

STATEMENT ON COMMUNICATION OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC



April 15th 2021 – In light of the importance of communications during the COVID-19 pandemic, **international professional and academic associations of Public Relations and Communicators** now seek to refocus the effort to achieve effective communication.



It has been more than a year since the World Health Organization first declared the COVID-19 outbreak an international public health emergency of international concern. However, globally there is an ongoing battle to limit the progression of COVID-19 and to deal with the loss of life and immediate effects of the virus.



Despite several warnings from the scientific community and the availability of information and lessons from previous infectious disease emergencies, governments and authorities around the world have shown a limited capacity to respond effectively to health emergency outbreaks. Like in previous health crises, numerous problems emerged concerning the coordination of communication across institutions. Empirical research has shown poor communication management along with low trust in information sources and authorities.



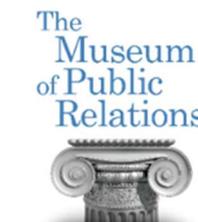
More than ever, simply informing the public has been inadequate. During public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a well-coordinated and efficient communications strategy helps stakeholders to define risks, identify hazards, assess weaknesses and promote community resilience, thereby increasing capacity to cope. Professional strategic communicators can guide the public on how to interpret information, risk, personal involvement and the actions they need to take.



The capacity to relay the right information quickly and clearly across different media platforms is essential to manage a public health emergency in an unbounded media landscape. In contrast, unclear and dishonest information can multiply the opportunities for miscommunication, in addition to leading to the dissemination of fake-news, conspirator theories and the spread of counter-behaviours that can compromise the abilities of societies to control the virus. Misleading messages and contradictory hints from leaders and institutions compromise trust, which can hamper a successful collective response.



We know that honest professional communication can save lives. We agree with the *WHO Review Committee* who highlighted the importance of communication following the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) pandemic. The Committee placed risk communication at the same level as technical skills when assessing the essential capabilities required to tackle a pandemic (WHO, 2011). In light of this, international professional and academic associations of strategic communication and public relations professionals are willing to help. To do so, we can advise, consult and facilitate access to expert members to enable individuals and organisations to communicate ethically and with professionalism. Public Relations practitioners are key to managing a pandemic as they can facilitate and maintain relations and mutual understanding between institutions and the public (Bled Manifesto, 2002).



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