

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DSWD AICS PROGRAM'S IEC MATERIALS AS PERCEIVED BY ITS BENEFICIARIES

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ABSTRACT

The Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) Program is a frontline social protection initiative of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). To ensure service delivery through effective Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials, this study examines the effectiveness of the materials utilized in the DSWD AICS Program as perceived by its beneficiaries.

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational approach to determine the beneficiaries' level of exposure to IEC materials, their knowledge of the DSWD AICS Program, and the effectiveness of the materials in terms of clarity of message, appropriateness of content, and attractiveness. It further examined the relationship between these variables using a closed-ended scaled survey instrument.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion, developed by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo, was adapted for this study. The ELM guided the analysis of which persuasion route the beneficiaries utilized when processing the IEC materials. These two major routes consist of the central route, involving deep message elaboration, and the peripheral route, which leads to the acceptance or rejection of a message without active scrutiny of the content.

The findings suggest that the respondents collectively perceived the DSWD AICS Program IEC materials as effective in terms of clarity of message, appropriateness of content, and attractiveness. These results indicate that the respondents may lean toward the peripheral route, relying on other external cues when assessing the information presented to them about the DSWD AICS Program.

Keywords: IEC Materials, Elaboration Likelihood Theory, government communication, DSWD, AICS Program

INTRODUCTION

One of the United Nations' sustainable development goals is to eradicate poverty in all forms worldwide. It targets that by 2030, a relative majority of the population is covered by the implemented social protection systems or floors (Goal 1 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). The reinforcement of effective labor markets, lowering risk exposure, and improving people's ability to safeguard themselves against risks and interruption or losses of income, are the aim of social protection as specified as a set of policies and programs that seek to mitigate poverty and vulnerability (Asian Development Bank, 2003).

In the Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is mandated to the development, coordination and implementation of social protection and poverty alleviation programs and services for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized sector.

Likewise, the DSWD has a program called Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation, or AICS, that purposely serves as a safety net of the families and individuals who are in crisis. The program provides medical, educational, funeral, transportation, food, and other cash assistance (AICS Program | DSWD - Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations, n.d.). This program also served as the Department's response to the Executive Order No. 292 in 1987, wherein to provide a balanced approach to welfare the will address the interests and needs of the Filipino people not only in times of crisis but, more importantly, in the situations that will lead to crisis. Currently, the DSWD AICS Program does not serve the poor or near poor only, they also aim to serve the middle-income earners who are in the midst of crisis situations.

Due to its relevance, the DSWD AICS Program has been pushed to be institutionalized by some politicians. However, the DSWD AICS Program has encountered communication issues such as political profiteering, the spread of false information about the program, and miscommunication within its program implementers.

The need for intensified communication efforts has been recommended to the DSWD AICS Program, in particular to strengthen its Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials dissemination or campaign. The IEC materials may include various products such as infographics, flyers, leaflets, brochures, social media posts, television adverts, radio spots, posters, billboards, etc. and it has proven to be an effective support to any development program to carry its persuasive messages.

Additionally, Information, Education, and Communication materials have been proven as an effective tool to increase awareness, counter misconceptions, provide relevant information, and promote social change (Poddar, 2023). Effective IEC materials will benefit the DSWD AICS Program, considering that one of the aims of the DSWD AICS Program as well is to reach and serve more individuals and families.

Herewith, this study aims to examine the perceived effectiveness of utilized IEC materials among beneficiaries. Through this research, it seeks to understand how effective the used IEC materials of the program are from the viewpoint of its beneficiaries.

Concepts and Theory Utilized in the Study

To examine the effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials, this study adapted the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion developed by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo in 1980. The model proposes two major routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. It aims to explain the various ways of processing stimuli (Elaboration Likelihood Model, 2022). The central route to persuasion involves message elaboration, which means an individual examines the message presented to them through a deep level of cognitive effort. Conversely, the peripheral route to persuasion accepts or rejects a message without carefully examining the presented content, relying instead on peripheral cues (Griffin et al., 2019).

With the guide of ELM, the effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials was assessed by first measuring the beneficiaries' exposure to the IEC materials, namely: DSWD Facebook post, DSWD website infographics, television plug, radio plug, poster, pull-up banner, brochure, and electronic kiosk. This process included determining the frequency of their exposure and identifying which specific communication materials were most frequently accessed or sought by the respondents.

Further, the study also determined beneficiaries' knowledge on the DSWD AICS Program, because according to Elaboration Likelihood Theory, individuals' existing knowledge can influence which persuasion route they follow. After this, the beneficiaries' perception of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials was determined as well, specifically, in the aspects of clarity of the message, appropriateness of the content, and the attractiveness of the materials.

Following the identification of the variables, specifically the beneficiaries' exposure to the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials, their knowledge of the program, and their perception of the materials' message clarity, content appropriateness, and attractiveness, the study evaluated the relationship between exposure and knowledge. This relationship represented the Central Route of persuasion.

Additionally, the relationship between the beneficiaries' exposure and their perception of the materials, which served as the Peripheral Route of persuasion. Consequently, by determining the elaboration route utilized by the respondents, the study demonstrated the effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials from the beneficiaries' standpoint.

METHODS

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research approach to examine the beneficiaries' perspectives on the effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials. This approach enabled the study to explore the relationships between variables without altering or interfering with them (Research Rebels, 2025).

In addition, a descriptive-correlational research approach is aligned with the study, as it seeks only to understand the relationships between the variables in the study, such as the exposure level of IEC materials, knowledge level of the beneficiaries on the DSWD AICS Program, and

perceived effectiveness of IEC materials in terms of clarity of message, appropriateness of content, and attractiveness, without examining cause-and-effect relationships.

To determine the sample size, the study utilized data from the DSWD AICS Program's first-quarter accomplishment report for 2024, which indicates that a total of 275,275 individuals benefited from the program. Of this total, 38,150 were assisted by the DSWD Central Office in Quezon City, while 237,125 received aid from the DSWD Field Office NCR ("Accomplishment Report," 2024). The study employed Cochran's formula and a proportional-quota sampling method since it aimed to capture the population of the DSWD AICS Program beneficiaries in the National Capital Region (NCR), specifically from the DSWD Central Office and DSWD Field Office NCR. The required sample proportion per office was 53 respondents for the DSWD Central Office and 331 for the DSWD Field Office NCR. Moreover, the study obtained 55 respondents for the final sample from the DSWD Central Office and 335 from the DSWD Field Office NCR, for a total of 390 respondents. This exceeded the required sample size for the study.

The research instrument was a closed-ended, scaled survey that was self-administered by the respondents. The components of the survey questionnaire included demographics such as name (which is optional), age group, gender, residence, the DSWD office where they availed of the assistance, and the type of assistance received. This was followed by determining the frequency of exposure of beneficiaries to each IEC material, testing their knowledge of the DSWD AICS Program, and assessing the effectiveness of the IEC materials based on the beneficiaries' perception of message clarity, content appropriateness, and attractiveness. These questions were directly based on the objectives of the research study.

Importantly, the research instrument was instrument was tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha, which was calculated by the consulting statistician. The overall coefficient for the instrument was 0.9400, indicating an excellent reliability level. This ensures the instrument's alignment with the research questions, objectives, and hypotheses. To add, the pre-test was conducted in the DSWD Central Office with at least 39 respondents or the 10% of the target sample population who did not participate as official respondents in the main study.

To ensure the ethical integrity of the study, an informed consent form was presented and explained to the respondents to guarantee their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their information in the survey.

The statistical tools utilized for the beneficiaries' demographic profile—including age group, gender, residence, office of availment, and type of assistance—were frequency and percentage distribution. Meanwhile, the beneficiaries' knowledge level was analyzed using percentage distribution. Since the research instrument utilized a Likert scale to measure the beneficiaries' exposure to and perceived effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials, the weighted mean was employed.

Moreover, the Chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between the beneficiaries' exposure to the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials and their knowledge of the program.

Concurrently, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was utilized to measure the significant relationship between the beneficiaries' level of exposure and the perceived effectiveness of the IEC materials in terms of clarity of message, appropriateness of content, and attractiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondents' Profile According to their Age Group, Gender, Residence, Location and Type of Assistance Availed

A moderate proportion (26.9%) of the respondents fell within the 45–54 age bracket. A strong majority were male (64.9%), while females constituted 34.4%. An overwhelming majority (90.3%) resided in the National Capital Region (NCR). In terms of the type of assistance availed from AICS, a clear majority received medical assistance (60.8%). Moreover, the distribution of respondents based on the location of assistance followed the study's sampling design, yielding a final count of 55 from the DSWD Central Office and 335 from the DSWD Field Office NCR, which successfully exceeded the required sample size.

2. Respondents' Level of Exposure to the DSWD AICS Program's IEC Materials

The IEC materials, including DSWD Facebook posts, DSWD website infographics, television plug, and poster, reportedly had exposure twice a month. This was interpreted as a moderate level of exposure. Conversely, the remaining IEC materials, specifically the radio plug, pull-up banner, brochure, and electronic kiosk, were encountered or sought by the respondents an average of once a month, interpreted as low level of exposure.

The findings indicate that the Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials with a moderate reach among the beneficiaries were mostly categorized as mass media, with the exception of posters. In relation to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Lance Holbert, Kelly Garrett, and Laurel Gleason argued that traditional media are "push media," which means information is pushed toward the audience. Conversely, new media are "pull media," where audiences actively pull the information they seek. They asserted that from the ELM's standpoint, audiences using "pull media" have the necessary motivation and are more likely to consume media messages at their preferred times, locations, and contexts, utilizing formats that fit their cognitive approach (Baran & Davis, 2014, p. 245).

Since the DSWD Facebook page and DSWD website infographics are new media, this indicates that the respondents are motivated to seek information from these IEC materials about the DSWD AICS Program. Concurrently, they were also exposed to information about the DSWD AICS Program via television, which pushes information to its audience, and through posters.

3. Respondents' Level of Knowledge on DSWD AICS Program

It was revealed that the vast majority of the respondents or 82.05% have an average level of knowledge on the DSWD AICS Program, which means they got the four to seven correct answers in the 10 item questions that measured their knowledge on the DSWD AICS Program.

Moreover, the questionnaire included items related to misconceptions and false information about the DSWD AICS Program, such as its vulnerability to exploitation by politicians or government officials for political gain, and the misconception that the program is just another financial aid or "ayuda" from the DSWD. This latter issue was addressed by DSWD AICS Program Director Edwin Morata, who emphasized that the program extends beyond mere financial assistance to include psychosocial support services, which notably feature psychological first aid and counseling (Cordero, 2025). This may have influenced the respondents' knowledge of the program, suggesting that their average level of knowledge indicates the presence of biased elaboration based on pre-existing beliefs about the DSWD AICS Program.

From the lens of ELM, the Central Route requires an individual to scrutinize the message content presented to them. Petty and Cacioppo emphasized the two kinds of elaborations: Objective elaboration is bottom-up thinking where the individual scrutinizes the message content without bias, seeking truths, and allowing the facts to determine the conclusion. Conversely, biased elaboration is top-down thinking in which an individual's pre-existing knowledge or beliefs color their scrutiny of the message content (Griffin et al., 2019).

4. Respondent's Perceived Effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC Materials in Terms of Clarity of Message, Appropriateness of Content, and Attractiveness of the Materials

Overall, the respondents' assessment of the IEC materials utilized in the DSWD AICS Program in terms of clarity of message, appropriateness of content, and attractiveness was collectively perceived as effective. For the clarity of message, the respondents find the materials easy to understand as they provide clear and concise information regarding the program. In regard to the appropriateness of content, the assessment indicates that the content is relevant to the target audience's interests and needs, using the right language, photos, graphics, tone, audio, and audio-visual elements. Finally, the materials' attractiveness stems from the use of creative and engaging fonts, layout, photos, audio-visuals, personalities, sounds, music, tone, and user-interface.

Furthermore, among all IEC materials, the DSWD Facebook post garnered the highest mean score as effective in terms of clarity of message (3.82), appropriateness of content (3.71), and attractiveness (3.72) from the respondents.

As mentioned in this study, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) posits two routes to persuasion, the central route, wherein an individual meticulously scrutinizes the presented message, and the peripheral route, where an individual relies on external cues that offer a mental shortcut to accept or reject the message (Griffin et al., 2019). For this study, the respondents collectively perceived the DSWD AICS Program IEC materials as effective in terms of clarity of message, content appropriateness, and attractiveness. This suggests that the respondents may lean toward the peripheral route when assessing the information presented to them about the DSWD AICS Program.

5. Relationship between the Respondents' Level of Exposure to the DSWD AICS Program's IEC Materials and their Level of Knowledge on DSWD AICS Program

Based on the chi-square test, which determined that the tabular value (15.507) is greater than the computed chi-square ($X^2 = 12.6372$), there is no significant relationship between the beneficiaries' level of exposure to the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials and their level of knowledge.

It is nonetheless noticeable that the DSWD Facebook posts and DSWD Website infographics are the IEC materials where respondents reported a moderate level of exposure. In light of this finding, the beneficiaries, as an audience, potentially "pull" information on the DSWD AICS Program in accordance with their needs. These materials are categorized as new media or "pull media," through which audiences actively retrieve the information they seek. From the perspective of the ELM, audiences who utilize "pull media" have a need-driven motivation and consume media in accordance with their preferred time, location, and context (Baran & Davis, 2014, p. 245).

Given this tendency, the respondents were motivated to seek information via the DSWD Facebook page and DSWD Website infographics as pull media, but they may have encountered and internalized other false information or misconceptions on social media related to the DSWD AICS Program. This exposure could have reinforced their pre-existing beliefs, thereby influencing how they understood the official IEC materials. This may imply that the respondents' elaboration on the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials was not conducted carefully, or that they did not process the materials through the central route.

6. Relationship between the Respondents' Level of Exposure and the Perceived Effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC Materials

The finding based on the Pearson Correlation indicates that there is a significant relationship between the beneficiaries' level of exposure and the perceived effectiveness of the IEC materials. This reflects the peripheral route to persuasion or elaboration among the respondents in terms of assessing the effectiveness of the DSWD AICS Program's IEC materials.

The results highlight that the DSWD Facebook posts, DSWD website infographics, and posters obtained a moderate positive correlation between the level of exposure and perceived effectiveness among the IEC materials utilized in the DSWD AICS Program. This strongly supports the claim that respondents commonly utilize "pull media," such as the DSWD Facebook page and website infographics, due to their profound need for information regarding the program. Likewise, the poster, which is considered a form of push media that delivers information directly to its audience, also yielded a moderate positive correlation between exposure and perceived effectiveness.

This further strengthens the claim from related literature that both traditional and social media should function collaboratively in government communication, wherein social media disseminates raw information and data, while traditional media verifies it (Yuan et al., 2024). Given that the respondents heavily utilized pull media, they potentially consumed

misconceptions and false information regarding the DSWD AICS Program online. Therefore, it is strongly suggested to utilize traditional media, such as posters, to verify information, especially since the respondents' assessment of the IEC materials may be driven by biased elaboration due to the prevalence of false information online.

Conclusion

The key finding of this study—the non-existent relationship between the beneficiaries' level of exposure to IEC materials and their level of knowledge of the DSWD AICS program—was confirmed by chi-square analysis. This result implies that the respondents did not utilize the central route of elaboration. In contrast, the study indicates a significant relationship between exposure and perceived effectiveness in terms of clarity of message, appropriateness of content, and attractiveness. This suggests that the effectiveness of the IEC materials, as perceived by the beneficiaries, was based on the Peripheral Route of persuasion.

The Peripheral Route was strongly evidenced by the information-seeking behavior of the respondents. As revealed by the study, respondents were more likely to utilize "Pull Media" (new media, such as DSWD Facebook posts and DSWD website infographics), actively pulling information that was in accordance with their immediate needs. This behavior corresponds to the respondents' high attention to clarity of message. In comparison, the remaining IEC materials are considered Push Media, which pushes information directly to the audience.

Viewed through the lens of the ELM, these results likely indicate the presence of biased elaboration based on pre-existing beliefs about the DSWD AICS Program. This was apparent in the average level of knowledge among respondents, where the assessment included statements related to misconceptions, such as program ownership, the notion of aid as merely 'ayuda,' and political profiteering. These factors strengthen the peripheral route by making respondents selective regarding the information they consume.

Consequently, the study also discerned the respondents' vulnerability to false information online. Due to their selective information-seeking behavior on pull media, they may have encountered and internalized misconceptions found on social media. This dynamic appears to have reinforced their existing beliefs and influenced their interpretation of the official IEC materials.

To counter online false information, the Department of Social Welfare and Development should strengthen its anti-fake news campaign to directly debunk internalized misconceptions among beneficiaries and the general public. Prioritizing push or traditional media such as radio plugs, posters, brochures, and electronic kiosks can help the Department provide verified information that effectively neutralizes false information and misconceptions. Furthermore, national government agencies must assess the impact of online false information on their institutional reputation and stakeholder perception. Maximizing all available IEC materials is essential, as both digital and traditional media play vital roles in communicating public programs and policies.

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DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS

The researcher utilized artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically Gemini, for grammar enhancement during the preparation of this study. However, the conceptualization, data interpretation, and overall composition of the work remain the original work of the author.

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