MEDIA COVERAGE OF DENGUE OUTBREAK IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract: As media have immense potential to aware and alert the common public on health issues, it is essential to conduct researches not only on the status of coverage of health issues in media but also on the probable impact of the coverage of health issues among common public. In this connection, the present research was conducted and the coverage, placement and presentation of dengue related news in a leading Tamil newspaper were analyzed. In addition, the probable impact of the coverage on common public was analyzed. The analysis on coverage revealed that there were 176 news items with the area of coverage of 46,241 cm², 84 illustrations with the area of coverage of 17904.39 cm² and 18 advertisements with the area of coverage of 1377.49 cm². The analysis on coverage also revealed that the coverage of preventive measures was higher than those of treatment and control measures. The analysis on placement revealed that the first and middle page placements were substantial due to spread, severity and effects of dengue. The analysis on presentation revealed that the way of presentation was mostly fine and the words used for description were mostly uncomplicated, informative and educative. The readers opined that they could identify, know and understand the news, illustrations and advertisements easily due to effective media communication in terms of coverage, placement and presentation. The journalistic discourse analysis revealed that the discourse of militarization was used in dengue-related news so as to emphasize the preventive, treatment and control measures. It could be concluded that the media would aware and educate the common public effectively by giving appropriate coverage, accurate placement and apposite presentation of prevention, treatment and control measures of any health issue.

Keywords: Content analysis, Dengue outbreak, Media coverage

Introduction: Dengue is a mosquito–borne tropical disease caused by the dengue virus and it is one of the main problems of public health worldwide. It is reported that dengue is caused by the mosquito of the Ades aegypti type that breeds in fresh water[1]. It is also reported that dengue causes headache, muscle and joint pains, vomiting, skin rash, high fever and decrease in blood platelets that can lead to internal bleeding and also breathing difficulty[2]. It is pertinent to state here that the common public of the state of Tamil Nadu was affected by dengue in the second half of the year 2017 and there were a considerable number of casualties. As it is known, the newspaper is one of the major media that provides continuous social, socio–cultural and political information to the public and make them to think and act according to the input information. It is reported that the news production and its interpretation in society is essential for the survival of society[3]. It is also reported that the newspaper, as a watch dog of the society, plays an important role by providing information to the public not only to create awareness but also to provide edification on health issues[4]. By considering all these factual information, the present investigation was devoted (i) to study the coverage of dengue related news (ii) to study the placement of dengue news and (iii) to study the way of presentation of dengue news in a leading Tamil newspaper. The objectives of this research were materialized not only by adopting standard materials but also by adhering standard methodology. The research outcomes have been documented in this research paper for the benefits of readers of newspapers, researchers and common people.

Methodology: The Tamil newspaper that has a wide circulation in Tamil Nadu was selected. The selected newspaper was systematically collected during the stipulated period of time (July to

November,2017). Subsequently, a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative method of content analysis was undertaken on the collected newspaper[5].

In the present research, the dengue related news items were identified from the headlines. In case the headlines were not clear, the contents were read to identify the subjects. All the dengue–related news items that included dengue related information, illustrations and advertisements were identified. They were marked and the marked news items were separated. The separated news items were analyzed[6].

In the present research, the number of news items was quantified. In addition, the placements of news items were analyzed. The way of presentation of the news was also analyzed. On the whole, the qualitative and quantitative analysis was carried out on dengue related information, dengue related illustrations and dengue related advertisements in the chosen and collected Tamil newspaper.

Results and Discussions: In the present research, the coverage, placement and presentation of dengue related information in terms of news, illustrations and advertisements were assessed. While the coverage has been presented in Table 1, the categorized presentation and placement in the newspaper have been presented in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 1: Monthly Coverage of Dengue Related Information

Month in the year 2017	Coverage in newspaper (No. and space in cm^2)		
	Coverage of News	Coverage of Illustrations	Coverage of Advertisements
July	32 (6733.88)	12 (1911.84)	1 (86.10)
August	38 (6987.24)	11 (2012.23)	2 (155.26)
September	34 (9522.69)	19 (4884.34)	4 (382.32)
October	42 (14500.15)	26 (5489.11)	8 (559.59)
November	30 (8497.52)	16 (3606.87)	3 (194.22)

Table 2: Categorized Coverage of Dengue Related Information

Month in the year 2017	Coverage in Tamil Newspaper (No. and space in cm^2)		
	Coverage of Preventive Measures	Coverage of Treatment Measures	Coverage of Control Measures
July	12 (3024.54)	11 (2599.01)	9 (1110.33)
August	17 (3587.56)	17 (2412.28)	4 (987.40)
September	15 (4835.07)	10 (2446.56)	9 (2241.06)
October	18 (6447.69)	11 (4565.25)	13 (3487.21)
November	8 (2236.35)	12 (4117.15)	10 (2144.02)

Table 3: Placement of Dengue Related Information

Placement	Placement in Tamil newspaper (No. and space in cm^2)		
	News	Illustrations	Advertisements
Front Page	32 (12879.36)	14 (3544.21)	-
Second Page	26 (8152.88)	22 (4654.33)	-
Middle Page	49 (15797.22)	29 (4915.09)	11 (730.41)
Last Page	39 (9412.02)	19 (4789.95)	4 (417.06)

In the present research, the news coverage analysis was conducted. In addition, the news source and news spread analyses were conducted. The news coverage analysis revealed that there were variations in the number of news, illustrations and advertisements in the newspaper during the stipulated period on the basis of spread, severity and effects of dengue on common public. The news coverage analysis also revealed that the overall coverage of all these news items, illustrations and advertisements could be categorized as coverage of preventive measures, coverage of treatment measures and coverage of control measures. It should be appreciated that the coverage of preventive measures was higher than those of treatment and control measures. The news source analysis revealed that the field coverage of occurrence was 34.8%, interview coverage with authorities was 12.3% and press release of authorities was 8.2%. The remaining sources of news and speakers were medical practitioners, health experts, environmentalists, researchers, Government officials, patients, field workers of nongovernmental organizations, common public and also representatives of news agencies. The news spread analysis revealed that the dengue related information was presented in news (85.8%), special articles (10.6%), editorials (0.8%), specific slogans (0.7%), advertisements (1.0%) and others (1.1%) . The news spread analysis also revealed that the major noteworthy information in news included keeping the home hygienic, keeping the environment hygienic, usage of mosquito nets, usage of mosquito repellents, changing flower vase water once a week, removing stagnant water, discarding plastic containers, discarding unused tyres and clearance of garbage. The news spread analysis also revealed that the other major noteworthy information in news included awareness campaign in educational institutions for prevention of dengue, advice of doctors for preventive measures, opinion of environmentalists for protection of environment, seeking early consultation for treatment, don't deny treatment to dengue, no medicine without doctors' advice, attention of fluid management during treatment and proactive treatment of hemorrhage, ministers' visit in fever wards in the hospital, ministers' visit in affected areas, fund allotted for the prevention of dengue, availabilies of mobile health units and action taken by the Government.

In the present research, the illustrative analysis was conducted. In addition, the advertisement analysis was also conducted. The illustrative analysis revealed that the dengue related illustration was presented as photographs and graphs. The major illustrations included photos of ADS mosquito (zoomed photo for better identification), mosquito breeding in stagnant water and mosquito biting a child during daytime. The major illustrations also included photos of rashes in skin, dengue affected person with breathing difficulty and dengue patients admitted in hospitals. The other noteworthy illustrations included photographs of the flower vase with water, accumulated plastics and dumping of garbage in roadsides. The other noteworthy illustrations also included graphs of health decay of dengue affected persons, hospital admissions with respect to months and causalities with respect to yesteryears. It is to be noted here that nearly 30% of the news items were supported by illustrations. It is also to be noted here that most of the photos were black and white and the photos that occupied the first and the last pages were color photos with suitable captions. The advertisement analysis revealed that the notable dengue related advertisements published in the selected newspaper were useful and effective and most of the advertisements were from Government and the remaining was from the nongovernmental organizations.

In the present research, the news placement analysis was conducted. Subsequently, the presentation and discourse analyses were also conducted. The analysis on placement revealed that there were variations in the placement of news, illustrations and advertisements during the stipulated period. As and when the outbreak of dengue happened, the front-page major headlines of the newspaper were about dengue and the related news were placed afterwards. The placement analysis revealed that the dengue related news occupied the major headlines every so often in front pages for six days and the news coverage were in half pages. Apart from this placement of news, the dengue related news also occupied the front pages in many times during the stipulated period and the coverage of dengue news was given in less than half page space mostly. In some cases, the headlines were in the front pages with partial coverage of news and the remaining news was given in the subsequent or alternating pages. As far as the coverage in second and other middle pages was concerned, the most of the news was given in less than half page and the remaining dengue news was given in half page space. The published special health page was solely dedicated for coverage of dengue information in terms of treatment measures with necessary illustrations. As the last pages of the selected newspaper covered mostly the local level news, the dengue news in the region was provided with necessary colorful illustrations. In the present research, the way of presentation of the dengue news was analyzed in terms of the headings, subheadings, introduction, body and conclusion of the given dengue information [5,6]. The analysis revealed that the way of presentation was mostly fine and the words used for description were mostly uncomplicated, informative and educative. The selected readers opined that they could know and understand the news, illustrations and advertisements very easily due to effective media communication. The journalistic discourse analysis revealed that the discourse of militarization was used through metaphors in the media so as to emphasize the preventive, treatment and control measures[7]. On the whole, the coverage, presentation and placement of health issues of the selected newspaper were found to be acceptable.

Conclusion: It could be concluded that the media would aware and educate the common public effectively by giving appropriate coverage, accurate placement and apposite presentation of prevention, treatment and control measures of any health issue.

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