

Critical evaluation of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) prevention health communication content on selected Facebook pages in Sri Lanka

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Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death locally and globally. Education and health promotion are vital in NCD prevention and Facebook has become a popular medium of health communication. The aim of this study was to critically evaluate the health communication theories and strategies used for NCD prevention on selected Facebook content in Sri Lanka. A Facebook content analysis was conducted on purposively selected posters, videos, and 2D/3D animations addressing physical inactivity and unhealthy diets published on the official Facebook pages of the -Non-Communicable Disease Unit and Health Promotion Bureau and Nutrition Division of Ministry of Health from 2018-2022. User engagement, the overall theme, and the adaptation of the health communication strategy (social marketing mix and Laswell's Communication model), and Health Communication Theory, based the Health Belief Model were analyzed deductively. Health communication theory and strategy used was scored between zero to three for six components each using the corresponding pre-designed marking scheme. Out of 28 videos and 109 still posts, related to unhealthy diets and physical inactivity 15 (10 videos and 05 posts) were selected based on the page published, topic and the highest engagement. Content related to physical activity was limited to 25%. The top four content with the highest social engagement content expressed a low adaptation to theory and a high level of strategic exposure. Health Communication strategy evaluation highest score (94%) was obtained by a video addressing health diets from the Nutrition Division and the highest score for health communication adaption (94%) was obtained by a salt reduction by the Health Promotion Bureau. Overall, the evaluation data reflected that the content chosen from all these Facebook pages had a high level of health communication strategic focus, but a very low level of health communication theoretical underpinning. Strategically sound content showed high user engagement.

Keywords: NCD prevention, Health communication theories, Health communication strategies, Facebook contents

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