

**Research Article**

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## Important pillars in delivery of mass campaign messages to a target audience through earned media

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**Abstract:** Over the years, the remits of different theoretical and policy discourses on media issues have dealt with how conventional forms of mass media are a crucial ingredient for effective media campaigns. They have marked and interrogated, in greater detail, how this essential role is augmented in today's era through these traditional media's adoption of digital technology. It is against this backdrop that a vast collection of research on mass media campaigns has been conducted across the world; however, many of these studies are seemingly suffused in how these campaigns are expended to enhance the behavior of a target audience positively and submerge or ignore in toto why some of them fail to realize the same. Given the persistent reality of how some of these campaigns are failing to achieve such desirable outcomes, primarily because of inadequate

funding that leads to their inconsistent delivery installments, or absolute lack of it through the media, this brief article delves into how such campaigns can still be delivered despite this financial impediment. Based on a qualitative systematic review research design, it demonstrates how mass campaigns can be delivered successfully through earned media coverage. In light of this possibility, it is concluded that relevant institutions seeking to deliver mass campaign messages should do so, at the very outset, by creating an enabling environment for such coverage to ensue. It is argued that such an environment will be realized if these institutions build a sustained series of events and news conferences specifically geared towards availing the campaign content for dissemination to a target audience at an affordable cost.

**Keywords** – Behaviors, Earned media, Mass campaigns, News stories, Target audience

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Within highly influential intellectual discourses on media-related thematic areas, it is often argued that media is a powerful platform, mainly through the dimension of its 'agent causality' in influencing people's attitudes and behaviors. In these discourses, this media, which is understood in print, electronic, and new media categorizations, holds this 'agent causation' potential because they are 'highly organized institutions' that make mass communication possible. In the context of this communicative recognition, a cacophony of competing voices posits the expectations of this media as those of conveying information, education, entertainment, and awareness to a mass audience. Critical forms of reflexive thinking developed from interpretative approaches of media's

expectations provide a perfect backdrop for distilling them into a larger framework of among many other responsibilities, those of facilitation and advancements of human rights, freedom of expression, democratic principles, and policy interventions and implementations (Gamble & Gamble, 1999; Goddard & Saunders, 2001; Jakubowicz, 2009; Tones et al., 1990).

In the context of these media's latent abilities, many existing studies in the broader literature entrench and confirm the notion that many organizations are using media as desirable and inevitable platforms for carrying their mass campaigns. Within these studies, it is possible to reaffirm and verify that such campaigns are extensively used to expose high proportions of large populations to messages through routine uses of the media in existence, including television, radio, and newspapers. Other avenues through which these campaigns are carried include billboards, posters, and the internet (Snyder, 2007; Wakefield et al., 2010).

Against the backdrop of this catalytic role by the media, there is an underlying assumption within the reviewed commentaries that mass campaign is one of the many other techniques used in changing the behaviors of a large group of people within a particular targeted population. It is pointed out that this campaign, which draws on organized communication activities, usually takes a specified duration of time and is always geared at achieving a particular desired goal (Snyder, 2007; Wakefield et al., 2010).

Pandering to the multiplicity and interactive impacts resulting from previously recorded mass campaigns, it is possible to identify areas that such campaigns have addressed significantly. Here, an example is often explicitly given of mass campaigns initiated to influence a mass population's various health behaviors. Such campaigns' core formulations have, for instance, been aimed at reducing tobacco use as a way of preventing heart diseases, addressing alcohol and illicit drug use, cancer screening and prevention, changing sex-related behaviors, improving child survival, dietary change, dental care, and many other health-related issues (Snyder, 2007; Wakefield et al., 2010). Another example mentioned in this context is the proper use of seatbelts to reduce road accidents (Snyder, 2007).

The origin of such campaigns can be traced back to Reverend Cotton Mather's campaign of promoting inoculation for smallpox in the early 1700s in the United States and healthy eating campaigns by Dr. William Alcott and Reverend Sylvester Graham between the early 1700s to mid-1800s. It is pointed out that such campaigns were carried out through pamphlets and personal appeals, and an example is given of smallpox inoculation where it was demonstrated that those who were not inoculated were much more susceptible to die from smallpox compared to those who had been inoculated (Noar, 2006; Paisley, 2001).

## **2. THE PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY THAT SHOULD BE CONFRONTED RATHER THAN IGNORED**

Provocative analysis and a great deal of evidence demonstrate that media campaigns' success lies squarely on a given media's ability to disseminate a well-crafted and designed message to a target audience. However, there is mounting anecdotal evidence that such success is illusory as several organizations and institutions keen on facilitating these campaigns have to dispense with the problem of exorbitant rates charged by the media to run them (Wakefield et al., 2010). The extreme opposite approach to the antirealism paradigm demonstrates in this context that sufficient financial resources are highly needed from such organizations and institutions for the purchase of adequate amounts of time or space in either of the desired media platforms such as television, radio, magazines, or newspapers (Rayner, 1996; Saunders & Goddard, 2002). In the context of such challenges, there is a need to establish how these agencies can still present their mass campaign messages via these media platforms affordably or even without any charge. Also, it is worth mentioning that the exposure of campaign messages to the audience through the earned media may fail to achieve the greatest results in terms of changing attitudes and behaviors of some individuals, especially because of inflexible tradition and culture (Wakefield et al., 2010). Such

occurrence opens up the need for a stronger investment in research designed to find the panacea for such a challenge.

### 3. THE MOST PRACTICAL WAY IN RESPONSE TO FINANCIAL IMPEDIMENT

Among the most lucid dialectical thinking that emerges in the context of such difficulty is how institutions and organizations can still attract media coverage to carry their campaign messages for free. Within this framework of thinking, there are 'nomothetic generalizations' that the so-called unpaid media, also referred to as the earned media, is a strategy that can be pursued as it garners enormous potency in situations where funds for mass campaigns are minimal. A key corollary theme that surfaces from this complimentary prescription is the systematic reflection of the media coverage's most practical way of amplifying campaign messages by generating more target audiences' exposure to the message. The literature often argues that this message's exposition's augmentation is implicitly or explicitly contingent on newspaper reporters, columnists, television, or radio anchors (Gutierrez, 2007).

In the context of the atomization of the events surrounding such message's exposure, commentators display a sense of imminence and foreboding by proposing the need for organizations to establish how they can create stories and attract the media to cover them. Here, it is possible to discern the emergence of essentialist orthodoxy within some reviewed discourses' communicable detail that actual events like launches, corporate social responsibilities, and public events are some of the surest means of getting media attention. Based on this underlying paradigm, there is a virtually exclusive emphasis that activities that make the news are, in most cases, those on current events and happenings. In this regard, therefore, if nothing of significance could have happened lately, the organizations must build a practical rationale for events creation as this will allow them to present their story and campaign messages through the media (Gutierrez, 2007; Weishaar, 2007).

Most commentators embed this insight with an additional epistemological orientation regarding how organizations can use dynamic sources such as prominent opinion leaders across cultures to put across a credible message during such events and, in this way, increase chances for news coverage. It is anticipated that such news is concomitant with various outcomes, including, at the very outset, the didactic delivery of a campaign message to a large audience and, with this, creating a maximum and lasting effect on this audience (Gutierrez, 2007; Weishaar, 2007). Contemporary notions of evidence-based practice suggest that such effect is achieved, for example, through exquisitely presented news stories on an anti-smoking campaign that foregrounds practical examples of the dreadful effects of smoking and juxtaposes them with the benefits of quitting the practice. A more holistic resonance about the pressing need of stopping such practice coheres to the logic and purpose of offering a telephone number that acts as a support line at the end of the story (Feltracco & Gutierrez, 2007; Wakefield et al., 2010).

### 4. CONCLUSION

This brief article developed qualitatively based on a related literature review demonstrates that mass campaigns can still succeed in light of deleterious effects afforded by financial impediments. In the context of this justificatory restraint, we have seen that an organization can pursue the earned media as an alternative option and that it should build on a practical rationale to make this shift a worthwhile endeavor. It can be concluded that this outcome is ergo dependent on the overt support of news editors, producers, reporters, and anchors, and for this reason, there is a need for an organization to build an effective relationship with these actors through their news agencies and ensure that they follow up on their mass campaign news stories from time to time.

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