MINISTRY OF HEALTH MALAYSIA
INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH

"Santau Garam": A Cultural Metaphor as a Behavioural Nudge in Health Communication for Salt Reduction

EP058

Nurul Nadia binti Hamdan
Datin Arfah Mahani binti Amran
Laila binti Muhammad

Health Education Division
Ministry of Health
Malaysia



Introduction

Excessive salt intake is a major contributor to hypertension and cardiovascular diseases, posing a significant challenge in reducing non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

In Malaysia, the Malaysian Community Salt Study (MyCoSS) reported an average daily salt intake of 7.9g, exceeding the WHO recommendation of less than 5g per day.

With the rise of digital platforms, Behavioural Insights (BI) approaches are increasingly used to enhance the effectiveness of health communication.

This study explores the use of a cultural metaphor ("Santau Garam") as a behavioural nudge to communicate the hidden dangers of excessive salt intake.

Objectives

1. To explore the application of cultural metaphor as a behavioural nudge in health communication.
2. To analyse the use of Behavioural Insights elements in the "Santau Garam" video.
3. To assess audience engagement and response to the video.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the effectiveness of behavioural insights in health communication.

The "Santau Garam" video was systematically analysed based on:

Narrative structure (storyline and message flow)

Visual elements (imagery, symbols, and presentation style)

Message delivery strategies (tone, framing, and clarity)

The analysis was guided by key Behavioural Insights components, which were applied as follows:

Salience – highlighting important health messages to capture audience attention

Reframing – presenting salt consumption as a hidden and harmful risk

Simplicity – delivering messages in a clear and easily understood manner

Cultural relevance - incorporating local beliefs and metaphors to enhance relatability

In addition, the evaluation was aligned with the EAST Framework, where the video was assessed on its ability to:

Easy -simplify health messages for better understanding

Attractive -use engaging visuals and storytelling to draw attention

Social -connect with audience values and shared cultural context

Timely - deliver messages through relevant and popular digital platforms

This behavioural insights-driven approach provides a structured basis for understanding audience engagement and supports the interpretation of the high reach and interaction observed in the results.

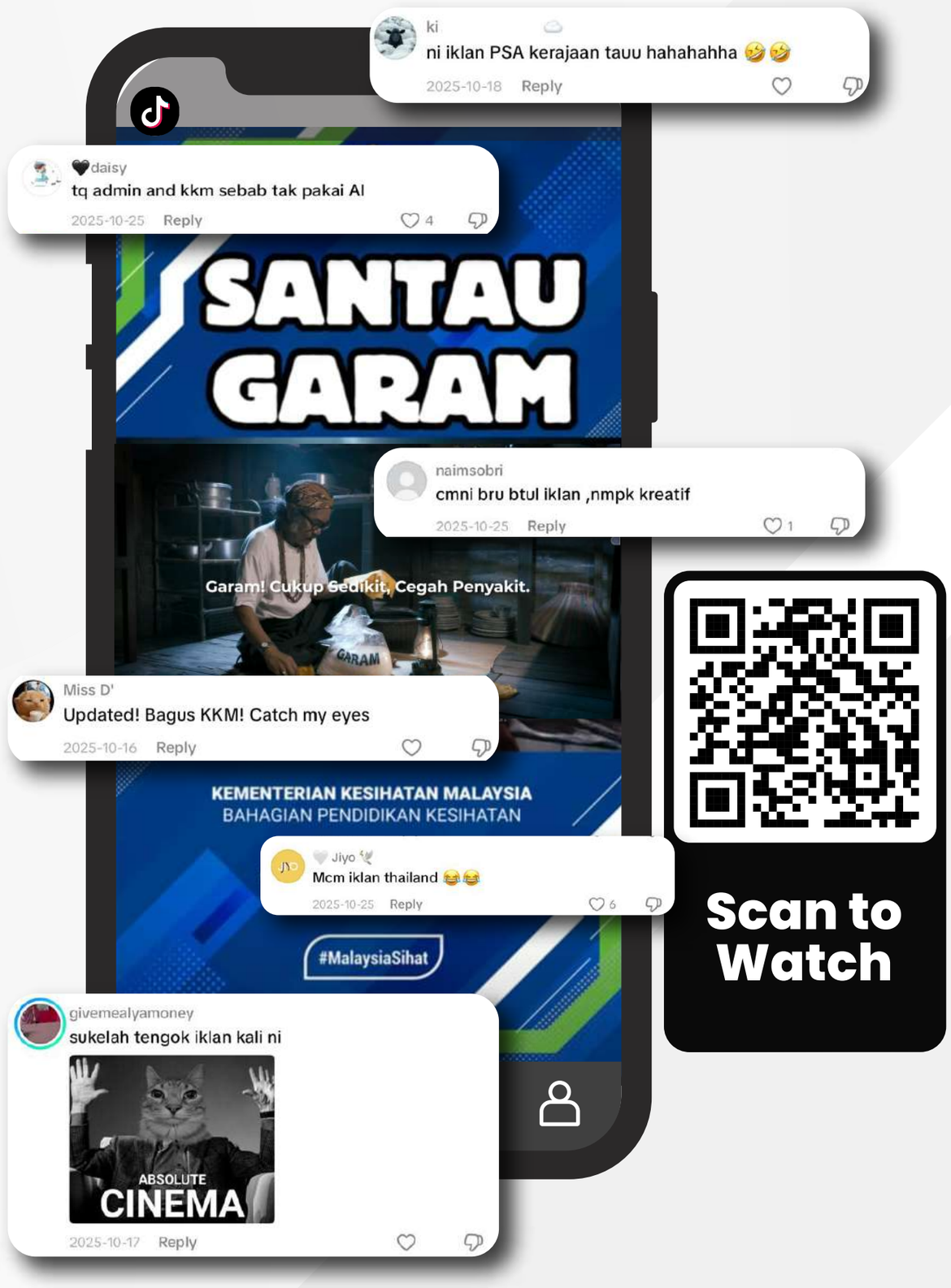
Results

As of March 2026:

- 356,500 views on MyHealthKKM TikTok
- High user engagement observed

Findings indicate that:

- Cultural metaphor successfully captured audience attention
- Creative storytelling improved message retention
- Reframing helped shift perception on salt consumption risks
- Behavioural Insights elements enhanced clarity and relatability of the message



Conclusion

The integration of cultural metaphor and Behavioural Insights demonstrates strong potential in improving health communication effectiveness.

The "Santau Garam" approach shows that:

- Locally relevant narratives can increase audience engagement
- Behavioural nudges can reshape public perception
- Digital platforms are effective channels for behaviour change messaging

This approach can be expanded as a strategic tool to support salt reduction initiatives and broader health promotion efforts in Malaysia.