

Inoculating Vaccine Disinformation: A Digital Media Kit Exercise

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ABSTRACT

Active learning through classroom role-play exercises has been directly tied to stronger learning outcomes in communication (Baglione, 2006; Govindasamy, 2016; Wang, 2016; Nair, 2019). This real-time digital media kit exercise to promote influenza vaccine uptake, developed for a public relations classroom, promotes active learning and fosters many of the knowledge, skills, traits, and abilities identified in the “Fast Forward” Report on Undergraduate Education created by the Commission of Public Relations, including business acumen, writing, editing, communication, creative thinking, collaboration, initiative, and time management. Assignment learning objectives include: 1) Understand the components of a digital media kit; 2) Create, compile, and synthesize relevant information for a digital media kit in real-time, mimicking immediate deadlines in the public relations industry; 3) Work as a team to achieve the desired outcome; 4) Familiarize students with collaborative project management software (Basecamp). Class-tested assignment metrics and a proposed sample rubric and self-evaluation form are included.

Keywords: health communication, public relations, media kit, role play

GIFT Overview

In response to feedback from recent alumni and prospective employers in public relations, students need to be trained how to create, find, and synthesize information for themselves in a variety of formats (e.g., written, photographs, videos). Likewise, students need to learn how to work collaboratively and how to self-manage projects rather than have an instructor provide all required components for them and to become familiar with project management software (e.g., Basecamp).

Therefore, this digital media kit assignment involved the end-to-end creation of a digital media kit to promote flu vaccine uptake on behalf of a fictitious medical organization (see Appendix A). Students were assigned various roles (e.g., photographer, editor, writer, videographer, social media manager) and given a summary outline of tasks to complete in real time (approximately 45 minutes allotted once the activity was introduced). The “Public Relations Director” utilized to-do lists and created content folders in Basecamp, to organize the students and coordinate the project. Ultimately, 18 students divided and conquered to produce two videos, two press releases, a fact sheet with directions to the office, bios for three fictitious doctors, social media handles, posts, and graphics for three platforms, three photos, a flu vaccine clinic calendar, a media pitch, and pitch list. All materials were uploaded to Basecamp and reviewed as a class at the end of the session.

Assignment Rationale

This assignment incorporates multiple knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) identified in the “Fast Forward” Report on Undergraduate Education created by the Commission of Public Relations (CPRE, 2018). First, students enhanced their business acumen as to how the various elements of the digital media kit could be synthesized to contribute to the bigger picture, including: 1) propelling a cohesive media relations strategy, 2) promoting behavioral objectives among key publics, and 3) developing

and engaging in collaborative project management processes. Additionally, this assignment was skills-based and incorporated the real-time tasks of writing, communication, and editing to create a comprehensive digital media kit that would meet industry standards. Next, the assignment fostered creative thinking skills, as each student had to utilize a limited amount of hypothetical information to conceptualize their portion of the digital media kit. Finally, this assignment allowed for developing key traits, including collaboration, initiative, and time management.

Assignment Learning Objectives

1. Understand the components of a digital media kit
2. Create, compile, and synthesize relevant information for a digital media kit in real-time, mimicking immediate deadlines in the public relations industry
3. Work as a team to achieve the desired outcome
4. Familiarize students with collaborative project management software (Basecamp).

Connection to Public Relations Practice and/or Theory

Leveraging mass communication theories, including gatekeeping theory (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950), inoculation theory (McGuire, 1964), agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972); persuasion theory (Petty & Cacioppo, 1987; Miller, 1989), framing theory (Entman, 1993; Hallahan, 1999), and uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), the foundations of media messaging are explored through role play in creation of a digital media kit where students create audience focused messaging from kit to pitch (Wallace et al., 2021). Exercises involving role play have fostered student learning as related to public relations education outcomes in crisis management (Baglione, 2006; Wang, 2017) and to develop verbal communication skills (Govindasamy, 2016). Similarly, in health communication, role play was found to be the most preferred and helpful method to teach communication skills to medical undergraduates,

with comparison of pre- and post-role play scores on communication skills showing statistically significant improvement (Nair, 2019). Role play exercises as a means of active learning are effective, as they provide a realistic environment where higher level learning occurs (Baglione, 2006).

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

This assignment was class-tested in a public relations course with 18 students in March 2022. After completing this activity, all students were able to summarize approximately 6 weeks later in an end-of-semester reflection essay about what media relations is and list the primary components of a digital media kit. Additionally, they could identify examples of strong media relations kits from brands online. They were able to provide an appropriate (hypothetical) media relations strategy for an academic unit trying to recruit students, including the identification of appropriate media outlets to target to reach the key publics and what kind of content those outlets would need to fully represent the program.

As one student explained in an end-of-semester reflection essay: “My favorite chapter was chapter 5, media. This chapter showed me how important media relations are [sic] and that it is important to navigate a crisis correctly and effectively. I will always remember this because I am interested in a job in both social media and public relations. It is important to have a good relationship with the media so you can always have your best foot forward.” Similarly, another student wrote: “I could argue that through doing my own personal case study and working on one with the group, it is the most immersed I have ever felt into real PR. Public Relations has so many components to it and I think that in going through the strategic process, I was able to truly see how it all comes to life.”

Finally, this activity was done under peer observation which included the following feedback: “I liked your mixture of alternating lecture, discussion, and an application activity. That mixture was really good. The open activity was wonderful--I was impressed with the

students' professionalism during it. They all worked together to complete specific tasks to compile a digital media kit during the class session."

Template Assignment Guide

75-minute class session | ~18 students

- Introduce the topic of Creating and Maintaining Relationships with Media Stakeholders based on the reading ~10 minutes.
- Complete in-class small group activity "Compiling a Digital Media Kit" ~ 45 minutes.
- Review the activity together as a class, and discuss lessons learned ~20 minutes.

The Situation

It is getting near the end of flu season here in March (the season is typically October to May), but your community is suddenly seeing huge spikes of the flu. Unfortunately, many people have foregone their flu vaccines, focusing more on COVID-19 instead. Now, many people are vulnerable to a particularly nasty strain of influenza, especially the elderly, infants, and immunocompromised.

Your public relations team (the entire class) works for a private medical group "Hopeful Health Hospital," and the doctors want to utilize both traditional and digital media channels to encourage patients and their families to come in ASAP to get vaccinated. This also gives you a chance to showcase the physicians' expertise by speaking to journalists about the flu virus, the risk, and the solution – increasing vaccination rates across the city.

Student 1- The Project Manager

delegates tasks to compile a complete digital media kit within the hour. You will create a Basecamp folder for all materials and invite your classmates to this folder. You are in charge of compiling/organizing all materials. On behalf of the organization, you will also work with the "doctors" and "videographers" to coordinate video content to go along

with the traditional press release.

Students 2-3- Creative/Videographers

Work with the PR director to compile short videos (minimum of 2) teasing the subject matter (consider video format and preferred placement – TikTok, YouTube, etc). These will obviously be “amateur” videos using your phones for today—no fancy equipment needed.

Students 3-4- Press Release Specialists

You will work in a team with the researchers (Students 6-7) to compile a press release to send out to local news outlets. Be sure to highlight the benefits of the flu vaccine and what your practice, HHH, offers. Remember a traditional news lede starts with the 5 W’s and H: Who, What, When, Where, Why, & How. Provide accessible information for potential patients. The researchers will bring in statistics and information that is pertinent to the key publics that you hope to reach, and it is crucial to base your press release and fact sheets on these findings.

Student 5

You will compile a succinct, one-page fact sheet about the importance of the flu vaccine (even at the end of the season), and work with the PR director & videographers to highlight these points in video content.

Students 6-8 – Research!

Conduct secondary research at the beginning planning stages to inform the strategy and tactics. You will identify pertinent statistics on the influenza vaccine to incorporate into targeted messages to reach the key publics that you identify. You will also identify the pertinent target audiences, beyond simply the “general public.” To do this, you will research which groups of people may be most vulnerable to influenza and help to advise the team on creating a research-based strategy to reach these groups.

Once the overall public relations strategy has been determined in coordination with the PR directors, you will turn your attention to media research. We live here in City Name, so be sure to research which journalists you would want to reach out to (print, TV, radio stations, etc). Identify specific people (min. of 3) who write health stories and work on the health communication beat.

Draft personalized email templates to each with their names at the top and have them ready to go—so that all you have to do is attach a public Basecamp link when the time is right!

Be sure to focus on the email subject line. It MUST be catchy, as journalists only respond to about 3.27% of pitches that they receive. Write 3-4 potential email subject lines so that the whole team can vote on the best.

Have a succinct synopsis of the story and pertinent facts in the email body with a link to the Google Drive to learn more & access additional resources. (Over 90 percent of journalists told us that pitches in the email body should be capped at 2-3 paragraphs!)

Students 9-11- The Doctors/Expert Sources

You should each craft a couple of key quotes to include in the press release. You will also appear in the video content being produced by the PR Director/Creatives and help students 15 & 16 with your short bios. (Have fun with these and feel free to make up all kinds of expertise!). Don't forget the photographer will want your photos as well.

- Student 9- Dr. Smith
- Student 10- Dr. Jones
- Student 11- Dr. Morgan

Student 12- The Photographer

Get strategic photos of the doctors and upload them/send them to the press release team ASAP. Consider what other photos that you would want to include in the digital media kit, and locate example images online.

Provide the social media managers with visual content to go alongside their posts.

Students 13-14- Social Media Managers

Create content that is packaged for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok (work with the photographer/videographer as needed). If the journalists don't want to use this content, you can always repurpose it for the practice's own page!

Students 15-16- Biographers

Oh no! We forgot that we don't have updated bios for each doctor. Please sit down with each of them to craft quick biographical sketches (500 words, max.). If you finish this task early, please offer to help your classmates with their assigned tasks. Many hands make light work.

Students 17-18- Calendar Gurus

Create a calendar of upcoming flu vaccine clinics at the medical clinic to include with the press release as well as a map and detailed directions for people to know how to find the office. Work with the press release team to include these. Brainstorm any additional visual elements that may be useful to journalists and potential patients, alike.

Students 19-20- PR Directors

PR directors will work with all students to coordinate a cohesive, polished final product. They will advise on public relations strategies and tactics and will ensure that other students are creating research-based assets for this effort. They will also review and proofread uploaded content to Basecamp, edit content, and provide feedback to the team.

Assignment Grading Criteria or Rubric

Additionally, a sample rubric is included which was developed based on the Fast Forward KSAs and can be implemented during the in-class portion of the activity.

Sample Rubric

Category	Score of 4-5	Score of 2-3	Score of 0-1
Required Elements & Business Acumen* (Team score—the whole class scores the same)	Includes all the required elements stated in the directions. The class was able to see the big picture and created a cohesive digital media kit.	Missing one or more of the required elements stated in the directions. The class was somewhat able to see the big picture and created a partially cohesive digital media kit.	Several required elements are missing from the project. The class was not able to see the big picture and did not create a cohesive digital media kit.
Writing/ Editing/ Communication	Uses proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation (GSP)—no errors. Uses proper format for communication channel (e.g., short caption for a social media post). Condenses main ideas, and writes concisely. Proofreads and edits final work.	1-2 GSP errors. May use an incorrect format for written communication (e.g., lengthy social media caption) but attempts to match the channel. Writes somewhat concisely, and attempts to proofread/edit.	3+ GSP errors. Uses incorrect format for written communication or does not attempt to write anything. Does not write concisely or pay attention to proofreading/editing to create appropriate content for the communication channel.
Creative Thinking	Exceptionally clever and unique in showing deep understanding.	A few original touches enhance the project to show some understanding of the material.	Shows little creative thinking, originality and/or effort in understanding the material.
Collaboration	Student was a team player. Utilized Basecamp without issues and shared all materials and checked off “To-Dos.” Student worked and communicated well with peers as evidenced by both verbal and written collaboration during the in-class activity. Clearly labeled files uploaded in a timely manner.	Student was somewhat of a team player. Logged on to Basecamp but may not have posted anything or responded to “To-Dos.” Student somewhat worked and communicated with peers as evidenced by both verbal and written collaboration during the in-class activity. Somewhat clearly labeled files uploaded in a somewhat timely manner.	Student was not a team player. Did not interact with the Basecamp platform. Did not work with and communicate with peers as evidenced by both verbal and written collaboration during the in-class activity. Does not label files and/or upload them in a timely manner.

Category	Score of 4-5	Score of 2-3	Score of 0-1
Initiative	Student took an active role in driving a vision for the digital media kit and provided guidance/leadership to other students in the class to ensure a polished, professional final product.	Student took a somewhat active role in driving a vision for the digital media kit. Student provided minimal guidance/leadership to other students in the class to ensure a polished, professional final product.	Student did not take an active role in driving a vision for the digital media kit. Student provided no guidance/leadership to other students in the class to ensure a polished, professional final product.
Time Management	Worked within the established time parameters to complete assigned tasks.	Worked somewhat within the established time parameters to complete assigned tasks (slightly over time or did not finish an element of assignment).	Did not work within the established time parameters to complete assigned tasks (Went way over time or did not finish multiple elements of the assignment).
Total	30		

An optional self-evaluation form (Appendix B) could also be utilized in addition to or instead of the other assessment components, where students provide insight on learning outcomes and act as co-creators of their grade.

Teaching Note

Public Relations Classes for Which the Assignment is Best Suited

This assignment is best suited for intermediate courses, where students already have some working knowledge of what public relations is. Examples of courses where this assignment may be incorporated include: Public Relations Techniques, Communication Strategy, Digital Communication, Media Relations Writing, and Public Relations Management and Cases.

Best Practices of Implementing the Assignment

- Introduce this assignment during a lull in the semester (e.g., immediately following Spring Break) to re-energize and engage the students.
- Be sure that they have had an introductory module on media relations and that they understand the functions of public relations and journalism.
- Try to ensure high attendance for best success; let students know well ahead of time that they will be graded on participation during this class session, especially if that is not normally part of the grading schema.
- Introduce students to Basecamp in a previous assignment, in which the professor has created various folders and showcased some of the features (e.g., message board, To-Do lists). This way, all students 1) have access and can easily log in, and 2) are familiar with the features of the platform.

Recommended Resources Related to the Assignment

- [List of news values and principles](#)
- [List of items to include in a digital media kit](#)
- Exemplars of digital media kits by major brands (e.g., [Delta](#) and [Airbnb](#)).
- [Canva Media Kit Maker](#)

Top Three Limitations or Challenges of Implementing the Assignment

1. For this assignment to be successful, student attendance is crucial, as the group project hinges on students being available to play a variety of roles. Thus, instructors may consider having a low-stakes quiz at the beginning of class or letting students know in advance about this graded in-class activity to ensure optimal participation.
2. Students exhibited varying degrees of familiarity with Basecamp,

and those most unfamiliar with the project management software struggled to get their bearings in the beginning. Thus, it would be helpful to have students log in and explore this project management software in advance, perhaps participating in an instructor-led activity in the classes leading up to the student-led digital media kit exercise.

3. This assignment mirrors the industry, as students are working on “deadline” and thus have no time to waste. Some students expressed stress at the tight deadline. If the class schedule allows, instructors could split the activity into two class sessions to allow more time to introduce students to the digital media kit concept and permit additional post-activity reflection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this assignment provided a hands-on learning opportunity that was well-received by students and helped to develop many of the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) identified in the “Fast Forward” Report on Undergraduate Education created by the Commission of Public Relations (2018). Likewise, the professor was able to observe how students work together in teams, better understand their baseline of project management skills, ascertain gaps in learning where students struggled with various components of the media kit, and identify key areas to help students improve their professional skills to maximize their future workplace success. In the future, it would be helpful to integrate a project management system (e.g., Basecamp) more fully into the course so that students learn to self-manage tasks, collaborate on projects (e.g., case studies) and become familiar with best practices in project management and organization. As some students were unfamiliar with tools such as Basecamp, there was a learning curve at the beginning of this activity, which should be accounted for. Splitting this activity into two class sessions, if time allows, would allow for more preparation and background

information as well as additional time to recap and reflect on lessons learned. Finally, a similar exercise could be developed and implemented to help students perform their assigned roles in campaigns teams (e.g., account executive, creative director, copywriter, research director, and media promotion manager) to help them organize their ideas, work collaboratively, and meet deadlines efficiently.

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Appendix A

The Organization- Informational Background Sheet

About the organization & pertinent information

Name: Hopeful Health Hospital

We are located at 555 Sample Road, Oxford, MS 38655.

Our office hours are Monday-Friday from 8-5 and Saturdays from 9-12 for sick appointments and vaccines only. We do not accept walk-ins except for special flu clinics during flu season, where walk-ins may be allowed during certain times.

Our phone number is (662) 555-5545.

Our doctors are Dr. Smith, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Morgan. Dr. Smith, a pediatrician, founded HHH in 2015, and Drs. Jones and Morgan joined the growing practice in January of 2019. HHH serves patients of all ages. Originally specializing in pediatrics, we now offer family medicine services as of January 2019.

We accept most major medical insurance plans, and uninsured individuals may receive a flu vaccine as well for a nominal administrative fee of \$20. According to the CDC, a yearly flu vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. Flu shots can be given to your child 6 months and older. The nasal spray vaccine can be given to people 2 through 49 years of age. We are fully stocked with all vaccines and nasal sprays during flu season. Families can come to get their flu vaccines together, no matter the ages.

Our Mission

To provide state-of-the-art care medical care that is delivered with a vital combination of compassion and expertise.

Our motto “Care, Commitment and Convenience” or the “3 C’s” explains the values that we wish to portray to our patients.

- **Care** – Each patient will receive consistent, individualized care that is unique to his/her needs.
- **Commitment** – Our providers are dedicated to you and your family. They are here as a resource and advocate for your family during each and every stage, from infancy to college graduation and beyond.
- **Convenience** – Our offices are open longer hours and on Saturdays to better serve you. We also work to get you in and out of each appointment within 1 hour.

Appendix B

Optional Self-Evaluation Form

Public relations practitioners have identified the following knowledge, skills, abilities, and traits (KSAs) as some of the “most desired” for entry-level practitioners in the field.

- Business acumen
- Writing
- Editing
- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Collaboration
- Initiative
- Time Management

**Please note: This list is not exhaustive.*

Please write a 2-3 page reflective essay evaluating your participation in the Digital Media Kit exercise and explaining whether/how this exercise helped you to foster these KSAs. Your essay should be structured as follows:

- *Define each of the KSAs listed above—what does each term mean?*
 - Reflect: Did your work on the Digital Media Kit Exercise sharpen and enhance your knowledge, skills, abilities, and traits to prepare you for the public relations industry? If so, how?
- *Write one paragraph about your role on this project.*
 - What portion of work were you responsible for completing?
 - What was your process for completing this work? In other words, what specific actions did you take? How did you spend your class time?

- Did you finish by the deadline? Why or why not?
- Describe your experience using Basecamp.
 - Consider:
 - Have you used this project management tool before – or anything similar?
 - What specific functions did you use on Basecamp?
 - Was this helpful? Why or why not?
- *Takeaways*
 - What did you find interesting and/or challenging about this assignment?
 - Which of the above-listed KSAs do you need the most practice with? In other words, in which area do you feel the weakest?
 - Conversely, which KSA do you feel most confident in?
 - What is your main “big picture” takeaway from completing the Digital Media Kit assignment?
 - Grading
 - What grade would you give yourself on this project (A-F)? Please justify the grade that you’ve selected.