Trends in Food Science & Technology 57 (2016) 311–315

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Trends in Food Science & Technology

journal homepage: http://www.journals.elsevier.com/trends-in-food-science-and-technology

Communication and impact through targeted channels and media

Adrian Giordani, Christina Sadler*, Laura Fernández Celemín

European Food Information Council, Rue Joseph Stevens 7, Brussels, Belgium

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 15 June 2015
Received in revised form
18 July 2016
Accepted 21 October 2016
Available online 17 November 2016

Keywords:
Mynewgut
Communication
Gut microbiota
Prebiotic
Probiotic
Social media

ABSTRACT

Background: Effective communication is crucial to make a project successful. A communication strategy should target specific audiences, using appropriate tools and channels, with the goal of being understood.
Scope and approach: This review outlines the communication strategy prepared for the MyNewGut project, which is funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme. The project aims to study and develop dietary interventions that may help prevent obesity, behavioural- and lifestyle-related disorders.
Key findings and conclusions: As MyNewGut generates knowledge about how the gut microbiota impacts human health, the project's communication strategy should align and adapt its various communication channels and messages.

1. Introduction

MyNewGut is a five-year multi-partner, multi-disciplinary study that receives funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The project officially started in December 2013 and aims to make basic human microbiome science, describing the human intestinal microbe population, which will be useful in promoting healthier lifestyles and developing practical nutritional applications for the public in Europe and beyond.

To be successful with the public, policy-makers and the wider scientific community, project communications must be effective and have impact from the start. There have been numerous studies supporting the notion that coverage of science results in the lay/popular press amplifies the transmission of the research results and increases citations, compared to no media coverage. In some cases, the strongest effect of media coverage can be seen in the first year after publication; articles on medical research publicised by the New York Times (NYT) received 72.8% more scientific citations compared to articles in the same issue of the journal that did not receive publicity in the NYT (Phillips, Kanter, Bednarczyk, & Tastad, 1991).

Another analysis found that breaking news coverage of articles from major US journals by 24 daily newspapers was associated with more frequent citations (Kiernan, 2003). More recently, articles in Wiley-Blackwell journals that received media coverage had an average increase of 1.8 full-text downloads, and increased citations by as much as 2.2 in comparison to other articles published in the same issue (Mathelus, Pittman, & Yablonski-Crepeau, 2012).

In 2014, the European Food Information Council (EUFIC) won a CommNet Impact Award for strong communication and dissemination activities engaging industry for Food4Me, a project also funded by FP7. Food4Me, which focuses on personalised nutrition, used a wide range of methods to communicate with stakeholders, including a booklet outlining future scenarios of personalised nutrition in Europe to help the development of business models (European Commission, 2014a).

The point of these examples is to demonstrate the importance of appropriately timed promotion of MyNewGut to target audiences other than academia to extend its reach and improve engagement, particularly with end-users. (see: Figs.1 and 2)

From the outset, MyNewGut's communication strategy has been to target audiences online, as well as offline. For example, MyNewGut is being presented at scientific conferences to promote the project and its outcomes so audiences can spread this knowledge through their networks. One way of reaching these target audiences is by using digital media, such as websites or social media, as a conduit. Media, including radio, TV, and social networks, for different groups of consumers, constitutes an important and influential source of information (FoodRisC, 2013; Bik & Goldstein, 2013). MyNewGut has an online brand identity

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: Christina.Sadler@eufic.org (C. Sadler).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2016.10.007
0924-2244/

(graphic logo) and digital presence in the form of a website (www.mynewgut.eu) and social media accounts on Twitter (@MyNewGut) and Facebook (MyNewGut Project - The Gut Microbiome). Encouraging people to 'like', 'share' or 'comment' on the project's website and social media channels, increases engagement, and gives rise to more opportunities for MyNewGut's research to go 'viral' by enabling the wider audience to promote stories using original content or create new stories based on the content provided.

The European Commission expects its funded projects to have a strong communication and dissemination plan. MyNewGut has developed a plan to consolidate efforts among its 30 partner organisations from 15 countries. This plan outlines how MyNewGut can best reach out to regulators, scientists, the media and the public with project results. The plan includes the general and specific objectives of the project; MyNewGut's media aims; its target audiences; barriers and challenges; and social media recommendations.

2. Current perceptions of the gut microbiome and its impact on health and wellbeing

Generally, nutritionists, dietitians and policy-makers — including those involved in establishing dietary guidelines — are unaware of the importance of the gut microbiome for health and wellbeing. MyNewGut will add to current knowledge about the gut microbiome, and increase the competitiveness of the European food industry through scientifically valid health claims for foods supporting a healthy gut, which will offer strong protection for consumers. These results may also help inform new strategies in public health, support EU legislation, and improve food-related disease prevention across Europe.

One of MyNewGut's objectives is to contribute to the development of new approaches to prevent diet-related diseases (e.g. obesity) and behavioural disorders, such as autism, through lifestyle changes. This may be through treatments designed to promote the growth of bacteria that are good for health, such as increased intake of pro- and pre-biotics, semi-personalised and innovative food products.

The gut microbiome is affected by diet, notably through the intake of 'fermentable' dietary fibre prebiotics, which are carbohydrates that cannot be digested by the human body (Conlon & Bird, 2015). Prebiotics act as "food" for the beneficial bacteria in the gut.

Currently, the only dietary recommendation related to prebiotics is: "Increased intake of dietary fibre". This recommendation is supported and endorsed worldwide. Many Europeans eat less dietary fibre than recommended (EFSA Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition, and Allergies (NDA), 2010) and most recommendations endorse increased intake of fibre naturally present in fruits, vegetables and whole grain products.

However, within Europe, recommendations for increased fibre intake, including supporting peer-reviewed papers, do not mention the importance of fibre for improving the gut microbiome. None of the many authorised health claims for various dietary fibres (e.g. bran of wheat, rye, oats, barley, pectin and resistant starch) refer to the role of fibre as a prebiotic.

Probiotics, on the other hand, are live bacteria or yeasts. When administered for example in a yoghurt product, probiotics may confer a health benefit to the host, this has yet to be confirmed. No specific health claims for probiotic foods have been approved by EFSA (Binnendijk & Rijkers, 2013; EFSA, 2015), which may explain why products containing probiotics — although popular among groups of consumers — are not specified in 'official' national

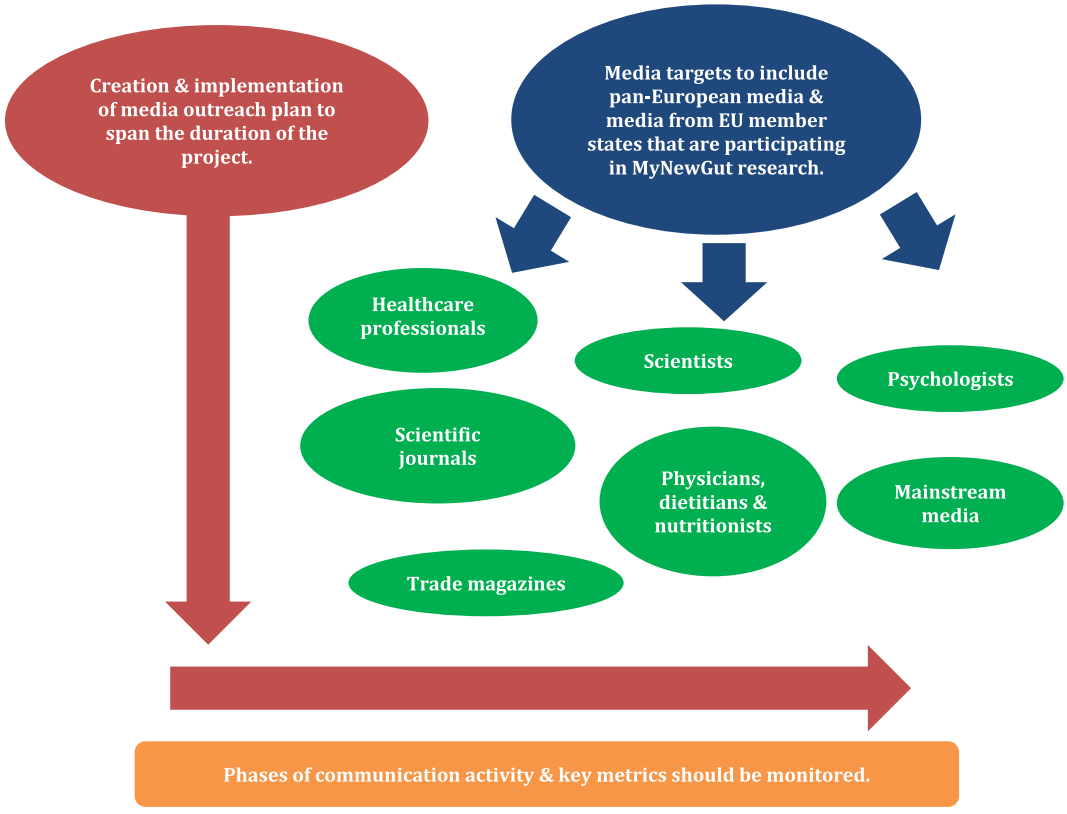

Fig. 1. A schematic view of the target audiences of MyNewGut.