

Title: Trusted Sources of Health Information During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background: As the role of media has evolved with display and consumption of health information, the need to decipher the quality of the information has become exceedingly important. This became more important during the covid-19 pandemic, when information was being formulated and released nearly real-time. Prior to the pandemic, government agencies, health professionals and authorities were generally trusted sources of information. Additionally, information passed more casually through family and acquaintances was also something people tended to rely upon. This paper explores the self-reported trustworthiness of different health information sources during the pandemic and also seeks to rank the importance from health information consumers.

Methods: The study employed the COVID-19 Impact on Health and Well-being Survey (IHWS) created by members of UTRGV. Inside the IHWS demographic information was collected along with questions on trusted sources on health information. To be included for analysis all trusted sources questions needed to be complete; 640 of 836 observations were used. Using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) important factors on trusted sources of health information were created. Descriptive statistics were created and stratified by the PCA factors. Multivariable regression was then used to explore if sociodemographic (age, race, sex, education, income) variables were associated with mean factor scores. An alpha of 0.05 was used to determine significance. SAS 9.4 was used to perform all analysis.

Results: The factors identified were Government/Non-Profits/News Outlets (F1), Family/Friends/social media(F2), Health Professionals (F3). The cumulative variance explained by the three factors was 67.1%. The majority of respondents were female (n=492, 78.2%), Hispanic (n=353, 55.3%), and college graduates (n=480, 75.1%). Age was associated with all factors, with younger respondents having less trust in sources. Income group was associated with F1 and F2, with higher incomes showing more trust in these factors. Race was associated with F1 with Caucasians showing less trust than Hispanics and other race groupings.

Discussion: This research found three important factors on grouping trusted sources of information with domain specificity. The most important factor was government/non-profits/news outlets. Differences were found across sociodemographic across the factors demonstrating tailored informational dissemination might be more effective based on these characteristics.