

## **MASS COMMUNICATION AND MASS CONCEPTS**

### **Structure**

1. Introduction
2. Characteristics of Mass Audience and Typology of Audience
3. Bauer's Concept

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### **1\_ INTRODUCTION :**

Mass media makes use of communication to understand the salient features of the target audience. Mass communication helps to reach a vast audience. Communication is done in such a manner so as to attract a large audience and influence society as well. This unit will help you under Bauer's concept of mass communication and the characteristics and typology of audience.

### **2\_ CHARACTERISTICS OF MASS AUDIENCE AND TYPOLOGY OF AUDIENCE :**

Before we enter into details, I would like to know that we deal with the dimension of media audience. To fully appreciate what this is, one must understand the meaning of the word dimension. As a noun, dimension means aspect or feature of a particular thing or item. As a verb, the word dimension may mean the shape or size of an object according to specific measurements. This section takes into account the term dimension as a noun to discuss the features of media audience. Students must be aware that print and electronic media have different types of audiences. That is to say, different kinds of media cater to different kinds of audience.

Books on the other hand have a more varied sort of an audience; the reader of a book may have several different dimensions and the author/(s) may have a certain readership in mind when writing a book. For instance, the intellectual elite may be the target audience for non-fiction books on politics whereas fictional novels or novellas with a light hearted theme are meant for a larger audience. Similarly, comic books or children's books are written keeping children's requirements in mind. Consequently, each of these books is different and this difference can be seen in the sort of language that the author uses; that is to say, the author of a children's book will use extremely simple words where as a book on Marxism may use technical words and academic jargon and will be too complicated to be read for pleasure.

Juxtaposed to newspapers, books and magazines, the radio is a more democratic media since it does not preclude those who cannot read and write. Radio is also of several types, the

most common being Frequency Modulation or FM as we know it. Further, there are different types of FM stations, community radio, commercial stations and government owned stations, to name a few. Community radio is a type of station that has a reach of about 5 km radius. It caters to a very specific and sometimes mixed audience as the area may consist of people of the lower, middle and the upper class. But the clever way to connect them all together is to talk of the situations and problems that specifically concern them, thus bringing them all together. Commercial and government radio stations are usually city specific, they have a range of about 60 km from the point of origin, and the main aim of such radio stations is to connect to a wider range of audience spanning the entire city. Target audience of different radio stations varies with the kind of content that they have to offer. For example most commercial radio stations use Hindi as their language of communication, the words used are fairly simple to be understood and the issues are not general to a particular area but something that each section of the society has to face. This ensures that not only is the audience entertained but that it feels united as well.

The motion pictures have a common ground with the radio. By definition, motion-pictures are just another name for what one commonly calls films. As you may be familiar, films are perhaps the most watched form of media and being that, it has a large and varied audience. Producers, directors, script writers all need to keep in mind their audience. Each movie genre as its own loyal, devoted audience and script writers write keeping that target audience in mind. For example, people who enjoy romantic-comedies would expect a certain kind of film that is being sold as a romantic comedy whereas those that enjoy action movies would expect a story very different from the kind that is offered by a comedy. Hence, depending on the genre and its target audience the movie makers would have to incorporate themes and stereotypes that would help their movie to appeal to its audience. It is important to note that there is no such thing as a bad film; films are made and produced for entertainment and information and what may be enjoyable to one may not be enjoyable to another.

### **Magazine Audience :**

A magazine is a journal generally containing articles or records of events which are circulated weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Magazines usually are financed either by pre-paid subscriptions, advertising, and purchase price or by all three. Magazines are of two types: general magazines and specialized magazines. General magazines cater to all aspects of the society, whereas specialized magazines cater to only one aspect such as literature, sports, film, women, computers and educational magazines. Magazines are categorized according to the audiences they cater to.

Educational magazines do not have a fixed target as dissemination of educational information is not limited to the young or the old. On the other hand, there are some magazines that do have specific age groups in mind as their target audience. The main point here to be kept in mind is that one must be really careful when compiling and editing the contents of a magazine; the language used, the ideas discussed, and the pictures incorporated should be such that they meet the maturity levels and the sensibilities of the target audience. For example, magazines that are primarily read by children or teenagers, not only have to make sure that the articles and editorials are written in a simple language, but must also

ensure that the issues and themes discussed and the visuals used are not such that they have a negative effect on young impressionable minds. On the other hand, such magazines that are read by adults, *Frontline*, *Outlook*, etc., can be more direct in writing about and reporting events and issues.

With the kind of popularity that the Internet now enjoys, electronic magazines are being favoured over the conventional print ones. These magazines are basically the electronic version of the magazines that are available in print. Since they can be easily read over the Internet, not only are they accessible from any part of the world, but they are also available free of cost. This however, also has a corollary: the Internet has in many ways democratized audiences and the availability of the magazine in more than two media generates a varied target audience.

### **Book Audience :**

Books are a form of print media that not only provide information and education but also entertainment. Books are categorized as fiction and non-fiction. These are further categorized as biographies, travel writing, adventure stories, novellas, novels, to name a few. Each and every one of these types of books cater to a fixed audience. For example, textbooks are written with a school or college curriculum in mind and are meant for students of the discipline they belong to. Textbooks are written to cater to the needs of a varied student population of different comprehension and understanding abilities. Hence they must necessarily have illustrations, activities, examples, etc. to enable a better understanding of the subject matter. As stated earlier, books (that are not subject based textbooks) are largely divided into fiction and non-fiction. Fictional works are further sub divided into different genres: crimes, detective, romance, thrillers, historical fiction, gothic fiction, to name a few. Each genre caters to different kinds of people. This is not to say that those who enjoy reading crime fiction do not like to read historical fiction. However, it cannot be denied that each genre does have a loyal, devoted readership how so ever small that readership may be. Apart from genres, book audience can also vary from the point of view of region; people of a particular region would prefer to read something that is relevant to them. Books that are outside their purview may not interest them much. Religion too plays a part in determining an audience: certain books (those which are religious or quasi-religious in nature) find favour with audiences that follow a particular faith. Religion also has in the past played a role in determining the acceptability of a work, whether fictional or nonfictional. Works such as Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* and even recently, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series have run into trouble with different religious groups. Authors therefore often need to keep in mind that their writings do not offend the religious sentiments of people. Of course this does constrict the freedom of an artist but that discussion is outside the purview of this unit. Suffice it to say that the audience of a book is controlled by many such factors as age, religion, region, political opinions and affiliations, interests, and many more.

### **Radio Audiences :**

The radio, like any electronic medium fulfils the dual role of entertainment and information. At the same time, it also brings people together. Since its invention, the radio has come a long

way and is no longer limited to radio waves in a city. In fact, with the introduction of satellite radio, one can now listen to radio stations from other countries as well as transmit stations from our country to other countries.

One of the most important contributions to the world of radio has been made by Worldspace Radio. This is a kind of satellite radio that catches waves directly from the satellite and transmits them to the radio set plugged in your home. The other form of radio, that is, the Internet radio has become a widely favoured means of communication and entertainment. The British Broadcasting Corporation has also the facility whereby people can listen to all its radio channels online. This is very convenient and beneficial since one can sit in the comfort of one's home and listen to broadcasts as they are made in the United Kingdom.

### **Motion-Picture Audiences**

Like books and magazines, films too belong to various genres. Films can vary from comedy, action, thriller, science fiction to fantasy, drama, horror, romance, historic, biopics, biographies, etc. Each of these genres cater to a different kind of audience. For instance, a child would be more interested in watching fantasy or animated films than in watching what he/she would think to be boring drama films or documentaries. Similarly, adults would normally watch drama, action, thrillers, or romantic films than fantasy or animations.

This also suggests that a lot of the viewership is determined by our social conditioning since the latter causes us to think and behave in a certain way. For example, an adult may be reluctant to watch cartoons or films meant for children lest he/she be considered immature. Nonetheless, as students of mass media it is very important to note that motion-pictures are a form of art and therefore should not be dismissed as irrelevant. Further, it should be kept in mind that motionpictures are an audio and visual form of media. This means that they consist both of sound and moving pictures. It is this aspect of motion-pictures which makes it very popular; films, more than any other form of media is not only informative and educative but is also a simple way to unwind and relax. Filmmakers need to keep many aspects in mind when making a movie; the first and foremost is the duration of a film. Motion-pictures can range from anywhere between 30 minutes to 4 hours. This means that the production team of a movie must create a film such that its audience stay engrossed and engaged. Innumerable films have been found fault with because audiences found them too long and hence boring. Moreover, moviemakers must also ensure that the content of the movie appeals its audience; it must be both engaging and entertaining.

### **3- BAUER'S CONCEPT**

At the very core of research of mass communication lies a basic dichotomy, a gap between opposite concepts of the process of mass communication and its audience. Usually seen in uses and gratification research, the deliberation stretches far beyond that paradigm. It often permeates a number of theoretical and methodological debates. A theoretical tug of war has come to the forefront over the last forty years of research. At one end is the active audience: individualistic, "impervious to influence", rational and selective. On the other extreme is the

passive audience: conformist, gullible, anomic, vulnerable, a victim. Both these ends are pulled by media theorists who put forward their idea of social reality.

Theorists and researchers of mass communication want to take up both the concepts simultaneously. This crucial difference of opinion encloses many questions one asks about the socio political role of the media, the audience member's insight of self and "reality", as also the moment to moment cognitive processes through which the individual decodes media content and form. Questions such as what are the boundaries of individual intellectual freedom in the institutions for the propagation of ideology and information? Or are these institutions for conformism of knowledge? All these questions look for a theoretical analysis of the basic assumptions that streamline and sometimes mislead the research on the audience of mass media.

On a table of theories, beliefs and arrogance the concept of the active audience is of key importance for the uses and gratification paradigm. Those who propound this paradigm stress that the, "most fundamental tenet" (Swanson, 1979) of audience activity is important and constitutes an essential underpinning of the approach and is extremely basic to the study of the mass communication effects in general, and central to the uses and gratification approach in particular. Some viewers feel that the active audience theory itself may be a "new dominant paradigm in effects research".

A lot of discussion has taken place and it has become apparent that this has given rise to a multifaceted and extremely mouldable construct that is "undeniably complex and multidimensional"(Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985), There is an unreal and relative process called "activity" and it needs to be defined. According to Rubin (1986) the concept of activity is difficult to define, inspite of the fact that the concept has been used in mass communication theory and research over decades. Along with other theorists and how they highlighted activity, Bauer (1964) saw the audience activity as "imperviousness to influence". This facet of activity can be referred to as the sociopolitical "bottom line" of the concept. The notion of "imperviousness to influence" can be the source of active audience. To understand this fully one needs to analyse the concept of active audience.

As said earlier, Bauer is the originator of the phrase "imperviousness to influence" and the "obstinate audience", which later metamorphosed to the "active audience", (Bauer, 1963, 1964). Bauer's aim is clearly stated in the first paragraph of his article. *The opening sentence of Ethical Standards of Psychologists is that "the psychologist is committed to a belief in the dignity and worth of the individual human being." ...But what kind of dignity can we attribute to a robot?*

Bauer was condemning the mass culture theory of conformism that had come to home via television. He puts in the forefront, a variant of the passive and active dichotomy. A model that is framed in the language of the marketplace, a "transactional model." A model where exchanges are equitable and each contributor expects to get his worth in terms of money. The attempt by Bauer was to retrieve the image of the individual which is integral to liberal democracy: the independent citizen who is rational, self-determining and pursuing a free life. The "active" audience members were the liberal democratic citizens. For them there was a

choice. Choice embedded in and ensured by an independent and obstinate citizen. The freedom to choose and exercise the choice was the sign of the “audience activity”. The “freedom of choice” was a consumerist plethora of choices. With the explosion of probabilities and choices, how could mass culture take hold?

### **KEY WORDS :**

**Magazine:** It is a journal generally containing articles or records of events which are circulated weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

**Textbooks:** These are written to cater to the needs of a varied student population of different comprehension and understanding abilities.

**Worldspace Radio:** This is a kind of satellite radio that catches waves directly from the satellite and transmits them to the radio set plugged in your home.