



PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A TOOL TO CULTIVATE PUBLIC HEALTH: AN OVERALL ANALYSIS OF 'SMOKE FREE AIR ZONE CAMPAIGN'

Assist. Prof. Dr. Pelin Hürmeriç
Yeditepe University
Assist. Prof. Dr. Gülşah Gönenli
Yeditepe University

Abstract

Public relations is defined as the planned, long-term efforts between an organization and its publics in order to create and maintain mutual understanding and goodwill. As we defined public relations, in this way, it can be stated that public relations, as a profession, plays an important role in the communication process of public health campaigns. As campaigns concerning the public health are analyzed, campaigns that are against tobacco usage are noteworthy since it is a global problem. Tobacco consumption as a global issue, is a major cause of death and illness. Turkey, has alarmingly high rates of smoking. In this study, 'Smoke Free Air Zone Campaign' which was held by Ministry of Health in Turkey, is analyzed through the perspective of Public Relations. Taking this campaign as an example, activities concerning public health, its elements, stages and outcomes are explained by using case study method.

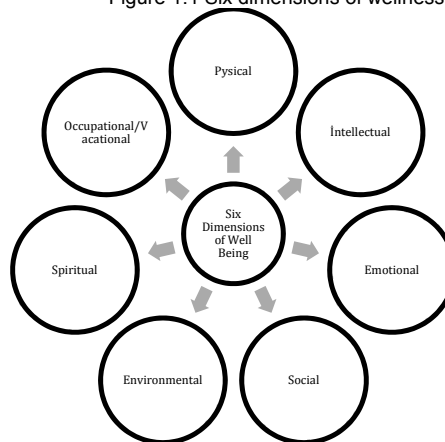
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1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Public Relations and Health Communication

Traditional approach focuses primarily on the physical aspect of health (Gatterman, 2007, p.4). However, in 1947 The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." WHO's definition was the first globally accepted conceptualization and stood the test of time for more than a decade (Blonna and Watter, 2005, p.4). Hettler enhanced these definitions as he states that wellness is multi-dimensional. Achieving optimal wellness is a process of striving toward being the best you can be across all six dimensions (Blonna, Loschiova and Watter, 2011, p.7).

Figure 1.1 Six dimensions of wellness



Source: Blonna, Loschiova and Watter, 2011, p.7

Health communication involves creating meaning of healthcare and conditions (Sparks, 2010, p.2). Health communication covers wide range array of topics, including disease control and prevention, emergency preparedness and response injury and violence prevention, environmental health, work place safety, and general communication behavior as it relates to well being and leading healthy lives (Sparks and Villagran, 2010, p.7).

In order for a health communication program to have an impact, it should disseminate appropriate health content that satisfies the following criteria, as prescribed by the *Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion* (Health Communication."Healthy People 2010.Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.in Unite for Sight, Health Communication online, <http://www.uniteforsight.org/health-communication-course/module1>)

Accuracy: The content is valid and without errors of fact, interpretation, or judgment.

Availability: The content (whether targeted message or other information) is delivered or placed where the audience can access it. Placement varies according to the audience, message complexity, and purpose, ranging from interpersonal and social networks to billboards and mass transit signs to prime-time TV or radio, to public kiosks (print or electronic), to the Internet.

Balance: Where appropriate, the content presents the benefits and risks of potential actions or recognizes different and valid perspectives on the issue.

Consistency: The content remains internally consistent over time and also is consistent with information from other sources (the latter is a problem when other widely available content is not accurate or reliable).

Cultural Competence: The design, implementation, and evaluation process that accounts for special issues for select population groups (for example, ethnic, racial, and linguistic) and also educational levels and disability.

Evidence-based: Relevant scientific evidence that has undergone comprehensive review and rigorous analysis to formulate practice guidelines, performance measures, review criteria, and technology assessments for tele-health applications.

Reach: The content gets to or is available to the largest possible number of people in the target population.

Reliability: The source of the content is credible, and the content itself is kept up to date.

Repetition: The delivery of/access to the content is continued or repeated over time, both to reinforce the impact with a given audience and to reach new generations.



Understanding what health communication can and cannot do is critical to communicating successfully. Health communication is one tool for promoting or improving health. Changes in health care services, regulations, and technology are also necessary to completely address a health problem (U.S. Department Of Health & Human Services Public Health Service, National Institutes Of Health, National Cancer Institute, online, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook/page3>) The many roles that health communication can play have been highlighted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These roles include (Thomas, 2006, p4):

- Increase knowledge and awareness of a health issue, problem, or solution
- Influence perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and social norms
- Prompt action
- Demonstrate or illustrate skills
- Show the benefit of behavior change
- Increase demand for health services
- Reinforce knowledge, attitudes, and behavior
- Refute myths and misconceptions
- Help coalesce organizational relationships
- Advocate for a health issue or a population group

In general, health promotion is any event, process or activity that facilitates the protection or improvement of the health status of individuals, groups, communities or populations (Marks et al. in Berry, 2005, p. 75).

Health communicators can use a wide range of methods to design programs to fit specific circumstances. These methods include (National Cancer Institute, online, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook/page3>).

- **Media literacy**—teaches intended audiences (often youth) to deconstruct media messages so they can identify the sponsor's motives; also teaches communicators how to compose messages attuned to the intended audience's point of view
- **Media advocacy**—seeks to change the social and political environment in which decisions that affect health and health resources are made by influencing the mass media's selection of topics and by shaping the debate about those topics
- **Public relations**—promotes the inclusion of messages about a health issue or behavior in the mass media
- **Advertising**—places paid or public service messages in the media or in public spaces to increase awareness of and support for a product, service, or behavior
- **Education entertainment**—seeks to embed health-promoting messages and storylines into entertainment and news programs or to eliminate messages that counter health messages; can also include seeking entertainment industry support for a health issue
- **Individual and group instruction**—influences, counsels, and provides skills to support desirable behaviors
- **Partnership development**—increases support for a program or issue by harnessing the influence, credibility, and resources of profit, nonprofit, or governmental organizations

Public relations in health communication may involve press releases, press conferences, distribution of feature stories to the media, public service announcements and other publicity-oriented activities. Some of the public relations practices have an established place in health organizations, most notably hospitals. Brochures, newsletters and health fairs are standard productions for hospital public relations departments. The 1990s saw dramatic new challenges facing health care businesses and practices; arguably, healthcare became the issue of the 1990s, driven by two increasingly critical problems: cost and access that necessitated introduction of both increased and innovative public relations strategies to meet them (Cutlip, Center, & Broom 2000). In the past, healthcare organizations often utilized public relations for crisis management and damage control, justifying controversial actions, explaining negative events, and so forth (Thomas, 2006, p. 120). Public relations in the health domain has moved beyond those and the traditional distribution of press releases to aggressively place guests on talk shows, regularly feed feature writers with compelling story ideas, and creatively stage pseudo-events to attract journalistic attention (including the dramatization of health-related statistics using "creative epidemiology" techniques). The source of public relations messages is especially important, as these messages tend to attain greater media acceptance when sponsored by high-profile and widely respected organizations that feature distinctive or compelling messengers (e.g., celebrity spokespersons, government officials, charismatic experts who have gained prominence, and victims and survivors, who provide a human interest angle (Thompson, Dorsey, Miller and Parrott, 2003, p 539).

Besides these, to maximize quantity, campaigners need to diligently seek funding from government, industry, and nonprofit sources to be able to purchase paid placements and leveraged media slots, aggressively lobby for free public service time or space, skillfully employ public relations techniques for generating entertainment and journalistic coverage, and utilize the low-cost Internet channel of communication (Thompson, Dorsey, Miller and Parrott, 2003, p 565).

2. CASE STUDY OF "SMOKE FREE AIR ZONE CAMPAIGN"

An important step was taken in the country regarding the restriction and prevention of tobacco use with the enforcement of the amendments made on 03/01/2008 to the law on the prevention and control of the harmful effects of tobacco products adopted on November 7, 1996 in Turkey on 19.5.2008 (www.mevzuat.gov.tr). With this law, T.R. Ministry of Health initiated the health communication campaign named "Smoke Free Air Zone" for the aim of increasing the awareness regarding the law and enable conformity to the law and its adoption. In this study, all stages of this campaign that were initiated on May 14, 2008 and have continued until today by embodying the features of being a sustainable communication campaign are analyzed by using case study analysis method in public relations. ROPE Model (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation) (Hendrix, J. 2007), one of the models used during the formation of strategies in public relations, constitutes the basis of this case study analysis.

2.1. Research

At the research stage of public relation applications, research regarding the attitudes, opinions and behaviors of the people to be affected from the application and policy of an institution is ongoing and the answer of "What is the final development in this respect?" is sought. (Balta Peltekoğlu, 2007, p.173). This stage, also referred to as status analysis (Seitel, F.P. 2007.p.89) is the process of obtaining detailed background data on the subject regarding which institution and public relations study will be conducted. Seitel (2007) states that particularly a robust research ground and the planning stage created diligently are required to conduct a successful study, while emphasizing that 4 basic steps are also important while creating a public relations plan.



At the preparation and research stages of "Smoke Free Air Zone" campaign, a survey was made between February 14 – March 1, 2008 and a public opinion poll was carried out among 1,331 Turkish citizens aged 15 and above, living in 16 provinces of the various regions of the country (http://www.havanikoru.org.tr/Docs_Arastirmalar/Kamuoyu_Arastirmasi_Sonuclari.pdf).

Survey results have indicated that the law on the prevention of the harmful effects of cigarette and tobacco products at all public places and workplaces is strongly supported. Majority of the Turkish people stated that they had understood the effects of being exposed to cigarette smoke passively, believed that all employees in Turkey must be protected from this and expected to recreate themselves in restaurants and bars without being exposed to cigarette smoke. Another research conducted in a more detailed way than this one was realized with a total of 32,994 people aged 15 and above, living in 81 provinces in November and December 2008 (http://www.havanikoru.org.tr/Docs_Arastirmalar/Kanun_Hakkinda_Vatandaslarimizin_Bilgi_ve_Farkindalik_Duzeyi_Arastirmasi.pdf).

According to the results of the research, it has been revealed that 87% of the participants are informed about the new law; 93% of those support the new law, and 92.2% of those know about passive smoking and its effects. Besides these researches, Global Adult Tobacco Research, Indoor Air Quality Research, Research for Measuring Smoking Habit of the Employees of the Central Organization of the Ministry of Health, Survey for Measuring Smoking Habits, Turkish Family Structure Research conducted in 2008 and 2009, and the surveys of "Are We Accustomed to Smoke-Free Air?" and "Do We Abide by Smoke-Free Air?" and also the data from the Global Youth Tobacco Research conducted in 2003, and research named Smoking Status of and Factors Affecting Health Care Professionals were also utilized (<http://www.havanikoru.org.tr/arastirmalar.html>). Both the results of the researches and secondary data utilized have acted as an important guide for the preparation stage of campaign strategy. Basic purposes of the campaign have been stated as increasing the awareness of the target audience regarding the new law and its implementations and ensuring the adoption of the behavior of abiding by law. In the light of those purposes, the campaign seems to be a planned, long term and a proactive campaign. Target audience of "Smoke Free Air Zone" campaign is all smoker and non-smoker Turkish citizens aged 15 and above.

When the research stage of the study is examined, it can be said that the Ministry of Health attaches great importance especially to research and preliminary preparation stages.

3.2. Objectives

At the stage of determining objectives, objectives that are desired to be reached at the end of public relations study should be clarified. Seitel (2007) emphasizes that properly determined objectives shall have the following characteristics:

- Objectives should be able to define the expected results at the end of the strategy clearly,
- Objectives should be understandable by everyone within the organization,
- Deadlines for reaching the designated objectives should be determined,
- Objectives should be realistic, accessible and measurable,
- Objectives should be in harmony with the objectives of the administration.

When the Objectives section is examined in the ROPE Model, it is seen that the objectives are divided into two, primarily as objectives aimed at impact and objectives aimed at output (Hendrix, 2007,p.28). Objectives aimed at impact are also divided into three as objectives aimed at briefing, attitude and behavior. As for objectives aimed at output, studies during the abovementioned public relations strategy should be conducted by indicating a numerical and definite deadline.

When "Smoke Free Air Zone" campaign is examined in terms of the determination of the objectives, it is seen that objectives aimed at impact have been particularly included in the campaign. The campaign was planned and realized in three stages and briefing and raising the awareness have been intended at the first stage and creating a positive attitude towards the campaign and changing behaviors have been intended at the second and third stages. Informing the target audience about the law and raising their awareness, making them adopt the opinion that abiding by the law is one of the requirements of being civilized, ensuring that the target audience supports the enforcement of the law, overcoming the perception of 'smoking is cool', especially adopted by the young target audience, and creating the perception that 'non-smoking is cooler' are among the basic objectives of the campaign.

3.3. Programming

In the programming part, two main themes "Smoke Free Air Zone" and "Protect Your Air" were used to communicate with the target audience. It can be said that both of the themes are catchy and memorable. During the implementation of the strategy, the word "forbidden" wasn't used in order to create a positive and connective atmosphere. The campaign focused on positive behavior change solely.

During the preparation stage, public institutions, related non-governmental organizations and local administrations were informed about the campaign. Executives from the media organizations were also informed and they were required to give their full support to the campaign. Connections with more than two hundred celebrities were made and they were asked to be the spokesperson of the campaign voluntarily. Political party leaders and General Staff were also informed. Radio And Television Supreme Council supported the campaign.

The campaign was implemented in three phases. The first phase was between 14.05.2008 and 18.6.2009. In the first stage, together with the advertisements, a film named "locations" was broadcasted to inform the target audience about the new legislation. Stickers and posters were designed to emphasize the smoke free air zones.



Figure 3.1. Sticker



Figure 3.2. Poster

Another tactic used in the first phase was to create a web site (www.havanikoru.org) and online applications to communicate with the target publics. Social media was also used to disseminate the necessary information about the campaign. The web page was used as a controlled medium.

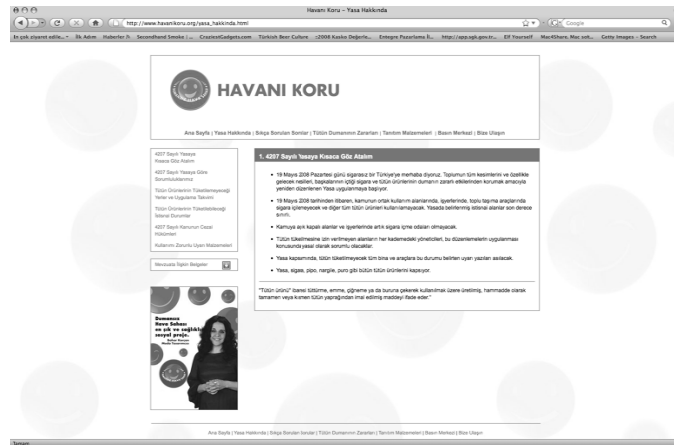


Figure 3.3. Web site

Following those tactics, much positive news concerning the campaign was published on the newspapers.

Another creative tactic used in the first phase was designing the lottery tickets with the “Protect Your Air” theme on 31st of May, which is the world tobacco day.



Figure 3.4. Lottery Ticket.

The first phase ended with a special film thanking for the Turkish people's support for the campaign.

The second phase was between 18.6.2009 and 20.2.2010. On 19.7.2009, smoking in the cafes, restaurants, pubs and night clubs became illegal. Because of this reason, a new theme (100% Smoke Free Air Zone) was created in this phase. New films mentioning the changes in the law were broadcasted and after 19th of July, revisions were made due to the execution of the law. On the 19th of July, testimonial films were also broadcasted on the Turkish national TV channel. The celebrities gave the message “I too, have a good reason to support the smoke free air zone”. An interactive campaign was started on the web page and people wrote their own reasons to support the new law. During the Ramadan Holiday, a film about the relationship between smoking and the cancer disease was broadcasted.

In the third phase, addition to the ongoing communicative tactics, product placements in the Turkish series were planned and executed.



In October 2011, Ministry of Health, activated a hotline 171 named "Counseling hotline for quitting smoking". Number of people calling this hotline is increasing day by day. According to the Ministry's records, the number of people calling the line and asking for counseling to quit smoking is 975.000 until today (<http://www.dalak.net/etiket/alo-171-sigara-birakma-danisma-hatti/>).

In the programming stage of the ROPE Model, many of the effective communication principles were used. Especially, source credibility (as Ministry of Health was the main source), two-way communication and audience participation (together with the use of Internet and social media), opinion leaders (celebrities, political leaders) were used effectively during the campaign.

3.4. Evaluation

"Smoke Free Air Zone Campaign" has won many awards. World Health Organization (WHO) gave a prize to Recep Akdağ (Minister of Health) for the ministry's fight against smoking. It also won "The Best Social Responsibility Project Award" given by the University of Galatasaray in 2008. "Success Award" was given by the Farmaskop Health Communication Creativity Awards in 2009.

Together with five teasers, 37 advertisements were broadcasted in total. During the first five months of the campaign, there has been a 10% decrease in the cigarette consumption. Approximately, two billion dollars were gained. The web site had 152.000 individual visitors during the five months. More than 20 groups concerning the campaign were created; more than 150.000 members (one group had 80.000 fans) in the Facebook.

These results can be seen as short-term outcomes of this campaign. As the campaign is an ongoing, long-term, proactive campaign, the main behavioral outcomes should be measured periodically and a total evaluation should be done after the campaign is officially over.

4. CONCLUSION

As all around the world, many different ways of communication such as social marketing, advertisement and public relations are being used in the developing health policies and communication campaigns in Turkey. In this study, "Smoke Free Air Zone Campaign" has been addressed as the case study and the studies in the field of public relations have been evaluated. As it is known, integrated marketing communication means that all these communication studies convey a single message as a single voice in coordination.

In order for the studies in the field of health care to be effective and successful, this matter should be taken into consideration in all communication studies that are used, as it can be seen in the case study. It is believed that the laws aimed at health care policy issued by public institutions will be much more successful especially when they are supported by public relations that involve planned and long term communication endeavors and all foregoing communication methods; and this will be reflected on changes of attitude and behavior of the target audience. In case these endeavors are carried out for a long term and according to a plan, not only these objectives will be reached but also the sustainability of the results aimed at these objectives will be possible.

"Smoke Free Air Zone Campaign" is a health care communication campaign put into effect with the enforcement of the law in 2008 concerning the prevention and control of the harmful effects of tobacco products enacted in 1996. In this campaign, advertisement, marketing and public relations have been used in an integrated approach and a single theme and messages in line with this theme have been communicated via different channels. In the campaign that is composed of three stages, the primary target is informing the target audience and secondary target is causing changes in attitudes and behaviors, respectively. Accordingly, the necessary primary researches have been conducted; available data on the subject have been updated and used, and measurable objectives have been defined by sticking to a specific time schedule. At the implementation stage of the campaign, strategies have been developed in line with the determined objectives and creative tactics have been applied regarding these strategies.

When this campaign was examined based on the ROPE Model of public relations, it is seen that all steps of research, setting objectives, implementation and evaluation were taken into account and applied and objectives determined at the evaluation stage prior to the campaign were measured, and the rate of voluntary adoption of the law and abiding by the law was realized at the rate of 95%.

In conclusion, "Smoke Free Air Zone Campaign" supported by the Ministry of Health that is among the communication studies conducted one-to-one by the same ministry has been recognized to a wide extent in Turkish society, has been awarded by various organizations and has succeeded in reaching its objectives to a large extent.

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