

The role and practice of healthy communication of mobile phone short messages during the epidemic in COVID-19

Liliang Wan^{1, a}

¹ School of International Journalism and Communication, Beijing Foreign Studies University,
Beijing, 100089, China

^a wll@bfsu.edu.cn

Abstract. In the face of the major crisis of the COVID-19, the comprehensive use of media means is conducive to the establishment of public health awareness and healthy behavior. Based on 467 epidemic related short messages released by Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province, this paper analyzes the function of mobile phone short messages during the COVID-19 epidemic from the perspective of health communication.

Keywords: COVID-19; short message; Health communication; Group communication.

1. Introduction

From January 24, 2022, in addition to new media channels, the government departments of Zhongshan City chose SMS to increase the arrival rate of epidemic information, playing a role of health communication to a certain extent. The author found that during the epidemic, China's health communication research mainly focused on the new media field, and there was less discussion on health communication of mobile phone short messages. Based on this, this paper studies the health communication of mobile phone short messages during the epidemic by taking the content of short messages issued by the government departments of Zhongshan City as an example.

2. The Concept and Practical Possibility of health communication of SMS

Short message is a non-real-time and non-voice data communication service that transmits text or digital short messages through mobile communication system. It has the characteristics of storage and forwarding, simple editing and low cost, and once played the role of the vanguard of information dissemination from the 1990s to the beginning of this century, and even the expression of "believing in life" appeared.

In 1996, Everett M Rogers, an American scholar, defined health communication as the behavior of spreading health-related content with the help of self-communication, interpersonal communication, organizational communication and mass communication. At present, the practice and research of health communication in China mainly focus on Weibo, WeChat, mobile client, short video and other new media matrices, and there is little discussion on health communication based on mobile phone short message media.

This epidemic in COVID-19 is not the first time that the health communication function of SMS has appeared. In the SARS incident in 2003, the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, and the citrus maggot incident in Guangyuan, Sichuan, mobile phone messages have all released positive or negative health information. Although SMS can't be regarded as a new media compared with WeChat official account and clients, it has the advantages of large user base, wide spread population and being unaffected by factors such as region and preference, and it is an effective health information transmission chain in crisis communication.

2.1 Facilitating the unobstructed dissemination of health information

Unlike the habit of using new media, SMS communication does not require the audience to actively follow media accounts or add friends to each other, and can directly send and receive information. This communication method eliminates the energy consumption and time loss of

mutual negotiation before receiving information. In a public crisis event similar to the COVID-19 epidemic, rumors or inaccurate information are very likely to cause group panic in a short time, thus triggering cluster events, which is detrimental to the social stability of a region or the whole country. The convenience and accessibility of SMS editing on mobile phones enable health information to be delivered to the audience in the shortest possible time, and then spread among the crowd, receiving, viewing, and knowing. This information acceptance line will provide the audience with a preset information in the early stages of the event, leaving operational gaps for in-depth reporting by other media in the future.

2.2 Helps to fill gaps in health information dissemination

The size of the audience is one of the indicators determining the strength of a media's competitiveness, and more specifically, it refers to the number of actual and potential audiences of the media. According to the "Provincial Distribution of Telephone Users from January to April 2020" released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China, as of April this year, the number of mobile phone users in China has reached 1.59 billion. According to the 45th data from CNNIC, as of March this year, the number of netizens in China reached 904 million. The difference between the two indicates that there is still a large portion of the audience in China who cannot extract information from the internet due to factors such as low equipment level and insufficient technical literacy, which also means that they are disconnected from new media such as WeChat and Weibo. For audiences who cannot use the internet, the use of SMS sent by mobile communication systems fills the information reception gap of such groups and expands the coverage of health information in major public health crisis events.

2.3 Beneficial for the dissemination of core health information

With the explosive growth of homogeneous information, the reading habits of audiences in the new media era have become fragmented and efficient, and there has been a phenomenon of "information avoidance" for lengthy content. The technical requirement for SMS is that each message should be sent with 160 English, numeric, or 70 Chinese characters. On the one hand, this restriction on the number of words in the content of short messages objectively requires information editors to refine the content they want to express and highlight the key aspects of health communication with the shortest text; On the other hand, this word limit subjectively caters to the fragmented reading habits of current media users, facilitating the efficient dissemination of the core content of health information.

3. The role of SMS in health communication in the epidemic

Since Guangdong Province launched the first-level response to public health emergencies, all communication operators in Zhongshan City have transmitted the prevention and control information of novel coronavirus to Zhongshan citizens through SMS. By February 11th, 480 million messages had been sent. Judging from the published contents, the health communication role played by SMS in this COVID-19 epidemic can be divided into three categories.

3.1 Spread health knowledge

Health knowledge refers to the content related to the prevention and control of the COVID-19, which involves food, travel, transportation and other correct practices in daily life [1]. At the initial stage of the epidemic, various rumors were spread through interpersonal and group communication. All kinds of We Media bloggers blindly voiced their voices in order to chase the traffic, which led to crowd panic and cluster phenomenon, such as drinking can kill COVID-19, and people gather to buy Forsythia suspensa. Although the content of health knowledge dissemination SMS is not long, it has a guiding function for the audience's actions, providing action suggestions from various aspects of life.

3.2 Advocate for health actions

Health actions refer to activities that prioritize one's own health and safety. When playing the role of "advocating health actions", mobile text messages apply the theory of "advocating communication" to promote public practice of health actions [2]. International communication professor Jane Swath believes that advocacy communication refers to promoting specific content to decision-makers and other potential supporters, including the public, through various interpersonal and media channels, with the aim of promoting support for specific policies or actions by relevant groups. The SMS content of Zhongshan Municipal Government departments is intended to guide the public to protect their own health and safety during various social activities during the epidemic period in a narrow sense, while in a broad sense, it is to promote the public to work together to control the epidemic and eliminate the virus as soon as possible.

3.3 Establish health awareness

Health awareness refers to people's awareness and attention to the external and personal health conditions [3]. During the post epidemic period, although various regions have achieved success in epidemic prevention and control and lifted the first level response to sudden public health events, some experts have expressed that there is a possibility of another outbreak. Therefore, it is crucial to establish long-term health awareness among the public. Establishing a health awareness of infectious viruses is also applicable to the prevention and control of similar public health emergencies, which can have a "immune effect" in thinking.

4. Cold thinking on the practice of health communication of mobile phone short messages

Paul levinson's theory of remedial media holds that all media are remedies and supplements to a certain media or a certain congenital deficiency function in the past. Compared with the traditional media, the new media does have its advantages, and it also facilitates people's daily life. However, the insistence of Zhongshan government departments on using SMS during the COVID-19 epidemic is a function re-emphasis and value return to the traditional media. How to make better use of short message media and maximize its healthy communication function, here are some thoughts.

4.1 Pay attention to the scientific literacy of SMS editors and release accurate and reliable information.

At present, mobile SMS dissemination is still in a one-way and unchangeable stage, which means it does not have the "post repair" function of new media means. Health communication has also stepped out of the pseudoscience model of "ignoring reality and exaggerating expression" in the past, and paid more attention to the dissemination of scientific health knowledge with real basis. Therefore, when editing SMS content, we must improve the scientific literacy of the SMS editing team. We should select technicians with relevant scientific knowledge reserves to work, check from the source of information, and ensure the reliability of information release.

4.2 In terms of text message content, it is necessary to avoid reading misunderstandings caused by the word "polysemy".

The Chinese character culture is vast and profound, and homophonic disagreement, as well as different sentences with the same word, can lead to semantic differences between sentences, which can lead to misunderstandings among the audience when reading and affect the accuracy of the dissemination of content. Unlike the thousands of words of tweets in new media, text messages, as a medium for expressing short information, have no other textual content to assist readers in understanding once errors occur in wording and sentence construction. Therefore, in terms of text message content, it is necessary to be both cautious and careful. After editing, a second review

should be conducted to avoid the interpretation deviation caused by the word "polysemy" in the audience.

4.3 Similar text messages should not be repeated to reduce audience fatigue.

Jean Baudrillard mentioned in "The implosion of meaning in the media" that symbols and information in the media eliminate and eliminate their own content due to high replication, resulting in the loss of meaning. Repeated transmission of highly replicated or completely identical information to the same audience not only reduces the efficiency of content dissemination, leading to the disappearance of the health promotion value originally attached to it, but also unconsciously reduces the audience's expectations of the information and the trust of the source, and perfunctorily completes the reading of the received information. Moreover, similar non creative mobile text messages may also cause audience fatigue in reviewing mobile text messages.

5. Summary

In 2016, the "Healthy China 2030" Planning Outline issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council emphasized that all kinds of media at all levels should increase the publicity of health science knowledge. In the information war of novel coronavirus epidemic, the new media undoubtedly played the main role in health communication, but as one of the traditional media, SMS also showed its function and value of promoting health science knowledge. Improve the practical norms of SMS communication operation, and believe that it can show more media advantages in the future healthy communication.

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