

## ***AEJMC Emerging Scholar Projects for 2023***

Grants were awarded to two Emerging Scholar research projects. Each research project received \$3,500.

### **Project #1**

**Megan Duncan, Virginia Tech**



### **“Relationships between Geographical Political Sorting, Discussion Networks, and Audience Perceptions of News Bias”**

**Abstract:** Audience trust in news has declined in the past two decades, while perceptions of news bias heightened. Meanwhile, scholars have increasingly paid attention to a connection to geographical political sorting in neighborhoods and workplaces as a factor driving polarization. Research on perceived news bias found that exposure to political disagreement and perceptions that their opinion is in the political minority or majority has an influence on how people view news bias. Political sorting in the communities where people live and work will influence the extent to which people experience political disagreement and how they perceive their personal opinion in relation to public opinion. Yet, the literature has not yet explored the connection between geographical political sorting and perceptions of news.

The purpose of this project is to study how geographical political sorting among where people live and work influences the trust audiences have in news and the extent to which they perceive bias. This study will examine the interaction between the audience’s personal political opinion and the opinion of the community on perceptions of news. This will speak to the impact of political sorting on news trust, engagement with news, and participation in democracy. The project will investigate if perceived bias increases and trust decreases where there is a difference between an audience member’s personal ideology and the ideology of the community. This project will contribute to scholarship on living in politically sorted communities, including likelihood to pay attention to the local news, participate in civic events, and vote. To examine these questions, this project will collect original survey data about Americans’ perceptions of public opinion and news. That survey data will be combined with public secondary data on community opinions and voting outcomes to examine interactions. The findings will provide news organizations information about how to increase audience trust.



## Project #2

Ciera Kirkpatrick, University of Nebraska-Lincoln



### **“Examining Health Information Seeking on TikTok and the Impact of TikTok Message Features on Young Women’s Health-Related Attitudes, Perceptions, and Behavioral Intentions”**

**Abstract:** TikTok is a preferred mass communication platform among young Americans, and recent reports suggest Generation Z prefers using TikTok instead of Google for locating information and advice. Simultaneously, TikTok has become home to millions of videos about health. Doctors use the platform to share health information, and young individuals use the platform to talk about personal health conditions and medical experiences.

While preliminary data has investigated how TikTok is used to obtain information, little is known about the actual uses and motivations of TikTok for health information specifically. This study is designed to provide knowledge of (1) how young women are using TikTok to obtain health information and (2) how health communication messaging on TikTok influences young women’s health-related behaviors. First, this study will involve a national survey of women aged 21-29 to gain a better understanding of how young women are using TikTok as a health information tool (e.g., frequency of information seeking, motivations, perceptions of information). Secondly, this study will use an experiment to test the effects of common message features found in TikTok health messages — source (doctor vs. peer) and level of autonomy support (supportive vs. non-supportive). Specifically, this study will examine the influence TikTok health messaging has on attitudes and intentions toward receiving important preventative health screenings. Nationally, the rate of young women overdue for a Pap test has increased from 14% overdue to 23% overdue. Pap tests are one of the most discussed women’s health topics on TikTok. The prevalence of this content, coupled with TikTok’s popularity among women aged 18-29, might cause young women’s knowledge, attitudes, and intentions toward preventative screening to be heavily influenced by content on this platform.

This project will demonstrate the importance of studying this communication platform’s impacts on public health and provide theoretical and practical guidance to health communicators.