EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FORMS OF MANAGEMENT IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this scientific report is to research and present the results and analyses of a representative scientific study regarding effective communication forms of management in the health sector in Bulgaria. The research was conducted by the Gallup International Balkan team, at the request of Doncheva Yankov, PhD. An author survey was used for the purposes of the research.
Material and methods. The method of conduct is "face-to-face" with tablets. The research is representative, the sample is 807 adult Bulgarians. The measurement of the results is based on the "Gallup International Balkan" method. The detailed analysis is authored by the creator of the present scientific work.
Results. Among retirees and the unemployed, more effective health communication practices would be classic PR (public relations) approaches. Conventional PR methods would be more relevant for ethnic groups of Roma and Turks, while digital communication forms of management would work better for Bulgarians. General practitioners are the most preferred source of health information, followed by relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors, followed by an online search engine, then TV (television), social network groups and others. Brand awareness is found to be more important than the potential impact of a healthcare company's website and social media. Google ads arouse more trust among younger people, and Google reviews appear to be more important for people with a more favorable life horizon.
Conclusions. Considering the obtained results, we can conclude that effective communication in the health sector can be implemented through hybrid approaches in health PR.

Keywords: healthcare, public relations, management, communications, PR.

Introduction

The development of the technological world and the evolution of communication channels affect interpersonal communication, the way people think, and all spheres of business, existence, and lifestyle. Does this psychological attitude of a consumer society also manifest itself when it comes to products and services in the health sector? Through which channels is information about health and social care products and/or services most often consumed? Is Google at the center of the consumer urge, and to what extent does the Bulgarian rely on the new information technologies as far as the health sector is concerned? Which public communication methods and tools are of greatest interest to consumers in the health sector? Does age determine digital preferences, and what

channels do different groups of consumers use for obtaining health information? Answers to these and other questions emerge from the research presented in this article.

It is important to clarify that the concept of the present work is based on the scientific category "management in health PR", since the subject of the study is in the health sphere, in the field of public communications. The studied signs in the scientific work are the possibilities for optimizing the PR management methodology in the health sector, especially in Bulgaria.

Until now, the health PR in Bulgaria has been studied through analyses, opening a view of which health institutions, what PR is applied (or not applied), what units are distinguished, and what specific activity they perform. The PR structures in the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Central Office of the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIS), the Medicines Executive Agency (IMA), the Bulgarian Medical Association (BLA), and the Bulgarian Association for Drug Information (BALI) were reviewed. There is data about which factors influence the decision to set up a specialized PR department in healthcare organizations: the scale of the organization, its specific activities, and its management policy.

To date, the research presented in this article is the only one summarizing the experience of health PR practitioners as well as the opinions and feedback from patients and clients of health organizations in Bulgaria.

Material and methods

The research was conducted by the team of "Gallup International Balkan" by order of Doncheva Yankov, and for the purposes of the research, an author's survey was used. The research is representative, and the sample is 807 adult Bulgarians. The conducting method is "face-to-face" with tablets, the most up-to-date method for conducting sociological surveys. The investigated characteristics are gender, age, type of settlement, amount of personal monthly income, employment status, education, ethnicity, and party electorate.

To understand which health PR methods are effective, and which tools are most effective in a digital environment, a logical step is to conduct a survey among the audience of consumers of health products and/or services. To formulate the questions, bibliographic sources that researched and described the experience and methodology of the success of health public relations were examined.

By gender: men and women.

By age: 18–25 years, 26–35 years, 36–45 years, 46–55 years, 56–65 years, 66+ years.

By type of settlement: village, small town, regional center, capital.

By personal monthly income: up to BGN 150, BGN 151-250, BGN 251-450, BGN 451-700, BGN 701-1000, over BGN 1000, refusal to share monthly income.

By employment status: working (employed) in a private structure, working in a government structure, self-employed/own business, retired, unemployed, not working. Keep in mind that the unemployed are unemployed people who are looking for work. The not-working are those people who do not have a job and are not looking for one; for example, housewives, students, or students who are not looking for a job. The retirees category is all those who told the interviewers that they are retired (pensioners). The category is declarative and is aggregated for all pensioners — for TELK pensioners, by age, etc.

By education: higher, secondary, primary, and lower.

By ethnicity: Bulgarians, Turks, Roma.

Electorate of (political bias towards): GERB, BSP, DPS, VMRO, Vazrazhdane, ITN, Democratic Bulgaria, "Stand up, Bulgaria", "We continue the change", "Bulgarian rise", I would not vote (I do not elect anyone).

After such a refined fragmentation of signs, we will be able to get information not only about effective tactics in health PR but also what audience we would impress using specific methods. When a healthcare organization knows to which audience (target group) to direct its campaign activity, it will be of great benefit to know which method will reach the same audience the fastest. The research for the present scientific work derives this valuable information, and given the representativeness of the study, it can serve as a professional guide for PR practices in the health sector.

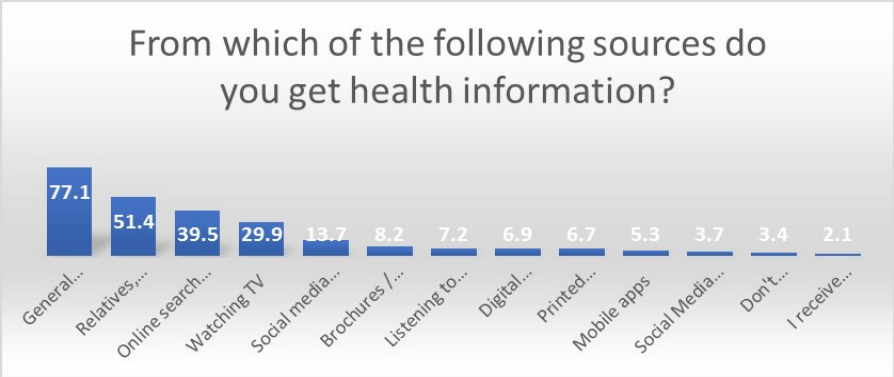
Results

The measurement of the results of the survey is based on the "Gallup International Balkan" method, and the detailed analysis of the same is the author's work of the creator of the present scientific work.

Regarding the sources of health information, GPs (general practitioners) are the most preferred source according to the declarative data, and it should be considered that some of the responses are probably also due to social desirability or automaticity.

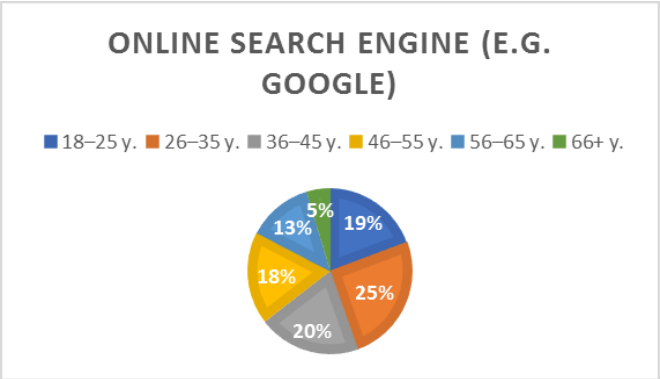
Diagram 1

Health information source preferences of all respondents



Based on 100% of the answers, the preferences for sources of health information after the personal doctor (77.1%) are relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors (51.4%); in third place comes an online search engine (39.5%), followed by television, social network groups, brochures, radio, digital forums, print publications, mobile applications. (See diagram #1). At the bottom of the ranking are sponsored content on social networks, lack of response, and other sources. If we take a closer look at the detailed fragmentation of age groups, it becomes clear that with increasing age and the associated circumstances of the life perspective (type of settlement, employment status, etc.), the influence of the Internet predictably decreases, while the influence remains evident, e.g., on television.

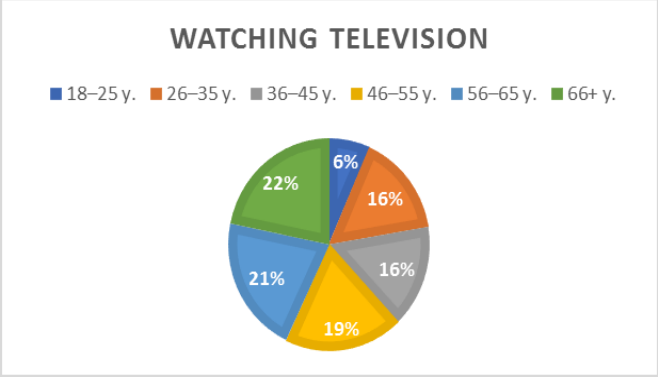
Diagram 2
Preference for an online search engine as a source of health information by different age groups



Quite expectedly, *online search engines* are the most popular method of searching for health information among younger groups of respondents, namely 26–35 years (25%), 36–45 years (20%), 18–25 years (19%). If we pay attention to the amount of personal monthly income, it is striking that online search engines are chosen most by people with the highest income.

Of the digital sources of information, the next most preferred is *television* (29.9%). It is not at all a surprise that the highest percentage (22%) of respondents are precisely from the group of adults over 66 years of age, followed by the 56–65-year-olds with 21%. Regularity is noticed: with increasing age, the interest and preference for television as a source of health information also increases. (See diagram #3).

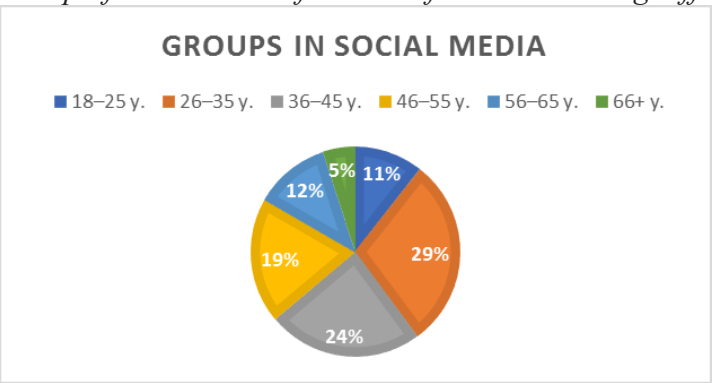
Diagram 3
Television as a preferred source of health information among different age groups



We should pay attention to *groups in social networks* as a source of health information; they are listed as preferable to radio for this purpose. Here, very similar to the result with online search engines, the reaction of the *26–45-year-olds is the most visible* (26–35-year-olds with 23.5% and 36–45-year-olds with 19.3%). Apparently, women are more interested (16.3%) than men (11%) when it comes to choosing specialized groups in social networks as a source of health information, and people living in regional centers are the most interested (15.2%), followed by residents of the capital (14.3%), people living in a small town (13.4%), and people living in the countryside (11.4%).

Diagram 4

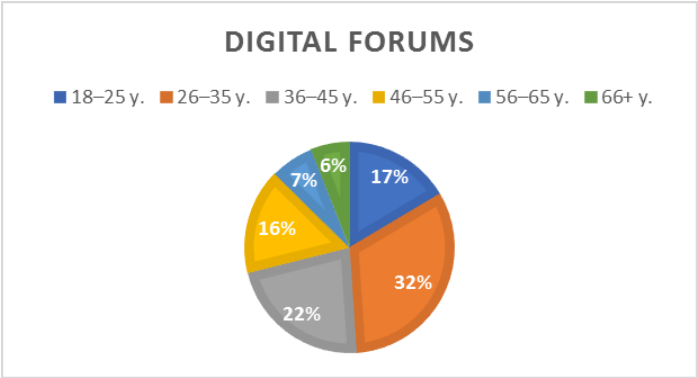
Social network groups as a preferred source of health information among different age groups



Radio is next in the ranking of preferred sources of health information, but it is not popular among young adults aged 18–25, as none of them named it as their preferred source. Our data also show that people aged 36–45 (14%) and 56–65 (17%) consider radio unimportant when it comes to seeking health information. Among all age groups, those over 66 years old listen to the radio the most for health information, with almost one-third (29%) of respondents in this age group choosing radio as their go-to source. An interesting result is that more men (8.8%) than women (5.7%) choose the radio. People over 66 years of age (11.6%), living in the countryside (10.2%), self-employed, and/or with their own businesses (16%) chose the radio the most. The correlation between educational status and interest in radio as a source of health information is clear; those with higher levels of education tend to exhibit greater interest. The situation with digital forums is very similar to the groups on social networks: with the increase in age, interest in the same decreases reciprocally.

Diagram 5

Preferences for digital forums



Almost twice as many women as men choose digital forums as a source of health information. The most popular choice is among 26-35-year-olds (13.6%), followed by respondents between 36 and 45 years old. The least chosen answer is from people over 66 years of age (2.5%). Regarding employment status, a completely logical result was obtained: the more educated a person is, the more he relies on digital technology. Bulgarians (7.5%), followed by Turks (3.2%), chose digital forums, while Roma did not indicate this choice at all.

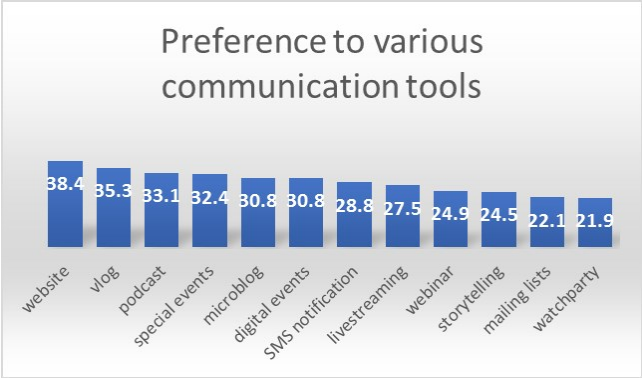
Although mobile applications are a hit trend in the field of healthcare worldwide, they are one of the least preferred sources of health-related information in Bulgaria.

Sponsored content on social networks is the least chosen source of health information, with more women than men relying on it (4.6% and 2.8%, respectively). There are dramatically more people between the ages of 26 and 35 (8.8%) compared to other age groups. Surprisingly, respondents with the highest and lowest monthly income made the same choice regarding sponsored content, and a uniform result, as with mobile applications, was also obtained here for groups with incomes between BGN 151-250 and BGN 251-450 per month, as not a single respondent selected them.

Before looking into the details of the results for the various indicators studied, we take a general look at the answers of all respondents, and it becomes clear that websites, vlogs, and podcasts are at the top of the digital ladder of honor when it comes to Bulgarians' preferences for communication tools and dissemination of health information. (See diagram #6).

Diagram 6

Preference for different tools for communication and dissemination of health information



At the bottom of this ranking is a watch party; this is not at all a surprise, considering the behavior of the management of social networks such as Facebook, which, as we mentioned in a previous chapter of the present work, decided to say goodbye to the function on April 16, 2021. Watch Party was discontinued. With bipolar thinking in the logic of choosing mailing lists, we share that they are second to last, presumably due to people's antipathy to being bombarded with unsolicited commercial messages. The surprise here is storytelling, which ranks in preference after webinars, live streaming, even after SMS notification, digital events, and microblogging. To understand the reason for this arrangement, we will pay attention to the life aspects of the respondents, for example, the type of settlement, personal monthly income, and education. Age is a significant factor in digitality, so we will take it into account when analyzing the results.

A website of a health or social organization is the most preferred of all tools for communication and dissemination of health information mentioned in the survey; men and women indicated almost equally this choice, although women slightly more (41.6% women and 35% men). Age tends to determine people's digital mood, and this is evident here: the website is of most interest to 26–35-year-olds, followed by the 36–45-year-old group, and least interesting to over-66s. The people of Sofia chose this method the most, and the population from small towns and villages the least. Almost as a joke, the most people with the highest income and those with the lowest income chose the website: 58.5% and 44%, respectively, and those with incomes between BGN 151 and 250 per month did not mention the website at all.

The *vlogs* were the next most chosen by survey respondents (35.3%), almost equally by men and women. The youngest are the most fans of this format for sharing health information, and quite expectedly, people over the age of 66 are the least. As with the website, people with the lowest

income and those with the highest have chosen the vlogs as an option they find interesting for obtaining health information, while the population with incomes between BGN 151 and 250 did not indicate this choice at all. The unemployed (those who do not have a job and are not looking for one, for example, housewives, students, or students who are not looking for a job) are the most (49.5%); this is logical since they have the most time for such activities.

Podcasts are a trendy option to reach a certain audience, including in the health sector. They are chosen almost equally by men and women, and younger groups of respondents are more interested in podcasts at the expense of the oldest, who are the least. Most answers about podcasts are from the people of Sofia (40.3%). Similar to vlogs, the most non-working people indicated that podcasts were of interest to them as a tool for communication and dissemination of health information (58.1%), while the least were pensioners (7.6%).

Special events, for example, charity events, premieres, openings of pharmacies, health facilities, etc., are an effective classic approach in public relations, and according to Bulgarians, they are in fourth place among the choices indicated in the survey. More women than men would respond to an invitation to a special event—36.2% of women and 28.3% of men. It is not atypical that young groups of respondents chose this option (18–45-year-olds are the most), and people over 66 are the least. The least number of people living in villages are interested in special events in the health sector, and the most interested are people from regional centers.

Microblogging is next in the ranking of the most preferred ways of communicating and disseminating health information in the health sector. Microblogs are most popular among people living in the capital and, quite predictably, least popular among people living in the countryside. The population with a monthly income of BGN 151-250 did not indicate the microblog at all, but as has been repeatedly obtained with other digital tools, people with the highest and lowest incomes are the most interested.

Digital events, for example, Facebook events, are a widely used tool in the management of public communications in the health sector, and according to the results of the current survey, they occupy the golden mean in the preferences of the respondents. Almost equally, men and women are interested in digital events; the trend for younger respondents' preferences is maintained here as well, led by the 26–35-year-old group, with the over-66s being the least.

SMS notification is a method that has been around longer than most of the other tools, and whether it is relevant and liked by the audience of consumers of healthcare services and products is clear from the results of the survey. There are no surprises in the age groups: most are young respondents; the least are people over 66 years of age. We find proportionality in the number of respondents from each type of settlement who chose SMS notification as a tool of interest to them. Most people with incomes between BGN 151-250 per month (46.6%) chose this type of communication. Pensioners (retirees) are the least.

Live streaming in the health sector is just as current an approach in PR as it is in other areas of business. The results show that it is less popular than SMS notification and all listed so far when it comes to people's health preferences. More men (30.7%) than women (24.4%) chose live streaming, although the difference was not drastic.

Webinars are a popular method of digital communication, which we paid special attention to in a previous chapter of this work. Men and women alike find webinars interesting, with 26–35-year-olds choosing this option the most, followed by 18–25-year-olds, and predictably, those over 66 are the least interested. Residents of the capital and those living in a regional center are equal, followed by people in a small town; the least are people living in a village. None of the respondents

with an income of BGN 151-250 per month described the webinars as interesting, and people with the highest and lowest incomes showed the most interest.

Oddly enough, *storytelling is ranked as one of the least interesting ways to communicate* and disseminate health information, as it is a common and fun way to communicate on the Internet. The smaller the population, the lower the interest. The educational regularity is in force here as well; in terms of ethnicity, the tendency of Bulgarians, Turks (7.9%), and Roma (6.9%), with Bulgarians (26.6%) being drastically more than the others, also applies.

For 22.1% of the respondents, *mailing lists* are of interest as far as communication in the health sector is concerned. Men and women who are interested in email communication are almost equal in number, and the younger the respondents, the more interested they are in this type of communication. The majority of people with the lowest and highest monthly income indicated periodic email notification as interesting to them, and those with an income between BGN 151 and 250 were not interested at all.

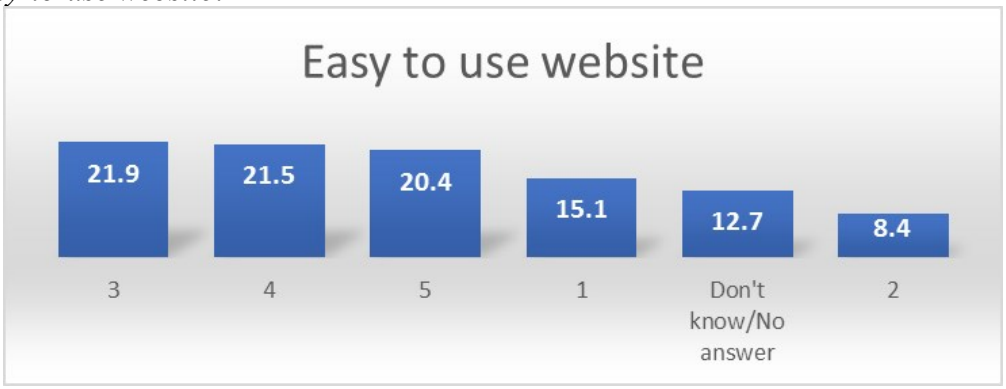
The watch party is an interesting tool for communicating and disseminating not only health information, but it is nevertheless the least preferred of the others in the survey. Respondents with the highest and lowest incomes, followed by those who do not share the amount of their monthly salary, are the most interested in watch parties, and people with a monthly salary between BGN 151 and 250 are not at all interested in this one method. The education attribute shows the same dependence as with the previous researched instruments in the survey, and by ethnicity, they are ranked as follows: Bulgarians, Roma, and Turks, with Bulgarians being significantly more interested.

The ~~topic~~ issue of trust in the health sector is both sensitive and crucial, as it is the main asset of health structures. Image and reputation are pillars of trust, and vice versa—trust can be the cause of an impeccable reputation. Building these values is a long-term process, and digital and conventional PR tools to achieve them can have varying levels of effectiveness. Consumers of health products and/or services have given their opinions on the matter, and here are the results:

The easy-to-use website inspires trust in over 60% of respondents to varying degrees: 3, 4, and 5, with 5 being the highest.

Diagram 7

How likely are respondents to trust a health/social care facility, doctor, or organization more if they have an easy-to-use website?



Men and women are almost equally likely to trust a health/social care facility, doctor, or organization more if they have an easy-to-use website; however, younger respondents, especially

those living in larger settlements and with the highest income, are more excited about an easy-to-use website. On the other hand, pensioners seem to be the least enthusiastic about this feature.

Having a well-known name is important not only in the health sector but also affects the work of PR teams as they strive to create a positive image of a particular health organization. When respondents are familiar with the name of a medical or social institution, pharmacy, or health organization, they tend to place more trust in it. The results demonstrate a classic progressive dependence - the higher the likelihood of trust, the greater the number of people who have made this choice. According to the survey, 55.6% of respondents stated that they are very likely or likely to trust a health or social care facility, doctor, or organization more if its name is familiar to them.

Diagram 8

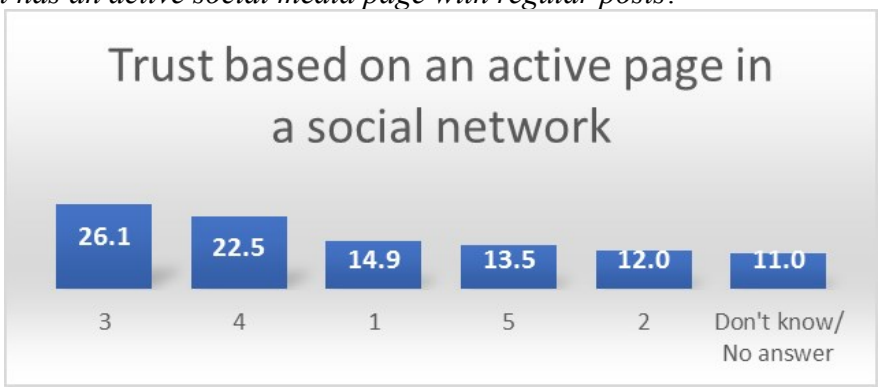
How likely are respondents to place higher trust in a given health or social facility, doctor, or organization simply because they are familiar with its name?

Bulgarians trust a well-known name of a health organization, but with small reservations, unlike the Roma, who can fully trust a pharmacy, for example, just because its name is familiar to them.

Social media activity can be indicative of an organization's overall activity as well as its desire to communicate with its direct and indirect audiences. The following survey question tells us how likely respondents are to trust a particular healthcare facility if it has an active social media page with regular posts. Of all respondents, 36% stated that an organization's social media presence is significant, while 26,1% were neutral.

Diagram 9

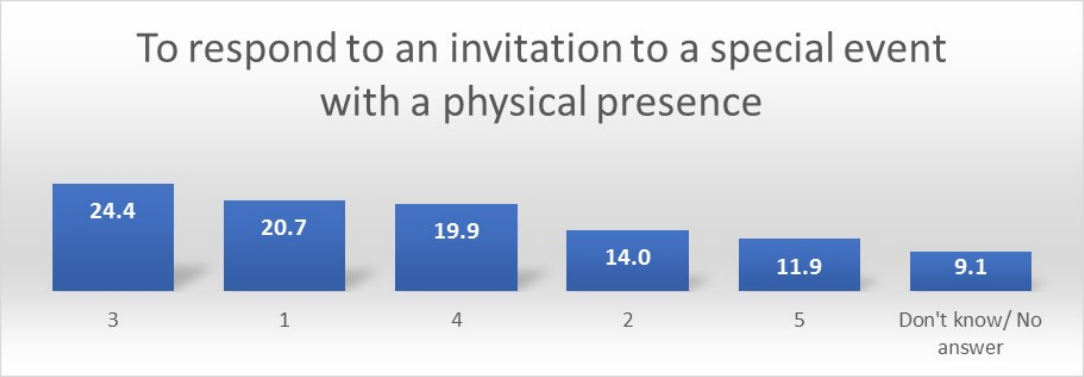
How likely are respondents to place higher trust in a given health/social facility, doctor, or organization if it has an active social media page with regular posts?



It is probable that 31.8% of the respondents will physically attend a special event in response to an invitation; when the neutral vote is included, the percentage rises to 56.2%. Our analysis will concentrate on people who get giddy about events involving physical presence.

Diagram 10

How likely are respondents to attend a special event in response to an invitation launched by a health/social facility, doctor, or health organization?



Responding to an invitation to a *digital special event with an online presence* is likely for 28.1% of people in Bulgaria, and if we add the neutral vote, the total is 49.2%. We consider those who are likely or very likely to respond to such an invitation.

Diagram 11

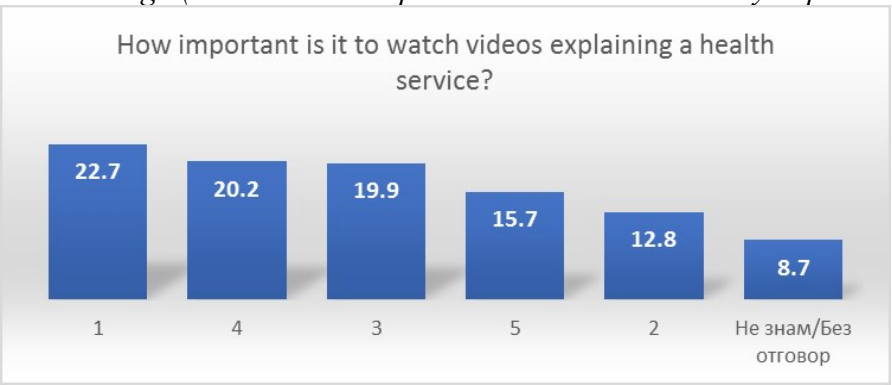
How likely are respondents to attend a digital special event (with an online presence) in response to an invitation launched by a health/social facility, doctor, or health organization?

These are rather women, 26-45 years old, almost regardless of the place of residence, the people with the highest incomes and those with an income between BGN 151 and 250 per month, mostly unemployed, well educated; the higher the education, the more likely they are to respond to an invitation to a digital event; the majority of ethnic Bulgarians, but none of the "Stand Up, BG" voters, are expected to attend.

We asked our respondents how important it is for them to watch videos explaining a health service that they or their loved ones will undergo. Here's what we found out:

Diagram 12

How important is it for Bulgarians to watch videos explaining a given health service that they or their loved ones will undergo (1 means "not important at all" and 5 is "very important")?

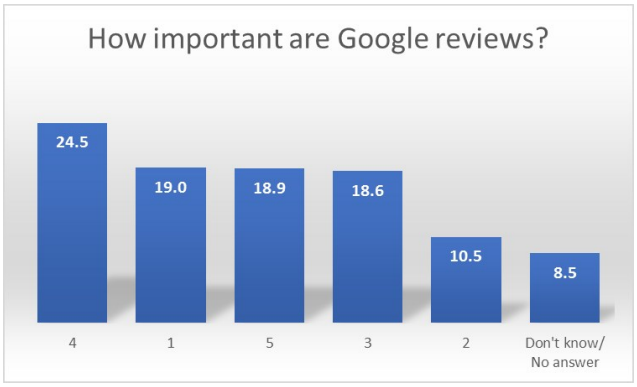


Almost an equal percentage of respondents, 22.7%, 20.2%, and 19.9% respectively, answered that it was not important at all, important, or neither important nor unimportant. However, 15.7% of the respondents considered it very important. Those for whom videos are very important are mostly young people aged 18-35; there are more women than men; the larger the type of settlement, the more the importance increases; and an interesting result is that the most people from the group of personal incomes between BGN 151 and 250 per month answered precisely, "It is very important to me.".

Seeking advice is a fundamental practice in real-life decision-making. Google reviews, or better known as Google opinions, shared by former patients and customers of a health or social care facility or health organization is the next health public relations tool we explore.

Diagram 13

How important is it for Bulgarians to read Google reviews? (1 means "not important at all" and 5 means "very important")

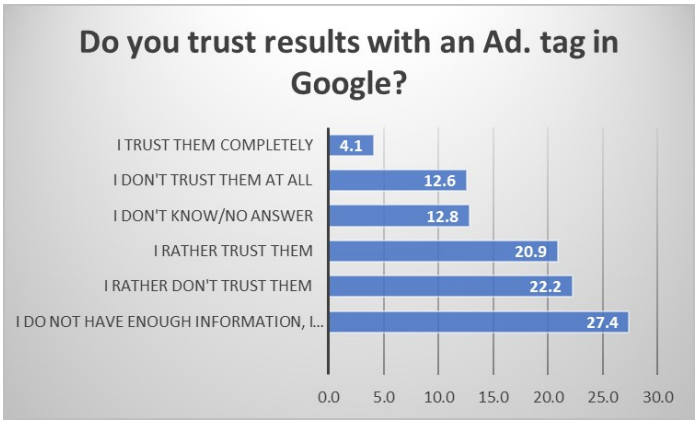


According to our data, nearly a quarter of the respondents consider it essential to seek advice from Google. The survey results showed that there was almost an equal number of votes for the two ends of the spectrum - very important and not important at all - with 18.9% and 19%, respectively. The study also found that people living in larger settlements tended to place more importance on Google's reviews. Furthermore, the results revealed that those who were unemployed, had graduated from universities, identified themselves as ethnic Bulgarians, and supported the "Bulgarian Rise" movement, considered Google's reviews the fourth most important factor.

Bianchi (2023) reports that Google's market share was over 84% as of December 2022. However, according to data from Statista (2023), this share was even higher in 2015 at 88%. This highlights the massive influence the search engine has on people's decisions and the resulting impact on their lives. The project's monetization makes it easy for users to be exposed to sponsored content presented in a sophisticated manner, with some users unaware that they are viewing paid advertising. The extent to which people in Bulgaria trust Google's results with the "ad" tag, which typically appears at the top, and whether they understand its meaning at all, can be understood from the results of the next question in the study. When searching for information on breast augmentation surgery, drugs, stroke treatment, or recovery from a car accident, for example, paid advertisements for hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, medical centers, and so on, are the quickest way to reach the searcher, and they base their treatment decisions on these results. This is the current situation in Bulgaria:

Diagram 14

How much do people trust results with an ad. tag on Google?



It is evident that there is insufficient information and that they did not pay attention to these details when nearly one-third of Bulgarians are unaware that sponsored content appears at the top of search engine results pages.

Similar results were obtained for the responses "I rather trust them" and "I rather don't trust them" (on a Google search with the tag "Ad"): 20.9% and 22.2%, respectively. We will specifically draw attention to the respondents because, in the context of public relations, an audience that is either completely or quickly trusted is more important. The likelihood that men and women will trust paid advertisements is nearly equal, with the highest levels of trust coming from those between the ages of 36 and 45, followed by those between the ages of 26 and 35 and 46 and 55. The type of settlement has almost no influence on the results; in fact, a fairly harmonic distribution emphasizes the fact that the majority of those with the highest incomes selected this choice.

Out of all the respondents, full credit of trust (as in Google advertising results) received the lowest vote (4.1%). The technical profile is not unusual: individuals in small towns between 18 and 25 years who are not very different from those in other types of settlements.

Discussion

The fundamental way that the health sector is different from all other business sectors is that it deals with people's lives and health, and it is distinguished by a unique audience sensitivity. Successful PR management is part of the strategy for the development of successful businesses, including in the health sector. The public relations management strategies used in the health sector that are currently known fall under the general principles of public relations, but they also have unique details. These include the following: writing and distributing press releases; planning open-door days; conducting information seminars; holding health exhibitions; purchasing technology; conducting research; expertly and meticulously planning PR campaigns; monitoring; managing crises; and handling other issues that may come up while a PR specialist is working in the field. Health PR management can also be accomplished by employing low-cost, subtle, and believable message delivery strategies like general marketing promotion, editorial endorsement, and third-party endorsement to spread the word. Questionnaires and surveys are part of the healthcare public relations management toolkit.

Among the key digital challenges for health PR specialists across various directions and platforms are the representative appearance of a health organization's website, comprehensible language, medically accurate texts; other challenges include periodic update of the information in the institution's website's "news" section; the creation of texts (articles and posts) for on-page and off-page SEO optimization; resourcefulness, responsiveness, sufficiency in communication with patients, clients, employees and the general public in various digital channels, as well as in the preparation of content for daily or periodic maintenance of the META profiles (and profiles in other social networks) of the institution they represent health PRs, creation of texts for menus and content mobile applications and periodic monitoring for updates and bugs in the system. When implementing digital special events in an online environment, hybridity and adaptability are qualities that are more than necessary for success.

The current empirical findings offer a fresh perspective and potential avenue for future study on the actions of health communication specialists (such as in their role as spokespersons), which can play a significant role in the development of homo sapiens, the success of the entire health organization, the local community's quality of life, and the global health of people. Similar research can be conducted on other territorial units containing diverse ethnic groups, and megacities ought to be included in the category of settlements.

Following the scientific and research analysis, recommendations can be made regarding the need for in-depth analyses of health PR in the meta universe (metaverse, multiverse, megaverse) - what is its specificity, how it works, which health PR methods remain universally valid in the 3D virtual space, which strategies result in effective PR for health in this context. Multiplied knowledge about the digital world and the way of life its conditions implied by the study of the health field in the parallel digital worlds, and particularly by the management of health public relations there. Additional suggestions for future research on the topic are made in relation to artificial intelligence; this technology is still relatively new when it comes to health PR, and tracking its advancement will yield fresh insights into the efficacy of these messages.

Conclusion

As the digital world continues to expand and grow, online communication will become increasingly prevalent. However, in Bulgaria, communications in the health sector are still a hybrid,

combining digital tools and traditional methods. Considering all that has been said thus far, the following conclusions will be drawn:

1. Classic PR approaches would be more effective in health communication with target groups such as pensioners, the elderly, and the unemployed, as they tend to be less tech-savvy than other groups of respondents. Conventional public relations methods would be more relevant for ethnic groups such as Roma and Turks, while digital communication forms of management would work better for Bulgarians. Sources of health information: General Practitioners (GPs) are the most favored source of health information, followed by family members, friends, and neighbors; an online search engine comes in second; then come television, social media pages, radio, brochures, internet forums, print media, and mobile applications. Sponsored content on social networks, unresponsiveness, and other sources rank lowest in the ranking.
2. Channels for health PR–Bulgarians show the most serious interest in websites. Perhaps due to the perceived ease of use, respondents prefer channels with video content more than those without. Except for websites, which are more established digital forms, older people do not yet find the new forms of communication to be as natural or as familiar. Trust (Image and Reputation) – Brand awareness predictably appears to be more important than the potential impact of a healthcare company's website and social media. However, the website (and, to a lesser extent, the social media pages) perform important outreach work for youth groups.
3. Younger people are more likely to trust Google sponsored content, Google reviews, and video content, but neutrality and reservation are commonplace. For those with a longer life horizon, viewing a video about a planned medical procedure, for instance, and particularly reading Google reviews, prove to be more significant. The respondents' level of education is positively correlated with their level of digital literacy and engagement. Although they use health organizations' websites, retirees are the least tech-savvy group.
4. The predominant mode of communication is hybrid: among the conventional channels, radio and television are most frequently utilized. Both the writing of texts for the website and the use of mailing lists for health communication are standard practices. Among the common practices are content creation for social media, mobile applications, and SEO optimization. The most popular digital communication channels in the health sector are social networks, e-mail, and websites. Although sponsored content is used in practice, respondents claim that it is not always effective.

Considering the obtained results, we can conclude that *the study fully supports the leading hypothesis,* which holds that the health sector can effectively implement communication through the use of hybrid approaches to public relations. Only in this way will health public relations specialists be able to fulfill one of their most basic functions – to be a bridge between health organizations and their audiences.

For PR professionals in the health sector, choosing which strategies to use is an intellectual journey along entwined paths of experience, skills, knowledge, professional intuition, and contacts. The efforts of health public relations specialists are valuable when the goal is better health and a healthier existence for the human species. Hybridity is a necessary horizon companion. Right now, more than ever!

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