



## ODD-EVEN SCHEME ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*When the Delhi government implemented a pilot scheme to curb the vehicular pollution and remove the stigma of being the most polluted city of the world off the National Capital of the largest democracy of the world, it saw almost 30 per cent decrease in pollution level in Delhi, as per the data collected by air quality monitoring vans. The initiative, popularly known as the 'Odd-Even Scheme', which came into effect from January 1, 2016 was run for a period of 15 days. Experts were initially divided on this but figures available with Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) too have revealed a dramatic fall in air pollution from January 7, 2016 onwards. Supreme Court-mandated Environment Control Pollution Authority (EPCA) report showed that peak levels of pollution on odd-even days had fallen compared to past month and last year. It also claimed that pollution level had fallen faster from peak during odd-even days, despite slow wind conditions. The first phase of research carried out by the researcher just after the pilot project was over saw the delhiites clearly skewed in favour of the scheme. The results concluded that the people of Delhi by and large supported the 'odd-even formula' even when they did not deny that it caused them a lot of inconvenience. The support that it garnered was not restricted to the political leanings of the masses and was largely because of the communication strategies adopted by the government to reach out to the masses. Positive reinforcement of the idea by the media also played a pivotal role in increasing the acceptability amongst the delhiites. This paper attempts to assess if there was any significant change in the level of acceptability of the Odd-Even Scheme phase 2 and to examine the factors behind it. The findings reveal a significant decline in the support to the scheme. This could be attributed to a number of factors discussed in*

*the paper. The paper concludes that effective communication strategies when implemented may help in initiating attitudinal changes but communication strategies alone cannot bring about long term attitudinal changes at the societal level.*

**Keywords:** *Road rationing; Communication Strategies; Acceptability; Media Intervention; Media Efficacy.*

The dawn of the first day of this year came with a much talked about initiative taken by the Delhi government. The intent behind this initiative of the Delhi government was to curb the vehicular pollution and remove the stigma of being the most polluted city of the world off the National Capital of the largest democracy of the world. The initiative which came into effect from January 1, 2016 was a pilot project which was run for a period of 15 days. Popularly known as the ‘odd-even scheme’, it saw almost 30 per cent decrease in pollution level in Delhi, as per the data collected by air quality monitoring vans<sup>1</sup>. Experts were initially divided on this but figures available with Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) too have revealed a dramatic fall in air pollution from January 7, 2016 onwards. Supreme Court-mandated Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA) report showed that peak levels of pollution on odd-even days had fallen compared to past month and last year. It also claimed that pollution level had fallen faster from peak during odd-even days, despite slow wind conditions<sup>2</sup>. According to Fortune magazine which has placed the Delhi Chief Minister amongst World’s Top 50 Leaders for this initiative, roads were less clogged, hourly particulate air pollution concentrations dropped by 13 per cent, and citizens could breathe deep as a result of the Delhi-government’s initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Delhi may be the first Indian state to have implemented this scheme, but similar road-rationing rules have been imposed in many places around the world like Paris, Mexico and Bogota. This system was also implemented in Beijing in 2008 just before the summer Olympics.

This pilot project, on which more than Rs 20 crore were spent<sup>4</sup>, on one hand caused distress to many but on the other hand benefitted not only in terms of decreasing pollution level but also saw decongestion of Delhi roads and national highways.

After witnessing the enormous support to the Odd-Even Scheme phase 1, the Delhi government announced re-implementation of Odd-Even Scheme for 15 days with effect from April 15, 2016.

Although the government claims that the second phase of the scheme was successful, several contrary reports too have been published in the media<sup>5</sup>. A report submitted to the Delhi Transport Minister by a committee headed by a Special Commissioner (Transport) Mr K K Dahiya identified many factors that contributed to the worsened traffic during the second phase. The factors included additional volume of 3,88,88,6 cars, 1,34,598 two wheelers and 8,000 busses on the Delhi roads, the ongoing construction work and dismantling of BRT corridor and large volume of vehicles plying on roads for ferrying the school children etc<sup>6</sup>. According to a report by Delhi Pollution Control Committee, pollution levels during the second week of the car rationing scheme remained high in the national capital<sup>7</sup>.

This paper is an attempt to compare the level of acceptability of the initiative (Phase 1 and 2) by the delhiites and the factors behind that. The paper will also examine the level of effectiveness of various communication strategies used by the Delhi government.

The objectives of this study are:

- To find out the level of acceptance of the Odd-Even Scheme Phase 1 and Phase 2 in Delhi and NCR;
- To examine if there is any co-relation between the level of acceptance and the political leanings of delhiites;
- To study the factors behind the acceptance or to examine the factors for the reluctance to accept the scheme;
- To study the role of media in people's response to the Odd-Even Scheme;
- To critique the communication strategies used by the Delhi government for popularizing/garnering support of the people.

## **Research Design & Methods**

To meet the objectives of the undertaken study, both qualitative and quantitative research design was adopted. Two surveys were conducted—one each after the phase 1 and phase 2 of the Odd-Even Scheme -- to assess the level of acceptability of the Odd-Even Scheme and to map the factors behind it. A non-probability sample of 400 respondents each was derived. The universe

for the survey was Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon in the ratio of 2:1:1. Media content related to the undertaken study was also examined by the researcher. A focus group discussion was also conducted to meet the objectives of the undertaken study.

## **Results & Discussion**

Following results were yielded by the analysis of the surveys:

- **Awareness Level regarding the Odd-Even Scheme:** The surveys depict that all respondents were aware of the Odd-Even Scheme. There was not a single respondent, irrespective of the literacy level, who feigned ignorance regarding the scheme. They were also considerably aware of various restrictions and relaxations as described in the scheme.

The reason behind this could be attributed to the widespread publicity by the Delhi government and the media. At the time of the Odd-Even pilot project, the Delhi government is estimated to have spent over Rs 4 crore on advertising and publicity of the scheme – Rs 3 crore on pre-event promotions and Rs 1 crore on thanksgiving advertisements. Another Rs 3.5 crore were paid to volunteers who motivated people to adhere to the pilot scheme and handed out flowers<sup>8</sup>. According to a report, nearly 5000 civil defence volunteers were paid Rs 500 per day for 13 days, while the amount spent on buying flowers isn't known.<sup>9</sup>

In all, the Delhi government has spent Rs 5.39 crore in publicising the two rounds of the scheme, in spite of being criticized by the Opposition for this huge spend<sup>10</sup>. More money was spent on advertising for the first phase of Odd-Even Scheme as compared to the second phase for obvious reasons.

The government sources said that the ad spend was necessitated by the realization that huge awareness was required for the first-time scheme to succeed<sup>11</sup>. Although the Delhi government is estimated to have spent as much as Rs 12 crore between April and December on radio commercials propagating schemes initiated by the Delhi government, according to the radio operators the Delhi government's ad campaign on the odd-even

road rationing scheme has been the Delhi government's most ambitious promotional effort so far<sup>12</sup>. According to Dr Navneet Anand, Director, Greymatters, the Delhi government initiated publicizing the scheme at a war footing level much before it was implemented on January 1, 2016. This helped in creating mass awareness. In the words of Bindu Sethi, Chief Strategy Officer at advertising agency J Walter Thompson, part of WPP, "For the Odd-Even scheme they wanted the response in a short duration of time because this was to last for the first two weeks of January. They needed a quick build-up of awareness, which they got. Towards the end of December, conversations in Delhi were about this scheme."<sup>13</sup> Initially, media seemed to be divided on their stance with media conglomerates like Zee and Times Now raising issues like feasibility and practicality of the scheme while the other section of media was more attuned to the scheme. None the less, advertising on one hand created awareness while media too worked towards bringing the scheme in the public sphere. The Delhi government had been successful in painting the public sphere with bold, clear message. With the announcement of the second phase of the traffic rationing scheme, the Delhi Transport Minister also announced the government's decision to give more advertisements on the scheme.

- **Percentage of Respondents Directly Affected by the Scheme:** During the first phase of the scheme, when the respondents were asked if they were affected by the Odd-Even Scheme implemented by the Delhi government, 71 per cent (284) answered in affirmative whereas 18 per cent (72) said that their life wasn't directly affected because of the scheme. As many as 44 respondents could not answer the question. Almost the same percentage of respondents (76 per cent) stated that they were affected by the scheme during the second phase. This slight increase in the percentage could possibly be attributed to the fact that unlike during the first phase of the scheme, schools were open during this time.
- **Extent to which the scheme was followed:** During the first phase of the road rationing scheme, as many as 68.25 per cent (273) respondents said that they religiously followed the scheme (wherever applicable) whereas 26.25 per cent admitted that they flouted the law sometime or the other. However, most of the respondents who flouted the rules of the scheme cited reasons like urgency to attend to something or lack of 'acceptable'

alternatives etc. Few even said that “it just slipped from my mind”. As many as 5.5 per cent (22) respondents who completely flouted the scheme said they were not convinced and saw the scheme as another “media-hyped gimmick” of the Delhi government.

According to a media report published in The Times of India, the Delhi government has informed SC-mandated EPCA that as many as 60,000 cars have been converted to CNG since the odd-even restrictions started on January 1<sup>14</sup>. Public transport providers DTC and DMRC told EPCA that DTC ridership has increased by 3 lakh per day while Metro, which usually sees a dip in ridership in January, has been running packed<sup>15</sup>.

According to Prof (Dr) Archana Shukla, former head, Department of Behavioural Sciences, Lucknow University, India there is a general tendency of the people to perceive change as dangerous and thus any change or expected alteration in human behaviour is met with initial resistance and reluctance. The more the probable impact of the innovative idea, higher the resistance. This can be altered by effective communication (constant message reinforcement using different communication strategies), Dr Shukla adds.

According to official data, in all as many as 10,021 people were challaned for violating the scheme and the government collected over Rs 2 crore from the violators<sup>16</sup> during phase 1.

In comparison to the first phase, the second phase saw a decline in the number of people who religiously followed the scheme. Out of the 400 respondents, only 216 said that they honestly followed the regulations. The respondents who flouted the rule cited reasons-- like inadequate public transport and lack of planning at the ground level-- for not following it. They also stated that hiring a cab on daily basis is economically taxing for them. Many respondents even mentioned that since as per the media reports, the second phase of the scheme hasn't been able to bring down the pollution level, they do not feel convinced to follow the scheme.

The undertaken study shows that the percentage of people resisting the initiative was skewed in favour of those wanting to give it a try when the idea was introduced in the

first phase. The focus group discussion reveals that the credit for this support to the scheme goes to the effective strategy at a massive scale used by the government along with the media support. Chief strategy officer, JWT Bindu Sethi says that the present Delhi government knows how to communicate an idea<sup>17</sup>. This combined with peoples' inherent desire to have a sense of control over society lead to creating positive orientation for "at least giving it a try", adds Prof (Dr) Rishipal, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Applied Sciences. According to Mr Sanjay Ahirwal, Managing Editor, NDTV the scheme roll out was very strategically timed. It was the time when the media coverage of The UN Climate Change Conference 2015 held at Paris from Nov 30- Dec 12, 2015 had already brought the pollution-related concerns in the public sphere. The Indian Express started the whole discourse about environment but soon most newspapers and media channels were highlighting the issue. The Delhi government encashed on the hidden anxiety of the people about the issue, he added. A focus group discussion post the second phase of the road rationing scheme concluded that the people of Delhi, although still felt strongly about the increasing pollution level, yet did not consider the rationing scheme as a viable solution unless the government significantly strengthens the public transport system.

- **Opinion about the Scheme:** When the Delhi government unveiled a blueprint to tackle the smog in New Delhi — called the world's most polluted city by the World Health Organization — many were skeptical<sup>18</sup>. However, when the researcher conducted the survey and asked the respondents if they supported the scheme, 73 per cent replied in an affirmative. As many as 12 per cent said they were not convinced about the scheme whereas 15 per cent were indecisive. A whopping support by the people of Delhi and NCR could be attributed to the repeated mass media messages using different appeals to gain idea acceptability. According to Harshad Jain, Chief Executive Officer of Fever 104, a radio station operated by HT Media Ltd, the Delhi government knew very well which audience segment they wanted to target and placed their ads accordingly. The extensive radio strategy seems to have worked in terms of spreading awareness and ad recall. Vandana Das, President of media-buying agency DDB Mudra (North) agrees that from the government's perspective, it is about getting a captive audience and hammering the message across. The more you listen, the more you imbibe, she adds.<sup>19</sup>

Another interesting fact that emerged was that the number of people principally supporting the Odd-Even Scheme was slightly more than the number of people completely following it. According to an opinion poll by Change.org, world's one of the largest online platform for social change, 78 per cent of Delhiites want the reintroduction of Odd-Even scheme. Out of this 78 per cent, 53 per cent want the scheme to be implemented permanently<sup>20</sup>. However, the scenario changed after the second phase of the scheme where only 38 per cent of the respondents wanted the scheme to be permanently implemented. As many as 82.9 per cent of the respondents who advocated in favour of permanent implementation of the scheme too wanted the government to ensure that it should not cause "too much" inconvenience to the daily commuters.

- **Reasons for following the scheme:** Following reasons emerged from the data analysis
  - ✓ Conviction
  - ✓ Innovative Appeals by children
  - ✓ Innovative Appeals by civil volunteers
  - ✓ Keeness to explore the option as a solution to pollution
  - ✓ Penalty Fear
  - ✓ Political affiliations
  
- **Challenges caused due to The Odd-Even Scheme:** When the respondents were asked if they faced any kind of challenges due to the Odd-Even Scheme, 48 per cent (192 respondents) answered in affirmative. Understandably, all these respondents were males who drove four wheelers. Many of them said that they could not/did not car pool and hiring a cab was expensive/inconvenient as compared to using their own car. It is Interesting to note here that in spite of these challenges, 71.8 per cent (138 respondents) of them were still in favour of the Scheme. However, in the second phase, a whopping 83 per cent of the respondents said they faced problems on daily basis because of the scheme.
  
- **Response to re-implementation of the Odd-Even Scheme:** The data analysis revealed that as many as 71 per cent of the respondents are in favour of re-implementing of the

Scheme. While 18 per cent were averse to re-implementation of the Scheme, 11 per cent were indecisive. Interestingly, irrespective of the response, most respondents suggested amendments/changes in the scheme.

However, the data analysis after the second phase depicted that only 39 per cent are in favour of re-implementation of the scheme. The sharp decline in the support towards the scheme may be attributed to the fact that no significant changes were introduced when the scheme was re-introduced in the month of April, 2016. The government, it seems, did not understand the pulse of the people or was still riding high on the huge success of the first phase of the scheme.

In the focus group discussion, it emerged that after the pilot project, Delhiites were feeling more confident of the Scheme not only because of their earlier experience of the odd-even scheme but also due to constant public participation. The Delhi government opened avenues for public participation in decision making regarding the scheme. In order to win the public support, the government launched a website – [oddevenidea.delhi.gov.in](http://oddevenidea.delhi.gov.in) – through which people can send their opinions on the implementation of the second phase of the road-rationing experiment. For not-so-tech-savvy citizenry, a mobile phone number has been widely publicized on which one may give his/her feedback<sup>21</sup>. Also, the government-authorized bodies have been conducting related surveys to understand the pulse of the people. The Delhi government too carried out surveys and public consultations through *Mohalla Sabhas* to find out what Delhiites thought of the scheme. According to the government statement, 81 per cent of the respondents wanted the Odd-Even policy to return<sup>22</sup>.

- **Amendments Recommended for Re-implementation of the Odd-Even Scheme:** The survey data analysis and the focus group discussion revealed that the majority of the people of Delhi may be in favour of the re-implementation of the Odd-Even scheme, but none the less they made some suggestions. Amongst the various recommendations, the top four recommendations were:
  - More number of buses (both without cooling and air conditioned) to be introduced

- Measures to ensure that auto drivers ply on all routes and run by meter only
  - No exemption for women. Women may be exempted only when accompanied by children
  - Other causes of pollution should also be identified and simultaneously worked upon so that the results are more promising.
- **Measuring Success of the Odd-Even Scheme:** When the respondents were asked if they considered the pilot project of the road rationing scheme a success or a failure, majority of them said that the scheme was a success. As many as 79 per cent of the respondents believed that the scheme was a success. As many as 14 per cent said that it was a failure whereas 7 per cent could not answer the question. 86.7 per cent of the respondents who termed the scheme successful seemed unaware about the approximate decrease in the pollution level. The percentage of the respondents who believed that the Odd-Even scheme was successful dropped drastically to a shocking 46 per cent after the second phase. The respondents said that the second phase of the scheme did not bring down the pollution level or decongest the roads. Also, they felt that the government should have worked towards providing better arrangements to the daily commuters so as to make it successful.

However, after the first phase, the respondents talked about other benefits of the scheme also. The respondents talked about traffic decongestion. Many of them admitted that now they saw car pooling and using public transport as a viable option. During the focus group discussion, Dr Shukla spoke about the social implications of such initiatives with which the researcher could identify while analyzing the data.

The respondents attributed many reasons to the success of the first phase of the scheme. All seemed concerned about pollution hazards. Many spoke about the awareness campaign launched by the Delhi government, innovative way of drawing attention through involvement of school children as volunteers, the strategy of giving flowers to defaulters and positive prodding for ensuring maximum compliance of the scheme. Many said that more than the fear of facing penalty, they felt attuned to the cause. This change in the mindset of people, according to Dr Shukla -- the behavioural and applied sciences expert -- was one of the primary reasons for the success of the scheme apart from the additional infrastructural support ensured by the

government. There is a perceptible Delhi-based bias among the media because of which the scheme got ample media coverage. This along with aggressive campaign through very effective ads, radio addresses using both rational and emotional appeals to reach out to different strata using different media platforms contributed to the success of the scheme. In fact, the scheme was a tiny replication of the same movement that got Arvind Kejriwal to power, adds the PR strategist Dr Anand. In fact, Fortune magazine, in its recent issue, has featured the Delhi Chief Minister amongst the world's 50 greatest leaders in recognition of his efforts to introduce Odd-Even Scheme<sup>23</sup>. However, there was a shocking decline in the number of respondents who believed that the Odd-Even Scheme phase 2 was a success.

- **Probable reasons for the Scheme Outcome:** Seventy nine per cent of the respondents who believed that the first phase of the Odd-Even Scheme was a success attributed many reasons for the whopping support it garnered across gender and class. They said the scheme owed its success to the aggressive media campaign and the relief it provided to the daily commuters in terms of easing the vehicular traffic on roads. The respondents believed that the government “very intelligently” involved the children in reinforcing the idea, which in turn enhanced the idea acceptability. People were sensitized of the pollution menace and appeals were made to the masses using rational as well as emotional appeal.

Interestingly, respondents, even after the second phase of the scheme, agreed that the ad campaigns related to the scheme were very appealing and media too gave ample coverage to the scheme. However, they also quoted media reports on negligible effect of the scheme on pollution and decongestion of roads. The Odd-Even Scheme phase 2 could not give the promised deliverables, they felt.

## **Conclusion**

Odd-Even Scheme phase 1 succeeded in garnering the support of the people at large. The credit for its success goes to many factors. The announcement and implementation of the scheme was strategically timed as media had already brought out the growing environmental concerns after the UN Climate Change Conference held at Paris to the public sphere. The aggressive media campaign which was started much before the scheme implementation helped in enhancing the

idea acceptability. Also, the communication tools and the innovative strategies used for mass mobilization proved effective with a mix of rational and emotional appeals. Different communication platforms were used for popularizing the scheme and increasing acceptability. The government ensured continuous public participation/involvement in the scheme implementation. The support that the scheme garnered across different strata of society goes on to prove that in times of crisis superficial needs and ego take a backseat and leadership and affiliations come to the forefront. However, the second phase of the scheme saw a decline in the public support. This could be attributed to apathy of the authorities to the “voice of the people” along with negligible drop in the pollution level and traffic decongestion. The paper concludes that effective communication strategies when implemented may help in initiating attitudinal changes but communication strategies alone cannot bring about long term attitudinal changes at the societal level.

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