Reach and Visibility: Perception and Social Marketing of AIDS Patients in Malaysian Media

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Abstract

Media has the potential in shaping and reshaping people’s opinion, behaviour, and notion on an issue or event. In addition to reach the public cohesive, the media representation on HIV/AIDS-related issues are essential inevitability. 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 paper examined the perception, visibility and reach of the social marketing programmes of AIDS patients in the 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. Three selected Malaysian Newspapers (Utusan Malaysia, The Star, and Sin Chew Jit Po) were content analysed. A less favourable in the social agenda setting by the media were portrayed when it comes to HIV-related and social marketing issues. The portrayal of HIV-related issues hardly secured the national pages even for the month that carries the highest amount on HIV-related issues news. 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. Social marketing program received little attention in the local media, hence implicating of a lesser media agenda towards promoting an idea or a program to gain behaviour change among the public about HIV-related problems.

Keywords: Visibility-Reach, Perception, Media Coverage, Social Marketing, HIV-AIDS

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Background

Malaysia, an open economies country in the world and with its strong natural resources and capable country management, she manages to reduce substantial poverty, as well as increases country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income constantly. Since 1970, Malaysia has the potential in attaining a number of national developmental goals which cover essential elements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in terms of poverty, human rights issues, country economic growth, gender equality and empowerment of women. (See http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/overview_4143.html) However, while Malaysia is forwarding to accomplish the MDGs comprehensively, there is one overwhelming social environment issue yet to be resolved not only by Malaysia, but the world—Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Since Malaysia has been experiencing its first case of HIV in 1986, Malaysian government realizes that HIV/AIDS epidemic was no longer treated as a problem limited to a specific field. Every day, more than 10 Malaysian are tested positive HIV. (Malaysian AIDS Council) As of 2010, there were 3652 people reported as newly HIV infection. (Malaysian AIDS Council, 2010) This figure gives more burdensome to the country compared to 2009. Not just that, Malaysia is labelled as a country with “concentrated HIV epidemic” currently by World Health Organization (WHO) due to the rates of HIV infection in Malaysia which are attributed immensely by Injecting Drug Users (IDU) and heterosexual transmission. (UNGASS, 2010, p.10) Indeed, women are now become the most population living with HIV in the region. (Siti Norazah Zulkifli, Mary Huang Soo Lee, Low Wah Yun, & Wong Yut Lin 2007) Tunku Panglima Besar Datuk Seri Tunku Intan Shafinaz Sultan Abdul Halim (2011) claims since 1986 until 2010, Ministry of Health has recorded 91 362 HIV cases. Estimated that this figure will increase to 300 000 cases in 2015, if there were no proactive actions taken effectively to curb the widespread of HIV. (Utusan Malaysia, 2011, May 10)

Hence, if the possession of 300 000 is true in 2015 means that effective, feasible and proactive strategies should be implemented accordingly. There is no question that media is the most powerful tool to reach the general population, therefore, putting media obligation in educating, information, preventing and controlling HIV/AIDS in this region can enjoy utmost success. Thus, this research paper is prominence in giving a sense to public of reachable and visible of HIV/AIDS-related news in Malaysian media, as well as its perception. By analyzing print media coverage on HIV/AIDS-related issues, this study sought to find out
does HIV/AIDS related issues consider as a national agenda in Malaysia. Besides, the challenge of this study is also to examine the visibility status of social marketing programmes in Malaysian print media.

**Theoretical Framework**

Media has the potential in shaping and reshaping people’s opinion, behaviour, and notion on an issue or event. Therefore, media act as gatekeepers in determining what to include or exclude in covering an issue or event that media practitioners think the issue or event is prominence to influence public itself. Uniquely, media has a connection with public and government as media plays its role in distributing certain information to the public, and the public give response to the government after getting information from media. Further, government then view the response from public and takes feasible action against the issue that pointed out by both media and public.

Hence, the agenda setting theory, contributed by scholars Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) set the framework for this paper. McCombs and Show pleaded that there is association when news media (newspapers, news magazines, and network televisions) position stories and attribution of importance of those issues reviewed by their audiences. (Melvin L. DeFleur, 2010). Natalia Chaban and Martin Holland (2006) examined the visibility through the media coverage in several countries and how the visibility actually effects the perceptions of the public towards the European Union image.

The agenda setting and visibility of AIDS and social marketing program in the media would not be completed without examining the relationships between the concept of reach and frequency in the realm of media planning are essential inevitability. In addition to reach our messages towards the target audiences, media planners need to assure the agenda to be repeated as frequent as possible via appropriate media channels. That is the notion of effective frequency. If the amount of an agenda did not appear often, it postulates inefficiency in disseminating the agenda through the public because the visibility of the agenda is on constrain. Simultaneously, in media planning, visibility and reach are tied with each other. There is no argument that an effective reach and frequency help planners to understand its needs to achieve communication objectives. (Hasmah Zanuddin, 2004) However, there is no guarantee that communication objectives could be achieved only due to the reach ability of
news, yet it relies on the visibility of news among the public and their intention to view it. Hence, for a successful communication, if the reach and visibility of an issue or event is not up to par, the effort in circulating messages to public will be less effective. Strategically, the ideas of reach and visibility outlined above lead to second-level agenda setting. The first-level of agenda setting is that media practitioners determine an issue which they think it is pivotal for people think about it rather than influence public’s opinion. Instead, the second-level of agenda setting occurs when the accessibility of a certain issue through media is able to influence public’s mind. It yields that a successful media agenda setting is when a person thinks about an issue more frequent or faster from his memory bank. (Amira Sariyai Firdaus, 2004) As a result, this suggested that if the frequency of reach and visibility for an issue is high, the second-level agenda setting then may exist among target audiences.

Further, media agenda setting has three indispensable components that can we explain. (1) Media agenda: Media practitioner screen information that they think the information enables to influence public for their further actions. Media then index the information into the news coverage and distribute it to the general population. (2) Public agenda: Public or audiences are very active in selecting news or information. They will “filter” the information which they think it is important to them. In short, audiences realizing the perceived benefits from the proposed issues. Once the public reviewed an issue from media, they will voice out or point out their opinion based on the issue which they have read to the respective people, normally to government agencies. (3) Government/policy agenda: Government is the greatest executor of a policy or agenda. Therefore, government will view the public opinions and voices seriously because this is the way for government accomplishes their election promises to the public. Later, government will then utilize media channels for promotional strategy of the policy that have been made throughout the public.

Explicitly, agenda setting is a circle that involves media, public, and government. (See Figure 1) In sum, the whole idea of agenda setting is media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about. (Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, 2006)
Social marketing is key subject being used splendid to address health environment within the domain of public relations. “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” (Kotler, P. et al., 2007). In addition to achieve good behavior change among the public regards HIV/AIDS, awareness of the existence of such epidemic is the threshold that needs to be taken in the community through education and information provision. Consequently, can then prevention and control follow. Stressfully, social marketing is useful for clinical guidelines and planning to prevent something might happen. (Zoë Slote Morris, & Peter John Clarkson, 2009) For instance, fasten your seatbelts securely before driving, do not drive drunk, eat green foods to save our mother earth, wearing condoms for safe sexual behavior, etc. These are the actions and behaviors that we anticipated our community to perform for their own sake. If these things could not up to par, social marketing then is the applicable and feasible means for individual change their existing behavior, give up certain costs and adopt new behavior. This is what social marketing all about.
Research questions

This paper examined the reach and visibility of social marketing program and the media perception on HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysia using three research question as below:

(1) To what extend the specific “voices” being included on covering HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysian media?
(2) What is the media perception on representing HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysian media?
(3) How importance of HIV/AIDS-related issues was viewed as a national agenda?

Methodology

This paper employed quantitative media content analysis to accomplish the objectives. For the study, 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, whereas The Star is “serious” newspaper. Those newspapers are mainstream newspapers especially for the three majority ethnicity (Malays, Chinese, and India) in Malaysia community. The search period of this media content analysis was from 1st January 2011 until 30th June 2011. Throughout the six months period, 49 articles were identified in HIV/AIDS-related issues and social marketing programmes.

University Malaya Main Library and Za’ba Memorial Library provided three newspapers for this study purpose. In the process of analyzing the news coverage, each article was reviewed thoroughly to identify whether or not the content includes references to HIV/AIDS-related issues/events or any social marketing programmes.

Coding

Each news report was coded on the following variables: (1) date of the newspaper; (2) focus of domesticity; (3) character of news; (4) section; (5) journalistic genre; (6) main actors; (7) framing; (8) credibility; (9) heading perception; (10) article review perception; (11) types of social marketing program; (12) exclusivity or inclusivity.
Findings

Reach and Visibility of AIDS News

A total 49 news articles appeared in three mainstream newspapers during sample period. On an average, eight HIV/AIDS-related news items should be published each month in each of these selected newspapers. However, result shows an inconsistent flow which total coverage in Feb for all selected newspapers only three, April only five and June only seven. In addition to let audiences begin to respond to a message or an issue, third repetition is a minimum number appear in a vehicle. (Hasmah Zanuddin, 2004) As a result, only The Star has fitted to the bill among the three newspapers except for the month of April, which only repeated twice, whereas in May there were double repeated news items reported. This is because May is the month for International AIDS Memorial Day 2011, and The Star is the newspaper which views HIV/AIDS-related issues seriously as a national agenda as per result. Sin Chew, however, repeated HIV/AIDS-related news items triple than the others for the month of March. This can be explained by the month had conflict issues which media practitioners view it seriously.

Figure 2
Number of Monthly Distribution for All Media, from 1st January 2011 - 30th June 2011, on HIV/AIDS-related Issues in All Selected Malaysian Print Media (N=49)

Focus of Domesticity

Figure 3 shows the reach and visibility for most of the news items ultimately were national news which recorded 26 of 49 articles for selected newspapers. Further, more than 50 percent
of the reported news articles reach nationwide. The visibility, especially, showed on The Star with a consistent number on portraying HIV/AIDS-related issues in all three focuses (national, region, and third countries). However, HIV/AIDS-related issues on national segment were more visible in Sin Chew which recorded 11 of 26 articles as whole, but 55 percent of 11 news articles induced conflict.

Figure 3
Focus of Domesticity for All Selected Malaysian Print Media (N=49)

News Framing

Result depicted that 37 of 49 HIV/AIDS-related articles were framed as social issue. (Figure 4) Uniquely, there are some of the articles framed as more than one issue. For instance, The Star represented an item entitle “Jakim to distribute 10,000 copies of HIV/AIDS manual”. This news was framed as social, religious, and government issues. Besides, both The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh recorded the highest number of articles in social frame. Further, fewer issues were framed as religious issue; only one issue was framed for both The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh.
News Perceptions

In the context of representing HIV/AIDS-related issues, result showed that there were 27 positive headings and 32 positive articles have been reported for the three newspapers. Besides, 12 of 49 headings have negative perception, while nine were negative articles. Moreover, 10 headings and eight articles were reported as neutral perception. (Figure 5)

Numbers of Social Marketing Programmes

From the total of 49 articles, the reach and visibility of social marketing programmes were 34 items. (Figure 6) This indicates the number of social marketing programmes in three mainstream newspapers have high level of reach and visibility throughout the community.
Apparently, The Star has covered more social marketing programmes (44 percent) contrary to the others.

Nevertheless, as outlined above that there is association among reach, frequency, and visibility. Therefore, it could be concluded that though the visibility of social marketing programmes were high in The Star or overall, but there is no guarantee that the frequency on reporting social marketing programme in all three newspapers is efficient because a successful social marketing programme should be carrying on continuously.

Figure 6
*Numbers of Social Marketing Programmes (N=34)*

![Social Marketing Programmes](image)

*Types of Social Marketing Programmes*

Out of 49 observations, social awareness messages dominated the scene, with 18 news items followed by workshops (eight news items). (Figure 7) These social awareness messages and workshops were more focusing on creating awareness and educating people on HIV/AIDS, and are half the battle won in combating with HIV/AIDS. Despite the number of social marketing programmes is predominance in alerting people about HIV/AIDS, the reach and visibility of government’s role in addressing the epidemic is lacking momentum. On an average, government policy in regarding HIV/AIDS only occupied one item in each newspaper. This could be suggesting that government has sluggish success in preventing and upgrading people’s awareness on HIV/AIDS.
Exclusivity on Reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues

According to figure 8, there were 28 articles (57 percent) of 49 articles have been identified as inclusivity when reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues, which mean media include specific “voices” into the discussion. Besides, there were 19 articles (39 percent) have been identified as exclusivity when reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues. Only two articles were found as not applicable in this section.
Discussion

(1) Visibility and reach of specific “voices” in reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysian media

Media has the privilege in determining whose “voices” should be highlighted more than the others. Apparently, most of the news articles reached specific voices such as experts in dealing with HIV/AIDS, ministers, NGOs, and part and parcel is victims as per the results. This gives good visibility to the public of the way media represent HIV/AIDS-related news precisely. For example, there was a news recently covered by The Star entitle “Widow finds new meaning in life after HIV”. Reporter interviewed a widow whom her husband dead because of HIV infection and her husband passed on the deadly disease to her. Nevertheless, HIV/AIDS does not hindrance her life, yet she joined a NGO to assist HIV/AIDS patients by educating, counselling, fund-raising and organizing seminars to boost up public awareness of the epidemic. As a result, the visibility of the news article is higher and reaching. Media practitioners select “right person” for circulating accurate and powerful information towards the public of this disease. This approach sought to give a better sense to public of how do these PLHIV persevere to live in this wider community.

(2) Media perception on representing HIV/AIDS-related issues in Malaysian media.

Most agree that media has the potential in shaping our notions of social phenomenon through the way they portray and report on news and social experiences. In the context of HIV/AIDS, the results showed that media did perform objective stand in reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues. However, there were still some articles and headings have been reported in a bias way. For instance, The Star reported a news entitle “HIV woman has sex with 100 in revenge”; Utusan Malaysia reported a couple of news entitle “HIV positive jailed. caned”, “HIV, jail changes lives” and etc.; Sin Chew reported a number of news entitle “Gay with HIV plays out 200”, “Datuk Michael Chong urges people who have sex with gay Casanova for medical check up”, and etc. The reach and visibility of those kinds of headings and articles structurally induced conflicts and anxiety among the readers. Jody Lawrence, et al. (2007) claimed that public health practitioners be good at utilizing media as their tool to alert the public to the menace of diseases and its protections. Hence, the use of language in media represent on critical diseases such as HIV/AIDS is prominence. As we can see the headings revealed above, though the use of language is simple and easy, the way they present are much stereotype. Thus, it is well described that language is not simply as a neutral means/notions of
communication but performs ideological work. (Jody Lawrence, et al., 2007) That is the effect of the media on what people may do or think regards language that represented by media. Therefore, media should very sensitive in using adapted language to portray the issue of HIV/AIDS effectively, whilst care of “others’ feelings”. Media practitioners should always bear in mind that no sentimental reasons in representing HIV/AIDS-related issues.

(3) Importance of HIV/AIDS-related issues viewed as a national agenda

The visibility of HIV/AIDS-related news items was found more visibly predominance in social frame. This indicates that media does agree that HIV/AIDS-related issues are essential as the dew to reach the public. HIV/AIDS is no longer visible as a disease, but it is a development issue to a country. However, the numbers of monthly distribution on HIV/AIDS-related issues in three main stream newspapers are very limited. The reports on HIV/AIDS are not continuously throughout the six months period. The only month indicated more coverage on HIV/AIDS-related issues was May. This is because May is the month for International AIDS Memorial Day 2011. Only The Star was reporting HIV/AIDS-related issues continuously for the six months period. This proves that The Star as a gatekeeper does think that HIV/AIDS is the health issues that should let public think about. Indeed, social marketing is still new school of thought to Malaysians getting to know its importance and notion in addressing health issues and too it is at the threshold of a new era in health realm. Therefore, the reach and visibility of social marketing programmes in addressing HIV/AIDS should be more highlighted by media people.

Conclusion

To date, there are many social issues waiting for us to address comprehensively in terms of getting more health problems surrounding our life. Many people are not aware and perceive of the complexity of HIV Positive lives are facing all kinds of problems and obstacles day-to-day. Therefore, putting media obligation in reaching general public with the accurate and visible information can give a greater benefit to the community. However, this is not an issue could be done by a party per se, but this is a global issue with a massive responsibility which need utmost contribution from community and NGOs. Explicitly, study revealed that The Star was the most predominance in news coverage with the greatest number of visibility of social marketing programs for AIDS patients and HIV/AIDS-related news articles. Thus, The Star is reaching the highest number of audiences from the public compared to other selected newspapers. However, the reach was limited to the English speaking audiences. Lower
visibility and reach from the Utusan Malaysia and Sin Chew Jit Poh, means a lower reach of the social marketing programs for AIDS patients for the Malay and Chinese speaking audiences in related to HIV/AIDS. The reach and visibility of the news coverage on health issues in the media unravel the media’s attitude and the underlying media policy, perception and agenda setting with regards to HIV/AIDS in Malaysia.

References


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