Coronavirus Discourses: Public Involvement Panel contributions and a Celebration and Evaluation Event

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Understanding the reception of public health messages in public-facing communications is of key importance to health agencies in managing the Coronavirus pandemic. Our study took a community-focused approach to better understand public perceptions about the impact of language and messaging surrounding Covid-19. We engaged a Public Involvement Panel or PIP, which was made up of 12 volunteer members from a range of diverse cultural and social backgrounds to be inclusive of the views of a wide range of people. All members of the group have relevant experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic in the UK.

what makes effective health messaging?
Throughout the project, we held sessions with our PIP online over MS Teams. Three group discussion sessions that we held with PIP member were on the topic of specific health messaging. For this, we showed the PIP images in advance and asked for their feedback on what was done well and how it could be done better. These sessions ensured the PIP were familiar with what constituted effective health messaging for them.
Then, in a live Google [Jamboard] activity, we invited members of our Public Involvement Panel to answer the question: *What makes public health messaging effective?* They drew on their prior knowledge from the discussion sessions to contribute notes to the board. We used their contributions to identify ten features or characteristics of effective public health messaging.

These ten features were used as multiple-choice items for a representative public survey, where we asked our 1089 respondents *Which of the following, if any, do you think would be most important in making COVID-19 public health messages effective?* We allowed them to select up to three options.

Our survey respondents valued messaging that was [informative] most highly, followed by the [reliability of the source] and [accuracy] of the content. They valued the characteristics [achievable], [encouraging] and [timely] as the least important characteristics.
A celebration and evaluation event
We held a project evaluation and celebration event on Wednesday 5th October to thank our PIP for their contribution to the project. We summarised the project outputs and the PIP’s involvement in bringing these to fruition and ran reflection exercises with PIP members to gather feedback that may be implemented in future.
At the event, we also welcomed Elvira Perez, who ran a Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) card sorting task with the PIP in two groups. The cards are designed to facilitate reflection and discussion about the potential strengths and weaknesses of a project or topic as it relates to RRI.

Two groups completed the exercise. The first group focussed on how to ensure diverse voices in research dissemination and selected one top priority card from each section of the card deck ‘Anticipate’, ‘Reflect’, ‘Engage’, ‘Act’ (A.R.E.A), adding cards below these where they felt subordinate categories were needed.

The other group critiqued the ‘hard to reach’ card (the middle green card shown in the image). Their conversation centred on the card's title, the framing of which they felt places emphasis on under-represented people as the ‘problem’. They suggested ‘representation’, ‘under-represented’, ‘underserved’ or ‘ignored’ would be appropriate alternatives.
The final event appeared to be successful and enjoyed by all. It was a useful opportunity for the project team and PIP members to reflect on the experiences of participating in a PIP in this type of project. Considering the positive experiences and what could be improved in this way is valuable for individual projects engaging with the public and more widely, for organisations engaging with communities.

Enquiries about the Coronavirus Discourses project should be directed to: Professor Svenja Adolphs.

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