

Trust in Covid Vaccines

Addressing vaccine hesitancy: Reviewing principles of COVID-19 vaccine communications and building trust

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UF's Center for Public Interest Communications helps movements, foundations, agencies and organizations apply behavioral, cognitive and social science to build better communication strategies for the common good.

At **Trusting News**, we demystify trust in news and empower journalists to take responsibility for actively demonstrating credibility and earning trust. We are a project of the Reynolds Journalism Institute and the American Press Institute.







How we approached this project

Our process included



Identifying leading scholars in vaccine confidence



Five in-depth conversations with 16 scholars over five days



Extracting eight core principles, reviewed with scholars



Testing principles through a survey in the UK,
Germany, France and the US



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8 principles for COVID-19 vaccine communications



Worldviews



Timing



Messengers



Narratives



Relationships



Social Norms



Emotions



Motivations



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Public Health Goal: Getting to herd immunity





It all starts with trust

Issues underlying lack of trust in vaccines

- ✓✓ Perceived inconsistency
- ✓✓ False balance
- ✓✓ Wrong messages
- ✓✓ Abstraction
- ✓✓ Wrong messengers
- ✓✓ Poor timing

**It's not the media's job to convince
people to take the vaccine.
(But what we do has big effects).**

**Just sharing information
is not enough.**

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 1:

**Everyone's worldviews, identities
and moral values
affect what they find credible**

Worldviews:

Are a collection of stories and expectations of the world around us.

Guide how people think the world works.

Exist along a continuum.

When presented with information and solutions that do not resonate with a community's worldviews, while truthful that information can often lead to information avoidance or perceived threat.

Moral values:

Guide people's decision making

Serve as basis for quick judgements of good or bad.

Are the underlying reason for different motivations across different cultures.

Moral Foundations Theory

Loyalty

Fairness

Care

Authority

Sanctity/Purity

Breakdown of motivations by value

Conservative Value	Motivation
In-group loyalty	Emphasis on loyalty or betrayal to his or her group. Emphasis on protecting the group, even above their own interests.
Respect for authority	Emphasis on respect for tradition and hierarchy and responsibility to fulfill duties of his or her role within society.
Purity/Sanctity	Identifying something as unnatural or disgusting, or violating standards of purity and decency. Emphasis on acting in a virtuous way.

Liberal Value	Motivation
Protection from harm	Emphasis on protecting someone from harm, suffering, emotional distress, violence. Care for the weak and vulnerable.
Fairness	Emphasis on equality and justice, i.e., people treated differently than others or someone denied his or her rights.

Identities:

Are the groups we see ourselves belonging to.

We self-select them.

People within identity groups share beliefs and norms.

Ex: Sister, Mother, Muslim, Student

We are unlikely to engage in behavior that separates us from the groups we identify with.

“Attitudes towards vaccines are about the way people think the world operates. I guess the association we see between populist or anti establishment voters and vaccine hesitancy relates to something about people's views towards elites and experts. This relates to people's understanding of the States and capitalism, pharmaceutical companies and things like this. So I think we have to really understand that there's some deep structural determinants of vaccine hesitancy that go way beyond information and awareness.”

**-Jonathan Kennedy, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, Global Public Health,
Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry,
Queen Mary University of London**





“What's going to be compelling for some audiences is what resonates with their personal values. So for those who are rugged individuals, it could be about the freedom to go back to work as quickly as possible, and the freedom to go back and congregate at your place of worship as soon as possible. And the freedom to move about on your own in your community on your own time. So it's all about that sense of individual agency, but for others, it may be about responsibility to community and family and being a good parent, a good daughter or son to protect an elderly immunocompromised parent.”

-Monica Schoch-Spana, Ph.D.

Medical Anthropologist and Senior Scholar, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security

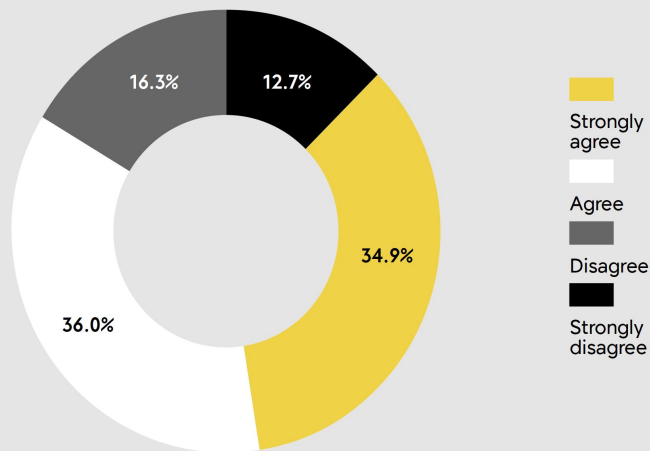


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Loyalty to their groups

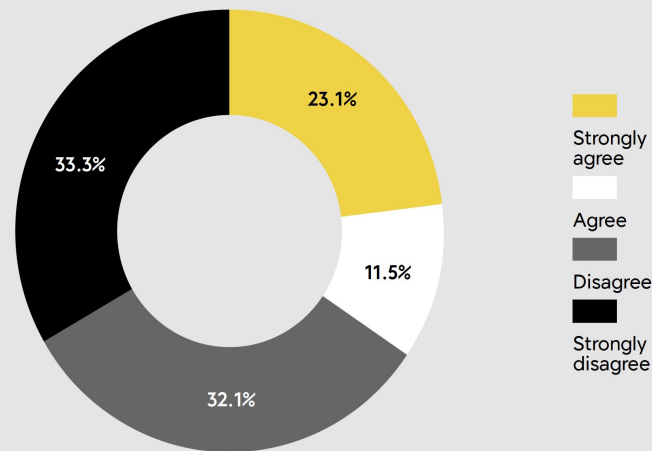
The more loyal people are to their “in group,” the more likely they are to think the vaccine should be mandatory

Of the people who are highly loyal to their in-group, 71% of them agree or strongly agree the vaccine should be mandatory.



The less loyal people are to their “in group,” the less likely they are to think the vaccine should be mandatory

Almost 65% of the people who do not value in-group loyalty disagree or strongly disagree the vaccine should be mandatory.



Conspiracy theories resonate with identities



Recommendations for Media

Recognize how worldviews, identity and moral values affect information we find true



The worldviews, identities and moral values of your communities drives what they believe to be true and what sources are **most important to them**.



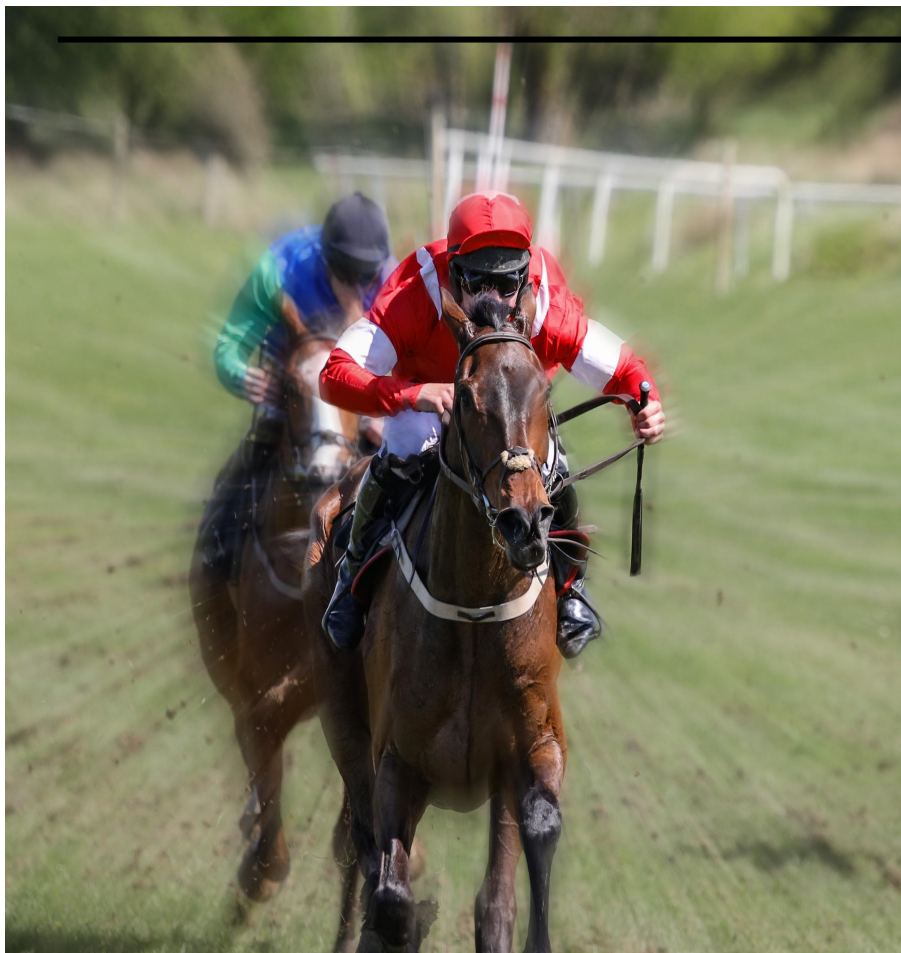
Our own worldviews and values can inadvertently bleed through our coverage — what we think is important may not be as valued among our communities. Journalists' focus on fairness, equality and holding those in power to account may skew to foundational values of some communities vs others.



Invest in understanding **your community's perceptions**, assumptions and information sources. Ask them what they need help understanding or what their concerns are. Listen for their values, so you can speak their language.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 2:

Who is first often sets the conversation



People trust what they hear first



Consistency counts



Different messengers with same message



Encourages critical thinking



A Tactic: Inoculation Theory



Saris or kilts

*“Inoculation theory is perfect for the issue at hand [COVID-19 vaccine]. The idea being that having the correct information initially is better than when you’re being exposed to misinformation, **because we know that information sticks**, especially if it’s something we want to believe.”*

*- Myiah Hutchens, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, College of Journalism and Communications,
University of Florida*





First Draft  @firstdraftnews · Aug 5, 2020

Inoculation, or pre bunking, builds up pre-emptive resistance to [#misinformation](#) by exposing people to examples of it, so they can recognize and reject them in the future.

Find out more here: firstdraftnews.org/latest/the-psy...



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NARROW MARGIN

Pre-bunking falsehoods: How Wisconsin voters can avoid falling for election misinformation

The best defense from rumors, hoaxes and propaganda is knowing what to expect. Here's a preview of what voters might see ahead of Election Day

By Howard Hardee (Wisconsin Watch) October 17, 2020



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Recommendations for Media

‘Falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it’ - Jonathan Swift, 1710



Simply sharing the ‘truth’ may not be enough to overcome mis- or dis-information. Myriad mentions from diverse sources is important to overcome perspective-affirming information. Move quickly to correct the public record or assumptions, and to back up your message with evidence of the credibility of your processes and ethics.



Sometimes we might need to be more intentional in debunking. How might we learn from inoculation theory as we serve as advocates of truth?



Consider what else is happening at the same time and how that might affect how much people trust your message.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 3:

Who we highlight matters

Messengers

Effective messengers are trusted leaders
and community experts

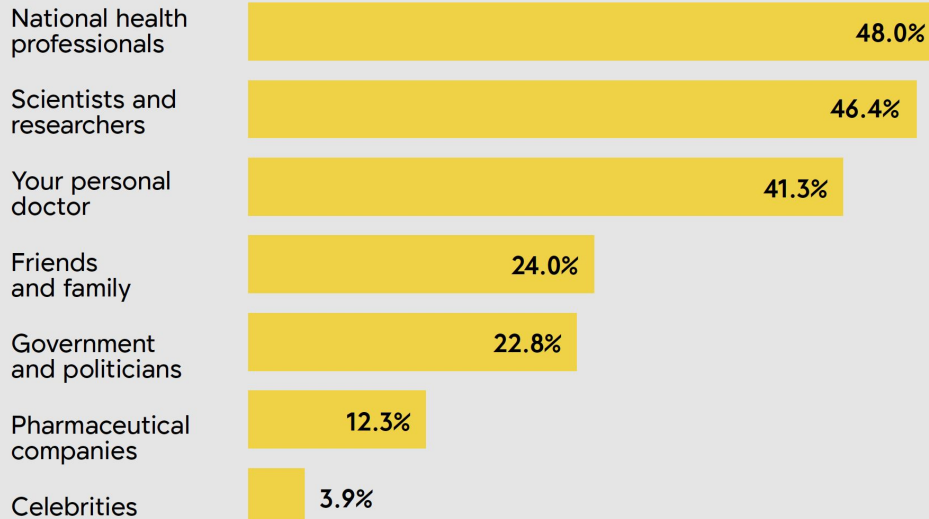
We trust our in-group over our out-group

Apolitical sources can be crucial



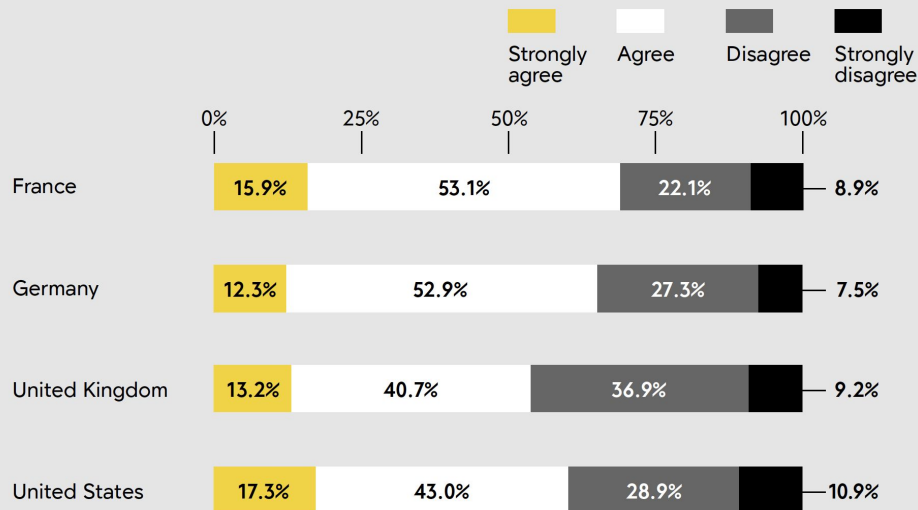
During the COVID-19 pandemic, who do you get reliable health advice from?

Scientists and health professionals are the most trusted sources of advice during the pandemic.



Most people want to receive information on a COVID-19 vaccine from people in their community

Across the four countries, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer to get information on a vaccine from people in their community rather than distant experts. French and German respondents were even more likely to want information from their communities.





“For Black Americans, for instance, barbershops turn out to be a really good place to get health information and having doctors train the barbers to talk about it turns out to be quite effective... It's important to have the information there, but having this trusted source who the experts trained to talk about it also helps broader dissemination. And so I think thinking about whatever messaging we end up coming up with from these multiple levels will be really helpful.”

-Neil Lewis, Jr., Ph.D.

Assistant Professor at the Department of Communications, Cornell University

Recommendations for Media

Who we choose as sources matter



Understand which **sources of information trusted messengers are citing** within the communities you are trying to reach. Consider highlighting sources who are members of diverse groups: local communities, religions, backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, political leanings, etc. Do not over-rely on homogenous experts who could be perceived as elites or outsiders.



Recognize that there are **trusted messengers in both offline and digital communities**. It's important to listen to both to identify trusted individuals who can help you share information that will be trusted by all communities.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 4:

**How we tell the story is important
for how people understand**

Creating content

Concrete language avoids ambiguity

Avoid abstraction = avoid bias

Definitions increase shared understanding

Narratives help sensemaking

Provide value

Three messages that have been used effectively by vaccine-hesitant communities: **regret, choice and control.**

Scholars suggest these might be flipped to increase vaccine confidence.

Abstraction leads to misinformation

AT THE EPICENTER

What if all covid-19 deaths in the United States had happened in your neighborhood?

Find out what would happen if your neighborhood was the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States.

Updated Sept. 24 at 11:43 a.m.

Data updated on Sept. 30, 2020

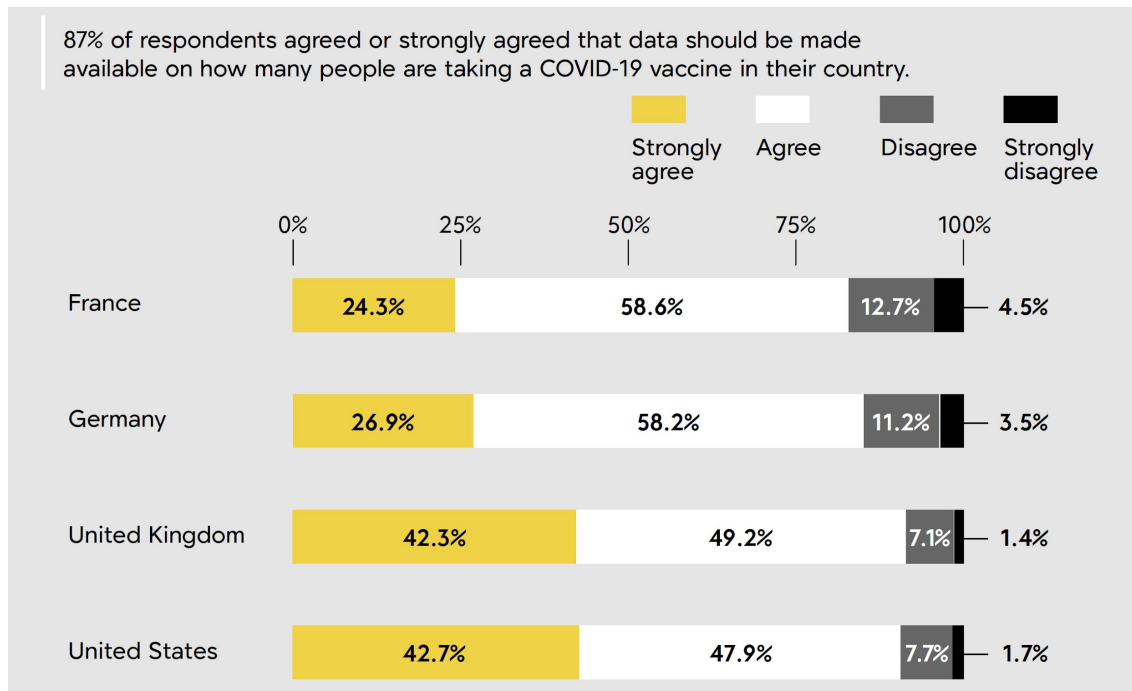


Enter your address in the USA



USE MY LOCATION

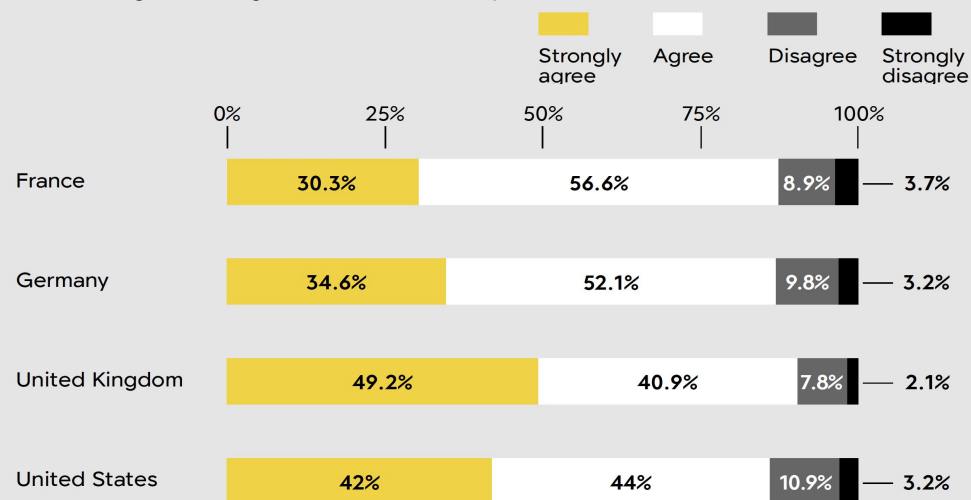
A strong majority of people think there should be data available showing how many people in their country are taking a COVID-19 vaccine when it is released



Most people agree vaccines save lives

Do you agree that since vaccines have saved many human lives around the world, taking a COVID-19 vaccine would also save lives?

87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that since vaccines are effective in saving lives a COVID-19 vaccine will also save lives. This was one of the strongest messages tested in this survey.



Recommendations for Media

Content should be concrete, supply a narrative and provide value



Overcome abstraction with messages that situate the importance in terms of local threat, likelihood, timeliness, and possible harm to people like you.



Include content that is consistent even as knowledge evolves — like the process for creating a vaccine.



Build a narrative. Situate facts within stories of individuals reclaiming control of their lives to make them believable and relatable.



Use definitions and details rather than acronyms and jargon.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 5:

**Recognize that communities have
different relationships with vaccination**

Cultural differences

“Loose” vs “tight” societies

Feelings toward authority

Perceived politicization

Language, metaphor, messages, and imagery look different and have different salience within different societies.



Specific communities have specific interests

Recommendations for Media

Recognize that communities have different relationships with vaccinations



Understand whether the communities in which you are communicating are “tight” or “loose.”



Take into account the relationship people in your community have with authority and frame the message accordingly.



Where possible, get deeply immersed in both online and geographic communities to understand their specific fears and concerns.



Recognize that particular communities have significant and valid reasons to be fearful of new medical interventions and address these transparently.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 6:

**Our stories help create
(and change) social norms**



Social norms



Norms are: ‘perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in specific behaviors’



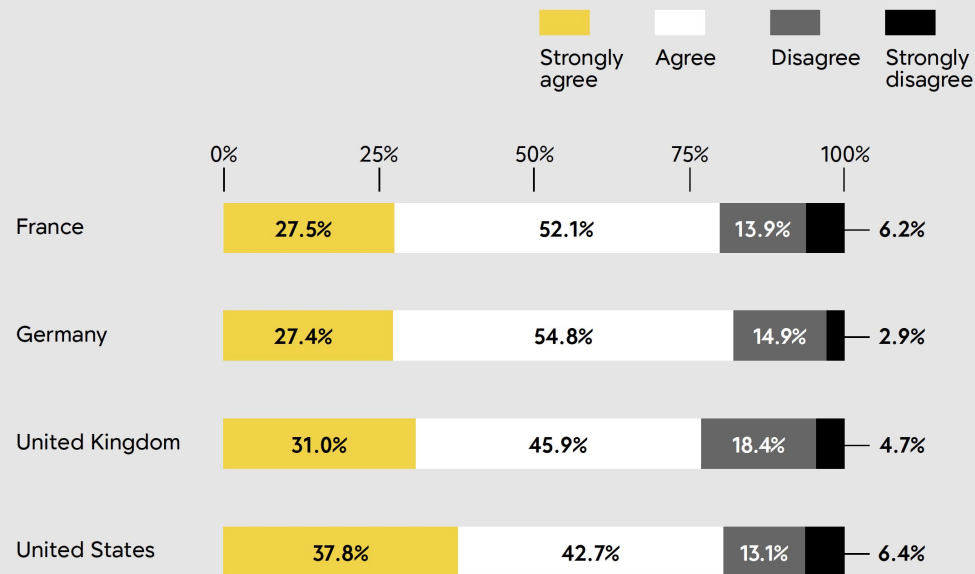
Individuals can be poor at estimating the actual behavioral and attitudinal norms of their peers and affiliated social groups



What we report has influence on what people see as ‘normal’

Most people agreed that a COVID-19 vaccine should not be mandatory

Reflecting strong social norms about personal choice, majorities across all four countries agreed or strongly agreed that people should have a personal choice as to whether to take a COVID-19 vaccine.



Recommendations for Media

Recognize social norms, not just more information, helps gain acceptance



Following a 'solutions journalism' model, we can highlight examples of people who are getting the vaccine, not just those who aren't.



Focusing on examples of people in and tied to your community along with the national and international experts can help tie the challenge directly with the people you serve



Recognize that we cover the exceptions, but often it is perceived by our audience as the rule. Point out flaws on overall media coverage, and describe the approach you're taking.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 7:

Evoke the right emotions

Emotions

Invoke specific behaviors

Should be chosen intentionally

Fear can elicit mixed emotions

Look to the pleasant emotions
more than the unpleasant ones.



"We don't want to feel the shame, but changing the behavior is not necessarily the easiest thing to do. . . This is something that's been on my mind a lot with university responses to students about shaming them around various behaviors. What you're asking them to do is lie to you on these daily checks, etc. It's not actually getting them to stop doing those behaviors. So that's something I want to be cautious about, is shame and stigma. Those appeals do not work in the way people think they do. It gets people to lie to you, and so we shouldn't do that."

-Neil Lewis, Jr., Ph.D.

Assistant Professor at the Department of Communications, Cornell University



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“Fear can be very immediate, but it can also be counter argued. Parental love, who’s going to counter argue it?”

-Ellen Peters, Ph.D.

**Philip H. Knight Chair and Director of the Center for Science
Communication Research, School of Journalism and
Communication, University of Oregon**



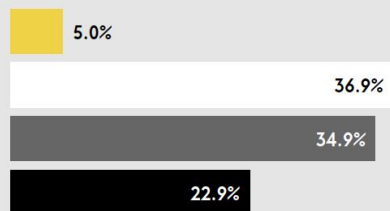
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A significant number of vaccine hesitant people responded positively to a hopeful message

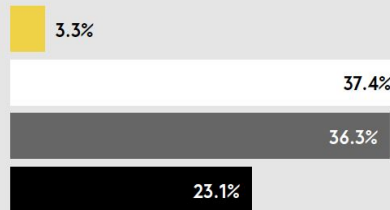
41% of vaccine hesitant individuals agreed or strongly agreed a COVID-19 vaccine was the "best chance" we have of ending the pandemic.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

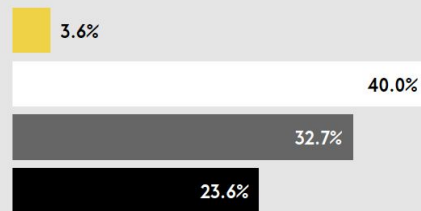
France



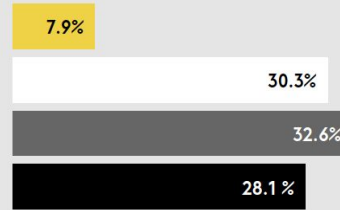
Germany



United Kingdom



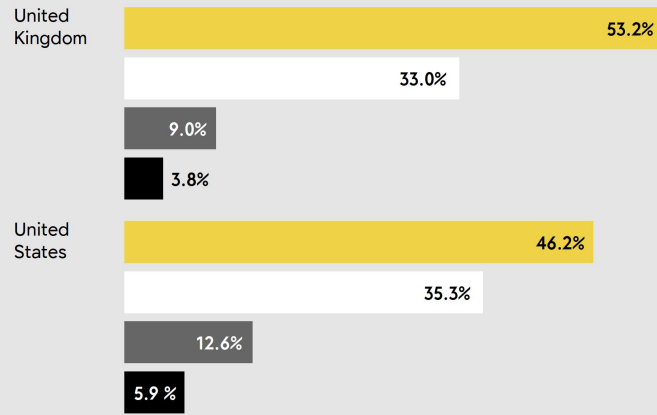
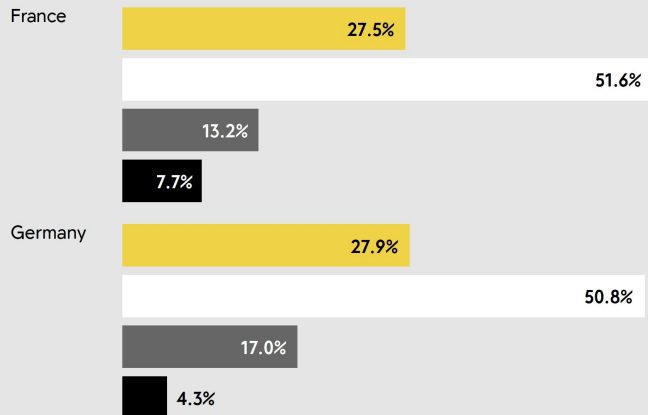
United States



Respondents would feel regret if their child got COVID-19 and they chose not to vaccinate

A large majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would feel regret if they chose not to give their child a COVID-19 vaccine and then their child became ill.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree



Recommendations for Media

Evoked the right emotions



Consider avoiding using shame, fear or sadness in coverage. We are likely to tune out messages that use sadness or shame so we can retain our positive sense of self; fear messages can be immobilizing.



Tap into hope, pride and parental love to motivate people to act and affirm their positive sense of self.



Be respectful, not dismissive as you report on vaccine hesitancy. Acknowledge the reasons people have to be fearful.

MEDIA PRINCIPLE 8:

**Our perceptions of the motivations
of the messenger matter,
as do our own motivations**

Motivation

When organizations are clear and transparent about motivations, people are more likely to trust them.

People who feel fear may be more motivated to seek information, however that fear makes them more susceptible to misinformation

Media needs to be transparent in their why

Recommendations for Media

Our perceptions of the motivations of the messenger matter, as do our own motivations



Learn about the **motivations** of your community and their information seeking behavior.



Be transparent about the motivations of the messenger. Combat public assumptions about the goals and values of “the media” by including information about your ethics, integrity and process.

8 principles for COVID-19 vaccine communications



Worldviews



Relationships



Timing



Social Norms



Messengers



Emotions



Narratives



Motivations

Guide to COVID-19 vaccine communications

realgoodcenter.org/vaccine



- See the report for vaccine communicators
- Greater detail and citations to underpinning research

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Stay Updated With Our Vaccine Work:

hi.realgoodcenter.org/mif2021



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Deeper Dives

Opportunity 1:

Learn principles of how funders can support science-informed strategies that build trust in vaccines.

Opportunity 2:

See examples of what it looks like for newsrooms to engage in more thoughtful coverage of vaccines by putting these ideas into practice.

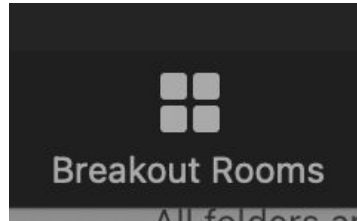
Choose Your Adventure

In the meeting control bar (dark bar at bottom of screen), click **BREAKOUT ROOMS**

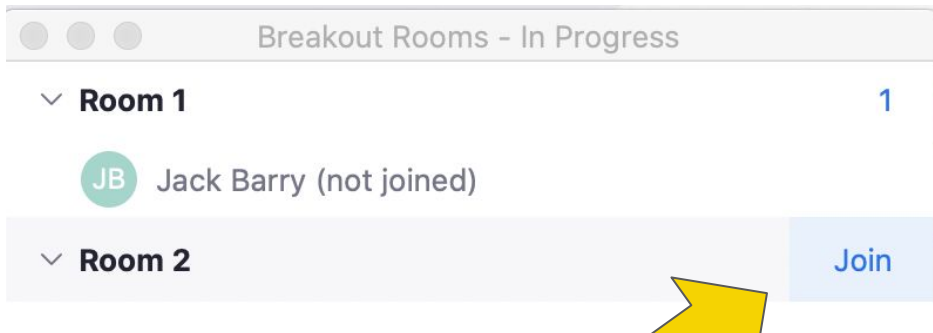
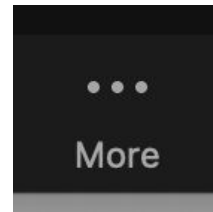
You will be presented a list options.

Hover your mouse over the option you'd like and a 'join' button should appear. Click Join.

(If participating through the Web interface, we'll help you move to a room)



NOTE: You may need to select 'more' to see Breakout Room option



Deeper Dives

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Breakout slides

Strategies for Journalism

**Putting these ideas to practice:
examples for newsrooms**

Strategies for journalists: Call attention to your values

FAIRNESS CHECKLIST

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Everything we do must be subject to a fairness test.

We will not hesitate to decline to publish a story that fails to meet our standards. We don't shade the truth. We let the facts lead us. We show our work.

- Be factually accurate
- Keep in mind our own values, cultural biases and preconceptions, and avoid imposing them on others.
- Ensure that our word choices and the overall tone of stories are fair and neutral.
- Present a diversity of views in their best light.
- Frame stories fairly and openly, in particular the critical sections that make an impression on readers – that is, in the lead and at the end.
- Ensure there are no surprises in the story for our subjects. They should have an opportunity before publication to know the full thrust of the report and respond to any meaningful details or accusations.
- Give subjects ample time to respond, generally speaking, a minimum of 24 hours.
- Include a timely response from subjects. Listen with an open mind and portray their point of view in a straightforward manner.
- Reach out to allies or sympathetic parties and scour the public record to understand the point of view of subjects who are unwilling or unable to talk.
- Make a sincere effort to reconcile conflicting information if our subjects' point of view does not square with other data points in a story.



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Strategies for journalists: Ask, and listen



mallorie sullivan ✨🔵 @malloriesullivn · 23h

the @dallasnews recently launched a guide with everything you need to know about the vaccine: [dallasnews.com/news/public-he...](https://www.dallasnews.com/news/public-health/2021/02/05/north-texas-coronavirus-vaccine-guide-everything-you-need-to-know/) ✓

in promoting on IG, I asked readers w/ a slider how much they felt they knew. today I began DMing resources + help to those who said they knew little, and... ↓



The COVID-19 vaccine rollout in North Texas is underway — and there's a lot of information out there.

How much do you feel like you know about the vaccine rollout so far?



Hey there! We noticed you indicated on a slider sticker we included in a recent Instagram Story that you know little about the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in D-FW. We hope you got a chance to take a look at our new Vaccine Guide! <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/public-health/2021/02/05/north-texas-coronavirus-vaccine-guide-everything-you-need-to-know/>

If there's something you can't seem to

If there's something you can't seem to figure out, please let us know and we'll do our best to answer! We know the rollout has been confusing for many, and we want to make sure everyone is up-to-speed as it continues.



woah this is such a cool way to get info to people!! nice use of social media y'all

Strategies for journalists: Ask, and listen



mallorie sullivan 🌟🔵 @malloriesullivn · 22h



literally thousands of readers answered this way or said they knew a bit but wanted to learn more, so I'm going to be messaging them for a while.

a lot of work, yes, but taking these extra steps to help educate them only strengthens their trust in us — and that's so rewarding 🙏



Strategies for journalists: Address hesitancies



Outlook • Perspective

I work in a nursing home. Here's why my colleagues are skipping the vaccine.



A nursing home resident receives a shot of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine at King David Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation, a nursing home facility, on January 6. (REUTERS/Yuki Iwamura/File Photo)



By **Asif Merchant**

Asif Merchant is a geriatrician and associate clinical professor at Tufts University School of Medicine. He serves on the COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Group for the governor of Massachusetts.

Add to list

No matter how outlandish some fears seem, I can't shrug them off. People's concerns aren't totally random; it's counterproductive to just dismiss them. Instead, I try to figure out where their understanding went wrong and to offer an explanation for that misunderstanding. For example, vaccines definitely don't contain GPS-enabled chips, but the Pfizer boxes carrying the doses do have a tracking device so that we can follow shipments to our facilities. After I show the staff videos of the boxes and their bar codes, that seems to assuage their fears. I also talk about the differences between RNA and DNA — people often confuse the two, I say, but the vaccine won't affect the latter.



Strategies for journalists: Find credible, local experts

SARASOTA

Sarasota Memorial Hospital administers same antibody cocktail Trump received

Angie DiMichele Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Published 5:05 p.m. ET Oct. 7, 2020 | Updated 5:47 p.m. ET Oct. 7, 2020



Dr. Manuel Gordillo, medical director of Sarasota Memorial Hospital Infection Prevention and Control, spoke Wednesday morning about the antibody cocktail President Donald Trump received to treat COVID-19. The same antibody cocktail is administered to patients at Sarasota Memorial Hospital through its clinical trials. *Angie DiMichele*



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Strategies for journalists: Keep audience attention local



Paul Glickman @PaulG57 · Feb 11

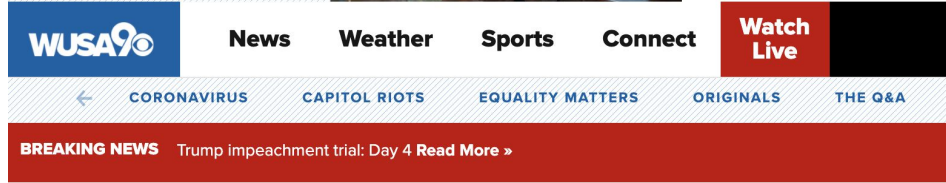
...

'We're Not Castaways' — Caregivers Of People With Disabilities Struggle To Get Vaccinated laist.com/2021/02/11/wer... ✓ via @laist.com



Caregivers Of People With Disabilities Are Eligible For Vaccination. So ...
Parents and caregivers of people with disabilities in California are supposed to be at the front of the line for the COVID-19 vaccine. But ...
🔗 laist.com ✓

Strategies for journalists: Normalize the process



VERIFY

VERIFY: Here are the most common vaccine side effects

PROCESS:

The Verify team first wants to note that while you will likely feel some effects after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, our experts stress that this is a completely normal response to immunization and it means the vaccine is doing its job.



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Strategies for journalists: Call out bad coverage

CNN BUSINESS

LIVE TV



Why it's crucial that news outlets get it right when covering adverse coronavirus vaccine reactions



Analysis by [Oliver Darcy](#), CNN Business

Updated 11:39 PM ET, Wed December 16, 2020

This tricky balancing act was brought to the forefront on Wednesday when The New York Times [broke news](#) that a healthcare worker in Alaska had suffered an allergic reaction to the Pfizer vaccine (a story that CNN and most major news outlets soon matched). A push alert from NYT added, "It's unclear if the case has broader safety implications." The push alert specifically raised eyebrows.

"This is akin to having a breaking news alert if a person admits to voting twice," Dr. Jonathan Reiner, a professor of medicine and surgery at George Washington University and a CNN medical analyst, told me. "An isolated instance doesn't equal widespread voting fraud and isolated adverse events shouldn't erode confidence in these vaccines. Multiple anecdotes do not equal data."



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What stands in the way of this work?



Journalists' financial incentives too often reward irresponsible coverage. For example, individual stories on adverse effects and overcoverage of hesitancy get a lot of attention.



Our hope is that we can **build the capacity** for journalists to invest in coverage that is more responsible, thoughtful, responsive and useful.

Strategies for Funders: Science-based communication has to be at the heart of your theory of change



Communications work and research is chronically and systematically underfunded in the social change sphere.



Social, behavioral and cognitive science offer answers that polling and other forms of message testing can't provide

What have we missed?

**What are some of the other roles
media is playing? How might we help
build the ecosystem we need?**

Strategies for Funders

**Funders have a unique and important
role to play in building vaccine trust**

Strategies for Funders: There are no message ‘panaceas’



People have very different reasons for waiting to get the vaccine or avoiding it entirely. Looking for a single message that works for all could backfire with some groups.



Specific identities and psychographic groups require dedicated efforts and strategies rooted in research.

Strategies for Funders: This is urgent



We need to move quickly. Among some groups--like nursing home workers--critical windows have closed, which brings new challenges.



Support grantees who are doing work in this space with simplified proposals and approval mechanisms.

Strategies for Funders: We need more than funding



You have connections your grantees don't. Ask what kinds of connections or introductions might be helpful.



Even where you don't have relationships, your “cold call” is more likely to get a response than your grantees' are, in most cases.

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Strategies for Funders: Communicate along the way



Those who are working to build trust are gaining insights throughout their projects--organizing briefings or webinars with the constituencies who can most benefit gets these insights into the field right away.



Communicating throughout the process creates an additional burden and may require additional support.

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Strategies for Funders: Figuring out what works globally offers two benefits



The principles we shared are rooted in western research, and we're not sure they would hold up in other global regions. But trust and access are most definitely global challenges.



Insights from scholars who can offer unique perspectives from and about other global regions would also help build confidence among diasporic communities.

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Strategies for Funders: It's chaos out there



We need a global clearinghouse for research and strategies to avoid duplication and benefit from each others' work.



Right now, we're relying on our own searches and relationships to identify relevant research and strategies.

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What have we missed?

**What are some of the other roles
funders are playing?**