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Using synergised social media approaches to support tobacco control policy and cessation related behaviours in Bangladesh

Social media, synergised with mass media approaches, may provide a powerful, low-cost channel of communication for public health interventions, including promotion of new policies such as graphic health warnings on tobacco packs.[1] However, the evidence on the efficacy of social media to support tobacco control within low –and middle-income countries, is sparse. An innovative website was developed to examine the potential of social media to increase bridging and bonding of social capital, building self-efficacy perceptions and supporting quitting behaviors, given the importance of providing cessation support services, which are seen as the 'weakest link' in WHOs MPOWER framework.[2]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A population level, mass media campaign; "People Behind the Packs" was synergized with messages on a social media site to raise awareness of new graphic health warnings and support quitting behaviors in Bangladesh.[3] One website page contained four public service announcements featuring patients suffering from diseases depicted on the new pack warnings. Another, "I can quit" page, provided quit tips from a doctor. Site metrics were reviewed and an online *Survey Monkey* questionnaire administered to explore attitudes and cessation related behaviors of tobacco users and others who accessed the webpages and responded to the survey.
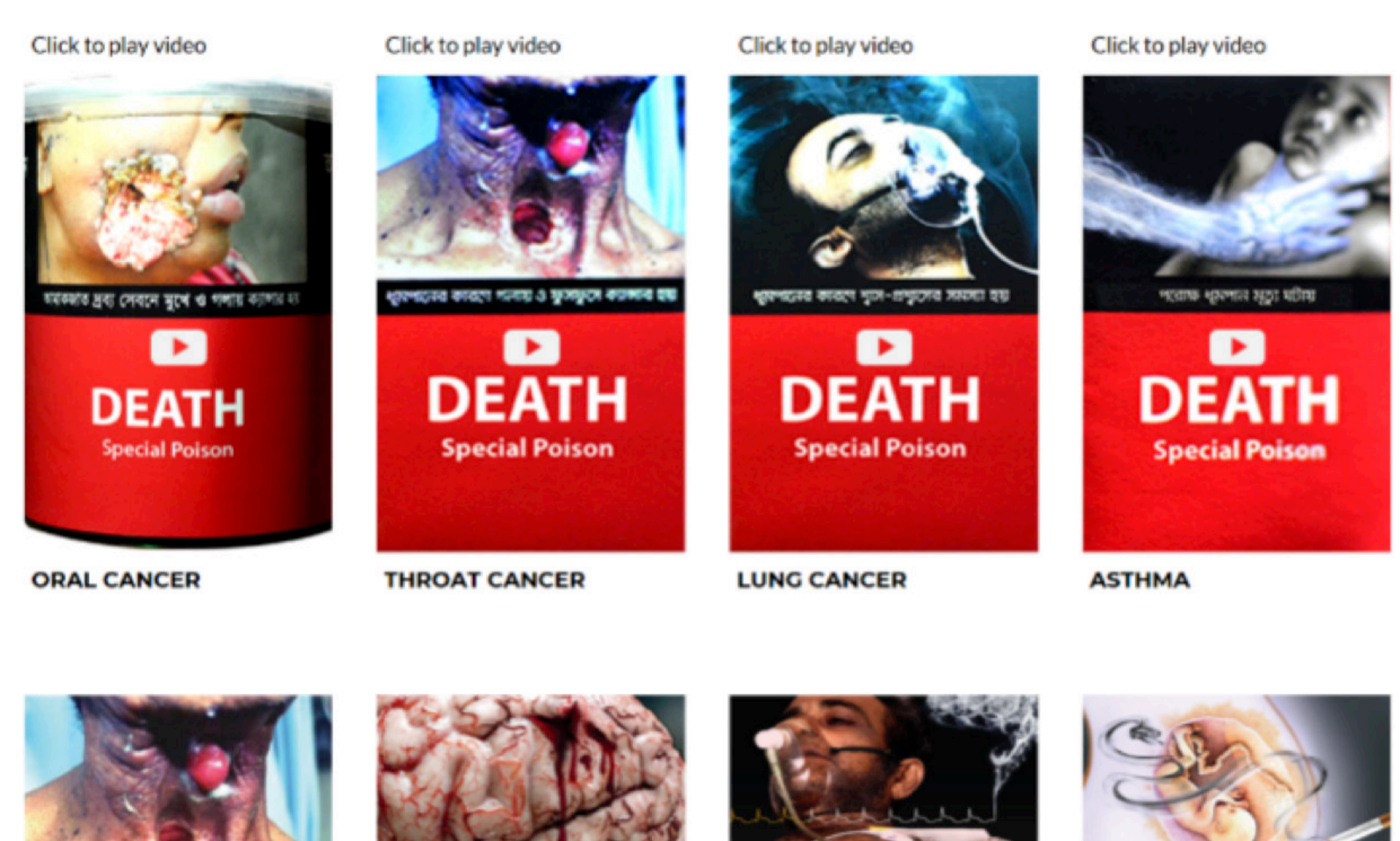
Results

"People Behind the Packs" website analytics identified over 100 thousand (65% of website visitors) viewed the quit page during the intervention period, with around 24 thousand (15%) accessing the patient testimonial messages. Content on the "People Behind the Packs" Facebook page set up to drive traffic to the campaign website made 4.7 million impressions over the 6-week campaign period, with the top five posts reaching more than 2.9 million people. Of the 775 respondents who completed the self-administered survey, the majority who accessed the site were males (96.1%) with 60.8% using tobacco regularly. 67.1% said they viewed the pack people messages on the home page. Responses identified good discussion with others on quitting or cutting down (20.3%), with 47.5% stating they also shared the link with someone they knew who needed to be warned about the dangers of smoking, 33.9% intended to cut down tobacco consumption. 43% of respondents reported that they intended to quit tobacco after seeing the messages on the quit pages.

The "Pack-People" website, which showed videos of real Bangladeshi tobacco victims. Visit **http://packpeople.com.bd** or **https://www. facebook.com/Morokerpechonermanush**

A doctor on the social media site provided recommendations and high message source credibility to build tobacco user self-efficacy toward making a quit attempt.

[1] Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends": Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, **12**(4), 1143–1168. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x

[2] Phua J. (2013). Participating in Health Issue-Specific Social Networking Sites to Quit Smoking: How Does Online Social Interconnectedness Influence Smoking Cessation Self-Efficacy? Journal of Communication.

[3] Turk, T, Negi N, Islam S, Murukutla N. (2016). Can social media change behaviour as part of a synergised tobacco control communication strategy? The 47th Union Conference on Lung Health. (2016). Poster paper. October 2016. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.11925.93925 10/2016.

CONCLUSION

Social media can provide low-cost interventions to engage audiences, promote discussion, and support policy and cessation related behaviours. The impact on policy initiatives such as graphic health warnings may increase when synergised with other mass media campaign components. Recommendations are for the expansion and piloting of web based cessation support services in other LMICs.

AUTHORS

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