

Behavioural insights for COVID-19 communications

Kate Orkin

Mind and Behaviour Group

Centre for Study of African Economies

University of Oxford

Paul Brimble, Helena Channon-Wells, Axel Eizmendi Larrinaga, Marta Grabowska, Enrico Guizzardi, Lukas Hensel, Maheen Mahmud, Winnie Mughogho, Steph Palla, Emma Riley, Giulio Schinaia

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Key messages



Speak socially
Invoke the future
Use every touch point you can

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Speak socially: Emphasize the behaviour of the majority (where it is also positive)

To increase compliance with public health guidelines, cash transfers can be accompanied by targeted messages which appeal to or correct misperceptions of social norms.

1

Messages should include both positive descriptive norms (information on desirable typical behaviour) and prescriptive injunctive norms (social approval for such behaviour).

"In last year's election the vast majority of eligible New Jersey voters actually voted. It was the highest election turnout in decades... We encourage you to join your fellow New Jersey citizens and vote this Tuesday!" (Gerber and Rogers 2007)

2

Messages should describe reference groups with which the recipient identifies and should be context specific.

3

Messages should be targeted at groups that are particularly likely to change their behaviour and tailored to be relevant for the targeted groups.

Key messages



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Invoke the future: make consequences of actions vivid

Messaging that includes visualisation of the future or concrete help with planning can improve preventative health outcomes, savings, technology adoption and investments in education

“Many people find it helpful to make a plan for getting their shot. You can write yours here:” Fields to fill in [day of the week], [month] [day] at [time] (Influenza vaccination, Milkman et al. 2011)

“Imagine that your future self can now talk to you. How does she feel? What does she want you to do?” (Chlorination, Haushofer et al. 2020)



Case study: social norms and sharing

Informal support networks (e.g. money transfers between friends and family) help households cope with crises, and often redistribute government assistance. To amplify the reach and impact of social assistance programmes, cash transfers could be accompanied by messages encouraging recipients to share some of their resources. Messaging could involve:

Appealing to the power of social norms, e.g. revealing through messages what most people do



- In the United Kingdom, explaining that many people like to give money to charity in their wills increased donation rates from wills from 9% to 13% (Behavioural Insights Team, 2014)
- Participants who witnessed others making generous charitable donations donated nearly twice as much as participants who watched others making ungenerous donations (Nook et.al., 2016)

Using imagination to stimulate empathy towards those in need



Some (limited) evidence shows potential for promoting empathy through an SMS intervention (Konrath et.al. 2015).
“Reflect on somebody close to you. What is the most recent thing in their life that made them feel sad or disappointed? How can you be there for them?”

Case study: cash transfers, violence against women, and imagining the future



Most studies on conditional cash transfers (CCTs) find a decrease in violence against women as a result of the transfer, while those on unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) find no change.

Cash alone

3 studies have found evidence that even when there is no change in violence on average, some groups of women experience an increase in violence as a result of both CCTs and UCTs.

The characteristics of the groups of women who experience an increase in violence differ but they can all be categorised as 'vulnerable'

Cash+aspirations

There is limited but promising evidence that an intervention that increases women's self-beliefs by encouraging them to imagine better futures can reduce violence against women when added to cash transfers as compared to giving transfers alone.

However, there is no evidence yet on delivering these without in-person contact.



Key messages



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People are low on 'bandwidth': use reminders



Reminders could be used to induce behaviour changes needed to combat the spread of the virus, or to maintain behaviour changes over time. Well-targeted reminder interventions help to promote adoption of new behaviours and habit formation.

1

Reminders have been shown to increase adherence to medicine regimes and getting medical examinations.

Lester et al (2010) and Pop-Eleches et al. (2011) find weekly messages reminding patients to take antiretroviral medication improve adherence by 12 and 13 percentage points respectively (% adherence in groups receiving no reminders was 50% and 40%, respectively)

2

Frequency and regularity matter for reminder success. While consistently delivering messages over longer periods of time is better, more frequent (e.g. daily not weekly) messages may not improve outcomes.

3

Reminders promote behaviour change best when their content is clear and actionable.

4

Instant communication reminders have many useful features. Policymakers are able to monitor the efficacy of their message and content can easily be adapted going forward.

Use other service provision to convey messaging: 'Labelling' transfers can be as effective as attaching conditions



Labels can be as effective at changing behaviour as conditions, presenting a useful alternative to conditions during the current crisis and allowing households greater autonomy during a rapidly changing situation.

Labels may also align those within a household on the intended use of a transfer, potentially reducing domestic discord.

The degree to which labels crowd out other productive uses of cash transfers is not yet understood based on a review of existing evidence.

Evidence base



The key messages are backed up by a set of policy briefs that review the relevant literature and provide key takeaways.

Available at <https://mbrg.bsg.ox.ac.uk/covid-19>

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Labeling and Planning

Using "labels," salient messages mentally linking a transfer to a particular purpose, can guide people in the intended use of a cash transfer and provide a clear structure for when, how, and for how long transfers will be available in order to allow people to plan effectively.

[Click here for more info](#)



Reminders

Adding reminders (e.g. SMS, pre-recorded voice messages) into cash transfer programmes can be a way to promote adherence to preventative guidelines as well as facilitate the formation of the required habits and behaviours of people.

[Click here for more info](#)



Sharing

Adding certain messages to cash transfers could help promote resource-sharing between community members and expand the reach of social assistance to vulnerable households that have been excluded.

[Click here for more info](#)

COVID-19 POLICY BRIEF - APRIL 2020

LABELLING AND PLANNING
INCORPORATING BEHAVIOURAL ADD-ONS INTO CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMMES

BY EMMA RILEY

The COVID-19 crisis means governments are looking to cash transfers to support households through a period of hardship and reduced incomes. Helping households think through the use of these transfers in order to meet their financial needs in both the short and long term is vital for ensuring these funds are used in the most effective way for each household. Governments can assist people by using "labels", salient messages mentally linking a transfer to a particular purpose, to guide people in the intended use of a transfer and provide a clear structure for when, how, and for how long transfers will be available in order to allow people to plan effectively.

Thoughts and comments? mbrg@bsg.ox.ac.uk

