Exploring the importance of social listening to mitigate anti-vax propaganda. A retrospective analysis

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Background

First case of covid 19 was reported in Sri Lanka on 27th Jan 2020

Vaccination campaign
- Covid 19 vaccinations were started in January, 2021
- Near 70% of eligible population vaccinated by 2022 with 2 doses

Booster
- Only 40% have obtained it 4 months after initiation, indicating vaccination hesitancy for booster

Social Media
- Communication on social media has been identified as a contributor for development of vaccination hesitancy.

Objective

To discover the anti-vaccination narratives that propagated on the Facebook page dedicated for health promotion, under the purview of the Ministry of Health, in Sri Lanka.

Method

1. Booster related posts were extracted from Health Promotion Bureau Facebook page
2. Comments were categorised as
   - Vaccine Related
   - Not-Relevant
   - Sarcastic
3. Vaccine related comments were further categorised into
   - Pro-vaccine
   - Anti-vaccine
   - Seek information
4. Anti-vaccine comments categorised according to the codebook, and Keywords added for commonly occurring codes

Results

Eight booster related posts were identified following the search.
- Total of 6514 comments were extracted (Fig.1)
- With 4001 (61%) vaccine related comments, which was further categorized as anti-vaccine, pro-vaccine and seeking information (Fig.2)

Most commonly occurring anti-vaccine codes were (Fig.3)
- Health hazards (29.51%)
- Lack of trust in administrative structures (11.87%)
- Motive is profit (8.92%)
- Not effective (8.59%)
- Protest (7.38%)

The least occurring anti-vaccine codes;
- Religious tenets (0.08%)
- Effective only for trivial diseases (0.08%)

Under the anti-vaccine themes the top three keywords were (Fig.4)
- Death
- Native remedies
- Consent

Under the seeking information theme the most commonly occurring keywords were realted to (Fig.5)
- Vaccination Program
- Information about the vaccination
- Eligibility forgetting vaccinated

Conclusion

- Even though Facebook has implemented a set of regulations intended to combat vaccine misinformation, the comment section seems to be frequently overlooked
- As a result, it may provide an ideal environment for the propagation of anti-vaccination propaganda.
- As evident from the research a high volume of anti-vaccine comments are being propagated via the Facebook page dedicated for health promotion, under the purview of the Ministry of Health.
- Therefore, a greater number of people have the potential to be exposed to them, which may lead to vaccination hesitancy and eventually give rise to a public health risk.
- Therefore, both offline and online social listening should be done timely and vigorously to identify the health misinformation that gets circulated on social media,
- Also immediate action needs to be taken to answer the public’s concerns with scientifically based evidence and debunk the myths.

References