



VIDHYAYANA

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

**The Role of Mass Communication in
Contemporary Society**

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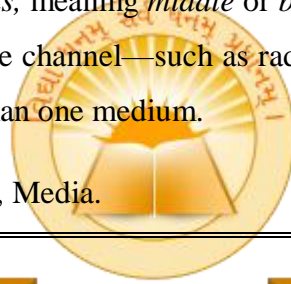
The Role of Mass Communication in Contemporary Society

Abstract:

Language is the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another. Language is primarily spoken, although it can be transferred to other media, such as writing. If the spoken means of communication is unavailable, as may be the case among the deaf, visual means such as sign language can be used.

From the earliest times, people have needed to communicate across distance or over time. Since the beginnings of writing, communication media have allowed messages to travel over distance and time. A communication medium is a means for recording and transporting a message or information. The word *medium* comes from the Latin word *medius*, meaning *middle* or *between*. It is a channel or path for sending a message between communicators. A single channel—such as radio, or a book, or the telephone - is called a medium; media is plural, meaning more than one medium.

Key Words: Language, Communication, Media.



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Although born helpless, human infants are equipped at birth with reflexes that orient them toward people. They are responsive to faces, turn their head toward voices, and mimic certain facial gestures on cue. It seems that human beings are inherently social animals. But the human being differs from the animals in various ways. He has another fundamental need beyond the physical requirements of food, clothes and shelter: the need to communicate with his fellow human beings. This urge for communication is a primal one and, in our contemporary civilization, a necessity for survival.

Communication is the art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. Upon this foundation modern men have built intricate, many faceted machinery for delivering their messages. The unfolding achievements of science are making this communication machinery more and more fantastic in its ability to conquer the physical barriers of our world. Our minds and our electronic devices are reaching into areas not considered even remotely possible by our grandfathers.

Mass communication is the study of how people and entities relay information through mass media to large segments of the population at the same time. It is usually understood to relate newspaper, magazine, and book publishing, as well as radio, television and film, even via internet as these mediums are used for disseminating information, news and advertising. Mass communication differs from the studies of other forms of communication, such as interpersonal communication or organizational communication, in that it focuses on a single source transmitting information to a large number of receivers. The study of mass communication is chiefly concerned with how the content of mass communication persuades or otherwise affects the behavior, attitude, opinion, or emotion of the person or people receiving the information.

Due to continuing developments in media technology, we are flooded by a huge volume of non-stop information. Most of this information comes to us without a filter or censor. The information can be positive or negative. It is important for all to be able to look critically at the information and the sources and make positive choices. Having a critical attitude means that we can distinguish between positive and negative information and make choices that will give us information that will benefit us and our society.

The mass media of communication play vital roles in our modern society. Those who work in the media hold positions of social responsibility, far more so than their friends in many other fields. Frequently their judgment is tested under pressure in matters of taste, social restraint and fairness, with few absolute rules to guide them.



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The mass media serves information, interpretation, instructive, bonding, and diversion functions:

- **Information function.** We have a need for information to satisfy curiosity, reduce uncertainty, and better understand how we fit into the world. The amount and availability of information is now overwhelming compared to forty years ago when a few television networks, local radio stations, and newspapers competed to keep us informed. The media saturation has led to increased competition to provide information, which creates the potential for news media outlets, for example, to report information prematurely, inaccurately, or partially.
- **Interpretation function.** Media outlets interpret messages in more or less explicit and ethical ways. Newspaper editorials have long been explicit interpretations of current events, and now cable television and radio personalities offer social, cultural, and political commentary that is full of subjective interpretations. Although some of them operate in ethical gray areas because they use formats that make them seem like traditional news programs, most are open about their motives.
- **Instructive function.** Some media outlets exist to cultivate knowledge by teaching instead of just relaying information. Major news networks serve the information function, while some cable news networks serve a mixture of informational and interpretation functions. The more dramatized but still educational content of the History Channel, the National Geographic Channel, and the Discovery Channel, serve more instructive functions.
- **Bonding function.** Media outlets can bring people closer together, which serves the bonding function. For example, people who share common values and interests can gather on online forums, and masses of people can be brought together while watching coverage of a tragic event like Pathankot or Peshawar attacks.
- **Diversion function.** We all use the media to escape our day-to-day lives, to distract us from our upcoming exam, or to help us relax. When we are being distracted, amused, or relaxed, the media is performing the diversion function.

Our mass media illuminate the social fabric of the nation. They are essential to the continued development of the economic fabric in a modern industrial state and they continue to fulfill their historic role in protecting and improving the political fabric of a democracy.



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With the opening of satellite communication, mass communication has become inseparable part of the human life. The history of mass communication is comparatively recent, but it has become indispensable in today's society, which has become dependent on mass communication.

At personal level, mass communication is woven into our day-to-day existence. Individuals use mass media to satisfy their need for entertainment or enlightenment. They become more aware of the country's problems and issues as well as help people develop understanding of the social problems. They also contribute to increased understanding of culture, politics, and economy and so on.

In developed nations, where literacy and industrialization is high, is likely to depend more on mass communication channels for people's knowledge, entertainment and decision making. Mass media has become an integral part of our lives and cannot be separated from our life. Particularly for the urban people, the need for information is more important than ever. Our values and way of life in the society in this information era are strongly influenced by the mass media like newspapers, TV, radio, video, and the internet. Mass media's influence on people's lives is even greater and deeper than many kinds of state indoctrination or priest's sermons from the pulpit in the church. The full range of unfiltered media is now available to most of us by using a parabola and satellite transmission. We can buy many kinds of videos freely. Access to the internet is easy and inexpensive almost everywhere. We can find many kinds of information using the internet technology.

As people of the country modernize and become more literate, individualistic and cosmopolitan, the use of mass communication channels becomes more and more important as there are many areas of common concern and interest to people about which people want to know. Today's society has become far more complex to function only through interpersonal or group communication. There are many important messages of common concern which have to reach effectively to masses at a time.

In India a large majority of the population is illiterate and hence beyond the reach of the printed media. Moreover, more than 65 per cent of Indian population is living in villages, bound by traditions, deep rooted attitudes and superstition.



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This is a challenge for any educator. It is only through persuasive influence of mass communication, the illiterate and backward population in India can be directed towards any social change required for development. Thus, mass communication has important role to play in enlightening the masses to raise the standards of their living and improve quality life.

Communication with rural people is difficult and challenging, as many of them live in inaccessible and isolated villages. In this situation mass communication is the only alternative for reaching them breaking all the barriers of physical distances and illiteracy.

Mass communication becomes very important while communicating ideas intended to change behaviour of people right from developing awareness to adoption of an innovation. When people are exposed to an increasing flow of information, they find themselves in a position which necessitates a change in their aspiration, attitude and effort.

Frequent exposure to mass media can create the urge for a higher standard of living. There is adequate research evidence throwing light upon the potentialities of individual medium of mass communication as well as a total effect of mass media exposure in changing cognitive and affective behaviour of rural people.

Radio and Television have invaded almost every corner of the country. People sit glued to watch television. Research has also proved the effectiveness of these media in educating people. Hence mass communication is one of the important inputs for the development of the nation. Radio, television, newspaper, movies are used widely as means of mass communication for information and entertainment.

Today, mass communication brings people closer by developing common understanding of the event or issue. We are dependent on mass communication not only for information, entertainment and politics but also education, science, religion, charities, agriculture and transportation. In one way or another, almost every major social activity in modern life depends on the use of mass communication media to greater or lesser extent.

Mass communication is important for socialization of people because changes in subtle areas such as the socialization of the individual in regard to knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs, can be brought about through



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mass communication by using media like television and cinema.

Through the mass media, information and ideas are circulated to the population at large, and in turn the media reflect the opinions and attitudes of the public and of organized groups within the general public. In a free society the printed and spoken word are not merely devices for handing down decisions and carefully censored half-truths from on high; they are the market place of public opinion from which political action can emerge. Skilful leaders can use the press to further their own policies, but if they got too far out of step with the public will, the press can become the instrument of defeat them.

The media also are means for recording and influencing the social behaviour of individual and group. They illuminated the social pattern and transmit the facets of our culture from one ocean to another, just as they bind the country together economically. There are faults in the ways the media influence social action, just as there are faults in the social fabric itself. The press has yet to achieve its potential in such areas as interpretation of the news, and its very freedom makes for imperfections and misuse of power. But that same freedom offers the opportunity for the mass media and the people who work in them to perform more capably in the future.

Thus, mass communication plays an important role in the transmission of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. It helps promoting the right things on right time. It gives a real exposure to the mass audience about what is right or wrong. Even though media is linked with spreading fake news like a fire, but on the safe side, it helps a lot to inform us about the realities as well. Mass media like television and radio are influential force when the same ideas, people, or behaviours, occur consistently from program to program and presented in a stereotype manner. Mass communication has developed into industry and has provided jobs to millions of people enabling them to earn their living.



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