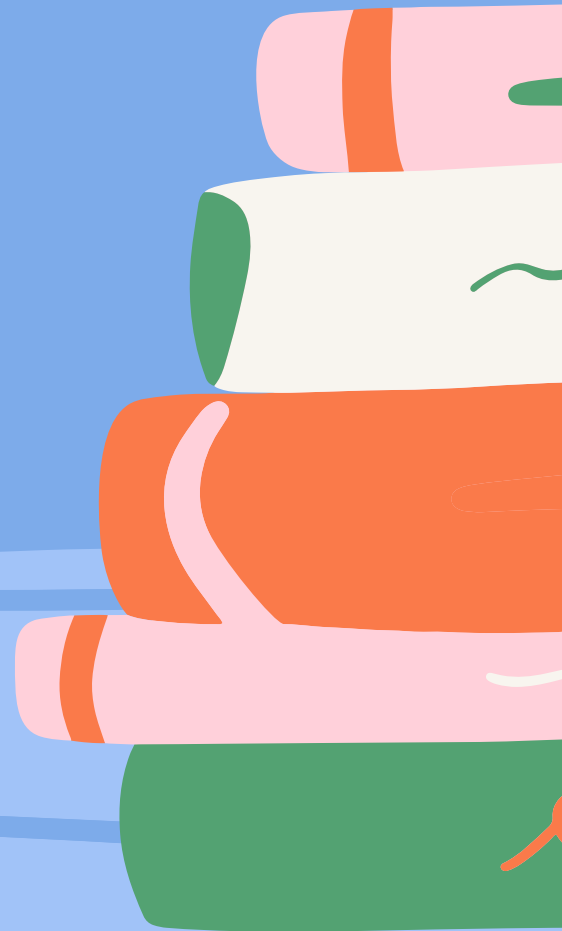


FRAMING FRICTION:

# A Content Analysis Investigating How the CDC Framed Social Media Communication with the Public During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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# INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- The organization communicates to the public in a number of ways, including through its website, Facebook, Twitter, information calls and more (CDC, 2017).

## Framing

- Frames are used by organizations, individuals, and groups to communicate, assign meaning, and provide context of understanding to topics or new phenomena, which can be extremely helpful whenever complex issues are being communicated (Hertog & Mcleod, 2001; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

## Tone of Voice & Organization-Public Relationships

- The two main types of tone of voice used by organizations are human tone of voice and organizational tone of voice.
- The relationship between an organization and its key public is categorized into six relationship dimensions: control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, exchange relationship, communal relationship, and commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999).



# Methods

## Sample

- Five videos directly related to COVID-19 were selected from the CDC's Facebook page for analysis. These videos were chosen because they directly addressed the public and allowed researchers to examine frames used to discuss COVID-19.

## Data Analysis

- Videos were analyzed by two coders using a coding sheet and pre-determined frames including tone of voice, and OPR indicators.
- Intercoder reliability was established through an official reliability analysis (Krippendorff, 2013; McHue, 2012; Riffe et al., 2019).
- NVIVO was used to code and analyze data.



# FINDINGS

## **Research Question One: How Did the CDC Frame Advice About Preventative Actions Related To Reducing The Spread Of COVID-19?**

Emergent themes that were the most salient were community, protecting yourself, encouragement to take action and understanding. Another theme that emerged but was not as prominent was fear.

## **Research Question Two: How Did the CDC Frame Its Tone Of Voice In Communication With The Public Related To COVID-19?**

Themes related to tone of voice were coded for either human or organizational tone of voice. Four out of five videos utilized a human tone of voice. One video utilized an organizational tone of voice.

# FINDINGS

## Research Question Three: How Did the CDC Frame Its Relationship with The Public Using OPR Indicators?

- The most prevalent OPR indicators identified were trust and communal relationship
- The least prevalent OPR indicator was satisfaction

**Trust:** "We review the literature regularly and speak to colleagues, I'm John Anderton...representing CDC's Emergency Partners Information Connection," "Dr. Sarah Lee...is the team lead for the Research, Application and Evaluation Team with the School Health Branch in the Division of Population Health here at CDC"

**Communal relationship:** "Let's work together, my cloth face covering protects you and yours protects me, helping each other"

**Exchange relationship:** "And as we learn more information about what this means for you and your home, we will keep you informed," "There are things that you can be doing"

**Control mutuality:** "We've been getting a lot of questions"

**Commitment:** "We are going to continue to monitor this situation, and as things change, we'll tell you," "These studies are important, and we are going to continue doing them"

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

## Conclusions

- Aligns with previous research in that frames were used by the CDC to communicate, assign meaning, and provide context of understanding to topics related to COVID-19 (Reese et al., 2001)
- Social media videos can be used to communicate the importance of scientific information using human tone of voice and OPR indicators during a pandemic
- Human tone of voice and OPR indicators can can enhance the benefits of communicating with the public

## Recommendations

- Future CDC communication efforts should continue to include calls to action and ensure a human tone of voice is used to convey messages
- The CDC should consider the OPR framework in all external communications to continuously build and maintain a relationship with the public
- These lessons can additionally be applied to organzational communication within agriculture and extension
- Future research could explore the organizational public relationship between the CDC and the public to determine how the relationship is reflected across communication efforts as a whole

