



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 37 – Fourth of July

****Please note: This is a rough transcription of this audio podcast. This transcript is not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.****

Participants:

LaKesha Anderson
Carlita P. Greene
Amber E. Kinser
Ascan F. Koerner
Audra K. Nuru

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Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. Hello, I'm LaKesha Anderson, Director of Academic and Professional Affairs at The National Communication Association and I'm your host on *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. Thank you for joining us for today's episode.

In just a few days, the United States will celebrate the 4th of July. Today's episode of *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast* addresses the 4th of July and holiday gatherings broadly including the relationship between food and nationality, the burdens that family meals can place on women, family communication related to celebrations, and the changes in family gatherings because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communication Professors Carlita P. Greene, Amber E. Kinser, Ascan F. Koerner, and Audra K. Nuru join me today to discuss these issues. First, a bit more about today's guests. Carlita Greene is the Dean of Behavioral, Social Sciences, and Global Learning at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston. Dr. Green researches rhetorical theory and popular culture, food culture and the media, and rhetorical theory in the twenty-first century. Green has served as editor of two books about communication and food: *Food as Communication, Communication as Food* and *Foodscares: Food, Space, and Place in a Global Society*. Hi, Carlita, and welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Carlita P. Greene:

Hello. It's a pleasure to be here.

LaKesha Anderson:

Amber Kinser is a Professor and Department Chair of the Department of Communication and Performance at East Tennessee State University. Dr. Kinser studies family communication, communication about health and aging, and communication about food and motherhood. Kinser



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has authored numerous journal articles and books, as well as an article in NCA's September 2019 *Spectra* issue about discourses related to family meals. Hi, Amber, and welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Amber E. Kinser:

Hi. Excited to be here.

LaKesha Anderson:

Ascan Koerner is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Koerner researches family communication with an emphasis on parent-child communication. Koerner has published numerous journal articles about family communication. With Marina Krcmar and David R. Ewoldsen, Koerner also co-authored *Communication Science: Theory and Research*. Hi, Ascan, and welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Ascan F. Koerner:

Hi, LaKesha. Glad to join you.

LaKesha Anderson:

Audra Nuru is the Endowed Chair in the Social Sciences, an Associate Professor of Communication and Family Studies, and Director of Family Studies at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. Dr. Nuru researches the ways in which individuals, families, communities, and organizations navigate periods of challenge and contestation, while negotiating the complex, fragmented, and competing intersectionalities of multiple identities. Hi, Audra, and welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Audra K. Nuru:

Hello and thank you. It's a pleasure to be here with you today.

LaKesha Anderson:

Some of the listeners may not be familiar with research on communication and food. CarlNita, could you provide a bit of background on what kinds of research that scholars in this area conduct?

CarlNita P. Greene:

Scholars actually can engage in a whole host of ways that they research communication as food. So it runs the gamut from ethnography to organizational communication approaches to interpersonal. There's intercultural. So there are a number of ways that communication scholars study food from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. It runs the range of you can have



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scholars who engage in interpersonal communication studies, organizational, ethnographic, rhetorical, media studies, and also critical cultural studies perspectives. So with all of the various ways that people study communication in general, food being at the center of those ways in which we can study communication, those same research methodologies and theoretical approaches can be applied to the lens of food.

LaKesha Anderson:

Carlita, you wrote the introduction to the book *Communication as Food, Food as Communication*. How is food a form of communication? What does it communicate?

Carlita P. Greene:

I think that one of the ways in which we can view food as a form of communication is to look at food as a communicative practice through which we create and manage meanings and share those meanings with other people. It relates to all different aspects of our lives from our most professional situations to our most private encounters. So I think that food communicates a number of different aspects related to our identities, related to the groups to which we belong or don't belong. It also is directly linked to culture and society. It also can be seen as a site of struggle, particularly a site of struggle over political and social issues. And it's a form of discourse that we find throughout the media.

LaKesha Anderson:

And Carlita, what does the food that is typically eaten for the Fourth of July communicate about the holiday?

Carlita P. Greene:

So I think this is a really interesting question because I think that the food itself in terms of the 4th of July conveys a whole host of meanings. If we specifically think about traditional foods that people typically tend to eat during the 4th of July such as barbecue, fried chicken, potato salad, like all the gamut of the different kinds of foods that we tend to think of with traditional holiday for the 4th of July, I think that really what it tends to convey is an idealized notion of American society and culture. And those meanings that are created really tend to link to things such as freedom, family, community, nationalism. But I also think that one of the things that we really need to think about is the fact that those meanings are often contested depending upon who you are as a person, depending upon your culture and your identity. And so some of those, what I would call those popular representational views of how we see the 4th of July as a holiday and the foods associated with them, I think that we need to call those things into question as well because those things can have meanings that mean a host of different things to people depending on people's identities and subject positions. So it's important to also call those things into question and not simply take them at face value.



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Amber E. Kinser:

One of the things that I think is interesting about the 4th of July food is that a lot of times it relates to outside, being outside, grilling outside. And the 4th of July being a kind of tribute to masculine worlds in that it's celebration of war victory. And so then we sort of embody that in the food ways of 4th of July by making it about grilling out which is traditionally a masculine domain, right? So I think that link between the masculineness of the holiday celebration and the masculineness of the food. And also much of that is meat, right? And so we know that there's a connection to images of masculinity or understandings of masculinity and its relationship to me. I don't feel like you can talk about food ever without talking about gender. It's so gendered. So that's always an interesting facet to me.

LaKesha Anderson:

And turning it over to you, Amber, your research concerns family meals. Specifically while some research suggests that family meals can be beneficial for families and children, your research looks at the burden that this place is on mothers who are still often preparing meals. What have you found when speaking to women about family meals and what pressure might holiday meals place on mothers?

Amber E. Kinser:

Well, that question, I'm going to link what I was just talking about in terms of gender with that. The most interesting finding to me was that the point of irritation, the albatross for women was planning, not the cooking, not sort of the getting the meal together the day of although that has multiple stressors too. What takes the most intense labor is the planning. And that means not just what are we going to eat every single night of the week which mostly women are addressing, but do we have the ingredients, making sure we have ingredients, the stop at the store, trying to find the sale so you can get the stuff, changing your mind about what your menu is because something was on sale and you need to go ahead and then you go back through the store and get the other things that go with the meat that was on sale that you just discovered at the other end. So this labor is invisible to most people. When we think about mothers feeding their families, it's the feeding moment is not really so much the hard part of it. They just really hated it. And it's relentless. It's like you have to think about it in multiple ways. Also, if you're doing the planning, you're also figuring out what are people's food preferences, what are people's food allergies, what are the potential allergens, who's gluten-free, who's dairy free, who's vegan, who's vegetarian? And then also we're trying to be healthy, and also we're trying to get children to eat it. I think that's one of the reasons that like food packaging delivery places like a Blue Apron, Hello Fresh, they take the planning out. And they go this is what you're having. You can have one of these three things and here's all the ingredients. You don't have to do any of the planning work. I think that's sort of what makes those services really, really appealing. And so that relates to this idea of a kind of tribute to masculine worlds through grilling out because throwing a hot dog on the grill is



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not the complicated part of having the big 4th of July celebration, right? It's all of the planning and the potato salad and the macaroni salad and ingredients and cooking far beyond the day of, well outside the day of. And also, if it's a family gathering, it means probably that women in those families, whether they're mothers or not, women in those families are talking and deciding together about well, bring this, then you bring that, and well, I'm already bringing a cold salad, could you bring. That's one of the things that is most compelling to me was the planning part of it.

LaKesha Anderson:

Let's focus a bit more on family communication. Ascan, you've authored articles about family communication, specifically Family Communication Patterns Theory, parent-child communication, and the long-term impacts of parent-child communication. What is Family Communication Patterns' Theory and what does it predict about the long-term outcomes of parent-child communication?

Ascan F. Koerner:

Thanks, LaKesha. Yes. So family communication pattern theory really is a theory about sense making and meaning making in families, and it really addresses the idea that families habitually engage in the sense making and meaning making process. And essentially it reduces this process or identifies two main strategies for families to arrive at a shared understanding of something. One is conceptual, meaning you discuss an idea and everybody's sort of participating. You sort of actively negotiate the meaning of something. The other process is social, meaning you will refer to some authority to define that for you. That could be church or state, and family is often a parent, usually the father. And so these two different ways of sense making are associated with habitual communication behaviors. So if you're concept oriented, you're really engaged in communicating about ideas. You're trying to, as I said, you negotiate the meaning of things. But all family members participate in a fairly free flow of ideas and opinions and perceptions. If you're more socially oriented, then you have a different orientation in that which we call authority orientation. So a definition is provided by somebody in authority. So it's a confirmation orientation where you look for somebody to define the meaning or the reality for you. So if families can have these two different ways of creating a shared understanding or shared meaning either communication orientation or conformity orientation, they can engage in either of these processes, but habitually that they often tend to either favor one over the other or really do both or really sort of do not care about creating a shared understanding of shared meaning and do neither. And so we have four different types that are again typically representative of how families communicate.

Families that are high in conversation orientation, we call them pluralistic because a lot of plurality of ideas and opinions. Families that are very high in conformity orientation, we call them protective because they have sort of the parental authority, sort of like the dominant structure in the family. And families that engage in both of these processes simultaneously, we call them consensual.



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So they achieve sort of an understanding. There's some sort of authority by a parent built in. And then finally families that don't use either strategy very often, we call them laissez-faire. Those are families that are often emotionally divorced or are not very, in the sort of a traditional family therapy point, dysfunctional or it's very little communication going on. So we have these four family types that really define habitually a way of communicating that is grounded in a habitual way of sense making and creating meaning for the family. And these habitual ways of communicating are associated with all kinds of outcomes, right? If you used to negotiate, meaning you function well in certain circumstances like school or college and whatnot. And if you're more conformally oriented, you might function better in environments that are authoritarian or hierarchical such as a military or a boarding school or a sports team or something like that.

So in any event, what we've really done in our research is really to sort of linking these habitual ways of sense making and communicating to long-term outcomes. And sort of middle class American families that are consensual do the best. It is sort of our ideal of how families should function. Parents should sort of be in charge but they should be explaining their reasoning and really persuade children more than forcing children, right? Whereas in traditional picture of a family that's more conformity oriented, there's an authoritarian parent or so. Again, that leads to short-term compliance, but at the end of the day, children in those families often have problems when they kind of get into more free environments. So those are the kids that when they go to college have a hard time to make good choices, right, for example because they've not been trained to really understand things. So that's the kind of research we are doing.

And so you can think about it the same thing when you think about 4th of July activities or meals. There's a lot of an activity that has meaning to families, and we already discussed some of them, right? So they said the father often doing the barbecue. That kind of creates some sort of like parental role of father patriarchal roles that are providing the food, and it's already described how the mother often is working towards that and doing the work in the background, not getting much of the credit for that but being tasked with providing the provisions and planning the meals and those kind of things. But it then reinforces certain gender norms that we're doing, and there's sort of a ritualized behavior. It's not very often negotiated. So it often falls more into this type of communication that you would maybe call more conformity oriented where there is sort of a sculptural script that we follow and that then reinforces notions of family relationships but also notions of we talked about patriotism and nationalism. So the idea that if we all participate in this all-American July 4th grill activity, that really reinforces who we are in our own identity as Americans and members of our community and what it means to be in that community at that space.



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LaKesha Anderson:

The last year has changed dynamics for a lot of families as many people are working from home, while their children may also be attending school at home. How do you think parent-child communication has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ascan? What opportunities do holidays like the 4th of July present for parents and children to reconnect given the experiences of this past year?

Ascan F. Koerner:

Yes, it's just the sheer amount of communication that has now moved into the family and that parents now have to assume the role of parent and not just parent. They're always parent but that role of parent and teacher and tutor and sort of organizer of social activities and negotiating the spaces where is it safe to go, who can come over, or do we have any contact with anybody, even within the family which family members are safe, which families members are not safe? That really sort of changed the dimension I think. So parents in a way have become much more influential in the lives of their children, certainly of older children, teenagers, and whatnot, right? Parents play that role for small children very much anyway and control their day very much, right? But for older children, key middle schoolers, high schoolers in particular, those dimensions really changed very much. And so they had to really renegotiate I think the relative power and who gets to say what, right? And particular an environment that is so imbued or was so imbued this fear and anxiety about individual health and really often life and death situations in the perceptions of a lot of folks, that really put a lot of strain on family relationships I think. And then just constantly being with one another. We're not used to that either, particularly again children really at a certain age orient outwards, outwards of family to orient towards their peers and have healthy peer relationships and really attach more meaning and more significant to their peer relationships than to their relationship with their parents. And all that sort of has been reduced during the pandemic. And so then these events, these rituals like the 4th of July or Memorial Day or Christmas and whatnot. So it also really gives sort of an opportunity to sort of reinforce the traditional understanding and the established ideas about who are we as a family and what are our roles vis-à-vis one another. They're taken a little bit the pressure off again because it's so ritualized, and it doesn't require actual negotiation in the moment.

LaKesha Anderson:

Audra, I understand that you've recently been working on research about the ways that couples and families navigate the COVID-19 pandemic through ritual. How has the pandemic reshaped personal relationships? How have couples and families used communicative practices and rituals to navigate these difficult times?



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Audra K. Nuru:

Thanks, LaKesha. Yes, my colleague Carol Bruess and I recently did a study where we analyzed over 1,400 pages of transcript data collected from couples as they communicatively navigated the pandemic right before our very eyes. And clearly the pandemic has impacted personal relationships and relational systems. While I can't quite speak too specifically about our data at this time, what I can say is that our study extends and reconfirms Braithwaite and Baxter and Bruess and Pearson's work evidencing that rituals serve as important cultural occasions for recreating relational identities and cultivating and sustaining the relational system. One way that couples and families used communicative practices and rituals to navigate these challenging times was by adapting their pre-COVID rituals in ways that still allowed them to connect even when socially and geographically distant. For example, weekly after dinner conversations over Zoom, preparing meals in new and creative ways, or going for socially distant walking meetings, all of which allowed families to maintain cohesivity by connecting in new ways.

LaKesha Anderson:

Great. Let's focus a little on the upcoming holiday. Audra, how does the 4th of July present opportunities for families to embrace old traditions while creating new rituals?

Audra K. Nuru:

So what we know from current literature is that rituals become especially important to relational systems during times of conflict, challenge, or change. In some ways, rituals offer relational systems stability while also calling for a need for flexibility which is what happened during the pandemic. The 4th of July holiday presents opportunities for families in the United States to engage rituals as Baxter and Braithwaite say to step back from everyday life in order to reflect symbolically on that very life. I imagine that many relational systems will be adapting or reshaping their rituals as they reflect on the past year.

LaKesha Anderson:

And after a year of very few social gatherings, many extended families might be gathering for the first time in months for the 4th of July. So does anybody have any ideas about how family gatherings might look different now?

Amber E. Kinser:

I think in some ways they're going to be smaller just because we've had so many deaths. So if this is the first gathering of families, multi-generational or large groups of families and family subcultures and that sort of thing, in some ways, it may be a little bit sad because many, many of those families celebrating are going to have members who are not there. But then I was thinking today that in other ways, they may be larger because I wonder if people might be more committed to doing the 4th of July thing this year because we haven't seen each other in a long time. So



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somebody might say, well, I think I'm going to skip the 4th of July thing. We're just going to go see the fireworks. I'm going to skip the whole big family deal or something. And I think maybe there'll be fewer people skipping out on that I guess to the extent that they feel safe in terms of the pandemic.

Carlita P. Greene:

I think that also in some ways one of the things that the pandemic, one of the silver linings in some ways if we can say that there's a silver lining about the pandemic is the fact that I think that a lot of the trappings that we had within our society and culture in the past about some of these kinds of things, not just the 4th of July but holidays in general and this idea that tends to run through some of these things linked to perfectionism, I think a lot of those notions or ideals of perfectionism have fallen away for a lot of people. So I think that in some ways, what is going to happen and what I've seen happening is that people are to some extent relaxing a bit more and being a bit more flexible about the outcome and not necessarily building up these ideals in people's minds about like, oh my gosh, if the potato salad isn't just perfect, then my whole 4th of July is going to be ruined, right? As a Southerner, I can say that is tragic, right? But I think that that's one of the things that has shifted, and that's one of the things that's changed, that to some extent, while they still hold significance and still have meanings, I think some of these trappings for a lot of people are definitely falling away and that people are also being more flexible in the sense of how we connect to other people using social media, not necessarily always having to be physically present. But I know families who gather and actually did a lot of celebrations not just 4th of July but like for Thanksgiving and for Christmas where everyone got together and had a celebration via Zoom because people couldn't connect in person. So I think that some of that flexibility is going to continually still be built into the way that we celebrate holidays as we move forward post-pandemic.

Amber E. Kinser:

I think so and I think that one of the things that I hope the women who are doing the food labor will recognize is that I think we all had a lot of practice, a year's worth of practice in like just forgiveness. Because nothing is working the way it was and people are trying their best and they can barely hold whatever together. So in addition to you get to let loose your expectations for your potato salad, which I agree as a fellow Southerner, that would be a disaster in another year. But I think that the people who are eating the potato salad are going, please, I'm just so glad we're together, that we're actually in the same room. Who even cares what we're eating? In fact, you don't even have to make it. Let's just get it at the store. Forget it. Let's just get together. So maybe in that way, there's more emphasis on the relationships than on the sort of particulars of foodstuffs.



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Ascan F. Koerner:

Right. And I think that's a real sort of a positive outlook and a real opportunity for us as family members to come together in a flexible way. On the other hand, we are also a little bit fearful because it's such a patriotic holiday that it sort of places us right in the discussion where we have as a country where we really regard who are we as Americans, what does the red, white, and blue mean to us not, just the flag but also the whole pomp and circumstance around that. And so I think there is also a real potential for families to experience conflict and strife. And we have seen this a little bit I think in Memorial Day when they had some sort of disagreements around on how we celebrate that holiday. And again, if it's such an important national holiday and very really the concept of what does it mean to be American and what does America mean to us and how do we relate to America and to what extent does our family participation in that holiday either reinforce or reform in some other ways maybe what our attitude about America is and our understanding of America is really interesting. And so I'm really looking forward to see a little bit, to hear from families' experiences around that holiday and how that played out. But I think there's a real opportunity for us to also be very mindful of the holiday and renegotiate in our families what does it mean to celebrate this holiday at this particular time. Particularly here in Minneapolis, I can tell you, it's a very fraught support holiday to participate in.

LaKesha Anderson:

Amber, in your article for NCA's magazine *Spectra*, you wrote that countries have used family meals as a shorthand to determine the health of the nation. Could you talk a bit about that and how it may tie into patriotic celebrations such as the 4th of July?

Amber E. Kinser:

Well, one of the things I think about is in the 19th century, U.S. women were seen as like the moral compass of the family, trying to keep everybody morally on track and particularly men on track and focused on all that's good and brave and true. And so I think that in the 21st century, we see women as a kind of health compass. Then how well the family is doing in terms of health and well-being becomes very important. So we condensed this health well-being idea of the family to food, and then since the early 90s, we've been using family meals as a kind of encapsulation of food and family and how that should play out and how that food can bring about family health and well-being and therefore national health and well-being. And women as in the 19th century continue to be in charge of that. So we're back to one of the things that happens in this kind of patriotic celebration is a reinforcement of gender norms, patriarchal norms, and we see that play out in the 4th of July celebration in how we eat and what we eat and who's doing what kinds of labor and when particular family members are dissatisfied or upset, who navigates those moments. Because if women are in charge of people's well-being, that's not just food. That's interactional well-being. So we'll see those kinds of dramas play out.



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LaKesha Anderson:

Finally, to wrap up, as we walk through the supermarket and see 4th of July themed foods and decorations, what does communication about the 4th say about cultural values related to food, family, and celebration?

Audra K. Nuru:

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, these traditions are rarely about the objects themselves but rather about the meanings that we give them. So I suspect that as people encounter these items, they may experience a wide range of emotions. Rich families may lean on past or reimagined rituals to develop new shared meanings as they turn the corner on a difficult year.

CarlNita P. Greene:

I also think that the way that these meanings are created particularly surrounding events and holidays such as the 4th of July with their links to national identity, families, cultural values depending on where one stands within the country and the society, also depending on one's identity, that these meanings are definitely fraught with contests, that they're questioned that they are troubled, that they don't necessarily mean the same thing to everyone. So I think it's important for us to call these things into question as well and to raise the question of when we're talking about cultural values, I think you kind of have to ask that question of whose cultural values are we speaking of? Because I think that that's important as well, and I think that really unpacking these sites of struggle politically and socially as well as how people create identities is extremely important even in something that seems as simple as 4th of July celebrations.

Ascan F. Koerner:

And I would echo that from a family communication pattern theory perspective. This is a real opportunity to engage purposefully in a conversational style of renegotiating those meanings or clarifying those meanings and understanding again what does it mean to us as a family to participate in this holiday at this moment in time in this society and what is our relationship to one another vis-à-vis the system and also, what's our relationship to the community and to the country and the nation as we understand it and how we see it all plays into this and how does it make sense for us and what is required of us in this moment? Is what is required a sort of a passive participation or an explicit endorsement or a maybe an explicit rejection of the particular? Maybe we don't barbecue and we have stew as an intentional act, as an intentional new tradition that we introduced to challenge meaning or problematize the situation. So I think it's a real opportunity for us to be intentional about our cultural practices and what our cultural practices mean to us but also what they mean to members of our community that are not around our table and how they perceive it and how that defines our relationship. So it's a real again good idea for us to investigate our relationships within families and of our family to the families around us.



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LaKesha Anderson:

Thank you for joining me today on *Communication Matters*. I hope you've enjoyed this timely discussion related to the 4th of July. If you're celebrating, have a great 4th.

NCA News:

In NCA News, NCA is now accepting applications for Research Cultivation Grants, Advancing the Discipline Grants, and grants funded by the Dale Leathers Fund to Promote Communication Studies in Emerging Democracies. Research Cultivation Grants facilitate first-time grant-seeking for those without prior grant experience or those desiring to build a foundation for future grant pursuits. Advancing the Discipline Grants fund projects and events that support work that is focused on the discipline itself. Finally, Dale G. Leathers Memorial Fund grants promote scholarship and teaching in Communication Studies that benefit emerging democracies and their peoples. The deadline for all grant applications is October 1, 2021. To learn more about the grants and apply, visit natcom.org/nca-grant-opportunities.

Also, in NCA News, recordings of the “#AltAC in COM” workshop series are now available on NCA’s YouTube page. The series, which was funded by an NCA Advancing the Discipline Grant, offers Ph.D. students interested in careers outside of the academy the opportunity to hear from communication professionals about how to transition from the academy to industry, the opportunities available for professional researchers, and careers within academia beyond the tenure-track. Visit NCA’s YouTube page at youtube.com/user/NationalComm to watch the videos today!

And, listeners, I hope you’ll tune in for the next episode of *Communication Matters*, which will focus on how social media, broadcast media, and conservative news outlets have influenced beliefs in conspiracy theories related to the COVID-19 pandemic. University of Pennsylvania Communication Professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Research Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center Daniel Romer will discuss their recent study on this topic, as well as some possible implications for both social media and traditional media.

Conclusion:

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world.

The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands



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from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Communication Matters, organized at the national office in downtown Washington DC, is produced by Assistant Director of External Affairs and Publications Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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