

Importance of Mass Media in Communicating Health Messages: An Analysis

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Abstract: *The demand for information about health has grown exponentially in the last few years. The media is an important ally in any public health situation. The local and international media play a vital role as the link between health workers and the larger public. Health authorities educate and entrust the media with essential health information, which is then relayed to the public in readily accessible formats through a variety of media channels. The mass media helps health workers expand their audience reach, which is crucial considering the fact that face-to-face channels of communication often require too many human resources and reach only a small number of people in large, underserved rural areas. The mass media provides an important link between the rural residents and vital health information. The mass media, in the form of the radio and television, are an effective way to persuade target audiences to adopt new behaviors, or to remind them of critical information. Besides informing the public about new diseases and where to seek help, they can also keep the public updated. The study based on secondary data which collected from relevant sources. The mass media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any communication devices. The present study intends to examine the role of media in the process of disseminating health messages.*

I. Introduction

Health is a complex concept that involves not just the soundness of a person's body but also the state of a person's mind and the quality of the social environment in which he or she lives. Good health and effective medical care are essential for the smooth functioning of society. Social inequality characterizes the quality of health and the quality of healthcare. The practice of public health has been dynamic in India, and has witnessed many hurdles in its attempt to affect the lives of the people of this country. Since independence, major public health problems like malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, high maternal and child mortality and lately, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) have been addressed through a concerted action of the government. Social development coupled with scientific advances and health care has led to a decrease in the mortality rates and birth rates. The basic function of mass communication media is to provide information, education, instruction and entertainment to the people. Media also motivate people directly or indirectly to discharge these functions as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation in a meaningful and purposeful manner in any country for national development.

Objective of the study

- To know the national objectives of communication policy.
- To find out the various national health programs and schemes
- To analyze the media reach and access.
- To study the knowledge of public service advertisements
- To assess the impact of health advertisements among general public

Research design and method

The study was mainly concerned with the evaluation of health advertisements for television. This study is conducted through survey method using questionnaire tool. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected using questionnaire tool. The secondary data is collected through the books, journals, internet and other publications. To study the media consumption, awareness and impact of health advertisements fifty questionnaires were administered to the respondents in Mysore city, the category of respondents are professionals, PG Students and research scholars, Housewives, business class. Fifty filled questionnaires were analyzed and results are presented

Government strategies to health communication

India is a "Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic" with a parliamentary system of government. As a developing nation both central and state governments contributes for developmental activities. India is a largest democratic country in the world with more than 120 crore people. In the context of

large scale economic development in industrial and agricultural sectors, the need for communication with the people through different media has assumed great importance. Communication with the people is necessary in any society and any form of government, especially democratic society depends much more. People must be told about government plans, programmes, policies, activities, successes and achievements. Reactions from the people to the policies and programmes must reach the policy-makers and administrators to modify, change, and continue the programme and to involve people and to get their willing participation.

Mass media is a potentially powerful tool in the effort to address the many public services and other social challenges facing this country. Media production is developing a strategic plan to address the entire scope of health communication, including research, creative strategy, production, distribution and evaluation.

Under the ministry of health and family welfare for providing basic health facilities to all citizens, government has introduced and implemented various health schemes and programmes. This section provides information pertaining to health programmes, policies, schemes, forms etc. for specific beneficiaries, which include women, children, senior citizen, etc. Details of Union and state government agencies, departments, organizations, research institutions, hospitals are also available. And also several health programs are introduced by the government regarding HIV/AIDS, helping youth recognize the dangers of tobacco smoking and promoting physical activity. These are a few examples of behavior change communication that focus on ways that encourage people to make healthy choices. Development of community-wide education programs and other health promotion activities need to be strengthened. Much can be done to improve the effectiveness of health promotion by extending it to rural areas as well; observing days like “Diabetes Day” and “Heart Day” even in villages will help create awareness at the grass root level.

Schemes and programs of health care services

The goal of population stabilization can be achieved only when child survival, maternal health and other health issues are addressed simultaneously and effectively.

- SarvaSwasthyaAbhiyan (SSA) launched for meeting health needs of all age group and reduce disease burden across rural India
- National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) designed to meet health needs of urban poor, particularly the slum dwellers by making available to them essential primary health care services
- National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) to provide accessible, affordable and accountable quality health services including water, sanitation, education, nutrition, social and gender equality
- JananiSurakshaYojana (JSY) under NRHM in 2005 Government of India modified the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS). The scheme has the dual objectives of reducing maternal and infant mortality by promoting institutional deliveries.
- Health care for women and children by integrating numerous vertical programs for family planning and child health.
- Reproductive and Child Healthcare (RCH) program to reduce infant mortality and reduce high desired fertility.
- Programs for Nutritional Support for improving nutritional status particularly of mothers and children.
- Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) for food supplementation program for improving nutritional status of mothers and children.
- Mid-Day Meals Scheme (MDMS) was launched in 1995 to enhance enrolment and participation of children in primary schools, simultaneously improving their nutritional status.
- National Nutritional Mission (NNM) announced by Prime Minister on August 15th 2001, provides subsidized food grains to adolescent girls and expectant and nursing mothers belonging to below- poverty-line families.

Some other national health programs are National AIDS Control Program (AIDS), National Cancer Control Program (cancer), National Filariasis Control Program (filariasis), National Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Program (iodine deficiency), National Leprosy Eradication Program (leprosy), National Mental Health Program (mental health), National Program for Control of Blindness (blindness), National Program for Prevention and Control of Deafness (deafness), National Tobacco Control Program (tobacco control), National Vector Borne Disease Control Program (NVBDCP) (vector-borne disease), Pilot Program on Prevention and Control of Diabetes, CVD and Stroke (diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke), Revised National TB Control Program (tuberculosis), Universal Immunization Program.

Objectives of national communication policy

In a country of India's size and population, diversity of religions, languages, regional imbalances and several other factors, it is not easy to evolve a national communication policy or generally acceptable information strategy. Nevertheless, such a policy is essential to give some direction to mass media. The country should also have the necessary infrastructure to implement the basic policy in the shortest possible time.

Reaching out to the beneficiaries of various national development programmes has become a challenging task for the policy makers and administrators in the present time.

There are several objectives of communication policy, such as,

- National objectives should be non-political, non- controversial and should have national concern
- Should have interests and well-being of the people
- Should promote the many-sided development of the country
- Should be long term one and need not change with political change
- Should have infrastructure to implement the basic policy in the shortest possible time and should give some directions to mass media effort
- Should preserve and strengthen the democratic way of life
- Should communicate the rule of law, rights and responsibilities citizen
- Involvement and participation of people in the socio-economic changes and developmental activities

Definition of mass media

Terrestrial TV: The signal for television content with advertising slots that is transmitted via a land based tower via air-waves and received at a viewer end through an air-wave antenna.

Satellite TV: The signal for television content with advertising slots that is transmitted via satellite and received with the help of a dish, whether at the cable operators' end or through personal direct to home (DTH) set box.

Cable TV: A TV connection which is provided by a local cable TV operator residing near the vicinity of TV homes and provides access to terrestrial and satellite TV channels.

Print: is a term used to define any written material i.e. Newspapers, Magazines and other publications.

Radio: A device which receives transmission of audio signals and plays out the same. FM (Frequency modulation) is only a way of transmission & receiving of the audio signal.

Cinema: A movie viewed in a cinema hall. Breaks during the movie are used as slots for health advertisements.

Internet: The World Wide Web, e-journal, magazine, radio, television

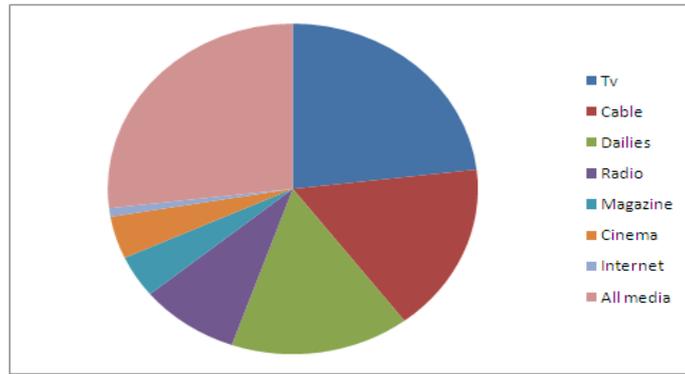
Outdoor: Billboards, wall paintings, traffic roundabouts, Kiosks etc constitute the outdoor media.

Public Service Advertising and health communication

Public service advertising is a potentially powerful tool in the effort to address the many public health and other social challenges facing this country. Whether it's tackling childhood obesity, recruiting community volunteers, raising awareness about global warming, promoting HIV testing or raising money for medical research, PSAs have the potential to reach a large audience through mass media to get the message out. PSAs are intended to modify public attitudes by raising awareness about specific issues. The most common topics of PSAs are health and safety. A typical PSA is part of a public awareness campaign to inform or educate the public about an issue such as family planning, pollution, care for aged and disabled, cautious driving, campaigns against alcohol, drugs, smoking, animal rights, and others related to health, environment and social development of the country.

National Level Media Reach:

Reach of media is not equivalent to availability or access to media. It is a combination of availability and willingness of the audience to use the media within a reasonable timeframe. Thus, first and foremost, the audience should have access to the media. The presence in media is dependent upon two factors – firstly buying of paid space through Advertising and secondly media presence through editorial space. This report deals with the buying of media space.



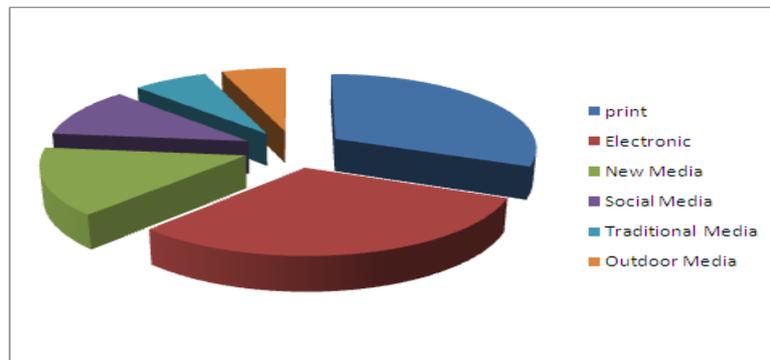
Source: IRS R2 2009

An analysis of the national media scene reveals that it is possible to reach approximately 65% of the Indian audience by at least one of the mass media channels ie either through Television, Cable, Newspapers, Radio, Magazines, Cinema or the fledgling internet. Overall, Television is currently the medium with the highest reach (56%) in the country. Cable TV is available to almost 40% of the audience. Newspapers follow at (38%) with Radio at (21%). Magazines and Cinema reach about 10% of the audience. Internet has just about begun to make inroads and at this point reaches a very small proportion of the audience (2%)

- **Television Reach:** Would include all individuals who have viewed TV at least once in a week.
- **Cable Reach:** Would include all individuals who have viewed Cable TV at least once in a week
- **Print Reach:** Would include readers who have read an average issue of at least one Publication
- **Radio Reach:** Would include listeners who have listened to Radio at least once in a week
- **Cinema Reach:** Would include cinema goers who have been to Cinema at least once in three months
- **Internet Reach:** Would include surfers who have accessed Internet in the last month

Mass media utility

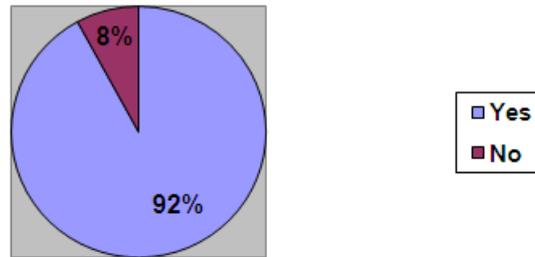
Medium	Responses	percentage
Print	32	64
Electronic	32	64
New Media	15	30
Social Media	11	22
Traditional Media	07	14
Outdoor Media	06	12



The pie chart shows media consumption of respondents. A majority of the respondents (64%) said they prefer print and electronic media, About Thirty percent of the respondents prefer new media, 22% were prefer Social Media, 14% prefer traditional media and only 12% of respondents are preferring outdoor media for information, education and entertainment.

Knowledge of public service advertisements among public

Response	Respondents	Percentage
YES	46	92
NO	04	08
TOTAL	50	100



The table shows knowledge of public service advertisements among respondents. Majority of the respondents (92%) are aware of public service advertisements and about 8 percent of the respondents were not aware of PS advertisements.

Knowledge of HIV advertisement

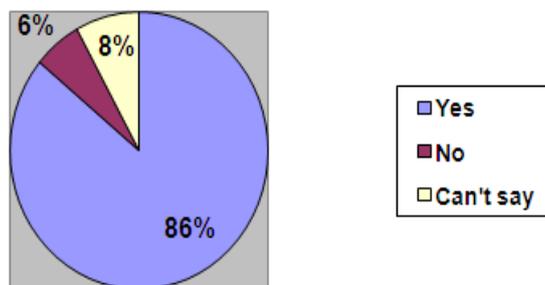
response	Respondents	percentage
YES	26	52
NO	24	48
TOTAL	50	100

The table shows that knowledge of HIV advertisement on television. Majority of the respondents (52%) have watched the above advertisement on television. About 48 percent of the respondents are not seen the above advertisement in television.



Knowledge of pulse polio advertisement on television

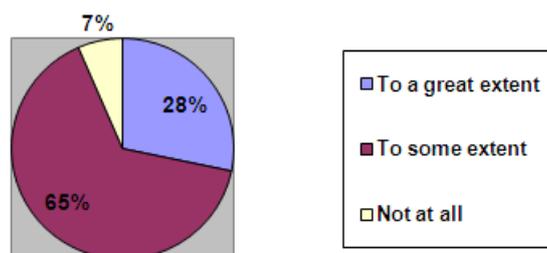
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	43	86
No	03	06
Can't say	04	08
Total	50	100



The table shows that knowledge of pulse polio advertisement on television. Majority of the respondents (86%) have watched the above advertisement on television. About 6 percent of the respondents are not seen the above advertisement in television.

Table shows the impact of these television health advertisements

Level of impact	No. of respondents	Percentage
To a great extent	13	28
To some extent	30	65
Not at all	03	07
Total	46	100



Majority of the respondents (65%) said that public service advertisements of health care have impact in some extent. About 28 percent of respondents said PS advertisements of health have impact in great extent. And about 7 percent of the respondents said these television health advertisements don't have any positive impact.

Table shows whether these health advertisements can influence public

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	41	82
No	05	10
Can't say	04	08
Total	46	100

Majority of the respondents (82%) are said these advertisements have influence on public attitude and behaviour. About 10 percent of the respondents are responded that these advertisements do not influence on public attitude and behaviour.

II. Results And Findings

An analysis of the national media scene reveals that it is possible to reach approximately 65% of the Indian audience by at least one of the mass media channels ie either through Television, Cable, Newspapers, Radio, Magazines, Cinema or the fledgling internet. Overall, Television is currently the medium with the highest reach (56%) in the country. A majority of the respondents (64%) said they prefer print and electronic media, About Thirty percent of the respondents prefer new media, 22% were prefer Social Media, 14% prefer traditional media and only 12% of respondents are preferring outdoor media for information, education and entertainment. Majority of the respondents (92%) are aware of public service advertisements. Majority of the respondents (86%) of respondents are aware of pulse polio advertisement. Fifty two percent of the respondents are aware of HIV advertisement on television. Majority of the respondents (65%) said that public service advertisements of health care have impact in some extent. About 28 percent of respondents said these health advertisements have impact in great extent. Respondents of (82%) are opinioned that the above health advertisements which are broadcasting on television have influence on public.

III. Conclusion

The mass media helps health communicators to expand their audience reach, which is crucial considering the fact that face-to-face channels of communication often require too many human resources and reach only a small number of people in large, underserved rural areas. The mass media provides an important link between the rural residents and vital national information. The mass media, in the form of the radio and television, are an effective way to persuade target audiences to adopt new behaviors, or to remind them of critical information. Besides informing the public about new diseases and where to seek help, they can also keep the public updated. Television as an effective audio-visual medium it reaches large number of population. And it is an essential communication force to convey the messages of health care services through advertisements and other health programs. Public service advertising is potentially powerful tool in the effort to address many health services and other social challenges facing this country.

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