

**REVIEW**

**DERLEME**

**AN EXAMPLE OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION IN THE PANDEMIC PERIOD:  
HEALTH COMMUNICATION STUDIES FOR TCVDS (2021)**

**Sırrı Serhat SERTER**

**Anadolu University Faculty of Communication Sciences, Department of Cinema and Television,  
Eskişehir, TÜRKİYE**

**ABSTRACT**

As of the pandemic period, the time people spend at home has been extended out of necessity and the use of digital platforms and social media accounts, which are sources to access information, has increased among middle aged individuals rather than being primarily relegated to the realm of the younger population. Due to the limitations brought by the pandemic, the duration of stay at homes has extended, but the durations of movement have decreased. At the same time, changing dietary habits have also laid the groundwork for many potentially fatal diseases. The Turkish Cerebrovascular Diseases Association has foreseen the possible increase in stroke cases due to the pandemic and has tried to use social media accounts as a source where people can access accurate health information. Studies show that TBDHD has succeeded in increasing interaction with the public through its social media campaigns in the field of health communication.

**Key Words:** Health communication, stroke, social media, Turkish Cerebrovascular Diseases Society, awareness work.

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**Address for Correspondence:** Assoc. Prof. Sırrı Serhat Serter. Anadolu University Faculty of Communication Sciences, Department of Cinema and Television, Eskişehir, Türkiye.

**Phone:** +90222 335 05 80 **E-mail:** ssserter@anadolu.edu.tr

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**ORCID ID:** Sırrı Serhat Serter [0000-0002-1656-5351](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1656-5351).

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## PANDEMİ DÖNEMİNDE SAĞLIK İLETİŞİMİNE BİR ÖRNEK: TBDHD İÇİN YAPILAN SAĞLIK İLETİŞİMİ ÇALIŞMALARI (2021)

### ÖZET

Pandemi dönemi itibariyle, kişilerin evde geçirdikleri süreler zorunlu olarak uzamış ve bilgi erişim kaynaklarından olan dijital platformlar ve sosyal medya hesaplarının kullanımı da genç nüfusa etiketli olmaktan çıkarak orta yaş ve üzeri kişiler içinde sıklıkla kullanılır hale gelmiştir. Pandeminin getirdiği sınırlılıklar sebebi ile kişilerin evde kalma süreleri uzamış ancak hareket etme sürelerinde azalma görülmeye başlanmıştır. Aynı zamanda değişen beslenme alışkanlıkları da birçok ölümcül olabilecek hastalık için zemin oluşturmuştur. Türk Beyin Damar Hastalıkları Derneği (TBDHD), pandemi koşulları ile inme vakalarında olabilecek artışı öngörmüş ve sosyal medya hesaplarını kişilerin doğru sağlık bilgilerine erişim sağlayabildiği bir kaynak olacak şekilde kullanımı yoluna gitmiştir. Yapılan çalışmalar göstermektedir ki; TBDHD sağlık iletişimi alanında sürdürmüş olduğu sosyal medya kampanyaları ile toplum ile başarılı bir etkileşim yaratabilmeyi başarı ile gerçekleştirmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Sağlık iletişimi, inme, sosyal medya, Türk Beyin Damar Hastalıkları Derneği, farkındalık çalışması.

### INTRODUCTION

Health has been an important and dynamic element in all periods of history. Although health has different understandings and practices in every society, it is one of the concepts that have indisputable importance for all times and societies. Health has become an area that should be interpreted as an entirety of new understanding and practices due to the cultural, economic, political, and technological changes and developments in our century. The desires of people to maintain their health and their efforts to improve when they get sick have led them to produce various solutions. Despite the fact that the traditional practices have been replaced by modern practices over time, both forms of practice are still available. The common point where traditional and modern medical practices meet is the improvement of health in the simplest term (1).

Health behaviors include actions that have an impact on the lives of individuals and need to be implemented positively. Knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of people about health are among the main factors in the formation of behaviors related to health. "Health before everything", which is a discourse that has reached from the past to the present emphasizes that people should pay attention to their health. One of the main factors that will create this attention is the concept of "health communication". The adoption of positive health behaviors by people can only be achieved by accurate and effective communication (2).

Health is important in both individual and social terms; therefore, the discipline of health

communication has developed based on using communication strategies and practices to inform society about the issues related to health, ensuring the adoption of ideal attitudes, and creating social awareness about the risks concerning health. Campaigns to be carried out within the scope of health communication play a critical role in reaching the targeted large audiences in health communication (3).

Health communication aims to enable people to develop positive health behaviors, present accurate information about health, and correct what has been known to be false or incomplete. Therefore, health communication, whose target audience is human beings, should use methods that can communicate directly with individuals in society to achieve these goals (4). In addition, health communication has individual, social, and institutional dimensions in terms of raising the awareness of the masses in the field of health, increasing the quality of life, preventing diseases before they develop, determining the ways to cope with them after they develop, and managing the process correctly.

There are various non-governmental organizations or associations related to health in our country; however, we cannot argue that all of them carry out qualified health communication activities for their target groups and public health. In addition, a small number of non-governmental organizations use different communication channels or facilities in health communication activities. One of these organizations is the Turkish Cerebrovascular Diseases Society (TCDS), which

has led the fight against stroke in our country together with the Turkish Neurological Society. Despite the fact that stroke is an extremely important health problem, it is a disease that has not attracted as much attention as more commonly known health problems such as heart diseases and cancer. Nevertheless, TCDS, one of the most important authorities in the field of stroke in our country, gave much more importance to health communication campaigns that it started during the pandemic in 2021, and carried out qualified activities to inform society about stroke and raise awareness. This article presents the health communication activities carried out by TCDS to create awareness about stroke in 2021 and during the pandemic. In this way, it will be beneficial for other associations and organizations to examine the health communication activities carried out by a non-governmental organization operating in the field of health and observe how different communication methods have been used.

### THE CONCEPT OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION

The concept of health communication emerged in the seventies with academic research conducted under the leadership of the Cancer Information Service within the National Cancer Institute of the United States of America (USA) and it has been accepted as a field of activity (5). Studies in the field of health communication have rapidly become widespread in Europe after the USA and have become a popular field of activity and practice in our country with the interest of academicians, non-governmental organizations, and public/private institutions operating in the field of health since the early 2000s (6).

It can be argued that health communication emerged as a response to the needs of the modern world to respond to the changing health expectations of individuals. Health communication is defined as "the examination and use of communication strategies to influence individual and social decisions that improve health" (7). Health communication is carried out by individuals and communication mediated by the media in the delivery of health services and promotion and improvement of health.

Health communication is an applied field of activity since it examines the pragmatic effects of human communication on the provision of health services and the promotion of public health, and

activities in this field are generally used to increase the quality of delivery of health services (8). Therefore, health communication is generally based on identifying, examining, and solving the problems concerning the promotion and improvement of health care and health (9). In particular, it can be argued that mass communication aims to change risky health behaviors in society and is carried out with the aim of promoting health.

Health and communication have always been two basic concepts that have manifested themselves throughout the existence of humanity. There is an inevitable relationship between the providers and the recipients of service from the beginning to the end of the process of providing health care. Realization of institutional goals in health institutions, provision of the service in every sense, and reflection of the reputation and quality of the institution are related to a correct communication process (10).

Health communication campaigns can create significant changes in societies in terms of health. These campaigns can enable individuals to become aware of the issues that pose a health risk, develop social awareness, adopt the desired attitudes about health, and change the undesired attitudes. Under current conditions, new media platforms stand out as communication environments to enable health communication campaigns to achieve their goals successfully.

The fact that the digitalization process enables the rapid dissemination of information and provides access to large target groups in a very short time and at a low cost has also created effects on the health communication discipline. New communication environments that can be used for target audiences to access information related to health, communicate with professionals in the field of health and interact with other people with similar interests or problems in the focus on health ensure the increase of the effects of these campaigns (3).

In health communication, it is sufficient to inform people about a health problem face-to-face in some cases, while in some cases, people should be informed at the social level. Communication experts should determine the level of communication to be carried out and these experts should select the appropriate tools for the nature and prevalence of the problem. These tools may

have a very wide range. According to the level of communication to be carried out, brochures, television spots, or movies are now indispensable tools of the current health communication practices (11).

Physicians, medical researchers, health policy practitioners, and health communication professionals have important information that consumers need to make better decisions about their health. Therefore, they try to persuade them and guide them correctly (12). In this respect, it can be argued that the main issue of health communication is to create awareness about health, protect the health, and improve it. Looking at the health communication and the media used, it can be stated that issues related to health reach the target audiences through published, visual, or digital media and there are different approaches to the type of media that is more effective in this field.

In the light of the information provided so far, it can be argued that health communication is one of the indispensable and basic needs of all private or public institutions related to health today. Considering the state that technology and communication tools have reached today, it seems to be one of the most important goals of all health institutions that information concerning health, which is the most crucial issue in human life, is delivered to all segments of society in an accurate, widespread, and sustainable way. One of the most effective, successful, and widespread institutions in health communication in Turkey is the Turkish Cerebrovascular Diseases Society (TCDS).

## HEALTH COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES OF TCDS IN 2021

As in all other countries of the world, a road map was followed in our country to prioritize awareness about global epidemics and pandemics in the studies conducted in the field of health in 2021. Accordingly, TCDS has arranged its public information and awareness activities about neurological diseases in general and stroke in particular for all age groups and redesigned them to ensure the participation of the target audience through intensive social media. Some of the campaigns carried out by the TCDS have attracted the attention of the mainstream visual and printed media channels since they are carried out for the first time in the field of health in our country, and

they have often been visibly displayed in the press. Atilla Özcan Özdemir, the President of TCDS, took part in the morning show of İsmail Küçükkaya to explain the activities carried out and planned within the Society on 10th May Stroke Prevention Day. The content was also announced on social media accounts and the number of target groups reached increased (Image 1).



**Image 1.** TCDS President Prof. Dr. Atilla Özcan Özdemir gave information about stroke and activities of the society as a guest on FOX TV Çalar Saat Show on May 10th, Stroke Prevention Day.

In addition to the mainstream media, Bijen Nazlıel, the Board Member of TCDS, and Ufuk Can, a member of TCDS appeared on Başkent TV. Mustafa Gökçe, the Board Member of TCDS participated in the Güne Bakış show on local news channel AKSU TV, İpek Midi, the Board Member of TCDS, participated in TRT FM, and Vedat Ali Yürekli, the Board Member of TCDS, participated in Max FM to create awareness and provide accurate information about stroke on behalf of the association (Image 2).

In printed newspapers, awareness about stroke was mentioned in the health column of Ayşegül Domaniç from Hürriyet and Isparta Express Newspaper. On internet-based news websites, the Society was mentioned in Ege Agency, Bir Gün, and Anadolu Agency. The news of Anadolu Agency was featured on platforms such as Sabah, Gazete Kollektif, Dürüst Haber, Risale Haber, Virüs Haber, and Wdm News. The content was published on Onedio, a social content platform frequently visited by the relevant age group, to ensure that the visibility activities reach the young age group (Figure 3).

TCDS developed strategies to reach the highest number of people in Turkey and a special activity was carried out in Istanbul considering the



**Image 2.** TV Shows featuring the Board Members of TCDS, Prof. Dr. Bijen Nazlıel and Prof. Dr. Mustafa Gökçe.

population. Visual materials on the awareness about stroke were displayed on all public transportation vehicles and city screens in Istanbul between May 10th-12th. In addition, another activity was carried out with Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality at the provincial level, and visual materials on awareness about stroke were displayed on public transportation vehicles in Balıkesir and 20 district municipalities for 2 weeks.

The Society contacted 20 football clubs competing in the TFF Super League with the request to go out on the field with a banner to increase the multiplier effect in the communication of the visibility activities. Although TFF prohibited athletes from going out on the field



**Image 3.** The visual published on Onedio platform. Access Link: <https://onedio.com/haber/10-mayis-dunya-inme-onleme-gununde-inme-hakkinda-bilmeniz-gerekenler-980266>

with a banner within the scope of Covid-19 measures, Beşiktaş, Gençlerbirliği, Konyaspor, Alanyaspor, and Başakşehirspor displayed the prepared banners in the tribunes (Figure 4).

In addition, within the scope of 29 October World Stroke Day activities, TCDS collaborated on the basis of provinces and carried out visibility studies on central city screens and on public transportation channels. In this context, visuals prepared about awareness on city screens and public transportation (including bus and underground stations) belonging to municipalities in Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, Manisa, Hatay, Balıkesir, Kahramanmaraş, Denizli, and Çanakkale were displayed for a period of one to two weeks. In addition, 50 posters were displayed in İzmir. In Antalya, visuals on awareness were displayed in five billboard areas allocated for the Society in urban centers. Field activities were also carried out in Ankara with the distribution of 150 booklets about stroke to the citizens in the underground stations and public areas (Figure 5).

The most prominent visual, audio, and printed media displays can be listed as follows (Table, Image 6).

Sports games were also used within the scope of awareness activities to provide effective visibility. Accordingly, a 1x14 banner displaying "Early Intervention is the Solution for Stroke" was sent to the relevant clubs for the football games listed below, and they were displayed in the tribunes during the Konyaspor-Fenerbahçe and



Image 4. Our banners displayed on the tribunes during football games.



Image 5. Examples from our field activities.

**Table.** Examples of health communication studies.

News Website	Link
DHA	<a href="https://www.dha.com.tr/saglikyasam/pandemide-inme-belirtilerine-ragmen-hastalar-doktora-gitmedi/haber-1857550">https://www.dha.com.tr/saglikyasam/pandemide-inme-belirtilerine-ragmen-hastalar-doktora-gitmedi/haber-1857550</a>
CNN TÜRK	<a href="https://www.cnnurk.com/saglik/inmeye-bagli-olumlerin-kovid-19-vakalarindan-fazla-oldugu-uyarisi">https://www.cnnurk.com/saglik/inmeye-bagli-olumlerin-kovid-19-vakalarindan-fazla-oldugu-uyarisi</a>
HÜRRİYET NEWSPAPER	<a href="https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/aysegul-domanic-velce/dunyada-bir-yilda-17-milyon-kisi-inme-geciriyor-41928320">https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/aysegul-domanic-velce/dunyada-bir-yilda-17-milyon-kisi-inme-geciriyor-41928320</a>
SES NEWSPAPER	<a href="https://www.sesgazetesi.com.tr/haber/8081785/ataturk-devlet-hastanesinde-inme-gunu-etkinligi-yapildi">https://www.sesgazetesi.com.tr/haber/8081785/ataturk-devlet-hastanesinde-inme-gunu-etkinligi-yapildi</a>



Image 6. Examples of news about us published in the media.



Hatayspor-Beşiktaş games on 30.10.2021, Başakşehirspor-Adana Demirspor game on 01.11.2021, Beşiktaş-Trabzonspor game on 06.11.2021, and Fenerbahçe-Kayserispor game on 07.11.2021 (Image 7).

In addition, the physicians, who were members of the Society provided information in the activities and participated in the communication activities despite the changing and heavy working conditions during the pandemic. On October 29th, TCDS enabled healthcare professionals to make a very important contribution to visibility activities by wearing T-shirts with "Early Intervention is the Solution for Stroke" prints. The images were published on social media accounts which allowed for reaching individuals other than the individuals reached one-on-one (Image 8).

TCDS diversified its Stroke Awareness Activities for 2021 under two headings: "protection against stroke" and "during stroke". Within the scope of "protection against stroke", the activities were arranged in a way to cover the young, middle, and advanced age groups, and they were shared as carousel posts on the social media accounts of TCDS with the headline "Strategy for Protection Against Stroke During Pandemic" and they were also displayed as sliders (featured content) at inme.org.tr (Image 9).

In addition, a blog page was created at inme.org.tr, and blog posts prepared by specialist

physicians were shared periodically. The announcements of blog posts were made from the social media accounts of TCDS and the information presented in the text format was converted into Carousel and video post designs suitable for social media. Therefore, a link for the blog page was provided and easy access to information content was ensured. The top headings that stand out on the blog page, which can be accessed from <https://www.inme.org.tr/blog> are as follows (Image 10):

- What is trans fat? What should we pay attention to about trans-fat for cerebrovascular health?
- How can we distinguish stroke from other neurological function losses?
- What is the relationship between blood pressure and stroke? What should we pay attention to in this regard?
- Is the higher the cholesterol level, the higher the risk of stroke?
- Why is the first four and a half hours very important in stroke? What happens in our body during this process?

In addition, the contents were created for social media activities to provide accurate information to the public from the primary source -field specialist physicians- as well as to replace the inaccurate information with the correct information. Follow-up participatory tests were prepared to determine whether the information

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Image 7. Our banners displayed on the tribunes during football games.



Image 8. Visibility activities carried out by neurology physicians on October 29th by wearing T-shirts with the "Early Intervention is the Solution for Stroke" prints.



Image 9. An example of a slider visual.

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Image 10. Examples of posts with reference to the blog page.

published through social media channels was understood according to its purpose, and contents were published under the headings that were considered to be incomplete by processing the data obtained (Figure 11).

The informative contents of TCDS were not only limited to production at the desk. Videos were recorded at Hacettepe and Gazi University Hospitals in Ankara and Pendik Training and Research Hospital and Kartal Lütfi Kırdar City Hospital in Istanbul by Prof. Dr. Atilla Özcan Özdemir, Prof. Dr. Bijen Nazlıel, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erdem Gürkaş, Prof. Dr. İpek Midi, and Prof. Dr. Mehmet Akif Topçuoğlu. The lengths of videos were determined to be between 1-2 minutes. Contents were prepared to fully explain the

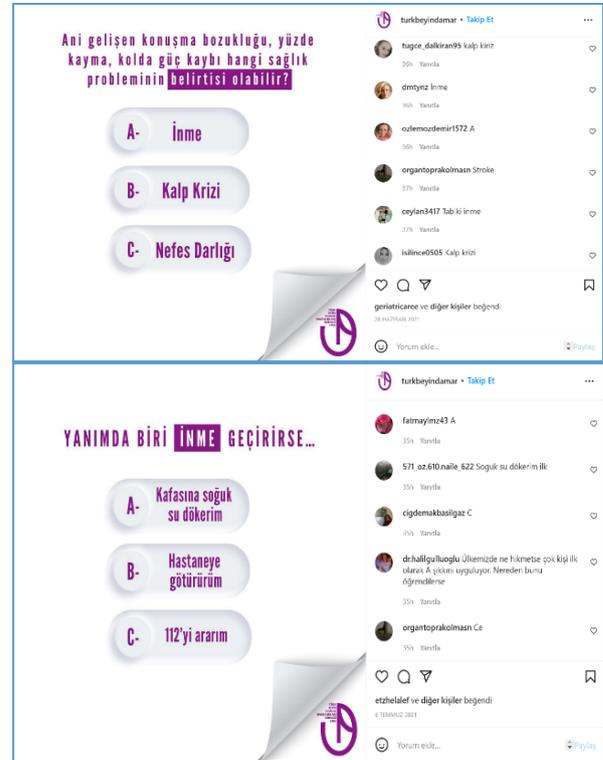


Image 11. Examples of social media posts.

process such as the symptoms of stroke, prevention methods, and things to do in case of stroke, and they were published periodically on social media accounts (Image 12).

The activities carried out by TCDS have been designed and implemented holistically to cover all segments of society and all age groups. It is aimed to decrease the rate of stroke in future generations and ensure the adaptation of the consciousness that it should be treated rapidly by creating awareness during childhood ages. Accordingly, animated movies about stroke were produced according to the interests of children and communicated to the relevant target audience from social media accounts (Image 13).

The health communication activities performed by TCDS in 2021 were not limited to the above-mentioned communication channels. It was aimed to reach the young age group by organizing a thematic short movie competition. A short movie competition was organized with the theme of "stroke" and under the name of "Are you aware?" for the first time in the world and it was aimed that young people would make efforts to learn about stroke. A total of 115 movies with the "stroke" theme from Turkey and TRNC applied to

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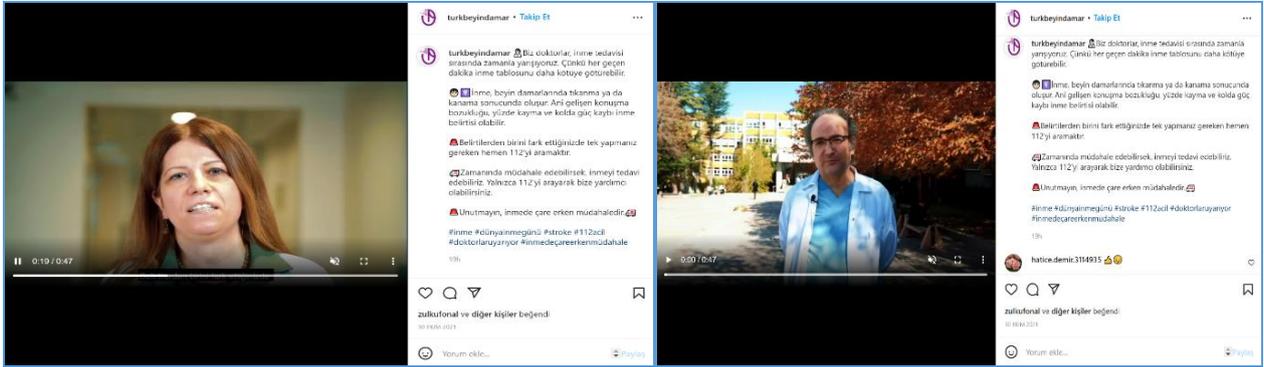


Image 12. Examples of video images from the "Our Professors Are Speaking" project.



Image 13. Example of an animation visual.

the competition, which was open to everyone over the age of 18. More than 4 thousand people participated in the popular vote of the competition.

Purgatorium, which became the second in the competition, was accepted to the "Health For The Film Festival" organized by the World Health Organization and it was of great importance in terms of being the first application on behalf of our country. Taking into account the interest and participation in the first year, the Society has decided to announce the competition to other countries of the world without restricting the participation criteria to our country and the TRNC. It is of particular importance that the short movie competition will take place with international collaborations and that one of the awareness activities on stroke, which is a health problem concerning the entire world, will be organized in our country (Image 14).



Image 14. 'Are you Aware? Short Movie Competition' visuals.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although different meanings have been attributed to the concept of health in different cultures, it generally refers to the state of mental and social well-being and not being sick (13). Human health, which used to refer only to the healing of diseases, has become meaningful over time, such as improving, advancing, and improving health due to the advancement of medical science (14). Health communication is a science that enables the improvement and development of public health. The importance of this field has increased in recent years. It is extremely important that this field, which aims to improve social health, is active and effective (15).

Health communication is an important discipline that provides awareness about the risks related to health in both individual and social terms and aims to inform the members of society on many issues threatening human health. The studies and campaigns to be carried out within the scope of health communication play a critical role in reaching the targeted masses in health communication.

Today, interpersonal communication and mass communication can be used to deliver campaign messages to target audiences within the scope of health communication. When health communication is considered in terms of mass communication, relevant information and messages are presented to the target audiences through traditional media channels such as newspapers, radio, magazines, television, or through new media in the current digitalization process. New media environments, websites, mobile phones, e-mails, and social media platforms that have emerged as a result of the digitalization process draw attention as tools that stand out in delivering health communication messages to target audiences.

With the intensive use of new media environments by target audiences, it is an important opportunity to use new media in the presentation of health communication messages to target audiences and the implementation of health communication campaigns. The structure and interaction feature of the new media that provides rapid access to large target audiences can bring up a capacity that can be used in terms of health communication.

Personal and corporate communication practices, which adopt correct communication strategies as an understanding, will reduce the number of problems in health communication in the future. It should be remembered that health and communication are everywhere around human beings, and both place the individual at the center and will shape the future with the right strategies to be determined accordingly. When evaluated both in the context of corporate and interpersonal communication, health communication is an interdisciplinary activity. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to carry out health communication activities with specialized communicators, as TCDS does.

In these health communication studies carried out by the Society, the use of different communication environments ranging from main news bulletins to national newspaper news, from urban billboards to metro stations, from national short film competitions to super league football games has contributed to reaching people of almost all ages and genders in society. In addition, it can be thought that the use of different communication channels and methods in this comprehensive health communication study conducted by TCDS in 2021 has created awareness in society about stroke.

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#### **Ethics**

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