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NEW MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Media is the fourth pillar of democracy and has immense power to act as the watchdog of society and is also an effective and powerful tool to bring social change. It brings mass awareness of political, economic and social issues and creates public opinion, which is important to bring social change.

In the previous lesson, you read about the impact of print and visual media on society. This chapter discusses the role and impact of new media social change as an agent. ‘New Media Technologies’ are very popular. The new media technologies are a group of online communication channels devoted to information, connection, substance and coordinated effort. Social media, blogs, virtual reality, online newspapers and digital games are part of new media technologies. All these channels are very interactive and incorporate two-way communications. Old media channels like radio and television are less interactive and more one-way. Channels like Netflix and Youtube offer market-driven content. Electioneering also depends upon new media, which has become a solid and active channel for bringing social change.



OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, learner:

- explains the new media technology;
- understands the role of new media as an agent of social change;
- assess the need for sensitive and empathetic representation of women in media;
- evaluates the media content that perpetuates myths and superstitions.

Gender and
Media**Notes****20.1 NEW MEDIA: CONCEPT AND COMPONENTS**

New media can be described as mass communication using digital technologies such as the internet. Some examples of new media are telephones, computers, virtual worlds, single media, website games, human-computer interfaces, and interactive computer installations. It is interactive with two-way communication and forms of computing.

New media can also be described as the content made available from different forms of communication made through the world wide web and smartphone technology. New media differs from traditional media, i.e. Radio, Television, Newspapers and other print publications. New media has six main characteristics: Digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked and Stimulated.

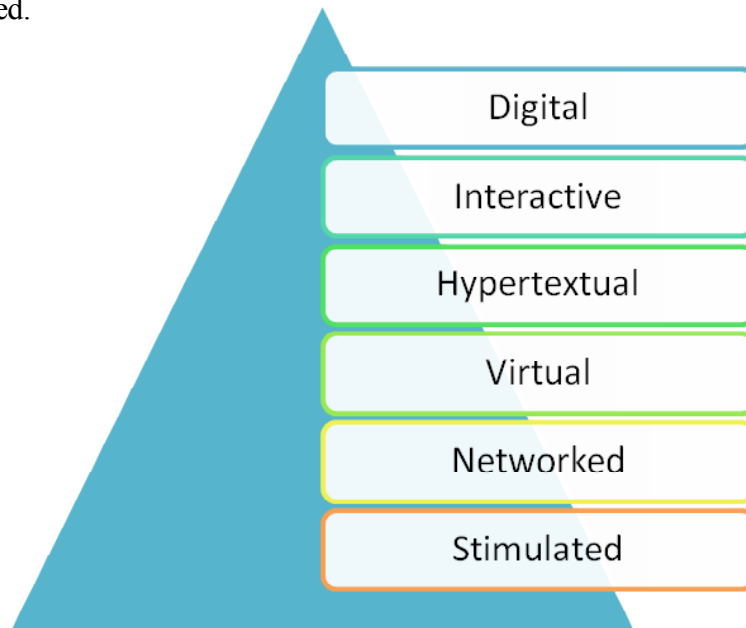


Fig 20.1: Characteristics of New Media

New Media has different formats such as Mashup, internet art, videogames, multimedia CD-ROMs, software, websites, blogs and wikis, email and attachments. In addition, the new media allows sharing content with others.

Moreover, the new media users are active producers and distributors of content and information. If we tend to travel in cyberspace, we should choose the internet rather than any material form of knowledge. The power of new media guides us through a virtual space.

Mainstream traditional media is highly centralised and costly to establish and maintain. New media is decentralised and cost-effective in operations. It needs low investment, provides greater interactivity and public participation and can be controlled. New media is very popular in society, and people can create their News and access the other side of the story by getting News from the internet, which is free from governmental control.

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The media shows stories of the victims of discrimination, and many people respond and contribute to show solidarity. It facilitates people to express their opinion without favour or fear. It works very fast, and within minutes, the people are engaged with each other

Media is also said to be responsible for the social upliftment of society. Media shows an accurate picture of society and helps to shape public opinion by influencing personal beliefs. Its role has now extended beyond the mere supply of information. New media allows people to act both as transmitters as well as producers. It is active in portraying the condition of society, especially of women, and is also here to raise the voice against discrimination and inequality.

‘Cyber-feminism’ is the new trend in the new media. For example, the ‘#Me Too’ campaign spread virally and revealed the real stories of women’s exploitation in the workplace. It helped sensitive people on issues of sexual harassment in the workplace for women. Such movements mobilise public opinion and compel the government to enact new laws.

Social media is more transparent, engaging and interactive. Young people are more attracted to the new modes of social media. Although it is consuming their time since they remain busy on the social internet, the number of users is increasing exponentially. About 500 million users and 50% of them log on daily. The information posted on social media attracts the attention of youth. The Supreme Court of India has advocated for freedom on social media. The impact of social media is immense. Nowadays, even election campaigns are run on social media.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.1**

1. Explain the meaning of New Media.
2. List the essential components of New Media.
3. Highlight the importance of New Media to bring social change.

20.2 NEW MEDIA AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Online portals like Twitter, Facebook and blogs provide a huge platform to communicate and exchange ideas, problems, happenings and events. It is not wrong to say that it has become an important medium of social change. An idea transformed in words and posted online can change people’s outlook. It encourages supporters and critics to voice their concerns. Anyone can share ideas and experiences on the net; others may join to give their viewpoint. Thus a system of thinking about an idea’ starts and helps to form public opinion. Netizens (this name knows new media users) help build a smart and sustainable concept or idea. It helps bring positive and negative changes by moulding ideas and attitudes. It also influences lifestyle and culture by creating awareness of gender discrimination and its ill effects. It is often seen that

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media challenges the gender attitude of society. Most of the time, women are portrayed in a stereotyped fashion, physically attractive and weak. Though new trends are emerging and bold stories of women are gaining space in the new media, huge marketing campaigns are still based on women's physical attraction and beauty.

The media can both retard and accelerate the process of gender equality. In addition, the media can inform the results of the efforts made in this direction, but it may also produce gender stereotypes.

In the traditional media, the basics and issues of women's empowerment has not given much attention as it is supposed to be. The issues of equality, justice, respect and dignity of women have not been given due importance. Instead, it has thrived on saleability. Media had been showing the News of rape or violence against women not as a cause but to raise the level of viewership. New media has entered this area as a reliable tool to influence people. The new media had mobilised the people on the incidence of the Nirbhaya Rape case and other similar issues of social concern

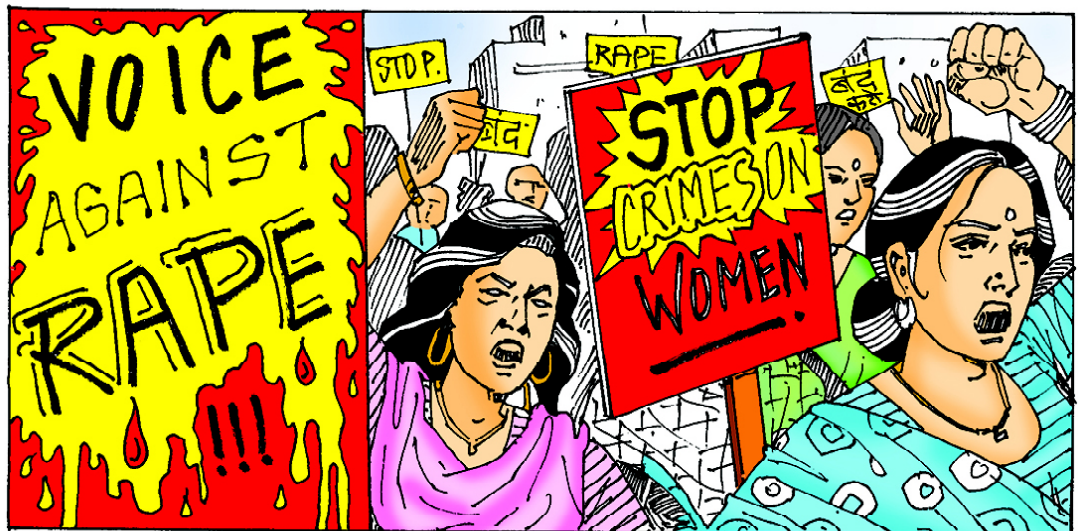


Fig 20.2. Support for Women's cause in internet

New media is being used to spread awareness and also to initiate action. More and more women are in the media and raising concerns. Representation of women in the Panchayati Raj system and local self-governments has also increased and has given women a strong voice. The way women are being portrayed in the News raises the media's hope for gender sensitivity and equality.

The portrayal of different issues makes us informed, excited, provoked and hopeful. Unfortunately, our opinions and actions are mostly based on how these issues are portrayed in the media. Media is working for fair treatment of women. Producers and media users must have the skills to counter the stereotypes and allow room for the fair portrayal of people and their issues.

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20.3 NEED FOR SENSITIVE AND EMPATHETIC REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA THROUGH NEW MEDIA

Mass media has always been responsible for being the watchdog of society, guiding change in society. However, the current media is dominated by ‘men’, so the issues related to women do not get the required attention. Media products are created mostly by men; hence women do not get the justified space and portrayal. Media cover the atrocities on women but neglect the achievements of women. Even coverage of such issues is biased. Women are depicted as weak and interested in domestic affairs like cooking, washing and family care. They are depicted as homemakers, and their contribution to the field of business, politics and academics is not given prominence. Even in New Media, women are represented in terms of their physical beauty and sexy image.

New media has provided the conditions to be closer to other parts of the world. Different new media components are cost-effective for spreading the word and getting support. Hashtag activism enables gender issues to be at the forefront of the political agenda. Various NGOs are working relentlessly towards giving people hope for change, like the recent ‘Gulabi Gang’, which was helped by various NGOs to tackle the issues related to women. Women have been victims of discrimination and have never been allowed to express themselves in the traditional media. Hence there is a need for sensitive and empathetic media to support the cause of gender equality and equity in society.

20.4 MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Media has played an essential role in the developments such as the fight against racism, gender bias, and poverty and spreading awareness about gender sensitivity. The portrayal of women in media conveys a direct message to people at large. On the other hand, the coy and weak portrayal of women in media leads to likewise opinion-making away from the masses. The stereotypical portrayal of women sets a dangerous precedent since people form opinions against the spirit of gender equality. Many advertisements are contributing to this process of change.

In the contemporary new media, more women are represented as decision makers, independent and bread earners, contributing to an average perception of women. For instance, some advertisements show the redefined concept of redefining the workplace and home wherein the wife has a leading role in the company. For instance, the Tanishq ad breaks multiple stereotypical representations of women. It portrays the wedding of a woman who is dark-skinned and has a young daughter. In another Premier league advertisement, a mother-in-law encouraging the daughter-in-law to sit with the family and enjoy shows a healthy change in gender representation.

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During the Nirbhaya case (Rape and murder of a young girl), new media played a significant role. Thousands of people were mobilised at India Gate to protest against the heinous crime. The new media built an atmosphere of concern against such crimes. As a result, a change in society was visible.



Fig 20.3. Support for social cause

These deep short films, participatory films, stories of successful women, and new quotes about women are getting viral on the new media components and are creating awareness of gender issues. Change can also be seen in mainstream cinema.

Films like *Pink* (girls living independently), *Dangal* (girl wrestlers) or *Sultan* have portrayed women in bold and strong characters.

20.4.1. Freedom of expression and Gender Equality

Gender equality is an important component of freedom of expression. Both are interlinked and interdependent. You can not have one without the other. Both go hand in hand. Unfortunately, the media itself is lacking in providing this freedom. We see an imbalance in the proportion of women and men in the decision-making roles in different media organisations. A few women are on the boards of media organisations, and the policies to promote gender equality are lacking in spirit. However, no reliable and consistent data is available on gender equality; without the data, it is difficult to assess the problem. Freedom of expression should be protected at all costs. Media should be free from the fear of censorship. Media should depict different forms of atrocities committed on women and give women space to speak out and support their own cause.

20.4.2 Women and decision making

Gender equality is not visible in media houses. Women are in the minority, and men hold technology-driven positions. Although the number of women is increasing in newsrooms, the

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position of high-level decision-making is still dominated by men. The media content is biased and male dominance is visible. More transparent and responsible media should address the lack of gender sensitivity. Some new initiatives are being made in the film industry, advertising industry and newsrooms to address the lack of equality between men and women.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.2**

1. Explain the way media can change society.
2. Explain the difference between the traditional depiction and modern depiction of women.
3. Highlight the role of new media in eradicating gender discrimination.
4. Cite any three examples of advertisements that depict women in a new avatar (strong, independent and decision-maker)

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Media is the fourth pillar of democracy. It brings awareness about political, economic and social issues. Moreover, it creates public opinion, which becomes a vehicle for social change.
- New media can be described as mass communication using digital technologies such as the internet. Some examples of new media are telephones, computers, virtual worlds, single media, website games, human-computer interfaces, and interactive computer installations. It is interactive and involves two-way communication and also some form of computing.
- Media is said to be responsible for social upliftment. This is because it shows an accurate picture of society and helps to form a public opinion by influencing personal beliefs.
- Twitter, Facebook, blogs and many other new media channels have become effective mediums of social change. New media is raising social issues and especially the issue of gender discrimination and gender equity. Any idea converted into words is communicated at a breakneck speed. Portraying different issues makes us informed, excited, provoked and hopeful. However, there is a need for sensitive and empathetic representation of women through the new media.
- Women should be there in the media. Women's political representation should increase, and they must have freedom of expression. New media is fast media, two-way communication and is very interactive. Its impact is immense. Even electioneering nowadays depends on the new media.

Gender and
Media**Notes****TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Define the New Media.
2. Differentiate between traditional media and new media.
3. Why is the media said to be an agent of social change?
4. Explain the need for a sensitive and empathetic representation of women in media.
5. How can New Media help to achieve gender equality and equity?
6. Explain the impact of New Media on society.

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****20.1**

1. New media is described as mass communication using digital technologies such as the internet.
2. Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.
3. New media is fast, interactive and cost-effective. An idea transformed into words and posted online can change people's perspectives.

20.2

1. Media makes people aware of different issues. Users of the new media participate in this interaction and form a public opinion which helps to change society's outlook.
2. In traditional media, women were seen as weak homemakers and subordinates. These days women are working in offices and companies, have independence and have the economic power to spend money earned by them. Modern depiction of women is that of bold, accessible and a decision maker in all walks of society.
3. New media is working against gender discrimination. Women have high positions in the media and raise the issues of women harassment and domestic violence against women.

New media depicts women at par with men. Women have occupied all the posts and places in men's control.