PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL MARKETING OF AIDS PATIENTS IN MALAYSIAN MEDIA

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Abstract

Media is a prominent source in shaping and reshaping people’s opinion and behaviour. In order to provide adequate public information on AIDS, media produces relevant articles and programmes of the HIV issues for the public. Coverage-related HIV issues can be potent means of perceiving people behaviour. However, even though the news on AIDS and HIV epidemic has attracted public attention, gain followers, taken as a vital social health problem, and gaining prominence in the national agenda, the social marketing programmes on AIDS patients in Malaysia is still lacking momentum. Thus, this study aims to study the perception and social marketing of AIDS patients in Malaysian media. The methodology chosen allows examination of media attitude, coverage and exposure of correct information on HIV and AIDS and audience or community reaction towards People Living with HIV (PLHIV) by analyzing social marketing programmes in Malaysia media. Agenda Setting Theory is used as theoretical framework to examine the news coverage on issue of AIDS and public opinion built through the Malaysian social marketing programmes. Data were collected comprehensively using: Media Content Analysis. Three selected Malaysian Newspapers (Utusan Malaysia, The Star, and Sin Chew Jit Po) were chosen for content analysis for three months in 2011.

Keywords: Perception, Media Coverage, Social marketing, AIDS, HIV, Public opinion

Introduction

HIV in Overview

The continuing rise in the population together with the modernization is showing that many people do not aware of their lifestyle. Since the first cases of rare lung infection Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP) were reported in injecting drug users, the first case of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) was recorded in the UK [1]. This shows that AIDS is now a pandemic. As of today, this epidemic could be found in everywhere in the world. According to Joint United Nations Programme HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in Global Report UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic 2010 [2] estimated that there were 2.6 million people became new case of infected with HIV in 2009. This figure is 19 percent fewer than the 3.1 million (2.9 million–3.4 million) people newly infected in 1999, and 21 percent fewer than the estimated 3.2 million (3.0 million–3.5 million) in 1997. This pop up a question of does this mean that HIV/AIDS has been controlled effectively? (Figure 1)

Figure 1

Number of people newly infected with HIV

Source: UNAIDS, 2010

Previously, HIV and AIDS was an unfamiliar virus to the entire world. However, in fact, this is not suggested that people nowadays are familiar with the epidemic per se. It is debatable because of many people are still lacking knowledge of this epidemic. There do people have been dismissed from workplace and rejected by society just due to their disclosure of health condition to their employee because they wish to obtain social support services. The result, explicitly, is not match as what they need because of negative attitudes such as prejudice, stereotype, and misconception directed at people living with HIV.

In Indonesia, Vietnam, even Malaysia per se, HIV prevalence in the prison population exceeds 10%. Ironically, HIV-related information is out of available to prison system in all countries. Furthermore, access to antiretroviral therapies
(ARVs) or harm reduction services are also limited in most prison setting in the region. [3]

**HIV in Malaysia**

Malaysia had detected its first case of HIV in Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur in December 1986 [4] [5]. Since then, all states have reported HIV Positive. As of December 2009, Malaysia has recorded a cumulative number of 87710 people infected with HIV (Table 1), and an estimated 105 439 people are currently living with HIV. [4] [5]

**Table 1**

**Overview of the Malaysian HIV Epidemic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>87710</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative number of reported HIV infections since 1986</td>
<td>13394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative number of reported HIV/AIDS related deaths since 1986</td>
<td>8.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women reported with HIV as of December 2009</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 13 with HIV as of December 2009</td>
<td>3080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New HIV infections detected in 2009</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of PLHIV accessing ART</td>
<td>9962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated adult (aged 15 – 49 years)</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV prevalence 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UNGASS 2010*

Each day, there are 9 new cases of HIV reported; two of them are female while the rest are male. From that figure, 6 persons infected HIV by sharing of contaminated needles, while 3 others were infected by sexual intercourse [4] [5]. Explicitly, it reveals that Malaysia’s epidemic has attributed immensely by Injecting Drug User (IDU) and heterosexual transmission. Seriously, heterosexual transmission is concerning for an increasing number of new HIV infections. Hence, World Health Organization (WHO) currently classifies that Malaysia is having concentrated HIV epidemic [4] [5].

Therefore, this research is important since it would see the importance of media roles in the response to HIV/AIDS. As mentioned, media is a very influential tool in providing information towards public, and public give respond after getting information from media. Whilst, government will take action after acknowledge public opinion. Hence, by analyzing print media coverage on HIV-related issues, this study sought to find out how media present HIV events/items and social marketing programmes to the public. Existing perception (misconception, stigmatization, discrimination, ostracism) against people living with HIV should be rectified in order to give an opportunity for public in well-recognized PLHIV as well as the epidemic per se, hence, this study contributes to the changes of public behavior against PLHIV. Generally, negative attitudes towards PLHIV do exist in everywhere. Such attitudes caused a lot of people with HIV dismissed from their workplace. Therefore, the challenges of this study is to examine news frame on HIV-related issues in order to create public awareness and understanding on social marketing programe in media which promote people with HIV/AIDS into the community.

**Definitions of Agenda Setting Theory**

Agenda setting theory is contributed by scholars Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their research article which published in 1972. Their study indicated that there is correlation when news media (newspapers, news magazines, and network television positions stories and attribution of importance of those issues reviewed by their audiences.

Whilst agenda setting theory helps to understand three important aspects of mass communication and their functions in society which are to understand the complex relationship among news media treatment of issues, public belief about those issues, and the policy concerns of leaders regarding those same issues [6, p.160]. As we known, elite and policy makers are the people who execute a policy of an issue/item. Once the public reviewed an issue from media (media agenda), they will voice out their opinion base on the issue which they have read because these people are active audiences (public agenda).

People have their right in determining what sort of information they want to perceive or receive. As policy makers are the executor of a policy or event, therefore, the public opinions are very important for them to note down and come out with a best solution or policy for a particular event or issue in order to fulfill public’s needs (policy agenda).

**Definitions of Social Marketing**

“Social marketing is the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole.” [7, p.5]

Social marketing is slightly different from the conventional marketing. Philip Kotler, Ned Roberto, Nancy Lee (2002) pleaded that social marketing is used to influence an audience to change their behavior on certain issues for their own sake. The key concept of marketing is “exchange” [7]. Marketers asks the consumer to take an action (say buying McDonald) and in
exchange, the marketer gives the benefit (McDonald’s burger). This is what we call as commercial marketing. Commercial marketers involve in selling products and services unlike social marketers involve in “selling” ideas and behavior change to their target audiences. In regards to this research, social marketing is used to influence public to change their attitudes, behavior even perception about HIV/AIDS and people with HIV. The behavior change is very depending on target audiences. In another word, social marketing is using “soft power”—voluntary rather than “hard power” which means using legal or economic.

**Research Question**

As have mentioned in the early part that because there is no any vaccination at this point of time, the only weapons in preventing the spread of HIV infection in the community are education and social marketing programmes. Currently, the constantly increasing of the rate of HIV prevalence in community has driven an unpredictable damage to the entire world. It clearly understands that we may not cure or fix the HIV prevalence 100%, but we might prevent its prevalence by executing effectively marketing programmes by using media tools towards the public. As have mentioned many times that it is irrefutable for the importance of media roles in disseminating information to the public. Therefore, in ascertaining the ways on dealing with HIV prevalence in community, researcher raised up a research question of what is the status of social marketing programme and media perception on HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysia? From the research question, researcher examined the media perception in reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues and social marketing programmes in selected Malaysia media in a way to answer the research question.

**Methods**

**Newspaper selection**

Three Malaysian newspapers have been selected namely Utusan Malaysia, The Star, and Sin Chew Jit Poh. Utusan Malaysia and Sin Chew Jit Poh. are broadsheet newspapers, while The Star is “serious” newspaper. Those newspapers are national newspapers especially for the three majority ethnicity (Malays, Chinese, and India) in Malaysia community.

**Search strategy**

The period of analyzing those newspapers were from 1st January 2011 to 31st March 2011. The University Malaya Main Library provided the three newspapers. Each article was reviewed thoroughly to identify whether the content includes references to HIV/AIDS-related issues/events or any social marketing programmes. Throughout the three months period, 26 articles were found on HIV/AIDS-related issues and social marketing programmes.

**Data coding**

Data collected from the articles were classified into four categories: (i) basic information, (ii) framing, (iii) discourse analysis, and (iv) social marketing. The basic information category consisted of background data: date, name of newspaper, total pages, headlines, page, and focus of domesticity, character of news, section, and journalistic genre. The framing category identified the used of frame an issue/event in media coverage. That included social frame, health frame, religion frame, and government frame. The discourse analysis category examined form of reporting, credibility, main actor, heading perception, and article review perception in reporting HIV-related issues in selected newspapers. Social marketing category identified the amount of social marketing programmes, type of social marketing programmes, and the exclusivity and inclusivity in media coverage of HIV-related issues/events. Coding was completed for all examined articles.

**Results**

**Basic information**

**Monthly distribution**

The number of monthly distribution for all media from 1st January 2011 till 31st March 2011 on HIV-related issues in selected Malaysian print media showed consistent for the three months period (Figure 2). For Utusan Malaysia, the frequency of reporting HIV-related issues for January and March were the same which only 3 items on each month had been identified, while in February, there were no items found. For The Star, it showed a consistent number for the monthly distribution, which three items identified in reporting of HIV-related issues for each month. Sin Chew Jit Poh, however, showed inconsistency for monthly distribution on news of HIV-related issues which only two items been identified in January, and no items in February, but there were nine items identified in March.
**Focus of domesticity**

Most of the articles primarily were national news which recorded 15 articles out of 26 articles for all selected Malaysian print media in reporting HIV-related issues (Figure 3). Sin Chew Jit Poh recorded the highest news (eight articles) in reporting HIV-related issues for national within the news followed by Utusan Malaysia (four articles), and The Star recorded three articles. For domestic news category, The Star reported four HIV-related articles, while Utusan Malaysia and Sin Chew Jit Poh reported two articles. There were also three articles focused news out of Malaysia (South Africa and India). Sin Chew Jit Poh reported a news on a 66 year old folk from German who abused 400 underage prostitutes in Thailand for revenge and two news were in The Star reporting “S. African school kids to be tested for HIV” and “HIV woman has sex with 100 in revenge” in India.

**Character of news**

Category of news character consisted of two attributes which are conflict and prominence/important in reporting HIV-related issues. The result showed that there were 12 conflict items identified in three newspapers, while a total of 14 prominence/important items have been identified for all newspapers as well. Sin Chew Jit Poh have more conflict items in reporting HIV-related issues compared to other newspapers (Figure 4). Utusan Malaysia, however, was the least in reporting conflict items on HIV-related issues. The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh reported the same number of prominence/important news for HIV-related issues.

**Journalistic of items**

Result showed that most of the HIV-related issues were reported in the form of interview and news-in-brief, which recorded eight items for each (Figure 5). Feature writing on HIV-related issues were rarely seen in all selected Malaysian print media except in The Star paper, which got three articles. The Star showed a consistency in number of feature, interview, and news-in-brief in reporting HIV-related issues. Besides, only one conference report has been reported in Sin Chew Jit Poh. In Utusan Malaysia, interview was the most popular form in reporting HIV-related issues. Furthermore, the used of news-in-brief and news in reporting HIV-related issues showed a significant number in Sin Chew Jit Poh.
Framing

Most of the HIV-related news was framed as social issue (Figure 6). Both The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh recorded the highest number of articles in social frame. It was interesting that only one article was framed in religious (Buddhist and Christian) in Sin Chew Jit Poh. Government frame showed a consistency in number of framing on HIV-related news for the three newspapers.

Discourse analysis

Among the total of 26 headings, 11 were positive, 11 were negative, and four were neutral. Among the total of 26 articles, 15 were positive, eight were negative, and three neutral in reporting HIV-related issues (Figure 7).

Social marketing

Amount of social marketing programmes

Among 26 articles in all selected Malaysian print media, there were 15 social marketing programmes identified in the three newspapers (Figure 8). Each newspaper consisted of five social marketing programmes, while 11 articles were reported not applicable for any social marketing programmes.

Exclusivity of items

Among the total of 26 articles, there was 42 percent of exclusivity of items about HIV-related issues, and 50 percent inclusivity in reporting HIV issues. However, there were eight percent of non-related to social marketing articles (Figure 9).
Types of social marketing programmes

From the result, most of the social marketing programmes were awareness messages to the public about HIV-related issues in order to achieve behaviour changes against HIV/AIDS-related negative perceptions. Both The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh recorded three awareness messages in reporting of HIV-related issues (Figure 10). However, there were much more not applicable numbers appeared in the result. There was one in Utusan Malaysia; four in The Star; and six in Sin Chew Jit Poh. These showed that most of the items were just reporting HIV-related issues, but not promoting an idea or a program to gain behaviour change among the public about HIV-related problems.

Figure 10
Types of social marketing programmes about HIV-related issues in all selected Malaysia print media (N=26)

Discussion

Media has an influential role in influencing public’s perception. It is often suggested that media shape our notions of social phenomenon through the way they represent and report on news and social experiences. In short, the media that we consume often help us to understand society and even ourselves. Stella Babalola, et al. (2009) strongly suggested that HIV-related programmes in media coverage able to reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigma effectively [8]. This research, however, found that Malaysian media reported insufficient HIV-related issues towards public for educating people to well-understand about HIV and social marketing programmes that help PLHIV. Therefore, media should provide more HIV-related issues and promote more social marketing programmes in order to achieve win-win situation and contribute the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Malaysia.

In fact, media should perform objective stand in reporting any events. However, as we can see from the results given, there were some conflicts been addressed by media itself in covering HIV-related issues. These conflicts associated with heading perception and article perception. Some of the headings carried were very negative perception until raised up conflict in reporting HIV-related issues. For an example, in Utusan Malaysia, there was news titled “HIV positive jailed and caned”. Such heading leads negative perception on “HIV positive will get into jail and caned”. If we go through the article itself, actually, the HIV positive was being jailed due to possession of 484 gram cocaine. In fact, the HIV positive was a jobless person. However, the media insisted to stress the word “HIV positive” instead of “jobless person”. Therefore, this can be concluded that Malaysia media did not hold objective perception in reporting HIV-related issues. This answered the research question of the media perception on HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysia media.

Most of the news were framed as social issue by media. This indicated that media do agree with the status of HIV infection as hyperendemic. However, from the analysis, only both The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh carried out more news in social frame compared to Utusan Malaysia. The entire result depicted a less favourable in social media agenda setting when it comes to HIV-related and social marketing issues. The portrayal of HIV-related issues for the first quarter of the year 2011 hardly secured the national pages even for the month that carries the highest amount on HIV-related issues news. Most of the HIV-related news put it on the inside pages of the newspapers. For an example, if the total pages of a newspaper is 30, HIV-related issue(s) likely will be put at between
pages 20 to 30. This indicated a weak identification of the importance of health issues in our community by the media editor. The roles of media practitioner as the gatekeeper in setting the social national agenda for the HIV-related issues and social marketing programmes in this study do not prevail strongly. The total news amount reflected in a weak coverage and poor news placement pattern in the Malaysian media, which present an idea of a weaker media role. The weaker coverage created an image of poor representations of the issues to the society.

Seriously, HIV/AIDS-related problems have become a global problem that has affected every country. However, when people viewing HIV as a social issue, there was one article framed HIV-related issue as a religious issue in Sin Chew Jit Poh. With its heading of “Understanding AIDS and care for People Living with HIV (PLHIV), Sin Chew Jit Poh not only framed this item as a health issue, but at the same time they also framed it as a religious issue by interviewing religious leaders (Buddhist and Christian) in different perspectives about HIV-related. There was a conference report which carried out by Sin Chew, and Sin Chew reported this item in a very objective way, where it has included many perspectives, opinions, as well as suggestions from experts (doctors, academicians, and religious leaders). However, media still excluded “victim voices” in viewing HIV-related issues. Again, that was related to the idea of objectivity in reporting HIV-related issues by media. Nevertheless, it was suggested that media did include respective “voices” in this item as whole. In sum, government and respective organizations such as Non-Governmental Organizations were urged to design or to partake in preventing HIV/AIDS-related problems.

Becky L. Genberg, et al. (2009) pleaded effective HIV-related prevention, treatment, information, education programmes should be implemented in a way to give some ideas about HIV/AIDS towards public [9]. However, there were few social marketing programmes have been carried up by selected newspapers in Malaysia. From the result, we can be explicitly seen that only 15 social marketing programmes have been reported by selected newspaper for the first three months of year 2011, but the rest (left 11) were not applicable. Most of the social marketing programmes were meant to raise public awareness in disseminating positive messages about HIV-related issues towards the public. Furthermore, there was a successful social marketing program, which carried up by The Star—“Orang asli women get education on HIV. Most of the attendees at the two-day workshop were illiterate”. This social marketing program was successful ones because of there was feedbacks from public against the social marketing program. Media reported the effect of the program by interviewing some participants. A participant said she has now a more accurate perception about HIV/AIDS. This achieved research objective in contributing behaviour changes among the public after a social marketing program has been run.

Apart from that, from the result of exclusivity of items about HIV-related issues in all selected Malaysia print media, there were 50 percent of articles included “certain persons’ voices” while reporting HIV-related issues, and 42 percent of articles excluded “certain persons’ voices” in reporting HIV-related issues. Lean Mei Li (2005) revealed the importance of including opinion from experts, government, pronouncements, statistics offered by “experts”, or discussion of the “social impact” of AIDS by specialist medical or health correspondents in media coverage of AIDS lead a high level of credibility [10]. However, there were some articles did not include other “voices”. For an example, both Utusan Malaysia and Sin Chew Jit Poh reported “Minister of Defence: Implement in May. All NS participants will have to attend for health and sexual knowledge class”. This item only included the Minister of Defence Malaysia, but not included National Service participants in order to achieve the idea of “top-down, bottom-up”. Base on the result, Malaysian media, however, did lead a level of credibility in reporting HIV-related issues towards the general public.

References

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