



# Impact of Media on Perceptions of Food Safety Issues

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# Thank You!

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# JIFSAN Grant: 3-Stage Project

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Theoretically driven, multi-methodological examination of how people perceive media portraying terrorist attack on food safety

- Qualitative Focus Groups
  - Experimental Design
  - In-Depth Interviews
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# Variables Measured

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- Problem recognition/perceived threat
  - Level of personal involvement
  - Perceived constraints
  - Source credibility
  - Fear arousal
  - Information processing
  - Information seeking
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# Stage 1 Focus Groups

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- 6 focus groups of individuals from different backgrounds; total = 62 participants
  - Presentation of news scenarios and discussion
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# Severity and Susceptibility

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- “Level” of source used in news
  - Geographical proximity
  - Severity = risk of death
  - Susceptibility =
    - Perceived similarity to victims
    - Shared experience with source of news
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# Perceived Barriers

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- Time
  - Lack of access to resources
  - Engagement in other activities
  - Language
  - Perceptions of uncertainty, fear
  - Low self-efficacy, fatalistic beliefs
  - Cognitive overload of information
  - Prioritization of “everyday life” risks
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# Phase 1 Key Findings

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- Sharing experience/risk with source important for problem recognition, personal involvement, info processing and info seeking
  - Perceived similarity to victims important
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# Stage 2 Experiment

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- H1: Perceived shared experience with source increases 1) problem recognition; 2) involvement; 3) perceived constraints; 4) info processing; 5) info seeking
  - H2: Perceived shared experience with victim increases 1) problem recognition; 2) involvement; 3) perceived constraints; 4) info processing; 5) info seeking
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# Experimental Design

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- Random assignment to four treatment groups (2 by 2)
  - Produced simulated print news article
  - 2 phases of pre-tests
  - Manipulation checks confirmed
  - 94 participants, 50% female
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# Hypotheses Supported

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- Perceived shared experience with source significantly increased problem recognition ( $F[1,89]=4.62, p < .05$ )
  - Shared experiences with source *and* victim also lead to significantly higher problem recognition ( $F[1,86]=4.55, p < .05$ )
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# Hypotheses Supported

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- Perceived shared experience with source significantly increased males' information processing ( $F[1,86]=4.13, p < .05$ )
  - Shared experience with source significantly increased females' level of involvement ( $F[1,86]=3.34, p < .05, \text{one-tailed}$ )
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# Stage 3 In-depth Interviews

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- Interviews with women only, to explore in-depth how media sources can lead to greater personal salience, perceived susceptibility, and other potential outcomes.
  - 23 women, variety of states, diversity in ethnic and racial backgrounds, age, and professional experience
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# Phase 3 Key Findings

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- Perceived shared experience with spokesperson affected level of personal salience, and message interpretation
    1. Identity as caregiver, family contexts
    2. Spokesperson's human vulnerability over expert persona →
      - Personal involvement, higher trust
      - Negative reaction, low trust
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# FDA Funded Study

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- Specific call to focus:
  - Contradictory, sometimes conflicting media messages about safety of eating fish
  - Pregnant and nursing women, women of childbearing age, mothers of young children
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# Focus Groups

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- How do women perceive media environment about safety of eating fish?
  - What factors impact interpretations of the safety practices requested?
  - What constraints prevent the women from understanding safety guidelines as presented in media?
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# Facts are confusing, doubtful

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- Confusion, “cloudy” facts
  - Skepticism, doubt
  - “Why is it so controversial? Either mercury is okay for you or it’s not. It should be fairly black and white.”
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# Perceived Barriers

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- Availability of realistic, comparable options to eating fish
  - Additional, enabling resources to assess facts
  - Other health concerns
  - Self-efficacy: am I capable of understanding amounts, types, to be safe?
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# Filtered facts through...

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- Eating practices, current behaviors, family traditions
  - Comparative food risks
  - Social, peer networks and “food rumors”
  - Sense of vulnerability as pregnant woman
  - Economic livelihood
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# Responses

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- Negotiating the conflicting messages typically led to perceived inability to balance benefits with risk
  - Cut out fish from diet altogether
  - Ignored, disdained, or resisted risk messages and ate fish as always did.
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# Theoretical Significance

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- Support integration of theories
  - Elaborated on dimensions of key variables
  - Applicability of theory to areas of media, bioterrorism, and conflicting health info
  - Top research paper awards from national communication conference; published in field's ranked journals
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# Practical Significance

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- Guidance for dissemination of information in time of risk
  - Prioritization of factors before communicating to media
  - Address constraints in order to increase likelihood of preventive actions
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# Publications from Research

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- Aldoory, L., & Van Dyke, M. (2006). The roles of perceived “shared” involvement and information overload in understanding how audiences make meaning of news about bioterrorism. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83(2), 346-361.
  - Aldoory, L., Kim, J. N., & Tindall, N. (2010). The Influence of Perceived Shared Risk in Crisis Communication: Elaborating the Situational Theory of Publics. *Public Relations Review*.
  - Vardeman, J. E., & Aldoory, L. (2008). How women make meaning of their shared involvement with spokespersons in news about bioterrorism. *Media Report to Women*, 36(2).
  - Vardeman, J. E., & Aldoory, L. (2008). A qualitative study of how women make meaning of contradictory media messages about the risks of eating fish. *Health Communication*, 23(3), 282-291.
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