(Mis)information and (Mis)communication

Part of Health Promotion Ontario's *Resilience, Recovery, and Renewal in Health Promotion* winter webinar series

Additional Q&A

Public Health Moves at the Speed of Light

Melissa MacKay - PhD candidate in Public Health, University of Guelph

Q: Thank you for the excellent presentation! The information you provided regarding sentiment analysis and engagement metrics was highly useful, and it raises the question of how to reconnect with groups who have disengaged from mainstream media in response to COVID?

A: Thank you! Great and important question. By mainstream media, I am assuming you mean both traditional media but also social media. An important aspect of reaching groups of interest is to identify a trusted spokesperson. Is there someone/an organization that you can partner with to enable them to deliver evidence-based messaging in a way that is representative of the group's values, needs, wants, etc.? Working directly with a trusted spokesperson/organization to co-create messaging or to get feedback on what information is needed, what channels are preferred, and what may not be working about current messaging is also a best practice of crisis communication.

Q: One of the notable challenges with addressing disinformation that is present regarding COVID is how rapidly it is generated. What approaches would you recommend to keep up with the frantic pace this information appears on social media?

A: Very true. I would recommend aiming first to monitor mis/disinformation being shared within your organizational social channels. Importantly, monitoring the comments on your posts and replying to them can help counteract mis/disinformation shared there. It also builds trust with followers as you are engaging directly with them to answer questions and provide verified and accurate information. Social listening can help you to identify themes of mis/disinformation that may be occurring so you can put out posts related to the common areas of mis/disinformation.

One of the best practices of crisis communication is to address mis/disinformation but it isn't widely implemented. You can either create posts that address it or reshare other agencies (CDC and WHO have been doing some of this) to ensure accurate information is being shared with your followers.

Q: Melissa - do the constructs of a social marketing framework transfer to crisis communications?

A: Yes, absolutely. There is a lot of crossover, especially with regards to knowing your audience and using persuasion. Thinking through the 4Ps (product, place, price, and promotion) can also be helpful in identifying barriers and benefits specific to various audiences. Your messages can then be targeted to promoting the benefits and helping overcome the barriers.

Q: Melissa, how can local PH utilize a participatory approach to crisis or risk communication? Engaging those sub-segment audiences in communications planning, delivery and evaluation?

A: Great question. A good place to start might be to partner with organizations within the community who work directly with subpopulations you would like to reach. Perhaps they can assist in identifying trusted spokespeople and individuals that may be interested in participating in the process. You can also use social media to try and better connect with followers through holding dialogue (Twitter chats, Facebook lives, etc), answering questions that come in through messages or in response to posts, and using options like polls to get feedback into knowledge gaps and communication needs. Trust is a really important aspect of being able to engage any populations and two-way communication can help build trust.