

The Role of TV Advertising in Promoting Children's Health Awareness During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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Abstract

Objectives: This study examines the message framing and effectiveness of advertising in health awareness campaigns, with a focus on children.

Methods: The study analyzed 11 health awareness ads related to the COVID-19 pandemic, broadcasted on the MBC3 channel from March to August 2020 using a comprehensive inventory analysis.

Results: The results show that the health awareness campaign used three types of content to educate against the virus: prevention instructions (55%), precautionary information (35%), and general instructions on maintaining healthy habits (10%). The framing strategy of the health awareness campaign focused on delivering a specific message, either through health instructions or passing general health information. The investigated ads used simple steps in their structure to guide children to the required outcome of the infection, explaining the cause and effect of actions by showing the positive impact of staying home or social distancing in eliminating or minimizing the infection or the spread of the virus. There were no significant differences between the effectiveness of long and short ads in conveying the message to children. The ads used emotional advertising appeal, including strong imagery, impactful text, and powerful music.

Conclusions: The study suggests that understanding the target audience is crucial for developing effective health awareness campaigns, and using simple language, appealing characters, and appropriate means of explanation can enhance the effectiveness of health awareness ads. The findings of this study have implications for designing future health awareness campaigns, especially those targeted towards children, to enhance their effectiveness in conveying health-related messages.

Keywords: Health awareness, coronavirus pandemic, virtual media, television (TV), MBC3 TV channel, TV advertisements.

دور الإعلان التلفزيوني في تعزيز الوعي الصحي للأطفال خلال جائحة كورونا

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ملخص

الأهداف: تناقش هذه الدراسة فعالية الإعلان التلفزيوني في تقوية وتعزيز حملات التوعية الصحية الموجهة للأطفال خلال جائحة كورونا.

المنهجية: الدراسة اعتمدت على تحليل 11 إعلاناً صحياً يتعلق بجائحة كورونا، تم الإعلان عنه من قبل قناة ال MBC3 خلال الفترة من مارس إلى أغسطس 2020 باستخدام تحليل الجرد الشامل.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج أن حملة التوعية الصحية استخدمت ثلاثة أنواع من المحتوى الإعلاني للتثقيف ضد الفيروس: المحتوى الخاص بتعليمات الوقاية، وقد حصل على أعلى نسبة (55%)، يليه محتوى المعلومات الاحترازية الذي حاز على نسبة (35%). أما محتوى التعليمات العامة حول الحفاظ على العادات الصحية؛ فقد حصل على نسبة (10%). ركزت استراتيجية الترويج للحملة الصحية على إيصال رسالة الوقاية والحذر من الفيروس من خلال توضيح أساليب الوقاية من المرض عن طريق تقديم المعلومات العامة عن ماهية الفيروس وكيفية انتشاره والأعراض المصاحبة له. استخدمت الإعلانات خطوات بسيطة لتوجيه الأطفال، وشرحت طرائق ووسائل انتشار الفيروس. بالإضافة إلى تعزيز أهمية الالتزام بالبقاء في المنزل والتباعد الاجتماعي. أشارت النتائج إلى عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين فعالية الإعلانات الطويلة والقصيرة في إيصال الرسالة إلى الأطفال. استخدمت الإعلانات أشخاصاً كارتونية فعالة ومؤثرة لدى الأطفال والنصوص المؤثرة والموسيقى القوية. وحددت الدراسة وسائل الشرح الأكثر فعالية للأطفال، مثل استخدام الصور والرسومات وإدراج الصوت البشري.

الخلاصة: استنتجت الدراسة أن قناة ال MBC3 نجحت في اختيار وتصميم إعلانات هادفة خلال مرحلة جائحة كورونا، كما أن استخدام لغة بسيطة وأحرف جذابة ووسائل شرح مناسبة يمكن أن يعزز فعالية إعلانات التوعية الصحية. إن لنتائج هذه الدراسة انعكاساتها على تصميم حملات التوعية الصحية المستقبلية، وخاصة تلك الموجهة للأطفال، لتعزيز فعاليتها في إيصال الرسائل المتعلقة بالصحة.

الكلمات الدالة: التوعية الصحية، جائحة كورونا، الإعلام الافتراضي، التلفزيون، قناة MBC3، الإعلانات التلفزيونية.



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Introduction

Television (TV) is an important means of cultural, informational, and mass media directed to all members of society. The various materials broadcasted on TV are intended for entertainment and awareness (Anthony, 2013; Rothwell, 2019; Stephens, 2022). During crises, it has been observed that media consumption, especially TV, increases, which is precisely the case with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The complexity of lifestyles and cultural growth has resulted in increased media consumption globally, which is further aggravated by the pandemic (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2021). As per the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, TV consumption increased significantly after the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) that COVID-19 was a global public health emergency and the enforcement of global lockdown. TV is the most common means of media used to raise public awareness worldwide (CCDML, 2022; Wakefield, 2010; Krendl and Lasky, 1987; Abrams et al., 2003). It combines various components that attract public attention, including entertainment, news, education, culture, weather, sports, and even music (CCDML, 2022). The Global TV Market estimated that the number of TV households worldwide in 2021 was 1.72 billion and is expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2026 (Stoll, 2022).

The pandemic has brought an increased focus on health awareness globally, especially after most countries implemented lockdowns (Joffe, 2021), restricting their population's movements, work, education, gatherings, and general activities to flatten the curve of COVID-19 cases (Elrod and Fortenberry, 2020). In this critical period, the responsibility of communication, raising health awareness, and combating the spread of the virus has become the media's responsibility. Therefore, health has become a constant presence in all sorts of media. However, there is a lack of relevant studies on how different age groups of society, especially children, deal with a health crisis. Therefore, the significance of this study is to understand the role of TV ads in educating children in developing countries and testing its influential factors to deal with a crisis properly (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2021).

TV ads have played a crucial role in raising health awareness against the coronavirus pandemic. Over the past few decades, TV consumption has increased significantly and has had a considerable impact on consumer's health and well-being (Zuckerman and Zuckerman, 1985; Hamm et al., 2014; The Internet & Television Association, 2020). However, TV is the most effective medium to educate and spread awareness, especially during the fight against COVID-19 (The UN specialized agency for ICTs 2020). Nowadays, TV uses advanced technology to produce ads to deliver messages effectively to the audience, penetrating their consciousness directly and accumulating in their minds without the need for contemplation or analysis (Kontos and Bomba, 2021; Wakefield, 2010; Al-Mashhadani, 2013). TV ads form a large area of TV display materials that impact all groups (FLINT, 2014; Wolk, 2018; Disis, 2018). The diversity and globalization of passing messages worldwide are aligned with the development of media technology and the innovation of the satellite (Elrod and John, 2020; Elrod and John., 2017). Satellite channels have become a feature of contemporary reality and provide the elements of immediate availability of notable events for people around the world (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2021). Health awareness campaigns increased and became one of the significant ways of communication in advertising modules during the pandemic (Shams, 2009; Ali, 2008), focusing on changing the health behavior of the population by creating awareness and promoting prevention, such as hand hygiene practices and immunization coverage (Torani et al., 2019).

Educational TV for children during COVID-19

Children form a significant portion of TV viewers and are exposed to various forms of media messages, including advertisements. TV has been known to play a significant role in the development of children's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, making it an essential tool for their education and entertainment (Chernin and Nichols, 2005; Young, 2022). Advertisements are a significant part of children's TV education programs, especially during times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health communication and education were integrated into children's daily life during the lockdown, particularly through the broadcast sense (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2021). Educational components targeting children, such as TV ads, have been utilized to communicate health knowledge and protection aspects against coronavirus (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Advertising content to affect children's health awareness should consider biodiversity

and cultural aspects. Different strategies are used to promote awareness among children, such as appealing to their emotions, using heroes and cartoon figures to emphasize their attention, and passing messages through songs and stories (The Australian Parenting Website, 2019).

TV advertising has merits that help children's development, such as reliance on live pictures, sounds, the multiplicity, and the diversity of clip sizes used (Ad Standards, 2020). Several theories have suggested using TV programs to increase children's belief of risk, stimulate their health awareness, and improve their ability to make informed decisions (Linn, 2010). In general, TV advertising aims to deliver information to children in a fast, simple, and correct manner. Therefore, TV ads can play a crucial role in raising awareness among children and informing them of preventive measures during times of crisis.

Addressing the Underutilization of TV Advertising in Health Education. The main issue this research aims to address is the critical importance of health awareness, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become evident that promoting health awareness is not just a matter of public health significance but also a matter of life and death. However, what is often overlooked is the role that advertising, particularly on television, can play in this effort. In marketing, television is a powerful tool, and it is primarily used to boost economic growth, encourage consumerism, and generate profit. While these are crucial aspects of a thriving economy, it is equally important to leverage the reach and influence of television to educate and create awareness, particularly in the health sector.

Television can reach a wide and diverse audience, making it a prime platform for disseminating essential health information. Unfortunately, this potential is underutilized. This study seeks to rectify this imbalance by shedding light on the often-neglected role of television advertising in health education. It serves as a crucial step towards harnessing the full potential of television as an educational and awareness tool. By focusing on how TV advertising can be used to inform, educate, and inspire behavioral change, particularly in the context of children's programming, this research strives to establish a more balanced approach where television not only serves economic growth but also contributes significantly to building a healthier and more informed society. This is vital not only in the midst of a pandemic but for the overall well-being of communities and individuals.

Significance of the Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a significant threat to global public health, especially for children who may not fully understand the risks and preventive measures. Therefore, it is essential to explore the effectiveness of media in promoting health awareness and educating children to defend against COVID-19.

This study aimed to investigate the proportion of health awareness ads broadcasted on TV during the preliminary stages of the pandemic (March to August 2020). The study specifically focused on analysing the efficiency of using TV ads as a communication tool to raise health awareness for children. To achieve this, the study examined the frequency and content of health awareness ads broadcasted by the most common children's TV channel in the Middle East, MBC3. The choice of MBC3 was based on several factors, including its high viewership rates compared to other channels, its designation as a channel entirely for children, and its popularity among parents due to its reflection of ethical and cultural aspects of the Middle East (AMC, 2021; AbdulHaleem, 2020).

The significance of this research lies in the need to understand and clarify the effectiveness of media in promoting health awareness, particularly for children, and in educating them to defend against the COVID-19 disease. The findings of this study can provide policymakers and health professionals with insights into the role of media in health promotion and suggest ways to develop effective health awareness campaigns that can reach children. Additionally, the study's results can help media outlets and advertisers understand the importance of producing targeted health awareness ads and the significance of content and frequency in ensuring their effectiveness. Overall, this research can inform policy and practice by highlighting the potential of media in promoting health awareness and education, particularly in times of public health emergencies.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study is aimed at understanding the effectiveness and quality of TV ads that promote health awareness and educate children on the prevention of COVID-19 in the Middle East region. Specifically, this study focused on the frequency and content of health awareness ads broadcasted on the popular children's TV channel, MBC3, between March and August 2020. To conduct this study, the MBC3 channel was watched for 24 hours a day during the study period, and all TV broadcasts were recorded daily. The recorded ads were then analyzed based on their content and display format.

The first part of the study aimed to answer three research questions related to the MBC3 health awareness campaign.

1. Did the coronavirus pandemic was given enough space in the channel's programs.
2. What is the type of ad parts used in the health awareness campaign, and
3. How informative the ads were in emphasizing the importance of following the WHO guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

To answer these questions, a comprehensive inventory analysis was conducted to determine the number of ads, their duration and repetition, and the type of message appeal used. The ads were classified into three categories: informative, emotional, and combination, to assess the effectiveness of the health awareness campaign. Frequency analysis was also used to determine the rank of each ad category and the means used to transmit the messages. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of using TV ads to promote health awareness and educate children on the prevention of COVID-19.

Results and Discussion

Message Framing and Applications in Health Awareness Appeal

The study examined the types of message framing used in the health awareness ads for children on the MBC3 channel during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results revealed that the channel used three types of content to educate children about the virus: prevention instructions, precautionary information, and general instruction on maintaining healthy habits to increase the body's immune system. Among these, prevention instructions were the most frequently used type of content, making up 55% of the ads, followed by precautionary information at 35%, and general instruction at 10%.

The frequency analysis showed that the health awareness campaign aimed to educate children about the importance of following the precautionary steps necessary to prevent infection and reduce the spread of the virus, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). This finding highlights the importance of providing clear and explicit instructions to children on how to protect themselves and others against COVID-19. Overall, the study underscores the value of message framing in designing effective health awareness appeals, particularly in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

Table 1. The description and frequency of the targeted instructions used in the ads broadcast by the MBC3 channel for their health awareness campaign from March 20 to August 31, 2020.

Category of ads Content	Target of Instructions	Description	Frequency
Precautionary Information	Hand washing	Teaching children through illustration how to wash hands properly, as well as showing them the importance of using sanitizers to avoid infection and prevent the spread of the virus	11
	Use of disinfectants and sterilizers	Describe and give an example of the essential sterilizers that should be used for self-sterilizing or to sterilize items or objects in use or handled by touch	4
	Clarify the symptoms	Clarify all the symptoms that a person can go through when infected with the virus	3
	Following the correct way to sneeze and cough	Teaching children through illustration the importance of covering the nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing to prevent transmission of the infection	3

Category of ads Content	Target of Instructions	Description	Frequency
	Wearing mask	Teaching children through illustration the proper way of wearing a mask	1
Prevention Instructions	Social distancing	Introducing the children to the legal distance for social distancing and how this distance can be estimated if there are no signs or sign	4
	Stay at home	Clarify the following aspects 1) the importance of staying at home, 2) the need to adhere to the law to contribute to eliminating the virus and preventing its spread	4
General Information	Maintaining healthy habits	Explain the importance of eating healthy and exercising to strengthen the immune system and keep it effective	4
	Information on germs	Introduce children to the origin, structure, and impact of the virus using educational and scientific components	1

Message framing is an essential marketing communication strategy used to classify information to be conveyed to the target audience, enhancing their attention and desire for the message (Chang and Lee, 2009). When it comes to children, framing requires a specific approach that balances simplicity and attraction to ensure effective communication and comprehension of the message (Wakefield, 2010; Torani et al., 2019). The health awareness ads broadcasted on MBC3 channel, as listed in Table 1, utilized a specific framing strategy to deliver their message. The campaign aimed at providing specific messages to children, either through instructions or general information. The ads that provided precautionary education utilized a simple three-step approach to guide children on the required outcome. For example, the ads that focused on washing hands and wearing masks constantly urged children to wash their hands with soap and water, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021).

The ads used to deliver prevention instructions focused on establishing the cause-and-effect relationship of actions, emphasizing the positive impact of staying at home or social distancing in eliminating and minimizing the spread of the virus. This approach aimed to encourage children to understand the importance of preventive measures and their role in protecting themselves and others from the virus. Overall, the study highlights the importance of utilizing an effective framing strategy in health awareness campaigns targeting children to ensure effective communication and comprehension of the message.

The Effectiveness of Message Length on Children

The study examined the effectiveness of message length on children in the context of health awareness ads. The data analysed in Table 2 showed that the MBC3 channel used a combination of long and short ads for their health awareness campaign against the Coronavirus pandemic. The ads ranged from 30 to 295 seconds in length, with no significant differences observed between long and short ads. Out of a total of fourteen ads, eight were long ads while the remaining six were short ads.

Previous research has shown that understanding the target audience is crucial when creating effective advertising campaigns. In the case of targeting children, repeatable short ads may be less effective than longer ads that feature appealing characters (Olenski and Share, 2012). The study found that the MBC3 channel used both long and short ads in their health awareness campaign, likely to cater to a range of attention spans and learning styles.

The effectiveness of long ads in enhancing learning and increasing the ability to understand and process the message is supported by previous research (Singh and Cole, 1993; Jiaoju et al., 2021). On the other hand, short ads focus on delivering effectiveness efficiently, with the "template theory of memory" suggesting that most of the effect of advertisement length on advertisement awareness is delivered by the first five seconds of exposure (WRAC, 2020).

Table 1: Total number of health awareness ads, length (seconds), and category of message appeal broadcasted by the MBC3 channel from March 20 to August 31, 2020. *The same advertisement but presented in two different ways.

Add Name	Length (Seconds)	URL Source
Our health is our most valuable treasure	205	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7RbaJn1qsA
Educational break during Tawasol Program	285	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yRCT2ySOwg
	295	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxnI7KHnVIY
Coronavirus	125	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMOWaUS54PE
Do you know where Germs live and hide?	144	https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=657759491729213&_rdr
Coronavirus prevention	119	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek48zZ07Pc8
*Washing my hands and staying home	113	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujKrejylkLw
*Washing my hands and staying home	112	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQL-nmN-58M
Hello Simsim Program: Wash your hand with soup	40	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWQVn4luSnk
Wash Your Hand with Elmo	30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb01fvHUZGY
Learn how to sneeze and cough with your friend Karkur	30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BV005Zx7Dp8
Caring for yourself is a sign that you care about others	30	https://twitter.com/alsumariatv/status/1249593162277904384
Wash your Hands Now	30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGrifA8BcA

The Effectiveness of Message Appeal on Children

The ads used for the health awareness campaign of the MBC3 channel have an emotional advertising appeal strong imagery, impactful text, and powerful music. Among the variety of components that the emotional advertising appeal depends on, Table 3 indicates the Type of message appeal and the means of delivery for each ad used in the MBC3 health awareness campaign with a general description of the message outcome.

Table 3: The Type of message appeal, means of delivery, and message outcome of the ads used in the MBC3 health awareness campaign broadcasted from March 20 to August 31, 2020.

Add Name	Type of message appeal	Means of delivering the message	Message outcome
Coronavirus prevention	Social	Verbal	Detailed illustration on how to wash hands properly
Do you know where Germs live and hide?	Social	Verbal	Drag the children's attention to the locations of germs and where they usually grow. Give the children ideas on preventing and combating germs, including adopting a healthy diet to strengthen the body's immune system, washing hands constantly, and using tissues when sneezing and coughing.
Our health is our most valuable treasure	Social	Song	Illustrate and show the proper way of washing hands, the safe way to sneeze, the importance of using sanitizers, social distancing, and eating healthy food

Add Name	Type of message appeal	Means of delivering the message	Message outcome
Washing my hands and stayed home	Social	Song	Illustrate and show the proper way of washing hands and how important to stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus
Educational break during Tawasol Program	Social, Fear	Verbal	Provide general information on the origin of the disease and show the latest news on fighting and preventing the spreading of the disease and emphasize the importance of following the health instructions explained by the WHO
Coronavirus	Social and Fear	Verbal	Provide general information on the origin of the
Hello Simsim Program: Wash your hand with soup	Endorsement	Verbal	Emphasizing the importance of washing hands with soup to get rid of all germs
Wash your Hands Now	Endorsement	Verbal	Indicate the situation where hands need to be washed
Learn how to sneeze and cough with your friend Karkur	Endorsement	Verbal	Illustrate and show how to sneeze properly
Caring for yourself is a sign that you care about others	Endorsement	Music	Illustrate and show the proper way of washing hands
Wash Your Hand with Elmo	Endorsement	Music	The proper method of washing hands

The result shows that most ads adopted in their formulation and illustration of the endorsement type of emotional appeal, using famous characters like Elmo from Sesame Street Show and team WAW. The social attractions were found in ads that used dolls and general cartoon characters for motivation. These ads focused on showing the appropriate way of washing hands, the safe way to sneeze, and the importance of wearing masks. In addition, few ads adopted the fear appeal, where their message emphasizes the harm and damage caused if children do not follow the recommended health safety instructions.

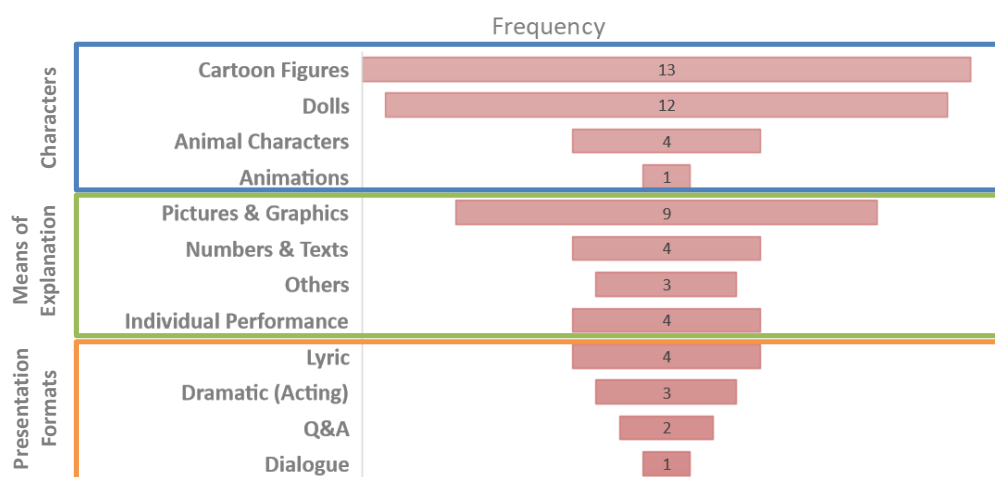


Figure 1: The Type of appeal and frequency used in the three advertising components in the MBC3 health awareness campaign broadcast from March 20 to August 31, 2020.

The study analyzed the effectiveness of health awareness ads in a campaign by the MBC3 channel (Figure 1). The study evaluated the ads based on their use of characters, presentation forms, and methods of explanation. The ads included 26 characters, including cartoon characters, dolls, human elements, and emotions. Understanding the audience is critical to evaluating the effectiveness of the ads, as children are attracted to cartoons, inanimate objects such as dolls, and animals (The Australian Parenting Website 2019, Ali 2008, Chernin and Nichols 2005).

The study found that using a human voice in presenting the content is an excellent way to attract children's attention, as children are accustomed to receiving guidance and instructions from adults. The ads used various means of explanation, with pictures and graphics being the most prominent, followed by numbers and text display, and videos, signs, and games.

The study also analyzed the methods and formulas adopted by the advertisements for Corona on the MBC3 channel directed to children. The personal and lyrical forms were the most used, followed by the dramatic form, while the dialogue form ranked last. The use of a singular form, such as a character, doll, or child, or using lyrics to talk about the virus and ways to prevent it, are simple forms that can be quickly understood and memorized by children. This form also gives the recipient a feeling of being addressed personally, making them more interested in the information presented to them.

Conclusions

In today's society, TV has become a primary source of information and entertainment, especially during times of isolation. The importance of targeted health awareness campaigns through ads has become more apparent. Ads have been shown to be an effective way to deliver information in a fast, simple, and correct manner. However, to effectively communicate with children, it is crucial to understand their cognitive level. Children are very observant, sensitive, and easily distracted, and it is important to ensure that messages are interesting, natural, and stimulative to attract and maintain their attention.

Moreover, choosing the right character can have a major influence on children's interest and desire to learn. Cartoon figures and superheroes are elements of attraction and interest to children, making them more likely to engage with the content. Ad length is also a crucial element that determines the effectiveness of the message, and a balance between detailed and snap-shot messages is essential.

The health awareness campaign of the MBC3 channel is a prime example of an effective and informative tool against the pandemic and the dispersal of coronavirus. Their interest in supplying health awareness and making it part of the channel's content shows their concern for children and their right to understand what is going on around them. The channel's success lies in simplifying the preventive content against the coronavirus pandemic and presenting it in an easy and simplified manner to make it easier for children to follow and adhere to it.

Monitoring children's development through media is essential, and the importance of positive media should not be overlooked. Health awareness ads can have a positive impact on children's development by teaching them essential information and promoting healthy habits. Therefore, targeted health awareness campaigns through media should be an ongoing effort, focusing on the importance of choosing the right character, message length, and content to effectively reach and engage children.

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