OPEN PEER REVIEW

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An "Open Peer Review" process is making the details of all review process (including reviewers, associate editors, and EICs comments) as "Public" as it is agreed by EIC, Authors, and reviewers.

Advantages of "Open Peer Review" process

- More transparency, constructiveness and tactful comments of the peer review process: leads to an increase in the quality of reviews
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https://sites.kowsarpub.com/kowsar/knowledgebase/category/tree.html#opr.html

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Peer Review Report for "Public Adults Information Seeking Behaviors During Early Weeks of COVID-19 Epidemic: Early Lessons for Improvement of Epidemic Communication"

Author(s): Hossein Molavi Vardanjani, Hamid Sharifi, Sajad Delavari, Mohammad Hossein Sharifi

Review Timeline:

Submit Date:	13 Jul 2020
Revised Date:	21 Sep 2020
Accepted Date:	9 Oct 2020

Revision (0)

Here, you can see the **Reviewers**, **Associate Editors** and **EICs'** comments from the beginning to the end of the revision process.

Behnam Honarvar: Reviewer | **Revision** (0) — 1 Aug 2020

Dear AE,
Thanks to the authors for choosing this topic. However, there are substantial points that should be regarded. The points were clarified in the attached PDF. Please reform the manuscript as a "short communication" ,while considering the attached PDF and improvement of English writing, style of reference writing, and rewriting of discussion to have a more integrated one. The sentence "If we can assume that trend of search queries on the symptoms of COVID-19 in Google can predict the epidemic with a lag of one week, we can accept that the true starting date of the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran was 18 February 2020" should be explained more by giving valid references.
Thanks.

Behnam Honarvar: Associate Editor | **Revision** (0) — 1 Aug 2020

Dear EIC,
Thanks for choosing this topic. However, there are substantial points that should be

regarded. The points were clarified in the attached PDF. Please reform the manuscript as a "short communication", while considering the attached PDF and improvement of English writing, style of reference writing, and rewriting of discussion to have a more integrated one. The sentence "If we can assume that trend of search queries on the symptoms of COVID-19 in Google can predict the epidemic with a lag of one week, we can accept that the true starting date of the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran was 18 February 2020" should be explained more by giving valid references.
Thanks.

REFEREE: EIC | **Revision (0)** 3 Aug 2020

Dear Author,
Your article is reviewed by the reviewers carefully. According to their comments, this document needs major revision. Please follow their comments as requested.
Thanks.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (1)

Reply to Reviewers

Ideally, the reviewing process can significantly improve the submitted manuscripts by allowing the authors to take into account the advice of reviewers. Author(s) must reply to all reviewers' comments in a separate Word file, point by point. A "**Reply to Reviewers**" document is submitted along with revised manuscript during submission of revised files, summarizing the changes that the authors made in response to the reviewers' comments. The responses to reviewers' comments specifies how the authors addressed each comment the reviewers made.

You can read the authors' responses to the reviewers' comments in the next page.

Dear Editor-in-chief

We are grateful to the editors and reviewers for their time and constructive comments on our manuscript. We have implemented their comments and suggestions and wish to submit a revised version of the manuscript for further consideration in the journal. Changes in the initial version of the manuscript are either highlighted for added sentences or strikethrough for deleted sentences in the revised version.

Below, we also provide a point-by-point response explaining how we have addressed each of the editors or reviewers' comments. **Notably: all changes highlighted in manuscript.**

- **Q1: In title, Reviewer recommend that Public's Information Change to Public Adults Information. In addition, recommend "Risk Communication",**
- **R1**: Thanks for valuable recommendation, Changes was done in as far as possible, but authors believe that Epidemic Communication is suitable to "**Risk Communication**"

NEW TITLE: Public Adults Information Seeking Behaviors During Early Weeks of COVID-19 Epidemic: Early Lessons for Improvement of Epidemic Communication

- **Q2: how many of IRAN's people have access to the internet? There are other sources of information such as satellite channels, newspapers,SMS,Friends** ,...
- **R2**: Following change with new reference was done in manuscript based on valuable recommendation: LINE 36-39

According to the World Bank data, internet penetration rate has been steadily increasing over the last decades in Iran, and more than 49 million Iranians (equal with an overall 60 penetration rate) have used the internet in 2017(9)

World Bank, 2019. International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ ICT Development Report and database, and World Bank Estimates. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER

- **Q3**: **incomplete sentence (LINE 29)**
- **R3**: Change was done, thanks for consideration

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has become exposed with propagated rumors that claim health authorities in different countries such as USA, Iran, Turkey, UK withhold epidemic information form public

- **Q4**: What's "**Daily percent change** (DPC)"
- **R4**: Definition Daily percent change (DPC) was done:

Daily percent change ((frequency of today's search queries divided by the frequency of yesterday's search queries)*100); DPC)

- **Q5**: **Reference? LINE 79-80**
- **R5**: Response: **Add bellow new reference**:

Fighting the COVID-19 Infodemic: Modeling the Perspective of Journalists, Fact-Checkers, Social Media Platforms, Policy Makers, and the Society.

- **Q6**: Did you mean national or at the Province level?
- **R6**: National level

- **Q7**: **Reference? LINE 84**
  - **R7:** add reference: **What sources can be considered as credible?**

https://www.academia-research.com/freelance-writing/crediblenon-credible-sources

All changes in paragraph: **LINE 79-86**

Iranians mostly sought information on the "epidemic news" in the first days of the COVID-19 epidemic. It may be the result of their mistrust in formal and state TV epidemic news. This mistrust amplified by rumors that propagated by some foreign, and also local news agencies that claim Iran's government withholds epidemics news from public (10). Accordingly, the most peoples in the country searching for non-governmental sources of the epidemic news during the first days of the epidemic. As we know, and also in the public's point of view, the most independent source of information is the scientific community(11). Accordingly, timely sharing of scientific information by well-known academic persons could be an important way to reduce the public panic (12, 13).

Q8: **How such an assume has a scientific base (reference)?**

R8: Four references added (4-7). Thank you so much. According to the available evidence two scenarios are available, we revised the text and presented both of them in this revision. LINE 87-100

4. Kang M, Zhong H, He J, Rutherford S, Yang F. Using google trends for influenza surveillance in South China. PloS one. 2013;8(1).

5. Olson DR, Konty KJ, Paladini M, Viboud C, Simonsen L. Reassessing Google Flu Trends data for detection of seasonal and pandemic influenza: a comparative epidemiological study at three geographic scales. PLoS computational biology. 2013;9(10).

6. Dugas AF, Hsieh Y-H, Levin SR, Pines JM, Mareiniss DP, Mohareb A, et al. Google Flu Trends: correlation with emergency department influenza rates and crowding metrics. Clinical infectious diseases. 2012;54(4):463-9.

7. Cho S, Sohn CH, Jo MW, Shin S-Y, Lee JH, Ryoo SM, et al. Correlation between national influenza surveillance data and google trends in South Korea. PloS one. 2013;8(12).

Q9: **How did you reach to this date?**

R9: Thank you so much. According to the available evidence two scenarios are available, we revised the text and presented both of them in this revision. LINE 87-100

Iran's ministry of health (MOH) announced the COVID-19 epidemic at 19 February 2020. If we can assume that trend of search queries on the symptoms of COVID-19 in Google can predict the epidemic with a lag of one week, we can accept that the true starting date of the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran was 18 February 2020 (4-7). However, some authors have shown that Google Trends predict the epidemic with a lag of three weeks, assuming this scenario, the starting date of epidemic in Iran may be 04 February 2020 (4-7). The former may be more plausible starting date for the epidemic in Iran. Therefore, in the absence of any early warning system, Iran's MOH announced the epidemic with an acceptable lag. However, in the era of online social networks and the possibility of targeted rumors being propagated by political and economic bad intentions, this strategy for epidemic communication may not be appropriate. Communicating with public about the probability of epidemic in Iran,

and the probable starting date of that in a plausible time before the confirmation of first cases of COVID-19, could have led to an improved public trust in authorities. Further researches are needed to investigate what will be the timeliest epidemic public communication.

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- **Q10: love?!**
- **R10**: loved one (plural loved ones). A very close friend or family member for whom a person has feelings of endearment

- **Q11: thanks for valuable recommendation for change word to dissemination reviewer recommendation**
- **R11**: change was done

- **Q12: Conclusion is poor writing**
- **R12**: Revise Conclusion completely:

Although Iran's MOH has not concealed the epidemic information, it has not used an appropriate strategy to communicate with public before and during the COVID-19 epidemic. Iranian health policy-makers must have predicted the potential of occurrence of the epidemic, its probable starting date, and also needed equipment and behaviors of public during different phases of the epidemic, and then design to communicate with public in a timely way (before the onset of / and during the epidemic). At the start of an epidemic, public seeks mostly the "epidemic news" and "what that they will need to protect themselves" and any public epidemic communication has to support the public in this regard.

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Revision (1)

Here, you can see the **Reviewers**, **Associate Editors** and **EICs'** comments from the beginning to the end of the revision process.

Behnam Honarvar: Reviewer | **Revision** (1) 5 Oct 2020

Dear Authors
Thank you for your efforts to improve the manuscript.
Thanks.

Behnam Honarvar: Associate Editor | **Revision** (1) 5 Oct 2020

Dear EIC
Based on the authors' answers to the reviewers' comments, the reviewer(s) have recommended publication.
Kind regards.

REFEREE: EIC | **Revision** (1) 9 Oct 2020

Dear Author,
The document is reviewed carefully by the reviewers. According to their comments and your revisions as requested, this manuscript is accepted.
Thanks.