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PhD Position Media and health: Examining the impact of health risk news on public responses to risk f/m

For 1.0 fte

Vacancy number: 1.2011.00176

Description of position

A PhD position is available at the Department of Communication Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences, VU University Amsterdam.

In modern society, the media not only determine to a great extent which health issues are discussed by the public, but they also influence risk perceptions and health behavior. However, to date, fairly little empirical evidence exists regarding the portrayal of health information in the news, and its relationship with public risk estimates, attitudes and health behavior. The present research project investigates the development of public opinion about the past A/H1N1 disease and related vaccination possibilities both in the mass media and the online sphere (blogs, websites, etc.); identifies key media events and critical factors that amplified or diminished public perceptions of risks associated with A/H1N1 and vaccination possibilities, such as dread, uncertainty, or disagreeing experts; and identifies key players in the media debate in terms of opinion leadership, trustworthiness, and social influence. Based on the outcome of media content analysis and model testing in different European countries, the research project also tests the effectiveness of risk communication strategies in online experimental studies.

The project is part of a larger European consortium on epidemic outbreak management. The SARS and influenza pandemics in recent years have sensitized politicians, health authorities and the general public all over the world that effective measures should be in place to counter the impact of such major epidemic outbreaks. Scientific knowledge and technical ability have increased tremendously in the past years to respond effectively. However, major deficiencies have become apparent in the governments' and health authorities' ability to communicate the need for such large-scale measures in a trustworthy manner and increase the acceptance thereof among the general population and specific risk groups. In order to develop effective communication strategies, integration of social and behavioral sciences, communication, media expertise and civil society is needed. The EU consortium will develop an evidence-based behavioral and communication package that can be applied effectively by health professionals and agencies throughout Europe in case of major epidemic outbreaks. The EU project brings together communication scientists, epidemiologists, economists, psychologists, and media experts.

The PhD position will be located at the department of Communication Science at VU University Amsterdam. In this department, research into free and paid publicity is pivotal. Teachers take a theoretical perspective in learning students how to perform research into communication within organizations and between organizations and the public. It is not just the application of knowledge, but instead the enhancement of insight that is emphasized. Knowledge of communication processes is especially developed in the field of public and political communication, marketing and corporate communication, health communication and communication for private purposes (social media, gaming).

Tasks

The candidate is expected to do research and publish on the basis of the research. The candidate will complete a PhD dissertation based on the research carried out in the project. Active participation in the project (attendance to international workshops, conferences, etc.) will be a part of the PhD project. The candidate will also perform teaching duties (up to 25%, depending on the contract).

Requirements

- A relevant Master's degree, preferably a Research Master's degree or equivalent qualifications, with a background in communication science, psychology, health communication or a related field. Candidates who are due to graduate before 1 September 2011 are also welcome to apply;
- a firm basis in quantitative research and the willingness to learn new statistical techniques;
- (preferably) experience with (automated) content analysis and with experimental research (gained, for example, in a Master's thesis or as a student assistant);
- good written and spoken command of English, preferably also in Dutch;
- good organizational skills;
- the ability and interest to work in a team.

Further particulars

The position (1.0 fte) starts per 1 November 2011 and is initially for 1 year. Extension of the contract after the first year to a total of three or four years (depending on the amount of time spent on teaching duties) is subject to satisfactory performance and evaluation of the initial appointment. You can find information about our excellent fringe benefits of employment at www.workingatvu.nl like

- remuneration of 8,3% end-of-year bonus and 8% holiday allowance
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Salary

The salary will be in accordance with university regulations for academic personnel, and amounts €2.042,- gross per month in the first year up to €2.612,- in the fourth year (salary scale P0) based on a full-time employment.

Information

- For a detailed project description or questions about the project please contact Dr. Enny Das (H.H.J.Das@vu.nl) (see website at: <http://www.fsw.vu.nl/en/departments/communication-science/staff/das/index.asp>)
- Questions about the application procedure and other general questions should be addressed to Corry Hienkens, 020-59 86854, secretariaat.cw.fsw@vu.nl

Application

Please send a letter of application and CV before July 25, 2011 to VU University Amsterdam, Faculty of Social Sciences, drs. M. Karssen, De Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam or by e-mail to Vacature.cw.fsw@vu.nl

Please mention the vacancy number in the e-mail header or at the top of your letter and on the envelope.

Any other correspondence in response to this advertisement will not be dealt with.