# Evaluating the Impact of Verified Government Accounts on the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Intentions of Saudi Residents During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ghadeer Kayal, University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia & Prince Mohammad bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia*

 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7141-0275

Hasan Balfaqih, University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia

Farah Durani, University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia

Hatem Akeel, University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia

 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4854-3189

Abdulwahab Abukwaik, University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia

Norozzati Azudin, University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia

## ABSTRACT

Governments utilize various media channels to disseminate knowledge pertaining to infectious diseases such as COVID-19. When it was declared a pandemic, society began to depend on the media for critical information and countermeasures that would facilitate tackling the virus. The main objective of this research is to examine the impact of verified Saudi government accounts across various media outlets on respondents' knowledge, attitudes, and intentions regarding COVID-19. A structured online questionnaire was distributed and 315 responses were used for analysis. The results were analyzed using SPSS. The results indicate that the residents of Saudi Arabia have adequate knowledge concerning the symptoms, precautionary measures, and modes of transmission of COVID-19. The respondents have gained this knowledge from verified Saudi government accounts across various media outlets, most prominently via social media.

## KEYWORDS

Attitudes, COVID-19, Intentions, Knowledge, Saudi Arabia, Social Media

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, a unique pandemic started in China, resulting in severe consequences for the governments, economies, and communities of the world. Within the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the country was second to Iran in terms of active COVID-19 cases (WHO, 2020). With a population of approximately 34 million, the Saudi government has been diligently reporting data relevant to the pandemic, such as infection rate, recovery rate, and deaths, since the first case was reported in March 2020 (The General Authority for Statistics, 2020). In addition, the government has taken a very strict approach to tackle the pandemic, as the

*Corresponding Author

country has dealt with a coronavirus (CoV) outbreak before (Al-Dorzi et al., 2016). Their efforts were evident in their enforcing precautionary measures, suspending travel, directing their resources to the healthcare sector, and more.

Still, the role of the country's population is of the utmost importance in containing the pandemic and limiting its aftereffects, as previous studies have reported that individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors concerning a disease have a significant influence on authorized efforts to hinder the spread of the disease (Ajilore, 2017; Person et al., 2004). Several studies have examined knowledge and practices in the context of COVID-19 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Hanawi et al., 2020; Alhazmi et al., 2020). However, the existing research did not examine the influence of verified government accounts across various media channels, the attitudes of the population toward the government's response to tackling the pandemic, or specifically, the precautionary measures that were imposed.

Accordingly, this research's main objective is to evaluate the impact of verified government accounts on the knowledge, attitudes, and intentions of Saudi residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The realization of this objective would shed light on the effectiveness of verified Saudi government accounts in disseminating information to the public. Furthermore, it will highlight the attitudes of the public toward the government's efforts to tackle the pandemic. To achieve the main objective, the research commences with a literature review section, which provides an overview of COVID-19, as well as its initiation and spread to date, followed by Saudi Arabia's response to the pandemic. Moreover, the literature reflects on the role of verified media accounts in forming individuals' attitudes, specifically in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Next, the research presents and provides support for the conceptual model utilizing the theory of reasoned action (TRA), followed by the research hypotheses. After that, the research specifies the research methodology, including the sample and procedure, measures, and analysis. The research then presents the findings and discusses the results. Finally, the research concludes with the study's theoretical and practical contribution, and limitations and recommendations for future research. The findings of the research specify that the residents of the Kingdom have substantial knowledge pertaining to the symptoms, precautionary measures, and modes of transmission of COVID-19. The participants have obtained this knowledge from verified Saudi government accounts across various media outlets, most notably from social media. The majority of the sample has showcased positive attitudes toward the Saudi government's response to tackling the virus, as well as the imposed precautionary measures. As a result, a significant percentage of the participants reported that they intend to follow the recommendations that the Saudi government has provided.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 COVID-19

Since both human beings and animals are vulnerable to respiratory and enteric infections, both can be affected by CoVs. CoVs belong to the subdivision of *Coronavirinae* in the group *Coronaviridae* of the order *Nodvirales* (Carstens, 2009). The subfamily of *Coronavirinae* contains four genera, namely the alphacoronavirus, betacoronavirus, gammacoronavirus, and deltacoronavirus. Two of these genera, alphacoronaviruses and betacoronaviruses, infect mammals, while gammacoronaviruses and deltacoronaviruses generally infect birds and fish (Woo et al., 2012). The probability of animal-to-human and human-to-human transmission of CoVs has been proven by the outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

In November 2002, a pneumonia that SARS putatively caused was initially identified in China, and it spread rapidly to Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Singapore in 2003 (Hui & Zumla, 2019). With respiratory droplets being the major form of transmission, SARS proved to be a remarkably infectious disease. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that those infected with SARS are not infectious during the interval of incubation, which lasts between 3 and 5 days (Lai et al., 2020). Several studies

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