

Food Tube: Online Coverage of Food Safety

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Abstract: Food safety at restaurants is an increasing concern among consumers. A primary population segment working in foodservice is receiving food safety information through new media channels such as video social network Web sites. This research used content analysis to examine the purpose and messages of food safety-related videos posted to YouTube. A usable sample of 76 videos was identified using “food safety” in the YouTube search function. Nearly two-thirds of all videos were author-categorized as News & Politics (40.8%) or Entertainment (23.7%). Researcher assessment identified more than 40% of the videos as being educational in nature. Integrating multiple factors, the mean credibility rating for all videos was 3.7 on a 5-point scale (1 = not credible, 5 = very credible) ($SD = 1.10$). The burden of food safety was most commonly placed on individuals (42.1%), followed by government (22.4%) and food companies (21.1%). A slight majority of videos (52.6%) had a proactive food safety message; the remaining videos had a negative tone, impugning someone for poor food safety. Results indicate that videos originated by agricultural communicators must be artfully developed to attract YouTube users while conveying a credible and educational message. Communicators also must monitor new media for competing messages being viewed by target audiences and devise strategies to counter such messages. This one-time snapshot of how food safety was portrayed on YouTube suggests that the intended purpose of videos, whether educational or entertaining, is not as relevant as the perceived purpose and the message being received by viewers.

Keywords: Food Safety, YouTube, Content Analysis, Internet, Agenda Setting