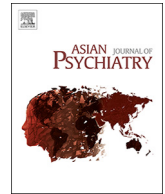




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Can #PlayOurpartTogether help prevent miscommunication?

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#PlayApartTogether is a trending hashtag on twitter currently. The Facebook page of the Google Play Store mentions #PlayApartTogether “is all about bringing us together through games, special events, activities, and rewards!” (#PlayApartTogether, n.d.) The promotional campaign focusses on bringing “special events, exclusives, activities, rewards, and inspiration to some of the most popular games in the world” to help players fight the urge to socialize in person. (Play Apart Together Uses Games to Promote Social Distancing, 2020)

Interestingly, there are web pages that describe #PlayApartTogether as a WHO campaign. On the other hand, there are numerous news articles that are debating whether WHO has changed its stance on gaming disorders. (“#PlayApartTogether,” 2020) This issue is particularly relevant as social distancing has been encouraged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We carried out a twitter search for #PlayApartTogether. We searched specifically for tweets that tagged the WHO’s official twitter handle (@WHO). The search was conducted on April 5, 2020. A total of 149 tweets were retrieved. On reviewing the search results, eight tweets were excluded from the analysis. Seven of these tweets were in non-English language and details for one tweet were not captured completely. The remaining 141 tweets were included in the present analyses. The data were compiled and analyzed using SPSS version 21.0 (Armonk, NY, IBM Corp). The results were considered significant at p -value < 0.05 .

Of the total tweets, 20 tweets (14.2 %) suggested #PlayApartTogether as a WHO recommendation or campaign. Seven tweets (5 %) suggested that the WHO has collaborated with the gaming industry on this campaign. The tweets that did not suggest WHO joining the gaming industry on the campaign were liked and retweeted

significantly more as compared to the ones that suggested such a collaboration ($p = 0.001$ and 0.026 , respectively, Mann-Whitney U test). Thirteen tweets (9.2 %) suggested either a possibility of consideration of discontinuation of gaming disorder or WHO finding some benefit in gaming. The tweets that did not suggest discontinuation of gaming disorder as a diagnostic category were liked significantly more than the other tweets ($p = 0.023$, Mann-Whitney U test). Interestingly, around fifty percent (73 tweets) of the tweets encouraged physical distancing and supported the WHO for its efforts. However, the retweets were comparable irrespective of this message (p -value > 0.05). Fifty-six tweets (39.7 %) carried a promotional message for a game or a gaming console or device. Finally, tweets that suggested partnership of the account holder with WHO to encourage or support #PlayApartTogether were liked and retweeted significantly more than the other tweets ($p = .002$ and $.002$, respectively on Mann-Whitney U test).

Gaming disorder was included as a diagnosable medical condition in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). (Higuchi et al., 2020) (King and Potenza, 2019) This move from the WHO has been criticized in the past both in academic publications as well as media reports. (Aarseth et al., 2017)

The current situation in the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is extraordinary. There are multiple reports expressing concern over the misleading information amid the COVID-19 pandemic. WHO’s recent recommendations have cautioned against excessive gaming and screen use in the current times. (“#HealthyAtHome,” n.d.) The ‘stay at home’ recommendation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic may offer reasons to spend an increased amount of time gaming.

Keeping in mind the complexity of the current situation, it is important that the precise and unambiguous public health messages are

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conveyed. One needs to be cognizant of the potential adverse consequences of excessive engagement in gaming behavior. The situation secondary to the pandemic should not serve as a risk factor for an increase in the public health burden due to gaming disorders. Every stakeholder needs to play its part. Hopefully, *#PlayOurpartTogether* shall soon be trending more on twitter.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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