Project REFOCUS

Media Frames and Recommendations to Reduce Cultural Racism and Social Stigma

Understanding News Media Framing and Social Stigma

Journalists and news editors use media frames to interpret and assign meaning to current events[1] Frames, most often present in the news, help audiences to define, interpret, evaluate, and information.[2] With the use of these frames, reporters and media outlets can embed both their conscious and unconscious biases into the story development.[3] These decisions are then reflected in the words, phrases, sources, and images included, or even excluded, in the final story.

Research has shown that media frames, which are defined as the "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion,"[4] during health crises construct "otherness" in times of health crisis. For example, when race is framed in the media during health crises, it can be used to blame community groups for health outcomes. Media coverage is often colorblind, and may lack an intersectional approach to understanding how structures of race, class, sexuality and gender condition the marginalized populations' engagement with and response to risk and crisis messaging.[5]

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Framing of Public Health News Stories: Recommendations

Project REFOCUS examined mainstream and ethnic press articles to determine how each category of media outlets covered culture, racism, and COVID-19. The following themes emerged:

KEY INSIGHT

COVID-19 was mainly framed as an economic crisis in the mainstream press.

"Racial equity is not only a social justice issue, but I believe it is an economic issue. To the extent that we have more inclusive society and more inclusive economy, we will have a healthier society and healthier economy."

— *Houston Chronicle*, June 28, 2020.

KEY INSIGHT

COVID-19 was mainly framed as a societal problem in the ethnic press.

"The Commonwealth Fund survey indicates that large numbers of Black and Latino adults, as well as people with low income, are struggling to pay for basic necessities and experiencing mental health concerns related to COVID-19. Such findings call for greater investments in the economic security of these disproportionately affected groups, including rent relief, nutrition assistance programs, and expanded access to behavioral health care."

— *Houston Defender*, Sept. 11, 2020.

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Public Health Surveillance Systems and Media Framing Recommendations

Surveillance systems should track pandemic frames in newspaper coverage in real-time.

- If surveillance systems track media frames in real time, organizations can be alerted to pertinent messages and recommendations that may be needed to help shift public opinion, attitude and action around specific preventive and treatment measures.

Surveillance systems should track pandemic frames in newspaper coverage to assess clarity of messaging.

- By using surveillance systems to track pandemic frames in real-time newspaper coverage, it may signal when cultural-specific and relevant preventative behaviors need to be clarified and disseminated among disproportionately affected populations.

- If surveillance systems track pandemic frames in newspaper coverage in real time, it may signal when more scientific data is needed to help increase understanding of disease prevention behaviors and treatment benefits, (e.g., mask wearing, COVID-19 vaccination) and (re)establish trust in medical and scientific institutions.

- Surveillance systems can monitor media frames to inform strategies that can balance information shared about individuals and communities with news stories that also explore the structures and institutions affecting them.

- Monitoring news media frames can provide critical data that can be used to challenge the presence of racial stereotypes and support community empowerment.

1   Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. Journal of Communication, 43,(4), 51-58.

2   Gamson, W. (1992). Talking politics. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

3   Hong, S. C. (2013). Scarce sells? A framing analysis of news coverage of recalled Chinese products. Asian Journal of Communication, 23(1), 86-106

4   Gitlin, T. (1980). The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (p. 7).

5   Warren, D. M. (2012). Constructing "the Other" Media Representations of Katrina Evacuees in Houston, Texas. Race and Justice, 2(2), 93-113.

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Racial Ethnic Framing of Community-Informed and Unifying Surveillance

About Project REFOCUS

COVID-19 has illustrated that public health practitioners need access to data and tools that appropriately identify, respond to, culturally tailor, and reach historically marginalized and/or racialized populations during crises. Project REFOCUS was conceptualized as a collaborative and community-informed effort to address these challenges. Recognizing the need for a system that monitors stigma impacting these populations, Project REFOCUS prioritizes community input and the mediating roles of interpersonal communication, media frames and misinformation in relation to individual and collective health behavior. These factors are critical aspects of a successful response to public health crises.