

FESTIVAL OF MEDIA, VALENCIA - Best Communication Strategy for BBC World Services Trust

Condom usage in India is very low, with only 15-20% of sexually active people using them. The problem was that anything associated with sex is taboo in public, and the word “condom” connotes negative associations with HIV and immoral behaviour. The BBC World Service Trust, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, wanted to get people to accept condoms and remove the stigma attached to them.

The key aim was to get people to say the word condom aloud in public without taboo. If they couldn't say the word, they were never going to ask for condoms at the pharmacy. Quantitative and qualitative research done by the AIDS Foundation, showed that men who talk about sex and condoms freely are more likely to be consistent condom users.

BBC World Service Trust adopted a strategy to get people to say the word “condom” aloud in public and start discussions about them. Media, in addition to the ads on air, took on the task to act as a catalyst to make condoms an acceptable word. The campaign started with a contest where the consumer had to answer a riddle, the answer to which was the word “Condom”. The contest was aired on several TV channels, radio stations and cinema halls. Consumers had to call a voice portal and say the correct answer to win prizes.

As the second leg, the agency created a buzz by leveraging the creative in which the words “Kabbadi” used by the players in a popular local sport got replaced with the word “CONDOM”. Editorials in publications and radio anchors reported on a fictitious tournament in which the players actually used the word “condom” instead of “Kabbadi” in real life. This acted as a lead-in to a debate asking consumers for their opinion about saying the word in public.

Thirdly they created a ringtone using the word condom, downloadable through SMS from campaign site www.condomcondom.org.

The campaign reached 139 million adult men nationally versus the targeted 48 million. 400,000 people participated in the contest riddle; 475,000 people asked for the condom ringtone download through the SMS short code, 200,000 downloaded the ringtone from the website. The website received over 3.5 million hits over the campaign period. As per NACO, (National Aid Control Organisation of India), condom sales through government channels grew by 5.0 million units in the last six months.