

Dr. Parul Jain

Discussing her Research on Health Communication, Media and Health Disparities



Photo provided by Scripps College of Communication

Spotlight on Research

Journalism 4870

By: Vernon Eguakun

Dr. Parul Jain, professor of strategic communication in Ohio University's Scripps College of Communication, focuses her research on health communication, media effects, and health disparities. Her work explores how media and communication shape the way people think about health, healthcare systems, and personal health decisions.

Dr. Jain said her interest in health communication started from both personal experience and media influence. Originally from Delhi, India, she immigrated to the United States about 25 years ago and said adjusting to a new healthcare system played a major role in shaping her academic interests.

"I immigrated from India... and it was very interesting to me to understand the healthcare system and the lack thereof," Jain said. "I used to love watching TV... like Grey's Anatomy was becoming popular at that time. So, I was interested in understanding how media portrayals impact health attitudes and behavior."

She said those experiences, along with her background in marketing research, eventually led her to pursue a Ph.D. in health communication at The Ohio State University.

Dr. Jain describes her research in simple terms as the study of how media influences health beliefs and behaviors, along with how inequalities in healthcare shape patient experiences.

“I like to understand how media images and portrayals—news, social media, digital media—how all that influences our health attitudes and beliefs,” she said. “And also understanding health disparities and how differences in who we are impact the healthcare we receive.”

A major concern in her field today, she said, is misinformation.

“Right now, misinformation is a huge issue,” Jain said. “With deep fakes and AI, people don’t know what is correct and what is not. The biggest challenge is figuring out how to communicate trustworthy information and get people to trust it.”

She also noted that political beliefs have increasingly shaped how people interpret health information, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another part of her research focuses on what people misunderstand about health communication. Jain says many people think it only involves public health campaigns, but it is much broader than that.

“People think it’s just campaigns like don’t drink and drive or texting and driving,” she said. “But health communication is so much more than that. It’s everyday life decisions—what we watch, what we eat, how we interact with doctors, even what our friends and family think about health.”

She explained that doctor-patient communication, media portrayals, and even social interactions all play a role in shaping health outcomes. “How I communicate with my doctor affects whether I take medication or go back for a follow-up,” Jain said. “Even small interactions in daily life influence health behaviors.”

Dr. Jain also emphasized that health disparities remain a major issue in the United States, especially for racial and minority communities. She said her work often examines how social and structural inequalities affect health outcomes over time.

“I think organizations need to see things like minority stress as a fundamental health communication issue,” she said. “Everyday stress and microaggressions can impact health at a cellular level and lead to long-term conditions like cardiovascular disease.”

Overall, Dr. Jain’s research aims to help people make healthier decisions by improving how health messages are communicated. She says that her goal is to design messages that encourage people to make healthier choices for themselves and their loved ones.

Contact Information

Email: jainp1@ohio.edu

Phone: 740-593-2598