

# Crisis Communication During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

Crisis communication is an important element in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. It allows for efficient exchange of information between the government and society. The crisis situation caused by Sars-CoV-2 has a negative impact on human life and health as well as on the information environment. Institutions and specially appointed teams responsible for providing information are obliged to provide reliable information based on expert knowledge. A dangerous phenomenon is disinformation, which, combined with the pandemic, may cause an increase in the crisis situation and the risks associated with it. Crisis communication based on principles and goals will lead to overcoming the effect of panic, fear and ignorance among the public.

The aim of the article is to present the methods of crisis communication during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to draw conclusions about the researched problem, the method of analysis of sources conducted with the technique of desk research secondary data analysis was used. Existing materials, including developed reports and summaries, were analysed.

**Keywords:** crisis, crisis situation, pandemic, information, communication, crisis communication.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has determined the operation of most areas of human activity. This process has also affected the information sphere.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, information about it has filled the world's media, constituting the „leading theme” of most news and journalistic programs. Such media actions were a reaction to the need of recipients, who were interested in the course of the pandemic, if only because of its scale. The widespread threat of the disease is already suggested by its name and the characteristics presented by the World Health Organization (WHO), describing the pandemic as the spread of a new disease around the world. The observation of such a phenomenon has not yet been the experience of the present generation. This interest was strengthened by the growing awareness over time that the threat of contagion was becoming more and more real, close and direct. Information about emerging new cases of infection initially described a distant world, the reality of which is changing due to the spread of the new virus, but the geographical distance from these events generated a sense of personal security. Recipients of media information are accustomed to processing data on distant misfortunes, which - although real - do not change the routine of everyday life, habits, personal sense of comfort. Over time, when cases of Covid-19 infection began to appear closer and on a larger scale, the pandemic ceased to be just a dominant component of news services, and turned into a determinant of the daily activity of most citizens in most areas of life.

The consequence of this process was a state in which the assimilation of information about the pandemic, which determines the level of knowledge about it, acquired the features of practical knowledge determining a set of everyday behaviours affecting the safety of one's own and the environment. Shaping the level of security at the community level, from groups connected personally to communities of a larger scale, related by common education, work, service, up to the level of community of society and the state.

At the same time, all narratives denying scientific knowledge about the pandemic, which functioned in the information sphere before Covid-19 became a practical, direct threat to the recipient of information, changed their status from potentially dangerous to dangerous here and now. Resistance to disinformation has become a factor determining the level of personal and social security during the crisis caused

by the pandemic. The factor responsible for compliance with health-promoting restrictions, considered crucial in the fight against the pandemic.

A feature of all the restrictions introduced during the pandemic, apart from their obvious pro-hygienic function, has been the varying degree of discomfort associated with their observance. This feature of the restrictions means that a personal decision to comply with them must be based on knowledge from credible, verifiable sources, and therefore based on science and trust in the institutions that decide about the introduction of these restrictions.

## 2. CRISIS, CRISIS SITUATION AND COMMUNICATION

In the literature, a crisis is called a breakthrough time, which can become a turning point, i.e. a moment that determines the further state of affairs. It is described as a state of affairs preceding a turn towards good or evil, a potentially dangerous state<sup>1</sup> and a period of breakthrough, a turning point<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it means a situation that ends the pre-existing status of the functioning of reality. It ends the period of stability, and in its course, it is characterized by imbalance or instability. After its end, the period of stability begins again, which, however, is often based on rules other than those guaranteeing stability before the crisis<sup>3</sup>.

It brings with it a dramatic change in the daily routine of human groups and institutions. It is very often a challenge and a kind of test for members of societies and organizations that manage their lives. It often hits the basic values underlying the organization, conditioning their effective operation. Its duration can be counted in hours, days or weeks. However, regardless of its duration and the reason for its occurrence, the literature describes some elements common to the state of crisis. The effect of the crisis may be changes in the field of economy and politics. The crisis tests the effectiveness of decision makers and leaders. Their cognitive, adaptive and moral abilities. Effective action during a crisis builds public trust in institutions, organizations and structures. And in opposition to such a process - failure of action and ineffectiveness of decisions at this time can weaken the structures of the organization, bring social dissatisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> *Podręczny słownik języka polskiego*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1996, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> Kopaliński T., *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1968, p. 417.

<sup>3</sup> Dayton B. W., *Management, International Encyclopedia of Peace*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, pp. 1-2.

Another key phenomenon, from the point of view of the discussed issues, is the crisis situation. According to the definition contained in the Crisis Management Act, it is a situation that has a negative impact on the level of security of people, large property or the environment, causing significant limitations in the operation of competent public administration bodies, due to the inadequacy of the available forces and resources<sup>4</sup>.

These definitions have key differences, namely that every crisis is a crisis situation; not every crisis situation has a crisis phase; a crisis situation is a challenge; a crisis is part of a crisis situation<sup>5</sup>.

In order to prevent the negative effects of these phenomena, certain actions should be taken. These include, among others, informing the public about the situation. One of the most important elements of all crises and emergencies is communication. It makes it possible to take appropriate steps to neutralize the threat resulting from a crisis situation. Communication is „a type of contact between two people in which the sender tries to convey to the recipient cognitive content relating to his mental states or external reality using tools specially adapted to this type - means of communication”<sup>6</sup>. Communication in crisis management responsible for responding to crisis situations is the exchange of information among entities that are obliged to counteract their effects<sup>7</sup>.

One of the parties involved in communicating the crisis situation is the media. Currently, they are the basic forum for the relationship of communication processes. Through the generated message, they can influence the behaviour of recipients. This can have both positive and negative connotations. A pejorative message in a time of crisis may lead to its deepening<sup>8</sup>.

Analysing various types of crises, the literature divides its course into five basic phases. The growth phase, which, depending on the build-up over time, can be mild or rapid, leads to a climax followed by a decline phase, followed by a decay period, followed by a relapse time, after which the cycle repeats itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Prorok M., *Podjęmowanie decyzji w sytuacjach kryzysowych. Część I: podstawy teoretyczne*, „Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka”, (2015)/3, p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Olejnik T., *Zarządzanie kryzysowe a komunikacja, czyli jak i kiedy informować ludzi?*, „Security, Economy & Law”, 16 (2017)/1, pp. 37-46, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Majkowska A., *Komunikowanie w sytuacjach kryzysowych*, Szkoła Główna Służby Pożarniczej, Warszawa 2018, pp. 50-52.

### 3. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Communication is a process that develops and evolves. It also happens with crisis communication, which occupies an important place among the means needed to control a crisis situation.

The key objective of the state during a crisis situation is to ensure the security of citizens. This can be achieved in many ways. One of them is effective communication with the public. They are actions taken before the occurrence of a threat arising directly from the danger. This type of communication is used when a crisis situation requires informing the public about possible disruptions in everyday life. Its basis is the range through messages issued by the services. This is to make citizens aware of the seriousness of the situation and to organize good communication between the services and the public<sup>9</sup>.

The key objectives of communicating in a crisis situation include<sup>10</sup>:

- taking control of the consequences of the threat as quickly as possible;
- minimizing the losses resulting from the crisis;
- upholding or restoring a good image by entities responsible for civil protection.

Fulfilment of the above-mentioned objectives can be an effective stimulus leading to controlling the crisis situation.

Important elements of crisis communication are the confidence and competence of entities responsible for the protection of civilians. These features manifest themselves in four overarching forms<sup>11</sup>:

- appropriate preparation for the crisis, which is perceived as the peak of the crisis situation;
- immediate response;
- establishing cooperation with the media;
- openness towards the mass media and presenting the situation with “one voice”, i.e. not providing divergent information.

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<sup>9</sup> Olejnik T., op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Danielewicz M., *Determinanty skutecznej komunikacji kryzysowej*, „Prace i Studia Geograficzne”, 55 (2014), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 12.

In the event of a crisis, a quick reaction becomes crucial. This should be done in an organized manner and in consultation with relevant stakeholders within the organization. Communications must be accurate and transparent, even if that means admitting you have no knowledge of the possible outcomes<sup>12</sup>. As for the form of the message itself, it must be short, contain the most important information and information that cannot be manipulated. Technical formulations, inconsistent content and speculation should be avoided. One of the most important principles of crisis communication is based on providing only true information. They must be confirmed and in line with reality. The media should be treated openly and in a partnership way. They are the ones who have the greatest impact on society<sup>13</sup>.

The state conducts crisis communication with the society. It does this by means of specialized services, which inform the appropriate media at the time of danger. The key task of those responsible for communication is to deliver the so-called holding message. It takes the form of a statement, the purpose of which is to satisfy the initial information needs declared by journalists. Thanks to it, you can reject speculations about the situation and limit the number of rumours that arise<sup>14</sup>.

Crisis communication involving the exchange of information between groups responsible for counteracting a crisis situation is conducted in order to minimize the negative effects, restore the state from before the crisis and prevent its development. Starting the communication process effectively neutralizes the threats accompanying a crisis situation<sup>15</sup>.

Crisis communication should be perceived in the context of internal and external communication. The first refers to one institution, service or organization and consists in transferring information between its co-workers. The second is a broader phenomenon consisting in informing the external environment in which a given organization or service functions<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Crisis communication tips, experiences and guidelines from the COVID-19 response*, <https://www.4cstrategies.com/news/covid19-crisis-communication/> [Access on: 05.05.2022].

<sup>13</sup> Kochan M., *Komunikacja kryzysowa jako czynnik rozwoju kryzysu*, „Kultura – Media – Teologia”, 39 (2019), pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Danielewicz M., op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Wróblewski D., *Komunikacja kryzysowa – wybrane aspekty komunikacji z mass mediami*, „Bezpieczeństwo i Technika Pożarnicza”, (2007)/1, pp. 115-134.

<sup>16</sup> Trzęsimech J., *Public relations w sytuacjach kryzysowych w Policji. Perspektywy badawcze*, [in:] *Komunikacja w sytuacjach kryzysowych*, ed. by Stawnicka J., Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach, Katowice 2010, p. 70.

Crisis communication conducted in accordance with the above-mentioned principles, objectives and based on appropriate messages will allow the services to function without disruption. Proper informing the society about the existing crisis situation will allow to control its effects in a shorter time and is an effective element of the fight against threats.

#### 4. PANDEMIC AS A CRISIS REQUIRING A RESPONSE

The development of the crisis in relation to the timeline outlined in the earlier part of the article could also be observed during the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, the development of the crisis was determined by the number of confirmed cases during the successive waves of the pandemic, and this one followed the above-described pattern. Regardless of the course of the first phase, a crisis means a decrease in effectiveness or a complete loss of significance of the rules in force before its beginning, as indicated by the definitions quoted above. Such a situation, as indicated by the literature and the authors' own observation, results in a state of surprise for the people affected by the crisis, and often also for the structures regulating their functioning. If the first phase is impulsive, the state of surprise lasts when reality changes so rapidly that it overtakes the ability to react effectively to its changes. In such a situation, new challenges appear faster than the effects of decisions made in response to changing environmental conditions. The state of surprise and the lack of the ability to effectively counteract difficulties generates an increase in the demand for data describing the changing environment. There is a growing demand for information on both society as a whole because, to put it simply, „people want to know what's going on” and governing bodies that need data to make decisions. The increase in the amount of information that needs to be communicated may exceed the capacity of the information system and lead to its overload. The system, still operating under time pressure, will require more and more up-to-date information to react adequately to changes. When such data is not provided in a timely manner, the decisions made will be ineffective. The system will become inefficient and unstable, which in turn may lead to a state of panic and an increase in the level of general threat, social losses that are difficult to accept and even more chaos and panic. Such a course of the crisis requires taking non-standard measures and quick decisions, often in conditions of conflict of interest of various human groups<sup>17</sup>. Considering the above, it can be pointed out that the efficient flow of information in a crisis can reduce the occurrence of its negative effects and social

<sup>17</sup> Wróblewski D., op. cit., p. 116.

losses. Internal communication is subject to procedures assigned to a given institution and determines the effectiveness of its operation. Effective communication of the institution with the outside world should prevent panic, ineffective or even harmful actions that may be taken under the influence of lack of information or under the influence of false information.

The pandemic, which began in the world in November 2019 and in Poland in March 2020, is a challenge for communication.

Alert Media Communications conducted research on communication and the Sars-CoV-2 epidemic<sup>18</sup>. 70% of respondents rated the impact of Covid-19 on the communications department as very high (8 or more points on a 10-point scale). The coronavirus crisis requires communication specialists to look for new ways to reach interested people, including customers and employees, and only 1/10 of companies and institutions expect that they will continue to operate as before the pandemic. Changes in the style of communication and the tools used are no longer predictions, but facts. Four out of five organizations are deploying dedicated crisis teams. Due to the pandemic and the accompanying restrictions, the vast majority of organizations introduced various types of special communication activities responding to the requirements of the crisis - 96% of the surveyed entities did so, and only 4% of them operate as before. The most frequently mentioned tool (69% of responses) are dedicated newsletters addressed to employees. More than half of the entities reduced their advertising activities, and as many as 73% of companies decided to implement and communicate social initiatives supporting the fight against the epidemic<sup>19</sup>.

The coronavirus requires communication professionals to find new ways to reach interested people, especially customers and employees. Already at the beginning of the pandemic, only about 10% of companies and institutions announced that they predicted that they would continue to operate as before the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The participants of the study were a group of over one hundred selected specialists responsible for communication in leading Polish companies, state and local government institutions and non-governmental organizations. PR service providers, i.e. employees of PR agencies, did not participate in the study. The respondents were only PR specialists, the so-called "in house", i.e. employed in corporations or institutions.

<sup>19</sup> Alert Media Communication, *Kryzysometr 2020. Komunikacja w czasach zarazy*: [https://alertmedia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Kryzysometr-%E2%80%93-komunikacja-w-czasach-zarazy-%E2%80%93-raport-z-badania\\_full.pdf](https://alertmedia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Kryzysometr-%E2%80%93-komunikacja-w-czasach-zarazy-%E2%80%93-raport-z-badania_full.pdf) [Access on: 07.05.2022], p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Alert Media Communications, op. cit., p. 3.

Unfortunately, the predictions came true and changes in the style of communication and the use of tools were necessary.

Since the development of a crisis situation leads to non-standard actions - also in the sphere of information - at some stage, some authors claim that the rules of crisis communication do not exist because there is no single effective pattern of behaviour that would be effective in every situation, especially the one described as a crisis, i.e. a state that is inherently different from the existing norms. However, most researchers are of the opinion that it is possible to formulate a general pattern of behaviour that increases the effectiveness of organized activities. It is usually emphasized on this occasion that the need to communicate the truth, to provide only verified data, not to contradict facts and obvious information<sup>21</sup>. Important in this context is also the speed and regularity of providing messages, which in their form should be simple and unambiguous, i.e. those that are not easily manipulated<sup>22</sup>. Based on the literature and the authors' own observations, during the development of the crisis, the flow of information directed outside the institution may be disturbed, due to the perception of the interests of these institutions and the media as contradictory.

In the first phase of the crisis, when institutions recognize the situation by collecting and verifying data, the media often demand specific information provided to them as soon as possible. In a situation where they do not receive them, some media may use unverified sources of information, while looking for drastic data, causing an increase in the recipient's sense of threat, at a time when the intention of the institution is to calm the information recipient to prevent panic behaviour. Moreover, expert evaluations, presenting drastic assessments of the situation and forecasts of its development are gaining popularity in the media, because they are more often sought by the recipients, while expert opinions presented by institutions are usually intended to tone down the mood. The media are also looking for mistakes made by institutions during crisis-prevention measures, while institutions would most often prefer not to report them. At the same time, the media, having developed information distribution channels, seem to be a useful tool in crisis situations. It should also be noted how heterogeneous the media environment is. Professional media often try to verify data before publishing it. In the editorial process, the importance of checking the credibility of information (so-called „fact checking”) increases. The social impact of each publication is also assessed before

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<sup>21</sup> S. Windon, M. Stollar, *Strategies to build trust for better crisis communication*, <https://extension.psu.edu/strategies-to-build-trust-for-better-crisis-communication> [access: 08.05.2022].

<sup>22</sup> M. Kochan, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

it reaches the information space, especially in a crisis situation. Good recognition of the media environment in this situation seems to be helpful in conducting effective crisis communication.

Taking into account the above-presented crisis development pattern, taking into account the risk of information system failure due to the state of chaos and panic resulting from the shortage of current data, it should be pointed out that this threat increases when instead of real data in the information space there are false data, which are the basis for to ineffective and harmful decisions. Counteracting such a threat is difficult because currently data in the information sphere flows in many directions. They are transmitted by the media to the recipient, but also flow from him due to the interactivity of professional media developed over many years<sup>23</sup>. Information also spreads without traditional media intermediaries - with the help of social media. In addition to the activity of social media participants, the circulation of information is also shaped in them, and according to some authors - above all - by the algorithms that organize this space. They analyse all data from people using this type of media. Some of this data is used to improve products or services. The others, called „behavioural surplus”, are transformed by artificial intelligence algorithms into a product for „predictive analytics” to predict what a person will do now, soon and later<sup>24</sup>. This process supports the individual distribution of information consisting in providing the recipient with data consistent with his habits and expectations and leads to the formation of the so-called „filter bubbles” understood as a kind of personalized information space, to which only data that the recipient is able to accept, because they are consistent with his previous decisions made in the information sphere, get through. The aforementioned algorithms<sup>25</sup> are responsible for the selection of this data. In such a diverse environment as the modern information sphere, the decisive factor in the selection of information is trust in its source. Trust is also a decisive factor in shaping attitudes towards recommendations from institutions. Especially in a situation of threat, which is the state of crisis. Human reactions during the Covid-19 pandemic confirmed this assumption. The trust factor shapes social behaviour, compliance or non-compliance with imposed health restrictions, especially those considered

<sup>23</sup> Szpunar M., *Czym są nowe media - próba konceptualizacji*, „Studia Medioznawcze”, 35 (2008)/4, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Zuboff Sh., *Surveillance capitalism and the challenge of collective action*, „New Labour Forum”, vol. 28 (2019)/1, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Popiołek M., Sroka K., *Bańka filtrująca i świadomość mechanizmów jej funkcjonowania wśród młodzieży - wyniki badania przeprowadzonego wśród gimnazjalistów*, „Zarządzanie Mediami”, 7 (2019)/3, p. 161.

to be onerous<sup>26</sup>. The level of trust in a social group is described as a function of its history and current structure. Within the framework of the structure, normative stability is important, i.e. the existence of an understandable, simple set of rules, the observance of which helps to achieve the goal, which introduces a sense of order, and thus security. Maintaining this state is supported by the awareness of its invariability or changes introduced gradually, as well as transparency, comprehensibility of structures facilitating operation in a social group<sup>27</sup>. Since the essence of the crisis is sudden change, other confidence-building factors seem to be gaining importance here. Another function in the process of increasing the level of trust in institutions is compliance with their general rules and procedures that apply to the entire social group, the observed effectiveness of actions taken and consistency in their enforcement.

Trust also moderates three basic, key organizational behaviours described in the literature, which may be a response to a crisis. These are decentralized decision-making that complements centralized decision-making: seamless communication and collaboration within and between organizations and institutions<sup>28</sup>.

The literature also presents practical conclusions from the analysis of the crisis situation. He emphasizes the need for efficient adaptation, because each crisis unfolds in a slightly different way. Therefore, it is impossible to act according to unchanging reaction patterns developed on the basis of the last crisis event. Which should not discourage from planning activities, but only from treating these plans as immutable. It is recommended not to rely solely on the hierarchical structure of the organization, especially with regard to the decision-making process. In a crisis situation, when the structure of the hierarchy is disturbed by the course of events, grassroots, civic and independent actions may be the only chance for activity. Every decision-making process should have a voice of „advocatus diaboli” searching for weaknesses, asking questions, presenting alternative situations to the assumed ones, views opposite to the majority of the group making the decision. Researchers also point to the usefulness of simulations, crisis behaviour exercises, and recommend

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<sup>26</sup> Marczewski P., *Epidemia nieufności. Zaufanie społeczne w czasie kryzysu zdrowotnego*, Forum Idei Fundacji im. Stefana Batorego, Warszawa 2020, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Czajkowska M., *Kultura zaufania w organizacji. Istota - potrzeba - kształtowanie*, „Annales: Etyka w życiu gospodarczym”, 11 (2008)/1, p. 314.

<sup>28</sup> Mishra A. K., *Organizational responses to crisis: the centrality of trust*, [in:] Kramer, Roderick M., Tyler T. (eds.), *Trust in Organizations*, Sage Publishing, Newbury Park 1996, p. 266.

treating a real crisis as an opportunity to gather knowledge that will be useful for drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of future actions<sup>29</sup>.

The crisis requires quick action and reliable communication and real information. Communication conducted on the internal and external level of the state is important. Many people and organizations spread scientifically unsubstantiated theories. The fight against emerging disinformation is also a joint effort undertaken by all European institutions. The European Union (EU) works closely with online platforms to encourage them to promote trustworthy sources, downgrade information that has been checked to be false or misleading, and to remove illegal or health-hazardous content<sup>30</sup>.

The involvement of international organizations and social media contributes to the transmission of true information and the fight against those that deviate from the truth during the crisis.

An example may be the TikTok application, usually associated with light and rather uninvolved content, which was used for awareness-raising activities about the risks and ways to prevent coronavirus infection.

The dominant role on TikTok was taken over by the World Health Organization (WHO), which has not been present on this platform so far, decided to set up an account where it regularly creates educational videos and animations, in which it informs, among others, about how the virus is transmitted, or how to avoid it, and posts statements by its representatives<sup>31</sup>.

Using the popular dating app Tinder, you can come across information inserts redirecting to the WHO website, supplemented with a list of some useful tips. It is true that the website only recommends avoiding close contact with other people during public gatherings, not to mention individual interactions, but what counts here is the caution of the users themselves<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> B. W. Dayton, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Walka z dezinformacją*, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation\\_pl](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation_pl) [access: 10.05.2022].

<sup>31</sup> *Komunikacja kryzysowa w Internecie w dobie pandemii Covid-19*, <https://maxroy.agency/blog/prawdziwy-viral-czyli-internetowa-komunikacja-kryzysowa-w-dobie-pandemii-covid-19/> [access: 10.05.2022].

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

Facebook, Instagram and Google have taken up the fight against global disinformation and issued statements in which they committed to removing fake news and harmful information. They also declared the promotion of knowledge about the virus coming only from reliable sources. They try to provide users with reliable information and flag false.

Google also created an overlay on the search engine window, which first displayed links to the websites of national institutions and news about the spread of the virus.

Google has launched an SOS alert for searches related to the coronavirus. The company does this regularly for emergencies around the world where public safety may be at risk. Search SOS Alert connects people to the latest news and safety tips and links to more authoritative information from the World Health Organization<sup>33</sup>. Top news, helpful advice from trusted organizations, and proven security tips are displayed.

Instagram and Facebook help you quickly find accurate information about the situation, for example via the Covid-19 information centre tab. All information is based on guidance from the World Health Organization.

The [www.cyberdefence24.pl](http://www.cyberdefence24.pl) website<sup>34</sup> ran a short guide to fake news about the coronavirus, in which it denied false information about Covid-19.

The Chancellery of the Prime Minister strived to ensure that all citizens of the Republic of Poland, including people with disabilities, had equal opportunities in access to information. That is why press conferences focused primarily on the development of the epidemic in Poland and held at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister were interpreted into sign language. The [gov.pl](http://gov.pl) government website provides up-to-date information on, among others, the spread of coronavirus, the introduced restrictions and anti-crisis shields.

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<sup>33</sup> S. Pichai, *Coronavirus: How we're helping*, <https://blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/coronavirus-covid19-response/> [access: 12.05.2022].

<sup>34</sup> *Krótki przewodnik po fake newsach o koronawirusie*, <https://www.cyberdefence24.pl/krotki-przewodnik-po-aktualnych-fake-newsach-o-koronawirusie> [access: 12.05.2022].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

A crisis is a sudden state that causes a change in the existing rules governing social life and the operation of institutions. The development of this state disrupts the flow of information that allows for effective decision-making and can lead to chaos and panic. Such a threat is even greater when, instead of reliable, credible, fact-based information, false data appear in the information space. Disinformation leads to ineffective or harmful actions, which deepens the destructive effect of a crisis situation.

The misinformation in the media regarding Covid-19 is current. It mainly concerns the effectiveness of vaccines against this virus. Expert opinions on mutations of human genes, mental illnesses and even deadly harmfulness of vaccines appear in all social media.

It should be remembered that a crisis in the age of the Internet forms very quickly and can be independent of the initial crisis situation. Therefore, consistency in all communication activities is necessary; in regularly informing recipients with regard to reliable sources; in the speed of reaction, i.e. immediate reaction after the appearance of false information and in showing empathy and understanding for people who must be in the centre of attention<sup>35</sup>.

Opposing disinformation is supported by a good understanding of the information environment, i.e. knowledge of how its components work, and by raising the level of trust in social structures, institutions and sources of knowledge based on proven facts. The course of the crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic did not differ from the rules described above.

In some ways, the pandemic turned the world we lived in upside down. However, we must accept that it has created a new reality to which we must adapt. With this situation, new challenges arise that encourage mobilization and test our readiness in crisis conditions<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> E. Bujak, *Koronawirus a zarządzanie kryzysowe w sieci*, <https://ewabujak.com/koronawirus-a-zarzadzanie-kryzysowe-w-sieci/> [access: 12.05.2022].

<sup>36</sup> Szczepański P., Pacer M., *Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Education-A Case from a Military Academy*, [in:] *Research and Innovation Forum 2021. Managing Continuity, Innovation, and Change in the Post-Covid World: Technology, Politics and Society*, ed. by Visvizi A., Troisi O., Saeedi K., Axel Springer, Cham 2021, p. 191.

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