Disruptive Innovations in Public Health Communication

Bizimana Rukundo T.

Faculty of Biological Sciences Kampala International University Uganda

ABSTRACT

Public health communication is essential for fostering positive health outcomes by influencing individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Traditional methods, such as media campaigns and public service announcements, have long been the cornerstone of public health messaging. However, as the landscape of technology and society evolves, the emergence of disruptive innovations has revolutionized how health messages are crafted, delivered, and received. These innovations, including social media, gamification, and influencer marketing, leverage personalization, pervasiveness, and participation to engage diverse audiences effectively. This paper examines the transition from traditional public health communication strategies to innovative methods, showcasing successful case studies that highlight the power of digital tools in addressing contemporary health challenges. Additionally, it discusses the ethical considerations and challenges inherent in implementing these disruptive approaches, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder collaboration and trust to ensure equitable and effective communication in the public health domain.

Keywords: Public health communication, Disruptive innovations, Social media in health, Gamification, Influencer marketing, Health messaging.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of public health communication is to influence individual beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors in ways that will enhance the health and well-being of them and others. The means to this end are varied and include the provision of health information, prompting of health-seeking behaviors, triggering of conversation or action regarding health risks and illnesses, enforcement of public health directives, and the reduction of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use. Because important subpopulations require targeted communication to address their unique needs, exposure or vulnerability to health risks, and partnership in public health interventions to address these issues, public health communication necessarily uses channels and methods that are not used in commercial marketing, despite similarities in objectives and principles applied. The budget for commercial marketing or PR messages is substantial when set against total income and capital budgets, but small when set against individuals' disposable income. Public health communicators thus have much the same problem as commercial advertisers in getting noticed [1, 2]. Public health communication uses a wide variety of channels and messages, many new but continuing elements of traditional public health social marketing, such as visual warnings, mandated advertising spaces and returnable containers, and outlet information requirements. The majority of these are delivered as part of mixed social marketing efforts that may also reduce price, increase convenience, or promote new products, services, treatments, or outlets. In large part, the long-term success of these initiatives depends on the extent to which they are blended with audience engagement, education, and dialogue, delivered as public health communications or initiatives or in collaboration with special interest groups. Other public health communication channels and interventions trigger product searches and citizen action, job assistance, shelter, and food resources which are also provided by government safety net programs. Public health communication and social marketing interventions differ most in terms of

their unique features: reactive interventions, which differentially target the parts of the audience that are most in need of them, conserve mailbox, voicemail, and live person contact space, spam attacks, providing that both advertisements and functions receive equal attention, place greater importance on permission, and combine in different ways to influence the social norms of the audience [3, 4].

Definition and Importance

Despite common myths, public health communications have always been part of the rural development process, as evidenced by the dewaras used between ashvamedhas, vajapehas, and the mahasabhas of rural India in the Vedas. This was considered the traditional newspaper or cable of communication for the distribution of knowledge to the general public. The health communication service, originally implemented through the ancient jatras of our country, continues to be practiced by the rural people as a mass communication series even today, proving the importance of public health communication in society [5, 6]. The importance of health communication in the Indian context has been recognized at the national, state, and district levels as part of the function of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. As the program notes, there are common misconceptions about public health communication in rural areas. The relationship between communities and health communicators is related to understanding, participating in dialogue, discussing common problems and questions, and creating a two-way communication function. The reason lying dormant in India is that about 70% of Indians live in rural areas, and fast and thorough communication is required at the grassroots level of these health awareness programs for implementation. The term "Health Communication" is less heard than the "Successful Science of Transmission of Health Guarantee Information" to reach the rural and semi-rural groups of the country to ensure that the five-year and above child mortality rate is well below the target limit and that the mother-child mortality rate reaches zero, if possible [7, 8].

Traditional Methods of Public Health Communication

In public health, a variety of strategies have traditionally been employed to communicate with the public. Despite the advent of digital communication platforms, these strategies continue to be used and require disruption to explore innovative methods for public health communication. Throughout the history of health communication, media campaigns have been the most utilized method. Media campaigns are intended to provoke public health organizations to increase citizens' awareness of a health issue or their issues, such as smoking or obesity. Traditionally, media campaigns include television broadcasts, cable, radio broadcasts, magazine articles, and internet pages. One important assumption behind these traditional media campaigns is that they will be able to attract people's attention and thus foster active thinking or increase the level of consciousness. Unfortunately, they appear to have some inherent limitations in effectively engaging audiences. Americans are watching and generally do not trust television programs. Moreover, this approach fundamentally provided more opportunities for entrenched Democrats while failing to reach younger generations [9, 10]. The rise of digital communications has given rise to conversations and brought a significant number of refugees and opportunities to public health professionals. Luckily, traditional therapies have been used in very agile and innovative ways, creating a growing interest in health marketing and advertising. Thanks to that, today's health professionals can combine traditional ways to connect with new disruptive innovations to create more awareness and study health issues than the pioneers may have imagined [11, 12].

Media Campaigns

Public health communication is an essential tool for changing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that underlie population health outcomes. However, there are also more traditional methods of communicating with the public, and media campaigns represent a large portion of contemporary public health communication programming [13, 14]. The earliest and archetypal form of public health communication is the public service announcement (PSA): television, radio, and print advertisements offering preventative health advice that is ultimately in the interest of the viewer or listener. Community outreach campaigns share an orientation of public health benefits, but they also take this purpose a step further, often aiming to enhance the connection between the health of the viewer and the surrounding community. Media campaigns of both the PSA and community outreach varieties work to raise awareness of public health threats, shape mental associations regarding specific health-related issues, and converge on desired, health-protective outcomes through shaping the beliefs and attitudes that undergird decision-making and subsequent behaviors. Specific health campaigns have been shown to have an impact on public knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, media campaigns are effective in motivating certain healthy behaviors, and one-off campaigns to encourage quitting smoking have been associated

with increases in calls to quitlines. However, community-oriented media campaigns have the potential to increase social capital, trust, social connectedness, and collective efficacy in communities and are thought to have a role to play in conducting emergency risk communication. These types of media activities can also strengthen social norms to support behavior change. Public health communication organizations have also been reporting successes in some respiratory virus vaccination efforts of late, made possible through substantial media expenditures. Still, significant coverage of the relevant health event is needed to achieve success with traditional media programming [15, 16]. Media campaign spending in the United States has been holding at approximately $750 million per year with over half of the budget allocated to television ads compared with radio. Increasingly, the advent of the internet has required that campaigns produce digital media, such as online banners, webcasts, and online videos; but as recently as roughly two decades ago, radio PSAs were the norm. Public service campaigns tend to focus on preventative health behavior, connecting with the community, and advocacy. Other framing strategies for campaigns include focusing on the risks and consequences of a particular issue, promoting social responsibility, launching counter-advertising strategies, or targeting personal responsibility. As media usage trends evolve from television watching to online streaming, with younger generations leading the change, public health campaigns must also evolve to capitalize on non-traditional media forms if they hope to achieve mass reach. Media endorsements by advocacy groups, individuals, or public figures can also be effective in changing public attitudes toward unhealthy behaviors. Modeling of risky behaviors and sexual content in film and television can also potentially contribute to aggressive behavior patterns among youth. Finally, as people are actively seeking out health-related information on social media, it also behooves those using traditional forms of public communication to integrate social media into their campaign strategic planning. Public health agencies and other similar organizations have shown an interest in examining the utility and implementation of recent social media campaigns [17, 18].

Disruptive Innovations in Public Health Communication

In the constantly innovating landscape of public health communication, methods for carefully crafted campaigns and audience targeting have drastically shifted. Reaching an audience rapidly through digital storytelling and health messaging disseminated across the globe is one of the disruptive innovations characteristic of communications in the twenty-first century. Disruptive innovations are successful because they provide audience empowerment and targeted scenarios. One of these innovations is the use of social media. Public health communication has become personalized; real people can share real stories and get real-time responses from a handful of people and health organizations [19, 20]. The creation of public health campaigns in the twenty-first century takes into account the use of disruptive innovation and, in doing so, public health professionals can break down long-standing conceptual and technological barriers and yield results for an increasingly demanding and technology-savvy public. Integration of these innovations into health messaging has the added benefit of reaching populations that were previously difficult to access out of fear, mistrust of the message source, tough-to-locate populations, or even geographical enclaves of disease and disparities. A quick scan of various platforms shows that several health campaigns have successfully used digital storytelling and social media; some have gone viral, and nearly all are found on the websites of public health organizations [21, 22].

Social Media and Influencer Marketing

Platforms have democratized health messaging, making access to critical ideas on every conceivable topic a reality. The growth of earned media as an embedded component of mass communication plans used by health organizations has reshaped the landscape. Credible health information disseminated through influencers in many instances has ignited specific actions in the fan base. Integrated influence creates action, emotion, and participation that provide a multi-faceted competitive advantage over traditional paid media efforts. translated social media intelligence into fan audiences as a volunteer workforce to promote seasonal flu vaccination. This "workforce" may include skill sets well beyond personal enthusiasm or awareness. Our studies have documented social influence campaigns that have spread to millions. Interest participation continues to build across industry verticals, including our work co-publishing a leading book on how the public health industry can use social influence to remove harm. Already, the potential uses the public health community has for the intel licensed exclusively to our platform and services are significant. Additionally, social media analytics help identify and inform campaigns that promote positive behavior while negating disinformation. Organizations deepen plans to disrupt industry norms with otherwise unavailable data reflecting true audience participation and the need for both campaign risk assessment and management [23, 24].

Case Studies of Successful Disruptive Innovations

Case Studies of Successful Disruptive Innovations Using Gamification for Health Messaging. In 2015, Relationships, Health, and Love began as a pop-up museum and work of migrant art that detailed the stories, face-to-face, of migrant youth's relationships, love lives, and understandings of health and well-being. Over time, the group became the home of the Relationships, Health, and Love initiative under the direction of a lead researcher. The heart of our work is to bring the voices, bodies, and experiences of Latinx youth to a public audience and to work alongside communities to create new health projects that will continue to inspire and change everyday health for all of us. Strategies associated with the museum workspace and the art of research also live at Relationships, Health, and Love. This report is an analysis of one of these strategies: our game that has brought thousands of Latinx youth into valuable dialogue about environmental justice. In our analysis, we briefly define gamification, describe the game and its value in a community-based participatory research component of our work, and conclude that despite the perils of gamifying health and academic work, the game is generating community-based participatory research data for migrant health justice in ways that other methodologies alone could not achieve [26, 27].

Use of Gamification

Disruption is a process where innovations and strategies evolve over an extended period. This defines a technology-centric view of disruption. Early and late disruptors may find challenges during this process. Disruptive innovations in public health communication can be characterized by the three P's: Personalization, Pervasiveness, and Participation. Gamification is a nontraditional type of disruptive technological innovation in public health communication [28, 29]. Gamification involves applying game mechanics to non-game contexts, including those that raise awareness about health detriments or promote changes in health behaviors. NPD theories propose attributes of online health messaging that are enticing for today's crucial audiences; however, a detailed discussion of how gamers might use this medium is nonexistent. In research, strategic thinking around gamification ranges from a technical perspective to considering what can be learned from restorative games, aside from addiction and neurological studies. Recent studies discuss how employers use games' ability to attract and retain information over time. Moreover, games can increase motivation and reduce the time for learning a topic. It is important to apply conclusions related to public health thoughtfully, ensuring that positions and restorative accuracy are likely not compromised. Nevertheless, the most common elements of games that can be applied to health messaging favorably include points, levels, rewards, and leaderboards. An example of a game used for health education and communication discovered that an interactive board game increased knowledge related to diet and blood clots in a sample of the U.S. adult population [30]. To promote changes in attitude, knowledge, and awareness among high school students, an interactive nicotine and physical health game board is used. Although there are few cases of direct applications, games are promising tools for promoting basic health messages to the American public. Analyzing whether the game was designed to bridge the digital divide in health messaging is essential. Because the target population for this analysis had an average household income and was composed mostly of non-Hispanic blacks, designing an ethnic game can bridge the cultural divide. Additionally, a bridging assistant is needed for the educational divide. The game also needs to be geared toward patients with a low degree of health literacy [31].

Challenges and Ethical Considerations in Implementing Disruptive Innovations

In the communication field, disruption centers on change, such as technological change. Adopting or using innovation might engender unintended or adverse outcomes. These considerations should not mean we disengage from innovation-driven change. Instead, we suggest a healthy respect for the possible adverse impacts and taking appropriate measures to prevent or mitigate such impacts. For example, social media data might potentially be used to map and predict population movements during a disaster. However, when respecting ethical guidelines for research with vulnerable people, the detriment might outweigh the potential gain [32, 33]. While the emergence of disruptive innovations could mean extensive collaboration, consultation, and partnership between multiple, diverse groups, the ease and speed of technological advancement might also result in losing the stakeholder's voice. This is especially true when advancing ethical considerations becomes secondary to the achievement of public health outcomes. A lack of transparency and culpable innovation could mean a loss of public trust in health communication technologies and result in low uptake or non-compliance. Innovation for the sake of innovation does not justify a lack of rigorous review of the ethical implications of messaging and

interventions for better health information. It might also justify a duty of care on the part of stakeholders in the creation and dissemination of public health messaging [34].

CONCLUSION

Disruptive innovations have significantly transformed public health communication, enabling more inclusive, personalized, and impactful approaches to delivering health messages. Tools such as social media, gamification, and influencer marketing have expanded the reach of public health campaigns, effectively engaging traditionally underserved populations and fostering proactive health behaviors. However, these advancements bring ethical and logistical challenges, including concerns about data privacy, misinformation, and the potential for exclusionary practices. As public health professionals navigate these innovations, prioritizing transparency, collaboration, and cultural sensitivity will be essential to harnessing their full potential while maintaining public trust. By integrating these considerations into practice, the field of public health communication can continue to evolve, addressing health disparities and improving outcomes for communities worldwide.

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