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Research Article

TV AS AN EFFECTIVE MEDIUM OF MASS COMMUNICATION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH (A STUDY IN THE STATE OF RAJASTHAN)

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ABSTRACT

The health issues are complex and necessitate systematic understanding & knowledge of the topic that goes well beyond the health sector to address them. The creation of this knowledge involves a number of social sciences disciplines working together with the medical professions. Public Health enquiries examine various levels of social context through different types of communication including intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and mass communication. Due to its potential role in the influencing and shaping human health behaviour, & public health; mass communication has attracted a lot of attentions from health care professionals, policy makers, academics, social scientists, and other stakeholders.

Mass media disseminate health news & information among the general public. Globally, mass media are extensively used for producing & disseminating public health messages among general public aiming at improvement of general health of target audiences. Studies show that mass media, especially TV, is an effective medium for spreading awareness about different public health issues, among general public.

This study tried to explore the role of mass media for health communication among general public. This study is part of the ongoing research study on 'role of mass media on health-seeking behaviour of general public'.

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INTRODUCTION

In 21st century public health is considered among of the most important aspects of human development across the globe. Health public issues have been evolving continuously and force the government official, policy makers, social / behaviour scientists, and other stake holders to tirelessly work on tackling them. Public health interventions i.e. Obesity, use of condoms for family planning and safe sex; wearing helmets, & wearing seatbelts for safe driving; washing hands before meals, different vaccination drives, covering mouth while sneezing, avoid use of tobacco & liquor etc are aimed at transforming the life of people across the planet. Main objective of public health is improving health & hygienic living conditions & modifying the health behaviour of public and prolonging their life.

The mass media are extensively used in public health programmes. Huge amount of money is spent yearly on productions and dissemination of health messages e.g. booklets, pamphlets, advertisements / article in newspaper, radio programmes and documentary / advertisements for television programs.

This intensive use of media is done at every stage of public health programmes with a view to achieve three main objectives: s

1. Imparting the Accurate Health Information
2. Changing the Health Beliefs and Attitudes
3. Promoting a Healthy Behaviour and Lifestyle

Pictorial representation of public health issues



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Public Health

World Health Organisation's (1986) health promotion glossary defines that Public health [1,2] is the science and art of promoting health among common public. It aims at the prevention of disease, and prolonging the life of people. This prevention of disease and prolongment of life is done through the well-coordinated and organised efforts of different segments of society.

Going through the WHO (1996) definition of public health, we see that Public Health is the

1. Science and Art of
2. Promoting Health
3. Among Common Public
4. With the Objectives of Prevention of Disease
5. And Prolongment of Life Through
6. Well-Coordinated and Organised Efforts of
7. Different Segments of Society

The public health programmes are aimed at empowering people to make use of available health infrastructure for attaining improved health conditions, as health is an important input in the process of overall development. The Public health infrastructure [2] includes health-care facilities, health information and health communication. Media is an important input in any health infrastructure set-up.

Health Promotion

WHO [1,3](1996) mentioned that health promotion is a key component of Public Health. In fact, the very basic structure of public health is based on health promotion. Health promotion aims at promoting the health of each and every individual in any given populations. Wright *et al* [1,3] mentioned that health promotion is in the core of public health activities. Main objective of health promotion activities are to enhance the knowledge of common public about different prevailing health issues. By providing relevant and timely information related to prevailing health issues; media can play a crucial role in boosting the health promotion activities in a society.

Mass Media

Mass media, also called mass communication, are the vehicles of mass communication, as they disseminate a variety of messages to millions of audiences, scattered over different geographical territories. Mass media is an important social institution in any democratic society informing, entertaining & educating people about different events/ issues happening around by presenting the facts before them. Moreover, media create awareness among people. Media also play the role of facilitator by fostering consensus on matters of local, national & importance through debates & discussions.

Mass media is generally categorised into three categories.

- Print Media
- Electronic Media
- New Media / Web Media

Let's examine these media in brief:

Print Media: As the name suggests print media means the media, which serves the messages in printed format. It includes

books, magazine, newspapers, posters, leaflets and other printed material.

Electronic Media: Electronic media includes radio, television (Satellite TV, cable TV), and cinema etc. Besides informing people, electronic media provide entertainment to a huge number of audiences.

New Media / Web Media: New media are internet / web based communication technologies. Examples of web / new media are websites, blogs, YouTube, social media, and social networking websites etc. Social Networking Websites (SNWs) are also example of new media or web media e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat etc.

Mass Media and Public Health

Since media have the potential of reaching and influencing the mass audiences they are the best channel to be used for implementation of public health policies. Hornik [4] said that globally mass media are used strategically to reach out to millions of target populations for the promotion of public health policies. Evidences suggest that mass Media play a central role in informing & educating people about important events, and changes happening around the world, because media connect the audience to the world beyond their immediate reach.

In other words, media bring the world closer to the audience and increase their reach and access. Public health issues are extensively covered by media for promoting a healthy lifestyle & awareness about different raging topics related to health in any society. Mass media can be very effective in public health programmes, as they provide the most important input of any health venture i.e. health information. Mass media can educate a large number of audiences through various types of health information and content related to the community's health needs.

Public health programmes are used for a variety of health topics, and customised health messages are developed according to the needs of audiences. In any given society, health requirements of kids, youth, mature, and old age people are different and diverse. Media play a crucial role in delivering and disseminating customised health message according to the needs of audiences spread across the geographical boundaries in a society, state or nation.

Across the globe public health promotion activities focus on health education and awareness campaigns to influence health behaviour of the target audiences.

By disseminating health information and increasing awareness, mass media play huge role in promoting health. Media not only spread awareness, but also inform and educate people over a period of time. This ultimately helps in the change of attitude & behaviour of audience for achieving better health.

Invention of Television (TV)

Since its invention (1920s), TV has occupied its place in millions of households Rai *et al.*⁵⁶ [5] in every nook and corners in the world. Television comes to India rather very late, on September 15, 1959. Today India has over 183.4 million [6] TV sets in their households. In Rajasthan approximately 37.6

% households [7] have their own TV sets. The numbers of TV viewers are actually much higher than the TV sets in Rajasthan, as one TV set is being watched by many people in a family. This number grows manifold when TV is watched at a public place like cafeteria / restaurant / recreation centres, or a hotel etc.

The Landmark Site Experiment -1975

India conducted the SITE experiment (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) of 1975.

It was a landmark experiment about TV and its influence on the society. SITE was an experimental programme designed by the joint venture of ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) and NASA (National Aeronautical Space Agency of USA). The duration of SITE experiment was one whole year i.e. starting from August 1, 1975 and ending at July 31, 1976. The experiment was conducted in over 2400 hundred villages in around twenty districts of 6 states of India. These states are: Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh.

Main objectives of SITE were to assess the efficiency of Television on the following main issues i.e.:

1. Population control
2. Improving agricultural practices
3. Improving sanitation practices
4. Promoting national integration
5. Dissemination information
6. Spreading awareness
7. Educating people about health & hygiene
8. Using technology for community development

The ultimate aim was to improve the quality of life in rural areas in the country.

The SITE experiment successfully achieved its objectives. It showed that technology can be successfully used for informing people. Besides:

1. It showed that TV is a great medium to influence the audience behaviour
2. It proved that TV has a huge impact on the audiences

The same types of experiments were used in various countries for spreading awareness; informing and educating the people about different socio-economic issues. Public health issues were among them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gordon, (1965) [8] who is considered as the prophet of media communication, had mentioned that TV has converted this big world into a small global village, as far as we are concerned with the exchange of idea and thoughts.

George Gerbner (1967) [9] was of the opinion that mass media have subtle effects on audiences who, unknowingly, absorb the dominant symbols, images, and messages of media. Gerbner called it 'cultivation theory of dominant image pattern'. Gerbner mentioned that a long and persistent exposure to TV is capable of cultivating common belief about the world. Gerbner and his associates were of the view that messages of TV do not portray reality in society; repeated exposure to such distortions leads to development of particular beliefs about the world. And

these beliefs get reinforced once they are developed. For example repeated viewing of glamorous locales, big houses, luxurious cloths, expensive toys, chocolates, fast food, electronic gadgets, may lead viewers to believe that they can expect such things in life. Interestingly, such messages are not beneficial for the poor and underprivileged majority. Gerbner strongly suggested that the powerful effects of mass media act as the mould of society.

KATZ (1973) [10] in its study on TV found that TV is used by the audiences to satisfy their psychological needs. Besides fulfilling the psychological needs, TV also fulfils their social needs which include:

1. TV helps in family bonding i.e. bringing family members closer
2. TV is a stress reliever
3. TV helps escape the routine worries
4. TV is a great diversion tool.
5. TV helps us in having a surveillance on society

Chander *et al* [11] while mentioning about SITE -1975 (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) said that SITE was a landmark social experiment in the history of democratic India to assess the effect of TV in the rural Indian society. This SITE experiment was a very successful experiment and had far-reaching impact on rural Indian society.

The SITE experiment was a grand success [12]. Following were the achievements of the SITE experiment.

1. It showed that technology can be successfully used for informing people
2. It proved that the use of media technologies in spreading awareness about health & hygiene
3. It showed the use of technology in improving the life of people.
4. It proved the proper use of technology can bring change in the attitude and behaviour of people
5. It showed that TV is a great medium to influence the audience behaviour
6. It proved that TV has a huge impact on the audiences

Besides, it helped India in developing its own satellite programme-called INSAT (Indian National Satellite System) Kreps (1988) [13] suggested that health communication can be used for health promotion & health education for different aspects of prevention of disease and it is useful in various situations. It includes formulation of public health messages and disseminating them for promoting healthy behaviour among the common populace.

Wallack [14] mentioned (1989) that the use of mass media is very economic for public health programmes. Media is capable of reaching a large number of audiences spread over different geographical locations simultaneously. Media reaches the globally scattered population in an instant, and delivers the health messages in a cost effective and efficient way.

Amezcuca, *et al.* [15] in their research (1990) found that mass media has been employed extensively by public health professionals for being the most powerful medium for persuading the audience, shaping their behaviour and modifying their attitudes towards a accepting healthy lifestyle and rejecting the previously unhealthy practices and behaviour

McLuhan said that TV camera goes to every nook and cranny of this planet, and brings the live images to our homes. These images can be seen anywhere in the world. For example a person sitting in his / her drawing can watch the live football game happening in the far distant places. Muurgan (1990) [16] opined that TV is one of the most revolutionary inventions of modern times, which shaped the way of looking at life of billions of people in different countries across the globe. Fiske *et al.* (1994) [17] in their studies found that there is a strong interrelationship between the messages broadcasted at the TV and the daily life realities. TV has influence on the everyday life of its audiences. TV influences and shapes the culture of the audiences.

The influence of TV in India is immense and yet to be nurtured, Rawat *et al.* (1999) [18].

Social scientists & communication researchers have emphasised that TV is among the most powerful medium of mass communication in the 20th century. It has been instrumental in influencing the lives of millions of people and reshaping their daily life in society.

Mass media is one such institution which has the ability and potential to influence every individual's life in a big way. We see that media has ability to influence, our behaviour, our culture and even it can affect our thinking and attitudes towards different issues in our daily life Gupta (2006) [19]. Mass media is one such social organisation having wide reach and access that can influence the public by improving their health education level.

Noa (2006) [20] mentioned that mass media have been employed for public health programmes for a long period of time. Mass media are used to disseminate health messages to millions of people through newspapers, magazines, radio and televisions, internet etc.

Schiavo (2007) [21] said that health communication is a multi-disciplinary and multifaceted approach of communicating with diverse audiences who have a common concern among them i.e. they seek health related information. The goal of health communication is to influence the attitude of the audiences, to shape their behaviour to help improve their health outcome. These audiences include all the stakeholders of health i.e. individuals, families, communities, health-care professionals, patients, policymakers etc.

Wakefield (2010) [22] explained that to make a public health programme successful, Health communication messages should be a right mix of different factors i.e. following the local and social norms; and a persuasive message. Wakefield further said that health communication messages should be used according to the needs of the audience, and should be in tune with the prevalent customs and traditions of the society. The messages must be persuasive.

Gupta *et al.* (2015) [23] suggested that mass media impart necessary health information in our daily life enabling common people to take appropriate decision about different aspects of their lives; especially about health.

Objective of the Study

Main objective of the study is to explore the potential of TV as an effective medium of mass communication for public health

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory approach has been adopted for the purpose of this study. Data are mainly collected from secondary sources. Primary data are also used.

Working Definition of Key Words

Public health

Public health is the science and art of promoting health among common public. Public health aims at the prevention of disease, and prolonging the life of people.

Mass Communication/ Mass Media / Media

Mass media is also called the media / mass communication. Mass media is considered any mechanical devices, which can take messages to millions of geographically scattered audiences simultaneously, overcoming the geopolitical borders.

Media includes Radio, TV, (DTH, Satellite, and Cable TV etc.) newspapers, magazines, internet; & different SNWs (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter etc.). For the purpose of this study media means all the above type of media. All the three words mass media, media, and mass communication are used interchangeably.

General Public

For the purpose of this study, general public means a person, an individual (male & female) in the society, irrespective of race, complexion, cast, creed etc.

Television (TV)

For the purpose of this study, TV means all types of screens, providing audio-visual messages simultaneously, used at homes, market, offices etc. For example TV, (DTH, Satellite, and Cable TV, cinema etc.)

Major Health Issues in Rajasthan

Rajasthan is the largest state of India. Rajasthan is located in the north-western corner of India. The border of Rajasthan touches Punjab in the north side, while it touches Uttar Pradesh & Haryana in the north-eastern side. In southern side Rajasthan border touches the state of Gujrat; while in the eastern side, Rajasthan border touches Madhya Pradesh.

Malaria, Typhoid, Diarrhoea, Dengue, Hepatitis, Chicken Gunia, AIDS/HIV, Anaemia in women, low female birth rate, adulteration in food, air & water pollution, sound pollution, use of chemicals in food items, child issues, women safety, sedentary life styles of people, radiation from the mobile towers, glare coming out of mobile phones/ tablet phones / laptops, fake or spurious drugs, lack of healthy lifestyle habits (i.e. not brushing the teeth, not washing hands before meals etc.), not wearing seat belt, not wearing helmets, environmental pollution, noise pollution etc. This list is endless. We see that media has been playing an important role in highlighting these important issues about public health and spreading awareness among general public.

Television's (TV) Unique Characteristics

TV as a medium of mass communication has many unique characteristics. Following are the unique features of TV.

- Medium of Two Senses
- TV is An Instant Medium
- A Highly Credible Medium
- A Medium of Glamour
- A Medium of Close-up
- A Living Room Medium
- Democratising Medium
- Wide Reach of TV

Let's now discuss these features in brief.

Medium of Two Senses

TV captures two senses i.e. visual and audio. It means that when you see something in front of your eyes; you tend to believe it without many arguments, even though it seems impossible Unlike other mediums of mass communication (i.e Newspaper / Radio), TV is a medium of two sense i.e. eyes and ears.

While newspaper is only a medium of eyes and that too mostly for the literate people, TV conveys the message across the board for literate and illiterate as well. Radio is a medium of ears only, which affects only one sense i.e. ear.

Being an instant medium affecting two sense (hearing and viewing); TV becomes one of the most influential, medium of mass communication.



Interestingly TV is more of Visual and less of audio medium that makes TV a unique medium, which has the maximum potential to affect audiences, among all the media.

Psychologists suggest that the potential influence of TV as a medium of mass communication is much greater than other mediums. They say that as far as a message is concerned eyes absorb more than that of the ear in a given period of time.

The retention powers of eyes are more than the retention power of ears at a given time. This means eyes retain any message for a longer period of time than the ears retain the same message. What the eyes see on TV screen is felt by the mind as if it is happening in real life.

TV is an Instant Medium

TV is a medium of immediacy. It shows the events live, as they are happening. Unlike newspapers, yesterday's news is no news on TV. It would make TV look outdated.

In audio visual terms, TV is an instant reporter. TV reports events and incidents here and now. You may remember the minute by minute reporting about important events from ground zero. TV reports in a fixed time schedule. Every programme is allotted a time slot. This time allocation must be respected both by the producers and the audiences.



A Highly Credible Medium

There is a saying in English 'Seeing is believing'. This saying goes well with the TV, as TV makes us believe what we see on the TV screens. Many things which people may not otherwise believe, they believe it when they are shown on TV screen.

TV is a great medium of mass communication. Satellite technologies have made it possible to beam the live images directly into our bedrooms and drawing rooms. TV is a highly credible medium of mass communication. It is also called a believable medium.

Wide Reach of TV

The TV has a wide reach. It reaches everywhere. The camera goes to every corner of this universe. TV camera goes under water, TV camera goes to the sea, and TV camera goes to wildest of jungles, TV camera shoots from the sky. Now a person sitting in a small village of Bikaner or Barmer District can watch a football match happening in the Amsterdam or Sydney in the comfort of sitting in their drawing room. In fact, the TV has widened the mental horizon of human being. As a great educating medium, TV has helped us learn a lot about new and unconventional things happening around us.

A Medium of Glamour

TV is a medium of glamour. We watch glitterati on TV i.e. fashion shows, and film festival, international personalities, and events, important conferences and festivals, sports meet, travel shows, world leader's interviews and much more. Because of all this glitterati, TV is also called a magic box [24]. We can watch all sorts of programmes at any time during the day. This round the clock availability of all types of contents makes the TV a magical medium for audiences. A very few people can resist the glamour of TV.

A Medium of Closeup

TV is also called a medium of close-up. It is an ideal medium for expressing actions and interaction between people in a

programme shown on TV, for presenting interview and discussions etc. Moreover, because of its small screen, it's an ideal medium for small gathering. It is close-up of human faces, rather than showing long shot of the subjects.

A Living Room Medium

TV is mostly watched in the drawing room or living room, so it is also called a living room medium. TV is a medium of entertainment and information for family at home.

TV brings cinema and theatre to the living room [25]. Popular soap operas become living room theatre. Films and other theatre drama convert TV into a living room theatre.

Earlier, people used to go to cinema and theatres to enjoy them. For that they used to get specially dressed to watch them. But now it is all available in the convenience of their homes.

Democratising Medium

TV is a democratising medium Mithali *et al.* [26], as it is available to everybody. Irrespective of ages, colour, cast, creed, religion; public health messages beamed on TV caters to the audiences of all age group. Be it kids, children, youth, mature or old people, everyone can enjoy the programmes shown on TV. TV being a medium of mass communication caters to all sections of society. It provides information and informal education to everyone in a democratic way.

Due to these characteristics, TV emerged as one of the most effective medium of mass communication.

TV's Huge Influence on Audience

TV has been very popular in Indian society. Over last few decades TV have emerged as the most powerful channel of mass communication which has the potential to shape and change the life of people. Many TV Soap Operas, and reality shows are among the most popular programmes in the world. Millions of people watch their popular programme at the same time in different cities of the world. Some of the most popular TV programmes in India and world are Big Boss, Big Brother etc. Doordarshan's epic serials 'Ham Log, and 'Yeh Jo Hai Jindagi' are an excellent example of Indian TV's immense popularity.

TV is a live medium of mass communication, which creates reality in front of the audiences.

We remember the times when the Mahabarat and Ramayan serials were aired in India. During that time the roads and the markets become deserted and people postpone /postpone their social commitments. People used to believe these serial as true as if they are the divine words of Lord Krishna or the divinity of Lord Rama.

Even the characters (the actor / actress) of these epic serial were treated with a great respects. Wherever these characters go in their social life, people revere them and follow them with devotion. Many of the viewers of these epic serials even touch the feet [27] of these characters, and seek blessing in life.

TV As an Effective Medium for Public Health

TV broadcasts are considered to serve many purposes in the mass societies. TV broadcasting has played a vital role in the shaping the opinion of people and changing their belief and

attitudes about different issues in society by creating social realities on the small screen.

Because of its wide reach and believability, TV has emerged as an effective medium of mass communication for public health interventions by:

1. educating people about health and hygiene, and
2. inculcating new healthy behaviours,
3. motivating them to abandon unhealthy practices, and
4. change the unscientific health beliefs and
5. Develop healthy attitudes for achieving better health.

All these traits make TV a very powerful medium of mass communication for Public Health.

CONCLUSION

Mass media is a very powerful social institution, which have immense potential of shaping the beliefs attitudes of the people in society. Due to its wide reach among the audience, media have been playing instrumental role in public health interventions in Rajasthan. By informing and educating people about various health programmes in society, media help people adopting better health practices in life. We can say that, media play instrumental in bringing behavioural changes in knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about health and healthy behaviours.

Suggestions

1. There is a huge scope of study about different TV soap operas and their influence on different categories of audiences e.g. children, adolescent, youth and mature.
2. More researches are proposed to study new emerging media technologies,

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