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The Role of Channel Beliefs in Risk Information Seeking

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1.0 Introduction

Today's risk perception and communication scholars embrace the challenges associated with seeking to understand audiences as active participants in the risk communication process. Gone, thankfully, are the days when both researchers and practitioners assumed that one need only invest in the careful construction of messages, in order to educate or persuade. During those naïve decades, unsuccessful outcomes—and there were many—were simply blamed on the audience. Today, we realize that one can achieve a reasonable fit between message and outcome only by coming to grips with the judgments that audiences make, about both messages and the channels that disseminate them, and then by aligning our communication efforts accordingly.

Crucial to a good fit between message and audience, is therefore an understanding of audience members' information-seeking and processing behaviors. Risk messages can be informative, and otherwise effective, only when audiences intercept them and encode them in some way. Yet, studies of the effects of risk messages have, historically, treated seeking and processing as 'black box' attributes of audiences, as indecipherable way stations along the route to some kind of message impact. Recent work in psychology and in communication science has unearthed substantial variance in the extent to which individuals look for, and then analyze, information. That variance, in turn, can have a profound influence on how a person reacts to a risk message.

We think it important, as a result, to pull information seeking and processing out of the black box and into a well-lit environment, where risk communication scholars can explore both precursors and outcomes. The coauthors have devoted intellectual effort to this over the years, including the development of the Risk Information Seeking and Processing (RISP) model (Griffin et al. 1999; Griffin *et al.*, 2013), to which we will refer later in this chapter.

Of the two concepts—information seeking and information processing—it is the second that has received the lion's share of attention from researchers. In psychology, dual-process theories, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the Heuristic-Systematic Model, and Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory, all seek to better understand what leads individuals to engage in more or less effortful

processing of information (for a comprehensive look at these and other dual process theories, see Chaiken & Trope, 1999). Equally important has been the work on decision-making in the face of uncertainty, pioneered by Kahneman and Tversky (some of this early scholarship is gathered in Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982), which explores the use of heuristic processing strategies.

Less well understood, however, is the impact of information *seeking* on the success or failure of risk messages. While the activity of seeking information is viewed by many scholars as a component of processing, we argue here that information seeking can be treated fruitfully as a separate concept, driven by various motivations, feelings of efficacy, and beliefs about the relevance and availability of information channels in one's environment.

Thus, we have chosen in this chapter to concentrate on risk information seeking. We will first define what we mean by the term, then will turn to an array of conceptual models that explore predictors of individuals' decisions to seek information, more or less actively. Prominent among those predictors are beliefs about information channels, so a focus on these beliefs will constitute another major segment of this chapter. We will finally forge linkages between these concepts and risk information, with a particular focus on the RISP model mentioned earlier.

2.0   Information seeking

Wilson describes information seeking as 'the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal' (Wilson, 2000: 49). However, since we include passive behavior in our conceptualization, we remain equivocal about the crucial nature of 'purposive', at least as a stable characteristic. Instead, we argue that one can situate information seeking along a couple of continuums: It can be more or less active, as well as more or less purposive. Inclusion of mediated information channels, in particular, invites attention to more passive seeking. Many of us live in rich, mediated environments, and individuals inhabiting such a landscape can allow information to wash over them as they engage in, at best, only sporadic bouts of attention, episodes that are more reactive than purposive. Television has fashioned itself into the ideal channel for this kind of immersion. Conversely, someone may look for information in a much more purposive and active way, even setting aside normal tasks to devote time to unearthing relevant bits of evidence, sometimes from channels not normally employed. The Internet is growing as a channel of choice for these individuals.

Avoidance is another dimension of information seeking, and, although it is by definition purposive, it, too, can be practiced in more or less active fashion. In that information-rich environment of ours, moving one's eyes off screen, as we sit in front of the television on the typical evening, serves as a form of less active avoidance. On the other hand, an individual confronted with a grim health diagnosis may actively choose to avoid additional information about the disease, feeling such detailed knowledge may be more harmful than helpful.

An example of active avoidance in the face of risk was uncovered years ago by British sociologist Brian Wynne, whose study of workers at a nuclear fuels

reprocessing plant in northern England found that some individuals expressed little interest in learning about the possible risks of their work environment. Apparently, ignorance helped keep in check the angst that might arise from a more thorough knowledge of those risks (Wynne, 1992).

Models of information seeking, developed by both communication and information science scholars, share a few basic characteristics. They include the importance of uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Miller & Jablin, 1991), and of social factors (e.g. Chaffee & McLeod, 1973), as motivators of information seeking. Another is a focus on the motives and behaviors of information users, rather than on the decisions and actions of providers (Kuhlthau, 1991). For example, Dervin's Sense-Making theory engages scholars in something of a mental models approach to users, in order to glimpse information-seeking processes in action (Dervin & Nilan, 1986).

Given a high uncertainty environment and a focus on understanding the information user, what then influences the nature and intensity of information seeking about risks? One can imagine a number of answers to that question, but for purposes of this chapter we propose three interrelated factors: motivation, capacity, and channel beliefs (Griffin et al., 1999) Motivation refers to the processes that spur a person toward or away from a behavior; in this case, seeking (or avoiding) risk-related information. Capacity refers to information gathering self-efficacy, a person's assessment of their own personal ability to find and utilize information. 'Channel beliefs' refers to a varied category of beliefs about information channels themselves that may move a person to look for information in some types of channels rather than others. We turn to those three arenas below, concentrating primarily on channel beliefs, while reflecting on some of the ways that motivation and capacity might relate to these beliefs.

3.0   Channel beliefs

Channel beliefs are the mix of cognitive and affective ways in which people assess information channels, typically with respect to the expected outcomes for themselves or others of using those channels for risk-related information. We expect these beliefs to moderate individuals' seeking styles, including decisions to avoid information.

3.1   What is a channel?

It is important here to distinguish 'channel' from 'source', as these terms are sometimes employed (erroneously, we would argue) as synonyms in studies. While the two terms refer occasionally to the same entity (i.e., an interpersonal channel may be an individual, such as an expert, who is actually the source of information about a risk), they more often refer to conceptually distinct ones. A channel is a conveyance device that collects information from a source or sources, repackages it and then disseminates it. Those functions lead scholars to refer to such channels as 'mediated' ones; that is, the channel acts as something of a

'go-between' between source and audience. Mediated channels rarely transmit without first repackaging information; in fact, primary goals of mediated channels are to be highly selective in choosing information, and then to embed the selected information in narratives that seek to summarize, analyze or be persuasive about the events or processes of interest.

For research purposes, channels are typically categorized dichotomously as mediated or interpersonal. Common mediated channels include newspapers, radio, television and magazines, while common interpersonal channels include friends, neighbors, and individuals with specific areas of expertise. Although interpersonal channels can affect a merger of channel and source characteristics, as noted above, even those channels engage in 'mediation' almost as much as traditional journalistic channels. Consider your physician, who provides treatment recommendations for your various aches and pains. Those recommendations may stem not from the physician's own research but instead, from reading the research of others, or from learning of new drug options from manufacturers' representatives. Your physician is passing on packets of information from sources in ways not unlike the narratives of more traditional mediated channels.

Scholars are struggling, at present, to fit new communication channels into these two conceptual categories. At times, those channels seem to serve a straightforward, mediated function; an Internet search for information about the risks of asbestos, for example, may turn up sites brimming with government fact sheets. Alternatively, other options such as Facebook, listservs, blogs or chat rooms offer interactive access to what appear to be individual opinions. We know that the Internet has become our preferred channel when we need to search for science or risk information (National Science Board, 2012). But we are only beginning to understand the beliefs that individuals hold about these channels, beliefs that will drive their openness to and interpretations of information found there.

3.2 Why focus on channel rather than source beliefs?

Persuasion research has historically privileged studies of perceived source and message characteristics (see, for example, Perloff, 2003), rather than studies of channel perceptions. But an understanding of decision-making suggests increasingly that individuals make judgments about the credibility of information less on the basis of the sources embedded in a message, and more on the basis of the channel that carries that information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Bates *et al.*, 2006). This would be consistent with the argument that humans are fundamentally heuristic information processors (e.g. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), that we take shortcuts whenever we can. Judging the credibility of a channel, frankly, is a lot easier than the effort required to read narratives carefully, in order to sift through and evaluate the sources cited there.

People hold many beliefs about information channels, with some of those beliefs more idiosyncratic than others. Below, we mention scholarly explorations of a number of the more systematic belief categories, and their origins in

individuals' capacities to seek information, their motivations to do so, and the mixture of these factors.

4.0   Capacity and channel satisficing

It may seem a matter of common sense to say that one major predictor of channel use is a person's judgment that a channel can, in fact, provide the information needed. But our environment is replete with instances of people opting into channels that they judge to offer inferior information. For example, while individuals describe physicians as the ideal channel for health information, they get the bulk of their health information not from doctors but from mediated channels, including the Internet (Johnson & Meischke, 1991; Hesse *et al.*, 2005).

Chaffee (1986) offered an explanation some years ago for this pattern. Channel choices result from juggling two evaluative perceptions: (1) the likelihood that a channel will contain information relevant to your need; and (2) the cost of accessing that channel. Sometimes channels are literally too expensive in dollar-and-cents terms; for example, the cost of a subscription to a hard copy of the daily *New York Times*, arguably the most prestigious newspaper in the United States, is beyond the means of many Americans. But channels can also be costly in terms of time and effort. If a person seeking to follow up on information about a risk does not know whom to contact, the time required to clarify that source may be too great. And while the likelihood of finding relevant information in a channel is clearly an important factor, cost will likely trump relevance every time.

In the case of health information, this pattern is clear. Although most people would prefer to talk to a physician when they have a health question, that channel is costly to access, at least in the United States, where patients are billed for health care, and where physicians are often sequestered within organizations that guard their time. As a result, individuals default to more accessible channels such as TV and magazines, even though they regard those channels as less likely to contain information relevant to their needs.

Thus, in addition to channel beliefs, individuals seem to bring to information seeking a set of beliefs about their own levels of efficacy when it comes to accessing and evaluating risk information; beliefs that will influence their assessment of the costs of potential channels. For many people, these efficacy levels may be quite low. After a number of studies of public efforts to build knowledge about science and risk issues, British sociologist Brian Wynne noted:

> An important discovery from our research has been the enormous amount of sheer *effort* needed for members of the public to monitor sources of scientific information, judge between them, keep up with shifting scientific understandings, distinguish consensus from isolated scientific opinion, and decide how expert knowledge needs qualifying for use in *their* particular situation. They must also judge what level of knowledge is *good enough* for them [italics in the original].
>
> (Wynne, 1991: 117)

Wynne was talking about both information seeking and processing, of course, but the daunting requirements of finding potentially relevant channels, and then assessing their quality, may simply defeat many individuals. The Internet places literally thousands of channel options at the doorstep of an inquiry, but while that may seem to solve the access problem, it multiplies the assessment challenges. Evidence suggests that many people respond to that channel largesse by abandoning channel credibility evaluations altogether (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Bates *et al.*, 2006). Even the perception of access may be something of a false promise; an inability to search effectively, combined with websites designed with users other than the public in mind, means that many individuals step away from Internet searches in frustration (Lankes, 2008).

5.0   Motivations, expectations, values

The motivations that drive people to seek, avoid, or use information have been explored by various scholars over the years. Among cognitive motivators, the drive to manage and overcome uncertainty—usually considered to be an unpleasant state of mind—is a key factor (e.g. Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Related to this drive is a person's desire for judgmental confidence, and information sufficiency for topics that are salient, and with which they may need to cope (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). This need for information sufficiency can motivate information seeking as well as processing, in regard to health or environmental risks (Griffin *et al.*, 1999). Affective motivations can also influence information seeking or avoidance. For example, citizens' anger at risk management agencies has been associated with active information seeking and processing of information about a flooding problem (Griffin *et al.*, 2008). In addition, people might avoid information that could arouse fear of a health risk—another unpleasant state of mind—if they feel that there is little or nothing they can do about the threat (Witte, 1994).

Outside of various cognitive and affective drivers, other factors that motivate people to seek and use information have origins in our relationships with others. For example, people might seek, select and use information in preparation for discussing a topic with others (Atkin, 1972), to defend and support their viewpoints, or to manage the impressions they convey to others (Chaiken *et al.*, 1996). People might also seek and process information because of perceived social norms. For example, individuals might believe that others expect them to know about a given risk, or that other people similar to them know about a risk and so they should, too (Griffin *et al.*, 1999; Griffin *et al.*, 2013).

5.1   Uses and gratifications

When people choose channels to help them meet such informational needs, they often rely on their beliefs about the various channels, in particular what they expect the content of the channels to offer them (Katz *et al.*, 1974). In the field of mass communication research, a fairly large literature has developed under the

'uses and gratifications' label, to explore people's tendency to select channels and messages that fit specific and often situational needs. In this framework, communication behavior is assumed to be largely goal-directed and purposive, although scholars acknowledge that the degree of initiative or activity varies from person to person, and from situation to situation (Ruggiero, 2000). Researchers have developed typologies of communication motives—for example, the need for surveillance versus the need for diversion—and find that individuals often opt into different channels to satisfy these different needs. Individuals will seek to satisfy a surveillance motive by attending to a channel that delivers news (newspapers, news programming on radio or television, Internet news sites), while a need for diversion may lead them to channels where entertainment programming dominates (for a reasonably current look at the uses and gratifications arena, see Papacharissi, 2009; Rubin, 2002).

Slater (2007) argues that the process of selecting channels to satisfy particular needs activates feedback loops, that he calls 'reinforcing spirals'. These loops mean that gratifications obtained at one point can reinforce subsequent channel selections; a process that Slater suggests helps to construct and then maintain stable patterns of channel use. A similar process was identified by Palmgreen and Rayburn (1985), whose expectancy-value model proposes that the gratifications people obtain—or not—from media consumption have a learning and feedback effect, on the beliefs about expected outcomes that individuals bring to subsequent channel choices.

5.2   Expectancies and values

According to expectancy-value theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), a person's attitude toward performing a given behavior (AAct) is essentially based on two elements: (1) one's beliefs—or expectations—that performing the behavior will result in a set of specific outcomes (each outcome measured on a scale of the perceived likelihood of its occurrence); and (2) the value the person puts on each outcome (on a good-bad scale). Each outcome belief is multiplied by its respective evaluation, such that higher scores represent expectations that a good outcome is likely or a bad outcome unlikely, while lower scores represent the opposite. The product terms are then summed to produce a composite measure of behavioral beliefs. These beliefs predict AAct, which according to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 2005), is one of three factors—along with *perceived behavioral control* (self-efficacy) and *subjective norms* (perceived social norms)—that predict the intention to perform the behavior and, ultimately, the behavior itself. TPB has been supported in a myriad of studies (see, for example, Armitage & Conner, 2001; Topa & Moriano, 2010), including those applying at least part of TPB to information-seeking behaviors (e.g. Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984; Kahlor, 2007), but has been criticized for excluding affect as a predictor of behavior.

Using a uses and gratifications perspective, Palmgreen & Rayburn (1985) extended Fishbein & Ajzen's (1975) expectancy-value formulation to a model

designed to predict information seeking and avoidance as behaviors. They proposed that individuals seek specific gratifications from given channels or content. Ultimately, people base their choice of channels and content on: (1) their beliefs (expectations) that the medium or content has a particular attribute relevant to their needs, or some characteristic that will produce a particular outcome for them; and (2) an affective evaluation of the attribute or outcome. For example, outcome beliefs related to television news viewing can include the expectancy that attending to the TV news will allow one to keep up with current events, or provide something to talk about with other people. Beliefs about attributes can include the perceptions that the news is trustworthy or dramatic (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). The beliefs themselves are formed from personal observation and experience (including the outcomes from past use of various channels and content), from information gathered from others, and by inference. The combination of one's expectations and evaluations can lead people to various patterns of seeking or avoiding a given channel and its content actively or passively, and to searches for alternatives (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985).

5.3   Normative expectations

McLeod and colleagues argue that individuals' values help construct expectations about channels. Specifically, they posit that judgments of how the world works (worldviews), about what societal values should be pursued (i.e., materialism, postmaterialism), and about what normative roles the news media should play all figure into channel choices. One study found, consonant with expectation, that individuals who felt that mass media facilitate a pluralistic society were more likely to opt into channels that emphasized public affairs information. Those who saw the media as agents of social control and conformity, on the other hand, sought channels that provided more entertainment content (McLeod *et al.*, 1998).

5.4   Self vs. others

A final source of channel beliefs stems from audience judgments that channels vary in the expected relevance of their information for us personally, vis-à-vis others. Put another way, when it comes to evaluating risks to ourselves, we get picky about information channels that we judge to be relevant to the task at hand.

Much research in psychology and risk perception has established the tendency for individuals to perceive themselves as different from everyone else. When it comes to risk, we routinely judge ourselves to be more immune to harm. For example, we believe that we are better drivers than everyone else, so would be less likely to be hurt in an auto accident. While we readily perceive others to be adversely affected by hard economic times, we believe ourselves to be relatively untouched. In the face of a flu epidemic, we think everyone else desperately needs a vaccine shot, but declare our good health to be protection enough from

infection. Psychologist Neil Weinstein has labeled this tendency 'unrealistic optimism' (Weinstein, 1989), and argues that it constitutes a ubiquitous gap between 'perceptions of 'self' and 'other'. In one recent study, a group of neuroscientists used fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) to explore this difference physiologically, and found that individuals 'updated their beliefs more in response to information that was better than expected than to information that was worse' (Sharot *et al.*, 2011: 1475). In other words, we are quick to see positive information as relevant to self, but resist seeing negative information as equally relevant.

Individuals also expect different outcomes of channel exposure by referent. *Third-person effect* researchers repeatedly find that individuals see themselves as more immune to information effects than others; that other people are more influenced than are they themselves (Davison, 1983; Paul, Salwen & Dupagne, 2000). They view others as more malleable, more persuadable by narratives (Perloff, 1993). However, some individuals may still respond in some way to a message because they believe that others will be affected by it (Davison, 1983).

It should be no surprise to the reader, then, to learn that the 'me/other' distinction also comes into play when we choose information channels. Political scientist Diana Mutz calls the phenomenon the 'impersonal influence' hypothesis, as it leads us to view some channels as more relevant to others than to us personally (Mutz, 1998). Specifically, we regard information in mediated channels as being about others, and resist seeing such information as informing our own personal situations. If we need to seek channels to inform our personal risk decisions, we want to talk to someone; that is, we regard interpersonal channels as far more likely to contain risk information relevant to self. Other scholars have found similar patterns in individuals' choices of channels for health and risk information (Dunwoody & Neuwirth, 1991; O'Keefe *et al.*, 1998; Griffin *et al.*, 2000).

This leads individuals to employ mediated stories about risk as a means of learning about a risk in a general way, and as a means of assessing the climate of opinion regarding that risk. But, unusual circumstances aside, media risk stories have only modest impact on individuals' personal risk judgments.

6.0   Channel beliefs and RISP

How, then, might individuals' beliefs about channels of risk information, their sense of their personal capacity for accessing and using these channels, and their motivations to do so combine to affect their seeking of risk information? One approach that incorporates these concepts is the model of Risk Information Seeking and Processing (RISP).

In its original formulation (Griffin *et al.*, 1999), the RISP model proposed that the ways individuals come to seek (or avoid) and process risk information (systematically or heuristically) are affected most directly by interactions of three proximate predictors: (1) motivation, based primarily on the drive to obtain and understand sufficient information about a risk so as to cope with it in life (based on the Heuristic-Systematic Model of Eagly & Chaiken, 1993); (2) one's ability

to seek and process this information (based on Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, and Ajzen, 2005); and (3) relevant beliefs that individuals hold about channels of risk information (based initially on Kosicki and McLeod, 1990). Secondary predictors were also included in the model, such as individuals' *affective responses* to a risk and *informational subjective norms* (an application of Ajzen's, 2005, subjective norms variable), both of which were expected to affect motivation. Informational subjective norms are an individual's perception of social pressures and norms, related to gathering or avoiding information about a risk.

RISP also proposes that an individual's affective responses (e.g. worry, anger) will be based on combinations of a set of *perceived characteristics of the hazard*, primarily risk perception (the subjective probability of being affected by the risk combined with its perceived seriousness), one's self-efficacy in dealing with the risk, and one's trust in organizations to deal with the risk. One's experience with the risk and various other individual characteristics are also included. Subsequent tests of the model have added perceived attributions of responsibility for the risk to the set of perceived hazard characteristics (Griffin *et al.*, 2008; also see Kahlor, Dunwoody & Griffin, 2002).

A review (Griffin *et al.*, 2013) of the performance of the RISP model's proximate predictors across various studies found that motivations and capacity have performed reasonably well in their hypothesized, main effect relationships with risk information seeking and processing. An inconsistent performer, however, has been channel beliefs.

In the relatively few studies using the RISP model that have employed channel beliefs, two dimensions of these beliefs have emerged fairly consistently: (1) the extent to which the channels are perceived as biased and sensationalizing; and (2) the extent to which the channels are seen as providing the users with cues, to assist the evaluation and processing of the information they contain. Analyses show that the first dimension, perceived bias and sensationalism, tends to bear no direct relationship with risk information seeking or processing. The second dimension, the perceived presence of validity cues, does relate to both systematic processing of risk information and, albeit somewhat weakly, to active seeking. In other words, the perceived characteristics of some channels (e.g. channel attributes that facilitate one's comparison of information across channels, or that help a person to find patterns in facts or events) may be attractive to some individuals, and may catalyze both channel choices and deeper processing. Reflecting on the Palmgreen & Rayburn (1985) expectancy-value formulation, these channel beliefs were operationalized as beliefs about the attributes of channels, but not as beliefs about the outcomes for the self of using these channels. In addition, the studies involved did not ask the respondents to evaluate the perceived attributes.

Among the Griffin *et al.* (2013) suggestions for further research are examinations of: (1) the role of other motivations, especially informational subjective norms, as both direct and indirect drivers of seeking and processing risk information; and (2) the conceptualization and operationalization of channel beliefs in studies of risk information seeking and processing. They found that tests of the model have, generally, not examined the interactions among motivations, capacity, and

channel beliefs. It is likely that channel beliefs, in particular, work best in combination with motivations and capacity, to affect risk information seeking and processing, rather than as main effect predictors. In addition, operationalizing channel beliefs in an expectancy-value format might strengthen their conceptual and empirical roles, in studies of risk information seeking and processing. As this review has suggested, these interactions beg for examination.

7.0   In Conclusion

When a risk becomes salient to an individual, a wide variety of factors will influence that person's information seeking behavior. An important component of such seeking will be the individual's choice of channel, as research suggests that lay audiences often deem channel evaluations to be 'good enough' arbiters of information quality. Although people are generally willing to invest some effort in attaining a good fit between available channels and their informational needs, a number of factors mediate against success. Among them:

- Channel costs—price, time, effort—may be too high, making some channels inaccessible.
- An individual's perceived capacity to seek (i.e., I don't know how to surf the World Wide Web) may limit the use of even accessible channels.
- The normative expectations people have of channels (i.e., media messages tell me something about the world at large, but not about me personally) may lead individuals to devalue risk information in some channels and overvalue information in other channels.

Work with our RISP model suggests—consonant with Chaffee (1986)—that individuals value channels that they believe contain information relevant to their specific needs. As we noted above, it seems to matter to people that a channel is willing to go beyond simple provision of risk information, by offering its users cues for evaluating that information. This may help explain why interpersonal channels are perceived as far more useful to personal risk judgments than mediated ones, as interactivity encourages the assumption of information specificity. Many risk communicators have received this message: the National Cancer Institute, by way of example, offers a rich array of opportunities for individuals to interact with cancer information specialists by telephone, online chat, or email (http://www.cancer.gov/global/contact).

Still, there is still much to learn about factors that may influence channel choices. Griffin *et al.* (2013) suggest that informational subjective norms may be more important players in channel selection than previously assumed. Since purposive, systematic information seeking is uncommon, even in the face of a risky situation, individuals may face considerable ambiguity in deciding where and how to seek. That, in turn, may lead them to use the channel choices of others as guides.

Recent work in political science on 'motivated reasoning' augments our discussion of the importance of understanding motivators of information seeking.

In a recent study, Nir (2011) explored the extent to which information seeking and processing, in the political arena, were driven by two dimensions: accuracy goals (i.e., an effort to reach correct conclusions); or directional goals (i.e., an effort to reach and then reinforce preferred conclusions). As we noted earlier in the chapter, both goals do motivate risk information seeking. A decision to avoid learning more about a risk is a good example, as such behavior has little to do with constructing an accurate understanding of a risk, and much to do with minimizing one's exposure to potentially threatening information; that is, reinforcing a kind of protective ignorance of possible outcomes. Many risks carry political baggage (the risks associated with global warming offer an iconic example), and studies of the ways in which motivated reasoning influences information seeking may be of particular value in those contested domains.

Finally, we reinforce our earlier call for more studies of information seeking that allow channel beliefs to interact with other possible predictors, such as informational self-efficacy and a variety of motivations; in particular, informational subjective norms. Risk information seeking will emerge (or not) from combinations of these factors, and both scholars and risk practitioners must be prepared to look at that fuller picture. It is only in that highly nuanced landscape, we suspect, that one will find that long-sought good fit between message and behavior.

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