

Meeting public information needs in a crisis: How MU Journalism students responded to COVID-19

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Presented by Regan Mertz



Mo Info Corps

What is Mo Info Corps?

From May to August 2020, [Missouri Information Corps](#), a MU School of Journalism pop-up newsroom, reported on the coronavirus pandemic. We did this because many of us had lost jobs and internships because of the pandemic. We worked as an autonomous newsroom with two graduate student editors and two faculty advisors.

I am presenting on behalf of Mo Info Corps and am citing my teammates' work, as well as my own.

Student need

Senior capstone projects no longer possible, summer internships canceled



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Community need

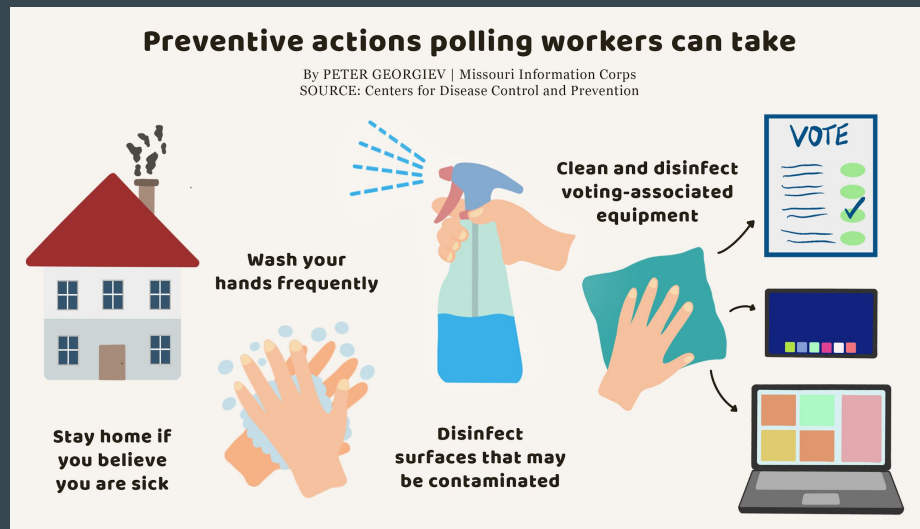
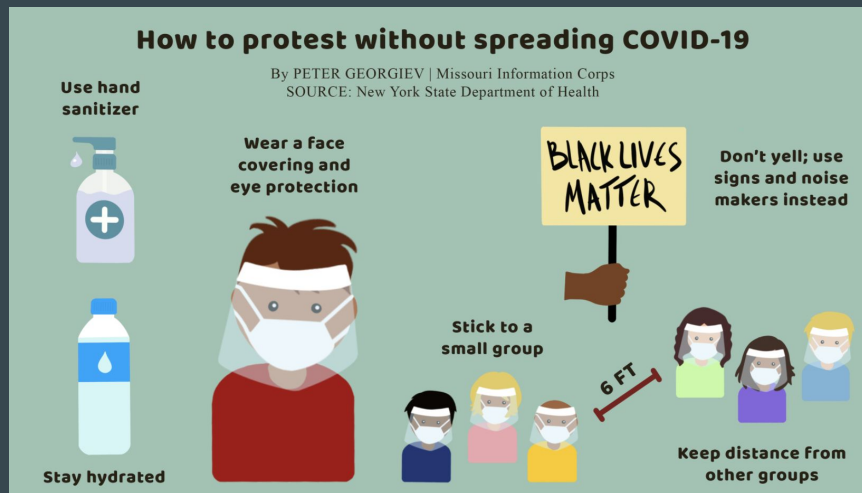
Many communities lack access to local news, local healthcare resources or broadband

What did Mo Info Corps do?

- Identified local news ecosystems
- Two teams: reporting and distribution
- Shared content directly with Missouri editors
- Semiautonomous with the Journalism School
- Traditional public service journalism and enterprise reporting
- Experimented with delivering crucial public health information in social media groups
- Put our training to use by informing the public in our region and reinforcing newsrooms that were under severe economic stress due to COVID-19 shutting down many advertisers

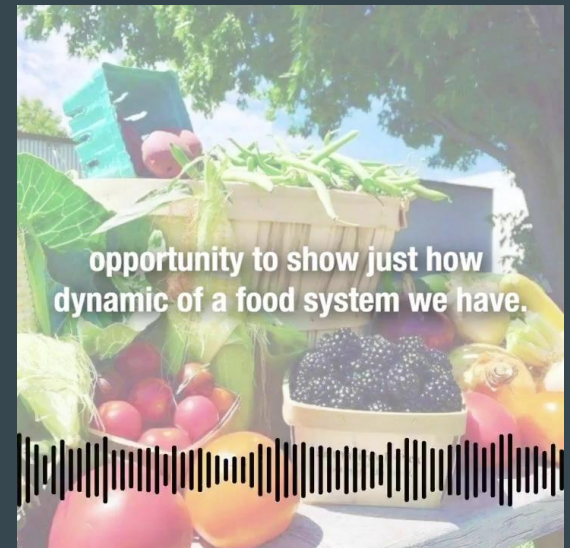
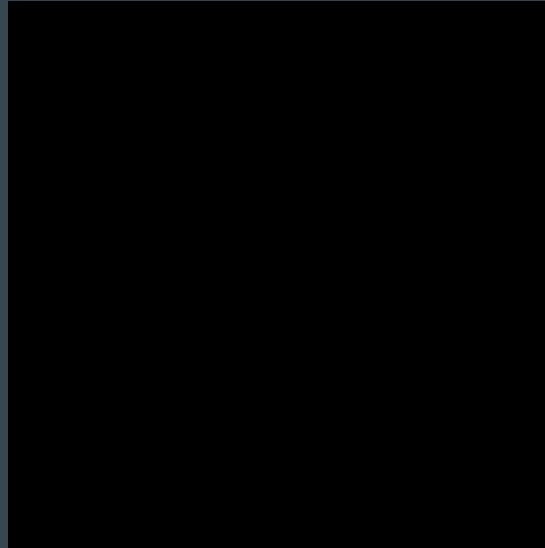
What types of journalism did Mo Info Corps produce?

- Accountability reporting
- Q&As and “news you can use”
- Text and audio
- Graphics and data reporting



Mo Info Corps' Multimedia (click to listen)

Redkey USB/Shutterstock.com

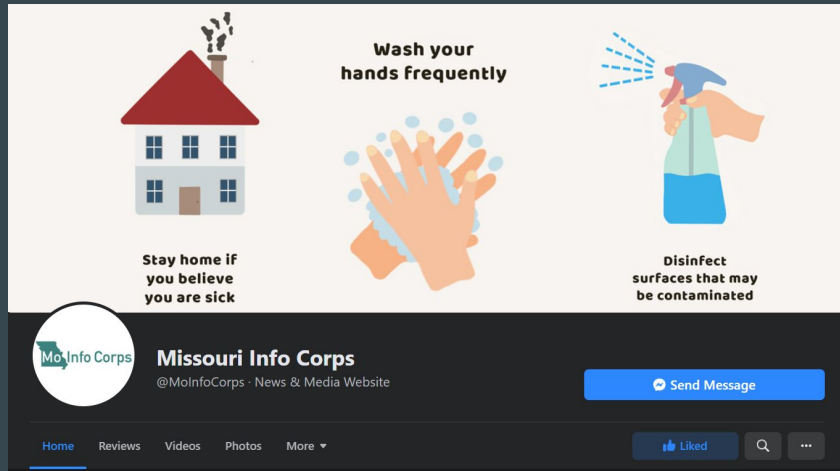


Mo Info Corps' Print Stories (click links to read)

- The impact of [COVID-19 in prisons](#)
- Missouri's failure, as of early July, to support [contact tracing at the local level](#)
- Missouri counties' [slow disbursement of federal coronavirus relief funding](#)
- Missouri farms pivoted to [selling food locally](#)
- UM System researchers take on [new projects during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- Thousands of Missouri [farmers applied for federal coronavirus relief](#)
- A [class that encouraged Latino gardening](#) which drew Spanish-speakers around the world

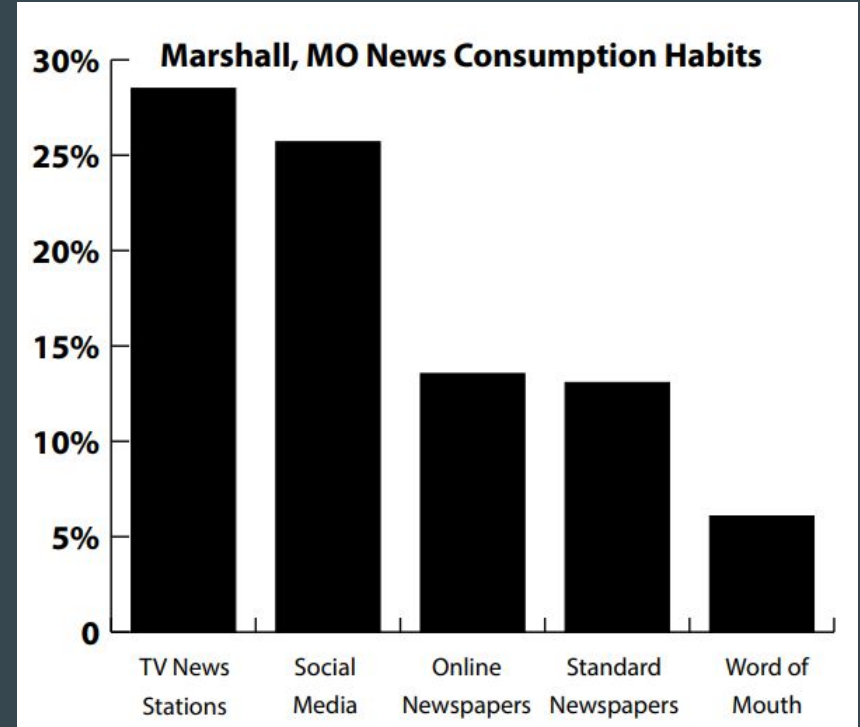
Mo Info Corps' Distribution

To make our news and information widely accessible at a time of great public need, we offered it to news organizations for free. Mo Info Corps also established a presence in local Facebook groups, engaging with people through comments and occasionally doing additional reporting to answer questions.



Mo Info Corps' Market Research

The distribution team targeted all residents of Marshall, Mo which includes all genders and age groups above 18 to determine their news consumption habits. The goal of this market research is to learn more about the climate surrounding local COVID-19 news. This information can guide Missouri news coverage to better serve the needs of Missourians, and hopefully be one step on the way to repairing the broken relationships between the news and the people.



What did Mo Info Corps find out?

Our work has been published in more than 30 outlets, including USA TODAY, and we received many messages of gratitude from readers and editors.

By the end of the summer, we learned to:

1. Engage with communities on social media
2. Explain why information is changing
3. Keep it quick, clear and useful