



Arab Official Efforts to Raise Awareness of COVID-19: The Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Model in the UAE

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جهود رسمية عربية في التوعية بكوفيد-19: نموذج اتصال الأزمات والمخاطر في الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the contents of crisis communication used by the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to raise awareness of the dangers of coronavirus (COVID-19) and reduce its spread in three phases – preparation, initial and maintenance – following the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication model. The study implemented content analysis for three elements from the crisis and risk communication components introduced by the UAE government. At the start of the coronavirus pandemic crisis, the UAE government quickly drew up a national plan to deal with the crisis under the leadership of the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority (NCEMA) and the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP). In the maintenance phase, it relied on a number of means to raise awareness of coronavirus and prevent its spread; these included press conferences, periodic media briefings, awareness campaigns, community-based initiatives, and electronic publications on official websites of the NCEMA and the MOHAP. It also provided diverse, honest, accurate and detailed crisis communication to explain the crisis. All the UAE government's communication content provided a variety of risk information on the new coronavirus. This helped to deal with the crisis efficiently and effectively and contributed to raising community awareness and highlighting the health system's ability to investigate and follow up in a timely manner.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن محتويات اتصال الأزمات الذي قدمته حكومة دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة للتوعية من مخاطر فيروس كورونا (كوفيد-19) والحد من انتشاره، وذلك في المراحل الثلاثة الأولى Preparation، Initial، Maintenance. لنموذج اتصال الأزمات والمخاطر (CERC). وقد اعتمدت هذه الدراسة منهج تحليل المحتوى لثلاثة محتويات من مكونات الاتصال بالأزمة والمخاطر، كانت قد قدمتها حكومة دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة لإدارة الأزمة والتعامل معها. وخلصت هذه الدراسة إلى نتائج عدة أهمها: مسارعة حكومة الإمارات إلى وضع خطة وطنية للتعامل مع الأزمة منذ بدايتها تحت قيادة كل من الهيئة الوطنية لإدارة الطوارئ والأزمات والكوارث، ووزارة الصحة ووقاية المجتمع. واعتمدت في هذه المرحلة وسائل متعددة للتوعية بفيروس كورونا والحد من انتشاره، من خلال عقد المؤتمرات الصحفية، والإحاطات الإعلامية الدورية، والحملات التوعوية، والمبادرات المجتمعية، والمنشورات الإلكترونية المتاحة في الموقعين الرسميين لكل من الهيئة الوطنية لإدارة الطوارئ والأزمات والكوارث، ووزارة الصحة ووقاية المجتمع. وبهذه الخطوة تكون الدولة قد قدمت اتصال أزمات متنوع، وصادق، وصریح، ودقيق ومكتمل لشرح الأزمة، وبيان أبعادها، وكيفية مواجهتها، والتوعية بمخاطر الوباء والحد من انتشاره. حيث عملت كل المحتويات الاتصالية لحكومة الإمارات على تقديم معلومات متنوعة وشاملة وغنية عن فيروس كورونا المستجد، ساعدت في التعامل مع الأزمة بكفاءة وفعالية، وأسهمت في تعزيز الوعي المجتمعي وتعريف المجتمع بقوة النظام الصحي في الدولة وقدرته على التصدي والمتابعة المستمرة على نطاق واسع، الأمر الذي مكن الجهات الصحية من رصد الحالات الجديدة وحصر أماكنها بأسرع وقت من خلال تطبيق نظام الكشف والتقصي.

KEYWORDS

الكلمات المفتاحية

Government communication, media briefings, awareness campaigns, CERC model, UAE Ministry of Health, emergency and crisis management

الاتصال الحكومي، نموذج (CERC)، الإحاطات الإعلامية، الحملات التوعوية، وزارة الصحة الإماراتية، إدارة الطوارئ والأزمات

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1. Introduction

One year ago, one of the most dangerous seasonal viruses called coronavirus disease swept across almost the entire world. It is one of a group of viruses that cause diseases such as the common cold, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). A new type of coronavirus was detected after it was identified as a cause for one of the diseases that originated in the city of Wuhan in China in December 2019. The disease that resulted from this virus is called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). In March 2020, the WHO announced that it had classified COVID-19 as a pandemic. The number of virus infections and infected people increased rapidly, as did the number of deaths, between February and July 2020.

When diseases and epidemics break out, governments and healthcare organisations develop emergency plans for managing the resulting crises. Most plans are developed by relying on the

information and guidelines from the WHO, and such plans include readiness, response and recovery strategies (Seeger, 2006). Mass media and communication are important components in implementing such a strategy (Covello et al., 2001; Wray et al., 2004). The crisis communication concept implies that an honest, open, instant, accurate and complete response to the crisis is one of the primary requirements for the crisis management process (Small, 1991). Public communication processes during a crisis seek to explain the specific incident and determine the potential consequences and results, as well as provide specific information to alleviate the damage for the affected societies (Reynolds and Seeger, 2005). Scientific efforts for merging the concepts of risk communication and crisis communication in practice were described as communications about emergency risks and crises (Reynolds, 2002). Based on the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) integrated model, it is assumed that crises will develop methodologically, which can be predicted through four stages: preparation, initial, maintenance, and resolution (Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019).

Public health focus groups, such as the CDC in the United States of America and the WHO, have monitored the pandemic and published updates on their respective websites. These groups have also issued recommendations on how to get protected against the disease and how to cure it (WHO, 2020). 'Many questions regarding effective risk communication during a public health crisis, particularly with respect to the use of social media, need further research' (Garfin et al., 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak received the highest media coverage of all the epidemics that have ever swept across the world, including the Ebola virus outbreak. A New York Times study in the United States found that 23 times more newspapers were dealing with the spread of the virus than newspapers dealing with the Ebola virus over a similar period in 2018 and also during the first month after the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Ducharme, 2020).

In fact, according to the CERC model, each emergency case, disaster or crisis develops in stages. The efforts and priorities of communications must align with these stages. Communicators should adapt and respond according to each stage. The first phase is preparation. During the preparation stage, communicators should draft and test messages, develop partnerships, create communication plans, and determine the approval process for sending out information in an emergency. The second phase is the initial phase. During the initial phase of a crisis, communicators should express empathy, explain risks, promote action, and describe response efforts. During the third phase, maintenance, communicators need to explain ongoing risks and will have more time to segment audiences, provide background information, and address rumours. The final phase, resolution, requires communicators to motivate the public to remain vigilant, and communicators should discuss lessons learned and revise communication plans for future emergencies (CDC, 2019).

This study will discuss the efforts made by the government of the UAE to increase awareness of the hazards of COVID-19 and minimise its spread through two stages: initial and maintenance. This is due to the fact that the coronavirus pandemic has not come to an end yet. Societies are still suffering from it and they have not yet reached the stage of cleansing, recovery, resolution and evaluation. The Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP), in collaboration with the National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority (NCEMA) and the Ministry of Education, as the spokesperson of the government of Abu Dhabi, organised periodic media briefings. They launched awareness campaigns and societal initiatives through social networking platforms and opened several communication channels with civil society.

2. Literature Review

The study was based on several previous studies on COVID-19 or other epidemics. The study conducted by Andrade et al. (2020) assessed the government of Puerto Rico's crisis and emergency risk communications following Hurricane Maria and the post-disaster information environment to identify factors that may have contributed to negative public perceptions of mortality reports. Data included government of Puerto Rico press releases, press conference audio recordings, and Facebook Live transmissions (Andrade et al., 2020).

Hinjoy et al.'s (2020) study aimed to assess the Thailand Department of Disease Control's early responses to COVID-19 regarding communication with the international community and to identify Thailand's response during public health emergencies (Hinjoy et al., 2020).

The aim of the study conducted by Wieland et al. (2020) was to demonstrate the use of a community-engaged research health

partnership in Southeast Minnesota in the United States to address COVID-19 prevention, with vulnerable populations leveraging its social networks, credibility and technical expertise to promote bidirectional crisis and emergency risk communication for the COVID-19 pandemic (Wieland et al., 2020).

Hagen et al.'s (2020) study examined the use of Twitter by federal, state and local government actors during the 2015–2016 Zika virus outbreak in the United States. This investigation offers insights into the areas of emergency management and public administration for both scholars and practitioners, as it helps to deepen understanding of how government agencies and political leaders across various levels engage with the public during times of crisis (Hagen et al., 2020).

Garfin et al. (2010) studied the relationship between the spread of COVID-19 and media coverage and reviewed several studies which revealed that exposure to the media can lead to increased anxiety, heightened stress responses that can, in turn, lead to downstream effects on health, and misplaced health-protective and help-seeking behaviours that can overburden healthcare facilities and tax available resources. The researchers drew from work on previous public health crises (i.e. Ebola and swine flu pandemic -H1N1) and other collective traumas (e.g. terrorist attacks) where media coverage of events had unintended consequences for those at relatively low risk of direct exposure (Garfin et al., 2020).

Based on CERC guidelines, Ophir (2018) analysed the themes of 5,006 articles from leading American newspapers covering three epidemics: H1N1, Ebola, and Zika. Using mixed methods of automated and manual content analysis, he identified three themes used to cover the diseases: pandemic, scientific, and social (Ophir, 2018).

Lwin et al. (2018) investigated how social media can be used to implement and adapt the CERC model by examining the strategic uses of Facebook in communications related to the recent Zika epidemic by Singapore's health authorities (Lwin et al., 2018).

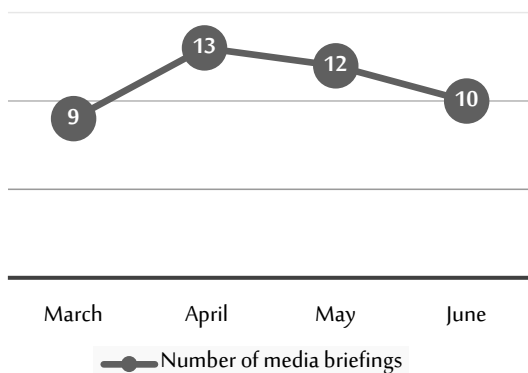
Nour et al. (2017) developed the first case study in the Middle East region to document what happened during the response to the 2013 MERS outbreak in Qatar. It provided a description of key epidemiological events and news released from a prime daily newspaper and main emergency risk communication actions that were taken by Qatari public health authorities. Using the CERC theoretical framework, MERS-CoV-related events were chronologically tracked, together with the relevant stories that were published throughout in a major newspaper, for three distinct phases of the epidemic (Nour et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

This study adopted qualitative content analysis for three contents from the crisis and risk communication components provided by the government of the UAE for increasing awareness of the hazards of coronavirus and minimising its spread:

- **First:** Press conferences and periodic media briefings organised by the UAE MOHAP in collaboration with the NCEMA to report the updates of coronavirus in the UAE over four months (March, April, May and June), starting with a press conference on 26 February 2020. The first media briefing was held on Saturday, 7 March 2020, and the last media briefing was held on Tuesday, 27 June 2020. In a press conference on 30 June 2020, the MOHAP announced that the periodic media briefings had come to an end and that it would hold media briefings as required. Figure (1) illustrates that the Ministry of Health organised 44 media briefings: 9 in March, 13 in April, 12 in May, and 10 in June. The purpose of these briefings was to prevent more virus infections, to provide reassurance to society, and to increase awareness of the risks of the disease (Emirates News Agency, 2020).

Figure (1): Chart Illustrating the Number of Media Briefings Provided by the UAE MOHAP over Four Months



- **Second:** Contents of the Coronavirus Awareness Center on the official websites of MOHAP and the NCEMA include a set of pages. They discuss COVID-19 and provide general tips about coronavirus and the world statistics for the spread and impact of COVID-19.
- **Third:** Contents of the awareness campaigns and community initiatives launched by the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing, the MOHAP, the Ministry of Education, Abu Dhabi Media Company, the Abu Dhabi Police, and the Media Office of the Sharjah Government.

The analysis was conducted using two analysis categories:

- **Form Category:** This category recorded the number of press releases and media briefings and distributed them over months, number and type of the coronavirus pages on the websites of the MOHAP and the NCEMA. It covered the number of awareness campaigns, community initiatives, the dates they were launched, the number of entities that launched them, the number of speakers in the media briefings, their traits, and the participants in the awareness campaigns and community initiatives.
- **Content Category:** This category covered the analysis of the communicative content of press releases, media briefings, and the webpages of the Department of Health, the MOHAP and the NCEMA on coronavirus. It also covered the messages of the awareness campaigns and community initiatives to increase awareness of coronavirus as per the CERC model in its first three stages.

4. Discussion

4.1. UAE Government Crisis Communications in the Preparation (Pre-crisis) Stage

The UAE has a general national strategy related to readiness and preparedness for risk, crisis and disaster management through the NCEMA, which was established within the system of the Supreme Council for National Security organisational structure on 14 May 2007. The NCEMA aims to realise the UAE policy regarding the necessary crisis and emergency management measures. It is the primary national authority in charge of coordinating and developing the standards, regulations and rules related to the emergency, crisis and disaster management, developing a unified national emergency response plan. It is also responsible for developing and unifying the sustainability of laws, policies and procedures related to emergency, crisis and disaster management at the national level.

In the crisis and risk communications to increase awareness of the risks of seasonal influenza and minimise its spread, the UAE government relies on awareness campaigns and promulgating the relevant health laws and legislation that enhance its ability to combat epidemics and communicable diseases. The government organises national campaigns, annually, to increase awareness of seasonal influenza and explains its signs, symptoms, and the most vulnerable groups. It urges members of society to receive periodic vaccinations and immunisations for prevention and treatment. Article (20) and Article (21) of Federal Law No. (14) enacted in 2014 stipulate that

individuals shall receive vaccination and immunisation against communicable seasonal diseases. Furthermore, Articles (4), (5) and (6) obligate individuals and health authorities to report the infections of communicable diseases. Article (22) gives the Minister of Health the right to publish information related to the areas where the epidemic appears (Ministry of Health and Prevention of the United Arab Emirates, 2014). Table (1) attached to the law determines all the communicable diseases expected to appear in the country, including influenza (Ministry of Health and Prevention of the United Arab Emirates, 2014).

Moreover, the UAE government implements national plans and policies to control seasonal diseases. Procedures 1–4 of the National Policy for Control of Communicable Diseases explain the effective and vital role of communications in the field of public health and the prevention of communicable diseases. The procedures highlight that the use of communication strategies and technologies will improve awareness of the risks, enhance solutions, and increase the probability that the target public will adopt healthy behaviours and practices. It assures that the national message is to be centrally coordinated and that an official spokesperson is to be appointed to ensure the availability of accurate and true information, whether directly or via mass media. The procedures also assert the following (Ministry of Health and Prevention of the United Arab Emirates, 2020b):

- Communications must be made an integral part of the scientific and technological works of communicable diseases and must be connected to the current interventions that are based on evidence and evaluations.
- Scientific studies and research must be conducted in the field of controlling communicable diseases, and their findings must be used in determining the most effective strategies for meeting the information needs of the population groups, especially the at-risk population with a low educational level.
- Guiding principles must be developed about communications in the field of health, in respect of all the risks, to determine the functions and responsibilities of the health authorities, official spokespersons, and target public.
- The efficiency of training, educational and awareness activities provided by the communications about control of communicable diseases must be evaluated.

Procedures 2–3 of the National Policy for Control of Communicable Diseases focus on improving the information systems, control systems, and robust information technology infrastructure. They also focus on improving the links between the different health information systems and establishing a national register of communicable diseases. Furthermore, they highlight that relying on health research is the primary source of information, especially in connection with the determination of the sources of diseases and epidemics, mechanisms of conducting diagnostic examinations, the development of the vaccines, and secure treatments for updating the strategies for their control and the prevention against them (Ministry of Health and Prevention of the United Arab Emirates, 2014).

The UAE government launched the National Agenda for the United Arab Emirates to realise its 2021 Vision. The Agenda incorporates several perspectives in the different fields, with participation from the different sectors and governmental and private entities in the State. The UAE government works hard in the field of applying the health system by The National Agenda under world-class standards and collaboration with all the health authorities, to approve all the governmental and private hospitals according to clear national and international standards in terms of providing the services, quality, and adequacy of the medical staff. The National Agenda seeks to stabilise the preventive side and reduce the rate of lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes mellitus, heart diseases, and cancer diseases to achieve a healthy lifestyle and long life. Moreover, it seeks to reduce the level of the spread of smoking and improve the readiness

of the health system to address epidemics and health risks so that the UAE will become one of the best countries in terms of the quality of healthcare (The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, 2020).

4.2. UAE Government and Crisis Communications in the Initial Stage

At the beginning of the crisis, the UAE government immediately developed a national plan to address the crisis, led by the NCEMA and MOHAP in coordination with all the agencies and sectors in the UAE. The UAE government also enhanced the strategic stock of medicines and food. It took several measures for combatting COVID-19 throughout the response period, which lasted 153 days from the recording of the first infection case on 29 January 2020 to 30 June 2020 (The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, 2020).

In the initial phase of the crisis, to increase awareness of coronavirus and minimise its spread, the UAE government relied on the press releases, periodic media briefings, awareness campaigns, and community initiatives.

The Minister of Health and Prevention and the Minister of Education held two press conferences, the first of which was held on 29 February 2020 and the second was held on 31 March 2020, after the Abu Dhabi Sports Council decided that the remaining stages of the UAE Tour, a cycling contest, would be cancelled since two positive coronavirus cases had been detected on 28 February 2020. During both press conferences, they outlined the response measures, including the examination and follow-up of all the participants in the contest, totalling 612 participants. The Minister of Education asserted that the students who were present at the UAE Tour, totalling 131 students, did not have contact with the infected technicians; however, they were tested and proved to be safe and then were subject to home isolation with education and health support provided. Several measures were taken, including the following: schooling was suspended at kindergartens, and events and student trips were suspended throughout the State.

In collaboration with the NCEMA and the Ministry of Education, MOHAP organised 44 periodic media briefings between 7 March 2020 and 30 June 2020 on Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays. Media briefings focused on the latest updates and figures about the positive coronavirus cases in the UAE and the governmental measures and initiatives taken and announced to minimise the spread of COVID-19 in the UAE. These briefings were broadcast on the local television channels, and posts about them were published on the social networking channels. Several officials and spokespersons participated in these briefings on behalf of the UAE government. Starting from the fourth briefing, held on Saturday, 21 March 2020, the MOHAP decided to hold the media briefings of the UAE government online, without the presence of the mass media, to follow the preventive measures and avoid gatherings to protect the safety and health of the society.

In the first media briefing message, the MOHAP asserted that the UAE had sufficient strategic stock of basic medical supplies necessary for the advanced examination to detect coronavirus, and had isolation rooms equipped in such a manner to ensure that no viruses would be transported to the neighbouring areas, as well as having specialist medical staff and a call centre for the epidemic, in the health institutions, working around the clock for fact-finding and follow-up. The MOHAP also asserted that it had raised the readiness and preparedness level of the medical facilities in both the governmental and private sectors and at the laboratories qualified to conduct the medical examinations and tests since announcing the emergence and outbreak of the virus.

Moreover, the Department of Health, the MOHAP and the NCEMA

supported the content of their official websites in the Awareness Center section with webpages that included the following: detailed information about COVID-19, its symptoms, method of spreading, and methods of prevention; tips to be followed before travel to get protected against COVID-19; the preventive tips to be followed when greeting other people, especially if there are respiratory symptoms; and awareness tips for travellers to areas where COVID-19 had spread.

The UAE government launched successive awareness campaigns and community initiatives via social media networks under different slogans. These campaigns focused on the established community values in the UAE society and aimed to send messages of sympathy and reassurance. They included the following campaigns:

- **#La Tchelon Ham (Don't Worry) Campaign:** This campaign was launched by the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing in March. It established communication for seven weeks and achieved large-scale interactions and shares from the different categories of the UAE society. It aimed to provide psychological support to the members of society against the repercussions of COVID-19 in line with all the national efforts and precautionary measures for protection against the virus. The campaign also aimed to embody the orientations of the government, namely that the quality of life is the top priority and that health is the most important pillar for the quality of human life and society. As used in the Emirati dialect, this phrase gives reassurance to anyone who lives in the UAE and gives an important message that the leaders of the UAE support anyone who is affected as a result of this crisis. The campaign also included, for psychological support, three main components: #Lenadaam_Maan (Let's Support Together), #Linatahaddath_Maan (Let's Speak Together), and #Lenatmaen_Maan (Let's Be Reassured Together) (National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2020).
- **#Sanadkom (Your Support) Campaign:** This campaign was launched by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the MOHAP. It targeted the students among the sons and daughters of medical, administrative and nursing staff members, as well as those of staff members of the supporting services working in the UAE and representing the first line of defence against COVID-19. Its purpose was to enhance the academic progress of this category of people and meet their requirements from the technical and psychological perspectives due to their fathers' and mothers' preoccupation with combatting coronavirus. It provided all types of support to them so that their sons and daughters would be able to continue their remote education, where they could continuously gain knowledge and skills as required. It worked according to three main parts: providing academic support to students through a cluster of brilliant teachers; providing technical support to students whose parents are working within the health sector, meeting all their needs in terms of tablets and other necessary tools to continue their educational journey; and providing psychiatric support to students, using qualified specialists for this mission (Ministry of Education of United Arab Emirates, 2020).
- **#Shokran Khat Defaana Alawwal (Thanks to our First Defense Line) Campaign:** This campaign sought to appreciate the efforts of all the medical teams and staff members and all the personnel working in the health sector in the UAE, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, and administrative and technical staff members who work around the clock in light of the circumstances and challenges the world is currently witnessing as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. They did their best to protect and serve every person who works and lives in the UAE (Alkhuli, 2020).

Press conferences were held by the Minister of Health and Prevention, His Excellency Mr Abdulrahman Alowais, and the Minister of Education, Dr Hussein Al-Hammadi, and the media briefings have been organised by the MOHAP since the beginning of the crisis. They contained reassurance messages to all that the State has a robust epidemic fact-finding system, response measures, and immediate reward, which contributes to maintaining health security and ensuring social safety, as well as controlling diseases as per the protocols and practices approved by the WHO. They also gave a message to the effect that the State has a strategic stock of sterilisers and face masks used to cope with the virus, and that the relevant health authorities in the State closely follow up the availability of all the supplies and tools (Albayan News, 2020).

On the first day of the crisis, the UAE government immediately allocated some hospitals and medical centres to deal with the coronavirus positive cases, after verifying that they were completely ready in terms of the medical staff, equipment and supplies necessary for this mission, along with a large number of field hospitals to allocate additional medical facilities equipped and prepared for addressing the increasing number of positive cases, supporting the capabilities of the health sector, and increasing its absorption capacity and readiness to deal with the current challenges. This enhances the potential of the State to provide healthcare and treatment services as per the best medical standards and at the highest quality levels.

The UAE was primarily concerned with dealing with the virus and minimising its spread, as well as responding to any updates. A total of 128 medical examination centres with the latest equipment to detect the results of some possible cases within 24 hours were opened. The UAE established 15 field hospitals at an absorptive capacity that reached 5,750 beds distributed across all the emirates (Ministry of Health and Prevention of United Arab Emirates, 2020d).

The MOHAP had conducted up to four million medical examinations up to the end of the analytical study period (30 June 2020), equivalent to 42.7% of the total population. In an indicator demonstrating the UAE’s success in coping with COVID-19 in the narrowest possible framework, a large number of hospitals and medical centres announced the recovery and discharge of the last positive coronavirus case at the time when most hospitals in the State, whether governmental or private, resumed providing their diagnostic and treatment services. There are no more pressures resulting from the receiving of positive coronavirus cases. Diffractive Phase Interferometry technology (DPI) relying on the use of laser radiation was adopted to detect the suspected positive coronavirus cases within a few seconds.

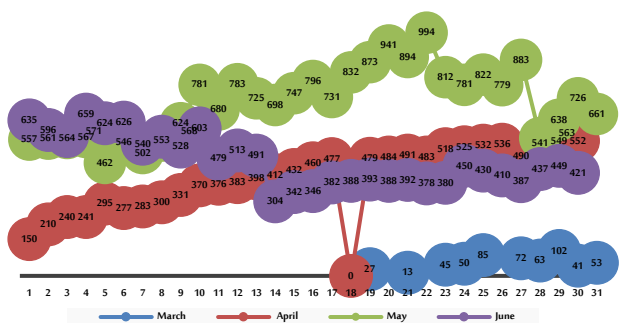
These results are consistent with the those of the studies reported in the literature review (see, for example, Nour et al., 2017; Lwin et al., 2018; Hinjoy et al., 2020; Wieland et al., 2020).

4.3. UAE Government and Crisis Communications in Maintenance Stage

The UAE government worked hard during the maintenance and recovery stage on the periodic media briefings. It conducted 35 media briefings between 1 April 2020 and 30 June 2020. It enhanced the content of the official website of the MOHAP. The UAE government also launched awareness campaigns and community initiatives to urge society members to participate effectively in the awareness process and limit the spread of the virus.

The MOHAP intensified its media briefings during April and May in line with the high number of positive coronavirus cases during these two months (Figure [2]) and abided by the time specified for all the briefings.

Figure (2): Chart Illustrating the Development of Coronavirus Cases during the First Four Months after Announcing the First Coronavirus Cases in the United Arab Emirates (Source: Ministry of Health and Prevention of United Arab Emirates, 2020d).



The MOHAP supported the content of its official website, in the Awareness Center section, with videos of all the media briefings provided, and another two pages.

The first webpage, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), contained detailed information that provided answers to the frequently asked questions (FAQ) in this field: What is Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)? What are the clinical signs and symptoms of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)? How can Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) be spread? What is the treatment for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)? What are the methods of protection against Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)? What procedures should people who have been travelling undergo, and what are the sources of reliable information? (Ministry of Health and Prevention of United Arab Emirates, 2020c).

The second webpage contained a set of general tips about Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), such as practical methods for prevention against the novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19); the basic diet that contributes to protection against Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19); tips to be followed before travelling for protection against Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19); protective tips to be followed when greeting others, especially if there are respiratory symptoms; and awareness tips for travellers to areas where Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has spread (Ministry of Health and Prevention of United Arab Emirates, 2020a).

The Ministry provided awareness materials in the form of printed announcements to answer the FAQ about the pandemic in the following languages: Arabic, Urdu, Chinese, and Farsi. It also provided 35 awareness videos for adults and children to introduce the Coronavirus, how it is communicated, how to get protection against infection, along with messages of reassurance for the infected people, for which the UAE made the necessary arrangements to provide all that is required for minimising the spread of the virus and undertake the treatment of all the positive cases.

Some national authorities and civil society organisations launched awareness campaigns and community initiatives, which aimed to widen the scope of the crisis communication messages to include all the categories of society, in different languages, and unify the efforts of response and recovery:

- Abu Dhabi Media Company launched media campaigns, in collaboration with the National Media Council, to introduce the coronavirus updates, in three languages, through the AlItihad newspaper and Radio Mirchi. It aimed to reach the largest number of residents in the UAE to keep them informed of the latest developments about the spread of coronavirus and the measures taken in this respect. The AlItihad newspaper issued a periodic appendix in three languages: Urdu, Filipino, and Malabar. It shed light on the initiatives of the UAE regarding the manpower category, keeping them informed of their rights and duties as a part of the UAE society and partners in the development and achievement. The Abu Dhabi Radio Network contributed by providing an awareness campaign via the Hindi Radio Mirchi in three languages: English, Hindi, and Malabar.
- The Media Office of the Sharjah Government launched the initiative #Akbar_Min_Corona (#Greater than Corona). This is a national initiative, and it is considered worldwide to be one of the most humanitarian of the UAE’s initiatives. It aims to unify the efforts of the citizens and appreciate responsibility. These are the most powerful solutions for overcoming the challenge encountered by the State. Sheikh Sultan bin Ahmed Al-Qassemi, the Chairman of Sharjah Media Council, called on all the citizens of the UAE and its institutions to participate in the campaign to overcome the crisis. The most prominent participants in the campaign included the singer Hussein Al-Jassmi, the media professional Mustafa Al-Agha, the artist Yara, and other celebrities. The initiative aimed to provide a dedicated platform for following up and sending the development updates about the coronavirus outbreak, and to urge people to abide by social responsibility and unify the efforts to overcome coronavirus and support the appropriate social practices (Sharjah Government Media Bureau, 2020).

In several media briefings organised by the MOHAP in March and

April, the MOHAP spokesperson explained about the virus, how it is spread, and how to get protected against it (social distancing and avoiding close contact with others and not sharing masks, as this is an unhealthy habit and is a cause of transmitting the infection from one person to another). She also explained the different stages that the infected person goes through and highlighted that there is a lack of studies that prove the relationship between using incense or gum at home and reducing the spread of infection (Emirati habits). It is better to abide by the approved and reliable practices, such as cleaning the surfaces and the continual washing of hands.

All the media briefings provided diversified and rich information about the novel coronavirus. This information helped to deal with the crisis effectively and efficiently. All the media briefings, especially those during April and May, focused more on the following: providing medical information about the virus, how it is spread, methods of prevention, and instructions for conducting periodic temperature examinations at home, for all the members of the family; explaining all the precautionary measures taken at the level of the country; and the consequences of such measures such as the suspension of travel unless necessary.

Furthermore, the Ministry's spokesperson provided an analytical and detailed reading of all the press conferences and the periodic media briefings, which were organised by the MOHAP, totalling 44 media briefings, regarding their content.

She provided an analytical reading of the communication content on the official websites of the Department of Health, and the MOHAP and the NCEMA stated that it was honest, clear, accurate and complete content explaining the current crisis (the coronavirus crisis), its dimensions, how to cope with it, awareness of the epidemic risks, and minimising its spread. All such content had the following characteristics:

- **Immediate transfer of information (immediate response):** All the above-mentioned communication contents provided quick, diversified, comprehensive and in-depth information about the coronavirus. All the media briefings during April and May focused more on providing medical information about the virus, how it spreads, methods of prevention, the need to conduct periodic temperature examinations at home for all the members of the family, and the importance of covering the nose, mouth and hands when going outside. All the precautionary measures taken were explained at the level of the State, with their consequences, including the prohibition of travel unless necessary. Consultations were provided on how to manage the field operations related to quarantine, epidemic fact-finding methods, and how to follow up the close contacts.
- **The content of the UAE government communications:** It relied on the sensory test based on presenting evidence and facts about the number of examinations, positive cases, recovered cases, and deaths daily; details on the nature of the virus, how to be protected against coronavirus, qualitative examples about the infection and recovery cases; and results of practical applications and health measures applied at hospitals and testing centres in the UAE. This includes approving the DPI technology that is based on the use of laser radiation to detect the suspected cases within a few seconds, prevention and treatment protocols in dealing with coronavirus as per the latest scientific research and world medical updates, and presenting the experience of other countries.

Encountering the rumours and replying to them, from time to time, through the following:

- The speakers adopted a transparent and open approach in presenting all the information related to coronavirus. They kept the public informed on a periodic and regular basis of the updates of the situation in the UAE through the media briefings organised by the MOHAP in collaboration with several ministries and other governmental authorities. Adequate and accurate information was provided in such briefings about the number of infected cases, recovered people, and deaths. In addition, the relevant officials in different fields had interviews via mass media to present a complete presentation of the situation and all the relevant details.
- All the procedures implemented and decisions taken were explained

within the framework of efforts for combatting the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, information was provided on the available treatments, the progress achieved at the level of scientific research, and the efforts for developing the medicines and vaccines against the virus.

- On 31 March 2020, the Cabinet approved Ministerial Resolution No. (24), regarding the publishing and sharing of health information related to communicable diseases and epidemics and false information related to human health, to augment the governmental efforts for enhancing the health awareness of the public and furnish them with facts, guidelines and procedures. This can also be done with the assistance of certified spokespersons and experts and reliable governmental sources, away from the promoters of rumours and false news, to keep the society healthy and safe and counter any false health information, rumours or false news that could have negative consequences for the society or could mislead public opinion.

These findings contradict the findings of a study conducted by Andrade et al. (2020) about the government of Puerto Rico's crisis and emergency risk communications.

5. Conclusion

Relying on the details of procedures outlined by the government of the UAE in crisis and risk communication to increase awareness of the coronavirus pandemic, our conclusions are as follows:

- **In the preparation stage:** The UAE had a national strategy on preparedness and readiness in relation to risks, crisis, and disaster management. This national strategy is implemented through the NCEMA and other supporting ministries and authorities as soon as the crises and disasters occur as per the standards and components of the National Agenda 2020 (The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, 2020). Thus, the UAE government also has a legislative and legal system to combat the seasonal communicable diseases and is ready for combatting novel epidemics and pandemics.
- **In the initial stage:** At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic crisis, the UAE government immediately developed a national plan to address the crisis, led by the NCEMA and the MOHAP and in coordination and collaboration with all the agencies and sectors in the UAE. The UAE government also enhanced the strategic stock of medicines and food. It took several measures for combatting COVID-19 throughout the response period, which lasted for 153 days from the recording of the first case of infection on 29 January 2020 to 30 June 2020. During this stage (beginning of the crisis), it relied on several methods for increasing awareness of coronavirus and minimising its spread. Such awareness methods included the following: press conferences, periodic media briefings, awareness campaigns, community initiatives, and online posts on the official websites of the NCEMA and the MOHAP.

The government provided diversified, honest, open, accurate and complete crisis communication to explain the current crisis (coronavirus crisis), its dimensions, and the methods of its control, increasing awareness of the risks of the epidemic, and minimising its spread.

In collaboration with the NCEMA and the Ministry of Education, the MOHAP organised 44 periodic media briefings between 7 March 2020 and 30 June 2020 on Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays. The media briefings focused on the latest updates and figures about the cases related to the coronavirus in the State, the governmental procedures taken and initiatives announced to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the UAE. This information was broadcast on all the local television channels and posted on the UAE government's social media accounts.

Some officials and spokespersons of the UAE government from the different sectors participated in providing the media briefings and made considerable efforts to keep the UAE society informed of all the details related to coronavirus. They kept providing awareness messages to the society, including the message that infected people must abide by the preventive and precautionary measures, physical distancing, and quarantine procedures, and called on the public not to share rumours and false news.

The Department of Health, the MOHAP and the NCEMA also

supported the content of their official websites, in the Awareness sections, with webpages that included the following: detailed information about COVID-19, its symptoms, the method of its spread, and methods of prevention; tips to be followed before travel to get protected against COVID-19; the preventive tips to be followed when greeting other people, especially if there are respiratory symptoms; and awareness tips to travellers to areas where COVID-19 has spread. Such information was made available in an interactive fashion, as illustrated on the first webpage of the Ministry of Health website, in particular.

All the communication contents of the UAE government provided diversified and rich information about the novel coronavirus. This information helped in dealing with the crisis effectively and efficiently and contributed to enhancing society's awareness and informing the society that the health system is powerful and capable of continuous fact-finding and follow-up on a large scale. This enabled the health authorities to record the new cases and their whereabouts as quickly as possible through the detection and fact-finding system.

Several awareness campaigns, under different slogans, and community initiatives were launched to work together with the media briefings to increase awareness of the coronavirus risks and to explain the precautionary measures taken by the government of the UAE to minimise its spread.

In the third stage (maintenance stage), the UAE government relied on periodic media briefings and awareness campaigns. It enhanced the relevant health laws and legislation to enhance its ability to combat the pandemic and save lives:

- The MOHAP intensified its media briefings during April and May, in line with the high number of coronavirus infections during these two months (Figure [2]), and abided by the times specified for all the briefings.
- The Ministry provided awareness materials in the form of printed announcements to answer the FAQ about the pandemic in the following languages: Arabic, Urdu, Chinese, and Farsi. It also provided 35 awareness videos for adults and children to introduce coronavirus, how it is communicated, how to get protection against infection, along with messages of reassurance for the infected people, for which the UAE made the necessary arrangements to provide all that is required for minimising the spread of the virus and undertake the treatment of all the positive cases.
- It issued a COVID-19 Guidance Manual in five languages: Arabic, English, Urdu, Chinese, and Farsi.
- Some national authorities and civil society organisations launched awareness campaigns and community initiatives that aimed to widen the scope of the crisis communication messages to include all the categories of society, in different languages, and unify the efforts of response and recovery.

The strategy of expansion in conducting the examinations that were applied in the UAE contributed to enhancing the efforts for containing the virus and the efforts of inquiry and following up the cases. As of 13 July 2020, the UAE had recorded more than four million medical examinations conducted, accounting for 42.7% of the total population. As an indicator of the success of the UAE in controlling coronavirus, a large number of the hospitals and medical centres announced that the last infected case had been discharged, and other hospitals in the UAE, whether governmental or private ones, resumed their work to provide diverse diagnostic and treatment services. There are no more pressures resulting from the receiving of COVID-19 infection cases.

6. Recommendation

The study recommends tracking the crisis and risk communication adopted by the UAE government in the next phase and its role in achieving recovery. The study also recommends that further research

should be conducted using the CERC model to investigate the effectiveness of crisis communication applied by the bodies and organisations in the Arab region to manage crises and risks.

Biography

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