
UNIT 9 ROLE OF MEDIA*

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of media;
- Discuss the different types of media and its importance;
- Comprehend the role of media in good governance;
- Analyse the importance of media in securing people's participation, public opinion, human rights and social change; and
- Throw light on the challenges faced by media.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Governance is the process of decision-making and the manner in which decisions are implemented. It describes how various public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. So it is not limited to the three branches of government i.e., executive, legislature and judiciary but it needs effective participation from market, civil society, media, and non-government organisations and masses as well. In today's knowledge society with unprecedented developments in information and communication technology (ICT), media plays a seminal role in ensuring good governance. In fact, media is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. There are some essential features of good governance such as legitimacy, participation, accountability and transparency about which we have already discussed in Unit 2 of this Course.

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In today's world, media becomes an essential part of our daily life. It may not have a direct role in the governance of the country. But it shapes the public opinion; gives voice to the citizens, provides information to the public institutions, market and civil society. Today media has immense responsibility in creating and shaping public opinion and strengthening the society. So it becomes important to understand the role of media and channelise it to achieve the goals of good governance. In this Unit we shall focus on these aspects.

9.2 MEDIA: MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

The word 'media' is derived from the word *medium*, signifying mode or carrier. Media is used to reach and address a large target group or audience. It is generally defined as impersonal means of communication which may be written, visual or auditory or sometimes a combination of these. Through this, messages, information and ideas are transmitted directly to the audience. In simpler terms, the word 'media' denotes the means of communication with a large number of people through written or printed words or sound and voice or visual images or a combination of these. In simplest terms, we can say that the term media refers to the groups that communicate information and news to people. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, audios and videos as well as movies are examples of media.

By the definition itself, we understand that media is an organised means of sharing information. Through it we can reach a large number of people, quickly, timely, effectively and efficiently. The main characteristics of media are:

- i) It can reach millions of people in short time; even instantaneously.
- ii) Audio media is very useful for illiterate and visually challenged.
- iii) Visual media can be effective in a multilingual society with illiteracy to a large extent.
- iv) It is cost-effective and user-friendly.
- iv) Generally, media provides one way communication to the recipients. Though these days opinion polls, letters to editors or open columns are some methods of making it interactive, but still they are limited.

9.3 TYPES OF MEDIA

Media has become an important part of our life. It has a crucial function to perform to generate awareness and promote vigilance towards the rule of law and making information accessible to the citizens, be it legislative or administrative proceedings or documents. Most people get information about government, happenings around, current affairs and so on from the media. It contributes towards creating an informed, aware and an accountable society. There are three main types of news media: print media, broadcast media, and the internet.

Print Media

This is the oldest media form. Newspapers, magazines, journals, brochures, newsletters, books, leaflets and pamphlets and other publications are collectively known as the print media. Most of us start the day by reading a newspaper on a regular basis. Therefore print media is very significant. The regular readers of print media tend to be more likely to be aware and active about several issues.

The print media is responsible for exhaustive reporting than other news sources. Many

news reports on television, for example, are merely follow-up stories about news that first appear in newspapers. Although it is said that the electronic or new media have replaced the print media, a majority of audience prefer the print media for various communication purposes.

Broadcast Media

This mass media includes television and radio as well as electronic media like movies, CDs and DVDs, as well as the new gadgets. Prior to the advent of television in the 1950s, reliance for news was on radio broadcasts. With the emergence of television, fewer people rely on radio as their primary news source. Local news stations have a particularly large audience because they can report on local weather, traffic and other events. In India, radio is still a very important medium of communication. Especially in rural areas we see that in disaster situations, in giving warnings about weather, this medium is very useful. Similarly television too has impact due to the presentation and catchy visuals through which information is disseminated.

Internet

With the advent of new technologies such as the internet, we are now enjoying the benefits of high-technology mass media, which is faster and has a widespread range. The internet has the advantage of audio as well as visual components. Mobile phones, computers and the internet are often referred to as the new-age media. The internet has opened up several new opportunities for mass communication, including e-mail and web blogs. It is slowly transforming the news media because more people are relying on online sources of news instead of traditional print and broadcast media. The web also allows for a more interactive approach by allowing people to personally tailor the news they receive through personalised web portals, news groups, podcasts, and feeds. It makes it more interactive, with audience leaving their comments and having discussions online. We have dealt this in detail in Unit 8 of this Course.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
 ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) What do you understand by media?

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2) List the features of media.

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9.4 MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE

Good governance encompasses participation by market and civil society along with the government in governing, adhering to rule of law, promoting transparency, accountability and human rights. It includes accountable, transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive administration. Media as a fourth pillar of democracy plays a vital role in ensuring that all these criteria are met. It is not the investigation and criticism of media which ensures that good governance takes hold, but its role to act as a beacon of change for masses and as a tool for the “good” and betterment of masses and not in its own interest. Media’s role in promotion of good governance can be understood with the help of its contribution in protecting human rights, curbing corruption, promoting rule of law, bringing change and ensuring people’s participation in decision making. It ensures a check on government actions and brings out in open public concerns and voices.

In contemporary times media has an important role in governance as it

- Creates a platform for freedom of expression
- Focuses on responsiveness of State to citizens and improve State-citizen relations
- Fosters debates and dialogues by making available balanced and reliable information.

9.4.1 Media and Democracy

Democracy is the primary requirement for any good governance. And it is rightly said that democracy without media is like a vehicle without wheels. Media’s role in democracy is clear when Thomas Jefferson says “If it were left on me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter”. Media is being considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. Media brings about awareness among the people and acts as one of the major instruments of social change. In a democratic set up, it is media which strengthens the democratic norms and values and also accelerates the pace of development.

According to Norris (2006), media has three key roles in contributing to democratisation and good governance. The very vital function of media is to act as a watch dog over the powerful, promoting accountability, transparency and public scrutiny. The second important role of media is to function as a civic forum for political debates, facilitating informed electoral choice and actions; and the third function is to act as an agenda setter for policy makers, strengthening government responsiveness for instance to social problems and to exclusion.

Democracy requires the active participation of citizens. Media keeps citizens engaged in governance by informing, educating and mobilising them. Democracy can work properly only if it is able to secure maximum participation of the people. They, when informed have the knowledge of what is going on and are aware of various social, political and economic issues. This information about the plans, programmes, policies, actions and intentions of the government is given to the masses by media. With the information people get through media, they are able to appreciate or criticise, support or oppose the government policies. Media also acts as a channel of communication by which masses raise their voice, concerns and grievances. Many a time, it has been seen that it is the pressure created by the public opinion which has made governments of the day to take any particular decision or change their decisions. In this way, media ensures a democratic base of the good governance. For example in India, the movement of Anna Hazare for Lokpal Bill was given wide coverage in media. It resulted in mobilisation

of entire nation against the corruption and government was pressurised to bring Lokpal Bill in parliament. Recently when Goods and Services Tax (GST) was imposed on sanitary napkins, womens organisations particularly and women in general registered their opposition through media particularly social media. We are witnessing many instances regularly where mobilisation of masses on various issues is taking place. Since media’s outreach is vast it has a responsible role to play.

It is media which gives the voice to every common citizen in the decision making and enables an environment for this. The media also exposes the loopholes in the democratic system and helps the government to fill these and makes the system more accountable, responsive and citizen-friendly. Thus, media plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy.

Media has an educative role by not just giving the news but through debates, comments provide political education and strengthen democratic culture. This is the reason political scientist, Karl Deutsch, has called that the system of communication proves a “nerve of the polity”, and any breakdown of the nerve may cause dysfunctional impact in the performance of the polity causing governance decay. Educating the ignorant masses on a large scale is a tough task. Only media can achieve this goal. It generates discussion on issues amongst masses and initiates debates in public sphere and capacitates people in making informed choice. Aware and informed citizens participate more actively in the decision making.

9.4.2 Media and People’s Participation

One of the characteristics of good governance is participation. Peoples’ participation means that citizens and their institutions have the opportunity to be involved in a meaningful ways in making decisions that affect them or in which they have an interest. Media increases people’s involvement in the governance .It provides them with the information and skills needed to participate in political system. It makes citizens feel that they have the right, the opportunity and a mechanism through which they can make their voices heard. Through media people can influence the decisions that affect their life. Media increases access to political information. It provides for creation of a public sphere or space where people can participate over a wide range of debates and gives opportunity for presentation of different viewpoints. It creates democratic legitimacy over issues.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
 ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) How does media promote democracy?

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2) What role does the media play in securing people’s participation?

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9.4.3 Media and Public Opinion

Public opinion is citizens’ cumulative views on politics, government actions, social issues, and so on. It is very important for any governance or democratic system to understand and accept public opinion because citizens’ political actions are driven by their opinions. It helps political and administrative system to understand citizens’ expectations. Public opinion sheds light on the reasons for specific policy outcomes. It also serves as the feedback to the government, its policies and actions. Therefore in democratic governance, authorities come to know about the aspirations, wishes, needs and grievances of people by gauging public opinion.

Media shapes opinions by providing the information on different issues not only to public but also to policy makers. Media, first, draws attention to issues. Then it provides facts, information, and expert opinion. This enables citizens to voice diverse opinions on governance and reform and help build public consensus to bring about change. Finally, media provides this information to public policy makers, so that they can develop an informed decision and move forward with a proper solution to the issue. It reveals the shortcomings in government policies and actions, so in a way, it constitutes a mechanism of checks and balances on government.

The media plays another important role by bringing into open public opinion on key issues. In this way it makes it possible for public opinion to encompass large numbers of individuals. It also builds grassroots support on key issues to gain importance.

Media not only disseminates information but also plays a vital part in mobilisation of public opinion. It facilitates interpretation and systematisation of information into firm viewpoints and allows people mobilise their opinions. This is visible during the conduct of elections in the country.

Media also helps in raising awareness of the people through disseminating legislative debates, speeches of eminent personalities, public grievances and current issues. Such news and views help people to augment their political and social awareness which in turn, helps in the formation of public opinion. We all are aware about media’s role before and during elections in our country that contributes to forming public opinion on issues.

9.4.4 Media and Accountability

Media acts as watchdog against the misuse of administrative authority. Its continuous watch on government policies and actions ensures accountability of government to the citizens that helps in improving service delivery and governance. The media reports act as a check on the arbitrary use of powers by the government authorities and institutions and ensure that transparency and accountability are adhered in governance.

The World Bank has opined that media by raising corruption as an important governance issue creates space for discussion about it and also a public consensus to fight against it. Presently, with multi fold increase in the functions and powers of bureaucracy, there is a need for check on its arbitrary and misuse. Transparency in governance allows for

checks on the possible conflict of interest and ensures greater legitimacy for the government. Media with its investigative reports is able to shed light on this possible conflict of interest. It ensures that clarity is maintained in the execution of all the government policies and government is taking care of the interests of the masses but not of one particular group or section of the society.

9.4.5 Media and Change

Media has the potential of being a change agent. Due to its wide outreach, media has played a huge role in the development of the country. It implies positive change where old practices and structures are changed towards a better system and processes. Media plays a pivotal role in conceptualising, communicating and bringing about this change. As the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report has aptly put it, “development and communication are out of gear. On the one hand, we have the media used without a developmental purpose. On the other, we have developmental action without media or communication support. Yet, in an ideal world, the two would work hand in hand”.

Media has an influencing role in changing the mind-set of people and moulds their perception. It raises various social issues and influences the public opinion. It makes people aware of their rights as well as duties. Especially in a country like India with widespread poverty and ignorance, media plays a key role in changing people’s attitudes. We have several examples where media has played a crucial role in creating awareness on various social evils and bringing the desired change. For example we are aware of the success stories of pulse polio campaign. “Do Boond Zindagi Ki” this tagline was displayed again and again on TV and radio. It was due to this awareness created by media that India has achieved the rank of a polio-free country. In the case of information dissemination on HIV/AIDS also, media played a key role. From time to time media covers women’s issues and raises voice against the cases of domestic violence, dowry, sexual harassment and makes vociferous demand for a dignified respectable place for women in the society. We all are aware that the issue relating to organ donation is being given wide publicity by media. And its gaining momentum and a slow change in public perception is visible. It indicates the progressive role media has in ushering in social change.

Media gives information about the government’s plans and programmes relating to poverty eradication, women empowerment, literacy, employment etc. It generates awareness among the people on various social, economic, environmental issues. When people become aware of the government schemes and programmes and their benefits, they are able to avail them. This ensures the success of the government plans and policies. Media not only highlights the achievements of the government in terms of its programmes and policies aimed at bringing social change, but it also gives wide coverage to their loopholes and shortcomings. This makes government committed to the agenda of development and change.

Media plays an important role in dissemination of new ideas and practices. Especially television and radio play a pivotal role in taking the development plans and programmes to the masses of rural areas.

9.4.6 Media and Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings have certain basic inherent, inalienable and unassailable rights to which they are entitled by birth. Providing these rights to citizens and protecting the same is the foundation stone of democracy and good governance. Media has a very important role in securing, protecting and

promoting human rights. It can create awareness about the concept of human rights and a congenial environment for their protection. Certain human rights which are basic to human development like right to equality, freedom of speech, right to peace, right to a dignified life, should be the common agenda of media and given topmost priority in coverage. Media should build a culture of human rights through all segments of society.

Media in particular should pay special attention to the cases of violation of human rights. It should investigate and report on cases of human rights violation. Along with bringing out the shortages and challenges in the protection of human rights, it should also cover the success stories of individuals and organisations striving hard for securing and protecting human rights. Media can act as a check on arbitrary use of power that affects human rights. Since media plays the role of communication between the State and the public, it can also play an effective role in making the authorities aware of their duties. Media has a role in generating awareness among citizens about the rights and also become a reliable source of information to the public authorities and civil society organisations working towards protection of human rights.

9.4.7 Media and Rule of Law

Rule of law is essential for the smooth functioning of democracy. According to the United Nations “The term rule of law refers to a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency”.

Rule of law is one of the key pillars of good governance. When rule of law is ensured, it builds confidence in the democratic process of the country. When it is not respected, arbitrariness and impunity dominate the governance.

By the term rule of law, we simply mean that everyone is equal before the law and same rule applies equally to everyone. Media plays a crucial role by promoting vigilance over maintenance of upholding rule of law. It gives wide coverage to any deviations in use of rule of law and this creates awareness among the masses and pressurises the government to take suitable action. Media promotes vigilance towards the rule of law, especially through fostering investigative journalism, ensures the openness of court, legislative and administrative proceedings and access to official and public documents.

For rule of law, freedom of speech and independent media are very important. Whenever government violates the letter and spirit of law, people must be free to and be able to criticise the actions of government. In this way, media plays an essential role in upholding the rule of law.

No rule of law can work successfully unless people have faith in it. They need to be assured that there is some system to raise their voice when law is surpassed and supremacy of law is threatened, and every case of violation of rule of law will be treated in a fair and just manner. This instils their faith in governance. In particular, rule of law can be protected in the presence of independent and honest judiciary. It gives wide coverage to public interest litigation in which concerned actors-citizens and other voluntary organisations can bring to the notice of the Supreme Court or the high courts of states, any issues which need immediate attention and redressal of the affected parties. This also acts as a great shield for the protection and promotion of rule of law in the country.

Media is an important factor in promoting democracy and the rule of law only if it is given the opportunity to function without being oppressed or intimidated by the political and administrative authorities. The independence of media is threatened if their sources of information are not protected, and they themselves are open to legal action which prevents them from reporting in the public interest.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) What is the impact of media on public opinion?

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2) Explain the role of media in promoting accountable governance.

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3) How does media promote rule of law?

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9.5 CHALLENGES FOR MEDIA

Media acts as a catalyst for good governance by promoting its key indicators. It creates the environment for good governance, nurtures, protects and promotes it. But to achieve this task, media needs to be honest, impartial and independent. But if media is biased, corrupt and favours only a particular party or few individuals, it can prove to be very dangerous for the smooth functioning of democracy. On the contrary when media is monopolised by a particular party or a corporate house, its credibility is at stake. Paid news is a threat to free and fair media that needs to be curbed for promoting healthy democracy and good governance.

In present scenario, media is facing enormous challenges.

- The nexus between political parties, media and corporate houses is proving fatal for good governance. Many a times it is observed that media is not representing the voice of people but vested interests of its stakeholders. It derails the process of healthy participation of people. It undermines the accountability of government and paves the way for another form of corruption. It turns the democracy into aristocracy. So it is very important that media should be free and neutral so that it can work without any fear or pressure.
- Equally important is the fact that media's powers should have some reasonable restrictions. We have seen large scale misuse of media's powers. It must not cross its boundaries and encroach the area of other three branches of government. Only then it can serve as a true vehicle of good governance.
- Media needs to be sensitive to explain and generate discussions on those issues that bring about development.
- Use of ICT and responsible social media also plays an important role in developing informed citizens.
- Building professionalism, ethical standards of media through independence, building capacity, enhancing their accountability, free from intervention by the State and the media owners and democratising media access.

Media independence is to be ensured and its potential in promotion of effective governance is to be sustained.

9.6 CONCLUSION

The role of media including social media is getting recognised. It needs to make people information rich and make them active participants in governance process. As we have discussed in the Unit, media has a multifaceted role to discharge. A sensitive, accountable, responsible and professional media can contribute immensely in effective governance.

9.7 GLOSSARY

Paid News: It refers to media outlets publishing articles in newspapers, magazines and news coverage in electronic media in exchange for money.

Public Interest Litigation: It refers to a suit filed by an individual or group of individuals in the Supreme Court or High Courts of the states. This is filed generally on matters of public interest such as violation of fundamental rights, education, health, environment and so on.

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - Media is generally defined as impersonal means of communication which can be written, visual or auditory or sometimes a combination of these.
 - It also refers to the groups that communicate information and news to people.
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
 - Its reach to people in short time.
 - Audio media is very useful to illiterate and visually challenged.
 - Visual media can be effective in a multilingual society and with illiteracy to a large extent.
 - Cost-effective and user friendly.
 - Generally it is one way communication but of late it is becoming interactive.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - Media acts as a watchdog over the powerful, promoting accountability, transparency and public scrutiny.
 - Civic forum for political debate, facilitating informed electoral choices and actions.

- Agenda setter for policy makers, and strengthening responsiveness for citizens and government.
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
- Media provides people information and skills needed to enable them participate in political system.
 - It gives people the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their life.
 - It makes the voice of citizens heard.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
- Media shapes public opinion by providing information on different issues not only to the public but also to policy makers.
 - Reinforces the latent attitudes of public and activates them to take action accordingly.
 - Builds grassroots support on key issues to gain importance.
 - Helps in raising awareness of people which in turn helps in formation of public opinion.
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
- Media acts as watchdog against misuse of administrative authority.
 - It acts as a check on the arbitrary use of powers by government authorities.
 - It creates a space for discussion and public consensus.
 - It checks possible conflict of interest in government and ensures legitimacy for the government.
- 3) Your answer should include the following points:
- Media promotes exercise of vigilance in maintaining rule of law.
 - It ensures openness in judicial, legislative and administrative proceedings and access to official and public documents.
 - It instils faith amongst people over rule of law.
 - It creates awareness on the importance of public interest litigation.