

THE USE OF SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS IN RAISING AWARENESS OF THALASSEMIA IN THE UAE

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the communication strategies that were adopted by thalassemia campaigns in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The author discusses how thalassemia campaigns relay their messages and activities. Which communication channels are used by the campaigns? And which target audience do they consider to be important? The content analysis and survey were conducted to understand the strategy and impact of the campaigns. The results confirm that the campaigns were successful in various aspects such as planning, targeting the audience, coming up with creative and appropriate messages, as well as choosing effective communication channels. The awareness strategy utilised in the campaign took into consideration the specific social and cultural aspects of the Gulf region, especially where endogamy marriages take place, and which thus are directly related to the campaign's subject. The research results indicate that social media usage (37.52%), personal communication (30.02%) and print media (15.03%) played a significant role during the campaigns in raising awareness of thalassemia in the UAE. It was found that less than half of all respondents (48.21%) confirmed that they received information regarding the disease through thalassemia campaigns' web sites, 20.36% said that they accumulated information about the disease from mass media, while 13.16% of respondents said that local media outlets were their source of information about thalassemia.

KEY WORDS:

communication strategies, mass media platforms, social marketing campaigns, social media, thalassemia

Introduction

Social marketing relies on meticulous planning in conducting campaigns to raise public awareness. This term, which was coined in 1971 by Kotler and Zaltman¹ and then used by, for example, Atkin and Wallack,² refers to a form of marketing communication that aims at improving peoples' lives in facing numerous

¹ KOTLER, P., ZALTMAN, G.: Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change. In *Journal of Marketing*, 1971, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 3.

² See also: ATKIN, C., WALLACK, L.: *Mass Communication and Public Health: Complexities and Conflicts*. California: Sage Publications, 1990.



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challenges and all kinds of negative phenomena.³ Since the 1980s, social marketing has expanded around the world to include active living communities.⁴

Social marketing uses campaigns to raise awareness and encourage positive behaviours. Atkin and Wallack claim the importance of well-thought-out plans and designs⁵ as the conveying of the campaign's message is one of the most complicated parts of the plan because it aims at changing the ways of thinking and inoculating new ideas in peoples' minds.⁶ In this regard, Weinreich argues: "Social marketing is the use of commercial marketing techniques to promote the adoption of a behavior that will improve the health or well-being of the target audience or of society as a whole. These are the same methods that a company such as Coca-Cola uses to sell its soft drinks – a focus on its consumers, market research, and a systematic process for developing a marketing program. The key characteristic that distinguishes social marketing from commercial marketing is its purpose; that is the benefits accrue to the individual or society rather than to the marketer's organization."⁷

The experience of implementing social marketing campaigns in raising awareness of thalassemia in the UAE is considered as one of the most successful campaigns in the Arab world. In this respect, Dubai was able to eliminate the spread of thalassemia in the year 2010 because of the combination of several factors, one of which is the existence of a communication strategy plan to apply social marketing campaigns to delivering messages, and thus convince the target audience of the need for a medical examination before marriage.

Literature Review

Scholars have used different approaches to discuss social marketing campaigns design, implementation and evaluation.⁸ Atkin and Wallack found that mass media were the best way to communicate with the target audience.⁹ Thomas claimed that the Liverpool Primary Care Trust (Liverpool PCT) social marketing programme was successful at changing the behaviour of the target audience.¹⁰ The Liverpool PCT's social marketing programme provides people with ongoing support and feedback within the framework of a citywide challenge to residents to pledge and lose weight. Scheier and Grenard argue that campaigns which target youth in the early part of adolescence, when they are vulnerable to drug initiation, succeed at proffering a bevy of media communication strategies showcasing the personal and social pitfalls of drug use. The researchers suggested that if a social marketing campaign wants to be successful, it should choose to remediate behaviours that are less intransigent to change.¹¹

The study of Al Khaja and Creedon found that television advertising is the most optimal awareness communication channel in the first breast cancer awareness campaigns in the UAE.¹² Buchthal found that a social marketing campaign was the best way to emphasise the importance of promoting increased physical

activity and nutrition.¹³ Iles suggested that effectively conveying information to a target public is a gruelling task and it becomes even more difficult when behavioural change is under discussion.¹⁴ Luca mentioned the use of theory in social marketing and that the most frequently cited theories include the diffusion theory, the stages of change model/the transtheoretical model, the social cognitive theory, the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behaviour, the health belief model, and the protection and motivation theory.¹⁵ Rogers suggested that the first step in any educational campaign is to create appealing messages.¹⁶ Social marketing accomplishes this by applying marketing strategies to increase the acceptability of ideas or practices in a target group and improve the spread of it through message promoters who resonate with the target audience. The design and implementation of social marketing campaigns must take into account the socio-cultural aspects of target audiences.¹⁷

Recent social marketing studies have noted that non-mainstream types of promotion will be more important to social marketing,¹⁸ and that more campaigns have included new media technologies in the past few years.¹⁹ Namkoong found that the theory of planned behaviour is effective in predicting behaviour intention and demonstrates the usefulness of a multi-theoretical approach via an interactive campaign research on social media.²⁰

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theory of goal-setting helped to form the idea of social change as a means of motivation: it creates social change through motivation.²¹ The theory suggests that people need simple and specific objectives. The thalassemia campaigns tried to achieve this idea through creating a 'motivation': "Thalassemia disease is hereditary, but easy to get rid of."²²

Sending multiple messages in the same campaign could cause confusion and misunderstanding among the targeted receivers of the message. In fact, some communication studies, as stated in the social expectations theory of DeFleur, confirmed that most messages in campaigns target a distracted audience;²³ therefore, most of the messages get lost in a sea of video and audio messages, and thus prevent the campaigns from being effective. From this standpoint, it is more effective when the campaign focuses on one message at a time, reflecting one portion of the problem, and taking the same action for the other aspects, creating accumulating effects at the end.

3 SANDERS, S., BARKINGTON, D., SKIDHARAN, S.: Redefining Social Marketing: Beyond Behavioral Change. In *Journal of Social Marketing*, 2015, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 163.

4 LEFEBVRE, R.: *Social Marketing and Social Change: Strategies and Tools for Improving Health, Well-Being and the Environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013, p. 15.

5 ATKIN, C., WALLACK, L.: *Mass Communication and Public Health: Complexities and Conflicts*. California: Sage Publications, 1990, p. 15.

6 Compare to: ANDRIEN, M., BEGHINI, I.: *De l'Education Nutritionnelle Conventionnelle à la Communication Sociale en Nutrition*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 1993, p. 7; BACKER, T., PRADEEP, S.: *Designing Health Communication Campaigns: What Works?* California: Sage Publications, 1992.

7 WEINREICH, K.: *Hands-on Social Marketing: A Step-by-Step Guide*. California: Sage Publications, 1999, p. 3.

8 See also: KOTLER, P.: *Improving the Quality of Life*. New York: Sage Publications, 2017; LUCA, N.: Theory and Model Use in Social Marketing Health Interventions. In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2013, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 20; HASTINGS, G.: *Social Marketing: Why Should the Devil Have All the Best Tunes?* Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2017.

9 ATKIN, C., WALLACK, L.: *Mass Communication and Public Health: Complexities and Conflicts*. California: Sage Publications, 1990, p. 36.

10 THOMAS, J.: Using Social Marketing to Address Obesity: The Ongoing Liverpool's Challenge Social Marketing Program. In *Journal of Communication in Health*, 2009, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 217.

11 SCHEIER, L., GRENARD, J.: Influence of a Nationwide Social Marketing Campaign on Adolescent Drug Use. In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2010, Vol. 15, No.1, p. 270.

12 ALKHAJA, M., CREEDON, P.: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the First Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign in the United Arab Emirates: Lessons Learned and Next Steps. In *Public Relations Review*, 2010, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 387.

13 BUCHTHAL, V. et al.: Avoiding a Knowledge Gap in a Multi-ethnic State Wide Social Marketing Campaign: Is Cultural Tailoring Sufficient? In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2011, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 325.

14 ILES, I.: Eating Disorders as a Social Problem: An Impact Analysis on Health Campaign Videos. In *Journal of Media Research*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 13, p. 13.

15 LUCA, N.: Theory and Model Use in Social Marketing Health Interventions. In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2013, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 29.

16 ROGERS, E. et al.: Development and Early Implementation of the Bigger Picture, a Youth-targeted Public Health Literacy Campaign to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes. In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2014, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 145.

17 LOZANO, N. et al.: How to Develop a Social Marketing and Public Relations Campaign to Prevent Obesity among Teenagers in Catalonia. In *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, 2015, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 255.

18 See: FRENCH, J., GORDON, R.: *Strategic Social Marketing*. California: Sage Publications, 2015; HILL, R., MORAN, N.: Social Marketing Meets Interactive Media: Lessons for the Advertising Community. In *International Journal of Advertising*, 2015, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 815-838; KOTLER, P., LEE, N.: *Social Marketing: Influencing Behaviors for Good*. California: Sage Publications, 2017.

19 HILL, R., MORAN, N.: Social Marketing Meets Interactive Media: Lessons for the Advertising Community. In *International Journal of Advertising*, 2015, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 815.

20 NAMKOONG, K.: Communication, Reasoning, and Planned Behaviours: Unveiling the Effect of Interactive Communication in an Anti-smoking Social Media Campaign. In *Health Communication*, 2016, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 49.

21 See: LOCKE, E., LATHAM, G.: *A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990.

22 *About Emirates Thalassemia Society*: [online]. [2018-10-15]. Available at: <<http://www.thalassemia.org.ac/>>.

23 See, for example: DEFLEUR, M.: *Theories of Mass Communication*. New York: Edition David McKay, 1970.

Definition of the Study Concepts

Kotler and Zaltman defined the concept of “social marketing” as the design, implementation, and control of programmes calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research.²⁴ Lough and Pharr argue that “social marketing campaigns that adhere to the principles of commercial marketing have been successful, especially when they incorporate a marketing plan”.²⁵

A “social change campaign” is an organised effort conducted by one group which attempt to persuade the target adopters to accept, modify, or abandon certain ideas, attitudes, practices or behaviour.²⁶

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To understand the communication strategies of thalassaemia campaigns.
- To know how the target audience perceives the thalassaemia campaigns.

Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to examine the strategies used in planning and executing thalassaemia campaigns in the UAE. The research will answer the question of how do thalassaemia campaigns relay their messages and activities. Which target audience do they consider to be important?

Research Questions

We seek to answer four research questions:

RQ1: What is the planning used in the campaigns?

RQ2: What are the communication strategies of the campaigns?

RQ3: What are the appeals and other aspects of the campaigns’ messages?

RQ4: What are the target audience’s perceptions of the campaigns?

We used both content analysis and the survey method to answer the research questions. Due to the diversity of messages in the campaigns during the period of the study (1st September 2004 to 1st September 2018), a purposive sample was used. Twenty thalassaemia campaigns were chosen for their importance and connection with the subject of the study. Brochures, publications, online messages (published on *Twitter*), videos on *YouTube*, *Facebook* ads and TV spots, as well as activities related to the campaigns during the period from 1st September 2004 to 1st September 2018 were analysed.

24 KOTLER, P., ZALTMAN, G.: Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change. In *Journal of Marketing*, 1971, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 5.

25 LOUGH, N., PHARR, J.: Use of a Multi-tiered Framework to Analyze Commercial, Cause and Social Marketing Strategies in Sport. In *Journal of Applied Marketing Theory*, 2010, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 10.

26 KOTLER, P., EDUARDO, R.: *Social Marketing: Strategies for Changing Public Behavior*. New York : Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1989, p. 11.

The content analysis of twenty thalassaemia campaigns out of 98 in total is equivalent to a rate of 19.6% and this is sufficient analysis for this type of study. The twenty thalassaemia campaigns were selected from the UAE Genetic Diseases Association,²⁷ the Emirates Thalassaemia Society²⁸ and the Thalassaemia Centre – Dubai.²⁹

A pre-testing³⁰ helped to make some modifications to the grid analysis, by adding a photo analysis component, due to its importance in conveying the messages of the campaigns. The grid analysis enables us to answer the problematic questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3) and to explain how the campaigns (and their contents) were designed. The second method is a quantitative research method that enables us to answer RQ4, i.e. what are the target audience’s perceptions of the thalassaemia campaigns.

We opted for the stratified sampling as a simplified method³¹ when it comes to picking the right sample within the University of Sharjah consisting of 50 male students and 50 female students (N=100) studying at the College of Communication. The response rate is 100% of distributed questionnaires. The software SPSS version 22 was used to treat the data through frequencies and cross tabulation. There were two variables – gender and age (18 – 25) that were implemented in analysing the data gathered from the survey. The questionnaires focused on the nature of the disease and the different perceptions of the campaign’s messages by the respondents and the extent of their understanding of the semiotic messages contained in the campaigns. The data was collected between 1st April and 30th April 2018.

Results

The Campaigns’ Topics

The coding categories of thalassaemia campaigns’ messages revealed the subject and the meaning contained in the messages.³² *In vivo* coding³³ was used in this study only for short phrases code, as the short phrases code operation enables us to limit the campaigns messages’ subjects and contents. Also, the coding categories took into consideration the model implemented by Marying,³⁴ and were applied as follows:

Table 1: Coding categories of the Thalassaemia campaigns

Category	Definition	Message	Coding Rules
C1: Endogamy Marriages	The relation between thalassaemia and marriage between family members.	“Encouraging young Girls and Boys Getting Married to Do Early Check-ups”. ³⁵	- Premarital screening. - Free check-ups.
C2: Prevention	Thalassaemia is a genetic blood disorder. ³⁶	“Prevention and Treatment of Genetic Diseases and Blood Disorders”; “They Can Save Lives and Reduce Pain and Suffering”. ³⁷	- Education of thalassaemia. - Organisation of prevention programmes. - Thalassaemia awareness programme.

27 For more information, see: *UAE Genetic Diseases Association*. [online]. [2020-03-20]. Available at: <<http://www.uaegda.ae/>>.

28 For more information, see: *Emirates Thalassaemia Society*. [online]. [2020-03-20]. Available at: <<http://www.thalassaemia.org.ae/>>.

29 For more information, see: *Thalassaemia Centre – Dubai*. [online]. [2020-03-20]. Available at: <<http://www.thalassaemia-dubai.com/>>.

30 BAKER, L.: *Doing Social Research*. 2nd Edition. New York : McGraw-Hill, 1994, p. 182.

31 BUCHTHAL, V. et al.: Avoiding a Knowledge Gap in a Multi-ethnic State Wide Social Marketing Campaign: Is Cultural Tailoring Sufficient? In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2011, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 318.

32 KOHLBACHER, F.: The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research. In *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 2006, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 13.

33 SALDANA, J.: *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London : Sage Publications, 2009, p. 74.

34 MAYRING, P.: Qualitative Content Analysis. In *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 2000, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 8. [online]. [2018-05-09]. Available at: <www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089>.

35 *About Emirates Thalassaemia Society*. [online]. [2018-10-15]. Available at: <<http://www.thalassaemia.org.ae/>>.

36 PRATHYUSKA, K et al.: Thalassaemia – A Blood Disorder, Its Cause, Prevention and Management. In *Research Journal of Pharmaceutical Dosage Forms and Technology*, 2019, Vol. 11, No. 3, p. 186.

37 *UAE Genetic Diseases Association*. [online]. [2018-10-15]. Available at: <<http://demo.emiratescontent.com/uaegda/en/>>.

C3: Blood Donation	Regular blood transfusions, which allow patients with Thalassemia to grow normally and be active. ³⁸	“Save Someone’s Life and Give Blood Today... Every Minute of Every Day, Someone Needs Blood.” ³⁹	- Anaemia. - Blood transfusions. - Blood donation.
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Source: Own processing, based on MAYRING, P.: *Qualitative Content Analysis*. In *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 2000, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 8. [online]. [2018-05-09]. Available at: <www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089>.

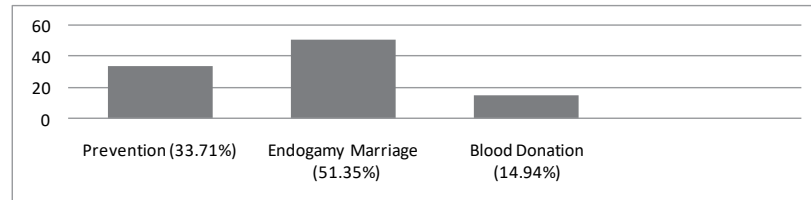


Figure 1: Subject of the campaigns

Source: Own processing

Figure 1 shows that 51.35% of the campaigns focused on the relations between thalassemia and marriage between family members. This approach seems logical as endogamy marriages are very common in all Arab Gulf countries. This was then followed by the prevention of thalassemia factor (33.71 %). Finally, the lowest percentage is related to blood donation (14.94 %), which indicates the need for blood donation and aim not to scare the public away from having their blood drawn and transferred to thalassemia people.

The Campaigns’ Goals

The social marketing campaigns’ goals were defined in terms of behavioural change,⁴⁰ and awareness through knowledge.⁴¹ The campaigns’ main objective set by the UAE Genetic Diseases Association was “to eliminate the spread of thalassemia in the UAE”. There were other derivative goals such as “reinforcing awareness about the disease” and “encouraging young girls and boys who are getting married to do early check-ups”.⁴²

The Social Marketing Product

The process of designing the “social product”⁴³ is a complex one because it relies on making an “image advertising”⁴⁴ that is abstract to the social product. In the thalassemia campaigns, the “social product” consisted of providing free medical check-ups during the campaigns, which helped to define precisely the product which was accessible to people and, thus, contributed to the campaign’s success.

Segmenting and Targeting

Figure 2 shows that the thalassemia campaigns were mostly aimed at the age group 18 – 29 (47.85 %) from both genders, especially those getting married. The second target group was those aged between

38 THALASSEMIA FOUNDATION OF CANADA: *Frequently Asked Questions*. [online]. [2018-09-18]. Available at: <<http://www.thalassemia.ca/resources/faq-2/>>.

39 *What Is Thalassemia?* [online]. [2018-10-13]. Available at: <<https://www.dha.gov.ae/en/SpecialtyCentres/Thalassemia-Center/Pages/Thalassemia.aspx>>.

40 STRUTHERS, A., WANG, M.: Buzz Agents in a Teen-driven Social Marketing Campaign: Positive Campaign Attitude Leads to Positive Changes in Health Outcomes. In *Social Marketing Quarterly*, 2016, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 218.

41 SANDERS, S., BARKINGTON, D., SKIDHARAN, S.: Redefining Social Marketing: Beyond Behavioral Change. In *Journal of Social Marketing*, 2015, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 167.

42 *About Emirates Thalassemia Society*: [online]. [2018-10-15]. Available at: <<http://www.thalassemia.org.ae/>>.

43 KOTLER, P.: *Marketing Management: Analysis Planning Implementation and Control*. New Jersey: Hall International, 1997, p. 33.

44 KEY, T., CZAPLEWSKI, A.: Upstream Social Marketing Strategy: An Integrated Marketing Communications Approach. In *Business Horizons*, 2017, Vol. 60, No. 1, p. 328.

30 and 45 of both genders (35.06%), as they are the most likely to be either getting married or to explain to other categories of people the dangers of the disease. The third group targeted by the campaigns was those who are 46 or older of both genders (9.01%). This consists of a small percentage and it makes sense as this group of people is less likely to be directly impacted by the disease.

Figure 2 shows that the least percentage was given to those who were between 8 – 17 years old (7.45%). It means that the campaigns could have an early impact in the youngsters’ lives in order to raise a new generation which is aware of the disease, but mostly didn’t choose to do so.

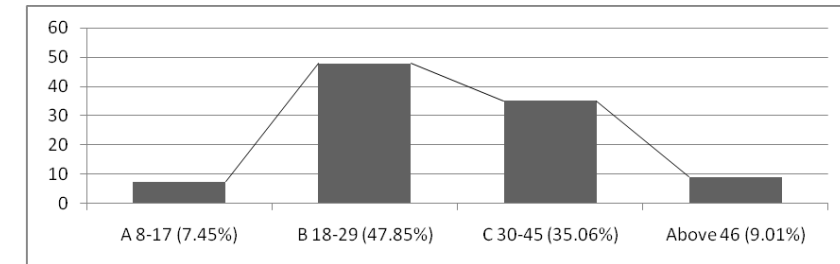


Figure 2: Age categories

Source: Own processing

The segmentation findings concluded that almost 2/3 of thalassemia campaigns (65.51%) targeted the national audience, while only 34.49% were allocated to local populations, although the results may indicate the need for more focus on populations in remote areas. In fact, many studies have shown that marriages between family members occur generally more often in rural and remote areas.⁴⁵

Message Construction

The study shows that a slightly higher priority was given to rational messages (54.69%), as the nature of the disease requires the use of facts to convince the target audience, such as “A simple blood test will indicate whether the person carries thalassemia trait” (published by Emirates Thalassemia Society on 11th September 2017) or “A drop of blood means a lot to thalassemia patients. Will you choose to donate blood?” (published by Emirates Thalassemia Society on 14th December 2017). On the other hand, the emotional element still has an important impact on individuals (45.31%) as in this case, emotional content represented a huge incentive for people to donate blood. For example, showing images of kids suffering from the disease is a very powerful visual message. The Emirates Thalassemia Society’s campaign was initiated on 23rd May 2016 with the slogan “Blood donation is good”.

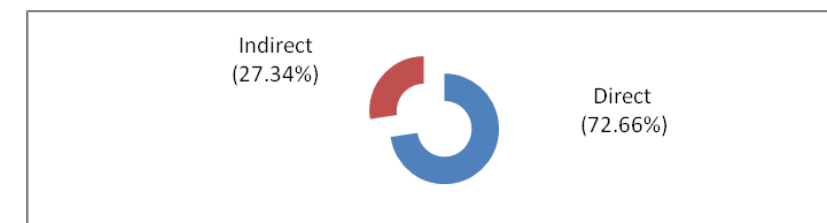


Figure 3: Direct and indirect thalassemia messages

Source: Own processing, based on BOWE, H., MARTIN, K.: *Direct and Indirect Messages: The Role of Social Context Identified by Grice and Searle*. In *Communication Across Cultures: Mutual Understanding in a Global World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 11.

45 Compare to: EROL, B.: a-Thalassemia Syndromes in the United Arab Emirates. In *Hemoglobin: International Journal for Hemoglobin Research*, 2011, Vol. 35, No. 5-6, p. 577; AL-DABBAGH, B.: Half of the Emirati Population Has Abnormal Red Cell Parameters: Challenges for Standards and Screening Guidelines. In *Hemoglobin: International Journal for Hemoglobin Research*, 2014, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 58.

As indicated by the figure above, the campaigns used more direct messages (72.66%), because they tend to have a stronger impact on the receiver. One example of a direct message is “*The choice is yours, for a UAE without thalassaemia*” (included in the UAE Genetic Disease Association campaign, published on 13th May 2016). It was also found that indirect messages (27.34%) were much less used than direct messages since implied messages address a more educated category of people via social media. One example of an indirect message: “*I test my blood for my future*” (published by Emirates Thalassaemia Society, on 14th November 2017).

Execution of the Messages

All messages were written in a short style, which made them understandable to a larger public. Very simple and clear language was used. Because of the unique diversity characterising the UAE society, Arabic as well as English was used in 75.67% of messages, with Arabic used exclusively in 24.33% of messages, mostly in rural areas.

Semantically,⁴⁶ in the thalassaemia campaigns colours reflect different ideas. The red colour reflects the degree of “seriousness of the disease”, and also the colour of blood which is needed continuously in transfusion procedures for people with thalassaemia. Black is traditionally “the colour of death” and was used to raise awareness and hit people’s consciousness. White reflects “the hope and assurance” by getting checked up before marriage.

The Communication Media

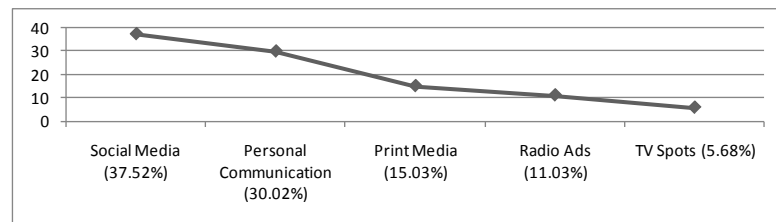


Figure 4: Usage of communication media

Source: Own processing

Choosing the right communication medium is crucial to the success of any campaign strategy.⁴⁷ Figure 4 shows that social media were the most used medium in the campaigns (37.52%), because they are well established within UAE society and are widely used by the youth⁴⁸ as they represent the largest group within the target audience. Social media are economically beneficial, and, most importantly, they allow an instant reach with a limitless interaction, especially via *Facebook* (the most used platform in the campaigns). The results also indicate that the medium, which was least used by the campaigns, were TV spots (5.68%) and this could be because of their high cost. It was found that personal communication comes second (30.02%). It is effective in conducting interactive communication.

46 See also: BARTHES, R.: Introduction à l'Analyse Structurale des Récits. In *Communications*, 1966, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 25; PEIRCE, S.: *Semiotics and Signifies*. Indiana : Ed Charles Harwick & Bloomington, 1977; SCHOLZEL, H., NOTHHAF, H.: The Establishment of Facts in Public Discourse: Actor-Network-Theory as a Methodological Approach in PR-Research. In *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2016, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 55.

47 ANDRIEN, M.: *Guide Méthodologique des Interventions dans la Communication Sociale en Nutrition*. Rome : FAO sous division de la Communication, 2005, p. 86; See also: CUTLIP, S. et al.: *Effective Public Relations*. New Jersey : Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006.

48 SALEM, F.: *Social Media and the Internet of Things Towards Data-Driven Policymaking in the Arab World: Potential, Limits and Concerns*. Dubai : MBR School of Government, 2017. [online]. [2018-09-15]. Available at: <https://www.mbrsg.ae/getattachment/1383b88a-6eb9-476a-bae4-61903688099b/Arab-Social-Media-Report-2017>.

Perception of the thalassaemia campaigns

This part of the research clarifies how selected respondents perceived the thalassaemia campaigns’ messages. Results of the study show that 62.36 % of respondents state that they have sufficient information about thalassaemia. 77.69 % of younger female respondents (aged 18 – 25) are significantly more likely to have information about thalassaemia. Younger male respondents (22.31%) are significantly less likely to have information about the disease.

Less than a half of all respondents (48.21%) confirm that they received information regarding the disease through thalassaemia campaigns’ web sites. Moreover, 20.36% say that they accumulated information about the disease from mass media. Finally, 13.16% of respondents claim that local media outlets were their source for information about thalassaemia.

Also, 11.97% state that their knowledge about the subject goes back to their high school years when the Ministry of Health used to send sensitisation teams to provide students with information along with free medical check-ups. Finally, 6.30% of respondents say that they learned about thalassaemia from their families.

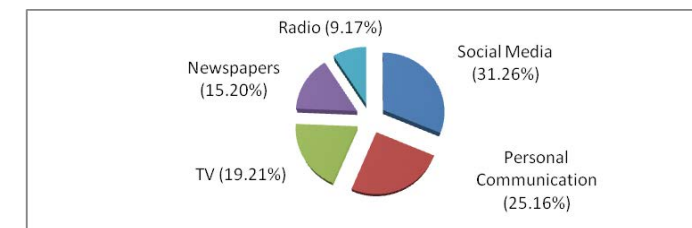


Figure 5: Sources of information about the thalassaemia campaigns

Source: Own processing

Regarding mass media platforms, 31.26 % of respondents confirm that they heard of the thalassaemia campaigns thanks to social media, especially *Facebook* (26.33 %), *YouTube* (24.60 %), *Twitter* (18.45 %), *Instagram* (12.28 %), *WhatsApp* (10.33 %) and *Snapchat* (8.01 %). Also, 25.16% followed the campaigns via personal communication, 19.21% heard about these campaigns while watching TV, 15.20% from newspapers and magazines, and finally, 9.17% via radio. Those results seem in concordance with communication media adopted by campaigns’ managers (Figure 4).

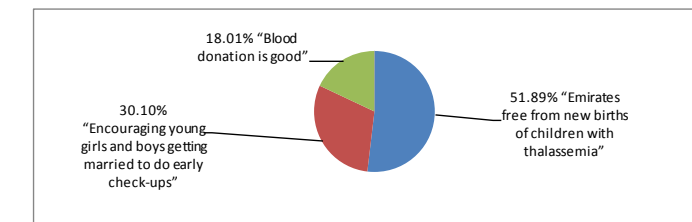


Figure 6: Three most important messages remembered by respondents

Source: Own processing

The figure above shows that the highest percentage of recall (51.89%) is given to the message “*Emirates free from new births of children with thalassaemia*”. This message represents the most important idea in the strategy of thalassaemia campaigns run since 2004. Most of the local media usually repeat this message.

In second position (30.10%) comes the following message: “*Encouraging young girls and boys getting married to do early check-ups*” (Emirates Thalassaemia Society, published in 2017). The last message (18.01%)

relates to the slogan “Blood donation is good” (Emirates Thalassemia Society, published on 23rd May 2016). Furthermore, 60.11% of participants state that messages run by the campaigns were well understood, 33.29% say that the level of comprehension was average, and only 6.60% said that campaigns’ messages were ambiguous as they were mixed up with blood donation and anaemia.

As for the images, colours and signs used in the campaigns, 68.09% of the respondents say that they had a positive impact on the messages and the delivery of the messages, but 5.60% have an opposite opinion. Moreover, 18.31% of respondents claim that there was perfect harmony between messages and the signs and images used in the campaigns. The majority that agrees with this statement are female respondents (60.77%), while male respondents express this opinion less often (39.23%).

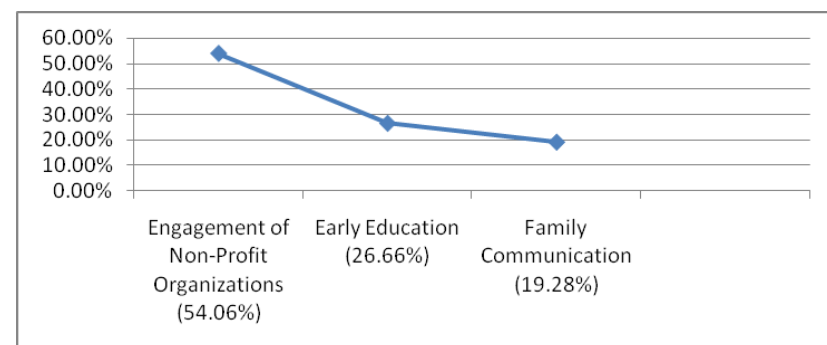


Figure 7: Strategies for improving thalassemia campaigns

Source: Own processing

54.06% of respondents think that thalassemia campaigns must improve and make their communication strategies more inclusive by inviting non-profit organisations into their network of activities. Another portion of respondents (26.66%) view early education of children as an important factor in fighting against thalassemia. Finally, 19.28% claim that campaigns should encourage parents to discuss the topic with their kids.

Regarding the response to RQ4, results show that thalassemia campaigns succeeded in having a positive impact on peoples’ awareness through messages about the dangers of thalassemia, which is always important in social marketing campaigns.⁴⁹

The results also prove that female respondents have more knowledge about the thalassemia campaigns and followed them more closely. The explanation for such a phenomenon could reside in the fact that, in general, women are more sensitive to the health issues of their families. The findings also show that many of the female respondents were volunteers working with NGOs.

Discussion

The findings indicate that diversification in using different strategies of communication, especially social media (37.52%) and personal communication (30.02%) helped greatly in disseminating the campaigns’ messages. In fact, social media platforms would assure a much larger public exposure for such a campaign against the disease,⁵⁰ especially in remote places. Hill and Moran argue in this regard that “social marketers can do more to understand how online social networks and communities influence behaviour in the new media

49 See: ILES, I.: Eating Disorders as a Social Problem: An Impact Analysis on Health Campaign Videos. In *Journal of Media Research*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 13, p. 24; BUCHTHAL, V. et al.: Avoiding a Knowledge Gap in a Multi-ethnic State Wide Social Marketing Campaign: Is Cultural Tailoring Sufficient? In *Journal of Health Communication*, 2011, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 325.

50 LOZANO, N. et al.: How to Develop a Social Marketing and Public Relations Campaign to Prevent Obesity among Teenagers in Catalonia. In *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, 2015, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 255.

environment, which to date has been used in few social marketing campaigns and behavioural interventions”.⁵¹ In addition to the use of traditional media outlets, as well as digital media platforms, the campaigns succeeded in instrumenting creative tools to communicate with the public such as organising meetings at public parks and schools and distributing flyers and pamphlets at service stations and malls. Those initiatives are newer approaches to interacting with the larger public, which may not be familiar with social media, and contribute to the campaigns’ efficiency.

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