CURRENT ISSUES OF COMMUNICATION INTERACTION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC DISCUSSION DURING THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC CORONAVIRUS INFECTION

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Abstract.
The article examines current issues of improving communication between public authorities and the public during the spread of coronavirus infection 2019-nCoV. Communications in public administration and the main elements of the communication process are described. The concepts of "communication" and "informing" are distinguished. Some practical tools for informing the
population about COVID-19 in Ukraine are described. The role of crisis communications during the pandemic has been studied. The main advantages and disadvantages of the process of the formation of communication interaction between public authorities and the public are given. Ways to reduce resistance to change and improve feedback in the communication system are suggested.

Key words: communication, COVID-19, changes, crisis communications, public administration.

The urgency of the research. The most pressing scientific problem is the need to study the processes and methods of the transition of power structures from information policy to effective communication with the public, as information openness of public authorities is one of the prerequisites for a democratic society, involvement of citizens in policymaking, effective governance and public control. These issues become especially relevant during the period of spreading new challenges for the state, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as the future of the country depends on a timely response to them. The government's ability to ensure proper communication with the public can increase the effectiveness of the necessary changes required by the situation during the spread of coronavirus infection 2019-nCoV. The ability of the medical
system to withstand a pandemic in the current circumstances largely depends on the establishment of effective communication between authorities and the public.

Actual scientific researches and issues analysis. The following scientists made a significant

contribution to the study of the problems of communication interaction of public authorities with the public: E. Afonin, V. Bebyk, I. Vasylenko, S. Vdovenko, R. Voitovych, A. Kolodiy, V. Kuybida, A. Melnyk, K. Trygub, A. Tkachuk and others. However, there is a lack of research on the implementation of the practice of effective communication in the period of challenges facing our country today. Despite the rapid development of information technology and the active use of

software in various systems, there are several problems regarding the reliability, openness, quality, and efficiency of information interaction.

The research objective. The purpose of this study is to substantiate the effective areas of communication between public authorities and the public from the standpoint of managing effective information exchange during the spread of coronavirus infection 2019-nCoV.

The statement of basic materials. The global pandemic has become a global lesson for humanity, and it affects many areas, including communications. In the context of intensifying the formation of civil society, communication is becoming a mandatory component of modern democracies, ensuring public participation in decision-making and control over government actions, openness between them, building public confidence in public authorities, and providing support, stabilizing public relations.

COVID-19, also known as coronavirus disease, is an infectious disease caused by the SARSCoV-2 virus. It is transmitted between humans through the secretions of infected people, mainly

by direct contact with respiratory drops of more than 5 microns. These drops can be transmited at distances of up to 2 meters. It can also occur through the hands or fomites contaminated with these secretions in contact with the mucosa of the mouth, nose or eyes. The average incubation period is 5-6 days, with a range of 1-14 days. The average time from the onset of symptoms to recovery is 2 weeks when the disease has been mild, and may reach 6 weeks if it has been severe.

The most frequent symptoms are fever, dry cough and tiredness. Most hospitalized cases and deaths are concentrated in the elderly and those with chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes and lung diseases. The most frequent complications are pneumonia, multi-organ failure, and sometimes death. As noted by the authors in previous studies, the health sector in Ukraine is in crisis, so the importance of preventing a pandemic at the

state level is especially important.

Previously, the concept of "communication" was identified mainly with "informing", but they are a significant difference. Interpretations of the term "communication" are quite many, and they

depend on the approach used by the authors of research - process, philosophical, psychological, social, economic, etc. [1]. At the same time, even within one approach, the concept of "communication" can characterize different processes - information exchange, social interaction, reaction to the received message, one-sided informing, etc.

In general, communication in public administration is defined as the movement of information, a tool of dialogue between participants in the management process, a component of the process of interaction between government and civil society. Regarding the communication interaction of public authorities with civil society organizations or individual citizens, this type of

communication is interpreted by some authors as a set of actions for the formation and implementation of management tasks and functions, meeting the information and communication

needs of public service consumers and the authorities based on social communication technologies [2].

The Law of Ukraine "About Information" defines information as any information and/or data that can be stored on physical media or displayed electronically, and information activities - as a set of actions aimed at meeting the information needs of citizens, legal entities, and the state [3]. Besides, information is also facts about the world around us, which are reflected in the human mind, recorded in a certain way, and have the ability to reproduce.

The process of public administration communication contains components typical for any communicative act, in particular: 1) the sender-communicator, depending on the initiation of the communication process, it can be both government agencies of different branches and levels of government and civil society organizations citizens); 2) messages (official public information, oral or written, verbal and nonverbal); 3) the recipient (society as a whole, various institutions of civil society, individual citizens); 4) channels of transmission/dissemination of messages (interpersonal, institutional, mass; formal, informal); 5) feedback channels (requests, appeals of citizens, various forms of civic participation, etc.); 6) the process of coding-decoding information
(preparation of information messages, their adequate interpretation by the audience, etc.); 7) various communication barriers (technical, semantic, psychological, nonverbal, sociocultural) [4].

In the age of information chaos, one of the key points in the fight against the spread of coronavirus is honest, responsible communication with the public about the level of morbidity, how to protect yourself and fight against the virus, and most importantly - where to get help. Therefore, the Ministry of Health should become the flagship of such communication.

It should be noted that the budget of Ukraine cannot afford to finance information activities, and the state press services are always working only on enthusiasm, the question arose as to who supports the "heavy communication artillery" of the Ministry of Health at present. It should be noted that one of the tools for informing the population about current issues regarding COVID-19
in Ukraine is Viber (3272732 participants as of 23.07.2020) and Telegram (752600 participants as of 23.07.2020). The description of the Coronavirus_Info channels in Viber and Telegram has changed to a "volunteer community authorized by the Ministry of Health of Ukraine". The downside is that the "volunteer community" reports information from WHO concerning the news,
rather than the source [5].

It should be noted that in the period of counteraction to the spread of COVID-19, crisis communications are becoming increasingly important, which should be distinguished from communications in times of crisis. The European Space website [6] presents a course "Crisis Communications", which is designed to help NGOs in communications to prevent the spread of coronavirus, as well as in establishing effective communication in crises. The course is interactive with weekly webinars, videos, practical tips, and ready-made templates for work. A Facebook group "Crisis Communications" has also been created, where administrators and moderators share current knowledge and practices in this area. It should be noted that this group

presents a lot of information that reflects the latest trends in improving communication between public authorities and the public in the direction of counteracting the spread of COVID-19 and beyond.

At the same time, most international organizations have separate manuals on how to respond to a specific crisis. In general, crises are guided by the main principle of "doing what causes the least harm". The Practicum website presents the basic rules for responding to crises: take responsibility for the situation; intensification of the anti-crisis team; efficiency; choice of speakers; use of the CAP principle (Concern - 1%; Action - 5%; Perspective - 94%); adhere to two-way communications; constant monitoring of the situation; adherence to ethics and empathy [7].

On the website "Decentralization" [8] provides a guide for local government which identifies ten steps of communication during a pandemic: 1) establishing communication; 2) regular messages (definition of the spokesperson); 3) collection of information materials; 4) informing people; 5) cooperation with other state structures; 6) involvement of local opinion leaders; 7) popularization of verified information; 8) training of the community in preventive institutions; 9) explanation of the importance of preparation for a possible emergency; 10) identification of segments of the population in need of specialized assistance.

It should be noted that the implementation of any changes related to the COVID-19 warning provokes a common reaction in the public - resistance to changes. There are many reasons for this and they are often difficult to determine. However, whether the resistance is overt or covert, it should be seen as material for further consideration. The main reasons for such resistance may be the following: lack of proper information on changes; feeling anxious; hostility and nonacceptance of the news; lack of participation; distrust of the initiators, etc.

Today, citizens of any country are trying to find information about COVID-19 on their own. Unfortunately, the reliability of such information is very questionable. R. Sheremet explored the main reasons for the difficulty of finding true information: 1) people consume a lot of information. In 2019, the average statistician spent almost 7 hours online, including half that time

on the phone [9]. A recent study found that Internet use during the pandemic increased by 47% [10]; 2) lack of responsibility for false information. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that according to research on one of the largest social media platforms, 40% of COVID-19 posts are generated by bots [11]; 3) social networks lead people into an "information bubble of likeminded people" in which people see almost no alternative opinions and this reinforces their prejudices [12]. The author also gave some tips that can change the situation: 1) reducing the consumption of news and information, especially - poor quality information; 2) consumption of information of those people whom you trust and who have a good reputation; 3) in social networks it is necessary to have friends and subscribers who do not agree with your opinion. This

will help fight your prejudices.

A positive factor is the release of the video on the YouTube channel of the well-known in Ukraine and abroad E.O. Komarovsky. This channel has 2.54 million subscribers as of July 23, 2020. On the positive side, it is fair to say that not only the presentation of interesting medical information in an accessible language for each individual but also the opportunity for quick feedback in the form of comments to the video in the format of questions and answers.

The website of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine also provides a wide range of information on

coronavirus infection 2019-nCoV [13]. The site in the section "Citizens" provides information on operational information on the spread of coronavirus infection 2019-nCoV; the number of active cases; links to the verified Viber community and telegram channel; hotline phones; algorithm of actions for suspicions of COVID-19, etc. At the same time, the issue of quick feedback remains open.

At the same time, it should be noted that large-scale communication campaigns are underway in Ukraine to counter the spread of COVID-19. Authorities and local governments are trying to prevent the spread of the disease in the country thanks to these campaigns (for example, the allUkrainian campaign #I SupportDoctors, #StayHome, #IHome, etc.). But at the same time, they

forget about the obligatory feedback in the system of communication interaction, which will allow forming a qualitative interaction. It should be noted that this connection should be formed

at the local level, ie not only public authorities but also local governments should make every effort to attract all possible tools. Sometimes there is a confrontation between citizens and their associations and structures of the health care system at different levels in the direction of providing the population with quality medical services in the treatment of COVID-19, as this issue is relevant for many citizens who are responsible for the epidemic.

Note that the main precautionary measures are: 1) wash hands frequently with soap and water. Avoid touching your face or mask; 2) when coughing or sneezing, cover the mouth and nose with

the inside of the elbow; 3) maintain a safety distance of at least one meter with other people; 4) go to the doctor in case of fever, cough and breathing difficulty, calling in advance if you are in areas where the virus is spreading or if have been visited in the last 14 days; 5) stay at home if you start to feel unwell, even in case of mild symptoms such as headache, until you recover if you are in areas where the virus is spreading or have been visited in the last 14 days; 6) social distancing; 7) recommendations regarding the use of masks. The use of masks is not a substitute of other protection measures and hygiene recommended for the prevention of infection. In individuals infected with SARS-CoV-2 and in their close contacts, the use of a surgical mask is a priority over other types of mask [14, 15].

Based on the above, an effective model of public communication with public authorities in a period of increasing number of challenges for the state, requires an active position of each party: 1) ensuring information openness by public authorities, timely information about changes; motivation to act in accordance with the content of the information message, the formation of individual and collective consciousness [16, P. 4]; 2) formation of an effective system of "feedback" through the coverage of mechanisms of public control, public expertise, monitoring, public consultation on issues of priority importance to society [17, 18]; 3) information content on the full activation of civil society organizations of activities related to the implementation of informational, educational, expert-analytical, human rights functions; stimulation of public activity, initiative, increase of civic competence, in particular special skills of communicative interaction with authorities; 4) monitoring compliance with medical care protocols and preventing possible deterioration of its quality, compliance with moral and ethical standards, responsibility for providing false information, constant feedback from the public in the format of surveys and analysis of comments on social networks, etc.

The result of the successful solution of the specified tasks can become a creation of an integral

system of informing of the public; obtaining objective data (in particular, in the dynamics) that characterize public opinion regarding the quality of medical services; increasing public activity on the way to counteracting the spread of COVID-19; involvement of the population in the process of resolving issues related to the epidemic; overcoming or weakening communication barriers in public relations, reducing not always justified claims to public administration, reducing paternalistic sentiments.

Conclusions. Today, in the 21st century, communication is proactive interaction. It is much more than information, in particular, it is "live" communication with opinion leaders or with ordinary people who are interested in government activities in various fields, it is a process of dialogue and discussion, a procedure that should promote a common understanding of certain views and principles. Public authorities themselves must seek to promote their activities, and at the same time study and take into account public opinion, and this is possible only with effective feedback. Only if government officials realize the difference between "informing" and "communicating" can significant changes be expected towards the formation of a partnership between public authorities and society. In our opinion, the very issue of participation and involvement of the public is key to establishing communication in any field, including counteracting the spread of COVID-19. When public authorities and local governments do not sufficiently transparently analyze the problems that arise during crises in the state, make decisions based on unclear motivations, in violation of procedures, and then only information about the decision - this is the main cause of communication problems. Public misunderstanding of certain steps taken by government officials can lead to active opposition to change, which only
hinders active opposition to the spread of COVID-19.

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