LETTER to the EDITOR

TikTok Content Analysis on Smokeless Tobacco and Betel Quid: Perception Versus Reality

Dear Editor

We read with great interest the paper by Senevirathna and colleagues titled 'TikTok- potential impact on the use of smokeless tobacco and betel quid by young people.' (Senevirathna et al., 2022). We take this opportunity to discuss some of the intricacies associated with the keyword terminologies used and its probable impact on the data interpretation.

The author on multiple occasions refer to the use of betel quid (BQ) and smokeless tobacco (SLT) synonymously with 'meethapaan', 'sweet-paan' and 'paan' which in our opinion cannot be considered as completely accurate as the food items are different in terms of ingredients used in them. The latter (meetha-paan/sweet-paan) does not include areca nut or tobacco as a constituent and uses merely herbal spices and components including and not limited to fennel seeds, cardamom, coconut, dates etc. wrapped in betel leaf and is popularly consumed as a mouth freshener cum digestive aid. On the other hand, the former usually contains tobacco and areca nut additionally in different concentrations with the preparations being usually customizable. The latter preparation of BQ without added areca nut or SLT poses negligible hazard to oral or general health and the literature provides no data on any ill effects of consuming betel leaf. On the contrary, plenty of literature is available on its medical benefits (Rai et al., 2011, Ali et al., 2022, Aara et al., 2020). On the other hand, the preparation constituting areca nut and/or SLT has been categorised as a class I carcinogen by WHO. (IARC Monographs, 2004) Furthermore, literature has categorized BQ into categories; ones containing areca nut or tobacco or both (Zain et al., 1999). Placing these various substances under the same umbrella group despite having a difference in the constituents with variable degree of carcinogenic potential is preposterous and will only lead to more ambiguity in this regard. As is evident from the data provided by the authors, majority of the posts (88.7%) analysed do not describe the ingredients used in the products.

In the same context, 'fire-paan', 'fire-paan-challenge', 'cool-lip', 'cool-lip-challenge' are variations of the 'sweet-paan' with added flavours and tinctures but seldom includes areca nut or SLT. Considering that majority of the keywords used by the authors correspond with the hashtag terminologies of '#paan, #meetapaan, #bengalipaan, #firepaan, #paanlover, #sweetpaan, #firepan, #firepaanchallenge, #coollipchallenge, #coollip',

which should not be considered in the same category as other products containing areca nut and or SLT.

Despite the ambiguities, the data provided by the authors is highly commendable as it provides an insight into popular trends on such media platforms and the potential impact it may have on the younger generation. Undeniably, the influence of social media platforms like 'TikTok' and other content sharing applications on the attitude build-up of younger generation cannot be overlooked especially when there exist no age restrictions for access on such platforms. While majority of the content being posted on the application is monitored and goes through stringent filters before being shared and any violation of the terms and guidelines can lead to suspension of the individuals account temporarily or permanently, there still exists gaps in the system which are manipulated or exploited for personal gains such as increasing views or likes on one's post. Photograph or videograph posts imitating a restricted product (tobacco or cigarette smoking) are still available on such social media platforms in bulk and can be considered to fall into the grey area of being restricted. The real outcome of the influence of social media in this aspect can only be assessed at an individual level through KAP (knowledge, attitude, and practice) analysis. Nonetheless, the potential impact of Tik-Tok and other social media platforms in shaping a young mind cannot be disregarded and warrants prompt amendments.

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Reply to the letter to the editor: TikTok Content Analysis on Smokeless Tobacco and Betel Quid: Perception Versus Reality

Dear Editor

We intend to publish an article as letter to the editor in response to a recent article published in your journal titled 'TikTok – Potential Impact on the Use of Smokeless Tobacco and Betel Quid by Young People'. On behalf of all the contributors, I will act as guarantor and correspond with the journal from this point onward.

I hereby declare that all the authors have participated substantially in the intellectual content, conception, designing and writing this article. This work has not been published before, is not being considered for publication elsewhere and has been read and approved by all the authors. There is no conflict of interest and financial interest.

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