

**Public Perceptions of Rhetoric Communication:
Case Study of Health Media Messages**

Aloysius Louis Mubiru

B Mass Communication, MAK, M. Business Administration, UMU

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Supervisor: Prof. Goretti Nassanga

ABSTRACT

The study, *Public Perceptions of Rhetoric Communication*, is an analytical review of the effectiveness of media messages and uses a case study of HIV/AIDS audio media messages.

The study is guided by the uses and gratification theory which looks at how people use and react to consumed media messages. The study also used three audio media messages which were disseminated in 1995, 2000 and 2005 to determine the reaction levels. HIV/AIDS messages are disseminated to the public /audience to consume and react accordingly i.e. to effect behavioural change or re-enforce a behaviour pattern that averts the spread of HIV/AIDS. The study used Aristotle's five canons of rhetoric (arrangement, invention, style, memory and delivery) as a framework to understand rhetoric. These rhetoric canons helped the study to determine the persuasive aspects (rhetoric language) in HIV/AIDS messages.

The study was cross sectional and the sample for the study was determined by multi-stage sampling where Uganda was divided into the Bantu and Nilotics with data being collected from Luweero and Kitgum districts respectively. The data was collected by administered questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions from Northern and Central Uganda, with samples from urban, semi-urban and rural settings. The total sample population was 254 respondents. Out of these 126 responded to the questionnaires with 61(48.41%) males and 65 (51.59%) females. The 128 remaining were in the six sessions of focus groups (three male and three female) of which, 65 (50.8%) of the respondents were female and 63 (49.2%) male.

The findings of the study revealed that the efficacy of the media messages is not solely a result of disseminating messages but an inter-play of socio-cultural and economic factors. The study noted that socio-economic initiatives with planned dissemination programmes should be adhered to. The study also points out that message efficacy cannot be simply pre-determined by use of an 'ideal' language but rather taking into consideration consumers' intrinsic factors, community norms/ cultures and individual's mindset at the time of the consumption of information.

Hence the efficacy of Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Information Education Communication (IEC) HIV/AIDS messages should take an integrative holistic approach. The right amount of information should be disseminated through the accessible outlets and the messages should suit the consumer. In addition to that, all stakeholders should take particular interest in the communication/dissemination processes.

The study also notes that there is need for communication audits with routine monitoring and evaluation of message efficacy and the comprehension levels of the respective messages. Lastly the study noted that the communicator should endeavour to evaluate the amount of information and levels of reaction derived from the respective messages.