Portrayal of Health Issues in Leading Urdu Newspapers - A Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Mass media is an important source of information in any modern society. It is the reliable, accurate, rapid, relevant and impartial source of information for the public about their health related issues. This research study aims to explore the portrayal of health issues in mass media. Health related content of mainstream Urdu newspapers are analyzed for the study. Time period of this study was from August, 2011 to April, 2012. The Daily Jang, Nawa-e-Waqat and The Express were selected as leading Urdu newspapers. The rationale behind choosing of these newspapers for the study is that these newspapers had wide circulation in the country. The unit of analysis for the study is the messages related to health published in the newspapers. This aspect of the study provides adequate information about the involvement of the press in health issues. The researcher tries to explore the space related to health issue and formats of this space as news, feature stories, advertisements and letters to editor. The researcher also tries to find out the direction of these news items as informative, uninformative and neutral. Results concluded that Urdu press follow similar policy as informative about the coverage of health related issues. Total number of news related to health issues published during the time period of the study were 343 out of which 317 (92%) news items were depicted as informative while only 9 (3%) present uninformative and 17 (5%) placed neutral.


INTRODUCTION

Health care situation in Pakistan is under the average, when statistics compared to others South Asian countries. Health conditions are very miserable in Pakistan (World Bank, 2005) [1]. Pakistan failed to control the infectious diseases like Malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhea etc. Pakistan joins World Health Organization in 1978 which laid foundation for the health sector, focusing health promotion and disease prevention in the country. First National Health Policy is introduced by Pakistan’s government in 1990 to cater the health problem and for the betterment of the citizen’s health (Ministry of Health, Government of Pakistan, 1990) [2]. Primarily it emphasized on family planning; school health services; malaria control programs; nutrition programs; communicable diseases control and availability of clean drinking water and sanitation. National Health Policies were introduced in 1997, 2001, 2003 and 2004 which focused on health education programs like “none -communicable diseases, such as, cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes were highlighted for prevention and control measures…. “the main goal is to create mass awareness in public health matters with a major focus on the use of multimedia to disseminate information” (Ronis & Nishtar, 2007)[3].

As it is predicted that mass media has an extreme influence on public behavior about their health. Newspapers are seemed easy in building perception of the public about different issues through agenda setting. Media and media polices maker has substantial power to which issue get more coverage in newspapers. Newspapers direct its audience to what they think about and how they take action on that. This way media attain its core function to inform the people, to educate the people, to influence the people and to change the people’s perception.

In September 2011, Dengue fever has created an epidemic situation in the country especially in the Punjab. Due to lake of awareness about dengue fever and insufficient preventive measures this disease spread rapidly. High cost of treatment and lake of specialization of relevant expertise is the major cause of widening this disease. In November 2011 more than 300 people died due to dengue fever and more than 14,000 were infected by this disease (Wikipedia, 2012) [4]. Most of these cases were reported in Punjab, Pakistan. Dengue fever become very severe in the urban areas of Lahore, where a
“Secretary Punjab Mineral Development Corporation, Ataullah Siddiqui and Ghausuddin, a Member of the Punjab Public Service Commission died as a result of the Dengue fever” (The News, 2011) [5]. Member of Provincial Assembly Mumtaz Jajja also died due to dengue virus infection (Tribune, 2011) [6].

Hepatitis is a very fatal disease and spreading rapidly in Pakistan. It is estimated that “Hepatitis B at 3-5 % and Hepatitis C at 7-10 % in Pakistan more people die of Hepatitis every day than terrorism in a year”(Mediol, 2012) [7]. According to latest figure of patients contaminated with Hepatitis C and B in Pakistan go above 15 million (Mediol, 2012) [7]. In August 2005, Prime Minister has initiated Hepatitis prevention and control program. Blood contamination and poor sanitation condition is the major cause of spread of hepatitis. Drug abusers are other carriers of this disease due to overuse of therapeutic injections and reusing of the syringes and shaving blades (Dawn, 2011) [8].

Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources PCRWR was reported in a research study that 80 percent drinking water sources in 24 districts were found unsafe and harmful to human beings. PCRWR (2012) [9] had stated that 250,000 children died due to impure water drinking and water born illness each year.

Cancer is another mortal disease in Pakistan. According to estimation one in every nine women in Pakistan is on possible risk of breast cancer. In these statistics Pakistan position is on the top of frequency rates in Asia.

HIV/AIDS is a new growing syndrome in Pakistan. Commercial sex and non-marital sex resulted aids in the society. Pakistan National AIDS Control Programme estimated that 97,000 individuals are HIV positive in the country (Wikipedia, 2012) [10]. This disease has outbreak due to unsafe sexual relation and lack of preventive measures like using syringes and shaving blades.

Method of content analysis is used to investigate the phenomenon. Health related contents of leading Urdu newspapers were analyzed. Time period of this study was August, 2011 to April, 2012. The Daily Jang, Nawa-e-Waqt and The Daily Express are selected as leading Urdu newspapers. Rationale behind selection of the content analysis is to find out the coverage and direction of the health related contents in the Urdu Press.

This research study addresses the following questions:

RQ: 1 To what extent coverage is given to the health content in Urdu press?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mass media plays an important role in providing and sharing information among the masses about different issues. Communities rely on the information presented by mass media regarding their health issues. They gather information about various disease and risk of their spread. This way media inform them how to counter with any epidemic and how adapt the preventive measures. World Health Organization defined health as, “a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities” (WHO, 1986) [11]. Furthermore it can be explained that, “the absence of disease or illness, health is the maximal attainment of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being” (Birse, 1998) [12].

Mass media had power to influence and direct the attention of public about certain issues. Cohen (1963) [13] explains as the media “may not be successful in telling their readers what to think, but are stunningly successful in telling their readers what to think about”. Freimuth et al. (1984) [14] presented that people are dependent to mass media for information about their health problems. According to Brown and Walsh-Childers (1994) [15] media coverage about health issues “tends to ascribe the power to control individuals’ health to medical experts using high-technology equipment”. Various studies have presented that mass media tend to boost coverage about health related issues as it effect on large number of masses in their audience.

Previous research studies about the media health literacy campaigns indicate that mass media had a potential to influence the attitude of individuals about their health issues. Mass media has sturdiest impact on life style and thinking of a community. Newbold (2011) [16] describes that, "Social media provides an outlet for the publication of health information to consumers, while allowing
consumers to respond and contribute to advice that was traditionally only issued by providers”. Mass media emerged as prominent and influencing forum between individuals and healthcare professionals to adopt and sustain a social change that ultimately improve health matter.

Health issues present less coverage than other issues. Media owners and polices makers had their own preferences and agenda which influence the coverage of health related issues. In America many health professionals adopted “media interventions as a way to address a broad variety of health threats to children and adolescents” (DeJong et al. 1992) [17]. They utilized different types of social media approaches to “change perceptions and attitudes around lifestyle choices, including aggressive behavior, alcohol and tobacco use, nutrition, illegal drug use, seat belt use, dental and medical care, and more exposure to messages that promote healthful lifestyle choices is acknowledged to be a valuable component of substance abuse prevention for children and youth” (DeJong et al. 1992) [18]. President Clinton (1998) [19] reveal one-billion dollar for advertising campaigns to mitigate drug use among the youth. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published a critical analysis report on media presentation of advertising that endorse the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs which concluded that media influence the public behavior.

Sustained community health education programs and awareness campaigns used mass media communication for the prevention of dieses. However, successful media campaign required extensive awareness program that contains provision of preventive measures. Community based programs should focused to promote healthy activities to reduce risk factors. As presented by Windahl et al. (1992) [20], “Information or communication cannot resolve problems that are essentially caused by scarce resources, rather than a lack of knowledge.” Burrows (1988: 16) [21] argued that, “A media campaign can be effective, but it means nothing unless the campaign is integrated into an overall approach dealing with the various aspects of the problem being addressed.” Brown (2001) [22] explained that possible message disagreement to campaigns resulted negative emotions.

Dennis and Merrill (1996) [23] wrote that mass media is “most powerful in furnishing information and setting agendas for members of a public . . . next powerful in impinging on the thoughts, opinions and attitudes of members of a public . . . [and] least powerful in affecting actions of members of a public.” Marcus et al. (1998) [24] elucidates that media campaigns also had “a crucial role to play in setting agendas for professional, administrative and political leaders and decision makers”. Freimuth et al. (2001) [25] describes that mass media exposure constantly influence on the behavior of the masses. This way mass media become “a vehicle that constantly reminds people to value” (Goddard, 2002) [26] health and acclimatized the preventative measures.

According to Wilkins & Ball-Rokeach (2006) [27] earlier health related studies had concentrated on four areas: I) “the extent to which specific health issues had been covered in the media.” II) “Media portrayals of public health crises”. iii) “the framing of health news stories related to public policy” and IV) “the portrayal of health behaviors in the media”. These studies focused on coverage of newspapers, magazines and electronic media. Wenger et al. (2001) [28] study focused on “newspaper’s coverage of tobacco industry and compared it to health consequences of tobacco use”. DiMaggio (2009) [29] identified neo-liberal media treatment of health improvement in America. He notes down that US media in general while The New York Times particularly diverts community attention from the increasing costs of medical items toward “private health care system” for profit.

Different studied concluded that media spotlight portrayal of behaviors like eating, drug and alcohol abuse, sex, smoking, entertainment programs and violence got more coverage rather than coverage of health issues (Diefenbach & West, 2001; Tirodkar & Jain, 2003; Greenberg et al., 2003) [30]. The majority of these studies have depicted that health related news stories failed to provide adequate information of health problems. Leask et al. (2010) [31] describes as, “For public health communicators to attempt to achieve their goals, it is essential to understand how the mass media works. Over the past three decades, a number of works have investigated how news is sought and shaped by journalists within media organizations. Others have proposed strategies for increasing news coverage of significant health and medical issues but these strategies need to be pursued carefully.” Actually reality is that health professionals and media persons had different values and goals and they
portrayed reality according to their own perception. When journalists reporting they focus on their agendas and frames reality lying on their preferences.

This study is supported by framing theory. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) [32] describe it as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (p. 143). Tankard, (1994) defined it “framing stems from a process of “selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration,” (p.3)[33]. Entman (1993) identified framing process as, “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described,” (p. 52)[34].

METHOD

Method of content analysis is adopted in this study. Content related to health issue appeared in print media were analyzed for the study. Content of The Daily Jang, Nawa-i-Waqat and The Daily Express published during August, 2011 to April, 2012 were studied. The study time period is divided into three parts; First part contained news content from August to October, 2011, second from November to January, 2012 and third is from February to April, 2012. According to Stacks and Hocking (1992) [35] content analysis is “a research method or a measurement technique that involves the systematic study of the content of communication messages”.

National Urdu newspapers published in Pakistan are the universe of the study. Three mainstream Urdu newspapers were selected due to wide circulation. The Daily Jang has started its publication in 1939. It had wide circulation as Urdu newspaper in the country. Circulation of The Daily Jang is more than 850,000.copies daily (Pressreference, 2012) [36]. Nawa-i-Waqat has started as a fortnightly periodical on March 23, 1940. It was turned into daily on July 19, 1944. Nawa-e-Waqat holds second place with 500,000 copies daily (Pressreference, 2012) [37]. The Daily Express, initiated on September 3, 1998. It grew rapidly as national Urdu language newspaper in the country. The Daily Express “claims to have a 24% circulation share” (Wikipedia, 2012) [38].

The core function of newspapers is to inform public and spread information. They published "news items" which contained description of any event. In this study all health related content are sorted in four categories. Category "A" contained general news stories related to health issues, Category "B" enclosed the editorial pages including letter to editor, "Features stories" printed on health issues and health seminars sorted in category "C" , While advertisement and public service messages are collected in the category "D".

Direction of Health Items

Informative; All those news stories, editorials, feature stories and public service messages were considered informative if they are providing information about health problems, preventions, awareness and supporting the health related activities.

Uninformative; All those news stories, editorials, feature stories and public service messages were considered uninformative if they condemn or criticize negatively health related activities or campaigns.

Neutral; All health issues were considered neutral which are moderately presented and not categorized informative or uninformative.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the selected study period total numbers of news content related to health issues were 343. In first part of the study, The Daily Jang published 35 (10%) news items related to health, Nawa-i-Waqat 42 (12%) and The Daily Express 29 (8%). In second part of the study Jang published 34 (9.91), Nawa-i-Waqat 46 (13.41) and Express 33 (9.62). In third part of the study Jang 39 (11.37), Nawa-i-Waqat 49 (14.28) and Express 36 (10.49) health items published (Table 1).

In the first part from August, 2011 to October, 2011, The Daily Jang published 35 (11%) news items out of which 14 (40%) in Category A, 3 (8%) in Category B, 9 (25%) in Category C and 9 (25%) in category D. Nawa-i-Waqat published 42 (12%) news items out of which 13 (31%) in Category A, 8
(19%) in Category B, 13 (31%) in Category C and 8 (19%) in category D. The Express published 29 (8.5%) news items out of which 13 (45%) in Category A, 3 (10%) in Category B, 6 (20%) in Category C and 7 (24%) in category D.

In the second part from November, 2011 to January, 2012, The Daily Jang published 34 (10%) news items out of which 18 (53%) in Category A, 5 (14%) in Category B, 8 (23%) in Category C and 3 (9%) in category D. Nawa-i-Waqat published 46 (13%) news items out of which 22 (47%) in Category A, 10 (21%) in Category B, 10 (21%) in Category C and 4 (9%) in category D. The Express published 33 (9%) news items out of which 19 (57%) in Category A, 1 (3%) in Category B, 10 (30%) in Category C and 3 (10%) in category D.

In the third part from February, 2012 to April, 2012, The Daily Jang published 39 (11%) news items out of which 20 (51%) in Category A, 4 (10%) in Category B, 7 (18%) in Category C and 8 (20%) in category D. Nawa-i-Waqat published 49 (14%) news items out of which 21 (43%) in Category A, 9 (18%) in Category B, 11 (22%) in Category C and 8 (37%) in category D. The Express published 36 (10%) news items out of which 19 (52%) in Category A, 1 (3%) in Category B, 6 (16%) in Category C and 10 (27%) in category D (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mont</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Category A* (%</th>
<th>Category B* (%)</th>
<th>Category C* (%)</th>
<th>Category D* (%)</th>
<th>Direction of health items</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part-I</td>
<td>Jang</td>
<td>35 (10.20)</td>
<td>14 (40)</td>
<td>3 (8.57)</td>
<td>9 (25.71)</td>
<td>9 (25.71)</td>
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<td>Nawa-i-Waqat</td>
<td>42 (12.24)</td>
<td>13 (39.50)</td>
<td>8 (24.04)</td>
<td>13 (39.50)</td>
<td>8 (24.04)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>29 (8.45)</td>
<td>13 (44.82)</td>
<td>3 (10.34)</td>
<td>6 (20.68)</td>
<td>7 (24.13)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-II</td>
<td>Jang</td>
<td>34 (9.91)</td>
<td>18 (52.94)</td>
<td>5 (14.70)</td>
<td>8 (23.52)</td>
<td>3 (8.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawa-i-Waqat</td>
<td>46 (13.41)</td>
<td>22 (47.82)</td>
<td>10 (21.73)</td>
<td>10 (21.73)</td>
<td>4 (8.69)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>33 (9.62)</td>
<td>19 (57.57)</td>
<td>1 (4.70)</td>
<td>10 (30.30)</td>
<td>3 (9.09)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-III</td>
<td>Jang</td>
<td>39 (11.37)</td>
<td>20 (51.28)</td>
<td>4 (10.25)</td>
<td>7 (17.94)</td>
<td>8 (20.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawa-i-Waqat</td>
<td>49 (14.28)</td>
<td>21 (42.85)</td>
<td>9 (18.36)</td>
<td>11 (22.44)</td>
<td>8 (36.73)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>36 (10.49)</td>
<td>19 (52.77)</td>
<td>1 (2.77)</td>
<td>6 (16.66)</td>
<td>10 (27.77)</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>159 (46.35)</td>
<td>44 (12.82)</td>
<td>80 (23.32)</td>
<td>60 (17.49)</td>
<td>317 (92.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*News stories (Category A), Editorials pages (Category B), Feature stories (Category C), Public services messages (Category D).

In the categories of the contents, category A news stories of health issues present 159 (46%) a large number of news stories followed by category C, 80 (23%) as Features Stories (Fig.1).
In these three parts during nine month research study The Daily Jang published 108 (31%) news items out of 343 total news items. While Nawa-i-Waqat stand at top with the coverage of 137 (40%) out of 343 total news items and The Express placed with low coverage as 98 (29%) news items during the whole study (Fig.2). In the direction of health items newspapers framed 317 (92%) news items an informative while only 9 (2.6%) portray as uninformative, remaining 17 (5%) were neutral.

When researcher take an overview of coverage of health issues it was founded that Nawa-i-Waqat (40 %) endowed more coverage comparatively The Daily Jang (31 %) and The Express (29 %) as showed in figure 2.

This research study intended to explore the portrayal of health issues in mainstream Urdu newspapers. Health related content of mainstream Urdu newspapers were analyzed for the study. Generally results of mainstream Urdu newspapers were not different. All selected newspapers presents similar coverage in some categories while differ in some cases. In category B editorial pages the Daily Express give very rare coverage to health issues but Nawa-i-Waqat appeared as leading coverage in all categories.

The content analysis of nine month was done that were divided into three parts every part contained three month study. All the findings were calculated separately as shown in table 1. Third part of the study presents more coverage. It was the time period after the outbreak of Dengue fever in the country. The outbreak of Dengue fever consequently alerts the government and media. In this time period public service messages based on “Dengue fever” prevention appeared rapidly in the newspapers. News based on government’s activity for reduction of Dengue fever was found as informative in this time period.
Basically outcome of the study present the assumption that media framing health issues with some extent as Urdu mainstream newspapers portrayed it. Total health related issues published in the time period of the study were 343 as showed in table 1. In total 343 health issues 159 (46.35%) were general news stories published on front back and inner pages of the newspapers and after it feature news stories 80 (23.32%) obtained more coverage in health issues. When we take view that how media framed that issues it presented that out of 343 health issues 317(92.4%) framed as informative where only 9 (2.2%) were uninformative while 17 (4.9%) presented as neutral (as showed in Table 1).

CONCLUSION

Print media is a powerful source which can put up a gigantic change in the society. Many social institutions, voluntary organizations, NGO’S and government’s institutions had focused on print media to communicate, inform and educate the public about health issues. Newspapers always focused with priority issue like politics, national and international affairs and give less coverage to health issues. Same statement is issued by Weber (1990) [39]. Crime and violence are the second last issues covered by print media. News related to health issues is widely covered in the Urdu press but it is considered necessary to published in depth interviews, seminars and detailed information about health problems.

This study was accomplished on health related contents emerged in print media. After the detailed content analyses of health related issues in main stream Urdu newspapers the researcher concluded that these newspapers had followed a similar policy to give less coverage to health issues. Nawa-iwaqt depicts health items more informative and supportive to resolve the health problems while other presented those issues as general way. There should be trained medical beat reporters with having medical background. This way they can easily explained and discussed the medical issues. Media policy maker should take a review on that to give sufficient coverage to health issues. Family medical doctors can play an important and effective role as the provide coverage on media for community awareness campaigns.

REFERENCES

