

“How can we communicate more effectively to young people that although, as individuals, they are not at significant risk from Covid, they are a major route of potential infection, danger and death for their parents and grandparents?”



Living in a digital age has created many problems in this modern-day society. With the juxtaposition between the fake news spread on media sites and the real-life implications of young peoples' actions on families' and doctors' lives, it can be easy to blame the spreading of this virus on young people. The dissonance between the government and the youth only lowers the impact of the advice given to this population. However, the focus should be guiding these developing minds to be more empathetic and understanding of others, though they may not be affected by this virus first-hand.

Living through this pandemic can be difficult as a young person who has been living with shielding family members with underlying health conditions. It can feel like a weight of responsibility on their shoulders when they leave the house to go to school. Sanitiser becomes their travel companion, while their mask becomes their shield. Seeing other young people, who underestimate the harm of this virus, can feel saddening or frustrating. On one hand, the will for young people to socialise and make the most of their years in school is understandable, but on the other hand, many face the fears of losing the ones they care about most; it is a fear so palpable that even stepping outside makes them anxious. Having this personal insight into the life of a shielding family gives these people a unique vantage point on spreading awareness of this pandemic, through understanding both sides of the story. Therefore, one way to reach young people is for others to speak openly about their stories. This is not limited to just shielding families, but a spectrum of different perspectives, such as key workers and other age groups. Few people enjoy being told what to do, so one way to make young people understand the consequences of careless or risky behaviour in the pandemic is through this medium of communication. By being able to both empathise and educate, changes can be done towards the way young people look at this pandemic and their role in protecting society.

Research reveals that young people are more apathetic towards the government/higher levels of authority; they feel disconnected from politics and leaders due to a lack of influence on decisions themselves. This disconnect between the two groups has also led to the youth seeking other means of expressing their views, such as protest groups, as they feel there is a lack of options. Further frustration forms, as even protests have become prohibited due to Covid; for the youth, this lack of communication with the Government damages the already estranged relationship. However, interest in community-related issues and social action has risen, showing that young people have a level of empathy and engagement. Therefore, one way of communicating the risk they pose to others is by the Government using their campaigns to emphasize individual responsibility and empowering them to believe they make a difference. With government taglines such as “stay alert, control the virus, save lives,” young people struggle

to grapple with how detrimental their actions may be to people's lives, due to the lack of emotion; this results in the campaign feeling non-personal. If there is anything we can all learn from the world's largest campaigns in history, it is the importance of emotive and precise language.

Another example of a solution to this problem could be a dedicated official government website to communicate with young people. While the content itself could be more serious, the site should be more in tune with 'commercial' websites designed for young people and contain several key elements such as interactivity, updates, and ease in navigating. This also links to the role of media and its influence on communication. This idea could be built upon by employing a team of young people as youth representatives to liaise with the government on the most effective communication strategies.

Media, an infinitely growing source of information, no longer comprises of just newspapers or television. With the rise of the internet and social media, everyone has access to any knowledge they pursue, and it is a convenient, fast, and trusted source of information. In terms of Covid-19, utilising these different platforms is essential, as media has become integrated into everyday life as a means of staying updated. In fact, images/advertisements used right now convey the risks that exist; an example of this is the images of over-worked healthcare workers facing the pandemic. It seems to have proven to be more effective than the previously mentioned tagline, which could be because of emotive imagery/language and more clarity. However, the disadvantage of any such accessible platforms is the spread of misinformation. Young people, who become misinformed, risk losing communication between themselves and others who try to provide the correct information, as they no longer know which is true. As added information is a constant, so is false information; attempting to filter all fake news would be near impossible. Consequently, action that can be taken against misinformation is keeping people around us more informed if possible. Examples of this are: Using websites ending in gov.uk, .org or ac.uk for information, recommending the same to others and reporting false information yourself when you see it.

Overall, the younger population is the most pivotal group of people when providing targeted information but unfortunately are also the least considered. Effective use of appropriate communication platforms and government portals will lead to the right information, reaching the right people - in this case, the youth which will bring a positive change in how they will handle this pandemic.