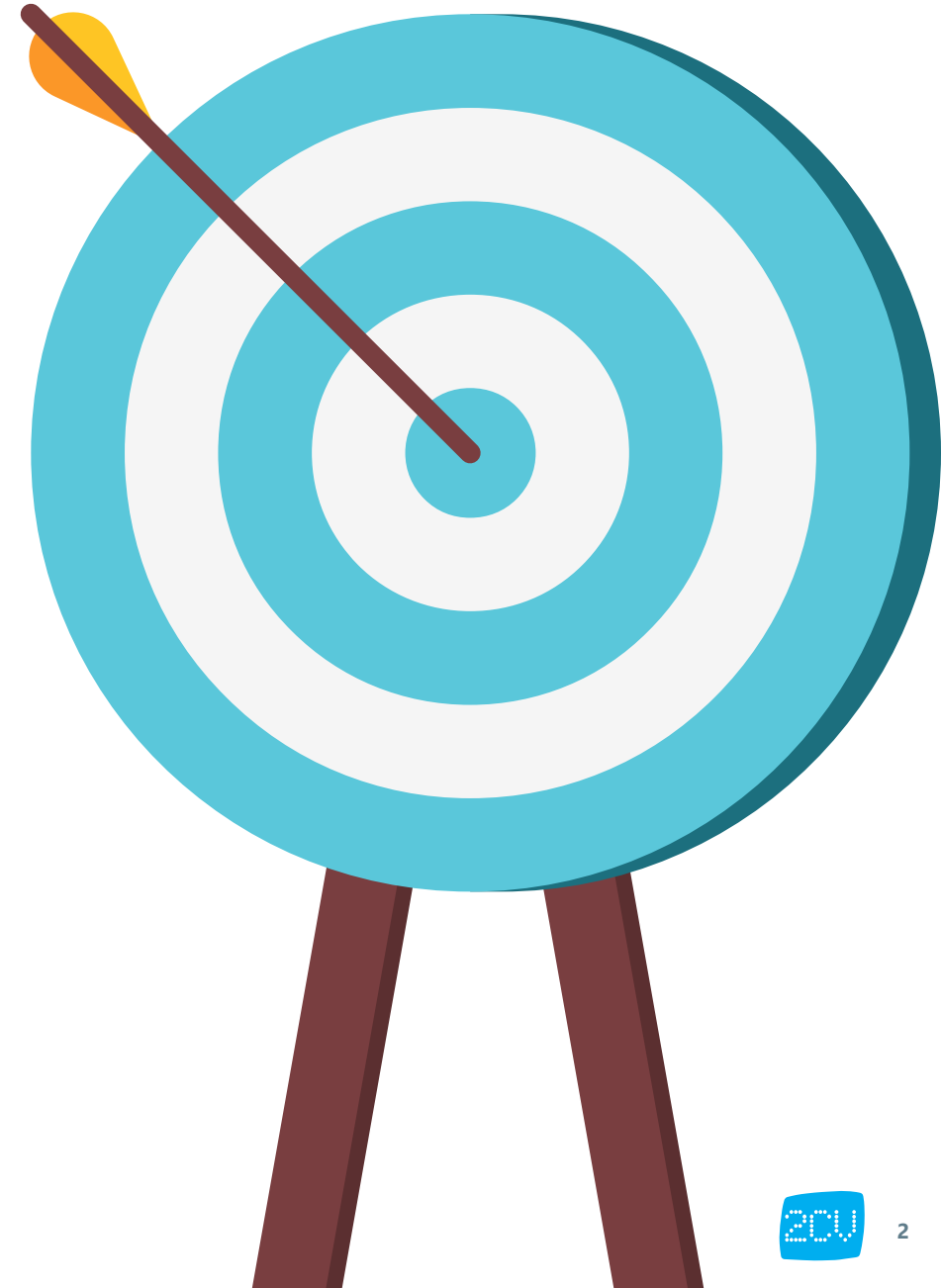




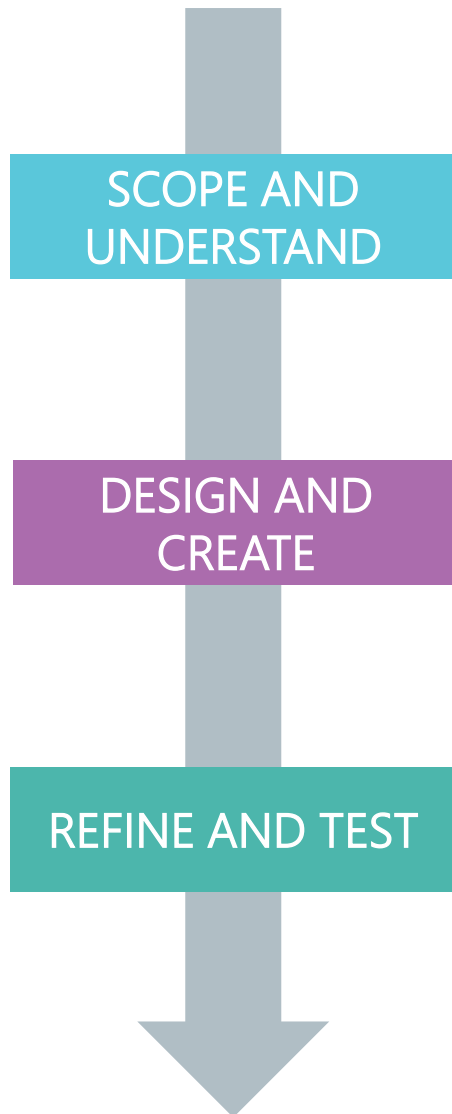
Michelle Patel
SC7-7(s)

Research objectives

1. To explore and validate toolkit hypotheses developed from a review of literature and experts in the field of communications
2. To gain an in-depth picture of risk perceptions in relation to the food system and responses to messages designed using hypotheses with the general public
 - How do they view food and the food system, what are their interactions with it?
 - How does 'risk' manifest and how does this impact on behaviour?
 - How do they learn about risks into the food system and their perceptions of message
 - What types of messages resonate and why
3. To develop, design and test a toolkit fit for purpose



Our approach – where we are in the process



1. **Springboard** – A dedicated session with key stakeholders aimed at immersing and sharing current thinking relating to the issues at play. To clarify objectives, validate decisions about sampling and our approach for the next phases
2. **Data Immersion** – A deep dive into FSA’s existing knowledge in this space as well as familiarisation with findings from desk review
3. **Practitioner and Intermediaries Consultation** – Evaluation of the recommendation and insights from the desk review by FSA communication managers and journalists
4. **Stop and Think** – A workshop to take FSA through the ‘Scope and Understand’ phase and plan materials for primary research with consumers
5. **Deliberative citizen forums** – Workshops with consumers designed to understand risk perceptions and respond to messages designed using hypotheses from desk research
6. **Stop and think** – A deliberative workshop to take FSA consumer findings and rework the toolkit and messages to re-test
7. **Testing of new messages** – Depth interviews with consumers to evaluate new messaging created using refined hypotheses developed after citizen forums
8. **Development and evaluation of toolkit** – Design and develop toolkit alongside FSA stakeholders. A Draft toolkit to be evaluated by FSA practitioners

We are here

Methodology and sample



15 x practitioner and intermediary tele-depth interviews

What we did:

- **40-60-minute semi-structured telephone interviews** with intermediaries and communication practitioners

Who we spoke with:

- Intermediaries (including journalists, editors and bloggers) who write about a range of different areas within the food sector and beyond
- Communication practitioners including *Head of PR; Senior Communications Manager; Head of Communications & Marketing ; Director of Communications; Business, Marketing & Events Strategy consultant*

Sample breakdown:

- 4 x intermediaries
- 5 x communication practitioners
- 7 x FSA communication practitioners



3 x citizen forums

What we did:

- **3 x 3-hour deliberative workshops** with members of the general public in London, Belfast and Cardiff.

Who we spoke with:

- 16 x participants per location
- Equal split of gender
- Mix of ages between 18-65+
- Mix of ethnicity
- Mix of working status (including quotas for full-time, part-time, casual workers and retired)
- Mix of life-stage
- Spread of living in rural and urban locations

Perceived risk is abstract and therefore subjective

- There are two types of risk: **absolute** and **relative**
 - **Absolute** risk refers to how likely the risk is; the higher the absolute risk, the more likely it will happen (Fagerlin and Peters, 2011; Rakow et al, 2015)
 - **Relative** risk referring how likely a risk will happen in comparison to something else (Rakow et al, 2018)
- Risk is subjective to the individual with factors influencing risk perception being two-fold: personal and cultural (Charlebois and Summand 2015; or McGloin et al. 2009)
 - Personal influences are much more individualistic and centred around how the presented risk would affect them (psychological heuristics; Tversky and Kahneman 1981), and often perceived relative to other situations (i.e. is this risk more likely to happen to me or them)
 - Cultural influences refer to social norms and values. For example, what is the status quo (how do other people behave, what is being communicated about said risk), how someone is raised, and a person's social environment (van Dijk et al. 2008; de Freitas et al. 2019)
- Different audiences may also perceive a risk in different ways (de Freitas et al. 2019). Audiences can be categorised in various ways:
 - Level of knowledge in an area (e.g. food, science, health...)
 - Associations of a risk (e.g. smoking and cancer, fast food and obesity)
 - Awareness of a risk
 - Numeracy/literacy levels

The ways in which a risk is presented can inform how it is perceived

1.



Qualitative

- Can explain what a risk means to an individual
- Can provide context to a quantitative presentation of a risk (Rakow 2015)
- However, can be easily interpreted in different ways. Some could perceive a low risk as something quite severe and vice versa (Kent 1994; Wallsten et al, 1986 in Fischhoff 2013; van der Bles et al 2019)

2.



Quantitative

- Generally, percentages are easier to understand
- Frequencies can be used and makes the risk feel more definitive (Slovic et al. 2000; Fagerlin and Peters 2011)
- Presenting too much information can be overwhelming and confusing (depending on who is being communicated to)
- When presenting an absolute risk the literature recommends providing contextual information (Fagerlin and Peters 2011; Rakow et al. 2015)
- When presenting a relative risk literature suggests showing this alongside an absolute presentation of risk to comparison (Fagerlin and Peters 2011; Spiegelhalter 2017b)

3.



Visual

- Graphs can be used to understand a risk quickly, however, different graphs communicate different information (Fagerlin and Peters, 2011; Spiegelhalter 2017a; Freeman et al. 2017).
- Use of symbols can lead to misinterpretation (Peters et al. 2007)
 - Refers to using smiley faces/emojis, colours, and icons which can be interpreted in many ways.
- Visual communication can be more emotive and engaging/memorable (McInerny et al, 2014; Spiegelhalter, 2017a)

There are expectations of how a risk should be created and communicated

The role of the communicator: practitioners versus intermediaries

- Communicators are ultimately responsible for how a message is perceived
 - Communication practitioners and intermediaries decide how a message is presented and how it is communicated
- The responsibility of the communicator practitioners and intermediaries, however, differs
 - Intermediaries craft a narrative in order to determine what is deemed 'newsworthy' (Wilson et al, 2014)
 - Communication practitioners deliver a message that allows the public to be informed

The role of the channel

- Traditional media is trusted to deliver risk communications
 - Previous research suggests consumers prefer to receive risk communication through traditional media channels compared to social media
 - TV being the preferred channel (Etienne et al, 2018)
- Social media has potential to engage consumers through two-way communication but is considered less trustworthy (Regan et al, 2016; Charlebois and Summan 2015)
 - For example, there is an awareness and expectation for the information to be fake news

There is not a universal approach to risk communication

The literature indicates that there is no one size fits all approach to communicating risk, however, there are guiding principles shared across the frameworks/toolkits:

1. Determining objectives
2. Being open with what is being communicated
3. Being transparent with what this means
4. Having appropriate timing

"Decision-making on risk communications cannot be made into an exact science, and judgements need to be made, but a thorough and systematic consideration of all possible relevant factors can help to make that judgement more informed."

- EFSA food risk guidelines 2016

Key take-outs of the literature review

Implications from the literature



1

To what extent do practitioners think of the audience when creating food risk comms and their understanding of the consumer context of food risk?



2

How do practitioners and intermediaries conceptualise their role in food risk communication?



3

To gauge awareness of the impact different presentations of risk have on the consumer (qualitative, quantitative, visual)



4

What impact, from a practitioner perspective, does the channel have on how the food risk is perceived?



5

What principles do practitioners consider when faced with food risk communication?

Practitioners do not perceive food risks to be that different to other risks

- Practitioners acknowledge that consumers have a more emotive response to food (and risk in food) than they do to different products and services
 - Complexity of the emotional relationship people have with food means comms about food will engender a highly emotional response - it can be challenging to produce comms that do what they're meant to: allow people to make informed decisions and manage risk.
- But on balance, practitioners do not differentiate between comms about risk more broadly, and *food* related risk.
 - The processes are still the same (if they follow one) the same things (message, audience, channel)
- And some intermediaries apply an overlying principle to *all* comms
 - Importance is to get the information right and get as much supporting evidence as possible
 - Portray story in as balanced and non-hysterical way as possible

Food is inherently both cultural and personal. To tell someone to stop doing something which they've been doing all their life, like washing their chicken, is incredibly difficult.

Risk communication is simply good comms

Responsibilities of practitioners and intermediaries vary



FSA communication practitioners

- When communicating a food risk, the safety of the public is paramount
- The challenge here is three-fold:
 1. How can we effectively communicate the risk without sparking panic?
 2. How can we present the risk which is consumer friendly?
 3. Ensuring the message resonates



Communication practitioners

- Communicating 'risk' is about consumer safety but also about mitigating damage to the brand
- The emphasis is more focussed on controlling the narrative as much as possible
- Acutely aware of how things can change and gather momentum
- Consumer confidence can be prioritised



Intermediaries

- Communicating risk to their audiences a mix of delivering the news; holding people to account
- Challenges faced here:
 - Getting the information to support the news narrative
 - Peoples' nervousness in talking to media
 - The balance of 'news' vs hysteria

What unites practitioners and intermediaries is their role to keep the general public informed

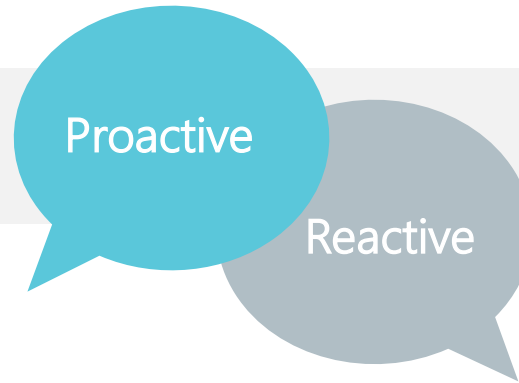
- Practitioners and intermediaries see the role of risk communication as raising awareness so that the target audience can make informed decisions and manage their risk
 - Here it is critical to get the balance of informing and not scaring people right
- Informing people even when you do not have all the information to hand is also seen as the role of practitioners:
 - As communication practitioners it is essential not to pass the buck or play the 'blame game'.
- To engender and develop trust (in brand, organisation) transparency and honesty is considered a core value and demonstrated by
 - Communicating openly (internally and externally)

There are technical, scientific differences – yes. But, even in previous comms roles, risk comms is all about presenting a risk to the public in the most useful and appropriate way

Consumers always react better when they know something is going on. Silence and uncertainty makes them highly suspicious and likely to think something is being covered up

Risk communications tend to be either reactive or proactive

On balance, food risk comms appear to be either proactive (taking a lead on dissemination of information) or reactive (responding to situation)



Leading the story

Channel – more select choice of channel used Social Media & social channel more likely main route. May brief specific journalists

Nature of message - food (safety) campaign aimed at the general public means organisation can lead on timeframe and target audience

Audience - highly targeted audience
This could be demographics, life stages; or even down to the nitty gritty of area they live, a product that's been bought

Responding to a story

Channel - less nuanced selection of channels to reach as wide an audience as possible. Use of press and media releases

Nature of message - if responding to queries, no opportunity to dictate timeframe and audience and likely to adopt 'carpet bombing' strategy

Audience – a mass audience

Consumers acknowledge decisions are determined by informed risk

Consumers are confident in their ability to mitigate against risks

- 'Risk', to consumers, primarily means financial cost/damage (being 'ripped off'; poor quality for high investment etc.) and, less commonly, physical harm. And participants understand that as consumers they are exposed and vulnerable to this
- They mitigate against these risks by making informed decisions on the reliability and potential harm they might experience—and this is how they define 'informed risk'
- Participants acknowledge that their decisions and behaviours as consumers and service users are informed by critical information. Most typically mentioned elements
 - Experience (inc. existing relationship)
 - Price
 - Quality (inc. brand reputation)
 - Recommendations
- When discussing *who* is most/least trusted to inform them on risk, 'trust' calculations to determine this are consistent with what we have seen previously* and rested on three key factors: **context** (what is the happening); **social trust** (do you intend me harm or good?); **cognitive trust** (do you have the authority and capability to work in my interests?).

If they are meant to keep you safe, if they have no agenda, you trust them & what they say

Most trusted

- Public bodies: (Govt; WHO; PHE, Health professionals, 'experts')

VS

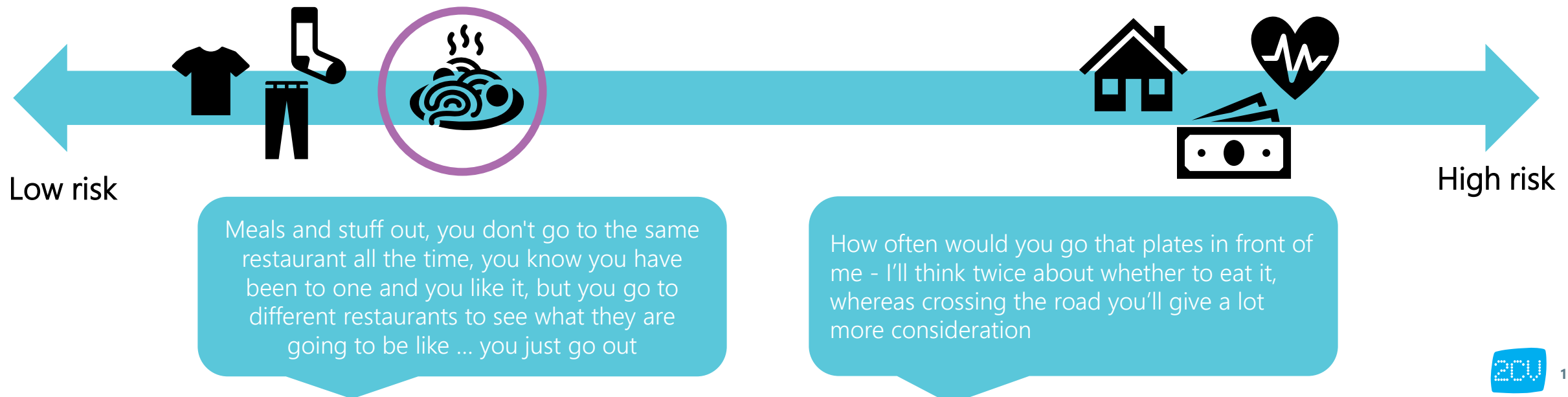
Least trusted

- News outlets; Facebook/social media, & Govt

They are trying to sell/advertise. They have ulterior motives.. You don't know who is behind them

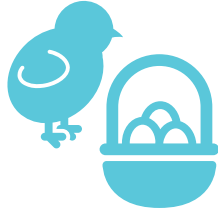
Food doesn't feel risky to consumers in comparison to other sectors

- Food is part of everyday life and any associated risks feel unavoidable
 - Buying, preparing, cooking and consuming food is habitual and many feel they can identify and mitigate food risks with ease
- Whilst there is some concern for food safety and hygiene, it's not top of mind
 - Food risks do not feel serious, unless they affect health i.e. food poisoning or allergic reactions
- Financial and health risk seem more serious, particularly big-ticket and 'serious' items such as buying a house, car or white goods
 - Food risk, in comparison, is normalised



Consumer responses to proactive and reactive messaging* highlight how different approaches to risk comms worked

Proactive



Salmonella and eggs

Audience – Assumed to be more focused and aimed at a ‘vulnerable’ audience

Channel – Mainstream media considered appropriate

Message – Seen as contextualising and updating the ‘risk’ rather than a warning. Some question timing of announcement and want explanation of why the risk has changed

Messenger – Some wariness re mainstream media and agenda behind story

This isn't urgent. More like an update.
It's good to know

Reactive



Listeria in sandwiches

Audience – Seen as aimed at broad general public

Channel – Given nature of risk, some want this to be more prominent in mainstream media vs FSA site

Message – Risk to public is relevant and communicated clear. Tone is right and avoids ‘panic’

Messenger – Independent regulator (govt) considered the right ‘messenger’ but knowledge of FSA and its role is not universal

This feels more like a warning to me.
It actually made me feel scared

*Participants were shown a range of messages in the sessions. These are included in the appendix

Participants' risk communications principles focus on simplicity and honesty

Across the sample participants are consistent in what risk communications need to do. Main principles for communication around risk contained these key factors

-  **1.** Highlight the risks clearly and unambiguously
-  **2.** Be honest, transparent – explain what is happening
-  **3.** What steps are being taken? What action is required by general public?
-  **4.** Get the message out (pick the most suitable channel i.e. mainstream news social media)

The impact of different presentations of a risk validate findings from the literature

Presentation	What the literature said	Impact on message
Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what a risk means to an individual. • Can provide context to a quantitative presentation of a risk (Rakow 2015) • Can be easily interpreted in different ways (Kent 1994; Wallsten et al, 1986 in Fischhoff 2013; van der Bles et al 2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels the most public friendly way of communicating risk. It's more human and easier to understand • There are concerns that the danger of a risk can be misinterpreted • Practitioners feel that these messages resonate
Quantitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentages are easier to understand • Frequencies can be used and makes the risk feel more definitive (Slovic et al. 2000; Fagerlin and Peters 2011) • Presenting too much information quantitatively can be overwhelming and confusing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be used to scale up or size the impact, or likelihood of a risk happening. • Cautious to only use quantitative presentations of risk as can be taken out of context.
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphs can be used to understand a risk quickly • Different graphs communicate different information (Fagerlin and Peters, 2011; Spiegelhalter 2017a; Freeman et al. 2017). • Symbols can be interpreted in many ways (Peters et al. 2007) • Visual communication can be more emotive and engaging (McInerney et al, 2014; Spiegelhalter, 2017a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would not use graphs to communicate with the general public but would consider it with a specialised audience (businesses, scientists). • Creative visualisations are a way of making a risk memorable e.g. showing 25 blue dots and 75 white dots to represent 25%; showing an icon of a pregnant woman to provide clarity of audience.

Consumers prefer food risk communications* that are: concise, easily interrogated and supported by a credible messenger



Imagery and graphics

Graphics work well if easy to interrogate. In this instance it helped individuals identify *who* was most at risk easily and intuitively



Messenger

Credibility of messenger is key in driving engagement (CEO vs scientist; Govt vs media). Messages from independent organisation (FSA) believed to have no agenda. But it is important independence is backed up with expertise (Mumsnet vs FSA)



Audience

Messaging clearly identified individual's vs general population and can help identify whether comms are relevant to them. This can, however, be a barrier to broader engagement on the issue



Channels

Social media is anticipated and valued (particularly for getting messages out promptly) but mainstream media thought to have wider cut through

*Participants were shown different iterations of a CBD message using principles including: use of percentages; different messengers; different formats

In this instance, participants preferred communications that are: concise and easily interrogated; and supported by a credible messenger

Principles for food risk communications



PURPOSE

Having a clear hold on **what the communication intends** to achieve e.g. behaviour change or raise awareness.



CONTROL

Managing the situation (including the narrative) as much as possible is critical for any organisation. Areas of control will include pretesting messages, campaign sequencing; brand equity and future proofing → how can we protect ourselves down the line.



TRANSPARENCY

With the interests of the public in mind it's important to **be open and honest in all communications**, even if uncertain.



CONTEXT

It's important to **consider the audience's context**; not just who they are but the context that risk has in their life. How will they receive the comms? What will they take away from it? What will they do with the comms? Do we need another view/context? 3rd party endorsement (including stakeholders, consumers)? This stuff is complicated.

Principles for food risk communications (ii)



CHANNEL

Understanding the **impact of channels chosen** to disseminate messaging (as well as the messenger) is critical. Knowing how audiences interpret individual channels (be it brand; platform, medium) is key and can determine choice



TIMING

A balancing act between **telling the public as fast as possible, especially if it's high-risk, and gaining a bigger picture** of what needs to be communicated (e.g. more research, crafting the right message)



EVALUATION

Organisations should look to see to what extent the communication has **done what was intended**. This affords an opportunity to learn from communications and how to develop/improve



CLARITY

Providing enough information that **explains what the risk is, clearly**. Here, the language used is paramount; will they understand? Equally, there needs to be enough information for people to make their own informed decision