

Communicating the pandemic

Wave One

Effective communication is a vital component of dealing with a public health emergency, and communication professionals depend on accurate, insightful data to ensure that their health messages are being received and understood by those they want to influence.

The University of Leeds, working with the polling company Savanta ComRes, is conducting a national study to investigate how people receive, understand and act upon official messages related to COVID-19.

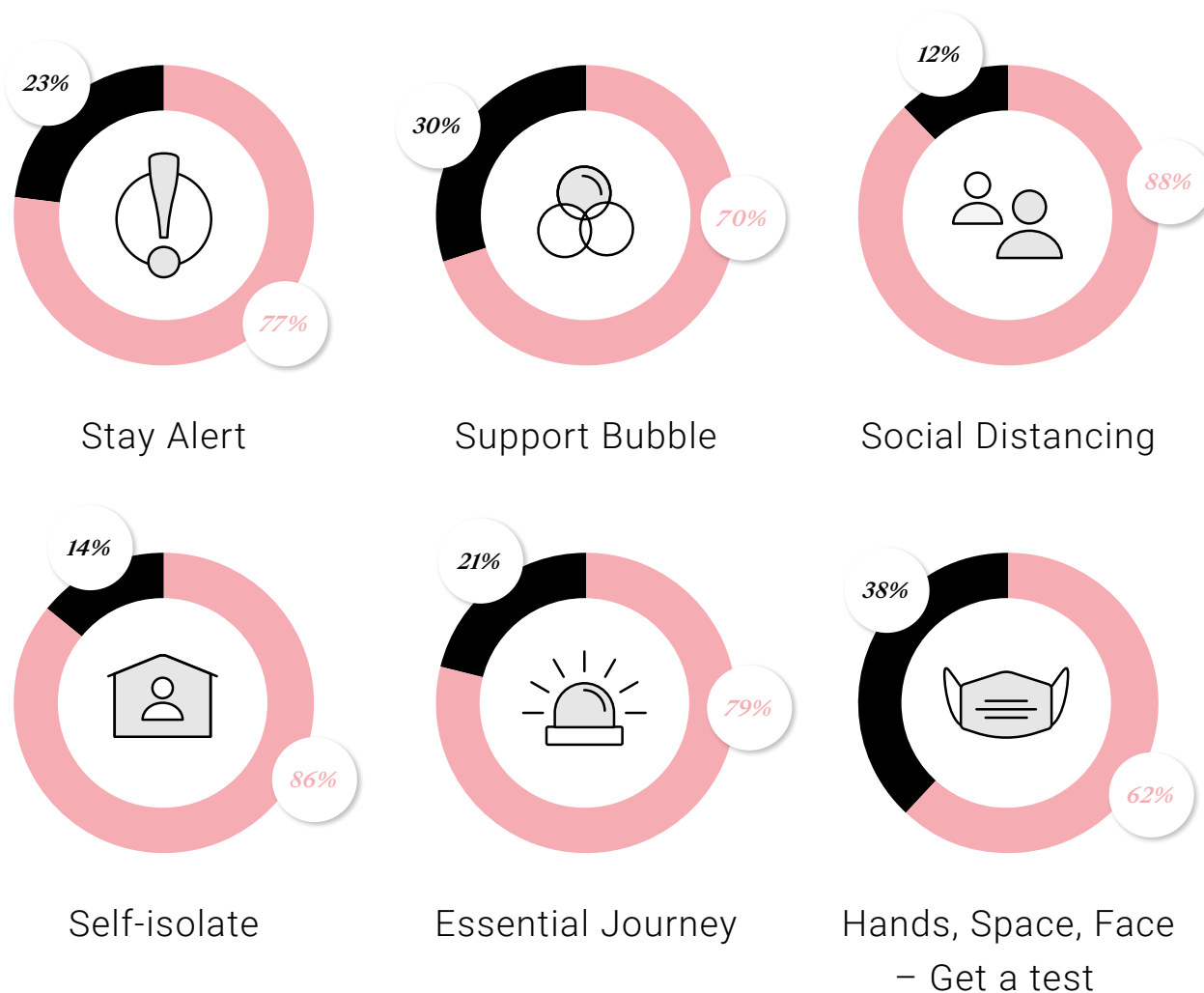
We will deliver three major reports:

- ✔ The study, which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), combines regular surveys with a nationally representative sample of UK adults and focus group research to provide the strongest possible evidence regarding channels of dissemination and the intelligibility and effectiveness of messages for different audiences. We will deliver three major reports: Next month (September) we will produce a report employing factor and cluster analyses. The population will be clustered into audience segments or groups based on shared attributes (e.g., attitudes, values, and experiences during the pandemic). This analysis will help us to understand the key factors that shape the reach, intelligibility, and effectiveness of official communication and understand which combination of communication channels or messages are important to prioritize for specific groups.
- ✔ In November we shall produce a second report drawing on our focus group research, exploring the perceptions and experiences of different groups in greater depth.
- ✔ We will complete a final report in February 2021 reviewing all our project findings and setting out feasible strategic recommendations to the appropriate bodies on how to improve public communication related to COVID-19

Initial findings from the first wave of our survey in August confirm the need for our in-depth study of how the pandemic is being communicated. We found that **79% of UK adults suggest they are interested in information about the pandemic. However, 64% report that they are overwhelmed by the different messages they are receiving, reflecting the complexity of the communication task involved.** Understanding also varies across the population. For example, a significant minority of respondents seem to suggest they are unclear about the meaning of key phrases and messages:

How clear or not are you about what each of these terms or phrases mean? (1-10 scale)

■ Clear (6-10) ■ Unclear (5-10)



In future weeks, we will track changes over time and identify differences among specific groups in how they receive, understand and act upon official messages.

We are sharing this with you as someone we have identified as having an interest or role in the development and deployment of messaging related to COVID-19. If you would like more information about our work, please contact the Principal Investigator. Similarly, if you think a colleague would be interested in our research, please share their contact details so we can add them to our list.



Professor Stephen Coleman
Principal Investigator
s.coleman@leeds.ac.uk