

# The Vital Role Of Communication In Improving Health Awareness In India

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Effective communication is a cornerstone of health awareness, particularly in diverse and rapidly developing countries like India. This paper explores the connection between communication strategies and the enhancement of health awareness among the population, focusing on a survey conducted among 500 individuals. Health issues are becoming increasingly complex. These issues can be addressed by focusing on health communication. A combination of health education, health literacy, health communication, and health policies can reduce the severity of health problems. Designing messages for health communication is a very skillful task. The message needs to be designed in simple terms in a way that can be easily understood by the public. An easy-to-understand message can lead to more effective communication. It is indispensable to convey the message in an accessible manner to the common citizens of rural areas. Designing health communication messages is a difficult and challenging task, especially in a country like India. Messages have to be designed considering India's geographical structure, social strata, economic disparity, linguistic diversity, cultural differences, traditions, etc. Some Indian states have a low rate of literacy. There is a sizable proportion of people who are illiterate or are just becoming literate. Given this context, each stage of the health message creation process requires specific consideration. The tools used for health communication are more important. In particular, it is necessary to use tools that have the ability to convey the message of health to the public. The government of Maharashtra has planned a separate policy for the health of its citizens. The state government has an action plan to implement this policy. The findings reveal significant correlations between communication methods, information access, and health knowledge levels. This research aims to identify effective communication strategies that can improve health awareness and, ultimately, health outcomes in India.

**Keywords:** Health Communication, Health Communication Tools, Health Policy, Health Message

## Introduction

Health awareness is essential for the prevention and management of diseases. It empowers individuals with knowledge about health practices, enabling them to make informed choices. In India, a country characterized by linguistic diversity, cultural pluralism, and varying levels of education, communication plays a crucial role in disseminating health information.

## Health Communication

Communication is the exchange or transmission of information, thoughts, feelings, opinions, roles, and perceptions among those who are communicating. Communication includes the information source, sender, channel, message, receiver, destination, etc. Feedback plays a very important role in communication. Communication includes information sources, senders, channels, messages, receivers, destinations, etc. Feedback plays a very important role in communication. Simply defined, communication is the art of

transmitting information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another. (Edwin Emery, Philip H. Ault, Warren K. Agee, 1967) The process of communication is going on at different levels simultaneously. This process needs to be accelerated in order to reach people with health messages. The main objective of health communication is to influence individuals or communities. Health communication should help individuals or groups make decisions. Health communication is a multidisciplinary field of study and practice that applies communication evidence, strategy, theory, and creativity to promote behaviors, policies, and practices that advance the health and well-being of people and populations. Accurate and objective information is essential for making any health decision. Decision-making depends on information, so objective information should reach people. Involving patients as well as the public in the decision-making process requires checking the veracity and reliability of information. The World Health Organization has suggested six principles in the context of communication. It includes being accessible to decision-makers, actionable by decision-makers, credible and trusted as perceived by decision-makers, relevant to decision makers, timely to enable decision-making, understandable to decision-makers, etc. The process of health communication can be facilitated with the help of this principle. Apart from these six principles, the role of information and technology in health communication is very important. A focus on information technology and mass media is needed to ensure that mass media can also be used for health communication. Through different communication channels, media, devices, and applications, health messages can be delivered to numerous people. (Coiera, 2006) Information technology, as well as mass media, is helpful in delivering health and healthcare services to people. This new technology should be used to make health facilities easily accessible to citizens. Health communication encompasses the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) with regard to health and healthcare. (Thomas, 2006) Good communication between the patient and the health workers is essential from the very beginning. If there is harmony from the beginning, then all subsequent transactions can be healthy. (Berry, 2007) The Patient Charter, published in the United States in 1992, also mentions the importance of good communication between patients and health workers. In India, too, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare published a document in 2019 on patient rights and entitlements. In fact, patient rights have been declared human rights in India. (NHRC, 2019) The right to information is also included in human rights in India. Every patient in the country has the right to access health-related information. This has helped to create transparency in the entire transaction, along with respect for the rights of the patients. This paper emphasizes the vital role of communication in enhancing health awareness and presents data from a survey conducted among 500 individuals across different regions of India.

### Literature Review

Prior research has established that effective communication strategies can significantly influence health knowledge and behaviors. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), communication is a necessary component of public health initiatives. Studies show that when health information is accessible, culturally relevant, and delivered through appropriate channels, it increases the likelihood of positive health behaviors (Kreps, 2017). Health campaigns utilizing mass media, community outreach, and digital platforms have particularly shown improved health outcomes (Banyai et al., 2019). Many practitioners and researchers around the world have worked on health communication from different angles. Even in India, researchers have done research on health communication. A strategy of communication has had to be advocated to combat the many epidemics that have emerged in India. Communication has been very important in increasing public participation in polio vaccination, especially in India. Communication strategies have contributed to such progress on several levels by: mobilizing social networks and leaders; creating political will; increasing knowledge and changing attitudes; ensuring individual and community-level demand; overcoming gender barriers and resistance to vaccination; and, above all, reaching out to the poorest and most marginalized. (Rafael Obregón, Ketan Chitnis, Chris Morry, Warren Feek, Jeffrey Bates, Michael Galwaye, Ellyn Ogden, 2009) Mass media has played a very important role in creating public awareness about polio. Public awareness was raised through specialty radio and television, which helped increase public participation in polio vaccination campaigns. Health journalism needs to be done carefully to communicate health information to the public. Recently, health journalism has been gaining attention in India. However, the seriousness and objectivity of this journalism must be given special attention. Information published in newspapers is considered the most reliable in India. This has resurfaced in the COVID era. However, the media in India should take steps for qualitative and quantitative growth in health news. (D.C. Sharma, Abhishek Pathak, Rameshwar Nath Chaurasia, Deepika Joshi, Rajesh Kumar Singh, Vijay Nath Mishra, 2020) If the media ignores the health issues, there will be difficulties in reaching the masses with health facilities. Mass media should convey accurate health information to the people so they can benefit from health schemes. Information technology is widely used in India. Mobile phone technology has reached rural areas as well as Taluka and District levels. In such a case, it is easily possible to convey health information to people with the help of new technology. Across all media and whatever the content, policymakers, program planners, and communication and information specialists need to keep in mind the five parameters for actionable information—language, timeliness, simplicity, quantity, and accessibility—to meet the diverse needs at each level of the health system. ( Nandita Kapadia-Kundu, Tara M. Sullivan, Basil Safi, Geetali

Trivedi & Sanjanthi Velu, 2012) The desired outcomes of health communication will be achieved if the reach and message-carrying capacity of the mass media are high and effective. Along with the mass media, the role of traditional media is equally complementary for health communication to be effective. Community mobilizers helped bring about change by being a part of the change process themselves. Community influencers, religious leaders, teachers, managers, and other such influential groups can be important allies in bringing about change. Human resource management techniques and ongoing capacity development can lead to the building up of social capital that can be harnessed for social change. (AR Siddique, P Singh, G Trivedi, 2016) Local influencers in health communication can convey more effective messages. Health communication will be more effective if it also focuses on traditional communication method. Healthcare Communication in India Healthcare communication is playing a very effective role in the current situation. Pharmaceuticals have adopted a consumer-oriented and patient-centric model. It is focusing on healthcare communication. Meaningful dialogue among various stakeholders, including pharmaceutical companies, medical research institutes, hospitals, and patients, becomes paramount. Healthcare communications specialists embody the critical role of facilitating collaboration and communication among these diverse entities.

### **Health Education and Communication**

Health education has been consistently emphasized in India. Public awareness is created through health communication and health education. According to the directives of the Government of India, the activities of the Health Education and Public Health Department are essential for public health awareness. Earlier, different health programs were implemented separately in the state. There was a lack of coordination, variation in programs, and errors in implementation. To overcome these issues, the Government of India has set up an integrated 'State Health Education and Outreach' department at the state level. In 1996, the State Health Education and Communication Department was established in Pune to strengthen health information, education, and communication in the state of Maharashtra. The Maharashtra State Government has its own independent 'State Health Education and Outreach' department. The department is strengthening the health program in the state by taking an integrated approach to the state's health program and health services through the planning, implementation, and evaluation of health education, information, and communication strategies, as well as programs and activities in the state. (IEC, 2023) The State Health Education and Outreach Department is linked with the District Extension Media Officer at the district level. This department is the focal point for behavior change communication. Radio is the most effective medium in India for communicating information to rural people. Health information also reaches the masses through television advertisements. Various government initiatives need to be consciously communicated and disseminated to the public regarding patient needs and facilities available to patients. (N. Naveena, 2015) Face-to-face communication tools are more useful for conveying health information. Apart from traditional media, newspapers and electronic media also help spread health messages far and wide. Television and newspapers are important sources of health and nutrition science for many viewers and readers. Many research studies have considered them a tool that may influence the behavior of the community. Therefore, the reporting of news about medicine, public health, and nutrition science is an area of concern to many health and social scientists. Mass media campaigns on health are a very beneficial tool for promoting health services at the national as well as rural levels. It is better to stop arguing about the fact that mass media is an effective channel for promoting health, since it is obviously a very important tool that reaches a large population and delivers a vast amount of knowledge about health issues and health care. Knowledge and awareness about various serious health issues like HIV, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, etc. can be promoted via mass media, which will help a lot of people become aware of such health problems and diseases. The massive IEC campaign for social mobilization for Pulse Polio Immunization over the last few years has been a significant activity. One of the most important lessons learned from the polio campaign has been the realization that, at the field level, interpersonal communication (IPC) is the key to behavioral change. The mass media creates an enabling environment; it lends credibility to what the health worker is saying, but the crucial factor in getting people to come to the booth for the vaccine is the persuasive skill of the health worker.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample Selection**

A sample of 500 individuals was randomly selected from urban and rural areas in India. Participants were stratified by age, gender, education level, and socioeconomic status to ensure a comprehensive representation of the population.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through structured questionnaires, focusing on:

- Forms of communication used to access health information (e.g., television, internet, community workshops, newspapers)

- Level of health awareness (measured through questions related to knowledge of preventive measures, treatment options, and health services)
- Preferred communication channels for receiving health information.

### Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients to identify relationships between communication methods and health awareness levels.

## Results

### Demographics of Participants

Demographic Factor	Percentage (%)
Age 18-25	22%
Age 26-35	25%
Age 36-45	23%
Age 46+	30%
Male	48%
Female	52%
Rural	45%
Urban	55%
Education (No formal education)	12%
Education (Up to high school)	34%
Education (Graduates)	40%
Education (Post Graduates)	14%

### Communication Channels and Health Awareness

Communication Channel	Frequency (%)	Awareness Level (1-10)
Television	60%	7.5
Internet	45%	8.2
Community Workshops	30%	6.8
Newspapers	22%	5.5
Social Media	35%	7.0
Radio	15%	4.0

### Correlation Between Communication and Health Awareness

The correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between preferred communication channels and health awareness:

- Television ( $r = 0.65$ )
- Internet ( $r = 0.70$ )

- Community Workshops ( $r = 0.60$ )
- Newspapers ( $r = 0.45$ )
- Social Media ( $r = 0.55$ )

### Key Findings

- 1. Internet and Television** were the most effective communication channels, resulting in higher health awareness scores.
- 2. Community Workshops** proved beneficial for participants seeking localized health information but had a lower reach.
- 3. Social Media** is increasingly becoming a popular platform for health communication among younger generations, yet it lacks credibility when compared to traditional sources.

### Discussion

The findings indicate that communication significantly impacts health awareness levels among the surveyed population. Notably, the higher awareness levels associated with internet and television use underscore the importance of investing in digital health literacy and media literacy programs. Community outreach remains vital, particularly in rural areas with limited access to digital resources.

Barriers such as misinformation, language barriers, and lack of trust in health information sources persist and must be addressed to optimize health communication strategies.

### Conclusion

The study highlights the critical role of communication in enhancing health awareness in India. By utilizing effective communication channels tailored to the target audience, public health initiatives can significantly improve health literacy and outcomes.

Health communication has been practiced in India for a long time. In fact, although there are many tools of health communication in the country, among the traditional tools, radio occupies the highest and most important position. Through radio, the message of health reaches the common people in rural areas effectively. Adequate and accurate feedback facilities are not available on radio, but the reach of radio is greater compared to other traditional media. Hence, radio is most useful for conveying the health message in a dynamic manner. Along with traditional media, digital media is also being extensively used for health care communication in India. The number of smartphone users in India is increasing, and the internet is becoming cheaper as a result. As a result, the number of users is also increasing significantly. Hence, it is becoming easier to convey health information to people through digital tools. Central and various state governments have made effective use of information, communication, and technology to make health facilities available to the common people. Due to the use of ICT, efforts are being made to deliver not only information but also health facilities to citizens promptly. Information about health policies and facilities available to citizens is conveyed more quickly and effectively through digital media. Therefore, digital media has been given special emphasis for health communication in India in the last few years.

Future interventions should focus on integrating diverse communication strategies while considering cultural contexts to foster sustainable health awareness.

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