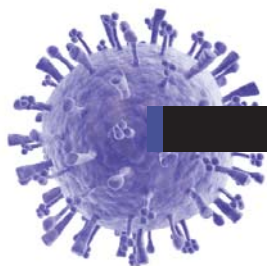


Swine Flu: **getting the message through** *A study in risk communication*

December 2009



Swine Flu: getting the message through

Communicating with the media is challenging at the best of times. In fact, research shows that a visit to the dentist is preferable to a visit from a camera crew! But when the interview relates to a potential health risk, the stakes are even higher. The ability of a spokesperson to communicate effectively in these circumstances will have a direct effect on whether the public takes the appropriate action and how reassured they feel.

There are a number of ingredients that result in successful communication by a media spokesperson, including content, body language and tone of voice. These areas will be covered in most media training courses. But it struck me that much of what we think we know about the effect of a media spokesperson at a time of risk is based on assumption rather than hard evidence. This was why Insignia Communications decided to commission academic research to dig deeper into what really influences the public when they listen to a spokesperson communicating about risk.

Swine Flu and the uncertainty surrounding it, provided the perfect test case for evaluating the public's response to risk communication. However, we believe that the conclusions of this report have direct relevance for all areas of risk communication from the erection of a mobile phone mast, a food safety scare, an environmental incident through to online security. We therefore hope that it provides useful insights for anyone called upon to provide comment to the media on risk.

This research shows that there are many factors which make for an effective spokesperson, but that you need to combine all of these elements in one package if you are to communicate truly effectively about risk.

Specifically, we were able to identify two spokesperson "equations" which are likely to result in either greater reassurance or heightened anxiety among the public:

CS + WA – AA = Anxiety

Where CS is Credible Spokesperson, WA is Worrying Analysis and AA is Actionable Advice

Whereas

CS + SA + PA + AA = Reassurance

Where CS is Credible Spokesperson, SA is Serious Appearance, PA is Personable Approach and AA is Actionable Advice

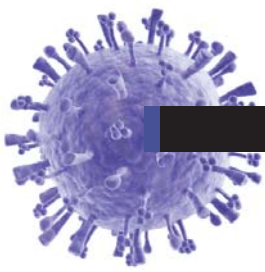
Delivering all of the elements of the reassurance equation is a tough challenge. However, by understanding what the ingredients are, ensuring that nominated spokespeople have the natural ability to deliver them, and providing the right training and preparation for any media encounter, the likelihood of important messages getting through is significantly increased.

Jonathan Hemus, director, Insignia Communications

Insignia Communications, a reputation management and communication consultancy, specialises in crisis and issues management, corporate reputation management, communication training and change communication. Find out more at www.insigniacomms.com

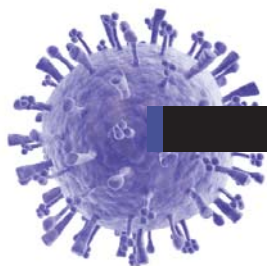
For further information about this report and associated issues, please contact us or take a look at our blog or Twitter postings:

jonathanhemus@insigniacomms.com
+44 121 382 5304/+44 786 832 9102
www.insigniatalks.com
http://twitter.com/jhemusinsignia



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1) Introduction

There has been an increase in the media appetite for stories associated with risk and the management of risk in recent times. Sidell considers that, "the appetite for health information and programmes is ever growing" but also warns health and risk communicators that with the increased opportunities to address mass audiences, comes potential hazards. Seale concurs, asserting that, "coverage of [...] infectious disease issues [...] contain considerable potential for creating scares". Therefore, Sidell advises that "good communication and an ability to develop a rapport and understand the perspective of the 'other'" are key elements to effective communications.

This report identifies those elements of clear communications to enable spokespeople to better eliminate doubt from their communication of key messages related to health or other risks. The initial evaluation provides a suggestive analysis of the data which identifies a number of characteristics which could be said to connote trustworthiness and reliability, which is particularly important in the delivery of health and risk communication campaigns.

2) Background

The Institute of Media Arts at the University of Wolverhampton was commissioned to undertake a research project on behalf of Insignia Communications. The initial brief was to conduct research into what makes for effective communication of messages via the media in the context of health concerns. In simple terms, we were seeking to identify the ingredients that make a media spokesperson credible, trustworthy and effective when communicating about risk.

The client for this project was Jonathan Hemus, director of Insignia Communications and the lead researcher was Sarah Williams, senior lecturer in PR at the University of Wolverhampton. A series of meetings were held between the lead researcher and the client to establish timetable, methodology and other administrative matters. The research team is considered to be Sarah Williams and Jonathan Hemus for the purposes of this report.

Swine flu was chosen as the vehicle through which to analyse components of effective media communication due to its topical news value as well as its importance as a risk communication campaign. The research team considered that the issue of swine flu was of significant importance to citizens of the UK and therefore the elements of media interview techniques in this scenario were likely to have a more realistic effect on the reactions of the audience.

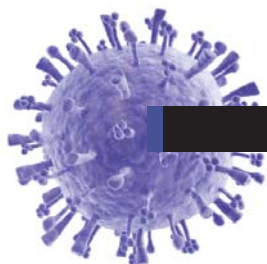
It was decided that a series of 15 clips featuring a range of spokespeople providing advice and views on the subject of swine flu would be shown to participants. They would be asked to record their thoughts about the spokesperson's performance after each clip and then take part in a discussion about the interviews after all clips had been shown. The client supplied the clips. Methodology is considered in greater detail in the following section.

¹ See Beck, U (1992), Klein, N (2007), Giddens, A (1990 and 1991) and Brooker, C & North, R (2007) to name but a few authors writing on the subject of risk in society and the media.

² Sidell, M in Katz et al. (eds.) (2000) Promoting health: knowledge and practice London: The Open University, p.196

³ Seale, C (2002) Media and Health London: Sage, p.92

⁴ Sidell, M in Katz et al. (eds.) (2000) Promoting health: knowledge and practice London: The Open University, p.196



3) Research methodology

Focus groups were held on the main campus of the University of Wolverhampton on 7th and 8th October 2009. In total 4 groups were held:

Group	No. of participants
1 – Wednesday 7 October Morning	8
2 – Wednesday 7 October Afternoon	11
3 – Wednesday 7 October Evening	10
4 – Thursday 8 October Evening	9

Fig. 1 Spread of participants

Focus groups are a form of group interview in which participants are asked to explore a particular topic in some depth. One of the characteristics of a group interview is the ability to interview a number of people at one time making it an efficient interview method. However, as Bryman asserts, it is also concerned with the ways in which people discuss an issue as a group and not merely as individuals. Therefore the technique often seeks to establish how people react to and debate issues within a group situation. This was important in this study as we wished to identify the extent to which peer pressure and the power of word of mouth would influence people's ultimate perceptions of the spokespeople.

In this instance, the researcher adopted two approaches to data collection. Firstly, participants were asked to record notes immediately after clips were shown and also to indicate their top three and bottom choices as to the most and least effective spokespeople; secondly, a group interview was carried out after all clips were shown. This approach ensured that initial reactions were recorded, as well as capturing how these opinions were re-negotiated and adapted during group discussion. Therefore the study can be said to have taken a blended focus interview and focus group approach.

Initially it was hoped to attract between 40 and 50 participants to the project but in the end, 38 people were recruited. The researchers hoped to attract two main groups to the project: parents and young people. While the project succeeded in attracting high numbers of young people (27 people aged 25 and under took part), it was less successful in attracting parents; despite putting on focus groups in the evening, only 13% of participants were parents.

4) Initial findings

4.1) Quantitative data analysis

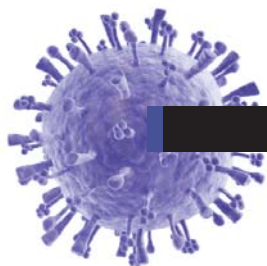
In total 38 people took part in the focus groups. The majority of the participants were childless females with 13% being parents and 26% being male. The average age of the respondents was 27; with the youngest being 18 and the oldest aged 50. The table below shows the spread of ages among the participants:

Age	No. of people
18	1
19	1
20	4
21	10
22	4
23	4
25	1
31	1
36	1
37	2
39	1
43	1
50	1

Fig. 2 Age range of research participants

The table shows that the mean age of participants was lower than the average age at just 21. The majority of participants were aged below 30 with just 7 people or 18% aged 30 or over. However, those aged over 30 tended to have higher academic qualifications, with two of those participating having a doctoral qualification.

⁵ Bryman, A (2004) Social Research Methods Oxford: OUP, p. 346



4.2) Qualitative data analysis

In this section we outline the main responses to each of the interviews: spokespeople are ranked in the order of popularity as defined by the individual scores of group members. Their position following group discussion is shown in brackets.

- 1) Prof John Oxford, professor of virology, University of London (1)
- 2) Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Health (2)
- 3) Professor Sir Roy Anderson, Imperial College, London (4)
- 4) Dr Tom Jefferson, The Cochrane Collaboration (3)
- 5) Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer (=5)
- 6) Dr Boon Lim, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (=5)
- 7) Dr Carl Heneghan, Department of Primary Health Care, Oxford University (7)
- 8) Sandra Mounier-Jack, Department of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (8)
- 9) Belinda Phipps, chief executive, National Childbirth Trust (9)
- 10) Professor Hugh Pennington, Professor of Bacteriology, University of Aberdeen (10)
- 11) Dr Richard Halvorsen, GP and author of The Truth About Vaccines (11)
- 12) Dr Steve Field, chair of Royal College of GPs (12)
- 13) Gregory Hartl, communications advisor, World Health Organisation (14)
- 14) Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Director of the Initiative for Vaccine Research, World Health Organisation (13)
- 15) Gordon Brown, Prime Minister (15)

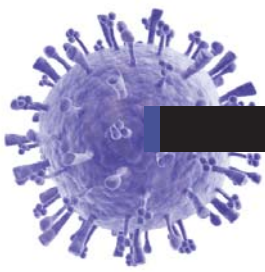
Research subjects

1) Professor John Oxford, professor of virology, University of London (1)

Professor Oxford was filmed in a London street environment providing advice on how people could deal with the swine flu outbreak. This was overwhelmingly considered to be the best interview. Participants warmed to his friendly, calm and informative manner and felt that he was giving practical advice in terms they could understand, without patronising them. The location was broadly welcomed with many respondents identifying it with Harley Street or another medical setting. Participants were generally reassured by the practical advice given and entertained by his exuberant manner and emphatic gesticulation. His appearance also provoked comment, with many considering him to be an eccentric British 'gent' which again added to the memorability of his performance. He was considered to be both authoritative and trustworthy and many felt that he communicated in terms that they could understand.

Insights:

- Professor Oxford's style was idiosyncratic. As a result, people remembered him, and remembered what he said
- Body language used effectively to reinforce verbal messages is incredibly powerful
- A serious appearance – usually implied by clothing – combined with a down to earth, personable style of communication is a very effective combination in risk communication
- The public expects and values practical advice more than just "comment" or generalities
- If you are appropriately entertaining, you are more likely to successfully impart important health advice



**2) Andy Burnham,
Secretary of State for Health (2)**

Andy Burnham was filmed at a health centre commenting on the launch of the swine flu hotline. The Health Minister came across well, as participants found him clear and confident. They particularly liked his location at a flu centre, which they felt showed that he was 'involved' with the situation. They felt that he gave clear and practical advice and liked his manner. He came across as both confident and reassuring in the majority of cases and many participants rated him as convincing. He was also felt to be plain speaking.

Insights:

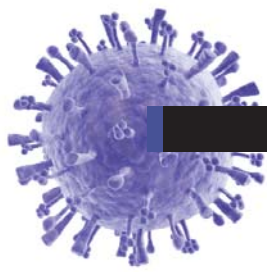
- Environment is important. People liked the fact that the surroundings for the interview were not only relevant, but also positioned the minister as in touch with the public. Both these factors lent credibility to his performance
- In the event of a health scare, clear, simple, actionable advice must be imparted by spokespeople: this empowers people to take a level of control over the situation
- A down to earth style resonates well with the viewing public
- Politicians are not necessarily distrusted or disbelieved: the actual content and performance of the spokesperson can override stereotypes or negative preconceptions

**3) Professor Sir Roy Anderson,
Imperial College (4)**

Sir Roy Anderson was filmed in an academic office: lighting was set up to create a shadowy, almost sombre image. He was talking about the potential impact of swine flu. Many felt Sir Roy Anderson's interview to be dramatic. Both the setting and side lighting seemed to increase this sense of drama and many felt that his precise and assertive use of language helped with the delivery of his message. Many found his approach convincing yet pessimistic, which one participant described as 'scary'. He was largely considered to be authoritative and professional yet many were not reassured by this interview.

Insights:

- A person's status or profession lends immediate credibility – they are seen to have a right to speak and a right to be listened to
- Well-prepared, clearly communicated messages are a prerequisite for success
- The environment – even the lighting – in which the interview is shot affects how people interpret the message they receive



**4) Dr Tom Jefferson,
The Cochrane Collaboration (3)**

Dr Jefferson was filmed outdoors in an unidentifiable location. He was wearing a polo shirt and was commenting on the potential dangers of the swine flu vaccine. This interview led to the most divided opinions; there were those who considered that his tone, delivery and appearance could have been interpreted as scare-mongering, while others felt that his precise language and tone indicated the seriousness of his message. Many misinterpreted the message though, with only the older and more highly educated participants believing that he is trying to calm fears by highlighting the folly of the panic surrounding swine flu.

Insights:

- Commentators with strong views or coming from a recognised standpoint can be used to deliberately spark a debate as they are likely to reach some people very effectively, but alienate others
- Casual clothing need not be a barrier to effective communication
- Trust and credibility may be eroded if you are presented as scare-mongering
- Sophisticated or complex messages are hard to communicate effectively to the general public, so keep it simple

**5) Sir Liam Donaldson,
Chief Medical Officer (= 5)**

Sir Liam Donaldson was filmed inside an unnamed and unidentifiable building offering the latest information and advice on the outbreak. While calm and assured in his delivery, some participants felt that his tone was too monotone to maintain their interest. However, his message was overwhelmingly considered to be clear. He is considered by the majority to be reassuring; however his bland delivery style means that he is not the participants' first choice of interviewee.

Insights:

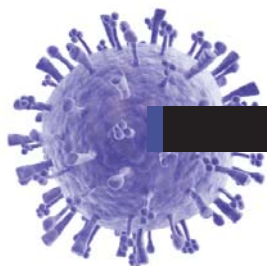
- Clarity is essential: spokespeople must know exactly what they want to say beforehand and be clear and succinct in communicating it
- Measured delivery adds gravitas and engenders a feeling of reassurance
- Personality and energy should be introduced into interviews if full engagement with the public is to be achieved

**6) Dr Boon Lim, Royal College of
Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (= 5)**

Dr Lim was filmed outside in an unidentifiable location and provided advice on swine flu and pregnancy. This interview was largely considered to be clear and calm with people trusting the interviewee. It was felt that practical advice was offered and an attempt was made to calm people's fears. This interview featured quite highly in the ranking, with south-east Asian participants, in particular, being reassured by his still and calm delivery. Others thought he displayed a lack of emotion which they felt uncomfortable with. The location of this interview also seemed to reinforce the feeling of calm felt by respondents and many felt he gave sensible advice.

Insights:

- People find the provision of clear and practical advice by spokespeople to be a key factor in reassuring them
- A calm spokesperson is usually a credible spokesperson



7) Dr Carl Heneghan, Department of Primary Health Care, Oxford University (7)

Dr Heneghan was filmed in an academic office commenting on the potential effects of the swine flu vaccine on children. This interviewee displayed a much more casual verbal style of delivery which was off-putting to many – there were also comments that his body language seemed unsure. His message was considered to be diffuse, and parents, in particular, were alarmed by his comments. Some participants felt that he was concerned and, rather than feeling more knowledgeable about the treatment, they now felt more worried. While the interviewee's use of hand gestures maintained some participants' interest, others were confused by the complexity of the argument and didn't feel the message was clearly explained. There were also concerns about the fluency of the speaker: hesitation, stammering and change of pitch all contributed to some participants finding the interview hard to follow.

Insights:

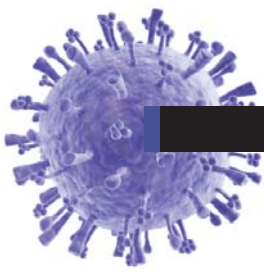
- Spokespeople must be capable of preparing and delivering clear messages – complexity should be avoided when communicating to the public about risk
- Being personable engages the public; being casual turns them off
- A spokesperson doesn't have to be word perfect. But in times of health fears and concerns, a fluent delivery is reassuring and ensures the successful communication of key messages. Organisations should, if possible, avoid putting forward spokespersons who are unable to meet this challenge.

8) Sandra Mounier-Jack, Department of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (8)

Sandra Mounier-Jack was filmed on a street outside a building. She commented on plans to deal with swine flu. There was some discrepancy in people's opinions about the location of this interview – some found it to be more natural while others were distracted by the background. Her manner was found to be calm and questioning yet participants were a little alarmed by her concern that there were no adequate plans in place. Many felt that she was downplaying the consequences and were reassured that she felt the disease would be mild. Others, however, were confused by the message and were unsure whether to feel reassured or alarmed.

Insights:

- This spokesperson had a noticeable French accent: it appeared to have no effect on people's views of what she said. We can conclude that regional or national accents should not be a barrier to successful communication.



9) Belinda Phipps, chief executive, National Childbirth Trust (9)

Belinda Phipps was filmed in an office environment and commented on the potential risks of swine flu for pregnant women. Participants felt that while calm and confident in her delivery, Ms Phipps did not offer any useful information. Her use of qualifying phrases such as "might or might not", and the way she appeared to be 'hedging her bets' was seen to be unhelpful and could cause confusion. Many thought her speculative approach could lead to accusations of scare-mongering. Many participants were confused about the level of risk for unborn babies and their mothers at the end of the interview.

Insights:

- It is not enough to be a calm and personable spokesperson: successful communication is not just about image – there must be substance and clarity in what is being said
- Speculation is seen to be very unhelpful – the public wants facts and clear guidance
- Spokespeople need to focus on reducing confusion rather than adding to it with equivocal statements

10) Professor Hugh Pennington, Professor of Bacteriology, University of Aberdeen (10)

Professor Pennington was filmed outside a hospital talking about the likely development of swine flu. As a person, this interviewee came across as assured and professional. However, many participants found his comments alarming, with one respondent even claiming that 'he makes me feel really upset and powerless'. Many considered him to be reliable and trustworthy but were concerned about the content of the message which some felt could be interpreted as scare-mongering. His smart appearance and physical movement added interest and gravitas to his presentation but overall, participants still found the content to be worrying.

Insights:

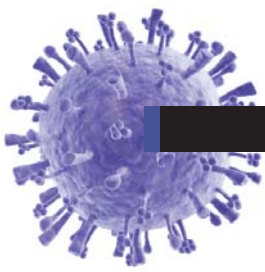
- Worrying facts communicated by a credible spokesperson without accompanying advice on how to address the situation can cause significant public anxiety. Spokespeople need to be aware of this power and responsibility

11) Dr Richard Halvorsen, GP and author of The Truth About Vaccines (11)

Dr Halvorsen was filmed in a studio, giving his views on the swine flu vaccine. He was generally perceived to be agitated and not confident. His fast speech and tendency to interrupt and overlap the interviewers contrasted with their calm and assured presentation style, all of which contributed to his appearing 'edgy' and nervous. Many considered his style to be aggressive and patronising to the interviewer, although the viewers themselves did not feel patronised. Many felt that his intention was good and that he was trying to help people but that his style and manner made him appear to be lacking in confidence. There were also those who felt that he had his position of authority undermined by the presenter. While undoubtedly passionate, many felt that this level of emotion detracted from his main message.

Insights:

- People like passionate spokespeople who come across as real people. But when a spokesperson's emotions boil over, their ability to communicate effectively is diminished
- Avoid "taking on" the interviewer – the public reacts badly to this and loses focus on the content of the message



12) Dr Steve Field, chair of Royal College of GPs (12)

Dr Field was filmed sitting in an office, probably at a GP surgery, and commented on the launch of the swine flu hotline. Many participants found this interview worrying and it is also one of the bottom ranked interviews. Two main aspects were identified; firstly, his body language and stance were considered to be arrogant and distant by many participants; and secondly, the language used by the interviewee seemed to be both excessively 'corporate' and removed. Respondents felt that he had chosen his words carefully in order to distance himself from any consequences: his use of passive rather than active language, i.e. 'we have been reassured', rather than 'we can reassure you that', worried participants who felt that he had no faith in the system. Overall people did not find this interviewee trustworthy or reassuring.

Insights:

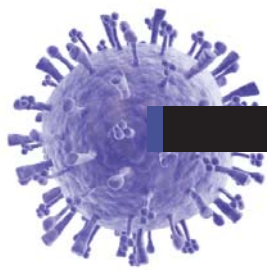
- Spokespeople need to consider their body language: the public will not empathise with people who appear to be arrogant or distant
- Spokespeople need to be seen to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem when communicating about risk. Alternative views are acceptable, but they need to be expressed in a constructive way. This can be reinforced both with words and body language.

13) Gregory Hartl, communications advisor, World Health Organisation (14)

Gregory Hartl was interviewed in front of computers and screens in a room which resembled "mission control". This was considered to be one of the worst interviews. Many were distracted by the background, and participants were put off by his casual dress and jerky body language. They were confused by his use of the word 'event' to describe outbreaks of the disease: they were not sure if this meant individual cases or localities where cases had broken out. His casual attitude also irritated participants, with many feeling that he didn't care about what he was saying. Overall participants were not reassured by the disease and found the presentation 'scary'.

Insights:

- Presentation is important: the environment, personal dress and body language are important elements in how the public views a spokesperson and the messages they communicate
- In risk communication, avoid jargon at all costs
- In a serious situation, spokespeople need to be seen to be in control and taking the situation seriously



14) Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Director of the Initiative for Vaccine Research, World Health Organisation (13)

Dr Marie-Paule Kieny was filmed in a dark and uninspiring studio with the WHO logo in the background. She spoke directly to the camera as though she were a newsreader. The setting for this interview was considered to be off-putting. The formal studio, with table and flags was considered old-fashioned and many did not feel that it added anything to the interview. This coupled with a fairly dry and monotone delivery style, led to this interview being in the bottom three interviews. Many were confused by the message and felt that the delivery and relevance of the message was not clear. However she maintains good eye contact and several of the respondents picked up on that. She clearly had notes in front of her and many felt that she was not prepared for the interview: she seemed as though she had just come from a laboratory to speak after little preparation.

Insights:

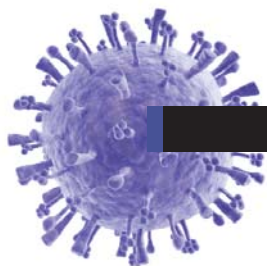
- A formal setting conveys a subliminal message that this is a major crisis
- Dry content and a monotone delivery will fail to connect with the public – even in a crisis, an energetic and animated style engages the public better

15) Gordon Brown, Prime Minister, (15)

Gordon Brown was shown speaking about the outbreak at an international conference: he stood at a podium and had a backdrop of national flags. Overall, participants considered Gordon Brown's speech to be too general. The message was not very clear and it failed to reassure them with its lack of real ideas or decisions. Many felt the interview was too dramatic with national flags in the background – it conveyed a national disaster, which participants found unnerving, not reassuring. He appeared vague, as though he didn't understand the issues very well. Participants were also put off by his refusal to address the audience or look directly at the camera.

Insights:

- Preconceptions of a spokesperson can affect how that individual's performance is perceived. Gordon Brown's lack of popularity at the time of the research is likely to have negatively affected perceptions of his communication effectiveness
- The speaker's environment is important in determining how the message is received: the formality of Gordon Brown's surroundings implied a major and serious issue
- When speaking about health risks, the public wants hard information and advice: they are looking for leadership
- Strong eye contact engenders credibility, trust and confidence



4.3 Discussion

Following group discussion, participants were asked to re-rank the spokespeople. This resulted in only marginal changes to rankings: therefore, the small shifts in rankings following group discussion seem to indicate that peer pressure has only a limited ability to change personal opinions of a spokesperson's effectiveness.

A first from Oxford

Across all four groups Professor John Oxford was found to be the favourite and most trusted spokesperson. Almost half the total number of participants rated him as their top communicator, with comments such as *"I thought he came across as really friendly and not scary, he just gave the kind of information that you would use"*; *"I thought he spoke in layman's terms so everybody at all levels would understand him,"* and *"[he] was the best communicator because he related to the audience and gave concrete advice on how to treat the illness and what precautions can be taken."*

In total, 25 people or two-thirds of the participants rated Professor John Oxford in their top three speakers. Reasons indicated for this include:

- His suit implied seriousness and gravitas
- His personable and unique style delivered the memorability factor – he was different from the other spokespeople and so his advice stood out
- His use of gesticulations helped to support his argument and more clearly communicate the advice he was giving
- His calm manner engendered reassurance and confidence in what he said
- He provided concrete advice: this meant there was real value in what he said and offered ways that viewers could take a level of control over the situation
- He seemed 'like your GP', a person whom members of the public generally recognise, trust and respect
- His location – possibly Harley Street – lent further credibility to his messages

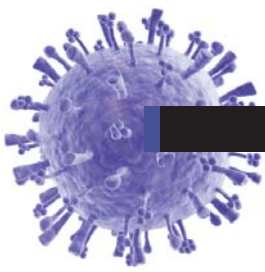
Overall, it appears that it is the combination of all the previous factors that made him the most successful spokesperson. One or two of these attributes are not enough: the most effective spokespeople have the "full package". With this in mind, it is clear that the most able and competent spokespeople should be used whenever risk communication is required. Compromising this can be dangerous if messages are to be effectively delivered.

The only other interview which provoked a similar level of consensus was that of Gordon Brown; 14 people identified him as the worst spokesperson, and double that of his closest rival (Marie-Paule Kieny). Comments here included "One of the worst public speakers ever"; "he did seem really unsure about what he was talking about"; and "he's probably been briefed about thirty seconds before he walked through the door".

Keeping up appearances

While some participants claimed to be influenced only by the speaker's content, appearance was important to the majority of respondents, although some felt that this would depend on who was presenting. For instance, one respondent claimed not to have noticed what the interviewees were wearing but asserted that they would be "absolutely disgusted" if Gordon Brown came out wearing a T-shirt and jeans.

The role of the interviewee was also important when making judgements about clothing: less consideration was given to appearance where the interviewees' job didn't normally involve presentation. For example the participants were less concerned about the appearance of doctors such as Dr Heneghan, Sandra Mounier-Jack and Dr Marie-Paule Kieny. However those people whose job was seen to involve presentation (Andy Burnham, Gordon Brown and Sir Liam Donaldson, for example) were judged more harshly on their appearance. Gregory Hartl suffered particularly badly on this criterion, with a high number of participants criticising his casual appearance, which seemed to them to be indicative of a 'disinterested' attitude. It is, perhaps, for this reason that, following group discussion, he displaced Dr Kieny to take second last place.



Content is king

The main characteristic shared by the interviewees in the bottom three places – Gordon Brown, Gregory Hartl and Dr Kiemy – was that none of them seemed to have anything useful or concrete to say. Dr Marie-Paule Kiemy suffered from a perceived lack of expression; her statement was delivered very precisely but in a monotone and this was seen as ‘unconvincing’ by the participants who placed her in the bottom three. Gordon Brown provoked the most vehement response on this matter as it was felt that he was ‘shifty’ in his delivery and that he had nothing useful to add. Gregory Hartl also suffered from a perceived problem with his attitude, coupled with the use of words described by one participant as ‘meaningless’.

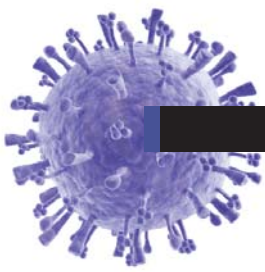
Belinda Phipps was judged by almost a third of the respondents to be ‘scare-mongering’ and yet more considered that she had nothing ‘useful’ to add to the debate. Conversely Dr Boon Lim was found to be calm and reassuring as almost a third of participants rated him in the top three of all interviewees. The contrasting interview styles of these two presenters could be said to contribute to the differing opinions, for Ms Phipps, although confident and assured, seemed to give little concrete advice, whereas Dr Lim was perceived as calm and more considered and offered useful advice to viewers, according to participants.

A question of trust

The risk of ‘scare-mongering’ was a concern raised about a number of the interviews. Despite this, Dr Heneghan and Dr Tom Jefferson succeeded in presenting alternative and even controversial views, and on the whole, participants still considered them to be trustworthy. Accent and dress seem to have an effect on perception here, although a number of participants were put off by Dr Jefferson’s casual appearance. One person even said that he was a conspiracy theorist because of his approach and appearance, although this view was not echoed by other participants. Dr Steve Field was generally considered to be off-putting because of his physical position, leaning back in his chair with one leg casually thrown across the other.

Brown and Burnham split the voters

Contrary to popularly held belief, politicians were not automatically mistrusted. Indeed, although Gordon Brown did fare badly in terms of his presentation style, Andy Burnham, by contrast, was widely considered to be reassuring and informative. His interview was rated as one of the best interviews in the focus group and people appreciated his delivery and presentation style. Again, contrary to popular opinion that politicians deal only in spin, it was also one of the few interviews perceived to have provided concrete advice – meaning that the substance of the interview was also considered to be useful and important.



5) Implications for risk communication

Key insights from the research indicate that the following factors are most important when communicating about risk via the media:

Personal style

- 'Likeability' is a key factor: participants were more likely to respond positively to those who came across as warm and approachable
- Tone of voice is important: participants were put off by monotone delivery, irritated by over-confident or patronising tones and reassured by friendly, down-to-earth, animated styles
- There is a thin line between the interviewee coming across as confident or arrogant: spokespeople should be aware of their physical stance during an interview; too relaxed a position can be perceived as arrogance

Credibility

- Spokespeople should dress appropriately: on the whole, participants considered that interviewees should dress formally to deliver important or risk-related information
- Suitability of interviewee is an important factor: the participants were concerned with the perceived relevance of the interviewee; this was a key factor in engendering respect

Content

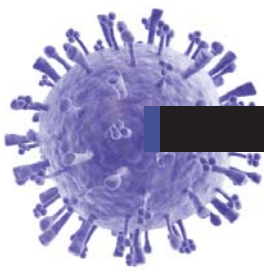
- Content is king: it is important that there is a correlation between content and presentation; participants were quick to spot when interviewees had little of substance to say
- Clarity of language is vital: participants were confused or annoyed with jargon, which prevented them from understanding the message

Body language

- Movement is an advantage: participants were attracted to those interviewees who displayed a passionate delivery style; gesticulation for emphasis was appreciated (although there are risks in taking this too far)
- Interviewees must address the camera or interviewer: participants were wary of those who did not directly address the audience

Environment

- Location is important: contrived settings were not as popular with participants as those interviewed in more natural or relevant locations



6) Conclusions

It is clear that while individuals may react differently to individual spokespeople, there are a clear set of criteria for ensuring effective communication of risk or health issues. This report identifies five key areas for communicators to concentrate on:

- personal style
- credibility
- content
- body language
- environment

Beyond this simple list, we are also able to create two spokesperson "equations" which are likely to result in either greater reassurance or heightened anxiety among the public:

CS + WA – AA = Anxiety

*Where CS is Credible Spokesperson,
WA is Worrying Analysis and
AA is Actionable Advice*

Whereas

CS + SA + PA + AA = Reassurance

*Where CS is Credible Spokesperson,
SA is Serious Appearance,
PA is Personable Approach and
AA is Actionable Advice*

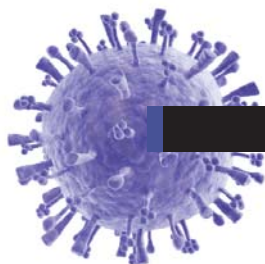
It is clear that for risk to be clearly communicated and messages to be accurately received, communicators should take steps to ensure that they satisfy as many of the key criteria as possible.

7) Future developments

This report provides an initial suggestive analysis of the data. The nature of the topic under study and the data collected would suggest that a social semiotic analysis may lead to more nuanced findings being uncovered as the investigation goes deeper.

It is therefore recommended that the study continues with a more profound examination of the data considering social semiotics and visual analysis as theoretical lenses through which more meaningful insights can be uncovered.

A number of participants identified 'giving good information' as a key quality for a good interview. Future critical discourse analysis should be carried out on the interviews in order to establish what information is being given, if any, and how this correlates to audience perceptions of information being given.



Appendix 1: Swine flu interview footage

Footage reference	Timing	Name/title of spokesperson
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15CV60CIEKI Swine Flu - PM on swine flu pandemic	0.00 - 0.46 (46 secs)	Gordon Brown, Prime Minister
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W12PdWsNuka Officials try to calm swine flu pregnancy fears	1.34 - 2.01 (27 secs)	Belinda Phipps, chief executive, National Childbirth Trust
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaCXZjvZ1F0 Swine flu: Health Secretary Andy Burnham on UK plan	0.46 - 1.23 (37 secs)	Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Health
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0rZLhTTZ-U Swine flu: plan to vaccinate UK population	0.43 - 1.10 (27 secs)	Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31yMhpFbaEs Researchers question legitimacy of swine flu jab	0.35 - 1.54 (79 secs)	Dr Tom Jefferson, The Cochrane Collaboration
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/8096709.stm Swine flu's shifting status	3.40 - 4.10 (30 secs)	Professor Sir Roy Anderson, Imperial College
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/8096709.stm Swine flu's shifting status	4.24 - 4.57 (33 secs)	Sandra Mounier-Jack, Department of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt_8qCPvzQ8&feature=related H1N1 kills 271 - A9 H1N1 - BBC	1.06 - 1.23 (17 secs)	Gregory Hartl, communications advisor, World Health Organisation
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6masqztbHt8 Swine flu expert gives verdict on coping strategy	0.03-1.33 (90 secs)	Professor John Oxford, professor of virology, University of London
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_n5hZ6TXgVA Big fall in swine flu cases	1.00-1.29 (29 secs)	Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Director of the Initiative for Vaccine Research
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzVTbjV9okg First swine flu death without underlying health problems	1.00-1.23 (23 secs)	Professor Hugh Pennington, Professor of Bacteriology, University of Aberdeen
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32DIjUeoMnI Swine flu could affect Britain's financial health	0.55-1.15 (20 secs)	Dr Boon Lim, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYStmUOHLa0 Swine flu enquiries almost double in a week	0.50-1.05 (15 secs)	Dr Steve Field, chair of Royal College of GPs
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E16BArPFLYg&feature=channel Tamiflu "could harm the under 12s"	0.50-1.29 (39 secs)	Dr Carl Heneghan, Department of Primary Health Care, Oxford University
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31yMhpFbaEs Researchers question legitimacy of swine flu jab	1.59 -4.03 (124 secs)	Dr Richard Halvorsen, GP and author of <i>The Truth About Vaccines</i>