

# Media Criticism

## Unit 2 - What is Criticism, The Essence of Criticism and Why Critique the Mass Media

### Unit Structure

- 1.0 Objective
- 1.1 Introduction
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- 1.3 Media Criticism: The Essence of Criticism.
- 1.4 Media Criticism: Why Critique the Mass Media.
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### **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

After reading this unit you will be able to understand

- Definition of Criticism
- The Essence of Criticism
- The importance of an unbiased and subjective approach to criticism
- Framework for Critiques
- Reasons for critiquing Mass Media

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

A media environment extraordinarily surrounds our worlds. We use smartphones, radio, television, newspapers, magazines, emails, messaging, and video content on a daily basis to sustain our lives and their activities. As consumers, the world is constantly surrounded by choices of digital and conventional media channels to provide its audience content, twenty-four hours a day. While some might argue the consumption, we often club our consumption with

television, reading a newspaper, or book while watching television, or watching a show on our phones as we text our peers. The volume of information surrounding us is indeed an overwhelming reality of our lives.

Human Beings are known to sustain art and performances all through their lives. Our life is incomplete without the consumption of these forms. We have been doing this through various media channels like video and audio channels, print and digital publications and social media to name a few. Like every profession assesses its contribution, the responsibility to understand, comprehend and learn through various mediums is essential. The industry is bound by the responsibility to derive methods for assessing the performance of its members. As professionals, it is the duty of the ones leading the group to understand and apply the methods put forth and apply and assess their work and that of their colleagues, competitors and others alike. In Media, however, this is no different. These assessments and acts of examining the quality are what constitute the common practice of criticism. Oftentimes, the connotations of the word ‘Criticism’ are misunderstood in common language.

In layman conversation, as one mentions the word criticism, it is adhered to as being criticized, embarking on an unpleasant and negative series of occurrences for an event, platform or person. It is considered a practice that solely focuses on the extermination of the mentioned subject or practice. Rather criticism is a constructive tool that better allows the consumer to look at and only acquire information or consume media content that is required of them. In the present age, Media Criticism offers a varied, critical approach to discourses in fields through sources such as the radio, television and the Internet.

This unit will help you understand the theoretical concepts of Media Criticism. It will help you describe and introduce you to the nature and scope of the field. It will help you differentiate between various Mass Media channels. It will introduce you to the concept of criticism, its origin and media criticism along with its importance. It will also give you an insight into the essence of criticism and the ways it can be utilized to enhance the quality of the said media content. The unit sheds light on how a critic can utilize their skills and add value to the existing media content. The unit also explains five things a critic should keep in mind while

demonstrating their opinion to their audiences. Apart from that, you will conclude the reasons and importance of critiquing Mass Media, allowing you to build a holistic perspective that contributes to modelling the values, behaviours and cultural significance of our society.

## **1.2 WHAT IS CRITICISM?**

The ideal reflection of a society can be derived from the consumption of art and culture. Jerome Stolnitz states that we analyze art to understand the compositions better and along with that to pass judgment on the value they hold. The word *Criticism* finds its origins in the Greek word, *krinein*, meaning to comprehend or to judge. This, in turn, attests that both comprehension and judgment are essential tasks in the critical process. These processes allow the person to comprehend defects and look for spaces created in the artistic spaces. However, a critic recognizes what is termed defective elements and then constructively suggests ways the flaws can be rectified, ultimately enhancing the value of the art being consumed by people.

Jerry McNeeley states, "Criticism is a carefully considered judgment of the merits and faults of a work of art with the purpose of improving and stimulating interest." Criticism can therefore be termed as a thorough comprehension of art, aiming to include the responsibility by formulating positive and negative comments on the specific content being consumed or being interacted with to ultimately increase its value. A professional critic makes it a point to assure that the 'judgment' for the work ultimately enhances and becomes the hallmark of valid and constructed comments adding value. Genuine criticism is known to further expand and upgrade the audience's attentiveness, enhancing the market for the product.

Media criticism, on the other hand, can be described as a set of methods providing an insight into uses, effects, and practices associated with media, into the meanings, perceptions, biases, with the messages created, into cultures that produce and consume the messages, follow the ideologies and establish themselves as products and producers of the content.

## **1.3 MEDIA CRITICISM: THE ESSENCE OF CRITICISM**

Keeping in mind what we discussed criticism to be, constructive assessments and constant appraisals form the baseline for a critic to look at the piece of information being delivered to them. The term, however, has been used with a negative connotation in the past and the tasks and responsibilities of the involved individual are often misunderstood. The essence of criticism can be mapped with Caren Deming's statement. He said, "critics must demonstrate the willingness to meet works and their audiences on their own terms: the willingness to understand the forces compelling creators and the gatekeepers making decisions."

Using media to produce and consume various messages on television, radio, smartphones, the Internet, books, and one-on-one interactions, we create and cultivate Media Literacy in our environments. Often, we come across thoughts that help us understand that when we truly understand ways how media can shape messages and identities, we learn better about the decisions we take to frame and write messages. Once we acquire the ability to see how content can harm and shape ideas, and emotions and present it to the rest, we truly become aware and careful of how and what we consume through media.

With every professional's fundamental responsibility and ability to derive tools to assess the performance of those around them, as critics, it is essential that they understand and constantly apply similar rules and methods to their creations along with those members they assess. This holds true for stalwarts and young members of the industry. It is, however, necessary that the critic or the professional believes in the worth of the said medium or product. A piece of art cannot be put to its audience if the creator does not believe in its value. Similarly, only bringing out the negative aspects cannot be termed a criticism. A professional will always provide a more comprehensive understanding by acknowledging the good and the mendable parts of the media they consume with the sole motivation to add value to the product.

Even though it isn't necessarily required for a critic to have extensively worked in the industry for long years, their assessments and exposure to the art definitely allow them to build a more comprehensive, unbiased and subjective view no matter the medium. This careful consideration of subjective rectification, a suggestion with a singular focus to bring out the best

in the art being consumed forms the essence of criticism. It is essential for the professional to understand the scope and the longevity of the product.

To explain this concept, this example sets out best. The best way to validate an edifice to meet the current expectation is to remodel them. In this process, the current establishment undergoes scrutiny and an in-depth analysis of what needs to be removed and what can be kept. With a central focus to bring out the best from the space and the edifice, the quality of the remodelling cannot be compromised. This tearing down and building up process thus is done for the sake of the structure's rectification. Hence, it is essential the critic understands and believes in the capability of the media product as they term ways it could be rectified for a better reach and growth for its audience.

**Check your progress**

1. Define Media Criticism and write about its importance for enhancing the value of the media product.

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2. Write about the importance of cultivating a comprehensive, unbiased and subjective eye for a media critic with examples.

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3. Using examples, explain in brief the essence of criticism.

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**1.4 MEDIA CRITICISM: WHY CRITIC THE MASS MEDIA?**

So far we have understood what criticism is, the essence of criticism and the importance of cultivating an unbiased and subjective eye for critiquing media content. This section will elaborate upon the importance and reason for critiquing the mass media. Let’s take a more detailed look. Richard Blackmur labels the difficulty and responsibility as “the critic's burden.” In Blackmur’s words, the responsibility encompasses “making bridges between the society and the arts”.

Before we get to that, it is essential to define what comprises Mass Media. Conventionally, the electronic media (radio, television, film, and recorded music), print media (newspapers, magazines) and popular artefacts, experiences, practices, and processes can be termed Mass Media. Economically and politically driven to cause science and technological development, these, like several other domains of human life, are bound to the use of language. For a mass media critic, it is essential they approach these from several angles keeping in mind institutions, workplaces, communicative practices, cultural products, social activities, aesthetic forms, and historical developments. It is also essential they remember that these are correctly used to represent and shape the prevalent socio-cultural values. (Spitulnik, D. (1993))

As essential as it is for the professional to map out the mediums they would interact and review, it is fundamental that we understand that they form the bridge for carrying criticism from an author to media decision-makers and to the media audiences. In order to focus on this properly a critic In order to focus on this properly, a critic undergoes “a structured method or principled procedure to test the proposed interpretations as attested by Monroe Beardsley.

Stephenson Smith categorizes these into five steps. He states through observation of the working methods of the great critics, the complete process of criticism, for any work of art should encompass each of the five basic steps as follows:

- Impressions
- Analysis
- Interpretation
- Orientation
- Valuation

Even though there is no such order that an individual critic should follow, it is essential they comprise two or more of these to derive a more logical comprehension of the said media content. It is left upon the critic to intermingle, omit or utilize the steps to the best of their capabilities in order to come to form an opinion. This allows the audience to view the critical process categorized into a working method rather than blindly following a set of rules. Smith states, “But we should not estimate one work in terms of another. This yields a false analogy between critical methods and the older scientific practice of classification.”

By saying that he so notifies that working critiquing within a framework allows the critic to better argue and put their case forward. An individual requires a baseline or a common ground to work from and the framework offers that. On the other hand, he also believes that one work cannot be compared to another without transposing expectations, hence it is essential for critics to know the origins and sources of the content they might be critiquing. It is essential to carefully critique so as to enhance the value and bridge gaps between the audience and the content being consumed by them.

### **Check your progress**

4. Define “the critic’s burden” and write about its importance.

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5. What comprises Mass Media according to you and why?

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6. Using examples, reasons for critiquing Mass Media.

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### **1.5 LET'S SUM UP**

Human life is incomplete without the consumption of content through various sources of Mass Media. The assessments and acts of examining the quality are known as the criticism. Media Criticism offers a varied, critical approach to discourses in fields through sources such as the radio, television, literature and the Internet. The word Criticism originated from the Greek word, *krinein*, meaning to comprehend or to judge. With careful comprehension and judgment as essential tasks in the critical process, it is a platform for a person to see defects and voids in the art spaces and recognize their prevalent potential. These spaces and voids are recognized by critics. They recognize missing elements and then suggest ways they can be rectified, enhancing the value of the content for its audience.

Mass Media comprises electronic media (radio, television, film, and recorded music), print media (newspapers, magazines), the Internet, practices and processes in a society an individual resides in. This, in turn, using language, gives the economically and politically driven

society to cause science and technological development in several other domains of human life. Media criticism has gained popularity through forums, blogs, groups, and messages on social media networks. The spaces allow professional critics to coexist with the amateur critics giving them an opportunity to express their opinions and criticism of the quality of an article or a film to name a few. It is, however, difficult to point out if their voices are being heard, it is essential that we notice that with the advancement of social media spaces, the emergence of people who possess the means and ability to critique has found like-minded spaces to let out their opinions to a much senior group of folks. (Bakanov R.P)

As a critic, it is essential to understand and delve deeper into the essence of criticism. With a central focus on bringing out the unseen, a critic functions on the willingness to understand creators and gatekeepers, ultimately for their audience. Even though a critic is not required to possess an extensive degree in criticism, their work and contribution to the industry allow audiences to build on their assessments and exposure to obtain a subjective view of the content being discussed. It is essential for the professional to understand the scope and the longevity of the product. This careful consideration of subjective rectification brings out the best forming the essence of criticism.

Keeping in mind the importance of a comprehensive, unbiased and subjective eye for critiquing media content, a critique should follow a framework or baseline to acquaint themselves with the context. Taking inspiration from Stephenson Smith, a critic follows a process to encompass five basic steps to place forth their critique to its audience, stakeholders and creators alike. These include:

- Apprehension of the work through **impressions**.
- **Analysis** to bring in perspective and correct unbridled impressionism.
- **Interpretation** of the work for the reader of the criticism.
- **Orientation** to its place in the history of similar works.
- **Valuation** or determining the peculiar and general essence of the work.

The framework allows the critic to form a context and a base for their argument in front of the audience and stakeholders. To conclude, there are several reasons behind the importance of critiquing Mass Media. These spaces allow you to build a holistic perspective, present you with an opportunity to delve deeper into the subject and allow you to argue and research your opinions through a linear common ground. It is an essential task of a critic to present a view that enhances and brings forth the spaces between the content of consumption. It is essential to note that, only negative commentary will never form a critique for any forms of art or content being presented to the audience. Criticism is a constructive tool with the sole purpose to enhance, see and bring value to an object, practice or various forms of art.

The role of critics has been prevalent in streams of management, economics, sociology and information sciences, apart from media. (Debenedetti, S. (2006)) Media criticism and its relationship to the cultural industries are not alien. The process to tackle critical discourse by evaluating cultural products, the professional evaluation and multiple roles played by critics have indeed contributed to the advancements in the society. These contributions have played an essential role in modelling the values, behaviours and cultural significance of the society we inhabit.

## **1.6 QUESTIONS**

1. What is Criticism? Talk about its origin and importance.
2. Discuss in detail the essence of criticism?
3. Why is it essential for critics to understand their responsibility while critiquing media content?
4. Elaborate on Caren Deming's statement "Critics must demonstrate the willingness to meet works and their audiences on their own terms".
5. Write short notes on:
  - a) Stephenson Smith's five steps for critics to keep in mind.
  - b) Explain the importance of cultivating a structure in critique.
  - c) Explain the reasons for critiquing Mass Media.
  - d) Explain "the critic's burden".

## **1.6 REFERENCES**

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