

Theoretical Foundation of Advocacy

The roots of advocacy is as old as communication itself. Known as one of persuasive communication in line with advertising and marketing among others, it traces back to the Rhetorics of Aristotle where a speaker should utilize three rhetorical proofs such as logos (logic), pathos (emotional) and ethos (ethical) to persuade his or her audience. Griffin (2012) described rhetoric as the “the art of using and discovering all available means of persuasion, focusing upon lines of argument, organization of ideas, language use, and delivery in public speaking. One of the striking features of the rhetorical tradition is “a setting in which a single speaker attempts to influence multiple listeners through persuasive discourse. Effective communication requires audience adaptation.” It can be deduced that the purpose of an advocate, whether an individual, group or a system is not just to put on their concern on the table and wait for favourable decisions, but to make sure that they strategize to get maximum support or defend their case, possibly reframing and counteracting their opponent’s arguments (Chapman, 2001).

Advocacy Works

For this presentation, the focus will be on two advocacy campaigns--one involving the youth specifically on tobacco use smoking prevention and tobacco control which is the Truth Campaign and the other is the Ice Bucket Challenge. Both are examples of **media advocacy**.

Carlisle (2000) describes media advocacy as the strategic use of the mass media to advance social or public policy initiatives. In this particular case, it has been used as a particular strategy to generate news coverage about tobacco control (Niederdeppe et al 2007).

A. The Truth Campaign



Description

The Truth Campaign is a branded, national smoking prevention campaign designed to reach at-risk youth ages 15 to 17 primarily through TV advertisements with an anti-tobacco industry theme. This was launched by the American Legacy Foundation in the year 2000 and is the first youth anti-smoking campaign which is not supported by the tobacco industry.

This campaign features fast-paced hard-edged ads that present the facts of the addictiveness of smoking, the number of deaths and the number of disease attributed to smoking, the ingredients in cigarettes and the marketing practices of the tobacco industry. Since ads that give messages of saying 'no' to smoking is counterproductive they designed the ads as non-preachy and non-downgrading to the smokers. Instead of designing their messages as a series of Dos and Don'ts, the ads present factual information which made the youth decide for themselves. Evans, Pryce and Blahut (2005) further that the campaign features youth spokespersons with personal characteristics associated with smoking such as rebelliousness, independence and risk-taking. It has used this "stereotypical image" to change norms about not smoking. Moreover, the television ads are supplemented with radio ads, growing internet presence as well as grassroots "truth" tour. The Truth Tour is a summer bus tour that brings crew members across the states for the people to experience the campaign first hand.

Impact of the Campaign

The Truth Campaign is known to have heaped more than 300 creative awards since its launching. This campaign has been proven effective on the following ground according to Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells (2010):

1. **Awareness**- After 8 months on air, 75% of US teens could accurately describe one or more of the truth ads. Currently, 57 percent of teens recall seeing the ads
2. **Belief**- More than 70% of teens that seeing the ads makes them feel negative toward tobacco companies.
3. **Persuasion**- More than 90 percent of teens who saw the truth ads say the ads gave them good reasons not to smoke.
4. **Behavior**- Dr. Matthew Farrelly and his colleagues conducted a study and found out: 22% of the overall decline in youth smoking from 2000 to 2002 was directly attributable to the truth campaign

Dr. Cherly Heaton president and CEO of the American Legacy Foundation said that the truth campaign has made a significant impact in reducing youth smoking rates in the United States.

B. The Ice Bucket Challenge



The Ice Bucket Challenge (IBC) is one of the most viral social media phenomenon that has rocked the world and was participated by people from all walks of life—both famous and common. It was even noted as the “Harlem Shake of the summer” by the Mashable (Kelly, 2014).

Statistics revealed thru the New York Times that 1.2 million videos were shared by many active users between June 1 and August 13, 2014 on Facebook and was mentioned 2.2 million times on Twitter on July 29 to August 17, 2014 (Steel, 2014).

The Advocacy Works and Theories on How it persuades

1. Behavior Change Theory

One of the most notable theories on how advocacy persuades is the **Behavior Change Theory**. It posits that external variables, individual differences, and underlying beliefs contribute to differential influence pathways for outcome behaviors, intentions, attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy (Ndonye, 2014).

Truth Campaign

In the case of the Truth Campaign, it is apparent that they have a specific target audience in mind and feature messages that could influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on the specific change that the campaign intends to achieve. Messages should be pre-tested with particular attention to the possible difference of effects it can have when showed to different race, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Allen et al, n.d.).

It implies that an advocate should know the target audience. first, their demographics, characteristics, knowledge level, attitude and behaviour before mapping out a whole campaign. Because the Truth campaign has a thorough knowledge of its audience, the power of the content and the creative art direction of their ads successfully matched to their needs and captured their support and made the whole campaign effective.

Ice Bucket Challenge

This media advocacy has heaped the support of many from all over the world going beyond ethnicity and social status.

This is because they have captured the audience's fancy on participating on going viral especially that this participation would mean support to a certain cause—thus changing the behaviour of the people.

The millions sharing videos and actively mentioning it on Twitter are manifestations of behaviour change.

2. Message Frame Theory

This framework focuses on how message appeals are packaged in terms of “gain-frame promotion of positive behavior versus loss-frame prevention of negative behavior, especially for audiences likely to display reactance” (O’Keefe & Jensen, 2007; Quick & Bates, 2010).

Truth Campaign

Based from your knowledge of the audience, an advocate scrutinizes the messages and packaged it in a way that can communicate best to the audience. For instance, the Truth Campaign focused on informative and non-preachy style of presentation using cool youth spokespersons like them to encourage them to prevent smoking. Below are the critical key messages of the Truth Campaign and how it was packaged.

- a. First is taking note of the teens’ high-brand consciousness and the pervasiveness of the tobacco brands. With this, there was a call for the creation of a teen-focused non-smoking or counter-tobacco brand of campaign.
- b. It recognized for a teen-focused campaign. It should talk to teens using their own voice and not appear talking down to them.
- c. The campaign highlights the actions of the tobacco industry and its way of marketing cigarettes including its failure to point out the adverse health effects and its addictive qualities

Ice Bucket Challenge

Using the social media platform requires a simple yet a powerful message. The IBC has framed its message enough to be understood by people from all walks of life. The message is clear and simple---to promote awareness on Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) thus gaining humongous support from people all over the world.

3. Social Cognitive Theory

SCT emphasizes the processes by which source role models demonstrate behaviors, and depiction of vicarious reinforcement enhances the impact of mediated messages (Bandura, 1986). The one sending the message has a very important role in the process of message sending since they have an effect on how the messages are to be taken by the audience. Thus, it is important to factor in this elements in crafting for advocate messages.

Truth Campaign

In the case of the Truth Campaign, the team decided to make use of teenagers as spokespersons for their ad. They depict the “stereotypical image” to change norms about not smoking to deliver the message. The people behind the campaign know that teenagers tend to listen to people who share the same characteristics as theirs (Evans, Pryce and Blahut, 2005).

Ice Bucket Challenge

The popular ice bucket challenges for ALS have taken over our News Feeds, and thousands of people, even some famous names, have done their part to keep the hashtag going since late July. CEOs, actors, musicians and athletes have put together creative and entertaining videos to help raise millions for the ALS Foundation, calling out some of their famous friends as well (Romano, 2014).

The Ice Bucket Challenge has gone viral among millions of people especially among the celebrities with reputation that precedes them. The netizens seeing them participating is actually a major factor of their support for the advocacy. They serve as their role models.

Among the celebrities who joined include Chris Patt, Jon Bon Jovi, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg among others.

Reflections

After analysing the advocacy works and the theories, it can be deduced that:

1. Advocacy work is a deliberate and persuasive form of communication. It needs strategic planning with the audience as the focal point of consideration therefore a thorough knowledge of them would mean a greater chance of success.
2. The strategic planning produces a powerful message that can resonate and capture the intended audience for a specific advocacy work.
3. The media specifically the social media is a very powerful platform to reach millions of people therefore effective influencing their behaviour towards certain causes.
4. The source of the message greatly affects how are messages are to be taken by the intended audience.

Based from the reflections above, it prodded me to be deliberate, systematic and on-point in my future advocacy works. Dedication to research and creativity are the ways for a successful advocacy campaign especially that I am working in the persuasive areas of communication like Development Communication and Advertising.

Discussion Points

1. Based from the presented theories and advocacy work, in what areas can theories of persuasion help an advocate to craft an effective and persuasive advocacy campaign like the Truth Campaign and the Ice Bucket Challenge?
2. Do you know of more theories that could explain the persuasiveness and success of the Truth Campaign and the Ice Bucket Challenge?