

Help for communications teams on COVID-19 from SPI-B members

SPI-B is the behavioural science subgroup of SAGE. Having produced several internal papers on how behavioural science principles could be used to improve communications and help people adhere to Government advice, the group are keen to support policy colleagues in implementing these principles. This note provides advice to Government comms teams and others working on the Covid-19 response about the help available from SPI-B members.

Why behavioural science is useful

- The COVID-19 pandemic is a new situation so there are no ready-made communications strategies proven to change behaviour.
- But, as the pandemic progresses, we are learning what works, what doesn't and what is counter-productive.
- The pandemic has not fundamentally changed how people think and behave so existing research on other topics will be helpful.
- A huge body of literature in behavioral science offers insights not available from professional expertise.
- Behavioural research has identified lots of well-intentioned strategies that didn't work or caused harm.
- Given limited time and finite resources, we need to concentrate on strategies with the best chance of saving lives.

Key dos and don'ts for campaigns

Do

- **Be precise:** Give precise advice about what behaviour / behaviour change is needed
 - Present concrete examples of what following and not following the advice would look like, powerful images and the actual voices of those we need to protect (loved ones, the vulnerable, the NHS).
- **Tailor, motivate and enable:** Think about what information people need, how to motivate them and how to ensure they can make the change.
 - Tailor messages to appeal to specific audiences e.g. gender, age, region, ethnicity or culture.
 - Stress how desired behaviours protect the most vulnerable including those we love.
 - Communicate how our sense of self is rooted in membership of families, neighbourhoods, communities and nation.
 - Use inspiring concrete examples (such as NHS volunteers) to stress how different ethnic, socio-economic etc. groups are helping each other.
 - Tell people what support is available to help them adhere.
 - Help households plan how to socially distance and review these plans regularly.
- **Promote trust and show respect:**
 - Draw on voices trusted by the group
 - Emphasise what people are doing well rather than focus on minorities not adhering

Don't

- Give vague advice or suggestions.
- Use stereotypic or divisive messages.
- Show or imply that people are doing undesirable things.

Communications planning

Each campaign should, where relevant, include the following:

- defined behavioural aim (e.g. under 'consumer objectives')
- clear and specific message (e.g. under 'focal insight')
- source/voice and medium/method (e.g. under 'deliverables')

- target group (e.g. under 'target audience')
- expected reach and indicators (e.g. under 'objectives/outcomes').
- a theory of change of how the campaign will impact on behaviour (e.g. under 'design principles')
- the evidence and principles of behaviour change that are being used (e.g. under 'support/evidence')

Case studies where behavioural insights have contributed to a campaign

In Andra Pradesh, India, the *SuperAmma* campaign, based on the motives of nurture (desire for children to grow up to be successful) and disgust (of dirty hands) led to a sustained 30% increase in observed rates of handwashing with soap (Biran et al., 2014). The campaign used the theory and principles of Behaviour-Centered Design (Aunger & Curtis, 2016)

The ASSIST intervention employed school students rather than professional educators to prevent uptake of smoking among students in English secondary schools. Education messages and communication strategies were informed by behavioural science. Behavioural science also informed the recruitment of the peer educators - students in each school were polled about which individuals they thought would be most influential. A randomised controlled trial found significant effects reducing smoking and the intervention has now been widely scaled up.

Commissioning advice from SPI-B members

This form should be used by comms colleagues to set out their ask for the sub-group. Commissions should be sent to SAGE@go-science.gov.uk. Alternatively, please contact **NR** directly on **I&S** to discuss any asks.

Name and Department of requestor:	
Input required/question being asked (details of background can help researchers know if other data may be useful/better):	
Is this a one-off or ongoing requirement?	
How will these findings/research be used?	
Are there any risks associated with these uses?	

Aunger, R., & Curtis, V. (2016). Behaviour Centred Design: towards an applied science of behaviour change. *Health Psychology Review*, 10(4), 425-446.

Biran, A., Schmidt, W.-P., Varadharajan, K. S., Rajaraman, D., Kumar, R., Greenland, K., . . . Curtis, V. (2014). Effect of a behaviour-change intervention on handwashing with soap in India (SuperAmma): a cluster-randomised trial. *The Lancet Global Health*, 2(3), e145-e154.