



Managing Fearbola – A public relations perspective to global health policy

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Introduction

“Nothing on earth is more international than disease.”

- Paul Russell





Background:

2013-2015 marked the worst Ebola epidemic of the century: 11,000 cases of Ebola cases have died, including 507 health professionals (WHO, 2015).

In October, 2014, Canada restricted travelers from Ebola effected countries to travel to Canada.

The decision violates the International Health Regulation (IHR), which then Minister of Health in Canada helped draft in 2005 in response to SARS.

Canada went against global health policy guidelines

The World Health Organization has expressed dismay with such policies, highlighting the lack of evidence that travel restrictions do anything to curb the spread of disease. In fact, the resultant economic penalties and stigmatization faced by states dealing with outbreaks can actually worsen the spread of disease by incapacitating already strained health care systems, driving migrants underground, and creating a major disincentive for nations to report infectious diseases in their midst. It also signals to other countries that this is an acceptable response to the crisis.



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of international law and will undermine our ability to deal with future pandemics.

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Scope of the presentation

- What I'm going to talk about: Findings from a course project in Organizational Public Relations (PR).
- What I'm *not* going to talk about: The Cabinet or PHAC's decision-making process.
- Conflict of interest: None. I am a registered nurse who has worked in CDC-Taiwan during the H1N1 pandemic.



Research Question:

WHY did Canada impose a travel VISA restriction?

- What does public relations (PR) has to do with the VISA ban?
- Do PR professionals have a role to play in the process?

PR \neq propaganda

PR \approx public diplomacy

Propaganda:

‘The deliberate attempt to influence the opinions of an audience between theory and practice through the transmission of ideas and values for the specific purpose, consciously designed to serve the interest of the propagandists and their political masters, either directly or indirectly’.
(David Welch, 1999)

Public relations:

‘The strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals and serve the public interest.’ (CPRS, Flynn, Gregory & Valin, 2008)

Public diplomacy:

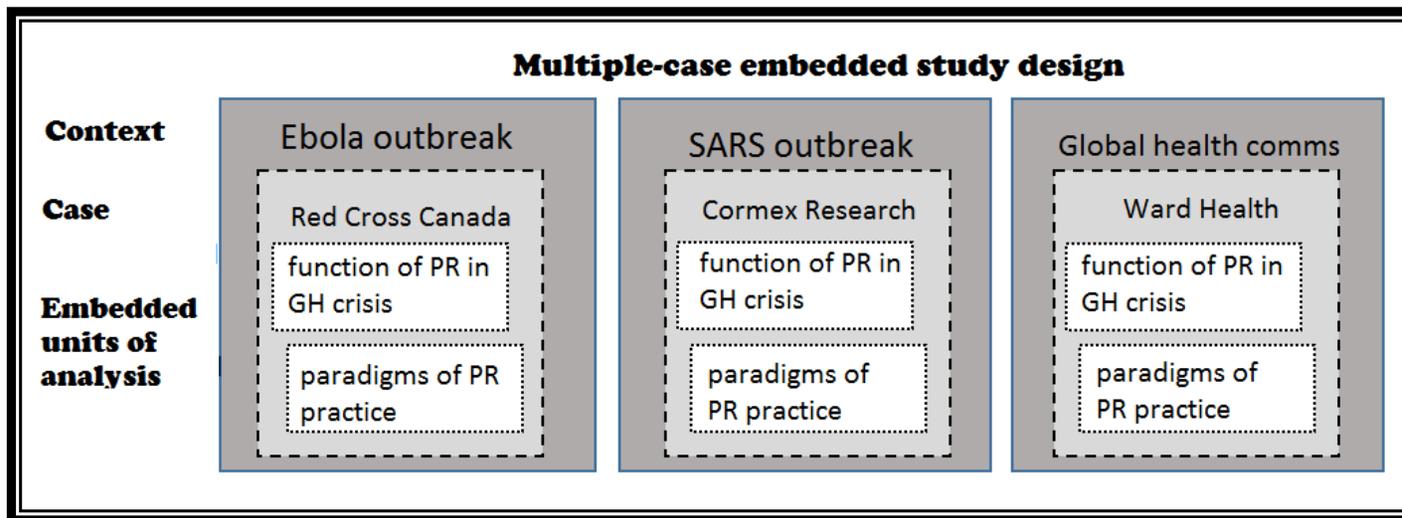
‘The process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented.’ (Paul Sharp, 2005)

Both PR and PD builds on trust and credibility, and it often works best with a long horizon.

Case Study Research Design (1)

(Yin, 2013)

- **Rationale:** empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Conclusions result in analytic generalizations (Yin, 2013).
- **Data collection:** data source triangulation: semi-structured in-depth interviews, documents (i.e. online news outlets, social media), and archival records (LexisNexis).



Case Study Research Design (2)

(Yin, 2013)

- **Theories of reference:** the conceptual linkage between public relations and public diplomacy in a globalized socio-political context in global health crisis management.
- **Purposeful sampling:** I interviewed 3 public relations (PR) practitioners with at least 10 years of experience in global health public-private partnerships. Interviewees are from Red Cross Canada, Ward Health, and Cormex Research.
- **Data analysis:** *pattern-matching* to compare original propositions with the data collected. I listed several potential patterns, and then compared the case study data to patterns to see which one is closer.
 - Potential patterns include: (1) border control during an infectious disease has always been the case, 2) Australia's ban justifies Canada's decision, (3) Ebola poses more threat than other international infectious diseases, (4) ?

A vertical rectangular image on the left side of the slide, showing a blue-tinted electron micrograph of an Ebola virus particle. The particle is a long, thin, filamentous structure with a distinct head region at the top and a tail region at the bottom.

WHY did Canada impose a travel VISA restriction (from a PR's perspective)?

1. It is the strategic management of the fear of Ebola

“People believe media is a reflection of other people's views. I may not think Ebola is important, but, Gosh, I think other people must think Ebola is important because the amount of coverage. And that's what the government is concerned about is that there's a perception of public opinion and they need to respond to that.” (AL)

Definition of PR

(Canadian Public Relations Society, 2008)

The strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals and serve the public interest.

(Flynn, Gregory & Valin, 2008)



WHY did Canada impose a travel VISA restriction (from a PR's perspective)?

2. Because PR serves the interest of the dominant coalition such that they are unable to exert influence to create a dialogue with the public

“I think the stigma is disheartening both from the official level and on an interpersonal, general public level. [...] Part of the work that I was trying to carry out is helping people to understand what the risk actually is, which to Canadians is negligible. It's certainly also helping people understand that stigma is killing people, not just there (Guinea) but also here (Canada).” (GE)

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WHY did Canada impose a travel VISA restriction (from a PR's perspective)?

3. To serve the Canadian public's interest

“Because there had been cases in the US, for the Canadian community to do nothing about that, and if a case in Canada do show up, then everybody would be saying 'you should've done something', or 'why don't you try and stop it.' ” (SL)

“[They're] Looking at the perspective of the public - what's the upside of putting in these types of travel restrictions versus the downsides? And there's not a lot of downsides. You know, criticism from UoT bioethicists is not a downside.” (AL)



WHY did Canada impose a travel VISA restriction (from a PR perspective)?

4. The decision is values-driven and interest-driven

“In communications, there's always room for improvement, in some situations it's a case where it's good intentions (like the travel ban). Yes, there are things that can be handled better, but are you ever going to totally eliminate controversy? No. [...] Obviously it's a serious issue effecting Africa, but if you're looking at the health burden, it's small, it's scary, it spreads easily. Really, it's the idea of it that scares people.” (SL)

Definition of PR

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What is Missing

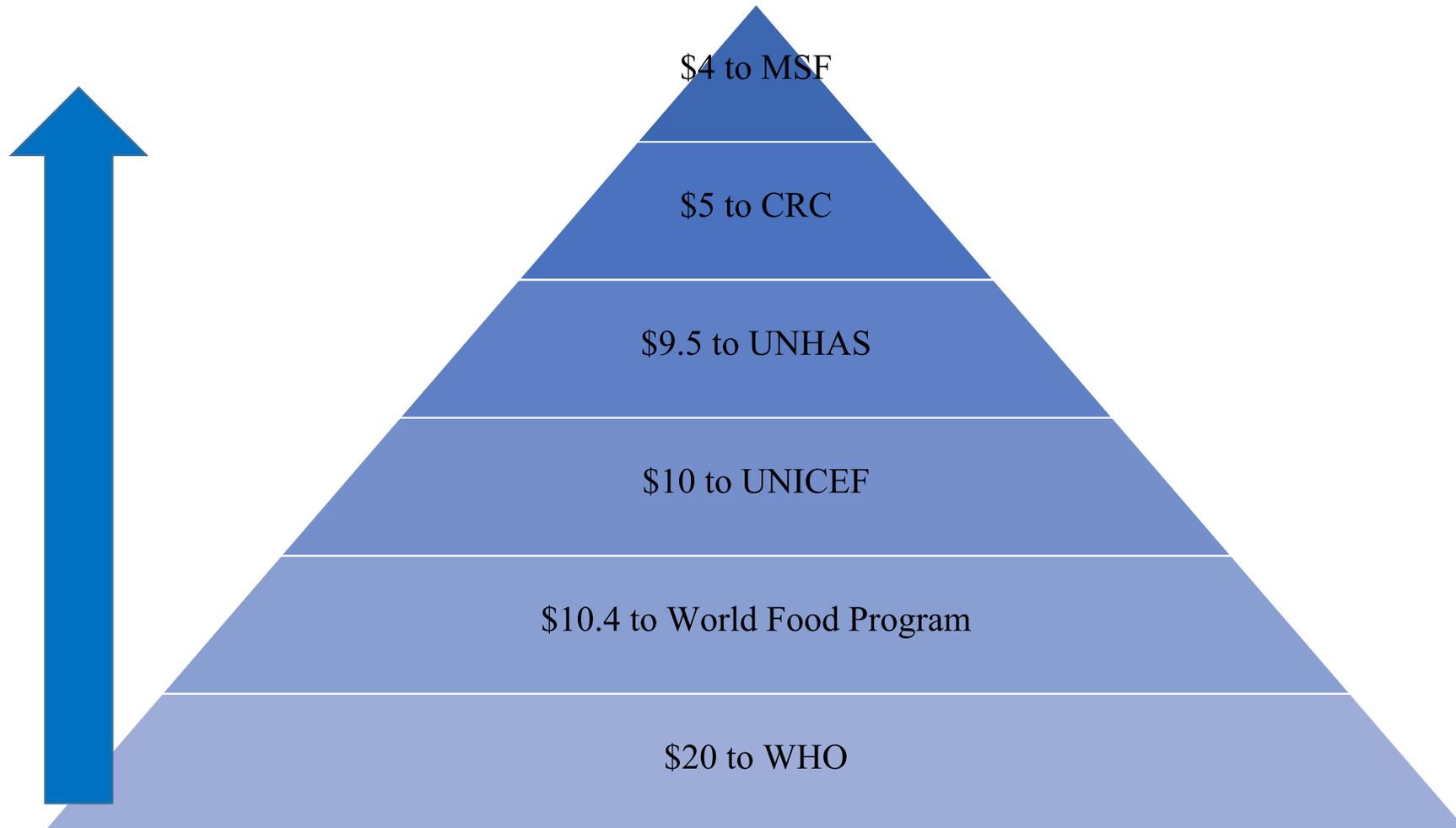
The strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals and serve the public interest.

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Some ways to improve communication

PR's rule of conduct:	Feasibility and criticism:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize the interests of all stakeholders involved in a public health crisis both at home and abroad 	<p>Low feasibility, state interest is a priority in the decision agenda</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present the interest of all Canadians as a priority 	<p>High feasibility, more media content analysis and public deliberation needed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and allow both formal and informal channels of communication to collect feedback from stakeholders (including the public) on behalf of each organization 	<p>High feasibility. In governance - more intersectoral communication between the Cabinet, PHAC, and CIC needed. In the community level- public engagement practices needed (e.g. emerging infectious diseases communication)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent in delivering humanitarian efforts on the ground 	<p>High feasibility. Ongoing provision by the Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) and The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operate within the boundaries of the values and missions of the organization at home and abroad 	<p>Low feasibility for implementing WHO's values and missions in Canada. High feasibility to operate in conjunction with the values of the Canadian government.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultivate media relations before any outbreak or public health crisis both at home and abroad 	<p>Low feasibility. Too many portals of communication in terms of public health crisis management.</p>

To be fair, Canada has donated over **\$123 million dollars** to humanitarian aid in West Africa (0.05% of total federal expenditure)



(HealthyCanadian, 2015)

To this day, Canada is still imposing restrictions on Ebola-stricken countries

“These temporary measures apply to worker, student and visitor classes of foreign nationals. This includes individuals who have resided, travelled or transited countries affected by the Ebola outbreak. Applications for temporary residence and applications for permanent residence are affected.

Discretion will remain for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to grant entry on a case-by-case basis in exceptional circumstances where travel is essential and in Canada's interest.”



Canada drops visa ban for Liberia after declaration country is Ebola free

HELEN BRANSWELL

TORONTO — The Canadian Press

Published Monday, May. 11 2015, 1:18 PM EDT

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How can we do better next time?

“Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts.”—E.B. White



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Paper available upon request. Thank you!