

Diabetes Healthcare Awareness in Malaysia:

Communication Medium Through Poster in Socioeconomic Patterns

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Abstract—Poster has been a medium of communication in public healthcare since World War I and II. It was used to channel the minds of the public towards one common insight and from this iconic milieu, poster propaganda has emerged globally. To date, health posters have been produced and distributed by the Ministry of Health Malaysia to the hospitals and healthcare centres. It has been used extensively in many areas of healthcare campaigns to evoke health awareness among the public. Nevertheless, many are not aware that health posters have been part of communication tool in health seminars, campaigns and exhibitions around the country. However, despite the usage as healthcare communication tools, diabetes statistic in Malaysia still increases drastically from 1.6 million in 2011 to 2.6 million in 2012. The huge increase invites an enquiry on the role of diabetic posters as communication medium in healthcare. This study explored public's opinion in two areas of socioeconomic patterning through observations and interviews in five different regions of the country with two socioeconomic patterns; rural and urban. Beneficial entries goes to the Ministry of Health Malaysia towards understanding the role of diabetic poster as a communication medium in diabetic healthcare awareness among different socioeconomic patterning in Malaysia.

Keywords- poster; propaganda; diabetes healthcare; awareness; visual message

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Malaysian Diabetic Awareness

Diabetes is a deadly disease that has no cure. It is a major hazard to global public health of today (Abegunde, 2007; cited in Shafae, 2008). In 2006, a report from World Health Organisation (WHO) indicated that, "Malaysia would have a total number of 2.48 million diabetics compared to 0.94 million in 2000 which was a 164% increase" (World Health Organisation cited in Mafauzy, 2006: 397). In a small scale preliminary interview, medical doctors and pharmacists who attended to patients everyday had confirmed that major patients were those who suffered diabetes with hypertension. In 2012 to date, the government, through local newspapers has urged

studies to be done on diabetes awareness and prevention. Diabetes healthcare awareness and knowledge on diabetes is pertinent for everyone as early diagnosis and preventions measures could improve one's health management.

Previous studies have found that the public in Malaysia has been lack of knowledge on diabetes healthcare awareness. Most healthcare personnel in private clinics have been found not to know much about diabetes mellitus (Norlaila et. al., 2011: 1362, Mafauzy, 2005). Therefore, there is an urgent need to educate the public in diabetes healthcare awareness.

B. Diabetic Poster as Healthcare Communication Tool

In order to educate the public on diabetes healthcare awareness, diabetes posters have been produced and disseminated to hospitals and healthcare for the public. The dissemination of posters has been channeled through the Promotions Unit in each health department and hospitals. Diabetes posters and other healthcare posters are usually posed in clinics, hospitals, and medical centres for the public. Series of diabetes healthcare campaigns and seminars have also been held in various states in the country to promote diabetes awareness. Nevertheless, despite the effort to educate the public on diabetes healthcare awareness through posters, the country's diabetic statistic is increasing tremendously each year.

From the year 1996 to 2006, the rate of diabetes has increased to 80% (Zanariah et. al., 2008). A recent alarming diabetes statistic showed tremendous increase from 1.6 million in 2011 to 2.6 million in 2012. The highly accelerating figure has invited a query on the role of diabetic posters as healthcare communication medium towards the public. The annual increment of diabetic patients in Malaysia could lead to mortality and morbidity among the society in future if prevention in all aspects is not taken. Besides that, the public's expenditure on diabetic medications could increase if no proper preventive measures are taken. To date, there has been no study to focus diabetes healthcare awareness through poster communication in Malaysia. Besides obtaining public's

opinion on posters, this study also engaged on how diabetes posters are interpreted by the public in these two different socioeconomic patterns; rural and urban areas.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. History of Poster

The connection of poster and communication is inevitable. Despite the current virtual world of science and technology, poster has been used extensively around the world especially in healthcare (Bu & Fee, 2010). Poster was interpreted as a single-page format, used to deliver information, data, schedules or offerings to persuade and promote (Landa, 2010). Covert (2012) considered that poster is ‘a paper’ that contained graphic images and texts to convey information. Before printing existed, news and proclamations were transmitted through shouts and loud voices in the streets to attract people’s attention with messages and to cater some illiterate society. The voices were at times being accompanied by sounds of trumpets and drums (Covert, 2012).

During the fifteenth century when printing press was invented in Germany, more people had been reached out with messages on printed materials. Although the era of before 16th century had seen poster as advertisements, it lacked of aesthetic values. Since then, the world has changed with posters as an additional communication method when the first poster was produced in the form of ‘Printed Broadside’. Broadside only contained texts that had been printed only on one side and were intended for immediate impact. As time goes by, Germany introduced lithography posters in 1796 for production of mass printed materials. Lithographic poster was invented by Alois Senefelder in 1796 using grease and water. After lithographic, the method called chromolithography came into the scene with vibrant colours. In mid-nineteenth century a Father of Modern Poster named France’s Jules Cheret (1836-1932) emerged in Paris. He was an artist and lithographer who first introduced the use of various vivid colours and figures of human in his poster production (Covert, 2012).

In early 1870s, posters have dominated the world of mass communication. It bloomed rapidly from Paris to Europe and America. When World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) turmoiled, posters were used massively as communication medium from the government to convey messages on political, social and healthcare to the public. Posters were used to channel the minds of their people towards one common insight. Massive dissemination of posters at the time was enormous, amounting to 20 million posters only in America (Lapides, 2011). Since then, posters became the visual media used as agent of persuasion for people to believe something or to support government’s initiatives. The massive usage of posters during the world wars had acknowledged the era as poster propaganda. Propaganda means the spread of ideas and opinions which may be true or false but aimed to get people to believe them (Aylett, 1988). Poster propaganda has brought huge impact to the people, society, authority and the country. Indirectly, poster propaganda has uplifted the art as a significant contributor in the history of world wars.

B. Significant Persuasion Through Poster

Significant impact of poster propaganda could be seen during the earlier of world war when women were urged to stay at home to guard children and prepare food for the army. This encouragement was by their government through dissemination of posters portraying images of housewives at home with their children when their husbands were away to serve in the war. However, up to an extent when manpower has been getting lesser, the government started to call women into the army by changing their mindset from feminine housewives to masculine ladies. This has been persuaded through dissemination of posters.



FIGURE I. RECRUITING SOLDIERS (SOURCE: STOCK-ALLEN, 2011)

Series of posters with images of strong and muscular women in uniforms had been circulated all over the streets to motivate women to join the armed forces. The persuasion through poster has been successful to call women to work in the armed forces. One of the famous posters in the history of war was called ‘Rosie the Riveter’ by J. Howard Miller as shown in Figure 2 with the text ‘We Can Do It’ (Stock-Allen, 2011). From there on, the poster has managed to transform the role of women from feminine into masculine.

C. Poster in Malaysian Scenario

Some similar western war posters have also produced in Malaysia with the national language and images for army recruitment. Poster has been proven powerful in many ways to evoke and shape the public. Through previous studies, the emergence of poster in Malaysia has been believed to happen before Malaysia achieved independence with the evidence of travel posters that have been produced in 1930 by the Federated Malay States Railway which has been archived in Malaysia Design Archive. During printed information plethora since the British colonizers arrived in Malaya, poster had been produced together with illustrated information such as magazines, newspapers and advertisements (Jamal, 2007 cited in Ezrena, 2010). Most posters have been about movies and travels.

D. Poster as Visual Message

A poster involves visual message that appeared in the form of pictures. Health posters portrayed visual images and messages with the means to educate the public about ways to prevent diseases. Visual message existed before text message during the prehistoric cave drawing era. Image with symbols communicate meanings (Brill et. al., 2007). Mustaffa Halabi

(2011) expressed that “a sign is something, which represents something to somebody by using the triadic or tripartite system of icon, index and symbol” (Mustaffa Halabi, 2011: 22). It provides “a wider and broader perspective towards its interpretation” (Chandler, 2002: 15, cited in Mustaffa Halabi, 2011: 22).

TABLE I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SIGNS BY PIERCE MODEL (SOURCE: MUSTAFFA HALABI, 2011)

	Icon	Index	Symbol
Signify	Resemblance	Causal Connection	Convention
Examples	Photograph	Smoke	Flag
Process	Recognise	Can Figure Out	Must Learn

Icons or symbols in poster’s image posed as signs that represent something for viewer’s interpretation. Viewers’ interpretations are important to contribute understanding on the visual messages to ensure that the messages are correctly understood.

E. Why Poster in Diabetes Healthcare

Posters in healthcare had been used since the world wars. During the world wars, series of healthcare posters were distributed by the western government to their public. Their public were urged to stay fit through posters such as to drink milk, avoid prostitution, prevent syphilis and many other health messages that were delivered through posters. The connection of poster and communication is inevitable until today. Despite the current virtual world of science and technology, poster has been used extensively around the world especially in healthcare (Bu & Fee, 2010). Poster has been powerful to construct people’s minds to create healthy environment in their society. Hardcopy healthcare posters could be posed anywhere for people from all walks of life. People from rural and urban could see the healthcare posters anywhere, whether they want it or not, the posters are still there to communicate healthcare information.

III. METHODS

Data in this study has been drawn from a qualitative method through observations and interviews. Respondents in five regions of Malaysia (Northern, Central, Southern, Eastern and Sabah/Sarawak/Labuan) involving two socioeconomic patterns namely rural and urban have been studied. Non-participant observations have been carried to observe the availability of diabetes poster for its visitors at the waiting room and field notes have been taken on the activity of the patients whether they notice the existence of the poster and whether they look or read it. Hospital and healthcare centre that does not pose diabetes poster has been discarded from this study as the instrument is the diabetes poster. After the observation, face-to-face interview has been undergone at the exit point out of the compound of the hospitals and healthcare centres. The respondents have been picked through a systematic sampling approach from the people who walked out of the hospital compound. Respondents have comprised of patients who went for medication, monthly check-ups and some of them have been the next-of-kin who have

accompanied the patients into the waiting room. They are aged between 20 and 61 and vary in race, sex and education level. It has been assumed that these patients and their next-of-kins have seen the diabetes posters in the waiting room. The interviews have been held with open ended questions and have been audio recorded. The data has been transcribed in English for data analysis process using NViVO Software. In this phase, three themes have been analyzed; i) Realize or Notice the Existence of Diabetes Poster; ii) Remember Text/Catchy Words, and ii) Remember Visual Image. The themes have been adapted and improvised from Ward & Hawthorne (1994). These themes have been found recurring in the data and have been chosen as the themes from the diabetes healthcare awareness poster of what the public has obtained from diabetic posters that they have seen at the waiting area.

IV. THEORY

The underlying theory in this study is the communication theory that portrays the sequence of communication process. Communication Theory by Shannon and Weaver (1949) has been adapted in this study. In the process of communication, diabetes poster was considered as the medium of persuasion to the viewers as it allows receiver’s perception.

The production of diabetes poster as communicator to the receiver undergoes a critical process in between the channels of encoding and decoding (Adzrool Idzwan et. al., 2010). The theory explained that encoding and decoding process that entailed how media messages were produced, disseminated and interpreted. Encoding involved production of the message and decoding incorporates how the viewer understands and interprets the message. This research has been focusing on the feedback loop in the communication model as the potential area of research problem.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The observation has revealed that most hospitals and healthcare centres have posed diabetes healthcare posters at the waiting areas although there are a few hospital and healthcare centre who does not pose diabetes posters for their visitors. However, most healthcare centres in urban socio-demographic mostly pose posters on current diseases such as malaria, cancer, and obesity. Referring to the socio-demographic pattern, in this study half of the people in rural setting consist of the public from lower education level.

From the data analysis, the first theme, i) Realize or Notice the Existence of Diabetes Poster has revealed that rural public obtains total of 45.7% coverage of noticing the diabetes posters while the urban bid higher with 67.5%. For the theme ‘Remember Text/catchy Words’ only the public in urban settings confirmed remembering the text/catchy words with coverage of 74.64%. Public in rural settings responded they did not remember and could not remember the texts or catchy words in the posters. For the theme ‘Remember Visual Image’, both rural and urban public have had mere scores. Urban public scored the coverage of 89.92% and rural public has scored 82.56%. The mere difference was only by 7.36%.

This proved that both of the public has noticed and acknowledged visual images rather than the texts and catchy words. Visual image “is part of communication tool and an effective image must have the ability to communicate well to the society (Adzrool Idzwan, 2010: 310). Visual images in the poster could be understood by everyone even illiterate people. Furthermore, it has managed to attract viewers and grasp the attention with its exceptional figure and colour.

This has shown the importance of visual images and exceptional images in the poster. Both public in rural and urban can remember the visual images more than the texts. Furthermore, most of the respondents have confessed that they could remember the diabetes poster with an exceptional picture of a rotten leg of a diabetic patient whereas the poster has not been posed in the hospital or healthcare centre that they have been interviewed. Some respondents recapped that they would reduce the amount of sugar intake whenever the image of the ‘diabetic patient’s leg’ triggers their mind.

Finally this study reveals how the poster has played its role on the diabetic healthcare poster as a communication medium to the illiterate and literate public through visual communication. The finding has revealed that poster can construct one’s mind with new knowledge through exceptional visual images. The exceptional visual images confines into the viewers’ minds to connect with other similar attributes that the viewers have already known throughout their previous experience. What the public see and internalize from the diabetes healthcare poster will further construct their minds to how they perceive and understand the message. Therefore it is concluded that the diabetes healthcare awareness poster is an instrument of constructivism.

This study recommends graphic designers to look into new possibility of utilizing exceptional and larger visual images in the diabetes posters. Adzrool Idzwan (2010: 210) has concluded that “the size of the image generally captures our attention and how we perceive the image from our eyes” is considered as the physical element. Furthermore, large visual image with brief texts have been used in the world war posters for the illiterate and literate society which have been proven to be among the successful communication mediums during the iconic.

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