

Transforming the dynamics of Emerging Infectious Disease (EID) communication: An innovative integrative framework

www.tellmeproject.eu

Anat Gesser-Edelsburg^{1*}, Yaffa Shir-Raz², Nathan Walter², Emilio Mordini³, Dimitris Dimitriou⁴ and Manfred S. Green^{1†}

1. School of Public Health, University of Haifa, 199 Aba Khoushy Ave. Mount Carmel, Haifa 3498838, Israel

2. Department of Communication, University of Haifa, 199 Aba Khoushy Ave. Mount Carmel, Haifa 3498838, Israel

3. Responsible Technology SAS, 12 rue de la Chaussee d'Antin, 75009, Paris, France

4. Zadig communication, information and education in science, via Arezzo 21, 00161, Roma, Italy

* Corresponding Author

† Head of School of Public Health, University of Haifa, 199 Aba Khoushy Ave. Mount Carmel, Haifa 3498838, Israel

The Dynamics of TellMe Framework Model

The focus of the new model is constructed through four phases (Interpandemic, Alert, Pandemic and Transition) which encourage national and international authorities to react to different risk assessments.



TELLME (Transparent communication in Epidemics: Learning Lessons from experience, delivering effective Messages, providing Evidence) is a European Commission funded, collaborative project that has systematically reviewed existing evidence to develop practical guidance, online tools and models for improved risk and crisis communication during pandemics.

Objective

This EID communication integrative framework asks how to incorporate notions of two-way communication, uncertainty and transparency; and how to harness the potential of social media. It is aimed mainly at local-level health organizations, which often lack adequate "maps" for EID communication.

Methods

Building upon existing textbooks of outbreak communication, and identifying gaps and misconceptions of pandemic communication campaigns, it suggests that in order to succeed we need to adopt a multilayered public health perspective that is aware of technological, cultural and social changes.

Results

We propose a theory-driven framework incorporating key components from culture and communication studies into the wider context of the communication process (public sphere, segmentation, mass media, social media, opinion leaders, research and stakeholders). Each component is discussed separately, and then amalgamated into one communication integrative framework, emphasizing its unique position in the dynamical nature of public health crises.

Conclusion

The significance of the proposed risk communication framework is that it integrates relevant concepts and theories with a practical approach. The contribution of this framework is that it can be adapted to many specific risk situations through simulations in which the ideas can be developed into concrete plans.



TELLME Framework Model

Key Components

1 The Public Sphere

Our framework refocuses the center of communication to the public sphere, which is therefore represented at its heart. Communication evolves from within the public sphere, and therefore must take into account an in-depth understanding of it. This is where communication occurs and where other components or actors operate (e.g. stakeholders, opinion leaders, and social and mass media). This is where concepts like transparency, risk perception, collective memory, trust and ethics come into play.

2 Segmentation

On a conceptual level, segmentation can aid in understanding the public in order to reach it. It is crucial to carry out segmentation because of differences between groups of people and segmentation helps "tailor" the message.

3 Mass Media

The present-day media map has undergone a revolution, transforming its role in outbreak communication, including the potential for two-way communication. Mass media should voice public concerns, while the organizations should provide convincing responses to mitigate ongoing concerns.

4 Social Media

Includes different types of channels, including Internet forums, social blogs, social networks, weblogs, wikis and podcasts. Each channel has different features and sometimes targets a specific audience. Although social media is being adopted by international and local health organizations, they use it primarily as a channel to distribute information, rather than capitalizing on the interactivity available to create conversations and engage with the audience.

5 Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders are trustworthy members of our social network who do not necessarily hold an official leadership position. While they may be community or religious leaders, they can also be charismatic laypeople - neighbors, friends or colleagues - whose ability to engage and influence others puts them in a position to distill information from the mass media, and pass along the condensed version through an additional filter of subjectivity.

6 Research

Research entails not only evaluating pro-vaccination campaigns and conducting epidemiological surveillance, but also building public profiles through qualitative and quantitative studies pinpointing different sub-populations and identifying different trends in public discourse, or the public sphere. According to the framework we suggest, research should initiate and shape discourse, and then help to shape campaigns and policies.

7 Stakeholders

- Government and institutional actors (policymakers)
- Pharmaceutical industry and commerce
- Community-based public institutions and infrastructure
- Civil society organizations

For more information on the TELLME project or to access the guidance documents and tools, please go to

www.tellmeproject.eu



This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 278723