

COVERAGE OF HEALTH INFORMATION IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The one of the basic principle of the media has to spread the information to create awareness in the people for the welfare of the state. It is well known that the mass media are an important social institution in any modern society. There is a greater demand and need for accurate, relevant, rapid and impartial public health information by people, and a growing reliance on mass media as the main source of information. The study was conducted on the health related messages that appear in the electronic media i.e., the radio and television. These two communicative tools are used for the analysis were randomly chosen. This aspect of the study gave the researchers an insight into involvement of the media within the health communications. Detailed content analysis of communication media concluded that all types of media provide information regarding health matters but political, social, crime and sports news were primarily covered in the electronic media.

Keywords: Mass Media, Advertisements, Health Issues, Healthcare Products.

INTRODUCTION:

The mass media is one of the best communication tools to spread the information and create awareness in the people so that there is acceptance of any idea to create interest. Mass media displays information about health and make people aware so as to prevent the spread of various diseases. There are various types of mass media magazines, television, internet, newspapers, traditional media and folk media etc., mainly the electronic media very much interact with the people even illiterates can easily understand the information aware about the social, political and well developmental issues. The media have the power to direct our attention towards certain issues and highlighting various issues to resolve the problem. This is the agenda setting theory. In the words of Cohen (1963), the media “may not be successful in telling their readers what to think, but are stunningly successful in telling their readers what to think about”. The media reflect the realities, values, and norms of a society. Thus, if we want to study a society we could turn to its media □ its films, novels, television series, and popular stories. They will reflect to us what people feel and think, how they behave, and so on. The media act as a mirror of society, or a ‘window on the world’, which can be used as a resource to understand the society, O’Shaughnessy (1999). Freimuth et al. (1984) have shown that many people rely on the news media for their health-related information. Policy makers also obtain considerable amount of information from the media. As Stein (2001) argues that the media has an essential function in social□learning to provide the information that will empower ordinary people and transmit the idea that structure people□s thinking. Apart from the educative role, the media also play an advocacy role instrumental in making policy makers and key opinion leaders take the epidemic seriously, Getachew (2006). As Bryant and Thompson (2002) have suggested that news coverage of health matters takes on considerable significance that has the potential to shape the impression of average citizens and powerful policy makers alike. In the words of Brown and Walsh-Childers (1994), news coverage of health “tends to ascribe the power to control individuals’ health to medical experts using high-technology equipment”. According to Mehta and Sadhi (2004), communication involves dialogue. Participants of the dialogue, who play their role as news sources, not only exchange knowledge but also critically look into their beliefs, attitude and behavior patterns. Studies have also shown that the news media tend to increase their coverage of health concerns as they affect the society’s mainstream and/or the greatest number of people in their audience.

IMPORTANT OF THE STUDY:

The main purpose of the content analysis is to understand systematically health related messages in different mass communication tools. The mass media can be divided into two parts. Those are electronic and print media. The electronic media such as radio and television, and print media such as newspaper and magazine were used in this study. Radio is the oldest communication in the world. Recently past few decades television emerged as a important mass communication source. Media are dominant feature of our day to day life and available both in domestic and public environments. They intend to engage people, to convey some kind of information, and to produce reactions in their audiences which justify their continuing production. Sometimes the main message is clear to the audience but it is also likely that some other meaning is produced in audience mind unconsciously. The purpose of these messages is to engage an audience and influence the audience way of thinking about certain subject. Electronic media playing a key role to module the mindset of the people.

Content analysis method is used for qualitative and quantitative analysis of health related topics covered in the electronic media. Stacks and Hocking (1992) defined content analysis as “a research method or a measurement technique that involves the systematic study of the content of communication messages”. Holsti (1969) gave some steps in carrying out content analysis research such as selecting and defining content categories; defining the unit of analysis; deciding on a system of enumeration; and carrying out analysis. Hartmann and Husband (1974) opined “despite its limitations, content analysis enables us to say “something about what is being called ‘event as news’ - that is, the version of the world daily laid before the public as a kind of suggested agenda for their thought, discussion and action”. A health content analysis is a useful tool to know how media disseminating the health messages and the way in which population receives this health information in terms of the amount of timeslot providing for advertisements, visual references, graphics, etc. (Roberts 2004). Several researchers had used content analysis to study health related research areas. Bonnie and George (1975) discussed the role of radio and television on the announcements for family planning. Dubey and Burdhan (1981) developed a module on content analysis of message and programmes in health and population communication, to orient and develop a greater appreciation and understanding of communication research among middle and lower level field workers. Singh Archana (2007) studied the role of mass communication in prevention and control of AIDS using content analysis of Indian newspapers and electronic media. The public health community usually looks to the media for support, attention and endorsement and are considered as a primary source of health and science information, even for health professionals.

On the other hand, they are also seen as an important tool to disseminate health information to the population. The news media are quite important in furnishing the public with health information. In line with the agenda-setting theory, Bryant and Thompson (2002) are of the view that “news coverage of health matters takes on considerable significance, in that it has the potential to shape the impressions of average citizens and powerful policy makers alike”.

METHOD:

The analysis was conducted on the health related messages that appear in the electronic media. This study of was conducted through observation method. The health messages broadcast or telecast by the electronic media during period of 2010. The radio and television channels used for the analysis were randomly chosen. This aspect of the study gave the researchers an insight into involvement of the media within the health communications.

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:

RADIO:

For the welfare of the people the Radio has been adopted a policy to broadcast the message for their audiences. Health messages can be delivered by radio in different forms. News items about health events can form a part of regular news broadcasts. This is the major and important aspect to touch the audience. Special education programmes on health topics can be broadcast, ranging in length from a few minutes to an hour or more. These can be in the form of talks, interviews, or discussion programmes at the radio station. In Hyderabad, there are four major radio stations namely Big 92.7 FM (92.7 MHz) which is owned by (Reliance Industries) Anil Dhirubhai Ambani. Second one is Radio Mirchie 98.3 FM (98.3MHz) owned by Times of India Group. Red FM (93.5 MHz) and *Prasar Bharti* owned by the Government (103.1 MHz). Out of these four channels, the researchers chose Radio Mirchie (98.3 MHz) randomly and heard the broadcast for one week continuously.

In this study it was found that on an average there were 45-55 health related items being broadcast per day. Out of these, approximately 30-40 advertisements were of some health clinics or hospitals, fitness centers etc.; 8-12 were related to cosmetic and herbal products; and 10-13 were general medicines advertisements (facial creams, Dettol, Gelusil, etc.). There were approximately 8-10 health related messages related to different issues like hygiene, mother-child health care and immunisation of children. The important aspect is that a day before the polio-day (Sunday, Saturday) the message regarding immunisation was played several times. The message was announced normally for 10 to 15 seconds. The researchers also listened a health related phone-in program for eight months that is, from September, 2009 to April, 2010. The programme named FM Lifeline was aired every Tuesday from 11.00 to 11.30 am on *Prasar Bharti* (103.1 MHz). In this programme which a doctor was called and he/she gave advice and solved health related queries of people who called for help. The different issues dealt were normally related to AIDS, immunisation of children, different types of cancer, oral health, infections (viral, bacterial and fungal), eyes, injuries, respiratory problems, gynecological problems, joint pains, neurological problems, lifestyle diseases (diabetes, hypertension), cardiac problems, different types of allergies, and aches, etc. On an average, 5 to 10 callers from various places called seeking help. The programme was sponsored by Chandana Brothers, Hyderabad, and Director of Health Services, Andhra Pradesh. Sometimes there was an advertisement of some clinic or hospital and messages on female foeticide, mother child health, and immunisation of children before and after the programme.

TELEVISION:

One of the most important communications to motivate the people towards the better society called television. It can have a great impact on people and extend knowledge, influence public opinion, and introduce new ways of life. In the health field, in urban areas and in rural communities, it has already served as a powerful advocate of healthy behaviour. The researchers chose one entertainment channel, one spiritual and one news channel randomly to watch on TV. The researchers watched these channels for one week each from 8.00 am to 11.00 pm. The entertainment channel chosen was Gemini channel. It was found that on an average there were 7-9 health messages per day which were related to joint replacement, pneumonia vaccination, and mother-child health care. There was preponderance of advertisements as there were approximately 40-45 advertisements of beauty products; 25-30 were related to female utility items; 12-14 were on health or energy drinks (Boost and Horlicks, etc.); 10-12 were general medicines advertisements (Crocine, Moov, Cough-Syrup, etc.); 11-13 were on oral health (tooth brush and tooth paste related); 2-5 were related to various contraceptives; around 5-6 were on cooking oils; approximately 5-7 were related to ayurvedic products like *Chawanprash*, and Dabur products; and

10- 12 were related to baby health care products (nappies, baby food, etc.).

It is generally found that the spiritual channel is mainly listened to by middle age and aged people. The channel chosen was *aastha*. It was found that very few advertisements and messages were there on this particular channel. If there was some advertisement, it was mainly related to some herbal or ayurvedic product. Most of the products from the house of Ramdev baba's. The news channel that was chosen was ABN Andhra Jyothi. It is a Telugu news channel. Comparatively, there were more health messages. On an average, there were 10-15 health messages in a day. The messages were mainly on mother-child health, flu, knee replacement, dengue and chickengunia and on oral health. There was a phone-in health programme everyday from 2.00 to 2.30 pm. In this the doctor advised and solved the health related queries of people who called in for help. The health related advertisements numbered 30- 40. Out of these, 5-7 were on contraceptives; 4- 6 were related to baby products; 14-16 were cosmetic related products and 10-12 were on general medicines (fast relief balm, cough syrup, Crocin, Gelusil,etc.).

The electronic media are vital sources of information for many Ethiopians, basically radio and television are cover the urban and rural areas widely. Interestingly these two mass media tools reach the hearts of even illiterates also. There are significant geographic differences in media exposure. Despite the place of residence, however, urban women and men have had better access to all three media sources than their rural counterparts. Besides, viewing exposure along gender lines showed that the distribution is in favor of males when compared with that of females.

CONCLUSIONS:

A study was conducted on the health related messages that aired in electronic media ie., radio and television. The radio and television channels used for the analysis were randomly chosen. From the detailed content analysis of various communication media, it can be concluded that all the different types of media provide information regarding health matters but the political subject is the most preferred area of news in all types of media. The news related to crime and accident is at second place. The news related to social life and culture is at third place. However, advertisements did cover a lot of space and time and they formed the largest single category in the whole year. News related to health in our life is being widely covered. Very important and useful information regarding health had been given in them. There were special programme on radio and television and additional sections in the newspapers on health. It has also been found that various issues related with some subjects were given more space and they were frequently discussed while others were totally absent. The advertisements related to beauty and health products were telecasted more on television especially at the prime time when the viewership is high. The health messages were telecasted more on radio and in newspapers than broadcasted on television. This may be because of the financial investment which is more in the case of television than radio.

SUGGESTIONS:

With reference to the study the following suggestions has been made.

When give a message to mass you should aware on the issue at least a minimum level. There should be a special reporter for the coverage of different areas of development. Such reporters should be specialists in their subject. Due to preference of majority of readers, the health messages should be given either on first page which covers mainly political news or on sports page of the newspaper. Due to large viewership, the health related information or messages should be telecasted more during the prime time on radio and television.

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