

Short Communication

Study on Role of Print Media in Public Relation Activities of a Hospital

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ABSTRACT

Media, whether it is an information sheet for patient during admission or hoarding or press releases, all of these support the services provided by health/administrative/clerical professionals in guiding the targeted population or community to adopt healthy lifestyle and also assuring pleasant stay of patients in hospital. Media's role is therefore to use salesmanship and advertising to sell more "services". The focus is on doing everything possible to stimulate transaction. Many people question the use of terms consumer & patient. The traditional vies of a consumer and patient is that of someone passively consuming something, but today's consumers are also producers. They are actively sending their messages about their experiences, providing new finding and other resources to their physicians, and lobbying for more and better benefits. Public relations are meant to facilitate the patients and enhance the image of the hospital, in the community. Aim: To study the role of print media in public relation activities of a teaching hospital. Methods: A retrospective study of the data in marketing department registers. Results: This hospital reaches to its public through nearly 120 newspapers, and also has health supplements in papers. Press release of this hospital portrays various incidents, upcoming events, reminders; important health related occasions. With credibility and laws pertaining to advertising of health, physician and medical institutions, one has to keep a check on advertisement content being released. It was measured by the size of each clippings/article/column in two year period.

Keywords: Print media, Hospital setting, Marketing department, Advertisements in hospitals.

INTRODUCTION

A hospital is an institution for healthcare, providing treatment to patients by specialized staff and equipment, and often but not always provides for long term stay of the patient. A hospital today is a centre for professional healthcare provided by physicians and nurses. The primary function of the hospital authority is to provide for their patients the best available

medical care and with it the highest possible level of satisfaction of their human needs. ^[1]

Public relations are meant to facilitate the patients and enhance the image of the hospital, in the community. The image is the culmination of the user's impression that he gathers from so many aspects such as the attitudes of the hospital staff, efficiency of the hospital administration, prompt medical treatment, clean surroundings to name a few. Aim of

PR is to highlight the "good work" but sometime mistakes are also takes place. News media are bombarded with stories every day so it is important to establish a long-term strategy that emphasizing your 'good works'.

Media planning is emerging as an important new speciality in public relations. [2] Media plays a very significant and important role in creating the image of hospital, while helping in disseminating information, projecting the facilities and achievements thereby facilitating patient care. Health authorities educate and entrust the media with essential health information, which is then relayed to the public in readily accessible formats through a variety of media channels. [3]

Due to modernization, improvement of old administration methods and by the use of new technology, electronic media slowly dominates over print media that are the oldest form of Mass Media. Despite the technological advancements, the special attributes of print media still render them as important source of information, as the *World Association of Newspapers* suggests, pointing out that one million people in the world read a newspaper everyday...! [4]

Media not just helps the service receiver but also providers through the suggestions provided by patients/visitors through feedback forms in improving and maintain effective hospital services. [5] This study is an effort to explore the media strategies adopted by a teaching hospital, to learn the possibilities of each media in healthcare public relation which can go unnoticed in the emotional, hostile environment of hospitals, despite its vast role in creating relation between organization and external and internal public with special reference to oldest media of communication-print media and its role in healthcare PR.

Aim: To study the role of print media in public relation activities of a teaching hospital.

Objectives:

- 1) To understand the role of public relation and study the different media used for public relation activities in a tertiary care teaching hospital.
- 2) To analyse the use of print media in public relation activities of a tertiary care teaching hospital.

METHODOLOGY

A retrospective study of data present in marketing department was done, with analysis of the data and discussion with in-charge of Marketing department of the Hospital. The marketing team was discussed about public relation activities in the hospital with special reference to different media used for public relation activities.

RESULTS

Despite heated competition from television and more recently, online sources of information, newspapers continue to be a prime source of information media used by the hospital to reach the public. It is because newspapers are seen everywhere in the world. They are printed and published in each and every language known to man all over the world, this is the very on reason why public relation team of this hospital has chosen "newspaper" as its primary medium of reaching its targeted audience. Through Newspaper PR Team tries to win the heart and loyalty of its readers through news and views, articles, pictures, exclusive stories and news items related to health.

Newspapers/print media is used for advertising and press releases, irrespective of when they are published i.e. morning, afternoon, evening, weekly newspapers. Local papers are a major attraction with readers in India because of their connection to local issues. This hospital reaches to its public through nearly 120 newspapers, some

of them have been listed in table below (Table 1) with coverage from northern Karnataka to north Kerala in the form of press releases, also through its health supplement in newspaper.

Table-1: List of state level publications, hospital features in over years:

No	Publication	Language	Edition
1	Udayavani	Kannada	Local
2	Vijay Karnataka	Kannada	Local
3	Prajavani	Kannada	State
4	Samyukta Karnataka	Kannada	Local
5	Hindu	English	Local
6	Times Of India	English	Local
7	The New Indian Express	English	State
8	Deccan Herald	English	Local
9.	Mathrubhumi	Malayalam	Other State Local
10	MalayalaManorama	Malayalam	Other State Local

A calculation was made from clippings, randomly retrieved, collected and stored by the marketing department from newspapers made available. (Table 2) Monetary value of clippings which is unavailable in filing, from newspapers published in other parts of state, can add up to double the values given here.

Table-2: Coverage in newspapers acquired by hospital from press releases for a period of last two years in terms of columns:

No	LANGUAGE	2012-2013	2013-2014
1	Kannada	71 Columns	162 Columns
2	English	40 Columns	90 Columns
3	Malayalam	1column	2column.
	Total	112columns*	254columns*

Press Releases: A press release is our first and best chance for communicating why our story is worth the media's attention. Press releases in a major newspapers bring along with them the credibility for the information, that influence and capture target audience.

Press release of this hospital portrays various incidents, upcoming events, reminders; important health related occasions etc in coordination with local press, the result is coverage/exposure in daily publication about news relevant about our institution for the benefit of external public as well as internal. Press release from hospitals finds it difficult to make a presence

in newspapers at times of national importance like state election, central election etc.

The Team and process: Press releases are done by a team comprising of medical superintendent, marketing manager of hospital, and also public relations officer. The University along with the various department heads of the hospital who gave their valuable inputs in bringing out a credible piece of information which are thereafter send to the press for publication.

Frequency: Press releases are done every time anyimportant happenings, upcoming events, reminders, important health related occasions are to be brought in attention to the external public of hospital.

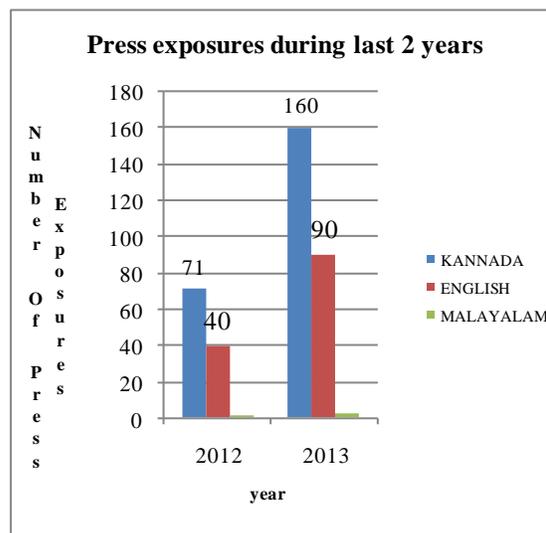


Figure -3: Shows the growth of press exposure over last two years:

Advertisements: Newspaper advertising still makes it a valuable marketing tool even in the modern age of multiple advertising channels. With credibility and laws pertaining to advertising of health, physician and medical institutions, one has to keep a check on advertisement content being released. It was measured by the size of each clippings/article/column in two year period. To advertise in a newspaper, this hospital pays its space at the given rate. Rates for an advertisement are

measured in Rs. per square cm. (standard)
e.g.:

A Local Kannada daily charges:-Rs. 425 /180 square cms

A Local English daily charges: - Rs100 /180 square cms.

A neighbouring state local Daily charges: - Rs180 /180 square cms.

Table-4: Cost of Press Release versus newspaper Advertisements:

Year	No. of columns (article) in newspaper	Total Column Size Appeared In Newspaper	Rate of Advertisement / 180 Cms ²	Rate for press release / Cms ²
2012-2013	112 columns	12400 cms ²	Rs.15,50,000	Nil/free
2013-2014	254 columns	27590 cms ²	Rs.41,38500	Nil/Free

Number of columns: Number of articles/columns appeared in newspaper.

Column Size (cm²): Width of column x Height of each column (w x h).

Total column: Sum of column size of total number of columns.

Rate of advertisement per 180 square cms: Fixed rate for each newspaper per square cm x total column size.

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted carrying two objectives with an aim to explore healthcare public relation with respect to media, with special reference to the oldest mode of communication that is Print media. James Gruing and Todd Hunt in the famous article Managing Public Relations(1984) defined public relations as managing communications between the organization and its public. [6] In this hospital PR is working with the goal of improving communication with its both internal and external public. Communication is done effectively through use of different mix of media in the form of talk shows, brochures, leaflet, pamphlet, press releases, events, camps etc. Internal public comprising of employees mainly doctors, nurses are motivated and encouraged by various special events like “doctors day, nurse’s day”, walkathon, camps, are conducted for the same.

According to Kotler, [7] PR’s contribution is difficult to measure because it is used along with other promotional tools. If it is used before the other tools come into action, its contribution is easier to calculate.

The easiest measure of PR effectiveness is the number of exposures created in the media. Publicists supply the client with a clipping book showing all the media that carried news about the product.

As stated above by Kotler, “Clipping Books” comprising articles related to this hospital, appeared in various newspapers (made available), were randomly retrieved, collected and maintained in the marketing department from 2005, as a testimony to the efforts of public relation or press relations. Clippings from newspapers published in other parts of state were unavailable in filing due to practical difficulty in collecting them from far of places.

This calculation revealed how Effective public relations and other publicity projects can ignite the creation of earned media, which is carried out with press releases; the result is free coverage/exposure in daily publication about news relevant about our institution for the benefit of external public as well as internal whereas if exposure was done by advertising, it would have proved expensive. This study was done in terms of three factors, in all three factors print media proved more beneficial in gaining desired goal i.e. relation with public of hospital at lowest possible cost. The features of print media/newspaper that makes it important in public relation activities of a hospital are: [8]

1. Flexibility: Newspaper advertisements are flexible in that they can present any number of items and can use either black and white or colour ads can be changed quickly. In

response to sudden alterations in product availability, marketing plans or consumer demands. They can change in size from one inch to full page or even multiple pages.

2. Convenience for audience/patients/community: Newspapers can be carried everywhere and read at any time or place, in business office, and in living rooms. Ads can be clipped and saved for study, comparison or later use at the reader's convenience.
3. Crisis management: Media, especially press coverage will be more informed and accurate if they know the local players or spokesperson in hospital ahead of time (press relation). You need the media to communicate to the public in a disaster event so that you can:
 - 1) Reassure them that what needs to be done is being done.
 - 2) Communicate the progress that is being made.
 - 3) Provide correct and needed information and dispel rumours.

CONCLUSION

Print media thus with its credibility, reliability, mobility and efficiency become the most sort out medium of communication by a Hospital in reaching a large number of people & dispensing information for its public relation activities. Newspaper is one of the initial communication tools of the society. There is a need to understand what appeals to urban customers may not be appropriate for their rural counterparts

owing to their different lifestyle. A modern day paper has done miraculous activity in recent years and shown that even in the age of internet and news portal, the radio and television, newspaper can still change the life and mind-set of the society.

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