



# THE NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF USE OF MASS MEDIA IN HEALTH COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

Communication processes are central to broader empowerment practices through which people are able to arrive at their own understanding of issues, to consider and discuss ideas, to negotiate, and to engage in public debates at community and national levels (Communication for Development, 2011). It is crucial to adopt effective communication strategies to encourage healthy behaviours; it inevitably leads to improving the health status of people. It is pertinent that audience centred approaches are developed in order to reach the maximum population. Public officials must identify mass media channels such as television, radio, and newspaper to promote public awareness, increase public knowledge, and lead them to adopt healthy behaviours. This paper will critically look at some of the research studies on government schemes, their implementation and outcome and the use of mass media by the government in the same.

**Keywords:** Government Schemes, Mass Media, Communication, Strategy, Beneficiaries

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## INTRODUCTION

The communication objectives must be set before the target audiences are identified, profiled, and selected. The early stages of any communication planning model should explicitly link the overall program's broad goals, specific outcome objectives, and individual behavior change objectives to the communication component of the program. Communication objectives can be set only after current awareness, belief, and attitude levels are measured in the selected target audiences. (a) The overall program's behavior change objectives must be explicitly stated prior to the setting of communication objectives so as to guide the communication strategy development, (b) a consumer orientation demands that the target audience's current beliefs, attitudes, and behavior be understood prior to setting communication objectives, and (c) communication objectives must be consistent with the channels available to reach

the selected target audiences, which requires prior knowledge of the target audience's information and entertainment habits (media exposure, for example).

Carlile (2011) argues that effective communication strategies will differ depending on whether you are communicating to influence change, engage or mobilise communities, share information, or raise profiles. Influencing change relies on engaging key audiences in dialogue that is relevant, context-specific and backed up by robust evidence. Communities can be mobilised by providing platforms for debate — for example through networks or coalitions — and building the capacity of marginalised actors to participate. Communication for sharing information ensures good flows of clearly presented robust information in an accessible and engaging way.

Strategic communication efforts involve a range of activities, including informing audiences in the



short term by managing and distributing information, influencing through long-term persuasion campaigns to “affect attitudinal change,” and engaging audiences by building relationships. It is pertinent that the strategic communication process includes a complete chalking out of the goals & objectives beforehand and then the steps are synchronized & integrated accordingly irrespective of the campaign being run at the national or the local level. Communication and information capabilities (e.g. print, broadcast, and other engagement elements) must be assessed and analysed for their effectiveness in the particular campaign

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A sensitive understanding of the barriers and incentives to healthy lifestyles is helpful in designing effective communication activities. Nutbeam (2000) emphasizes the role of mass media and insists that the mass media are a proactive and effective tool in dispensing the information, the media, especially with the advent of 24-hour television programming, actively seek health news...it is clearly demonstrated that “health sells.” - The population is looking for information on health that presents clear ideas of what can be done to maintain, improve, and reclaim healthy individual and collective lifestyles. Kreps (2005) concluded in his study that the health disparities can be checked through new communication technologies. The Internet can be a means to reduce disparities related to health. Noar S. (2012) is of the opinion that more of primary research is to be done in the area of health communication and more research is required on the effects of mass media. He further states that communication channels may have an essential part to play in affecting the health care intervention. Mass media tools must be considered by the researchers and officials to communicate with the target groups. Rock (2011) explains that media advocacy is a well-established strategy for transmitting health messages to the public. In the similar vein, Rice (2012) puts forth that since health communication campaigns are purposive in nature,

they are designed to raise awareness, enhance knowledge about, and even influence behaviour related to, health issues, it only makes sense that an organized set of communication activities including an array of mediated messages in multiple channels be designed in order to bring about benefits to individuals and society. Dorfman and Krasnow (2014) further elaborate on media advocacy that it uses mass communication to penetrate within a narrow audience of fewer people or policy makers who are instrumental in making policy decisions that shapes conditions in a given environment. Stoto et al., (2005) further emphasise on the need of clear, relevant and timely communication with the public conducted through the mass media along with direct communication such as through telephone hotlines. Ganikos et al., (1994) explain the protocol of development communication. They delineate the entire process in 6 steps: a) mass media and their community based application b) a study of the target group c) Educational & informational messages customized d) Channels of communication identifies and e) synergising all related programs f) Evaluation.

It is imperative to set the communication objectives in advance and then to identify and profile the target groups. In the nascent stages of the program itself, all of its comprehensive goals, its precise objectives must be clearly stated. Unless the homework and research regarding the target groups is done thoroughly such as their current awareness, belief, and attitude levels, communication objectives cannot be set. A communication strategy involves a long term foresight and a set of well-defined goals. It is the articulation of a vision and putting it into action. Donald & James (1996) define communication strategy as consisting of messages and media option as well as the various marketing communication tools such as sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations to deliver and display messages. Joshi (2001) emphasises the importance of strategizing the communication as communication and social change leading to



sustainable rural development go together. Communication by itself cannot provide finance input or infrastructure, but it can surely help in creating awareness and is thus the essential element of social change. Hence a utilization and implementation of effective communication strategies to promote healthy behaviors is an indispensable tool for improving the health status of people. It is imperative that target group or intended audience centric strategies are devised in order to understand their actual needs. They give invaluable insights into community behaviours, how to best approach them, their health practices, their beliefs, their supports and barriers, their financial constraints. Without a sensitive understanding of the barriers, it isn't feasible to design effective communication activities. Schiavo (2013) articulates the meaning of communication strategies specifically related to health as a statement describing the overall approach used to accomplish communication objectives... Health communication strategies must be designed in a way that they respond to an actual need that has been identified by preliminary research and confirmed by the intended audience. Further elaborating about how the communication can be effective as well as sustainable. Schiavo (2013) contends that the intended beneficiaries must participate and be involved in the strategizing process because there is direct proportionality between the participation of the communities and their influencers and success of communication efforts and eventually attaining those objectives. DeJong (2011) proposes that a lot of health communication literature seems to emphasise on the strategic aspects of persuasive communication. When looked closely, two types of messages are focused on in the health communication literature: communication that may cause problematic behaviors (e.g., the effects of alcohol advertisements or product placement), and communication that is designed as an intervention to promote healthy behaviours (e.g., a commercial, a brochure, or a training program. Jorgensen & Herring (1990) discuss about various components

which can help in strategizing communication such as the participants being offered workshops on planning health communication programs, communicating with high-risk populations, involving minority media, social marketing, and evaluating health communication program. Donovan (1995) comprehensively lists the strategizing process as: a) The overall program's behaviour change objectives must be explicitly stated prior to the setting of communication objectives so as to guide the communication strategy development, (b) a consumer orientation demands that the target audience's current beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour be understood prior to setting communication objectives, and (c) communication objectives must be consistent with the channels available to reach the selected target audiences, which requires prior knowledge of the target audience's information and entertainment habits (media exposure, for example). Schiavo (2013) summarises communication strategies as a statement describing the overall approach used to accomplish communication objectives. Health communication strategies need to respond to an actual need that has been identified by preliminary research and confirmed by the intended audience. Filney (2015) argues that strategy and communication should not be seen as separate from each other. They are best practiced as art and not science. The communication strategist uses principles and intuitions in a world consisting of complex systems. The process of designing a communication strategy need not necessarily be linear one.

#### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

Since there are many government which are launched by the government officials for several target groups, it is imperative to also critically evaluate them and whether their benefits are availed by the people they are meant for. The government disseminates information regarding the schemes depending upon communication objectives, audience segmentation, and approaches to be adopted for achieving those objectives and using appropriate communication



channels for disseminating information. The Government disseminates information but it is the opposite of dialogue. There have been several studies done to study the above factors in different government schemes. Here the objective is to check the use of mass media in communicating the schemes to the beneficiaries.

Some of the existing studies on government schemes in India were reviewed for the study. The studies chosen were all related to public welfare from the year 2000 onwards. The objective was to locate the role and use of mass media in communicating the schemes to the public and the scheme's beneficiaries.

**Existing Studies in Government Schemes**

Study	Place of study	Method	Key findings
Awareness of women beedi workers on government schemes related to the beedi workers (2002).	Karnataka, India.	Purposive sampling & personal interviews.	Awareness programs on various government schemes must be conducted. The state government has to take up an action plan to increase the awareness of women beedi workers on various laws and schemes of government.
Recent Welfare Schemes: An Assessment (2004)	Pan India	Secondary data , review of schemes	In a developing country like India the public health services should involve both private and government agencies for better execution.
Health Insurance for the Poor: Need to Strengthen Healthcare Provision (2004).	India	Secondary data from General Insurance Public Sector Assurance.	There is a need to improve healthcare infrastructure and a greater awareness amongst the target group is required.
Health Care Financing for the Poor: Community-Based Health Insurance Schemes in Gujarat (2005).	Gujarat	Interviews and Focus Group discussions.	Limited levels of awareness about these schemes. There is need for the scheme to be accompanied with an information campaign.
Ladlis and Lakshmis: Financial Incentive Schemes for the Girl Child (2012)	Pan India	Desk review of 15 child promotion schemes	Very little is known about their implementation and effectiveness. Most of the schemes are administered by state governments through the department of women and child development. According to officials, neither the guidelines for implementation are understood by the staff neither are they oriented towards it. There is no on-field monitoring to study the impact of such schemes..
Publicly-Financed Health Insurance	Karnataka and Tamil Nadu	Review on the said schemes	The absence of a dedicated data set is one of the main constraints for robust impact



Schemes about Concerns Impact Assessment (2013)		for the informal in which 34 relevant studies were examined	assessment
Women at the Crossroads: Implementation of Employment Guarantee Scheme in Rural Tamil Nadu (2013).	Tamil Nadu	Ethnographic study And survey method.	Implementation of the scheme is found to be good with high awareness levels of the scheme
Implementation of MGNREGA & Its Impact on Rural Madhya Pradesh 2015.	Madhya Pradesh	Survey method, case studies, in-depth interviews.	The awareness levels of basic provisions of the act amongst rural households were poor. The implementation of MGNREGA has been very inefficient.
The Problem with 'Targeting' (2017)		Review of various welfare schemes, including the ones aimed at achieving financial inclusion (Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana), improved sanitation (Swachh Bharat) and providing electricity to all villages (Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yoj	An emphasis on the fulfilment of targets the processes through which welfare schemes are executed are undermine, Instead the focus should be on more effective implementation of the process.
Government-led schemes to address	Pan India	Government and non-	Mainstream food security schemes do have some successes, but are simplistic and macro-



food insecurity (2017)		government reports	level and action plans mostly based on the centralised distribution of food grains.
Awareness on health and social welfare benefits among beedi workers-a community survey (2015)	Karnataka	Survey Questionnaire	Majority of the beedi workers had Average knowledge on benefits available from the Government. That an education will encourage them to utilize their benefits.
A study on awareness and utilization of 'Chiranjeevi Yojana' among members of BPL families in the field practice area of rural health training centre (rhtc), sayla of surendranagar district (2013)	Gujarat	Survey Questionnaire	majority of the study participants were unaware about the 'Chiranjeevi Scheme' Information, Education & Communication activities with emphasis on Government programs should be strengthened.
Effects of JANANI SURAKSHA YOJANA (a maternity benefit scheme) up-on the utilization of ante-natal care services in rural & urban-slum communities of Dehradun (2012)	Dehradun	Survey Questionnaire	It is required to create better awareness regarding all aspects of JSY so that people should avail all the benefits of the scheme.
A Study of Awareness, Enrolment, and Utilization of RashtriyaSwasthyaBima Yojana (National Health Insurance Scheme) in Maharashtra, India (2016)	Maharashtra	Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with key informants.	A need to improve awareness, by proactively educating the vulnerable sections. Providing mere booklets or information pamphlets does not mean that information has reached the beneficiaries, many of whom are illiterate.

Findings: From a review of the above studies, it was found that the role of mass media has not been highlighted. Mass media channels and interpersonal communication have a pivotal role to play in the diffusion and eventual adoption of an innovation. As discussed earlier, communication is a two way road with traffic moving from both the sides. Communication mostly involves several forms of media such as print, electronic media

(radio, television), outdoor media new media etc. These media also act as tools for empowerment. These different forms of media can be used productively to communicate knowledge and information to the masses. That means they are used to facilitate and encourage the participation of people in developmental activities.

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**





The review raises important questions regarding the public being aware of such innovations or the yojanas, the role of communication plays in the implementation of such schemes in India and their adoption. After reviewing different researches and studying the researcher's findings on some of the existing government schemes in different states of India, it is found that the role of mass media in communication and empowerment can be debated as to how media works in communication leading to empowerment. When it comes to media literacy and target groups comprehending and making sense of media messages, the encoding/decoding theory has a pertinent role to play and it is important to know the awareness levels of the people of such media messages. Communication scholars are of the view that even though the media can facilitate the process of empowerment through communication, it cannot achieve the goal of empowerment solely. Even though the media can inform people, it does not lead to the conclusion that communication can be achieved without interpersonal & horizontal communication. There are several factors that are responsible for this such as people's participation in the media content, interpersonal & horizontal communication for dissemination of information, the public dialogue in policy framing & designing of schemes.

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