



335en14



## ROLE OF TELEVISION AS A MASS MEDIUM

How often do you watch television? Most of us cannot imagine a world without television. It is undoubtedly one of the most popular inventions. You might have a favourite programme. Have you ever thought of what makes your favourite television programme so interesting? What are the features of television as a medium? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are the functions of television? This lesson will try to answer some of these questions.



### OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the features of television;
- describe how television differs from other mediums of mass communication like print, radio and new media;
- explain the strengths and limitations of television;
- enlist the functions of television.

### 14.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF TELEVISION AS A MEDIUM

How do you feel while watching a cricket match on television? Isn't it almost like being there in the stadium? It is quite different from reading about the match in the next day's newspaper or hearing a radio commentary. What makes the cricket match on television more interesting?

While radio has sound, television content includes both sound and visuals. **This audio visual character of television makes it a magic medium which allows us to watch the world from our drawing rooms.**

You might remember how exactly Sachin hit a sixer in a crucial match. For most of us, "seeing is believing". This powerful visual nature helps television to create



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vivid impressions in our minds which in turn leads to emotional involvement. The audio visual quality also makes television images more memorable.



Fig. 14.1

How is watching television different from going for a movie? To watch television, you need not leave your drawing room. No need of going to the movie theatre or buying tickets. You can watch television in the comfort of your home with your family. This is why television is generally regarded as a domestic medium. It provides entertainment and information right inside our homes and has become an integral part of our everyday lives. It can actually pattern our daily activities.

Does your family make it a point to watch their favourite serial at a particular time and adjust dinner timings accordingly? This domestic nature of television influences the content also. Have you noticed that a newspaper report has an impersonal tone, whereas the television anchor addresses you, the viewer? The domestic nature of television makes it an intimate medium. This makes the viewers experience a sense of closeness to the anchors of a show or with the characters in a serial.



Fig. 14.2



What will you do if you hear that there is a bomb blast in a neighbouring city? You may switch on your television set for more information. This is because the live nature of television allows it to transmit visuals and information almost instantly. So, another important characteristic of television is that it is capable of being a live medium. The visuals of an earthquake in Indonesia can reach your television set in almost no time. This capacity of the medium makes it ideal for transmitting live visuals of news and sports events. If you are watching a football match in a television channel, you can almost instantly see the goal hit by your favourite team. On the other hand, you can read about the football match only in the next day's newspaper. Television allows you to witness events which happen thousands of miles away.

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Fig. 14.3

All of us know that there are a large number of people who cannot read or write. Such people may not be able to read a newspaper, but they can watch television. Any one with a television receiver can access the information shown on television. This makes it an ideal medium to transmit messages to a large audience. In a



Fig. 14.4



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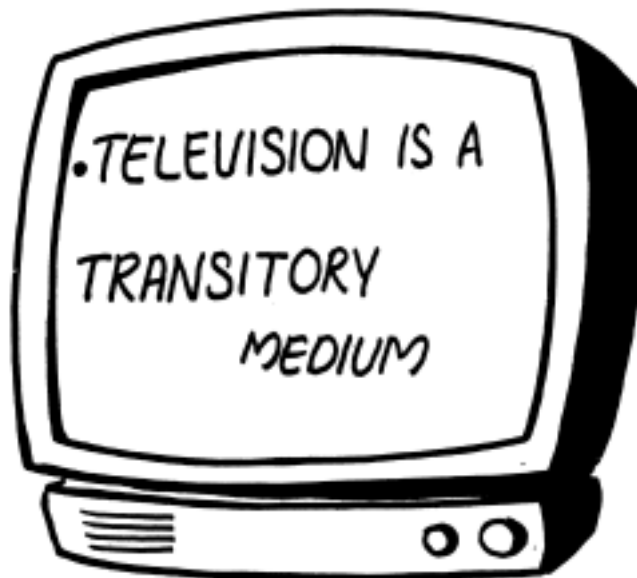
country like ours, with a huge illiterate population, this characteristic of television makes it an ideal instrument for transmitting social messages. Television also has a very wide output, range and reach. It is truly a mass medium.

**Activity 14.1**



*Conduct a survey to find out how many hours people in your neighbourhood watch television.*

Do you read your newspaper every morning? What if you did not get time in the morning? You can always read it later. But, what if you miss an episode of your favourite television serial? You will have to be satisfied with some one telling you the story unless you had arranged a recording of the programme. Due to the large output and lack of permanence, television programmes are not easy to be recorded by viewers. It may be practically impossible to record every programme which appears on your television. Therefore, television is generally identified as a transitory medium.



**Fig.14.5**

Have you ever visited a television station? You will be amazed at the amount of machinery and expertise needed to run a television station. Have you or your friends ever tried to bring out a hand written magazine? You can write articles and stories and draw your own pictures. All you need will be paper, pen, drawing instruments and time. However, a television programme can never be made this

**Transitory : Existing or lasting only a short time**

easily. It requires lots of money, machinery and experienced people. Broadcast media in general and television in particular involves complex technology and organization. You will need crores of rupees to start a television station.



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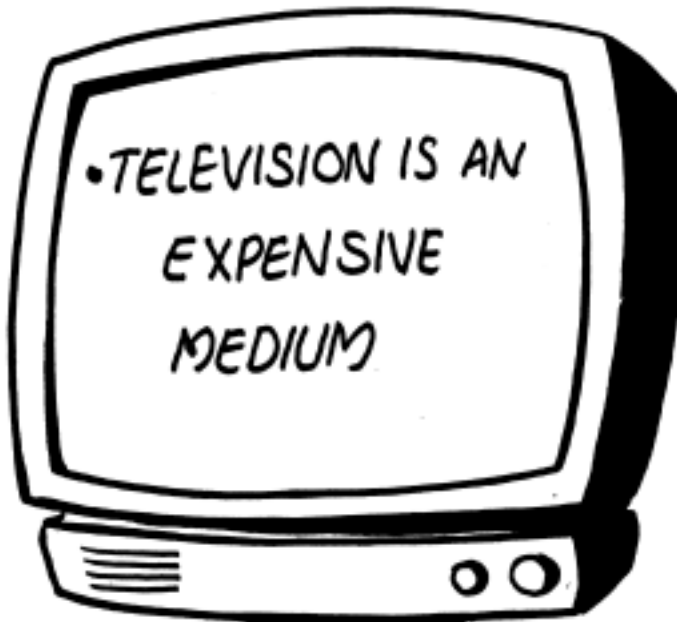


Fig. 14.6

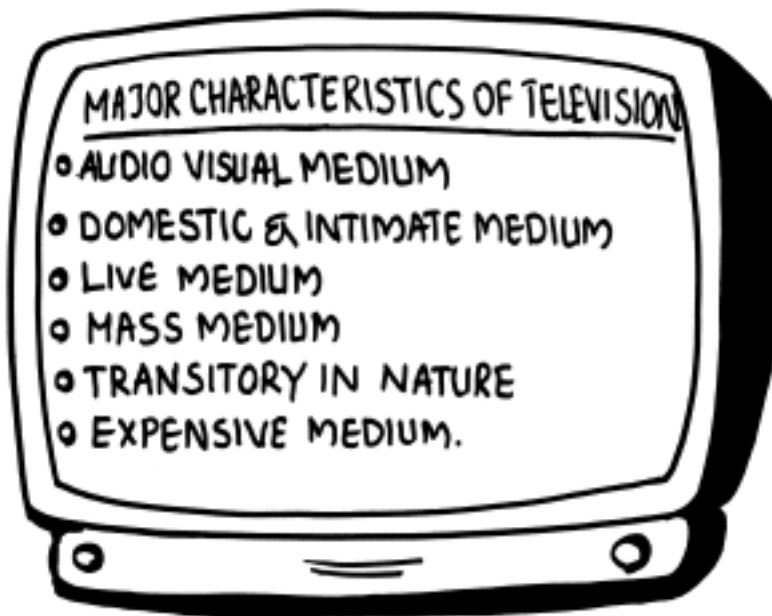


Fig. 14.7



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**INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.1**

1. What makes television images more memorable?
2. Mention three characteristics of television.
3. Name two characteristics of television which makes it an ideal medium for the telecast of sports events .
4. Tick mark (✓) the appropriate answer :
  - (i) Which character of television makes it an intimate medium?
    - (a) live nature
    - (b) domestic nature
    - (c) audio visual character
    - (d) transitory nature
  - (ii) Which of the following mediums transmits messages faster?
    - (a) newspaper
    - (b) manuscript magazine
    - (c) television
    - (d) cinema
  - (iii) Name a drawback of television
    - (a) expensive medium
    - (b) mass medium
    - (c) domestic medium
    - (d) live medium
  - (iv) Which characteristic of television makes it an ideal medium for delivering news?
    - (a) audio visual character
    - (b) live nature
    - (c) domestic character
    - (d) transitory nature
  - (v) Which of the following is a relatively permanent medium?
    - (a) television
    - (b) radio
    - (c) television newscast
    - (d) newspaper

## 14.2 TELEVISION AND OTHER MEDIUMS OF MASS COMMUNICATION

We have gone through the unique characteristics of television. Now let us explore how different television is from other mediums of mass communication like radio, print and new media. Each of these mediums has their own strengths and imitations.

How do you get your daily newspaper? Your newspaper boy delivers it to your doorstep, right? Otherwise you will have to go to a shop and buy the newspaper. In other words, print medium needs physical distribution of its limited products. If there is too much demand, the newspaper stand can run out of newspapers. Compare this with television. Any one with a television set can have access to it. Too many people tuning in to a particular programme does not affect its availability.

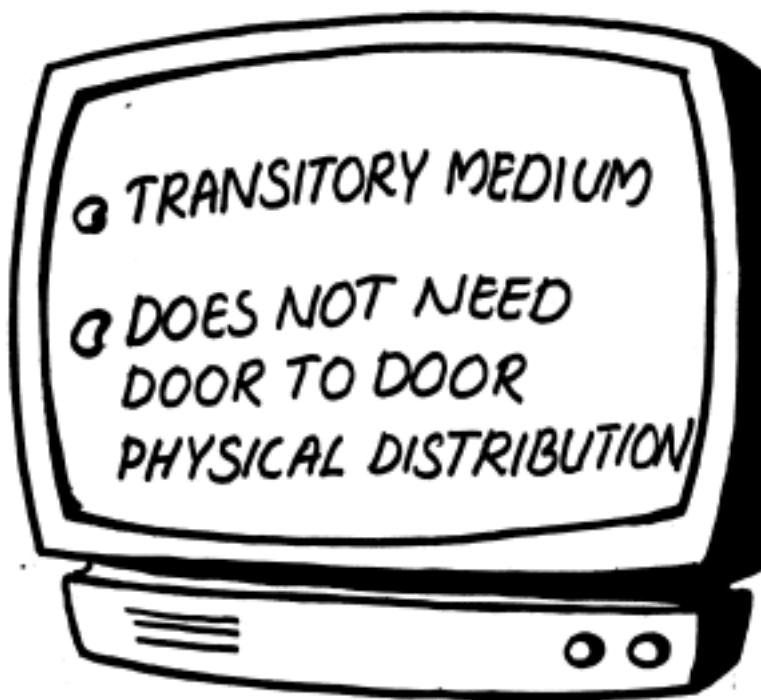


Fig. 14. 8: (a) Characteristics of television

On the other hand, we have already learnt that television is a transitory medium. Contrast it with the comparative “permanence” of print. You can easily make cuttings out of your favourite articles from your newspaper. Contrast it with recording your favourite television news for a month.. Which will be easier to do?



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Fig. 14.8: (b) Characteristics of Print Media

How would you like to watch world cup cricket? Will you wait for the morning newspaper to know what happened in the last day's match? Or will you listen to the radio commentary? If you have a television set, most probably you would prefer to be in front of it to catch the latest action. This is because the audio visual nature of television gives it an edge over both radio and print.





Radio is an aural medium whereas print relies just on visual content. The tremendous success of television as a mass medium has its roots in its ability to incorporate both visual and aural content. It combines compelling visuals with the personal immediacy of radio. This audio visual character gives it great power in conveying realism and this keeps the viewer emotionally involved.

Do you own a television set as well as a radio? What kind of programmes do you listen to in your radio set? Does your favourite radio channel broadcast more music oriented programmes? This is because the aural nature of radio makes it an excellent medium for transmitting music and speech.

Television, on the other hand is a better medium for conveying documentary information. Would you prefer watching news on television or listening to it on radio? The visual content of television news makes it more appealing than radio news. This is because radio cannot outsmart television in providing the experience of physical reality. Imagine watching a tennis match between Sania Mirza and Venus Williams on your TV set. Wouldn't it convey a more "real" experience of the match than hearing a radio commentary?

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**Aural:** relating to the ear or to the sense of hearing



Fig. 14.9: (a) Television



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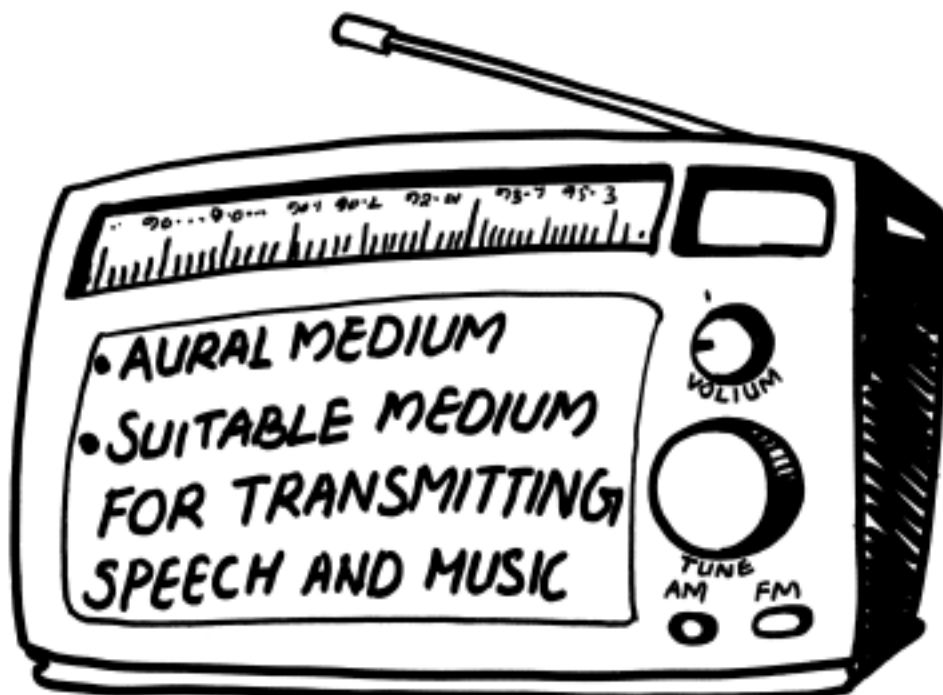


Fig. 14.9: (b) Radio

You can listen to radio while doing your household work. You can listen and drive or shave while hearing the news. However, watching television demands more undivided attention. You can play your radio in the living room and hear it from the kitchen. However, if you try to do the same with television, you are



Fig. 14.10: (a) Listening to radio

sure to miss most of the action. Many people keep their radios switched on in the background while they go about with their daily activities. This trait of radio has helped it to survive the onslaught of television. Radio stations have realized this advantage and have included more musical content in their programming.



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Fig. 14.10: (b) Watching television

Imagine hearing the commentary of the republic day parade on radio. How different will it be from watching it on television? You will notice that the radio commentary tries to paint the picture of the republic day parade through words. On the other hand, audio content in television is used to support the visuals. This is because television is an audio visual medium, while radio relies solely on audio content. This fundamental difference between the two influences the way in which news or other programmes are presented in the two media.



**Activity 14.3**

*Compare the television and radio broadcasts of a single event. Note down which one you preferred and the reason for it.*

In lesson one, you have seen that internet is giving television a tough competition. Internet or new media has opened a whole new world of communication. What do you do when you find a particular television programme boring? You might change the channel. Or you might write a letter to the television channel about the programme. In both the cases, the feedback is delayed. There is no mechanism which allows the producer of the programme to find out whether all the viewers liked the programme or not. Thus, another trait of television is delayed feedback.

New media on the other hand is an interactive medium. It allows you to instantly



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register your comments about its contents. It allows you to even create your own content. The lesson on new media will give you more details about how to do this. While watching a television programme, you are more or less an inactive spectator. This is definitely not the case with new media.



Fig. 14.11

We have already seen that a television news show can bring the world to our homes. It can tell us about world leaders meeting in Washington, the effects of global warming in Antarctica and about an Indian athlete winning a gold medal in a world championship. We have learnt that television is generally regarded as a domestic medium. New media, on the other hand, is the medium of the individual. It allows you to connect with people around the world with just the click of a



Fig. 14.12 (a) Television

mouse. Television allows you to witness events happening around the world. New media empowers you further by allowing you to participate in these events by posting your comments on websites.

Do you discuss your favourite television programme with your friends? Watching a popular television programme can give you a sense of community. New media takes this one step further. It allows you to create communities which will help you to stay in touch with people of similar interests. For example, if you like the songs of Kishore Kumar, you can join a Kishore Kumar fan club on the internet. This will help you to be in touch with and share songs with another Kishore Kumar fan in as distant a place as New York.



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Fig. 14.12: New Media

If you compare today's newspapers with those before the arrival of television, you will notice that the visual content of today's newspaper is much more. This is because the arrival of television has prompted the print industry to reinvent itself. People were impressed by the magic of the visual content offered by television. Not to be left behind, the print media started providing more photographs and other illustrations.



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**Fiction – an imaginary tale or invented story**

Every time a new medium emerges, the older media try to adapt to the new challenge. Before the advent of television, more than 60 percent of the print content was fiction based. However, soon television became the preferred source of entertainment for most people. This prompted print to shift more towards non fiction content. Pay attention to the way news is reported in both television and print. You will notice that while television delivers you the latest headlines in no time, the newspaper concentrates more on analysis and provides you with additional background information.

**Activity 14.4**

Take the same news item in a newspaper and a television channel. What difference do you find in the way the news is reported in the two mediums ?

Do you watch audience backed shows? Here, the voters decide the outcome of the show. This is an attempt by television to include an element of interactivity into its content. The arrival of new media has prompted television to change itself to meet the new challenge.

Similarly, news shows and other programmes have started airing viewer's 'sms'. Some news channels allow you to send reports which might have been shot on your camera or mobile phone. This is termed as '*citizen journalism*'. This allows the viewer to participate in the content or programme production. Today, newspapers also try to be participatory in nature. Many major newspapers encourage viewers to send interesting photographs which are published.

When television first came into existence, it was predicted that it will wipe out newspapers. However, we have seen that it is not so. The newspaper reinvented itself to meet the new competitor. Similarly, many predict the death of television in the age of new media. What do you think? Will you stop watching television in the years to come?

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.2**

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate word/s:
  - (i) Radio is an \_\_\_\_\_ medium
  - (ii) Newspaper is a comparatively \_\_\_\_\_ medium in comparison to the transitory nature of television
  - (iii) The arrival of television prompted print to \_\_\_\_\_ its visual content
2. (i) Which of the following statements about television is not true?
  - (a) it is audio visual in nature



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- (b) it is a live medium
  - (c) it is less powerful than print
  - (d) delayed feedback is one of its traits
- (ii) Which of the following allows the viewer to participate in television content production?
- (a) Citizen journalism
  - (b) Current affairs programmes
  - (c) News
  - (d) Serials
- (iii) Identify the false statement
- (a) Newspapers need to be physically delivered to the readers
  - (b) Television has wiped out newspapers
  - (c) Television is a domestic medium
  - (d) New media is interactive in nature



**Activity 14.5**

1. Monitor television news, radio news and your daily newspaper for a week and enlist the differences in the ways in which the same news is reported in all the three mediums. Pay special attention to the way words and pictures are used in each medium.

**14.3 FUNCTIONS OF TELEVISION**



Fig. 14.13



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Do you watch the programmes aired on channels like National Geographic? They give you a whole lot of information about a variety of topics ranging from the life of turtles to the scientific facts about volcanoes. Similarly, a news channel gives you information about events ranging from the local football match to the war in Iraq. Thus providing information is one of the main functions of television.

**Activity 14.6**

*Identify and watch a programme which provides information in your favourite channel. Make a note of the information you gained by watching the programme.*

Do you watch the programmes of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) aired on Gyan Darshan? Do they help you to understand your lessons better? Gyan Darshan is an excellent example of how television is used for educational purposes. Because of its visual nature, television can be an excellent source of instruction. A lesson about France can be made all the more exciting through a television programme on the country which can show you the sights and sounds of Paris. Thus, television can be an excellent educational tool.

Can you think of other topics which can be taught better by using television?

Television can be used:

- to demonstrate processes or physical skills
- to show movement
- for those lacking reading skills
- to make distance learning more personalized
- to make teaching and learning more attractive, and dynamic

However, television has its limitations as an educator. In a class room you can always ask your teacher your doubts. Also, the teacher can repeat a difficult concept. Obviously, a television set cannot do this due to practical constraints. A few limitations of television in the educational field are due to the fact that:

- it is primarily a one-way communication medium
- both production and transmission of programmes are costly
- the production process is very lengthy



Why do you watch television? Is there any one major reason? Many of us watch television to relax or to be entertained. Thus providing entertainment is one of the major functions of television. As a result serials, films or music based programmes are among the most popular television programmes. Television provides different kinds of programmes for different sections. Your brother might watch a football match while your sister may be more interested in a quiz contest.



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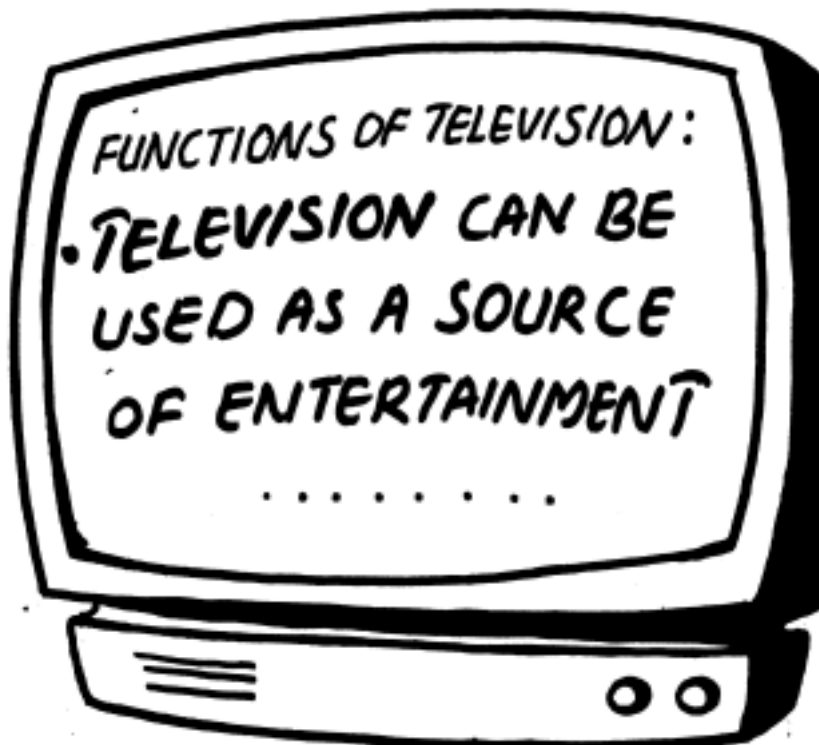
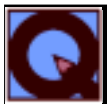


Fig. 14.14



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.3

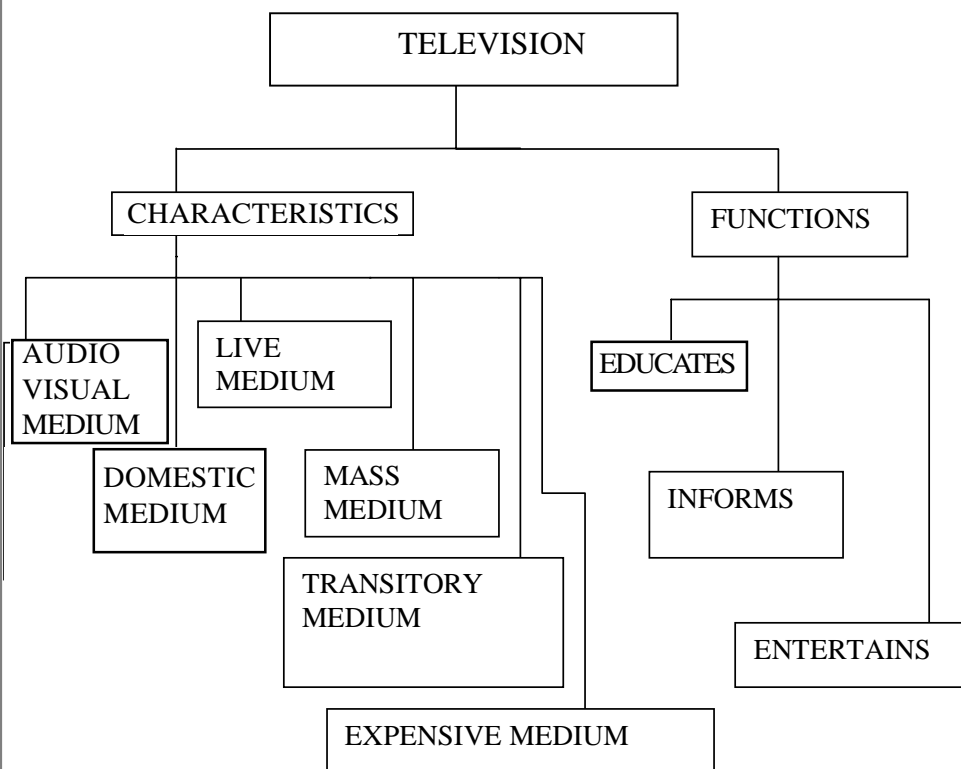
1. Name two functions of television
2. Give an example where television is used for educational goals
3. Name the most popular function of television.
4. Fill in the blanks with appropriate word/s:
  - (i) \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of a channel which provides informative programmes.
  - (ii) Television can help to make distance learning \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (iii) The one way communication method of television \_\_\_\_\_ its role as an educator.



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**14.4 WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**



**14.5 TERMINAL EXERCISES**

1. What are the major characteristics of television?
2. Identify the major differences between television, print and radio.
3. What are the main strengths and limitations of television?
4. Explain the functions of television.



**14.6 ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

- 14.1**
1. The audio visual character of television
  2. Live medium, audio visual content, domestic medium, any other
  3. Live medium, audio visual nature.
  4. (i) (b) (ii) (c) (iii) (a) (iv) (b) (v) (d)



- 14.2** 1. (i) aural  
(ii) permanent  
(iii) increase  
2. (i) (c) (ii) (a) (iii) (b)

- 14.3** 1. (i) educates (ii) informs (iii) any other  
2. (i) Gyan Darshan (ii) any other  
3. providing entertainment  
4. (i) National Geographic, any other  
(ii) personalized  
(iii) limits

**Notes**