

Can social media change behaviour as part of a synergised tobacco control communication strategy?

Message pre-test findings from Bangladesh

Social media offers a powerful and relatively low-cost channel of communication for public health programs, including those to promote new policies such as graphic health warnings (GHWs) on tobacco packs.¹ There has also been considerable interest within low- and middle-income country settings, as a result of the resource limitations, to explore the potential of social media in the promotion and adoption of protective health behaviours, with cessation support services identified as the 'weakest link' of WHO's MPOWER strategy.² This study aimed to assess the acceptability of social media pages among tobacco users and increase cessation related behaviours of tobacco users, prior to the implementation of a national communication campaign to support GHWs in Bangladesh.

METHODS

A qualitative study design was embarked upon to pre-test social media pages prior to implementation of a national GHW communication campaign in Bangladesh. Two social media options – long copy and short copy – were designed for a site called people behind the packs: www.packpeople.com.bd/. The site included information on the new pictorial warnings as well as quit tips and referral options for tobacco users. The social media component was synergised with television, outdoor and print communications to support recall of interventions across a range of communication channels (see Figure 1). Eight focus group discussions were conducted with male and female tobacco users aged 18–35 years, with low/middle socio-economic status, located in urban and rural settings of Bangladesh. Components of the website were pre-tested including: pictorial warnings and cessation pages, videos of personal testimonials from tobacco victims and related pack warnings, as well as cessation support messages from a clinician.

RESULTS

Focus Group findings identified that respondents intended to access the site, or refer tobacco using friends and family members to the quit pages. Responses to testimonials appearing on the webpages identified that the messages had high impact on intentions to make a quit attempt or talk to others about quitting. Respondents also identified their appreciation of quit tips support and referral options. Additionally, barrier and benefits analysis provided insights for design modifications to optimise social media approaches and build on communication campaign synergies.



FIGURE 1

Community posters which were part of the “packpeople” social media website message pre-test with testimonials also to appear on television public service announcements and billboards.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings point to the potential for social media synergised with tobacco control messages on other communication channels to impact on attitudes, intentions and cessation related behaviours of tobacco users. More in-depth research including campaign outcome evaluations need to be conducted to build the programming science. Formative research such as message pre-testing is an important precursor to the final development of message designs and creative approaches, prior to the implementation of evidence based, tobacco control, media interventions.

AUTHORS

Vital Strategies: Tahir Turk Nalin Singh Negi Shafiqul Islam Dane Svensen Nandita Murukutla
Bangladesh Centre for Communication Programs, Dhaka, Bangladesh: Md. Kapil Ahmed
Corresponding Author: Tahir Turk (MComm, PhD) Email: tturk@vitalstrategies.org

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