

**MASS MEDIA FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATION AMONG GENERAL PUBLIC  
(A STUDY IN THE STATE OF RAJASTHAN)**

**Sushil Kumar Sharma and Dr.Yogesh Kumar Gupta**

Department of Mass Communication, NIMS University, Jaipur

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**ABSTRACT**

Health communication is an emerging area of study focusing on communication needs of diverse audience in health sector. Due to its potential role in the influencing / shaping human health behaviour, health communication has attracted a lot of attentions from academics, social scientists, health care professionals, policy makers and other stakeholders.

Mass media helps in disseminating health news & information among the general public. Globally health communication messages are disseminated through mass media aiming at improving the quality of life of the target audience. As a niche area of health communication, this study examines the roles of mass media in employing different strategies to develop health messages to promote the health of 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**

Health communication enquiries examine various levels of social context through different types of communication including intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and mass communication. The health issues are complex and necessitate systematic understanding & knowledge of the topic that goes well beyond the health sector to address them. The study of health communication is an applied area of research in social & behavioural sciences. Health communication tries to examine the influence and impact of communication on different facets of human behaviour and its relationship with health care management system with respect to its social, cultural, economic, and personal forms. The term health communication is composed of two words i.e. health & communication. Let's first try to understand their meanings.

**Health**

WHO, World Health Organisation, (1998) [1] defined health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not just the absence of disease or infirmity'. WHO mentioned that health is not just physical state of health. It includes health & wellbeing. WHO's this definition of health was modified in the Ottawa chapter (1986).

The word health is taken from was the English language word 'hoelth', which means a state of being sound, and it is generally used to reflect the soundness of the human body, as mentioned by Dolfman (2002) [2].

Presenting the ancient views on health, Cook (2004) [3] mentioned that the concept of health is not new, it is as old as the humanity. In old text, the term health is mentioned as Healen, which meant 'to heal'. During medieval English, the term health was used as helthe, meant to be in a state of sound body, mind, & spirit.

The Ottawa Charter of WHO tried to include this multidimensional (2012) [4] concept of health. World Health Organisation (1986) Ottawa Charter stressed that education, food, shelter, income, peace, a stable ecosystem; sustainable resources, equity, and social justice are necessary inputs for health. Ottawa Declaration (1986) stated that an individual or group must be able to identify and realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Ottawa declaration (1986) emphasised that health is an important resource for life, which enables individuals to recognise and realise their daily needs and help individuals to achieve them while coping with the changing circumstances around them. The declarations further states that the health is a positive and multifaceted concept combining many personal traits and social resources. It said health is positive concept for everyday life, and all the individuals must be able to fulfil

*\*Corresponding author: Sushil Kumar Sharma*

Department of Mass Communication, NIMS University,  
Jaipur

their daily needs and desires by recognising it and should be able to satisfy them.

Paul (2006) [5] suggested that health is the basic foundation of humanity, which helps all the human beings and communities to exist. Therefore, the state of health in any given population not only indicates the well-being of the people, it also reflects upon the human development of the given population as well.

Sharma *et al.* [6] have stated that health is much more than the biomedical health. Health includes physical health, mental health, spiritual health, family health, & social health etc.

Health is the combination and result of many activities of an individual governed by the prevailing socio-economic conditions.

According to old Sanskrit texts, ancient Indian health system is known as Ayurveda [7] (the ancient Indian traditional medicine system). Ayurveda treats a human being as a complete unit. It treats the human health in a holistic way. It emphasizes on maintaining a good health by respecting the environment and synchronizing the body and mind along with promoting good behaviour (healthy living habits in tune with nature). The Ayurveda says that the complete health is the result of maintaining the delicate balance between the physical body, its senses & mind.

After discussing about meaning and definition of health, let's take a look at the meaning & definition of communication

### **Communication**

Communication generally means human communication. Communication helps human being in conveying meaning between individuals & groups. This process of conveying the meaning occurs through some words, signs & symbols. Communication connects, informs, entertains and educates. Social scientists have tried to define communication in different ways. A few of the definition of communication are given below.

Charles E. Osgood [8] says communication is "One system influences another system"

Collin Cherry [8] defines communication as "the transmission of stimuli"

Wilber Schramm [8] defined it as the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop

Another definition [8] says it as "the transfer or conveying of meaning to other person"

Another definition [9] says communication is the "Sharing of experiences on the basis of commonness"

Although there are many definitions given by social scientists, communication experts, and philosophers; yet is there not any agreement on any single definition of the communication.

Still, if we try to develop an acceptable definition of communication, we can say that: Communication is a process of sharing or exchange of ideas information, knowledge, attitude, or feeling among two or more humans.

### **Communication Is Vital to Humanity**

Communication is vital to human existence. Being at the core of all the human activities, communication plays a vital role

in any venture. Be it an enterprise, business, community service, government or any other activities, communication plays an important role in the success of any human activities. Communication plays a variety of roles in the society. Communication connects with others, communication removes hurdles in the way of persuasion, communication helps the work done by making people understand, communication helps in development of a society and much more, as suggested by Siltrauz *et al* [10].

### **Health Communication**

Combining the two words health and communication – we get health communication.

According to WHO (1998) health promotion glossary, "health communication is the use of the mass media and multimedia and other technological innovations to disseminate useful health information to the public, with a view to increase awareness of specific aspects of individual and collective health (Public Health) as well as importance of health in development", as mentioned by WHO.

Pictorial representation of Health Communication



Let's examine some other definitions of health communication.

Schiavo (2007) [11] 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, authorities, Kreps (1988) [12] 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.

Health communication means producing and exchanging the useful information with a view to motivate, influence or educate different audiences i.e. individual, common public, institutions, communities or societies, as mentioned by Maibach *et al* (2007) [13].

Juliana [14] mentioned that as an applied research discipline health communication tries to identify a problem related to human behaviour and health care management and focuses on the solution of these problems with the help of different communication theories and principles along with the application of different communication models.

Based on the above-mentioned definitions of health communication, we try to summarise about the nature of health communication. We find that: Health communication is:

1. Multidisciplinary and multifaceted concept
2. Uses different types of communication (interpersonal, group and mass)
3. Employs various type of media (mass media, multimedia, new media)
4. To produce / create health messages
5. According to the needs of target audiences (individual/ common public/ institutions / communities)
6. To educate / influence or motivate them
7. for promoting health behaviour or
8. Unlearn the previously learned unhealthy behaviour, and
9. Treat health as part of development

Health communication employs different strategies to develop health messages to impart health education and to shape & modify the health-seeking behaviour of general public.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Literature reviews suggested that proper use of mass media is very useful in spreading health communication among general public.

Altschull (1995) [15] explained that different mass media are largely present in our daily life and they have a big impact on us. These media play a great role as political and social force and they have the power to influence different aspects of our life in a big way.

Ruggiero (2000) [16] mentioned that many research findings made more sense if communications are interpreted as link between man and his environment. He suggested that communication effects can be explained in terms of the role they play in enabling people to bring about more satisfactory relations between themselves and the world around them.

Black [17] said that the media has been used for garnering support for political decisions and influencing the mind-sets of people for political purposes and introducing new changes in the society for over one century. Apart from providing the information and knowledge about many topics, they have been used for promoting the cause of the publishers or the rulers, among the populace, in any given society Bandura (2001b) [18] claimed that in any given society, general publics are self-conscious and actively involved with their social environment. They are not just the passive receiver of the media messages. They are self-reflecting and self-regulating as well. They adapt the things willingly, which they feel can bring useful changes in their own life. Irrespective of the outcome of their behaviour change, they choose to follow the behaviour propagated by the media. Media provides ideas for a huge variety of people living in different social, cultural, and geographical environments.

Biagi (2003) [19] found that in today's technology driven world, an individual, who uses these gadgets, spends more time with these gadgets than the time he spends in sleeping or on his/ her work or business. Biagi explained that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century an individual is so occupied with the modern technological gadgets that he has no free time for himself/herself.

Whitehead (2004) [20] mentioned that health education activities aims to inform individuals about the cause and nature of health /sickness and the individual's vulnerability attached with their lifestyle and behaviour. Whitehead further explained that the main objective of health education is to motivate individuals, groups, and communities to adapt to a process of behavioural change by influencing their value system, attitude and beliefs.

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) [21].

Health is a balanced combination of many three different elements. These are body, mind and soul. In other words it is also called as physical, mental & spiritual elements of human being. Without a balance in all these elements, a person cannot be called to be healthy, as explained by Ramona (1999) [22].

Gupta & Sharma (2015) [23] suggested that mass media disseminates necessary health information in our daily life enabling common people to take appropriate decision about different aspects of their lives; especially about health. Evidences suggest that mass media plays a central role in informing & educating people about important events / changes happening across the globe. Especially because media connect the audience to the world beyond their immediate reach.

Adhikari [24] said that time and again media has proved its role as a powerful social institution in improving the overall functioning of society by performing several roles. Media is not only a watchdog in society; media is a guide, and teacher in society.

Murthy (2015) [25] propounded that the discipline of health communication has been developing as a dynamic and useful field of study over a couple of years. Due to an influential potential role in the human health behaviour, public health management, health promotion, and healthcare system; health care professionals, have been developing strategies to address the specific needs of target audiences.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

Main objectives of this study are:

- To explore the role of mass media in spreading health communication among general public of Rajasthan.
- To find the scope of health communication among general public.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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

### ***Need for the Study***

In twenty-first century, media has become the part of our daily life. Media is so embedded in our daily life that we cannot imagine life without the media. On an average day, an individual interacts with media more than anything else. This regular interaction with media has far-reaching impact in our

daily life. Studies have revealed that media is changing our culture in many different ways. By changing our behaviour, media is change the way we communicate.

Since technology has to stay, we have to bear with the technology in our daily life. Yet, we have to find the influence technology is having on us. Over the last couple of years, a great amount of work is done in India & across the globe in the areas of role of communication & its importance in the healthcare industry. This study would provide valuable input for the health professionals, policy makers, researchers and common men that how media is used for public health.

### ***Scope of Health Communication***

Since health being related to each and every individual on earth, the scope of health communication is vast and varied. Health communication works for every individual in different societies, cultures and nations. WHO emphasises that health is a basic constituent of development. Any country cannot grow fast, if the health of its citizens is in poor shape, as the health communication is an important ingredient of development. Health communication plays an important role in increasing awareness about health risks among general public in any given society. Health communication can also motivate the people and help them acquire necessary skills required to reduce these health risks. Effective health communication can play a great role in creating demand for appropriate health services. On the other hand, it can reduce the need inappropriate health services.

Health communication employs numerous channels of communications that includes:

1. Intrapersonal Communication
2. Interpersonal Communication
3. Group Communication
4. Mass Communication

Examples of different types of communication in healthcare system:

### ***Intrapersonal Communication***

Intrapersonal communication takes place within a person. Examples are:

1. An introspection by the patient about his/ her medical history,
2. Perceived treatments / procedures / consequences of health issues by a patient
3. Assessment of a health status / diagnostic reports of a patient by healthcare professional
4. Suggested treatments of health issues by a healthcare professional of a patient

### ***Interpersonal Communication***

Interpersonal communication takes place between two persons. Examples are:

1. Communication between the patient and doctor;
2. Communication between patient and healthcare professionals;
3. Communication between two healthcare professionals
4. Communication between a patient's relatives or
5. Communication between two patients or health-care professionals

### ***Group Communciation***

Communication activities that take place among a group of more than two people are called group communication. Examples are:

1. Discussion about a health topic among health care professionals
2. Discussion about a health issue among the family members
3. Discussion about a health issues among patients and healthcare professionals
4. Discussion among different stakeholders of health care system

### ***Mass Communication***

Communication that takes place through different channels of mass communication is called mass communication. Examples are:

1. Dissemination of health messages through print media i.e. newspapers/ magazines/ books/ leaflets / pamphlets etc.
2. Dissemination of health messages through electronic media i.e. Radio, TV, and Cinema etc.
3. Dissemination of health messages through internet, social networking websites etc.
4. Interaction / discussion among different stakeholders of health through SNWs

### ***Mass Media / Mass Communication***

Mass media are the vehicles of mass communication. Mass media have assumed a significant place in the mass society because they carry messages to the millions of people, scattered over a large geographical area, simultaneously. Both the terms mass media and mass communication have been used interchangeably. Mass media, in short, is also called as media. Mass media is divided into three broad categories.

1. Print media
2. Electronic media
3. 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 / Webmedia***

New media are internet / web based communication technologies. Examples of web / new media are websites, blogs, you tube, social media, and social networking websites tec.

Social Networking Websites (SNWs) are also example of new media or web media e.g. face book, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat etc.

### **Mass Media as an Important Social Institution**

Mass Media is called the fourth pillar of any democratic society & considered as an important social institution. As a social institution media inform, entertain & educate the people. Moreover, media creates awareness among people about different issues by presenting the facts before the audiences. Media also play the role of facilitator by fostering consensus on matters of national importance through debates & discussions.

Different theories of mass media & Theories of behaviour change suggest that mass media has an immense impact on the behaviour of an individual. Mass media have the potential to shape & modify the behaviour of general public.

Behaviour change theories suggest that by informing or educating the people media can play the role of an educator in moulding / shaping the opinion of general public. Media provides ideas for a huge variety of people living in different social, cultural, and geographical environments. Mass media can help people in motivating to lead healthier life by spreading health awareness, and influencing the people about different aspects of health.

By motivating and informing general public, media help promote healthier lifestyle in society. Irrespective of the outcome of their behaviour change, general public choose to follow the behaviour propagated by the media.

### **Mass Media Scenario in Rajasthan**

All type of medium of mass communications are available in almost every nook and cranny of the state of Rajasthan. Besides disseminating all types of news & advertisements in Rajasthan, media have been spreading awareness about various socio-economic issues. Media has been useful in empowerment of women in Rajasthan. Media has proved its powerful role in the eradication of numerous superstitious practices in the remote area of Rajasthan. Media has also played an influential role in public health by increasing the level of awareness about health hygiene even in far-flung areas of Rajasthan. Almost all the national / local dailies are available at different districts of Rajasthan. Besides, TV has been a very effective tool of mass communication among Indian masses. TV has made a deep inroad into the drawing rooms of millions of people in Rajasthan. Different national and community radio channels are working round the clock in Rajasthan.

Even the Internet is available in almost every village of Rajasthan. Of course, in commercial places and metro cities, internet signal are good; while in remote village internet signal are still a problem. Yet, people from every segments of life can be seen using internet on different gadgets e.g. mobile, tablet computers, desk top etc.

### **Major Health Issues in Rajasthan**

Dengue, Diarrhoea, Chicken Gunia, AIDS/HIV, Malaria, Hepatitis, Typhoid, 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 healthy lifestyle habits among kids ( i.e. not brushing the teeth, not washing hands before meals etc.), not wearing seat belt, not wearing helmet

for two wheel drivers etc....The list is endless. We see that media has been playing an important role in highlighting these important public health issues and spreading awareness among common public.

### **Mass Media for Health Communication**

Being a social institution, mass media play an important role in spreading health communication. Mass media constantly keep sending messages to individual through different channels throughout the day. These channels may include TV, Radio, Newspapers, & internet. Media have wide reach and access to influence millions of audiences, geographically scattered over thousands of kilometre in different territories, across the geopolitical boundaries. With these qualities media are intensively employed in health communication.

A huge population depend upon media for their health information requirements. It is the mass media which provide tips to people to take precautionary measure to save them from seasonal changes, cold wave / heat wave etc. media spread awareness about the dengue fever.

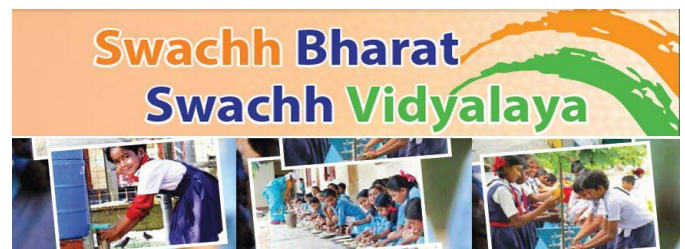
Even mobile phones have huge potential for spreading awareness about health, through different social networking websites & applications like face book, Instagram, WhatsApp, & telegram.

By informing the important things about the health related issues, media help bringing the behavioural changes among the people. These changes may be related to change in the previous unhealthy habits, or wrong beliefs, or may be related to preoccupied attitudes or aimed at reinforcing the existing beliefs of habits. Studies showed that exposure to media influence the decision-making process of general public. There are numerous instances when general public, guided by media, have taken preventive measures and avoided the outbreak of many seasonal diseases.

It is the media who provides information to general public about the free treatment of TB, Eczema, or other disease. It is the media who provide information to people that AIDS is not a contagious disease. So the patients of AIDS need not be outcast.

Importantly, to be effective -these health information / health related information need to be customised according to the target audiences. Also to be acceptable this customization should be in tune with the local cultural beliefs and practices.

Picture of Healthy India Campaign



### **CONCLUSION**

Health and communication are two most important aspects of human personality. Health is a vital resource for life, while communication is an integral aspect of any human being's personality. Mass media as a social institution, provides important input for health communication general public.

Mass media has immense potential of shaping the beliefs/ attitudes of the people in society. Having the wide reach among the far-flung areas, media have been instrumental in spreading health communication message among the populace of Rajasthan. Media play the catalytic role as change agent in the society. By informing and educating people about various health issues in the community, media provide knowledge and thus help bring a change in the attitude towards certain prevailing contemporary conditions / practices leading to better health practices in life. In the light of above facts it can be concluded that the planned and organised use of mass media for health communication may yield in positive health benefits for general public.

#### Suggestions

- More researches are proposed to study the link between different media and the health communication among general public.
- Since new media / social media (SNWs) are becoming fast popular, among the users (especially youth) the impact / influence of new media is yet to be determined by the social scientists.

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