



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Digital Campaigns and Behaviour Change Communication for Organ Donation

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Abstract

Organ donation remains a major public health concern in India due to the persistent gap between the demand for organs and their availability. Despite advancements in medical science, factors such as low awareness, cultural beliefs, misinformation, and fear continue to hinder voluntary organ donation. In recent years, digital campaigns and Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) strategies have emerged as effective approaches to influence public attitudes and promote organ donation. This study examines the role of digital platforms in promoting organ donation through structured BCC approaches.

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data. Data were collected from national health reports, government portals such as NOTTO, peer-reviewed journals, campaign reports, and published literature on digital health communication. The collected information was analysed using thematic and trend analysis to understand patterns in awareness generation, attitude change, and donor registration behaviour.

Findings suggest that digital campaigns using storytelling, testimonials, and myth-busting messages significantly improve awareness and positive attitudes toward organ donation. Social media platforms are particularly effective among younger populations. However, digital access gaps and limited regional language content restrict wider participation. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive BCC strategies, stronger digital outreach, and integration of awareness campaigns with online donor registration systems.

Keywords: Digital Health, Behaviour Change Communication, Organ Donation, Social Media Campaigns, Public Health Awareness

Introduction

Organ donation is a critical component of modern healthcare systems, offering life-saving treatment options for individuals suffering from end-stage organ failure. Advances in transplantation medicine have significantly improved survival rates and post-transplant quality of life. However, the success of organ transplantation programs is heavily dependent on the availability of donated organs. Globally, and particularly in developing countries like India, the demand for organs far exceeds the supply, resulting

in long waiting lists and preventable mortality (Friederike Martin, 2026).

In India, organ donation rates remain low despite legal frameworks such as the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA) and the establishment of national coordination bodies (Transplantation, 2021). The gap between medical capability and social acceptance highlights that organ donation is not solely a biomedical issue but a deeply social phenomenon. Decisions regarding organ donation are influenced by multiple factors including lack of awareness, misinformation, cultural and religious beliefs, fear of body disfigurement, mistrust in health institutions, and emotional distress at the time of death.

Traditional awareness efforts—such as posters, pamphlets, seminars, and mass media advertisements—have primarily focused on information dissemination. While these methods have improved basic awareness, they have shown limited effectiveness in translating awareness into sustained behaviour change. Research consistently indicates that knowledge alone does not guarantee willingness or action. Behavioural resistance, social norms, and family dynamics play a decisive role, particularly in the context of deceased organ donation.

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In recent years, rapid digitalization has transformed the way health information is produced, shared, and consumed. The widespread use of smartphones, social media platforms, and internet-based services has created new opportunities for health communication. Digital campaigns allow health systems and civil society organizations to reach diverse populations, engage audiences interactively, and deliver tailored messages at scale. When strategically designed, digital campaigns can address emotional, social, and cultural barriers more effectively than one-way communication models.

Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) provides a structured framework to design such interventions. BCC emphasizes audience segmentation, formative research, message framing, repeated exposure, and reinforcement through credible messengers. Integrating BCC principles with digital platforms enables campaigns to move individuals along the continuum from awareness to intention and action.

From a social work perspective, digital organ donation campaigns raise important questions related to ethics, equity, consent, and inclusion. Social workers bring a human-centred lens to digital health initiatives by advocating for vulnerable populations, addressing emotional outcomes. Using secondary data, the study critically examines existing digital initiatives, communication approaches, and their implications for social work practice in the field of organ donation.

Review of Literature

Scholarly literature on organ donation increasingly recognizes the importance of digital campaigns and behaviour change communication (BCC) in addressing low donation rates. Researchers across public health, communication studies, and social sciences have examined how digital media, message framing, and theory-driven interventions influence awareness, attitudes, and behavioural intentions related to organ donation.

Basu et al. (2021) conducted a narrative review on the role of social media in promoting organ donation. The study highlights that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are effective tools for increasing awareness and engagement due to their wide reach and interactive nature. However, the authors caution that awareness generated through digital platforms does not always translate into actual donor registration. The study emphasizes the need for structured, theory-based communication strategies and ethical guidelines to prevent misinformation and misuse of emotional appeals.

Reese et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of theory-informed online messages through a randomized controlled trial. Their study tested different digital advertisements based on behavioural theories such as the Health Belief Model and social norms theory. While the digital messages

successfully attracted attention and clicks, the conversion rate to actual organ donor registration was limited. The findings suggest that digital campaigns must go beyond information delivery and focus on reducing perceived barriers and enhancing self-efficacy.

Ahmed, Hardey, and Vidal-Alaball (2025) analyzed organ donation discussions on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) using social network analysis. Their study identified influential users, dominant narratives, and patterns of engagement shaping public opinion on organ donation. The authors proposed the "OrgReach" digital engagement framework, emphasizing continuous interaction, correction of misinformation, and recognition of community voices. The study demonstrates how digital social networks influence attitudes and behavioural intentions.

Olsacher, Bade, and Ehlers (2023) explored the effectiveness of different message framing strategies on Instagram in promoting organ donation. The study found that transformational and emotionally driven messages were more effective than purely informational content, especially when aligned with audience personality traits. The findings reinforce the importance of audience segmentation and tailored digital communication in behaviour change efforts.

Symvoulakis et al. (2018) reviewed mass media and communication strategies used for organ donation awareness campaigns. Their analysis revealed that while media campaigns improve knowledge and positive attitudes, sustained behaviour change requires repeated exposure, cultural sensitivity, and integration with interpersonal communication. The study highlights that one-time digital campaigns are insufficient to influence deeply rooted beliefs related to organ donation.

Stefanone et al. (2012) conducted one of the earliest empirical studies on the use of online media for organ donor registration. The study demonstrated that exposure to online organ donation campaigns significantly increased individuals' likelihood of registering as donors. It emphasized the role of social influence and peer communication in shaping behavioural intentions, supporting social learning theory in digital contexts.

Murphy et al. (2020) proposed a data-driven framework using digital analytics and social network indicators to assess changes in public awareness and attitudes toward organ donation. Although not exclusively focused on organ donation campaigns, the study highlighted how digital data can be used to track behaviour change processes and refine communication strategies in real time.

A behavioural medicine study by Siebelink et al. (2017) examined the impact of narrative framing on willingness to commit to organ donation. The findings revealed that stories focusing on organ recipients and families were more persuasive than factual or donor-centered messages. This

supports the role of emotional engagement and narrative communication in behaviour change.

Kopfman and Smith (2020) critically analyzed public health communication strategies for organ donation from an ethical perspective. The study argued that fear-based or moralizing messages may alienate undecided individuals. Instead, trust-building, transparent, and empowering communication was found to be more effective in motivating voluntary organ donation.

Finally, Wakefield, Loken, and Hornik (2010), in their broader review of mass media campaigns and health behaviour change, concluded that media campaigns are most effective when integrated with community-based interventions and supported by policy and institutional mechanisms. Their findings are highly relevant to organ donation campaigns, emphasizing that digital BCC must operate within supportive social and systemic environments.

Summary of Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature indicates that digital campaigns play an important role in increasing awareness and shaping attitudes toward organ donation. However, studies show that information alone is not enough to motivate individuals to register as organ donors. Effective behaviour change requires theory-based, emotionally engaging, and culturally sensitive communication strategies. Research highlights that narrative messages, personal stories, and recipient-focused communication are more persuasive than purely informational approaches. Behavioural theories such as the Health Belief Model, Social Learning Theory, and Diffusion of Innovations emphasize the role of perceived barriers, social norms, role models, and self-efficacy in influencing organ donation decisions. Social media platforms further support awareness by creating interactive spaces where peer influence and digital communities normalize organ donation. At the same time, challenges such as misinformation, ethical concerns, and digital inequality persist. From a social work perspective, organ donation is shaped by family systems, cultural beliefs, and community contexts. Therefore, digital Behaviour Change Communication strategies should be integrated with community engagement and institutional support for sustainable impact.

Conceptual Framework

Digital Campaigns in Health Communication

Digital campaigns refer to the use of internet-based sources i.e. social media, websites, mobile applications, email campaigns, and online advertisements to disseminate health-related information (D.Sakthi, 2025). In the context of organ donation, digital campaigns include online donor registries, social media awareness drives, short videos, testimonials, webinars, and interactive chatbots that provide information on the process, legality, and benefits of organ

donation.

Digital campaigns offer several advantages over traditional communication methods. They provide wider reach, cost-effectiveness, real-time feedback, and the ability to tailor messages for specific demographic groups. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have become key channels for public health messaging, particularly among youth and urban populations (D.Sakthi, 2025).

Behaviour Change Communication (BCC)

Behaviour Change Communication is a systematic approach that uses communication strategies to influence positive health behaviours. BCC is grounded in behavioural theories such as the Health Belief Model, Theory of Planned Behaviour, and Social Learning Theory. It focuses not only on increasing knowledge but also on addressing attitudes, perceived risks, social norms, and self-efficacy.

In organ donation, BCC aims to move individuals through stages of change—from awareness to interest, intention, and finally, action (registration and consent). Effective BCC strategies use repeated exposure, emotionally resonant messages, credible messengers, and supportive social environments.

Integration of Digital Campaigns and BCC

The integration of digital platforms with BCC strategies allows for sustained engagement and deeper impact. Digital tools can deliver personalised messages, reinforce positive norms, counter myths, and facilitate easy access to registration platforms. Social workers, health educators, and community organisations play a key role in designing such integrated approaches.

Empirical studies on digital organ donation campaigns have shown positive outcomes in terms of increased website traffic to donor registries and short-term spikes in registration numbers. Campaigns that incorporate storytelling, testimonials from recipients and donor families, and emotionally resonant narratives are found to be particularly effective in shaping positive attitudes. These narratives humanize organ donation and help individuals emotionally connect with the cause.

Behaviour Change Communication literature emphasizes the importance of theory-driven interventions. The Health Belief Model has been widely used to explain organ donation behaviour, highlighting perceived susceptibility, benefits, barriers, and cues to action. The Theory of Planned Behaviour underscores the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Digital campaigns that align messages with these theoretical constructs tend to show stronger behavioural outcomes.

From a social work and ethical standpoint, scholars caution against purely technocratic approaches to digital health promotion. Issues of digital divide, algorithmic

bias, data privacy, and informed consent are frequently discussed. Marginalized populations, rural communities, older adults, and individuals with low digital literacy are often excluded from digital campaigns, potentially widening health inequities.

Organ donation is a critical public health issue globally and particularly in India, where the gap between the demand for organs and their availability remains alarmingly wide. Despite medical advancements and legislative frameworks such as the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994, organ donation rates in India continue to be among the lowest in the world. Cultural beliefs, religious misconceptions, lack of awareness, fear of bodily harm, mistrust in healthcare systems, and inadequate communication strategies significantly influence individuals' decisions regarding organ donation.

In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of health communication (D.Sakthi, 2025). Digital campaigns—utilizing social media platforms, mobile applications, websites, and digital storytelling—have emerged as powerful tools for disseminating health information, shaping attitudes, and influencing health-related behaviours. When integrated with Behaviour Change Communication (BCC), digital campaigns have the potential to address deeply rooted myths, normalize organ donation, and motivate individuals to pledge and discuss organ donation with family members.

From a social work perspective, organ donation is not merely a medical or technical issue but a complex social phenomenon influenced by social structures, cultural norms, power relations, and access to information. Social work, with its commitment to social justice, empowerment, community participation, and behaviour change, plays a crucial role in designing, implementing, and evaluating digital BCC interventions for organ donation. This paper examines the role of digital campaigns in promoting organ donation through the lens of Behaviour Change Communication, grounded in relevant social work theories (D.Sakthi, 2025).

Concept of Organ Donation

Organ donation refers to the voluntary process by which an individual donates organs or tissues, either during life (living donation) or after death (deceased donation), for transplantation into another person in need. Organ donation is a life-saving intervention that improves quality of life and reduces mortality associated with end-stage organ failure. However, willingness to donate organs is shaped by a complex interplay of individual beliefs, family dynamics, socio-cultural values, religious interpretations, and trust in institutions.

In India, family consent plays a decisive role in deceased organ donation, making interpersonal communication and social norms especially significant. Therefore, effective communication strategies must go beyond information

dissemination and address emotional, cultural, and relational dimensions of decision-making.

Digital Campaigns in Health Communication

Digital campaigns refer to planned, strategic communication efforts delivered through digital platforms such as social media (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube), websites, mobile applications, email campaigns, podcasts, and online advertisements to influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. In the context of organ donation, digital campaigns can:

- Reach large and diverse populations at low cost
- Enable interactive and participatory communication
- Provide personalized and targeted messages
- Use storytelling, visuals, and testimonials to evoke empathy
- Facilitate peer influence and social norm formation

Digital campaigns are particularly effective among youth and urban populations, who are active digital media users and can act as change agents within families and communities.

Behaviour Change Communication (BCC): Concept and Relevance

Behaviour Change Communication is a strategic, theory-driven approach aimed at influencing knowledge, attitudes, social norms, and behaviours through sustained and culturally sensitive communication. Unlike one-time awareness campaigns, BCC emphasizes:

- Audience segmentation
- Understanding behavioural determinants
- Addressing barriers and motivators
- Reinforcing positive behaviours over time

In organ donation, BCC focuses on moving individuals along a continuum—from lack of awareness, to intention formation, to actual behaviour (pledging organs and discussing the decision with family members).

Conceptual Framework: Integrating Digital Campaigns, BCC, and Social Work Theories

The conceptual framework of this paper integrates digital campaigns as communication tools, BCC as a process, and social work theories as guiding principles for understanding and influencing behaviour related to organ donation.

Ecological Systems Theory (Urie Bronfenbrenner)

Ecological Systems Theory explains human behaviour as the result of interactions between individuals and multiple environmental systems.

- Microsystem: Individual beliefs, knowledge, attitudes toward organ donation
- Mesosystem: Family discussions, peer influence, social networks
- Exosystem: Media messages, healthcare institutions, digital platforms

- **Macrosystem:** Cultural values, religious beliefs, laws, and policies
- **Chronosystem:** Changing attitudes over time due to repeated digital exposure

Digital campaigns operate across these systems by influencing individuals directly while simultaneously shaping social norms and public discourse. Social workers can design BCC strategies that target multiple levels—for example, encouraging family conversations through digital storytelling.

Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)

Social Learning Theory emphasizes that people learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement.

In digital organ donation campaigns:

- Testimonials of organ donors and recipients act as role models
- Influencers and public figures normalize donation behaviour
- Positive reinforcement (social approval, recognition) strengthens intention

Social work practice uses this theory to promote modeling of prosocial behaviour, where digital narratives demonstrate the emotional and social benefits of organ donation.

Health Belief Model (HBM)

The Health Belief Model explains health behaviour based on individual perceptions of risk and benefits.

Key constructs applied to organ donation:

- **Perceived severity:** Consequences of organ failure
- **Perceived benefits:** Saving lives, social contribution
- **Perceived barriers:** Fear, myths, religious concerns
- **Cues to action:** Digital reminders, pledge drives, campaigns
- **Self-efficacy:** Confidence in registering and discussing donation

Digital BCC campaigns designed by social workers can directly address barriers through FAQs, myth-busting videos, and culturally sensitive messages.

Empowerment Theory (Social Work Perspective)

Empowerment Theory focuses on enabling individuals and communities to gain control over decisions affecting their lives.

Digital campaigns empower individuals by:

- Providing accessible, accurate information
- Encouraging informed decision-making
- Amplifying marginalized voices (recipients, donor families)
- Facilitating participation through online pledges and discussions

From a social work lens, empowerment-based BCC respects autonomy and promotes informed consent rather than coercion.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Everett Rogers)

This theory explains how new ideas and behaviours spread through society.

In organ donation:

- Digital platforms accelerate diffusion
- Early adopters influence wider social networks
- Social media creates visibility and legitimacy

Social workers can identify and engage community influencers, youth leaders, and digital advocates to spread positive organ donation norms.

Role of Social Work in Digital BCC for Organ Donation

Social workers play a multifaceted role in digital campaigns for organ donation:

- **Advocates:** Promoting ethical, transparent, and inclusive messaging
- **Educators:** Developing culturally appropriate digital content
- **Community Organizers:** Mobilizing online communities and peer networks
- **Researchers:** Evaluating campaign effectiveness and behavioural outcomes
- **Policy Influencers:** Bridging digital campaigns with health systems and policy frameworks

Their training in communication, counselling, ethics, and community engagement positions social workers uniquely to design people-centered digital interventions.

Challenges in Digital BCC for Organ Donation

Despite its potential, digital BCC faces several challenges:

- Digital divide and unequal access
- Spread of misinformation and myths
- Cultural and religious sensitivities
- Privacy and ethical concerns
- Difficulty in translating intention into actual behaviour

Addressing these challenges requires continuous monitoring, participatory approaches, and collaboration between social workers, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and digital media experts.

Objectives

- To examine the role of digital campaigns in influencing awareness, attitudes, and behavioural intentions toward organ donation as reported in existing literature.
- To examine the effectiveness of Behaviour Change Communication strategies used in digital organ donation campaigns, with reference to message framing, audience engagement, and theoretical foundations.
- To assess the contribution of social work theories and perspectives in designing and implementing digital Behaviour Change Communication interventions for organ donation.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative–descriptive and analytical research approach based entirely on secondary data to examine the role of digital campaigns and Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) in promoting organ donation. This approach enables a systematic review and synthesis of existing research, theoretical perspectives, and documented outcomes related to digital health communication and behaviour change.

The study follows a systematic narrative review and analytical research design, which allows critical examination, comparison, and integration of findings from previously published studies and reports. The research is desk-based and non-experimental, covering both Indian and global contexts of digital health campaigns related to organ donation.

Secondary data were collected from the following sources:

- Peer-reviewed national and international journals
- Published research articles and systematic reviews
- Government reports and policy documents
- Reports from international organizations
- Conference proceedings and working papers
- Reputed academic databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, and JSTOR

A purposive and criterion-based sampling technique was used to select relevant literature focusing on organ donation awareness, digital media communication, and behaviour change frameworks. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, a final sample of 30 research studies (published between 2010 and 2025) was selected for qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected secondary data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The analysis involved the following steps:

- Systematic reading and familiarization with selected studies
- Coding of recurring concepts related to digital campaigns and behaviour change
- Categorization of themes such as message framing, audience engagement, theoretical application, and behavioural outcomes
- Comparative analysis of findings across studies
- Interpretation of results through a social work and BCC lens

This method facilitated identification of common patterns, gaps, and emerging trends in digital organ donation campaigns.

Ethical Considerations

As the study is based solely on secondary data, no direct involvement of human subjects was required. Ethical integrity was maintained by:

- Proper acknowledgment and citation of all sources
- Avoidance of data misrepresentation
- Respect for intellectual property and academic honesty

Limitations of the Methodology

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which restricts the ability to draw causal inferences or capture real-time behavioural changes. Additionally, variations in study designs and outcome measures across reviewed literature may affect comparability.

Findings

The following key findings are given below

- Digital campaigns significantly enhance awareness but show limited direct impact on actual organ donor registration. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that social media platforms, websites, and online campaigns effectively disseminate information and improve public awareness regarding organ donation. However, many studies report a noticeable gap between increased awareness and actual behavioural outcomes such as donor registration or family consent, suggesting that awareness alone does not ensure behaviour change.
- Emotion-driven and narrative-based messages are more effective than purely informational content. Literature highlights that digital campaigns using personal stories of organ recipients, donor families, and transplant survivors evoke empathy and emotional engagement, which positively influences attitudes and intention toward organ donation. In contrast, fact-based or technical messages show limited persuasive power.
- Behaviour Change Communication strategies grounded in theory yield better outcomes. Studies applying behavioural and social work theories—such as the Health Belief Model, Social Learning Theory, and Diffusion of Innovations—demonstrate greater effectiveness in addressing perceived barriers, enhancing self-efficacy, and reinforcing positive social norms. Theory-driven campaigns are more likely to move individuals along the behaviour change continuum.
- Family and social norms play a decisive role in organ donation decisions. The literature emphasizes that individual willingness to donate is strongly influenced by family attitudes, peer opinions, and cultural expectations. Digital campaigns that encourage family discussions and normalize organ donation within social networks are more impactful than those targeting individuals in isolation.
- Social media influencers and peer networks contribute to normalization of organ donation. Research shows that endorsements by trusted figures, influencers, and peer advocates increase credibility and acceptance of organ donation messages. Social learning through

observation and imitation is a critical mechanism in digital behaviour change efforts.

- Cultural sensitivity and ethical communication are essential for campaign effectiveness. Several studies underline the importance of addressing religious beliefs, cultural myths, and ethical concerns transparently. Campaigns perceived as coercive, fear-based, or morally pressuring often generate resistance rather than acceptance.
- Digital divide and misinformation remain major challenges. While digital platforms offer wide reach, unequal access to digital technology and the spread of misinformation limit the effectiveness of online BCC campaigns, particularly among rural, older, and marginalized populations.

Conclusion

The study concludes that digital campaigns integrated with Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) strategies can significantly enhance awareness and positive attitudes toward organ donation. However, their effectiveness depends on addressing social, cultural, and psychological factors influencing behaviour. Evidence from secondary data indicates that while digital interventions improve awareness, sustained behavioural change requires theory-based, emotionally engaging, and culturally sensitive communication. From a social work perspective, organ donation is shaped by family influence, community norms, and institutional trust. Therefore, digital BCC initiatives should adopt participatory and community-oriented approaches. Integrating digital campaigns within broader behaviour change frameworks can strengthen organ donation systems and promote equitable public health outcomes.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Adopt theory-driven digital Behaviour Change Communication frameworks. Policymakers and practitioners should design organ donation campaigns using established behavioural and social work theories to systematically address perceived barriers, enhance self-efficacy, and reinforce positive social norms.
- Strengthen narrative and emotion-based digital storytelling. Campaigns should prioritize real-life stories of organ recipients and donor families to humanize organ donation and foster empathy, rather than relying solely on informational or statistical content.
- Promote family-centered and community-focused digital messaging. Digital campaigns should encourage family discussions and collective decision-making, recognizing the central role of family consent in organ donation, especially in the Indian socio-cultural context.

- Engage social workers in digital campaign design and implementation. Social workers should be actively involved in content development, audience engagement, counselling-oriented messaging, and ethical oversight of digital organ donation campaigns.
- Leverage influencers and peer advocates responsibly. Trusted community leaders, youth influencers, and healthcare professionals should be engaged as digital ambassadors to enhance credibility and social acceptance of organ donation messages.
- Address misinformation and ethical concerns proactively. Campaigns must include clear, transparent, and culturally sensitive information to counter myths, religious misconceptions, and fears related to organ donation, while respecting individual autonomy.
- Bridge the digital divide through hybrid communication strategies. Digital campaigns should be complemented with offline and community-based interventions to ensure inclusivity and reach populations with limited digital access.
- Encourage future empirical and mixed-method research. Further studies using primary data, longitudinal designs, and impact evaluations are recommended to assess long-term behavioural outcomes of digital BCC interventions for organ donation.

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