

ROLE OF FOLK MEDIA IN PROPAGATING THE MESSAGES FOR HEALTHPROMOTION

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ABSTRACT

The term Communication” refers to a social process – the flow of information, the circulation of ideas and propagation of thoughts. The role of communication in the health and family welfare programme is to help, motivate people to accept the idea: the ultimate aim of communication inputs is to bring about change in behavior. The IEC input is a three channel media network: Mass Media, Mid Media including folk Media and Inter-personal communication. A strategy is a particular combination of resource within a administrative framework to achieve goals of influencing audience behavior in the desired direction. In India there have been no detailed exercises in evolving comprehensive IEC strategy, particularly for the unreached areas.

INTRODUCTION

Ninety percent of world’s population lives in the developing countries and 70 per cent of them lives in rural areas. Mass media such as newspapers, television, radio and the internet do not effectively reach these people. The high rates of illiteracy adds to the inadequate reach of mass media as vast majority of India’ s population who resides in the rural areas are illiterate. Therefore the reach and effectiveness of mass media have not made an impact in certain areas and use of Inter-personal communication is very limited due to geographical locations, linguistic and cultural barriers. Folk arts and folk media are the aesthetic components of the concepts of belonging and affinity in a cultural context. In rural societies, art is an integral part of the process of living in the community. Folk media are classified as audio-visual media because one hears and sees the artistes and their messages. It has double impact of both seeing and listening. It tries to engage the audience face to face and brings them closer to the media. One gets quick and instant feedback in the folk media. Folk media are still the only means of entertainment for some regions in rural India. These media are still alive in villages and continue to provide both information and entertainment to the people in remote areas who are not exposed to the modern media of communication. Thus, folk media are very useful in a country like ours to inform, educate and entertain the poorer and illiterate sections of the society. Folk media have been in existence in India for long and have been used as a medium of communication, particularly in remote parts of the country where the modern media of communication has either less penetration or no penetration at all. Despite the revolution of modern media including; new media such as internet, social networking such as facebook, whatsapp twitter etc., the folk media yet occupy some space in the delivery of messages to a large number of people in the country. The folk media are defined as ‘ those media which attempt to communicate a message to a particular group of target audiences in a given time in local dialect with entertainment’. Folk media, hence, become personal forms of communication and can be considered to be matchless persuasive means of communication for policy makers and administrators’ and an inexhaustible treasure of colorful forms and meaningful themes for mass

media personnel^[1].

During the years preceding the advent of electronic media, the folk media not only reflected the joys and sorrows of people, but also inspired the masses. Mass media have extended the area of coverage of a folk performance, while folk media, with their inspiring colour and costumes, dance and music; have enriched the content of the mass media channels. In addition, utilization of folk media for communication revives culture. Systematic organization of people's performances makes the motivational work more community based with the objectives of social and economic betterment and cultural revival^[1].

Every region has its own folk art form that is immensely popular in that area. The major limitation of folk media is that they cannot reach the mass audiences. They cannot create greater awareness, however, this problem can be overtaken by binding traditional media with modern media, such as Television, Radio and film.

In 1972 a series of meetings on the Integrated Use of Folk Media and Mass Media in Family Planning Communication Programmes were organized in London by the International Planned Parenthood Federation and UNESCO which represented the importance of folk media in communication and development strategies of the developing countries. The meeting identified folk media as a vehicle for the expression of development messages. India's interest in the potential of folk media as a communication device pre-dates the 1972 meeting. The need to use folk media for this purpose was anticipated during India's First Five-Year Plan. The Song and Drama Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was created in 1954 to meet this need and the Division is still active^[2]. It makes the use of "live entertainment media to make the masses aware of the various national programmes and objectives" and has 12 regional centers, 1000 empanelled artists of its own and some 700 private troupes registered with it. The media it uses include puppetry, plays, dances, ballets and 'harikathas'. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare gives to the division funds from its own budget for publicity through the folk media. The programmes are designed at the division's headquarters and centers. The mobile units of the Directorate of Field Publicity and the troupes, both official and private, of the song and drama division come in direct contact with people in villages. The communication channel they provide is more intimate and vibrant and can be extremely useful from the point of view of family planning. But their limitations are severe. As mentioned earlier, the total number of people they reach in a whole year is less than what the cinema in the city does in less than a week^[3].

The prominent features of folk media include:

- (i) Non-technological in nature but flexible and culturally rigid;
- (ii) limited reach;
- (iii) Tremendous impact on the audiences as the messages are presented live before them;
- (iv) More appealing effect to the target audience as it has been designed in communication cum entertainment mode so as to make the messages more appropriate, understandable and convincing;
- (v) Effective in communication because of its cultural compatibility;
- (vi) Instant feedback because of face to face interaction;
- (vii) Operate with the motto of minimum input and maximum output- Bringing about changes in the behaviour of the target audience; and
- (viii) Privileges of attracting the people easily^[4].

Folk media are of various kinds and vary from place to place, culture to culture and region to region, but in all these forms the purpose remains the same, that is to inform, educate and

entertain the audiences for generating awareness among them about various development issues, including health and family welfare, rural development, agriculture, social aspects etc. Different methods of folk media are predominantly used in different parts of the country according to the pulse of the audiences.

The song and drama division of the Government of India uses various forms of traditional media to spread awareness on a number of social issues like AIDS, polio immunization etc.^[4] Similarly Pala, a folk form of ballad singing is used for spreading awareness on various social issues by the Government of Orissa.

The use of folk media as a means of education, publicity and propaganda is by means a recent phenomenon in India. Since the end of 19th century, folk media have been exploited as a method of raising the political and social consciousness of the people and also educating the audience. Thus, the role of folk media in publicizing the social projects such as family planning, five year plans, national integration, modern methods of agriculture, and matters of hygiene and nutrition. Private agencies have produced several plays on social themes either with or without official backing and support. The government sponsored play relates to family planning, health and nutrition attended by large number of population. Individuals who have used folk forms as an expression of their own creative impulses have been able to embody their social concerns in forms which communicate effectively^[2].

Policy makers involved in planning and implementation of research and extension activities should use the combinations of folk and electronic extension methods, make available digital libraries and facilitate internet connections in villages. In a developing country like India, an effective communication system of folk media along with mass media is an essential element in producing healthy & literate individuals for bringing about effective participation in nation building activity. All these together contribute immensely for making rural development a reality.

According to Chiovoloni et al. (2004), for sustainable development of villages, there is a need for close collaboration between development agents, traditional and new rural communicators to revive or strengthen the traditional communication system for making optimal use of its interactive power to stimulate people's participation^[7].

All India Radio has in the past done some work in the use of folk songs to convey social messages. For example, 'Songs of the nation's builders' titled programme was broadcast on radio in which folk singers were invited to present songs in their traditional folk styles depicting the progress made in their respective regions. 'Nai Naveli Nautankee' - is a series of programme written in hindi and produced by Urmil kumar from All India Radio, Lucknow^[8].

Doordarshan also used folk media in different programmes widely. 'Basanter Tika Nin' (1977) used glove puppets to allay the fears of children regarding small pox vaccinations. The programme was mainly designed for rural children within the reach of the Calcutta television centre. Similarly the leather shadow puppets in Orissa were devoted to the theme of family planning.

IFPSA formulated a state wide communication strategy for health and family planning in Uttar Pradesh, developed BCC campaign titled 'Aao, Batein Karein' illustrated by Tota and Mynah, birds derived from folk lore recognized in UP associated with storytelling, with the aim of bringing the hitherto taboo subject of family planning out into the open and triggering dialogue between young couples, providers and clients, between policymakers and implementers. They had also trained the folk troupes in various folk forms - Nautanki, Nukkad Natak, Puppet Show, Jadu and Birha, to

raise awareness and knowledge of NHM, family planning methods, JSY and allay myths and misconceptions associated with different component, proved to be a tremendous success.

CONCLUSION :

Folk media is still a veritable tool in expression of development messages; including health and family welfare have been fully recognized. The National Population Policy (2000) also emphasized the importance of communication of messages by the folk media by making simple, very clear, focused messages coupled with local dialect and entertainment. Communication of message has been practical in approach and goes to the heart and head of the people. So many folk media are used for propagation of messages on health and family welfare in different parts of the country. Nautanki, Puppets, Hari Katha, Comedy, Bhand Pather, Kariyala, Veedh-Natakam, Naqal, Villupattu, Powada and Baul, are some of the popular forms of folk media found in India for communication of messages on social issues as well as on health. Folk media become more impactful when used with mass media and people use it only for getting information but for putting the information into action, they need channels like inter-personal communication or the media which can help them remove their queries. Folk media have some limitation but their impact cannot be underestimated.

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