

THE KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING FORUM

REALITY CHECK: PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING ON TELEVISION TODAY

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WASHINGTON, DC

MS. VICKY RIDEOUT: Thank you very much. And thank you all for coming. And before I begin, the very first thing that I want to do is add my own thanks to the many Kaiser Family Foundation staff members who helped to put this event together today. And I want to single out in particular Jennifer Webber, our Communications Officer, Kristin Leo and most especially my colleague, Teresa Boston, who probably every one of you here today has talked to or emailed at least once in the last couple of months, for her contributions in putting this together. So thank you, Teresa.

As Matt mentioned, we have two goals for today. First, to take a good hard look at the reality of public service advertising on television today. And second, to explore the future of public service advertising in the face of what is a very rapidly changing media environment.

So, we're going to start with today's realities. And what I'm going to do now is present a couple of findings from two studies that we conducted in preparation for this forum on public service advertising. Copies of these studies can also be found in the binders that you received today, along with a number of really useful background papers that I hope you'll have a chance to take a look at, and case studies of a number of different public service campaigns.

And as Matt mentioned, if at any point you want to go back and check anything, you can always go to the Kaiser Network at www.kaisernetwork.org where you can watch the Webcast of this event. You can find transcripts. You can search it by key word. And you can also find additional copies of all of the conference materials.

So, the first study that I want to talk about is a content analysis. It's designed to measure how much donated time networks and stations are currently making available to PSA's on what topics at what times of day and so on.

The study was designed by Foundation staff in collaboration with Indiana University Professor Walter Gantz and his colleague, Nancy Schwartz, and they are here with us today. And it was conducted for us by Professor Gantz and Ms. Schwartz and their colleagues.

And let me tell you a little bit about the methodology of the study. The analysis is based on a sample of a week's worth of programming for every network that's included in the study. And the sample was drawn in the first half of the year 2000. There are ten networks included in the study including the major broadcast networks, the top rated cable channels in the genres of news,

sports, music videos, children's programming and general cable programming, and the dominant Spanish language network of Univision also.

Now for each network, programming was sampled in seven different markets across the country in order to take into account any regional differences that might exist in the number of PSA's that are aired or the topics covered or that kind of thing.

In the end, there was a total of 1,680 hours of television programming that was analyzed. And for every spot that appeared to be a public service ad, the researchers contacted both the station that aired the ad and the sponsor of the ad to determine whether the air time had been donated by the station or purchased by the sponsor.

So, the first finding that we have this morning concerns the very basic question of how much time is made available for free for public service advertising. And the average that we have for all of the networks that we've studied combined, for broadcast, cable, Spanish language--ooh, excuse me, put together and averaged out over all the different parts of day - the late night programming, prime time programming, and so on, is 15 seconds an hour per network is donated on average to public service advertising.

Now while the average is 15 seconds an hour, in a way that doesn't really tell you very much because it masks some very significant differences between broadcast and cable networks, Spanish language networks, and between the different times of day - how much is donated an hour in the overnight periods versus during prime time. So what you can see from this chart, we're going to--we'll break it out and show you how it goes sort of--type of network by type of network.

On the major broadcast networks, there is an average of 17 seconds an hour that is donated to public service advertising. In prime time, there's an average of five seconds an hour. Now, given that there are three hours a night of prime time, that means there's about 15 seconds a night of public service advertising on average on each of the major broadcast networks in prime time.

So, PSA's are occurring in prime time on the big broadcasters. It could be that it's one 30 second spot every other night. It could be that it's a 15 second spot every night. But they are occurring. At the same time, there's a total of just a minute and 45 seconds a week in prime time on each of the broadcast networks. And that's obviously a challenge when you look at it from the perspective of a group that's trying to reach their intended audience with messages about AIDS or child abuse or domestic violence.

We found that cable networks donate an average of seven seconds an hour overall and 8 seconds an hour in prime time. Now, there are some regulatory issues that could play a role in the difference that we observe here between broadcast and cable.

Broadcasters are not required to donate any time at all to PSA's. And they're certainly not required to air a certain number of PSA's or at a certain time of day. But they are required in exchange for their use of the public's airwaves to "serve the public interest". And they're

allowed to count time that they donate to PSA's as part of fulfilling this requirement. So, in addition to their sense of civic responsibility, broadcasters do also have at least a modest regulatory incentive to air PSA's.

And on the other hand, there's no comparable regulatory policy for the cable networks. Now despite that, as you can see, cable networks do donate time to public service advertising. In fact, a little bit more on average in prime time than the broadcast networks. But, you can see a difference in terms of the overall amount of time.

Now before I move on, I should mention that there was one cable network that we looked at that was significantly different from this pattern. We looked at five cable networks. Four of the five cable networks that we studied averaged about five seconds an hour that they made available for PSA's. One of the networks, MTV, donated 16 seconds an hour on average to PSA's. So, they nearly matched the broadcast record and that kind of raised the average for all of the cable stations. And in the interest of full disclosure as Matt mentioned, the Kaiser Family Foundation has had a partnership with MTV for the last several years conducting public service campaigns.

Univision, another network that we have partnered with on public service campaigns topped all of the other networks with an average of 48 seconds an hour overall and that remained pretty steady during prime time.

Now another thing that we looked at in this study is just how does that amount of time that's made available for PSA's compare to the amount of time that networks sell for commercials or that they use themselves to promote their own shows. And what we found is that the TV show itself now takes up about three-quarters of all the air time on television on average.

And as you can see from this chart, 20 percent of all air time is now spent on paid advertising, five percent is spent on promos, one percent is spent on infomercials. This is on average. Obviously, in the middle of the night, it's going to be a larger percentage of any given hour of broadcasting. .4 percent is spent on filler. This is things like tests of the emergency broadcast system. And then finally, donated public service advertising which also constitutes just under one-half of one percent of all of TV air time.

Now the other thing that's of concern to groups that are making PSA's, of course, is the time of day in which they're run. And unfortunately, for those health and other organizations who are trying to get their messages out to the public, the largest chunk of donated PSA time, 43 percent, occurs during the late night hours between midnight and 6 a.m. which as Matt mentioned, also happens to be the time with obviously the lowest amount of television viewership.

The remaining donated PSA's are pretty evenly divided throughout the rest of the day with about 18 percent running here in the popular viewing hours of 6 p.m. to midnight and then just under one in ten running during the most highly coveted time slots of prime time.

Now again, this is an average for all of the networks that we studied: broadcast, cable and Spanish language. If you were to look at it just for the major broadcast networks that would be a different percentage. It would be a smaller percentage that run in prime time.

Now another thing that I know some groups have been concerned about is what some people call PSA style promos, which is where the major networks create their own campaigns using their own stars. And there are differences of opinion about whether this is a positive or a negative development for groups that are interested in doing PSA campaigns. Some argue that this is a wonderful development because it involves famous public figures and stars and who better to deliver these messages. And others find it a less than positive development because they feel that, you know, they'd rather have that time available for their own spots that communicate their message in the way that they want to communicate it.

We certainly wanted to at least take a look at how common this is. And what we found is that on the major broadcast networks, these spots account for about one out of every four donated PSA's is one of these network PSA style promos. It's a spot that features a network star. And we did count these obviously as donated time.

Now an additional issue that concerns those who are trying to get their messages on the air is how long the spots are. We all know how hard it is to communicate a message in a 30 second spot, but we've also heard that a lot of networks are asking for even shorter spots such as a 10 or 20 second spot. And that can pose an even greater challenge. So we wanted to see just how widespread that practice is.

And what we found is that on the major broadcast networks now, about half of all donated PSA's, a little over half, are 30 second spots. Interestingly, we did find that some longer spots also get on the air. About seven percent of all donated PSA's were 60 second spots. And it's always tempting to take 60 seconds because you feel like you can say more than twice as much in a 60 second spot than a 30 second spot. We also found that a total of about 40 percent of spots--donated spots are now 20 seconds or less including 18 percent that are 10 seconds or less. So of all the donated PSA's out there, about one out of every five of them is just a 10 second spot. So that's another challenge that groups have to face.

Of course another hurdle that a lot of groups face is convincing the station or a network to address your particular topic especially if you happen to be working on something that might be a little bit controversial. So what we're going to do now is shift gears a little bit and look at the kinds of issues that are most likely to get this donated air time that we've been talking about.

Not surprisingly, the most common topic in donated PSA's is children's issues. More than one out of three PSA's is on some sort of a children's issue. And this could be on children's health issue. It could be on mentoring. It could be on literacy. It could be on child abuse prevention and so on. Other than that, the most common topic was health with just over one in four donated PSA's on a health topic of some type.

Now I should mention that these aren't mutually exclusively categories. All the spots that we counted as being on children's issues, we also counted in whichever other category that they fit in, whether it was education or health or so on.

Under health issues, the most common topics were drug and alcohol abuse which got 8 percent of all donated PSA's were on topic of drug or alcohol abuse. Various diseases, mostly cancers but other diseases as well accounted for eight percent of all donated PSA's. HIV/AIDS got five percent. Other sexual health topics got two percent. And smoking prevention got one percent. And you may find that a little surprising to say wow, really only one percent of all donated PSA's are on smoking prevention. It doesn't seem like what the situation is given what we see ourselves on TV. And I'll have a little more to say about that a little later on.

After children's and health issues, other common topics included spots about local groups or events, civic issues such as patriotism or voting and of course, these issues are probably even popular since September 11th, fundraising spots for various groups, volunteerism, family issues such as parenting or caring for an elderly relative. And then somewhat less common were spots on education, on the environment, on safety issues and that included seat belts and fire prevention and spots on crime or violence and that included school violence spots, gun safety spots, domestic violence spots, date rape spots and so on are all in that category.

So all of these findings that I've been presenting concern donated PSA's only, those spots for which networks or local stations donate the air time for free whether it's for a spot that's part of their own campaign featuring their own stars or it's a spot that's created by an outside group or government agency as part of a broader public education campaign.

But, we're also interested in what some say is a trend toward groups buying time for their public education campaigns. So we wanted to see just how common that is. And the answer is that it's quite common. In fact, of all the spots that you see on TV that look like PSA's, that have public service messages in them, two-thirds really are PSA's, that is they meet the FCC's definition of a PSA which is that the time is donated, made available for free by the station.

One in three of the things that you see on TV that look like PSA's now are paid for by the sponsor. Now this includes a small portion of time that's purchased by corporations - the Philip Morris spots on domestic violence are one example. But most of it is from the same kind of non-profits or government groups that are trying to get donated time. The White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy purchases air time for its spots. The Truth anti-smoking campaign purchases air time for their spots and so on. So it's not that they're aren't a lot of anti-smoking spots on TV. There are. It's just that most of them are paid for by their sponsors.

And obviously, since these campaigns are paid for, they tend to get better air time. So, you're more likely to--these are the spots that you're more likely to see. So for example, in prime time on the major broadcast networks, you're twice as likely to see a paid PSA as you are to see a donated PSA.

So, now I want to turn to the second study that we conducted which was a survey of public service directors at local TV affiliates across the country. The study was directed by Tina Hoff whose a Vice-president of the Foundation and her colleague, Liberty Green. And it was conducted in June and July of 2001.

The survey was of more than 500 public service directors at broadcast affiliates only and it was in the top 150 markets. Now one of the issues that we wanted to cover with the PSA directors is what factors influenced whether or not a spot gets aired because after all a fair amount of time that's donated to PSA's is local time as opposed to network time. And these are the folks who are getting everybody's tapes in the mail or over their network feed and are deciding which spots they're going to put on and which spots they're not going to put on.

So, we asked them what factors were major influences in them airing a spot. And the factor that was named the most often as being a major influence is whether or not the spot was locally produced, with 75 percent saying that's a major influence on them.

Now other significant factors were whether the spot is sponsored by the station's affiliated network, whether the station has a chance to co-brand the spot or receive some sort of cross promotion in exchange for airing it, whether the National Association of Broadcasters or the AD Council has endorsed the spot, whether the group producing the spot has also bought time on the station, and then finally, whether the station can seek a paid sponsorship for the spot from a local company.

Now, these last couple of items raise an interesting question. If you're able to buy some ad time--TV ad time for your spots, does that help or hurt your chances of getting donated air time? And we asked this of public service directors. We asked them whether or not they were more or less likely to donate time to a group that had also bought time. And we don't have the most conclusive results here. We have just under half of the respondents said it really wouldn't make a difference to them one way or another whether a group had also bought time. Eleven percent said it would make them less likely to donate time if the group was also buying time. And 35 percent said it would make them more likely to donate time if a group had also bought time.

Now, of course, beyond whether your group is buying ad time, there's also just the issue of how well ad sales in general are going. And obviously, that's of particular concern right now with the slowdown of the economy. And it was of particular concern to everybody when the economy was going great guns a year ago because at the time you might hear things like well, there's just no ad inventory out there because we're selling so much ad inventory.

And now, you might hear we can't afford to donate time to PSA's because we have to, you know, we're selling our ad inventory for such low prices, we have to sell as much of it as we possibly can.

Some people speculate that most stations won't donate time unless they can't find anyone to buy it. In other words, that all you're going to get is unsold ad inventory. So we wanted to find out what--what the PSA directors at local affiliates had to say about that. So we asked them. We found 28 percent of PSA directors said that is not something that we even consider. We don't factor into our decision making whether or not we could have sold that time. We have another 14 percent who say well, we think about it but we often will sell ad time even--we often will donate ad time even if we could have found a paying buyer for it. We have 36 percent said we sometimes will donate time even if we could have sold it to somebody. And 15 percent say we never donate time if we could have sold it to somebody.

At this point, I just want to take step back from some of these specific findings and offer just a couple of observations. There's no question that the media environment that we live in is changing at an astronomical pace. There's the incredible expansion of channels, the unprecedented consolidation of media companies, which I expect given the news in the last couple of days is something that may continue at an even quicker pace over the next couple of years, the explosion in on-line use, the growth in wireless, the rise and fall of banner ads, and the new technologies like TIVO or interactive TV that may completely change the way that we watch TV or use the Internet or may even spell the end of TV advertising as we know it.

But hasn't changed is the fact the people in this country continue to spend an enormous amount of time with media - 28 hours a week with TV alone. What hasn't changed is that media continues to be an incredibly powerful force in this society. And I think the events of September 11th only served to reinforce that for a lot of us.

And what hasn't changed is that anybody in our society who wants to influence people's behavior whether it's their voting behavior, their purchasing behavior or their health behavior, anybody who wants to influence people's behavior wants access to the media to try to bring that behavior change about. And that media access is something that politicians, drug companies, toy companies, all pay dearly for and for a reason.

So, just as there's a huge incentive for commercial advertisers to figure out this new medial world, and believe me, the Proctors & Gambles and the McDonald's and the Pepsi's of the world are out there figuring how are we going to be able to get our advertising in this new media environment, so too is there a huge incentive for public interest organizations to do the same thing.

At the Kaiser Family Foundation, we've been very fortunate to be able to partner with a lot of networks - with MTV, with BET, with Univision, with UPN, with Nickelodeon on large national public service campaigns that have received a tremendous amount of free air time and we're very, very grateful that. But not all groups can take advantage of those types of opportunity. And we all need to look at the challenges that are going to be facing all of us in the years ahead. And we certainly don't expect to finish that discussion here today, but we do intend to begin it.

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