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# Any Questions: An Examination of Public Service Advertising and the Psychological Factors Affecting It

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Any Questions

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Any Questions: An Examination of Public Service  
Advertising and the Psychological Factors Affecting It

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Running Head: ANY QUESTIONS: PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING

Abstract

An examination of public service advertising (PSA), and some factors affecting it, was made. Psychological topics important to public service advertising, such as: attitude change, motives, and personality traits were reviewed. The impact of four communication variables, source, message, channel and receiver, were also examined. Finally, examples of successful PSA campaigns were analyzed. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of future public service advertising were made.

## Literature Review

I conducted my information search by working from the broad to the narrow. My first step was an examination of different encyclopedias. I looked up topics such as: advertising, public service advertising, persuasion and fear in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences and the Encyclopedia of Psychology. Next, I spent a great deal of time in the card catalog where I focused on topics like: advertising, messages, appeals, motivation, attitude change, persuasion, fear, and public service advertising. I also used the Illinet computer of books and authors to make sure I had not overlooked anything. Finally, I used systematic browsing in advertising, marketing and psychology sections of the library. This led to the discovery of several books previously not found.

Once my book search was complete, I moved into periodical literature. I used the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, years 1988-1991, and the Infotrac General Index, years 1986 to 1991. These sources yielded many articles on my subject in business and popular periodicals. I began locating scholarly articles by

using the Social Science Index from February 1983 to the present, the Humanities Index from 1976 to the present, and the Business Periodicals Index from July 1982 to the present. In addition to the topics already mentioned, I also examined subjects that might use public service advertising such as, drug abuse, AIDS and crime prevention.

Four other indexes were used in my search for scholarly sources. I examined the Psychological Abstracts and Sociological Abstracts from 1988 to 1991 on all topics aforementioned. Next, I used the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) which led me to several scholarly convention papers. Finally, I looked at the Index to Journals in Communication Studies from 1980 to 1985.

Reference lists from articles already found proved to be the best source of new articles. These lists often provided a very thorough overview of previous studies, even those dating several decades back. I also found some review articles in psychology which provided a wealth of related studies.

The final step in my information search was to talk

to professors. By doing so I hoped to gain additional written sources, as well as some of the experience and wisdom of the professors. This search proved very successful with two professors from whom I obtained several books and convention papers.

All in all, my information search was very successful. I was able to acquire almost every source desired. I ended up with 41 relevant articles, nine books and a dissertation from which I could begin my evaluation.

Any Questions: An Examination of Public Service Advertising and the Psychological Factors Affecting It

The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) defines a PSA as a message "for which no charge is made and which promotes programs, activities, or services of federal, state or local governments (e.g., recruiting and selling war bonds) or the programs, activities, or services of non-profit organizations (e.g., United Way and the American Red Cross) and other announcements regarded as serving community interests excluding time signals, routine weather announcements and promotional announcements. (Paletz et al. study, cited in Freimuth, 1985, p. 56)

Probably the most cited definition is that of Jerry R. Lynn (1974). Lynn defines public service advertising (PSA) as "a pervasive, yet highly specialized form of communication utilized to disseminate information on public issues to the masses" (p. 622). He believed the purpose of PSA was "to encourage individual response to social problems" (p. 622).

It is difficult to date the exact beginnings of PSA. Different groups and certainly the government have

used public communication campaigns for many years. Social issues such as, "the effects of spiritous liquors on the mind" (Paisley, 1981, p.29) and "female education" (p. 29) were part of public communication campaigns in the 18th century. Currently, PSA is done for many topics of social importance. Some of the topics receiving particular attention are: safe sex, drug abuse, crime prevention, and drinking and driving.

According to Freimuth (1985) there are five different types of sponsors for PSA, "the private firm (e.g., Exxon), charitable organizations such as the March of Dimes, nonprofit institutions (e.g., the American Council on Education), government agencies such as Housing and Urban Development, and the Advertising Council" (p. 56). The Advertising Council, "a non-profit organization supported by media, advertising agencies, advertiser associations and donations from private firms" (Lynn, 1973, p. 673), has played the largest role in public service advertising.

In order to understand PSA as a whole, it is necessary to examine many of the factors influencing it. For this reason, some principles of psychology and



communication research affecting PSA will be reviewed. This paper will also present examples of PSA campaigns that have succeeded and recommendations to help future campaigns do the same.

#### Significance of Topic

Public service advertising is a topic of extreme importance to many people for many reasons. On one end, it serves as a vital communication tool for governments, private institutions, social groups, and in general, for people who care. On the other end, public service advertising helps people who may have problems or needs and provides them with a source of information and support.

Because public service advertising employs mass media, as well as many other communication sources, it can have very powerful social effects. Among these effects are: educating and informing; persuading and changing attitudes; and, training and behavior modification. When one considers that these effects may be in relation to life and death matters such as, AIDS, Cancer and drug abuse, the importance of public service advertising becomes overwhelming.

In an age where social problems abound, even the greatest critics of advertising must agree that public service advertising is not only beneficial, but vital.

### Psychological Research

#### and Public Service Advertising

One of the goals of psychology has been the study of why man does what he does. What is the combination of internal and external variables that stimulates memory, changes attitudes, elicits action? These questions have also plagued advertisers for many generations. Convincing consumers to buy products has never been a particularly easy task. However, it can sometimes seem elementary compared to the task of the public service advertiser. Not only must public service advertisers change attitudes and behavior, but they must do so in the face of sensitive topics, social apathy and deeply-rooted behaviors. For these and many other reasons, psychology has played an important role in public service advertising.

The study of persuasion and its many approaches has been vital to the development of public service advertising. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) define persuasion

as, "any instance in which an active attempt is made to change a person's mind" (p. 4). To make this attempt, it is necessary to know everything possible about the person and the workings of the mind. Therefore, three major areas have been studied to facilitate the persuasion process. They are: attitude change, motives, and personality traits.

#### Attitude Change

"The area of attitude change is the largest single body of research in social psychology, with over five percent of the 25,000 articles and books summarized each year in the Psychological Abstracts being devoted to this topic" (McGuire, 1976, p. 302). Over the years, several different theories of attitude change have been developed and examined. Many theories enjoyed individual popularity during a particular time period. Although no one theory has emerged as the explanation for attitude change, each has played an individual role in providing new insights and shaping the beliefs of the time.

Principles of learning. These theories suggest basic ways attitudes may be learned. Among these learning theories are: operant conditioning, classical

conditioning and modeling. Operant conditioning refers to Skinner's theory of positive and negative reinforcements. A response or attitude that has a positive consequence is more likely to be repeated. An attitude that receives a negative response is less likely to be repeated. "Classical conditioning occurs when an initially neutral stimulus (the conditioned stimulus, or CS) is associated with another stimulus (the unconditioned stimulus, or UCS) that is connected inherently or by prior conditioning to some response (the unconditioned response, or UCR)" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, p. 40). Finally, modeling refers to attitudes acquired through observation of others. Modeling is an important theory in child development and may help to show a connection between shared attitudes of parents and children.

Message learning theory. Hovland, Janis and Kelley developed the message learning approach at Yale University in the 1950s. This theory consisted of four factors: attention to a persuasive message, comprehension of it, retention of its arguments and conclusion, and yielding to the message (Petty and

Cacioppo, 1981, p. 60). Other variables such as source, recipient and channel were shown to have potential effects on the response to the message.

Perceptual judgement theories. These theories of persuasion deal with the formation of attitudes in relation to the individual's experience. They also examine message perception. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) found the approaches to attitude and persuasion falling under the realm of perceptual judgement theories all shared the same view:

The psychophysical principles of human judgement that are used to explain why one light is rated as brighter than another, and why one line is rated as longer than another, can be used to understand why one person is more influenced than another, why one message is more persuasive than another. (p. 95)

Two important theories in this area are the adaptation level theory and the social judgement theory. Both work from the basis that people rank or order stimuli along some dimension. In the adaptation level theory, the adaptation level is said to be the "psychological neutral point" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981,

p.95). "The adaptation level is of considerable importance because other stimuli are judged in relation to it" (p.96). Here the actual perception of a stimulus may be distorted by comparing it to the adaptation level. This distortion is called a contrast effect. In the social judgement theory, two distortions can play a role: contrast and assimilation. These terms refer, respectively, to shifts in judgement away from or toward a reference point.

While there are many other theories of attitude change, the theories presented here; learning, message learning and perceptual judgement, have played an important role in understanding attitudes. They provide insight on how attitudes are learned and changed, and the roles that message, perception and judgement can play in those changes.

#### Motivational Theories

Human motivation has been an area of immense study. These theories are concerned with the dynamic forces within the person that lead to responses, such as information processing or action.

There is a wide variety of dynamic theories

underlying research on persuasive communication, each theory being a partial view of the person, focusing on one aspect of human motivation and using it to provide insight into how communication campaigns can be made more effective. (McGuire, 1981, p.54)

Generally, these theories have been classified as either cognitive or affective, depending on whether the motive was thought-oriented or feeling-oriented. These theories have also been categorized as theories of stability or theories of growth. According to McGuire, "stability theories depict the person as striving to maintain the current homeostasis, while growth theories depict the individual as striving to develop to higher levels of complexity" (p. 54).

Cognitive stability theories. As the name indicates, these theories focus on the thought end of the spectrum, while attempting to maintain stability. The basic assumption of cognitive stability theories "is that there is a strong tendency for people to maintain consonance (consistency) among the elements of a cognitive system" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, p.126).

One important group of cognitive stability theories are the consistency theories. Consistency theories "were extremely popular in guiding persuasion research during the 1960s" (McGuire, 1981, p. 56). Important examples of these theories include balance theory, cognitive dissonance theory and congruity theory (p. 56). These theories have yielded important findings for persuasion and communication research. Among them are the possibility of "selective avoidance of belief-discrepant communications and the notion that attitude change follows rather than precedes behavioral change (in order to justify the behavior)" (pp. 56-57).

Two other important groups of cognitive stability theories are categorization theories and noetic theories. Categorization theories suggest that people continually work to organize incoming stimuli into cognitive categories (McGuire, 1981, p. 57). Noetic theories, which gained popularity during the 1970s "stress the human tendency to impose meanings on the experienced world" (p. 57).

Cognitive growth theories. These theories are similar to the cognitive stability theories in their



focus on thought. However, these sets of theories differ in that cognitive growth theories "see action as initiated by the need to grow rather than to maintain or restore the current equilibrium" (McGuire, 1981, p. 58).

An important group of theories in this area are autonomy theories. These focus on "the person's need for freedom and control...over one's own identity and environment" (McGuire, 1981, p. 59). Stimulation theories also fall into the category of cognitive growth theories. Stimulation theories present the person as "stimulus-hungry, playful and excitement seeking"

(p. 60). These theories relate to later studies concerning personality traits such as high/low sensation seeking and to message characteristics such as appeal.

Affective stability theories. These theories differ from the last two sets in that they focus on affective end states or feelings. They also emphasize maintaining the stability of these feelings. Theories that fall into this category are tension-reduction theories, expressive theories and ego-defensive theories (McGuire, 1981, p. 61). Ego-defensive theories are particularly important because they "focus on the human tendency to

maintain one's self-concept in an acceptable form by selectively noticing and ignoring aspects of the self and the environment" (p. 61). Affective stability theories can provide important insight into people's affective states and can help communicators better develop messages in relation to feelings.

Affective growth theories. This final set of motivational theories emphasizes "the human need for the growth of the feelings" (McGuire, 1981, p. 63). Included in these theories are: assertion theories, empathy theories and identification theories (p. 64). The affective growth of individuals as presented in these models often relies on the influences of other people. People need to examine the people they encounter, shape themselves accordingly, impress others and feel loved. These are important ideas considering PSA campaigns often ask people to act on behalf of themselves and others. For example, empathy theories point out not only man's need to be loved, but also his potential for altruism. This potential is key to the success of public service advertising.

Motivational theorists will undoubtedly continue to

develop and debate theories about human motives. As with research on attitude change, there is no one correct theory of motivation. However, each set of theories offers many beneficial insights and recommendations to communicators. Motivation is an important area to public service advertising that should be studied in depth.

#### Personality Traits

Several personality traits have been studied in relation to public service advertising. Individual differences concerning characteristics such as self-esteem and fatalism have been shown to contribute to the perception and effectiveness of messages. Eight personality traits particularly important to public service advertising will be examined. They are: self-esteem, optimism, fatalism, powerlessness, personalization of risk, sensation seeking, anxiety, and self-efficacy.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to an individual's positive opinion of himself. This personality trait can have important implications concerning the targeting and appeal of a public service message. After examining several studies of appeal and self-esteem Higbee (1969)

summarizes,

Thus, the interaction of self-esteem with fear level in persuasion is quite well supported. People with high self-esteem are more persuaded by a high-threat appeal than are people with low self-esteem. One reason for this may be that high-esteem subjects are less personally threatened by a high-threat appeal and thus can react to such an appeal by taking realistic action. (p. 430)

While the effects of self-esteem may continue to be debated, it still provides important information for public service advertisers.

Optimism. Optimism is a personality trait emphasizing a positive outlook. Optimistic people generally look for the bright side of everything. Sun (1989) in his study of predictors of learning from public service advertising, found that recall of public service announcements was negatively associated to optimism (p. 17). Sun believed the reason for the negative relationship was, "the nature of conceptualization of optimism" (p. 17). Citing McLeod et al. (1988), Sun referred to optimism as the Polyanna world view. (p. 17)

"This term conveys a 'blind' positivity, meaning optimistic people measured by this factor may be relatively naive and confident about the world without specific reasons for changes" (p.17). Based on this study, optimistic people are likely to ignore or disbelieve public service announcements.

Fatalism. Fatalism as a personality trait refers to a "belief in external control" (Lynn, 1974, p. 623). A person high in fatalism "believes that he is primarily directed by external forces which he cannot control" (p. 623). Lynn found fatalism an important personality trait in relation to public service advertising. Two studies in which Lynn examined fatalism and public service advertising were: Effects of Persuasive Appeals in Public Service Advertising and Evaluation of Public Service Advertising Messages with Local and Non-local Source Attribution: A Controlled Laboratory Experiment.

Prior studies on fatalism had revealed "a negative relationship between fatalism and information sensitivity" (Lynn, 1974, p. 623), and a tendency for fatalists "to respond only to reward explanation messages" (p. 623). Lynn (1983) stated:

In terms of the significance of fatalism in PSA message response, the implications are probably most important for the copywriter who must help the high-fatalist overcome the natural tendency to ignore messages that do not have an explicit reward. (p. 60)

Powerlessness. Powerlessness, also referred to as anomie, is similar to fatalism in many ways. Anomic individuals believe "they can do very little to control their everyday lives or their destinies" (Mendelsohn, 1973, p. 59). Like fatalists they find the external forces to be overwhelming. However, powerlessness goes beyond fatalism, in that anomic persons can "experience a debilitating sense of helplessness in coping with life directly" (p. 59). These findings can be important in the targeting and type of appeal used in PSA. This is due to the fact that highly anomic people were generally elderly or of lower incomes, two important groups in health-oriented messages.

Personalization of risk. Personalization of risk is the ability of the individual to perceive their actual vulnerability. Oftentimes the problem with

personalization of risk, especially for public service advertising, is the lack of it. "Individuals intellectually understand that they are participating in behaviors that are potentially risky, but they have the ability to divorce themselves from the problem" (Freimuth et al., 1990, p. 778). This failure to personalize problems presents difficulties for public service advertisers in attitude and behavioral change.

Sensation seeking. Sensation seeking refers to the level of stimuli an individual is most comfortable with and most likely to actively seek out. This personality trait is divided into low sensation seekers and high sensation seekers. High sensation seekers "driven by a biologically-based need for sensation... are attracted to information about activities which fulfill this need" (Donohew, 1989, p. 29). Conversely, low sensation seekers are more interested in a message with low sensation levels. In relation to public service advertising, sensation seeking is an important consideration for message content. This is especially true for problems associated with sensation seeking, such as drug abuse and drinking and driving.

Anxiety. "Anxiety is an unpleasant state of arousal which occurs in response to cognitively or environmentally produced stimuli" (Hill, 1988, p. 36). Anxiety levels can differ significantly from person to person, even in response to the same message. Anxiety is a very important area in public service advertising. Anxiety for a problem such as AIDS may be very high for many different people, even those at almost no risk. Since this anxiety may influence reception of the message it is an important consideration. "As suggested by Levanthal et al. (1983), people's anxiety about a threat may interfere with their evaluative and cognitive reaction to the message, or may contribute to a sense that they cannot cope with the hazard" (Struckman-Johnson et al., 1990, p. 1398).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory as stated by Bandura and cited by Maddux and Rogers (1983) "maintains that all processes of psychological change operate through the alteration of the individual's expectancies of personal mastery or efficacy" (p. 470). "Self-efficacy expectancy is the perception of one's ability to perform a specific behavior" (Tanner, Jr., et al., 1989,



p. 268). This has two important implications for public service advertisers. First, an individual who does not believe they can carry out a task, such as smoking cessation, may not be affected by any message. Second, including simple instructions in a public service announcement may make the behavior seem more attainable, even for those with low self-efficacy expectancy.

Research on personality traits has provided public service advertisers with new knowledge and direction. Continued research could aid public service advertising in realizing its full social potential.

Although not all the areas of psychological research affecting PSA could be presented, it is clear that psychology plays an indispensable role in the creation and effectiveness of public service advertising.

#### Communication Variables

There are several different components of the communication process that are key to the development of effective information campaigns. Research in this area has focused on determining the importance and role of each component. By breaking down the communication process and examining each factor, researchers have been

able to make recommendations to public service advertisers in areas such as: source, message, channel and audience. An examination of each of these communication variables follows.

Source Factors

Source factors refer to the characteristics of the spokesperson or the person delivering the message.

Hence, what concerns us here are the characteristics of the individual who ostensibly presents the message to the public (for example, the Secretary of Agriculture, the friendly forest ranger, or the ubiquitous and articulate Smokey Bear) rather than the characteristic of the person in the Ad Council, Forest Service, or ad agency who actually produced the message. (McGuire, 1981, pps. 45-6)

"The most thoroughly studied aspect of sources is credibility" (Atkin, 1981. p. 275). Three criteria make up credibility. They are: expertise/competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism/attractiveness. Because credibility has a positive effect on impact and persuasion it is a very important source characteristic.

Research indicates that the importance of each

credibility criterion is related to the intent of the message. If the message is technical or complex, expert/competence is the preferred characteristic. When a message deals with persuasion, especially in relation to attitude or behavior change, trustworthiness is most important. Research has found that, in general, sources similar to the target are most trusted. "Rogers (1971) uses the term homophily to describe sources who use similar language, give evidence of shared values, and resemble the receiver in personal and social characteristics" (Freimuth, 1985, p. 78). The third dimension of credibility, dynamism/attractiveness, is best exemplified by celebrity sources. This type of source credibility is most effective in low involvement situations. It is important to note that source credibility hinges on the perceptions and composition of the audience. A highly credible source for one group may have low credibility for another.

#### Message Factors

"Effective messages, according to the message-learning approach, provide incentives for learning and accepting the advocated attitudinal position" (Petty and

Cacioppo, 1981, p. 69). For this reason, message factors are possibly the most important components of the communication process. They are also the components over which the creator has the most control. Three message factors are of considerable importance to public service advertisers. These factors; frequency, content and persuasive appeals will be examined in the following section.

Frequency. "PSAs must be shown frequently to be effective but there is evidence to suggest that a point of saturation can be reached after which continued exposure may create negative effects (Ray et al., 1971)" (Freimuth, 1985, p. 79). The best recommendation for avoiding this wearout effect is repetition with variation. Timing of message presentation is also an important consideration of frequency. Pulsing is believed to be the best method of exposure. By using concentrated bursts of messages, receivers can "learn the message thoroughly due to intensive practice, while avoiding wearout due to prolonged contact" (Atkin, 1981, p. 276). Finally, message placement is an important factor that is often overlooked. Because public service

announcements often rely on donation of media time, they are rarely aired during important broadcast times. If the target audience is never exposed to the message, the campaign is sure to fail.

Content. The content of the public service message plays an important role in the receiver's understanding and subsequent actions. Some messages provide very little information and rely, instead, on the hope that the message recipient will seek out more information. This is not usually the case. "Freimuth and Marron (1978) found that only 10 percent of their sample had ever requested additional health information that they heard about on television or radio" (Freimuth, 1985, p. 80). Another potential content downfall is providing too much information. To avoid both problems it is recommended "that PSAs should have one central piece of usable information and if possible that should be something the audience will talk to other people about, thereby multiplying the effectiveness of the spot" (p. 80).

Persuasive strategies. An enormous amount of research has been done concerning message appeals and

persuasion. For decades researchers have examined the relationship between the persuasive strategy and the responses it elicits. Four different types of persuasive strategies have received the most attention. They are: emotional vs. rational appeals, positive vs. negative appeals, one-sided vs. two-sided arguments, and fear appeals.

The difference between rational and emotional appeals is the difference between fact and feelings. It is difficult to say which is more effective overall because each has benefits in particular situations.

Logical appeals are superior for intelligent, sophisticated audiences, for print channels, for competent sources, and for producing cognitive change. Emotional appeals have the advantage of attracting the interest of indifferent persons and are best suited for broadcast channels, dynamic sources, and affective change. (Atkin, 1981, p. 276)

The debate over positive vs. negative appeals focuses on the point of view of the ad. McGuire (1981) states that, "public communicators, though typically having the option of using a positive or a negative

appeal, tend to overuse the negative" (p. 47). For example, ads concerning pollution generally show dirty streets and decaying streams instead of beautiful examples of clean streets and waterways.

The difference between one-sided messages and two-sided messages is whether an ad is "presenting only those arguments favoring the recommended conclusion (a one-sided message) and discussing also arguments opposed to the position advocated (and then refuting them--a two-sided message)" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, p. 74).

In most cases, one-sided messages are used. However, there are some situations in which presenting opposing ideas is beneficial. These circumstances take into consideration audience characteristics and effects of outside information sources. Atkin (1981) suggests using two-sided arguments when "the audience is resistant and initially opposed to the recommendation, highly sophisticated and educated, and likely to be exposed to opposition messages" (p. 277).

The final and possibly the most important persuasive strategy is fear. "The effectiveness of fear arousal in communication has been debated in the literature for over

35 years" (Struckman-Johnson et al., 1990, p. 1397). In 1953 Janis and Feshbach did a study on dental hygiene messages and the effects of fear appeals. They found low fear appeals to be more effective than high fear appeals. Since then, a myriad of studies have been conducted both supporting and refuting the original findings.

The use of threat, or fear arousal, is quite common in many types of persuasive attempts. The procedure generally used is either to associate an undesirable practice (e.g., smoking) with negative consequences (e.g., lung cancer), or to associate a desirable practice (e.g., brushing teeth) with the avoidance of negative consequences (e.g., cavities). (Higbee, 1969, 426)

As the inconsistencies in the research indicate, it is very difficult to come to definite conclusions about fear. This is especially true when source and receiver characteristics are considered. "No level of fear arousal is persuasive when the source's credibility is low" (Freimuth, 1985, p. 82). In relation to audience, different personality types will have different responses to fear appeals. In some groups, such as those with high



self-esteem, fear appeals may be effective. In contrast, high-fear appeals usually fail with optimistic people.

The research generally shows that high-fear messages are superior to low-fear messages in changing short-term attitudes, intentions, and some behaviors. For long-term effectiveness, a high- or low-fear message must be accompanied by a specific plan to cope with the threat. (Leventhal, Safer, and Danagis, 1983, as cited in Struckman-Johnson et al., 1990, p. 1397)

"Researchers generally agree that fear is an extremely powerful motivator" (Severn, 1988, p. 12); one that should not be overlooked or overused by public service advertisers.

#### Channel Factors

Channel factors deal with the medium used to transmit the message. Each medium offers advantages and disadvantages. Each can be very different in the type of message conveyed, audience reached, perceived credibility, and duration and complexity of the ad. Television is an intrusive medium "best suited for carrying stylistically entertaining messages" (Atkin, 1981, p. 277). TV also has the potential to reach mass

audiences. Furthermore, "television attracts children, elderly, minorities and low income groups" (p. 278). Print media is recommended for messages with a great deal of information or complexity. Messages in the print media also have a longer lifespan and are consumed by choice.

The diversity in function and characteristics of the channels suggests that the most effective dissemination of information is in multimedia form.

#### Audience Factors

The target audience of a campaign affects every other aspect of the communication process. It decides what the message will be, what channel it will go through, and who will be the source. It is, therefore, extremely important to know everything possible about the audience. This knowledge includes demographics, personality traits, lifestyles, and many other characteristics. For example, income, self-esteem, and conservatism all send definite messages about the target audience. It is the job of the public service advertiser to know this audience completely, so as to tailor the best possible message to them.

Public service advertisers have frequently been criticized for failing to make effective use of communication factors. While some variables, such as message appearance, may be out of the control of the advertiser, those factors within his control should be taken full advantage of.

#### Successful Campaigns

##### Mental Retardation

In 1970 Douglas, Westley and Chaffee conducted a six month information campaign on mental retardation. The results were very positive, finding that the campaign 'significantly increased people's knowledge and improved their attitudes toward mental retardation" (Sun, 1989, p.3).

Two important generalizations were made based on this study. First, the issue presented in a public service announcement is related to the changes expected from the audience. Since "the issue of retardation is doubtless not one on which many deep-seated, ego-involved personal values are based" (Douglas et al., 1970, p. 487), it may have been easier to create change, especially in information and attitude.

Second, "results of the campaign evaluation suggested that media-borne messages including large quantities of print ads were the primary reasons for the impressive achievement" (Sun, 1989, p.3). Since it is likely that the campaign presented a large amount of information, it seems careful attention was paid to channel factors. As already mentioned, communication variables can play a key role in the success of a campaign.

#### Heart Disease

A very famous and effective campaign was the Stanford heart disease prevention campaign. This program "successfully increased people's knowledge in heart disease prevention and modified people's behaviors in the experimental communities" (Sun, 1989, p. 3). The success of this campaign has implications for other public service advertisers, especially those concerned with health messages. First, message dissemination was very pervasive and appeals were carefully prepared and engaging (Atkin, 1981, p. 272). Second, many communication sources were utilized. In addition to multimedia presentation, interpersonal instruction

programs were used.

Crime Prevention

"The National Crime Prevention Campaign, with its 'Take A Bite Out of Crime' theme, was initiated in 1979" (O'Keefe, 1989, p. 5). The source for this campaign is McGruff, the "trenchcoated 'spokesdog'" (p. 5). This campaign is one of, if not the most, evaluated public service advertising campaign.

This study found that exposure to the public service announcements "was significantly related to increases in most of the preventive activities" (Sun, 1989, p.3). Based on this campaign's success, O'Keefe made several recommendations for future campaigns. Among these recommendations are: use of formative research, using interpersonal and community based programs, incorporation of theoretical models into campaign planning, and using innovative programs with specialized objectives (O'Keefe, 1989, p. 12).

Each successful campaign is not only an example for other campaigns, but also an example of the potential of public service advertising as a whole.

Discussion

"Public service advertising attempts to stimulate corrective action on social problems. It is a common form of mass communication and emanates from many different sources" (Lynn, 1974, p. 630). It is also concerned with very important social issues. However, concern does not always lead to beneficial results.

Opinion of public service advertising is mixed. At one extreme are those who believe that media, and therefore advertising of any kind, have little, if any, effect. At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe firmly in the potential of public service advertising. A moderately positive view seems to be most common. Many believe that public service advertising has the potential to fulfill its goals if it is carefully designed and implemented.

An important part of this design process is the consideration of many, many important variables. Psychological factors such as, attitude change, personality traits and motives must be studied before campaign planning begins. Furthermore, if components of the communication process are not carefully examined and

planned, there is a high possibility of failure.

It is also important for the campaign planner to remember some important points on human nature. First, some habits, whether healthy or not, are very deeply-rooted. It is not very likely (though not impossible) that an information campaign alone will convince the heavy smoker to give up cigarettes. It also seems that people can deal with higher levels of dissonance than earlier thought. This is apparent in the heavy smoker who believes cigarettes to very harmful.

Second, establishing a relationship between knowledge, attitude and behavior has been a very elusive task. Because it is difficult to know which effect leads to the others, it is also difficult to know how to plan the campaign. A planner relying on information to change attitudes and attitudes to change behavior may fail miserably.

Finally, the uniqueness of each individual leaves even the most specific targeting subject to failure. These points, however, should not prove discouraging to public service advertisers. For every downfall, there is an equal number of positive recommendations.

The research, as a whole, yielded many recommendations for effective public service advertising. First, extensive amounts of research should be conducted prior to any planning. This research should include examinations of past campaigns, as well as reviews of theoretical research in psychology and communications. Attention to motivation, attitudes and personality traits can provide insight into the audience.

Second, conduct as thorough an investigation possible about the audience. Knowing the market and segmenting it appropriately has been a downfall for public service advertising. Some studies indicated that messages need to be more specifically targeted to high-risk groups. This should be taken into consideration.

Third, if possible pretest campaign messages before using them. This is a common practice among commercial advertisers, but is often ignored in public service. As already mentioned the many elements of message can be very influential in the success of the campaign.

Fourth, increase pressure on gatekeepers to provide more effective media presentation of public service advertisements. Messages aired at 2:00 a.m. are likely



to miss their target audience.

Fifth use of interpersonal communication sources may be a key to increased future success of public service advertising. By complementing media campaigns with face-to-face interaction programs, greater changes could be achieved.

Sixth, set solid campaign objectives before beginning the process. These objectives can help guide the different phases of the campaign and can be helpful in later evaluation.

Finally, evaluation is a very important part of any public service campaign. It is more beneficial if evaluation is done as the campaign progresses, as opposed to after it is completed. Comprehensive evaluation of this type can discover where the campaign succeeded and where it failed.

These seven suggestions are just a part of a much larger body of recommendations. Most studies, successful or not, will provide insight for future attempts. As the quantity of research on public service advertising increases, so can the knowledge and effectiveness of public service advertising.

Although doubt still exists about the potentials and effectiveness of public service advertising, success campaigns like those presented here make it clear that public service advertising can be beneficial. In 1952, G. D. Wiebe asked the question, "Why can't you sell brotherhood like you sell soap?" (Solomon, 1981, p. 282) Today I ask the same question.

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