

Suggestions to incentivize the Indian youth to take the vaccine; A systematic review of vaccination policies in different countries.

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ABSTRACT

This article is a systematic review of reasons the Indian community exhibits reluctance towards taking the COVID-19 vaccination, critically analyses vaccination policies in the USA, Europe, and Asia. A survey with 2500+ participants to discern the youthful opinion and offers credible suggestions that will help the Indian government incentivize youth to take the COVID-19 vaccination.

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I. DATA AND ANALYSIS

India adopted a swift approach to vaccinating its citizens and is set to reach the 100 crore vaccination mark in October. Although vaccinations for ages 18 and up have long since opened, it has not yet started vaccinating individuals under the age of 18. Despite efforts to make vaccinations a cheap and quick process, sections of society hesitate from signing up to take the vaccine to remain.

People coming from rural communities lack access to the internet and other sources where they can garner information about the COVID-19 vaccination. Their main source of information is through word of mouth; as one is subjected to misinformation they will quickly spread this information like wildfire. Since they do not have access to sources of information or even if they do choose to disregard them misconceptions spread. Women in rural communities believe that it can lead to a stop in their menstrual cycle and possibly even cause them infertility and both men and women resist because of caste reasons emphasising that their caste has high immunity and getting the vaccine would be a sign of weakness. They also lack incentives to get the vaccine as the process is tedious, from registering to waiting at the centre site and then suffering possible side effects for a few days.

Next are members who come from an extremely stigmatized and marginalized community in India; those who identify as transgender, often referred to as "Hijras". They might be willing to take the vaccine but the discrimination they face while going to get it is something that often turns them away. There is 4.87 lakh (487,000) transgender individuals in India. But according to recent government data, only 25,468 (5.22 percent) individuals have been vaccinated. This is because of 3 main reasons, lack of documentation like Aadhar (a big problem while trying to document a change in identity), history of trauma with healthcare, having had bad experiences with doctors refusing to offer care, and being turned away just because of their identity and people not wanting to get vaccinated with members of the transgender community because they do not want to be around them or consider them untouchable.

Lastly, the one community which does not face any of these barriers; educated with easy access to the vaccine and to make up for sick days because of it are the middle and upper class of Indian society. One would expect no hesitation from them however that is not the case. They often do not have enough facts or data related to the vaccine and get all their facts mostly from unreliable sources of social media including Whatsapp, Meta (Facebook), etc They also come up with theories regarding it being a "Big Pharma Conspiracy" and have blatant misconceptions like "we are immune because India is extremely dirty". It is shocking to think that these are people who have been educated and work in various sectors of society.

This article aims to examine policies employed by other governments to encourage vaccinations and analyze how India can incentivize certain communities to get vaccinated in similar fashions.

1.1 Celebrity Involvement (Focused on Europe, Russia, and The United States)

Olivia Rodrigo, a famous American singer, and actress met with President Biden and Dr. Anthony Fauci at the White House as part of a campaign to convince young Americans that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is "good 4 u." The 18-year-old singer spoke to the White House press corps from the podium inside the briefing room, wearing a pink, white, and black tweed jacket and matching mini-skirt, which she teamed with a pair of white platform pumps. "Hi," she began. "I am beyond honored and humbled to be here today to help spread the message about the importance of youth vaccinations." Encouraging Americans to get vaccinated, Rodrigo added that she was "happy to help lend her support to this important initiative." Moreover, "It's important to have conversations with friends and family members encouraging all communities to get vaccinated and get to a vaccination site, which you can do more easily than ever before, given how many sites we have, and how easy it is to find them at vaccines.gov," she exclaimed before leaving the briefing room.

Another example of celebrities supporting vaccinations comes from Sir Elton John and Sir Michael Caine, who star in a National Health Security (NHS) of England ad. Encouraging people to obtain the coronavirus vaccine. The advertisement was shot in the style of an audition video, with John auditioning for the lead role in a public health campaign. The director instructs the singer-songwriter to be "a little less showbiz" at first, and then "a little more showbiz" afterward. After failing to impress, John attempts an impression of Caine and breaks out into his 1983 hit song "I'm Still Standing." The ad ends with Caine, the person who successfully lands the role. After receiving the vaccine, the actor sits in a chair and informs viewers that it "didn't hurt" - adding his famous line, "Not many people know that." Both celebrities are in the age categories for whom the vaccine has been recommended, John is 73 years old and Caine is 87 years old. The NHS announced in the earlier weeks of October that anyone aged 70 and up who has not yet been vaccinated against coronavirus should come forward to be protected.

When Russia's domestic Covid-19 immunization program hit a snag in early March, notable tech and publishing entrepreneur Ilya Krasilschik resorted to social media to urge his followers to obtain their coronavirus vaccinations. In a widely shared Facebook post, Krasilschik said, "We are living through a national catastrophe." "Get yourself vaccinated." Krasilschik is one of the few Russian celebrities to publicly support the country's first-in-the-world coronavirus vaccine, which has received a lukewarm reaction and subdued promotion among vaccine-skeptic Russians' despite international hype. Experts fear that a belated public relations assault, which is in the works to sell Sputnik V at home, may not be enough to overcome deeply established skepticism in one of the only countries where Covid jabs are freely available.

II. ANALYSIS OF POLICIES IN LATVIA AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

2.1 Monetary incentives

Currently, to encourage vaccination among senior citizens, the government has said that for every winter month, vaccinated seniors will receive 20 euros for their electricity bill.

This points to monetary incentives; by giving 20 euros to pay a bill for a necessity like electricity, not only is the government successfully incentivizing elders to take the vaccine but also making sure that the money is put to good use. To incentivize the youth, the government could partner with large stores like Adidas and Nike to give the youth a discount/voucher once they have shown that they have been vaccinated. Even a 5 percent discount could have an impact on the youth mindset.

2.2 COVID pass

Another incentive for getting vaccinated is a COVID pass, which is an electronic or printed pass, which vaccinated citizens receive and can use to be able to attend specific events or enter specific areas, which unvaccinated people cannot. A considerable portion of Latvia's population is Russian or speaks Russian. In order to improve poor vaccination rates, Latvia's health minister said that the government would increase a Russian-language communication campaign on vaccine safety. This is attributable mostly to the dissemination of "vaccine misinformation" in Russian-language media, as well as more widespread "anti-vax propaganda." "The Latvian government has had multiple unsuccessful vaccination campaigns, most of which have either been met by a negative reaction from the public or have failed to capture attention altogether. One example of such a campaign was the display of weird-looking posters throughout the country, that the government thought would reach a large audience and motivate them to get vaccinated. These posters did quite the opposite and made some people think that vaccination may not be necessary at all.

In India when one vote they usually mark their nail with some nail polish/a marker to symbolize that they cannot vote again, however, this can be an effective strategy when it comes to vaccinations through a marker showing that a person has gotten vaccinated. It may also encourage others to get vaccinated to feel part of the community. Covid passes can be applied to clubs for the youth; if they would not be allowed to enter restaurants, sports arenas, and other places they go to socialize then this would incentivize them again to take the vaccine.

2.3 Task Force/Agency

The government also founded an agency dedicated specifically to the task of encouraging vaccination and making sure that citizens get vaccinated. They are responsible for all things related to vaccinations, from advertisements, logistics, or deciding how the vaccination process will take place. One reason that the agency was so disliked was the fact that the people working in the agency were given far, far larger salaries than the average Latvian citizen. This agency basically had the opposite effect on society, because people were mad that taxpayer money was spent on something like this and that no real results were coming out of the agency. We can't completely dismiss them because they did contribute to the vaccination campaign, especially in terms of organizing emphasizing locations and distributions of vaccines, but it is clear that overall it was unsuccessful.

For the battle against COVID-19, the European Union-funded a fight/recovery plan against the virus, where each EU country, including Latvia, got a substantial amount of money and the process of the spending of this money by the government specifically wasn't transparent. The government's handling of EU funds and failure to communicate effectively with the population has left people angry and the thought of corruption is slowly growing. Billions of dollars were given to the healthcare system, but it's not clear what was done with that money. The healthcare system is still on the verge of collapse and in the past year, only 120 extra hospital beds have been made for COVID-19 recovery processes. The government has not been able to explain what has happened to the funds. Neither the health minister nor the prime minister has made any attempt to explain where this money has gone and has continued to ignore this question. If the government were to be more transparent in their spending of the money, it is likely that not only would we see a higher vaccination rate, because of a better healthcare system but also because citizens would have more trust in the government.

III. ANALYSIS OF POLICIES IN SINGAPORE.

3.1 Employer incentives.

The most prominent incentive is employers giving benefits to vaccinated employees. Employers wanted to help those suffering the side effects of vaccines and gave them paid bonuses as incentives to get vaccinated. They also offered cash bonuses, including dinner vouchers, additional training programs, and other non-cash gifts to stimulate vaccination. Furthermore, The Minmed Group has launched an online platform - iamvaccinated.sg - where local businesses can offer discounts and promotions to those who have received their vaccines.

Even India can adopt this. Employers can give employees days off to recover from the side effects of the job, offer them discounts and other benefits that will make it hard for them to say no to getting it.

3.2 Lottery draws

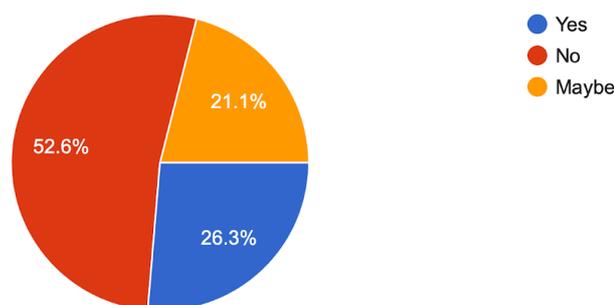
The Hong Kong authorities have also dangled a vaccine lottery featuring a new flat worth HK\$10.8 million (S\$1.84 million), which has reportedly led to a surge in vaccine bookings since the lottery was announced on May 28, 2021.

India can also enter participants into a lottery, which will make all those not getting vaccinated feel excluded and feel like they are losing out on an opportunity at winning a lot of money.

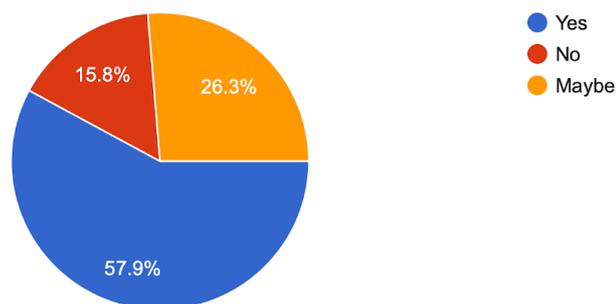
Suggestions as to how we can get Indian youth to take the vaccine:

We conducted a survey that investigated reasons for vaccine hesitancy amongst Indian youth and what they think will be effective in incentivizing them to take the COVID-19 vaccine. We surveyed 2500+ youth and compiled responses.

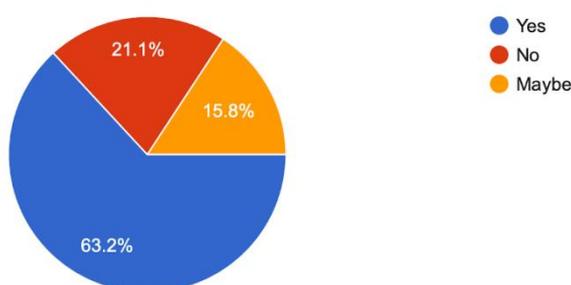
Q1. Do you know a lot about the COVID-19 vaccine?



Q2. Do you think there is misinformation about the vaccine in India?



Q3. Will you take the vaccine when it comes out in India?



Q4. Why will you take the vaccine? (Ex: parents, news, etc)

A few responses received were:

“Parents and generally wanting to be protected from the virus. It's very deadly. I also have has relatives who have it and say it's very bad”

“I will take the vaccine because I want to stay protected against the virus and ensure that I do not get infected. I also want to take the vaccine for the safety of others”

Q5. What do you think are some effective strategies to incentivize youth to get the vaccine in India?

Approximately 50% talked about campaigns to spread information, 20% talked about celebrity involvement and others talked about a host of different strategies that we have tried to include in our suggestions.

Using these results and data we've curated a host of suggestions that the Indian government can employ to encourage vaccination.

Suggestions include:

Firstly, it is necessary to end any apprehensive, underlying thoughts that adolescents may have about the vaccine. It is essential for them to clear any doubts and be absolutely certain of their decision, in order to prevent any additional stress that may be linked to their uncertainty. As well as to ensure that the people surrounding them are not impacted by their possible adverse reactions to the vaccine. Confusions around the vaccine often stem from social media myths, and as teenagers are a prominent part of social media, we can use this same method to bring facts and information from credible sources into the light. This can be done through social media campaigns, webinars, challenges, and increased exposure from the media.

Just as the US government incentivized vaccinations among its population through celebrities such as Olivia Rodrigo, the UK through Elton John, and Michael Caine, India can use the youth's dependency on celebrities and public figures to bring more exposure to the benefits of vaccinations. Active involvement of local influencers, religious leaders, traditional healers, local NGOs, local doctors, Panchayat heads, many others, which may also encourage vaccine uptake. These leaders can be made to take the vaccines in open public sessions to spread the message regarding their safety. Furthermore, in order for this scheme to gain more traction, the government can impose compulsory 5-10 minute school programs that inform students about the vaccines. This ensures a clear and concise way of transferring credible information to students, which they can then pass on to their families.

Broader policies beyond raising awareness, such as monetary incentives and the implementation of COVID passes may also be efficient in increasing the vaccination rate among adolescents. The Indian

government may follow Latvia's example by providing an affordable financial fee for vaccinated individuals and making places frequented by teenagers COVID-pass exclusive. This can be done through the introduction of a card that confirms whether an individual has been vaccinated, which imposes a sense of urgency on the youth; COVID-passes also help limit COVID rates by extension, due to the decreased likelihood of a vaccinated person being affected by the virus.

In order to spread awareness to local rural communities, loudspeakers can be employed that will dispel myths amongst villagers, raising awareness about the benefits of the vaccine and the pursuit of getting a chance at a lottery would incentivize them even further to look into getting the vaccine. With villagers the most important thing would be to establish a connection, curating a network of volunteers that will not only talk to them about the vaccine, help them register but also drive them to and from the vaccine centers while ensuring that they have all the necessary resources to take care of themselves after they're vaccinated. Posters can be designed to appeal to the younger generation that will not only get the vaccine themselves but also encourage their elders to take it.

Lastly, in order to support the transgender community, make sure any negative comments made are addressed and stopped. Vaccine sites should make sure that signs that are clearly visible advocate respectful behavior to all individuals. Training of employees and volunteers regarding the vaccination process of individuals of the transgender community is done thoroughly.

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