Examining media coverage of Covid 19 vaccination program in the U.S. during period from December 2020 to October 2021

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Proposal Description:

Broad COVID-19 vaccination programs are the main tool to allow people to begin the post COVID-19 pandemic recovery process and return to normalcy. Our data and prior studies have shown that individual trust in the vaccines’ safety is the strongest predictor of willingness to take the vaccine.

The CDC is tasked with disseminating information about vaccine safety. Independent news outlets actively participate in such discussion as part of healthy discourse. To understand how these sources of mass information influenced individual perception of vaccine safety during the period when the vaccination program had been rolled out in the U.S., we (1) surveyed 349 individuals on how much they trusted the vaccine and what sources of information they used in February, April, and October of 2021; and (2) collected all publications on COVID-19 vaccine from the media sources, identified by our respondents, between December of 2020 and October of 2021 (N ~ 13,000).

Our data indicate that (1) reduced trust in vaccine safety was associated with greater mental health distress accumulated during the pandemic, (2) the CDC became more effective in promoting trust in the vaccine over time; (3) CNN, ABC, CBS and CNBC promoted confidence and Fox News promoted skepticism in the CDC message; and (4) Fox News was more likely to target different socio-economic groups (e.g., women, pregnant women) with group-specific skepticism-promoting messages.

We suggest that public mental health services should take into account potential unintended consequences of the public discussion in developing public mental health support programs. To succeed in this effort, it is important to better understand patterns that such discussions follow.

Requisite Skills and Qualifications:

The RA would use the organize data already collected, evaluate what data are missing, and finish extracting these missing data. The RA would assist with thematic analysis of the media sources, also create tables, graphs, and mind maps with the dataset. Finally, the RA would use NVivo software to run analyses.

Award: Bridget Vito
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