COVID Information Commons (CIC) Research Lightning Talk

Transcript of a Presentation by Asheley Landrum (Texas Tech University), February 10, 2021

Title: *Influencing Young Adults' Science Engagement and Learning with COVID-19 Media Coverage*

Asheley Landrum CIC Database Profile

NSF Award #: 2028473

Youtube Recording with Slides

November 2021 CIC Webinar Information

Transcript Editor: Saanya Subasinghe

Transcript

Asheley Landrum:

Slide 1

All right. Thank you so much. Sorry, I had to unmute my microphone there for a second. So we are so glad to be invited to these talks today. And I'm going to talk briefly about the NSF-funded projects that I have in collaboration with KQED Public Media, from San Francisco, called: "Influencing Young Adults' Science Engagement and Learning with COVID-19 Media Coverage."

Slide 2

So this is really just part of our project team. And you can see we have members from both KQED and my group over at Texas Tech, and then Scott Burg at Rockman et al is serving as our external evaluator.

Slide 3

So we had several project aims, the first of which was to build a better understanding of young adult audiences for science media, to provide information about future and missing audiences for this type of content, to build audience research opportunities for professional content creators, such as those in the news team at KQED, and build an academic practitioner collaboration. And this was part of a larger grant that we had funded through the NSF, pre-pandemic, and then to support the production of science content, specifically that surrounding COVID-19.

Slide 4

So we had two primary research questions. And the first was: well, how could COVID-19 coverage, we designed to best inform, engage and educate millennials and younger adult audiences about the science of virus transmission and prevention? And we had several studies on this. And I'll just briefly go over those. And then the second part of this, and this is the part that was led by Scott from Rockman was can we develop best practices for Crisis Reporting, as journalists respond to both constantly updating information and changing audience needs? And then how can these be used by other media outlets. And this was our process evaluation.

Slide 5

So, because we're limited on time, please do look for our QR codes. And again, these will - this will be available in the recording as well. These will link you to the full study report for each of the studies that I present. And on the final page, it'll link you to our website.

Slide 6

So the first study that we looked at was how misinformation is disseminated on Twitter about the pandemic. And the sheer number of conversations disseminating misinformation about the virus in 2020 was very disheartening, but not particularly surprising. So we had examined the misinformation being shared online, really to kind of focus in on what those knowledge gaps were from the public. And we came to realize that news organizations really do need to create content that is informative, accurate and timely, so that when people get online to, quote, do their own research, there is information that's accurate and available there. In order to help fill these knowledge gaps in our communities about the virus. I mean this emphasizes more important, the importance I'm sorry of doing research on knowledge gaps, specifically, like those related to COVID-19.

Slide 7

Our second set of studies that we worked on, were focusing around the idea of communicating consensus versus helping audiences better understand information by explaining, kind of, what's going on. So we all saw during the pandemic, you know, Dr. Fauci or others getting good at saying, 'this is what the science says,' 'this is what the science believes'. But what we found is that presenting participants with a consensus message saying that 'science knows this,' that their scientific consensus that, for example, masks prevent the transmission of COVID 19 - this does not significantly influence their beliefs. But the presence of an infographic depicting how masks help to spread COVID-19 did in some circumstances, influence participants beliefs.

Slide 8

And for this, we used the image that was published in *Science*, but we had edited it a little bit to be more friendly to general audiences, where we showed, you know, somebody who is infected- sorry - infected but not showing symptoms, wearing a mask versus not wearing a mask. And then when they're wearing a mask, you can really kind of intuitively understand from the image how you'd be less likely to both

transmit and take in viral particles. And of course, because of the nature of the polarization around COVID-19, we did find that political party was the strongest predictor of participants' beliefs about COVID-19 risks, mask wearing, and policy support for masks. But to the benefit the infographic, this here did seem to influence Republicans and male participants' beliefs about masks wearing, which is really important because those are the audiences that seemed to reject the information most.

Slide 9

We also had a survey about germ and vaccine attitudes and knowledge where we tested people's interests or beliefs, for example in or whether they anthropomorphize germs and viruses. So germs move to places that make it easier for people to infect them, which of course is false. But 60% of people got that incorrect. So this shows you people's understanding is still a bit - did not mean to do that - going backwards. Participants' understanding is still a little bit weak. In addition, whether understanding whether diseases are caused by viruses or bacteria is a little weak. We found that although the correct answer for what causes strep throat is bacteria, only 31% of participants in a national sample got that correct. COVID-19 - 60% understood that virus was the correct answer. It is, you know, the V stands for virus, after all, so that I think getting that information pretty consistently. But it's still surprising that 40% of people who responded to this said bacteria.

Slide 10

We also looked at the myths and rumors such as COVID-19 can be transmitted by a 5G mobile phone signals. Most people understood that that was incorrect. So only 10% really thought that only 21% thought COVID-19 can be killed by warm water. And only 15% thought that COVID-19 is less dangerous than the flu. So most people seem to be on on the right page here, where you start to see the effects of political polarization, for example, is in the belief that hydroxychloroquine has been scientifically proven to be effective in treating COVID-19. You see a bit more of a split there. So or - the belief that COVID-19 was created as a weapon in a Chinese lab - 42% believe that, so you can still see the misinformation spreading.

Slide 11

Also, we measured vaccine intentions. And again, we did collect this data during the limited availability of vaccines. So this is January to February in 2021. And at this point, 5% were vaccinated already, but 63%, they were likely to get vaccinated and 32% said unlikely and this is pretty consistent with what we see for who's vaccinated now, are the number of people vaccinated now.

Slide 12

And you can see that this varies pretty strongly by political ideology. Only 16% of people who identify as politically liberal said it was unlikely that they would get a vaccine, whereas 40% of those who identify as politically conservative said it was unlikely.

Slide 13

Finally, I just want to briefly talk about our academic practitioner collaboration. So this was one of the largest public investments in science media communication research collaborations, our process evaluation was conducted by, again, Scott Burg to assess the impact of our two groups sort of working together, and he had embedded himself in our team.

Slide 14

We did have many accomplishments, despite some unforeseen challenges. Really, the two different timelines that journalists versus academics tend to work on was definitely something that we found to be a difficult hurdle to overcome. But it did help create a mutual respect and appreciation for each other's skills and knowledge and working methods. We got to apply both applied and basic research. You know, we - and this whole process together validated, each team's different the ways that they've come to gain knowledge and our abilities.

Slide 15

Also, my team, for example, particularly the Ph.D. students, really benefited from having the opportunity to talk to professionals and find out what the greatest needs are in research for journalism and science communication in general. But KQED also came to understand, sort of, how we go about our research and some of the quotes from our, from the news journalists had expressed how it's really changed the way that they see when they're reporting how science is done, understanding science. And so we hope that this is a process that can be replicated.

Slide 16

So, thank you so much. If you want to hear more about our studies, you can go to our website. And again, this QR code will link you there. And here's my email address if you have any questions.

[www.kqed.org/about/program/cracking-the-code]

Thank you.

Lauren:

Thank you, Ashley. It's really helpful. It's interesting to see this intersection between media and science. So I'm sure we'll get lots of questions about this from the audience. And as a reminder to our fantastic audience, if you have any questions for any of our speakers, either hang on to them for the moderated Q&A session at the end, or go ahead and drop them in the chat and we'll see if our speakers have any thoughts in between now and when we open it up to all of you.

So I'd like to introduce our final speaker for today. Helena Solo-Gabriele who is based in the University of Miami. Helena, we're leaving it to you, please take it away.