Module 34

The Role of The Media in Advocacy and Social Mobilization

Overview

The media is recognised as the 4th Estate of the realm. This recognition alongside the other three pillars of democracy, the executive, legislature and the judiciary is an acceptance of the important role the media play in society. As the main channel through which information reaches the public, the media have the potential to influence policy, attitudes, behaviours and ultimately change society. Consequently, it remains one of the best tools in advocacy and social mobilization.

General Objective

The general objective of module 34 is to examine the agenda setting role of the media and how the media can be effectively used in advocacy and social mobilization to promote the goals of education and development.

Specific Objectives

To enable the user to:

- Discuss the functions of the media
- Examine the agenda setting role of the media and its application in advocacy and social mobilization
- Highlight specific examples of use of the media in advocacy and agenda setting.

Expected Outcome

By the end of the module the user will understand the power of the media and its potential role in advocacy and social mobilization to promote any development cause.

Introduction

Generally, the role of the media is to inform, educate and entertain. The public depends in most cases on the media for information about events in the world. Through its role as the channel and source of news, entertainment and information, the media influence the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of many people.

Module 34 is divided into 2 units and it discusses how the influence of the media can be used in advocacy and social mobilization. Unit 1 discusses the agenda setting role of the media and highlights some guidelines in effective use of the media in advocacy.
and social mobilization. Unit 2 offers some case studies of successful use of the media in advocacy and social mobilization.

Unit 1

Agenda Setting

Role of the Media in Advocacy

The traditional function of the media which is to “inform, educate and entertain” enables the media to play what has been described as an “agenda setting role” through which it able to influence the views of its readers, listeners and viewers.

As the gatekeepers of news and information, the media exercise their influence by their choice of what stories to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them. An insignificant story that is published across a banner headline at the front page attracts more attention and interest than a relatively much more important story that is literally buried in the inside pages of a newspaper. The media have the power through sustained reporting of an issue followed by editorials, features and documentaries to raise an issue to great significance and by so doing influence either government policies or public opinion.

The influence of the media is seen more in politics and elections where endorsements and coverage by the media have in many instances determined winners and losers. Although corruption is endemic in many African countries, the phenomenon has in some countries become a major public issue only after the media have given prominence in coverage to corrupt practices.

A series of media campaigns against the maltreatment of albinos in Tanzania led the government to initiate actions against the perpetrators.

The well-documented coverage of the Washington Post and its two reporters, (the Watergate scandal) that led to the resignation of US President Richard Nixon is a classic example of the influence of the media.

The media with its power and influence would undoubtedly make a big difference if, and when they choose to play an advocacy role in education. For instance important educational issues such as Special Needs Education and the Girl Child Education which are not given the attention they deserve will with sustained reportage in the media become major issues.
How The Media Sets Agenda

The following are recommended tips for the media in agenda setting:

- Identify an issue or cause that must be addressed by society and government.
- Conduct research or investigation into issue
- Convince editor or head of media house about justification of the story.
- Write an article or produce documentary/news story about issue.
- Follow up with more articles/stories/documentaries.
- Write editorials on the issue
- If possible get other journalists and media houses to write about the issue.
- Monitor and evaluate progress/change in policy towards issue/issues
- Use media to publish opinions of stakeholders.
- Never give up when results are not forthcoming. Sustained coverage of issue will eventually produce results.

Activity 1

1. Identify an issue that calls for urgent attention and solution.
2. Design an action plan that will bring about the desired change.

Unit 2

The Media in Advocacy and Social Mobilization

There are many examples of media advocacy and campaigns in Africa and other parts of the world that have resulted in attitudinal and behavioral changes and most importantly influenced government policies. Public smoking is banned in many countries today thanks to media advocacy that showed the negative effect of such smoking on non-smokers.

Legal reforms in many African countries have resulted in some instances in the repeal of criminal libel laws. Media pluralism and freedom of expression on the continent have witnessed steady progress due to sustained campaign by media organizations, institutions and associations as well as human rights and other civil society groups. Even the very sustenance of good governance in some African countries has come about through the proactive role of the African media.

Both the print and electronic media in many African countries have joined fundraising campaigns to support the health needs of children, hospitals and school buildings. The levels of awareness about HIV and AIDS have been achieved through awareness campaigns in the African media.
The role of the international media such as the BBC, CNN, and RFI in mobilising resources in cash and kind to help victims of famine, earthquake, hurricane and other natural disasters in certain countries like Ethiopia, Haiti, Chile in recent years show the influence the media wield in social mobilization.

Research Paper

The role of reported tobacco-specific media exposure on adult attitudes towards proposed policies to limit the portrayal of smoking in movies

1. Kelly D Blake1,
2. K Viswanath1,
3. Robert J Blendon2,
4. Donna Vallone3

Author Affiliations

1Department of Society, Human Development, and Health, Harvard School of Public Health and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Boston, Massachusetts, USA
2Department of Health Policy and Management, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
3American Legacy Foundation, Washington, DC, USA

Correspondence to Dr Kelly D Blake, 44 Binney Street, MS LW703, Boston, MA 02115, USA; kellyblake@post.harvard.edu
Received 5 May 2009
Accepted 18 November 2009
Published Online First 11 December 2009

Abstract

Objective: To assess the relative, independent contribution of reported tobacco-specific media exposure (pro-tobacco advertising, anti-tobacco advertising, and news coverage of tobacco issues) to US adults’ support for policy efforts that aim to regulate the portrayal of smoking in movies.

Methods: Using the American Legacy Foundation’s 2003 American Smoking and Health Survey (ASHES-2), multivariable logistic regression was used to model the predicted probability that US adults support movie-specific tobacco control policies, by reported exposure to tobacco-specific media messages, controlling for smoking status, education, income, race/ethnicity, age, sex, knowledge of the negative effects of tobacco and state.
**Results:** Across most outcome variables under study, findings reveal that reported exposure to tobacco-specific media messages is associated with adult attitudes towards movie-specific policy measures. Most exposure to tobacco information in the media (with the exception of pro-tobacco advertising on the internet) contributes independently to the prediction of adult support for movie-specific policies. The direction of effect follows an expected pattern, with reported exposure to anti-tobacco advertising and news coverage of tobacco predicting supportive attitudes towards movie policies, and reported exposure to pro-tobacco advertising lessening support for some movie policies, though the medium of delivery makes a difference.

**Conclusion:** Media campaigns to prevent tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke have had value beyond the intended impact of single-issue campaigns; exposure to anti-tobacco campaigns and public dialogue about the dangers of tobacco seem also to be associated with shaping perceptions of the social world related to norms about tobacco, and ideas about regulating the portrayal of smoking in movies.

**Case Study 1**

**Media Literacy Education**

Media literacy education provides tools to help people critically analyse messages to detect biases, in news, propaganda and censorship in programmes.

In South Africa the demand for media education evolved from dismantling apartheid, which eventually ended with the 1994 democratic elections after massive advocacy campaigns.

The campaign for media literacy has yielded good results in that now it is being used for health education, with an emphasis on understanding environmental influences on health decision-making.
Case Study 2

“Smoking is not good for youth in school”
Under the media campaign “smoking is bad for students” and through media advocacy and social mobilization, tobacco control became successful. In this campaign, local leaders and community members became involved, by taking control approaches as their own. This eventually enhanced the campaign implementation process of the project, which had an achievable objective. In the end the youth realized that “smoking is not good”, and that, they should concentrate on their schooling in a more serious manner to help their future development.

Case Study 3

Journalists need to be empowered
The Inter Africa Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development (FAMEDEV) is also an example that provides training and production exercises for African women and men journalists on gender and media advocacy and HIV and AIDS. The programmes are aimed at providing practical tools and skills to enable them embark on gender and media advocacy activities, influence gender policies in their media houses and organizations and report effectively on gender, HIV and AIDS from a rights perspective.

Conclusion

These case studies have shown that advocacy and social mobilization have a major role to play in changing attitudes and behavior to bring about the expected change to accelerate the overall development in Africa.

References

   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/media-literacy
   http://unesco.org/education (18/07/09)
3. BBC World Service Trust The Role of the Media as an Agent of Change in Africa. Recommendations to the Commission for Africa (18/07/09)
5. Development and communication, printed by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung