DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF UKRAINE
IN HEALTH CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *During the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, governments around the world faced for the first time the need for large-scale communication campaigns to prevent the spread of the global infection. Against the background of lack of experience in conducting this type of behavior change campaigns, there is a need to assess the practice of digital communication and develop steps to address problematic communication aspects. The article presents the results of the study of digital communication content and tools of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine during the pandemic of coronavirus infection COVID-19, analyzes communication messages through the prism of factors influencing behavior change (MINDSPACE). The study substantiated recommendations for improving government digital communication in health care in the context of global challenges.*

Keywords: *Communications for the sake of behavior change, Digital communications, Government communications.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a large-scale crisis for humanity. The main features of the pandemic were uncertainty, emotional messages, fear. In these circumstances, the main tool to combat the spread of fear and panic is to ensure continuous access to objective information. Communication campaigns of government authorities in a pandemic should be targeted towards changing the behavior patterns of the population, as almost the only measure to combat the coronavirus at present is the observance of hygiene rules and social distancing. In order to develop recommendations for the use of communication tools and technologies by government agencies for behavioral change in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a study of digital communication practices of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine was conducted. The content analysis method was used to analyze the content, including through the prism of MINDSPACE and communication tools in the Telegram channel „Coronavirus_info" in the period from March 12, 2020 to May 10, 2020. The hypothesis of the study is that if in the first months of quarantine restrictions the authorities' communication were aimed only at informing citizens and there was no full implementation of factors influencing behavior in communication strategies, the majority of the population would eventually stop following the rules of hygiene and social distancing, and this in turn would lead to the increase of morbidity and a new wave of COVID – 19 pandemics.

Studies show that in a pandemic COVID-19 it is important for government agencies to establish accessible official channels for the transmission of coronavirus information. Moreover, the 2020 study by The Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update recorded a change in the level of trust in

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the government due to the coronary virus pandemic worldwide: The issue of t*rust and the COV-ID-19 Pandemic reveals that trust in government (65%t) surged 11 points since January making it the most trusted institution for the first time. Respondents want governments to lead in all areas of the pandemic response: containing the pandemic (73%); helping people cope with the pandemic (72%); informing the public (72%); providing economic relief and support (86%); and getting the country back to normal (79%).* The study covered 11 countries. Although Ukraine did not participate in the study, the likelihood that the expectations of the country's population in the crucial role of government agencies in overcoming the pandemic and disseminating objective information about the coronavirus has increased is quite high.

During the quarantine period, there was an increase in time spent online in all countries of the world, including Ukraine, where Internet traffic increased by 25%. Social networks have become one of the main channels for finding and obtaining information about the pandemic. According to KantarTNS (Ukraine) CMeter in March 2020, the level of coverage of Internet users of Google, YouTube, Facebook increased compared to February 2020 (by 0.13%, 1.44% and 3.13% respectively) and amounted in March 2020 to 93.56%, 73,95% and 67,92%. Telegram began to be used more often on PCs, not just smartphones. This allowed the messenger to rise from the 51ˢᵗ to the 28ᵗʰ position in the ranking of popular sites.

With the beginning of the epidemic, the main communication channels of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine became not only websites (www.moz.gov.ua, www.covid19.com.ua), but also pages in social networks, which covered different parts of the country's population (see Table 1).

Table 1. Communication channels of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine about coronavirus in the Internet

	Communication Channel	Number of Subscribers
1	The page of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine on Facebook (fb.com/moz.ukr)	209 thousand preferences, 390 thousand to follow
2	The page of the Ministry of Health Care on the YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-kYPlo9h8F2--Xyesbh-8w)	7,71 thousand
3	Telegram channel of the Ministry of Health Care (@mozofficial)	38,3 thousand
4	Twitter channel of the Ministry of Health Care (@MoH_Ukraine)	8,7 thousand
5	Facebook page of the Health Care Minister (fb.com/maksym.stepanov.official)	18.2 thousand liked it, 20.4 thousand watched
6	Telegram-Channel "Coronavirus_info" about COVID-19 in Ukraine (https://t.me/COVID19_Ukraine)	782, 3 thousand
7	Instagram account «Covid19_ukraine» (https://www.instagram.com/covid19_ukraine/)	1587
8	Viber Community «Corona Virus Info» (https://vb.me/covid19_ua)	3 380,3 thousand
9	Page in TikTok "Coronavirus_info" (@coronainfoua)	14,8 thousand

Such channels of information dissemination were also used as SMS-messages (from 14.03.2020 for the release of the main recommendations for the fight against coronavirus), the DRUG (Friend) system (https://friend.mfa.gov.ua/#/) for the registration of citizens of Ukraine, who were in other countries and wanted to return home. The chat bot of the Ministry of Health Care (@ COVID19_Ukraine_Bot) was launched on March 7, 2020 to answer common questions about the coronavirus in Ukraine, and on April 17, 2020 it was restarted. Chatbot Doctor Elon

Musk provides up-to-date information on coronavirus verified by the Ministry of Health Care, in particular, morbidity statistics; updated information on quarantine restrictions; advises how to protect yourself and loved ones; tells you how to act in different situations related to coronavirus disease, according to the protocols of the Ministry of Health Care.

In order to minimize the use of unreliable sources, the Ministry of Health Care together with Facebook launched expanded access to local Facebook notifications with up-to-date information on coronavirus from official sources of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine, such as the official website ("moz.gov.ua") and the site with answers to basic questions about COVID - 19 ("covid19.com.ua"). The Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine also agreed to cooperate with Google in the framework of information support. At the end of March 2020, the Ministry of Health Care expanded its communication platforms and created the official Viber-community „Coronavirus Info". The site was authorized by Rakuten Viber. In-app notifications are also sent via messenger to all users registered in Ukraine.

On March 31, 2020, the Ministry of Health Care launched the Coronavirus Info @coronainfoua channel for younger people on TikTok and Instagram. The channels started with the announcement of the #мийруки (#Washhands) challenge. Under the terms of the challenge, you had to record your own videos and encourage your friends to take care of your health. To remind once again how important it is to be at home, on the page of Coronavirus_info on Instagram on the eve of Easter (April 19, 2020) they launched a flash mob VdomaDobre (#BetterAtHome) (post a photo at home, put the hashtag #DomaDobre) .

The most popular Telegram channel „Coronavirus_info" started publishing messages on March 6, 2010. The channel uses a different arsenal of messages - from daily reports on the number of sick, dead and recovered, data on the age characteristics of infected to informational videos aimed at spreading recommendations to help reduce risks coronavirus infection, explanation of quarantine conditions, the Government actions to overcome coronavirus, etc. (Figure 1). From 4 to 11 messages were published daily. The number of people who scrolled the information was varying from 49.6 thousand (message from 7.03.2020) to 1 million (message from 26.03.2020). Almost 40% of the messages were presented in the format of infographics and videos at the 1st stage of quarantine and almost 50% at the 2nd stage of quarantine. Interactive infographics with disease statistics in Ukraine are published daily (twice a day during March-April). It should be noted that this information diversity works to maximize the assimilation of critical information.

During the 1st quarantine period (March 12, 2020 to April 3, 2020), the largest number of publications concerned the Government's actions to prevent and overcome the pandemic, including video appeals of the President of Ukraine, the Minister of Health Care and recommendations to help reduce the risk of infection. quarantine. They accounted for more than 27.8% and 25.9%, respectively. Quite a large proportion of publications disclosed operational information about COVID 19 in Ukraine (19.7%). It should be noted that the tone of most of the messages was formal and neutral.

During the second stage of quarantine (4.04.2020-10.05.2020) 30% of publications were operational information about COVID 19 in Ukraine, 12% - about the Government's actions to prevent and overcome the pandemic, including the addresses of the President of Ukraine, briefings of the Minister of Health Care or his deputies. It should also be noted that the share of such publications in comparison with the first stage of quarantine has halved). 27% of the publications concerned coronavirus prevention and precautionary measures. The official and neutral tone of the messages was preserved.

However, in the new column „Good morning, The Country!", which was launched on March 24, 2020, the tone of the messages has become significantly more caring, there appeared soft reminders of the need to take care of your health and the health of others. The messages in this section often used the genre of literary meme, which made it possible to relieve official information of anxiety. So, for example, from March 25, 2020 in information messages characters from the Ukrainian history and their well-known statements were used: „Fight and you will overcome!" by Taras Shevchenko, „Down with sad thoughts!" by Lesia Ukrainka, „Show your courage!" by Bohdan Khmelnytsky and even the figures of the legendary founders of Kyiv - Kyiv, Shchek and Khoriv: „Keep the distance!".
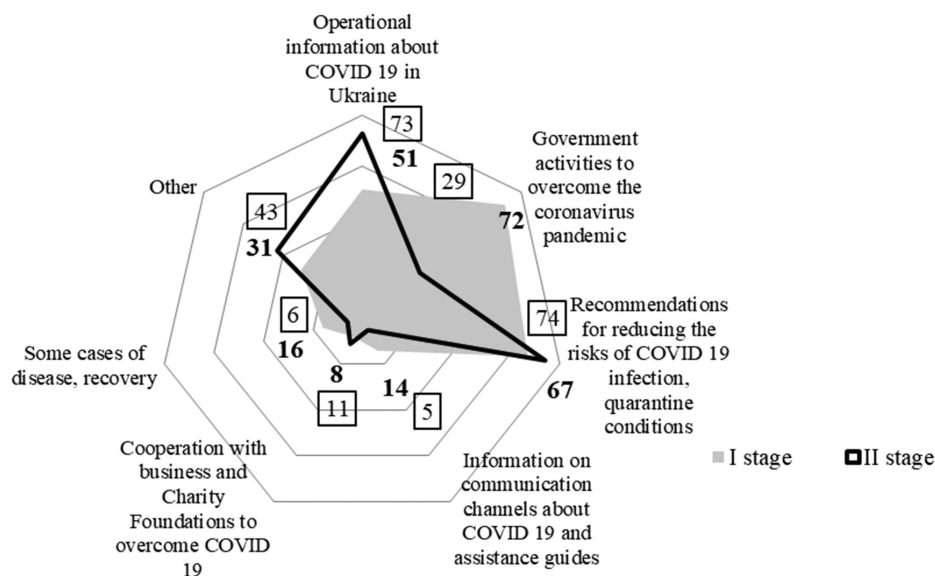
Figure 1. Number of publications made at the Telegram Channel "Coronavirus_info" by types at the I and II stage of quarantine

During March-mid-May 2020, several information campaigns continued on the Coronovirus_info Telegram channel. #SimpleThingsSaveLife (13.03.2020 - 5.04.2020) was represented by 14 messages. As part of the campaign, a video was shot in which Ukrainian show stars called to obey simple rules that would help to maintain people's health. Several video clips were produced for communication campaign promotion: e.g. "Moms remind: quarantine is not a holiday", „Dads recall: set an example for your family during an outbreak of coronavirus infection, follow sanitary and hygienic norms, take care of your loved ones and be responsible. Stay at home and be healthy! „ There were also 7 infographics, 4 of which were created jointly with UNICEF Ukraine. These messages were explaining in an accessible form the main rules that reduce the risk of COVID 19 infection: „Good nutrition and sleep. Avoid „fatigue", „Avoid crowds", „Wash hands always and everywhere", „Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing."

Since March 18, 2020 22 messages have been posted as part of the #StopCoronavirus information campaign. Among them: a video message from doctors - experts of the Ministry of Health Care with an explanation of the possibility of getting sick in a large crowd, the need to use a mask, etc.; rubric „Myth" - „Truth"; clarification of quarantine conditions and basic rules that will help reduce the risk of infection COVID 19. Ukrainian singers, actors, presenters supported this information campaign.

In mid-March 2020, the Ministry of Health Care also launched an information campaign #SupportDoctors and called on everyone to be grateful for the dedicated work of physicians who oppose the spread of coronavirus. The Telegram channel „Coronavirus_info" published 18 mes-

sages with this hashtag (14 of them - video). In total, more than 30 Ukrainian show stars took part in the #SupportDoctors campaign.

The campaign # Stay at Home (March 28, 2020 - April 18, 2020) was represented by 8 publications, of which 6 were videos. The Ministry of Health Care, together with the National Bank of Ukraine, shot and posted a video calling to teach the elderly to pay for utilities online. On the eve of Easter, videos with online footage of online services abroad and a call to stay at home during Easter were posted.

Summing up, it should be noted that the information messages of the first two stages of quarantine in the Telegram channel „Coronovirus_info" mainly contained recommendations that would help reduce the risk of infection (25.9% of all publications during the 1st stage of quarantine and 27 % - in the 2nd quarantine period). The share of communication messages covering the Government's actions to overcome the pandemic (27.8% and 12%) and operational information on the spread of COVID 19 (19.7% and 30%) was also quite high. The communication messages of the 1st quarantine period mostly contained a significant amount of information and were characterized by a formal tone of information presentation.

The whole communication process was significantly complicated by a lack of trust in the Government authorities (according to the Razumkov Polling Center, the level of trust in the Government in February 2020 in Ukraine was 28%). At the 2nd stage of quarantine, the tone and content of messages was changed. Experts note that the change in the tone is necessary, because you need novelty and creativity in communications. Communication expert for social and behavioral change A. Nurzhynska (2020) notes that having too much information and not enough time for reflection, a person relies on automatic, subconscious and quick solutions for action. Accordingly, people act as others do.

With this in mind, British experts have developed the MINDSPACE concept, which, based on thorough research in the field of social psychology and behavioral economics, identifies the main factors of behavior change and communication tools that can influence people's behavior (Dolan P., Hallsworth M., Halpern D.and other, 2010). If the communications of the Ministry of Health Care during 12.03-12.05.2020 in the Telegram channel „Coronovirus_info" on MINDSPACE are analyzed, it turns out that almost half of the MINDSPACE factors were used (see Table 2).

Table 2. Communication tools of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine according to the MINDSPACE concept, which was used in the Telegram channel „Coronovirus_info" (12.03-12.05.2020)

Behavior Change Factors	Communication Instruments
Messenger	Well-known Ukrainian singers, actors and presenters were actively involved in communications. To a lesser extent, doctors were involved.
Incentives	The communication mostly used regular reminders about the need to follow the recommendations that would help reduce the risk of infection, emphasizing on the ease of these action (hand washing, social distancing, etc.), as well as on their benefits - "Keep a good mood and remember that we sit in quarantine not for quarantine, but to live and stay healthy. In the meantime, think about what you will do on the first day after it's all over! "
Norms	"Believers stay at home and attend worship services online. Everything to save lives and health. "
Defaults	Distance stickers in stores. "Add markings to help people keep their distance."
Salience	The use of characters from Ukrainian history and their famous sayings: "Fight and you will win!" by Taras Shevchenko, "Down with sad thoughts!" by Lesya Ukrainka, etc.
Priming	-
Affect	-
Commitments	-
Ego	-

Although Messenger has been widely used in Ministry of Health Care's campaigns, communication message developers have not taken into account the fact that, according to research, Ukrainians trust COVID-19 reports from physicians, WHO representatives and experts the most. Statements about COVID-19 by others, including celebrities, journalists, government officials and politicians, appeared to be not that credible (GfK Ukraine, 2020).

Actually, the Norms factor was not used. Only once in the messages on the eve of Easter a video was posted stating that on April 10-12, 2020, the faithful of the Vatican and Israel stayed at home and joined the services online. „Everything to save lives and health." However, the same video also contained information that residents of Chernivtsi (in the region with the largest number of patients) came to the churches on Palm Sunday.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine used a sufficient number of digital communication channels, which were targeted at different age groups. The use of various information channels, a significant number of users of these channels indicates that communication messages were available to a large number of people. However, an analysis of one of the Ministry of Health Care most popular digital communication channels, Coronovirus_info, shows that communication messages were mostly official, with a share of information on COVID 19 dissemination and government action to counteract recommendations to help reduce the risk of infection. Communication messages of the Ministry of Health Care did not fully use the main factors of behavior change and communication tools that can influence people's behavior and focused mainly on raising public awareness. The hypothesis of our study was confirmed because there was no large-scale implementation of behavioral factors in communication strategies, the majority of the country's population (as well as its leadership) stopped following the rules of hygiene and social distancing, and this, in turn, led to the increased morbidity. With this in mind, the authorities need to consider the following.

Assuming the fact that people do not always think rationally in the decision-making process, and information alone in 80% of cases does not change people's behavior (Dolan P., Hallsworth M., Halpern D. and other, 2010), the concept of MINDSPACE must be used when developing communication on combating the spread of COVID 19. At the same time, special attention should be paid on focusing on support and motivation, by framing messages in terms of thinking about the future, the effectiveness of precautionary measures, emphasizing that more and more people start following all the rules of quarantine and precautionary measures. It should also be kept in mind that the amount of information provided in the messages should not be overflowing, and we have to create a shorter list of the most effective actions that people in the country can follow. The spread of the coronavirus pandemic is a protracted crisis characterized by a considerable uncertainty and communication should be built according to the stages of the crisis (see the McKinsey guide (2020) for details. The practice of government communication needs further research. Effective communication practices for behavioral change must be implemented as soon as possible in communication strategies aimed at counteracting the spread of COVID-19, because in many cases, people's lives and health depend on it.

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