UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning objectives
1.2 Introduction
1.3 Characteristics and features of audio-visual media
1.4 Impact and reach of audio-visual media
1.5 Audio media vs. audio-visual media
1.6 Let us Sum up
1.7 Answers to check your progress
1.8 Further reading
1.9 Possible questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- note the specific characteristics of the television medium
- explain the impact and reach of television
- describe the potential of TV as a mass medium

1.2 INTRODUCTION

By now, you must be familiar with the term Mass Communication. The channels required for Mass Communication are known as mass media. Mass media can be broadly divided into print media and electronic media. Conventional electronic media can be broadly segmented into the twin categories of radio and television.

Television means an electronic system of transmitting transient images of fixed or moving objects together with sounds over a wire or through space by apparatus that converts light and sound into electrical waves and reconverts them into visible light rays and audible sound. It is an audio-visual medium. Radio is a medium which you can only hear, while television is a medium which you can hear as well as see. That is why; radio is called an audio medium while television is known an audio-visual medium.

In this unit you will become familiar with the audio-visual medium, that is, television. You will understand the basic difference in characteristics between radio and television. You will also get an idea about the impact and reach of television in our country. We hope, after going through this unit, you will have a clear concept of the television medium and how it works. So let us concentrate on the sections given below.

1.3 CHARACTERISTICS AND FEATURES OF AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

The term audio-visual may refer to works with both sound and visual component, the production of or use of such works, or equipment involved in producing such works.

Film and television are examples of audiovisual medium. Television is an audio-visual medium because it comprises the elements of sound and images. It adds sight, movement and, usually, colour also.

Television has had a profound impact on the people because of the combination of sound and images in it to create a sense of reality that the audience can identify with and relate to.

Although every medium has some strengths and weaknesses, much more depends on how the media is used. Television constitutes an important medium widely used to disseminate information to its viewers. It has the unique feature of combining audio and visual technology, and is therefore considered more effective than audio media. It serves multiple purposes of entertainment, information and education.

Television possesses some distinguishing characteristics. Let us discuss a few:

1. Television is an audio-visual medium. It favours simultaneity of visual and auditory images. Viewers can not only hear what someone is saying but also see what is going on.
2. It is said that one picture is equal to a thousand words. You can then very well imagine the potential of pictures that can move! The elements of sound, colour and motion, lend television more credibility than other mass media.

3. Television has large, diversified, heterogeneous and anonymous viewers. People belonging to diverse backgrounds, age groups, culture, religion etc can watch television. Therefore, it is not possible to measure the number of viewers of a particular programme at a particular time in a specific channel. And hence viewers are considered to be anonymous.
4. Television needs electricity to be functional. It can also be operated with batteries. Anyway it involves some expenses to run. That is why it is beyond the reach of many people living in the underdeveloped or developing countries. Compared to other media like newspaper and radio, television is an expensive medium.
5. Television can be accessed by anyone. One need not be a literate person in order to watch television.
6. Television sets are normally bulky and, therefore, not portable like radio and newspapers.
7. Television is a glamorous medium. Visuals, colour, sound and motion make it a glamorous means of communication that entertain people.
8. Television has the potential to show viewers events and happenings in real time. We have to wait for a day to read the news in a newspaper, but television has the ability to give us what we call 'live' news.
9. Television is called a 'lean back' medium because unlike newspapers or the internet, we need not concentrate deeply when we watch television.
10. Television is a potent tool of disseminating information. Not just through news and current affairs, but also through various other formats of television programming, we get to know about events, people and places that we otherwise would never have known about.
11. Television provides entertainment to its viewers. People can relax after a hard day's work by watching television.



ACTIVITY 1.1

1. Make a list of all the features of the Television which you think are its merits and demerits. Justify your list with appropriate examples.

.....

.....

.....

2. Visit a slum area and find out how many people there watch television and where.

.....

.....

.....

1.4 IMPACT AND REACH OF AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

Impact of Television:

This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it is nothing but wires and lights in a box. — Edward R. Murrow

You may have heard several critics blaming television for everything from obesity to the increase in murder rate. Well, while TV is easy to criticise, and much of the criticism is justified, we also need to keep in mind that television benefits society in many ways.

In this section we'll look at the effects — both good and bad — of this pervasive medium. We will examine the social impact of television from the standpoint of seven major criticisms. When we get through presenting all seven criticisms we'll look at some of the positive effects of television.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION

1. Television Debases the arts and audience's tastes

It is seen that television channels often gives audiences not what is in their best interests but what they are most interested in. What audiences actually need is good current events programming, documentaries, in-depth news, 'good' music, and meaningful dramatic productions so that they can develop a greater understanding of the world events and a greater appreciation for the arts. This, critics say, is not what television gives us. Television is bombarding us with all kinds of celebrity gossip, sports and entertainment news that is not actually necessary for us.

2. **Television Undermines moral standards**

Television is one of the main reasons, why, say critics, our value system is getting distorted. Chief among the moral concerns, of course, are casual sex (sex outside of marriage or without a loving commitment) and gratuitous violence (unnecessary and graphic violence added to programming for the sake of gaining ratings).

Most programmes on television today glorify sex and violence in order to stay ahead in the race for **TRPs**. As a result, it has become normal to see programmes, mainly soap operas, where people engage in extramarital affairs as a norm and kill people without battling an eyelid. Those who criticize television for showing gratuitous violence cite the fact that by the time they are 18, Indian children typically see nearly 20,000 murders on TV. Most of these murders appear to be without consequence and most are represented as the "solution" to a problem.

3. Television Encourages escapism

We all need to take some time to relax and escape from the responsibilities of the day. But we quickly create problems for ourselves when we use anything - alcohol, drugs, constant socializing, TV, etc.- as a way of escaping from our personal responsibilities. Some people maintain that television has become the "**opiate** of the people". Television shows us unrealistic things and leads us into a fantasy world, which does more harm than good.



TRP: Television Rating Points. It is a tool for judging the choice of the people and also the popularity of a particular channel. For calculation purpose, a device is attached to the TV set in a few thousand viewers' houses for judging purpose. These numbers are treated as sample from the overall TV owners in different geographical and demographic sectors. This data is very useful for the advertisers as they choose to sponsor programmes which have the highest TRP in order get maximum reach.



Opiate: derived from **Opium**, a narcotic that numbs the mind.

4. Television Engages in economic exploitation

Commercial television is a moneymaking business - it makes money by getting viewers to spend money on advertised products.

Programme popularity is critical because it means that more people will watch the commercials, and, as a result, more products will be sold. In a sense, TV programs are basically a means to get people to watch commercials. At the same time, we find that, in order to sell products, *needs* often have to be *created* in people's minds. Using advertising to try to convince us that owning the "right things" and maintaining the right image (including being slim, trim and beautiful), is *economic exploitation,* according to the critics.

5. Television Sets up false images of reality

Critics feel that TV perpetuates stereotypes, especially when it comes to minority groups. For example, television soap operas in India very often portray submissive and meek housewives as 'virtuous' and the smart, confident career women as 'scheming and bad'. This kind of stereotyping does a major disservice to the whole truth, of course. Television sets up false images of reality, and those who say so, point out that, in order to get messages across quickly to an audience, issues are very often over-simplified.

6. Television Distorts reality through omission

What television doesn't say, or omits is considered to be one of its biggest drawbacks. Television is sometime blamed for taking sides. In order to highlight one side of an issue, the other side is completely ignored. By choosing to ignore one aspect, television distorts reality.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION

1. Television is a "window of the world" for news and information.

Newspapers and the print media provide a degree of separation from reality, but TV graphically brings happenings right into living rooms, complete with colour, sound, time sequences, and even to some degree, the associated "feelings."

Reading about thousands of children starving in Africa or some other country is one thing; actually seeing the misery is quite another.

Reading about people being tortured because of their political beliefs is one thing; hearing the people involved in talking about what happened to them, and seeing their scars and tears is quite another. The latter is always more convincing and authentic.

Compared to newspapers, television may be superficial when it comes to reporting facts. However, good pictures can still be worth 1,000 words. Pictures can convey emotions beyond facts and statistics.

In democracies Television can be used to inform the electorate about things they need to know to make informed choices at the ballot box. When TV is responsibly programmed and viewed with a critical, educated eye, it is capable of looking through the surface shine and pretence of people and events, giving us glimpses of the reality lying beneath.

Television is capable of making us an 'eyewitness' to events as they happen. These events can range from the hostile invasion of a country to what a person is doing in a confined space in reality programmes like 'Big Boss'. In this regard, TV breaks down the barriers of distance and becomes an extension of our senses.

2. Television provides relaxation.

There is no second opinion about the role of Television as a provider of entertainment and relaxation. Television allows us to momentarily escape our own problems and view the experiences of other people. Television offers different programmes that include entertainment, education, sports etc. We thoroughly enjoy soap operas, and film-based programmes. We also watch exciting sports events. Through all these, we allow ourselves to be momentarily lost in a beautiful fantasy world; while at the same time find an escape from the tedium of our daily living. In the end, our spirits are lifted and sometimes we begin to look at things with renewed hope and faith.

3. Television introduces new ideas and information.

Just imagine what the mass media have done to make our life easy and comfortable. It used to be a matter of months even years before a new medicine or an important innovation becomes commonly known to the masses. But television has completely changed the

scene and today that time is typically cut down to a day- if not a few hours. We can include a variety of things in this category such as new products and services that make our life easier or safer; new recipes, important safety procedures and even instructions on whom improvement and repair are instantly available to us.

An important positive effect of television is we are constantly exposed to new ideas which we can compare, evaluate, and then accept or reject. Besides, television has immense contribution to the dissemination of development information and the process of modernization. It enables effective public participation and support in developmental programmes, protects national security and advances the cause of national integration. Television in India is not merely a means of entertainment. It is also used for spreading education and development messages among the common people. It is a potent instrument of positive social change.

Television has contributed to the political education of the masses. It gives extensive visual coverage to the political events taking place because of which people have become politically enlightened and aware of the issues affecting the country and the world at large.

4. Television helps people engage with reality

Television has brought a revolutionary change in the way people receive information and understand the world by bringing the events into the homes of the viewers which makes people feel that they are directly experiencing the events taking place in locations far away from them.

5. Television integrates.

Another important contribution of TV relates to its role in synthesizing the heterogeneous Indian society. India is a multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious society. The audio-visual medium has been very useful in fostering a spirit of integration among its people. We know that India is a vast country with various communities, tribes, languages and religions. Television through its programmes which have pan-India appeal helps in bringing communities and societies, regions and states together as a nation.

The TV programs have a reach even to the remotest part of the country. There is a certain Indian way of responding to situations or events, whether personal or social. TV can take credit for developing such common responses in personal and social communication. People of different beliefs and lifestyles are bound together by this medium.

Reach: Television was started in India in 1959 as an educational project supported by the **UNESCO**, and it grew very slowly during the 1960s. The big leap towards expansion of the television audience occurred in the mid-1970s with the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), which broadcast to 2400 villages in six states of India. An American satellite ATS-6 was used to transmit educational programmes for the development of rural India and it helped Indian scientists gain television broadcasting expertise prior to the launching of the national satellite, **INSAT**, eight years later.

Today, Doordarshan, a **public service broadcaster**, is the largest terrestrial network in the world. More than 90 per cent of the population of the country can receive Doordarshan programmes through a network of nearly 1044 terrestrial transmitters, thanks to the initiative of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She supported the expansion of satellite-based television in India while she was the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Mrs. Gandhi viewed television as an important tool for development in rural India, although her critics contended that her real aim was to exploit the television medium as a tool for political propaganda. It was also under her patronage that colour television was introduced in India during the Asian Games held in New Delhi in 1982. The communication satellite INSAT was launched in 1983 that greatly increased the people's access to television signals.

Doordarshan, a part of All India Radio till 1976, consists of one national network and seven regional networks. In 1992 there were 63 High Power **Transmitters** (HPTs), 369 Medium Power Transmitters (MPTs), 76 Low Power Transmitters (LPTs) and 23 **transponders**. As on May 31, 2002, Doordarshan had 1314 transmitters and 23 satellite channels including Gyan Darshan. By May 2009, it had 66 studios across the country. Doordarshan, the national television service of India, is devoted to public service



UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisatiion.



INSAT: Indian National Satellite.



Public-service broadcaster: A broadcaster which generally transmits programming that aims to improve society by informing viewers, as opposed to commercial outlets whose aim is to provide popular content that attracts a large audience, maximizing revenue from advertising and sponsorship.



Transmitter: An electronic device which, usually with the aid of an antenna, propagates an electromagnetic signal such as radio, television, or other telecommunications.

Transponder: A wireless communications, monitoring, or control device that picks up and automatically responds to an incoming signal. It is a contraction of the words *trans*mitter and res*ponder*.

Flagship: A flagship channel is the most important channel of a broadcast network (radio or TV). It can be the channel that produces the largest amount of material for the network, or the station in the parent company's home city or both. Originates from the naval term **flagship** which is the lead ship in a fleet of vessels.

broadcasting. It is one of the largest terrestrial networks in the world. By early July 2010, its network of 1400 terrestrial transmitters cover more than 90.7% of India's population.

International satellite television made its entry into India in 1991 with CNN bringing the first Gulf War to Indian households. By early 1992, nearly five lakh Indian households were receiving STAR TV telecast. A year later, the figure was close to twenty lakh and by the end of 1994, one crore twenty lakh households (a little less than one-fourth of all television households) were receiving satellite channels. This increasing viewership was made possible by the sixty thousand or so small cable operators who mushroomed across the country.

The number of TV sets increased from five lakh in 1976 to ninety lakh in early 1987 and to around four crore seventy lakh in 1994. By 2000, there were 79.3 million TV household.

The increasing reach of television in India was due to the investments made in creating an infrastructure of about 1000 ground-based transmitters, which carry the satellite signals to the surrounding areas. And the growth of television audience was due to some of the television programmes that became hugely popular and appealed to Indian audiences, beginning with *Hum Log* (1984-85) and subsequently *Buniyaad, Ramayana, Mahabharata* etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. In what way do you think television engages in economic exploitation?

.....

.....

.....

Q.2. "Television provides needed escape and relaxation". Discuss.

.....

.....

.....



ACTIVITY 1.2

1. Talk to 25 people who watch television. Ask them to mention two things each about what they like and dislike about television programmes. Compile your findings to know what the impact of television on people is.

.....

.....

.....

1.5 AUDIO MEDIA VS. AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

Radio is an audio medium because it has only a sound element for communicating a message. Radio is by far the most portable means of Mass Communication and it remains one of the world's major media for entertainment and information. Radio is also known as a blind medium because it relies only on sound to reach its audience.

There are some eruptible differences between the audio media and audio-visual media or between radio and television. While radio is an audio medium, television is an audio-visual medium because it comprises the elements of sound and images. While radio relies on sound, television adds sight, movement and usually colours also. No other medium can offer the unique blend of persuasive communication factors like sight, sound, motion and colour. This combination enables television to lend more credibility to its programmes among viewers. While radio is an audio medium, television is an audio-visual medium because it comprises the elements of sound and images. While radio relies only on sound, television adds sight, movement and usually colour also. No other medium can offer the unique blend of persuasive communication factors like sight, sound, motion and colour. This combination enables television to lend more credibility among viewers.

Radio vs. Television:

Unlike the print media, both radio and television get through to the illiterate population, the less formally educated and those belonging to the lower socio-economic strata. One need not be educated or even literate to listen to a radio programme or view a television programme. However, there are some basic differences between radio and television:

1) Television is the most persuasive medium as it combines all the important elements, namely, sight, sound and motion. The visual experience of watching television is more dynamic and meaningful due to the movement and sound associated with it. That is why television has greater credibility and believability than other mass media like radio, which only has the element of sound.

2) Radio is a personal and portable medium. Because of its portability, radio can be accessed more conveniently than television. Since most radio sets are battery operated, people can carry it and listen to it anywhere, at home, in buses, in the kitchen, in the farm etc. On the other hand, television sets are bigger and bulkier. They cannot be carried from one place to another easily. Moreover, television sets mostly run on electricity because of which they have to be put at a fixed place.

3) Compared to television, a radio set is much cheaper. Today, a radio set can be bought for as low as seventy rupees while the cheapest television set comes for not less than three times that amount. Poorer section of the society can afford to buy a radio set.

4) Television is an expensive medium. The cost involved in producing a television programme is much higher than that of a radio programme. This is because the technology and process involved in the production of a television programme is expensive, elaborate and complicated. Compared to television, radio is relatively cheaper per person reached and demands much less sophistication in programming and production. The technology required to produce a radio programme needs much less maintenance and it is within the capacity of developing countries to afford it.

5) Production of a television programme is more time-consuming than production of a radio programme. A television programme requires

shooting relevant images to complement the accompanying audio narration. But in a radio programme, images are created in the minds of the listeners with the help of sound only. As a result, it is easy for a radio programme to get 'on air' quickly

6) Television is a glamorous medium. By the nature of the medium itself, the programmes made for television are more entertainment-oriented. Some critics believe the television programmes cater mostly to the affluent section of society since television in India still remains an urban phenomenon. Radio, on the other hand, because of its cheap cost, is a huge hit among the poor rural masses of the country. As a result, most of the radio programmes cater to the rural masses airing informational and instructional programmes mainly related to agriculture, family planning, health and hygiene etc. However, the scenario is changing. With the cost of television sets plummeting and the reach increasing, rural India is taking to television in a big way. On the other hand radio in recent years has made a deep impact in the urban centers of the country, especially in FM mode.

7) Because of the conversational nature of radio programmes, it is considered to be a more intimate and friendly medium. It addresses individuals. Television, on the other hand is more impersonal and it addresses groups of people.

8) Radio broadcast can be localized to each community, so as to cover local events and thus appeal to local audiences. Television is a mass medium, and generally each network affiliate offers something for everyone- sports for men, soap operas for housewives and cartoons for children. That, however is changing, with content or audience specific channels being launched.

9) One can listen to the radio while doing so many other things at the same time, like cooking, shaving, driving etc. It is not the same with either TV or newspaper. Television requires more attention on the part of the viewer. One has to look at the television screen to view the programme.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3. Television is for entertainment while radio is for information. Elaborate.

.....

.....

.....

Q.4. Television is the most persuasive medium. Why?

.....

.....

.....



ACTIVITY- 1.3

1. Listen to All India Radio's news bulletin at 9 pm and also to Doordarshan's news telecast at 10 pm on the same day. What differences do you find in the mode of presentation, the language used, the order in which news stories are read? Which media do you think provides wider coverage?

.....

.....

.....

2. Watch Doordarshan (DD National) and any one private satellite channel and compare the programmes of the two channels.

.....

.....

.....

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the basic concepts of audio-visual media. Let us quickly recapitulate these concepts.

- The term audio-visual media refer to works with both a sound and visual component.
- Radio is a medium which you can only hear, while with television you can hear as well as see. That is why radio is called an audio medium while television is known an audio-visual medium.
- Television has both its merits and demerits which mainly depend on how the medium is used.
- In today's context, television has wide reach and great impact on the lives of the people.

1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q No.1 : Commercial television is a moneymaking business - it makes money by getting viewers to spend money on advertised products. Program popularity is critical because it means that more people will watch the commercials, and, as a result, more products will be sold. In a sense, TV programs are basically a means to get people to watch commercials. At the same time, in order to sell products, *needs* often have to be *created* in people's minds. Using advertising to try to convince us that owing the "right things" and maintaining the right image (including being slim, trim and beautiful), is, in the minds of the critics, *economic exploitation*

Ans. to Q No.2 : Television allows us to take momentarily an escape from our problems and experience the experiences of other people. We find programmes on entertainment and sports events. If the programmes are made well we enjoy them so much that we can even allow ourselves to be momentarily lost in a beautiful fantasy world. Thus, our spirits can be lifted; and sometimes even hope and faith restored.

Ans. to Q No.3 : Television is a glamorous medium. By the nature of the medium itself, the programmes made for television are more entertainment-oriented. Television programmes cater mostly to the affluent section of society since television in India still remains an urban phenomenon. Radio on the other hand, because of its cheap cost, is a huge hit among the poor rural masses of the country. As

a result most of radio programmes cater to the rural masses airing informational and instructional programmes mainly related to agriculture, family planning, health and hygiene etc. However, the scenario is changing. Radio in recent years has made a deep impact in the urban centres of the country, especially in FM mode.

Ans. to Q No.4 : Television is the most persuasive medium as it combines all the elements namely, sight, sound and motion. The visual experience of watching television is more dynamic and meaningful due to the movement and sound associated with it. That is why television has greater credibility and believability than other mass media like radio, which only has the element of sound.



1.8 FURTHER READING

- Aggarwal, Vir Bala, Gupta, V.S. (2002) Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication. New Delhi : Concept Publishing Company
- Kumar, Keval J (2012) Mass Communication in India. Mumbai : Jaico Publishing House
- Kundra, Shipra (2005) Basic Audio-Visual Media. Anmol Publishing Pvt. Ltd.
- Shrivastava, K.M. (2005) Broadcast Journalism in the 21st Century. New Dawn Press
- Wadia, Angela (1999) Communication and Media : Studies in Ideas, Initiatives and Institutions. New Delhi : Kanishka Publishers



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What are the main characteristics of the audio-visual medium

Q.2. Explain the basic difference between audio medium and audio-visual medium.

Q.3. It is said that the invention of television has completely change the world as it is today. Do you agree with this statement and why?

Q.4. Name three disadvantages and three advantages of Television.

Q.5. What is the role of Television in a multilingual and multiracial country like India?