

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF UKRAINIAN MEDICAL OPINION LEADERS IN SOCIAL NETWORK

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Abstract

The article deals with the analysis of effective communication of Ukrainian opinion leaders in social media. In Ukraine, the use of social networking sites Facebook and Instagram has become widespread. There are also two recognized opinion leaders in the field of health care, Yevhen Komarovskiy and Ulana Suprun. Based on a two-step flow model of communication, the authors investigate how opinion leaders create their Internet content on social networks and establish communication with the audience. The study uses qualitative and quantitative research methods, which allow for reproducing the overall scheme of building the opinion leaders' internet content. The features of Ukrainian opinion leaders' effective communication with the audience were determined by specifying content distribution technologies, specifying formats for presenting information as well as identify the subject of messages, selecting out hashtags. According to the results of the study, opinion leaders use different channels of communication with the audience, and patients (own website, a YouTube channel, participation in media projects). Their activities in social networks Instagram and Facebook are confirmed by the regular posting and communication with other users, encouraging feedback. Opinion leaders in the medical field apply the following technologies to create a positive image and maintain credibility among the audience: minimizing messages about private life; creating a column about breaking down health stereotypes; spreading medical innovations; quality visual content; hyperlinks to their other channels; use and creating hashtags; simple and clear advice to their patients.

Key words: opinion leader, social networks, hashtag, doctor's image, communication, feedback, post, audience.

Introduction

Ukraine is a post-communist state in the process of reforming the health care system. In Soviet times, communication between doctors and patients was limited. The residents of the town/city received medical care at polyclinics according to their place of residence. Doctors built their reputation and professional image during clinical examination, consulting patients, and providing them with medical care. The expanding of the communication network was due to the "snowball" method: if a patient was satisfied he could recommend the doctor to his acquaintances.

Doctor-patient communication can expand due to social networks, where you need to find the target audience and future patients. In current conditions, medical institutions and doctors have the opportunity for the use of social networks to advertise their services, increase the number of visitors, establish communication with patients. The most widely used social networks in Ukraine are Instagram and Facebook. Twitter, quite popular in many countries around the world, is hardly ever used in Ukraine. YouTube video hosting channels are also involved in building a professional image.

In Ukraine, the social networks Facebook and Instagram are competing with each other for the number of users and downloads of mobile versions. The social networking service Instagram is dominated by photos and other types of visual content (graphics, videos, animations), whereas textual messages can be absent. Facebook content can combine visual and textual forms or use each one separately. In contrast to Instagram, a FB user can create big texts. Users of both networks have the opportunity to write comments, receive replies, and write private messages. This reproduces two-way communication (mutual messaging process) between the account owner and the network audience, or between account subscribers and audience extensions. New hashtags are used and developed to facilitate the necessary information search.

Image is a system of signs that helps an individual encode particular social roles and represent him/her in social spaces, including the virtual one. A properly constructed image allows for establishing communication with the audience

and preventing the incorrect decoding of messages to the recipient. The main image features are variability based on particular impressions and positive characteristics of the subject.

In social networks, the image is a product of informational influence made as an element of effective multilevel communication. The image-making technology in cyberspace is based on the structuring and clear orientation of the image transmitted to the audience. The image management in social networks occurs.

The advantages of spreading a professional image in social networks are: interactive communication between the communication participants and changing their roles as an information source and receiver; use of hyperlinks to search for information; accelerating the transfer of information; creating special hashtags; involving experts and other users to create a discussion space; personification of pages; influence on public opinion, etc.

In Ukraine, the opinion leaders in the field of health care are Yevhen Komarovskiy and Ulana Suprun [2].

Related work

Opinion leadership theory destroyed the conventional model of communication when the media created messages for the audience. According to this two-step model, information has a better effect on the masses if transmitted by an opinion leader. Thus, the idea of interpersonal communication arises.

Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz in their book "Personal Influence" (1955) [3] claimed that people's reaction to media reports was intermediated by interpersonal communication with members of their social environment.

The main characteristics of opinion leaders are the following: they have a particular position and a network of social contacts where they spread their own opinions on topical issues and influence the formation of public opinion. Opinion leaders are active users of the media, now social networks. They work with information, collecting it from various sources and processing it, and create their information content. Then this information is passed on to the public.

Ukrainian scientist G.G. Pocheptsov [4, p. 442–452] identifies the following methods for determining opinion leaders:

- 1) self-designating method, when people assess their influence on other people by themselves;
- 2) sociometric method - asking each member of the group whom they seek advice from;
- 3) informants' ratings - asking selected key informants about the most influential people in the group;
- 4) observation - an objective method, when an investigator identifies people as opinion leaders and records the results of their influence.

In the context of the wide-spread of social networking, the two-step flow of communication theory has received new aspects of development. Recent studies have described how social networks Instagram and Facebook, and YouTube video hosting channels influence audience behavior. The motives for the use of particular social networks by some audiences were studied. For example, investigators studied how opinion leaders' content affected the consumption of cosmetics in Indonesia. Firda Istania, Intan Putri Pratiwi, Mizla Felia Yasmine, Artha Sejati Ananda surveyed 250 Instagram users. The results of the survey showed that the content of opinion leaders influenced their position, and the number and quality of posts are not factors in forming authority among the audience [5].

These days, the issue of representation of one's image by other individuals on social networks has become widespread in academic research. People use Instagram and Facebook to represent their image and creativity. Scientists Ravi Ranjan, Prof. (Dr.) Sanjeev Bansal, Prof. (Dr.) Teena Bagga explores the motives for using social media, among which they selected out the five main ones: social interaction, creativity&Self-Promotion, mind diversion, documentation, and business promotion. Some modern studies emphasize that, in social networks, the individual has the opportunity to create a virtual personality through visual content [6]. Aliasger Wagh notices that one of the most popular types of self-presentation on social media is selfies [7]. To study the representation of the individual in social networks, the author uses the "snowball" method of selecting respondents, in-depth interviews, analysis of the visual content of respondents' accounts, ethnographic and virtual-ethnographic approaches.

The two-step model of communication on the Internet has gained new development: bloggers and account holders with a large number of subscribers have become opinion leaders on social networks. The two-step model of communication on the Internet has gained a new development: bloggers and account holders with a large number of subscribers/followers have become opinion leaders on social networks. These are figures who do not only process information and are experts in a particular field (this is not a mandatory criterion), but they also convey the information for public discussion.

Methodology

The article analyzes Internet accounts of physicians in Ukraine and the technology of building a positive image and establishing communication with the audience. It is difficult to specify the exact number of these accounts, as it is permanently updated and changed. In Ukraine, there are registers of public hospitals and information directories (paper and online versions) indicating the exact number of hospitals. There are a lot of Internet resources that contain information about medical institutions and doctors. However, there is no single system that would enable calculating the sample and determine the exact data of the subject studied. Hashtags, which group similar messages, are applied to clarify the links. These enable tracking the number of topic mentions on the social network and the relations to other topics.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research is a set of philosophical, general-scientific, and special methods that provide an interdisciplinary theoretical analysis of effective communication of Ukrainian opinion leaders in the field of medicine.

An interdisciplinary approach is applied because effective communication and its structural elements are a subject of research in various sciences (social communications, medical management, public relations, organization management, etc.). The application of the semantic method allows for revealing the meanings of the content of encoding/decoding the messages of opinion leaders. The comparative method enables identifying the general features of communication of opinion leaders with the audience and technologies of receiving feedback from the audience.

The study applies qualitative and quantitative research methods. Opinion leaders' accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube contain quantitative and qualitative analysis. Thus, it allows reproducing the overall scheme of creating opinion leaders' content. The study analyzed the content of the official pages of selected people for a month from January 1 to January 31, 2020. The study does not take into consideration who exactly manages the content of these pages, a person, or a media professional.

All the material studied was encoded simultaneously by three encoders to enhance the objectivity and accuracy of the entire encoding process. Due to such an approach, the authors were also able to discuss all the differences in encoding.

The number of post likes does not allow for accurately distinguishing cheating likes, so we did not take into account.

To identify the features of effective communication of Ukrainian opinion leaders in the medical field with the audience, it is necessary to:

- analyze opinion leaders' accounts on social networks;
- select channels of information distribution;
- specify content distribution technologies;
- specify formats for presenting information;
- identify the subject of messages;
- select out hashtags used and created by doctors for their positive image;
- establish how opinion leaders engage subscribers in active dialogue and feedback.

Research results and discussion

The first influential physician in Ukraine listened to by a wide audience is Yevhen Komarovskiy, MD, pediatrician, Ph.D., doctor of the highest category, author of books on children's health. Yevhen Komarovskiy gained his authority as a doctor among the general population due to his participation in television projects and his TV program Dr. Komarovskiy's School. It was the media that allowed the doctor to demonstrate his professional skills accompanied by oratory skills, the ability to convincingly explain the causes of children's diseases, combating stereotypes of upbringing, and popularizing the culture of family ties.

These days Yevhen Komarovskiy actively maintains his image using several channels:

- a personal website [8] which has a convenient structure under the following headings: books, videos, articles, blog, questions, letters;
- Komarovskiy's social network [9];
- YouTube channel [10].
- social networks Instagram and Facebook [11; 12];
- books;
- the mobile application;
- participation as an expert in TV and radio programs.

More than 68,000 posts on various topics have been posted on Instagram under the hashtag #doktorkomarovskiy. The search engine identifies as similar the following hashtags #помощьдетям (#helpforchildren), #максимка_победит

(#maxim_wins), #детскийонколог (#childrenoncologist), #мирглазамиребенка (#worldthroughtheeyesofchildren), #здоровьедетей (#childrenhealth), #помогитеребенку (#helpachild), #донаторы (#donators), #лейкоз (#leukemia), #добрыелюди (#kindpeople), #ракнеприговор (#cancerisnotasentence). Many of these posts are not related to Dr. Komarovskiy, but serve as hyperlinks to other accounts.

In January 2020, Dr. Komarovskiy's Instagram account [11] published 71 posts. In Ukraine, there are two public holidays celebrated in January: The New Year (January 1) and Christmas (January 7). Those days, posts were not published. On the eve of the holidays, December 31 and January 6, the doctor congratulated his followers on holiday. On other days, he published two or three posts daily. The number of posts per day was not registered.

In January 2020, Dr. Komarovskiy published 17 posts on Facebook [12], six of which were answers to users' questions with a link to the official website. Posts with questions were accompanied by the hashtags #вопрос_ответ (#question_answer) and #ответы_Комаровского (#Komarovskiy's_answers), there were no other hashtags. There was also one post advertising his Instagram account.

To spread his ideas, the doctor uses such technologies as videos and entertainment pictures. Some messages have a link to the account of the social project "Safe Childhood" (@bezopdet) aimed at informing the public to prevent accidents with children. On January 2, the doctor published a post with a link to the article by psychologist Nadiya Zheleznyak where the author mentioned four books that can create the New Year's spirit in the family. At the end of the post, the author asks his followers about their favorite New Year's stories and cartoons for the whole family and invites everyone to create a New Year's list of Christmas stories. Safety information is presented through vivid pictures and simple clear text. The format of such posts can have 5-7 images or contain none.

To maintain his image, Dr. Komarovskiy used the following information formats:

- videos that were shown on TV in the past but are still relevant;
- videos from his personal YouTube channel;
- photos;
- graphic images.

Text messages to the post included:

- answers to his followers'/subscribers' questions;
- citations from his book;
- references to other doctors and psychologists' opinion;
- tips for parents;
- destruction of myths about medical treatment;
- his reflections on health issues.

Topics covered in the posts:

- children's health and safety;
- family relations;
- topical issues of health and safety (coronavirus);
- his traveling.

60 of 71 posts are aimed at establishing communication with followers. These are answers to the followers' questions in the form of videos, entertaining pictures, or links to other professionals' accounts with similar topics.

The doctor engages his followers in active dialogue and feedback by creating a post:

- as the answer to the question with further discussion in the comments;
- with questions and a proposal to join the discussion (the post advertising the mobile application "Doctor Komarovskiy" suggests "Share in the comments where and how the tips in our application helped you");
- with a proposal to complete a list of possible answers in the comments.

In the comments, users write clarifying questions. For example, "Is it possible to walk in any weather? We have constant wind and drafts on the street, even nowhere to walk ///Should I walk in the wind or I'd better stay at home?". Such comments help to update the content, create a space for dialogue between users.

Hashtags help users find and identify information. On Facebook and Instagram, each post has hashtags. The semantic meaning of the message corresponds to newly formed hashtags.

Example:

- tips for a family living in a small space home - #doktor_komarovskiy #дети (#children) #родительство (#parenting) #семья (#family) #звук (#sound) #громкость (#volume);
- tips about the impact of regular walks on child's health - #doktor_komarovskiy #простыеистины (#simpletruths) #дети (#children) #семья (#family) #родительство (#parenting) #свежийвоздух (#openair) #здоровье (#health) #прогулки (#walks);

- safe ice skating which implies that children must be accompanied by an adult - #doktor_komarovskiy #безопасность (#safety) #травматизм (#trauma) #здоровье (#health) #свежийвоздух (#openair) #родительство (#parenthood) #дети (#children) #лед (#ice) #зима (#winter) #внимание (#attention);

- prevention of frostbite and hypothermia - #doktor_komarovsky #простыеистины (#simpletruths) #дети (#children) #родительство (#parenthood) #семья (#family) #безопасность (#safety) #здоровье (#health) #свежийвоздух (#openair) #зима (#winter) #холод (#cold).

Analysis of other posts allows us to identify the following sequence of hashtags. The first is always a hashtag with the doctor's name #doktor_komarovskiy; it accompanies all posts. The following hashtags are also the most frequently used: #parents or #parenthood, #children, #families, #health, #simpletruths, etc.

The hashtag #question_answer marks answers to followers' questions. Besides, to keep in touch with the audience, a video post also has links to the website, YouTube, Telegram, and Facebook.

Some parts of Yevhen Komarovskiy's book 365 tips for the first year of your child's life were adapted especially for Instagram. These posts are marked with the hashtag #365tips.

Information about the new virus spread in China was posted on Instagram on January 23 with the hashtags: #doktor_komarovskiy #health #safety #package #china #coronavirus #virus #illness #news #question. The post included links to videos on other channels.

In 2016, a new health care reform started in Ukraine, initiated by Acting Minister of Health of Ukraine Ulana Suprun. The public's reaction to the innovations was mixed, which contributed to an active information campaign by the government. Thus, Ulana Suprun was formed as a Ukrainian opinion leader using the following channels:

- a blog [13] divided into four sections (health, transformation, myths, culture) with topics also discussed on social networks;

- social networks Instagram [14] and Facebook [15];

- participation in TV and radio projects as a public figure, expert.

In January 2020, Ulana Suprun published only four posts on Instagram, three of which were about the premieres of Ukrainian films (one to My Thoughts are Silent, two to Lethal Kittens) and one to her participation in a cooking program. More than 233 posts on Instagram have the hashtag #улянасупрун (#ulanasuprun).

In January 2020, Dr. Suprun published 60 posts on Facebook. The main format for presenting information is a text with photos and graphics. Ulana Suprun complements her Facebook posts with hyperlinks to her blog, the previous posts on her pages, and Internet resources to strengthen her argument. For example, most posts in January included links to the special project PsycheЯ [16].

Topics covered in the posts:

health issues;

mental health;

events in the country;

world events;

premieres of Ukrainian films

the need to reform the health care system;

historical dates and their significance;

advertising fake medication;

the impact of social networks on health;

features of health professionals' work;

own experience of using Facebook (accusations of using hate speech).

A feature of the content of Ulana Suprun's posts on Facebook is the response to events in the world and the country and their association with human health. For example, several posts were dedicated to the shooting down a Ukrainian passenger jet in Iran, killing all 176 people on board. Besides expressing condolences to the victims' families, U. Suprun mentioned methods of maintaining mental health. On January 1, Ulana Suprun congratulated her followers on the national holiday, New Year, and invited them to discuss how to start the year with mental health benefits. She also wrote patriotic posts for the Ukrainian Political Prisoner Day and the Ukrainian Unity Day. Besides public holidays and anniversaries, U. Suprun highlighted health issues, for example, a contest for the post of Head of the National Health Service of Ukraine or the reform of the health care system and the need for access to all hospitals for every citizen.

Ulana Suprun's posts also reflected world events, for example, fires in Australia and the spread of COVID-19. She hardly ever uses hashtags. On Facebook, Dr. Suprun's most posts have the hashtag #абивибулиздорові (#keepyouhealthy), which is universal and combines issues of food, detox, mental health, body state after the New Year holiday feasts.

Conclusion

The base of the general scheme of building an attractive image of a doctor is various channels of communication with the audience and patients such as a personal website, YouTube channel, participation in media projects, etc. Activity in social networks Instagram and Facebook is confirmed by the regular posting and communication with other users, encouraging feedback.

Doctors, who are opinion leaders, use the following technologies to create a positive image:

- giving preference to one of the networks in spreading information;
- minimization of messages about private life (most often it is traveling);
- creation of headings and posts dedicated to destroying health stereotypes common in society, which do not correspond to the current level of medicine;
- spreading medical innovations;
- informing about problems relevant to the social network users' health, regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics;
- response to current processes in the world (COVID-19);
- predominating medical topics in postings;
- quality visual content;
- hyperlinks to other own channels;
- use and creating hashtags;
- regular postings;
- congratulations on public holidays;
- simple and clear advice to patients.

To promote their ideas, opinion leaders use such technologies as videos and entertainment pictures. Some posts contain links to other sources with similar issues.

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