

Strategic communication: the objectives and methods of using TV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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In late March, MediaScope published TV ratings. According to statistics, the total TVR in Russia increased by 4% since the start of the nation-wide quarantine [7]. This also occurred in the United States, where “the news programming was most-watched on TV” [11]. It attracted 21% more people than the annual average. Such increased popularity of television at the start of the coronavirus pandemic shows that people chose TV to get the latest information concerning the disease.

Having become one of the main channels between governments, the World Health Organization (WHO), and people, television was used as a primary means of communication. The objectives of these television broadcasts included:

- Providing adequate and trustworthy information
- Using official press-releases, interviews with experts, and data analytics to explain statistics, coronavirus official data, reasons for a quarantine or lockdown and economic changes
- Calming people down, preventing any form of panic
- Persuading people to follow WHO recommendations and take precautions by explaining the benefits of such measures

Trying to fulfill this set of responsibilities, TV has become an important part of the strategy to fight coronavirus and thus reduce the probability of contracting it [8].

What were the methods of achieving such a result? First, TV showed interviews with experts, doctors and nurses. These medical personnel helped advise people about the pandemic and provide accurate information. In so doing, these interviews showed the reality of the situation and equipped citizens with the tools needed to decrease the risk of infection. As it was said by the Secretary-General of The United Nations António Guterres, “Journalists and media workers are crucial to help us make informed decisions. As the world fights the COVID-19 pandemic, those decisions can make the difference between life and death.” [10]. As an example of this, Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN’s Chris Cuomo the reasons why young people should take coronavirus very seriously [4]. Second, TV channels aired reports about doctors’, nurses’, volunteers’, patients’ daily lives and risk. For instance, CNN reported about a doctor who treated coronavirus patients and died [5]. Third, not only has the news become an important and accurate resource to help people stay informed as to what is happening with COVID, in addition to informational programs other TV channels have also contributed to the dissemination of information. Daytime shows which usually broadcast with the sole goal of entertaining people, changed their typical interviewees from stars, actors, and famous people to doctors and nurses fighting with the disease. For example, on the very popular American program, *The Ellen Show*, during one of the episodes Ellen hosted nurses from Philadelphia who spoke about their experiences during the pandemic [9]. Fourth, the technical platform of TV programs has changed. Following WHO recommendations, TV programs made interviews via Zoom or Skype instead of in person. In addition, during their reports, journalists wore

masks and gloves. Moreover, some programs were filmed at home. For example, the *Russia-24* journalists shot their news from home [2] as did the *Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. The host of this American show, Jimmy Fallon, with his kids made programs from home using FaceTime to talk with guests [6].

The COVID-19 pandemic completely changed TV. The whole broadcasting scope had to refocus their program plans, reequip their studios, and more importantly, everyday risk journalists' lives to get the best content for their audiences. Unfortunately, while pursuing vital information for the citizens of their nations, some journalists became infected with the virus and fell ill. However, this didn't discourage them from continuing their research. Journalists who did contract the virus used their illness as an example to demonstrate the symptoms of the disease. For instance, Anton Vernitskiy working on, *Pervy Kanal*, told his audience that he was ill with coronavirus, how he recovered, and where [1]. In late March, the most popular Russian channels produced a mutual video with the slogan "Stay home" [3]. Despite the dangers, journalists were ready to work, gather the latest news, and produce interesting content while people were at home. Mass media was the main channel to the public. By listening to and watching news broadcasts people were able to gain important and accurate information about the virus, thus containing the spread of the disease.

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