



Midocean University

Faculty of Management

Department/Specialization: Public Health Management

The Impact of Health Awareness Campaigns on Public Health Behavior in Saudi Arabia

Student Name - Ahmed Abdulrahman Alharbi

ID - 222000067

Graduation Project – 1

Faculty of Management – Midocean University

Supervisor

Dr. Abdulrahim Nader

Faculty Member – Faculty of Management – Midocean University

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Health awareness campaigns have emerged as a fundamental strategy for promoting healthier lifestyles in societies worldwide. With the rise of chronic diseases, mental health concerns, and pandemics, governments are under increasing pressure to educate citizens on preventive health measures. In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Health has led several campaigns focusing on conditions like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, mental health, and more recently, infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

Traditionally, many Saudi citizens were unaware of the link between lifestyle choices and health outcomes. However, the rise of social media, coupled with a national drive under Vision 2030, has introduced modern communication channels to reach the public. Despite the increased visibility of health messages through platforms like Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TV, and outdoor advertising, the question remains: Are these campaigns truly influencing behavior?

This study aims to bridge that inquiry by exploring the depth and nature of behavioral change that occurs as a result of such campaigns in Saudi Arabia. The focus will be on identifying effective platforms, measuring the credibility of various messengers (doctors vs. influencers vs. government), and determining whether these campaigns lead to tangible actions such as dietary shifts, increased physical activity, or medical check-ups.

1.2 Research Problem

Over the past decade, Saudi Arabia has witnessed a noticeable surge in health awareness campaigns launched by government bodies such as the Ministry of Health, private hospitals, and non-governmental organizations. These initiatives have spanned a variety of topics ranging from chronic disease prevention (e.g., diabetes and cardiovascular health) to mental well-being, nutrition, physical activity, smoking cessation, and more recently, pandemic preparedness. These campaigns have been delivered through multiple channels—television commercials, billboards, public service events, mobile apps, posters in clinics, and social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter (X), and YouTube.

However, while the **visibility and frequency** of these campaigns are commendable, a significant issue persists: **there is a lack of comprehensive empirical evaluation regarding their actual impact on public health behavior**. In other words, we do not know how effective these campaigns are in achieving their ultimate goal—sustained behavior change among the population. A health campaign might attract views, likes, or shares, but does that translate to increased exercise, better dietary habits, or routine health check-ups? This gap between **awareness and action** remains poorly understood.

Anecdotal evidence and limited pilot studies suggest that while many citizens consume health content, only a small portion may internalize it enough to alter their behavior long term. Often, individuals may momentarily express interest or experiment with lifestyle changes, such as trying a new diet or visiting a clinic once, but these habits tend to fade quickly. Furthermore, **message fatigue**, where audiences become desensitized due to repetitive content, and **mistrust in sources**—especially on social media—may further reduce campaign effectiveness.

Another key concern is that **campaign messaging is not always adapted to the diverse socio-demographic makeup of Saudi Arabia**. Messaging that appeals to urban, tech-savvy youth may not resonate with elderly citizens, rural populations, or lower-literacy audiences. In some cases, content may even contradict prevailing cultural or religious norms, leading to rejection or misunderstanding. Thus, the absence of nuanced, segmented, and culturally informed messaging further contributes to the ineffectiveness of some health campaigns.

The core research problem, therefore, lies in identifying **to what extent these health campaigns influence real, measurable behavior change, and which factors—such as platform type, message tone, or source credibility—enhance or inhibit that change**.

1.2.1 Theoretical Gap

The theoretical foundation for most studies on public health awareness and behavior change has predominantly been developed within Western or European contexts. These frameworks often assume a population with a high degree of health literacy, individualism, secular governance, and trust in formal institutions. However, these assumptions do not always hold true in Saudi Arabia, where **collectivist cultural values, religious considerations, and varying levels of trust in government and influencers** shape public perceptions and decision-making processes in unique ways.

Moreover, Western studies tend to generalize behavioral response models—such as the Health Belief Model (HBM), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), or Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)—without adapting them to regional socio-cultural dynamics. While these models provide a useful lens for understanding behavior, their application in Saudi society requires **contextual calibration**. For example, the influence of family elders, the mosque, or tribal leadership in

disseminating and validating health advice may play a far more important role than in Western countries.

Unfortunately, there is a **notable absence of localized theoretical models or empirical studies that examine how Saudi culture, language, trust structures, and digital engagement shape health behavior change**. This results in a theoretical void—making it difficult for policymakers and campaign designers to base their strategies on robust, evidence-based frameworks tailored to the Saudi context.

1.2.2 Practical Gap

From a practical standpoint, even though the government and healthcare organizations invest significant time, effort, and financial resources into designing and disseminating health awareness messages, **there is currently no standardized mechanism to evaluate their real-world outcomes**. Most campaigns do not track post-campaign metrics beyond viewership or basic engagement rates. There is limited follow-up to assess whether the audience actually changed behavior or improved health outcomes after exposure to campaign materials.

Furthermore, **campaigns are often designed using a one-size-fits-all template**, overlooking critical variations in audience needs, literacy levels, digital accessibility, and cultural attitudes. For instance, a campaign encouraging early cancer screening may be effective in Riyadh but fail to resonate in more conservative or remote regions due to stigma or lack of healthcare infrastructure. Similarly, younger audiences may respond well to humorous or influencer-led content, while older individuals may require a more formal and medically endorsed message.

Without a **data-driven feedback loop**—such as pre- and post-campaign surveys, focus groups, behavioral tracking, or regional impact analysis—campaign designers are left to operate on assumptions rather than facts. This lack of empirical accountability means that even well-intentioned efforts might not achieve their objectives and may lead to **resource misallocation, message misalignment, and public disengagement**.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for structured evaluation systems and adaptive design frameworks that ensure health awareness campaigns are not just seen—but are understood, trusted, and acted upon across different segments of Saudi society.

Main Research Question

To what extent do health awareness campaigns impact public health behavior in Saudi Arabia?

1.3 Research Significance

Health awareness campaigns are one of the most visible forms of public health intervention. They have the potential to prevent illness, promote early diagnosis, and reduce the burden on healthcare systems—especially in a rapidly developing nation like Saudi Arabia. As such, evaluating their effectiveness is not only timely but critically important. The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution: both to academic knowledge and to public health practice in the Kingdom.

1.3.1 Theoretical Level

On a theoretical level, this research seeks to address an evident and persistent gap in the academic literature surrounding public health communication in the Gulf region, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Most existing models of health behavior change have been developed and tested in Western contexts, where factors such as individualism, secular public life, and high health literacy dominate the discourse. These variables may not be directly transferable to a Saudi context, where **collectivism, religious values, trust in traditional authorities, and rapid digital transformation** all play crucial roles in shaping health-related attitudes and behaviors.

By applying behavior change theory within a culturally specific framework, this study aims to **localize global models** such as the Health Belief Model (HBM), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), or Diffusion of Innovations theory, testing how these constructs function in a Saudi population. It also adds value by examining the **interaction between media type (e.g., television vs. Instagram) and source trust (e.g., doctors vs. influencers)**—an area that is still underdeveloped in Saudi-focused research.

Furthermore, the study contributes to **interdisciplinary scholarship**, intersecting public health, psychology, media studies, and cultural sociology. The insights gained will inform future researchers interested in **how health messages are interpreted, internalized, or rejected** based on social norms, generational identity, or region-specific communication patterns. In doing so, this research lays the groundwork for a more nuanced, theoretically sound, and evidence-based understanding of public health messaging in Saudi Arabia.

1.3.2 Practical Level

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study could offer **immediate value to public health institutions, campaign designers, and policymakers**. In particular, the Ministry of Health (MOH), which is the central authority for healthcare campaigns in Saudi Arabia, could benefit significantly from evidence-based recommendations regarding **what works, what doesn't, and why**. This is especially relevant given the Kingdom's ambitious Vision 2030 objectives, which prioritize both physical and mental well-being as essential components of national development.

By revealing which communication platforms (TV, social media, public events, etc.) are most effective across demographic segments—and by identifying which message sources the public finds most credible—this research can guide campaign strategists in **allocating budgets more efficiently**, improving message design, and increasing public engagement. For example, if the study finds that young adults trust medical influencers on Instagram more than government ads on TV, future campaigns could strategically pivot in that direction.

Moreover, this study offers **practical insight into message targeting**—highlighting the importance of tailoring campaigns to different cities, age groups, literacy levels, and gender-specific preferences. By identifying these nuances, health authorities can avoid the inefficiencies of generic, one-size-fits-all campaigns and instead adopt a **more data-driven, segmented, and personalized approach**.

1.4 Research Questions

- Do Saudi citizens gain knowledge about diseases through awareness campaigns?
- Which platform (TV, social media, etc.) has the widest reach and greatest influence?
- Do campaigns lead to actions like health checkups or dietary changes?
- Who is perceived as the most trustworthy messenger: government, doctors, or influencers?

1.5 Research Objectives

- To evaluate whether health awareness campaigns influence health-related behavior.
- To compare the effectiveness of various communication platforms.
- To analyze which sources are trusted most by the public.
- To provide recommendations for future health campaigns in Saudi Arabia.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

- **H1:** Health awareness campaigns significantly influence public health behavior.
- **H2:** Social media campaigns yield more behavioral change than traditional television campaigns.
- **H3:** Trust in the source of the message strengthens the effectiveness of the campaign.

1.7 Research Model

Variables	Type
Health Campaigns	Independent Variable
Health Behavior	Dependent Variable
Trust, Age, Gender, Region	Moderating Variables

1.8 Research Methodology

This research adopts a **quantitative research methodology**, which is appropriate for studies aiming to measure patterns, trends, and relationships across a broad population. The decision to use a quantitative approach stems from the study's primary goal: to statistically assess the influence of health awareness campaigns on public behavior in Saudi Arabia and determine which variables—such as platform type or message source—most significantly impact behavioral outcomes.

The primary data collection instrument will be a **structured online questionnaire**. This questionnaire will be designed to include both closed-ended and scaled-response questions (using Likert scales) to capture a range of responses related to awareness levels, behavioral changes, trust in message sources, campaign exposure, and platform preference. Questions will also collect demographic data including age, gender, education level, and city of residence to allow for segmentation and comparative analysis.

The survey will be distributed digitally through social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram), university forums, and email networks to ensure wide reach and accessibility. Given the high internet penetration rate in Saudi Arabia, online distribution is considered both practical and representative for this study.

The **target population** comprises Saudi citizens aged 18 years and older. Particular focus will be placed on respondents from the Kingdom's three largest urban centers: **Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam**, as these cities are often the focal points of national health campaigns and have diverse, demographically representative populations.

After data collection, responses will be coded and analyzed using statistical software such as **SPSS or Microsoft Excel**. The analysis will involve:

- **Descriptive statistics** (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means) to summarize data trends.
- **Inferential statistics** such as **correlation and regression analysis** to explore the relationships between independent variables (e.g., campaign type or platform) and dependent variables (e.g., self-reported health behavior changes).

1.9 Scope of the Study

The scope of this research is **deliberately defined to ensure focus, manageability, and relevance**. This study concentrates exclusively on the behavior and perceptions of **Saudi citizens aged 18 and above**, as this demographic is legally recognized as adult and fully capable of making independent health-related decisions. Additionally, adults are more likely to have encountered a range of health campaigns and possess the cognitive and social maturity to assess and act on health information.

Geographically, the study focuses on **urban populations**, specifically within the cities of **Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam**. These cities are selected for several reasons: they host a large proportion of the Kingdom's population, serve as hubs for health infrastructure and education, and are typically prioritized in national campaign rollouts. As such, residents of these urban centers are more likely to have been exposed to multiple formats of health campaigns across various platforms, making them ideal subjects for analysis.

The study does **not include rural populations**, non-citizens (including expatriates and migrant workers), or individuals under the age of 18. While these groups are undoubtedly important to broader public health strategies, their inclusion would require a different sampling strategy and potentially different survey instruments to accommodate variations in language, legal status, literacy, and campaign exposure.

Additionally, this research limits itself to analyzing **campaigns that were active between the years 2020 and 2025**, aligning with recent public health priorities, including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, non-communicable disease prevention, and mental health promotion.

Chapter 2: Suggested Industry and Organization

The study will primarily focus on the public health sector in Saudi Arabia, with particular emphasis on the national-level health awareness campaigns initiated and managed by the Ministry of Health (MOH). As the central government authority responsible for healthcare delivery and health education, the MOH plays a crucial role in designing, funding, and executing awareness campaigns across the Kingdom. These initiatives are typically aligned with national health priorities and Vision 2030 objectives, which emphasize disease prevention, healthier lifestyles, and increased public engagement in personal wellness.

To achieve its outreach goals, the Ministry of Health employs a variety of communication formats and distribution channels. These include traditional media such as television and radio public service announcements, digital platforms like Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube, as well as on-the-ground community engagement through workshops, school programs, and mobile health clinics. Additionally, the MOH has increasingly collaborated with social media

influencers, celebrities, and health professionals to amplify its messages and make campaigns more relatable—especially among younger audiences. These collaborations are essential for enhancing the credibility and accessibility of health information.

While the MOH is the primary driver of national campaigns, the study may also explore relevant initiatives conducted by private hospitals, nonprofit organizations, and local NGOs. These institutions often implement their own health education programs, sometimes in partnership with government entities or international health organizations. Including these secondary actors allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the overall health communication ecosystem in Saudi Arabia, and helps identify how multiple stakeholders contribute to shaping public health behavior through education and awareness efforts.

Chapter 3: Research Structure

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

Background, Problem, Significance, Questions, Objectives, Hypotheses, Model, Methodology, Scope

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

Discussion of previous studies, global vs local context, theoretical foundations

3. Chapter 3: Methodology

Research design, sampling method, instrument, data analysis technique

4. **Chapter 4: Results and Analysis**

Survey outcomes, statistical testing, tables/figures

5. **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Interpretation of findings, relation to hypotheses, theoretical implications

6. **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

Summary, practical implications, limitations, and future research directions

7. **References**

8. **Appendices** – Survey, charts, raw data

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