Trust in Science and COVID-19

Subjects: Psychology
Contributor: Marilena Mousoulidou , Andri Christodoulou , Marios Argyrides , Michailina Siakalli* , Louiza Constantinou

In this entry, trust in science is defined as the reliance, confidence, and dependence on science to understand scientific information. With the outbreak of, and the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, turning towards science and trusting the specialized knowledge of experts is of particular importance during this period.

trust science COVID-19

Trust is an important construct that influences the actions of individuals, organizations, and societies. Every day, people need to make decisions, and frequently, trust plays a critical role in the decisions they undertake. It is, therefore, imperative, especially in periods of crises, for individuals to know whom and what to trust.

From December 2019, a novel SARS-CoV-2 virus broke out in China and rapidly spread across the world. Along with the virus, the fear of uncertainty concerning the future spread. On 11th March 2020, after 118,000 cases in 114 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic [1]. The WHO's declaration prompted clinicians, scientists, and scientific organizations worldwide to provide valuable medical and epidemiological information to control the spread of the virus. This included information about the virus' transmissibility, the severity of the disease, and preventive public health behaviors and measures. The virus was considered highly contagious [2] and therefore demanded from the public a high level of compliance to the suggested prevention guidelines. Like with other viruses in the past that entailed uncertainty, people had to turn to science to stop the spread of the virus.

This entry aims to provide a more thorough understanding of the significant role of trust in science during the COVID-19 era. It begins by defining trust in science and then discusses some within-individual factors (religion, political orientation, education, socioeconomic status, and psychological factors) that influence trust in science. The role of this trust in the accuracy of information one receives is also discussed by examining the effect of social media, misinformation, and conspiracy theories. Next, the role of trust in science in public policy and its effect on preventive behaviors (compliance to public measures and vaccination) is explored. The entry closes with some general conclusions.

References

1. World Health Organization, . WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19 . Available online: https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020 (accessed on 20 November 2021).
2. Mohapatra, R.K.; Pintilie, L.; Kandi, V.; Sarangi, A.K.; Das, D.; Sahu, R.; Perekhoda, L. The Recent Challenges of Highly Contagious COVID-19, Causing Respiratory Infections: Symptoms, Diagnosis, Transmission, Possible Vaccines, Animal Models, and Immunotherapy. Chem. Biol. Drug Des. 2020, 96, 1187–1208.