two questions are asked and spontaneous responses are collected. This method is used in print media also when on the subjects like budget, on policy changes etc. reporters collect public opinion and present the story with their comments or opinion.

Digital technology tools to gather, categorise, tabulate and analyse data are also extensively used. Precision journalism uses various software to collect and analyse data. CAR (Computer Assisted Reporting) techniques have been used to take information from the database, use of statistical programmes to analyse data, digital information mapping has enabled journalists to produce more precise and effective stories with their skills and creativity. Technology has enriched journalists with sophisticated tools for data support to develop complete stories. Satellite imagery are used when journalists tend to develop stories on natural disasters such as flood, firestorms, Tsunamis, earthquakes etc. You might have seen such stories in newspapers and TV channels, on news websites with satellite images which increase the accuracy and tell the readers incident as well as reasons, backgrounds, and predictions in one script.

Research findings are also used to develop meaningful stories. There are subjects where use of research is indispensable. Development journalism, health and hygiene, energy, environment, water management are some of the core areas where research findings always help journalists presenting best stories. For example, if, as a journalist, you are planning to write a story on diabetes then lot of research inputs will be required. In such stories both medicine and lifestyle inputs would be needed. You have to explore from database of research institutions, health organisations to get the information of recent progress in the field as well as to complete the story expert interviews will also be needed. In this way as a journalist you have explored both primary and secondary data in your writing. First, you have chosen a theme or problem and explored or reviewed the available information. Second, you have supported the subject by quoting experts whose opinion is collected by applying interview method. Third, after receiving inputs from the field and from the data base you have analysed the information and at the end a conclusion is drawn. Your experience and observation would also help you to prepare balanced and complete report. Here, though not strictly, but same steps

you have used to finalize your story which can be used by any researcher when he or she is investigating and problem undertaken.

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## 6.7 LIMITATIONS IN RESEARCH USED BY JOURNALISTS

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Developing a meaningful research story always need research as good stories cannot be developed without research. A reporter collects information, taking opinion of public, verify the facts with cross-checking and reliable sources and prepares balanced report. If you minutely observe many limitations will be seen in the research used by journalists conducted for stories. Some limitations are associated with the motive, some with functions and some associated with the knowledge limitation of the journalists.

Motive or objective is very crucial in research. Basically news stories get their place on the basis of elements of news which includes proximity, public interest and revenue. Journalists often use data and interviews to earn support for their thinking as they sometimes frame the issue with their preconceived notions. In such cases proximity plays a role in manipulation of facts and objectivity gets compromised. Public interest leads journalists to pick-up subjects easy to grab public attention. When special survey based issues are published either they cover elections or lifestyle segment. Most of our popular magazines have chosen fantasies with sensual and explicit questions and sometimes erotic narrations. Such contents have been presented by using proper methodology and help publications to increase their shares in the readership. Circulation and ultimately revenue figures. Such subjects may not be of the vital importance for society or against the ethical standards but used by media houses for multiple reasons. This is a kind of limitation of journalistic research which, because of certain obligations, cannot go far from the readers' interest.

Another limitation is related with lack of training and having research aptitude. Since research is just a tool not the core area of concern for journalists, they are not very acquainted with research traditions and ethics. Often they deviate from the restrictions which results in possibility of errors. Most of the time convenience is preferred over rules, thus, journalists rarely consider importance of randomisation, following the steps and size of heterogeneity factors.

### Check Your Progress 3

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

1. What is research methodology?

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## 6.8 DIFFERENCES OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY JOURNALISTS WITH OTHER TYPES OF RESEARCH

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As we know research is conducted for multiple reasons and in various institution. Numerous organisations, institutes, universities conduct research for innovation, verification, in search of new facts etc. One can find lot of differences in researches conducted by journalists and by other researchers. These differences can be established on the basis of methodological issues, application of analytical tools, presentation of results and use of research. More differences can be found out in language, organisation and problem identification. Research performed in academics and in research lab primarily focused to prove or disapprove theory and principle or to find out solutions of the day to day problems. On the other side research in journalism is used to create public interest or public information. Except special survey research most of research in journalism adopt flexible approach with methodology and randomisation, objective selection of elements, review, method of data collection.

Ordering and inclusion of all well-defined steps of research can not be found in journalistic research. Use of statistics is also limited to simple frequency and percentage analysis. Journalistic research is more qualitative in nature and numbers are used to support the narration. Even when numbers are the main part of data, converting the theme into interesting, meaningful, precise and concise piece of prose is one of the qualities of the journalist. A journalist rarely uses standard and complex language and prefers to communicate in a language which is understandable for common readers. For a journalist, research is either telling the readers interesting research findings of others by using research to increase the credibility and draw a map of such situation in the minds of audience.

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## 6.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed meaning, importance and need of research in our life and in our society. The unit also explained the need and importance of research in the field of journalism by way of presenting important research work to public and also provide journalists present special stories and grab extra attention of audience.

The unit has also described various kinds of research methods used in media. Some research inputs are used to gauge the popularity of the programme and the channel/publication and some inputs help improving quality and presentation of the content. Journalists use research techniques to investigate important issues which help them in presenting the stories with greater credibility. Rigorous research methods are used to publish survey based stories that help in increasing audience base as well as revenue of the organisation.

We have also explored the research-technology-journalism mix in the unit and found the use of digital technology and internet data base for data journalism and precision journalism. In precision journalism social science research methods are used to analyse the subject. Satellite images and compiled data base are used to narrate the story with additions like background, factors and consequences. While journalistic research is a lot different from academic research, yet it gives journalists same advantage as it gives to other researchers; telling the truth rationally and objectively.

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## 6.10 KEY WORDS

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- Variables** : Variable is any quantity which have different values. Research basically defines correlation between different variables.
- Sample** : Sample is sub-set of the population. It is unit of the study chosen from the study area.
- Hypothesis** : Hypothesis is the tentative generalization or assumption of relationship between variables which has got to be tested.

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## 6.11 FURTHER READINGS

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1. Klaus Bruhn Jensen (2003). A Handbook of Media and Communication Research. Routledge. New Delhi.
2. Arthur Asa Berger (2012). Media Analysis Techniques. Sage, New Delhi.

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## 6.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

Exit poll survey is conducted mostly on the polling place. Only few questions are asked to the voter immediately after he cast his or her vote. Most of exit polls in India are conducted with help of professional researchers. Exits poll surveys and analysis should be conducted with utmost care as they have potential to influence the votes.

### Check Your Progress 2

Data journalism is the practice of journalism based on data. With emergence of digital technologies data has been available on various platforms such as Internet websites, Social Media and Mobile Communication. ICT has enabled journalist to collect and analyse such data and present the news with broader perspectives. This is the key essence of data journalism.

### Check Your Progress 3

Research methodology is a guidepost of research. It is process of identification, collection, processing and analysis data following particular set of rules, tools and statistical method of analysis. Research methodology is a systematic plan which every researcher needs to define in research reports. According to nature of the study different methodologies are used for different research studies.