Risk Communication
The Increasing Importance of Social Media
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The TELL ME Framework Model offers a multi-layered approach taking into consideration technological, cultural, and social developments. The TELL ME Framework Model offers a new look on the inter-relationships between seven components of risk communication: public sphere, segmentation, mass media, social media, opinion leaders, research and stakeholders.

Our Background

Communication of risk is a critical step towards influencing public perceptions and attitudes. Since the outbreak of the H1N1 or "swine flu" virus, communication has become a central issue for managing risk.

Communication is a multi-dimensional concept and discipline, which draws on inputs from psychology, sociology, public health, and media studies. The TELL ME Framework Model is designed to address the complexity of the public sphere very much at the centre. Members of the general public should not be perceived simply as passive recipients of messages, but active collaborators in the formulation of strategies. Public health officials must devise new strategies for meeting the information needs of the public and dealing with public concerns. The TELL ME Framework Model offers a multi-layered approach taking into consideration technological, cultural, and social developments.

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TELL ME research and focus groups with HCPs across Europe and the US found that HCPs themselves felt social media should be used more widely to improve communications with the public.

Many HCPs use social media to exchange clinical information, search for and discuss career opportunities and engage in discussions on the latest health news and research. HCPs can amplify and add credibility to public health messages on social media during a crisis.

- BMJ's doc2doc has over 70,000 registered users
- The French Réseau Santé Social (RSS) has over 50,000 full members

However, throughout the literature, a lack of HCP participation in planning for a pandemic and developing seasonal flu vaccination campaigns is apparent. If social media is to be adopted as a serious crisis communications tool by HCPs, institutions need to properly quantify and integrate the value of social media as a means to spread public health messages.

In addition to HCPs, there should be a wider use of opinion leaders at a local level to disseminate health messages. From the interviews TELL ME have conducted with bloggers, it was evident that they are thirsty for information and cooperation with governmental authorities.

Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) and Social Media

### Harnessing Spokespeople

- Engage with opinion leaders
- Understand attitudes, issues & perceptions
- Build trust & confidence
- Recruit trusted spokespeople
- Dispel myths & rumors
- Address fears & concerns
- Mediate communications through trusted sources
- Evaluate response to communications
- Pre-test messages with focus groups

### Case study 1: Social media communication during H1N1 2009

- According to the Oxford Internet Institute, the average UK user now considers the internet as their most important source for information. Confidence in the reliability of information found on the internet has increased. That makes it a powerful medium that can be used to collect and disseminate information during a crisis.

HOW THE PUBLIC COMMUNICATED

- 10,000 tweets that mentioned 'swine flu' in the space of an hour
- Swine flu messages featured twice in Twitter’s top 10 news trends of 2009
- More than 500 Facebook groups were dedicated to H1N1 and the three largest had over 10,000 members

The H1N1 was "the first pandemic with a blogosphere and other rapid communication tools that were impossible to ignore" (ECDC, 2010) and WHO declared that the use of new information technologies should be an essential part of strategic communication plans (WHO, 2011).

HOW GOVERNMENTS AND HEALTH AUTHORITIES COMMUNICATED

- Only five EU member states used social media as a tool to reach the general public
- The Centers of Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) set up a dedicated Twitter account to provide information about H1N1 and posted videos on their website; but a YouTube video from the CDC’s Influenza Division received over 1.9m more views than the same video on the CDC site
- CDC targeted independent and influential bloggers to help spread information, created widgets and RSS feeds for easy access to their materials
- The German Red Cross set up an account on Twitter to provide news to their followers
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Users will not always know to go to the official source to find information, so it is vital that organizations disseminate their content and updates across numerous platforms.
Presence before a crisis
An interactive two-way process
Comprehensive and flexible
Timing
Credibility, accountability, transparency and honesty
Proactive stance
Monitor social media and trending topics
Appealing to Health Care Professionals
Online communities as a resource

Ten Golden Rules of Risk Communication

1. Presence before a crisis
2. An interactive two-way process
3. Comprehensive and flexible
4. Timing
5. Credibility, accountability, transparency and honesty
6. Proactive stance
7. Monitor social media and trending topics
8. Appealing to Health Care Professionals
9. Online communities as a resource
10. Information needs of various key stakeholders

Case study 2: How does Twitter deal with misinformation?

As part of the TELL ME research, good practice and key principles for outbreak communication have been identified, which are central to each phase of a pandemic.
For more information on the TELL ME project or to access the guidance documents and tools, please go to www.tellmeproject.eu

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