

The Art of Communication

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What are the vital factors when Governments communicate
with their citizens?

Addressed to Prime Minister, The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Written by Jake Cunningham

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Executive Summary

When governments communicate with their citizens, there are vital factors that are important. Government communications must be clear and trustworthy, it is essential for governments to communicate in a way that is easily understood by the public. This means avoiding technical language and instead using simple, plain language that is easily understood by all and therefore cannot be misconstrued. Clear communication also means being transparent and upfront about the information being shared and not hiding or withholding important information or statistics from the public. This helps to build trust, as citizens are reassured that their government is providing them with accurate and complete information.

Trustworthiness is also an essential component of effective government communication. When citizens trust the government, they are more likely to believe and act on the information provided by the government. Trustworthiness can be established through consistent and honest communication and by following through on promises made to citizens. Governments can also establish trust by being transparent and accountable in their decision-making and actions. (Blind, 2007, June)

Additionally, governments can use various forms of communication to be accessible by all reaching a wide range of citizens. Press releases, speeches and social media are all effective ways to reach many people quickly and effectively. Social media platforms have become an increasingly important tool for governments to connect with citizens and share important information. Governments can also use more subtle forms of communication such as political advertisements and propaganda to shape public opinion and influence decision making.

When governments fail to effectively communicate with their citizens, it can have serious consequences for both the government and the public. One of the most significant consequences is a loss of trust between the government and the citizens. When the public does not trust the government, they are less likely to believe and act on the information provided by the government. This can lead to a breakdown in the relationship between the government and citizens, making it difficult for the government to effectively govern and for citizens to participate in their democracy. In addition, when the public loses trust in the government, they may also begin to disregard future communication from the government. This can make it difficult for the government to effectively communicate important information and to mobilize citizens to act in response to crises or other important issues. This can further undermine the ability of the government to govern effectively and can make it more difficult for citizens to access important information and resources.

Introduction

This Report will evaluate the vital factors that are needed to be considered: Such as how governments need to be clear with their communications as well as how those communications need to be transparent and trustworthy. The report will also review how some governments have failed to communicate effectively with their citizens and what response this led to as a result. Governments have different ways of communicating with the public depending on the circumstances of the message needed to be sent.

Communication is defined by the act of exchanging information; Spoken and written are the most common forms of communication that humans use daily, all around the world regardless of the language spoken.

Mass communication from governments must be clear and trustworthy when communicating with citizens. This is to ensure that messages are received by the public in a manner that cannot be misinterpreted or misconstrued. Trust is critical for a government to be able to harness public cooperation and be able to ensure future messages are not ignored or disregarded by the citizens. Governments should also prioritise transparency with the public, this can build on top of the trust the public has in the government. A government that is transparent will be able to be open and not need to hide information from their citizens.

Governments may use many different methods of communication, such as Press releases, speeches and social media to communicate with the public. Additionally, governments may use more subtle forms of communication such as televised political advertisements, lobbying and propaganda to shape public opinion as well as influence decision making.

This report will therefore evaluate different key factors of communication that need to be adhered to, so that effective and trustworthy communications can be made by the government to their citizens.

Overview

Trust

When communicating with the public, the government requires the trust of who they are conveying the message too. Trust with the public is key for the correct response to a message and being able to strongly harness public cooperation with future communication. If the public does not trust the government, communication between citizens and government may become sour and the public will begin to disregard communication from their government. Trust in the government is on a decline as the public become more aware of what is going on behind closed doors. (Blind, 2007, June)

In the United Kingdom, trust was tarnished during the covid-19 pandemic, guidelines were in place preventing people from hosting gatherings. A while later an inside source leaked information that the people creating the guidelines had themselves been breaking them. The government then continued to deny that there had been any gatherings and that all the rules had been followed. It was then later revealed there was photographic evidence proving that the Prime Minister, Chancellor and several other high members of the government had broken the rules on several occasions. This caused uproar around the UK and resulted in the loss of trust in the conservative government. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, refused to resign from his position and reiterated that no further action was necessary. The public lost all faith in the government along with other members of the conservative party resulting in the resignation of Boris Johnson.

Similarly, in 2003, an outbreak of SARS in Hong Kong was spreading without control. Prior to the outbreak in Hong Kong, the government told local media that there was no cause for concern. This led the public who trusted the government, to believe that there would be no reason to panic and would ultimately be fine. Once the outbreak had hit Hong Kong, the Government of Hong Kong failed to affectively provide any information on what the public should be doing to suppress the spread and any communication with the press was reported as not transparent and unclear. It took 14 days until the then Chief executive, Tung Chee-Hwa, didn't make any public appearance or statements; leaving the public in the dark and worried as there was not any official communication between the government and the public. Tung Chee-Hwa then disappeared again for 10 days, further leaving Hong Kong in the dark without any solid communication. The government seemed to care more about the economy more than the public, even stating that mask wearing would scare away tourists and ruin the image of Hong Kong. These failures led to the public losing trust in the government. (Lee, 2009)

The examples mentioned have unfortunately led to a loss of trust between citizens and their respective governments. For trust to be re-established and maintained, it is crucial for there to be open and transparent communication between the government and the citizens. It is important that the government is seen to be acting in an honest and forthright manner and that citizens have access to accurate and reliable information about government actions and decisions. This is essential for fostering cooperation and mutual understanding between the

government and the citizens and for ensuring that the needs and concerns of citizens are being effectively addressed. Additionally, active engagement from the government to listen and respond to citizens' concerns is also a key aspect in building trust. Overall, clear and honest communication is a fundamental component of building trust between government and citizens, which is vital for maintaining a healthy and functional society.

Transparency

Government communication must be transparent, this is because a government that is always transparent about what is going on can build public trust. It can also ensure that government issued messages are delivered in a clear manor that cannot be misinterpreted by the public and result in the spread of misinformation. (Development, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020)

In the United Kingdom, Political parties may run an advertisement campaign that will play on Television, this advert may be a few minutes long and will try to persuade the viewer to vote for their political party in the next upcoming election. Political advertising is required to be transparent and will declare that the contents are paid advertising by the party before and after the advert for the viewer to understand that this is both; Not the political views of the channel and that the contents of the advert will likely be biased into sharing the good things that the part has done and will paint the party out to be better than they might otherwise be. This is to further sway the viewer into remembering only the good things that party has done and will continue to do if re-elected.

In the United Kingdom, citizens have the right to access information held by the government through freedom of information laws. These laws allow individuals to request information regarding the actions and decisions made by government officials and agencies, as well as any statistics or data that the government may possess. This helps to promote transparency and accountability within the government and allows citizens to better understand and participate in the democratic process. Additionally, these laws help to ensure that the government is open and responsive to the needs and concerns of the public.

Preventing misinformation is a critical aspect of transparent government communication. Misinformation can come in many forms, such as false or misleading statements, rumours, or conspiracy theories. When government is not transparent about its actions and decisions, it can be difficult for citizens to discern what is true and what is not. This can lead to the spread of misinformation, which can erode trust in the government, create confusion and even lead to division among citizens. (Kalsnes, 2018)

Clarity

Clear and concise communication is essential for governments to effectively inform and engage with the public. When governments use complex language, it can create confusion and make it difficult for citizens to understand important information. Clear communication is particularly important for conveying information about government policies, programs and services. This can help citizens understand how these policies will affect them and make informed decisions about how to engage with their government.

Clear communication also helps to build trust between the government and the public. When citizens feel that they are well-informed and understand what the government is doing, they are more likely to trust and support government decisions. Clear communication can also help to prevent misunderstandings and misinformation, which can lead to public mistrust and disengagement.

To ensure that communication is clear and concise, governments should use simple language, avoid complex language and provide detailed explanations when necessary. They should also use a variety of communication channels such as social media, press releases and public meetings to reach different segments of the population. Additionally, governments should also ensure that their communication is accessible to people with disabilities and non-native speakers by providing translation and interpreting services.

The United States is one of many countries that have an Emergency Alert System or EAS. The EAS allows the Government to send out emergency alerts quickly, effectively and clearly to any mobile device within a set area. This allows for emergency communication to be sent in a trustworthy and clear way to citizens.

The EAS has helped and will continue to help save people's lives. It can warn people of an impending natural disaster such as an Earthquake or Hurricane. The EAS in the United States is automatic and if a sensor is triggered can alert people without the need for any human input. The Signal is secure and uses its own messaging channel therefore cannot be impersonated or falsified. Once an EAS has been sent out, each person will be able to read the alert and make an informed decision on what action to take next. (Moore, 2010)

Effective forms of communication

Public advertising has been used in many settings, such as in Australia where a series of anti-smoking campaigns that ran in during the 1980's. These campaigns were funded by the Australian government and were ran in the cities of Sydney and Melbourne order to persuade the Australian public to stop smoking by educating them on the negatives of doing so. (Young, 2007)

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY ANTISMOKING CAMPAIGNS

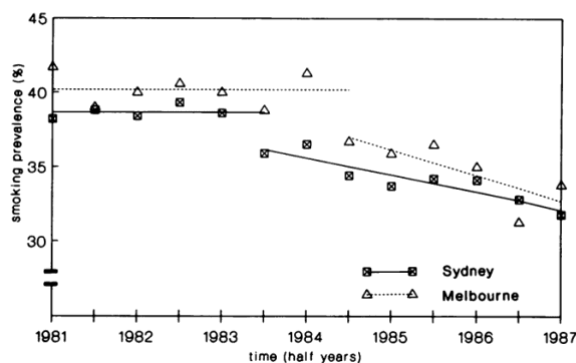


FIGURE1 -Age Standardized Smoking Prevalence for Males in Sydney and Melbourne, 1981 to 1987 (Pierce, et al., 1990 P.567).

FIGURE1 Shows the effectiveness of the advertising campaign; Starting 1 year earlier in Sydney shows how smoking declined earlier and Sydney continued at the same rate until the campaign then started in Sydney where the smoking trends declined also. Researchers then began studying the response that the advertisements had on the public. The response to the advertisements showed a decline in the number of people who identified as smokers. The study also showed that those who continued smoking, had a negative feeling about their smoking habits and had considered stopping. (Pierce, et al., 1990) The political advertising done by the Australian government strongly communicated the dangers of smoking and the benefits of stopping.

Social media has emerged as an effective form of government communication in recent years. The widespread adoption of social media platforms has provided governments with a cost-effective and efficient means of distributing information, interacting with citizens and building trust. The reach of social media platforms is vast, with a large and diverse user base, allowing governments to reach a wide range of citizens quickly and easily. Social media is interactive by design, providing governments with the ability to engage directly with citizens and receive feedback in real-time. This allows for the gathering of public opinion on policy proposals and addressing concerns or questions. Additionally, the cost-effectiveness of social media compared to traditional forms of communication such as television and print advertising allows governments to reach a large audience without breaking the bank. Furthermore, social media can also increase transparency and accountability, by allowing citizens to see what their government is doing and providing easy access to official information and services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, government communication must be clear and trustworthy to establish and maintain positive and effective communication with their citizens. When a government is transparent and honest in its communications, the public will begin to trust and cooperate the government more and lead to the effective delivery of messages as well as guarantee future communications will be received well. This trust is crucial for the government to be able to effectively communicate with citizens, as it ensures that messages are received and understood as intended.

Also, it is important for governments to use various forms of communication to reach a wide range of citizens, such as press releases, speeches and social media, as well as subtle forms of communication like political advertisements and propaganda, to shape public opinion and influence decision-making. However, when governments fail to communicate effectively and transparently, it can lead to a loss of trust, public outrage and a breakdown in the relationship between the government and citizens. Ultimately, it is essential for governments to prioritize clear and trustworthy communication to maintain the trust and cooperation of their citizens.

However, when governments fail to communicate effectively and transparently, it can lead to a loss of trust and public outrage, as demonstrated by the examples in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. It is crucial for governments to understand that communication is a two-way street and that it is essential to listen to citizens, as well as to provide them with clear and trustworthy information. By prioritizing clear and trustworthy communication, governments can maintain the trust and cooperation of their citizens and ultimately, improve the relationship between government and citizen.

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