Consumer Insights: Findings from Behavioral Research

MSI Relevant Knowledge Series

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Mass-media Campaigns and Health-related Behaviors

Insights

Mass-media campaigns can produce positive changes and prevent negative changes in health-related behaviors across large populations.

Success in mass-media campaigns is strengthened when:
- Campaigns include the use of multiple interventions (e.g., additional workplace and/or school interventions).
- Health-related behaviors are one-off or episodic (e.g., screening, vaccination) rather than habitual or ongoing (e.g., food choices, sun exposure, physical activity).
- Campaigns include easy access to relevant services and products (e.g., fresh fruits and vegetables, vaccines, condoms).
- Policies back up campaign messages (e.g., seat belt enforcement, smoking bans).
- Campaigns are sustained over time.

Success in mass-media campaigns is weakened when:
- Competitive messages from society or from the marketplace are pervasive (e.g., social norms around suntanning; cigarette marketing).
- The health threat involves addiction (e.g., drug use).

Evidence Base

Searches of seven databases in public health, social sciences, and business; identified review articles from 1998 onward on each of several mass-media campaign topics. Review findings supplemented with empirical studies published after the date of the last reviews, totaling more than 500 empirical studies.
Managerial Implications

To improve their effectiveness, mass-media campaigns should be included in comprehensive approaches to improve population health behavior. Sufficient resources in mass media should be invested over time to enable frequent and widespread exposure to campaign messages, especially for ongoing behaviors (e.g., physical activity). Promoted services and products (e.g., condoms, immunization sites) should be readily available to the target audience. In addition, complementary policy decisions that support change (e.g., smoking bans) should be considered.

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References
