Examining College Students' Trust in Sources for Scientific Information

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Introduction

The literature has identified **trust** as a key component for message processing.

In a time where misinformation runs rampant and distrust in scientific institutions is at an all-time high (Krishna, 2021), it's important to strategically craft messages from sources audience members trust to foster maximum message impact.

Conceptual Framework

Trust: "to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of something" (Merriam Webster, 2022)

"Trust makes information processing more efficient" (Lee et al., 2005)

Individuals are more likely to process messages positively from a trusted source and are more likely to automatically refute information from untrusted sources (e.g., backfire effect: Kahan et al., 2011).

Methodology

Online Qualtrics survey delivered through the University's extra credit research portal

Data collected from Nov. 2021 to May 2022 (n = 105)

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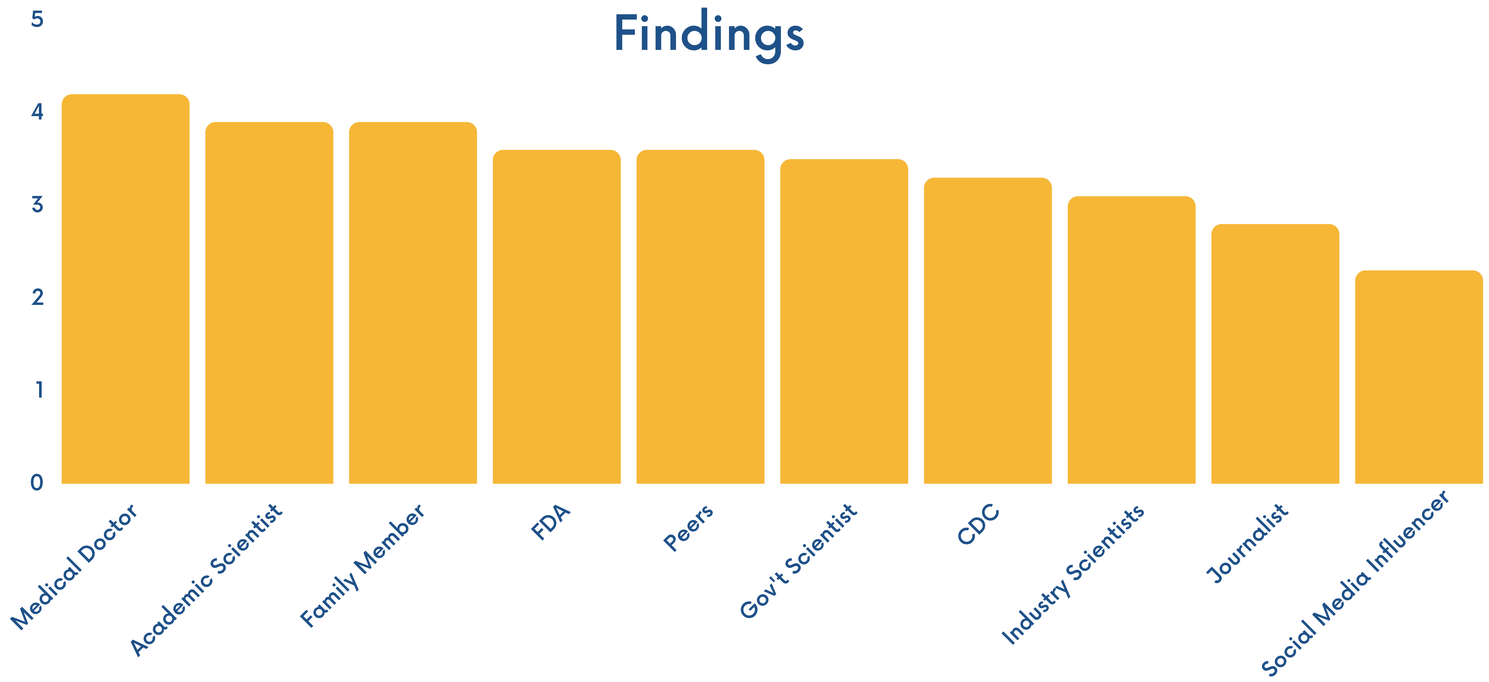
Findings



Note. Trust in source for scientific information (N = 105): "Indicate the level of trust you place on the following source regarding scientific information" (1 = *completely distrust* to 5 = *competely* trust)

Conclusions & Recommendations

Messages portraying the scientific consensus or the desired action should be delivered from trusted sources, or the messages could do more harm than good (Kahan et al., 2011).

Considering that college students trusted medical doctors, academic scientists, and family members, these may be prime sources to deliver information around complex, controversial topics like genetically modified foods or climate change.

Future research should investigate why people trust certain sources across specific scientific topics (i.e., climate change, vaccines, GMOs, livestock production).