2.1 Definitions

The term “communication” is derived from the Latin word “communis” which means “to make common, to share, to impart, to transmit” but the term ‘communication’ has various connotations. As reported by K. J. Mcbarry, “A comprehensive work by Lee Thayer entitled Communication: Concepts and Perspectives – [London Macmillan, 1965] discusses the definitions by Psychologists, Philosophers, Neurologists and other specialists but all the definitions of communication tend to cohere into two main groups: the first emphasizing the transfer of a mysterious “something” from the mind of one person to another and the second, as Oxford English Dictionary defines, ‘communication’ saying “the imparting, conveying or exchanging of ideas, knowledge, etc. by means of speech, writings or signs”.

Another definition by Charles Cooley, a renowned sociologist says “the mechanism by which human relations exist or develop - all the symbols of the mind together with means of transmitting them through space and maintaining them in time. It includes facial expressions, attitudes, gestures, tone of voice, the spoken, written and printed word, railways, telegraphic, telephone, everything, in fact, which includes the very latest achievement in the conquest of space and time.”

Another author of Communication, Lasswell, gave a formula to understand communication and i.e., “who says what, to whom and with what effect which breaks down the phenomenon of communication into
different components or areas.” In this the content of the message encoded by the Communicator, transmitted through a network and received after being decoded, comprises communication, a process which has been described as mechanistic.

Another definition has been given by the American Sociologist Edward Sapir in which he tells that “communication also implies the means of transmission. The process of communication takes place when someone says something in some way to someone else for a specific purpose. That someone is the sender, something is the message, someway is the channel, someone else is the receiver and purpose is the reason for communicating in the first place. An intriguing aspect of the process of communication is that we use it in practically every moment of existence”. According to Sunanda Arya, “the communication process also performs an amplifying function by magnifying some of the actions of individuals to the point that they can be felt throughout the society, in a sense of transforming men ‘man sized’ acts into ‘society sized’ acts”.

Therefore, all definitions of communication clearly show two things: One is the content which may be an idea, thought or knowledge and second is its reach for its receiver. The second one is also known as technique or tools through which we disseminate information, ideas, thoughts or whatever we have to receive. The success of the content is dependent on the success of technique and the same is true of the technique also.

Organizational Communication

There are various kinds of communication or levels of communication in an organization. The communication which affect or shape perceptions of an organization are mainly:
(i) **Internal Communication or Employee Communication:** This is the communication between groups in an organization or from the management to employees & vice versa. This is bottom-up top-down and parallel or horizontal communication which plays a great role in contributing to the reputation of an organization. It can be through various media such as magazines, circulars, blogs, video conferencing, etc. Employee is the ambassador of his organization. Their perception of the organization, its working, policies, etc. enforces or has a multiplier effect on the overall perception.

(ii) **External Communication or Mass Communication:** It has two components. One is ‘mass’ and the other ‘communication’. As reported by Jean Johisee “Mass or Audiences as per various authors, implies a heterogeneous quality, in the sense that its members come from every social group from different levels of culture, fortune and class and present a situation where the individual members do not know one another and where they are geographically and physically dispersed”. The other part is the ‘communication’ which is from the organization to the masses and can be through various modes i.e. print, audio-visuals, Internet, blogs, etc.

Rowland Lurinur reports that O. Sullivan in his revised definition of ‘mass communication’ states as follows:

“Mass Communication is the practice and product of providing information and leisure entertainment to large often unknown and increasingly fragmenting audiences. When undertaken by means of modern technologies this process involves, institutionally financed and
organized organization that provide commodities and associated free services in print, on the screen, electronically and by electromagnetic broadcast. When undertaken by more traditional means ‘mass communication’ includes any means of providing information, images and / or leisure entertainment to large numbers of people from all social strata and demographic groups, but who are homogenous in their behavior of choosing to attend to an information source. “

Authors have given various definitions for ‘mass communication’ but in totality mass communication is the process of conveying a message or an information to the audience to whom we want that message to reach through a medium which is most appropriately suited to the target audience. Mass communication is different from communication as in relatively small groups or in face-to-face relationships. Mass Communication is basically secondary communication multiplied by some technological device to reach masses.

Organizations need to resort to mass communication and internal communication for disseminating information regarding their achievements, policies and programmes to the target audience or stakeholders. It is to reach the message of working as per mandate and as per the goals of the organization so that it is comprehended in the right perspective and generates the right response.

2.2. Mass Communication and Perception

Most efforts at mass communication significantly influence perceptions and behavior by confirming the beliefs which people already hold. Mass communications often effectively re-enforce and stabilize perceptions and beliefs which might change otherwise. The fact is that mass communication, while imparting knowledge, helps stabilize perceptions and beliefs and in
stabilizing beliefs, stabilizes social actions. This has also been reconfirmed by Anthony Dester “It is probable indeed, in a society in which scientific technology leads to rapid change, human mass communication in part assumes the function of tradition in a slower moving world. But no one yet knows how to analyze the dynamics of social stability”.

Therefore, mass communication in organizations through media and other modes is able to sway impressions, create perceptions, etc. The repetitive messages from media create perceptual sets which even though not linked to reality, influence perceptions, opinion and behavior.

2.3 Communication, Perception and Public Opinion

Elizabeth Noelle–Neumann’s theory of ‘Spiral of Silence’ analyses and demonstrates how interpersonal communication and media operate together in the development of public opinion”.

This theory states that in elections certain views seem to get more play than others. Sometimes people mute their opinions rather than talk about them. Noelle–Neumann called it ‘Spiral of Silence’. It occurs when individuals express when they perceive that their opinion is popular and those who think otherwise remain quiet. This process occurs in a spiral, so that one side of an issue ends up with much publicity and the other side with little. This expression/non-expression rests on two premises. The first is that people know which opinions are popular. The second is that people adjust their expression of opinion to these perceptions. Psychologists believe that this ‘Spiral of Silence’ is caused by fear of isolation as the ‘Spiral of Silence’ is not just a matter of wanting to be on winning side but is an attempt to avoid being isolated from one’s social group. Threats of criticism are also powerful forces in silencing
individuals. This process affects public opinion but these are exceptions as there are groups and individuals who do not fear isolation and express their opinion irrespective of outcome.

Although public opinion is formed by both personal observation and media utterings/exposure, individuals mix the two and confuse what is learned through the media with what is learned through the interpersonal channels. Neolle-Newmann has observed - “The longer one has studied the question, the clearer it becomes that fathoming the effects of the mass media is very hard. These effects do not come into being as a result of a single stimulus; they are as a rule cumulative, following the principle that water dripping constantly wears away stone. Further discussions among people spread the media’s messages further, and before long no difference can be perceived between the point of media perception and points far removed from it. The media’s effects are predominantly unconscious; people cannot provide an account of what has happened. Rather, they mix their own direct perceptions and the perceptions filtered through the eyes of the media into an indivisible whole that seems to derive from their own thoughts and experiences”.

Therefore ‘Spiral of Silence’ is a phenomenon which involves personal and media channels of communication. The media publicize public opinion, making evident which opinions predominate. Whether individuals express their opinions or not depending upon the predominant points of view, the media, in turn attend to the expressed opinion, and the spiral continues.

Another phenomenon has been mentioned by George Gerbner called ‘Cultivation’. This effect does not talk about the one time effect of media message but of the overall effect or the culture created as a whole. It is not
concerned with what any strategy or campaign can do but with the total impact of numerous strategies. According to Gerbner:

“Television is a centralized system of story-telling. It is part and parcel of our daily lives. Its drama, commercials, news and other programs bring a relatively coherent world of common images and messages into every home. Television cultivates from infancy the very predispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other primary sources. Transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility, television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of an otherwise heterogeneous population. The repetitive pattern of television’s mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment.”

Lippman took the view that public responds not to actual events in the environment but to ‘the pictures in our heads’ which he calls the ‘pseudo-environment’. According to him:

“For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And altogether we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it.”

This has been further elaborated by Donald Shaw, Maxwell Mccambs and their colleagues as under:

“Considerable evidence has accumulated that editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying news. This impact of the mass
media – the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals and to structure their thinking – has been labelled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication - its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.”

Thus media establishes the silent issues or images in the minds of the public and what the public knows about any issue at any given time is a product of media gate-keeping.

In the essay on Mass Media and shaping up of public opinion by S. Ganesh in Lectures on Mass Media (Indian Publisher Distributors) on the issue of how public opinion is formed, states that there are a number of steps involved. Firstly, there are personal factors which influence the individual to form an opinion. This view, according to him, is expressed by Lawrence Lowell in his 1913 study titled “Public Opinion and Popular Government”. He says that a person pays attention to an argument which concludes with his interest and emotions. Gorden Allport gives prominence to four psychological factors. These are (1) accretion and integration (2) individuation and differentiation (3) traumatic experience, and (4) limitation. According to a theory given by Clyde King, in his preface to W. B. Graves Reading in Public Opinion, published in 1928, the first stage in public opinion formation is discontent in a matter believed to be capable of remedy by group action. The second stage is that this discontent finds general expression and there emerges an awareness of a common need. This stage is followed by the third in which issues are crystallized following discussion and controversy in
the press. This is followed by the fourth stage in which judgment and decision is reached.

Klappers “Limited Effect Model” of media influence as reported in Media Making by Grosberg, Wortella Whitney suggests that when (and if) media affects behavior, they do so through a web of other influencing factors, such as personality characteristics, social situations and general climates of opinion and culture. In this model Klapper argued that other factors significantly limited the media influence. He also pointed out that media’s greatest strength was not in causing changes in individuals or society but in reinforcing status-quo. Thus effects are not always about changes but can be about preventing change or strengthening the current social order.

Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Herbert Menzel in their essay on Mass Media and Personal influence have stated that “More educated people attend to more of the mass media. People overwhelmingly select for their attention statements of those opinions with which they already agree. News and opinions about an issue are paid most attention to by those who are most interested in the issue and that usually means those minds are already made up”.

The public opinion about an organization is thus a cumulative effect of not only satisfaction or non-satisfaction regarding issues but it is communication in totality which includes perception about issues, needs and aspirations of target audience and import of issues as established by popular communication.

In the final analysis the communication - both mass and interpersonal, and its influence on perception is the product of the interaction among
various societal structures and individual needs, desires and dependencies. It may be difficult to pinpoint its influence or attribute it to known definable factors but the influence of media communication on perception formation and finally opinion formation is tremendous and may create perception, opinion and own realities in an organizational set up.

2.4 Organizational Communication, Image and Identity and its Role in Perception

Organizational communication, image and identity are interrelated but communication is not the only component which is responsible for creating organizational image or reinforcing identity. It is a accumulation of many factors. S. H. Venkatramani states:

“M. G. Ramchandran, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, was a very popular film actor before he got into politics. In his films he diligently and constantly played the role of a good Samaritan and a do-gooder, reaching to the succor of every soul in distress. It was the momentum of that celluloid public image that carried M. G. Ramchandran right through his political career. Same was true of Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao. It would be difficult to gauge Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao’s character and personal qualities as they were in real life. To do so would be to piece together an endless jumble of indirect and direct testimony. The image, therefore, overwhelms the reality.”

Edward de Bono, an internationally acclaimed expert on human minds thinking patterns says “Image at perception stage is water logic i.e. it can take the shape of the container in which it is put and turns into ‘rock logic’ immutable and firm”.

“An ideal is what we strive towards. But an image is what we fit into.
The image has to fit us. But we have to fit into the ideal. In the case of image the onus of being appropriate is on the image itself. In the case of the ideal, the responsibility to live up to the ideal is that of the person who is striving to measure up to that ideal.” The image has to measure up to ones standards whereas ideal extracts a certain standard of performance from one.

Image is thus an all pervasive influence and the supreme deciding factor in forming or reinforcing perceptions and it should be credible and reliable and not too far-fetched.

Organizational image as per Stephen Baker in his work “Visual Persuasion” is “the Corporate image is a person’s spontaneous idea of a company. It is the composite of all the things associated with the organization and the product it fabricates”.

“The image of an organization is the cumulative impression of all the different and diverse images that customers of the company’s products have, that investors and stakeholders carry in their minds, that the media mentally harbours, and the view in the eyes of public opinion leaders and key influencers. These images can be mutually dissonant, or mutually synergistic but yet untrue”.

Organizational identity is different from image as organizational identity is ‘how the organization sees itself’ and organization image is ‘how the organization is ‘perceived’ by the world outside’. Identity concerns presentation of the organizational ‘persona’ whereas image is ‘what the organization appears to be. Unlike image, identity does not change from one audience to another.

Organization’s image / identity can be built on its core competencies,
in its culture and interaction with stakeholders. Identity is simply an ensemble or collection of such unique core competencies that define the competitive advantage of the organization. The image that organizations have to consciously build or project has to flow out of this identity or a set of core values that the organization wants to promote within the organization and project outside.

An organization is more than an association or a product as it acquires a personality. Its service signifies its character which is more than a statutorily created or incorporated body. Reality in an organization prevails and works only through images if projected rightly. But if left to individual interpretation, it can be interpreted differently.

In a paper prepared by the Confederation of Indian Industry [CII] for its two day summit on “Corporate Image : Going Beyond Brands” in New Delhi in March, 2002 Corporate image was seen as a strong factor in business performance, communicating the image effectively and a critical aspect of leadership. The Paper said that “in order to have an effective corporate image, communication needs to encompass all characteristics of a business from name and logo to office technology, market, vehicles, employees, ethics, product, organizational structure and advertising. It defines a company’s identity by creating a fit between the company and how it is perceived in the market place.” According to the CII paper “dealing with a highly skeptical media has added a new dimension. The answer did not lie in burying the “collective corporate head” in the sand but in communicating with apparent transparency and getting it right first time”.

Therefore, perception is the sum of all images generated by the cumulative effect of all individual images. It is the composite of all the
things associated with the organization and the product it fabricates. In communicating to the stakeholder, the task of communication is not to get one’s ideas across to the other party. The real purpose of communication is to elicit the desired response from the target audience. Target audience looks for conviction in the communication. The target audience feels that if the communicator himself does not believe in the idea he has no right to preach. Here internal organizational communication comes into play. The intent of the communicator is more important to the audience.

2.5 Organizational Communication and Perception Management

Communication is one of the primary tools for managing perception to motivate the desired behavior. As per David Ogilvy “communication is the means to manage perceptions, to create behavior patterns for business success. These days companies should have a specific function for perception management. Trust is the central facet of this model as increased trust facilitates the communication process and its degradation makes the process harder. Trust can be built or degraded as the organizations interact as a result of their decision-making processes, communication of intentions, and follow-through on plans and promises”. Albert C. Gunther in research on ‘Effects of mass media on perceived Public Opinion’ suggests that people infer public opinion from their perceptions of the content of media coverage on others. In this study data was collected by measuring participant responses to news stories on current stories and giving them a favourable or unfavourable slant. Findings supported the hypothesis that people appear to estimate public opinion based on their own reading of press coverage – an indirect effect of mass media that can have significant consequences”. A communication model which can
ensure the reach of reality leading to right perceptions was reported by Water Environment Federation.

Thus trust is built through a process and can be achieved through communication as the stakeholders interact, gather information about each other, process, respond and act on that information. Trust can be increased - through efforts to understand stakeholders and key issues; by aligning programmes with communication plan and view point; by information dissemination; and by monitoring of results. The communication in the right perspective is one of the key components which helps in perception management.