

**Using Markers for Digital Engagement with the Audience
of *Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon* Season 3**

A Transmedia Entertainment Education Initiative
for Sanitation, Family Planning, and Gender Equality in India

by

Roel Lutkenhaus
and
prof. dr. Martine Bouman

in collaboration with

dr. Helen Wang
and
prof. dr. Arvind Singhal

Final Report

Submitted to the Population Foundation of India

April 16, 2020

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	13
<i>Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon: An Indian and Entertainment-Education serial</i>	13
Adapting to transitions in the Indian media landscape.....	14
EE and social media.....	14
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	15
Markers as digital points of engagement.....	15
Story circles: conversation catalysts.....	16
Enhancing diffusion in online social networks	16
Chapter 3: Method.....	18
Team composition	18
Project structure and collaborative process.....	19
Preparation phase	21
Broadcasting phase.....	24
Post-broadcasting phase.....	24
Data collection plan.....	24
Social media platforms (engagement).....	24
Google (diffusion).....	25
Chapter 4: Results	26
RQ1: Setting up story circles	28
1: First responses.....	28
2: Connecting the dots.....	29
3: Syncing TV and social media	32
4: Sustaining momentum.....	34
5: Addressing taboos	37
RQ2: Enhancing visibility.....	42
On digital platforms	43
Beyond <i>MKBKSH's</i> website and social media pages	43

- Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion..... 47
 - 1. Infrastructure 47
 - a) On the same social media platforms..... 48
 - b) Across different social media platforms 48
 - c) Beyond social media platforms..... 48
 - 2. Narratives..... 49
 - Dramatic arc 50
 - Characters 51
 - Timing 51
 - Connection fiction to reality..... 51
 - 3. Story circle agents 51
 - 4. Processes..... 52
 - Be specific in invitational messages..... 52
 - Breaking the ice 52
 - Do not ask too much 53
 - Recommendations 53
- References 55

Executive Summary

The rise of social media and rapid changes in the digital media landscape offer an unprecedented opportunity to engage mass audiences across media platforms to promote messages for positive social change and track their uptake through digital footprints (Lutkenhaus et al., 2019). Purposely incorporating "markers"—new words, phrases, visual representations, and practices that are well-aligned with a project's social objectives—represent an innovative strategy to not only promote new social realities but also track how audience members engage with them over time.

Purpose and Process

In this report, we highlight the communication strategies, research methods, and major findings on the incorporation of markers related to sanitation, family planning, and gender equality in *Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon Season 3 (MKBKSH-3)* in India. We as the Center for Media & Health (CMH) in the Netherlands worked closely with our colleagues at the Population Foundation of India (PFI), including the digital communications team, creative writer and director of *MKBKSH-3* Feroz Abbas Khan, and Drs. Arvind Singhal and Helen Wang, to co-create, promote, and systematically track eight markers in *MKBKSH-3* (Table 1).

Table 1

Markers Tracked in This MKBKSH-3 Research Project

Theme	Marker	Meaning	Messaging
Sanitation	<i>Swachhta Elaan</i> <i>स्वच्छता एलान</i>	Cleanliness pledge	A pledge to sanitation and hygiene
Family Planning	<i>Mast Pitara</i> <i>मस्त पिटारा</i>	Pleasure basket	A basket of contraceptive options, promoting family planning
Gender Equality	<i>Lambi Sagai</i> <i>लंबी सगाई</i>	Long engagement	Promoting a delayed marriage to allow a woman to finish education, start a career, and for a couple to get to know each other
	<i>Laadlidin</i> <i>लाडली दिन</i>	The day of the cherished women/girls	A day to celebrate daughters, sisters, mothers, and other women in the family
	<i>Aurat Ki Marzi Ka Din</i> <i>औरत की मर्ज़ी का दिन</i>	The day women decide	Promoting women's role in decision-making
	<i>Dono Barabar</i> <i>दोनों बराबर</i>	Both equal	Promoting gender equality
Promotion	<i>Kahani Badlo</i> <i>कहानी बदलो</i>	Flip the story	Promoting positive change through storytelling
	<i>Log Kehte Hain</i> <i>लोग कहते हैं</i>	People are saying	Implying the general opinion of the public

From the initial planning phase in Summer 2018 to the culmination of *MKBKSH-3* in September 2019, we provided real-time guidance on how to orchestrate online conversations about the *MKBKSH-3* markers, including emphasizing cues-to-action, nominations, and steps to facilitate a social movement around sanitation, family planning, and gender equality. This guidance was provided through a dozen face-to-face meetings in India in September and December 2018, six partner Skype conference calls in 2019, 18 marker memos/checklists, and 11 interim digital tracking reports.

Tracking Methods

Our digital marker tracking centered around two domains. First, in terms of user engagement on social media, we focused on addressing the following questions: Which strategies, tactics, and content formats are most suitable to stimulate user engagement around markers and set up story circles; and how does engagement contribute to shifting social norms? To answer these questions, we retrieved and analyzed data from the open web (Google), Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.¹ We used R packages to access the social media services' API and to analyze the text content in social media posts and comments. We then used Gephi to generate semantic network visualizations.

Second, in terms of the online diffusion of markers, we focused on addressing the following questions: How would the use of markers spread across different online platforms to help increase the visibility of our messaging, and can we capture this by tracking the diffusion of markers? To answer these questions, we connected to an Indian VPN and used an R script to Google media content containing our markers. For the top 50 Google results in each search, we retrieved the embedded hyperlinks and backlinks connected to those web pages that also contained our markers. This allowed us to capture the diffusion of markers from one web page to another over time.

Key Findings

Social Media User Engagement

Over a 9-month period from January to September 2019, *MKBKSH-3* amassed:

Facebook: 356 posts, of which 250 included markers, for a total of 246,100 likes

5,812 comments were received in response to marker related-posts and 4,230 posts containing markers were shared;

The highest daily engagement with marker-related posts (446 comments) was on May 11, 2019. On that day, two social media posts connected *Aurat Ki Marzi Ka Din* with Mother's day, asking *MKBKSH* fans to share stories and write poems about their mothers; and

¹ As defined in the ToR, the platforms to be monitored include the open web (Google), Facebook, and YouTube. CMH has also monitored Twitter and manually tracked audience engagement on Instagram and TikTok for this research project to include comprehensive audience feedback.

The most successful posts received 42,941 likes (a post announcing the new *MKBKSH*'s season on January 17, 2019), 310 comments (a Mother's Day post on May 11, 2019), and 319 shares (the poem "Aurat", recited by Shabana Azmi on March 6, 2019).

Twitter: 311 tweets by the *MKBKSH* account followed by 2,400 users

544 retweets, 162 replies and mentions of the *MKBKSH* account;

1,068 tweets about *MKBKSH* by 514 unique users; and

The most successful tweet connected the Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO) rocket launch to *Laadlidin2* (given the important role played by Indian women scientists) and received 87 retweets and 907 favorites.

YouTube: 106 videos and 52,600 followers

1,450,508 views, 5,394 likes, 1,185 dislikes, and 844 comments;

The most viewed video³ was posted on January 21 and viewed 90,327 times with 107 likes and 8 comments; and

The most commented video was the Sanitation *Qawwali* music video⁴ with 7,750 views, 413 likes, and 402 comments.

Markers

Across all social media platforms, the markers receiving the highest average number of comments per post were: *Lambi Sagai* (57), *Dono Barabar* (54), and *Log Kehte Hain* (51).

The series of *Lambi Sagai* posts in April that coincided with the dramatic resolution in the love story about Panna and Sameer, the two characters who along with Sneha and Arjun represented ongoing role models for delaying marriage. These *Lambi Sagai* markers were purposely introduced to also affirm and celebrate the career choices made by Panna, who becomes the Pratappur village ASHA worker and Sneha, the protagonist medical doctor on a mission to change the face of her nation (*main desh ka chehra badal doongi*).

The sanitation *Qawwali* challenges in the end of April and beginning of May promoting *Swachhta Eaan* (and later the *Condom Bole* ["condom speaks"] Rap on family planning) where users were invited to finish a musical score from *MKBKSH* with their own words.

The *Laadlidin* marker in *MKBKSH*'s opening episode where users posted many pictures of their cherished women and daughters in response to Sneha's parents celebrating their anniversary by

² <https://twitter.com/MKBKSH/status/1153238885654323200>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byfT2OpjXvI>

⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FO_wOpN-ivY

having four young girls collectively cut their birthday cake. The purpose behind the marker was to portray a new practice—a public celebration of girls' birthdays at par with boys' birthdays thereby emphasizing gender equality (or *Dono Barabar*). Later, *Laadlidin* was connected to the celebration of Indian women scientists during ISRO's moon mission in late July 2019.

The most important implication from the marker findings is that all three cases above are strongly rooted in the plotlines of *MKBKSH-3*. Additionally, they invited and encouraged user engagement in diverse ways over time and promoted practices related to delaying marriage, upholding the career decisions made by women, and symbolically celebrating and affirming their position in society.

Google Hyperlink Diffusion Network

The diffusion network for markers grew 11-fold over a 9-month period during the broadcast of *MKBKSH-3* (Figure 1).

At the start of the season, 4 web pages contained the markers;

After 26 episodes, 20 web pages had published content that included markers;

By the end of *MKBKSH-3*, 45 web pages had published content about the markers, including the following:

Regional and national news websites (e.g., sarita.in, asianage.com, telanganatoday.com)

Online magazines and blogs about Indian cinema and television (e.g., indiantelevision.com, indiatvnews.com, indiantvfanclub.wordpress.com); and

Figure 1

Marker Diffusion Network in January, May, and October 2019



Discussion and Recommendations

Our findings record that on several occasions the *MKBKSH-3* social media team succeeded in stimulating an exchange of messages around a variety of ideas, beliefs, and practices associated with markers. What guidance and recommendations about tactics and strategies for boosting marker-related engagement and enhancing visibility of markers arise from our findings?

Guidance on Stimulating Marker-Related Engagement

(1) Use markers to connect plotlines and reality

Markers that were strongly rooted in *MKBKSH-3* proved to be the most valuable fodder for conversation material, especially when the dramatic arc and social media posting schedule were in sync. The *Lambi Sagai* posts in late-April provide a good example of how a *story circle* was set in motion toward the climax of the romance between Panna and Sameer. It is important to note here that the Panna and Sameer romance and their explicit decisions of having a *Lambi Sagai* were foreshadowed and undergirded by the longstanding decision between Sneha and Arjun to delay their marriage so that Sneha could realize her goals to change the face of Pratappur.

Markers to be effective need to connect plots from the *MKBKSH* universe with the real world. The social media team achieved this by connecting markers to events such as World Population Day and International Friends Day, the success of the Indian badminton champion PV Sindhu, and also to the women-led launch of the Chandrayaan-2 moon rocket by ISRO. On July 22, 2019 the *MKBKSH-3* social media team posted an image of the two women, Ritu Karidhal and M. Vanitha, who led the project and connected the event to the *Laadlidin* marker with the text: "Let's celebrate this historical moment when women lead India into the frontiers of space. Tag and tell us of girls and women who are special to you and their #Laadlidin achievements that make you proud." The post received 594 likes, 43 shares, and 113 comments, sparking social media comments about how these female scientists were 'a true inspiration'."

(2) Aim for meaningful engagement

Meaningful engagement with markers can be enhanced by issuing specific invitations, for example, asking audiences to finish song lyrics or asking what they would do if they were in the shoes of Sneha or Panna, or inviting them to share their own stories. The more specific the invitation, the less ambiguity there is to participate, and hence the threshold to respond is lowered.

Musical scores (the Sanitation *Qawwali* and the *Condom Bole* Rap) proved to be excellent material on social media, receiving several hundreds of comments where audiences would be invited to finish the songs with their own words. On World Population Day, July 11, 2019, the *MKBKSH* social media team posted a music video of the rap song *Condom Bole*. The song, specifically written for *MKBKSH-3* made its appearance on the television serial on 11 August 11, 2019. The rap music video was shared with the following message: 'Promise to use condoms and keep up with your partner for

double protection and fun! Listen and share this song together!' It resulted in 346 likes, 32 comments, and 134 shares. On YouTube alone, the video received 216 comments.

Puzzles, quizzes, and contests with prizes were useful in breaking the ice around sensitive taboo topics. Ideally, these challenges should invite the audience to think and talk about the issues associated with markers (e.g., finishing song lyrics) and have cues to action such as tell your story or celebrate the women in one's life.

(3) *Enhance the visibility of engagement*

Social media content formats offer possibilities for audiences to engage in simple, playful ways, such as through the use of Facebook Frames for the marker *Lambi Sagai* that received large numbers of responses and became highly visible in the social networks of *MKBKSH* fans. On May 16, 2019, the *MKBKSH-3* social media team launched their *Lambi Sagai* Facebook Frame—a digital picture frame that Facebook users could add onto their profile pictures with a simple click. The message said: "Every pair has a story of their own. Share a photo with a partner and tell your story in the comments! Don't forget to tag them!" Another post said: 'Share your *Lambi Sagai* moments on your profile picture using our new Facebook frame: [link]. Share a screenshot in the comments maybe? We would love to see.' This particular post received 130 likes, 18 shares, and 128 comments, mostly with screenshots of the audiences' newly-framed profile pictures.

Beyond Facebook Frames, we received a few pictures that included applied VR effects such as glasses, eye patches, wigs, or other funny visual enhancements rendered real-time onto a user's camera. The implication: one must purposely design markers that allow audiences to play with virtual visual metaphors both in their social media and instant messaging environments.

When posts or markers included a strong but close-ended message—such as slogans, quotes, or statistics—audiences seemed less likely to *comment* and more likely to *like* or *share*. Therefore, these posts helped boost the *MKBKSH* page's online presence but did not meaningfully engender intense user engagement.

(4) *Lower the threshold to participate*

It is important not to over ask. For example, the *Condom Bole* video was well-received by social media users and media outlets but did not yield a hearty response. In hindsight, recording a dance video may have been too much of an ask. With the challenge being particularly open-ended, instead of offering audiences a 'one-click' or low threshold impetus to participate, it remained just that—a challenge.

Guidance on Enhancing Visibility of Markers

(1) Tailor strategies to the platforms and technologies that the audiences are using

The *Condom Bole* challenge aimed to elevate community engagement around a song to build a condom movement. For such movements to emerge, in small or in large, it is important to involve a 'critical mass' as quickly as possible. For this reason, it is better to target challenges and invitations for the larger *MKBKSH* community on Facebook, than to invite a relatively smaller community of TikTok users—which was the centerpiece of the *Condom Bole* campaign. Furthermore, the content should be cross-posted strategically and in a meaningful phased way to promote the flow of users between platforms, integrating the various communities, and thereby raising the prospects of social movement-building. In the future, Facebook Stories can be used to implement user-generated content challenges such as *Condom Bole*.

For challenges to truly spread across digital platforms and build visibility, there is a need to be strategic about utilizing media formats that are well able to travel the networks that connect the various communities of the *MKBKSH* target audiences. For example, press releases should include embeddable, actionable media content: Facebook-video including comments, Facebook stories, YouTube videos, and more. The purpose is to directly offer audiences multiple entry points to the *MKBKSH* story universe.

(2) Leveraging social Influence

Visibility and engagement can be boosted by inviting influential celebrities or social influencers. When Indian Bollywood celebrity Kareena Kapoor posted a picture of herself holding up a sign with the text '#MKBKSH', it received 34,500 likes, 39 shares, and 103 comments. It was one of the best-performing posts in terms of likes. In the future, celebrities and micro-influencers must be more strategically and proactively engage in stimulating meaningful user engagement, for example by directly participating in the *Qawwali* or *Condom Bole* challenges and by asking their followers to do so as well. Here, the lessons of the highly successful ALS Ice Bucket Challenge social media campaign can be leveraged where celebrities including Bill Gates and others publicly challenged people and a viral movement got underway. In general, audience members are hesitant to openly talk about sensitive topics on public platforms such as Facebook. We noticed that humorous memes using Condom Baba and Munna and Buaji in *MKBKSH-3* were useful to break the ice and received many likes, but not too many comments to open and expand the conversation space.

Conclusion

Our systematic tracking of digital markers across various *MKBKSH-3* platforms provided valuable insights on the possibilities that emerge when there is a strategic alignment of television and transmedia content with social media channels. Ideally, new realities will emerge from the mainstay television content in ways that allow social media pages to propagate chains of conversations around markers using new television clips to continuously highlight different aspects each marker. However, doing so well requires a

tremendous amount of coordination with respect to orchestration of stories, markers, and elements across different channels in the transmedia strategy. In the future, initiatives like *MKBKSH* stand to benefit from an integrated approach at the design stage of the project. Foremost would be to assign a *transmedia storyteller* who is platform-independent; oversees the macro, meso, and micro story circles; and expands and integrates stories, invitations, cues-to-action, and much more—all with audience engagement in mind.