ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT:

Breast Cancer Campaigns and Research Funding: The Perfect Storm

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Why does breast cancer receive so much more federal funding and fundraising efforts than other types of cancers, particularly lung cancer – the leading cause of cancer related deaths? This question is critical to public relations practitioners, in order to replicate or build on the success of breast cancer campaigns.

This study was conducted in two parts. First, an Internet survey was distributed as a pilot study to examine public perceptions of cancer related issues. Next, depth interviews were conducted with 25 experts in the cancer field from across the nation.

A comparison of pilot study results with actual statistics shows that breast cancer advocates are making a significant difference in people’s perceptions. Breast cancer advocacy campaigns are so pervasive, people don’t understand the significant numbers of other cancers that are diagnosed each year, as opposed to breast cancer.

Interviews revealed that breast cancer awareness and funding have benefited from a perfect storm. According to interview participants, breast cancer advocacy may be attributed to: the feminist movement, the HIV/AIDS campaign, celebrity endorsers, and a passionate advocate named Nancy Brinker, who had just lost her sister, Susan G. Komen, to breast cancer. Screening and surgical technology also advanced at the right time, allowing breast cancer research funding and awareness to benefit from the perfect storm.

It’s clear that Komen and other breast cancer advocates have made a huge impact on public perceptions of the disease and its research funding. Will other advocates be able to replicate it with the same degree of success, or will it take another perfect storm?