

Media Information Literacy and Increasing Consumerism

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ABSTRACT: *In the contemporary scenario, the whole world is a market. Man created the initial market system to meet his various needs. In this way, man started using the market system according to his needs, but now this system has become so widespread and complex that now the market uses man in its own way. Now the market has come out of public places and reached people's bedrooms. Once upon a time, the time of opening and closing of the market was fixed, but now people are in control of the market and its activities 24 hours a day. Man cannot be completely free from the market even if he wants to. The first major change in market expansion was the introduction of the printing press. After this, the market expanded its scope by using mediums like radio and then television and film. After this, computer and internet and smart phone revolution have expanded this scope so much that now every human being is in the control of the market all the time. In such an era, when the market forces are dominating the human being all the time, his thinking and every decision of consumption is being influenced by them. So the importance of media information literacy increases a lot. This can make people aware not only how to avoid being caught in the market but also how to better understand them in this bombardment of information. This chapter will explain the meaning of media information literacy and consumerism as well as throw light on their interrelationships and at the same time it is an attempt to explain other aspects related to them.*

Key Words- *Consumerism, Media Literacy, Digital Media, Media and Consumers, Bombardment of Information, Consumption*

I. INTRODUCTION

The global scenario has changed very rapidly after the industrial revolution. India is also going to become a 5 trillion economy in the coming time. In 2022-23 India's GDP is at the level of around Rs.160 lakh crores. This is when the Covid pandemic has completely shaken the economies of the world. According to the estimates of the World Trade Organization, there will be a growth of 1 percent in 2023. Although it is much less than 3.5 percent of 2022, nevertheless, these figures point to the fact that despite the pandemic like Covid, the economy will continue to grow and so will the size of the market and its forces. Growing economy and market is considered a symbol of development and prosperity of any nation and state, but excessive consumption of goods also brings many challenges. The growing culture of consumerism is responsible for the ever-increasing interference of the market in the lives of people.

II. DISCUSSION:

There was a time when imperialism was based on maximum exploitation of resources, but at present we find that the world is engulfed in war and competition for maximum capture of the world market. Be it the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the competition between China and America to move ahead of each other or the interference of other countries in the case of Gulf countries. In the center of all this, mainly the economic interest and the interest of capturing the market somewhere is clearly embedded. The world's interest in India also seems to be a result of its vast market and growing culture of consumerism. Every big country wants better relations with India because it knows that India is a very young country whose consumption needs are very high and due to India's better economic condition, the west keeps an eye on India. Everyone knows how much China is interfering in Indian markets. Despite all the boycott campaigns, China's share in imports to India in 2022-23 is 13.91 percent. India has imported a total of 83.76 billion dollars from China in 10 months and there has been a jump of 9 percent in comparison to the previous year, whereas in the same period, India has exported only 12.20 billion dollars to goods China. Despite the tension on the border, there was no significant decline in the import of Chinese goods. It is the power of the market and the weaknesses of consumerism that people are forced to succumb to. Don't know how many substances and things are there which are harmful to human health

and for it in various ways, yet people are buying such things indiscriminately. The power of the market does not give an opportunity to think that people can reason properly or think what is right and what is wrong for them. The main reason for this increasing influence of the market is the tempting advertisements that follow us everywhere 24 hours a day and do not leave us anywhere. So if one has to understand the market properly and use it for one's welfare then one has to understand these messages following us through various mediums. There is a need for media information literacy in order to understand the real purpose of a message or advertisement and then be able to decide with our discretion how important a service or product is to us. The current state of media literacy is very worrying. That is why it is necessary to understand the relationship between media and market, to discuss various aspects of consumerism and media information education so that human can use the market in spite of market using humans.

Meaning of Media Literacy and Consumerism

Media literacy involves critically analyzing and evaluating media messages from a variety of sources. This is very important in the current era where there is a constant bombardment of information. To improve media literacy skills, individuals can evaluate their ability to analyze media messages, engage in media analysis and creation, and participate in media activism to promote the responsible use of media.

A comparative perspective is important in understanding the importance of increasing media literacy. By comparing different societies or cultures, we can observe the impact of media on individuals and communities. It helps us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to media education and literacy. Additionally, a comparison of different types of media, such as traditional news sources and social media platforms, can provide insight into the challenges and opportunities presented by each. Ultimately, a comparative approach can help us develop more thoughtful and effective strategies for increasing media literacy and fostering more informed and engaged citizens. In today's digital age, media literacy skills are critical to critically analyze the vast amount of information presented to individuals through various forms of media. The ability to evaluate, analyze, and interpret media messages is especially important for young people growing up in an environment where digital media is ubiquitous.

Digital media refers to any material or communication that is stored in digital format and can be transmitted through electronic devices or computer networks. This includes text, images, audio, video and interactive media. These can be viewed and shared through digital technology. Digital media can distribute, modify, and reproduce content easily and rapidly. It is also characterized by interactivity, which allows users to interact with the content and contribute to the creation and sharing of information. Digital media refers to all forms of media that are created, stored and distributed digitally. It includes text, images, audio and video and is usually accessed through electronic devices such as computers, smart phones, tablets and TVs. Websites, social media platforms, digital books, e-books, digital newspapers and magazines, podcasts, streaming music and video services, and online gaming platforms are examples of digital media. Augmented reality and virtual reality are examples of interactive experiences that can be incorporated into digital media.

At present, there is no such field where the media is not involved in some form or the other. Market and media both complement each other. So consumerism is also influenced by the media in the same way. Consumerism refers to the consumption of goods. In this, customers are encouraged to buy anything, even if they do not need it. Such consumer desires are often driven more by lifestyle passion than by necessity, giving people pleasure and fulfillment from material goods. The idea refers to the consumer ideology of Western society, which revolves around a social and economic structure. In terms of economics, consumerism is a positive phenomenon that promotes economic growth. Consumerism is primarily concerned with the Keynesian view that consumer spending is a major component of the economy and that encouraging consumers to spend is entirely rational from this point of view. In simple words, it underlines the tendency of a capitalist economy in which people are highly materialistic and nothing else matters much to them. Consumerism in this context is widely understood to be against traditional values and with the exploitation of people through businessmen leading to exploitation of the environment and negative psychological effects. Thorstein Veblen, a 19th-century economist and sociologist, is best known for coining the term conspicuous consumption in his book 'The Theory of the Leisure Class' (1899). Conspicuous consumption is a means of showing one's social status, especially when publicly displayed goods and services are economically very expensive for other members of the same class. AC consumption is generally associated with the wealthy, but it can apply to any economic class.

The history of consumerism is linked to the concept of development. When wages increased in the early 18th century, the people of North-West Europe, due to the abundance of money, they also started buying things that were not necessary for them. Thereafter, the consumerism movement or the consumer revolution began in the middle of the 18th century. People started spending more on those things which were not necessary for them. More businesses sprang up because of more spending. This created more job opportunities with increased wages, giving people more income to spend. During that time many industries expanded in Britain.

This was the time when the intellectual revolution also started gaining momentum. Various scholars put forth their views on the changing economic structure of the society. The London physicist Bernard Mandeville, in his book *The Fable From the Seed*, described how commercialism motivated people to buy goods to prove that they were no less than others. Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued how society would be balanced by living a minimalist lifestyle or meeting only basic needs.

With the end of World War I in 1918, production in the United States accelerated. The rate of production in 1920 was 12 times higher than in 1860. Also, the unprecedented growth in consumer credit and increased lending by banks in that decade forced people to spend large amounts on material goods. Although these important events were short-lived, they gave consumerism a special global recognition in the 1920s. In this way, the tendency of consumerism increased due to the increase in the expenditure of the people on luxury items.

Interrelationship of Media and Consumerism:

Not only were the mediums of information and communication also changing with time, but they were becoming very effective with new forms and techniques. With the world increasingly coming in contact with each other, the reach of the means of communication also increased at the same speed and so did their need. New markets were being searched to consume the increasing production, while businessmen felt the need of new consumers. The ever-increasing competition in business created the need for advertising and promotion. The urge to outdo each other in companies and economies compelled them to turn to the media. It was his compulsion as well as a necessity. From print mediums to electrical mediums were used for propaganda. In these, newspapers, outdoor media, radio, television, films were used to reach more and more people with the promotion of goods and services. With the increasing competition in the business, the use of catchy and effective advertisements increased. The practice of using famous personalities to woo people was also a part of this trend. Later, technologies like computer, internet and multimedia made this work even easier. When the smartphone came, it completely changed the market along with the common people. Now every product and item is just a click away. This barrage of publicity only worked to increase people's craving for consumption. With the growing media interference in people's lives, it has become difficult for them to understand how to better understand the content shown on these mediums. The trends of propaganda and distortion of information underline the need for media literacy. Various scholars have emphasized that it is very important to increase media literacy so that people can better understand the content that is continuously influencing their thinking and economic interests from their decision making. Media and market are directly related so media literacy and consumerism are also related to each other in the same way. People can avoid becoming victims of unnecessary consumerism through media information literacy, as media literacy enables them to understand the reality of the message. The difference between advertisement and information can be better understood through media literacy, because advertisements are also being served as information to people. The whole economics of media business usually depends on the market. It is only through media literacy that it can be understood that which message is being shown to the people with what purpose. It is a matter of concern that in India, efforts towards media literacy are not seen as much as they should be. It has not yet been widely adopted in schools. However, some initiatives have been taken with the aim of promoting media literacy among the youth in the country. For example, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has introduced media literacy as a part of the curriculum in some states (Kumar, 2020).

Media literacy education in India has focused on developing critical thinking skills among young people with an emphasis on identifying sources of information and evaluating their credibility (Bhatia and Sharma, 2016).

Challenges and Opportunities:

The seriousness of the challenge of consumerism can be understood from the problems currently prevailing in the world. There is an atmosphere of tension all over the world. Everyone is aware of the horrors of the Ukraine-Russia war. Carbon emissions are at record levels. Glacier ice is melting due to global warming. Due to rising sea level, the people living on the sea shores are facing a crisis of life. The world is still struggling with an epidemic like Covid, on top of that the threat of biological weapons is different. Forests are decreasing. Environmental problems are creating new challenges. Don't know how many creatures have become extinct. If there is a crisis of drinking water, poison is dissolving in the air due to the ever-increasing consumption of fuel. Due to the excessive use of pesticides, even food items have become poisonous. Human needs are continuously increasing on it. Somewhere in the root of these problems, the increasing trend of consumption is seen. Industrialization has made life easier for humans, now more challenges are standing in front of them.

While consumerism is helpful in development from the economic point of view, it has many disadvantages from the social point of view. Mahatma Gandhi called consumerism wrong for the society and the country. He

emphasized on minimum consumption and considered the increasing trend of consumption wrong. The advantages and disadvantages of consumerism can be understood from the following points.

Advantages:

- Consumerism creates new employment opportunities. To meet the increasing rate of consumption, the production units require more workers and employees, thereby providing new employment opportunities to the people.
- More consumer spending is better for various businesses, national gross domestic product, and the global economy.
- Consumerism encourages fair marketing practices and the production of material goods of high quality.
- This increases competition, forcing businesses to offer better products to people. This enables consumers to access goods with high-quality standards.
- Due to this, better opportunities are available to the talented people. Because skilled people are essential to produce innovative products that meet customer needs. Only the best brands and businesses survive the competition.

Disadvantages:

- Consumerism leads to a lot of consumption, as a result of which people may have to bear the problem of rising prices.
- Consumerism can fuel a recession because government incentives to increase purchases, from increased lending by banks and issuing credit cards at low interest rates, can increase debt levels.
- Under trends like consumerism, possession of material goods can become a symbol of identity and social status for people, which is a wrong trend.
- Consumerism can cause stress, anxiety and depression in people.
- Consumerism is harmful to the environment through over-exploitation. It can lead to industrial pollution, waste disposal and depletion of natural resources, in addition to economic, social and psychological consequences.
- Consumerism can influence the moral values and principles of consumers as they try to emulate the lifestyles of their counterparts.

The growing challenge of consumerism and apathy towards media literacy is worrying. On the one hand, where companies are capturing more and more market by expanding the scope of their products and services by using the ever-changing and intensifying technology of media, on the other hand, due to lack of media literacy, consumers are becoming more and more victims of constant marketing strategies. There is a competition to collect more resources even if they are not needed. If there is a solution to this problem, it is media information literacy. Unless people have the ability to understand the media, they will not be able to understand the realities and tricks in the content. For this, efforts will have to be made from the school level itself so that people can control their consumption needs by understanding the increasingly aggressive advertising and marketing strategies and save themselves from this blind race.

III. CONCLUSION:

The nexus of market and media is very strong and it is going to become stronger with the changing technology and digitization. Innovative technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality will further strengthen it. There is no corner where one can escape from the clutches of the market. Awareness is the only weapon by which at present one can save oneself to some extent from being a victim of consumerism. Now on smart phones we are being shown personalized ads. Whatever activity we do on the Internet, its footprints are being recorded in the web. Search engines keep an eye on our every activity. What we eat, what we hear, what we see, where we go, what we like, what we dislike, even our personal relationships and information are no longer personal. To save ourselves in such times, it is necessary that we not only understand the nexus of market and media but also stay updated with the continuous changes coming in it. If media literacy increases and people are able to understand the real meaning of the message and advertisement, they will be able to make better consumption decisions. Consumerism may be necessary for economic growth and prosperity, but one cannot close one's eyes to its negative impact on humanity. It is necessary to talk about sustainable development now. A happy and satisfied society is far better than a socially distressed and mentally disturbed developed society. Therefore, there is a need to promote media information literacy to control the growing trend of consumerism.

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