
UNIT 14 GENDER AND MEDIA

Structure

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives
- 14.3 Defining Media
- 14.4 Classification of Media
 - 14.4.1 Folk Media
 - 14.4.2 Print Media
 - 14.4.3 Electronic Media
 - 14.4.4 New Media
- 14.5 Effect of Media on Society
- 14.6 Women in the Media
 - 14.6.1 Objectification of Women in the Media
 - 14.6.3 Gender and Print Media
 - 14.6.4 Gender and Electronic Media
 - 14.6.5 Gender Roles in Advertisements
 - 14.6.6 Gender Roles in Cinema
- 14.7 Summing Up
- 14.8 Key Words
- 14.9 References
- 14.10 Unit End Questions

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Mass media in its various forms have become an integral part of our lives. The issues related to media, identity and gender are integral to the discipline of media and Gender studies. The reason is the popularity and diversity of media as a source of mass consumption and its influence on constructing ideas and generating debates. The media scene in India has expanded in the (unnecessary) recent times as there is a plethora of media choices available to the audiences. The media structures and systems have also undergone a sea change with privatization and globalization. These developments influence media projections and representations of various issues – gender representation is a major concern - what media portrays gets assimilated into the minds of the audience and influences them in various ways. In this unit we shall discuss the role of media and its representation of gender.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the word ‘Mass Media’;
- Explain how media influence us; and
- Explain the role of media in representation of genders

14.3 DEFINING MEDIA

In more recent times, the influence of media on society has expanded exponentially and into ever diversified forms. Media has the potential to play an active part in shaping and framing our perception of the world, and indeed in affecting the nature of that world.

Media is considered as a “mirror” of modern society, In fact, it is the media which shapes our lives and perspectives. Society is influenced by media in so many ways. It is the media for the masses that helps them to get information about a lot of things and also to form opinions and make judgments regarding various issues. It is the media which keeps us updated and informed about what is happening around us and in the world. There is a need to learn to access, analyze and interpret media messages, as well as to create our own media. Thus it is important to understand the role of media in our life which begins with understanding the concept of media along with its functions, types and genres.

“Media, like a light bulb, creates an environment by its mere presence”.

Marshall McLuhan

Media is the plural form of ‘medium’, understood as something in a middle position; a means of effecting or conveying something (as a channel or system of communication); a condition or environment in which something may function or flourish (‘media’). The concept of media has grown enormously and the term is used in the modern sense to reference the agencies of mass communication. At one time missing, but desperately desired, the concept has become commonplace in our society. It has become so common, that in terms of communication it has become known as any tool used to store or deliver information or data, such as advertising media, electronic media, hypermedia, mass media, social media and multimedia.

Media has been defined as “means of communication designed to reach and influence very large numbers of people” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1980). Media is the communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data or promotional messages are disseminated (businessdictionary.com). Media is an umbrella term that includes all types of print, broadcast, out-of-home, and interactive communication. It includes all channels that carry brand messages. It includes newspapers, magazines, television, radio, cinema, billboards, mail, telephone, fax and now, the internet.

Thus media refers to the means of delivering and receiving data or information. In other words, media is a form of dispensing information. The term is also commonly used in place of mass media or news media. Media consists of the various means by which information reaches large numbers of people, such as television, radio, movies, newspapers, and the Internet.

Mass Media has been defined as “means of communication designed to reach and influence very large numbers of people” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1980). Janowitz’s (1968) defined media as “technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content”

Media are those means of communication which help

- Transmit messages to large, heterogeneous, anonymous masses living in different regions of a locality, nation or the world.
- Transmit messages rapidly and instantaneously.
- Large group of people in different locations to receive same information in the same language, although translations of the main points can simultaneously be displayed in subtitles.

14.4 CLASSIFICATION OF MEDIA

The mass media comprise different kinds of communication means which is designed to reach a large audience. Mass media can be categorized according to physical form, the technology involved, nature of the communication process, etc. Given below are the major categories of mass media:

- Folk Media (Puppetry, Folk Theatre, Street Theatre)
- Print (books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, etc)
- Electronic (Radio, Cinema, Television)
- New Media (Internet, Mobile)

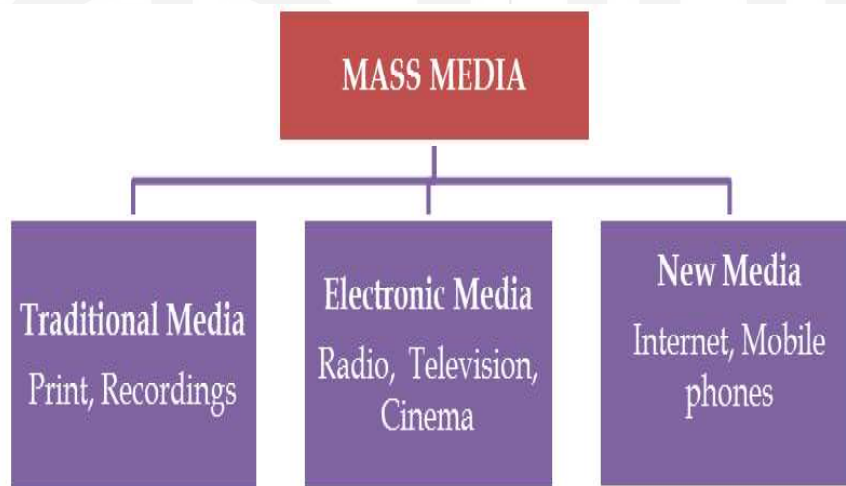


Figure 1 Classification of Mass Media

14.4.1 Folk Media

Folk Media or Traditional Media is an excellent tool to enhance communication and promote dialogue at the grass roots level of any society.

Puppetry is a popular form of folk media that is entertaining and informative. Ancient Hindu philosophers have paid the greatest tribute to puppeteers. They have likened God Almighty to a puppeteer and the entire universe to a puppet stage.

Street Theatre is another form of traditional media which is being used widely to propagate socio political messages and to create awareness for social issues. Street plays are short, direct, loud, and over expressive since they perform in places where there are huge crowds. They are known to propagate strong message

about social reforms and are considered as powerful tools to mobilize crowds towards a certain matter.

14.4.2 Print Media

Print media encompasses mass communication through printed material. It includes newspapers, magazines, booklets, periodicals etc. The printed word are a carrier of knowledge, information and news stories. In India printing came first to Goa in 1556 and penetrated into Kolkatta and inland provinces through the coastal towns.

One of the chief characteristics of Print media is that they offer extensive news coverage and in depth treatment of themes. They provide a large variety of coverage, through different kinds of writings than any other media in India. The main weakness of the print media is that they can be read only by literates.

14.4.3 Electronic Media

Another very popular means of social interaction and propagation that has emerged along with the print media is the rise of Electronic Media. Electronic media are media that use electronics or electromechanical energy for the end-user (audience) to access the content. The birth of electronic media took place with the invention of Radio when a single voice a mile away thrilled millions across the continents who marveled at this miraculous hearing of a voice.

Radio

One of the most dramatic developments of the 20th century has been the invention of the radio waves. Radio has become a means of communication of unparalleled immediacy, intimacy and power as it is highly effective and found everywhere. Radio broadcasting in its reach, power and impact, constitutes the most significant medium of mass communication. Radio has an inherent advantage to overcome three major hurdles to meaningful communications- such as mass illiteracy, lack of efficient means to reach the remote places and poverty which prevents access to mass media.

Cinema

Cinema is the Latin spelling of the Greek word 'kinema', meaning "a motion." Indian film industry is considered a huge film industry in terms of production. Indian cinema is a popular mode of entertainment for all. Digitalization is considered to be the next best thing for Indian Cinema and it is in a position to exploit the technology in all aspects: building capacity, content creation, processing, management and distribution of the digital content in various formats and sources. Indian Films have gone beyond the geographical boundaries. They have come out of the epoch of love and fantasy and learnt to work on experimental plots. The effect of globalization of Indian cinema is applicable not only to the Bollywood (colloquial) films, but also to the regional film industries of the country. Many Indian films are not only making more money outside the home market but also attracting foreign producers and directors to the industry.

Television

In 1926, Scottish television pioneer John Logie Baird (1888-1946) demonstrated the first television system since then Television has played a very important role in our lives. Television is considered one of the greatest inventions of man. It is

a multi-media system predominated by the visual medium. T.V can transport the viewers to the actual scene of action to see things as they happen. Having a television set in the home has become very essential in today's society. We depend on it to entertain us with its sitcoms and to inform us about current world issues.

A T.V broadcast directly affects two senses simultaneously i.e those of hearing and seeing. It is more effective than radio because of its visual components which has a greater influence on the minds of the viewers.

With the help of satellite technology, T.V has reached all corners of the globe. According to Marshall McLuhan the T.V has turned the world into a global village in which ideas, information and images can be exchanged with people spread all over the globe. Television is a medium of immediacy as it captures images of events as they are happening, that is why we have headlines like 'breaking news' that present events exactly as they are unfolding, hence, T.V is also called the medium of 'here and now'.

14.4.4 New Media

New Media is also known as new media or global media. New media are those that are recent in origin. The most important feature of the new communication technology is interactivity. While in the case of television, radio and other electronic media, communication is only a one-way process; their interactive capabilities are very limited because feedback is delayed. However, in new communication technologies we can get immediate responses and feedback because of advanced techniques of communication.

Modern media transmits signals instantly from one source to any destination in the whole globe by modern electronic technology. The new communication technologies are based on 5A's "Anyone can transfer any information at any time at any place to anyone". The media or the global media are capable of a much higher degree of interactivity than those offered by traditional communication technology. The use of computers in one form or the other is an integral part of most of the modern communication technologies.

Check Your Progress Exercise

Note :

- i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.
- ii) Compare your answer with the course material of this unit.
 - 1) List different categories of media
 - 2) Write short note on "New Media".

14.5 EFFECT OF MEDIA ON SOCIETY

Media effects human mind and the way we behave and act in society. The degree of influence depends on the availability and pervasiveness of media. All of the traditional mass media still have great influence over our lives.

Books once were supremely influential because they came first before newspapers, magazines, radio or television. Newspapers and magazines became great influencers after they were developed. Sound recordings and film were and still are influential. Radio and then television were very influential. As the 20th century

closed, TV exposed us to untold numbers of images of advertising and marketing, suffering and relief, sexuality and violence, celebrity, and much more. New and influential media-distribution channels have appeared in the 21st century. Delivered via the World Wide Web across the Internet, we are influenced daily by blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and myriad forms of content sharing.

The media permeates almost every part of our lives. Whether it's TV news, web content, books or anything in between, the information we receive from the media plays a major role in everyone's everyday life. Something this large and ubiquitous is bound to. The impact of media on the society extends to both social and political sectors. There are a variety of elements in each and media touches on both sectors and each element. Media has both positive and negative effects on society

Positive effects of media on Society such as access to information, improved access to education, independent nature of social media, media can play a positive role in children's learning and development, It gives current news and information about what's happening in the world.

The major areas of negative effects of media are presented here: Invasion of privacy; perversion of truth by electronic trickery; violation of security (Governmental and institutional); Impact on the democratic process; Isolation of people; and Information overload.

14.6 WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Women are also the potential victims of media's influence over society. The portrayal of women as sexual figures in popular culture is also a threat to the well-being of our society. Frequently women are depicted or portrayed in some form of sexual representation. This portrayal has created a standard for the ideal female image that women are compared to by themselves or others. Research claims that the sexualized images of women in media serve as 'models of femininity' for females, especially young girls who are still developing their sense of self. Young girls exposed to these models may face future problems in mental and sexual development. Research also links exposure to sexualized female ideals with lower self-esteem, negative mood and depressive symptoms among adolescent girls and women".

14.6.1 Objectification of women in the media

Objectification is the representation of women in media as an object rather than as a whole human entity. This happens in many contexts including advertisements and cinema. Feminist scholars say that the objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of an instrument for the sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another. Media often portrays women in vulnerable and easily overpowered situations. Some images will focus only on a part of the body, a leg, a neck or a headless torso that constitutes objectification and introduces the concept of Fetishisation. It intends to reduce women to disembodied parts of their anatomy.

14.6.2 Gender and Print Media

In India, print media and electronic media continue to enjoy as widespread a reach. They also leave their impression on both general readers and policy makers. Events rather than processes make news. Most issues of special concern to women do not fit into the traditional concepts of what constitute news.

Women's empowerment should bring about a situation where women can use their fullest potential and capacity to construct a better human society for all and media has a critical role to play in responding to these processes. Media commitment and support are seen as necessary for effecting social reform and initiating various movements towards achieving a better quality of life for women.

14.6.3 Gender and Electronic Media

The tremendous popularity of television and its ability to reach a vast audience with illiteracy being no barrier led to the idea of using television as a channel for information on development among several governments/ administrators. From the mid- seventies television began to be used to promote development oriented messages among the Indian population. But there was no exclusive focus on women's problems and their development. In the absence of a comprehensive media policy in India, television content emphasizing entertainment has grown to such an extent that today all television channels are oriented towards commercialization.

Most of the soaps shown in Indian television are sexist. Even the so called matriarch (supposedly the head of the home) shown in some of the TV soaps victimizing the younger daughters and 'bahus' (daughters in laws) of the house and teaching them how to be 'good'.

All serials wrapped in tradition of male chauvinism discourage women to aim for more than a loving husband, happy children and a modern home. She is portrayed as a glamorous doll whose physical beauty is her only asset. The sacrificing role of women in every serial is highlighted, as it poses no threat to the patriarchal structure. Women are all the time shown as compromising and negotiating.

Sex stereotyping is also very much evident in television portrayal of men and women in their appointed roles. Invariably, masculine personality attributes are emphasized and women in the world of television are presented in the role of domestic help, a wife, a mother etc and similar nurturing and care-giving roles and they are portrayed as submissive and engrossed in common family affection and duties. As against this, men are depicted as employed, competitive. Women shown in similar competing roles with men are far less in number and are considered to be oddities and deviations from norm, trait wise though there is a stereotypical portrayal of women being congenitally much more than men. Even when women are presented as power holders, the patriarchal context is unmistakably present. The attributes of power and aggressiveness is portrayed as something unnatural to a women and a challenge to the male ego. In families in which the gender roles are largely traditional, television may tend to serve to reinforce such gender roles. In this way television certainly plays a role in the construction of gender roles.

14.6.4 Gender Roles in Advertisements

Advertisements are yet another prominent and integral part of television viewing. Due to its persuasive power, advertising is the best known and most widely discussed form of promotion. Advertising persuades and motivates consumer about the advertised products, service or ideas. Advertising plays an important role in persuading the public to change their attitudes towards a product, service or idea. The constant flow of advertising images of gender, types of persons, social classes, and other groups influence our social learning process.

Men and women are portrayed in advertisements according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. To be a woman is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine. There is little room for variation or a reversal of roles, except within the smaller frame of: niche marketing.

In the world of advertising, men and women have consistently been portrayed in stereotypical ways. Men are portrayed as more autonomous than women, with men portrayed in many different occupations as compared to women being shown as housewives and mothers. Men were far more likely to advertise vehicles, or business products, job website while women were found mostly in advertisements for domestic products. Some common sights of women as seen in advertisements show them cooking in the kitchen, washing bucketful of clothes bandaging wounds of their husbands and children. Men were far more likely to be shown outdoors or in business settings while women were shown primarily in domestic settings.

Women are alternately displayed as sari-wearing stay at home mothers whose only purpose in life is to please their family, ravishing sex-idols who are as objectified as they are seductive, and independent, strong-willed, intelligent go-getters. Women are usually shown in advertisement of household products. They are seen washing utensils, clothes or cooking for family. In the advertisements, women are predominantly employed to promote products and services. In every item they are utilized whether it requires their presence or not. Even in masculine accessories women are presented. From these advertisements a desirable value can be discerned. Women are portrayed as sex objects who are probably cast to titillate the viewers by exposing their body parts. Women are shown wearing revealing clothes and adopt leaning and yearning postures - signs of incompleteness or lack of security. Even in commercials of the products consumed mostly by men- male perfume/deodorant, briefs, male soaps etc. women are used as models exposing their bodies.

Fair complexion, tall, slim and beautiful looking women are the ideal ones and dark complexion is propagated as a major hindrance for self development even marriage. Utmost care is taken to manipulate the minds of young women that overweight, dark complexion are the disqualification for their self development. Fairness cream and beauty soap, shower? promises to make their dreams come true.

14.6.5 Gender roles in Cinema

Women characters in cinema are often devoid of a realistic projection and end up on screen as stereotypes. A 'good' and ideal woman in Bollywood, has traditionally been long-suffering and submissive, who is chaste, and is inclined to make sacrifices for other especially the male members in the household. The

'bad' woman on the other hand, has been depicted as Westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. The Hindi film industry has repeatedly reinforced the notion that the glory of ideal Indian womanhood lies in the tolerance she shows toward society and men, even when she is unjustly treated and brutally victimised.

The narratives of Hindi cinema have undoubtedly been male dominated and male centric. Themes have been explored from the male audience's point of view. The heroine is always secondary to the hero. Her role is charted out in context of any male character which is central to the script. It may be the hero, the villain, the father, the boss, an elderly male figure etc. She is devoid of any independent existence and her journey throughout the film is explored in relation to the male character. This kind of straight-jacketing limits the women's role to providing glamour, relief, respite and entertainment.

Some film-makers dared to explore subjects from the women's perspective. *Mother India* (1957) Hindi film epic, written and directed by Mehboob Khan is a strong political statement on a woman who can do anything to establish that justice has been done even while remaining within the framework of marriage and motherhood. She defied the micro state of being a biological mother in order to fit into the framework of becoming the mother of the nation when she shot down her own son to save the honour of a woman of the village. The *sati-savitri* image underwent a radical make-over probably with Nutan, who, without showing skin, made a powerful presentation in strong roles such as *Seema* and *Bandini* while Geeta Bali promoted the image of a mischievous tomboy, also a positive deviation from the *sati-savitri* image.

During 70s actors like Jaya Bachchan, Smita Patil and Shabana Azmi stripped glamour off the female lead's character and played roles that were as important as that of the hero. Some contemporary films like *Chameli* (2003), *Cheeni Kum* (2007), *Paa* (2009), *Ishqiya* (2010), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), *Dirty Picture* (2011), *Queen* (2014), *Mary Kom* (2014) have pictured extraordinary themes and portrayed women as central to the story line. These films have forced creators to take a fresh look at the different roles played by women and introspect upon the kind of typecasting that was being perpetuated earlier.

14.7 SUMMING UP

We have understood that the issues of media, identity and gender are integral to the discipline of media and Gender studies. The reason is the popularity and diversity of media as source of mass consumption and its influence on constructing ideas and generating debates. The media scene in India has expanded in the recent times as there is a plethora of media choices available to the audiences. The media structures and systems have also undergone a sea change with privatization and globalization. These developments are bound to affect the manner in which media scrutinizes and covers any issue – gender being an important one. Over a period of time all forms of media has gender component in it. What media portrays goes deep into the subconscious and unconscious mind of people and influences audience in various ways.

Women are shown as playing a secondary and passive role in various programmes, T.V Soaps and films. The reality reconstructed by the media, does not match the

one encountered by women in their daily life. There is huge disparity between real women and those presented over the medium of television which is perplexing and disquieting at the very least. Television programming doesn't include the image of the working class woman. Media in its myriad forms needs to create space for more progressive representations of women to do justice to women and their role in the society. Indian society is in a state of transition where it is important that media in its various forms narrate/depict positive images of articulation, agency and empowerment.

14.8 KEY WORDS

Television Soap Operas: Television or Radio serials which deals with daily events in the lives of same group of characters.

14.9 REFERENCES

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14.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you understand by the term 'Mass Media'.
- 2) Discuss the various classifications of Media.
- 3) What do you understand by objectification of women?
- 4) Men and women are portrayed in advertisements according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. Comment