

Exploratory Essay on Public Relations & Mental Health

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Introduction

Purpose, Audience & Context

While technology continues to improve and change, so does the use of social media and marketing. These changes allow organizations to have a wider influence, spread a powerful message, and formulate effective plans. Public Relations and Marketing are integral parts of any organization, company, or campaign, and their positions allow them to spread meaningful messages that can influence people. Being a strong advocate for mental health, I started to notice in the past few years that I've had ads for mental wellness companies come across my home page on my different social media applications; some are offering professional mental health services, while others offer ways to get involved in different groups or communities to assist in the overall mental wellbeing of its members. With all these different factors combined, I realized that a career in public relations or marketing could make a difference in the world and the communities closest to my heart; this also led me to see that a degree in psychology or behavioral health was not needed to make a difference with mental illness and the stigma against it. I have developed a critical inquiry question based on my research and analysis. Is there a way of using the current trend of destigmatizing mental health to aid in saving Veteran lives, and can one do so without having a professional degree in behavioral health?

Analysis

Professional Organizations and Conferences

First, I researched professional organizations and conferences. During my research, I learned that there are many different conferences and professional organizations, so I decided to focus on the few most popular to aid my research. One of these popular organizations is Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and has been assisting Veterans across the country for over a century, completely free of charge. The DAV has played a critical role in advocating for Veterans at the federal level regarding Veteran programs, transition services out of the military, benefits, and health care. (Disabled, American Veterans,

2019) The DAV gets involved in communities across the country by assisting veterans with and after doctor appointments, providing information about resources, and helping them take the next step in their careers. The DAV is a great resource because its mission is to provide and assist veterans, and it has vast opportunities for veterans to volunteer and help other veterans. The DAV holds and sponsors different events each month for Veterans to get involved in and publish regular blogs that are uplifting and informational. Most importantly, they keep their audience up to date on current bills in Congress and other pertinent world happenings that may affect the Veterans or their benefits.

Another credible organization is the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a non-profit organization whose sole focus is on mental health and bettering people's quality of life. NAMI provides resources regarding mental and behavioral health to anyone who may be looking for them. The organization is up-front with numerous ways to find help, whether it be their helpline, the national suicide hotline, or speaking with someone on their website via chat. NAMI strives to take action in their advocacy efforts nationwide, and their efforts have continued changing laws to aid those who deal with mental illness. Not only does NAMI get involved in communities all over the country, but they also provide education about mental illnesses, crisis intervention, and how to get involved to change the stigma against mental health. NAMI is an excellent resource for those looking to have a better understanding of mental illness and how to get involved in the change. NAMI holds an annual national convention, sponsors NAMI walks, and hosts Awareness Events, all to get people involved in changing the stigma against mental health and to help those around us with mental illness. (NAMI, 2022)

The current trends that I identified from my research of Disabled American Veterans and the National Alliance on Mental Illness are diversity and education. Both organizations discussed the importance of diversity in their programs. The DAV addressed the importance of having veterans volunteer for specific positions or volunteer their time to speak with another veteran.

NAMI discussed the importance of diversity in mental health in a few ways: the vast differences in mental health diagnoses, how diversity affects mental health, etc. The DAV discusses education concerning having an understanding of mental illness and what someone goes through when diagnosed with something like PTSD. NAMI discusses education in the matter of the importance of educating oneself on the nuances of mental illness and seeking further informal education to have a better understanding of mental illness. Trends from the conferences that I found cover the topics of awareness, joining the conversation, suicide prevention, and ways to get involved in making a difference. These topics are essential to be aware of and learn about to be able to work with individuals with mental illness without obtaining a professional degree in behavioral health.

Social Media

Second, I researched social media's role in public relations and mental health. The professional organizations for mental health and veterans leaned heavily into social media, utilizing their public relations department. DAV utilizes Twitter to keep in touch with veterans more personally. At the same time, NAMI uses Instagram to motivate and provide resources to individuals who may need help or know someone who needs help. These are both credible and relevant resources to use for mental health and an example of a proper public relations campaign because they provide a wide range of information, resources, and motivation.

Another popular social media site is Better Help, a company whose public relations campaign has been so broad and powerful that if you have been on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc., over the last few years, you have seen their ads. Not only has Better Help used its broad reach to help break the stigma against mental health, but it also provides different tips and tricks for managing mental illness, resources for getting professional help, discussing self-care,

and introducing different Doctors and Providers who work with Better Help. This is a great site to use when trying to understand a well-thought-out marketing strategy that has been seen and utilized by different age groups, races, and populations. Their balance of informative, factual data mixed with the service they are selling has made a recipe for success that can be learned from for decades.

The topics discussed on social media closely mirrored those covered by professional organizations and conferences: awareness, education, and resources. Trends in these topics are relevant to someone at my academic and professional development stage. Each of these social media accounts provides numerous resources, which is important in solidifying the organization's validity. This means it is essential for the person in charge of social media (usually marketing or public relations) to research and provide relevant information and resources to the consumer. In rare situations, the resources provided to the audience can be life-changing or life-saving, so the resources and education being provided are of utmost importance. In my research, I found that veteran or mental health organizations have been using social media to provide motivation but also to bring awareness to the stigma against mental illness. This information has provided insight into my critical inquiry question because it has shown that solid research can give the audience practical, helpful information and resources to aid in their mental health or someone they know without a professional degree in behavioral health being required.

Information Resources

Third, I researched various Information Resources regarding mental illness and public relations. I discovered there are different types of resources you can use to gain information such as magazines, social media sites, websites, and books. The same organizations I found are also good sources for information resources. Disabled American Veterans publishes a blog that keeps

their audience updated on new veteran benefits, ways to volunteer, and events being held. The National Alliance on Mental Illness provides recent press releases, publishes a blog, surveys and reports, infographics and statistics, and a newsletter you can sign up for.

Another great source of information I found was the British Journal of Psychiatry. This journal has numerous articles and research presented by doctors and providers from all over the world. Specifically, the article named *The Role of Social Media in Reducing Stigma and Discrimination* was particularly interesting and pertained to my critical inquiry question by aiding to answer how social media (usually run by marketing or public relations) is used to aid those who deal with mental illness. (Betton et al., 2015) This article also shows that individuals, rather than organizations, companies, or institutions, are running the online mental health conversation. One of the most relevant findings from this article's research was that the "rise in user-generated content means that collective action by individuals has the potential to influence mainstream media and policy without sole reliance on campaigning organisations. It may be that we are more likely to adjust our attitudes because of what our peers think than because of what organisations encourage us to think." (Betton et al., 2015) This is imperative to understand as an organization or anyone who may be entering into the Public Relations or marketing sectors.

While researching professional organizations, conferences, social media, and information resources, I found that they are all intertwined and relate to one another. Professional organizations and conferences use social media to advertise their services and provide information and resources to the audience. The information and resources being provided to the audience via social media make these professional organizations a reliable place for resources and information. In my research, I also ran across unreliable sources such as Wikipedia, where anyone can update the information, and that new information may not be factual or credible.

Influence of Context & Assumptions

Professional organizations and associations have largely influenced the field of mental health and public relations by providing different relevant topics on mental health, updates to benefits or resources, what changes have been made or are foreseen to come, policies, and what to expect when working with veterans, mental illness, or in the field of public relations. O*NET Online provides employment trend data that includes information on tasks, skills, knowledge, work activities, education, related occupations, wages, and employment trends for different public relations careers (O*NET Online, 2019). This information is imperative to understand the requirements for various public relations jobs and what the job may entail. It is specifically important to pay attention to wages and employment trends to help you map out your future. I found that public relations jobs currently have a faster-than-average projected growth, and salaries for a public relations specialist in New Hampshire are higher than the national average. This information is always helpful because if I ever want to move, I can look at the projected growth for my career and the expected wages to be earned in the state that I may relocate to. O*NET also provides an overview of skills and abilities that one should have when looking to be in the public relations sector, and this information is helpful so that you can improve where you may be lacking or see what skills you can bring up during an interview.

My military experience will be crucial to my endeavors in public relations and mental health. I can use my own traumatic experiences to shed light on what veterans may be experiencing and show the corporate world how to appeal to different classes of individuals regarding mental illness. Being in the military has shown me first-hand how important diversity is. Along with diversity comes education and the willingness to learn and empathize with others. A career in Public Relations requires attention to detail, integrity, initiative, dependability,

persistence, independence, leadership, and communication (O*NET, 2019), all traits that I have obtained during my military service and have continued to bolster in my time since.

Through my research of information resources for the Public Relations field of study and my critical inquiry question, I have found that my military service and experience will play a significant role in my career moving forward. I bring many skills, such as time management, leadership, communication, and integrity. The hardest part of the transition from the military to a civilian career is the change in verbiage and how we communicate, so I will need to be very aware of how I communicate with others and how my communication with them makes them feel. Another disadvantage is that my human resources experience in the military doesn't directly correlate to public relations in the civilian sector. Although there are similarities, my experience with public relations is mostly informal, so I will need to provide additional evidence of my trials in the public relations space.

Conclusions, Related Implications & Consequences

During my research related to my critical inquiry question regarding Public Relations and mental health, I have found that a career in public relations requires a wide range of knowledge and skills. Research is an imperative aspect of a career in public relations because the information and resources being presented to the audience or client need to be reliable, factual, and relevant. Communication is another factor that works itself into every aspect of a role in public relations; whether it is communicating internally with the organization or communicating with the audience, it is crucial to understand the context and how to communicate effectively.

Professional organizations and conferences are great sources of information for public relations professionals to seek out information, educate themselves, and communicate within the

community. These organizations also use social media to interact with their audience by asking questions, redirecting them to further resources, or providing them with information or motivation. For someone at the same stage of their academic career as myself, it will be vital for them to keep up with the employment trends, pay, and necessary skills needed for a career in Public Relations. They can do this by regularly checking the O*NET Online website. It's always advantageous to know and understand what trends are happening and what topics are being discussed when beginning your career in any field, and because public relations is usually at the forefront of an organization's image, it is even more crucial to have a grasp on these trends. Understanding the topics, trends, skills, and education needed for a career in Public Relations will help you better prepare as you continue your academics and eventually enter the workforce.

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