# UNIT - 1 : THE MASS MEDIA

## UNIT STRUCTURE


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## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Name the different mass media
- Describe the characteristics of the different mass media
- Explain the terms ‘audience’, ‘reach’ and ‘impact’
- Illustrate the role of mass media in the society

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

By now you must have understood that Mass Communication is the process of communicating with the masses, which needs different media or tools for carrying out this task. These media which act as the carrier of the Mass Communication messages to the people are known as the mass media.

Mass media is an essential element in achieving the goals of Mass Communication. Therefore, in the first unit of course – III of post graduation programmes of mass communication, we will discuss the various aspects of mass media in the light of its importance in the life of human beings as the bridge between the masses and mass communicators.

## 1.3 MEDIA OF MASS COMMUNICATION

In communication, media (singular medium) are the storage and transmission channels or tools used to store and deliver information or data.

As carriers of messages of Mass Communication, mass media are very powerful instruments for informing the people or masses about virtually anything on the earth. The various types of mass media possess different characteristics, advantages, disadvantages etc. And most of the time, it is important to note that whenever a media publicity campaign has to be taken up in any sector or for any product, it will be a wiser idea to have a media mix of all the available media in the society rather than depending upon only a few selected ones. This is because due to technical and other characteristics, every mass medium has its unique aspects which also determine what kind of audience or readership it will attract.

Mass media can also be classified into several categories as given below-
**Print Media** — Newspapers, journals / magazines / books
**Electronic Media / Audio-Visual Media** — Television / Radio / Films, **New media** — Internet, Internet Radio, Blogs.

As is obvious from the above description that the category of Print Media includes the mass media of printed words. On the other hand Electronic Media or Audio-Visual Media has under its jurisdiction TV, Radio, films etc. These are the traditional forms of mass media.

Nowadays, as the Internet is gaining an ever-increasing popularity among the masses all over the world, it is being included in the category of New Media. In this category, the system of **Blogs** is also becoming highly significant as they are being increasingly accepted as a medium of expression for mass use.

However, it is still being debated by the experts' circle in mass media whether the internet and blogs can be declared as media of Mass Communication and an unanimous agreement is yet to be arrived at.

It is true that when a message is uploaded into the internet through an e mail address or a blog, it becomes accessible to innumerable people anywhere in the world. But it

lacks the specific characteristic of Mass Communication that the messages or information have to be available at the same instant to anyone interested in receiving it. This is because all the people that the messages are aimed at, may not access it at the same time.

We all know that when we listen to or see something it leaves a much better influence on our minds than when we just read the same thing. We can say that credibility as well as influence increases in an ascending order from print to radio and TV. In other words, reading, listening and listening-viewing (combined), in this order, have influences over us.

This happens because when sound and visuals are combined together, its influence and effect on human beings are greater than that from print media.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - A**

1. What is media of Mass Communication?

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2. What are the categories into which mass media can be classified?

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## 1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF DIFFERENT MASS MEDIA

In the last section you have learnt about the different mass media. Let us now glance over the different characteristics of the mass media.

**Print Media:**

1. Being a portable medium people can take it along to read it at leisure time,
2. Lot of space available for covering many news items,
3. The professional communicators involved with 'the read only medium' must be able to create the desired impact on the masses by using the appeal of written languages,
4. It has to be physically delivered to the peoples' houses by someone in person, but is a time-consuming process,

5. A person must be literate to read a newspaper,
6. Delivering it may be difficult at some places due to geographical constraints,
7. It is the oldest form of mass media, and it has already acquired a special status in the minds of the masses in spite of the growing popularity of TV and Radio,
8. It provides enough scope and space for in-depth analysis of various current events and detailed description of incidents, events etc.,
9. Scope for manipulation of news items is high in this medium,

**Radio:**

1. This old and widely-used technological communication device for disseminating information is a flexible, diversified and easily-accessible medium,
2. As it is an electronic medium, its messages need not be carried physically to the readers. If a person possesses a radio receiver set, he or she can receive the programmes anywhere under the coverage area of that particular radio centre,
3. One need not be literate to listen to radio programmes,
4. It being an audio medium the professional communicators involved in it must be able to create an influence on the listeners by the modulation of one's voice only,
5. As it is a portable medium one can carry a receiver set anywhere and listen to its programmes whenever one feels like,
6. It is a cheap medium which can be enjoyed by anyone irrespective of being rich or poor, literate or illiterate. Therefore, the Radio enjoys the reputation of being truly the 'medium of the masses',
7. One can listen to programmes only at scheduled times,
8. It is also termed as a 'sightless' medium because the communicator remains invisible to the audience,
9. Many communication experts and practitioners firmly believe that it is primarily a rural medium,
10. Scope for manipulation of information is somewhat less than in print medium,

**Television:**

1. The retention rate of messages among the masses is quite high in Television due to its visual impact,
2. Being an audio-visual medium its impact on the masses is the highest amongst all the mass media,
3. Being a bulky instrument it is not a portable one,
4. Programmes can be enjoyed only at scheduled breaks of time,
5. Scope for manipulation of information is the least in this medium as visuals constitute a considerable part of its programme contents,

6. Like Radio, physical delivery of messages is not necessary which is a major convenience point,

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - B**

1. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of Radio, Television and newspapers as mass media.

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## 1.5 AUDIENCE, REACH AND ACCESS

When we are talking about media, one term which we cannot avoid is 'audience'. Audience here means the total number of persons, who form the class of readership of a newspaper, listenership of a radio programme, viewership of audio-visual programmes etc.

Now, depending upon several factors, the size of audience of a particular mass media and its types may differ widely. Such as – Doordarshan India (DDI) and All India Radio (AIR) have an almost exhaustive terrestrial network coverage of the whole country including even some areas of the neighbouring countries. So, the entire population of the country can be termed as the audience of these two organizations. Similarly, if a newspaper or a magazine is available in most of the places in a state or a country then also the whole population is normally termed as its audience.

As against this overall audience, in a specific Mass Communication vehicle or media also, particular programmes, columns, events, issues do have their own individual audiences; for example – in TV or radio or newspapers, different columns, different serials, different news bulletins, talk shows etc. may have their own fan following which can be called its individual audience.

Many a time you will also come across the term Target Audience which means nothing but the segment of audiences who are specifically targeted by a company for selling something. For a company selling any product, there are more chances of

being successful if it can identify and pinpoint the audiences in an exact manner so that all efforts in advertising can be directed at them.

Further, the different types of products from the same group of companies will have different target audiences as the products are quite dissimilar to each other even though they are produced by the same company or group of companies.

Audiences, in other words, are the customers of those products. As ‘customer is god’ in the business world, companies try their level best to make themselves as much popular as possible. Because more popularity or circulation translates into more people receiving the advertising messages and this is expected to boost sales of that product.

**Audience as ‘consumers’**

This is a new concept gaining ground over the last few decades which considers mass media instruments like TV / Radio / Newspaper contents as brands and audiences as the consumers of these services. So, packaging has become important due to the intense competition for attracting more and more audiences.

Today, as mass media organizations are driven by the urge to make maximum profits they seem to be governed by extremely market-friendly programmes and consider the audiences as mere ‘consumers’ of media contents. And just as there is immense cut-throat competition among various products or services for gaining customers’ attention, the same is the case with media contents also.

Quite often advertisers make a choice between mass advertising and targeted advertising. Now, an advertisement in a local general commodities shop or a departmental store is aimed at the overall customer base of the area and so it is called mass advertising. On the other hand, a high profile motor vehicle or a luxury jewellery product range would aim only at a specific customer base identifying the places which such potential customers normally visit.

Now, mass media and the audiences form the two integral sides of the same coin. The very existence of media would be threatened if the other did not exist but not vice versa. Ideally, the relationship between mass media and its audiences should be very cordial and constructive.

This is because the media on its part should try its level best to inculcate a healthy, progressive and thought-provoking attitude in the audiences so that the **edutainment** function of media can be properly carried out.
Mass media is an 'informal open university' which, in addition to the profit-making goal, has to necessarily shoulder the responsibility of educating the masses through entertainment, agenda-setting and showing the right path at times of crisis.

**Reach and Access**

These two terms are very important constituents of the Mass Communication process and a clear appreciation of them will help one understand the process in a better manner.

Now, Reach in Mass Communication terms means whether a particular mass medium is available to the masses at a certain place or not. For example, I stay at Namrup, a town in Dibrugarh district of upper Assam. Reach in this context will mean whether various Cable / satellite TV / Radio channels or newspapers and journals actually are available there or not. If they are available that means the place has Reach to those media. And if I possess the means for availing them I should be able to watch or read them without any hitch at all.

Again, let us say that the signals (messages / programmes) of All India Radio (AIR) Dibrugarh are not available in Guwahati and the same for AIR Guwahati in Dibrugarh. This means that AIR Guwahati does not have Reach for Dibrugarh and vice versa.

On the other hand, Access means whether a person has the necessary means to avail the services of mass media vehicles like TV channels, newspapers if they are available at that place. For example, if I do not possess a TV / Radio receiver set or can not afford to buy a newspaper or a journal that means despite having Reach of those media I personally do not have Access to them.

This inability to access the mass media products / software may be due to several factors including financial problems, technical reasons for which a particular TV channel or a newspaper might not be available or 'reachable' at a particular area / spot of a place even though in general the larger area might have its availability.
Of course, there are examples of technical deficiencies due to which many times we may find that a mass media does not enjoy Reach in a certain area even within its general Reach area. Let us take the example of mobile phones to illustrate this point.

That is – we all know that Guwahati enjoys the Reach of several mobile phone service providers. However, at times we find that some pockets in the city show a lot of difficulty in accessing those signals and networks. This is due to technical problems.

Another important aspect in this connection is that even though we might be enjoying adequate Reach of some mass media yet due to our personal preferences, interests and personality we may not access all of them and choose only one or a few of the available ones. This is because we like to expose ourselves only to those things which we like or with which we are familiar, and none otherwise. We have discussed in detail this phenomenon in the initial part of this paper.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - C**

1. What do you mean by the term audience?

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2. Define the terms:
    a. Reach
    b. Access

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## 1.6 ROLE OF MASS MEDIA

### 1.6.1 Creating Public Opinion

By now you must have realized that mass media is very a powerful instrument for informing people at any level of the society about anything we would like to. Can any other media reach such innumerable masses at the same instant or within a very short time? The answer would be a certain 'No'.

Further, media also influences our minds to a great extent by shaping our attitude, personality and the overall lifestyle. Hence, whenever there is a need

for creating public opinion about any specific issue, mass media is the most effective and important tool to do so.

For example – in recent times, the new style of national level talents shows like the Indian Idol followed by others have become a craze amongst the people. Things have gone to the extent of instilling even regional or state-level sentiments for voting for the contestants in the competition. All of you know yourself how much publicity and public opinion these have developed during those days which even went on to decide who will win and who will not win.

In the same way, in case of the digging up of the Ram Setu at Rameswaram for facilitating better sea transport had to be abandoned due to widespread public protests. These public protests were also orchestrated by the media.

This is done in a careful manner to give an impression that the opinions and reactions from the masses are spontaneous and not projected by the media. But, in reality, media is responsible to a high extent for stoking up these issues and then suggesting the course of action to be taken up by the people.

Even though media is not supposed to tell people what stand or side is to be taken in important issues at discussion, it gives adequate amount of hints to the people indirectly dictating which side should be taken and which not.

Let us talk about another example. You must be familiar with the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act or the IM(DT) Act which was declared null and void by the Supreme Court when its validity was challenged in the court.

Now, quite naturally, there might always be different opinions about the validity of the Act – someone may support it or oppose it. Now, the role of mass media is to present both the diverging views about the Act to the readers / people and let them form their own opinions.

On the other hand media as an integral part of the society has a definite responsibility to the nation or society and thus must provide ‘leadership’ through opinions to the masses who might not be educated or wise enough to know what to do under certain critical situations.

During our freedom struggle, media – newspapers – played a leading role in informing the people as well as making them aware about the bad effects of the colonial rule and encouraged them to oppose it tooth and nail.

### 1.6.2 Agenda-setting role

We have earlier mentioned that our literacy rate is not very impressive and even for the literate people a majority of them are not much concerned about different issues of our society, whether it is of utmost importance or not.

But, everyday we are being confronted by hundreds of important issues with a potential to cause big damage to our society. And if the society in which we live is disturbed by them, definitely we will also be affected by it.

Now, the question is - out of so many issues and events taking place, trying to catch our attention, which of them should be given priority and which of them need not be given attention.

Right here mass media has a great role to play by preparing an agenda to be put in front of the people for acting on significant issues.

For example, sometime back, during the time when the Sony TV Indian Idol programme was at its peak, an important incident took place in Assam in which one question paper of the HSLC examination was leaked before the examinations. Definitely there was some amount of protests at that time about it. But as the mass media was too busy featuring the Indian Idol contest, adequate emphasis was not put upon this issue whereas this was a more important issue than the Sony TV contest. This is because it concerns the lives of lakhs of our future citizens. Media should not discriminate news and information but the scale of coverage should be adequate enough for making people properly aware about a certain issue so that they can take a stand – whether to support it or oppose it.

It is natural that people look upon mass media for leadership and opinions at times of crisis. This is because most of the times we – the mass people – do not have enough access to sources of information which the media possess. And that is why they are in a much more advantageous position to form a

balanced opinion on those issues and can put them before the people for creating a public opinion.

So, it is the duty of the media to decide whether cricket matches between India and other countries should get more priority than question paper leakage or whether panchayat elections will get better coverage than hundreds of self-help groups (SHGs) doing a commendable service at the grassroots level of the society. This activity reflects the maturity of mass media in any society.

| | **Radio** | **Television** | **Newspaper** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Being a portable medium it is convenient | It is not a portable medium | Being a portable medium it is also convenient |
| 2. | One has to listen to the programmes at the pre-scheduled time slots; if not, then the programme is missed by the listener | One has to watch the programmes at the pre-scheduled time slots; if not, then the programme is missed by the viewer. However, popular programmes are usually retelecast | Can be read and referred to, anywhere, anytime, no worry for missing news items, |
| 3. | As the messages are transmitted through air, if a person possesses a radio set it is very convenient and can listen to programmes at the same instant all over the world | In case of TV one can watch the programmes anywhere in the world at the same instant, provided that a TV set is available in that place | As it has to be delivered physically, it is a time consuming process, |
| 4. | In case of emergency situations, it can continuously provide updated information every hour or half hourly basis | In case of emergency situations, it can also continuously provide updated information every hour or half hourly basis | There is a problem of time because usually there is a time gap of 24 hours or at least 12 hours between publication of two editions of a newspaper |
| 5. | Radio has a natural advantage as | TV has the advantage of both spoken words | Written words have a limited amount of |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | spoken words are much more effective and influential to people than written words | and visuals making it much more effective and influential to people than only spoken words | expression capability compared to spoken words |

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - D

1. What are the two main roles of mass media?

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2. How do mass media set the agenda for the people?

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### ACTIVITY - A

1. Read two daily newspapers - one in English and one in your mother tongue – regularly everyday for 30 days at a stretch. Now classify the main news items and other features into the different functions of Mass Communication described above. Which function has the most number of entries?
2. Carry out the same exercise for two TV channels or radio channels. Try to take Doordarshan and a cable TV channel for the purpose.
3. Now, out of the findings in both the exercises, make a comparative study of the volume of functions performed by the electronic media and the print media.

## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

1. The media which act as the carriers of the Mass Communication messages to the people are known as the mass media.

2. Mass media can be classified into several categories: **Print Media** — Newspapers, journals / magazines / books
   **Electronic Media / Audio-Visual Media** — Television / Radio / Films,
   **New media** — Internet, Internet Radio, Blogs.

3. Every mass media has its unique aspects which also determine what kind of audiences or readership it will attract.

4. Audiences are the consumers of different programmes or news items of mass media.

5. More audience means more popularity of that specific media organization or a specific product which in the end means more revenue from advertisers.

6. Control of the mass media is in the hands of the audiences / readers. They may switch it off if they don't like the programme or decide not to read a particular newspaper/ news item. So, every mass media organization tries its best to attract the maximum number of people to itself by all possible means.

7. Reach in Mass Communication terms means whether a particular mass medium is available to the masses at a certain place or not.

8. Access means whether a person has the necessary means to avail the services of mass media vehicles like TV channels, newspapers if they are available at that place.

9. Media is a highly potent and effective weapon for creating public opinion on any important issue of the society.

10. It is the duty of media to prepare agenda of issues to be taken up and deliberated by the people in the society, especially at times of crisis.

## 1.8 FURTHER READINGS


- **Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication** — *VB Agarwal & VS Gupta, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi*

- **Mass Communication in India** — *KJ Kumar, Jaico Books, Mumbai*
- **Understanding Human Communication** — *Ronald B Adler & George Rodman, Harcourt Brace College publishers*
- **Mass Communication in India**, *JV Vilanilam, Sage Publications, New Delhi*
- **Mass Communication, Theory and Practice**, *Uma Narula, Harchand Publication, New Delhi*


## 1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - A**

1) Media of Mass Communication or Mass Media are the vehicle or carriers of the messages of Mass Communication as it carries the messages to the people from the main communicator. While Mass Communication is the process of communicating with innumerable people, mass media implies the instruments through which those messages move around.
2) The categories into which Mass Communication can be classified are – Print Media, Electronic Media and New Media.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - B**

1) Comparison between radio and newspaper

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - C**

1) Audience means the total number of persons who form the class of readership of a newspaper, listenership of a radio programme, viewership of audio-visual programmes etc.

2) **a. Reach:** Reach means the availability of a specific mass media in any locality. So, when we utter this term we mean whether that media is available in that area or not. For example – if we say that XYZ Cable TV has Reach in Guwahati it implies that the signals of this channel are available in Guwahati and if anybody wants, he or she can catch them through their TV or Radio (in case of Radio channels).

**b. Access:** Access means whether the people or the readers / audiences can watch or see those programmes / read the news at their homes if they possess the means to do so – own TV or Radio sets for accessing them/ afford newspapers.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - D**

1. The two main roles of mass media are – Creating Public Opinion and Agenda Setting.

2. If you think deeply, you will observe that people normally learn or pick up a lot of things from mass media, whether knowingly or unknowingly at any moment of time. Besides, it is a well-known fact that media influences us to a very high extent. So, media sets the agenda for discussion among the people by taking up a certain issue. You may remember that some time back, mass media decided to focus on a few singers from the North-Eastern region in a national level singing contest. But at the same time, a question paper was leaked in the matriculation examination in Assam. But the latter incident never received the same kind of treatment like the singers managed to get. In other words, this means that media wanted the people to think or discuss more about the signing contest than the question paper leakage. Hence, we find that most of the time it is the media which decides what issues we should think about and what issues we need not think about. Even though many a time, media's agenda-setting decisions may not conform to our own decisions, yet we have to go by it because this is what the majority ask for.

   Thus, we can say that media sets the agenda by consciously promoting certain issues, events at the cost of others. This depends upon quite a few factors including the interests, principles and goals of the individual media organizations, the editorial people in authoritative positions in the media etc.

## 1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by the term mass media? What are its characteristics? How do they differ from Mass Communication?

2. What are the different types of mass media? Which one of them is the most suitable for communicating with the rural and underdeveloped areas of the country and why.

3. How would you define audience? Why is it important in connection with Mass Communication?

4. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of the different mass media vehicles. Which of these is your favourite and why?