# Role of Public Service Advertisements In Sensitizing Masses during Covid-19 Pandemic

**Smiti Padhi,** (Ph.D.), Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha, INDIA

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**Corresponding Author**
**Smiti Padhi,** (Ph.D.),
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Fakir Mohan University, Balasore,
Odisha, INDIA

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

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Role of Public Service AdvertisementsIn Sensitizing Masses During Covid-19 Pandemic Abstract COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the globe impacting people from all spheres and walks of life and has caused anxiety, panic, concern amongst masses. It has also led to change of lifestyle and sanitation pattern practised by people. The media industry also could not escape the brunt of the pandemic.

## Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the globe impacting people from all spheres and walks of life and has caused anxiety, panic, concern amongst masses. It has also led to change of lifestyle and sanitation pattern practised by people. The media industry also could not escape the brunt of the pandemic. After announcement of the 21day lockdown in India, everything except essential services were shut down, including production of television serials and films. This led to telecast of old episodes on different entertainment channels. Interestingly, due to telecast of old blockbuster serials on Doordarshan, the government run public broadcaster topped charts of viewership in India. As people were confined to their homes during nationwide shutdown, television viewership increased from 560 million to 592 million (Broadcast Audience Research Council of India). The Economic Times[10/04/2020]says, "Coronavirus related ads on TV crossed 40,000 minutes in the last week of March".

This paper examines the role of Public Service Advertisements in creating awareness about Covid-19 pandemic and tries to understand the viewing pattern of Public Service Advertisements of the respondents. A descriptive research design has been chosen for the study and primary data has been collected through survey method by using structured interview schedule disseminated to respondents through Google forms. The area of the study is Remuna Block in the Balasore District of Odisha State. A total of 150 respondents were selected. Sample was selected through simple random sampling method.

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## Key Words

**Covid-19, Public Service advertisements, Pandemic, Sensitization.**

## Introduction

Denis Mc Quail has rightly referred to media as an engine of social change (Mc Quail, 1985,p.90).

In order that media's full potential be realised, it is pertinent to use media in a deliberate and planned manner. After a cluster of pneumonia of unknown variety was recounted in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China on 31st December 2019, the Chinese authority on 7th of January 2020 identified a new type of coronavirus as a cause of pneumonia outbreak, which was different and more fatal than any other human coronaviruses discovered by then. The new strain was named as Covid-19 by World Health Organization (WHO).

After Prime minister of India announced nationwide lockdown in India from 24th March, 2020 onwards, various media tried to convey the gravity and relevance of the situation through various formats via different media. In times of such pandemic, masses have an important role to play in practising sanitation, avoiding crowded places, wearing mask and maintaining social distance. Stuart Hall and others coined the term 'primary definers' for people and social actors who define events primarily and impose their views during the public debate. Those are usually the people who govern, do business, and are part of elite circles (Hall, 1979). In today's time media plays the role of primary definers. They inform, educate, analyse and help masses interpret the happenings around them. Public service advertisements were one of such mediums of education and persuasion.

During the health crisis, the State and Central Governments increased public service advertising to disseminate information about the pandemic. In the course of few months, the number of public service advertisements on the anticipation, cause, and side effects of the disease rose up.

Hindustan Unilever and ITC were two topmost advertisers, disseminating message identified with coronavirus during the pandemic. Others in the top five included Reliance Jio Infocomm., Star Cement, and Piccadilly Agro Industries (Urvi Malvania, 2020). This research study aims to examine the role of public service advertisements in sensitizing masses about Covid-19.

## Review of Literature

**Hussain, Wajahat** (2020) reveals that Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has produced a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way we perceive our world and everyday lives. Not only the spread rate of contagion and patterns of transmission endangered our sense of security, but the safety measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus also require social distancing by refraining from doing what is inherently human, which is to find comfort in the company of others. Within this context of physical threat, social and physical distancing, the role of the different mass media channels and social media in lives on individual, social and societal levels cannot be underestimated.

Rural Health Centre enlisted multiple communication channels including television, newspaper, radio, social media and internet, to transmit important information with consistent tone and message. (Centre for Rural Health, 2015)

Public health and safety campaigns are important tools used for promoting healthy and safe lifestyle along with discouraging unhealthy behavior in the society. If these campaigns are developed in a strategic manner and cultured by theories of effective communication, they can be extremely powerful in conveying effective messages to a wide section of audience (K. Atkin & E. Rice, 2001)

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The news report of Economic times, dated 28th April 2020 stated, "Research firm TAM catalogued commercial(non-government and non NGO) ads on television between week 6 of 2020 (February 2 to February 8) and week 15 (April 5 to April 11) and found a steep rise in ad volumes of coronavirus themed communication by brands."

## Statement of the problem

'The Role of Public Service Advertisements in sensitizing masses about Covid-19'.

## Objectives of the study

➢ To study the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.
➢ To find out the role of Public Service Advertisements in creating awareness about Covid-19.
➢ To find out the consumption pattern of Public Service Advertisements of the respondents.

## Methodology

In order to examine the role of Public Service Advertisements in Creating Awareness about Covid-19, descriptive research design has been adopted. Primary data was collected through survey method by using structured interview schedule. The responses were collected through the tool of Google form. The area of the study is Balasore District of Odisha State. A total of 150 respondents were selected. For the selection of the sample, simple random sampling was adopted.

## Findings and Discussions

**Table 1:** Sex distribution of the Respondents

| S. No. | Sex | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Female | 98 | 65% |
| 2. | Male | 52 | 35% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

Looking at the sex of the respondents, the above table reveals that majority (65%, N=98) of the respondents were Female and remaining 35% (N= 52) of the respondents were Male.

**Table 2:** Age Distribution of the Respondents

| S. No | Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----|-----------|------------|
| 1 | 15-20 Years | 18 | 12% |
| 2 | 21-25 Years | 42 | 28% |
| 3 | 26-30 Years | 42 | 28% |
| 4 | Above 30 | 48 | 32% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

Throwing light at the age distribution of the respondents, the above table shows that 28%, (N=42) of respondents age lie between 26-30 years. 28% (N=42) respondents are between 21-25 years of age. 32% (N=48) Respondents are above 30 years and only 12% (N=18) of the respondents were between 15-20 years of age.

**Table 3:** Education wise Distribution of the respondents

| SL.No | Education | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Primary/High School | 09 | 06% |
| 2 | Graduation | 42 | 28% |
| 3 | Post-Graduation | 81 | 54% |
| 4 | Any other | 18 | 12% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

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The Table no. 3 throws light on the education of the respondents. As seen in the table, more than half of the respondents (54%, N=81) were Post-Graduates. While 28% (N=42) of the respondents were Graduates. 12% (N=18) of the respondents selected the 'Any other' Category in the questionnaire and 06% of respondents were recorded in the 'Primary/High School' category.

**Table 4 :** Dependency of the Respondents on different media

| S. No. | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|---------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Newspaper | 51 | 34% |
| 2 | Radio | 06 | 04% |
| 3 | Television | 45 | 30% |
| 4 | Online | 45 | 30% |
| 5 | Other | 03 | 02% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

Table 4 highlights the various mediums chosen by the respondents most for their information and news and entertainment consumption. While 34% (N=51), that is the majority of the respondents depended on Newspaper, 30% (N=45) of the respondents chose television for media consumption. And another 30% (N=45) relied on the digital for media content. Lowest of all i.e. 04% (N=06) selected radio and 2% (N=3) of the respondents selected other category of media dependency.

**Table 5 :** Respondent's Trust on various media

| S. No | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|---------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Newspaper | 96 | 64% |
| 2 | Radio | 03 | 02% |
| 3 | Television | 33 | 22% |
| 4 | Digital | 18 | 12% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

The table no. 5 reflects the credibility enjoyed by different media forms amidst the selected population. As reflected, 64% (N=96) of the respondents opined that they trust the newspapers most, followed by 22% (N=33) of respondents trusting television the most. 12% (N=18) of the respondents choose digital media and 02% (N=03) respondents selected Radio as their most go-to and trustworthy medium.

**Table 6 :** Amount of time spent by Respondents on different Media daily

| S. No | Time | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Less than 1 hour | 18 | 12% |
| 2 | 1 to 2 hour | 27 | 18% |
| 3 | More than two hours | 105 | 70% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

This table shows that most of the respondents 70% (N=105) spend more than two hours in consuming media on a daily basis, followed by 18% (N=27) of the respondents spending between 1 to 2 hour everyday while only 12% (N=18) of the respondents spent less than an hour per day.

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**Table 7 :** Respondent'sview regarding advertisement on which medium attracts more

| S.No | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Newspapers | 18 | 12% |
| 2 | Radio | 06 | 04% |
| 3 | Television | 90 | 60% |
| 4 | Digital Medium | 24 | 16% |
| 5 | Outdoor advertising | 06 | 04% |
| 6 | Other | 06 | 04% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

It is observed from the table no. 7 that more than half i.e. 60% (N=90) of the respondents opined that television advertisements attract them more, while 16% (N=24) chose the digital or online medium advertisements as most attractive in comparison to other mediums. 12% (N=18) selected newspaper advertisements, followed by Radio, outdoor advertising and other category each chosen by 04% (N=06) respondents.

**Table 8 :** Which sort of advertisement Respondents read/watched/listened more?

| S.No | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Product advertisement | 60 | 40% |
| 2 | Electronics goods | 42 | 28% |
| 3 | Household products | 30 | 20% |
| 4 | Automobile | 24 | 16% |
| 5 | Public service ads | 60 | 40% |
| 6 | Other | 18 | 12% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

As seen in the Table 8, 40% (N=60) of the respondents reads/watched/listened to Product advertisement, 40% (N=60) of the respondents chose Public service ads, 28% (N=42) of the respondents reads/watch Electronic advertisements, followed by 20% (N=30) of the respondents are reads/watch Household products, 16% (N=24) of the respondents read/watch Automobile advertisements and 12% (N=18) of the respondents are read/watch other advertisements.

**Table 9 :** Over which media,respondents came across Public Service Advertisements the most?

| S.NO | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Newspapers | 51 | 34% |
| 2 | Radio | 12 | 08% |
| 3 | Television | 54 | 36% |
| 4 | Digital Medium | 27 | 18% |
| 5 | Outdoor advertising | 03 | 02% |
| 6 | Other | 03 | 02% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

As seen in the above table, 36% (N=54) of the respondents said that they saw maximum Public Service Advertisements over television, 34% (N=51) of the respondents said newspaper, the 18% (N=27) of the respondents said Digital medium, followed by 08% (N=12) of the respondents saying that they came across maximum PSA's over Radio. At the same time, 02% (N=03) of the respondents selected outdoor advertisement and another 02% selected the other category of the media.

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**Table 10 :** Number of Respondents who were aware of Corona Virus

| S.No | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes | 150 | 100% |
| 2 | No | 00 | 00% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

Table 10 shows the awareness of the respondents about the corona virus. It reveals that all the respondents i.e. 100% (N=150) were aware about the coronavirus.

**Table 11 :** Respondents know-how of the Symptoms of corona

| S.No | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Fever | 03 | 02% |
| 2 | Cough | 03 | 02% |
| 3 | Shortness Of breath | 03 | 02% |
| 4 | All of the above | 141 | 94% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

The respondents were asked to identify the symptoms of corona virus. This was meant to check the sample populations know how of the novel virus symptoms. As seen in the Table 11, 94% (N=141) of the respondents were aware of all the symptoms of corona virus, while 02% (N=03) of the respondents said fever as the one specific symptom of the virus, 02% (N=03) of the respondents choose cough as one specific option and again 02% (N=03) chose Shortness of breath as one specific symptom of corona virus.

**Table 12 :** Opinion of the Respondents about Effective method of removing corona virus

| S.NO | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Alcohol based hand sanitizer | 132 | 88% |
| 2 | Soap and water | 18 | 12% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

As seen above, majority of the respondents i.e. 88% (N=132) opined that alcohol based hand sanitizer was more effective method for removing corona virus and 12% (N=18) of the respondents said from soap and water was effective way to remove corona virus.

**Table 13 :** In which Media the Respondents saw maximum number of Corona Virus related advertisements?

| S.No | Media | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Newspapers | 36 | 24% |
| 2 | Radio | 03 | 02% |
| 3 | Television | 99 | 66% |
| 4 | Digital Medium | 09 | 06% |
| 5 | Outdoor advertising | 03 | 02% |
| 6 | Other | 03 | 02% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

As reflected in the above table, 66% (N=99) of the respondents said that they came across maximum information on corona through Television ads. 24% (N=36) of the respondents said that Newspaper ads gave them maximum knowhow. 06% (N=09) of the respondents chose Digital Medium,

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02% (N=03) of the respondents said Radio, another 02% (N=03) of the respondents said that they became most aware through outdoor advertising and the rest 02% said they saw ads on other categories.

**Table 14 :** Are Public Service Advertisements effective medium of awareness?

| S.No | Opinion | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|---------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | 102 | 68% |
| 2 | No | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Maybe | 48 | 32% |
| | **Total** | **150** | **100%** |

*(Source : Primary Data)*

Table 14 elaborates the view of respondents on whether Public service advertisements are effective medium for awareness. The answers show that 68% (N=102) of the respondents were of the opinion that public service advertisements were effective medium for awareness of covid-19, while 32% (N=48) of the respondents were not sure whether PSAs were effective or not. Interestingly no respondent thought public service advertisements to be ineffective as a medium to create awareness.

## Conclusion

The present research study concludes that the Public Service Advertisements have an important role in creating awareness about Covid-19. It is also found that most of the respondents of Remuna block of the Blasore district in Odisha have come across maximum public service advertisements through television. Hence it has proved to be the most effective medium in creating awareness about Covid-19 pandemic.

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