

THE NUDGED-BELIEF: TRIGGER TO PREVENTIVE SBCC ACTION AGAINST COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect humanity incessantly. Even though, vaccine science has been able to lower the curve, yet people's behaviour is far from desired. To address this gap a strategic SBCC strategy is needed to provide a blueprint of manoeuvres needed to motivate individuals to contemplate, prepare, act and maintain preventive behaviours. The current research, carried out with urban adults in Delhi-NCR explored the synergistic approach "Nudged-belief", combination of Health Belief Model and Nudge theory for behaviour change actions. Research results indicated that majority of the participants were well aware of the preventive actions to be taken. Nearly hundred percent of them confirmed that when nudged to take the action, there are high chances they would go for it. Approximately 90% of them confirmed using a sanitizer, if placed at their building entry; wearing mask before going out, if kept handy or following social distancing norms, if a circle was drawn at grocery store. Participants believed that when visibility of preventive actions to be taken is increased, they would follow them. Thus, study reaffirms the potential of nudging in behaviour change. The study recommends innovative-nudging and creative-communication to motivate people to adopt preventive actions, thereby managing the pandemic's destructive mode with science of human behaviour.

Keywords : *Preventive action, Corona, SBCC, Health Belief, Nudge, Innovative nudging, Nudged-Belief*

INTRODUCTION

According to World Health Organisation (2020), Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease that is spread by the lately discovered, novel coronavirus. As per WHO (2020), 'the best way to prevent and slow down transmission is be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease, its causes and how it spreads'. It has been suggested by WHO to indulge in frequent hand washing or to use an alcohol based sanitizer frequently and avoiding to touch your face for as long as

possible. CDC (2020), reiterates, 'Everyone should wear a mask in public settings and when around people who don't live in your household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain'. Despite the preventive actions in place and being advocated extensively, the entire world has been hit by the virus and is recovering at its own pace today.

As the world has witnessed lately appropriate vaccinations to alter the Covid 19 trajectory, but still prevention practices and remedial actions have to be relied upon for guarding off

the virus. Public behaviour that is compliant with WHO guidance has been recognized as a critical element in reducing virus transmission (UNDP, 2020).

India & Covid 19:

As a country that started really smooth and even appreciated globally for its efforts to contain the virus, ironically today, it is one of the nations who has submitted to the virus crash. As per The Times of India (September, 10, 2020), India's Covid tally rose to over 44 lakhs as the country registered 95,735 cases, inching closer to the grim reality of recording one lakh fresh cases in a day during the second wave. Today the nation stands in awe of yet another variant that may manifest as the fourth wave. With majority of the residents vaccinated or have gained herd immunity, Covid appropriate behaviours certainly cannot be taken lightly yet. Given the various socio-economic factors, such as increased number of migrants, unemployment, a dipping economy coupled with lack of awareness, the recovery path seems an arduous game for the country. A study carried out in Kerala in India by Jose et al (2020), found that more than ninety percent of the participants followed the recommendations by government to combat COVID 19, and more than half of them updated themselves about COVID 19 several times a day.

Gap between awareness & actions

The problem that the current pandemic behests is that despite awareness of actions to be taken, regrettably actions are being threatened. To address this gap what is needed is a dedicated and strategic SBCC strategy that can provide a blueprint of manoeuvres needed to motivate one to contemplate, prepare, act and maintain his/her preventive behaviours against Covid-19.

There is a need to focus on human behaviour and try and understand the heuristics and biases involved in following the desired behavioural actions. Bavel et al (2020), further recommend that insights from the social and behavioural sciences can be used to help align human behaviour with the recommendations of epidemiologists and public health experts.

Theoretical Framework:

The study proposes here, something that can work, which is a combination of the Health Belief Model and the Nudge theory. The synergistic approach the "Nudged-belief" can thrive the pandemic. Each one of us being aware of the susceptibility, the severity and the preventive actions for Covid-19 and the perceived barriers in taking up those actions, we all need cues to act; and a nudge can be a crucial cue to action prompting us to deem the "Nudged-belief" as imperative (See figure 1).

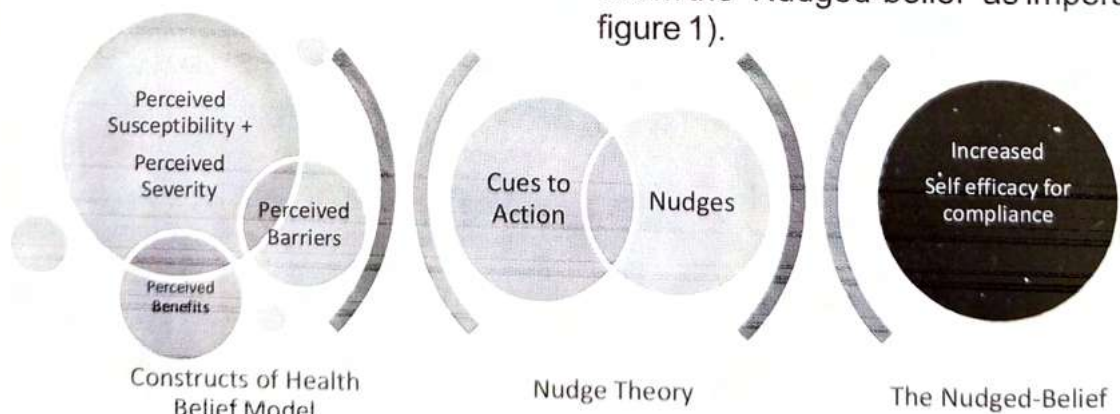


Figure 1 : Conceptual framework of the Study

Health Belief Model

Health Belief Model (HBM) theorizes six constructs predict health behavior (Champion & Skinner, 2008). Specifically, the model posits that people will take action to avert an ailment, if they regard themselves as susceptible to it (perceived susceptibility), if they deem that it could have serious consequences (perceived severity). Given the perceived susceptibility and perceived severity, if it is believed that a specific action can lead them to a reduced susceptibility and severity, and better outcomes (perceived benefits), then chances are the actions are encouraged, yet to continue with the actions, certain obstacles may be encountered (perceived barriers). A study done by Jose et al (2020) in Kerala state of India found that perceived susceptibility to be infected by the Corona Virus was more in two third of the respondents, whereas, perceived severity was less in forty four percent of the respondents and 55.7% felt that if infected it would be severe for them.

An advertisement of preventive behaviour, a talk by a health care provider, a poster or any media could then act as cue to the action that may motivate the person to take the desired preventive action. For instance, exposure to a campaign on H1N1 vaccine was positively related to vaccination behaviour in a study done by Jones, et al (2010).

As per Raamkumar, Tan & Wee (2020), the constructs of the HBM will be influenced by the interaction of information from news and media reports, government policy actions, and feedback from the public throughout the course of the outbreak. These act as cues to action.

The Nudge Theory

A nudge increases one's efficiency by making the desired action more approachable,

doable and simpler. Why a nudge? It is important to consider the use of nudges in the response strategies to assure prompt and sustained preventive action. The UK government's strategy is influenced by nudge theory, pioneered by the behavioural economist Richard Thaler and political scientist Cass Sunstein, which proposes behavioural "nudges": wash your hands, don't touch your face, don't shake hands with others, stay at home if you feel ill, and self-isolate if you have a continuous cough (Yates, 2020). A research carried out by Caris, M. in Netherlands has found that creative posters acting as nudges increased the use of an alcohol-based hand rub when the posters were shown next to dispensers (Green, 2020). Availability of a sanitizer dispenser at the apartment entry is a nudge, which will trigger you to sanitize your hands. Nudges that incite social distancing might include having circle marked on the ground outside/around/ near the grocery stores, markets etc., or having a painting of a six-foot ruler at the entrances of markets will remind the community members to keep safe distance from others. Within India, the Prime Minister (PM) frequently nudged the nation on staying at home, adhering to lockdown rules, improving immunity through yoga and Ayurveda and contributing to the PM-CARES fund (Debnath & Bardhan, 2020).

However, it must be realised that nudges activate good intentions, but people find it hard to follow through because of all the other influences on their behaviour that crowd out nudges on this occasion (Rigby, S., 2020). It is here when focus has to be on one's self efficacy against the background of his/her perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits and barriers, hence the theory of a Nudged-belief is recommended; where a nudge like a

cue to action can make an individual enhance his self-efficacy to comply with the desired action. According to the research published by Rigby (2020), while nudges increased respondents' intention to comply with guidelines to tackle COVID-19, they did not have the expected result of actually changing their behaviour.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Thus, against the background of understanding if the concept of a 'Nudged-Belief', a fusion of the Nudge theory and the Health Belief Model, can actually work in the present case of the pandemic and drive an individual to abide by the desired behaviour, the current research was thought of. With the aim to understand people's perception about susceptibility and awareness about the pandemic, the researchers also endeavored to understand if a nudge could trigger them to take the desired preventive action. The Google form listed a series of nudges and the accompanying desired behaviours and tried to seek the perception of the respondents on

their self-efficacy to perform the desired behaviour. Primarily the study was carried out with 178 urban adults of India to know their perception about if a given nudge can accelerate a desired preventive behaviour.

Data Analysis

The frequencies and percentages were analysed to comprehensively arrive at deducing the major proposition of the efficacy of the 'Nudged-Belief' in the prevention against Covid 19. Quantitative analysis was done for this study to understand the responses to various nudges related to Covid-appropriate behaviours.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The detailed findings are reported below.

Demographic Profile of the respondents

Since the current research targeted the adult population of India, hundred percent of the respondents were above 18 years of age. Nearly one fourth of them were in the age bracket of 18-25 years and 26-35 years respectively; whilst nearly 30% belonged to the age bracket of 36-45 years and a little

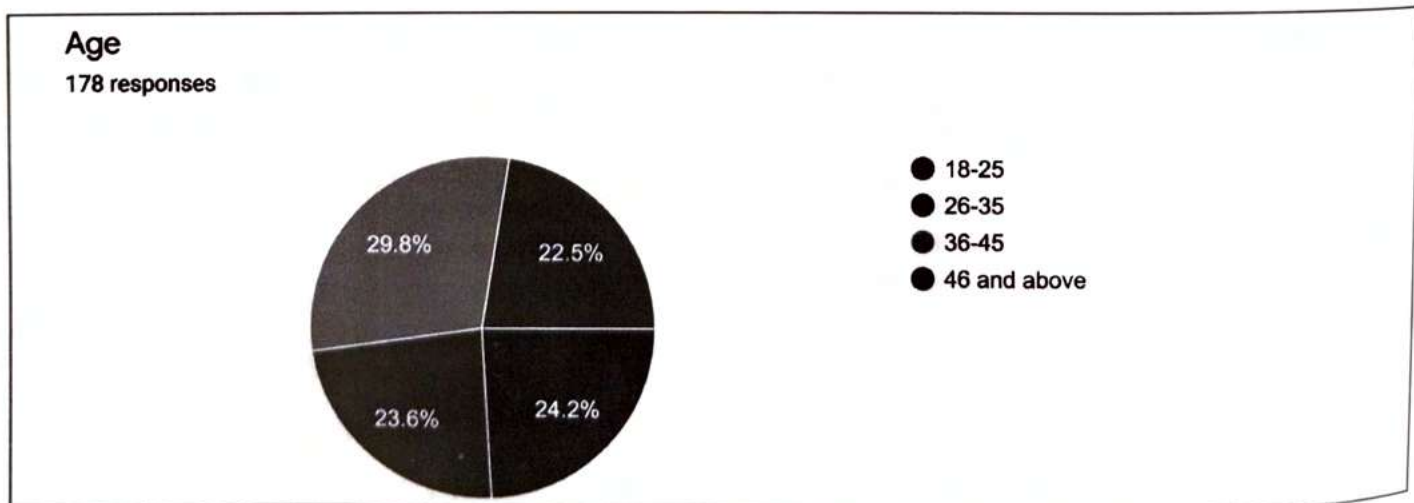


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

more than 20% were above 46 years of age (See figure 2). Hence a mixed set of sample was reached out to have a holistic view of their self-efficacy compliance when nudged for a specific behaviour.

Majority of the respondents were females i.e.

nearly eighty three percent, whilst the remaining were males.

Majority of the participants, i.e. eighty percent of them resided in Delhi/NCR. Just about one fifth of the respondents belonged to other parts of India. (See figure 3).

Are you currently a resident of Delhi/NCR?

178 responses

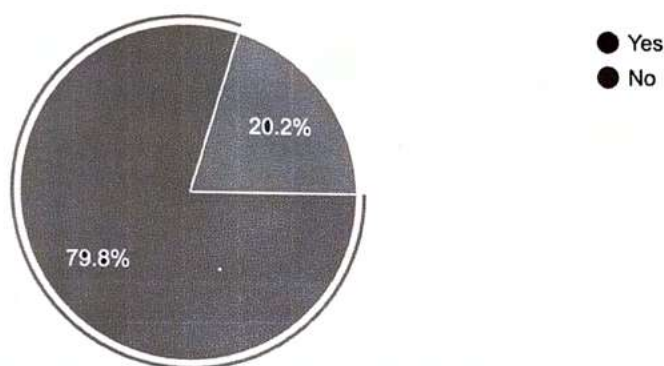


Figure 3 : Distribution of respondents by region

Perceived Susceptibility and Awareness of Preventive Behaviours pertaining to Covid 19:

When inquired if the respondents perceive themselves as susceptible to getting infected

from the virus almost cent percent of them agreed and confirmed, that anyone could succumb to the virus.

Nearly hundred percent of the responders affirmed that they were aware of the preventive behaviours against Covid-19.

Are you aware about the preventive behaviours against Covid-19

178 responses

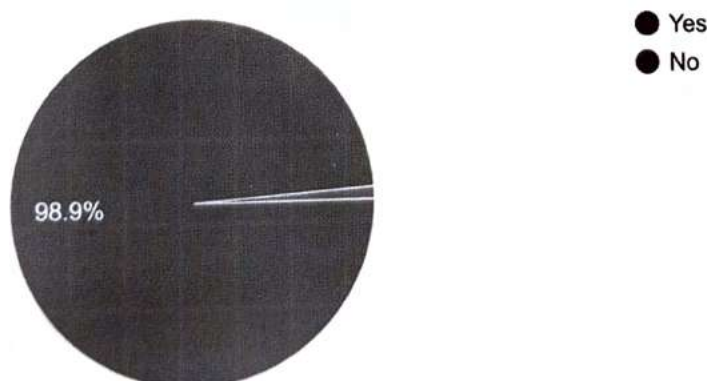


Figure 4 : Awareness about preventive behaviours against Covid 19

More than ninety percent of the respondents were aware of the preventive behaviours such as frequent handwashing, wearing a mask, social distancing, eating healthy and immunity enhancing diet.

A few respondents also reiterated maintaining hygienic environment at home, doing Yoga and Pranayam, exercising, being sensitive towards one's body temperature and staying at home for as long as possible as some of the preventive behaviours against Covid 19.

Nudges for Preventive behaviour:

Interestingly, majority of the respondents affirmed going for the preventive behaviour when encountered with a nudge to follow that

behaviour. The respondents were prodded with nudges that were doable, easy and cheap to avoid and tried to look at their compliance self-efficacy through their responses. The findings under this section are indeed encouraging and certainly advocate the theorem of the 'Nudged-Belief'. Listed below are compliance responses of the respondents when nudged to do a particular behaviour.

- Nearly ninety percent of the respondents confirmed that they would bother to use a sanitizer, if they see a sanitizer dispenser when they enter from outside to their apartment/house building (See figure 5).

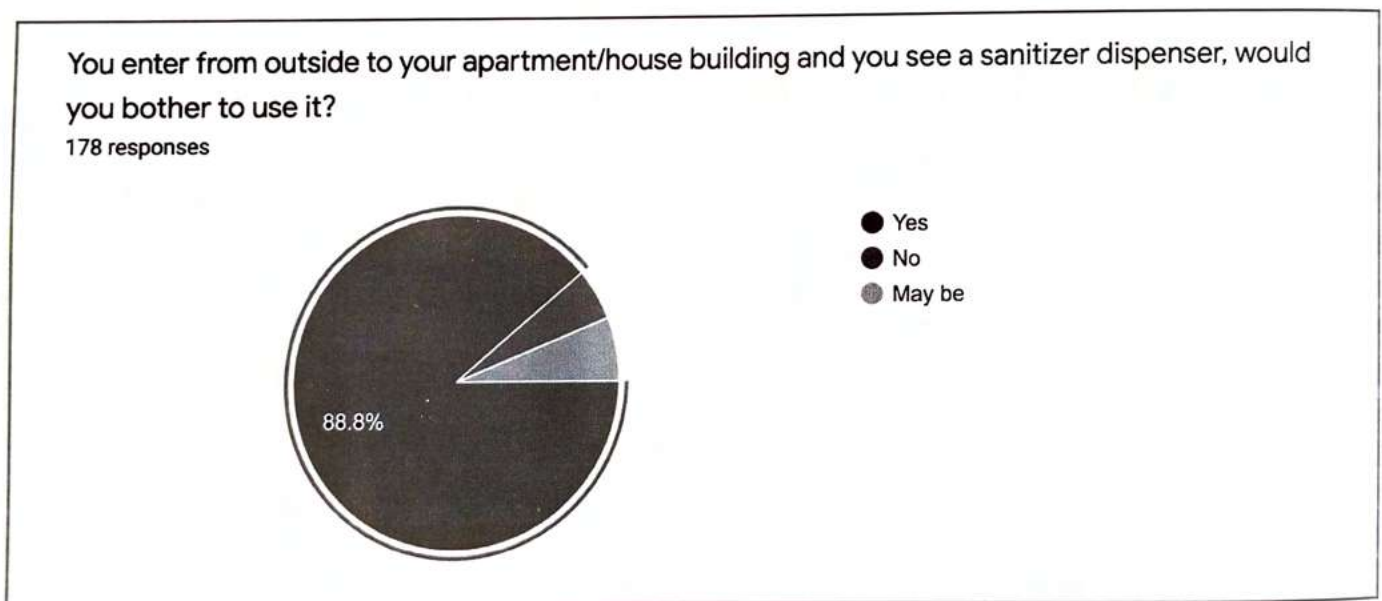


Figure 5: Compliance to use a Sanitizer if seen at the apartment entry

- Similarly, 93% of the respondents also confirmed that if a sanitizer bottle is kept at the main door or entry of the house, they would stop to sanitize their hands the moment they enter their house from outside (See figure 6).

You keep a sanitizer bottle at the main door of the house. The moment you enter from outside you sanitize your hands.

178 responses

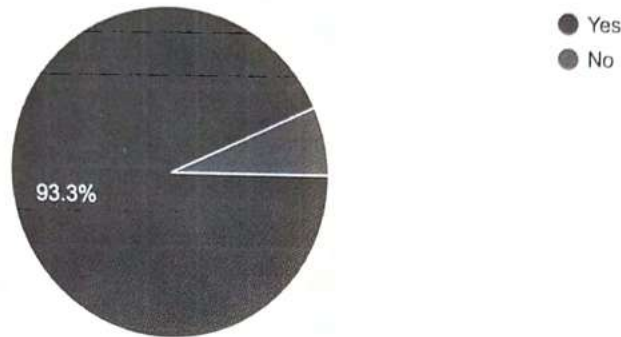


Figure 6: Compliance to use sanitizer if kept at house entrance

- An overwhelming 97% of the respondents confirmed that if they would keep their masks handy at the exit/entry of the house, they would not forget to wear them when they have to venture out

You hang/keep your mask handy so that when you have to venture out, you do not forget to wear it.

178 responses

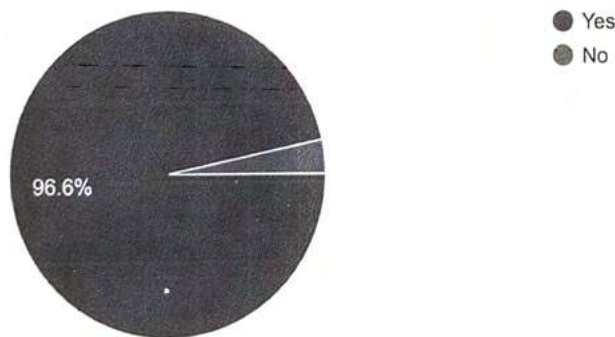


Figure 7: Compliance to wear a mask if kept handy

- If a family member reminds one of washing their hands, slightly more than one fourth of the respondents agreed to the reminders and washed their hands, whilst a little less than half of them asserted that if was the other way round where they were giving constant reminders to their family members to wash their hands (See figure 8). In either case reminders seem to be working in both cases and leading to increased hand washing by individuals within a household.

A family member reminds you to wash your hands and you wash your hands.

178 responses



Figure 8 : Compliance to hand washing when reminded

- Almost cent percent of the respondents agreed that they would follow social distancing norms, if they saw circles drawn at distance at a grocery store

(See figure 9). A circle drawn was acting as a nudge and motivated the respondents to maintain the requisite distance.

You go to a grocery store, and see a circle drawn on the ground to maintain social distance. You go ahead and maintain the distance.

178 responses

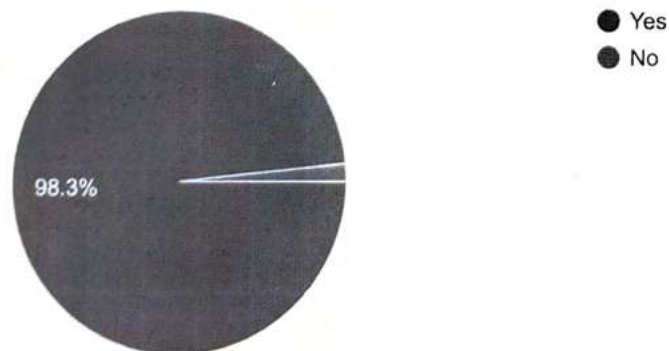


Figure 9 : Compliance to follow social distancing, if a circle of physical distancing is seen at a grocery store

- An encouraging 97% also agreed that when hiring a cab or using a public elevator, if they happen to read the

safety manual with respect to the do's and the don'ts for Covid-19 prevention, they would be more cautious (See figure 10).

You are in a hired cab/ a public elevator and happen to read about the do's and don'ts in the safety manual. You become more cautious.

178 responses

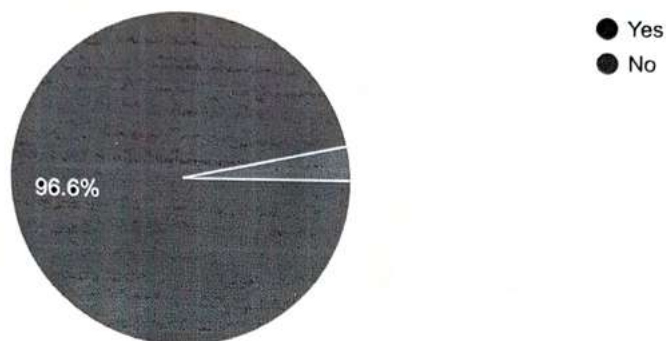


Figure 10 : Compliance to be cautious in a cab/elevator, if happen to read a safety manual

- Aarogya Setu is a mobile application developed by the Government of India to connect essential health services with the people of India in combined fight against COVID-19. (App description as on Play Store). It was interesting to learn that 97% of the

respondents confirmed that if their Arogya Setu App showed close to 50 cases within a 1kilometer radius, they would avoid going out, unless absolutely necessary (See figure 11). Thus, it can be said that increased cases on the app can nudge the respondents to stay indoors.

Your Arogya Setu App clearly indicates close to 50 cases within the 1 km radius, and you had to venture out. You:

178 responses

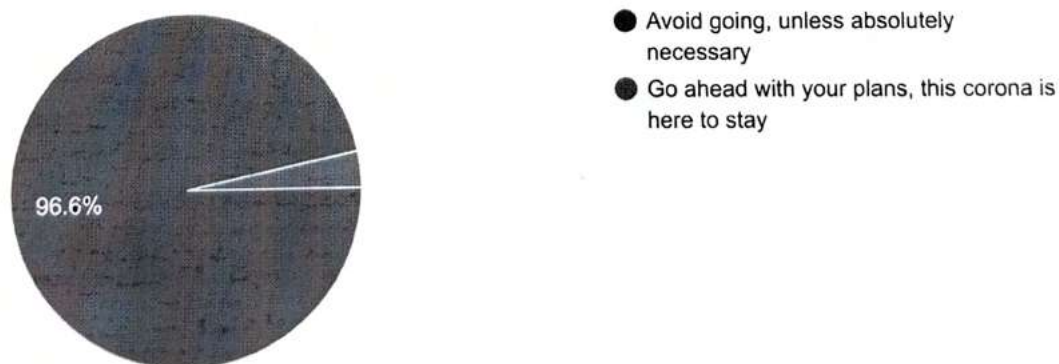


Figure 11: Compliance to stay indoors, if Arogya Setu App indicates high number of cases

- A feared nudge of seeing people around walking freely without masks would also motivate the respondents to ensure that

they are at least wearing theirs'. Almost 99% of the respondents confirmed to this (See figure 12).

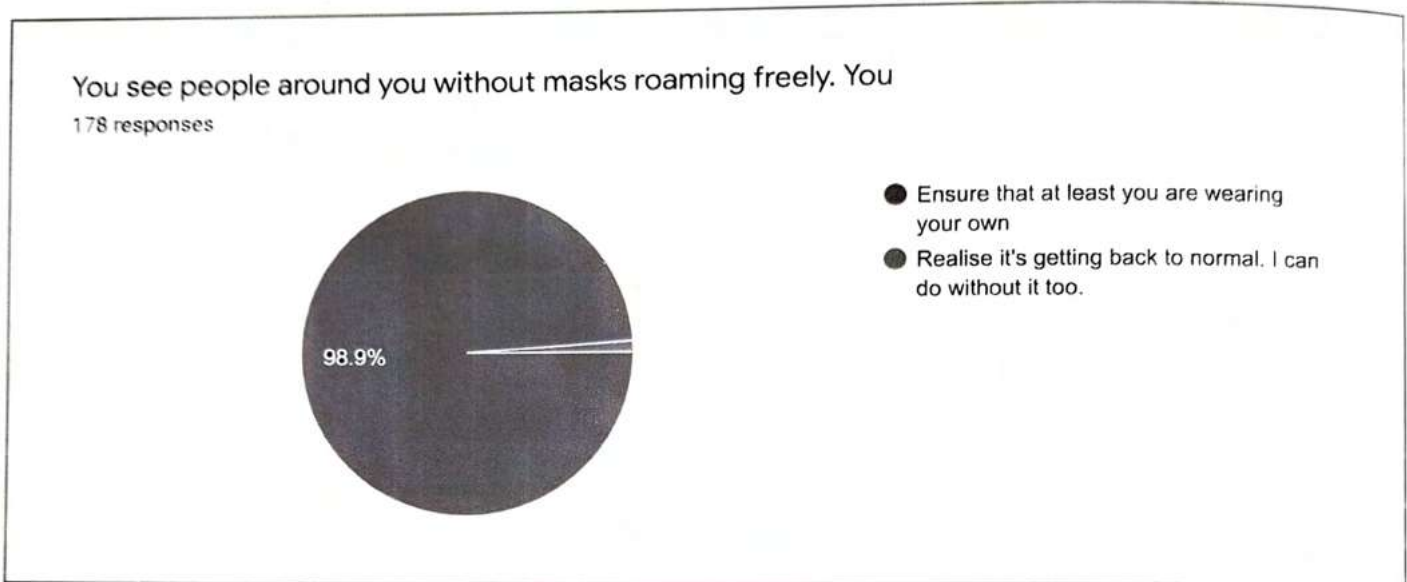


Figure 12 : Compliance to wear a mask, if fearful of seeing others without one

- Since the respondents are well aware about preventing any sort of contact with people or exchange of things/items, they ensured that all items are delivered at home and hence almost 60 percent specifically for cashless transaction only. A little less than one third of them mentioned avoiding cash transactions as long as it's not an urgency. For the remaining ten percent, going cashless was not possible at all. Hence compliance to go for cashless transactions seem to be higher, if eased options of e-wallets and availability of multiple card acceptance was indicated by the shopkeepers.

The list above clearly indicates that one will try to comply with a behaviour if a

nudge is easily visible and doable; thus, leading to a compounding effect of one's self efficacy for compliance of desired preventive actions against Covid-19.

Sustaining the 'Nudged Belief'

It is important that a nudge continues to poke an individual to abide by the desired action. Afterall, it is only then that the compliance self-efficacy shall multiply. For that, a nudged message must come from a reliable source. Almost cent percent of the respondents confirmed to practicing preventive behaviours, when information or prevention advisory from reliable sources like WHO, Ministry of Health etc. was received (See figure 13). This is specifically relevant, given the interspersed Covid-19 pandemic with an infodemic.

You get information or prevention advisory from reliable sources like WHO, Ministry of Health etc.
You read them and try to practice those behaviours.

178 responses

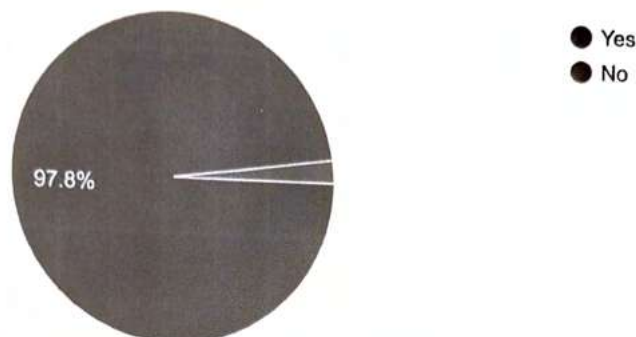


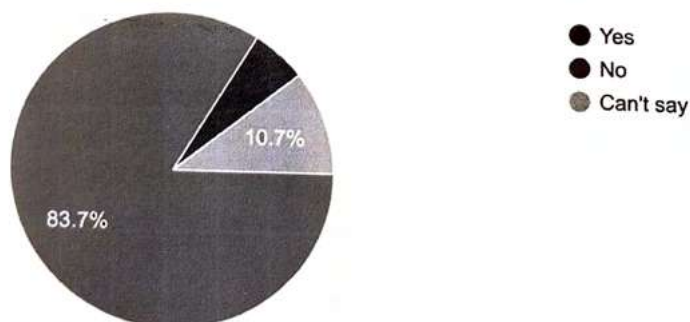
Figure 13: Compliance to preventive behaviours and reliability of information

Further, approximately 84% of the respondents confirmed that repeated visibility of messages around them nudged them or motivated them to adopt preventive

behaviours against Covid-19 (See Figure 14). When messages are reinforced again and again, they like a cue to action, nudge you to take the required preventive action.

Do you think repeated visibility of messages around you nudge you or motivate you to adopt preventive behaviours against Covid-19?

178 responses



CONCLUSION

The findings of the current research clearly indicate the potential of nudging to believe into taking the preventive action, being well aware of one's susceptibility and the actions that are to be undertaken. Nudges are nothing but a push and a reminder to do what we ought to do. The human mind, even though is well aware of what needs to be done, still succumbs to heuristics and biases that may lead a person to ignore the desired

behaviour. It is here that a nudge can do the needful. In all the cases of nudge and respective compliance behaviour it was observed that the compliance rate was almost over ninety percent for majority of the preventive behaviours. Nudges certainly act as a cue to action, increasing one's self-efficacy to comply with the desired behaviour. The research thus recommends, innovative nudging and creative communication to motivate people to take preventive actions, as this pandemic's destructive mode has to

be managed with science of human behaviour.

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