Risk Communication
The Increasing Importance of Social Media
www.tellmeproject.eu
Outbreak communication is an art, a science and an opinion leadership. The art is the understanding and translation of evidence and research into effective messages and the science is the understanding of the operational and technical aspects of communication. The ability to create and influence change is the opinion leadership.

**Our Background**

The **TELL ME** Framework Model was developed as a European Commission funded, collaborative project aimed at improving risk and crisis communication during pandemics. The project’s main objective was to develop a multi-layered approach for outbreak communication, 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, mass media, social media, opinion leaders, research and stakeholders.

Models of improved risk and crisis communication during pandemics will be a reality. In the next influenza pandemic, whether it is now or in the future, be the virus mild or virulent, the single most important weapon again will be the virus of opinion, determining whether the outbreak becomes a pandemic or not.

**The TELL ME Framework Model**

- **PUBLIC SPHERE**
- **MASS MEDIA**
- **SOCIAL MEDIA**
- **OPINION LEADERS**
- **RESEARCH**
- **STAKEHOLDERS**
- **PUBLIC POLICY”

In the next influenza pandemic, be the virus mild or virulent, the single most important weapon against the disease will be the virus of opinion, determining whether the outbreak becomes a pandemic or not.
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 used as a serious crisis communications tool by HCPs, Institutions need to properly quantify and integrate the value of social media as a means to disseminate 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 we have conducted with bloggers, it was evident that they are thirsty for information and cooperation with governmental authorities.

Information and cooperation with government authorities is essential. From the interviews, TELL ME has found that collaboration with bloggers is vital, especially if they are the first to disseminate public health messages. TELL ME has developed the following framework to improve communications with the public:

**Tell ME: Health Professionals (HCPs) and Social Media**

- Engage with opinion leaders
- Understand attitudes, issues, and perceptions
- Build trust and confidence
- Recruit trusted spokespeople
- Dispel myths and rumors
- Mediate communications through trusted sources
- Pre-test messages with focus groups
- Address trust and concern
- Facilitate communications with social media
- Encourage feedback

**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 information source. 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**

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

**How Government and Health Authorities Communicated**

- The H1N1 was “the first pandemic with a blogosphere and other rapid communication tools” (ECDC, 2010) and WHO declared that the use of new information technologies should be an essential part of strategic communications planning (WHO, 2011).

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 communications planning (WHO, 2011).
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. Information needs of various key stakeholders
10. Online communities as a resource

Case study 2:

How does Twitter deal with misinformation?

Rumour spread because this was dramatic news and not challenged immediately. As more people on Twitter found out about it, they began to cross-verify and check with official sources, both online and offline. To quash the rumour, it initially began to circulate widely and spread to users of all types and within different communities.

Factors that helped in the correction of the rumour:

- Official verification: The official verification played a crucial role in discrediting the rumour.
- Cross-verification: Users on Twitter began to cross-verify the information, leading to the correction of the rumour.
- Social media and trending topics: The rumour gained momentum through social media and trending topics, which helped in its rapid correction.

In the space of 30 minutes, the rumour of riots in a Birmingham children's hospital gained momentum through the process of re-tweeting a dramatic but erroneous tweet. However, the number of users reinforcing the rumour continued to grow, and a growing number of voices challenging the original rumour helped in its correction.

The original rumour · Retweet to bring more information to light and a growing number of voices challenging the rumour

FIG A - Circle 1 shows the network where the rumour began. @jazz_kaur started the rumour (113 followers).

FIG B - Tweet was re-tweeted by @HarrysLips (circle 2) (5,320 followers). Misinformation continued to be shared through associated networks. Red circles show the number of users reinforcing the rumour through re-tweets or similar messages. Green circles are the users who are refuting the rumour.

FIG C and FIG D - Within an hour, more information came to light, and a growing number of voices challenged the rumour.
For more information on the TELL ME project or to access the guidance documents and tools, please go to www.tellmeproject.eu

School of Public Health at the University of Haifa (Isreal)
Website: http://hw.haifa.ac.il/index.php/facultydeps/publichealth
Staff: Manfred Green, Anat Gesser-Edelsberg.

Centre for Research in social simulation - CRESS
Website: http://cress.soc.surrey.ac.uk
Contact: Nigel Gilbert, Jennifer Badham

National Centre for Epidemiology, Surveillance and Health Promotion, CNESPS (Italy)
Website: www.iss.it
Contact: Barbara De Mei, Valentina Possenti, Chiara Cattaneo

BMJ Publishing Group Ltd
Website: www.bmj.com
Contact: Mitali Wroczynski, Luisa Dillner

CEDARthree Ltd
Website: www.cedarthree.co.uk
Contact: Simon Langdon

European Union of General Practitioners, UEMO
Website: www.umo.org
Contact: Ferenc Hajnal, Renata Papp

Vrije Universiteit Brussels, VUB
Website: www.vub.ac.be/infovoor/onderzoekers/research/team.php?team_code=LSTS
Contact: Paul De Hert, Paul Quinn

National Disaster Life Support Foundation, NDLSF (US)
Website: www.ndlsf.org
Contact: James J. James, Italo Subbarao, Jack Horner

Vitamib (France)
Website: www.vitamib.com
Contact: Olivier de Bardonneche, Gérard Brugal, Youssoufa Tahirou

Zadig ltd (Italy)
Website: www.zadig.it
Zadig staff: Roberto Satolli, Luca Carra, Roberta Villa, Dimitris Dimitriou

Centre for Science, Society and Citizenship, CSSC (Italy)
Website: www.cssc.eu