
UNIT 11 TELEVISION: AN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIUM

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11.0 INTRODUCTION

Every living creature on Earth needs to communicate with its fellow creatures, and sometimes even with creatures of other species. Even human beings are no exception to this. Now the question arises: how can one communicate with their fellow living being(s) cutting across barriers of geographical location, language, culture, background etc? To fulfill such a need, the first requirement is to identify a suitable medium. We all are familiar with the easily available media such as newspaper, street play, radio, television, film, internet, mobile phone and so on which are also referred to as the Traditional/Folk/Electronic/New media (even though the usage of some of these media are slowly on the decline). Besides, not all these media may be accessible to any particular individual as it is based on his/her socio-economic background. So how do we select a medium? The golden rule for that could be that we should select a medium whose characteristics and strengths can be easily exploited for transmitting the messages, symbols etc. to the target audience (or, we may call them the 'receiver'). For example, researchers like Barrow, Jr. & Westland claim, "a medium which utilises both visual and auditory dimensions, such as television or sound motion pictures, is more effective in transmitting information

than one which utilises the auditory dimension alone, such as radio.”

We may suggest that a particular medium is more appropriate for a given situation if it is expected to produce better effect on the receiver. There is an old saying: “Seeing is believing”, but someone may choose to differ and argue that whenever we see a visual or an image or an event on television, we do not completely believe and accept it as true because we all tend to perceive the message or event differently. However, it would be difficult for us to completely ignore a visual vis-à-vis its reliability and authenticity. Most frequently, we call television a visual medium. And interestingly, we all tend to forget that television is an audio-visual medium rather than only a visual medium. At this juncture, would it be appropriate to call television as an audio-visual medium instead of calling it as only visual medium. Although, we may all agree that TV is an audio-visual medium with dominance of visual elements. It also further consolidates the age old argument: “A picture speaks thousand words.”

In this Unit, an attempt has been made to make you understand ‘Television’ as a medium and further to recognize its strengths so that you may use it to your advantage in every sphere of life.

11.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the strengths and weaknesses of television as a medium;
- describe the journey of Indian television;
- analyse the role and use of television in education; and
- discuss the integration and convergence of television with new media.

11.2 TELEVISION AS A MEDIUM

What is television ? The literal meaning of television is ‘vision at a distance.’ It is a composite word derived from the Greek tele- ‘at a distance’, and the Latin word vision - ‘sight’. According to Alfred Dinsdale (2000), ‘television’ may be briefly defined as “vision by telegraphy.”

It is believed that on 26 January 1926, the world’s first demonstration of true television was given by John Logie Baird in front of 50 scientists in an attic room in central London (BBC-History-John Logie Baird, n.d.). But at the same time, we should not forget Marconi, an Italian inventor, who developed wireless transmission, without which invention of television could not have been possible. But the question arises as to why television was invented? As we all know that the necessity is always the mother of every invention. It would be wise on our part to understand the vision behind introducing television to the masses.

“When television is good, nothing —not the theatre, not the magazines or newspapers — nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your own television set when your station goes on the air and stay there, for a day, without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland.”- Newton N. Minow, Chairman, Federal Communications Commission (FCC), who referred to American commercial television programming as a “vast wasteland” and advocated for ‘programming in

the public interest', in his speech, "Television and the Public Interest", popularly known as 'Wasteland Speech' (American Rhetoric: Newton Minow — Address to the National Association of Broadcasters (Television and the Public Interest, n.d.).

It was a landmark speech for the medium of 'Television', delivered during the convention of the National Association of Broadcasters held on May 9, 1961, at a time when there were only three TV networks in the United States and when the domination of television was much less than it is today. With the mushrooming of television channels in the present time, this 'wasteland' must have spread its area to a greater extent. Interestingly, even after five decades this speech has its own relevance and further it sets the agenda for all of us to discuss a major issue: does television function in the public interest?

The basic objective of television broadcast in India was to 'educate' the masses through 'entertainment'. But ironically, in due course of time, the 'education' aspect has taken a back seat and the 'entertainment' has completely overshadowed the basic motto of television in India driven by the prime objective of revenue generation.

11.2.1 Components of TV: Audio and Visual

As we discussed in the introduction, television is an audio-visual medium with dominance of visuals. This means it has two components – audio and visual. As far as audio is concerned, it supports and compliments the visuals. Many a times the audio plays very crucial role in television programmes. It helps in explaining the message, setting the mood of the scene and expressing the emotions of the characters. It is really very difficult to produce an effective television programme without the audio component. Different types of audio elements are used in television programmes, for example – voice-over, characters' voice, background music, ambience and various sound effects. Now we shall discuss the most important component of television, i.e., visuals. Visuals are the core component of television used to convey the message through this medium. The term visual encompasses various elements, like – recorded video, photographs, animations and graphics.

11.2.2 TV - Is It an Idiot Box?

Among thousands of technological inventions made so far, 'television' is still believed to be one of the greatest inventions of mankind. It gained popularity among millions of people from the day one when it was launched in the market. Interestingly, TV was considered a medium for the rich and elite in those times and may be so even today. The size of the TV screen and its thickness define how wealthy its owner is. Despite the threats posed by later day inventions and the revolution unleashed by technologies such as the new media forms like Internet, the TV has not lost its popularity. Actually, it has become an inseparable part of our household items and it would not be an exaggeration to tell that TV has begun to be treated more like a family member. No one would deny that if our TV goes off air for a while, we all become restless.

But as every coin has two sides, TV too has its other side. Despite all the good aspects of a TV, however, it is considered a passive medium. The TV was considered as not promoting the thinking process among the viewers and so it has never really earned a good reputation. And probably that is why, it was popularly known as an 'Idiot Box', something which makes you dumb. As one television viewer writes in his blog: "If you consider TV as your friend then it is betraying you, if you think TV as your brother then it will destroy your originality and your culture, if you think TV

as your son then it is just going to make you sick” (TV is not an Idiot Box, 2013).

We may not realize it nor accept it easily but it is true that a majority of us spend a significant part of lives in front of a TV. It has been rightly said, “if you read too much books you are called a good reader but if you watch too much TV you are not called good viewer”. So, it would be wise on our part to act smarter and not to get fooled by the TV- the IDIOT BOX. TV should not in anyway control you. While the TV may not be an Idiot Box, but it can make you an idiot if you do not use it smartly.

11.2.3 Is Television Part of Our Life?

After a long day at work and the resulting stress, you have to confess that most of you just switch on your television sets to relax and end up watching never-ending episodes of a particular serial or other programmes of your interest. Jane Root (1986), the first woman channel controller of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) describes, “television is very effective towards insulating ourselves from other people and their demands. Interestingly, ‘it is time for bed’ can be easily ignored with the help of a television set”.

11.2.4 Television Mass: Are They Zombified?

You might have come across children taking their food in front of television at home like robots. At times, children freeze for minutes (not seconds) and keep staring at the TV set and it requires some adult members of the family to tell them that they have already finished their meal. This happens not only with children but also some adults who eat food while watching TV. One would be tempted to quote Jane Root (1986) in her book “Open the Box: About Television” who describes the classic images of the television viewer in a very creative way, “The family is sitting in front of the TV, staring blankly at a fuzzy, low-quality image. Their eyes are glazed, their limbs hanging laxly from unhealthy bodies. Junk food is pushed mechanically into slackly open mouths. There is no conversation: just the occasional grunt as programme becomes advertisement and then becomes programme again.” Such image of TV viewer has been projected in countless films, novels and comics.

11.2.5 Who is Watching Whom?

It would be very funny if someone asks you that whether you are watching the TV or the TV is watching you? Apparently, the hidden question is: Are you paying proper attention to the TV? While it may be true that we all do not sit like a zombie in front of TV, it would be interesting to know about Peter Collett’s experiments ‘watching people watching television’ as mentioned in the book, Open The Box: About Television by Jane Root. Peter Collett, a psychologist at Oxford University, conducted an experiment by placing a cabinet containing an ordinary television, a video camera, a microphone and a timing device in the living rooms of 20 different families for a week. The video recordings revealed that people were doing a whole range of things in front of the TV set. They were engaged in a variety of activities in front of the TV set - eating dinner, arguing with each other, listening to music, reading books, writing letters and vacuum-cleaning the carpet. According to Collett, “People spend hours on doing all kinds of things that have absolutely nothing to do with TV viewing while the set is on”. If this is so, then TV becomes a Radio and it further undermines the role of TV as a visual medium.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What is television ? Define according to your understanding.

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2. Do you agree that television has become part of our life? Give reasons for your answer.

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3. What was Peter Collett’s experiment ‘watching people watching television’?

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11.3 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF TELEVISION

In the earlier sections, we have discussed the different aspects of television as a medium. We shall now discuss about the strengths as well as the limitations of this medium.

11.3.1 How do We Watch Television ?

You may recall some incidents from your own experience when you might have been disturbed by the sound of your door bell while watching a ‘Live’ telecast of a 20-20 cricket final match. You may also perhaps recall a time when your daughter/sister requested you to solve a mathematical problem while you were seriously watching news. It is a fact that most of us struggle to concentrate to watch TV programmes of our choice as we get distracted and drawn away by numerous family activities and hence, most of us tend to adopt different strategies to watch television. Also it is quite common for viewers to exhibit an inconsistent pattern of TV watching. At times they may concentrate intensely on the TV programme while at another moment they may be treating the television sounds as a kind of background music. It is believed that as a form of electronic communication, television can be part of the fittings of a room. The ‘experience of television’ is very different from film. Unlike film, we buy everything coming on television once we pay for our subscription fee.

Raymond Williams, the academic who seriously analyzed on how we watch television gave another approach to television viewing as a ‘whole experience’. Williams (n.d.) says that it is significant we often say ‘we have been “watching television” rather than that we have watched “the news” or “a play” or “the football”.’ Further he says, “An evening spent with the television is like having read two plays,

three newspapers, three or four magazines on the same day that one has been to a variety show and a lecture and a football match.” In fact, it is felt that despite the items being different, the television experience has come in a unified manner.

While watching television one may rightfully believe that ‘Audience is the King’ as these days the audience sit in front of the TV with a remote in hand. In this ‘viewer controlled’ TV era findings show that viewers frequently surf back and forth between channels, avoiding disliked parts of programmes or the commercials. Therefore, it is obvious that unless television channels offer the experience you are looking for; you may turn it off, or move over, or shift your focus on something else while leaving the TV set on.

11.3.2 Strengths of Television

Every medium has its own strengths and weaknesses. Yet, it all depends on how the medium is used. The strengths of television should be understood with reference to its advantages over other medium. But the most important point is that the strengths of television need to be exploited by you as it cannot automatically add values to your effort.

However, we may highlight the following strengths of television as a medium:

- Television has advantages of both audio and visual components. The combination of both audio and visuals make it a powerful medium.
- TV has reach to a large section of the population.
- Television is still the cheapest medium of entertainment and infotainment.
- This medium has an immediacy factor. It can deliver the message to the masses immediately, a strength which makes this medium suitable for news and sports.
- Literacy is not required to use this medium hence it can be accessed and used by the masses.
- Television as a medium has been flexible changing itself with time. Earlier TV was a linear and appointment medium, but now all the DTH (Direct to home) platforms are providing pausing and recording facilities. Viewers can pause the programmes and resume watching after sometime or they can record programmes and watch them at the suitable time.
- In the era of new media, television has converged with online media so now ‘live’ TV is available on smartphones also.

11.3.3 Limitations of Television

Every medium has some limitations including television. Few limitations of television as a medium are the following:

- It is primarily a one-way communication medium.
- It requires electricity for access.
- Most of the television services are still linear which makes this medium an appointment medium. It means if you want to watch certain programme, you will have to switch your TV set on at a certain specific time. However, many DTH services are offering recording facilities too.
- Both production and transmission of programmes are comparatively costly.

- It is not portable. However, television programmes can be viewed on smartphones with the help of internet.
- Presenting in-depth information is little difficult through this medium. That is probably why after the television revolution, newspapers started focusing on detailed news reports and in-depth features.
- It is only visible within the allotted range/power of the transmitter or around the footprints of the satellite carrying the television signal.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. List five strengths of television as a medium.

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2. List five limitations of television as a medium .

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11.4 THE JOURNEY OF INDIAN TELEVISION

There was a time when Indian viewers had no option but to watch the state owned Doordarshan programmes which most media analysts consider to be dull, non-commercial in nature and oriented primarily towards education and socioeconomic development. Entertainment programmes were only a handful and you could count them on your fingertips. But then a big change came in the history of Indian Television when the serials like Hum Log (1984), and mythological dramas like Ramayan (1987-88) and Mahabharat (1988-89) were televised and millions of viewers stayed glued to their TV sets. The scenario changed further with the upgradation from Black & White to colour TV and delivery of TV programmes via cable network began in smaller towns along with the metros. This led to a sudden increase in the purchase of TV sets.

11.4.1 Doordarshan: Birth of Indian Television

Doordarshan (DD), the national television network of India began its first experimental broadcast on September 15, 1959 from its first station in New Delhi. By 1965, this experiment became a full-fledged service when DD started telecasting signals to reach TV sets within houses in and around New Delhi. By 1972, the DD services were extended to Bombay (Mumbai) and Amritsar and then on, to seven other cities by 1975. Till 1982, the transmission was mainly in Black & White.

The first turning point in the history of Indian Television was when Doordarshan introduced colour TV during the Asian Games held in New Delhi in 1982 and simultaneously started installing transmitters nationwide for terrestrial broadcasting. It is significant to note that during that period, no private enterprise was allowed to set up TV stations or to transmit TV signals.

The second turning point came in the early nineties when foreign channels like CNN, Star TV and domestic channels such as Zee TV and Sun TV started broadcast of satellite signals. That is how people of India got the opportunity to watch regional, national and international programmes simultaneously.

11.4.2 Television: Is it for Entertainment or Education?

Sarcastically, Groucho Marx, an American comedian and film and television star has said (Groucho Marx Quotes - The Quotations Page, n.d.) “I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book”. Should we blame TV for that? Should it be used only for education or only for entertainment or for both? Like you go to your class room in the morning for attending class or counseling sessions, in the break you go to canteen for refreshment or lunch and then come back to your respective class or working place and finally you go back home and retire for the day, in the same way with a remote in hand you go on to surf different channels of TV, select the channel based on your need. You may first go to some news channels for news or headlines then you may switch over to Discovery or National Geographic for enriching/educating yourself with new kind of knowledge which you may not find in any book or in your text book, in particular. After some time, you may like to see a movie or a Reality Show just to entertain yourself. One may convince you easily by this logic that it is you (or you may say your ‘need’) which decides whether TV should be used for entertainment or education or both.

11.4.3 Television (TV) to Educational Television (EDTV)

Television always had a great potential to become a medium of instruction and this potential had been explored and utilized in the field of education, especially in distance education. We may list various functions of television in delivering education through distance mode, like supporting and enhancing teaching, instructing, explaining, clarifying, motivating and encouraging, and presenting unreachable facts and events (Hizal, 1983). In 1993, a ten-day long first IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University)-ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) teleconferencing experiment was done covering 525 participants. This experiment demonstrated the possibility of using one-way television with two-way audio wherein all students could view and interact with the teacher, and simultaneously the teacher could listen to all participating students through phone at remote sites. It became a major landmark in the extensive and continuous use of teleconferencing for distance education. The success of the experiment prompted the university to include teleconferencing as a regular component of the IGNOU student support system (Khan & Panda, n.d.).

The Open University (UK) which is considered as the pioneer in the field of distance education, had already demonstrated the instructional power of television. Parallel to UKOU, IGNOU was established by a Special Act of Parliament, IGNOU Act, 1985 to impart education through the mode of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and adopted a multiple media approach for transacting the course materials through Print, Audio (Radio) and Video (TV).

11.4.4 Gyan Darshan: Educational Face of Indian Television

Being a developing country, from the very beginning of the TV network in India, Television was perceived as an efficient tool for imparting education to primary,

secondary and university level students. Hence, educational broadcasting in India is more than 40 years old and UNESCO has played an important role in promoting use of electronic media for education. “Educational broadcasting has suffered from a built-in contradiction: whether it should be used to enhance classroom education or be used to enrich the knowledge of the learners.”, a point raised by Binod C. Agrawal, a noted educationist, in 2005.

With the introduction of open and distance education, the educational broadcasting gained a greater momentum. The potential of electronic media, particularly television, was recognized because of the distance neutrality and simultaneous reach in covering large areas. The National Policy on Education (1986) gave due emphasis to educational broadcasting in India. At this juncture, we may highlight some major educational television projects undertaken in India for three decades (1960-1990). These projects are Secondary School Television Project (1961) (Agrawal, 2005), Delhi Agriculture Television (DATV) Project (Krishi Darshan) (1966), Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) (1975) (SITE, 1981), Indian National Satellite Project (INSAT) (1982) and UGC-Higher Education Television Project (1984).

Gyan Darshan

A 24-hour educational television channel, known as Gyan Darshan (GD) was launched on January 26, 2000 in India at IGNOU (Agrawal, 2005). It was considered to be a major milestone in the field of educational broadcasting in India as a joint venture of the Ministry of Human Resources Development and Information and Broadcasting, Prasar Bharati and IGNOU. Gyan Darshan, a fully digital exclusive Educational TV Channel, was a digital bouquet of 4 channels GD-1 (Prime Channel), GD-2 (Interactive Distance Education Channel), GD-3 (Ekalavya-Technology Education Channel) and GD-4 (Vyas-Higher Education Channel). Nevertheless, due to some financial, administrative and technical reasons, this bouquet of Gyan Darshan channels was off-air on June 4, 2014 and it was back on-air on October 4, 2017, after a gap of more than three years.

Activity 1

Make a list of TV programmes you have watched during the last week. Classify these programmes into different categories, like – news, education, sports, infotainment, entertainment, etc. Analyse this classification to understand the role of television in your life.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. Write a short note on Doordarshan.

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2. In your opinion, is television being used for education or entertainment? Give reasons for your answer.

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3. What is Gyan Darshan ?

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11.5 TELEVISION IN THE ERA OF NEW MEDIA

We all know that internet has touched and impacted each and every field of our life. Television is also not an exception. Due to its impact on television we can see the modified form of TV and its content now. Earlier television was the most popular platform for consumption of audio-visual content but now online platforms are giving a very tough competition to it. OTT (Over the top) platforms are emerging as popular internet based platforms for audio-visual content specially in urban areas. Faster and cheaper internet services and flexibility to access any OTT platform of the world are helping these internet based platforms to attract more and more viewers. A section of urban population is shifting from traditional television to OTT and the size of this section is increasing continuously. However, television is still the cheapest and most popular medium of entertainment.

Television and online media are not just competing with each other. The two are also mixing with each other. Convergence of all media is a fact of the Internet age. Television is now available on computers, laptops, tabs and mobile phones with the help of internet. Apps of television channels are available for download on smartphones. A large number of people are now watching their TV programs on computers, tabs or mobile phones. On the other hand, general television sets are now turning into smart TVs. Internet can also be used on Smart TVs in addition to general television programs. It is a mixture of TV and computer.

11.6 LET US SUM UP

Television is an audio-visual medium with a strong potential to influence the viewers. This medium uses visuals as the core element of its content and gets the benefits of audio to support and enhance the quality of its programmes. This medium is being used for various purposes, like - entertainment, news, sports, infotainment, education, etc. In the present era of internet, television is also changing. Now television channels are available on computers, tabs and smartphones with the help of internet. Traditional television sets are converting into smart TV. OTT platforms are challenging the dominance of television as the most popular source of audio-visual entertainment content. Television has been continuously changing with the changing technologies.

11.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Conrad, P. (2016). Television: The medium and its manners. Routledge.

11.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Try to define television as per your understanding.
2. Write your point of view on the matter.
3. Peter Collett, a psychologist at Oxford University, did an experiment placing a cabinet containing an ordinary television, a video camera, a microphone and a timing device in the living rooms of 20 different families for a week. The video recordings showed that people were doing all kind of house hold things in front of the TV set.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Five strengths of television are following:
 - i. Television has advantages of both audio and visual components. The combination of both audio and visual make it a powerful medium.
 - ii. TV has reach to a large section of population.
 - iii. Television is still the cheapest medium of entertainment and infotainment.
 - iv. This medium has the immediacy factor. It can deliver the message to the masses immediately. This strength makes this medium suitable for news and sports.
 - v. Literacy is not required to use this medium.
2. Five limitations of television are following:
 - i. It is primarily a one-way communication medium.
 - ii. It requires electricity for access.
 - iii. Both production and transmission of programmes are comparatively costly.
 - iv. Presenting in-depth information is little difficult for this medium. That is why after the television revolution, newspapers started focusing on detailed news reports and in-depth features.
 - v. It is only visible within the allotted range/power of the transmitter or around the footprints of the satellite carrying the television signal.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Try to add some more information on Doordarshan not covered in this Unit.
2. Present your point of view on the use of television for entertainment or education or both.
3. Gyan Darshan is an educational television channel.

