4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to describe the distinct characteristics of a good and effective message in the process of mass communication. Having already learnt about the nature of that process, you will now know that the message is the kingpin in that process. The knowledge about message characteristics is vital for the students of mass communication. After reading this unit, you will able to:

- describe the nature and characteristics of an effective message
- explain how the impact of messages can be enhanced
- describe the importance of making messages relevant to the attributes of a particular medium and to the socio-economic status, attitudes, and media habits of the target audience
- analyse the significance of employing different techniques and formats in formulating messages for different media
- identify the elements that go into the building up of creative advertisements for different media.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding three units, you have come to know the characteristics of the print and electronic media and also the characteristics of the audience of all these mass media. Now, in this unit, we are going to consider the characteristics of mass media messages. With a discussion on the media messages in this unit. Block II will be concluded. In the next Block, we will trace the origin and development of mass media in India. In the first unit of Block III, we will naturally start with the press.

4.2 EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

Message formulation for the print or the electronic media or for advertising copy involves different techniques and formats to suit the compulsions of those media.

Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect? Harold Lasswell thus summed up the description of communication process. In this chain, 'what' refers to the message communicated. Although the other elements are certainly important in their own way, what is conveyed is of great significance to the recipients. No wonder some authorities call the message a central element. Some others characterise it as the heart and soul of communication.

A message may be communicated through words, pictures, gestures, signs and symbols or even through silence. But if it is not understood properly by the audience concerned, it is an exercise in futility. The difficulty in understanding the message properly can arise for a variety of reasons. May be the language is difficult. Or possibly the concepts are so complicated that the recipient cannot grasp them. The problem can also arise if the speaker doesn’t draw clear conclusion. In that case, the listeners may draw different conclusions, depending on their background and their understanding of the issue.

There is an interesting story which explains this point. Once a biology professor was performing an experiment. He dropped a worm into a beaker of water and the worm continued to wriggle in it. The professor then dropped the same worm into a beaker of alcohol where it immediately died. The professor asked the class as to what conclusion they would like to draw from this experiment. One student in the last row of the classroom replied: “If you don’t want worm, drink alcohol.”

The message to be effective must have certain attributes.
†Check Your Progress 1

Note:  i) Write your answers in the spaces given below.
        ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

1) Please explain why 'message' is the focal point of any communication.

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2) "New communication technology should be used with a burning desire to put the message across".

Do you agree with this statement?

( ) Yes   ( ) No

If yes, why? If no, why not?

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Activity 1

Take today's or yesterday's newspaper. Read the first two paragraphs of any news item and evaluate its content elements according to the values attached with each of the elements given under.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language is</th>
<th>Messages are</th>
<th>Sources are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clumsy and winding</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>Not credible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not so clear</td>
<td>Not so clear</td>
<td>Doubtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Clarity, Coherence and Consciousness

The message which is clear, lucid and concise is generally understandable. On the other hand, any message which is heavily loaded or is loose, jerky, overlapping, flabby or wooly becomes confused. Coherence is another attribute of a good message. The message should flow logically from point to point with proper links and examples. It should be a narration of story.

4.2.2 Simple Language

The communicators should approach the concept of style warily and avoid the temptation to embellish the language with purple phrases. The path to good effective communication is plainness, simplicity, orderliness and sincerity. Messages with these attributes get understood and that is what the aim of an effective communication is. There is a need for the communicators to take all precautions to ensure that messages are not misunderstood. Here lies the importance of pretesting and other forms of feedback. Pretesting minimises communication failures. This method can also help to pretest the following characteristics of a message: 1) effectiveness of appeal; 2) readability; 3) clarity; 4) effectiveness of presentation; 5) acceptability 6) appropriateness of length and layout of the message.
4.2.3 Credibility of the Source

'Who' in the communication process is another important factor in communication. If a famous historian tells how in the times of Jahangir the pulling of the silver chain in his palace would provide instant justice to any grieved person, people will consider that information to be correct, coming as it does from a historian of eminence. But if he recommends that the mechanism of distant communication adopted by Akbar to convey the tidings of the birth of Jahangir through physical chain transmission from Agra to Delhi is an ideal form of transmission and should be practised even today in our villages, the suggestion will fall flat on the students of modern telecommunications. That explains the importance of credibility of a speaker in respect of a particular topic. You will agree that the students of telecommunications will prefer to hear from an expert on telecommunications how a modern two-way telecommunication network could be installed in distant regions of our country.

4.2.4 Persuasion

The message, to be effective, must be persuasive. This means that the contents and appeals should have the power to influence the receivers' attitudes. Communicators today are acquainted with the package of techniques which can endow that thrust to the message. But before we mention them, let us note the techniques which we should not employ.

4.2.5 Rhetorics

At one time rhetorics (the art of oratory) was considered to be the source of persuasibility. The episode of Anthony diffusing the impact of Brutus through oratory in Shakespeare's drama entitled Julius Caesar is a good example of such a feat. In closed societies, propaganda is resorted to for that purpose. It implies drawing an iron curtain (not permitting people to get information or know about a situation from other independent sources). Then the communicators hide the other side of the picture, make repeated statements so that the news which they are disseminating is fully accepted and the cause which they are promoting gets an overwhelming support. They also use the techniques of associating the person, producer or organisation with favourable abstractions such as advocacy of freedom, justice, equality etc. On the other hand, they would associate opponents with the terms charge with negative meanings such as fellow traveller, pervert, reactionary, war monger, etc.

4.2.6 Modern Batteries of Persuasion

The batteries of persuasion used today are equally effective. They are even better techniques which work in the open and seek changes by consent. One of the techniques is that before starting actual communication, the source must resort to audience analysis. Audience analysis is knowing the attitudes of the recipients of the message on the issue, their socio-economic status, their exposure to media, etc. This audience analysis enables messages to be tailored more appropriately to the felt-needs or problems of the audience. This orientation makes messages appealable to the psyche or economic and social requirements of the members of the audience. A good image of the source and his expertise in drafting the message skillfully help a great deal in the acceptability of the message by the audience.

4.2.7 Audience Participation

The research bears out that the objective of communication—whether a change in the attitude or reinforcement of the existing belief—is well accomplished through audience participation. There are many findings which prove that if the management involves the workers in problem solving and makes the workers come out with a solution themselves, they will practise it willingly. This goal may not be attained by merely asking the workers to ensure quality production.
For a message to be effective, it must have some essential qualities. What are these qualities? Explain five of these qualities in a sentence each.

- **Note:**
  1. Write your answers in the spaces given below.
  2. Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

4.3 ENHANCING IMPACT OF MESSAGES

Even ordinary messages can be turned into interesting ones, into great attention catchers with a lot of impact, if some human interest touches, dramatic and emotional appeals are added to them. They can become very convincing and credible if presented graphically and supported by statistics.

4.3.1 Pathetic Stories

One can narrate a pathetic story to evoke an effective human response. For instance, depicting the miserable life of a particular refugee family in famine ridden Ethiopia could touch the human chord of sympathy more intensely than making a flat appeal to donate and save four million people starving in that country. Individuals can be related to a family but not to four million people. Human misery can be vividly illustrated by a small documentary showing a few shots of some poor children picking up remnants of food from a dust bin near a rich man’s house and contrasting it by depicting food being wasted on the dinner table of the rich family. The first part of the documentary could cause anguish and the other part could evoke the concept of disparity and poverty-divide in the country. A photograph of a thin sick woman holding a child with a distended belly would prove the adage that a single picture is more eloquent than a thousand words.

4.3.2 Statistics in Support of Correctness

The use of statistics in an economic survey of a country can lend support to the correctness of conclusions drawn from the survey. The use of percentages and the details can show more convincingly the extent of rise and fall in the production of a commodity. Similarly, quoting feedback evidences or media testimonials in support of a cause can earn significant public backing.

4.3.3 Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeals, if properly used at an appropriate time, can stir imagination. The phrase ‘Quit India’ coined by Gandhiji and addressed to the Britishers and ‘Aaram Haraam Hai’, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s slogan to activise the nation are still in the minds of Indians. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri’s slogan, Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, electrified the Indian people during India’s war with Pakistan. Churchill (UK Premier) and Roosevelt (USA President) could galvanise their countrymen by issuing well-chiselled appeals during world war II. Appeals to the self esteem or social status have made people buy costly goods which normally they wouldn’t.

4.3.4 Perception Filter

Any message is called a stimulus and a strong and emotion-laden message is termed as a strong stimulus. However, before any stimulus or message can transfer...
knowledge, create an image or change an attitude, or precipitate a behaviour, it must enter the mind of the receiver. Perception is the process whereby an individual receives stimulus through the various senses and interprets them. The factors which condition the perception of audiences are the information needs, attitudes, values, interests, learning process, social contexts etc. The ability of the source to codify messages with the knowledge of the perception filter of the audience is, therefore, an important condition for a successful communication process. It is held by the researchers that the effectiveness of a message ultimately depends upon its relevance to the media.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Write your answer in the spaces given below.
   ii) Compare your answer with the ones given at the end of the unit.

1) What makes message not only the source of giving information but endowed with capacity to influence the opinions or attitudes of the people? Answer in five lines.

4.4 MEDIA RELEVANCE

Each mass medium requires messages to be tailored to its format and technology. We shall first talk about the print media. We have already learnt that the copy of the print media takes a direct path from the paper to the eye to the brain. For that reason, the print media format can afford to include comparatively more diverse and indepth coverage of topics and news stories. Because of the traditional respect for the printed word, as also because of the greater freedom which the print media have compared to other media, newspapers and magazines enjoy more credibility and shoulder greater social responsibility. Lately, the print media have acquired more of colour and gloss and the contents are getting graphic treatment, all as a result of the new printing technologies. Consequently, more readers and advertisers are being drawn to these media. The Malayala Manorama, The Ananda Bazar Patrika, The Hindu, Punjab Kesari, The Times of India, India Today, Star Dust, Loksatta, Nav Bharat Times and many other publications have become the household favourites.

Electronic Media Messages

The messages of the electronic media and the newer visual media like satellite TV, cable TV, video magazines, include the spoken word, sound inputs, and the action oriented visuals. The radio copy is to be read aloud. Its writing must follow the common speech pattern. It needs to be written in the conversational style because the ear is most used to conversation. The conversational language is simple and informal. The simple sentence is the most effective tool for the writer of radio copy. Likewise, simple and commonly understood words are to be used. Besides, an easy flow of the language has to be ensured. Informal words like house in place of residence and actor in place of thespian are preferred.

In a broadcasting text, you are telling a story. You, therefore, use words and phrases that can be spoken naturally and relay the story in the form we are used to relating a story. If the language does not sound natural, if the meaning of words is not instantly clear to the listeners, it is not good radio style. One of the other important characteristics of the
broadcast message is that spoken words must match with other audio elements. Tongue-twisting alliterations or combinations of words which are jarring on ears are best avoided in radio copy. They create difficulties for news readers, announcers, and artists at the transmitting end and for listeners at the receiving end.

Radio being an aural medium, fine statistics should be avoided in news or other informational programmes. There is no use, for instance, writing that according to the Department of Fisheries, 30,11,782 fish died in the tanks of (any city or state), during the year 1993. "That exact figure is not likely to register with the listener's ears. And that precise figure has no special significance. It is good enough to say that "more than 30 lakh fish ...". Giving of the exact figure is of course essential in announcing the result of a closely contested election. For example, X of the Congress Party defeated Y of CPI(M) by a slender margin of 55 votes. Likewise, in sports stories, the precise figures are necessary. For example: X remained unbeaten with 187 runs. Y took 4 wickets for 37 runs.

TV writing is picturised presentation of a story. Visual pictures replace verbal ones. Programmes are shown, not told. The TV copy is a split copy describing both the video and audio components. Words lose two-thirds of their value on the TV and the eye holds up the picture. What is being seen on the TV screen need not be described through words. TV has its own techniques of visual narration. No wonder that the viewers cling to the TV, absorbed in what is put out on the small screen.

In video magazines, interviews and articulate shots produce poignant or striking news stories. In films, the still pictures captured by the camera at a speed of 24 shots per second and projected at the same speed by the projector in the hall create an illusion of motion pictures on the wide screen, depicting a vivid human story, punctuated by dance and song sequences and scenes of touching and dramatic actions.

Thus you have seen that the message writing or scripting varies from medium to medium and unless it is done to suit the typical attributes of that medium and is in tune with the social-economic conditions, attitudes and media habits of the target audience, the messages may not have the desired impact, the programmes may not click with the audience.

4.5 HOT AND COLD MESSAGES

Marshall McLuhan differentiates between hot and cold messages. By the former, he
Elements in Mass Media

means the messages with highly understandable specific contents. According to him, such messages are good for disseminating specific information. The announcement of a new product on the market is one such example. People read or hear such news in the media but there is very little involvement on their part.

Cold messages, on the other hand, are more appropriate if the objective is to have people internalise and retain the information. People interpret such news according to their own perception. In such messages, there is more involvement of the people.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Write your answers in the spaces given below.
   ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

1) Give three differences between Audio and Video media.

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2) Give two examples of each of the following:

   Hot Message:
   1) 
   2) 

   Cold Message:
   1) 
   2) 

4.6 CREATIVE AD MESSAGE

The copy writers of ad texts are constrained in what they can create by the production technologies and the availability of media forms. Nonetheless, it is a creative exercise. A print copy is described as "salesmanship in print". Creativity in the ad format is required towards this end. The entire copy is to be structured along the AIDA line, that is for attracting attention, stimulating interest, creating desire and invoking action. According to Advertising Manager's handbook, a good copy must do seven things in order to produce results. These are 1) create interest, 2) inform the readers to the maximum about the product in an interesting way or in a display form 3) highlight the solution which the advertised product or service offers, 4) help the readers to solve his or her problem, 5) convince the reader that the advertisement is truthful, 6) persuade the reader to buy the product, 7) to create such awareness of a product in the readers that the next time when they have a problem, they will remember the advertised product as the solution to the problem. In general, a creative copy style is one in which every word counts and communicates. It must speak the language of the market. The message must be concise, precise and eye-catching.
Activity 2

Take two pieces of advertisements from a newspaper and evaluate them in terms of clarity, attraction/catchiness, duration.

(You may repeat this exercise with the advertisements or programmes of television or news items/articles of newspapers.)

4.6.1 Radio Ad Copy

Radio copies, messages, slogans, jingles and musical commercials are very vigorous although they are oriented only to the ears of the listeners. Combining voices, spoken words, music and sound effects, the copies evoke various mental pictures. As radio gives the copy writer complete freedom of time, and better scope is available for ingenuity and creativity.
Radio copywriting or message or slogan formulation, therefore, is an imaginative and professional job. As someone said, the acid test of a good radio copy is "put the copy on the tape and play it back". If it is not found effective, re-do the process until a radio commercial becomes a good package of sound, creativity and mental pictures and above all an order spinner.

4.6.2 TV Commercial

As TV is a combination of all the virtues, strengths and beauty that audio-visual technology can impart, the medium alone draws more ads than any other individual medium does. However, writing a TV script for a commercial is a complicated and highly professional task, since the medium involves moving pictures. Whatever be the type of TV commercial that is to be produced, the script writer has to include all the basic selling steps to cover attention, interest, desire, conviction and action. In fact, the script has to use the strongest attention-getting, attention-keeping and persuasive elements, including personalities and drama. The difference between the TV commercial and the print medium ad is that TV commercial must ensure that viewers grasp the entire story the first time they watch it. In case of the print media, the reader has a chance to look at it again and read it repeatedly. Recent research studies in India and abroad have clearly proved that even TV spots of short duration possess a formidable selling pull. There lies the strength and promotional potency of TV commercials, whether for selling products and services or for promoting non-profit social ideas or public utility causes.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: i) Write your answers in the spaces given below.
ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

1) You must be watching TV spots on social themes like spacing of child births or inoculation. Are they effective? Why?

2) Why do children repeat radio slogans and jingles?

3) How does research help in making messages more effective?

4.7 VISUALS WITH NEW ANGLES

Pictures and other visuals used in various media are not merely playing the role of supplementaries for reinforcing a story but are giving new turns to stories. At times, they contain even independent or deeper versions. Whether it is the cropping, bleedings or placing of figures, they all add different moods to the pictures. Cartoons and other graphics speak their own language of satire or humour.
The video and TV camera, through close ups or long shots, aerial or side views, add a new angle to a story. Illustrative or visual journalism is, therefore, becoming a powerful art. The video magazines, computer graphics and mixers add new dimensions to news coverage. The students of mass communication must learn this new language and grammar of visuals because they are creative elements and constitute an integral part of the message.

**Check Your Progress 6**

Note:  
1) Write your answer in the spaces given below.  
2) Compare your answer with the ones given at the end of the unit.  

1) **What are the roles of pictures or visuals in making messages qualitatively and visually more impressive?**

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**4.8 LET US SUM UP**

In the process of mass communication, message constitutes a central element. For this reason, it is called the heart and soul in any exercise of communication.

Effectiveness of a message depends upon whether it is transmitted by a source who enjoys high credibility in the minds of recipients as far as that particular theme is concerned; whether it is attention-catching and is considered useful to the receiver; whether it is clear, concise, coherent and is understandable; whether it is tailor made to the needs, aspirations, interests or claims of the recipients; whether it offers a solution to a problem faced by receiver at that moment or later on.

Development of ability to change the opinions, attitudes, conviction or value depends upon how good a message is in terms of persuasibility. Analysing the audience, understanding the context and making the message relevant to the nature and characteristics of the media and its technology and format are some other conditions which endow to the message that power to change attitude.

Scripting message for an ad in any medium is an innovative and creative art. The sale appeal and the development of the message along the AIDA lines are essential attributes. Action, music, drama, spoken words and vivid pictures are orchestrated to create the capacity to invoke favourable action and response in a customer within a short period.

**4.9 GLOSSARY**

**Message**: A central element in an exercise of mass communication indicating who has said what to that particular audience.

**Interactory Model**: A process of communication in which the various elements interact with each other for creating an impact.

**Credibility of the Source**: An image in the minds of the audience that the source has expertise or knowledge about the subject.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements in Mass Media</th>
<th>Persuasion</th>
<th>The art of affecting options or an inherent capacity in a message to change or influence the attitudes of the audience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audience Analysis</td>
<td>Knowing the socio-economic attributes or the feelings, desires and needs of the target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity of a message</td>
<td>Indicates the elements of innovativeness, freshness, something better or different from the other messages scripted on the same theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visuals</td>
<td>Any pictorial or visual material, graphic or illustration, other than the written text, spoken word or audio.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) The very purpose of an act of communication is to impart a message. All other elements are secondary and they help to realise this purpose. Therefore, "message" is and should be the focal point of any act of communication.

2) Yes

Communication technology is there to put our message across to the desired target with clarity. It is not the technology but the desire to put the message across that should take the upper hand. Technology for technology's sake is a futile desire. It should be technology for communication's sake.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) Clarity of thought:

The communicator must know very well what to communicate; there must never be any doubt whatsoever regarding the message.

2) Simple and Clear Language:

The thought must be communicated with unambiguous, lucid and precise language.

3) Trustworthy of the Source:

The sources/persons from which the message emanate should have an unblemished image.

4) Convincing:

The message must be able to convince the receiver about the purpose.

5) Caring:

The message must sound to the receiver that the originator cares for him.

**Check Your Progress 3**

Any message imparted should take care of the background of the target audience. This will help the message to penetrate the emotions of the audience and thus appeal to them. The message imparted must always be supported with facts and figures. This brings credibility to the message. The presentation of each message must be sequenced logically.
Check Your Progress 4

1) a) Audio message is always in spoken and simple language, whereas in Video message the words are substituted with visuals and thus words are minimised.
   b) Audio message can only be heard, whereas, in video message the provision for visuals make the message seen.
   c) The process of making audio message is much simpler than making of video message.

2) Hot message
   1) Advertisement of Campa-Cola
   2) Advertisement of Rin soap

Cold message

1) A documentary on Kashmir problem
2) The continued rule of Left front in West Bengal.

Check Your Progress 5

1) No, they are not effective.
   I think the audience could not identify themselves with the people shown in the advertisement. And hence, could not evoke any response.

2) Radio slogans and jingles are catchy and leave a lot of room for imagination for the children. In addition to these, the radio spots are created with very simple language.

3) Research helps in finding out whether or not messages are reaching the target audience as intended. Research finds out strength and weakness of the message as well as the process. When the weaknesses are taken care of, the error free messages will have more impact.

Check Your Progress 6

1) Pictures of visuals bring up the level of trustworthiness by bringing the places of happening to the audience. The various types of shots help in focusing the salient points of the messages. Moreover, pictures and visuals clarify certain doubts which words fail to do.