COVID-19 Infodemic Management: Thailand Experience

Side event: Infodemic Management: Promoting healthy behaviors in the time of COVID-19 and mitigating harm from misinformation and disinformation

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Presentation Outline

• Overview of COVID-19 situation in Thailand
• Pandemic and infodemic in Thailand
• How did we manage?
• What did we do?
• What did we learn?
• Policy recommendations
Overview of COVID-19 situation in Thailand

13 Jan: The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Thailand

1 Mar: COVID-19 officially declared as a dangerous communicable disease

26 Mar: Thailand declared a state of emergency

3 April: Curfew 10pm - 4am

29 Jun: Extended the Emergency Decrees to 31 July

1 Jul: Educational institutions resumed

12 Mar: established CCSA, one day after WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic

15 Mar: Spike of infections from imported cases in boxing stadium & entertainment venues

4 May: First time that no new infections reported locally

16 June: Cabinet endorses three packages to revive ailing tourism

8 Jul: First wave of the COVID-19 outbreak ended

Infodemic = Information + Pandemic

“We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic.”

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
WHO Director-General
Munich Security Conference, 15 February 2020
Government officers open all parcel to confiscate surgical masks and resell them.

Police has the power to fine for 200 THB if you go out without a mask.

Putting sanitary pad on masks increases its effectiveness in preventing COVID-19.

Drinking hot water & eating ginger, garlic, & chili can prevent COVID-19.

Surin province has over 10,000 positive cases of COVID-19.

What to do to prevent COVID-19?
- Gargling with salt water
- Don’t take ant-virus without prescription
- Eat garlic, tea, & herb will protect from COVID-19
- Attend immune system-enhancing course
Infodemic in Thailand
Misinformation and confirmed cases of COVID-19

Note: Number of fake news verified by the Anti-Fake News Center, under Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Thailand (https://www.antifakenewscenter.com)
The number of confirmed cases extracted from https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/th
How did we manage?
Risk communication system in managing infodemic

• Whole-of-government
  Through Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) led by the Prime Minister

• One Voice
  Live TV daily briefing as an official source of information delivered by the CCSA speaker

• Verified Information
  Transparent, evidence-based, and easy-to-understand messages, guidelines and information ensures citizens’ trust and adherence

• Multi-sectoral collaboration
  Work with other actors (government and non-government) to amplify the messages and reach the broader audience

Dr Taweesilp Visanuyothin, spokesperson of the CCSA, became an icon of daily situation update televised in all media channels.
Flow of information in the risk communication system in Thailand

CCSA: The Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration
PM: Prime Minister
MOPH: Ministry of Public Health
MOI: Ministry of Interior
MODE: Ministry of Digital Economy and Society
DOH: Department of Health
DDC: Department of Disease Control
NHSO: National Health Security Office
EOC: Emergency Operation Center
ThaiHealth: Thai Health Promotion Foundation

Other related health agencies

WHO
ThaiHealth
DOH
NHSO
DDC
EOC
MOPH
MOI
MODE
PM office

National Spokesperson

Anti-fake news center

Official information delivered by national spokesperson

amplified and simplified information delivered by other partners

Two-way information:
1. Feedback and update of the current situation at the local level,
2. Verified information to be further disseminated to public (scientific and policy measures)

Other related ministries

General Public

Health workers and health volunteers

Governors and community leaders

Media and news agencies

Official information delivered by national spokesperson

amplified and simplified information delivered by other partners
What did we do?
Monitoring people’s behaviors and attitudes and evaluation of existing risk communication

• **A 10 weekly online survey May-July 2020:** to understand the behavior and attitude of Thai population towards misinformation and disinformation on COVID-19

• Establishing the media literacy index:
  (1) knowledge to differentiate misinformation,
  (2) Not-propagating/sharing false statements
  (4 May-25 June 2020: 52,354 respondents)

• Perceptions towards existing risk communication system (26 June-9 July 2020: 15,973 respondents)

For more information please visit: [http://trueorfalse.ihppthaigov.net](http://trueorfalse.ihppthaigov.net)
What did we learn?
Results of the survey of people’s behavior and attitude towards misinformation and disinformation related to COVID-19

• **Misinformation is everywhere**: distributed across the regions and different sociodemographic groups and can hinder the efforts to fight COVID-19

• **Official trustworthy sources of information**: particularly by health agencies are critical to build citizens’ trust and adherence to social interventions

• **Managing infodemic is beyond the health sector**: a whole-of-society approach is critical to counter misinformation

• 82% have seen misinformation and disinformation in social media.
• Media literacy index is at 69%: 54% can differentiate false or misleading information related to COVID-19 and 87% did not share false or misleading information to social media platforms.

• Health agencies were considered more trustworthy in disseminating correct information related to COVID-19.
• Traditional media platforms (live-tv daily briefing) is vital in providing information to the public which can be further disseminated through social media.

• The power of social media and celebrities has played a crucial role in raising awareness of the general public regarding the dangers of COVID-19 (Sirilak, 2020).
• Only limited news that can be verified from the official sources (limited capacity of the agencies, limited supporting evidences)

Policy recommendations

- **Strengthen the institutional capacity and transparency** in delivering correct information to public
- **Strengthen the whole-of-society approach** to counter misinformation
- **Establish a regulatory framework** to prevent the dissemination of misinformation in social media

1. Strengthen fact-checking capacity in collaboration with WHO and international partners
2. Strengthen multi-sectoral collaborations to disseminate trustworthy information and counter misinformation
3. Strengthen MODE’s timely legal sanction of deliberate dissemination of misinformation
4. Work with social media providers to ban and terminate accounts which disseminate misinformation
5. Develop mechanisms and tools such as artificial intelligence which detect and ban the recycling of misinformation and false statements in social media
Thank you for your attention

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