

AIDS Awareness Programmes: An Analysis over the Role of Mass Media

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Abstract

HIV is preventable, and GMAI members aim to improve public awareness and knowledge to help stem the spread of HIV/AIDS. This research paper examines the importance of mass media in AIDS awareness programmes to reduce stigma and preventing transmission of HIV/AIDS. It discusses the meaning of mass media and its different functions. It also elaborates how different types of media like radio, television, newspaper and internet and social media can bring changes in habits and attitude regarding AIDS/HIV. It further highlights the significance of media UNAIDS organized and supported Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI) to unite and motivate media companies around the world to use their influence, resources, and creative talent to address AIDS. It also discusses contribution of Indian cinema and television programmes to present such a sensitive global health issue like AIDS in front of Indian public where cinema and television are the major means of entertainment.

Key Words: AIDS, HIV, Prevention, Awareness Programmes, & Role of Media.

Introduction

"HIV/AIDS is the worst epidemic humanity has ever faced. It has spread further, faster and with more catastrophic long-term effects than any other disease. Its impact has become a devastating obstacle to development. Broadcast media have tremendous reach and influence, particularly with young people, who represent the future and who are the key to any successful fight against HIV/AIDS." — *Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General*

Today mass media is a primary source of information for individuals as well as society. Mass media can be proving most effective tool to bring changes in people's habits and attitude. Media have played a leading role in shaping, guiding and reflecting the public

opinion. The research from around the world shows that mass media can be used for attitudinal and behavioural changes associated with HIV/AIDS (Bertrand et al., 2006). Considering its effectiveness Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI) was organising in New York in January 2004 in a meeting convened by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The GMAI unites and motivates media companies around the world to use their influence, resources, and creative talent to address AIDS. In this meeting he also asked the executives of 20 media corporations from 13 countries to pledge their companies' commitment and resources to raising the level of public awareness and understanding about AIDS.

Media effects on society to much by playing a role and acting as informer of facts to the society. It plays a vital role in democracy. It entertains the people by music, films, drama, dance, sports etc. It is also helpful in business, marketing and economic growth of a country. Thus it may be said that media has huge impact on society. Radio, Television and newspapers are the basic tools of mass media. Most of the people have easy access to these tools to get their desired information. Internet, mobile phones and other recent technologies has revolutionized the field of mass media.

Meaning of Media

The word 'media' derives its meaning from the Latin medium, which means 'in the middle'. Media refers various means of communication, its aim to reach a very large population, such as the entire population of country. In media entrepreneurship the media, refers to traditional mass communication system and content generators as well as other technologies for mediated human speech. This would include traditional publishing (newspapers, periodicals, or books), traditional electronic media (broadcasting, broadband, cable, or satellite), motion pictures, video gaming, recorded music, advertising, and adaptations of the Internet for any of these media.

Characteristics of Media

1. John Thompson of Cambridge University has identified the following characteristics of media:
2. It comprises both technical and institutional methods of production and distribution. This is evident throughout the history of the media from print to the internet, each suitable for commercial utility.

It involves the commoditisation of symbolic forms, as the production of material relies on its ability to manufacture and sell large quantities of the work. Just as radio station rely on its time sold to advertisements; newspapers rely for the same reasons on its space.

3. It separate contexts between the production and reception of information.

4. Its "reach to those 'for removed' in time and space, in comparison to the production".

5. Information distribution, a "One to many" form of communication, whereby products on mass production are disseminated to a great quantity of audiences.

Types of Media

Media can be classified in three categories:

1. Print Media- Newspapers, Magazines, Booklets and Brochures, Magazines, Periodicals or Newsletters, Press Releases, Books.
2. Electronic Media- Television, Radio, and Films.
3. Third types of media include Mobile Phones, Computers, and Internet.

There are different types of media having its specific characteristics on the basis of reach, audience, and accessibility. Print media like newspapers and magazines influence people, such as politicians and policy makers who often turn to print media for their news, intended to reach general public. Radio is available to a broad audience which is suitable to communicate local information. It has an entertainment function but also a venue for serious discussions. It's having Strong ability for interaction with call-in shows. Television is medium for serious news or for entertainment, depending on the outlet; some talk shows and news broadcasts are intended to entertain and to inform, which require strong visuals for the effective communications. Internet is the online media, like blogs, and social media. It is very effective in developed countries for communication and receiving the information, but low rate of accessibility. In developing countries, it can quickly disseminate (accurate or inaccurate) information globally.

Advantages of Media

- In many areas people get educated through the media. They learn many things form media about the politics, outside environment, etc.

- Media like television is a good source for the people to get updated through the electronic media.
- Electronic media makes people aware of world-wide things.
- Greater opportunities you get through this media sitting at your place, this is an advantage of media.
- Firstly people used to use radio for the news but as the generation changes the media generation also changes to television and other electronic devices.
- Also through this electronic media you can get to see many cultural events going in world.
- Elder citizen and children get more knowledge through this media.

Significance of Media

According to national surveys conducted in the United States, 72% of Americans identify television, radio and newspapers as their primary source of information about HIV/AIDS, more than doctors, friends and family. Similar statistics have also been reported in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the world.

In a survey carried out in India more than 70% of respondents said they had received their information about HIV/AIDS from television. Clearly, media organizations have an enormous influence in educating and empowering individuals to avoid contracting HIV. Doing so with maximum efficiency, however, requires a clear understanding of the challenges and the obstacles to widespread and effective HIV-prevention education.

Mass media have been major sources of information about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. In a study in year 2000, 96 percent of 1,290 men aged twenty-two to twenty-six reported hearing about these subjects through television advertisements, radio, or magazines. Some authorities have expressed scepticism about the mass media's future motivation to provide positive sex education messages, since portrayal of sex attracts viewers, which in turn, increases revenues.

Following are the some important methods which are being implemented in India to spread awareness among people about HIV/AIDS and to reduce stigma and discrimination.

- Radio and Television

- Media Campaign
- Movies/ Cinema
- Articles in News Paper and Magazines
- Hoardings and Pamphlets

In a research conducted by the author about Impact of AIDS awareness programmes in Allahabad, respondents were asked about the source of their information about HIV/AIDS. Table about ' Respondent's Source of information about HIV', reveals that major source of information of the respondents is television as 87 respondents admit it. 21 respondents in rural and 39 in urban area replied that they came to know about HIV from peer groups or by word of mouth publicity. 21 respondents in rural and 42 in urban area cited books and magazines as their source of information. 34 respondents in rural and 21 respondents in urban area cited radio as their source of information. About 26 (17.33 percent) respondents in rural and 61(40.67 percent) in urban area cited television as the main source of information. About 23(15.33 percent) respondents in rural and 15(10.00 percent) in urban area said that they came to know about HIV/AIDS from health workers/doctors. Only 20 (13.33 percent) respondents in rural and 42 (28.00 percent) in urban area cited all the above means as their source of information. A large section of the respondents 58 (38.67 percent) in rural and 43 (28.67 percent) in urban area) said that they had not heard about HIV/AIDS from any of the sources at all.

Thus, it may be concluded that out of total 300 respondents,47.30 percent respondents reported television and radio as their primary source of information about AIDS. In urban area as a larger number of people have access to TV therefore larger number of people cited TV as their source of information about HIV/AIDS. On the contrary, radio has a deeper penetration in rural areas.

RESPONDENT'S SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT HIV			
Source of Information	Rural	Urban	Total
People/Peer groups	21 (14.00)	39 (26.00)	60 (20.00)
Books/magazines	21 (14.00)	42 (28.00)	63 (21.00)
Radio	34	21	55

	(22.70)	(14.00)	(18.30)
Television	26 (17.30)	61 (40.70)	87 (29.00)
Health workers/ doctors	23 (15.30)	15 (10.00)	62 (20.70)
All the above	20 (13.30)	42 (28.00)	62 (20.70)
None	58 (38.700)	43 (28.70)	101 (33.70)
Base	150 (100.00)	150 (100.00)	300 (100.00)

Flora, Maibach and Maccoby (2010) also found that Health promotion of mass media reflects many level of influence on health behaviour including social and environmental level factors. The study explored that majority of youth heard about HIV/AIDS (Fuseini &Tawiah, 2013) and their medium for acquiring HIV/AIDS related information through television and personal communication sources that occur among friends, family members and teachers. Further, the findings of study showed that mass media exposure of youth acts as predictor of awareness about HIV/AIDS. Similar findings are found by Yadav et al. (2011).

Another study conducted by Santosh kumar Gautam revealed that television is main source among youth for acquiring HIV/AIDS related information. It can create awareness as well as provide favourable environment for acceptance of health messages. Television with their advocacy bring issues in the public's notice, help to create a favourable social climate, counter hostile propaganda, dispel rumours and clarify doubts and misunderstanding about health related issues. This study also explored that television can be helpful for motivating and moulding society in a positive direction of behavioural and attitudinal change towards PLWHAs.

Contribution of Indian Television, Cinema and Sport Events

Government of India used television in a more creative, intensive and interactive manner. National Television known as Doordarshan depicted sensitive topic of HIV/AIDS in creative, intensive and interactive manner. The programs were broadcast by Doordarshan are "KhamoshiKyon" (2001), "Talk Positive" (2001), "Jasoos Vijay" (2002), "Haath Se HaathMilaa" (2002), "Kalyani" (2002) and "KyonkiJeena Isi KaNaam Ha (2002)". Objective of these edutainment shows was to make people aware about HIV/AIDS. The messages of

HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention and control of disease were telecast through these programs. These shows also discussed about sexually transmitted disease, safe blood transfusion, safe sexual intercourse and blood safety, voluntary blood donation (Global Media AIDS Initiatives, 2004). In 2002, Doordarshan, NACO and the BBC World Service Trust joint hands to produce television programmes – the detective drama, *Jasoos Vijay* and a Reality show- *Haath Se Haath Mila*. This was the first mass media campaign on HIV/AIDS in India and was hugely successful. The award winning *Jasoos Vijay* had reached 125 million people of India.

As far as Indian Cinema Industry is concerned, it kicked into gear in August 2004 with the release of *PhirMilenge*, a film about a young advertising executive who gets infected by her boy-friend and her legal battle against discrimination at work. The film was entered for international awards by UNAIDS.

Another movie *My Brother Nikhil* was released in 2005. The film was based on a life of a young man from Goa during the early years of epidemic was the vehicle for exploring misconceptions about HIV/AIDS and its effect on relationships.

Sports have been proved an effective means for raising awareness about AIDS. The Buladi Para Football Tournament 2005, held in August in Kolkata, was used as a vehicle to raise awareness about syndrome by the Indian Football Association (IFA) and the West Bengal State AIDS Control Society. Cricketer Rahul Dravid began promoting the fight against HIV/AIDS in July 2003 as a member of the India AIDS Initiative Board of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI)

On January 15, 2004 GMAI was organized at a special meeting held at United Nation headquarters by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in coordination with the Kaiser Family Foundation and UNAIDS. The Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI) mobilizes leading media companies around the world to leverage their vast resources to address AIDS. Through large-scale national and regional coalitions of media—a network that includes hundreds of media companies around the world, including in Africa, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Latin America and India—the GMAI leverages the communication power of mass media to get out information about HIV and challenge stigma related to the disease.

The GMAI creates a framework for sharing television and radio programming among media companies in order to increase public health messaging. The organization also educates journalists, editors and producers on how to cover the issue. HIV is preventable, and GMAI members aim to improve public awareness and knowledge to help stem the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Within the GMAI, there are five national and regional coalitions of media companies. As of July 2009, the media initiatives in Africa, Asia, Russia, Latin America and the Caribbean included over 300 member broadcaster's total. The GMAI was conceived and organized by the Kaiser Family Foundation and UNAIDS with financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

A Public Education Partnership to Combat AIDS in India

The Gere Foundation India Trust in partnership with Avahan-India AIDS Initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kaiser Family Foundation and STAR India launched the Heroes Project, a three-year campaign to combat HIV/AIDS in India. STAR India/STAR Care, a division of the STAR Group Limited had made a commitment worth \$14 million over three years for cross platform media placement of HIV/AIDS public service messages (TV and radio), TV and radio entertainment programming and news coverage.

Although mass media are important tool for disseminating health messages for information and awareness and also encouraging an adoption of healthful lifestyles, they currently fall short of their potential. The realization of this potential in the future depends, in part, on increasing the media advocacy skills of public health authorities, improving understanding of competing anti-health media messages, and organizing channels for an optimal use of media. Small videos, acts and short messages in between movies, television programmes, cartoons and logos in newspaper and magazines, moving messages in during live telecast of news and sports events are the some opportunities for effective use of mass media to make people aware about AIDS, to inform people about actual causes of transmission of HIV virus and also to eradicate stigma and discrimination associated with AIDS.

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