Overview

Promoting quitlines through mass media campaigns is an important task for health practitioners. Implementing effective strategies to maximize the impact of media is critical, particularly as the budgets of many quitlines across the country diminish. Using health campaign research to guide media strategy is a worthwhile, though often underutilized approach among quitline communication campaigns, often due to a disconnect between academic jargon and professional application. However, a review of extant literature offers several fruitful strategies quitting campaign organizers can apply to increase media impact while operating under a tight budget.

Objectives

Incorporating academic research into the design and execution of media health campaigns through an examination of three areas:

- The role of message sensation value in promoting attention, recall and conversation of health campaign messages
- Stimulating conversation in health campaigns
- Examining the best media buy strategy for low-budget health campaigns

Message Sensation Value (MSV)

- Message sensation value represents the degree to which formal and content audiovisual features of a message elicit sensory, affective and arousal responses. Often used to target high sensation seekers.

Features:

- 11-item scale to code for MSV within an ad:
  - Novel
  - Creative
  - Exciting
  - Intense
  - Dramatic
  - Fast-paced
  - Number of cuts
  - Special visual effects
  - Slow motion
  - Unusual colors
  - Intense images
  - Sound saturation
  - Music
  - Sound effects
  - Acted out
  - Unexpected format
  - Surprise/twist ending

Research on MSV and Health Campaigns

- Ads high in MSV have been found to produce increased attention and recall of PSAs
- High number of cuts may be particularly influential in eliciting arousal and recall
- High MSV ads rated higher in perceived message effectiveness
- Ads high in MSV may lead to increased conversation

Implications for Health Campaigns

- Designing messages high in MSV may lead to higher levels of attention, recall and conversation
- High MSV ads likely to be particularly effective in reaching high sensation seekers
- High MSV ads may maximize ad effectiveness with a limited budget

Conversation

Conversation, in the context of health campaigns, is a powerful force. When people talk about the images they see on television, campaign messages are diffused to many more people than could ever be reached directly. Conversation, in a sense, acts as free advertising for campaigns. Although the campaign cannot fully control the nature of the conversations that take place, the ability of a target audience to spread messages interpersonally far exceeds the impact a campaign can have through direct exposure. As such, campaign organizers ought to place significant import on effectively stimulating conversation among their target audience.

Measuring Conversation for Health Campaigns

- How much have you talked to friends and family about this ad?
- How frequently do you talk about the negative consequences of smoking?
- How often do people close to you talk about the negative consequences of smoking?

Research on Conversation in Health Campaigns

Health communication research suggests a number of ways to effectively stimulate conversation about media content:

- Boosting perceived knowledge about campaign issues
- Targeting “opinion leaders” with campaign messages
- Designing highly arousing messages
- Increasing intention to quit

Implications for Health Campaigns

- Stimulating conversation should be an important goal for health campaign practitioners
- Conversation can lead to diffusion of ideas, and act as “free” advertising for the campaign
- Interpersonal communication research suggests several ways in which health practitioners can maximize frequency of conversation

Media Scheduling

The best approach for scheduling media health messages is a controversial topic in the health campaign and advertising literature. Recently though, pulsing has emerged as a recommended effective advertising practice in response to the measurement of adstock, or carry-over effects. In this line of reasoning, media-planners believe advertising effect decays slowly over time, and pulsing is seen as the most effective device to counteract these effects. Furthermore, pulsing is thought to be the approach best suited for low-budget campaigns.

Strategies

- Pulsing: Constant low-level advertising, with periods of high bursts
- Continuous: Advertising run at a constant rate
- Pulsing: Advertising run in short bursts, separated by periods of no advertising

Research on Media Strategy

- Pulsing best strategy for low-budget campaigns
- A number of researchers have found pulsing to be the most effective form of advertising to combat advertising wearout
- Pulsing the most effective form of advertising under both competition and monopoly
- Pulsing argued to act as “quality restoration” for ageing advertising campaigns

Implications for Health Campaigns

- Pulsing appears to be the most effective advertising strategy, particularly for low-budget campaigns
- Incorporating academic research in media strategy helps guide health practitioners on most effective use of funds

General Discussion

Too often, there exists a disconnect between academic research and professional application. Although health practitioners can gain valuable insight from academic research, often this research requires significant interpretation to be valuable to professionals. This study reviews three areas of research that may be particularly important to the effective implementation of quitline media campaigns.

Implications for Health Campaigns

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