

APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY IN PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGNS

Syarifuddin *¹

Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua
syarif1572@gmail.com

Indah Sulistiani

Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua
indahsulistiani175@gmail.com

Laode Aharuddin Kapege

Universitas Halu Oleo
aharuddinlaode4@gmail.com

Al-Amin

Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia
al.amin-2024@feb.unair.ac.id

Abstract

This literature review aims to analyze the effectiveness of communication theories in improving public health campaign outcomes. By studying various sources and related literature, the review identifies how the use of communication theories, such as Meaningful Action Theory, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, and Behavior Change Theory, can provide valuable insights in planning and implementing effective communication strategies in a public health context. From this analysis, the study also considered the influence of technology and media in facilitating the dissemination of health messages, as well as how target audiences receive and process these messages. The results show that the strategic application of communication theory has significant potential in improving the effectiveness of public health campaigns. Key findings highlighted the importance of tailored approaches to specific audiences to increase resonance and relevance of messages, the importance of integrating multimedia communication strategies to extend reach and impact, and the need to understand the dynamics and preferences of target audiences. By strategically applying communication theory in the design and implementation of health campaigns, organizations and practitioners can achieve increased awareness, attitude change, and adoption of desired health behaviors among the broader public. The implications of these findings underscore the importance of a theory-based communication approach in enhancing the effectiveness of public health interventions.

Keywords: Application, Communication Theory, Public Health Campaign.

¹ Correspondence author.

Introduction

Advances in information and communication technology have opened up new horizons in the delivery of public health campaigns, which are expected to reach a wider audience in a more cost-efficient manner (Portugal, 2020). With widespread access to the internet and social media platforms, health information can now be disseminated quickly and reach individuals in different parts of the world, regardless of geographical boundaries. However, with this great opportunity comes significant challenges (Clayton-Johnson et al., 2021). The critical issue is how to ensure that health messages are not only widely disseminated but are also able to be received, understood, and encourage positive health behavior change. With so much information available, health messages need to be designed and delivered in a way that is engaging and prioritized by recipients amidst the daily flood of news and digital content (DeBate & Gatto, 2021).

Communication theory provides a framework for understanding how messages can be structured and delivered for maximum effectiveness. With health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of health communication has become critical. Successful health campaigns not only convey information, but also inspire and motivate people to take action (Myrick et al., 2023); (Powell et al., 2020).

Amidst the abundance of information and messages competing for audience attention, understanding and applying communication theory in the design and distribution of public health campaigns becomes increasingly important. Appropriate use of communication theory principles helps in designing messages that not only attract attention but also motivate behavior change (Zhang & Lu, 2024). In this context, theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior, the Health Belief Model, or the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, provide a framework for understanding the factors that influence the attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of a person or community regarding health issues (Hermanto & Katmini, 2021). By incorporating these principles in health campaigns, practitioners can identify what messages are most likely to be received and how best to deliver them to target audiences (Mehdizadeh-Maraghi & Nemati-Anaraki, 2023).

In addition, the adaptation and application of theory-based communication strategies in campaigns should be tailored to the demographic and sociocultural characteristics of the target audience. This includes understanding media preferences, health literacy levels, cultural norms, and other factors that influence how audiences process health information (Wibowo & Permassanty, 2024). Thus, the application of communication theory is not only about choosing the right media for distribution, but also about designing messages that respect the diversity of the audience. Effective health communication brings the challenge of bridging the gap between knowledge of desired health behaviors and actual actions by the public (M.-L. Du et al., 2021). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the application of various communication theories in the context of public health is key in formulating campaigns that are not only

informative, but also transformative. However, the successful application of theoretical aspects into practice is still variable, and sometimes less well understood in the context of Health behavior change (Küçükali, 2023); (Lin, 2022).

Therefore, it is important to conduct a more in-depth study on how communication theory can be applied effectively in the current context. This study seeks answers to key questions about the application of communication principles in health campaigns, so as to provide more specific and evidence-based guidance for future initiatives. This study is expected to provide new insights for public health practitioners, policy makers, and academics involved in the development and implementation of public health campaigns.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses a literature review. The literature research method is a systematic approach that involves collecting, reviewing, and analyzing publications related to the research subject to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic under study (Jelahut, 2022); (JUNAIDI, 2021). This method allows researchers to identify, analyze, and synthesize existing research results in the literature, thereby enhancing understanding of a particular phenomenon or answering specific research questions (Abdussamad, 2022). This technique is vital in forming the theoretical foundation for further study and can involve various types of sources such as scientific journals, books, articles, and others to ensure breadth and depth of analysis. In practice, conducting a literature study entails a systematic selection of relevant keywords for data search, followed by a critical evaluation of the materials found to determine their relevance and significance to the research topic (Wekke, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Communication Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, developed by Everett Rogers in 1962, is one of the most important and widely used communication theories to understand how a new idea or innovation is adopted in a society (Willis & Painter, 2020). Rogers identified five categories of adoption: Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, and Late Rejecters, each of which has specific characteristics in accepting innovations. The theory also emphasizes four main elements that influence the speed of innovation adoption: the attributes of the innovation itself, individual adoption decisions, communication channels, and the nature of the society or social system (Suarez-Lledo & Mejova, 2022); (Rone, 2023). In the context of public health, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory can help health campaign designers identify and target different groups with appropriate strategies to increase acceptance of new health practices (Vieira & Li, 2024).

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a psychological framework developed in the 1950s by researchers at the U.S. Public Health Service to predict and explain individual health behaviors with a focus on personal health beliefs (Huang, 2022). The HBM is based on the understanding that a person's health-related actions are influenced by personal perceptions of susceptibility to a disease or health condition, the severity of the disease or condition, the benefits of preventive or treatment measures, and the barriers to taking such measures (Demeter & Bajnok, 2022). This model has been used extensively in health campaigns to design messages that encourage people to take preventive action, such as immunizations or cancer screenings, by highlighting the benefits of action and providing solutions to overcome barriers (Willis & Painter, 2020).

Finally, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was developed by Icek Ajzen as an extension of the Theory of Meaningful Action. TPB suggests that behavior is the result of behavioral intentions, which are influenced by attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Nganda, 2023). In other words, a person will be more likely to behave in a certain way if they want to do so, they believe other important people expect them to behave in that way, and they feel they have the control or ability to do so (Weber et al., 2022). In the context of health campaigns, the TPB helps in designing interventions that not only change attitudes and norms related to health behaviors, but also increase individuals' beliefs in their ability to influence their own health outcomes (Vourc'h et al., 2022).

The Diffusion of Innovations theory has been used extensively in health contexts to facilitate the acceptance and implementation of various health innovations, such as vaccinations, digital health technologies, and new public health practices. For example, in the introduction of a new vaccine, an understanding of individual adoption categorization allows health professionals and policy makers to identify target groups that may require more information or persuasive approaches to adopt the vaccine (Chen et al., 2023). Health education campaigns can be customized to target innovators and early adopters to build initial advocacy, then gradually shift focus to the early and late majority to increase vaccination coverage. This technique has been shown to be effective in accelerating the adoption of positive health habits and integrating new health practices into societal norms (Ioannides et al., 2023).

Health Belief Models (HBMs) have become a valuable tool in the design of public health interventions, especially in disease prevention efforts and the promotion of positive health behaviors. For example, in smoking cessation campaigns, the HBM is used to design messages that raise awareness about the health risks of smoking, highlight the severity of health conditions that can result from smoking, and promote the belief that quitting smoking can significantly reduce those health risks (Sim & Wong, 2023); (Daines et al., 2020). Interventions based on HBM also include components aimed at reducing barriers to smoking cessation, such as nicotine replacement programs, to ease behavioral transitions. In this context, HBM has helped in the development of more

effective campaigns by directly targeting individuals' health perceptions (Yan et al., 2022).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been applied in many health initiatives to improve health intentions and behaviors. Examples include interventions to improve adherence to chronic care plans, utilization of preventive health services, and adoption of healthy behaviors such as diet and exercise (Mendez et al., 2024). Through the TPB, interventions are designed to influence individuals' attitudes towards a particular behavior, create supportive social norms, and increase individuals' beliefs in their control over the behavior (Hwang & Jeong, 2023). For example, in physical activity promotion, interventions based on the SDGs would target beliefs about the health benefits of exercise, support the formation of positive attitudes towards exercise in social contexts, and provide resources or strategies to overcome practical barriers to exercise. This demonstrates how the SDGs provide a framework for developing comprehensive health initiatives that take into account the dimensions of attitudes, norms and behavioral control (Esfandiary, 2021).

Communication in Public Health

Communication in public health is a strategic and planned process to inform and influence individual decisions that can affect health. It includes various methods and messages to disseminate information about risk factors, promotion of healthy behaviors, and health education to the public (Langford & Fridman, 2022). This aspect of communication is fundamental as it can increase awareness and knowledge, shape perceptions and attitudes, and ultimately change individual or community health behaviors. Effective communication is seen as an important resource used by public health professionals to mobilize people towards better health goals (Aghazadeh & Aldoory, 2023). Through the use of various channels, such as mass media, social media, educational campaigns, and community interventions, health messages are delivered to reinforce important information that can save lives and improve quality of life (Friley, 2024).

The influence of communication on health behavior is evidenced through its ability to shape social norms, influence individual decisions, and facilitate the spread of health innovations (Hunt et al., 2021). Ideas such as the health belief model (HBM) and theory of planned behavior (TPB) show how purposeful communication can change perceptions of the susceptibility and severity of a disease, as well as increase motivation to adopt healthier behaviors (Ojeka-John et al., 2023). Health messages designed with psychological and social factors in mind can motivate preventive actions, such as vaccinations or regular health check-ups, in a more persuasive way (Hussain & Alhabash, 2020). Furthermore, in today's digital age, effective health communication also utilizes social media and other digital platforms to reach a wider audience and offer more personalized engagement. By appreciating the importance of clear, targeted, and

culturally compatible communications, public health professionals can amplify their impact on health behaviors and desired health outcomes (Fontana et al., 2021).

One concrete example of a successful public health campaign using communication theory is the “Truth Campaign” launched in the United States to combat tobacco use among adolescents (Johnston & Glenny, 2020). Adopting an approach based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Health Belief Model (HBM), the campaign was designed to change adolescents' attitudes about smoking by presenting facts about the tobacco industry and the health effects of smoking in an engaging and direct way. Using television, print advertising, internet, and live events, the “Truth” campaign successfully reached a wide adolescent audience, generating awareness and discussion about the risks of smoking (Ogundoyin, 2020). Effective communication of the dangers of smoking and the tobacco industry's tactics in promoting its products increased risk perception and vulnerability among adolescents, ultimately contributing to a significant decrease in smoking prevalence rates among American adolescents. The success of the “Truth Campaign” highlights the power of informed and focused communication strategies in influencing health behaviors and achieving positive public health outcomes (Mandhana et al., 2020).

Communication Theory and Public Health Campaigns to increase awareness and change Health behavior

In the design and implementation of public health campaigns, the application of communication theory plays a fundamental role in directing how messages are structured, delivered, and received by the target audience. To illustrate, the use of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) allows campaign planners to understand how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the likelihood of individuals to adopt certain health behaviors (Stivers, 2024). Successful campaigns are not only a function of creative messaging, but also the result of an in-depth analysis of the beliefs and motivations that influence the target audience. For example, in anti-smoking campaigns, elements of the TPB can be used to design messages that challenge positive attitudes towards smoking by presenting serious health consequences, influence subjective norms by showing that most people do not smoke and support a life without cigarettes, and increase perceptions of control over behavior by providing information on resources and strategies to quit smoking (Venkatraman & Manoharan, 2021).

In addition, the Health Belief Model (HBM) is often used to design messages that increase perceived severity and perceived susceptibility; two key components that encourage individuals to respond to health threats. For example, in vaccination campaigns, the presentation of statistics about the severity of the disease and the likelihood of individuals contracting it can motivate awareness and proactive response (Placa, 2022). Effective communication in HBM-based campaigns will provide sufficient

information about the benefits of preventive measures and convince audiences that the proposed actions can effectively avoid risks. In addition, “cues to action” elements, or reminders to initiate behavior, are often included through clear calls to action or contacts for more information, facilitating the transition from positive attitudes to action (Wardasari, 2023). This approach not only reinforces the campaign message but also pushes individuals across the threshold from awareness to action, which is a key objective in many public health campaigns (Vieira & Li, 2024).

Furthermore, in the increasingly dominant context of digital and social media, the application of communication theory in public health campaigns has also evolved to make the most of these platforms. Approaches that utilize Diffusion of Innovations Theory, for example, recognize the importance of establishing early adopters or influencers in the community to accelerate the acceptance and adoption of health messages (Jang, 2020). In the use of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, health officials and campaign planners identify and work with individuals who have large followings and are considered trustworthy by the target community. These individuals act as credible messengers, increasing the legitimacy and appeal of the message. This is especially important in situations where health misinformation is rampant and source credibility is a key consideration for audiences (Majmundar et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the application of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in health campaigns focuses on the importance of role models in influencing observational behavioral learning. Campaigns that integrate videos or testimonials from individuals who have successfully undergone health behavior change, for example, are often more effective in motivating change as they provide tangible evidence and inspiration that change is possible (Markovich, 2022). In the context of public health campaigns, selecting appropriate communication strategies and integrating these theoretical principles not only increases message effectiveness but also enriches the audience's experience with the campaign, resulting in greater participation and, most importantly, positive health behavior change (H. Du et al., 2023). Thus, the application of communication theory in public health campaign design contributes to the creation of more targeted, personalized, and ultimately, more impactful strategies.

The effectiveness of communication approaches in achieving campaign objectives largely depends on how the planning and execution of communication strategies are tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of the audience. Creative and relevant communication approaches, such as social marketing, have been shown to be successful in attracting attention and engaging with target audiences (Jormand et al., 2022). In the context of public health, effective social marketing often combines persuasive messages with offers of concrete solutions that target behavior change. For example, anti-smoking campaigns that present data on health risks while also providing access to resources to quit smoking can be more effective. This demonstrates the importance of understanding the target audience's behavior and using communication

approaches that not only inform but also empower and motivate the audience (Ball et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in the digital age, public health campaigns that utilize social media and other digital strategies have significant potential to raise awareness and influence behavior at scale. The use of online platforms allows campaign messages to reach a wider audience at a relatively low cost, providing an opportunity for campaigns with limited budgets to have a significant impact (Coombs et al., 2020). In addition, social media analytics offer immediate feedback on audience reactions to campaign messages, allowing planners to make real-time adjustments to strategies. This emphasizes the importance of flexibility in communication approaches and the ability to adapt to changing audience dynamics and preferences (Choi & Hong, 2022).

Finally, communication approaches that involve direct community participation and engagement often achieve stronger resonance and more sustainable results. By encouraging audience engagement through two-way dialog, such as community forums, workshops, or social media, campaigns can build a sense of ownership and autonomy among target audiences. This approach instills a sense of responsibility and encourages individuals to become advocates of the campaign messages in their personal lives and communities (Silva et al., 2022). This participatory approach not only raises awareness, but also strengthens social support and community networks that are essential for long-term behavior change. Therefore, the ability of communication approaches to encourage active audience engagement and participation is key in determining the effectiveness of public health campaigns (Dillard et al., 2020).

The conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion of the effectiveness of various communication approaches in achieving campaign objectives is the importance of a communication strategy that is intelligently designed and well adapted to the needs and characteristics of the target audience. Campaign effectiveness depends not only on informative and persuasive message content, but also on its dissemination strategy, which should utilize the most relevant and effective communication platforms and tools for the target audience.

In today's digital age, the integration of communication strategies that harness the power of social media and online analytics to increase reach and boost engagement provides a great opportunity to achieve maximum effectiveness (Schillinger et al., 2023). However, technology alone is not enough without an approach that takes into account the human aspects, such as building relationships and direct engagement with the community, which strengthens the impact and sustainability of the expected behavior change (Contu & Breton, 2020).

Therefore, to maximize the effectiveness of a campaign, it is important to combine innovative use of media with a human-centered approach, which encourages community participation, dialogue, and mobilization. Doing this will not only create

greater awareness but also encourage sustainable behavior change among audiences, leading to more effective achievement of campaign objectives.

Conclusion

Key findings regarding the application and effectiveness of communication theory in public health campaigns suggest that communication theory, when applied appropriately, can greatly enhance the effectiveness of campaigns in changing people's behaviors and attitudes. The selection and application of relevant communication theories, such as Meaningful Action Theory, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, or Behavior Change Theory, assist campaign planners in designing messages and communication strategies that are more focused and tailored to the context and needs of the target audience. This includes understanding how audiences process information, how social norms influence behavior, and the factors that drive acceptance or rejection of proposed health behaviors. This application of communication theory allows campaigns to strategically design messages that resonate with the beliefs, values and practices of the target audience.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of integration between communication approaches and media use in public health campaigns. Communication strategies that incorporate multiple communication channels, such as social media, print, broadcast, and in-person interactions, and that are supported by strong communication theory, are likely to be more effective in reaching and mobilizing diverse audiences. The use of audience targeting and segmentation based on communication theory can ensure that the right message is delivered through the right channel to the right audience group. This emphasizes the importance of in-depth knowledge of the preferences, behaviors, and challenges faced by the target audience, allowing the campaign to tailor its communication strategy more effectively and ultimately achieve the desired behavior change more efficiently.

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