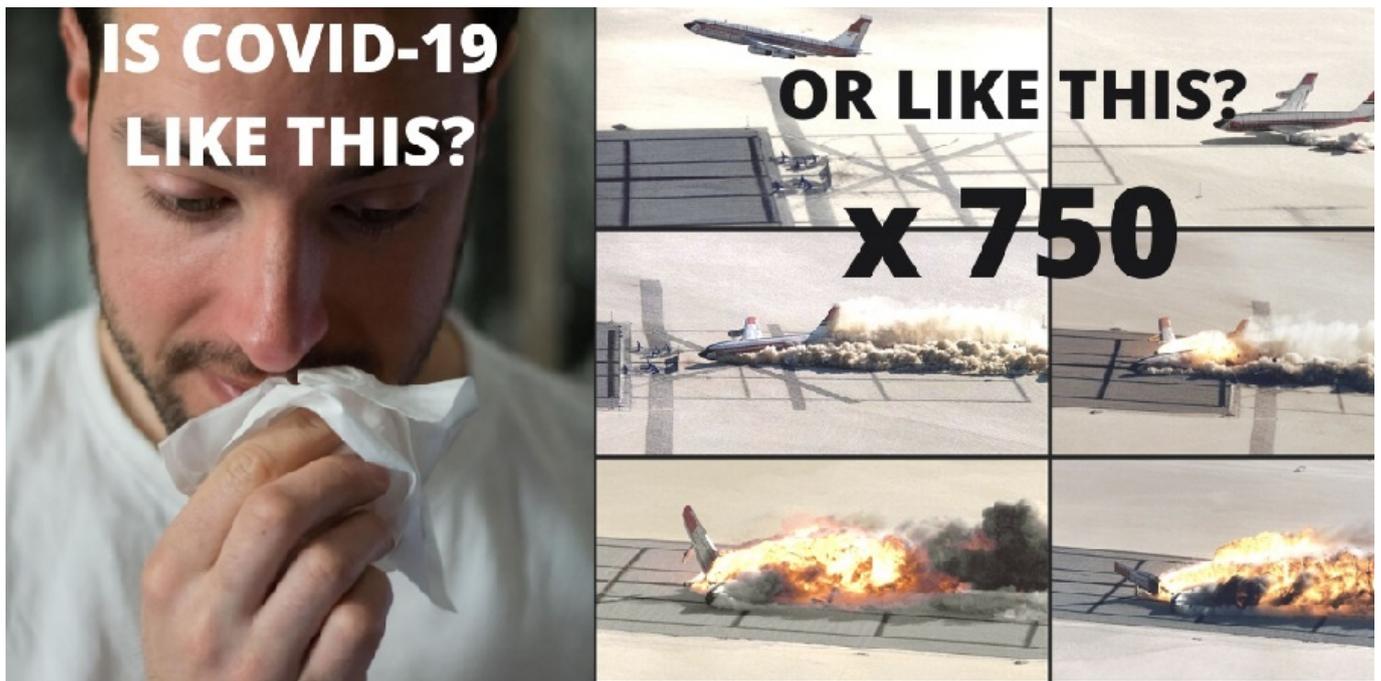


# #CheckMyMath...Are U.S. Covid-19 Deaths Really Like 750 Jets Crashing?

## Lessons in Using Analogies



*Gerard Braud, CSP, Fellow IEC*

In a politically divided United States, research indicates one-third of Americans think Covid-19 is a hoax, while two-thirds think it is a serious threat to health and safety.

Oddly, the message that "Covid-19 is like the common flu" seems to resonate soundly with one audience. Yet the larger audience seems to struggle to find their own analogy.

In search of an analogy, I heard a doctor in a TV interview comparing [Covid-19](#) deaths to jet crashes. His analogy was good, but it didn't stick. Why?

The analogy was delivered among many facts, and was not

delivered with passion, outrage, and a sense of fear.

**So I did the math, based on these statistics:**

1. At this point in the U.S., about 1,000 people die a day, according to the CDC.
2. Since the onset of the virus in March 2020, about 150,000 people in the U.S. have died, according to the CDC
3. The last major news story about an airline crash involved the Boeing 737-Max 8, which can hold about 200 passengers. After two crashes killed 346 people, the jet was pulled from service.

*(Foot note: An Axios poll release while I am writing this says 30% of Americans believe the numbers I just used are inflated.)*

<https://www.axios.com/axios-ipsos-poll-gop-skeptics-growing-deaths-e6ad6be5-c78f-43bb-9230-c39a20c8beb5.html>

## **So #CheckMyMath and #DoTheMath**

If 1,000 people die each day in the U.S. from Covid-19, it is like five 737-Max 8 jets crashing each day.

Using that same calculation, since March it has been like 750 jets have crashed in the U.S. and killed everyone on board.

If you #CheckMyMath and it is correct, then the analogy, from a communications standpoint, needs to be amplified by the doctors doing interviews about preventing the spread of Covid-19.

**Imagine if a medical expert got on television and made this impassioned plea:**

*“The daily death toll from Covid-19 in the United States is like five Boeing 737-Max 8 jets crashing everyday and killing everyone on board.*

*Governments around the world were outraged that 346 people died in two crashes of 737-Max 8 jets and they banned the planes from flying.*

*Yet here we are, in the middle of a pandemic, and there is no outrage when the number of people who die each day in the United States is equal to five jets crashing each day.*

*The number of people who have died since the onset of the pandemic in the United States in March is equal to 750 jets crashing and killing everyone on board.*

*As a country, would we sit idly by if five jets crashed every day?*

*As a country, would we allow 750 jets to fall out of the sky and killed 150,000 U.S. Citizens?*

*The answer is no. We would not stand for it.*

*So then why is it that we are ok with letting 1,000 U.S. Citizens die every day from a disease that we can fight and stop?*

*So then why is it that we are ok with letting 150,000 U.S. Citizens die in five months from a disease that we can fight and stop?"*

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**Winning an argument, or at least moving the needle of public opinion, requires**

- a strong analogy
- an impassioned delivery of the analogy
- an analogy that people can relate to

**The opposing viewpoint on this has been the analogy that says:**

- Covid-19 deaths are no different than the deaths we see every year from the common flu.

What is amazing is that his analogy has stuck with about one third of Americans. Yet according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the analogy is untrue.

- In 2016-2017, there were about 38, 000 deaths
- In 2017-2018, there were about 61,000 deaths, which is the highest over the past ten years.
- In the past ten years, annual flu deaths have been as few as 12,000 deaths.
- <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/past-seasons.html>

**Here are three reasons why one side has been more successful in messaging and the other has not:**

1. Medical experts are trying to sell scientific facts.
2. Medical experts are failing to sell compelling fear or outrage.
3. and #3 ... and this is a big one... those with opposing views have done a better job of getting out front with their own analogies first.

**He is an analogy we haven't ever heard:**

When a jet crashes and kills all 200 people on board, the President, members of Congress, governors and elected officials are not standing in front of the media saying, *"It's just one jet. More people die every day from the flu than died in that airplane crash."*

Two-thirds of Americans are unable to win the war of words over one-third of Americans. Perhaps it is time for the war to be waged with facts that are converted into strong analogies.

Let's watch to see if the analogy about the airline crash takes off.

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