UNIT - 2 : MASS COMMUNICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Define Mass Communication and Mass Media
- Explain the characteristics of Mass Communication
- Name and explain the types of Mass Communication
- Enumerate the functions of Mass Communication
- Delineate the evolution of Mass Communication

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have learnt the basic concepts of communication. In this unit we are going to discuss one of the most important forms of communication - Mass Communication - that has a very deep influence on the lives of all human beings across the world, an influence which is increasing every passing day.

Mass Communication is an activity that has been encompassing each and every sphere of our life. So, a detailed study of this system will help us in communicating better with our surroundings and the society. We will be discussing various aspects of the wider concept of Mass Communication here in this unit.

After you go through this unit, you will know what Mass Communication means, how it works, its characteristics, growth and development. So, let us first understand what Mass Communication means.

2.3 MASS COMMUNICATION

Mass Communication is the activity or process of communicating with an innumerable number of receivers or audiences who might be scattered all over the world.

Over the decades a rapid advancement in science and technology has facilitated the system of communicating with people anywhere in the world and it has become a simple enough, function today.

Sending across our messages to the audiences or receivers has been rendered quite simple nowadays and everyday it is improving at a faster pace.

Because of this, the world today has become a smaller place as any person can communicate with anyone across the globe in a few seconds any moment of the day or night. Geographical or physical barriers are coming down very fast.

Mass Communication helps us in socialization among the people irrespective of any border – whether geographical, political, economical or otherwise. Nowadays, like human beings, the nations of the world have also become dependent upon each other for so many things including their growth and development. So, an acute need to address the people worldwide has arisen over the decades reaching the peak today. Thus, Mass Communication

has assumed an ever more significant role today and an almost inseparable part of our life.

To communicate with an audience spread all over the world is definitely a tough task as all of them differ in culture, civilization etc. Being a system of communicating with such a large number of people with hardly any similarity among them, it is definitely a difficult task, totally different from personal level communication.

Mass communication is a 'mediated' communication because, to communicate with such a huge number of people all over the world, we must take the help of a mechanical medium without which it will be impossible to carry out the task.

This is also a highly impersonal form of communication. There is no direct personal touch between the communicators and audiences or readership at all.
It has to be simultaneous which means that the messages must be available to the interested people at the same instant, except in case of newspapers. Even for newspapers and magazines, though the time of delivery may not be exactly the same, yet a fair amount of concordence is maintained.

It is a 'magic multiplier' or 'force multiplier' which means that a single message broadcast by the media or printed in a newspaper or magazine is available in the air which can be downloaded virtually any number of times any moment with the help of receiver sets.

Mass Communication is an important discipline for every section of our lives – science & technology, environment, political system etc.

A profession in the media is a high pressure job because 'the switch is in our hands'. That is – if we don't like a certain programme we simply switch it off rather than watching bad a programme. So, the mediapersons must be good enough to keep the audiences glued to the media any time of the day or night.

2.3.1 Definition

Different communication experts have defined Mass Communication in different ways. However, if we want to quote a generalized definition of Mass Communication which reflects all the characteristics of Mass Communication, we can put it this way:

'Mass Communication occurs when a small number of people send messages to a large, anonymous and usually heterogeneous audience through the use of a specialized mechanical communication device.'

So, Mass Communication represents the creation and sending of a homogenous message to a large heterogeneous audience through the media.

Communication expert Mr JV Vilanilam defines Mass Communication as "a communication of mass-produced messages to mass audiences consisting of millions of people who do not gather at any particular place but individually receive the messages sitting in their homes or their offices. The messages are produced by trained professionals in organizations specially formed by private entrepreneurs or public / government / autonomous bodies which invest millions of dollars for the production and dissemination of those messages."

Here, we come across the concept of 'professional communicators' who are nothing but trained personnel engaged in broadcasting or publishing messages from the original sources. For example – if the Prime Minister of the country would like to send across a message to the people, the people employed by the media organizations like newspapers / TV / Radio, will edit the messages and broadcast / publish it in a suitable manner for the benefit of the public. So this breed of personnel is called the professional communicators.

2.3.2 Characterstics of Mass Communication

Here, we will discuss a few of the important characteristics of Mass Communication that will make it convenient for you to understand the concept better.

- The number of receivers or audiences is innumerable. It includes anyone living anywhere in the world without any consideration for gender, religion, country, state etc.
- The messages must be available to anyone who might like to enjoy it. There must not be absolutely any deprivation or discrimination based on any criteria in this regard.
- The feedback is the most delayed in this type of communication. This is so because even if a receiver would like to express as well as register his or her reaction about anything broadcast or published in the media it would still take some time before it can be properly acknowledged in the media.
- The message delivery has to be synchronous or in other words happening at the same moment everywhere, wherever it is available. For example - whenever we listen to radio or watch TV programmes it is available at the same time for all the receiver sets across the globe without any exception.
- The process of Mass Communication is rather a complex one with several steps, from encoding to finally delivering it to the receivers. This is very much comparable to the process of communication in the basic sense.
- Here, you will be introduced to an important concept called the 'gatekeeping' process. This concept means that out of so many things happening all around us and so many messages coming to us from all sides, we do not pay attention to all of them. We are attracted by only a few of these events and activities on which we do concentrate our attention.
- As the audience of Mass Communication is spread anywhere in the world with no homogeneity at all they are highly scattered, disorganized and shapeless as a whole.

2.3.3 Types of Mass Communication

Mass Communication is a vast field and has several types classified upon different parameters. There are basically three types of Mass Communication. Here we will give you just a very short introduction to the different types as each of these types will be discussed in detail in subsequent study materials. These are -

Journalism: It is the business of presenting news to the masses. It brings the whole world into our drawing rooms in the form of news items from across the globe from thousands of miles away. Even though the news items served in the newspaper or news channels seem to be simple enough, yet, one can hardly imagine the efforts, time, resources (financial and otherwise) needed to carry out the whole task.

Public Relations: It is that type of Mass Communication which tries to create as well as boost the pubic image of an organization among the masses. As the present age is an age of tremendous competition among the business corporations, the ones which will enjoy the maximum support of the audiences or publics will be the most successful ones in the long run. So PR is important for industry today.

Advertising: It is the paid form of publicity used for creating awareness about a product or service among the masses. For publication of an advertisement the manufacturers or service providers of the products or services have to pay a certain amount of money to the media house. It is interesting to note that most of the mass media organizations actually survive and thrive on the collection of advertising revenues which is generated by selling its space for publishing or broadcasting messages in return for a fee so that people can come to know about that product.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – A

1. Define Mass Communication.

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2. What are the different types of Mass Communication?

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2.4 FUNCTIONS OF MASS COMMUNICATION

Communication and Mass Communication are integral aspects of our life and thereby the society at large. That is why they have to perform certain functions which are expected of them by the society. This is obvious because only through communication we can transform the world, by allowing people to know about our revolutionary ideas, feelings, cooperation etc.

A few of the functions of Mass Communication are -

Information: We are essentially social beings and so we have to live in the company of other people in close proximity. Thus, to keep in touch with other fellow human beings we exchange our feelings, attitudes etc. From a technical point of view these are simply bits of information in themselves which carry and connote certain meanings to the receivers. The initiator or sender of the messages encodes those messages and the receiver decodes or accords certain meanings to them.

Instruction: Mass Communication has developed into a broad platform with lot of opportunities for presenting diverse views, solutions, models for various problems, issues and developmental initiatives from which the masses can pick up the one most suitable for them. Besides, being serious

analyzers of such issues and problems, day in and day out the mass media agencies develop certain expertise in such matters. And thereby instruct people about what course of action is to be taken at times of crisis.

Entertainment: Entertainment is a major function of Mass Communication along with others. Actually, for most of the audiences and readership of mass media, the term generally conjures up an image of entertainment programmes and messages at the first instance, while other facets come only later on.

Even when someone reads a news item in a newspaper it also brings to him or her a sense of entertainment besides fulfilling other necessities.

Persuasion: Mass Communication persuades the masses into believing in a certain issue or ideology by plainly offering all the sides of the issue or the problem in front of the people so that they can make a conscious and wise decision. We have already mentioned that it is a very effective platform for discussion of such issues.

Debates and discussions / agenda setting: It is a normal feature that every society has a number of problems and issues confronting it at any given time. For example, in Assam we had the immigrants' issue resulting in the Assam Accord of 1985, besides the problems of unemployment, secessionist violence and floods etc.

Similarly, at the national level the issue was whether India should produce nuclear weapons or not etc. Now, it is the media which keeps a hawk's eye on these issues and puts them in front of the public in order of a certain priority.

Cultural promotion: Mass media promotes cultural aspects of a society / community, a nation or a country by focusing it amongst a global audience. Otherwise, how could we, the people of India, more so Assam in general come to know about the socio-cultural ethos of, say, the Red Indians in the USA, or nearer home, about the culture of the South Indian people. Similarly, the culture of Assam and the communities of the North-East region have been introduced to the world audience by mass media. This activity very effectively works as a convenient cultural exchange programme in today's

age of increasing dependence upon one another amongst the nations and societies of the world.

Integration: Mass media creates a strong unifying sense amongst the masses. It can be mentioned here that English was introduced as a common medium of instruction in the schools and higher institutions across the country in the early quarter of the 19th century by the British government. This has contributed immensely towards the integration of the country during those days.

This was so because India is a country of continental proportions with hundreds of ethnic communities and tribes and other racial groups co-existing with distinct cultural identities. But English language has solved this problem to a great extent and the success of the freedom movement had a lot to do with this phenomenon

Socialization: Mass media is a wonderful instrument for introducing ourselves to the outside world, right from our childhood. For a child, the first ever introduction to the world is facilitated by his or her parents or the immediate family followed by friends, society, school etc. However, the influence of mass media in making the children aware of the world and its treasure of knowledge is quite overwhelming and more than anything else.

Further, it also has to perform the function of improving the taste and of enlarging the sense of life's worthwhileness among the masses.

The modern communication media allow individuals to be linked, for the first time, directly to a national community without any mediating influence of regional and local affiliations.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – B

1. What are the functions of Mass Communication?

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2.5 EVOLUTION OF MASS COMMUNICATION

We all know that in the earlier days, circulation of knowledge or information among the people or the masses was a very tedious process as each and every book, every pamphlet had to be copied by hand to make them ready for reading by the public. But the invention of the printing press by Johan Gutenberg of Germany in the 16th century was a revolutionary turning point in the history of mankind. This revolutionary event can be termed as the starting point of the development of the concept of Mass Communication as production of books in large numbers became possible and knowledge or information could be made public at a minimum cost and hard labour of the people.

From the basic idea of the printing press of Gutenberg several hundred years ago, state-of-the-art printing machinery have been developed today. Yet Gutenberg was the pioneer of the era of Mass Communication.

After this, there was a long gap of activity in the history of mass communication. But in 1873, Count Guglielmo Marconi invented the telegraph system which was improvised further leading to the development of Radio transmission that is considered another important milestone in the journey of the civilization of humankind.

In the post World War I scenario, TV was invented by a person called John Loggy Bayerd. By the mid-1920s Radio managed to garner a big growth by ensuring that most of the households in the USA had at least one radio set. They were supported by more than 700 small and big Radio stations in that country even by 1927.

Mass Communication is growing by leaps and bounds over the years because of its advantageous position. This growth has received a tremendous boost with invention of the satellite communication technology for sending across the messages of the original communicators to virtually any spot around the world using electronic signals from the earth to sky and back. This is what we now know as Direct to Home or DTH. By this, we do

not need terrestrial transmission towers or stations and the signals can be received directly into the drawing rooms in our homes through the satellite with a dish antenna.

So, the entire business of Mass Communication is throwing open numerous scope for professional engagement or jobs in the industry which is growing every passing year and will keep growing at a steady speed. More so, in countries like ours where even though the industry is opening up, yet there is a lot to be done for covering the entire country as a whole.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – C

1. Who invented the printing press?

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2. Why is Gutenberg's printing press considered to be a turning point in the history of mankind?

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3. Who invented the telegraph and when?

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2.6 MASS MEDIA

As we have already discussed, media are the tools and instruments for carrying a message of information to the audiences As such, mass media means the tools for facilitating Mass Communication. In simple terms, it is the carriers of messages of Mass Communication to an innumerable audience which may be scattered anywhere around the world in an uneven way.

As a communicator has to address so many people at the same instant all over the world, it is virtually impossible to do so without the help of a powerful instrument. Hence we have to use the services of mass media – Radio, TV, Films, Newspapers, Magazines, Books etc. They act as the bridge between the communicator and the people for whom the communicator is saying something.

In the entire process, two types of mediators are involved – first the human mediator or professional communicator who is responsible for collecting, editing or brushing up the messages for making them suitable for broadcasting or printing. Reproducing the messages of the main source communicator without any distortion is a challenging job. At the same time, while editing or brushing up the messages for human consumption, professional communicators also have to keep in their minds that the messages must be prepared in a manner easily understandable to the masses. Otherwise, it will lose its appeal and attraction.

Secondly, side by side with the professional or human mediators or communicators, the mechanical devices or mass media instruments must also be in a good state so that presentation to the masses is smooth and free of any technical difficulty. Else, even a very nicely-produced and attractive programme may become worthless if the TV or Radio broadcasting becomes problematic with disturbances from sound or other sources.

We can say that if a person is interested in making a career in this field – Mass Communication – it would be a good idea to have at least a fair knowledge of the general ways of functioning of mass media instruments.

The growth and development of mass media has actually revolutionized the world by helping in carrying information to the peoples' doorsteps, round-the-clock, 365 days a year.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – D

1. What do you mean by mass media?

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2. Name five important mass media.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the concept of Mass Communication. Let us go over what we have learnt.

- Mass Communication is the process of communicating with innumerable audiences at the same time with the help of mechanical devices.
- The audiences are mostly unknown to each other, separated by geographical and political barriers and do not enjoy any closeness amongst themselves. The feedback or the reaction or response to a message from the communicators is delayed due to several factors.
- There are different types of Mass Communication – Journalism, Advertising and Public Relations.
- On the other hand, mass media means the devices through which communication with the masses takes place, for example – Radio, TV, Films.



2.8 FURTHER READINGS

- **Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication** — *VB Agarwal & VS Gupta, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi*
- **Mass Communication in India** — *KJ Kumar, Jaico Books, Mumbai*
- **Understanding Human Communication** — *Ronald B Adler & George Rodman, Harcourt Brace College publishers*
- **Mass Communication in India**, *JV Vilanilam, Sage Publications, New Delhi.*



2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - A

1) Mass Communication is the process of communicating with an immeasurable audience or readership who may be spread across the world. Mass Communication occurs when a small number of people send messages to a large, anonymous and usually heterogeneous audience through the use of a specialized mechanical communication device.

2) Journalism, Advertising, Public Relations

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - B

1) a) Information
   b) Instruction
   c) Entertainment
   d) Persuasion
   e) Cultural promotion
   f) Integration
   g) Socialization

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - C

1) a) Gutenberg

b) Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 16th century was a revolutionary turning point in the history of mankind as it became the starting point of the development of the concept of Mass Communication as production of books in large numbers became possible and knowledge or information could be made public at a minimum cost and labour.

c) Guglielmo Marconi, 1873.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - D

1) Mass media are the tools for facilitating Mass Communication. They are the carriers of messages of Mass Communication to an innumerable audience which may be scattered anywhere around the world in an uneven way.

2) Newspaper, radio, television, internet, magazines.

2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What is Mass Communication? What are its different types ? Write with suitable examples.
2. What are the characteristics of Mass Communication?
3. Write on the growth of Mass Communication.
4. What is mass media? What are its types? Write with examples.
5. How does Mass Communication differ from mass media?

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