

Sophisticated communication a prerequisite for people's independence

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With the availability of the Internet, citizens are increasingly expected to search themselves for information on security risks in their living environment. Until now, however, too little was known about the willingness of citizens to do this and the factors that promote this information-seeking behaviour. The work of Dutch researcher Ellen ter Huurne suggests there are many factors which communication professionals should pay greater attention to.

What motivates people to search for personally-relevant risk information, for example by using the Internet? And which determinants can be influenced to stimulate the public to search for risk information? Ter Huurne developed the socio-psychological model FRIS (Framework of Risk Information Seeking) in an attempt to answer these questions. The focus of FRIS is on "active" citizens who, on the basis of self-obtained information, form an opinion about risks or gains independence.

Feelings of concern or anxiety appear to motivate people directly, just like subjective standards. For example, people ask themselves questions such as: "Do people I know expect me to be up to date on this subject?" and "Is it important, in my social life, to know something about this subject?" The research indicates that it is not only cognitive information needs that motivate people to search for information on risk. The role of affective and social factors is just as important.

Communication professionals can use the FRIS model when setting up

and realising more receiver-oriented communication strategies about risks. A balanced combination of communication strategies is needed to encourage people to be more independent and to search for risk information themselves.

A national media campaign could be established to increase risk awareness and thus encourage people to search out relevant risk information. The provision of factual risk information will then mainly take place at a local or regional level, allowing a direct response to the dynamic character of both the external security aspects and the information needs of the public.

Source: Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research

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