

Contemporary Media: Influence over Indian Masses

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Abstract: *Media refers to means of mass communication such as TV, radio, newspapers, etc. Media, be it any type, reaches the remotest corners of our country. As the literacy rate is increasing, Indians realize the need for more and more information. Newspapers, national and regional, focus on the various aspects of information : political, social, economic, sportive, etc. Radio is also a good source of information and entertainment. It helps a great deal during emergency or some disaster. Like radio, TV, too, is a very powerful media. With a continuous flow of news about business, sports, etc, TV has turned out to be a useful electronic media. Internet is an indispensable tool of our economic sector. In fact, it is required in public and private sectors. The use of computers for teaching is truly innovative which has benefited students of all streams. Whatever the type of media, its duty is to report impartially. But unfortunately media mostly focuses on catchy and exaggerated news to attract readers' or viewers' attention. Some newspapers indulge in the malpractice of "paid-news". Besides, media highlights violence which has a negative influence on juvenile minds. Perhaps the spirit of competition propels it towards indulgence in malpractices. But the fact remains that media is a powerful and useful medium, if it is used with care and responsibility*

I. Introduction

Media plays an important role in shaping our beliefs, values and behaviour. In the present world, print media is available to the readers in the form of newspapers, journals, magazines etc. The Electronic media such as radio, television and computer is found in almost every home and office. Media provides information about the various social, economic, political and cultural aspects of human existence. It is today an indispensable part of our lives. An educated Indian has access to one mode of media or the other. It is absolutely necessary to stay connected to information sources. The modern world moves on the wheels of knowledge, knowledge of all that is happening around. But there are certain evils in the society which affect the normal functioning of media. Corruption, greed, professional malpractices and present-day struggle for survival hinder the smooth working of media. However, media has one major advantage i.e., it easily reaches masses and expresses their sentiments, emotions, fears and fallacies. It is also instrumental in changing the perspective of people from one generation to the other and from one era to the next. In this paper, an effort has been made to discuss the different types of media, their advantages and disadvantages as well as their influence over the Indian masses.

II. Print Media

India is a democratic country where people hailing from different backgrounds, cultures, religions and regions live together and interact with one another. As the literacy rate is increasing, Indians, especially in the urban sector, realise the need for more and more information. Before independence, the newspapers evoked revolutionary feelings amongst masses and after independence, they continue to hold the torch of light. Many newspapers have been printed in our country from time to time. 'Calcutta General Advertise' (1780) was the first newspaper of the pre-independence era. Later 'Samachar Sudha Varshan', the first Hindi daily began in 1854. These newspapers dealt with some grave problems of our society such as poverty, illiteracy, colonial pressures and lack of interest in news. However, they have evolved over the years into a well-established industry. Many national newspapers like Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, The Economic Times, The Times of India, etc, appear in our country. In the same manner, there are several regional papers which are widely read here. The more popular ones are Gujarati Samachar, (Gujarati, Ahmedabad), Amar Ujala (Hindi, Agra), Lokmat (Marathi, Aurangabad), Nava Bharat (Hindi, Bhopal), The Tribune (English, Chandigarh) and Dainik Bhaskar (Hindi, Gwalior), etc. All these dailies focus on the various aspects of information – political, social, economic, sportive, financial, etc. Today, there is hardly any family, in the urban areas of India, which does not get a newspaper in the morning. In fact, the day of many people starts with a newspaper. The new world with its fast developing surroundings demands its citizens to be completely watchful of their environment. The social trends, too, are fast changing. The post-independence India harbours many news agencies such as United News of India (UNI), Samachar Bhatia (SB) and Press Trust of India (PTI), etc. These agencies lighten the job of newspapers by providing objective, authentic and impartial news items. Apart from the services rendered by news agencies, the newspapers employ many reporters and journalists to keep their business going.

There are also a large number of freelance journalists who write on issues which interest them.

It is said that any man who can express himself on important legal or political matters is a journalist. He puts forth his ideas, his grievances and his observations for general readers to analyse and form their viewpoint. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to mention that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has further strengthened the position of media. It states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold independent opinion and impart information through any type of media, regardless of frontiers.

III. Role Of Radio In India

The aforesaid declaration supports the free working of not only newspapers and journals but also of radio, TV and other electronic media. Consequently, All India Radio brings to its listeners latest and top breaking news on politics, sports and current affairs. Radio is surely a good source of information and entertainment. It aids immensely during emergency or some disaster. A more active role in this direction is played by Amateur Radio which makes communication possible during emergency when cell phones, wireless and other systems of communication fail. Its usefulness was primarily discovered during Tsunami, Orissa cyclone and Latur earthquake. Gandhiji launched the vigorous movement of independence and Amateur Radio operators have, ever since, played a vital role. Their number has substantially increased over the years. They form a club of which the headquarters are at New Delhi. It is called Amateur Radio Society of India. This club is fully aware of its responsibilities towards Indian citizens. Besides helping during trying times, they support educational programmes in a number of states. But major contribution in this direction is that of IGNOU-Air Interactive Radio Counselling, Gyan-Vani and IGNOU-Air Broadcast. The target group of these projects are students of open or conventional universities. In addition to that, they also carry out curriculum-oriented programmes for school students and provide assistance or advice on agricultural topics. Incidentally, the nation has seen the growing culture of Community Radio Stations. These are generally controlled by NGOs or educational institutes. These radio stations cater to the needs of a particular community. 'Radio Bundelkhand' at Bundelkhand, region of Central India mainly broadcasts news of this region. It was attached to a Delhi based NGO, Society for Development Alternatives (DA). Similarly 'Sangham Radio' in Andhra Pradesh works for women's groups in about 75 villages.

The discussion on radio as media would be incomplete, if one does not refer to satellite radio and on-line radio. Radio receives and decodes the signals received through an antenna like the one used in a car. On-line radio makes available live radio stations on internet which are played by a software media player in computer. The 80's, the 90's, oldies, the mix, jazz, etc. are some categories that one can listen on on-line radio stations like Radio Australia, Voice of America or Radio Free Europe. On internet one can use radio services of all countries. But Indians primarily prefer to listen Radio Mirchi 98.3 FM or Vividh Bharti, a popular channel of AIR. Ever since the first news bulletin was aired from Bombay station in 1927, radio has remained a popular media amongst Indians but the component of entertainment was incorporated later.

IV. Role Of Tv

Like Radio, TV too, is a very powerful media. It provides to its viewers entertainment, education and information. The TV serials shown on channels like Zee TV, Soni TV, Star Plus, etc. are recreative and entertaining. They deal with simple family issues to which even a commoner can relate. These serials have actually contributed to create understanding amongst families about human relations and emotions. They have also changed the way people live. Even people of moderate means prefer modern, luxurious lifestyle to simple ways of living. Nevertheless, spiritualism has not diminished; it moves rather hand in hand with material growth and gains. Channels like Zee Jagran, Astha and Sadhna have exposed man to a different world of culture, 'sanskriti' and religious strength. This strength has enabled man to face all problems with courage. The talks and discourses of saints and scholars have, thus, transformed many minds. These minds are further toned up by education channels like IGNOU-Doordarshan (1991) and Gyan Darshan (2000). Gyan-Darshan was launched jointly by IGNOU, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Information and Broadcasting and Prasar Bharti on 20th January, 2000. This channel gives 23 hours of indigenous programmes sourced from partner institutions and one hour of foreign programmes. The IGNOU-Doordarshan telecasts also programmes since 1991 mainly for distance learners. In addition to the numerous educational programmes designed with a view to help students, there is a big number of sports channels such as ESPN, Star Sports, Ten Sports, Zee Sports and Neo-Sports, etc. These channels telecast sports events like soccer, cricket and badminton, etc. There is a stiff competition among these channels and they have an excellent viewership. Similarly there is a continuous flow of news from channels like Zee News, NDTV, Aaj Tak, CNN, BBC, etc. These channels keep us informed about the events taking place all over the world. Just as these channels keep the grown-ups glued to their TV sets, there are numerous cartoon channels for children. Discovery, Animal TV and other TV Channels enthrall the viewers with their knowledgeable matter. From the period of black and white transmission to the present

phase of Satellite TV or Dish TV, the Indian television has metamorphosed itself into a complete package of information and entertainment. Curiously, TV is no more an idiot box as some people would call it earlier. With a plethora of news, sports, business or popular channels, TV has turned into a useful electronic media.

V. Internet And Its Impact

Another important electronic media is internet. People can connect to internet, these days, in a large number of ways. They can have Dial-Up Access, Broadband Integrated Services Digital Network (B-ISDN), Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), Cable Modem, Leased line or Wireless Broadband connection. It is an accepted fact of our age that no economy can flourish without a developed information technology and telecommunications infrastructure. It is definitely an indispensable tool of our economic sector. In fact, it is required in all public and private sectors : banks, trade and commerce units, agriculture, education, research, business houses and training centres. With the implementation of ICT policy formulations, the gap between the developed and developing countries has begun to narrow down. Internet serves as an electronic market place where both buyers and sellers can come together on a common platform. It facilitates trade transactions while ensuring its utility in political, socio-economic and cultural contexts. The various chat-rooms on internet provide a forum for discussion over important issues. In November 2008, people used internet sites like U tube or twitter to express their views on Mumbai terrorist attacks. Internet is used for election campaigns in developed countries but in India it is at its elementary stage. Here, very few political parties make their websites which are usually not updated. However, the trend of online editions of newspapers is much in air. English newspapers like The Times of India, The Indian Express, The Hindustan Times and The Hindu can be read online, as also several regional dailies in Bengali, Gujarati, Kanada, Malayalam, English, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Assamese. The readership of these papers is appreciable and fast growing. Internet advertises courses on the pattern of national and regional newspapers for admission to different online or off-line education courses. Web-based learning or e-learning creates an opportunity for students, at a distance, to pursue higher education. If desirous, the teacher can use computers or portable devices called laptops for class-room teaching. The use of computers for teaching is truly innovative which has benefited students of all streams.

VI. Responsibility Of Media

Whatever the type of media, its job is to report impartially. It should neither act as an accuser nor as a lawyer nor as a judge. Our constitution has declared it as the fourth pillar of democracy; hence it should discharge its duties carefully. But to our utter disappointment media mostly focuses on catchy and exaggerated news to attract viewers' attention. There is little truth and more exaggeration in news these days. Prime-time news items on TV include all kinds of programmes based on fashion, music or dance shows, astrology, superstition, serials, religion etc. Instead of telecasting programmes to encourage scientific or technological advancements, art or literature, it is chiefly concentrating on entertainment based programmes with the purpose of getting the maximum Television Rating Point (TRP). Even in breaking news, one gets ordinary details such as little boy, Prince, has fallen in a ditch; icons of Lord Ganesha are drinking milk; a young girl has recalled her previous birth, etc. In a country like India where so many serious issues need to be taken up, the news channels are busy terrifying people with solar or lunar eclipses. Instead of probing both sides of an incident, it resorts to cheap sensationalism. It does not hesitate from assassinating anybody's character on screen. There are programmes where husbands intentionally spoil the image of wives and vice-versa. All this happens when the accused is not even proved guilty. Later if the accused is announced innocent by the court, these channels do not apologize for their misconduct. In the recent Aarushi murder case, Dr. Talwar was charged with the murder of his daughter by the Noida police. Every news channel highlighted the story declaring Dr. Talwar as the murderer. Instead of assuming an unbiased role, media passed judgements. This is what one calls sensational journalism. And it is on account of this lack of professionalism that media is losing its credibility. Surely, media can make or mar reputations but this power should not be misused.

Similarly, the newspapers indulge in the malpractice of "paid news". Politicians buy space for their news items. These news items carry unreal and exaggerated details. Since media has a great impact on people, newspapers, sometimes, play with the emotions of readers. Politicians try to influence people through fake news material. The Press Council of India has lately found two newspapers guilty of selling newspaper space to politicians. These two papers are 'Amar Ujala' and 'Dainik Jagran'.

Media highlights violence which has a negative influence on juvenile minds. As a result, violent activities are increasing in our society day by day. It is not wrong to give honest reportings but a constant depiction of unnecessary violent scenes triggers aggressive behaviour amongst children and uneducated Indians. News selectors should avoid the scenes which can disrupt general peace of the society. It is expected that media endeavours to set up an environment of peace and harmony but it seems that the present media bothers less for vices and is concerned more for its own survival. It appears to have thrown to the winds all scruples, principles and laws. It can uproot criminality or malpractices, but the spirit of competition propels it towards indulgence in

corrupt practices. In order to prevent media from going the wrong way, the salaries of its employees should be suitably raised. If the families of journalists are well-fed and satisfied, one can expect an honest behaviour from them. An appropriate and congenial atmosphere for work should be created for the journalists or reporters because they are capable of building a healthy society. Visuals or written material mould the thought process of individuals. Therefore, print and electronic media have to be very careful in discharging their duties.

Unfortunately, much of the valuable time of news channels is taken by baseless stories. Reviews of serials or of reality shows consume much of their time even though a majority of these programmes have already been watched on entertainment channels. More so, all TV programmes are interrupted by repeated breaks and advertisements. Some advertisements are interesting but others like that of cola drinks are harmful for children. They have unhealthy ingredients and are even bad for human body. It is insensible and insensitive to allow these soft drink companies to continue advertisements of their harmful products. In view of the general health of public, these products should be banned. The important TV time should be used for issues like 'the women's reservation bill' which will improve the lot of women in Indian society, especially in the rural regions. Tobacco consumption or cigarette smoking should also be discouraged by media. They are hazardous to human health and should be completely banned. The problems of unemployed youth should be voiced. Attention of the Union Government should be drawn towards the jobless youth. Media can even urge the authorities to avail the services of retired persons. Sites such as Naukri, Click Jobs, Jobs Ahead and Monster India are good locations to search at but media has to wake up our government to create more job opportunities and resources. Another major difficulty in the path of our progress is the population of our country. It is fast growing. No matter how much we produce, the supply always falls short of the demand. Media through its sources can spread awareness amongst masses in this respect. In short, it can be said, if media takes up and discharges its responsibilities with care, many evils prevalent in our society will disappear. Our economy will thrive and our citizens will make a happy nation.

VII. Growth And Progress Of Media

With the passage of time, media has also grown in number and efficiency. Newspapers were the first popular media. After that, radio, television and computer appeared on the scene. They have made the flow of information very fast. The world has turned into a global village and all information is obtained with the click of the mouse. Moreover, the person desirous of reading / viewing news items on internet has a choice to pick the one of his preference. News once put on internet can be instantly read far and wide. However, this news is not always authentic or dependable since its source is, sometimes, vague and unknown. Newspapers on the other hand remain a reliable source of information. They are inexpensive and easily available. Media helps not only in exploring business, social and educational avenues, it also provides medical advice. Various health-related questions can easily be asked and answered on internet. Even the political activities gain quick attention, contrary to old times. In olden days, freedom fighters struggled for years before being acknowledged for their services. Now recognition for one's work, political or social, can be achieved by simply creating a web-site. Similarly, media has provided cost-effective methods to our travel and tourism industry which initially spent huge amounts to lure customers. The role of travel agents is minimized in our times, since all the necessary details are available on the internet.

However, newspapers and internet are not the only active media types. Radio, too, reaches the remotest corners of our country. It is not costly and is committed to all sections of society. In addition to sound, TV also produces visual images which present events taking place thousands of miles away. Like all other forms of media, TV is not just for information, it enables us to watch movies and documentaries which are often educative and informative. Media, be it any type, has shaped the personality of man and has broadened his outlook. It is true that the modern man is more alert, agile and organized in the present set-up than before. He is definitely more refined in his mannerism and has the skill to handle intricate situations. The modern man is progressive and media helps him to move ahead in all walks of life.

VIII. Conclusion

Media refers to various means of mass communication such as newspapers, radio, television and internet. It reaches people far and wide. Thanks to media, all the information is available at our door-step. But it has also some misuses. Sometimes, the information channels or newspaper columns are bought by influential people who manipulate media for their own ends. It is important that all citizens of the country should realize that media has to be used discreetly and not for our own petty purposes. Media is surely a powerful medium, only if its power is used with care and responsibility.

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