

Strategic advice regarding the Covid-19 vaccination

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Based on my non-scientific, personal experience, people are afraid to take the Covid-19 vaccine, due to their rapid development. Another non-scientific personal experience is that a lot of people are unaware of the time-line of vaccine development, the test-periods, the number of people generally used for phase 3 test, etc. So if someone says that this is happening too fast, they cannot contradict this information.

If I were asked to create a science communication strategy regarding the Covid-19 vaccine, I would do the following things:

- Collect information on people's opinion of the vaccine
 - o I would first run a social media analysis to get direct information on what people think about vaccines (you do not ask them, you observe what they write in the social media about this). In Dutch and English.
 - o I would create a survey in Dutch for the general public, based on communication theories, to collect information on what people think about the vaccine. What are their fears, what are the issues they would find problematic? I would stick to open questions, so people would not choose from already given options, but they could write down with their own words what they think. I would also ask them what kind of information they would need to be reassured about the vaccine.
 - o The information collected by these means would provide the basis of the communication strategy.
- I would design a communication campaign for a larger audience with multiple elements.
 - o Based on the inoculation theory, I would take the results of the survey and social media analysis and take the topics that come up and design individual campaigns.
 - o The inoculation theory is saying that if we are aware of a "threat" (in this case the threat would be the spread of these pieces of misinformation or "false" claims about the vaccine), then we can inoculate the people with counterarguments, before the actual threat. So if we have some information, we can create the counterarguments, which are based on scientific data or information on the vaccine development process, and inoculate those people, who do not yet think that these issues are problematic.
 - o For example, if some people say that the vaccine was developed too fast, I would make this topic as a focal point for a discussion of an evening talk show, jeugdjournal issue, write about this in various newspapers, not just the sophisticated ones. Then focus on the second topic and create a campaign for each and every one. Of course, some issues could be treated in the same event, for example in a talk show. Probably these will not convince everyone who already think that the vaccines were not

tested correctly due to time, but this will help to stop the spread of some misinformation.

- I agree with your statements that people probably need to be nudged to get vaccinated. But of course, the ways of nudging are different, regarding how they feel about being nudged. You can use external motivators (e.g. they are not allowed to public places if they are not vaccinated), but these will give a bad taste to some people in their mouth. If they do not recognize that they are somehow forced to get the vaccine, because they think that themselves wanted to get it, they will not have bad feelings. This is probably the most widely used way of nudging in the marketing world.
- Different theories could be used to design the nudging strategy based on the above-mentioned principle.

The Elaboration likelihood model is a cognitive theory saying that people use two kinds of ways to evaluate a message or a new piece of information. The central way needs logical thinking and motivation and costs energy and time. People use this when they actively decided to choose between mobile phone types or car brands, if they need to buy a new one, and they are comparing prices and attributes of the products. But in most of the times, people are using the peripheral route, in which logical and critical thinking is switched off. This is the place where nudging comes in. One can use different nudging forces, which could be part of your nudging strategy:

- Reciprocation: we do as the other person does. This could be used to convince influencers (youtubers for example), to talk about the vaccine in a positive way. Or showing everyday people (teachers, nurses who will get the vaccine in the first round) actually getting a vaccine, and talking about it and that they can go on working without worries.
- social proof (peer pressure): endorsed by others, reviews. This could be used to a distinguished campaign, aimed for special target groups, and use their in-group language and values to campaign for the vaccine. This could be the place of asking science writers/bloggers to write about vaccine development.
- Liking (attractiveness, personality): people we like have more credibility. This could be used by, for example, convincing influencers, youtubers, rappers, folk singers, etc to be in the news when getting the vaccine or talking about the issues discovered by the social media analysis.
- Authority (power, expertise, but also clothes, titles, accessories). More experts, immunologists, vaccine developers to the screen, into the news, so they can tell their side.
- Scarcity (limited duration) things that are hard to get worth more. This is already happening, right? So there will be rounds, because of the scarce availability of the vaccine. I might think about putting some gamification elements in the campaign: the price for the postcode lottery would also include a batch of vaccine as well (Ok, now I am joking, but other elements of gamification could be part of it).