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An Assessment of Awareness Campaigns in COVID-19 Management

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ABSTRACT

A public awareness campaign is a tool of social marketing technique. The quality of awareness campaign is determined based on its effectiveness which is evaluated by its impact on the audience. To know the awareness related to major media campaigns, during the COVID-19 pandemic related to COVID-appropriate behaviour, a survey tool was designed and administered in online mode among 200 young respondents from Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, India. Data were collected through Google forms shared via various social platforms and snowball sampling technique with age and area related restrictions. The media campaign which made a great impact on the mind and heart of the respondents were "Do gaj doori mask hai jaroori (Mask and maintaining distance of two yards is necessary) " and "Jab tak dawai nahi tab tak dhilai nahi (No carelessness till a medicine is recommended)" The sources which made people aware were "caller tune" followed by "family and friends" . Almost all components of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour were known to the respondents except, seeking COVID-19 related information from reliable sources and refraining from sharing unverified social media posts. This research throws light on the interventions that can be more impactful and will thus help in better designing and dissemination of awareness campaigns in future.

Keywords: *Awareness campaigns; COVID-19 Management; Sources of awareness; Media campaign on COVID-19*; Uttar Pradesh

INTRODUCTION

Raising awareness is the process which informally educates people regarding the topics or issue with a purpose to influence their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards achieving a defined purpose or goal. It can mobilize the power or opinions of masses in support of issues and challenges for the purpose of influencing the will of decision makers. There are various strategies adopted by the Government of India for raising awareness of general masses with the help of different tools and methods which are helpful to

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convey or spread awareness together with support and to influence public opinion towards preventive measures of COVID-19. The awareness campaign includes press releases, disseminating reports given by WHO and ICMR, briefings, publications and conclusion of studies, submissions given by committee working for management of COVID-19, working with media, conferences/webinars related to COVID-19 and creating educational material. Range of different means and tools, such as radio, television, films, internet, social media, newspaper, mobile phones, leaflets and posters were used to disseminate the information and awareness related to COVID-19 before and during the outbreak of pandemic. The frequency of launch of different media campaigns increased with the increasing corona cases.

Awareness is defined as a set of various activities planned for a set time, for a specific target group with the aim to increase their knowledge which leads to bringing changes in their behaviour towards the specific social issue. Impact of awareness campaign is evaluated on five different levels viz., awareness, engagement, change in behaviour, social norms, and wellbeing. Government of India has launched many awareness campaigns to sensitize the masses about preventative measures, care during COVID-19, accessing vaccination, post COVID-19 health tips, COVID-19 testing labs etc. in very simple language and through approachable media like mobile phone. Many celebrities, politicians and other responsible citizens are trying to change the negative attitude of the public and motivating them to avail medical facilities by cooperating with medical personnel, which ultimately leads to reducing corona virus infection in society (Anderson et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2020).

A study by Tiwari et al. (2021) on the effects of community awareness and global information campaigns, found that dissemination rate of awareness among susceptible individuals at community level and individual level plays pivotal role in curtailing the COVID-19 disease. In emergency times like the pandemic which affects billions of people across the globe, media can play a vital role. World Health Organisation (2020) reported that media can be identified as no cost partial treatment at the early stage of epidemic outbreaks when medical healthcare facilities and biomedical interventions (vaccination) are not sufficient to curtail the burden of disease. Media play the role of prime source of information having noticeable impact on the governmental healthcare involvement to bring the epidemic outbreak under control, as it affects individuals' behaviour toward the disease outbreak.

In the last few decades, numerous studies have endeavored to assess the impact of media in various disease

outbreaks. Most of these studies have concluded that media has a positive impact over reducing the transmission of disease. Funk et al. (2009) observed that awareness campaigns can impede disease growth. Misra et al. (2011) reported the impact of awareness programs by introducing an aware class that is isolated, and protected from the infections, formed by the campaigns. Samanta et al. (2013) observed that an aware class caught infections at a lower rate than the unaware class. It was reported that an increased rate of media campaigns results in decreased infection. Rai et al. (2021) examined the social media advertisements' impact on the transmission dynamics of COVID-19 pandemic in India and concluded that non-pharmaceutical interventions strategies should be implemented effectively to reduce disease burden in India. Thus, it can be stated that various media campaigns, if designed carefully, can be effective in curbing pandemic like situations in future.

Assessing the effectiveness of awareness campaigns can provide an insight into what appeals to the current generation and what kind of interventions can result into maximum impact in terms of behavioural change. Agriculture is a field which requires constant awareness drives for the farming community about new technologies, weather warnings, possible pest attacks or even newer policies and schemes. Hence, assessing the awareness campaigns of such a wide scale which has endeavoured to touch millions of lives, can prove to be beneficial for policy makers and extension personnel in the field of agriculture.

The present research was conducted during the peak of COVID-19 second wave i.e. during the month of April, 2021 to assess the awareness and knowledge about major media campaigns and their key messages.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Sampling

The present research was conducted with 200 youth (100 males and 100 females of age between 19 and 24 years) residing in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India as a part of a Post-Graduation Dissertation paper. This cross-sectional study utilised a self-administered, online questionnaire which was distributed through social media viz. Facebook, WhatsApp and emails across Varanasi throughout April 2021. The questionnaire was created, designed, and disseminated using the google forms platform. Participants were encouraged to fill out the form and assist in sharing the questionnaire with their family members, friends and relatives. Thus, participants were recruited by a snowball sampling technique. Moreover, participants were limited to one response to avoid duplicated or exaggerated data. Included participants were those who are currently living in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), had given an

informed consent and successfully completed the questionnaire. Participants residing outside the aforementioned area and outside the mentioned age range were excluded. In the light of the recommendations of self-isolation and home quarantine, online surveys were considered the most appropriate method for data collection. The tool included questions related to background information (their name, age, residence etc), awareness about major media campaigns (slogans), source of awareness about these campaigns and key components of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour. The statistical methods applied for data analysis were percentage analysis and chi square.

Data Collection

The data were collected in the month of April, 2021 when the second wave of COVID-19 was in its peak in India. Youth were selected as respondents because they are spending their time more on internet as well as they could be helpful in spreading these messages fast and can play a key role in the battle of COVID-19 vs human beings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with presentation of data collected through questionnaire and its discussion. To facilitate the data presentation, the section is divided into two sections-

Section- I- Background Information of respondents

Section-II-Awareness about major media campaigns on COVID-19 and their sources

Section- I- Background Information of respondents

Data regarding background information revealed that 68 percent male and 32 percent female participated in the survey, out of which maximum number of males (41%) belonged to 22-24 age category and maximum females (40 percent) belonged to 19-21 years of age. Their distribution according to their education depicts that majority among both the genders were pursuing or had completed their post-graduation degree (42% male and 45% female) and their residence (71 % male and 70 % female) is in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Section-II-Awareness about major media campaigns on COVID-19 and their sources

Government had taken various initiatives to protect people of India from pandemic, including creating awareness, imposing lock downs and establishment of temporary hospitals for the treatment of patients. High density of population had been a matter of serious concern for the government in better management of COVID-19.

Government of India had made efforts to make people aware about COVID-19 through digital media. The first successful effort was to set a caller tune in

female voice who was telling (to the person who initiated the call) about COVID-19. This caller tune continued for approximately six months, afterwards replaced by a new message and a new voice.

Table 1. Awareness about Key Messages of Media Awareness Campaigns

N=200

Sl.No.	Key messages	Awareness	
		Male (%) n=100	Female (%) n=100
1.	Stay Home Stay Safe	82	81
2.	#Unite to Fight Corona	14	8
3.	Be clean Be Healthy (*Saaf Rahe Swasth Rahe*)	61	73
4.	*Jab Tak Dawai nahi tab tak Dhilai Nahi* (No carelessness till a medicine is found)	92	90
5.	*Do Gaj Doori Mask Hai Jaroori* (Mask and maintaining distance of two yards is necessary)	95	97
6.	*Koi road par na Nikle* (No one should go on Road)	22	10
7.	*Badal Kar apna Vyahvar Karenge Karona par war* (through change in behaviour, we will attack corona)	9	2
8.	*Corona harega, desh jitega* (Corona will lose and country will win)	68	74

Analysis of Table -1 shows that the most popular media campaign was "*Do gaj doori Mask hai jaroori*" which was on tips followed by "*Jab tak dawai nahi, tab tak dhilai nahi*". Both the messages were promoted by the most reputed names of India viz., the Prime Minister of India and a popular film actor, which shows the human psychology of people to focus on the things which are promoted by famous people. Least noticed messages were "*Koi road par na nikle (*No one on the road)", "#unite to fight corona" and "*Badalkar apna vyahvar karenge korona par vaar (*Through change in behaviour, we will attack corona". The chi square test statistic in case of "*Do gaj doori Mask hai jaroori*" (χ^2= 13.50, p=0.0001), "*Jab tak dawai nahi, tab tak dhilai nahi*" (χ^2= 14.32, p=0.0001), "Stay home stay safe" (χ^2= 12.56, p=0.0021), "*Corona harega Desh Jitega*" (χ^2= 13.23, p=0.009) and "be clean and be safe" (χ^2= 9.34, p=0.0003) was found to be statistically significant based on α level of significance (0.05). There was no significant difference between the awareness levels of male and female respondents.

The above data could imply that for a message to cause significant impact, it is better to associate with a celebrity. In a study by Krishnan et.al. (2021), it was

concluded that games can also be highly effective media for spreading awareness about COVID-19 appropriate behaviour if due consideration is given to its looks, design, ease of playing etc.

Sources of COVID-19 awareness

With the restrictions of social distancing (no word of mouth) and hesitation for print media (because of risk of getting infected through newspapers), there were less options in terms of choice of media . At the initial stage, Government of India instructed all telecom companies to make COVID-19 messages as caller tune, with a simple message that has a sound of cough followed by COVID-19 information. This was perceived as annoying by many, so this tune was then changed to a female voice who informed people about corona. A review of Table -2 shows that this experiment was successful as 93 % male and 92% female respondents received the information about COVID-19 from caller tune.

Table 2. Sources of information about COVID-19

Sl.No.	Source	Male (%) n=100	Female (%) n=100
1.	Internet	72	57
2.	Caller tune	93	92
3.	TV	12	24
4.	Newspaper	16	11
5.	Family and Friends	81	74

In addition, family and friends were the major source of information for both males and females (81% and 74%). The respondents were youth so higher use of internet as source of information for covid was expected, but it is interesting to see that internet use as source of information was at higher side in males (72%) as compared to females (57%) (χ^2= 8.72, p=0.031). It could possibly indicate the gender difference in technology access. Time spent on TV was found to be more in female respondents and reason could be their lesser access to internet and TV was the next best thing. During COVID Lock down-I, people read only e-newspapers. Besides this, "youth is always less interested in reading newspaper" (Bharucha, 2017). The study by Semwal and Ranawat (2020) reported an increase in media usage during lockdown and found it to be effective in disseminating information about safety measures. The chi square test statistic in case of internet use (χ^2= 12.49, p=0.0002), caller tune based information (χ^2= 11.09, p=0.0003) and via friends and

family (χ^2= 10.71, p=0.0002) was found to be statistically significant based on α level of significance (0.05).

Awareness about key components of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour

COVID-19 pandemic has led to extraordinary and unforeseen challenges which need collective action and support from all. To overcome this situation and win over it, everyone should know about their roles and goals. For this, Government of India issued a guideline of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour which was popularised through various media. The key components of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour were, maintain physical distance even while greetings, cover mouth and face, wash hands carefully, regularly clean and disinfect the frequently touched surface, seek COVID-19 information from credible sources, do not circulate social media post without confirmation etc.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has been a big shock to the world. The only way to prevent this disease is to save, from being infected with right kind of knowledge, awareness, and practices (KAP). The study concludes that in COVID – 19 awareness campaigns, the most successful interventions were those which had an association of celebrities and those which put the onus on the public to behave responsibly and protect their family. Women could be motivated by creating messages focussing on the family's wellbeing. The results of the study will help in better designing of the campaigns and messages in future.

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