

Pharmaceutical Companies and the COVID-19 Crisis: An Exploratory Strategic Analysis

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical companies faced significant challenges to their reputations due to the spread of rumors, misinformation, and conspiracy theories. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on crisis communication by examining how pharmaceutical companies responded to misinformation and sought to enhance their reputations on social media during a global public health emergency. Drawing on an analysis of 6,466 tweets and replies from six major pharmaceutical companies over a two-year period, we identify eight core communication topics and two primary strategic approaches: preventive and reactive, both often supported by emotional appeals. The findings offer insights into effective social media strategies that pharmaceutical companies can employ to counter misinformation and strengthen public trust during health crises, highlighting the importance of emotionally attuned communication in building stakeholder trust, even in industries with historically low trust, such as pharmaceuticals.

Track: Marketing Communication (including digital) and Branding