

Summary: Sourcing Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

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- This study set out to determine why CAM is so popular by analysing how CAM is sourced by journalists.
- Five categories of source were defined: sceptics, dispassionate observers, believers, witnesses and sceptical believers. The reliability of each type of source was considered.
- The merits and risks of using case histories, common in CAM, was considered.
- A of PR was used to promote herbal medicines.
- The common news frames used in CAM were found to be:
 - Natural – associated with virtue and harmlessness.
 - Ancient – associated with being powerful, founding, masterly.
 - Holistic – whole-body but rarely extends beyond it.
 - Complementarity – with conventional treatment, benign support.
 - Guilt – ‘If you’re not healthy it’s your fault’.
- People buy CAM either because orthodox medicine is not offering them a solution for their ill health, or because they want to be ‘totally healthy’ and are in pursuit of wellbeing.
- CAM stories are wanted but tends to be over-enthusiastic and insufficient to make an informed choice.
- Risks are downplayed in CAM stories.
- CAM stories are persuaded by sceptics.
- Increasingly incorporated into ‘wellbeing’ stories.
- CAM stories remain important because CAM receives money from government (over £500 million a year from UK government). But covering CAM under news values of celebrity and timeliness still causes problems because these do not occur commonly in CAM.