

Neglecting Press and Failure in Population Control in Pakistan

Dr. Bakht Rawan

Abstract

The present study analyzed the contents of national daily newspapers "The News" and "Jang" for the year 1999 and found that very little coverage has been given to family planning. The researcher considers this insignificant coverage as one of the main factors in failure of controlling the evergrowing /population in Pakistan.

Introduction

In today's climate in socio –economic and political change around the world, mass media can play a decisive role in promoting innovations in individual as well as collective life. Social change both at the micro and macro levels is not only due to mass media and other sources of communication. The prevailing social, political and economic conditions of a social system are of much importance, but even then communication in its various forms is indispensable for introducing change in a society. Theories of social change – evolutionary, revolutionary and Marxist, all acknowledge communication as one of the important basic factors required for a social change (AIOU, 2000).

There are various means and channels used to reach the target audience, and the use of any channel must be made according to the needs and demands of the situation. However, to ensure greater access to the target group and secure their attention multiple sources of communication should be utilized by the campaign planners. Working on "Media effects of advertising" David W. Steward and Scott Ward have found that frequent opportunities to see ads, that is a higher frequency of advertising produced greater results (Zillmann, 1993). The need for media coverage arises when people are to be motivated to derive maximum benefits. Media is a subject of communication and "Communication is a process". This implies that communication occurs over a period of time. It is not a product, not merely the production of a brochure, a poster, or a social drama; it consists of a series of activities that include listening, reflection, expression, testing and adaptive changes in feelings and behavior. It is the process of identifying, segmenting and targeting specific groups / audiences with particular strategies and messages through various mass media and interpersonal channels (Iqbal and Zaidi, 1997). In diffusion of innovations (new ideas, objects or practices) mass media along with other available means of communication can play an effective role. Still (1958) found that if the probability of adoption is to be maximized communication channels must be utilized in an ideal time sequence, progressively from mass media to interpersonal channels. As the very name suggests mass media are important means used to approach wide scattered masses. Mass media channels are relatively more important at the knowledge function..... in the innovation-decision process (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1962). As compared to other channels mass media are usually cheaper, immediate and at times more credible. The effects of mass media at all levels- cognitive, affective and conative, has been a debatable issues since the birth of film in 1920s.

Earlier mass media were considered very powerful (the magic bullet theory); like all animals, human beings thought to be guided by a uniform set of instincts; media messages were assumed as like symbolic bullets striking every eye and ear, and resulting in effects on thought and behavior that are direct, immediate, uniform and therefore powerful(Lowery and DeFleur, 1994). However later on media effects studies denied such assumption's and found that media effects are not direct, these effects are varied in extent and nature for different individuals (Cantril, 1940). Nevertheless it has been objectively proved that mass media do exert influence on their consumers it may be more or less. Walter Lippmann had noted that since people had only limited opportunities to observe important events in a firsthand manner, they were dependant upon the press to provide them with information on what those events were like. The role of the press, he observed, was to provide us with views of "the world outside" from which we can form "pictures in our heads". Similarly, Bernard Cohen in 1963 noted that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its

readers what to think about". Likewise Donald L. Shaw and Prof. Maxwell E. Mc Comb hypothesized that the mass media set agenda for each political campaign, influencing the silence of attitudes toward the political issues. (Shaw and McComb used five newspapers two magazines and two television network evening news broadcasts). Their findings supported an agenda setting effect. Their data suggest a very strong relationship between the emphasize placed on different campaign issues by the media and the judgment of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics (Lowery and DeFleur, 1994).

Keeping in view the above facts one feels no hesitation in saying that for effective diffusion of some innovation the campaign planners should capitalize on the services of mass media along with other channels of communication. The objective may be awareness regarding the innovation, changing hostile attitude of masses (target group) towards the innovation or adoption of the innovation behaviorally. But this has not been the case in the use of print media (daily newspapers) for the diffusion of family planning in Pakistan at least in the year 1999.

The present study has been focused on the use of leading national Urdu and English daily newspapers for family planning, the year 1999. In the following lines we would discuss the population scenario in Pakistan and the use of print media (daily The News and "Jang") in campaign for population planning.

The State of Population in Pakistan

Pakistan's population is on the rise right from its appearance on the world map in 1947. By that time Pakistan hold 14 th position among the most populous countries of the world. However, after separation of its East part, then called East Pakistan and the present day Bangladesh, Pakistan lost his position. But with an overwhelming growth rate of three percent plus (3% +) until 1990s (Economic Survey of Pakistan 1995-96) Pakistan within a span of just 30 years not only regained its lost status rather she overtook other sister countries in the race of increasing population and fixed its position at # seven on the list of world most populous countries (cf Dawn, April, 17, 1998).

The everincreasing population caused great concern among policy makers as being a developing country whose economy is mainly based on agriculture Pakistan can not afford the prevailing growth rate. In fact high population rate is detrimental to a country like Pakistan because it nullifies all efforts of social development and puts a tight break on economic growth of the country.

Family Planning in Pakistan

Population planning is the only way to avoid the social, economic and large scale psychological hazards of over-population. The benefits of population planning touch all levels – individual, family, community, national and even globe. It enhances the quality of life by reducing infant mortality, improving maternal health and alleviating pressures on governments to meet social and economic needs. In addition, access to family planning can be seen as a human right and as a means to enlarge women's life options.

Government resources are stretched thin even to provide minimum levels of education, health care, housing, water and sanitation leaving alone the jobs to the ever-growing number of people in the country.

Family planning has been advocated in Pakistan in one form or the other since the formulation of five year plans. Initially as social welfare activity undertaken in 1953 by an NGO, Family Planning Association of Pakistan in urban areas (First Plan 1954 – 60). Later on it was provided as health package through government health outlets (1960 – 65). But a serious attempt as a population planning activity was made through a well-funded, well-staffed autonomous organization on a massive scale during the Third Plan (1965 – 70). It continued by fits and starts to date depending upon the political commitment of government.

In spite of distribution (During July 1988 to June 1996) of 430 million condoms, 11 million oral pills, 0.58 million foam bottles, 6.966 million injectables, 5.545 CUT insertions, we have failed to make a dent in the boom (Iqbal and Zaidi, 1997).

Reasons

There may be various reasons like individual, political, economic, sociological, etc for failure in bringing the population growth rate down in Pakistan. Here we have taken care of only one dimension of this multi-dimensional problem. That is the use of print media (daily newspapers) in the campaign of family planning in Pakistan.

The main question before the researcher in this study was to find out the extent of coverage given to family planning in national daily newspapers. An Urdu daily "Jang" and an English daily The News were selected for the study. The study period was the whole year of 1999.

Print media and Family Planning

Print media are usually regarded as closely correlated with education. But this assumption carries little weight because print media like other mass media have secondary audience. The number of secondary audience may, in many cases, be far larger than the original audiences (Black and Whitney, 1988). Its impact may be direct as well as indirect, mediated through opinion leaders.

Abdul Hakim and Badar –ud-Din Tanweer in their study "effectiveness of media messages in promoting family planning program in Pakistan" 1996 found that 50.3% currently married women aged 15-49 have ever read newspapers as compared to 32.6% and 29.0% who ever watched television and ever listened radio respectively. The above facts strongly recommend the use of print media for family planning program in Pakistan.

The present study evaluated the content of the two papers in categories of news, features, columns, editorials, cartoons, advertisements and special supplements. Content analysis of both the papers gives the following picture:

Findings from one year file of the two leading daily newspapers in both Urdu and English language "Jang" and "The News", show very little published material on the issue of family planning program (Zaidi, 2002). Coverage given to family planning in news, features, columns, editorials, cartoons, advertisements and special supplements is as under

Editorial

The 365 issues of the daily Jang, showed that not a single editorial had been written during the whole year on the subject of family planning program

Columns

The Jang carried only one brief column in which the writer has highlighted the necessities of pursuing family planning program in a more effective and result oriented passion.

Feature

The newspapers did not contain a single feature in any of its issue during the entire year. Even on the Population Day which is observed in the country every year on 11 th July no feature was given/written on this important issue.

Cartoons

On the cartoon side there was a total black out throughout the year.

News Items

News item wise the situation was slightly better. A total of 19 newspaper items regarding family planning appeared in daily Jang in 1999. Four in the month of March, three in May, one in June, two in August, five in October, one in November and three in December. There was no news regarding family planning in January, February, April, July and September.

Special Supplement

The Newspaper did not published any special supplement throughout the year (1999) despite the fact that **six billion day** was also held on 12 th October, 1999.

Advertisement

In the span of the 12 months only five advertisements were placed about family planning in the Daily Jang. One advertisement approached in May, three in October, and one in December. None of these advertisements appeared on either the back or the front page

Editorial

The 365 issues of the English language national daily "The News" published from Rawalpindi showed that not a single editorial had been written during the whole year on the subject of family planning.

Column

The statistics from 365 issues of The News carried two columns in the month of October. No column was written in The News during the rest of the year.

News Items

The total number of news Items regarding family planning published by the newspaper during the year 1999 is twenty (20). Two news appeared in January, two in April, one in May, two in July, one in August, two in September eight in October and two in November. For the months of February, March, June and December there was news in the paper regarding the issue.

Advertisements

In the span of the 12 months, no advertisement was placed about family planning in The News.

Feature, Cartoon and Special Supplement

Avoiding press in diffusion of some innovation in some social set up is equal to minimize the chances of access to the target audience. There might be various sociological, psychological, economic and political reasons for failure in controlling the ever increasing population growth in Pakistan. Among those various reasons there is one obvious reason of neglecting the press. The press has not been properly used in the family planning campaign. Specifically speaking in the year 1999 the press has been given very little importance by the campaign planners. The overt and covert publicity efforts in the press of the campaign is insignificant. During the whole year only 39 news items, three columns and five advertisements

regarding family planning in both the papers i.e. The News and Jang appeared. The researcher recommends that for effective accessibility to the target group all means of communication should be utilized properly. And in future newspapers should be given due attention in all public campaigns.

About the author

Dr. Bakht Rawan, Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad

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