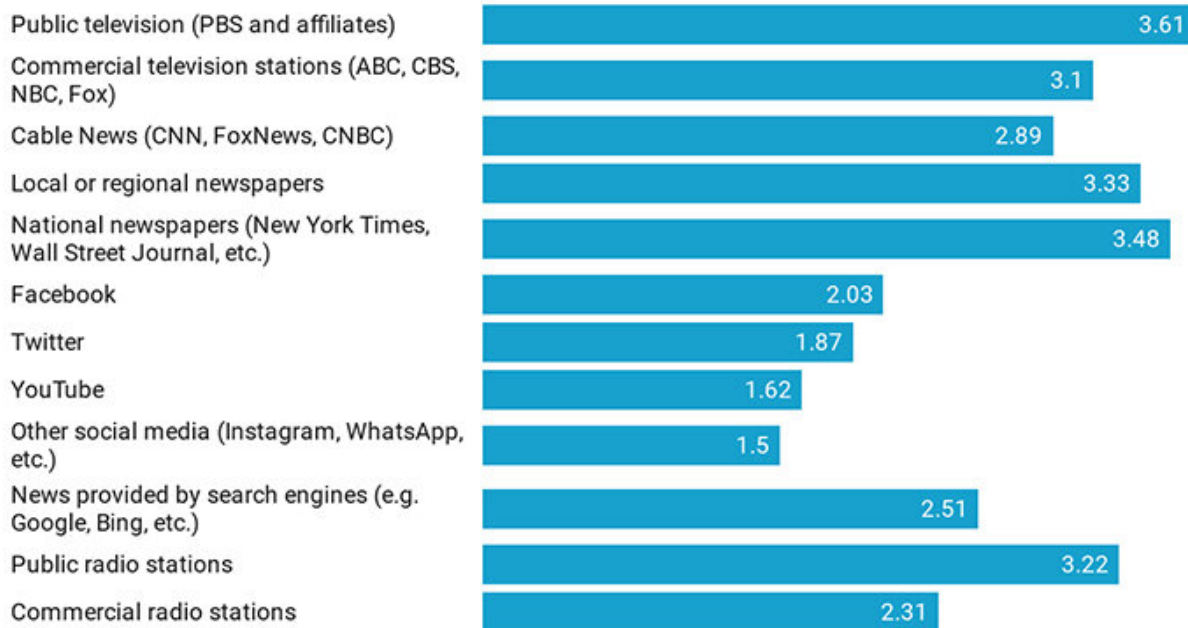


Study gauges how Kansans get information on COVID-19, how they assess risk

June 30 2020, by Mike Krings



A graph shows the information sources survey respondents trusted. The scores range from 1, least trusted, to 5, most trusted. Mugur Geana

New information emerges about the novel coronavirus on a daily basis, sometimes confirming, other times contradicting what we thought we knew the day before. Our reaction to this constant information flow depends not only on our understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic but also our sources, environment and how we estimate risk. A recent

University of Kansas study found that while Kansas survey participants relied on multiple sources about reliable COVID-19 information, they tended to prefer local authorities and distrust social media.

Mugur Geana, associate professor of journalism & [mass communications](#) and director of KU's Center for Excellence in Health Communications to Underserved Populations, wrote the study, which will be published in the June issue of the *Kansas Journal of Medicine*. The study showed responses consistent with the state's status, at the time, as an area with relatively few cases.

"When we did this survey in April, information was changing very fast," Geana said. "We wanted to make sure we captured a window in which data available to people did not vary widely."

More than 130 Kansans submitted answers to the [social media](#) survey, open only for a 96-hour window.

No respondents reported having COVID-19. Only 8% said they had family members diagnosed, while 41% said they knew someone in their community or place of work with COVID-19. Respondents appraised their knowledge of the pandemic as above average, and their responses to questions about the virus confirmed that.

"We wanted to understand what their concept of risk was. We were pleasantly surprised, but we also need to take it with a grain of salt, because the sample skewed toward highly educated participants," Geana said.

Those results are consistent with online surveys, which tend to be answered more by highly [educated people](#) and women, Geana said.

Among the significant findings was where people reported getting

information about the pandemic. The top source was Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly's daily [media](#) briefings, which were also rated as the most trustworthy. Information from search engines such as Google or Bing was second in terms of usage, with 60% of respondents saying they used them daily. National newspapers such as the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* were third in terms of use, while discussions with family, friends and co-workers followed.

As far as mediated sources of information, public television and national newspapers were the most trusted media sources, while local or regional papers, commercial television, cable news, liberal and conservative media sources followed. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram were the least trusted source of information.

A high level of knowledge among respondents was not surprising, but the lack of trust in social media was, Geana said.

"We somewhat expected that (high level of knowledge) because it was a salient issue. People had to stay at home because of COVID-19, so they were watching a lot of TV because of it, reading a lot of news because of COVID-19, etc. That was very surprising," Geana said of the observed lack of trust in social media. "In addition to media, in terms of trust, medical professionals are the most trusted people, but co-workers, family and friends are important, because you talk with them more, often through social media channels. Well, we found that they are not as trusted as we expected. Probably a lot of the recent scandals involving social media influenced the trust that people have in it nowadays."

The findings also showed a relationship between people's level of knowledge and their willingness to take precautions to protect themselves and others. Those who reported strong feelings about precautionary measures put in place by the state government to slow the

spread were also less likely to take precautionary measures. That was also in line with previous findings that people's risk perceptions were related to the severity of the outbreak in their community.

"If I believe a mask will not help me, I am more likely not to wear one, even though I have access to information that tells me that is dangerous and I could get COVID-19," Geana said of the findings.

The study is the first of two, and the second part will include further information on the perception of risk about contracting COVID-19 as states started to reopen, with survey data taken in May.

Image: A graph shows the [information](#) sources survey respondents trusted. The scores range from 1, least trusted, to 5, most trusted.

More information: Kansans in the Middle of the Pandemic: Risk Perception, Knowledge, Compliance with Preventive Measures, and Primary Sources of Information about COVID-19. *Kansas Journal of Medicine*. journals.ku.edu/kjm/article/view/13821

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: Study gauges how Kansans get information on COVID-19, how they assess risk (2020, June 30) retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-gauges-kansans-covid-.html>

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