



THE USE OF TWITTER TO INCREASE THE AWARENESS ON HEALTH ISSUES: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY MINISTRY OF HEALTH TWITTER ACCOUNT

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Abstract

New media is preferred to be used by various organizations. Governmental organizations are also some of these which use the tools of new media to communicate with their target audience. From this point, the aim of this research is to explore how the Turkish Ministry of Health uses its Twitter account to create awareness on health issues. Through purposive sampling, the Twitter account of the Turkish Ministry of Health is analysed. Only the public advertisements- which are published between the dates of 11 July 2018 and 11 October 2018- are chosen. The total number of the public ads is 59. The results indicate that Turkish Ministry of Health uses Twitter in an effective way to communicate with its audience. The visuals and the messages used in their designs are used in a balanced way and they both support each other. They do not only create awareness on health issues but also try to emphasize the importance of blood donation, vaccination and giving a road to ambulance. Therefore, it is possible to say that they also use public advertisements in order to make changes on attitudes. Since new media is an important tool, each organization should use it effectively; because its power cannot be underestimated.

Keywords: new media, awareness, advertising, twitter, public ads

Introduction

The increase in the use of new media has made it an important communication tool for institutions. The majority of the companies and institutions use new media to communicate with their stakeholders and target groups. New media is different from traditional media due to its advantages on being measurable and giving an opportunity to have a two-way communication which leads to a dialogue between the company and its publics.

New media is also an important tool for advertising. Advertisements are used not only to sell something or to persuade people to try or buy a product, but also to create awareness on public issues. These types of advertisements are called as public advertisements which are designed to disseminate information on specific issues such as voting, paying taxes and health. In terms of health, these advertisements help to create awareness on early diagnosis, hazards of smoking, suggestions for healthy nutrition and other health related topics.

In Turkey, the Ministry of Health also uses both traditional media and new media in order to create awareness on health issues. On televisions, they publish public service announcements related to different health issues such as creating awareness on breast cancer, quitting smoking and importance of blood donation. However, besides traditional media, the Ministry of Health also uses online sources to communicate with the public. They have a corporate web-page and they also use their social media accounts actively to create awareness and to change attitudes toward health.

From these points, the aim of this research is to explore how the Turkish Ministry of Health uses its Twitter account to create awareness on health related issues. Through purposive sampling, the Twitter account of the Turkish Ministry of Health is analysed. Only the tweets which have been published between the dates of 11 July 2018 and 11 October 2018 are chosen. Since the new Health minister took up his position on July 9, 2018, the tweets which are before that date are not included in the current research.

1. New media and advertising

New media is a very large network. In the 1970s, the term of ‘new media’ was used for radio and television because they were the “new” mediums. However, today new media concept emphasizes the social developments distributed by technology. Its interactive tools such as the internet, digital television or blogs could be listed as some examples (Özgen, 2011: 93). New media is a feature that is capable of bringing together all known different environments (Vural

and Bat, 2010: 3350). Since the new media is interactive, it enables organizations to communicate effectively and measurably with their target audience. In addition to these features, the new media is digital, has linkage text and is virtual (Lister et al., 2009: 13, Akar, 2011: 10). With these features, the new media offers fast communication and exchange of information to its users.

In the field of communication, new media and traditional media diverse from each other. Traditional mass media vehicles are directed to mass audience and include printing such as newspaper and magazines or broadcast media as radio or television (Blakeman, 2014: 1). Pavlik (1998) emphasizes that the main difference between the new and traditional media for the media consumer is that there is more control and selection for the user (from Vural and Bat, 2010: 3350). In addition to these, the new media offers the opportunity to educate and inform the target audience at a relatively lower cost than the traditional media (Biber, 2000: 164). When the characteristics of the new and traditional media are compared, a table (Table 1) appears as following. The traditional media is a monologue, however, the new media is a dialogue which provides a two-way communication.

Table 1: Differences between traditional media and new media.

Traditional Media	New Media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One way • Push • Non-continuous communication • Company oriented • Is a monolog. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two way • Push and pull • Continuous communication • The audience oriented • Is a dialogue.

Source: Akar (2011: 11)

Due to its advantages, the majority of the organizations and companies prefer using social media in order to communicate with their target audience or publics. Social media is also known with user-generated content (Blakeman, 2014: 127). In today's competitive world, in order to achieve success, companies need to use the tools of new media either to disseminate information or to persuade the audience against an issue. Most companies now have their presence in the new platform, especially in the social networking sites (Bhattacharyya and Chatterjee, 2016). This presence sometimes becomes visible through advertisements. Altstiel and Grow (2017:273) say that; "We can talk less about the technology of advertising and more about what it can do for us in terms of building branded relationships that connect consumers with marketing messages". It is obvious that, the use of advertising in new media is more about having a relationship with the audiences.

An advertisement is a paid and non-personal form of presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor through the use of an identified medium (Khan, 2007:248). Through advertisements, companies and organizations try to reach their target audience and aim to make changes on their attitudes towards a product or an idea. Companies generally use advertising for different reasons. For example, it could be used to build penetration, to increase purchase frequency, to stimulate brand trial by new users, to reinforce current users to buy the advertised brand repeatedly and to emphasize brand's functional features and benefits (Jones, 2002: xx).

The types of advertising could be grouped under three headings; informative advertising, persuasive advertising and reminder advertising. Informative advertising is used in order to inform the public or audience about a new product, correcting wrong impressions, reducing fears or informing the consumers about a price change (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006: 456). However, persuasive advertising is to sell a product or service exactly on that moment. These types of advertisements generally involve a deadline and expect the customers to try or buy their products. Reminder advertising is used to remind a product or a service. In this type of advertisement, the company knows that the audience that they are going to communicate has brief or deep knowledge about what they are doing. Therefore, these types of advertisements try to maintain the awareness and sustain the relationship.

Commercial advertisements have three sub-categories, which are consumer ads, business to business (B2B) and public ads. Consumer ads try to influence people to buy or to try a specific product. These advertisements generally provide information about a specific product or service and try to express its superiorities to their competitors. The target audience of these types of advertisements is the potential and current individual customers. B2B ads, on the other hand, are business to business advertisements. The target audience of these companies are other businesses. The third is public ads which generally serve to public interest. Some of the objectives of public ads could be listed as education and raising awareness on significant social issues, in an effort to change the public's attitudes and behaviours and to stimulate positive social change (Landa, 2010: 286). Public ads are also the most preferred communication tools that government agencies use in order to disseminate knowledge on health issues.

Communication activities to improve public health may vary from private to public sectors. Private health institutions, on the one hand, serve as a step of health services and they also require various advertising and marketing practices due to their commercial activities. As

demonstrated by a study of the communication policies of the private health sector, current competition conditions require that private health institutions conduct communication strategies that can be evaluated within the framework of advertising, marketing and public relations activities (Turanci and Bulut, 2016). On the other hand, it is considered that the basis of communication strategies of public institutions and organizations that determine public health as the primary goal is health promotion. In this context, the communication activities of the Ministry of Health are more informative and directed towards healthy life.

2. The Use of the Internet in Turkey

Turkey is one of the countries, in which the public use internet. The data provided from TurkStat (2018) indicates that 97% of the enterprises use computer, and 95% of them have internet access. 66,1% of the companies have a web-page. Once the households and individuals analysed, 59,6% of them use computer but 72,9% of them use the internet. This indicates that individuals who do not use computer, use the internet. This could be linked to the use of telephones and tablets. Once the different genders are compared, males (80,4%) use the internet (65,5%) more than the females (Table 2).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ICT Usage in Enterprises					
Computer Usage	94,4	95,2	95,9	97,2	97,0
Internet Access	89,9	92,5	93,7	95,9	95,3
Having Website	56,6	65,5	66,0	72,9	66,1
ICT Usage in Households and Individuals					
Computer Usage (Total)	53,5	54,8	54,9	56,6	59,6
Male	62,7	64,0	64,1	65,7	68,6
Female	44,3	45,6	45,9	47,7	50,6
Internet Usage (Total)	53,8	55,9	61,2	66,8	72,9
Male	63,5	65,8	70,5	75,1	80,4
Female	44,1	46,1	51,9	58,7	65,5
Households with access to the Internet	60,2	69,5	76,3	80,7	83,8

Table 2. The usage of internet communication technologies

TurkStat (2018) has also collected data on the interaction with public authorities and activities in the last 12 months. Through the use of the internet %45,6 of the individuals have interacted with public authorities. 41,7% of the individuals have obtained information from websites, %25,5 of them have downloaded official forms and 30,1% of them have submitted completed forms. Males have the highest share in each activity. However, these findings indicate that almost the majority of the individuals use the internet (Table 3).

Interaction with public authorities and activities in the last 12 months by sex, 2014-2018

(%)

Yıl Year	Individuals interact with public authorities			Activities								
	Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female	Obtaining information from web sites			Downloading official forms			Submitting completed forms		
				Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female	Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female	Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female
2014	27,2	34,2	20,4	26,1	32,9	19,4	12,0	14,9	9,1	10,6	13,1	8,1
2015	28,4	35,3	21,6	27,0	33,7	20,4	12,8	16,2	9,4	12,1	14,9	9,3
2016	36,7	44,9	28,7	32,6	40,8	24,5	16,3	20,5	12,1	22,6	26,4	18,8
2017	42,4	51,2	33,5	37,6	46,6	28,6	22,5	28,6	16,3	30,4	36,2	24,8
2018	45,6	56,4	34,8	41,7	52,5	31,0	25,5	32,1	18,9	30,1	35,6	24,7

Table 3. Interaction of individuals with public authorities and websites

3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to explore how the Turkish Ministry of Health uses Twitter to create awareness on health issues. Turkish Ministry of Health has 401,645 followers (by 16.10.2018). Through purposive sampling, the Twitter account of the Turkish Ministry of Health is analysed. Only the tweets which have been published between the dates of 11 July 2018 and 11 October 2018 are chosen. Since the new Health minister took up his position on July 9, 2018, the tweets before that date are not included in the current research.

The texts which the Ministry of Health has shared and the pictures that they have shared are not included in this sample. Only the visuals which could be classified under “public advertisement” are evaluated through descriptive analysis (The ads are on the Appendix 1). Descriptive analysis is constructed by four steps which are; having a frame, processing data according to thematic framework, defining the findings, and analysing the findings (Altunisik et. al., 2010).

Table 4 summarizes the main reason of the public ads (What the awareness is about?) and the messages of the ads which are the frameworks of this research. The original texts are translated from Turkish to English.

4. Findings

The total number of the public ads on Ministry of Health’s Twitter account is 59, ten of these ads are about physical exercises. Especially, the importance of walking 10,000 steps a day is emphasized regularly. Seven ads are about children and babies, breastfeeding, healthy nutrition, safety and child communication are the topics of these informative ads. During the summer, four of the public ads are related to choosing sunglasses, sunstroke, swimming in safe places

and the importance of drinking water. Heart protection and quitting smoking related ads have been published for three times. In order to create awareness on vaccination and immune system, the Ministry of Health has published public ads three times in a period of three months; besides this, drug use has been emphasized three times. In those ads, the focus is about using drugs consciously and in the way that the doctors advised. In addition to these, people have been informed on the use of air conditioning twice. Two ads are about health scanning programs and the importance of check-up. Two ads are about the causes of infectious and chronic diseases and how to prevent them. Type 2 diabetic's related ads are two of the analysed ads and the main focus of these is the importance of early diagnosis. Other two advertisements are about the importance of early diagnosis to overcome breast cancer. Eye health, rabies, tooth and mouth health, hypertension, Hepatitis B and C, healthy pregnancy, obesity, healthy nutrition are the other ads which are published only once.

In these public advertisements, the Ministry of Health also aims to grab attention to other topics which are not directly related with health. The main message of these ads are; giving way to ambulance, not using a phone while driving, blood donation, quality of sleeping, first aid, and paying attention to the labels on the packaged food.

No	AWARENESS ABOUT	MESSAGE
1	infectious disease	-It is important to wash hands, closing the mouth while coughing, washing vegetables and fruits and to consume foods when they are fresh.
2	choosing sunglasses.	-Do not buy sunglasses that are not approved by the experts.
3	sunstroke	-Use the sun-shields on the baby carriages; Use hats & sunglasses; Sun-ray is harmful, try to be inside during when sun is at pick; drink water.
4	physical exercise	-Doing exercise without warming up might damage your health
5	Smiling	-Smiling is healthy for both your body & mental health.
6	physical exercise	-Sitting in front of a computer for a long time affects your health negatively.
7	giving way to ambulance.	-If you give way to an ambulance, you will also open a new road to life.
8	not using a phone while driving a car.	-While driving a car do not look at telephone, look at the road.
9	physical exercise	-walk 10.000 steps will decrease the risk of chronic diseases.
10	physical exercise.	-Sitting in front of a computer for a long time without moving may cause pain on eyes, belly & neck.
11	health risk scanning programme.	-Before going on a holiday have a look at the risk on health in that region. If you have a chronic disease have a check-up.

No	AWARENESS ABOUT	MESSAGE
31	the use of air conditioning.	-Do not bring winter by using air conditions.
32	Swimming in safe places.	-Never swim in the lake, pond, irrigation channel or streams.
33	child communication.	-Do not interrupt your child while talking; let him/her express himself/herself.
34	child safety in car.	-Use child seat & put the safety belt on.
35	prevent chronic diseases.	-Not smoking and walking 10.000 steps in a day will prevent chronic diseases.
36	health pregnancy.	-Regularly follow up your pregnancy, if you have a chronic disease contact with your doctor, never use a drug without your doctor's approval.
37	drinking water.	-Heating may result with fluid loss. Drink water regularly.
38	fish consumption.	-Omega 3 vitamin strengthens the bones, protects against depression, decreases the risk of Alzheimer and protects the heart.
39	vaccine & immunity system.	-Vaccination is the most powerful tool to protect health and it strengthens immune system.
40	vaccine & immunity system.	-Protect against large outbreaks & germs that cause disability & death.
41	breast cancer.	-Early diagnosis saves life.

12	blood donation.	-Give life with your blood.	42	hair loss.	-The hair loss during season transitions is normal. If it does not end, see a specialist.
13	the use of air conditioning.	-Do not bring winter by using air conditions.	43	first aid.	-First aid should be done by people who are educated & trained.
14	physical exercise.	-If you make heavy exercises, it might damage your health.	44	hearing loss during childhood.	-If hearing loss are not diagnosed at earlier ages, it may cause physiologic, psychologic & social problems.
15	physical exercise.	-Walk 10.000 steps everyday.	45	Heart protection and stop smoking.	-Even within 24 hour your body will give reaction positively & your heart & blood start to become normal within time.
16	Hepatitis B & C.	-Diseases such as Hepatitis B & C can be caused by the sharing of personal belongings such as razor blades and toothbrushes.	46	healthy nutrition for children	-Healthy nutrition will let the students to concentrate, learn and practice early.
17	quality of sleeping	-Sleeping is as important as nutrition & exercise.	47	reading the labels	-Before buying a product, read the labels.
18	Type 2 diabetics.	-Gives 7 suggestions that could prevent the Type 2 diabetics.	48	healthy nutrition for children	-School year will start, while buying a product be sure that it is not harmful.
19	physical exercise.	-Do not stay at home without movement. Try to make exercise as much as possible.	49	health risk scanning programme.	-You can benefit from health risk programme for free.
20	using drugs consciously.	-Use drugs as it is recommended by your doctor or pharmacist when using your medication.	50	rabies.	-Rabies could be healed with correct treatment.
21	heart protection.	-Avoid using the products of the tobacco species, eat healthy food & stay away from stress.	51	heart protection.	-Avoid using the products of the tobacco species, eat healthy food & stay away from stress.
22	hypertension.	-If you have hypertension, pay attention to your weight, reduce salt & fat consumption, take your drugs regularly & be physically active.	52	physical exercise.	-Physical activity, healthy nutrition & not smoking will protect you from heart diseases.
23	vaccine & immunity system	-Unknown facts about the vaccination.	53	Type 2 diabetic	-The signs of Type 2 diabetic are mentioned, blood sugar could be measured in family health centre.
24	tooth & mouth health.	-Pay attention to your tooth & mouth health.	54	breast feeding.	-Once baby is breastfed, the milk production will increase.
25	using drugs consciously	-Do not use drugs which are not approved by physicians.	55	breast cancer.	-Early diagnosis saves life.
26	physical exercise.	-Even when you are working in your office try to do exercise.	56	physical exercise.	- Everyday walk 10.000 steps.
27	quality of sleeping.	-The ambiance of the room and lighting also affects your sleep.	57	obesity.	-Healthy nutrition & having physical activity protects your health.
28	packaged food	-When buying a ready-made-food, do not buy the products that have exploded or box-swollen.	58	breast feeding.	-The first milk that baby had through breast feeding is very important like the first vaccine.
29	meat storage	-If meat is stored incorrectly & consumed without control, it may threaten your health.	59	using drugs consciously.	-Do not stop using your drug before the date that your doctor told you.
30	eye health	Give breaks while you are working in front of a computer.			

Table 4. Reasons and messages of the public ads

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Advertisements are important means of communication for companies and organizations to communicate with their audiences. Organizations use advertisements, not only to sell something but also to disseminate information or to create awareness of a specific topic. In this study, the Twitter account of the Ministry of Health is selected to be analysed. The analysis is conducted in order to explore how they use Twitter to create awareness on public health issues.

The relevant research showed that the Ministry of Health conducts a campaign through the Twitter account, and regularly shares mini public ads in order to create awareness on health. Over a three-month period, 59 public advertisements have been shared. Since they have 401,645 followers, they could reach a significant number of people.

Once analysed, it is possible to say that the majority of their advertisements are concentrated on the importance of physical exercise, and the health-related issues for children followed this. Additionally, in Turkey there are a group of people who are against vaccination, therefore the Ministry of Health published three advertisements to put emphasis on the importance of vaccination and its advantages. It is obviously seen that cause and reason relation is used in order to explain the main concern of the advertisements.

The types of the advertisements also differ according to the time in which they are shared. In July and August, they publish ads not only on general health issues but also about the importance of choosing the right sunglasses, sunstroke, and importance of drinking water. Fishing season starts in September in Turkey and they share an advertisement about fish consumption and Omega 3. In addition to these, since the school year starts on this month, advertisements -which are related to healthy nutrition for children- have been shared. October is the breast cancer awareness month, that is why they also share public advertisements on the importance of early diagnosis.

Taking everything into consideration it can be concluded that Turkish Ministry of Health uses Twitter in a successful way to communicate with the audience. The visuals that they use and the messages that they try to disseminate are used in a balanced way. Both the visuals and the text support each other. They do not only create awareness on health issues but also try to emphasize the importance of blood donation, vaccination and giving a road to ambulance. Therefore, it is possible to say that they also use public advertisements in order to make changes on attitudes. Since new media is an important tool, each organization should use it effectively because its power cannot be underestimated.

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