**Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila**

**Department of English**

**Level:** Master 01

**Course:** British Civilization.

**Lecture**: The Media

**Lecture number**: 08

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The term “Media” may includeany communication system by which people are informed, educated or entertained. In Britain it generally refers to the print industries (the press or newspapers and magazines) and broadcasting (terrestrial or earth-based television, cable and satellite television, radio and video). These systems overlap to some extent with each other and with books, film and the Internet; are profitable businesses; and are tied to advertising, sponsorship, commerce and industry. The media have evolved from simple methods of production, distribution and communication to their present sophisticated technologies. Their growth and variety have greatly improved information dispersal, news availability and entertainment opportunities. They cover homes, places of business and leisure activities and their influence is very powerful and an inevitable part of daily life. For example, surveys indicate that 69 per cent of Britons obtain their daily news from television, 20 per cent from newspapers and 11 per cent from radio. Electronic technology, such as the Internet, is an important part of media, business and education, while the British use of home-view videos is the highest in the world. But the media provoke debates about what is socially and morally permissible in their content and methods. Questions are asked about the role of advertising and sponsorship, the quality of the services provided, the alleged danger of the concentrated ownership of media resources, influence on politics, restraints upon ‘free expression’ and the ethical responsibility of the media to individuals and society.

**1-The Print Media**

The print media (newspapers and magazines) began to develop in the eighteenth century. Initially, a wide circulation was hindered by transportation and distribution problems, illiteracy and government licensing or censorship restrictions. But, over the last two hundred years, an expanded educational system, abolition of government control, new print inventions and Britain’s small area have eliminated these difficulties and created allegedly free print media. The growth of literacy after 1870 provided the owners of the print media with an increased market. Newspapers and magazines, which had previously been limited to the middle and upper classes, were popularized. They were used for news and information, but also for profit and entertainment. Ownership, new types of print media and financially rewarding advertising increased in the competitive atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Owners also realized that political and social influence could be achieved through control of the means of communication.

**A-National newspapers**

National newspapers are those which are mostly published from London (with some regional versions) and are available in all parts of Britain on the same day, including Sundays. Many are delivered direct to the home from local newsagents by newsboys and girls. The good internal distribution systems of a compact country enabled a national press to develop, and Internet online copies now offer updated and immediate availability. The first British newspapers with a limited national circulation appeared in the early eighteenth century and were followed by others, such as *The Times* (1785), the *Observer* (1791) and the *Sunday Times* (1822). But most were so-called ‘quality’ papers, catering for a relatively small, educated market.

**B-Regional newspapers**

Some 1,300 regional newspapers are published in towns and cities throughout Britain. They contain a mixture of local and national news; are supported financially by regional advertising; and may be daily morning or evening papers, Sundays or weekly. Some nine out of ten adults read a regional or local paper every week and 75 per cent of local and regional newspapers also operate an Internet website. Excluding its national newspaper industry, London has one paper (the *Evening Standard*) with daily sales of 440,000. But there are also about a hundred local weeklies, dailies and evening papers which appear in the Greater London districts.Britain’s ethnic communities also produce their own newspapers and magazines, which are increasing in numbers, are available nationally in the larger cities and are improving in quality. There is a wide range of publications for Jewish, Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese and Arabic readers, published on a daily or (more commonly) periodic basis.

**C-Periodicals and magazines**

There are 9,000 different periodicals and magazines in Britain, which are of a weekly, monthly or quarterly nature and are dependent upon sales and advertising to survive. They are aimed at different markets and levels of sophistication and either cover trades, professions and business (read by 95 per cent of occupational groups) or are consumer titles dealing with sports, hobbies and interests (read by 80 per cent of adults). Although the number of periodicals has expanded, it is still difficult to break into the established consumer market with a new product. Some attempts, which manage to find a gap in the market, succeed, but most usually fail. The teenage and youth magazine market is fiercely fought for, but has suffered large sales losses recently. This is attributed to greater Internet and mobile phone usage. The men’s general interest magazine market is similarly volatile. Women’s periodicals, such as *Take a Break*, *Woman* and *Woman’s Own*, have large and wide circulations. But the bestselling publications are the weekly *Radio Times* and *What’s on TV*, which contain feature stories and scheduled programs for BBC and independent television. Other magazines cover interests such as computers, rural pastimes, gardening, railways, cooking, architecture, do-it-yourself skills and sports.

**2-The Broadcasting Media**

The broadcasting media are divided into public and commercial (independent) sectors and consist of radio, terrestrial television and cable/satellite television. Three authorities oversee these services: the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Radio Authority.

Radio was the first broadcasting medium to appear in Britain. Experimental transmissions were made at the end of the nineteenth century and systems were developed in the early twentieth century. After a period of limited availability, national radio was established in 1922 when the British Broadcasting Company was formed under John Reith. In 1927 Reith became the first Director-General of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and set the tone and style for the BBC’s development. The BBC had a monopoly in broadcasting and a paternalistic image. Reith insisted that it should be independent of government and commercial interests; strive for quality; and be a public service broadcaster, with a duty to inform, educate and entertain. The BBC built a reputation for impartial news reporting and excellent programs, both domestically and internationally.

The BBC’s broadcasting monopoly in radio and television (which had started in 1936 for a limited audience) led to pressure from commercial and political interests to widen the scope of broadcasting. As a result, commercial (independent) television financed by advertising and under the supervision of the Independent Television Authority (ITA) was created in 1954 and the first programs were shown in 1955. The BBC’s monopoly on radio broadcasting was ended in 1972 and independent radio stations were established throughout the country, dependent on advertising for their financing. A duopoly (two organizations) covered broadcasting: the public service of the BBC and the commercial (independent) service of the ITA. This division has been expanded as cable, satellite and other broadcasting services have developed in recent years. The ITA evolved first into the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) and finally the ITC (Independent Television Commission) and the Radio Authority was also created. British broadcasting is thus conditioned by the competition between the BBC and independent organizations.

**Media Ownership**

The financial and ownership structures of the British media industry are complex and involve a range of media outlets, which include the press, radio and television. Sometimes an individual company will own a number of print products, such as newspapers and magazines, and will specialize in this area. But this kind of ownership is declining. Today it is more common for newspapers to be owned and controlled by corporations which are concerned with wide media interests, such as films, radio, television, magazines, and satellite and cable companies. Other newspaper- and media owning groups have diversified their interests even further, and may be involved in a variety of non-media activities. In Britain, only a few newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Morning Star* have avoided being controlled by multinational commercial concerns. This involvement of large enterprises in the media, and the resulting concentration of ownership in a few hands, such as newspapers controlled by News International and Trinity Mirror, has caused concern. Although these concentrations do not amount to a monopoly situation, there have been frequent inquiries into the questions of ownership and control. Some critics argue that the state should provide public subsidies to the media industries in order to prevent them being taken over by big-business groups. But this suggestion has not been adopted, and it is felt that there are potential dangers in allowing the state to gain any direct or indirect financial influence over the media.

**Freedom of Expression**

The question of free expression in the media continues to be of concern. Critics argue that the media do not have sufficient freedom to comment on matters of public interest. But the freedom of the media, as of individuals, to express themselves, is not absolute. Regulations are placed upon the general freedom in order to safeguard the legitimate interests of other individuals, organizations and the state, so that a balance between competing interests may be achieved. There are several legal restraints upon media freedom of expression.

The *sub judice* rule means that the media may not comment on court proceedings and must restrict themselves to the court facts. The rule is intended to protect the individuals concerned, and if a media organization breaks the rule it may be found guilty of contempt of court and fined. Contempt of court proceedings may also be used by judges to obtain journalists’ sources of information, or to prevent the media from publishing certain court details and documents. The obtaining and publishing of state and official information is controlled tightly by the Official Secrets Act and by D-notices (directives to the media concerning information which should not be divulged). The media are also liable to court proceedings for libel and obscenity offences.

Libel is the making of accusations which are proved to be false or harmful to a person’s reputation. Obscenity covers any action that offends against public morality. In such cases, the media organization and all the individuals involved may be held responsible.

These restrictions prevent absolute media freedom of expression. It is argued that there is a need for reform if responsible investigative journalism is to do its job adequately. Britain is a secretive society, and the Labor government’s proposed Freedom of Information Act may break down some of the secrecy and executive control. The Human Rights Act may also allow greater freedom of media expression.

**EXERCISES**

**1-**Explain and examine the following terms

Ownership-Libel-Circulation-Media-Press-Tabloid

**2-Write a short essay about:**

The issue of freedom of speech and holding the media responsible

**REFERENCES**

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