



Context

Qatar took the lead among countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region by ratifying the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on 23 July 2004. In line with Article 12 of the WHO FCTC, the Ministry of Public Health in Qatar has initiated multiple nationwide anti-tobacco health awareness campaigns. These campaigns aim to educate the public about the harmful effects of tobacco use, including smoking and other forms of tobacco consumption. Despite observing a decline in tobacco use trends over the past five years, there remains a necessity to regularly implement such campaigns to complement the impact of other tobacco control interventions.

Initiative

In 2015, Qatar implemented the "Don't go up in smoke" national anti-tobacco health awareness campaign. The primary objective of this campaign was to encourage smokers to reconsider their habits and quit tobacco. It focused on highlighting the detrimental effects of smoking on individuals and those around them. The campaign targeted three main groups: adult smokers, young smokers and families. Emphasizing emotional relevance, the 2015 campaign aimed to evoke strong emotions. It was part of a broader healthy lifestyles campaign that ran from 2015 to 2017. The campaign utilized various communication channels, including newspapers, radio, television, cinema, the internet and social media platforms. It also employed outdoor print ads and transportation services. Following an evaluation of the 2015 campaign, Qatar conducted a new national anti-tobacco health awareness campaign in 2018 to optimize the outreach effectiveness. This latest campaign focused on achieving the following goals:

Encouraging residents to adhere to tobacco control laws and report violations.

Disseminating knowledge about the risks associated with tobacco use.

Discouraging youth from initiating tobacco use.

Providing the public with resources to support tobacco users in quitting.

The campaign was a collaborative effort involving three health entities: the Ministry of Public Health, Hamad Medical Corporation and the Primary Health Care Corporation. This partnership was significant as it marked the first time such a joint campaign was conducted in Qatar. The campaign was launched in two phases during 2018, with the initial release in May to June and a subsequent relaunch in December. The campaign was divided into two main themes: law and health hazards. During the summer season, the advertisements were prominently displayed in shopping malls and outdoor areas. In the winter season, the focus shifted to cinemas and key outdoor locations, particularly the popular Doha Souk Waqif.

The campaign activities were designed to coincide with World No Tobacco Day (celebrated on 31 May) and spanned the entire year, targeting peak times for maximum outreach. Communication was carried out in both Arabic and English languages through various media channels, including newspapers, radio, television, cinema, the internet and social media platforms, to reach as many residents as possible.

Newspapers. Press releases and print adverts were utilized in all eight newspapers in Qatar, strategically selecting high-visibility days of the week. Campaign images were also featured on online newspaper pages.

Radio. Ad spots were secured on all Arabic and English radio channels, airing in both morning and evening time slots for comprehensive coverage. Additionally, live radio discussions related to the campaign were conducted to engage with listeners.

Television. The campaign was broadcasted during the holy month of Ramadan and beyond, with a focus on religious programmes that garnered higher viewership during that period. Ministry of Public Health officials also participated in live interviews to discuss the campaign.

Cinema. Popular cinema theaters were selected to showcase campaign videos before movie screenings, with a total of 26 screens used for this purpose.

Internet. Online activities included social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, featuring live posts and click-to-link adverts. The campaign also utilized popular Qatar websites like QTickets, Mzad and Doha Mums, as well as blog discussions and debates on ILQ.

Successful aspects of the campaign

During Phase I, titled "Know the law", the campaign focused on highlighting the current tobacco control laws enforced nationwide. The objective was to promote stricter adherence to these laws, increase awareness about violations, penalties and fines, and encourage reporting of tobacco-related offenses. As part of this phase, a new hotline number was introduced to facilitate reporting of indoor smoking and other tobacco-related violations.

Phase II, known as "Health hazards (tobacco is poisonous)", centered on emphasizing the health risks associated with tobacco use and urging users to reconsider their habits. Feedback received indicated that the "Health hazards" campaign had a strong impact, particularly due to its eye-catching images and the revelation of tobacco's chemical content, which many people were unaware of. The campaign effectively conveyed the message that tobacco use is harmful, with a specific focus on the chemicals present in tobacco smoke and the detrimental effects on secondhand smokers.

The campaign's video and imagery depicting the health hazards of waterpipe tobacco smoking were particularly effective in raising awareness and dispelling misconceptions. One of the most widely shared images from the "Know the law" campaign depicted smoking in cars, informing people that it is considered smoking in an enclosed space as defined by tobacco control laws. In the "Health hazards" campaign, the image illustrating the impact of secondhand smoke resonated with many people, making it widely shared and relevant to their experiences.

Challenges and lessons learnt

The utilization of still images and videos in a different manner than previous tobacco campaigns proved to be more impactful and memorable. The direct approach employed in the campaigns was found to be particularly effective in motivating people to quit tobacco. However, the launch of the "Health hazards" campaign during Ramadan, coinciding with World No Tobacco Day, posed challenges as many residents were on holiday and social media usage was lower during this period. Future campaign cycles will take this timing into account. Social media and digital platforms were highly effective in raising awareness and facilitating public engagement and discussions on the topic. It is crucial to deliver clear and concise messages while considering cultural sensitivities. These factors should be incorporated from the initial design stages and in the delivery methods to ensure a significant impact and broad reach among the target population. Distributing the campaigns and materials in multiple widely spoken languages has proven highly effective in delivering the campaign and ensuring the messages are well-received.

Impact

The campaign had a positive impact as it was well-received by the residents, motivating many tobacco users to quit and seek cessation services. Social media platforms and blog discussions were filled with positive feedback and expressions of support for the campaign and the enforcement of tobacco control laws. By providing clear and insightful information about the health hazards of waterpipe tobacco smoking compared to cigarette smoking, the campaign contributed to the denormalization of tobacco use. Many residents, particularly young people, reported that they first became aware of these hazards through the campaign. The hotline launched alongside the campaign has been actively used, providing valuable information to enforcement officers. Additionally, the Primary Health Care Corporation and the Tobacco Control Center received numerous inquiries about the tobacco cessation services they offer following the campaign.

Next steps

The upcoming phase of the campaign aims to discourage young people in Qatar from taking up smoking as part of the broader goal of achieving a tobacco-free Qatar. Aligned with the objectives of the tobacco control policy to reduce tobacco use and prevent youth initiation, the next campaign, titled "Youth prevention" will primarily utilize social media platforms to convey the message of empowering young people to make healthy lifestyle choices and reject tobacco use. The campaign incorporates a dedicated TV channel and still images that will be predominantly promoted through social media to effectively reach the target audience. Extensive testing involving young people from diverse nationalities residing in Qatar has been conducted to ensure the campaign's acceptance and relevance among all youth residents. The campaign has already been filmed and produced, with plans for its release in the Summer of 2020, accompanied by a school-based programme that will be implemented throughout the

academic year. Additionally, the campaign includes a specific module addressing the harms of waterpipe smoking, oral tobacco use and e-cigarettes.

References

[MPOWER measures to reduce demand for tobacco](#)

[WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#)

Story originated in 2019.

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