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## **UNIT 8 SOCIETY, MULTIMEDIA AND HYPERMEDIA\***

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### **8.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning, significance and different types of multimedia
- Know the usage of images, videos and audios as forms of multimedia
- Discuss the meaning and application of hypermedia
- Know the relationship between multimedia, hypermedia and society

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### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

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While disciplines like Sociology and Social Anthropology have generally paid attention to the written word, there has been a shift towards inclusion of visual modes of representation in recent years. After all, images and videos are everywhere now, and hence engagement with them becomes necessary as scholars.

Visual Sociology and Visual Anthropology as fields of study use photographs, films, documentaries, videos and other modes to capture and represent aspects of social life. One can argue that it is still a developing field. In this context, multimedia and hypermedia have become useful tools for students of Sociology and Social Anthropology to engage with, particularly since the 1990s. Multimedia and hypermedia became popular as computers and computer-related technologies like sound cards, compact disks, digital camera and then the video camera became familiar objects. The internet has only furthered their popularity. In fact, today they have become fields of their own.

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\*Written by Dr. Rituparna Patgiri, Delhi University

Therefore, in this unit, we will be looking at both these tools to understand the role they can play in understanding society. In the first section we will discuss multimedia. The following section will discuss the use of images in sociological research. The next section is to hypermedia.

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## 8.2 MULTIMEDIA

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Multimedia is information that is disseminated using different forms of media like images (photographs), graphics, videos, audios, GIFs, animations, illustrations, maps, graphs, charts, etc. It is the use of audio-visual material to communicate various kinds of messages. It does not imply that multimedia does not involve the usage of text. In fact, it is a combination of both texts and audio-visual content.

### Box 1: Multimedia

Multimedia is information that is disseminated using different forms of media like images (photographs), graphics, videos, audios, GIFs, animations, illustrations, maps, graphs, charts, etc. The popularity and expansion of multimedia is closely connected to the popularity and availability of computer related technologies.

Usage of Floppy Disks, CDs, Pen drives and Hard disks to watch images and videos and view text are examples of multimedia.

Multimedia has a broad usage. It can be used for educational purposes as well as maintaining medicinal and statistical databases. Multimedia was initially used in addition to text, but today it is much more than that. Sociologists have found it useful to use multimedia not only to collect but also present their data. A popular example of multimedia is the use of Microsoft PowerPoint to make and present information in slides. It is used in both conferences and the classroom. It allows combining text with other audio-visual content. Blogs and websites are another very popular example of multimedia.

There is a unique combination of image and text in multimedia where ‘text becomes image and image becomes text’ (Lewis *in* Prosser 1998). It is an advantage of multimedia that one can build a sequence of texts and images. For instance, if a sociologist has to explain the structuring on an urban space like a city, s/he can use a pictorial diagram or a chart with texts. Multimedia also allows the scope of interaction between the presenter and the viewer. It can help in creating a better teaching and learning environment as well as research conditions. Multimedia helps address more than one sense, as it addresses the senses of both sight and hearing

Some of the major characteristics of multimedia are –

- 1) It helps in making the processes of reading and writing dynamic and interactive.
- 2) It helps in presenting information in pictorial and video forms make communication easy.
- 3) It helps in appealing to more than the sense of sight.

One of the most common forms of multimedia used in sociological research today is images or photographs. The next section looks at how images can be used to further the cause of research in the discipline.

## 8.3 USE OF IMAGES IN SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

In this section we will talk about various ways in which images based on different media are used in sociological research

### 8.3.1 Photo Elicitation

Images or photographs serve both the purposes of data collection and presentation. The first part of the discussion discusses data collection. Sociologists often use photographs to communicate their questions to the respondents. It is called photo elicitation (Harper 2012). In a typical interview, the researcher poses questions to members of the community s/he is studying and researching. But in the photo elicitation method, s/he inserts photographs in between questions and conversations to get better responses.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Multimedia can be used to both ..... and ..... data.
- 2) Multimedia is information disseminated in the form of .....

This tool is particularly useful in contexts that are unfamiliar to a researcher. In case s/he does not know the local language and context, sometimes it can be very handy to use images to gather meaningful information. The researcher can also gauge the body language of the respondents. At the same time, use of images can open up the conversation making the respondents feel like an equal participant. Photo elicitation presents them with an opportunity to become a part of the research instead of just being subjects. As a method, photo elicitation was first used by John Collier in the 1950s. He was a photographer and was a part of a team studying mental health in Canada (Harper 2012). Since then, it has become a popular method of collecting information in visual Sociology and Social Anthropology.

Photo elicitation can fulfil the following objectives:

- 1) Help in collecting information when the researcher is unfamiliar with the cultural and linguistic context
- 2) Make the interview process engaging and interesting
- 3) Understand the respondents' perspective better

Photo elicitation can be used in several ways. For instance, a researcher can collect a few images from the respondent's life to ask her/his comments on what and how s/he feels. Similarly, a researcher can use a collection of images from an important incident or event in their community to gather the participant's comments.

#### Activity 1

Use images from your family album to understand changes and continuities in women's status in your community .

### 8.3.2 Photo Voice

Apart from photo elicitation, photo voice is another method that uses the camera and images to gather information from people. However, in photo voice, the respondent has more control over the camera. It is defined as a method in which participants can generate content during the research study and initiate critical and analytical engagements by clicking and/or filming their surroundings. How one uses the camera and creates images is seen as an act of empowerment that gives the participants control over what they want to study.

As a methodological tool, photo voice was first used by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris in their participatory action research project in a Chinese village in 1992 (Harper 2012). It is mostly used in community studies, and the intent is to bring about social change by understanding insiders' perspectives. It can also increase community engagement and be used as a complementary method to traditional qualitative methods like focus group discussions.

The primary goals of photo voice can be described as:

- 1) To make the respondents equal participants in a research study
- 2) To encourage respondents to observe and record data from their surroundings
- 3) To promote critical and analytical thinking at the grassroots level
- 4) To take note of individual voices and perceptions
- 5) To reach policymakers and government officials

Photo voice was inspired by Paulo Freire's work on educational curriculum that looks at the pedagogical contribution of the marginalised or the oppressed. Therefore, it is often used as a method when participants involve vulnerable sections of the population such as women and Dalits in a research project.

Both the examples of photo elicitation and photo voice show that the significance and meanings of photographs are not fixed. They can change from person to person and context to context. These methods are no longer in the fringe but have become mainstream tools. They are not only used by sociologists and anthropologists; but also, by development sector professionals, policymakers, educators, market researchers, etc.

### 8.3.3 Photo Essay

While both photo elicitation and photo voice are used as methods of data collection, photo essay is a tool that helps in presenting data. Photo essays have become popular in recent years, along with the other two methods that have been discussed. A photo essay is a medium of storytelling that conveys the message through images and a small written description. Unlike a traditional essay, the emphasis is on images in a photo essay which can invoke emotions and understanding amongst viewers and readers. The author conveys his/her thoughts through images rather than text. The images are part of a series and are connected to form a visual narrative. In other words, a photo essay can be called a relationship between photographs that tells a story.

#### Activity 2

Think and write how photo voice can be used as a method to record experiences of women in a protest.

These forms of image-based data collection methods help us visualise information which is an addition to textual representation. There can, however, be certain ethical issues associated with visual methods. For instance, taking consent from people while clicking photographs can be an issue. Thus, most ethical guidelines issued by associations would ask researchers to either take informed consent or avoid clicking photographs of people's faces as much as possible.

There is also the concern of maintaining the privacy of participants as the circulation of images can put their lives in public scrutiny. Thus, a researcher has to be careful in using images in their research. It is essential to take informed consent from their respondents before clicking and circulating their images.

### Activity 3

Make a photo essay of your neighbourhood, depicting the changes that have happened in urban spaces over the years.

#### 8.3.4 Documentaries and Films

Apart from images, videos too have become important ways in which information collected during the research can be presented. In this sense, documentary films have become a popular mode of disseminating sociological knowledge. Ethnographers have particularly found it useful to record descriptive material in the form of documentary films. Often, films can leave a better impact than words, and social researchers have realised that. In fact, documentary films have been produced since the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was also a product of colonialism as films were used to record the different living styles and patterns of the colonised people.

Some of the popular ethnographic films that have been produced include *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert J. Flaherty, *The Hunters* (1957) by John Marshall and *The Anthropologist* (2015) by Seth Kramer. These films use the camera as a tool to depict and show cultural ways of the people. Many films include recordings of people's speeches which are in video format. These films reveal the cultural patterning of different groups of people.

However, multimedia is not just about images and videos. It also includes audio materials like voice recordings. Some of the audio modes of multimedia are discussed in the next sub-section.

#### 8.3.5 Audio Forms of Multimedia

In addition to visual methods, audio forms of multimedia have also gained immense popularity in social research. They are now used in both collecting and presenting data. Voice recorders and audio recorders are used to record personal interviews and focus group discussions, which are later transcribed, translated, and written down. It is imperative to seek consent before recording an interview or a group discussion similar to visual methods.

Audio modes of communication can also be used to present data and information in formats like podcasts. In fact, podcasts have become popular means of communicating information as they can be easily accessed and downloaded via the internet.

Both filmmakers and audio makers have to take care of ethical issues while filming and recording their respondents' interviews and speeches. Informed consent must be taken from the participants and community members before recording and/or filming them.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) Photo elicitation, photo voice and photo essay are examples of .....

2) What is the difference between photo voice and photo elicitation?

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3) What is a photo essay?

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4) Apart from visual forms of multimedia, what other forms can be there? Give examples.

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**8.4 HYPERMEDIA**

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Hypertext allows the user to access other links from the original text. Hypermedia combines images and texts with links. It is an extension of hypertext. For instance, a blog or a website are examples of hypermedia. Thus, surfing the World Wide Web can be seen as an illustration of hypermedia. Apart from that, electronic libraries, electronic books and online journals too can be seen as an example of hypermedia. Electronic databases like JSTOR are also examples of hypermedia.

Hypermedia combines images and texts with links. It is interactive, user-friendly and facilitates learning. Blogs and websites are examples of hypermedia.

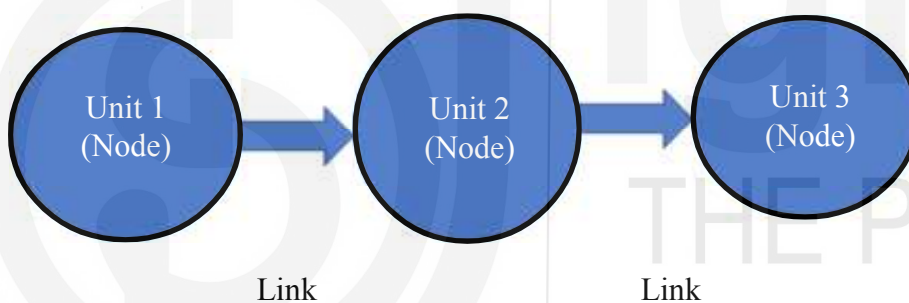
Jakob Nielsen (1995) is in favour of using the term hypertext for all forms of media, whereas others such as George Landow and Paul Delany (1991) want to

use the term hypermedia. However, more recently, George Landow has declared that the terms should be used interchangeably (Landow 1997).

Hypermedia is interactive, and there is the ease of accessing information. The users have the choice of selecting information based on their relevance, interest, curiosity, experience, needs and availability. It provides an electronic medium for knowledge facilitation.

One can access 'linked information' through hypermedia. It means one has mass blocks of knowledge available at his/her disposal through these 'clickable links'. These links can be both explicit and implicit. Explicit links redirect users to different websites, whereas implicit links can be materials such as encyclopedias and dictionaries. Hypermedia also enables a user to open multiple windows. The author cannot control how a reader will progress and which links s/he will choose to follow. Both hypertext and hypermedia are non-sequential and non-linear, giving the reader and the user options to choose.

They consist of interlinked pieces of text which can be small files or large bits of information. Each of these units of information is called a node and may have pointers to other units. These pointers are links. There are no fixed numbers of units (nodes) and pointers (links). There is also a backtracking facility, an option for the user to go back to the previous unit.



**Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of how hypertext and hypermedia work**

Some of the major characteristics of hypermedia are –

- 1) It allows access to vast blocks of information through clickable links
- 2) Users can exercise their choice in accessing information based on their needs and demand
- 3) Hypermedia provides an interactive environment for learning

It is important to remember that hypermedia is not really technology in itself but enabled by computer and internet-based technologies. While both multimedia and hypermedia can be used singly, they can also be used together. However, there is a difference in usage of the two - multimedia can be used to both collect and present data; whereas hypermedia is mostly used to present one's research. Presenting one's data through means of hypermedia can allow interactive engagement and feedback on their research findings.

Usage of hypermedia offers the opportunity to integrate one's research findings in different media, which is easy to access. The synthesis of visual, textual, pictorial and audio material makes hypermedia a useful method of conducting qualitative research.

### Check Your Progress 3

1) What is hypermedia? What are some of its characteristics?

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2) How can multimedia and hypermedia be used in social research?

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## 8.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MULTIMEDIA, HYPERMEDIA AND SOCIETY

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Use of multimedia in sociological research changes the traditional relationship that exists between a researcher and the community. Conventionally, researchers are seen as holding greater power in their relationship with participants. Methods like photo elicitation and photo voice give respondents a sense of equality and balance in the whole research process.

Photographs and photo voice become forms of communication between researchers and respondents. Similarly, documentaries become a mode of communication between researchers and the audience. They can help reach people who may not be interested in reading or find text too difficult to understand.

Today, one cannot ignore the role of multimedia in social research. Computer-based technologies are now involved in every step of the research process – from framing questionnaires to typing the research article. Price drops of cameras, audio recorders and computers have also encouraged this practice. The other thing that has helped digitise social research is the easy availability of networks like YouTube, where one can upload videos and films without any cost. The computer screen today enables easy use of visual research methods like multimedia and hypermedia. It has also been facilitated by changes in internet policies and cheap availability of internet.

Use of hypermedia and multimedia support social and collaborative research, learning and teaching. They are non-linear forms of visual tools – many links can be opened simultaneously. In contrast, traditional texts are sequential and linear. But they are also structured ways of collecting and presenting data.

Apart from research, multimedia and hypermedia can also be used to disseminate information amongst masses. For instance, many countries like Australia and New Zealand used podcasts to spread information about precautions against COVID-19. Similarly, audio recordings are used by the government to spread awareness against social evils like dowry and domestic violence. Radio channels



play these and as such can reach a vast number of people. Advertisements, too, play a similar role in conveying messages – both commercial and awareness related to people. Multimedia, thus, can be used even beyond social research.

A similar thing can be said about hypermedia too. Educational institutes today run websites and blogs to promote educational content. These are also innovative ways to reach out to students through videos, photos and audios along with text. As can be seen, multimedia and hypermedia are no longer used only as research tools. They can be used in multiple contexts like disseminating information, educational purposes and for maintaining databases.

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## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

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Today more than ever, researchers are using forms of multimedia to collect and represent their data. Theoretical and empirical innovations have made visual methods, both acceptable and accessible. In fact, visual Sociology makes evident to us the different kinds of technological changes that have taken place over the years. Therefore, qualitative researchers, including sociologists, have turned their focus to various kinds of visual methods. Easy availability of the means like the phone camera has made this visual turn easier. Although there are certain ethical issues associated with the usage of both multimedia and hypermedia, researchers can work their way around them.

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## 8.7 REFERENCES

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## 8.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Multimedia can be used to both collect and present data.
- 2) Multimedia is information disseminated in the form of texts combined with images, videos, pictures, GIFS, etc.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Photo elicitation, photo voice and photo essay are examples of multimedia that can be used to collect and present research findings.
- 2) Both photo voice and photo elicitation are visual methods that can also be seen as forms of multimedia. uses the camera and images to gather information from people. However, in photo voice, the respondent has more control over the camera. It is defined as a method in which participants can generate content during the research study and initiate critical and analytical engagements by clicking and/or filming their surroundings. Also, photo elicitation can be used to both gather and present data; whereas photo voice is mostly used as a data collection tool.
- 3) A photo essay is a medium of storytelling that conveys the message through images and a short-written description. Unlike a traditional essay, the emphasis is on images in a photo essay which can invoke emotions and understanding amongst viewers and readers.
- 4) Multimedia is not just about images and videos. In addition to visual methods, audio forms of multimedia have also gained immense popularity in social research. They are now used in both collecting and presenting data. Voice recorders and audio recorders are used to record personal interviews and focus group discussions, which are later transcribed, translated, and written down.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Hypermedia combines images and texts with links. It is an extension of hypertext. For instance, a blog or a website are examples of hypermedia. Some of the primary characteristics of hypermedia are –
  - i) It allows access to vast blocks of information through clickable links
  - ii) Users can exercise their choice in accessing information based on their needs and demand
  - iii) Hypermedia provides an interactive environment for learning
- 2) Use of multimedia and hypermedia in sociological research changes the traditional relationship that exists between a researcher and the community. Conventionally, researchers are seen as holding greater power in their relationship with participants. But the use of methods like photo elicitation, photo voice, and hypermedia give respondents a sense of equality and balance in the research process. The usage of multimedia and hypermedia offers the opportunity to integrate one's research findings in different media which is easy to access. The synthesis of visual, textual, pictorial and audio material makes both multimedia and hypermedia useful methods of conducting qualitative research.