Pretesting Messages and Materials

Messages and materials, however clear and eye catching they may appear, always need to be pretested. Pretesting involves measuring the reaction of a selected group of individuals representing the intended audience, to draft materials, concepts or messages before they are produced in final form and disseminated.

Unfortunately, the importance of pretesting is often ignored due to time or budget constraints, or due to the belief that the information and materials are suitable for serving their intended purpose. In emergencies, foregoing pretesting may be even more common as key information needs to be conveyed quickly and in a timely manner.

Pretesting, however, is an essential component of all communication messages and materials and ensures that what is designed is really suitable for the intended audiences. Even quick methods of pre-testing, such as rapid listening groups with different people nearby, can provide useful insight into how a behavior is understood or a message is perceived. Pre-testing helps ensure that your messages and materials have been contextualized properly. Even during the most critical of times, we recommend that programmers try to get hold of key audience members to ensure that messages serve the purpose for which they are intended. See the tool on the following page for recommendations on what aspects of messages and materials to pretest.

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Aspect to Be Pretested	Description	Sample Questions
Attractiveness	Whether the message/material commands attention	- What do you like about this message/material? - What do you not like about this message/material? - What was the first thing that caught your eye?
Comprehension	Whether the information is understood as intended	- What does the message/material say? - Who do you think the message/material is speaking to? - What words/sentences/images are difficult to understand?
Acceptance	Whether the material is culturally and socially acceptable	- Is there anything about this message/material that you find offensive or inappropriate? - Is there anything about this message/material that someone in your community may find offensive or inappropriate?
Relevance	Whether the information is of interest to the intended audience	- What type of people do you think should read/watch this message/material? - In what way are those people different from you or the same as you?
Call to Action	Whether the audience understands the call to action	- What does the message/material ask the audience to do?
Persuasion	Whether the key benefit is persuasive and appealing to the intended audience	- Why do you think you should do what the message/material asks you to do? - How likely are you to do that and why?
Stigma	Whether the message promotes stigma	- Is there anything about this message/material that makes you feel anger, judgement or fear for a certain person or group of people?
Improvement	If and how the material needs to be improved	- What would you change in this message/material to make it more appealing to you? - What information do you think is missing? - What else, if anything, would you like to include in this message/material?