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## UNIT 7 : SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE

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### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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Interestingly the journey of web traversed along the fast highway since the 1990s as it grew from web 1.0 to web 2.0 and lately to web 3.0. In a nutshell, while web 1.0 was all about the presence over the web, web 2.0 is about participation, collaboration, sharing and open network. Web 3.0, growing out of this democratic nature of the web, is about semantically connecting every sign made online, with a growing threat of capitalist take-over of the Internet. In this fascinating background of political, philosophical, ethical, social, cultural, economical and technological dynamics, the social media audience comes to the centre of deliberations and centre of the action. Social media is the culmination of democratisation of the Internet; it is a robust platform of public opinion that the world has never witnessed before. The audience is the primary benefactor as well as the beneficiary of this segment, making the web for the people and by the people. In this regard, social media audience becomes an essential element to explore and understand as part of any digital media course.

In this Unit, we shall discuss the concept of audience, its nature and evolution with particular emphasis on social media along with exploring a few audience theories, social media marketing strategies and exciting case studies.

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## 7.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- outline the evolution of media audiences and its changing nature;
- infer the validity of the term ‘audience’ in case of social media;
- distinguish social media audience from other media audiences;
- relate prominent audience theories with social media audiences; and
- apply tools and strategies particularly for social media marketing.

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## 7.2 AUDIENCE - THE TERM AND CONCEPT

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Jay Rosen, Professor of Journalism of New York University, in 2006 wrote in his Press Think blog post titled *The People Formerly Known as the audience*, “The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another— and who today are not in a situation like that at all.” Rosen with this blog post raised the issue of growing invalidity of the term audiences and the need to identify more relevant terms in the changing situation.

There is a long tradition of placing the audience in a lower stratum of hierarchy as gullible fools who lack knowledge and understanding. For Plato or Socrates, as can be found in *Gorgias* of Plato, the orator should carry the responsibility to enlighten these ignorant audiences or the so-called *hoi polloi*. However, for Aristotle, the demographics, emotional state and character type of the audience members are essential elements to define an audience. As he explained in *Rhetoric*, the audiences can be passive spectators or engaged publics or judgmental individuals. In India as well, Bharata’s *Natya Shastra* considers audiences more like judges than as critics. Quite similar to the Western concepts Bharata’s *Natya Shastra* acknowledged the incapability of audiences to grasp superior messages. However, *Ras* or emotional states are invoked among audiences through the *Patra* or the message mediators – more profound the invocation, more successful is the message.

More towards the current understanding of the term audiences, Shaun Moore in his book *Interpreting Media Audiences* wrote, “There is no stable entity which we can isolate and identify as the media audience, no single object that is unproblematic ‘there’ for us to observe and analyse.” The audience has been defined by categories of people, by the medium chosen, by type of messages and by the time as in era or as in preferred moments of exposure. As James Hay wrote in *The Audience and Its Landscape* that living in a mediated world amidst the continuous flow of messages, the audience becomes the audience about a particular social or cultural site. Thus the concept of audience though is highly context and text-specific, but they have always been the receivers in the traditional perspective of the term.

For the term audience, there have been many other alternatives used over the decades. There are *readers* for newspapers and magazines; there are *listeners* for radio and music, and there are *viewers* for television and cinema. The term audience encompasses all these types. In place of the audience, the word *public* has also been used by many, particularly concerning media

marketing and public opinion development. The term *mass*, in the mass audience, also has been used to convey a particular type of audience that grew out of mass society. Further going more towards the latter half of the twentieth century, the term *consumers* has been used in place of the audience as global conglomerates of media corporate houses rose to power-producing and selling their products in the form of news, cinema, soap operas, songs etc.

However, lately, after the rise of social media and the Internet, the role of the audience as a receiver has been changed. From their role as consumers against the producers of the media content, they became the producer of the content themselves. With the democratisation of new media, the earlier audiences now became the message sender as well as the receiver – they became the producer as well as the consumer of the content. Thus in the age of social media, the term audience to be replaced with the term *prosumer*, as coined by Alvin Toffler.

Furthermore, even for those who were not producing any content, they ceased to be an audience anymore; they became the *user* of the content which is much more an active role than merely being the audience. Further, with the growing population of social media and the engaged role of people in it, these users of the Internet became the *netizens* of the virtual world. It became almost like living in a parallel nation with rights and responsibilities of citizens in it. Moreover, more recently going against the corporate trend of the consumer-producer role of audiences, the term *produser*, as coined by Axel Bruns, has become more popular which acknowledges the role of producing content and the role of using that content rather than only consuming it. Thus it has taken a step against considering news, cinema and other media content as products to be consumed, from a political-economic perspective.

#### Activity – 1

Discuss with your grandparents and parents how they used to get news in their childhood and what they used to do for entertainment. Now discuss with your younger siblings or cousins how they get news nowadays and what they do for entertainment. Based on your discussion, list down all that has changed for them as an audience.

#### 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.

#### Fill in the blanks:

- The term prosumer is coined by .....
- Produsers* are the social media audiences who are both the ..... and the ..... of the content.

### 7.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE

So far, we have explored the evolution of the audience and its concept along with surveying the prevailing debate of the term, the questions surrounding its validity, with particular reference to the rise of social media. So, of course, social media have developed a new breed of the audience, which is different from before. However, the question is, how different is it. In the following section, we will look into the differences as we explore different types of social media audiences and various concerns related to it.

### 7.3.1 Characteristics

We have seen earlier that Marshall McLuhan categorised the evolution of communication media and media audiences in four stages-tribal age, literacy age, print age and electronic age. However, influenced by his work, Professor Robert K. Logan of the University of Toronto updated the categorisation including the age of new media. Following his categorisation, the five stages are as follows:

- i) The age of non-verbal mimetic communication
- ii) The age of orality
- iii) The age of literacy
- iv) The age of electronic mass media
- v) The age of digital interactive media

Marshall McLuhan proposed that the concept of *the medium is the message* which means that the meaning and effect of the message is shaped to a large extent by the medium of the message. In that respect, with the rise of digital interactive media, the effect of the message changes, affecting the nature of the audience. In comparison to the audiences of the earlier era, the audiences in the digital era are active or passive-active. The true spirit of the global village has emerged in the digital era where the horizontal communication between individuals residing in geographically far off places is fluent and dense, while the direct face-to-face communication between individuals living in small geographical communities is becoming less. The concept of community itself has changed, challenging the concept of time and space. Virtual communities or global communities have emerged. Geographical communities have become highly heterogeneous, while the homogenisation of global culture has reached a high. The speed of communication has been revolutionised. From the core-periphery model, where unity in diversity was innate in the electronic age, the audience has become highly fragmented based on the break-up model of audience fragmentation. Communication has become highly mediated with a drastic fall in face-to-face, and direct communication. The close-knit bond among geographical communities has faded, increasing the alienation among the individuals living nearby. Moreover, the power of gatekeepers and the hegemonic control by global media corporations has fallen with the rise of social media. This has resulted in information explosion and exposure to alternative views for the audiences. As a result of all this gradual inclusion of so-called subaltern voices and perspectives have become more frequent among the social media audience.

Prof. Jan A. G. M. Van Dijk of the University of Twente, the Netherlands in his book *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media* presented the characteristics of new media where he included various aspects of the new media audiences. Based on his criteria, the following are a few essential characteristics of social media audiences –

- i. **Component:** While earlier, the audience had a collective representation, the social media audiences are demassified – they are separate individuals who are continuously connected over a network.

- ii. **Nature:** Social media audiences are more heterogeneous when compared with any other audience. They can belong to any age, gender, race, class, caste, nation or section of the society with diverse socio-psychological backgrounds.
- iii. **Scope:** The global village dwellers of the electronic media era have become netizens which have changed the scope from global to glocal – a combination of global and local. The audience transforms local elements onto global platforms using universal resonance.
- iv. **Connectivity:** The social media audiences enjoy high connectivity among individuals, rather than between communities. The communication frequency is higher at individual levels, at times crossing beyond geographical distances, rather than between communities.
- v. **Density:** Earlier local communities were closely knit, creating a strong communal bond. However, the density of local communication and bond has decreased as social media audiences spend their time interacting in a mediated environment with people from geographically scattered places.
- vi. **Centralisation:** With increasing audience fragmentation, centralisation of communication and power distribution decreases, creating a polycentric nature of the audience as well as communication systems.
- vii. **Inclusiveness:** As the social media audience is fragmented, alienated and scattered, the inclusiveness of relations are rather loose. With rising individualistic society, the representative inclusiveness in the socio-political process has become more and more difficult.
- viii. **Type of community:** Though the role of communities has sharply decreased, yet, the community of audiences seems to have transferred mostly to the virtual world, enhancing the diversity of these audience communities.
- ix. **Type of organisation:** The organisations rather than being ruled by bureaucracy are being ruled by infocracy, where audiences are horizontally differentiated rather than vertically integrated. That is to say, even though the hegemonic control of power has receded, but rather than developing integration or unity based on increasing horizontal communication, they have developed more and more horizontal differentiation.
- x. **Type of household:** The nuclear family set up that was already growing has now traversed into individual family relation as social media is taking out most of the time away from family interaction. The alienation between individuals even within the family has increased as family members have turned into dedicated audiences for social media. Communication has become mediated even among family members, relatives and friends.
- xi. **Type of primary communication:** The audience of social media use mediated communication extensively, with a gradual decrease in face-to-face communication.
- xii. **Kind of media:** The social media audiences use narrowcast interactive media in place of broadcast mass media. Due to this, audiences are much more active in their media choices. They are participants in



experiencing media, rather than as passive consumers. They are getting habituated to personalised content with high interactivity.

- xiii. The number of media:** Social media audiences are getting habituated to handling a high number of media or source of information. As the issue of space limitation in publishing has decreased, so the revolution of information and information sources have become an obvious extension.

### 7.3.2 Types

Dennis McQuail categorised the audience of mass media by place, by people, by type of medium, by content and by time. The social media audience with their transnational nature has now attained different dimensions for these categories, particularly for the categories by place and by type of medium. However, still in many cases, this categorisation remains intact.

- i) **By place:** Earlier the categorisation was mainly local, regional, national, international etc. However, the social media audience becomes transnational in nature, more and more complexity of the categorisation by place increased. In a few cases, the audience is categorised more in terms of the similarity of users' behaviour rather than the geographical proximity. However, still, with increasing global communication, the audience in a few cases are classified by place to personalise the message as accurately as possible.
- ii) **By people:** This category has gained immense importance in the age of social media. The audiences are categorised based on their age, gender, race, class, political leaning etc. With targeted users' behavioural pattern in the age of social media, the audiences can also be classified based on the strength and quality of network they have in their social media accounts, along with their cultural tastes based on their activities online.
- iii) **By type of medium:** The audience, was done as earlier, can still be classified based on their usage pattern of the social media platforms. There are multiple social media platforms, and audiences may choose to use particularly one or two. Further audiences may have their accounts in multiple platforms, but still, be active users of one or two. Thus, audiences can be classified according to the platform they are using.
- iv) **By the content of messages:** As was done earlier, the audiences are still classified based on the content of their preference. However, particularly for social media, the audiences are not only audiences, but they are also producers of content. So we need to identify not only the type of content the audiences are liking or disliking, but also the type of content they are sharing and the type of content they are creating. This categorisation again can be based on genre, beats, subject-matter or even style.
- v) **By time:** This category earlier was more for identifying day time audiences, prime time audiences or fleeting audiences and dedicated audiences. Interestingly in the case of social media, this categorisation becomes essential with added dimensions. Not only the audiences categorised based on the time they prefer to use a particular social media platform, but also based on the length of time they spend on a platform. Further, social media audiences can be followers, can be subscribers or even can be active participants.

Beyond these established categorisations, social media audiences can also be classified depending on their degree of involvement.

There can be passive audiences who have just created their profiles and do not use a particular platform. There can be active audiences who have created their profiles and just check the updates without engaging any further. There can be passive users who have created their profiles, check the updates, but without engaging any further on that particular medium, they use the information received from the particular platforms for various purposes of their lives. For example, while an active audience will check all the updates from friends and family seen as feeds and then will forget about it. However, a passive user will look for a way to do a video on YouTube and will treat that thing as learning from YouTube. The passive user although will not like or comment or act otherwise online for that particular video.

Further, there can be active users who will act online as well as apply the information received from social media platforms in their lives. There are participants who not only watch, comment or like, but also who share or post or proffer their contribution to the particular social media platform. We have to keep it in mind that an individual does not necessarily always fall under a single category – the individual might change categories depending on the platform and time. So there is no airtight compartmentalisation of social media audience as such.

### 7.3.3 Concerns

So far, we have seen how social media have democratised the information society and how social media have unsettled the hegemonic power hierarchy and control of corporate media. However, the glory of the medium is not entirely unstained. There are significant concerns that are troubling the true spirit of the medium.

One of the significant concerns with social media is its failure to include the marginalised section of society. Though it has succeeded to include alternative voices more than any other medium, yet there are limitations. Social media runs on a platform which requires not only literacy but also computer literacy. Further, it requires not only an electric connection but also speedy Internet connections. For accessing many social media, there is a requirement of a high-speed broadband network. Though social media operates in regional languages, a large amount of content and audience are unreachable if the English language is not known. English dominates the Internet, thus suppressing the content for other language speakers. Such requirements to become social media users, restrict the access of these media to a large extent. Not everyone, therefore, can be a social media audience. Thus social media, to some extent become an elitist media platform, particularly in countries where broadband penetration is very low, electricity does not reach all households, literacy and computer literacy rate is low. In such countries a large number of its citizens live outside the realm of social media, thus never being able to be a part of the medium that can change their lives for betterment.

Also, the issue of the digital inequality has inflicted the positive image of social media with major drawbacks. As there are few countries in the world with higher broadband penetration, higher literacy rate, etc., so those countries are the privileged ones in the present scenario. Those countries with lower rates have lesser access to information sources and social media. The same division exists even within a country between its urban and rural areas. While metropolitan urban areas in India are gradually shifting towards the fifth generation of Internet connectivity, the rural areas still

strive with second-generation or lower or a bit higher connectivity. Thus, with limited access to social media, the audiences of these areas have less access to socio-political debates, information and opinion development platforms of the nation. This results in structural backwardness dividing the nation between those who have access and those who do not.

Apart from these, there are also growing corporate take-over of social media platforms. Social media have so far been a platform for the people and by the people. However, the owners of various social media sites are already making huge profits. They are exploring avenues to monetise by selling the audiences not only to advertisers but also to political parties, to propaganda generators and other interest groups. Privacy of social media users is at stake. Detailed data of netizens are available almost to anyone in the world, as the data are transmitted beyond political boundaries and geographical distances.

Further, like earlier systems, gradually social media platforms are also becoming an extension of a few global media corporate houses which are monopolising the industry. Due to this, the audience is at risk of a digital era of hegemony which is at its best than ever before. With web 3.0 or the semantic web, the propaganda and hegemonic powers become so subtle that it even becomes difficult for audiences to identify.

This triggers another major concern. Social media offers a platform for all, which includes audiences who are not media literate. This proposes a danger for the democratic functioning of a nation. There have been multiple instances of mob lynching in India, which were caused by messages and fake information shared via social media platforms. It also provides a glimpse of the audiences of social media who are vulnerable enough to be misled to this extent. So on one hand, though the audiences have become active information seekers with opinions of their own to debate on the social media platforms, there are, on the other hand, those who can easily be brainwashed by this overpowering media.

Moreover, if one looks at the micro-level interaction, the psycho-social profile of the audiences has changed a lot with social media. Here the concerns are growing alienation, identity crisis, weakening family ties, the virtual transformation of life and living, para-social relations, media dependency, egocentric society, detachment from the immediate environment, mediated emotions, social media burnout, decreasing attention span, increasing irritability etc., all these and more have been identified as symptoms of heavy users of social media. So even though social media platforms are helping people with information, alternative views and knowledge, they are also simultaneously causing various negative effects on their audiences.

**Activity – 2**

Chat with your friends and acquaintances who use social media. Discuss with them about what platforms they use, which ones they prefer, how frequently do they use, when do they use, what all they do there, why they use those platforms, what are their preferences etc. Now try to categorise them depending on their usage pattern and create audience profiles.



**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. State four characteristics of social media audiences.

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 .....  
 .....

2. What is the difference between passive audience and active users of social media?

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 .....

3. State four types of social media audiences.

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4. State four significant issues affecting social media audiences?

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**7.4 THEORIES OF AUDIENCE**

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Now you might think about why it is essential to know any theory, particularly when you are learning about such a dynamic and real-life based subject as digital media, social media and audience. What is the need for any theorisation in this field then? Well if you have done algebra in your school mathematics classes, then you might remember the formulae based on which you had to solve problems. Consider the theories similar to the formulae. These theories are developed based on reality with a generalised approach to understand reality and then to solve any problem. Theories will give you a macroscopic understanding of the events and elements around you, which as a practitioner will help you to develop your strategies, be careful with implementation, analyse the result and predict the possibilities. Theories on social media audiences are going to help you to know these audiences better.

**7.4.1 Public Sphere**

Richard Butsch wrote in his article *Audiences and Publics, Media and Public Spheres* published in the *Handbook of Media Audiences* that “To define audiences as publics is to conceive them enacting their role of ‘good citizens.’” As outlined in the book *Structural Transformation of Public Sphere* written by Jürgen Habermas, the concept of a public has evolved from the town gathering in ancient Greece and Rome to the gatherings in public cafes and tea shops, to the mass audiences of mass media and lastly to the users of new media. In simple terms, the public sphere has been a platform where people participate in debate and discuss issues of general interest and in the process form public opinion. As seen in the historical development of audiences, the public sphere has changed from direct face-

to-face communication to indirect mediated communication. Mass media have long replaced the platform of direct communication. In the forms of letters to the editors, phone-in programmers, panel discussions – mass media have long served as a platform for public debate and public opinion formation. However, the concept of an ideal public sphere that serves democracy, good governance and citizens stands different from what the mass media present.

A public sphere ideally should be a platform accessible to all citizens, where they would be able to debate over issues of general interest without any external control. That will result in the formation of public opinion. Mass media do not provide access to all. Mass media lack enough space and time to accommodate public participation, besides the participation is heavily controlled by gatekeepers. The mass media platforms are not free of control, as well. More so in the corporate media set up, whether it is a public-owned platform or privately owned platform, the media merely carry an illusion that it is providing the public opinion. At the same time, it manufactures the opinion to a large extent for sectional interest. This hegemonic control of public opinion by corporate media houses has gradually overtaken the public sphere reducing the public to mere consumers.

The rise of the Internet and social media, however, has changed the scenario more in a positive way. With the gatekeepers getting obsolete in social media, the control over the content generated by public or social media users is control free to some extent. Social media audiences are debating freely on issues of general interest over social media. There are groups, pages, channels and hashtags on various social media platforms, where citizens are coming together to debate, discuss, share and at times, even act on various social issues. Access to social media platforms is unrestricted – in the sense that anybody can make a profile, and anybody can post anything they like. There is no discrimination based on gender, race, religion, caste, creed or nation. The Internet, with its limitless space to publish content, also does not have the restriction on publishing. Thus, there has been a virtual transformation of the public sphere, which for many was closest to the utopian concept of the public sphere that Habermas proposed.

Nevertheless, if we look closely, the digital inequality is a significant hurdle and does not permit all citizens to have access to this public platform. As discussed earlier, beyond literacy, computer literacy, and electricity, the issue with social media is access to high-speed Internet connectivity. Sadly in developing countries, Internet penetration is low, and there is a gap between the number of urban users and rural users. Internet speed also drastically decreases as one moves from urban areas to rural areas. Thus, accessibility is still a practical issue to be solved for developing social media as a public sphere. Also, the control over content is another debatable issue. With only a few companies ruling over the Internet and social media content, the ownership concentrated with a few are creating a new threat for content creation. Also, there have been instances where social media have been used as surveillance tools, as tools to control and sway public opinion and as a tool to control and influence purchasing choices. Instances, where Facebook confessed of selling users' data to Cambridge-Analytica.

#### **7.4.2 Media Effect**

Aristotle defined effect in his book Rhetoric as “which leads one's condition to become so transformed that his judgment is affected.” In this sense, media often transforms the audience as much as to influence their critical

analytical ability and their judgment making power. This has developed the concept of media effect. Not only immensely compelling media like cinema or soap operas are responsible for media effect, but also news media create their media effect by influencing people's judgment. Marshall McLuhan highlighted this fundamental role of the media for changing human behaviour. For him, the medium is the message. However, few postmodern theorists like Fredric Jameson argued that human effect has gradually faded, creating people with lesser emotional capability. On the contrary, Brian Massumi explained that the modern era is suffering from an abundance of effects. Massumi effect is a 'state of suspension' where passion takes over the rationality.

This development of the concept of media effect takes an exciting turn with the rise of digital media - the online media. B. N. Hansen in his essay *Affect as a medium, or the 'Digital-facial-image'* explained that effect provides an "interface between the domain of information (the digital) and embodied human experience." For Hansen the interactivity of the screen blurs the differentiation between the world outside it and the world inside it, creating an effect linking humans to digital in a continuous loop of feedback. Considering the power of effect, it makes the audience vulnerable to emotional manipulation. This is where social media becomes essential for creating media to effect in a changing environment.

Social media audiences are exposed to a wide variety of feeds emerging from diverse sources with different intentions and treatments. This offers an entirely new experience for the audiences considering the media effect created. Social media addiction is evidence in hand, which shows a state of suspension created for the audiences. The state of suspension is further raised with the mediated emotions controlling human lives. Social media effect develops a situation when the audience feels compelled to keep on checking for updates, to keep on checking for reactions on their posts, to be happy or sad or angry based on the reactions they receive on social media. There have been multiple instances where social media feeds have led the users to depression. Social media affects human relations to the extent to develop new friends as well as to lose old friends.

Furthermore, from a broader perspective, social media celebrities maintain a strong influence on their followers, more compelling than ever before. Political parties with their social media feed influence prospective voters. Social media effect has gained such momentum that political parties maintain social media teams whose work is to influence the audience through feeds and updates at various social media platforms. Due to its targeted, personalised, continuous exposure, social media effect becomes distinct from any other type of media effect.

### 7.4.3 Online Disinhibition Effect

Unlike the other two preceding theories, online disinhibition effect has originated from a study on online users only and discusses mainly the users' behaviour of online platforms, mainly social media. John Suler, Professor of Psychology from Rider University advanced the concept of online disinhibition effect with his study published in 2004. Online disinhibition effect shows the waning social inhibitions and norms that generally rule face-to-face communication in the online environment. According to Suler, there are six aspects of online communication –

- i) **Dissociative anonymity:** In social media, users control their identity, and their online persona. Many times they create an avatar, they

use photos of other individuals as their profile display picture; they even at times hide information about their age, gender or location. Thus, they maintain anonymity online, which is dissociated from their offline self.

- ii) **Invisibility:** The invisibility of others' presence in communication over social media provides a distinct communication environment for the participants. This influences the quality of communication on a large scale. People tend to speak in a certain way which they otherwise would not do if the message receivers were present in front of them controlling the conversation with physical reactions.
- iii) **Asynchronicity:** Online communication in most of the cases is asynchronous communication – that is to say that the receivers of a message can take time to read, understand and reply at their own convenient time. There is no compulsion for the feedback or response to be immediate or spontaneous. That results in much carefully fabricated messages, lack of spontaneity and thus deliberation in developing online identity.
- iv) **Solipsistic introjection:** Social media users, most of the time, communicate among themselves based on text messages. Based on the textual language, the communicators develop an image of each other – they imagine the facial expression – at times with the help of emoticons, they imagine the voice and the way the person speaks. This results in the development of the imaginary persona of each other, based on the texts and based on the expectation of the communicators.
- v) **Dissociative imagination:** Interestingly, the preceding case of imaginary development of communicators' identity based on the textual conversation creates a different communicative dimension which might not be true to the real persons involved. Many times it so happens that the communicators when they meet in person, do not find each other as they have imagined resulting in discontinuation of the communication. This difference between the real person and imaginative person creates dissociation between the real world and the imaginary world. This leads to waning gravity of communication and social relations.
- vi) **Minimisation of status and authority:** When communicating online, the communicators are not bound by their age, gender, religion, race, caste or physical appearance. The most important thing that matters in online communication is the content and treatment of the message. Thus power relation based on other aspects like race, gender or physical appearance becomes less important in an online communicative environment. This leads to the free flow of communication without much concern to the power play and inhibitions associated with it.

Even as there are positive sides of online disinhibition, there are also negative sides that comprise cyberbullying, trolling and many others.

**Activity – 3**

Discuss with social media users on what they think about social media usage has affected them. Summarise, categorise and list down different types of social media effect on audiences.



**Check Your Progress: 3**

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

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

1. What do you understand about the virtual transformation of the public sphere?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

2. How did Aristotle define the concept of effect?

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 .....  
 .....

3. State four aspects of the online disinhibition effect.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**7.5 MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE**

Now that we have discussed the foundation to understand the social media audience, let us take a look how we can communicate with these audiences, what are the best ways to connect with them, when and how to connect with them. Many business organisations, political parties and various other interest groups are exploiting the medium and opportunity at its best to convey their messages and attain their objectives. It is essential to be aware of such actions before taking any decision and to know how to use the same medium for the betterment of society. Marketing through social media is different from marketing through other media, as this includes a lot of social media-specific tools and strategies.

**7.5.1 Audience Segmentation**

We have already seen that there are different types of social media audiences. However, audience segmentation is done for increasing business intelligence, for the ease of marketing and public relations and to be able to take the right decision for the best interest of any organisation. Audience segmentation is also a part of social media analytics which gathers, arranges, analyses and presents the social media data for more informed publicity or marketing decisions. There are multiple ways of audience segmentation. While a few of the segmentations are the same as that of the other media, some are distinct to social media only. Audience segmentation for social media is generally done based on the following:

- i) **Type of account:** For example, whether it is personal, professional or organisational account.
- ii) **Location:** Depending on the location of the user, the message can be targeted with customised geo-location based services or products.
- iii) **Gender:** Same as the location, the message can be targeted based on the gender of the user, shaping the content of the message accordingly.
- iv) **Age:** While most of the social media users are young adults, yet there are some people from older generations in social media as well. Depending on the age of the user, the message can be customised.

- v) **Social status:** The social status of the users can be segmented based on, for example, their economic status, their cultural status, their lifestyle choices etc. All this information becomes important in knowing what kind of product or service can be offered to a particular user.
- vi) **Relationship status:** Depending on whether the user has a family or not, can also be useful in offering a particular service or product. For example, a married woman with children can be targeted with a message for buying bigger cars, while a single working woman can be targeted with a message for buying smaller cars.
- vii) **Job profile:** Depending on the type of job the user is associated with, messages can be customised. The job profile may include working hours, type of responsibilities, average monthly income etc.
- viii) **Time spent on social media:** This and the following few social media-specific categories are also important for audience segmentation. One can thus identify the heavy user, the moderate user and light user and shape the message accordingly.
- ix) **Social media platform used:** Nowadays, a user is using more than one social media platform. Depending on the various types of platforms used, social media audiences can be categorised in such a way to get information about their interest and requirement.
- x) **Time of the day when social media are used:** Depending on the time of the day, the user generally uses social media, the audience can be segmented. The messages can be sent during that time of the day when a particular user is generally online.
- xi) **Type of activity done in social media:** This can be whether the user is passive or active. This can also be whether the user likes or comments, or both. This can further be whether the user shares content or posts original content or does both. This gives an idea of the user's potential to influence others.
- xii) **The intensity of activity done in social media:** This is not only how much time the users spend online, but also how much activity they are and in what way. For example how often are they posting something, how often do they like something, how often are they commenting, how often are they logging in etc. This gives an idea of how useful and effective the particular medium would be for communicating with the particular user.
- xiii) **Social network pattern:** This is based on the kind of people the users are connected with. For example, the network pattern for a particular user can be young college students, or for another user can be doctors.
- xiv) **The number of followers:** This is simply the number of people the user is connected within a particular social media platform.
- xv) **Users' behaviour:** This is basically what the user is posting about in social media. The segmentation is generally done based on a few keywords and searching the users' posts to see whether those keywords are there.
- xvi) **Users' interest:** This comprises the interest area of the user – that is to say, what they generally like, what type of groups are they part of, what or whom they are following. This can be segmented in hierarchical categories. For example, someone may like arts, under the arts it might be paintings, under the paintings, it might be modern paintings etc.

Above are the few categories based on which social media audience segmentation can be done, however, the list is not exhaustive. Depending on the need, objective and utility of the product, further segmentation can be done as required. Above are a few basic types based on an article titled *Audience Segmentation in Social Media* by Verena Henrich and Alexander Lang. There is much social media analytics software which can pull data from social media as specified and develop a database with the above information or more as required. Many social media accounts include free analytics services comprising necessary information for example if you are using a blog, in your blog's analytics section you can find how many people the audience is visiting your blog, how often they are visiting, from which area of the world they are visiting etc.

### 7.5.2 Marketing Tools

As social media marketing is booming, so is the variety of available marketing tools. Beyond the traditional online advertising, there is a surge of various applications, services and software that are useful for targeted social media marketing. To get an idea, the following five popular tools that serve various purposes of social media marketing:-

- i) **Buffer:** Buffer enables one to schedule posts on various social media platforms at once based on the day of the week, time of the day, controlling the frequency of the posts. It also helps to generate feedback on the posts, and evaluating its effectiveness. Similar to Buffer is Hootsuite, which has a free version and relatively cost-effective version for almost the same purpose.
- ii) **Google Analytics:** Google Analytics offers a free version as well as paid one with much more detailed social media analytics reports. The service generates detailed reports on the audience traffic.
- iii) **BuzzSumo:** BuzzSumo is a content aggregator and social listening service which gathers social media content on a specified topic or keyword. BuzzSumo offers a breakdown of most trending posts on specified keywords or topics along with listing the significant influencers who are sharing that content online. Feedly, Tagboard are other similar services available online.
- iv) **Sprout Social:** Sprout Social is a compact package of social media marketing needs, serving various purposes through one single application. Like Buffer and Hootsuite, it offers one to schedule messages for posting on various social media platforms. It also offers detailed social media analytics like Google Analytics. Moreover, like BuzzSumo, Tagboard offers a social listening service to understand the usage of social media platforms.
- v) **Social Mention:** Similar to social listening services, SocialMention offers one to track and measure what social media users are talking about a company, a service or a product. This free service offers the analysed data based on four categories of strength, sentiment, passion and reach.

Apart from these five, there are other multiple social media marketing tools designed for specific purposes. For example, Facebook Power Editors used for marketing, particularly on Facebook, Tailwind for Pinterest and Instagram, Tweepi for Twitter and so on. Then there is Bitly which one can use to shorten a long URL that makes it easier to be shared as social media feed. So the number of tools available is numerous which one should explore further online as per one's requirement.

### 7.5.3 Marketing Strategies

Social media marketing is unavoidable at present for any successful business or communication planning. It is not only that a large section of prospective buyers is social media users, but also a large section of the socially aware and active population is also on social media. Thus social media not only becomes a highly cost-effective way of promoting one's brand, but it is also a highly effective medium to spread social awareness. There are various marketing strategies already existing for various requirements. Here we will concentrate on strategies only applicable for social media marketing. These are not general strategies applicable to any media marketing planning. Among various social media marketing strategies, the following are a few important ones –

- Identify the goals to be achieved through social media marketing.
- Research social media platforms.
- Research social media audience.
- Identify social media demographics and target audiences.
- Research social media competition.
- Set social media marketing metrics like reach, engagement, clicks, sentiment analysis etc.
- Create social media accounts and be active.
- Develop a brand image through the same logo, colour sequence as display picture over various social media platforms.
- Generate social media hashtags, social media groups and pages.
- Identify the type of content most popular with the target audience and generate such content.
- Identify the time of the day target audiences are mostly online and schedule messages during that time.
- Do not post very frequently; space out the posts keeping in mind the audience's requirement.
- Tag related influencers in the post.
- Share useful content, and only quality content persists in social media.
- Try to avoid directly selling your products or services, instead inform, educate, collaborate and contribute.
- Use social bookmarking sites.
- Be very just and ethical in your posts and comments.
- Add your URL with the comments or posts for more information for the audiences.
- Develop and create good content over social media – for example, create entertaining YouTube videos, interesting Podcasts, useful blogs etc.
- In crises, do not hesitate to apologise and take necessary steps.

#### Activity – 4

Develop a social media marketing plan for a product of your choice.



**Check Your Progress: 4**

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

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

1. State four types of social media audience segmentation categories.

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 .....

2. What is the usage of Sprout Social?

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 .....  
 .....

3. Mention four strategies for social media marketing.

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**7.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this Unit, we have discussed different aspects of the social media audience. First and foremost, we have seen how social media audiences have evolved. In this context, we have also seen how the chronological approach of history has been replaced with the genealogical approach, focusing more on the evolution of interactions between different social institutions and elements. Then we have discussed how different elements of society have affected the changing concept of audiences. Along with it we also came to know of ongoing debate with the term *social media audiences*, which is being replaced by other terms as *prosumers* or *producers*.

After understanding the foundation of the concept of audience, we have delved deeper into the concept of social media audience. We have seen how social media audiences are different from audiences otherwise. We have discussed distinct characteristics of social media audiences, along with exploring different types of audience based on diverse attributes. We also came to know of vital issues and concerns surrounding the social media audience from social, political, economic and cultural perspectives.

We then discussed important theoretical aspects associated with social media audiences. We explored the concept of the public sphere as developed by Habermas and how there has been a virtual transformation of the public sphere. We have discussed how the concept of effect has transformed from ancient to recent times and how social media can manipulate human emotions to sway in favour of a particular group or individual. At a micro-level, we have discussed the online disinhibition effect and seen how social media trolling, cyberbullying is resulting from this effect.

Along with the theoretical dimensions, we have also explored the practical applications of different social media marketing strategies. We have seen how social media marketing is different from other forms of marketing. We learnt various ways social media audiences can be categorised for better application of marketing strategies. We have also explored interesting online tools useful for social media marketing.

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## 7.7 KEYWORDS

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**Hashtag Activism:** It is a kind of activism done over social media to spread awareness by using and re-using the same catchy hashtag and sharing with all. It is an act in social media to support a cause by like, share, comment or post using a particular hashtag.

**Produser:** They are the new age social media audiences who are at once producing content for the social media and using the contents available in social media.

**Social Media Marketing:** Social media marketing is traditional marketing, but only through social media platforms, for social media audiences, through online marketing tools and strategies.

**Web 2.0:** It is a phase of the development of world wide web which emphasises collaborative, sharing, participatory, open network, culture and communication.

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## 7.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## 7.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress: 1

1. Alvin Toffler
2. producer, user

### Check Your Progress: 2

1. Four characteristics of social media audiences are:

- i) Social media audiences are more heterogeneous in comparison to any other audiences.
  - ii) The social media audiences enjoy high connectivity between individuals, rather than between communities.
  - iii) As the social media audiences are fragmented, alienated and scattered, the inclusiveness of relations are rather loose.
  - iv) The audiences of social media use mediated communication extensively, with a gradual decrease in face-to-face communication.
2. Difference between passive audience and active users is mainly that passive audiences of social media are the ones who have just created their profile or account in social media, but do not use it; on the other hand, active users of social media are the ones who not only have an account, but they are involved in their social media activities at its best by liking, posting, sharing, commenting, talking about it offline and using the knowledge otherwise in their lives.
  3. Four types of social media audiences are:
    - i) Passive audience
    - ii) Active audience
    - iii) Passive users
    - iv) Active users
  4. Four significant issues affecting social media audiences:
    - i) Dominance of a section of society and world over social media
    - ii) Digital divide
    - iii) Corporate take-over of social media
    - iv) Vulnerable audiences lacking media literacy

### Check Your Progress: 3

1. Virtual transformation of the public sphere means the transformation of the public sphere to online media. Habermas explained in his article, Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere that the space for public discussion, debate and opinion formation has seen a transformation from ancient agora to the coffee house to mass media. After the emergence of the Internet and social media, the public sphere has now become virtual.
2. Aristotle explained the effect in his book Rhetoric as “which leads one’s condition to become so transformed that his judgment is affected.” Media effect leads media audiences to a condition that suspends their rational thinking and critical judgment. Social media also is responsible for such effect that can suspend heavy users’ normal lifestyle.
3. The four aspects of the online disinhibition effect are:
  - i) Dissociative anonymity
  - ii) Invisibility
  - iii) Asynchronicity
  - iv) Solipsistic introjection

**Check Your Progress: 4**

1. The four types of social media audience segmentations are:
  - i) Based on the time of the day when social media are used
  - ii) Based on social network pattern
  - iii) Based on social media users' behaviour
  - iv) Based on social media users' interest
2. Sprout Social is a compact package of social media marketing needs, serving various purposes of message scheduling, social media analytics and social listening through one single application.
3. Four strategies for social media marketing are:
  - i) Develop brand image through the same logo, colour sequence as display picture over various social media platforms
  - ii) Identify the time of the day target audiences are mostly online and schedule messages during that time
  - iii) Tag related influencers in the post
  - iv) Try to avoid directly selling your products or services, instead inform, educate, collaborate and contribute