

Use of Message Design Principles in Breast Cancer Brochures

Jia-Yiing HO (hojiayying@outlook.com)

Su-Hie TING (suhieting@gmail.com)

Faculty of Language and Communication
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
94300 Kota Samarahan

Abstract

Communication of health risk messages is usually through newspapers, magazines, brochures and increasingly through social media. For the health risk message to reach the public, the materials have to be picked up and read; therefore availability and appeal of the materials are important. Research on message design has identified a few principles that govern health risk communication. This study examines the use of message design principles in the breast cancer brochures produced by Ministry of Health. For the study, five breast cancer brochures were analysed for the use of colour, typographical features, and graphics. Analysis showed that most of the brochures were in pink colour which is associated with breast cancer (The Pink Ribbon connoting breast cancer awareness). The analysis revealed that typographical features is probably the element of message design that needs improvement because most of the brochures used upper case letters and did not maximise the use of other features to increase the public's appeal. As for graphics, the use of human figures and the pink ribbon illustrate key messages. The study suggests that public receptivity to breast cancer risk messages can be improved through better application of the message design principles.

Introduction

Message design principles underlie the creation of effective messages and materials. Creating good materials involves a combination of many factors including subject matter expertise, audience awareness, experience in the field, and an understanding of message design. Generally, expertise in the subject area allows relevant information to be selected and for the information to be formulated in ways that can be understood by the audience. Familiarity with the audience makes it possible for the messages to be tailored to the knowledge, experience and needs of the audience. For example, the design of health risk messages is important to ensure that the health awareness materials achieve the purpose of educating the public. Instructional message design involves "the process of manipulating ... a pattern of signs and symbols that may provide the conditions of learning" (Fleming and Levie, 1978). Instructional message design principles are research-based and systematises what is known about the subject through intuition, experience and indirect learning. The essence of the message should come across easily, with no ambiguity.

In the field of health communication, researchers have given considerable attention to explaining why people seek and avoid health information (Lambert, Loiselle, & Macdonal, 2009; Miller & Bell, 2012). Among these reasons is people may want to maintain hope or avoid