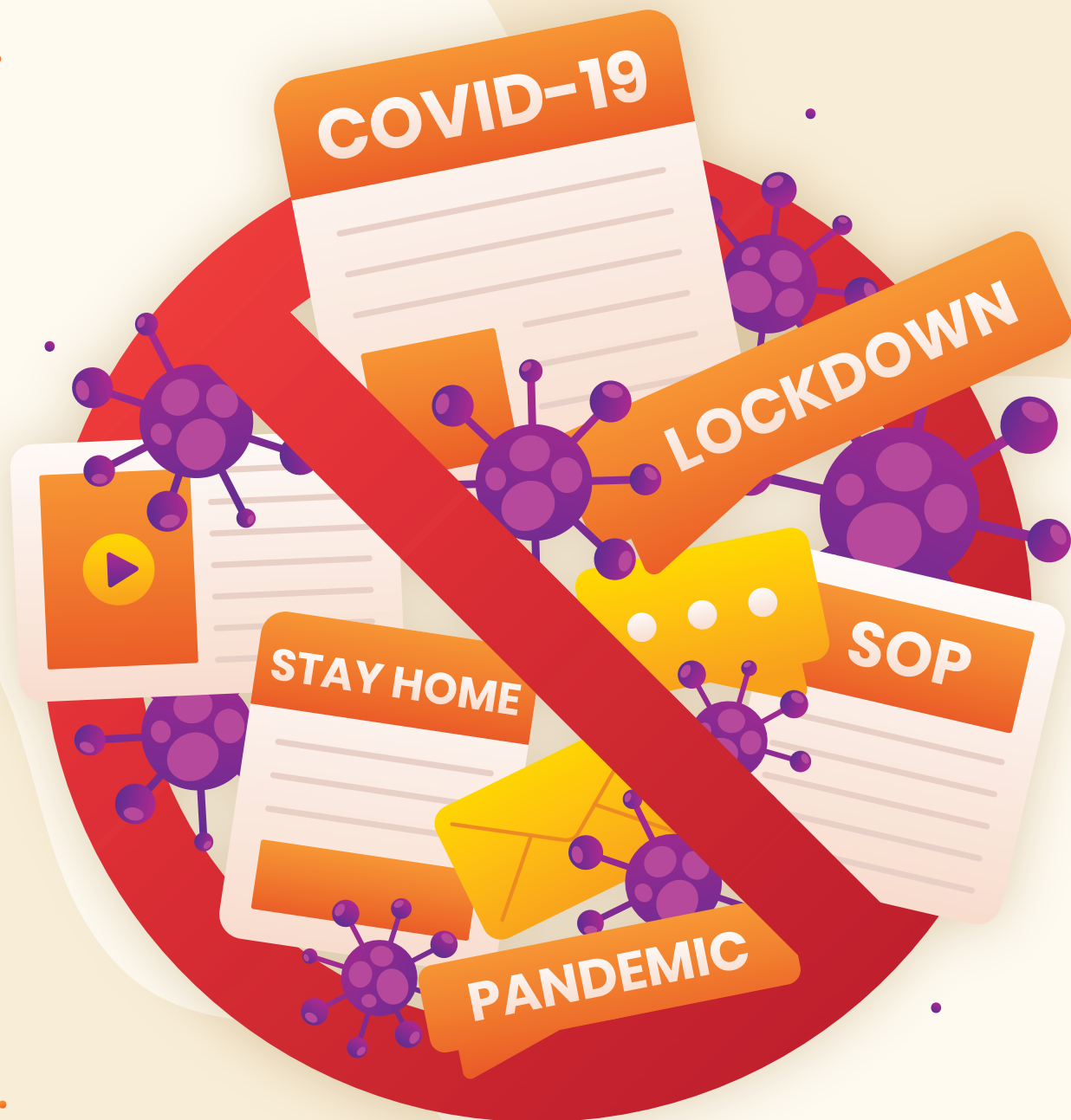


# Message Fatigue of COVID-19

AMONG ADULTS IN MALAYSIA: AN ONLINE SURVEY

*Key Findings*



# MESSAGE FATIGUE OF COVID-19 AMONG ADULTS IN MALAYSIA: AN ONLINE SURVEY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS



01 Background

02 What is Message Fatigue?

03 Methodology

04 Demography

04 Source of COVID-19 Information

05 Message Fatigue of COVID-19  
Perceived Overexposure

06 Message Fatigue of COVID-19  
Perceived Redundancy

07 Message Fatigue of COVID-19  
Exhaustion

08 Message Fatigue of COVID-19  
Tedium

09 One Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic  
How About Practice of Preventive Behaviour?

10 COVID-19 Vaccination Intention  
What are their Views?

11 Message Fatigue  
The Difference between Sociodemographic Profile  
and Relationship with Preventive Behaviour

12 Discussion

14 Recommendation

15 References

## Background

Many countries have implemented population movement restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to keep health systems from becoming overburdened as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic's latest threat to global health (Perez Perez & Talebi Bezmin Abadi, 2020). In Malaysia, according to a study conducted by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia from December 2020 to March 2021, which included 2,047 participants aged 18 and above from all over the country, 62.5% of participants suffered pandemic fatigue ("Pandemic fatigue experienced by Malaysians", 2021). The data also show that a considerable number of participants reported being physically and psychologically exhausted from having to follow the different SOPs introduced by the government to control the spread of COVID-19. Besides, the study also assesses the vaccination intention.

Message fatigue is one of the major concerns to be investigated concerning pandemic fatigue (WHO, 2020). Recent research on COVID-19 prevention has uncovered several factors that may have led to message fatigue (Ling Ling Chan & Tan, 2020; Reynolds-Tylus, 2019; Kim & So, 2018). The authors highlight the roles of reactance and inattention in persuasive communication, which refers to the sense that a person's freedom of choice has been taken away, limiting their activities. Reactance is operationalized as a combination of anger and negative cognitions, followed by a threat to one's independence. Reactance is a motivational mood that drives people to seek ways to reclaim their endangered or lost freedom. For example, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, people may experience anxiety, sadness, and helplessness, which is exacerbated by the need to adapt to new behavioural standards and fears about the probable loss of livelihood.

The discussion above raises the question of whether the Malaysian population is affected by COVID-19 message fatigue. To date, message fatigue has received little attention, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

Therefore, this study looked at the level of COVID-19 message fatigue among Malaysian adults and the variance across sociodemographic characteristics and its relationship with preventive behaviour to further understand this phenomenon.

This study's findings may provide empirical evidence of message fatigue, a significant but understudied side effect of prolonged message exposure. This may allow policymaker to evaluate and modify existing health communication strategies to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.





## What is Message Fatigue?

**Message fatigue** - A phenomenon of **feeling tired of receiving prolonged similar messages and repeated exposure** (So, Kim, & Cohen, 2017). It is measured in four sub-domains:

- **Perceived overexposure** - Perception that one has been **exposed to a class of messages beyond desired frequency**.
- **Perceived redundancy** - Perception that the **messages are repetitive and overlapping**.
- **Exhaustion** - A feeling of being **burned out** with the messages.
- **Tedium** - Lack of **enthusiasm** towards the messages.

## Methodology



**Study Design:** An online cross-sectional study.

**Study Population:** Malaysian citizen, 18 years above and residing in Malaysia.

**Methods:** Data were collected via an online survey using a Google Form and shared via email, website and social media platform.

**Data Collection Duration:** March– April 2021.

**Study Instrument:**

- Bilingual (Malay and English).
- Pre-testing and validation were conducted.
- Good internal consistency of .91, .77 and .66 for Message Fatigue (17 items), Preventive Behaviour (8 items) and Vaccination Intention (2 items), respectively.
- The sections include:
  - **Socio-demographic profiles** - categorical.
  - **Message fatigue** (7-point Likert-type scale). Adapted from So, Kim, & Cohen (2017), Arnold et al. (2014) and Frew et al. (2013), good reliability ranges from .76 to .94
  - **Preventive behaviours** (5-point Likert-type scale). Adapted from Norbaidurah Ithnain et al. (2020).

### Limitation of the study:

This study used a snowball sampling strategy rather than random selection to recruit respondents via an online survey. The findings are not intended to generalize to the Malaysian population.

## Demography



Total participants: 2943 participants

Majority are:

- from Selangor (29.6%)
- Female (60.3%)
- Malay (74.0%)
- a post-secondary education (diploma/degree) (80.9%)
- ages between 36 and 45 years (34.7%)

## Source of COVID-19 Information



“

*Almost half of participants learned about COVID-19 via social media platforms operated by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the National Security Council (NSC/MKN)*

**43.8%**

Social Media (MOH and NSC/MKN).

**21.2%**

Other Social Media.

**15.2%**

Websites (MOH and NSC/MKN).

**7.7%**

SMS.

**6.0%**

MySejahtera.

**3.6%**

Electronic Media (TV and Radio).

**1.8%**

Health Personnel/Family & Friends.

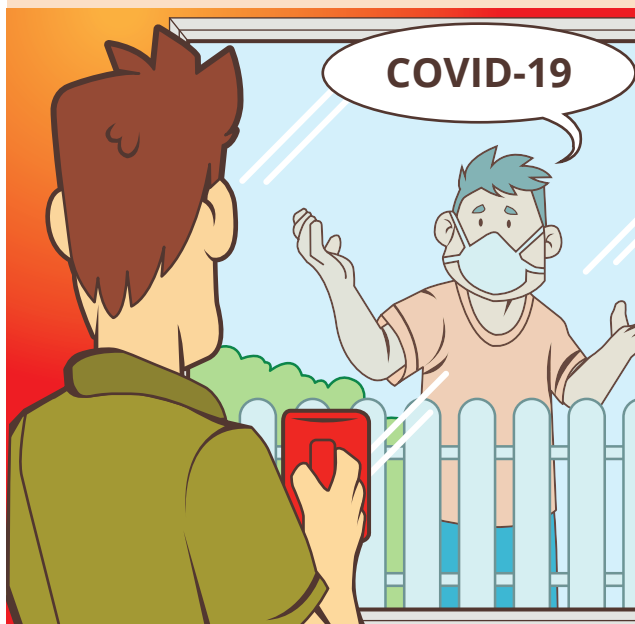
**0.7%**

Printed media (Newspaper, magazine & poster).

## Message Fatigue of COVID-19

### Perceived Overexposure

*Perception that one has been exposed to a class of messages beyond desired frequency.*



**90.9%**

I have **heard enough** about how important it is to practice preventive behaviours to avoid COVID-19.

**78.8%**

There are **simply too many** health messages about COVID-19 nowadays.

**74.5%**

I **have lost track** of the amount of times I have heard that COVID-19 is a serious problem.

**65.7%**

At this point, I have heard about problems related to COVID-19 **more than needed**.

**34.3%**

The importance of maintaining a preventive behaviour on COVID-19 is **overtaught**.



*\*The percentage (%) refers to those who agreed with the statement*



## Message Fatigue of COVID-19

### Perceived Redundancy

*Perception that the messages are repetitive and overlapping.*

**69.9%**

I can predict things to be conveyed by the COVID-19 message.

**60.9%**

Messages about COVID-19 are all beginning to sound the same to me.

**59.3%**

After receiving them for months, messages about COVID-19 seem **repetitive**.

**25.8%**

COVID-19 related messages **rarely provide latest information**.



**✓ AGREE**

*\*The percentage (%) refers to those who agreed with the statement*

## Message Fatigue of COVID-19

### Exhaustion

*A feeling of being burned out with the messages.*

**42.6%**

I am **burned out** from hearing that COVID-19 is a serious problem.

**37.8%**

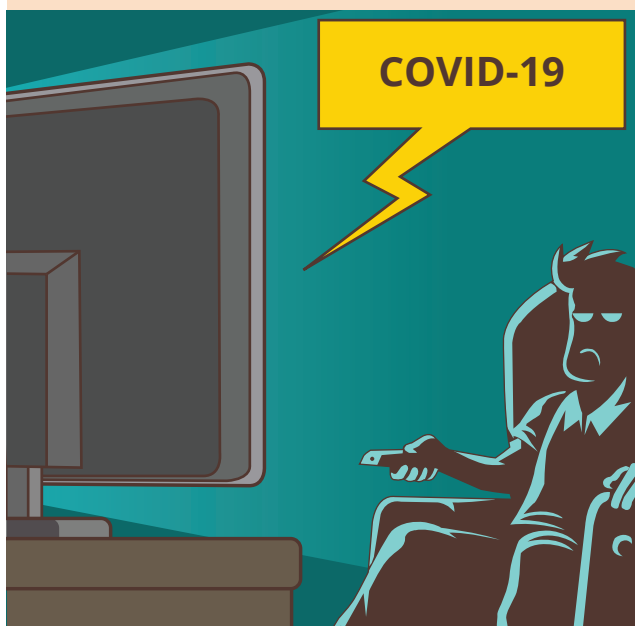
COVID-19 related messages make me **want to sigh**.

**36.1%**

I am **sick of hearing** about the consequences of COVID-19.

**33.0%**

I am **tired of hearing** about the importance of maintaining preventive behaviour against COVID-19.



*\*The percentage (%) refers to those who agreed with the statement*

## Message Fatigue of COVID-19

### Tedium

*Lack of enthusiasm towards the messages.*

**30.1%**

I find messages about COVID-19 to be **dull**.

**29.8%**

COVID-19 related messages are **tedious**.

**27.1%**

Health messages about COVID-19 prevention are **boring**.

**23.8%**

COVID-19 messages make me **want to yawn**.



*\*The percentage (%) refers to those who agreed with the statement*

## One Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic

### How About Practice of Preventive Behaviour?



### Preventive Behaviour



**94.0%**  
Wear face  
mask



**75.6%**  
Avoid meeting  
other people  
if experience  
symptoms



**65.1%**  
Practice  
physical  
distancing



**60.9 %**  
Stay at  
home



**59.7%**  
Wash hands  
regularly

### Avoid the 3Cs

*Be aware of different levels of risk in the different settings*



**Avoid crowded  
places  
with many  
people near by**  
**64.9%**



**Avoid close  
contact setting  
at close range  
without wearing  
a face mask**  
**56.7%**



**Avoid confined &  
close areas  
with poor  
ventilation**  
**66.0%**

*\*The percentage (%) refer to those "ALWAYS"  
practice the behaviour*

## COVID-19 Vaccination Intention

What are their Views?



### Vaccination intention

86.0% indicated an intention to be vaccinated. However, a substantial proportion disagreed (5.4%) and was unsure (8.6%).

### Trust MOH sources of COVID-19

78.1% expressed trust in the Malaysian Ministry of Health's information sources on COVID-19. However, a considerable number (6.5%) disagreed and were unsure (15.4%).

“

*The majority of participants indicated an intention to be vaccinated and expressed trust in the Malaysian Ministry of Health's information sources on COVID-19*

## Message Fatigue

### The Difference between Sociodemographic Profile and Relationship with Preventive Behaviour

#### Differences in participants' sociodemographic profiles on COVID-19 message fatigue

There is a significant difference by:

- **Gender:** Male being higher than female.
- **Occupation:** Self-employment is the highest, followed by the private sector and non-employed.
- **Marital Status:** Single group is the highest, followed by divorced group and married group.
- **Race:** Other races is highest, followed by Chinese and Malay.

However,

- There is no significant difference in message fatigue score between the **age group** and **household income group**.

*\*\*Mann Whitney Test & Kruskal Wallis Test has been used to perform the analysis*

#### Relationship between COVID-19 message fatigue and preventive behaviour

- This study established a significant inverse relationship between message fatigue and preventive behaviour. **Individuals who experience a greater degree of message fatigue are less likely to engage in preventive behaviour.**

*\*\*Spearman Correlation Test has been used to perform the analysis*

## Discussion

### Source of Information



- Most participants acquire information about COVID-19 through, the Ministry of Health's (MOH) and the National Security Council's (NSC) social media platforms and official government websites.
- The MOH and NSC social media platforms, in particular, were the most trusted source of information on COVID-19 messages.
- According to previous studies, participants who emphasized government-provided information were more receptive to vaccination (Lazarus et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2020).

### Message Fatigue



- Over half of the participants reported experiencing message fatigue due to overexposure and redundancy. They believed COVID-19 messages were repeated and overlapping, and between 30% and 90% of responses indicated perceived overexposure to COVID-19-related messages.
- Redundancy responses range from 50% to 70%, with the majority believing that COVID-19 messages are predictive, sound identical, repetitious and do not deliver the most up-to-date information. However, responses to another subscale of message fatigue, exhaustion and tedium, indicate that participants are not fatigued.
- Several factors could explain the findings, particularly in risk communication, which could influence people's responses to health messages provided during the COVID-19 pandemic (So & Popova, 2018).
- Gender, type of occupation, marital status, and race all show a significant difference in message fatigue score. The ability to self-regulate might be a plausible reason for these findings. The auto-regulation skills of individuals differ in their ability to control their behaviour, according to a systematic review (Kwasnicka et al., 2016).

## Discussion

### Preventive Behaviour



- Majority of participants adhere to the SOP guidelines. Additionally, participants took measures by avoiding contact with others who were experiencing symptoms.
- However, physical distancing, staying at home, and regularly washing hands were less popular. In terms of avoiding the 3C's, only about half of the participants consistently avoided crowded places, close-contact settings, and confined close areas.
- This study also revealed that participants who experienced more message fatigue have a reduced likelihood of adhering to COVID-19 preventive behaviours.
- Preventive behaviour's effectiveness during a pandemic may be influenced by an individual's attitude toward the behaviour, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control (Mao et al., 2021).

### Vaccination Intent



- Majority of participants reported a willingness to be vaccinated (86.0%). However, a substantial minority of participants (14.0%) voiced concerns and uncertainty.
- Previous studies in Malaysia indicate that the intention to vaccinate against COVID-19 is 83.3% (Syed Alwi et al., 2021) and 64.5% (Mohamed et al., 2021).
- In order to foster public trust in vaccines, it is essential to improve vaccine literacy, transparency, evidence-based policy, and clear, accurate communication to facilitate the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine (Bono et al., 2021).



## Recommendation



### Develop and produce COVID-19-related health messages based on:

- Clear and understandable and current information.
- Listen to public concern, be socially and culturally sensitive, and communicate via creative and innovative communication channels.
- Targeted at segmented groups, especially regarding perceived redundancy and overexposure.

*Government should continue their efforts to communicate with the public about the pandemic, as well as employ approaches for improved communication engagement with the public via traditional media and social media sources.*

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