

Crisis Communication & Health PR

An overview of the definition, strategies, tools, and examples of Health PR.

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For our final project, we are choosing to cover Health PR through the COVID-19 Pandemic, which goes hand-in-hand with crisis communication. Everyone in the world has been affected by this pandemic, meaning there have been a plethora of different PR campaigns rotating throughout the world. With the pandemic's longevity, PR plans have had to adapt with more information that comes out, as well as find new ways to communicate with its audience.



Objective

This assignment will show the knowledge and practices we gained during our introductory class. We want to show our readers that we have tools and experiences that are crucial to not just the Public Relations world, but to everyday media consumption. Our focus may be on Health PR and Crisis Communication, but we have the ability to discuss and break down PR practices across the spectrum, such as Cooperate PR, International PR, Community PR, Non-Profit PR, and Social Media, or Mobile PR.

Definition of Health PR

According to our class lectures, Health Public Relations uses communication strategies, methods, programs, and interventions as a means to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health. When it comes to delivering information to the public, it can be confusing and overwhelming. This is partly because of the advanced vocabulary used in the medical and health world.

Health PR, or Health communication, utilizes verbal, written, visual, and digital strategies to address individuals, populations, and communities to make healthier choices. Using evidence-based health communication strategies and best practices can streamline and often improve behavior change initiatives for public health. It is very similar to social marketing, which involves the development of activities designed to positively change behaviors.

In order to effectively communicate with our audience, we need to use research-based strategies to share materials and products with them over a variety of channels. For example, with the COVID-19 pandemic, research was shared with the public daily through press conferences from the White House and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). This information was then shared over and over again across other platforms and in different methods, such as hand-outs, videos, news stories, and social media posts.

It's important for education, concept, language, and priorities to be considered when making Health PR plans. Medical jargon is only understood by higher educated individuals; the general population is assumed to be at a middle-school education level when it comes to understanding. Therefore, it is crucial to break down what medical terms are used in order to empower the public to learn and understand the health crisis.

A global aspect to consider is access to the internet, media exposure, and cultural competency. If your audience doesn't have access to the internet, all advertisements made on that platform are ineffective. Instead, PR practitioners would have to make physical campaigns to install in the environments, such as billboards, flyers, brochures, and posters. If the audience is a part of a society that filters media exposure, it's important to abide by the governing requirements when it comes to reaching the audience. Lastly, cultural competency will take additional steps before releasing campaigns; in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many times where PR communications were restructured to discuss the "anti-vax" culture to help educate people rather than attack them.

By using a variety of communication channels, Health PR can send messages to shape mass media or interpersonal discussions. These communication strategies aim to increase risk perception, reinforce positive behaviors, influence social norms, increase the availability of support and empower individuals to change or improve their health conditions.

Considering these designs and their implications is crucial when creating a Health PR campaign. The overall communication is to intervene with a health crisis. It is necessary that the PR practitioners understand who the target population is so that content is created with purpose and is relevant. By tailoring messages to each of the different communication channels, you are more likely to get positive interaction and feedback. Additionally, using multiple communication platforms and media strategies ensures broader reach which can bring more change. Making this information easy to access is vital to successful Health PR plans.

Diverse Message Strategies

According to our class lecture, there are four main types of message strategies for Health Public Relations. Employee, media, community, and government public relations. All four of these different types of message strategies in Health Public Relations are very important and beneficial to have a successful Public Relations campaign overall. The main focus is to persuade and promote healthy behavior and focus on the public in the community overall; they are the main focus in Health Public Relations.

Starting with employee PR, employees are one of the essential audiences a company can have to reflect positively or negatively overall. Treating employees well can positively reflect the company overall, especially in health-related companies like a hospital or doctor's office. It is necessary to maintain a good and healthy relationship with the company's employees since they help represent the company's image and reputation among its employees and the patients. Employee PR can also help play a role when it comes to hiring or recruiting new employees. This is just one of the four main types of message strategies for Health PR.

Another type of message strategy for Health PR is Media PR. Media PR has been super important for the health industry in the past two years regarding COVID-19. PR agencies are taught how to navigate a crisis, as we have learned in this class, and COVID-19 was a huge crisis they had to handle, and media PR helped with that in a big way. Health media PR people have been sending out messages, giving interviews, writing crisis communication plans, and most importantly, trying to keep everyone at ease. Most importantly, media PR helps inform our community.

While media PR was putting all these things into the news, we were building trust within the community, which led us to our third type of message strategy, community PR. Having trust within the community is one of the more valuable assets a company can have. How health PR steers their trustworthy behavior throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has helped strengthen their bond with their customers and helps build trust within the community. It is essential to have a healthy relationship within the community so it can be easier to meet both needs to benefit the company and the community.

Finally, health PR professionals need to build networking relationships with government agencies to secure funding and build coalitions for health campaigns. During the pandemic, the Center for Disease Control had to work closely with health to take on the COVID-19 pandemic together. They worked alongside the media PR team to get messages out to the community as quickly as they could, with correct information to avoid rumors of "fake news" and other fallacies spread by leadership during the time. A great example of this deliverable was Dr. Anthony Fauci's daily press conferences.

These four strategies are all essential on their own but also work all together to run a successful health PR campaign. These four strategies are very diverse on their own and help send out messages to the community. Health PR has been super important to society in the last two years and has helped keep the world at ease while we are all trying to live through a pandemic together. As a medical professional, the company needs to focus on building the relationship from the inside, treating their patients with care and dignity. By doing so, it will help reflect the company overall and look good to the community overall. Overall the four strategies of Employee, media, community, and government public relations. Help with Health PR giving out diverse types of message strategies.

Media Tools for Health PR

There are many different media formats people working in Health PR will utilize in order to express their points. Social media, television, radio, print, and utilization of billboards have a major pull in the media realm; PR professionals would be quick to implement any of those media to connect with the general public.

We can first begin by looking at television. One example of how a Health PR campaign was integrated into television would be with MediBuddy. MediBuddy is a digital healthcare platform and they aired their ad on multiple channels on televisions and on IPL on Hotstar. Their platform is built around the concepts of trust and family; they say that they are “a buddy that everyone can trust to address any healthcare need.” This concept bodes well for them, as this allows their brand to connect with viewers’ emotions. Overall, this media is the most effective when it comes to spreading news and public statements.

Radio is another medium used in Health PR. One way radio is utilized in Health PR is through CPB’s “Take the shot: Vaccination Nation” campaign. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic buzz, this company used radio time in an effort to encourage listeners to get the vaccine. They marketed the broadcasts to vulnerable communities, in hopes of reducing the spread of disinformation and as a means of advancing the public health of the communities. Another radio broadcast was used as the “Harvesting Better Health, COVID-19 Safety on the Radio.” This campaign tried to reach the farmworker community and make an effort to rebuild the communities, support one another in working to end the pandemic, encourage people to wear masks and follow safety guidelines, and share information and build confidence surrounding getting the vaccine.

On social media, news has become one of the most prominent in this generation, and #Movember is one example of this. This is a social media Health PR campaign that works to raise awareness regarding men’s health issues. They encourage people to participate in No Shave November, like a trendy, yet meaningful mission to get others to support the cause. Many other social media campaigns become popular through trending hashtags and popular challenges, while still having a genuine heart behind the cause. This concept has gained a lot of traction throughout the timespan of the pandemic, because people have had more time on their socials and in their homes, therefore giving them more time to partake in these supportive causes.

While print media is not as prominent, many people still consume news/updates through reading newspapers and magazines. One print campaign example is a newspaper update that was focused on making the NHS safe for all people. In this particular example, there was an entire spread created to explain the complications facing the NHS, as well as how it could be improved over time. This is something that was even more publicized due to the pandemic and really came to the forefront of people’s minds.

Billboards are another popular example of media used in Health PR. This example does not come to the forefront of people’s minds, however, it is something people come across nearly every day. There are multiple kinds of billboard campaigns that have circulated all throughout the state and even the country, pertaining to Health PR. One specific example is “Health is Wealth.” This billboard Health PR campaign displays the simple message that states “EAT ORGANIC.” Many people dove into health, fitness, and food during the pandemic, so it comes as no surprise that such a campaign would be prominent after the fact.

Case Study

The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 brought crisis communication to the forefront of need and criticism. Organizations ranging from international airlines to local shops were affected by this “crisis contagion”. Health emergencies broke into supply and financial emergencies as the public panicked. This particular case study focuses on how the crisis communication affected organizations that faced financial and staff losses. In total, it analyzes how crisis responses were communicated using situational crisis communication theory (SCCT).

The main PR activities that were said to come into play throughout the COVID-19 crisis by the World Health Organization (WHO) were broken into seven steps. The first couple of steps included collecting information, attitudes, and perceptions people held regarding COVID-19, as well as using and creating mechanisms to engage with RCCE counterparts in partner organizations to formulate a response. They then worked to prioritize key RCCE objectives and identified key audiences and influencers in order to spread people’s real-life experiences with COVID-19. They used analysis results to reflect, adapt their strategy, and develop more strategies to achieve their objectives; they did this while working to tailor their overall message to their audience, so it would be most effective and relatable. WHO then worked to engage with the audience and community in order to set up a tracking system and closely monitor for misinformation and report technical faults, regarding the pandemic. Finally, the main step in their response process was constantly monitoring to make sure objectives were being fulfilled, positive changes we’re making an attempt at) being achieved, and the quality of the team’s work was always at its best.

By analyzing the overall PR activities we break down some of the strengths and limitations. You can see them entirely on the next page.

| Strengths | Limitations |
|--|--|
| <p>One strength from this case study was that they learned that when it comes to crisis management teams (CMTs), they need to be small and centrally located. This was a strength they learned when working in larger groups. They found it more challenging to coordinate with each other and their meeting was not effective. This was helpful to learn because they got to work more efficiently in smaller groups to see how crisis communication affected organizations that faced financial and staff losses is a strength in their overall PR activities.</p> | <p>During this case study, there was confidentiality of discussions with government authorities. Also, a lack of time to engage external advisers or evaluation during the crisis. This limited them to not having access to certain materials including having to leave out the minutes of meetings, not being allowed to access archived e-mails, websites, intranet statistics, and staff feedback. This limited the overall PR activities since they could not fully access all the information they needed.</p> |
| <p>They quickly turned from when they started the case study to when they published it. It is essential when working in PR to have a quick and efficient turnaround. COVID-19 is a global pandemic that only two years ago, so having to be quick and efficient with how the crisis communication affected organizations that faced financial and staff losses is a strength in their overall PR activities.</p> | <p>This analysis is based on examining crisis communication in one organization of a particular type, which could be argued to be atypical. They only focused on one organization of a particular type for each crisis communication examination, limiting the overall results of the case study. This causes a limitation in their overall PR activities since they only focused on one organization rather than multiple to gather better results.</p> |

Conclusion

To conclude, a solution we came up with for these issues is transparency with organizations. While it is difficult to expect everyone to understand the medical jargon, keeping it from the public is worse than holding off to break something down. Especially with the speed of spreadability of the COVID-19 virus, it was best to openly communicate and share information rather than waiting for other people to explain it to the public. This is done by press conferences and Q&As, so setting up on-the-spot teams rather than having them work off-site.

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