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Formal and Semiotic Analysis of Health Campaign Posters in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Mass media campaigns are widely used to expose high proportions of large population to messages through routine uses of existing media such as television, radio, newspapers, posters and bill board. Such campaigns are frequently competing with factors such as pervasive product marketing, powerful social norms and behaviour driven by addiction or habit. In this review, we discuss how gestures, signs and symbols aid in interpreting messages displayed on health campaign posters, in the various health-risk behaviour such as the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, heart diseases risk factor, sex related behaviors, road safety, cancer screening and prevention, child survival and organ or blood donation. We conclude that mass media campaigns of health posters are very sensitive to the society. It is therefore very pertinent that posters are used because of its numerous advantages which can produce positive changes in health related behaviours across large populations.

Keywords: Health and safety campaign posters, Public health campaign posters, Health promotion campaign posters
Health campaign poster ideas

1. Introduction

Imagine a world without sensitization with regards to health and other factors that determines growth and development. Such a world will be filled with chaos and lack of progress. Human being depends solely on knowledge to improve in various fields of endeavor. Interventions to change health related behaviour may range from a simple, face-to-face consultation between professional and patient to a complex programme, often involving the use of poster. This study looks first at the effectiveness and importance of the use of posters for health campaigns and secondly, studies the formal and semiotic analysis of health campaign posters in Nigeria. Posters may be used for many purposes. A good poster works in many ways. It can be a good advertisement for your area of work, an effective way to start a debate and a great way to raise awareness like that of health.

A health campaign attempts to promote public health by making new health inventions and information available. Posters are effective mass media medium to reach targeted audience in the dissemination of health education. This is not only because posters can easily convey messages through images and symbols, but because they are easy to produce. Regardless of cultural differences; health posters are meaningful to viewers because they frequently draw on images from popular culture and express the living habit of people which vary in approach and style. Consequently, the message in posters can illuminate how public health educators and activists see themselves and their audience and how many conceptualize the disease and define 'normal' behavior within each given culture or context.

2. Conceptualizing Formal and Semiotic Analysis

Generally formal analysis tends to describe the works of art as it is. Form describes the way an art work or design is made and its purely visual aspect rather than its narrative content or its relationship to the visible world. In other words, formalistic analysis tries to describe or determine how the artist combines the element found in the work are made to be one entity. Using this approach, the researcher in this study will simply analyze the various elements that make up the posters.

3. Advantages of Semiotic Approach

- Semiotics analyzes the meanings of posters as the result of a 'multi-party communication' (Lindstorm et al. 2014) between different interpretative communities (Yanow 2000). The meanings one attaches to image on posters depend on the interrelation between cognitive, axiological and emotional functions. Moreover, the everyday practices of individuals are able to attach new meanings to posters.
- Semiotic analysis takes into account both the cultural context in which posters are made and interpreted. Specifically, it explores how the meanings of the images on the posters originate from the dialogue between different interpretative communities with a cultural context.

Health campaign posters and slogans carry meaning beyond the conceptual and denotation level. Almost all the inscriptions in words, phrases and sentences have meanings. Images in health posters carries deep meaning that is aimed to elicit feelings, action and mood from the audience. there lies behind the literal meaning, implied value judgment or feeling which the designers and clients hope to be considered positively by the audience; they are interpreted based on the health message and ideologies.

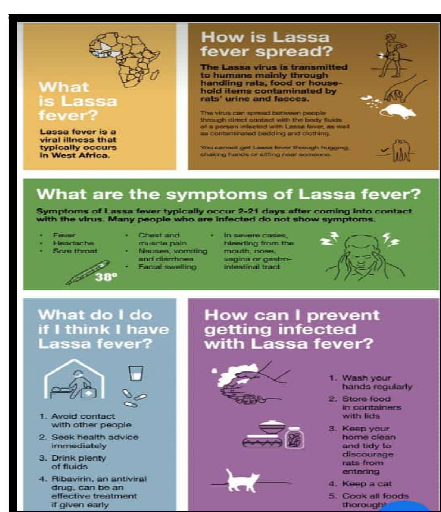


Figure1: Poster of Lassa fever Disease
Source: Nigeria Centerfor Disease Control (NCDC)

This contains large number of graphical elements that altogether contributes to the poster eliciting emotional response and emphasizing on the severedness of the disease. In it are different representations of the image of the African continent, which expresses the fact that the disease is a viral illness and also more common in West African. Also, there is the image of a human being and a rat; depicting how Lassa fever is spread through contact with infected rats. Below the image of a man who can be said to have headache and also a thermometer to depicts symptoms of Lassa fever. Also we have the image of the paramedics highlighting what to do if one has contracted the disease also how one can prevent getting infected with the virus. The poster presents five colors which are: orange, brown, green, light blue and purple which signifies urgency and subtle danger which means failure to heed to the warnings of this poster may escalate to something bad.

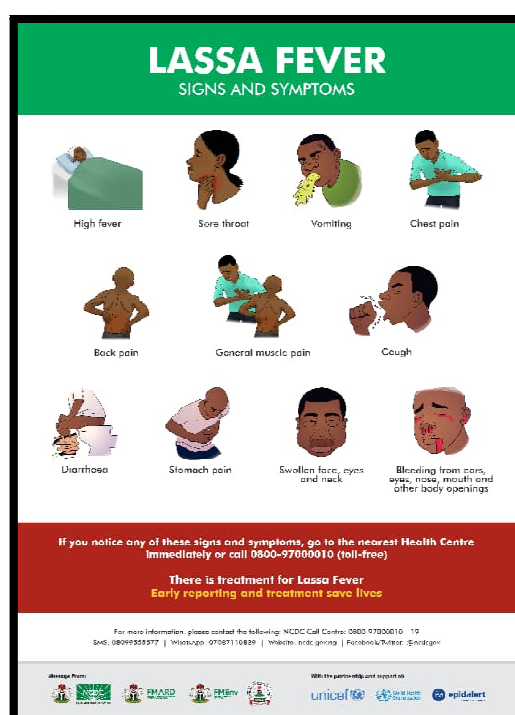


Figure 2: Poster of the Signs and Symptoms of Lassa fever Disease
Source: Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC)

This shows more detailed symptoms of Lassa fever. It shows images of the signs and symptoms from the early stages to the critical stage. The important inscription on this poster is 'Early reporting and treatment saves lives'. There are three colors in this poster, Green, white and dark red, the use of these colors has been made, designed and structured in a way that could make the visualization to catch the attention of the audience. Each of the images in this poster corresponds with the inscription under it.

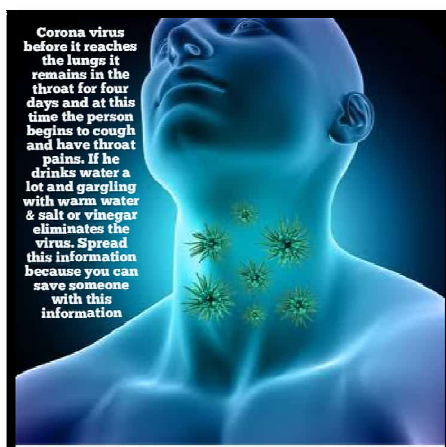


Figure3: Poster of Preventive Measures for Corona Virus (Covid19)

Source: Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC)

This combines text and a very bold image of a man infected with corona virus. The virus can be seen inside the throat indicating that as the starting point of the virus. This poster therefore is a campaign to educate the patient to seek precautionary measures when they notice some symptoms of throat pains, fever and cough; before it deteriorates to the lungs and hence the full spread of the virus. The colors in this poster are white, blue and green.



Figure 4: Poster of Preventive Measures for Corona Virus (Covid19)

Source: Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC)

The image is promoting the need for social distancing to reduce the spread of corona virus. The capsules with color red and white with the inscription 'STAY HOME' suggests that the safest way to avoid contacting corona virus is by staying at home and avoiding crowded places, also when it becomes necessary for you to go out you should make use of a nose or face mask, washing your hands with running soap and water and when that is not available you make use of alcohol based hand sanitizers and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. This poster therefore helps to create this consciousness in the mind of the observer.

5. Conclusion

Health awareness campaign is very sensitive to the society. It is therefore very pertinent that posters are used because of its numerous advantages. This study has provided an insight into the value placed on posters for disseminating health awareness information at the target audience. The poster analyzed according to our area of interest shows that images played an important role in disseminating information on posters. Images used by the designers are chosen in accordance with the health campaigns. however, the extent of the awareness that these images helped to create in the mind of the viewers is not determined in this research because this study aims at using semiotic analysis to understand how the images used in the posters relates to the campaign.

Nevertheless, the benefits of repetitive information, dissemination and use of image to accompany it cannot be over emphasized.

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