

Study claims governments should account for public attitudes before communicating crisis policies

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Research [published](#) in the *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development* has found that our feelings and attitudes during times of crises affect our behavior and that during globally testing times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, governments should make themselves fully aware of this prior to communicating with the public on the policy matters associated with addressing such a crisis

Kirti Dutta of Rishihood University in Haryana, India, Guillaume P. Fernandez of the Academy of Marketing and Communications SAWI in Geneva, Bart F. Norré and Joaquin Fernandez of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland in Marly, Switzerland, Dorota Reykowska of NEUROHM and Rafal Ohme of WSB University in Warsaw, Poland, Dunia Harajli of the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon, used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in their study.

They focused on declared behavior during the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) in Germany and Sweden. Their findings offer useful insight for policymakers hoping to improve the [government](#) response to such a health crisis.

The TPB, originally developed by social psychologist Icek Ajzen, extended the theory of reasoned action and suggests that our behavior has three main drivers: personal attitudes and views towards that behavior, subjective norms, such as perceived [social pressures](#) to perform or not perform said behavior, and perceived behavioral control, the ease or difficulty faced in performing the behavior.

Dutta and colleagues used this framework to look at the complex way in which people responded to the pandemic. Fundamentally, they found that people's perceived threats from the pandemic significantly affected their behavior, as one might expect. But, the effect was both direct and indirect, and attitude then played an important part in how people responded to the different ways in which governments attempted to handle the pandemic.

The team notes that in Australia and New Zealand, where the speed with which COVID-19 spread was lower than elsewhere, there were higher levels of social cooperation and positive [public attitudes](#) towards the health measures implemented by government. In contrast, the U.S., India, and Brazil encountered challenges because of a lower level of public compliance.

The [research](#) suggests that policymakers must prioritize understanding and shaping public attitudes through better strategic communication. This would allow them to improve the positive impact of any health measures needed during a future pandemic. Of course, public compliance during such a crisis may well pivot markedly depending on the behavior and compliance of those policymakers themselves.

In the broader context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these findings emphasize the importance of public attitudes in shaping behavior. Governments worldwide will have to face global crises again. The study offers useful pointers on enhancing public health strategies and fostering greater social cooperation.

More information: Kirti Dutta et al, Knowledge of declared behaviour: effect of attitude and intention, *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development* (2024). [DOI: 10.1504/IJKBD.2024.139361](#)

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