



The Impact of Risk Messages about Food Bioterrorism on Attitudes and Behaviors

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Environmental Context

- Post 9/11 environment
 - Heightened media attention
 - Increased public criticism of government
 - Media “savvy” audiences
 - Heightened perceptions of risk
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Practical Implications

- Keeping the public safe
 - Controlling spread of food-borne disease
 - Relationship with media personnel
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Theoretical Significance

- Integration of theories from different subdisciplines in communication
 - Extension of theory into understudied areas
 - Qualitative detail not often gathered in order to enhance and apply theoretical concepts
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Variables Measured

- Perceived threat/problem recognition
 - Level of personal involvement
 - Perceived barriers/constraint recognition
 - Self-efficacy
 - Source credibility
 - Fear arousal
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Two-Stage Method

1. Qualitative Discussion Groups
 2. Experimental Design
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Stage 1 Discussion Groups

- 6 discussion groups of various groups of individuals
 - A total of 62 participants
 - Trained moderators
 - Interview guide and pre-test
 - Presentation of news scenarios as well as general discussion
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Perceived Problem/threat

- “Level” of source used in news
 - Geographical proximity
 - Severity of risk, risk of death
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Personal Involvement

- Proximity
 - Perceived similarity to victims
 - Perceived susceptibility
 - Shared experience with source of news
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External Constraints

- Time
 - Lack of access to resources
 - Engagement in other activities
 - Language
 - Diet and health
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Internal Constraints

- Perceptions of uncertainty
 - Low self-efficacy
 - Fatalistic beliefs
 - Cognitive overload of information
 - Perceived inability to process information
 - Prioritization of risks in everyday life
 - Fear
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Theoretical Significance

- Supported integration of theories from different subdisciplines in communication
 - Elaborated on dimensions of key variables from well known theories
 - Applicability of theories to areas of bioterrorism and risk communication
 - A top research paper award from national communication conference
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Practical Significance

- 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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Challenges and Limitations

- Lack of visual stimulus used in discussion groups
 - Lack of diverse audiences to be included in participant pool
 - Little distinction between 1) media as focus of perceptions and 2) government sources as focus of perceptions
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Next Step: Stage 2 Experiment

- Experimental design: pre-test, post-test with control group
 - Focus on ways to increase problem recognition and level of involvement and decrease constraints
 - Manipulate perceived shared experience
 - Produce simulated radio news story
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