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ROLE AND IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA

As the largest democracy, India is considered a role model for a large number of developing countries. We have state and central governments elected by the people. We have a government run by our own elected representatives, known as Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the state and Members of Parliament (MPs) at the centre. Modern democratic governments have the following:

- a) A Legislature, i.e. State Assemblies and Parliament, responsible for framing laws and decide the way we run our affairs.
- b) An Executive: The Governor, the Chief Minister and the Ministers who run the state and the President, Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers who run the country.
- c) A Judiciary: The Supreme Court, High Courts and other courts which decide whether laws and the constitutional provisions are followed by the elected governments.

These institutions run the government of the country for the welfare and development of all the people. In a democracy, the people should know what the three institutions, namely the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary are doing for the welfare of the people. These institutions in turn need to know how the people are reacting to what they are doing. The main role of the mass media is to act as a bridge between the people and the government. So, in that sense, media can be considered as the fourth institution in a democracy.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to do the following :

- explain the role of media in a democracy;
- describe the role of media in society;
- explain the meaning of media ethics;
- enumerate the positive and negative effects of media.



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3.1 MASS MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Now let’s see how the mass media like newspapers, radio and television play the role of acting as a bridge between the government and the people. Let us consider an example. The government decides that the prices of petrol and diesel will either be increased or decreased. That decision needs to be conveyed to the people. This is done by the media. The media not only inform the people about it but also explain the effect of that decision taken by the government on the people.

Let’s take another example. The agriculture department of your state or the Indian Agricultural Research Institute develops a new improved, high yielding strain of wheat or rice. Farmers should be given information about the new variety, how it has to be used or what benefits they would get if they use it. Here again, it is the media that does this. But how does the media do this? Different forms of mass media such as print media, radio, television, traditional media and the internet are used to disseminate information. You will learn about this in detail in the subsequent modules.

Government Media Agencies/Departments

How do the central and state governments inform the public about their policies?

Governments use the mass media and also have media agencies and departments. These agencies of the central governments function under the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. As the name suggests, it has agencies and departments in:

- (a) Information and
- (b) Broadcasting.

These agencies give out information about the policies and programmes of the government.

Similarly, every state government disseminates information about its policies and programmes through its media agencies.

You will learn more about these agencies in the module on Advertising and Public Relations.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.1

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate word/s:
 - i) is the largest democracy in the world.
 - ii) The government in India is run by

- iii) Media the people about the actions taken by the
 - iv) Media can be considered as the institution in a democracy
 - v) Using mass media, and of people can be changed.
2. List the three essential institutions of a modern democratic government
 3. State any two ways in which mass media can contribute in a democracy.

3.2 FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEDIA

Mass media is a tremendous source of information for individuals as well as society. In the previous section, you have learnt about the role of mass media in a democracy. Let us now see how the media perform their functions to bring about changes.

- **Mass Media Can Help in Change**

Using mass media, people’s attitudes and habits can be changed. For example, all of us have mistaken or wrong notions about various diseases like leprosy or HIV/AIDS. Many of us think that by touching people suffering from these diseases we would be infected. You might have heard on radio or watched television programmes or read messages which tell us that by touching an HIV/AIDS patient we do not get infected.

Similarly, for eradicating polio there are special programmes and messages disseminated through the media. They inform people about the need for giving polio drops to children and about the day that is declared a ‘polio day.’ Special arrangements are made to give polio drops to as many children as possible on polio day.

Change would also mean things for the better. The concept of development of a country is again a matter of change, when old practices and equipment are changed and new, better and more efficient means are being used. The mass media play an important role in communicating this change. By giving the necessary information, and sometimes skills, the media can help bring about this change. You may ask how media can impart skills. A mass media like television can demonstrate and show how things work. You would have seen on television how a certain dish is cooked using modern kitchen equipment.

- **Mass Media have made the World Smaller and Closer**

The speed of media has resulted in bringing people across the world closer. Let us take an example. When you watch a cricket match between India and another country in England, Australia or New Zealand, live on televi-





sion, you feel you are part of the crowd in that stadium. Events, happy or sad, happening anywhere can be seen live. Sometimes we feel that the entire world is one big family. You might have heard the term “global village”. It means that the whole world is shrinking and becoming a village. Wherever we go to any part of the world, we see the same products such as soft drinks, television, washing machine, refrigerator etc. and the same type of advertisements. Similarly, the world wide web and internet have brought people and countries much closer.

● Mass Media Promotes Distribution of Goods

Mass media are used by the consumer industry to inform people about their products and services through advertising. Without advertising, the public will not know about various products (ranging from soup to oil, television sets to cars) and services (banking, insurance, hospitals etc.) which are available in the market as well as their prices. Thus mass media help the industries and consumers.

3.3 MEDIA ETHICS

We have seen how powerful the mass media are. By their very nature media and the media people meaning journalists of the print media, radio and television are quite powerful. So politicians, bureaucrats and the police look at them with apprehension. Generally they do not want to be in the media if the reports are not in their favour. If the media people praise them, they are happy. So by and large people try to be friendly with the media. But for the media this power comes with tremendous responsibility. If they misuse that power to do wrong things or trouble others, people will stop trusting them. Like in any other profession, like law or medicine, the media also need to have a code of ethics or guidelines on what is right or wrong. In the case of lawyers and doctors, there are clear codes of ethics, and anyone who violates the code can be punished, or removed from the profession. But in the case of the mass media there are only a few guidelines and no strict code of conduct. The Press Council of India is one of the organizations which issues guidelines on media ethics. To keep the fair name of the profession, the media practitioners need to follow certain ethical codes which are listed below:

- a) **Accuracy:** The information provided by media persons in the print media, radio, television and internet has to be accurate. If incorrect or baseless information is given, it can harm the interests of individuals, institutions and the country. For being accurate, media persons have to verify the correctness of their facts. For example, if only 50 people have died in an accident, the media cannot give out the figure as 200 or 500. If a media person writes against anybody or accuses someone of dishonesty, that person should be given an opportunity to give his or her version of the story.
- b) **Confidentiality:** A media person maintains confidentiality of



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information revealed by various sources.

- c) **Protection of sources:** A source which has provided confidential information should never be revealed. For example if a government official provides information pertaining to his department, media person should not reveal the name of the person in order to protect him from any harm.
- d) **Right to privacy:** A journalist should respect the right of a person to have privacy. That would mean that a journalist should not write about the private life of ordinary citizens.
- e) **No incitement to violence:** Mass media should not motivate or provoke people to indulge in violence or crime. Glorifying violence in writings should also be avoided.
- f) **No vulgarity or obscenity:** Mass Media should not write, display or broadcast anything that is vulgar or obscene.
- g) **No Communal writing:** India is a country where people follow diverse faiths and religions. Our Constitution believes in secularism, which means respect for all faiths and religions. It is easy for the media to create problems between sections with different faiths and religions by writing about them or broadcasting issues which can promote communal problems. There have been several occasions when communal riots and killings have taken place based on media reports. The media has to ensure that it works in the interest of the public.

3.4 IMPACT OF MEDIA

You have seen in the earlier sections the tremendous impact of the media on people. Just as a coin has two sides, the impact of mass media also can be positive or negative. Now let us list some of the positive and negative effects of media.

POSITIVE EFFECTS	NEGATIVE EFFECTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Media provide news and information required by the people. ● Media can educate the public. ● Media helps a democracy function effectively. They inform the public about government policies and programmes and how these programmes can be useful to them. This helps the people voice their feelings and helps the government to make necessary changes in their policies or programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The traditional culture of a country is adversely affected by mass media. ● Entertainment has become the main component of mass media. This affects the primary objectives of media to inform and educate the people. ● Media promote violence. Studies have proved that violence shown on television and

MODULE - 1

Introduction to Mass Communication



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Role and Impact of Mass Media

- Media can entertain people.
 - Media can act as an agent of change in development.
 - Media has brought people of the world closer to each other.
 - Media promote trade and industry through advertisements
 - Media can help the political and democratic processes of a country.
 - Media can bring in positive social changes.
- cinema have negative effects on children.
- Mass media promote the desire in people to buy and own products that are advertised through the media but which may not be essential for them.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.2

1. List five ethical codes to be practised by media persons.
2. Write any three positive and negative effects of media.



3.5 WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Role and impact of mass media
- Mass media and democracy
- Functions and responsibility of media
 - source of information
 - help in change
 - has brought the world closer
 - promotes distribution of goods
- Media ethics
 - accuracy
 - confidentiality
 - protection of sources
 - right to privacy
 - no incitement to violence
 - no vulgarity or obscenity
 - no communal writing

→ Impact of media

- positive
- negative



3.6 TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. Explain in detail the relationship between mass media and democracy.
2. What are media ethics? List out the ethical codes to be practised by media persons.
3. Discuss the various positive and negative effects of media on people.



3.7 ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

- 3.1** 1. i) India
ii) elected representatives
iii) inform, government
iv) fourth
v) attitudes and habits
2. Legislature, Executive and Judiciary
3. Refer to section 3.1.
- 3.2** 1. Refer to section 3.3.
2. Refer to section 3.4



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