



“Health-Media Literacy” for the Elderly: How Older Persons Perceive Health Information in Prescription Drug Ads

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The Issue of Media Literacy and Health Literacy

- The need for “health-media literacy”
- Older adults and media literacy
 - High rates of traditional media usage i.e. TV
 - Low rates of Internet usage compared to other age groups
- Health literacy definitions (i.e. HP 2010); Bernhardt & Cameron (2003-Handbook of Health Communication) includes 4 skills: literacy, numeracy, computer literacy and media literacy

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Literature Review (selected)

- Prescription Drug Ad DTC controversy in the medical community
 - Pro: patient info, freedom of access
 - Con: over-prescribing, medicalization
- Media usage patterns in older audiences (eg. TV and socialization)
- Media perceptions of elderly images in advertising (health, gender, etc.)

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Research Questions

How do older adults (ages 65+) perceive, interpret and use:

- health information in DTC prescription drug ads?
- texts and images in printed DTC drug ads
- texts and images in TV DTC drug ads
- awareness of media marketing tactics in DTC ads

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Theory and Methodology

- Symbolic interactionism: Blumer (1969) people actively learn from symbols they perceive in interactions (with media ads, doctors, neighbors, loved ones, etc.)
- Qualitative in-depth interviews: 25 women ages 65-90 were asked about their media usage, recalled DTC ads, shown 12 print DTC ads, and asked for a final statement on their views of DTC ads.

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Sampling Plan

- Began as homogeneous convenience sample (via four social networks incl. 3 churches, 1 rec center in PA and DE)
- Intensity sample (interest in health)
- Became snowball sample (recruiting)
- Print and TV ad awareness + use required
- Age 65+ (lit: chron. age misleading)
- Interest in health topics resulted in a number of retired hcare workers (9/25)

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Result 1: Intentional and Unintentional Health Media: Ad “Denial”

- For intentional media usage: print ads, were often “skipped”- yet texts and images retained.
- For unintentional media usage: television images in “background”.
- Each of the women was able to recall ads, describe them, and correlate recalled (TV) ads to viewed printed ad samples (eg. Lunesta butterfly, Crestor family pics)

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Result 2: Media Filters & DTC ads

- Media Filters - the women used four “media filters” to make sense of the ads, consisting of first-hand health-related knowledge and experience:
 - Self and personal health/medical history or experiences
 - Others in social network and their health histories
 - Doctors and health professionals re: degree of trust
 - Pharma companies re: degree of trust

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Result 3: Trust Types & DTC Ads

Trust types – embodied in the experience of relating to DTC ads:

- 1) The Believer = Trust in health care providers + Trust in drug companies
- 2) The Loyalist = Trust in health care providers + Distrust of drug companies
- 3) The Advocate = Distrust of health care providers + Trust in drug companies
- 4) The Skeptic = Distrust of health care providers + Distrust of drug companies

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Result 4: Prevailing Themes

- *Theme #1: Prescription drug ads reflect our perceptions of aging and health in society (attractiveness, mobility, gender).*
- *Theme #2: Prescription drug ads promise miracle cures (Invincibility of the self and gullibility of "others"; lifestyle changes also needed).*
- *Theme #3: Prescription drug ads reflect a culture that desires immortality. ("Do they want us to live forever?")*

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Next Steps

Answers to new questions (seniors online & trustworthy health information for decisions)

- 2007 – Pilot training project to introduce older adults to online health information and evaluate quality of websites in MD, DE, and PA using National Institute on Aging curriculum (see “Age Page – Can You Trust Health Info Online?” and www.nihseniorhealth.gov)
 - Study repeated with older males 65-90 (based on predictions from the women!).
 - Doctor/patient communication training from media literacy perspective (based on trust types).
 - Health-media literacy for other populations using other health-related media.

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For more information

- Contact ppoe@temple.edu
- References:
 - Handbook of Health Communication. (2003) esp. health literacy chapter by Bernhardt & Cameron.
 - Handbook of Communication and Aging Research. 2nd ed. (2004) esp. chapter on older adults and learning styles by Frances Glendenning.
 - Geist-Martin, Ray and Sharf (2003). Communicating health: Personal, cultural, and political complexities esp. studying experiences of aging and illness.
 - www.health.gov/communication . Consumer E-Health Tools 2006 study and Healthy People 2010 Health Communication Focus Area 11: Obj. 2 Improvement of Health Literacy.

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