

BUILDING POSITIVE POLIO NARRATIVES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Background

The Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) began developing a social media platform in 2014. At that time its online presence included a website and a few passive social media feeds. Four years later PEI launched a new comprehensive social media plan to increase acceptance of polio vaccination. The strategy was introduced, in part, due to the rising number of people gaining access to technology. Data from 2020 shows **75% of the population have access to mobile phones, 35% have internet access, and 17% are active social media users.** This increase sparked a need for a more comprehensive approach.

The social media strategy is supported by the endpolio.com.pk website with the goal of making it Pakistan's top-rated and most trusted source of information on polio. In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the polio campaign was initially suspended for several months. However, the polio social media strategy was used to respond to the emerging pandemic health crisis.



Challenges

Countering Rumours

Social media is an effective tool in the campaign to end polio. However, it is a double-edged sword. Rumours that spread through social media such as “the vaccine is haram” or “polio teams are part of an international conspiracy” have undermined trust among the general public. Fake news and negative stories dominated by anti-vaxers has declined on social media since 2019. There is, however, a need to address rising misinformation on WhatsApp.

One thing is clear - rumours and hoaxes need to be addressed promptly. For example, partnerships with channels like Facebook can help curb these rumours. However, this strategy is not foolproof and much more needs to be done including developing content that counteracts these negative messages.

The Peshawar Incident

One prime example of how rumours spread is the Peshawar incident. Analysis of the April 2019 incident demonstrates how social media was used to create and spread a video lie that captured enough attention to have it move through a number of social media channels and influencers gathering views and likes as it went. In the Peshawar case, social media was used for initial posting and dissemination which was picked up quickly and uncritically by news media outlets resulting in a rapid spread. Ironically, some of PEIs own attempts to discredit the original Peshawar posts added to their amplification. This shows the dangers of directly countering anti-polio vaccination rumours.

Global lessons learned

Learning from other countries experiences has helped Pakistan develop its' social media strategy. One example is Ukraine which experienced a VDPV outbreak in 2015 as a result of a ten-year decline in immunisation rates. Ukraine succeeded in tackling the outbreak in part by creating institutional websites and media. In addition, research showed that local content creation combined with a wide range of partnerships with trusted digital influencers to share that content was a critical element in their strategy.

In Australia, research into the issue of anti-vaccination showed that communication needs to be implemented with openness in an evidence-informed way; creating safe spaces to encourage audience dialogue; fostering community partnerships; and countering misinformation with care.

Many anti-vaccination rumours are global or share similar attributes meaning that successful responses can also be transferable. Directly confronting misinformation can be a useful tactic but it needs to be done with care to avoid amplifying misinformation. An understanding of local experience and perception is essential to creating content that resonates and partnerships with influential people and organisations are important elements for building credibility.



Evolving social media strategy

Today the strategy is building on the foundation established in 2019. Social media is integrated part of the PEI Communication Strategy and a more robust set of criteria have been developed with more challenging objectives. The social media strategy is based on repositioning polio eradication as a national public cause for the protection of children. To achieve this several areas of focus have been identified based on lessons learned over the two years.

Social listening

Since 2020, social listening has helped direct content generation. Social media tracking and the involvement of influencers has helped to generate audience specific content. Social media has an impact beyond social media platforms themselves. Viral messages, both negative and positive, have been repeated through mainstream media or by word of mouth to communities with limited access to the internet or even mobile phones. The strategy tracks social media spillover onto other media and to 'hear' what is being talked about in local high-risk settings to understand the questions and concerns and develop content accordingly. It also responds quickly to emerging issues and questions in ways that use local visuals, the local language, and local voices. Content creation will be decentralised but carefully managed for consistent messaging.

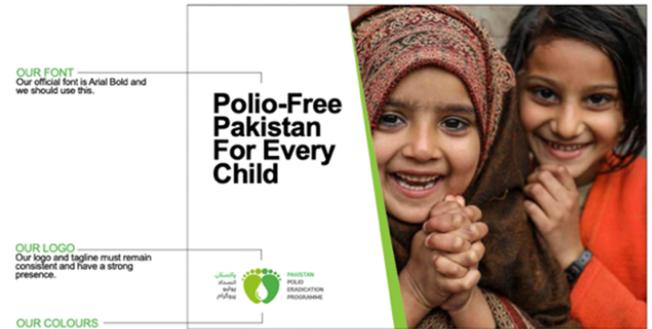
Social media branding

PEI strategy continues to build on the brand book which was developed in 2019 to ensure all media materials have the same "look and feel" which in turn helps build public trust through consistent use of materials that the public can easily identify.

More engaging content was then posted more frequently, and social media monitoring was introduced to provide up to date analysis of social trends.

Graphic Visual Guide

Iconic Brand Identity Elements



The brand expression articulates the values that define the programme. These traits should be articulated clearly and systematically in all communication, including social media and outreach initiatives.

Key Tactics

Increasing trust

- The creation of accurate, engaging and relevant branded content based on findings from social listening networks, produced at the provincial level in local languages and addressing actual questions raised by high-risk communities. This includes content is available in Pashtun as well as English and Urdu.
- Disseminating localised content through their channels and digital spaces.
- Engaging a wide range of polio champion influencers to share content on their channels.



Social media push

- Utilising paid advertising to get relevant content to high-risk communities by geo targeting.
- Improving understanding of the context, issues of concern and approaches through social data.
- Building ties with social media platforms such as Facebook
- Comprehensive tracking system using software and manual tracking
- Monthly sentiment analysis
- Campaign focused social media contents development and content integration
- Using CrowdTangle for social media performance monitoring.
- Regular content generation from provinces



Tackling misinformation

- Monitoring social media to track negative and positive polio vaccination content.
- Social media partnerships to remove or tag inaccurate harmful posts.
- Working with media to ensure they do not unwittingly pick up and disseminate rumours.
- Responding to rumours and misinformation without amplifying the wrong messages.



Improving visibility of front line workers

- Expanding public and private partnerships.
- Advancing the role and contribution of frontline workers to effective community engagement. This includes training polio staff to be knowledgeable pro-polio vaccination users of social media.

Conclusion

Pakistan's polio programme recognises that building a social media presence and brand is a long-term endeavour that will need to be carefully developed in line with Pakistan's evolving social media landscape. The strategy is a 'living document' that will be adapted based on data and changing trends.



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7 جون سے خصوصی انسداد پولیو مہم شروع ہو رہی ہے۔ میری تمام والدین سے درخواست ہے کہ اپنے بچوں کو پولیو سے بچاؤ کے قطرے ضرور پلاوائیں تاکہ وہ معذوری سے محفوظ تندرست زندگی گزار سکیں۔
غبیڑی قبیلے کے سربراہ احمد خان کا پولیو ورکرز سے بھرپور تعاون کا پیغام ! #VaccinesWork

