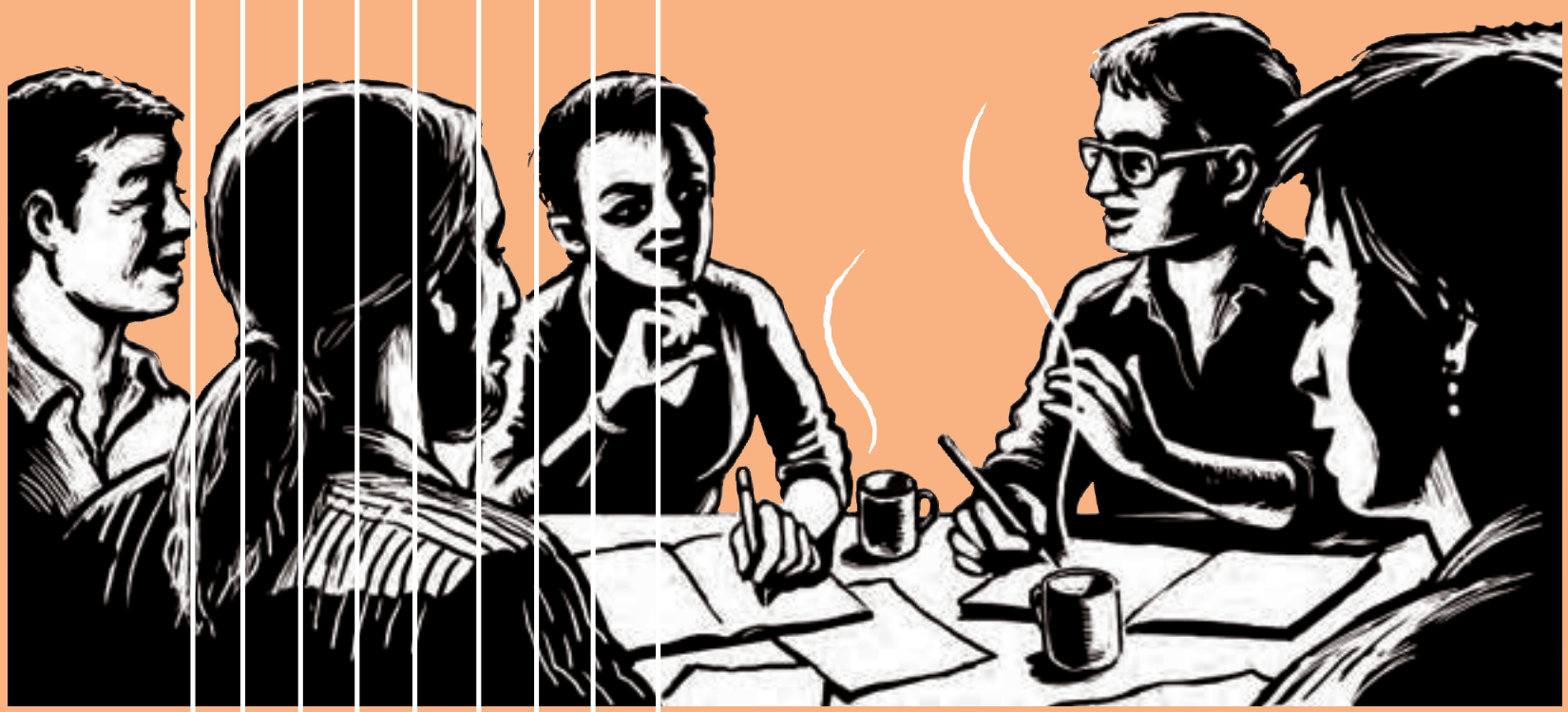
UNIT FOUR



Media

Teacher's note

Today, the media and advertising are a pervasive presence in the lives of young people, who may or may not have taken the opportunity to seriously reflect upon this fact. This Unit offers some ways by which we can begin to think about these.

The focus is on explaining the strong links between media and technology and media and big business. It explains how the media 'sets the agenda' through influencing our perception of issues worth devoting time and attention to, and issues that are neglected or overridden.

Chapter 6 foregrounds the widespread effects of the media, and attempts to connect the issues under discussion to the learner's own lives. At the end of the chapter, we expect the learner to recognise the role of big business in the media coverage of events — the way 'news' is selected for coverage, and the explicit/ implicit dimensions of that coverage. We use two fictitious news reports to demonstrate that there is seldom just one version of a story or an event. Building on this, we expect the learner to develop the skills required to critically analyse a newspaper report or a TV story through scrutinising the information provided, as well as understanding the logic behind the exclusion of certain perspectives.

These ideas can be strengthened by selecting examples from actual advertisements and structuring similar questions around them.

This chapter concludes by linking its contents to the idea of democracy. It emphasises, through using examples of local media as well as social advertising, how mainstream media and advertising tend to favour those who have greater financial as well as social resources. This point can be reinforced in the classroom by using local examples of media stories, as well as posing questions about the ways in which advertising is changing what is locally available as well as locally valued.

CHAPTER 6

Understanding Media

What is your favourite TV programme? What do you like listening to on the radio? Which newspaper or magazine do you usually read? Do you surf the internet and what have you found most useful about it? Did you know that there is one word that is often used to collectively refer to the radio, TV, newspapers, Internet and several other forms of communication. This word is 'media'. In this chapter, you will read more about the media. You will find out what is required to make it work, as well as the ways in which the media affects our daily lives. Can you think of one thing that you have learnt from the media this week?

Everything ranging from the stall at the local fair to the programme that you see on TV can be called media. Media is the plural form of the word 'medium' and it describes the various ways through which we communicate in society. Because media refers to all means of communication, everything ranging from a phone call to the evening news on TV can be called media. TV, radio and newspapers are a form of media that reaches millions of people, or the masses, across the country and the world and, thus, they are called mass media.

Look at the collage on the left and list six various kinds of media that you see.

Media and technology

It would probably be difficult for you to imagine your life without the media. But cable television and the widespread use of the Internet is a recent phenomenon. These have been around for less than twenty years. The technology that mass media uses keeps changing.

An artist's impression of Gutenberg printing the first sheet of the Bible.

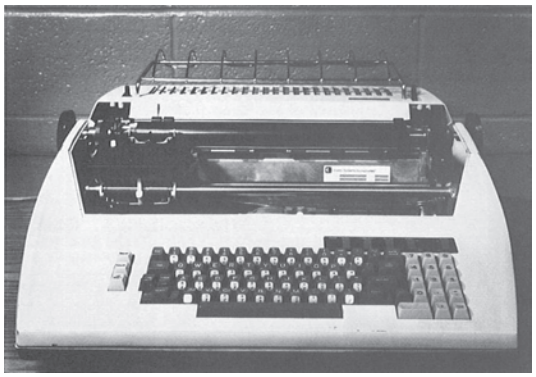
Newspapers, television and radio can reach millions of people because they use certain technologies. We also tend to discuss newspapers and magazines as the print media; and TV and radio as the electronic media. Why do you think newspapers are called print media? As you read further, you will find that this naming is related to the different technologies that these media use. The following photographs will give you a sense of the ways in which technology that mass media uses has changed over the years and continues to change.

Ask older members of your family about what they used to listen to on the radio when there was no TV around. Find out from them when the first TV came to your area. When was cable TV introduced?

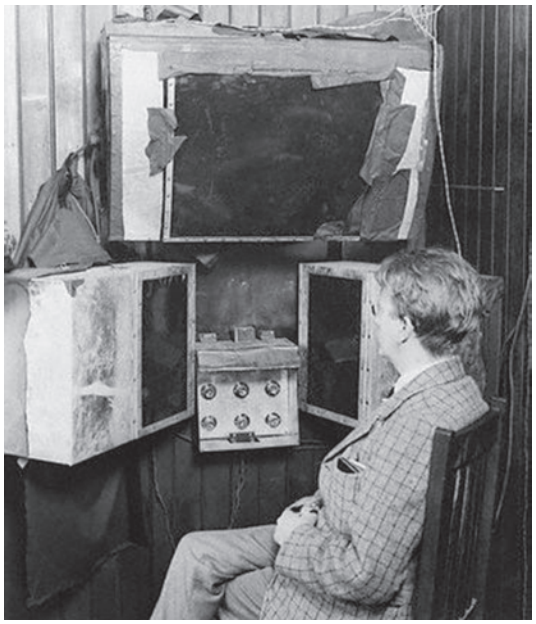
How many people in your neighbourhood use the Internet?

List three things that you know about some other part of the world from watching television?

Changing technology, or machines, and making technology more modern, helps media to reach more people. It also improves the quality of sound and the images that you see. But technology does more than this. It also changes the ways in which we think about our lives. For example, today it is quite difficult for us to think of our lives without television. Television has enabled us to think of ourselves as members of a larger global world. Television images travel huge



With electronic typerwriters, journalism underwent a sea-change in the 1940s.



John L. Baird sits in front of the apparatus with which he demonstrated to the Royal Institute, his invention, the 'televisor', an early television.

distances through satellites and cables. This allows us to view news and entertainment channels from other parts of the world. Most of the cartoons that you see on television are mostly from Japan or the United States. We can now be sitting in Chennai or Jammu and can see images of a storm that has hit the coast of Florida in the United States. Television has brought the world closer to us.

Media and money

The different technologies that mass media use are expensive. Just think about the TV studio in which the newsreader sits – it has lights, cameras, sound recorders, transmission satellites, etc., all of which cost a lot of money.

In a news studio, it is not only the newsreader who needs to be paid but also a number of other people who help put the broadcast together. This includes those who look after the cameras and lights. Also, as you read earlier the technologies that mass media use keep changing and so a lot of money is spent on getting the latest technology. Due to these costs, the mass media needs a great deal of money to do its work. As a result, most television channels and newspapers are part of big business houses.

Mass media is constantly thinking of ways to make money. One way in which the mass media earns money is by advertising different things like cars, chocolates, clothes, mobile phones, etc. You must have noticed the number of advertisements that you have to see while watching your favourite television show. While watching a cricket match on TV, the same advertisements are shown repeatedly between each over and so you are often watching the same image over and over again. As you will read in the following chapter, advertisements are repeated in the hope that you will go out and buy what is advertised.

Can you list three different products that are advertised during your favourite TV programme?

Take a newspaper and count the number of advertisements in it. Some people say that newspapers have too many advertisements. Do you think this is true and why?

The cost to advertise on a TV channel varies from ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 1,00,000 per 10 seconds depending on the popularity of the channel and time.

Media and democracy

In a democracy, the media plays a very important role in providing news and discussing events taking place in the country and the world. It is on the basis of this information that citizens can, for example, learn how government works. And often, if they wish to, they can take action on the basis of these news stories. Some of the ways in which they can do this is by writing letters to the concerned minister, organising a **public protest**, starting a signature campaign, asking the government to rethink its programme, etc.

Given the role that the media plays in providing information, it is important that the information be balanced. Let us understand what we mean by a balanced media report by reading two versions of the same news event given on the next page.

The print media offers a large variety of information to suit the tastes of different readers.

News of India Report

Crackdown on polluting factories

Protestors block roads and disrupt traffic

Radhika Malik | INN

Violent protests by owners and workers brought the city to a standstill today. People getting to work could not do so on time because of huge traffic jams. The owners and workers are protesting the government's decision to close down polluting factory units. Although the government did take this decision rather hastily, the protestors have known for quite some time that their units are not legal. Moreover the levels of pollution in the city will be greatly reduced by this closure. Mr. Jain a well-known figure in the city said, "With our city gradually becoming Indias's new business hub, it is important that it be a clean and green city. Polluting factories should be moved. The factory owners and workers should accept the relocation being offered by the government instead of protesting."

India Daily Report

Closure of factories causes unrest

Daily News Service ■

The closure of one lakh factories in the city's residential areas is likely to become a serious issue. On Monday, thousands of factory owners and workers took to the streets to strongly protest this closure. They said that their livelihoods would be lost. They say that the fault lies with the municipal corporation because it continued to issue licenses for new factories to be set up in residential areas.They also say that there were no adequate relocation efforts. The owners and workers plan a one-day city bandh to protest against this closure. Mr. Sharma, one of the factory owners said, "The government says that it has done a lot to relocate us. But the areas they have sent us to have no facilities and have not been developed for the last five years."

Are the above stories in the two newspapers similar? And if not, why not? What, in your view, are the similarities and the differences?

If you read the story in the *News of India,* what would you think about the issue?

The fact is that if you had read either newspaper you would only know one side of the story. If you had read the *News of India,* you would most likely think of the protestors as a nuisance. Their disrupting traffic and continually polluting the city with their factories leaves you with a bad impression about them. But on the other hand, if you had read the story in the *India Daily,* you would know that the protests are because a lot of livelihoods will be lost if the factories close because the relocation efforts have not been adequate. Neither of these stories is a balanced report. A balanced report is one that discusses all points of view of a particular story and then leaves it to the readers to make up their minds.

Writing a balanced report, however, depends on the media being independent. An independent media means that no one should control and influence its coverage of news. No one should tell the media what

can be included and what should not be included in a news story. An independent media is important in a democracy. As you read above, it is on the basis of the information that the media provides that we take action as citizens, so it is important that this information is reliable and not biased.

However, the reality is that media is far from independent. This is mainly because of two reasons. The first is the control that the government has on the media. When the government prevents either a news item, or scenes from a movie, or the lyrics of a song from being shared with the larger public, this is referred to as **censorship**. There have been periods in Indian history when the government censored the media. The worst of these was the Emergency between 1975–1977.

Do you think it is important to know both sides of the story? Why?

Pretend that you are a journalist for a newspaper and write a balanced story from the two news reports.

What does TV do to us and what can we do with TV?

In many of our homes, TV is on a lot of the time. In many ways, a lot of our impressions about the world around us are formed by what we see on TV: it is like a 'window on the world'. How do you think it influences us? TV has different types of programmes, soap operas, like *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, game shows, like *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, reality TV shows like *Big Boss*, news, sports and cartoons. Before, in between and after each programme are advertisements. Since TV time costs so much money, only those programmes that can attract the maximum number of viewers are shown. Can you think of what such programmes might be? Think of what are the kinds of things that TV shows and what it does not. Does it show us more about the lives of the rich or the poor?

We need to think about what TV does to us, how it shapes our views of the world, our beliefs, attitudes and values. We need to realise that it gives us a partial view of the world. While we enjoy our favourite programmes, we should always be aware of the large exciting world beyond our TV screens. There is so much happening out there that TV ignores. A world beyond film stars, celebrities and rich lifestyles, a world that all of us need to reach out to and respond to in various ways. We need to be active viewers, who question whatever we see and hear, while we may enjoy it too!

While the government does continue to censor films, it does not really censor the media's coverage of news. Despite the absence of censorship by the government, most newspapers nowadays still fail to provide a balanced story. The reasons for this are complicated. Persons who research the media have said that this happens because business houses control the media. At times, it is in the interest of these businesses to focus on only one side of the story. Media's continual need for money and its links to advertising means that it becomes difficult for media to be reporting against people who give them advertisements. Media is, thus, no longer considered independent because of its close links to business.

Besides the above, the media also tends to focus on a particular aspect of a story because they believe this makes the story interesting. Also, if they want to increase public support for an issue, they often do this by focusing on one side of a story.

Setting agendas

The media also plays an important role in deciding what stories to focus on, and therefore, decides on what is newsworthy. For example, the annual function at your school is unlikely to make the news. But if a famous actor is invited as the Chief Guest, then the media might be interested in covering it. By focusing on particular issues, the media influences our thoughts, feelings and actions, and brings those issues to our attention. Due to the significant influence it plays in our lives and in shaping our thoughts, it is commonly said that the media 'sets the agenda'.

Very recently, the media drew our attention to alarming levels of pesticides in cola drinks. They **published** reports that indicated the high level of pesticides and, thus, made us aware of the need to regularly monitor these colas according to international quality and safety standards. They did

this despite the government's resistance by boldly declaring that colas were unsafe. In covering this story, the media positively helped us focus on an issue that affects our lives and one that we might not even have been aware of it had it not been for media reporting.

There are several instances when the media fails to focus on issues that are significant in our lives. For example, drinking water is a major problem in the country. Every year, thousands of people suffer and die because they do not get safe drinking water. However, we seldom find the media discussing this issue. A well-known Indian journalist wrote of how the Fashion Week, in which clothes designers show their new creations to rich people, formed the front page headlines of all the newspapers while several slums were being demolished in Mumbai, the very same week, and this was not even noticed!

As citizens of a democracy, the media has a very important role to play in our lives because it is through the media that we hear about issues related

Fashion shows are very popular with the media.

What is the consequence of the media 'setting the agenda' by reporting on the Fashion Week rather than the slum demolitions?

Can you think of an issue that does not seem important to you because it is never featured in the media?

Local media

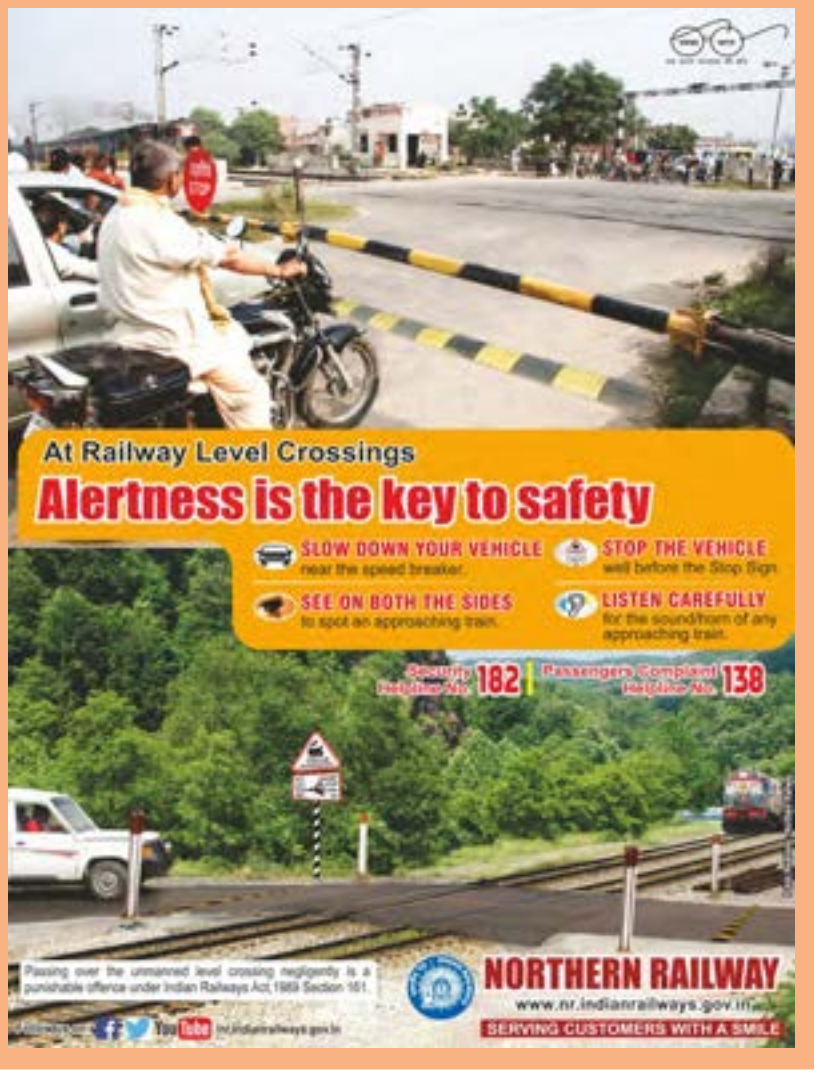
Recognising that the media will not be interested in covering 'small' issues that involve ordinary people and their daily lives, several local groups have come forward to start their own media. Several people use community radio to tell farmers about the prices of different crops and advise them on the use of seeds and fertilisers. Others make documentary films with fairly cheap and easily available video cameras on real-life conditions faced by different poor communities, and, at times, have even given the poor these video cameras to make films on their own lives.

Another example is a newspaper called *Khabar Lahriya* which is a fortnightly that is run by eight Dalit women in Chitrakoot district in Uttar Pradesh. Written in the local language, *Bundeli,* this eight-page newspaper reports on Dalit issues and cases of violence against women and political corruption. The newspaper reaches farmers, shopkeepers, panchayat members, school teachers and women who have recently learnt to read and write.

to the working of the government. The media decides what to focus on and in this way it 'sets the agenda'. The government can, at times, prevent the media from publishing a story and this is called censorship. Nowadays, media's close relationship with business often means that a balanced report is difficult to come by. Given this, it is important for us to be aware that the 'factual information' that a news report provides is often not complete and can be one-sided. We, therefore, need to analyse the news by asking the following questions: what is the information I am learning from this report? What information is not being provided? From whose point of view is the article being written? Whose point of view is being left out and why?

Social advertising

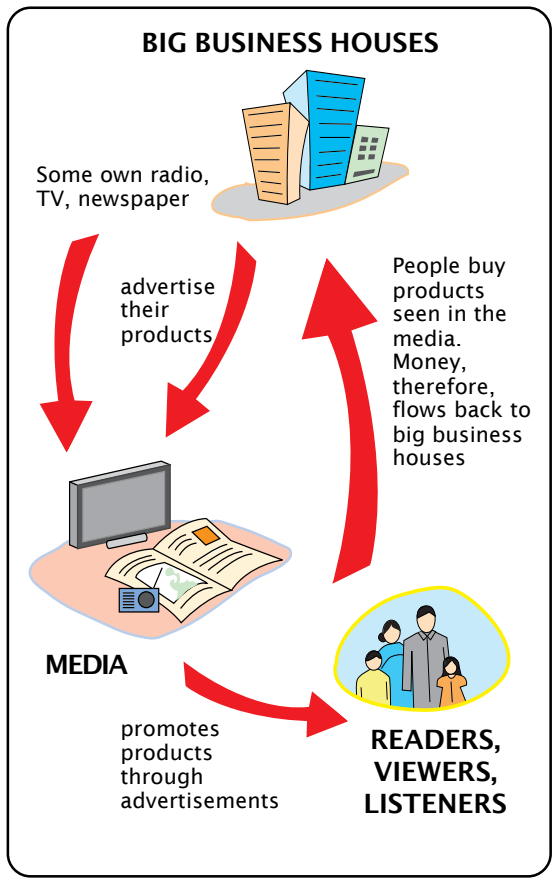
Social advertisements refer to advertisements made by the Government or private agencies that have a larger message for society. The following is a social advertisement regarding crossing of manned/unmanned level crossings.



EXERCISES

1. In what ways does the media play an important role in a democracy?

2. Can you give this diagram a title? What do you understand about the link between media and big business from this diagram?



3. You have read about the ways in which the media 'sets the agenda'. What kind of effect does this have in a democracy? Provide two examples to support your point of view.

4. As a class project, decide to focus on a particular news topic and cut out stories from different newspapers on this. Also watch the coverage of this topic on TV news. Compare two newspapers and write down the similarity and differences in their reports. It might help to ask the following questions–

   a. What information is this article providing?

   b. What information is it leaving out?

   c. From whose point of view is the article being written?

   d. Whose point of view is being left out and why?

5. Do projects (solo, pair or group) about types of advertisements. Create commercial advertisements about some products and social advertisements about public health, road safety and the need to save water and energy.

Glossary

Publish: This refers to newsreports, articles, interviews, stories, etc., that are printed in newspapers, magazines and books for a wide audience to read.

Censorship: This refers to the powers that government has to disallow media from publishing or showing certain stories.

Broadcast: In this chapter this word is used to refer to a TV or radio programme that is widely transmitted.

Public protest: When a large number of people come together and openly state their opposition to some issue. Organising a rally, starting a signature campaign, blocking roads etc. are some of the ways in which this is done.