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CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW MEDIA

We live in an age of rapid technological changes. Everyday we are flooded with information from everywhere. The internet makes sure that we are not left behind in terms of information on any front. In the process of news gathering and writing, the advent of computers along with the phenomenon of the internet has introduced the concept of new media. Unlike the print media, the new media does not rely merely on the written word for communication. Rather, it combines words with a lot of visual elements, including animation, cartoons etc. Similarly, learning through new media is like saying good bye to all our age-old textbooks. In this new learning phenomenon, learning can be fun. We can play computer games and through games, puzzles and cartoons, also learn our history and maths lessons. This amazing combination of words with visuals and cartoons is known as new media.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to do the following :

- distinguish between new media and other mediums of communication;
- illustrate the characteristics of new media;
- discuss about the interactivity of new media;
- compare the strengths and weaknesses of new media with television , radio and print media;
- analyse the limitations of new media.

21.1 NEW MEDIA: AN INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Madhavan looks extremely worried these days. She is hardly seen at social gatherings. And, when people see her on the roads, she avoids talking. Earlier she was so active. Now her neighbors don't know what has happened to her.



Her neighbour's daughter, Anjali is in class XII. She often goes over to Mrs Madhavan's house to help her son Aditya with his maths lessons.

Anjali has just finished her pre-board exams. In the evening she goes over to meet Aditya. There she finds Mrs Madhavan looking as worried as ever.

Anjali asks her, "What's wrong with you? Why are you looking so worried?"

"I am worried Anjali," Mrs Madhavan replies. "Aditya doesn't study nowadays. His school is closed for winters. The entire day he spends in front of the computer. On top of that he lies. He says his teacher has asked him to surf the internet and do his homework. I am sure he is either playing computer games or doing something else. I just don't know what to do."



Fig. 21.1: A worried Mrs Madhavan and Aditya working on his computer. Aditya doesn't care that his mother is worried. He looks happy sitting in front of his computer.

Anjali smiles and holds Mrs Madhavan's hand. "Don't worry aunty. I will talk to Aditya. I am sure he knows what he's doing."



Fig. 21.2 : Anjali trying to convince Mrs Madhavan



She goes inside the study and spends some time with Aditya. Later, during dinner she explains everything to Mrs Madhavan. By that time Mr Madhavan is also back from work.

“You see aunty, times are changing. Technology has come into our lives in a major way. Education is also changing. Gone are the days when children used to learn only from books,” Anjali explains.

“I remember, we learnt all about history from our textbooks,” she adds. “And, we found it so boring. But my brother hardly reads textbooks. Even his teachers tell him to watch the History channel and Discovery channel on television. Now he finds history so interesting that he might also take it up for higher studies.”

“But then Anjali, does it mean that children nowadays will not read at all,” asks Mrs Madhavan.

“It’s not like that aunty. Technology only helps us to learn. Computers cannot replace books. But today, all over the world people are realising that words alone cannot describe everything. That’s why learning is better when words are combined with visuals, sound and even cartoons. Books give us only words and illustrations, television gives us moving images and radio gives us sound. But what the internet gives us is a combination of all these. We call it new media and we are using it extensively to learn new things,” explains Anjali.

Mrs Madhavan now looks relaxed. She also tells Anjali that she is going to spend more time with Aditya trying to understand what all he’s learning.

21.2 NEW MEDIA AND COMPUTERS

Do you know what the internet is ? The **internet** is an interconnection of several thousands of computers of different types belonging to various networks across the globe. Any computer user on the internet can contact any other computer on internet in any part of the world. The internet is an integral part of new media.

You have already learnt that in print media, the products are either a newspaper or a magazine. Similarly, in the electronic media, the products are either a news channel or an entertainment channel or a sports channel. For instance, Doordarshan has a news channel, Star Plus is an entertainment channel and Discovery and Animal Planet are non-fiction channels.

In new media, the product is called a **website**. Every website has an address. To see a website you need a computer. On every computer, there is an icon called internet explorer. You have to click on it and a new screen opens up. On this, you type the address of the website and it will open up for you. Then you can see and read whatever is posted on the website.



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Fig. 21.3: Websites

Now, in a country like India, where there are so many villages, how many people have access to the computer? And, if they cannot use computers, then what's the use of new media?

To answer this question, let us recall the way television has expanded its base in India. When television first arrived in India, very few people could buy a television set. Whenever cricket matches were played, people used to stand outside a shop that had a television set and enjoy the match. In villages, people often sit together and watch television programs.

Similarly, there are cyber cafes all over the country. Several computers are kept in these cafes. People can go there and work on computers after paying for it.

We must all realise that people have to be educated about computers. So after you have learnt about computers, you must tell your friends about the benefits of using a computer. You may also tell your parents what they can do with a computer.

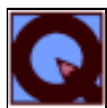
We read in the beginning of the unit that Mrs Madhavan was worried. She's worried because she does not understand what Aditya is doing with a computer. She's also worried because she has heard a lot of things about the internet from other parents. Some of them have told her that children should never be allowed to see a computer because the internet contains a lot of information and pictures that are only meant for adults.



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Since her knowledge of computers and the internet is very limited, Mrs Madhavan is really scared. It's only after Anjali explains to her that Aditya is doing his homework after collecting information from the internet that she feels a bit relieved.

It's not that Mrs Madhavan does not have reasons to be worried. Children are often seen wasting time playing computer games or chatting with their friends. Then it is the duty of parents and teachers to see to it that they don't overdo such things. Also, there are parents and teachers who often complain that children nowadays have almost stopped reading books. That they are more comfortable watching videos, cartoons etc, all of which they now get easily on their computers. That's probably what we need to look into more seriously. The Internet cannot replace books or a teacher. But it can definitely be a big help in terms of providing information. In fact, for anyone doing research in any stream, the internet always proves to be very useful.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.1**

1. Why do students use the internet nowadays?
2. Are reading habits going down because of the advent of computers ?
3. What is a new media product called?
4. Why is Mrs Madhavan so worried? After talking to Anjali, does she feel better?

**Activity 21.1**

1. Explain to a friend everything that you know about the internet.

21.3 NEW MEDIA: THE FORM OF COMMUNICATION

In your earlier lessons, you have learnt what communication is and how people communicate. To quickly revise it and put things in a perspective, communication means 'sharing of information'.

Whenever we communicate, we share information, ideas and even feelings. At times we may not speak but the way we look at a person conveys a lot to that person.

Another important point is that any form of communication is not complete unless there is a feedback. It means whenever we talk to someone or someone reads what we have written, there must be a response from the other person.

All forms of media, whether print or electronic, have feedback systems in place. Many of you may have seen the page in a newspaper that contains the 'letters to the editor'. This is a feedback mechanism used by the print media. Even television



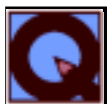
channels have a feedback system. Often we see, after a program, the anchor advises the viewers to log on to their websites and post their opinions. You may be watching many reality shows on television, especially music and dance competitions. Audience feedback, in these shows, decides the fate of individual participants.

New media is known for its ability to involve the audience. This is known as **interactivity**. Hence, we can say that compared to other media forms, new media has the most evolved feedback system in place.

Besides feedback, there are two other things that make new media very special. The first is the way things are written. New media uses a **narrative** style of writing. A narrative is a story. All of us like to read stories or listen to stories. If serious issues are written in the form of stories, more people are likely to read them and learn from them.

The other special feature of new media is the use of **multimedia**. As mentioned earlier, whenever stories are supported by cartoons, moving pictures, sound and music, it is called multimedia.

The question is why do we do so many things? What is the ultimate benefit of using new media. For one, the internet is very fast. We don't have to wait for one full day to read the day's events in the newspaper. At 4 o'clock in the evening, if we want to check out the latest cricket scores, we have to simply log on to the internet and check a news website that will flash the information that we are interested in knowing. Secondly we may not have time to read the entire newspaper, but will definitely have some time to grasp the day's happenings on a news website. That's why the internet is so popular.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.2

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate word/s:
 - i) We share _____ and _____ when we communicate.
 - ii) _____ is essential in any form of communication.
 - iii) New media uses a _____ style.
 - iv) Audio-visuals, voiceovers, animation and graphics which are combined with text is called _____.
 - v) Internet is an _____ medium.



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21.4 NEW MEDIA AND OTHER FORMS OF MASS MEDIA

All of us see a newspaper in the morning every day. Have you ever thought why we get a particular newspaper every day. Aditya once asked this to Mrs Madhavan. And, guess what? Mrs Madhavan had no answer. Later, her husband, Mr Madhavan explained to his son that they read a particular newspaper because they are used to reading it. It's been coming to their homes for years. "It's a habit, and I find it difficult to change. I tried reading another newspaper for some days when I had to clear an internal office exam. But I was never satisfied. Even if I read another paper, I have to read the same newspaper that I always read as well," explains Mr Madhavan.

Most of us don't question our habits. But, have you ever wondered why people read newspapers when they already see most of the things on television? If we are thinking like that, even journalists may have thought accordingly. That's why newspapers have changed. They are full of colour nowadays. Even the news that is carried has changed. Newspapers are trying to collect a lot of interesting information for the readers. Most newspaper offices have hired good photographers who are trying to improve the quality of pictures that we see in newspapers. All this is happening because newspapers are competing with television.

Then what about the new media? Where does it find itself in such a scenario? People usually go to websites when they have to look for something specific. For instance, if you are interested in pursuing a programme in mass communication, you will only look up websites that provide you with that kind of information. Also, most of us use the new media while we are working in office. That means the new media steps in when we don't have a television near us. At home, we hardly read news stories on the internet because we can see everything on television.

Since, people read websites in-between work, they expect a language that they can easily understand. That's why new media uses a narrative style or a story format so that readers can easily understand whatever is being communicated to them. The use of multimedia is also meant to facilitate the communication process. In fact, the success of the new media is fully dependent on whether or not it is able to attract users of the internet. For that it has to create some amount of interest or what is called 'interest factor'. The language and the multimedia packaging are both designed to act as 'interest factors'.

21.5 INTERACTIVE NATURE OF NEW MEDIA

Besides the creation of the 'interest factors', the other most striking feature of new media is its '*interactivity*'. This means readers can always write for websites and one of the ways to do so is through '*blogs*'. Blogs are online diaries. People who can write about their experiences can develop blogs.

Does this mean that anybody can start writing for news websites today? Frankly, this isn't something new. Even earlier, we had the concept of 'Letters to the Editor'. Anybody could write on a particular issue and send it to a newspaper for



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publication. But out of so many letters that arrived in newspaper offices everyday, only a few got published.

New media has a lot of space. When people write blogs, the entire article can be carried without any editing. If you look at the website of any news channel, you will find several blogs written by eminent journalists. The best thing about these blogs is that they are written with a lot of feelings. Sometimes there is also an element of humour.

Another thing about blogs is that you can write whatever you feel about anything. A writer on disaster management, has written a series of blogs on the tsunami that hit the Indian coasts a few years back. His website has more than a hundred articles on the tsunami. It is very clear that these blogs say much more than newspaper reports on the tsunami. That's because the blogs have a lot of space. Also, the writer is not bound by deadlines. It's his passion that drives him towards writing these blogs.



Activity 21.1

1. Start writing your own diary. Write down your experiences at least once a week. Include things like the book that you have read and some interesting person you have met.

21.6 ADVANTAGES OF NEW MEDIA OVER PRINT MEDIA AND TELEVISION

So what does the new media do? It has simply changed the way we communicate. It is also a very important mode of communication that we cannot ignore. Do you know that almost every organization today has a website. Anybody who wants to know about an organization will simply log on to the internet and check their website. Let us say, somebody wants to know details about the courses offered by the National Institute of Open Schooling. The best thing to do would be to open the NIOS website that will most likely contain most of the information that anyone would want to know.

Newspapers also have their own websites. These websites are often copies of their print editions. If we look at the history of online journalism, newspapers like 'The Hindu' and 'The Indian Express' were the first newspapers which started their web editions in India. But then the websites were not different from the print versions. The same stories that appeared in the morning newspaper were seen on the websites without any major changes. The websites did not even use animations or other forms of visual communication which is possible in the new media and not in print.

These web editions also have another purpose. Let us say, readers in the southern states of India are familiar with 'The Hindu'. But how would an Indian reader in



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Canada know about the same newspaper? That's where a web edition plays a crucial role. Anyone from any part of the world can easily access the web edition of '*The Hindu*'.

Some media houses have spent a lot of money in setting up their own websites. Now if readers get registered on these websites, they are supplied with whatever news they want on their mobile phones. Let's say you are interested in cricket. There is a match happening between India and Australia at New Delhi. At that time you have gone to Lucknow to spend the summer vacations at your grandparents' place. But you have registered yourself on the website of a news channel and you are carrying a mobile phone with you. In that case, every half an hour you will get the latest scores flashed on your mobile screen. Isn't this interesting?

Most television channels also have their own websites. Essentially, these websites are meant for information. A person can log on to the website of any television news channel and find out the different programmes that are going to be aired. A website is also an important feedback vehicle. Viewers can log on to the website and give their feedback and comments about any programme.

Which do you think is a better medium - print, television or new media? It's a difficult question to answer. All mediums have their own strengths and weaknesses. We often feel that like Aditya, most children nowadays are losing interest in reading. That's because the habit of reading a newspaper everyday in the morning is no longer there. Most of us get quick information from the internet. That's why we are losing our reading habits.

Mr Madhavan also agrees to this. It's true that a lot of information is available on the internet, but the indepth information that he wants on certain social and political issues is readily available in the newspaper that he reads. That's why he will never stop reading it.

In fact, Mr Madhavan surfs the internet only when he is in office. When he doesn't have much time, that's the only form of communication that suits him. But at night, he prefers to listen to at least one news bulletin on television. Again in the morning, he manages some time to quickly read through the newspaper. He even marks some of the articles and reads them carefully when he comes back home in the evening.

It is clear that all these mediums of communication such as print media, television and new media will survive together. Do you think so?

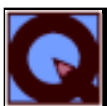


Fig. 21.4: Mr Madhavan is reading a newspaper. There is a computer and a television near him.)

21.7 LIMITATIONS OF NEW MEDIA

But you think everything is good about the new media? Not really. Just as all other forms of media have their own limitations, new media also has certain disadvantages. The most important issue here is that if anybody can write a blog and it is put up without any editing on the internet, then someone who wants to play mischief can always put up something on the internet that may have adverse effects. This has happened earlier also and media houses are therefore trying to take necessary precautions to prevent this.

Also, like Mr Madhavan feels, he doesn't enjoy reading something on the computer screen as it lacks the look and feel of a newspaper. This feeling may be expressed by many people. But would Aditya also feel so? Perhaps not. Because he is in the habit of reading on a computer screen. Nevertheless, if he doesn't read his textbooks thoroughly, it's very unlikely that the internet will fetch him good marks! For that matter, Mrs Madhavan's anxiety is justified.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.3

State whether the following statements are true or false.

- i) Blog writers are not bound by the rules of journalism.
- ii) In Indian villages, people don't accept technology.





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- iii) Companies will willingly open up their websites for people to write.
- iv) There is no credibility issue in new media.
- v) The internet has become very popular among young people because it is fast and it uses multimedia.



21.8 WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

→ New media — An introduction

New media and computers

- internet explorer
- website
- cybercafes

New media as a form of communication

- feedback system
- interactivity
- narrative style of writing
- use of multimedia

New media and other forms of mass media

- newspapers and websites
- television and new media
- new media - interest factors

Interactive nature of new media

- blogs
- online diaries

Advantages of new media over print media and television

- web editions of newspapers
- websites of television channels
- convergence

Limitations of new media



21.9 TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. Explain the importance of new media as a form of communication.
2. Assess the importance of computers in your daily lives. Give good examples to support your answer.
3. Discuss the advantages of new media with print and television. What are the limitations of new media ?



21.10 ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

- 21.1**
1. Students use the internet for educational purposes. They collect information for doing their homework.
 2. Reading habits have gone down because people don't have much time to spare. But people still need information. The internet provides a goldmine of information. So even if people are surfing, they are reading nevertheless.
 3. website
 4. Mrs Madhavan is worried because she feels her son Aditya is spending a lot of time on the computer and isn't learning anything. After talking to Anjali, she felt better because Anjali explained almost everything about the internet to her.
- 21.2**
1. i) information, ideas, feelings
 ii) feedback
 iii) narrative
 iv) multimedia
 v) interactive
- 21.3**
1. i) True
 ii) False
 iii) False
 iv) False
 v) True



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