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COVID-19 AND COMMUNICATION: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO FACE THE CRISIS


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To all communication professionals in their fight against Covid-19.

“The use of ethical frameworks to guide decision-making may help to mitigate some of the unintended and unavoidable collateral damage from an influenza pandemic.”

Thompson, A.K., Faith, K., Gibson, J.L. et al. Pandemic influenza preparedness: an ethical framework to guide decision-making. *BMC Med Ethics* 7, 12 (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6939-7-12>

The Radio Studies Center at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul believes that the same applies for actions in the communication area supporting the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.



PRESENTATION

This Covid-19 *and communication: a practical guide to face the crisis* results from the idea that **every media, in an increasingly convergent reality, must support society in fighting the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus**. Thus, it represents an united effort by the members of the Radio Studies Center (NER) at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in the sense of going beyond its original research focus during a time that demands a broader, collaborative and integrated vision from every major actor in communication. NER is a group certified by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), an agency of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCTI). The group was created in 2017, within the Postgraduate Communication Programme of the Faculty of Library Sciences and Communication from UFRGS, in Porto Alegre. It gathers professors and students focused on the Brazilian radio market, always considering the commercial stations as dominant in the area and trying to analyze them inside the bigger context of communication in a society marked by the culture of connection and convergence.

Here, acknowledging the time we live in, NER aims to go beyond its research and market impact perspectives. This guide comes from scientific knowledge, but is thought as a **guidance and disclosure booklet**. In that sense, it goes along with the parameters that guide the studies and reflections of the studies center, expanded and applies also to the other media:

(1) Radio is a service related to information: citizenship, entertainment, journalism, advertising...

(2) The communicator (journalist and/or radio personality) must act as a content curator, fostering dialogue and certifying events and statements.

(3) Nowadays, radio as a media positions itself as content producer in a multi platform context operated by professionals that take on multiple roles.

(4) There's a need for culture change in at least four levels: formation, profession and management.

(5) Communication's context is dynamic and changes happen in different speeds in each media traditionally considered as such: newspapers and magazines, radio, TV and internet.

(6) When looking for audience and advertisers' attention, everyone and everything compete with everyone and everything.

NER is sure the Covid-19 pandemic can't be won without a **strategic planning** concerning the crisis itself and also the **communication about the crisis** - a central theme of this guide. Since March 11th 2020, when the World Health Organization altered the status of the news coronavirus to a pandemic, NER started to shift its efforts knowing that the success of health strategies also depends on communication. Decades ago, society started an accelerated connection process based on convergence of contents such as audio, images, texts and videos, shared by professionals and amateurs. Pandemic and the widespread of misinformation concerning its nature and effects make it clear that we live in a moment of maxi-

mum need for appreciation over organized and correctly placed communication. **In the war of narratives, there is a need to win over the Fifth Column of fake news and obscure interests.**

Physically isolated in their own homes, but connected to each other via technology, human beings need the virtual companion and the sharp orientation provided by qualified media. Thus, NER is sure that:

(1) Never before it has been so relevant to have **knowledge about what is disclosed** in agencies and press offices, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet.

(2) Never before it has been so relevant to have **precision on publishing information** by media.

(3) Never before it has been so relevant to **fight against fake news**.

(4) Never before it has been so relevant to **take care of the health of professionals working on communication**.

(5) Never before it has been so relevant to think about the **economic sustainability of media**.

In this guide, while contemplating the production and supply of content, we follow the idea of a **pendulum motion**: from journalism to entertainment and vice-versa, from general to specific and vice-versa, from live to recorded and vice-versa, from spoken to musical and vice-versa, from images about the act to the professional who describes and narrates such fact and vice-versa, from more interactive to less interactive and vice-versa, from more public to less public information and vice-versa, from a technically more sophisticated communi-

cation to a less sophisticated and vice-versa, from home office to within a company and/or on an outdoor area and vice-versa...

We assume, furthermore, that **everyone is a content producer in today's society**. However, there is a need to put the **professional in a more relevant ground than that taken by the amateur**. That person is a content curator, moderator and certifier of events and statements. Therefore, is obliged to follow ethical and technical procedures, other than assuming responsibility for the definition of constant planning. In a moment of crisis such as the current, it also goes for businesspeople, managers and content produces in every area of human communication.

This *Covid-19 and communication: a practical guide to face the crisis* considers the existence of different types of content in four fields:

(1) **Journalism**, in which, more than ever, there is a need to always differentiate news and information from opinion and interpretation about the facts.

(2) **Advertising**, where the backbone of economic support is, and **propaganda**, from which the necessary public disclosure of governmental and institutional actions related to the fight against the pandemic happen.

(3) **Public relations**, closely related to the actions of journalistic and propaganda disclosure, but focused on institutional appreciation of the various processes and its protagonists.

(4) **Entertainment**, essential during confinement (social distancing, isolation, quarantine or community

restraint/ community quarantine), when there is a need to keep the mood and concentrate on healthy safety measure recommended by the World Health Organization.

NER has also tried to think of the role of communication to help on fighting the pandemic, considering what was the reality of media up to the start of 2020, what it has become afterwards and the challenges foreseen ahead, when the situation starts to enter a phase of normalization. In that sense, we propose a reflection concerning four core values, presented in a broad perspective, that need to be worked internally by businesspeople, managers and content producers within their media:

(1) **Flexibility**, referring to the idea of easy adaptation to new scenarios, without abandoning, during that process, what is essential.

(2) **Responsibility**, characteristic of those who recognizes their role and go with it and fully as possible, attempting to follow ethical and technical parameters during their activities.

(3) **Partnership**, expressing a union based on solidarity among those who put themselves on the same level, dialoguing and using differences to add towards the realization of common objectives.

(4) **Courage**, showing strength when facing tough situations which, in order to be resolved, demand creativity, persistence, resistance and, above all, a positive reactions towards adversity.

As a basis, this guide uses ethical recommendations that appear in various documents of representative

organizations in communication - both from employers and workers - and the technical parameters taught in college-level courses in that field.

As such, without intending to present a definite vision of something that is happening, this guide aims to:

(1) **Indicate procedures and provoke actions** for the maintenance of activities in agencies and press room, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet.

(2) Provide information about the **importance of communication** and ways it can help fighting the pandemic.

(3) **Move in the direction of similar efforts** deployed both nationally (in Brazil) and internationally by communication organizations.

(4) Demonstrate, through the effort made in this guide, the importance of **public investment in scientific research** and the commitment of educational institutions with practical results, especially in crisis situations.

As this is a practical guide - in the form of a booklet -, we also decided to go with a certain redundancy during the text. Such a measure aims to allow the audience of this work, after an initial reading, to find specific points without loss of a more complete comprehension of each part.

Understanding that the **pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 can only be fought by a transnational effort**, this guide, originally written in Portuguese, was planned to also have versions in Spanish and English,

with their copyrights totally free, as long as the attribution is stated.

In case the researchers of NER verify that important changes have to be made in the future, they publicly state here their commitment to reviewing this guide and providing a new and extended edition easily accessible.



FLEXIBILITY

COURAGE

RESPONSIBILITY

PARTNERSHIP



FLEXIBILITY

The ability to change or be changed easily and quickly according to the situation without losing what is essential.

◆ No matter the area you work on, **start by evaluating your limitations, possibilities and needs**. Everything changed on March 11th, 2020. And nothing will be like before. To survive, you will need to take a more flexible approach concerning the technical parameters learned in the market or during college. That goes for journalism, advertising and propaganda, public relations and entertainment. When it comes to ethical concerns, however, those demand twice as much effort and focus.

◆ Maintaining media activities needs to take two lines into consideration: **infrastructure** and **human resources**. One is directly connected to the other. Thus you need to evaluate what is available to work for the vehicle, remotely or outdoors.

◆ For journalism, the Covid-19 pandemic imposes similar challenges to those faced during a war coverage or when working in urban conflicts involving law and crime. The basic rule is the same: **survival first**. This affects one of the core values of the profession: being in the place where facts happen to narrate the protagonists' actions with as many details as possible. The possibility of contamination and the need of confinement impose a new attitude when it comes to reporting. Even in the one that demands the most that a team is present at the

place - television -, the professional starts making video calls with sources, both speaking from their own homes. Stock footage, images from public services or remotely operated drones become commonplace. Even that moment when the reporter speaks from where the facts are happening got reduced to the image of such professional over a neutral background or some office more or less improvised in his own home.

◆ For this *home office* migration, **audio, images and videos provided by press offices become fundamental** for the day by day of those who work with journalism. In many cases, something that was already happening just grew bigger: when sources provided their own content for professionals. And such a thing also happens, more quickly, when gathering materials sent by the public.

◆ **Colloquiality gained ground**, although the formal ways still resist in newspapers and magazines. No matter the media - but highlighting radio and television - chatting definitively took place over what can sometimes be seen as almost a speech. With the journalist at home, there is a certain level of empathy for the small breaches of everyday routine now open to the audience's curiosity. With an important amount of the population in confinement, hearing a baby crying or a dog barking actually put the journalist or radio personality on the same level, **strengthening the essential links of communication.**

◆ Clearly, service journalism becomes more relevant than before. There is a need to explain and explain again using serious sources. The old rule of not repeating content falls apart. In doubt, put an epidemiologist or virologist available to the public today in order to clarify doubts. And do that again tomorrow. And the day after as well. Redundancy of good practices will form the comprehension of what is needed to face the pandemic.

◆ As important as covering Covid-19 is to media, it is important to allocate a part of the available space and time for entertainment. A pandemic that demands confinement can't be faced without some sort of ways to "escape" the enormous psychological effort that comes from hygiene and risk control measures to which the whole population is subject. Thus it still is important to show what is possible to do in terms of exercises to replace sports that used to be practiced outside or in gyms and clubs. The same goes to shows, movies, comedy, soap operas, variety shows, children's television series, etc.

◆ The current moment pressures what has been learned along the professional studies, the socially built notions concerning content creation and the administration of all those procedures. Nobody has a quick answer to facing what we live now and what is to come. Planning without being overly pessimistic or optimistic will allow for safer decision making. When in doubt, go for the documentation or international institutions such as the World Health Organization. If you need data closer

to where your media is, turn to real experts, certified by a solid curriculum built on renowned institutions, be it universities, hospitals, representative organizations or big companies. Being flexible is important, but that does not take into account questions related to the profession's social responsibility. Those must remain untouched.

◆ **Images are more informative than words.** In virtual spaces, regardless of what type of media is involved, turning to graphics is of uttermost importance. Those images will be useful, for example, to demonstrate how to properly wash the hands or how to use or not use masks. They also help on understanding the medical assistance chain or situations involving supply and even finances. Remember: **people are concerned and, in that condition, they tend to get less focused**, a situation in which such resources may help considerably.

◆ Even if, logically, health comes first, **the economy needs to have its space within journalistic coverage.** The pandemic affects businesses and, thus, also survival. The economic impacts must be clearly explained, in a straight forwards manner and with much social responsibility. If on one hand you can't move towards alarmism, on the other, the audience needs to be shown a broad picture of what is happening.

◆ **Listening to every point of view related to a fact** is to be included among the basic parameters of journalism. And so is **performing a continuous exercise of doubt-**

ing. May a public personality, but from an area other than health, be included in a list of sources about Covid-19 and its impacts simply in order to be against confinement strategies? May a businessman from something other than representative organizations of his area be included in a list of sources about Covid-19 and its impacts just to defend the immediate reopening of his stores and industries? Would you invite one of those people to debate with an authority or an expert? The answer, because of the social responsibility of who makes content in the middle of a pandemic, needs to be “no”, even though it apparently contradicts the principles of hearing what is contradictory and questioning. In fact, the aforementioned types of people do not constitute real experts. They cannot be qualified as experts because they lack the knowledge and scientific support, or as protagonists, because they do not have the representativeness given, for example, by a prominent position in a representative organization.

◆ In a crisis like the current one, **government press offices, universities, hospitals, health representative organizations start working as media**, cementing a process accelerated by internet and especially by social media. E.g.: looking for information, hospital patients usually look for help directly on those institutions profiles in Facebook or Twitter. Clarifying their doubts is essential when facing the pandemic.

◆ In agencies and press offices, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and enter-

tainment services via internet, there are colleagues in different situations: their workplace, home office, next to clients or sources and even away from the job because of their age or health condition. **Sensibly, a certain level of flexibility starts being needed in what concerns even employer-employee relationships.** Or do you think that, as breaking news happen, a true reporter will hold its disclosure because he is out of the office? It was not like that before the crisis. It will not stop being so now that the professional is working remotely from home. The same flexibility needs to be adopted by a manager when **comprehending that professional and personal may overlap,** which can happen even with a reporter in confinement.

◆ Having a flexible approach to communication implies that **there is a need to offer multiple content, formats and routines. A newspaper cannot only address Covid-19.** A radio station, even if specialized in journalism, can and must work with consumer-oriented services related to on-line possibilities of entertainment. And a station more music oriented might as well have to include information services. Broadcast television channels already have programmes in which journalism and entertainment appear more or less frequently. In some moments, the space dedicated to leisure will have to be taken by news instead. Radio and TV will swing between live, totally interactive and with ease of reach to social media, to recorded, with music and third-party TV shows. There is a need to consider the hypothesis of periods of confinement happening along with those of nor-

mal conviviality, which will affect work routines: home office, inside a media or in external activities.

◆ Since the initial period of social distancing, **advertising and propaganda become even more essential than before**, although suffering the impact of, e.g. the impossibility of video recordings or photo shooting outside. Observe what happened during commercial breaks in TV channels. There is more voiceover and text than before. Resorting to stock images usually circumvents the problem.

◆ Changing routines have an impact on the technical presentation of content and might have been well absorbed by the audience, with a chance of remaining in the future. **The possibility of home office continuing in some situations has to be considered.** Before the Covid-19 pandemic, some initiatives where the journalist had the majority of his activities migrated from face to face to using a computer or a cell phone could already be observed. Advertising content producers were also already living similar situations working from home office and frequently also with third-party companies.



RESPONSIBILITY

Quality of those who recognize their role within society and exercise it as fully as possible, trying to follow ethical and technical parameters during their activities.

◆ What is the role of those involved in communication concerning the Covid-19 pandemic? How does that unfold? First of all, reflect on how facing the SARS-CoV-2 dissemination works. There is a global plan determined by the World Health Organization and others more specific in each country, region, state or municipality. They are focused on the crisis itself. **Making information available with responsibility is part of the process of facing the pandemic.** If there are various plans in the health sector for reducing Covid-19 impact, the same happens in communication, that encompasses a number of protagonists: agencies and press offices, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet. Each one of them is required to think about its restrictions, possibilities and needs, but doing so with the responsibility the moment demands:

(1) **Taking the measures needed** to protect everyone involved in the process of making content.

(2) **Informing with knowledge of the topics**, highlighting what is socially relevant and fighting misinformation and fake news.

(3) **Keeping content creation at a viable peak without overlooking economic sustainability.**

◆ In this pandemic, informing with responsibility starts by **naming the disease** - Covid-19 - **and the virus that causes it** - SARS-CoV-2, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or novel coronavirus. The same goes for confinement strategies:

(1) **Social distancing**, which establishes a decrease in interaction among people in order to slow down the viral transmission when it is already happening at a community level. It included closing schools and public markets, cancelling events and encouraging home office, while essential services are maintained. There is a recommendation that, when not in emergency situations, going outside should be restricted to shopping for food and medicine. In great measure, circulation depends on individual awareness.

(2) **Self-isolation**, with a goal of separating sick people (with respiratory symptoms, suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus infection) from healthy people, avoiding the virus dissemination. Depending on a person's clinical condition, it may happen at home or in a hospital. It can be prescribed by a doctor or another health agent and has a 14-day limit.

(3) **Quarantine**, which determines activity restriction or separating people presumably exposed to the disease, which may not be infected or might be in incubation period. It happens individually - e.g. for a person that has just returned from a trip to a region where infection is already at community level - or collectively - e.g. in the case of a ship, a neighborhood or a city.

(4) **Enhanced community quarantine**, when there is public power intervention, which restricts almost entirely the interaction of people in a community, city or region. It is an action taken when social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine prove to be insufficient, a measure also known as lockdown. Leaving home is allowed exclusively for food and medicine shopping.

It might seem simple, but **using the correct terminology shows confidence to the audience**, making for acceptance and understanding other equally relevant orientations.

◆ Working with information directly related to the effects of Covid-19, there is data that a journalist will have access to and about which he or she will have to think upon a number of times about how to present that in order to not generate harmful reactions to the fight itself against the pandemic. It does not mean self-censorship, but **being responsible about the narrative and its effects in society**.

◆ If broadly providing content coming from authorities and experts is up to larger media companies, smaller organizations have the responsibility of being close to the public. E.g. there is no station that knows its audience better than a radio in a medium or small city, given the depth of its insertion in the community. **Every media, no matter how big, has its relevance and responsibility.**

◆ Despite, in many cases, not being able to operate 24 hours a day, agencies and press offices, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet can be visited any moment and from anywhere. It is not possible to cover every need of the audience all the time, but the possibility of misinforming or allowing fake news to spread (through omission) have to be minimized. Therefore **relevant questions need to be answered whenever possible. It is also essential to clearly know the coverage possibility of content beyond its initial circulation.** Obviously, those who create content cannot be held responsible for how it is used in social media weeks after data exposed there have already expired. There is a need, however, to consider such a possibility and specifically state the when (date and hour) of that information.

◆ Which sources should be taken in consideration when treating Covid-19 journalistically? In any event, there is a number of types of people to be heard:

(1) **Authorities**, including the president, governors, mayors, ministers and secretariats of relevant areas. They are inevitable sources, even when they themselves are deniers or negationists. It is up to the professional to question them, even about the coherence of their opinions.

(2) **Relevant protagonists**, those that live in the fight against the pandemic, like doctors, nurses and other health professionals, patients, relatives... There is a need to be very careful in approaching those sources.

It is usual that they are stressed because of continuous pressure. Data and opinions given by them have to be treated very rigorously. On the other hand, life stories that always catch a lot of the audience's attention come from them. Again, be careful. There is a thin line between proper narrative and sensationalism. The eager to prepare content involving the audience brings the risk to escape from the proper tone. When in doubt, as the most relevant style manuals recommend, keep to nouns and verbs, doubling internal policy concerning unnecessary adjectives and catch phrases.

(3) **Experts** such as doctors in epidemiology and infectology, as well as researchers. In this case, speculation has to be distinguished from certainty coming from experimentation and scientific proofs. There is also a need to know how to translate scientific to colloquial language.

(4) **Witnesses**, those who see an event happening. In this pandemic coverage, the same recommendations given about relevant protagonists apply here.

But pay attention to what Laura Helmuth, Health and Science editor for *The Washington Post*, warns: "Look to infectious-disease and public-health experts for solid information, and be on alert for people trying to sell themselves as experts when they aren't. Lots of misinformation is circulating about coronavirus, and this problem will get worse as the outbreak does. Some politicians are minimizing the danger, some quacks are trying to sell sham treatments or protections, and some anti-vaxxers are weaving coronavirus into their conspiracy

theories about vaccines”. Therefore, **remember to listen to those who effectively have something to say, based on evidence**. Journalistically and from the point of view of public health, there is absolutely no need to e.g. establish a contradiction between a researcher of solid scientific production and someone with strong but unproven opinions looking for protagonism with conspiracy theories.

◆ **Ethics and responsibility go hand in hand with the support communication may give to facing the Covid-19 pandemic**. During his speech at the Munich Security Conference, in February 15th 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, already warned: “We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic”. And how can we fight fake news? When it comes to people working in communication, the basic parameter must be, on one hand, constant doubt and, on the other, the search for a reasonable truth. The idea of a “reasonable truth” - one which you come to at a certain moment, but may be contested by new facts and opinions from experts in the future - itself already limits the constant challenges in any professional’s day. That is what makes him or her someone who places themselves as:

(1) **Content curator**, someone who defines relevance or lack thereof about something to be informed at a certain moment.

(2) **Moderator**, someone who intermediates sources and the audience, encouraging opinions.

(3) **Certifier of events and statements**, someone

who states a certain fact or opinion as a reasonable truth.

Therefore, when facing any information, analyze what is shown and search for other sources about it, always considering if the fact, opinion or service have:

(1) **Timeliness**

How recently has this happened?

(2) **Proximity**

How close is it to the audience and its interests and needs?

(3) **Prominence**

Does it involve people who are really relevant?

(4) **Universality**

Is it really of interest for the majority of people and does it follow the interests and needs of society as a whole?

In not fulfilling those criteria, in case the information has already spread as fake news and depending on the level of that dissemination, contesting or disproving it is required. But **if the fake is relatively unknown, let it go unnoticed. With that, those who create content must take the opportunity to educate its public about how that kind of lying and harmful content can be identified.** Those are simple measure that need to be constantly spread. For the layman, it comes to reading the entire text and not only the title; checking the authorship, always suspecting a message citing, e.g., an information given by a *friend of the brother of an hospital employee*, never citing names and roles or, when those are referred to, not containing true relevance; checking for information timeliness; putting part of that message in a

web search engine; being careful with what any reasonable person considers sensationalism... When disclosing those procedures, the content maker also reaffirms him or herself as a curator, moderator and certifier of events and statements.

◆ Those who work in radio and/or television must especially question constantly about the **audience's understanding about what is news** - the narrative concerning the fight against Covid-19 - **and what is opinion** - statements from the communicator him or herself. Not making that difference clear can contribute a lot to disinformation. As content is delivered simulating a chat with the audience, those differences can be covered without the communicator him or herself realize. Therefore, be very careful.

◆ Not only must health be in the daily media schedule, but the **pandemic effects on the economy** must as well, in that case with the same recommendations previously stated about choosing sources and fighting disinformation and fake news.

◆ A pandemic has infected and fatal victims, but do not forget there are also cured people. Their example will serve as good news to the audience. **Therefore, try to value positive stories. That is a very important part of fighting Covid-19.**

◆ It is essential to value professional and those who are in the frontline of the fight against Covid-19. Without sensationalism and exaggeration on emotion, interviews and reports about the day by day of doctors, nurses, researchers and other health professionals help the public to understand the effort of society as a whole in joining the fight. The same goes for disclosing the work of those who maintain the basic urban services: provision, public administration, cleaning, security, among others. Obviously, as an example to all, refer to the measures taken by your media to bring safety to its professionals. After all, those working in communication also connect to fighting against the novel coronavirus dissemination.

◆ In what way can home office harm the relationship between personal and professional in content creation? How does that affect the responsibility of those who create content related to fighting the Covid-19 pandemic? It is not easy to have an eye on professional activity and the other on family, especially with the fear caused by the possibility of contamination. In the case of journalists, slip from strictly professional to personal may or may not be negative. Like in everything, common sense is fundamental. At times, a simple home situation will create empathy, transmitting the idea that the professional is in the same situation of its audience and that, together, everyone is helping to fight the pandemic. All will depend on the seriousness and responsibility of whom, even at home, keeps creating content knowing the right moment to open or close cracks of their personal life.

◆ Agencies and press offices, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet have the obligation to **use responsibly and to their full potential all resources provided by technology.** Questions about the pandemic itself and the fight measures taken by authorities can and must be settled with the use of interactive resources. Given the amount of fake news and the usage behind its dissemination, maybe posts in social media such as Facebook need more moderating or maybe even need to be replaced by groups in WhatsApp without the possibility of commentaries, but managed by competent professionals and volunteers. Well-informed communicators and digital influencers, both competent and serious, working closely with a younger audience or more related to popular extracts of population might, e.g., record videos, making World Health Organization recommendations have further reach through social media. Those are simple initiatives, but of great efficiency, for coming from opinion makers of confirmed reach with their audience.

◆ **In the inevitability of external work activities, follow the World Health Organization recommendations, adapting your actions.** Therefore, a television reporter or a cameraman need to wear masks, keep a minimum 2 meters distance from their interviewee, whose sound can be captured by directional microphones installed in extensions or by hand microphones held by the interviewee. Obviously, before and after their use, they must be cleaned with adequate material, the same going

for any other equipment, from smartphones to cameras. Remember that, in areas of armed conflict, the same basic rule is to be followed: safety and the professional's survival precede the relevance of any report to be done. Without you, what has been inquired, heard or seen will never turn into news.

◆ **Knowing how to administer not only quality, but also quantity of information about the pandemic** is also a part of the social responsibility of those who create and publish or broadcast content, avoiding overdoses of news about it. Interviewing psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts or other types of therapists about how the citizen can deal with confinement strategies is not enough. **Means of "escaping" it have to be offered**, informing about entertainment opportunities and making that kind of content available.

◆ Social responsibility is not exclusive to content creators. **Business owners and managers in communication have double the commitment in fighting Covid-19.** On one hand, they are required to keep the services because it is a moment of crisis. On the other, they are part of an economic relations complex threatened by the repercussions of this pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus. In the case of radio and TV stations, the responsibility, at least in Brazil, is configured by the bestowal given by the State representing society for the usage of a natural resource: electromagnetic waves. Agencies and press offices, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV sta-

tions and news and entertainment services via internet, with support from publicity agencies, will broadcast or publish commercial messages, essential to the resumption of growth after measures such as confinement end.



PARTNERSHIP

An agreement established by union based on solidarity between those at the same level, dialoguing and recognizing their differences as complementary and useful to completing activities seeking the common good.

◆ **More than selling time or space, media promotes - and sells - relationship between people and institutions either for or not for profit.** That calling has to be made available for:

(1) Society, including organizations created by it that have relevant philanthropic activities.

(2) Authorities, so that they transmit needed information with more clarity and speed.

(3) Companies, especially the smaller ones, that need to keep announcing so they do not disappear.

During the pandemic, this relationship network has to be cultivated without commercial interest, which is natural for any company, being determinant. Focus needs to be on the survival of everyone. Here, some considerations concerning already existing examples or attempts to establish partnerships on those three areas are shown.

◆ **The most evident partnership is established between a group of media companies positioned responsibly and general population.** A link is created connecting all of those in defense of strategies to fight Covid-19. It includes disclosure of hygiene practices, information about what happens and offering content aimed at entertainment. It

also includes valuing everyone involved in this process and constructive criticism related to eventual misconducts of a behaviors internationally validated. On one hand, therefore, there is the self-isolated audience and, on the other, electronic communication connecting those people between each other and the world. Therefore, the notion of partnership is already present in such an idea of virtual company.

◆ **Partnership might mean a more useful process.**

E.g. by putting epidemiologists or infectologists in chats or in radio or television shows, allowing openings for the audience to ask questions, media establish an evident partnership with the health sector. And clearly gain not just rating points, but also the respect of internet users, listeners and viewers. Something more evident happens when a newspaper or radio station establish a partnership with advertisers such as peer-to-peer ridesharing companies, offering free rides to health and/or security professionals. In both cases, **there is convergence and complementarily of objectives between media and the service.**

◆ Regardless of the scenarios that might show in the present and in the future, **there is a need to establish a partnership between communication area and the governments.** This way, tax reduction or exemption for water, electricity or telephone and internet must be considered, in a context of small or medium impact of pandemic in the economy, as some of the most important measures

for the survival of media companies and the continuity of services provided by them. In the case of a severe crisis, exemption from taxes and tariffs for a period and public credit lines might be the only way for maintaining companies.

◆ In different moments, newspaper from countries like Argentina, Brazil and Spain were delivered with equal covers highlighting the need for social union when facing the Covid-19 pandemic. Radio and TV stations from around the world had joint broadcasts with awareness and motivational messages. **The idea of partnership is one of the way for overcoming this crisis and must be taken into consideration by the various agents in communication.** A simple example: press offices from governments and health institutions have already been working in harmony with newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet. Obviously, transparency and responsibility are essential. And there are a number of other possible types of partnership, it all depending on the needs and opportunities of the process.

◆ In a pandemic, **the most essential partnership that needs to be thought within media companies is related to news-production teams.** It is up to business owners and managers to assure proper safety conditions required for continuing activities while following the World Health Organization's recommendations. Only by feeling safe and respected in their rights will profession-

als be able to work on their tasks, either within the organization or remotely.

◆ In any present or future scenarios, the dependency of newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet **seems crescent in regards to agencies and press offices.** Such partnership is especially important in the health and economy sectors during the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic and its unfolding.

◆ **Partnerships with artists, concert producers and theaters must be looked for** in order to provide entertainment in the form of online concerts, e.g. They might be expanded to possible advertisers, like companies that work with or recently started doing delivery. Finally, the media, considering their operating context, must **look for creative solutions** not only from its limitations, possibilities and needs, but also those of its possible partners.

◆ Media companies are organizations like any other and must take quick decisions to survive the crisis. Many of those decisions depend on the government, which often needs businesspeople pressure to act. That is why **it is even more necessary to strengthen representative organizations of private communication,** such as associations, trade unions and federations. Through those institutions channels of communications with regulatory agents are established and forums for idea exchange and knowledge acquiring are created.

◆ **Share information not only with the audience, but also with other media organizations. Competition cannot come before preservation of life.** With smaller teams and an increasing number of news, it becomes challenging for some to cover such demand. So be ready to collaborate. Give away materials free of charge. Several communication groups have already taken that step. Be sure that they will get out of this crisis stronger than those who remained selfish and insensitive towards the severity of this situation.

◆ **Stating that you are a partner is as important as being a partner.** The message in a brand of media companies must be suited to the current moment, meeting the empathy and solidarity the audience is looking for. Following a more sober tone, supporting donation campaigns, showing cooperation with health initiatives and even with competition, informing of attitudes taken to protect employees and valuing social responsibility actions are examples of essential attitudes.

◆ **The best answer to the decrease in advertising investment is putting your company as a partner of agencies and advertisers.** Disseminate credible data that helps companies to take better decisions, postpone billing, expand bonuses, offer discounts, reinforce service and even donate media for small businesses, after all they are responsible for an important part of the energy that makes the economy spin. Acting like that, the media organization will strengthen relationships and con-

tribute concretely for a healthy and alive market when the pandemic is over.



COURAGE

Show of strength in the face of complicated situations, demanding initiatives related to creativity in finding new solutions in a constant exchange between persistence, transformation and resistance while implementing them.

◆ Above all, **courage means to look for innovative solutions resisting to certain practices and transforming many others**. Keeping focus, one gains the strength to overcome and help overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. All this needs to be supported by flexible attitudes exercised with social responsibility and creating new partnerships based on planning with evaluation of limitations, possibilities and needs.

◆ In overcoming the pandemic, the financial crisis caused by Covid-19 can create three future scenarios:

(1) A **recovering economy**, returning - albeit slowly - to levels preceding the implementation of confinement strategies. But changes that occurred or were reinforced in the last months could remain, like: increased production e offer of content in multiple platforms with professionals definitely incorporating several roles; flexibilized work routines with a combination of work in different places, including home, other than a consolidation of mixed work and leisure hours; changes in the final product's form, going - and that depends on the resources of each media - from more simple to more sophisticated; and restructuring of advertising investment, with many companies readapting their focus to e-commerce,

and propaganda, with a need of the State to disseminate health public policies and those of growth incentive.

(2) A **recovering or in moderate crisis economy**, swinging between the well-known concepts represented by the idea that, depending on the point of view, a glass might either be half full or half empty. Since, via advertising, media companies represent part of the commercial realization of capitalism, those are dependent of the market's optimism or pessimism in general. It might be a consequence of society's need to coexist with eventual outbreaks of Covid-19 and, therefore, with new moments of confinement with obvious and more negative reflections on revenues. The advertising market would then alternate between periods of more retraction with other of some recovery.

(3) An **economy in deep crisis**, with risk of institutional disruption starting from a collapse of the health system and also agribusiness, commerce and industry, causing lack of public investment and extreme reduction of advertising investment with companies breaking and high layoff rate in communication.

In the last two situations, when looking for ways to lower costs, some possible solutions come from courageous union between newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations and news and entertainment services via internet; approximations among competitors, sharing structures; content flexibilization (e.g. streaming music in previously spoken-only radios); network operation; market repositioning...

◆ Regardless of ratings, companies with more solid planning and well conceived market positioning previous to Covid-19 are more prone to having better conditions to face the crisis while the fight against the pandemic is still going and in the moments following the lifting of confinement strategies. However, courage in this process does not mean excessive boldness and even less does it mean lack of prudence.



**HOW THIS GUIDE
WAS MADE**

Following the need to do something that would socially contribute to overcoming Covid-19, professors Luiz Artur Ferraretto, from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in Porto Alegre, and Fernando Morgado, from the Faculdades Integradas Hélio Alonso (Facha), in Rio de Janeiro, started keeping up with movements in the Brazilian communication market to face the pandemic. As similarities and divergences in initiatives were found, they carefully chose, from available references, the material to be used as a guide to base their observations about it. In that process, documents with guidance created by various institutions were especially useful. However, directly or indirectly, this Covid-19 and communication: a practical guide to face the crisis is guided mostly by recommendations from the World Health Organization. Support was also sought in researches already finished or still ongoing within UFRGS's Radio Studies Center (NER), with such content being considerably extrapolated from their original focus. After an initial discussion throughout March, a first draft was made by Ferraretto from April 3rd to April 8th, 2020, later reviewed and expanded by Morgado, who provided the graphic project. At NER's request, journalist Elisa Kopplin Ferraretto, communication advisor for strategic matters at the Hospital de Clínicas de Porto Alegre's board of directors, reviewed this work, further connecting the areas of communication and health. Meanwhile, Paloma da Silveira Fleck, Master's student at the Postgraduate Communication Programme in UFRGS, developed a website to make this content available online. The au-

thors and other members of NER are aware this is work done in the middle of a process with still unpredictable and ongoing consequences. Updates, corrections and reviewing might be necessary in the future. This guide - we reiterate - was planned to be made available in English and Spanish version, other than Portuguese. After the original work in Portuguese had been finished and disclosed, this version in English was completed by Guilherme Jancowski de Avila Justino. Their copyrights are totally free, as long as the attribution is stated.

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guide owes to the following works, with their results being considerably extrapolated.

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This guide also owes much to several conversations and consultations taken, informally and unsystematically, with business owners, managers and content creators from media in various points of Brazil. Without their testimony, it would have been impossible to consolidate much of the above.



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