ଓଡ଼ିଶା ରାଜ୍ୟ ମୁକ୍ତ ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ, ସମ୍ବଲପୁର, ଓଡ଼ିଶା
Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Odisha
Established by an Act of Government of Odisha.

Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Journalism & Mass Communication (BJMC)

BJMC-2

Introduction to Media and Communication

Block - 2

Mass Communication and Effects Paradigm

UNIT-1	MASS SOCIETY THEORY, PROPAGANDA
UNIT-2	LIMITED EFFECTS THEORY
UNIT-3	MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPHERE

The Course follows the UGC prescribed syllabus for BA(Honors) Journalism under Choice Based Credit System (CBCS).
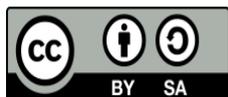
Course Writer

Prof. Benudhar Panda
Retired Professor
Ravenshaw University

Course Editor

Dr Ashish Kumar Dwivedy
Senior Academic Consultant
OSOU, Sambalpur

Material Production

Dr. Manas Ranjan Pujari
Registrar
Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur

UNIT-1   MASS SOCIETY THEORY, PROPAGANDA

Unit structure

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit the learner will:
- Know the history and importance of mass communication theory
- Understand the different theoretical strands towards understanding the phenomenon of mass communication.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Mass communication has effective role in modern society. The theories of Mass Communication explain the impact of mass media on society and public. Mass communication has seen the formulation of many theories. Since early 1900s, mass communication as a discipline has been in a state of flux. This is because of changing technologies as well as varying academic focus.

1.3 THE 'MASS' CONCEPT

Although the concept of 'Mass Society' was not fully developed until after the Second World War, the essential ideas were circulating before the end of the nineteenth century. The key term 'Mass' in fact unites a number of concepts which are important for understanding how the process of mass communication has usually been understood, right up to the present.

Early uses of the term 'mass' usually carried negative associations. It referred initially to the multitude or the 'common people' usually seen as uneducated, ignorant, and potentially irrational, unruly and even violent (as when the mass turned into a mob of

rioters). It could also be used in a positive sense, however, especially in the socialist tradition, where it referred tothe strength and solidarity of ordinary working people when organized for collective purposes or when oppressed.

The terms 'mass support', 'mass movement' and 'mass action' are examples whereby large numbers of people acting together can be viewed in a positive light. As Raymond Williams commented "There are no masses, only ways of seeing people as masses".

Notwithstanding the political references, the word 'mass' when applied to a set of people, has unflattering implications. It suggests an amorphous collection of individuals without a sense of individuality. The shorter oxford English dictionary defines the word 'mass' as an aggregate in which individuality is lost. This is closerin meaning to the term assigned by sociologists to the media audience. It was the large and seemingly undifferentiated audiences for the popular media that provided the clearest examples of the concept.

The main features attributed to the concept of 'mass' are:
- Composed of a large aggregate of people
- Undifferentiated composition
- Mainly negative perception
- Lacking internal order or structure
- Reflective of a wider mass society

Before discussing the mass society theory of media it would be fruitful to know the theoretical features of the mass communication process, the mass audience, the mass media as an institution and mass culture.

The mass communication process:
- Large scale distribution and reception of content
- One-direction flow
- Asymmetrical relation between sender and receiver
- Impersonal and anonymous relationship with audience
- Calculative or market relationship with audience
- Standardisation and commodification of content.

The Mass audience:
- Large number of readers, listeners, viewers, etc
- Widely dispersed
- Non-interactive and anonymous relation to each other
- Heterogeneous composition
- Non-organised or self-acting
- An object of management or manipulation by the media

The mass media institution:
- The core activity is the production and distribution of information and culture.
- Media acquires functions and responsibilities in the public sphere that are overseen by the institution.
- Control is mainly by self-regulation with limits set by society.
- Boundaries of membership are uncertain.
- Media are free and in principle independent of political and economic power.

Mass culture:
- Non-traditional form and content
- Intended for mass consumption
- Mass produced and formulaic
- Commercial
- Homogenized

Mass society theory of media:

The theory reflects some of the early thinking on media. The idea was initially developed in the latter half of nineteenth century. This was the time when rapid industrialization was drawing more and more people from rural areas to the cities. At about the same time printing presses were creating the first newspapers that were sold at declining prices to a rapidly growing number of readers. Although some theorists were optimistic about the future that would be created by industrialization, resulting in urban expansion, many others saw in this a breakdown of peaceful, rural communities. These theorists were fearful of cities because of their crime, cultural diversity, and unstable political systems.

The dominant view on media and society that emerged during this period has come to be referred as mass society theory. This theory was rooted in the nostalgia for rural life and anticipated a nightmare future where human beings lose their individuality and become slaves of machines. Basically these theories were developed by people who wanted the perpetuation of the old social order. The growth of penny presses and yellow journalism became targets of elite criticism.

Mass society theorists saw media as an instrument of capitalists. They strongly believed that content was likely to serve the interests of political and economic power holders. When this was the case, media cannot be expected to offer a critical or an alternative definition of the world, and their tendency will be to assist in the accommodation of the dependent public to their fate.

The dominant media model sketched above reflects the mass society view. Mass society theory give a primacy to the media as a casual factor. It rests very much on the idea that the media offers a view of the world, which not only serves as a potent means of manipulation of people but also as an aid to their psychic survival under difficult conditions. According to C.Wright Mills between consciousness and existence stands communication, which influences such consciousness as men have of their existence.

Mass society is paradoxically, both atomised and centrally controlled. The media are seen as significantly contributing to this control in societies characterised by largeness of scale, remoteness of institutions, isolation of individuals and lack of strong local or group integration. Mills also pointed to the decline of the genuine public of classic democratic theory and its replacement by shifting aggregates of people who cannot formulate or realise their own aims in political action. This regret has been echoed more recently by arguments about the decline of the public sphere, of democratic debate and politics, in which large-scale, commercialised mass media have been implicated.

Although the expression 'mass society' is no more in use, the idea that we live in a mass society persists in a variety of loosely related components. These include a nostalgia (or hope) for a more communitarian alternative to the present individualistic age as well as a critical attitude towards the supposed emptiness, loneliness, stress and consumerism of life in a contemporary free-market society. The seemingly widespread public indifference towards democratic politics and lack of participation in it are also attributed to the cynical and manipulative use of mass media by politicians and parties.

In particular, the new electronic media i.e. Internet has given rise to an optimistic view of what society can become. The same runs counter to the central mass society thesis. The relative monopolistic control typical of the rise of the original mass media is now challenged by the rise of online media that are much more accessible to many groups, movements and also individuals. This challenges not just the economic power of old media but also their guaranteed access to large national audiences at the time of their own choosing. There is a darker side to this vision, however, since the internet, also opens up new means of control and surveillance of the online population and is not immune to control by media conglomerates.

Main propositions of the theory:
- Society is organised centrally and on a large scale.
- The public becomes atomised.
- Media are centralised, with one-way transmission.
- People come to depend on media for their identity.
- Media are used for manipulation and control.

The mass society theory of media comes under the branch of media society theory, thereby gaining its name as media society theory. The other five such media society theories are:

I.   Marxism and political economy, also known as Critical Political Economic Theory: It is a media society theory

II. Functionalism: It is a media-society theory

III. Social Constructism: It is a media-society theory

IV. Communication technology determinism and medication technology determinism: This is a media society theory

V.   The information society. It is also a media society theory.

1. **Main propositions of the Critical political economic theory**
   - Economic control and logic are determinant
   - Media structure always tends towards monopoly
   - Global integration of media ownership develops as a result
   - Contents and audiences are commoditized

- Real diversity decreases
- Opposition and alternative voices are marginalised
- Public interest in communication is subordinated to private interests
- Access to the benefits of communication are unequally distributed.

2. **Functionalist theory of media: Main propositions**
   - Media is an institution of the society
   - They perform the necessary tasks of order control and cohesion
   - They are also necessary for adaptation and change
   - Functions are recognisable in the effects of the media
   - Media helps in management of tension
   - There are also unintended harmful effects which can be classified as dysfunction

3. **Social construction : main propositions**
   - Society is a construct rather than a fixed reality
   - Media provides the material for reality construction
   - Meanings are offered by media, but the same can be negotiated or rejected
   - Media selectively reproduces certain meanings
   - Media cannot give an objective account of social reality

4. **Communication Technology Determinism : Main Propositions**
   - Communication technology is fundamental to society
   - Each technology has bias to particular communication forms, contents and uses
   - The sequences of invention and application of communication technology influences the direction and pace of social change
   - Communication revolutions lead to social revolutions.

5. **Information society theory : Main Propositions**
   - Information work replaces industrial work
   - Production and flow of information accelerates

- Society is characterised by increasing connectivity

- Disparate activities converge and integrate

- There is increasing dependency on complex systems

- Trends towards globalisation accelerates

- Constraints on time and space are reduced

- Consequences are open to alternative interpretations, both positive and negative

- There are increased risks of loss of control

- Information society theory is an ideology more than a theory.

These theoretical perspectives on the relationship between media and society are diverse in several respects, emphasising different causes and types of change and pointing to different paths into the future. They cannot all be reconciled, since they reflect alternative philosophical positions and opposed methodological preferences. Nevertheless, we can made some sense of them in terms of the main dimensions of approach, each of which offers a choice of perspective and/or method.

Political economy theory and mass society theory have an inbuilt critical component. In contrast functionalism is more positive towards the working of media. Information society theory is open to critical and positive views, while social constructivism and technology determinism are open ended in nature.

1.4 PROPAGANDA

Propaganda is the process and product of deliberate attempts to influence collective behaviour and opinion by the use of multiple means of communication in ways that are systematic and one-sided. Propaganda is carried out in the interest of the sources or sender, not the recipient. It is almost certain to be in some respect misleading or not fully truthful and can be entirely untrue, as with certain kind of information it can also be psychologically aggressive and distorted in its representation of reality. Its effectiveness is variable, depending on the context and dispositions of the target audience more than on message characteristics.

Definition:
Jowett and O'Donnel define propaganda as 'the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist'.
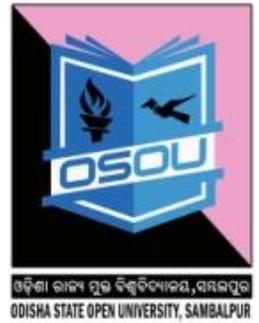
The connotations of the term have generally been negative.

It differs in some respect from simple persuasion attempts. It can be coercive and aggressive in manner; it is not objective and it has little regard for truth, even if it is not necessarily false, since sometimes the truth can be good propaganda. Finally it is carried out to further some interest of the propagandist, not the target audience.

Under conditions of information monopoly or severe ethnic conflicts, control of media has often been used to foster hatred and mobilize populations to violence. The historic examples of the twentieth century are obvious enough. More recent cases in the Balkans and Rwanda, show that the same propaganda continues to play an important role in our society.

1.4.1 History and the origin of propaganda:

Propaganda is not an American term. Nor is it a modern invention. The term came into use with the Roman Catholic Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Committee for the propagation of the Faith), an order of the church established in 1622. The Propaganda Fide was originally created to fight the Protestant Reformation.

For many years the meaning of propaganda was debated. Many forms of communication seek to persuade people – were all of them propaganda? Gradually the term *propaganda* came to refer to a certain type of communication strategy. It involves an extensive use of communication to propagate specific beliefs and expectations. The ultimate goal of the propagandists is to change the way people act. Fritz Hippler, head of Nazi Germany's film propaganda division, said that the secret to effective propaganda is to simplify a complex issue and repeat that simplification again and again. The propagandist believes that end justifies the means. Therefore, it is not only right, but also necessary that half-truths and even outright lies be used to convince people to abandon ideas that are wrong and to adopt those favoured by the propagandist.

Adolf Hitler
(Source: Creative Commons)

During wars prior to World War I the opposing military forces carried on their struggle somewhat independently of civilian population. The outbreak of world war called for backing of the civilian population at home. The armies of both sides were backed by huge industrial effects for maintaining the supply line. Total war required total commitment of the entire resources of the nation. Material amenities had to be sacrificed; morale had to be maintained; people had to be persuaded away from the families and into the ranks; the works in the factories had to be done; money had to be obtained to finance the war. Individuals were psychologically isolated from one another. Interactions were impersonal. They were devoid of traditional bonds and value loaded interpersonal relationships. It was necessary in this context to mobilise sentiments, loyalties towards the country and diffuse hatred and fear of enemy, maintain morale of individuals and capture their attention by some means.

But inspiring quick emotional integration among the civilians in favour of war efforts and charging them with the feelings of hatred and animosity was the overriding concern of the people controlling the war affairs. The diverse, heterogeneous and differentiated populations of individual societies didn't have a similar reciprocal,
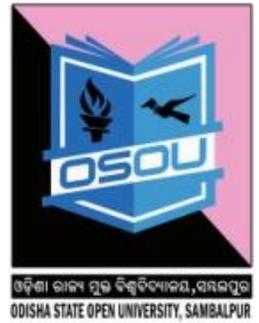
binding sentiment, which keeps humans together as a member of a totality. This was seen as the main reason behind propaganda.

According to Lasswell, propaganda was one of the most powerful instrumentalities in the world. In the great society it was no longer possible to fuse the waywardness of individuals in the furnace of war dance; a newer and subtler instrument had to push thousands and even millions of human being into one amalgamated mass of hate, will and hope. The name of this new hammer and anvil of social solidarity is propaganda.

Media was selected for that job. Propaganda were manufactured. Outrageous lies were told by one side, about the other, through mass media. Gross deceptions were practised.

People believed because they wanted to believe those untruths to strengthen their sentiments and attitudes toward their nation and enemies. People liked to believe all massacres on the enemy side and every triumph of their nation. They liked to be encouraged to keep their morale up, to cooperate in keeping the supply line intact for their very survival. These motivations played as strong intervening variables between propaganda stimuli and response, favourable to the interest of propagandist.

The bureaucrats, in fact, misunderstood the actual reasons of their success in propaganda effort and the social scientists became over enthusiastic about the potent of mass communication. The Hypodermic needle theory was advanced. Media were thought to be a powerful mechanism of shaping public opinion and swing the people to any direction and point.

When war days were over and when the prime motivation for survival was not in existence, the social scientists could realise how much they could expect from propaganda. They found that the straight forward stimulus response relationship that was apparent in the impact of propaganda during the war time could not be taken for granted. The existence of many intervening variables in between independent and dependent i.e. between stimulus and response variables came in to light.

Harold Lasswell
(Source: By Martap95 - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=46469016)

Personal influences, cognitive, emotional and other socio personal situational factors also played their part. They were instigators or repressors of reactions. It was not that these variables were not active while war time propaganda succeeded. However, they were overpowered by many factors:

a) Individuals were psychologically isolated
b) Individuals belonged to the society where traditional interpersonal links were not strong
c) Individuals were not under the influence of strong social ties and informal social control
d) Receivers of the propaganda message were charged with war enthusiasm, strong intent for survival, patriotic zeal and fear of the enemy and so on.

The result was that those factors acting as intervening psychological variables made the mass swayed by the propaganda efforts and shaped their behaviour and beliefs according to the intention of the propaganda makers. S-O-R relationship was as valid as it is valid now. As Katz and Lazarsfeld would say "The omnipotent media, on the one hand, sending forth the message, and atomized masses on the other, waiting to receive it" – and nothing in between. War time propaganda was severely criticised and the theory was abandoned:

Latter studies revealed the following observable features of propaganda:
a) Audience may respond favourably if they have same ideology held by propagandist.
b) Propaganda messages are mostly resisted by the audience since they do not trust or enjoy the propaganda content.
c) Quite often audiencegroups remain neutral or indifferent to propaganda other than those who hold identifiable opinion and ideology communicated to them.

Successful war propaganda
The mass media are now regarded as essential to successful war propaganda, since they are the only channels guaranteed to reach the whole public and have the advantage (in open societies) of being regarded as trustworthy. The possibilities for synergy between war making and news making are obvious. The public demand for news during war is very high. War news satisfies all significant news values.

However, there are some obstacles. Journalists generally don't like to seen as being used for propaganda purposes. Mass media are also uncertain instruments of propaganda since their audience cannot be restricted. One of the requirements of successful propaganda is that the right message reaches the right group. Especially since the Vietnam War, which has widely been regarded (but not very correctly) as propaganda failure for the authorities, every military action in the western sphere of influence has been conducted with great regard for effective propaganda.

In the Fallen Islands Expedition of 1982, Persian Gulf war of 1991, the Arab Israel conflict, Kosovo, Afghanistan, the Iraq war and many minor skirmishes, the allied (western) authorities have sought to control the flow of military information. Reports suggest that Russia had learnt which lessons to apply in the Chechnya war of 1999. Before these hot wars there was extensive (mainly American) propaganda at home and abroad.

In most of the war cases mentioned, being the main or only source of useful news content was largely successful in achieving the primary propaganda aim of getting support from domestic and significant world public opinion. In the recent Iraq war the tactic of embedding correspondents within the military (a practice with a long previous history) ensured a one sided (and more favourable) view of events for the forces concerned.

The main conditions in support of successful propaganda have thus been a near monopoly of supply of information and images (for home population) and a broad consensus on goals. In most of the recent instances, enemy propaganda has been largely unable to reach its targets in the home country or internationally.

Nevertheless, there is increasing difficulty in managing international opinion, mainly because the world is more divided and with more independent national information resources. In the case of Iraq, as events unfolded, control of the flow of information diminished and the propaganda of the victors was open to unsettling reality check. Shifts in public opinion against the war by participating countries suggested that propaganda was successful initially and later weakened.

Historical and present day examples of propaganda in action indicates that there is no single formula for success. The record also shows that free and independent media can almost as easily become effective vehicles for well-arranged propaganda. The only thing certain is that for propaganda to work it has to reach people and be accepted (if not believed). Acceptance mainly dependson the reputation of the media source, the absence of alternative objective information, and the inherent plausibility of the contents in the light of information available and the emotional and ideological climate of the time. It is difficult to sustain the blacker and more aggressive type of media coverage over the long term. Despite the special character of propaganda, all the normal rules for ensuring communication effectiveness still apply.

1.4.2 The process of propaganda:

Assumptions behind propaganda

Few assumptions behind propaganda activities were put forward by De Fleur and Rokeach:

1. Cleverly designed stimuli would reach every individual member of the mass society via the media; that each person would receive it in the same general manner and that this would provoke a more or less uniform response from all.

2. People inherit more or less the same elaborate set of built in biological mechanism, which supplies them with motivation and energies to respond to a certain stimuli in given ways.

3. Therefore it could be postulated that every known stimuli at any situation would initiate a predetermined response by every individual.

Publicity, propaganda and persuasion:

There should not be any confusion between publicity and propaganda. Publicity is based on truth and propaganda often suppresses the truth. One sided communication giving viewpoints of only the message source ignoring the view points of the receivers of the message may sound like propaganda despite the message being based on truth. Propaganda, therefore, is often authoritarian in its approach. On the contrary, persuasion is more democratic while trying to influence the audience to bring about a change in their attitude and behaviour.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the psychology behind all communications was thought to be as based on stimulus response (S-R) theory. Communication of propaganda message was accepted to go in line with the S-R theory in a straight forward way. The basic idea behind stimulus response (S-R) relationship (magic bullet theory) was that media messages were received in an uniform way by every individual member of the audience and that immediate and direct response were triggered by such stimuli. This is a very simple and naïve way of establishing a relationship between the stimulus and response and formed the basis of propaganda communication through mass media in early days. The distinction between propaganda and persuasion was not known to the strategists of mediated communication.

1.5. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Cite at least one or two incidents where you feel being exposed to propaganda messages via your favourite TV channel?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____
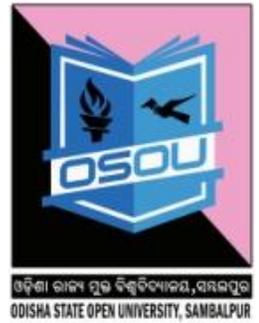
2. Where were the main criticisms against the mass society theories?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. What are the main propositions of the Information Society theory?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Unit structure

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learners after reading this unit will know about:
- Limited Effects Theory and its effect on civil society.
- Individual Difference Theory and its effect on civil society.
- Personal Influence Theory and its effect on civil society.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Mass communication is a means whereby mass produced messages are transmitted to large, anonymous, and heterogeneous masses of people. Mass communication refers to a process and is often used interchangeably with mass media which are actually the vehicles conveying the message that is communicated.

Most of the models for mass communication are similar to the ones used to explain basic communication, except that,in the former,the receivers are a large number and feedback is often delayed.

There are many experts dealing with the hardware, who constantly try to improve upon the channels which are used to transmit messages mechanically. Broadcast engineers are one such category of people. On the other hand, media gatekeepers play the important role of determining what is to be printed, broadcast, telecast or webcast for people's consumption. Editors, reporters, television programmers and move producers and bloggers are examples of gatekeepers.

The four primary functions of mass media are:
1. To inform
2. To entertain
3. To educate, and
4. To promote culture

These functions overlap at times. Each medium tends to emphasise one of these more than others. For example the print media tend to emphasise information where the broadcast and films stress on entertainment. Advertising is the most blatant form of persuasion, but much of the persuasion in mass media is concealed. Finally the media preserves culture by furnishing a record of events and by keeping a noteof changes in the social structure.

Impact of mass media:
Certain questions are raised about the impact of mass media, for instance, the question whether mass media consumers were being manipulated or brainwashed. While explaining the theories and models of communication we are to note that while the earlier theories assumed that mass media had an immense impacton the society, the later researchers denied any such direct cause and effect relationship. They underlined individual differences and personal influences on the transmission and retention of mass media messages.

Denis McQuail, proposed an interactive perspective. He held that mass media may equally mould, mirror and follow social change. Consequently, the origin, development and ultimate use and influence of mass media are in conformity with the changing complexion of society.

Though the industrial and communication revolutions have changed, India still remains largely an agriculture based socio economic entity. Thus the impact of mass media in India has to be seen in the back ground of the country's tradition and value based social structure.
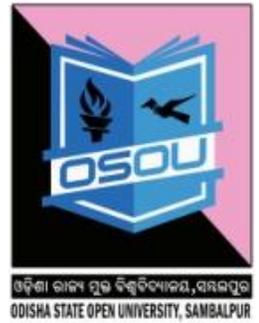
Nature of Mass media Effects:

We know that mass media has an impact, but answers to questions such as what precise impact they have, and how exactly do they impact us, remain elusive. Researchers are examining the effects of mass media; we know that we can predict certain outcomes for certain situations. But variables are numerous. Two social scientists Bernard Beralson and Morris Janowitz, once summarised their knowledge about the effect of mass media thus in Readers in Public Opinion and Communication:

The effects of communication are many and diverse. They may be short ranged or long run. They may be strong or weak. They may derive from any number of aspects of the communication content. They may be considered as psychological or political or economic or sociological. They may operate upon opinions, values, information levels, skills and overt behaviour.

Questions on media effects:
What are the effects of the mass media on our society? To what extent are we moulded and shaped by the media? Are we informed? Or are we manipulated? Are we in control? Or are we merely dancing to the tune of mass communicators?

Then there are allied questions. Should the mass media be as free as they are in our society? What rights should they have? And what limits should be placed on them? Should they be responsible to the government, the society, the audience or themselves?

Should there be any ethical guidelines or standards for mass media operations? where do the mass media overstep the ethical boundaries ? How can pressure be brought on the media to make them perform in accordance with norms acceptable to the society? For instance, what about crime and violence depicted in the mass media? Have we become a violent society because we read about crime in our newspapers and see violence on television? Do news stories about terrorism inspire terrorists? Do stories about airplane hijacking inspire the hijackers? What about stories relating to dowry deaths and suicides? Do they inspire women to take such extreme steps? Do the mass media create violence in our society by reporting it, or do they merely reflect the violence that is already there?

Are mass media in any way responsible for the increase in sexual promiscuity? What have the mass media done to us politically? Can one be elected to a political office without the endorsement of mass media? And are the media giving us an accurate
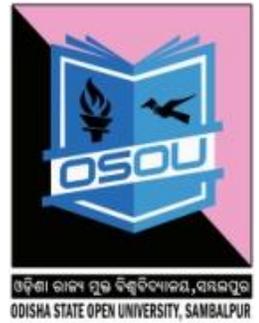
picture of our politics and politicians? When going to the polling booth, can we rely on the information we have received from mass media?

To what extent does our government control the mass media and vice versa? To what extent do the media control business and vice versa?

Do the mass media present a fair and accurate picture of women in our society? Are they adequately represented in the mass media? What are the results of the media distortions of the images of women in society or its version of women's issues? And there are similar question about other underprivileged and neglected segments of the society.

How have the mass media effected religion in our society? How have the mass media effected the culture as a whole? Are we becoming a classless or a class conscious society as a result of what is served out by the mass media?

And finally the media themselves are changing because of the new technologies. What impact will this have on our culture and our society? What will satellites, cable television, laser beams, computers, mobiles phones and various information technology applications do to us? And what can we do about them, if anything?

There are no clear cut and final answers to most of these question. The growth of mass communication has made it possible for us to get far more information today than any time before. Information is indispensable in a complex, advanced society. We are an information hungry society; we need an ever increasing amount of facts in order to maintain and enhance our standard of living. Information today is a commodity we are willing to pay for. The mass media today are not only entertaining the masses; they are selling information as well.

We have often been told that information is power. The question is, what do we have to do to ensure that the information we received from the mass media will serve our needs, not the purpose of someone else?

Today, the mass media are very important for us and we have to know where we stand on the issues relating to mass communication. They are too essential to be ignored. The issues raised by mass media will no doubt continue to grow in importance in the future.
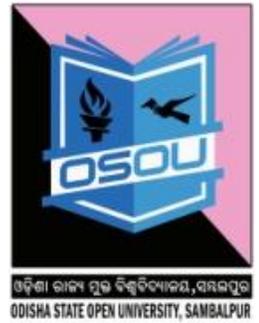
2.3 LIMITED EFFECTS THEORY

Beginning in 1940's, Paul Lazarsfeld and other researchers started a scientific approach towards mass communication. He carefully used empirical social research methods. He advocated conducting carefully designed, elaborate surveys and even field experiments to observe media influence and measure its magnitude.

By mid-1950's the empirical media researchers after interpreting the data collectedfound that mass media was not all powerful. But various other factors such as personal relationships and attitudes helped in resisting media. They found very little evidence to support the mass society theorist. They concluded that the effect of media was limited on an individual; this was later known as the Limited Effects Theory.

Paul Lazarsfeld
(Source: Creative Commons)

During the middle of 1960's the debate between mass media society and limited effects was over with the empirical evidence in support for the latter. Many communication scientists stopped looking for powerful media effects and concentrated instead on documenting minimal, limited effects.

The limited effects theory says that change in attitude due to media effects is therefore limited and rare. The World War II provided the best laboratory for propaganda research and Attitude Change theories. Carl Hovland and his team did intense experiments on attitude change.

One of the central tenants of attitude change theory was cognitive consistency. Dissonance theory, on the other hand, argues that when confronted by new/conflicting information people experience a kind of mental discomfort. Hence attitude change via media messages can be a tedious task. The same can, however, be achieved through persistent and systematic efforts.

According to Kapler, selective processing protects media consumers from its impact. Attitude change researchers studied three types of selectivity: selective exposure, selective retention and selective perception. Information Flow theory, John Klapper's phenomenistic theory or reinforcement theory are some of the other theories of the age.

The limited effect communication researchers felt that there was nothing left to study. But many disagreed and the limited effects theory was challenged from various fronts.

2.4 INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE THEORY

The psychological approach to understanding communication effects gives rise to many theories among which an important one is individual difference theory. According to this theory, different personality variables result in different reactions to the same stimuli. In other words, an individual's psychological mechanism accounts for her/his reactions to media messages. In other words, the reaction to media content differs according to motivation of its audience members, their predisposition to accept or reject a given message, their intelligence, beliefs, opinions, values, needs, moods, prejudices, perceptibility etc.

From the voluminous psychological studies two important concepts that have emerged – selective exposure and selective perception - act as barriers between

message and effect, thereby limiting the scope of direct impact of mass communication on people.

2.4.1   Selective exposure:

Selective exposure occurs when people tend to expose themselves selectively only to communications which are in general accordance with their established convictions and avoid communications which seem to challenge their beliefs. If by chance, people are exposed to contrary opinions, they are able to perceive selectively in order to invest the hostile arguments with acceptable meanings, thus narrowing the gap between what they believe already and what they are invited to believe.

2.4.2   Selective Perception:

Once the individuals have selectively exposed themselves to the messages in accordance with their preferences, they tend to "read into" the message whatever suits their needs. This process is called selective perception.

Selective perception also implies the tendencies of media audience members to misperceive and misinterpret persuasive messages in accordance with their own predispositions. For example, prejudiced people twist the meaning of anti-prejudice propaganda, so it ends up reinforcing their existing bias.

Melvin L De Fleur and Ball Rokeach have concluded that "from the vast available content, individual members of the audience selectively attend to, interpret and retain messages, particularly if they are related to their interest, consistent with their attitude, congruent with their beliefs and supportive of their values".

These studies, which tried to discover psychological characteristics as intervening variables, were admirable but they remained inconclusive. The possibilities of other specific traits of an audience which could serve as barriers between messages and effects emerged from the political studies and gave rise to personal influence theory.

2.5 PERSONAL INFLUENCE THEORY

This theory is the outcome of a classic study of the 1940 presidential elections in the United States by Paul E. Lazarsfeld and others in the book *ThePeople'sChoice*. The findings revealed that no voter seemed to have been directly influenced by the mass media. It turned out that the interpersonal relationships and not the mass media, had enormous influence on voters. Political discussions with other people particularly political "Opinion Leaders", had more influence onvoters than that exerted by mass

media. The informal communications network, in which audiences talked to one another and sought advice from opinion leaders, led to two-step flow theory of mass communication.
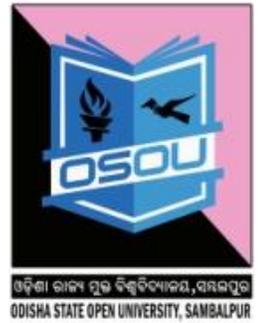
2.5.1 Two-step Flow:

The above mentioned study of presidential elections revealed that many voters had limited exposure to mass media. The information they received was mostly through other people called "Opinion leaders" who had first-hand access to mass media information. The Information often flowed from mass media sources directly to opinion leaders, who passed it along to less active sections of the population. Thus they got the information this way. The study revealed that the information received by the audience this way was second hand and could be different from the original because, the opinion leaders might add their own interpretation to the same before conveying it to others.

The opinion leaders, therefore, formed a valuable link in the two-step flow of information. This led to researchers try and answer many questions on opinion leaders. Who are those opinion leaders? What do they do to get information? How are they important to the dissemination of mass media messages? And so on. Researches revealed that these opinion leaders, although not elected members in the society, were more knowledgeable, educated, influential - both socially and economically - and more modern in outlook than other fellow members in their society. They are held in high esteem by people who relied on them greatly for ideas, information and guidance.

Like other theories, the two step flow has its shortcoming too: first, it diminishes the original, direct influence of mass media, secondly, its effects are evident only in political studies that were conducted decades ago when there was no television influence and therefore, may not be as applicable to the contemporary political scheme.

2.5.2 Multi Step Flow:

Further studies on opinion leaders led to the modification and re-conceptualization of the two step flow concept to multi step flow because of multi directional influence of opinion leaders, not necessarily only down wards, when they interpreted the media messages for audiences. The influence was seen to be "upwards" or back towards the media sources, when they sought to tell gatekeepers (editors of newspapers, news editors of radio and TV news, producers etc.) how to do their job. Also the influence was "sideways" when they shared insights with other opinion leaders. Moreover, the multi-flow concept was seen as having many relay points i.e. information reaching a

member of the audience directly or reaching him second hand, third hand or fourth hand and sometimes in a form considerably different from the original.

It is important to note that both two-step flow and multi-step flow theories clearly discredit the direct influence of the mass media because, because of extraneous influences, interpersonal channels and social relations of audiences which are often complex, multi-directional and multi-dimensional.

2.5.3   Dependency Theory:

Melvin De Fleur and Sandra Ball Rokeach have proposed an integrated dependence theory of mass communication in which they recognise various psychological and social factors that prevent the media from exercising arbitrary control over their audiences. De Fleur and Ball Rokeach describe it thus: "Mass Media not only lack arbitrary powers, but there is a personal lack of freedom to engage in arbitrary communication behaviour. Both the media and their audiences are integral part of their society. The surrounding socio-cultural context provides controls and constraints not only on the nature of media messages but also on the nature of their effects on audiences". In fact, communication in all its forms have a very important role in holding the society together. The need to belong to the society, to understand the society and keep up with society has increased our dependency on media and, in that sense, media enjoy certain powers.

2.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How do the limited-effects theories differ in their approach from the earlier mentioned mass society theories?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____
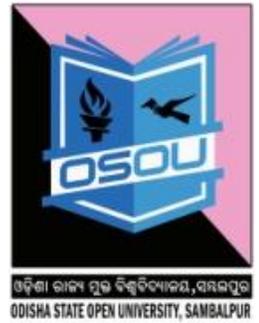
2. What role do the opinion leaders play in the limited-effects theories?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Can selective perception be linked to our TV viewing habits? Illustrate your answer.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

UNIT-3   MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPHERE

Unit structure

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will learn and understand about the mass media's role in public debate. This unit explains the importance of media in public life and civil society.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

The public sphere refers to a notional 'space' which provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate. Access to the space is free and freedom of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed. This space lies between the basis and the top of the society. The basis can also be considered to be the private sphere of individual citizens, while the political institutions at the centre are at its top.

In other words the public space rests on the idea of a space in which informed citizens can engage with one another in debate and critical reflection; hence its relevance. Jurgen Habermas argues that the increasing commercialisation has led to the decline of the public sphere and the press as a space that enabled the people to reflect critically upon itself and on the practices of the state.

Today according to this analysis, such reasoned public discussion has been replaced by the progressive privation of the citizenry and trivialisation of questions of public concern. But Habermas has been accused of idealising a bygone and elitist from of political life.

3.3 MASS MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLIC SPHERE

Especially since the translation into English in 1989 of Jurgen Habermas's book *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (1962), there has been much reference to the concept of a public in speaking of the role of the mass media in political life.

A condition of civil society is one of openness and plurality, where there are many more or less autonomous and voluntary agencies between the citizen and the State that provide security for the individual. There is also an adequate democratic political process, provision for justice and protection of human rights. Walzer writes for an essential 'space of uncovered human association and also the set of relational networks formed for the sake of the family, faith, interest and ideology.

The idea of the civil society stands opposed to 'mass society' analysed by Mills and it is also at odds with the various totalitarian systems. The media when organised in an appropriate way especially when open, free and diverse, can be considered as one of the most important intermediary institutions of the civil society.

In Habermas's account of the rise of democracy, historically the first version of the public sphere or space was represented by the eighteenth century coffee house or debating society, where the active participants in political life met, discussed and formed political projects. An important role was to keep a check on government by way of an informed and influential public opinion. The principal means of conversation were direct private cooperation, public assemblies and small scale print media. The formation of this public sphere owed much to the conditions of capitalism and economic freedom as well as individualism and the first form of public space was described as a 'bourgeois' public sphere reflecting its class ideology.

Subsequent developments have included the rise of new corporate interests and the general substitution of mass communication for the interpersonal discussion among elites. Habermas is generally somewhat pessimistic about the consequences for democracy in modern times. This was because, as he believed, the public was more likely to be manipulated by the media than helped to form opinions in a rational way.

3.3.1 Key Quotation of Habermas:

A key quotation by Habermas encapsulates his basic views, "With regard to the colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives, what I have in mind is (that)... under the pressure of the shareholders who thirst for higher revenues, it is the intrusion of the functional imperatives of the market economy into the 'internal logic' of the production and presentation of messages that leads to the covert displacement of one category of communication by another: issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment. Besides personalization, the dramatization of events, the simplification of complex matters and the vivid polarization of conflicts promote civil, private and a mood of anti-politics."

Despite much criticism by other scholars of the idealising of a bygone and elitist form of political life, the idea of a public sphere has been found to have been valued under conditions of mature capitalism.

3.3.2 Enter the New Media and New Hope:

Positive expectations concerning the role of the media in the public sphere have often been expressed in relation to new media. Dahigren names the different ways in which the Internet can help improve direct relations between government and citizens; giving platforms and channels for advocates and activists; hosting civic forums for debate and discussion; adding a new and more diverse branch of journalism. Rasmussen describes the differentiation with the political public sphere and, in particular distinguish between mainstream media that allows elites to present their ideas to the society at large and the media of diversity that represent what is going on at all levels of the public sphere. The former are mainly older mass media, the latter are Internet based.

In this context, we can place the notion of the press as an institution in society, as reinterpreted by Cook. By this he meant that there are fully worked out patterns of behaviour and norms for relating the news media to government, certainly in Western Democratic Society. The underlying rules and norms are often informal but exert great force by custom and application. According to his view, the whole procedure of making laws and governing is intimately dependent on the news media, which influences, constrains and mutually negotiates with the law makers. The strength and depth of this institution means that the newer news media are more likely to adopt to the institution than vice versa.

In Europe, where there has been a political project over several decades to establish a viable set of cross national democratic institutions, including a parliament and a court of Justice, the goal of a supportive public sphere extending across national frontiers has been pursued by theorists and policy makers. The key is often seen to lie in the hands of the mass media, as with national public spheres. There are many obstacles, not least the fact that there are no specifically European media to speak of and virtually all media are national in orientation and in the main have pressing objectives that are not met by serving this project.

3.3.3 How Media Supports the Public Sphere

It does so by:
1. Enlarging the space of debate
2. Circulating information and ideas as a basis for public opinion
3. Interconnecting citizens and governments
4. Providing and mobilising information
5. Challenging the monopoly of government over politics
6. Extending freedom and diversity of publication

3.3.4 Response to the Discontents of the Public Sphere:

Aside from the potential of the new media, one of the solutions to current ills that has been proposed has come from the American journalist community itself, under the name of civic or public journalism.

A basic premise of the public journalism movement is that journalism has a purpose that it ought to try and improve the quality of civic life by fostering participation and debate. Schudson describes it as based on a trusteeship rather than a market or advocacy model. He writes: In the trustee model, journalists should provide news according to what they, as a professional group, believe citizens should know, from this we can see a basis of legitimisation in the professionalism of the journalist, rather than in some more ill-embracing political theory.

In Schudson's, the journalists are professionals who hold citizenship in trust for us. According to Glasser and Craft, public journalism calls for a shift from a journalism of information to a journalism of conservation. The public needs not only information but also engagement in the day's news that invites discussion and debate. It should be clear that public journalism parts company with tradition of neutrality and objective reporting but, again, it is not a return to a politicised or advocacy journalism. The means for achieving the goals of the new movement remain somewhat in dispute

since the media themselves are structurally unchanged and it is doubtful whether this version of the professional task can really transcend the constraints of a competitive media market system and counter the fundamental causes of political apathy and cynicism.

Assessments of what has been achieved by public journalism are not very encouraging. Massey and Haas survey evaluative research on the topic and conclude that there has been little practical impact, even if the idea remains in favour with some. However, it has also been criticised for undermining the essential autonomy of journalism. The public journalism movement does not seem to have found much of a following in Europe. Attention has focused more on the need to strengthen existing public service media and other non-commercial media and also on the potential for harnessing new media to improve democratic participation.

3.3.5 Alternative Visions

Dissatisfaction with the established media has also found expression in the celebration of completely different forms, free from the established systems. There are several strands of alternative theory that are in one way or another, disconnected from mainstream press theory. But note should be taken of two somewhat different theoretical perspectives on the role of the media, one under the heading of emancipator theory, the other of communitarians.

3.3.6 Emancipator media Theory:

One branch of critical theory came to espouse the promise of the first new media, especially because of the potential for small scale, gross roots communication in channels independent from dominant mass media. The then technologies of the 1960s which gave interactive cable, CCTV, recording and replay seemed to put the potential of communication liberation in the hands of the people and out of the hands of the publishing monopolies. The guiding principles uniting the loose coalition of ideas referred to here are participation, interaction, smallness of scale, cultural autonomy and variety, emancipation and self-help. The emphasis is often on the process of communicating rather than the content, which is for individuals to determine.

These ideas about new and small scale media typically apply to the rich, media abundant and supposedly democratic societies. Much of the world is not like that. There is still room for theory that addresses the condition of struggle for basic rights. Downing coins the term rebellious communication to refer to media that operate in a positive way for political ends in situations of oppression. Such media operate in a

positive way in critical conditions. They include those serving a political cause, ranging from female emancipation to the over throw of oppressive or bourgeois regimes, and include manifestations of alternative publications such as the grassroots micro media in developing countries or in situations of authoritarian rule or foreign occupation.

According to Downing they generally serve two overriding purposes: (a) to express opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly to the power structure and its behaviour (b) to build and support solidarity and new working against policies. They are often stimulated by and help to generate new social movements and in general have in common the tendency to break someone's rules. Much of the early theorising surrounding the significance of the internet has extended essentially the same line of emancipator thinking.

3.3.7 Communitarian Theory and the Media:

A relatively new development is expressed in terms of communitarianism, which reemphasises the social ties connecting people, in contrast to modern libertarian individualism. It stresses duties owed to society as well as rights to be claimed. In respect of media, relations between media and audience take on a more mutual character, especially where they share a social identity and a place. One exponent of communitarian thinking stresses the ethical imperative of the media to engage in dialogue with the public it serves. In some respects the call is to return to a more organic social form, in which the press plays an integrative, expressive and articulating role. Not self-interest but partnership is seen as the way forward.

In the communitarian model according to Nerone the goal of reporting is not intelligence, but civic transformation. The press has bigger fish to fry than merely improving technology and streamlining performance. In a communitarian world view, the news media should seek to engender a like-minded philosophy among public. A revitalised citizenship shaped by community norms becomes the cherished aim. News would be an agent of community formation.

Communitarian theory of the press is in some respects quite radical. In some other respects it is reactionary and anti-libertarian, although its spirit is inclined towards voluntarism. It is probably fair to say that communitarianism is more at home in the American radical tradition than in Europe or in the different forms of communal society in Asia and Africa. Like public journalism, it does not seen to have travelled very far from its origin.
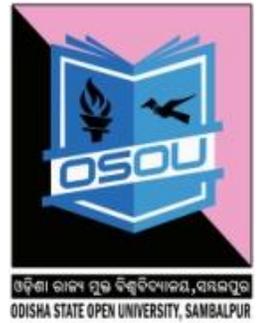
3.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Explain Habermas 'Public Sphere' in your own words.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

2. Can new media reinforce the idea of a Public Sphere in the present day media discourse?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

3. The goal of a journalist is not just to report. What has Schudson to say on this?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____