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Health Communication (COME327A)

Health Campaign Analysis Assignment

How to Convince People of the Invisible Threat

Introduction [1-2 paragraphs]

In the story of the boy who cried wolf, a town becomes sick of a young shepherd's constant cries that there is a predatory wolf attacking his sheep, only to find when they get there that the boy was just making it up for attention. On and on, the shepherd continues his pranks, until finally the people of the town decide that enough is enough. One day, the shepherd cries out about a wolf, but the townspeople ignore it, assuming that the shepherd is just toying around with them again. Unfortunately for the shepherd, this time the threat is real, and depending on the version of the story, either the livestock or the boy himself are gobbled up by a hungry wolf as the townspeople go about their business, ignorant to the very real wolf attack. While this story was initially created to teach children the importance of treating the threat of danger seriously, the past year has in some ways shown just how real the story can get.

When I first heard of Coronavirus, my reaction was one of absolute and utter disinterest. I was in Ireland studying abroad, and the last thing on my mind was some random flu all the way over in China. Then, as the year went on, more reports started to come out. This virus was not just an ordinary flu, but one that attacked viciously and spread much more rapidly. Still, throughout my life there had been plenty of deadly diseases that had raged through the world and supposedly threatened our way of life. I remember having to stay inside at dusk when I was little due to the Zika virus being carried on mosquitoes, or the Swine Flu, or the Ebola scare. In every case, those supposedly dangerous diseases had fizzled out, and the people that had been freaking

out about it were seen as overdramatic. Just like the townspeople in the Boy Who Cried Wolf, most of the world viewed the “Coronavirus” as another false flag. This Chinese virus was not fizzling out though. In fact, it was only seeming to spread faster and faster. I spent most of my semester abroad not worrying about the larger world (which after the past 4 years in America, was a welcome change), but every now and then I would check into Reddit or the BBC and get more and more worried. Eventually, my school in the States began to reach out to me to let me know they were monitoring the situation. My fellow American students were unbothered, and their schools did not seem to view Covid as a cause for immediate concern. As Covid raged through China, the emails became more and more common, and then, Italy reported its first cases. At that point, I knew that my time in Ireland had been set on an unavoidable, brisk timer. What I could not have guessed, however, was that I had unknowingly entered my final days not just in Ireland, but in the pre-Pandemic world..

Health Topic Description and Audience Analysis [minimum 3 pages]

The Health campaign that I chose to analyze was the COVID-19 Public Education Campaign by the United State Department of Health and Human Services. This campaign seeks to educate and encourage the American public to follow CDC guidelines such as social distancing, masking, and limiting social interaction with others. Additionally, the campaign attempts to inspire more confidence in the american public to take the Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and Moderna vaccines that have become available to the public. The people that stand to benefit from these behaviors are very literally every man, woman, and child in the United States and even internationally, as the more people who do these things and ultimately become protected against the disease help ensure that the world can get back to “normal”, or as close to it

as possible. As it stands, millions of Americans have already received one of the three vaccines, and spent the past year wearing masks and socially distancing. As of May 5th, at least 32% of American citizens 18 and up are now fully vaccinated (www.americanprogress.org). That comes out to roughly 107 million people being fully vaccinated against Covid. However, as the rate of available vaccines has increased, the rate of people accepting them has stopped. This can be chalked up to vaccine hesitancy in many Americans, especially after the recall of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine due to cases of fatal blood clots in six americans. For many people they want to be one hundred percent certain that what they are putting in their bodies is safe and will not lead to any adverse hidden side effects. Additionally, there is also the topic of misinformation. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, the messaging from American leadership was mixed at best. Americans were initially told by top leadership in the government that there was nothing to worry about, until very suddenly the threat became serious. Still, throughout the year, more and more distrust of science was shared online, in cable news, and in the government itself. Many Americans believed that mask wearing and social distancing were ineffective, and infringed on personal liberties. Misinformation and conspiracy theories spread wildly, and in a significant number of polls, large numbers of Americans denied that Covid even existed. The COVID-19 Public Education Campaign attempts to clear the air and encourage both people who are predisposed to believe science - and those who do not - the advantages of following the guidelines and getting vaccinated.

If one were to imagine the audience as one person, that person would most likely be a young adult aged 18-35. This person could be anyone, a brother, sister, mother, father, but again most likely on the younger side. Let's say for the sake of simplicity that person is a 20 year old college student named John. John is a white male who enjoys video games, reading, and

communication and Media classes. Family and the ability to live one's own life is extremely important to John, and it is because of this that Covid has severely affected him negatively. John's media habits are usually based through the web on sites like Reddit, though he will occasionally tune in for important news events on the television. Mostly though, John stays off of social media, and does not have an active online presence, choosing instead to observe and not participate. It is most likely that John would alter his behavior in response to the COVID-19 Public Education Campaign, which can be explained by answering the five factors of the Health Belief Model:

- Has the campaign convinced me that I am susceptible?
- Has the campaign convinced me that there are consequences?
- Has the campaign convinced me that I will benefit from doing what they say?
- Has the campaign convinced me that it is worth it?
- Has the campaign piqued my interest and made me feel motivated?

Since John had tracked the virus from a relatively early stage, he had discovered just how susceptible he was after seeing how fast the virus spread. Additionally, the Health campaign convinced him that there were consequences because he was already somewhat inclined to believe so after knowing at least one person in his hometown who had died of Covid. The campaign convinced John that following the guidelines and receiving the vaccine was very much worth it, as it would provide a chance for John to both help protect his family and get to go out into the world again. The campaign peaked his interest by emphasizing the availability of the vaccines and the success rates so far, which made John optimistic again.

The Social Cognitive Theory states that environmental and internal factors often influence whether we actually do something that we say we want to do. This presupposes that

we are driven by what we think/feel, but also what we perceive to be socially acceptable:

- Internal: what we know, how we feel, what we think we can do
- Environmental: what is socially acceptable, what our physical environment allows for us to do, institutional rules

When the two are aligned, it is easier to change behaviors. For John, the feeling of hopelessness that he had been feeling for the majority of 2020 had ironically helped make him more hopeful for a way out, which the campaign promised with the vaccines. Additionally, due to the rates of people getting vaccinated, John did not feel discouraged from getting the vaccine.

Channels of Communication [minimum 2 pages]

Describe the channels used in the health campaign. Specifically, analyze one (1) of the PSAs and the online platform.

The PSA I chose to look at on the HHS website was the protecting our lives ad. The PSA starts with an introduction with narration by black historian Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The ad shows different black Americans that are all being affected by Covid while uplifting and inspirational music plays. The ad urges Black Americans to unite in protecting their lives by getting the COVID vaccines by talking about their accomplishments in history and even in the ongoing vaccine development. This ad to me was quite effective, even though I was not in the intended audience bracket that they were aiming for, and provided adequate information on how the viewer could learn more in the form of hyperlinks. As for the website itself, navigation is painless and simplified. Even those with limited tech savviness should be able to find relevant information no matter where they turn. The info on the site is spelled out in an easy to digest way

while also encompassing all of the important bits. The way the site is set up motivates the user to explore the different offerings on the site and discover new, interesting information. However, the site does not seem to encourage continued visits back to it, as all the information is mostly static. 20 minutes on the site would provide one with adequate info. Both of these materials work seamlessly together to push the narrative of positivity and encouragement to follow guidelines. Despite all of this, and the unique take on the health topic, the website most likely would not reach older audiences that are not well versed in website navigation.

As I flew home from Ireland out of a near empty airport on an equally empty plane, I had many emotions running through me, with none of them being anything even remotely positive. However, the one thing that kept popping into my head was a question: *“How did this happen?”* How had things turned so desperate so fast? As I learned over the course of that year, there were many answers, but one big one. The world had grown careless. We had been so conditioned to sensationalized headlines of world threatening viruses, seen in so many movies, that when the virus finally struck, we were entirely unprepared. As we slowly but surely reach some kind of normalcy again, one has to ask themselves; did we learn the right lessons? Or have we merely doomed ourselves to repeat history?

References

[About the Campaign | WECANDOTHIS.HHS.GOV](#)

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