

Communication during Covid-19: A Swiss National Study

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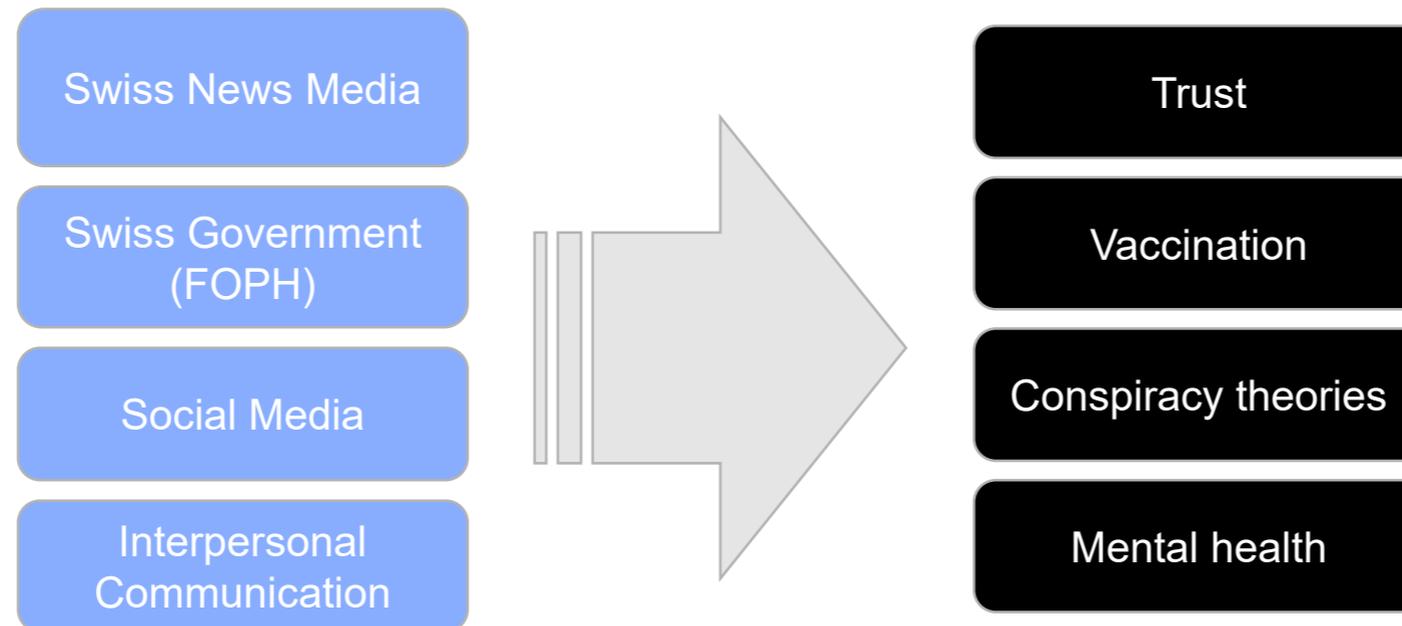
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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent did Covid-19 communications by the **Swiss traditional news media** (TV, radio, newspapers) and by the **Swiss government** (Federal Office of Public Health „FOPH“), communication in the **social media**, and **interpersonal communication** affect Swiss residents' (1) trust, (2) willingness to vaccinate, (3) engagement in conspiracy theories, and (4) mental health?



NATIONAL SAMPLE OF SWITZERLAND



Random sample = 742 adults who lived in Switzerland entirely during Covid-19

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| Lake Geneva region | 14% |
| Swiss „Mittelland“ | 14,4% |
| North-West Switzerland | 14% |
| Zurich | 14,3% |
| Eastern Switzerland | 14,4% |
| Central Switzerland | 14,1% |
| Ticino | 14,7% |
| Total | 100 % |

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age:

Mean = 42,91 years old
Range = 18 - 69 years of age

Sex:

51,3% Female
48,7% Male

Migration status:

22% No family member born in CH
24% Only self born in CH
54% Entire family born in CH

Employment status:

79,4% working population
→ 28,2% work related to Covid-19
20,6% unemployed

Marital status:

40% married
20% single
18% cohabiting with partner
11% divorced/separated
10% dating
1% widowed

Highest education:

5% obligatory school
35% vocational/trade school
22% higher technical school
13% high school (matura)
25% college/university

Annual gross income:

25% less than 59'000 CHF
41% between 60 – 119'999 CHF
16% above 120'000 CHF
18% preferred not to respond

DURING COVID-19...

22% lived alone

78% lived with someone else

Living status had no effect on „loneliness“ during Covid-19.

DURING COVID-19...

Most trusted source of Covid information:

69% The Swiss government (FOPH)

54% Scientific experts

45% Healthcare providers

37% Swiss traditional news media

33% Scientific publications

14% Internet (e.g. Google-search)

16% Family members

12% Friends

8% Social media

5% Pharmaceutical company reports

4% Other (e.g. own instinct)

DURING COVID-19...

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12% Friends

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5% Pharmaceutical company reports

4% Other (e.g. own instinct)

No „one“ trusted
source

Low trust in
science and
medicine

DURING COVID-19...

Searched for Covid-19 information in:

| | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Less/Never |
|--------------|-------|--------|---------|------------|
| Newspapers | 36% | 36% | 14% | 14% |
| Television | 38% | 31% | 18% | 13% |
| FOPH Website | 21% | 34% | 29% | 16% |
| Radio | 26% | 28% | 18% | 28% |
| Facebook | 13% | 10% | 10% | 67% |
| Twitter | 4% | 4% | 5% | 87% |
| Youtube | 6% | 5% | 7% | 82% |
| Instagram | 8% | 7% | 5% | 80% |
| Telegram | 2% | 4% | 2% | 92% |

DURING COVID-19...

Searched for Covid-19 information in:

| | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Less/Never |
|--------------|-------|--------|---------|------------|
| Newspapers | 36% | 36% | 14% | 14% |
| Television | 38% | 31% | 18% | 13% |
| FOPH Website | 21% | 34% | 29% | 16% |
| Radio | 26% | 28% | 18% | 28% |
| Facebook | 13% | 10% | 10% | 67% |
| Twitter | 4% | 4% | 5% | 87% |
| Youtube | 6% | 5% | 7% | 82% |
| Instagram | 8% | 7% | 5% | 80% |
| Telegram | 2% | 4% | 2% | 92% |

RISK PERCEPTION: DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS...

Felt at risk/threatened/afraid of getting infected with Covid-19:

51% yes

49% no

Felt that Covid constituted a severe public health problem:

75% yes

25% no

Felt that an infection with Covid-19 could have severe consequences for own health:

50% yes

50% no

RISK PERCEPTION: DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS...

Felt at risk/threatened/afraid of getting infected with Covid-19:

51% yes

49% no

Felt that Covid constituted a severe public health problem:

75% yes

25% no

Felt that an infection with Covid-19 could have severe consequences for own health:

50% yes

50% no



Relatively low risk
perception...

PANDEMIC IMPACT

Infection with Covid-19:

25% have been infected (positive test)
19% had symptoms, but no positive test
56% never had symptoms, nor a positive test

Hospital stay due to Covid-19:

1% yes
99% no

Knew someone in hospital for Covid-19:

52% yes
48% no

Knew someone who died with Covid-19:

36% yes
64% no

Lost job because of Covid-19:

4% yes
96% no

Had lower income because of Covid-19:

22% yes
78% no

...but considerable
impact...

PANDEMIC IMPACT

Infection with Covid-19:

25% have been infected (positive test)

19% had symptoms, but no positive test

56% never had symptoms, nor a positive test

Hospital stay due to Covid-19:

1% yes

99% no

Knew someone in hospital for Covid-19:

52% yes

48% no

Knew someone who died with Covid-19:

36% yes

64% no

Lost job because of Covid-19:

4% yes

96% no

Had lower income because of Covid-19:

22% yes

78% no

RELATIONAL IMPACT

Friendship conflicts about Covid-19:

72% no

28% yes

→ 8% friendship ended because of Covid-conflict

Marital conflicts about Covid-19:

88% no

12% yes

→ 2% marriage ended because of Covid-conflict

Family conflicts about Covid-19:

78% no

22% yes

→ 4% family ties ended because of Covid-conflict

Work conflicts about Covid-19:

80% no

20% yes

→ 2% work relationship ended because of Covid-conflict

RELATIONAL IMPACT

...with considerable
interpersonal
conflict.

Friendship conflicts about Covid-19:

72% no

28% yes

→ 8% friendship ended because of Covid-conflict

Marital conflicts about Covid-19:

88% no

12% yes

→ 2% marriage ended because of Covid-conflict

Family conflicts about Covid-19:

78% no

22% yes

→ 4% family ties ended because of Covid-conflict

Work conflicts about Covid-19:

80% no

20% yes

→ 2% work relationship ended because of Covid-conflict

COMPLIANCE WITH PANDEMIC CONTROL MEASURES

Face mask:

- 2% could not wear a mask
- 10% refused to wear a mask
- 14% occasionally wore a mask (e.g. beneath the nose; when people were watching)
- 74% always, as prescribed

Hygienic measures:

- 1% never
- 7% rarely
- 37% often
- 55% always, as prescribed

Social distancing:

- 2% never
- 10% rarely
- 38% often
- 50% always, as prescribed

Vaccination:

- 1% medically unable to get vaccinated
- 15% did not want to get vaccinated
- 3% received one vaccination
- 25% received two vaccinations
- 56% fully vaccinated and boosted

COMPLIANCE WITH PANDEMIC CONTROL MEASURES

Face mask:

2% could not wear a mask
10% refused to wear a mask
14% occasionally wore a mask (e.g. beneath the nose; when people were watching)
74% always, as prescribed

Hygienic measures:

1% never
7% rarely
37% often
55% always, as prescribed

Social distancing:

2% never
10% rarely
38% often
50% always, as prescribed

**Relatively low
compliance**

Vaccination:

1% medically unable to get vaccinated
15% did not want to get vaccinated
3% received one vaccination
25% received two vaccinations
56% fully vaccinated and boosted

SATISFACTION WITH COVID-19 RESPONSE

Satisfaction with the Swiss Government's response:

68% satisfied

32% dissatisfied

Satisfaction with the FOPH's response:

68% satisfied

32% dissatisfied

Satisfaction with the Canton's response:

67% satisfied

33% dissatisfied

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Satisfaction with the Swiss Government's response:

68% satisfied

32% dissatisfied

Satisfaction with the FOPH's response:

68% satisfied

32% dissatisfied

Satisfaction with the Canton's response:

67% satisfied

33% dissatisfied



1/3 dissatisfied

„SHOULD HAVE COMMUNICATED BETTER“:

Swiss news media:

41% Yes

59% No

FOPH:

38% Yes

62% No

> 1/3 would have expected
better communication

NEWS MEDIA COMMUNICATION



„SHOULD HAVE COMMUNICATED BETTER“: **HOW?**

„SHOULD HAVE COMMUNICATED BETTER“: HOW?

| The traditional news media should have... | % |
|---|----|
| <i>...explained more</i> | 9 |
| ...been less „one-sided“, more critical | 4 |
| <i>...propagated less fear and panic</i> | 7 |
| <i>...offered more objective facts</i> | 9 |
| ...made sure to provide more accurate information | 4 |
| ...stated more „coherent“ messages to the outside | 1 |
| <i>...been more honest and transparent</i> | 15 |
| ...reached out more broadly | 1 |
| ...been less negative | 1 |
| ...promoted societal coherence rather than polarization | 2 |
| ...been more empathic / adaptive to their listeners emotional needs | 2 |
| ...communicated in a calmer, reassuring manner | 1 |

| The traditional news media should have... | % |
|--|----|
| ...been more accommodating to listeners' linguistic needs | 2 |
| ...reached out through more diverse channels | 2 |
| ...been more consistent with their messages | 4 |
| ...been less contradictory | 1 |
| ...been more timely | 4 |
| <i>...communicated less frequently about Covid-19</i> | 6 |
| <i>...communicated in a more simple manner</i> | 15 |
| ...been more clear | 1 |
| ...been more inclusive | 3 |
| ...been more independent (e.g. less focused on monetary goals) | 3 |
| ...been less hasty / impulsive | 3 |

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION PREDICTED TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA

„Accuracy,“ „contextualization“ and low „clarity“ were significantly associated with trust in the news media.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,663 ^a | ,440 | ,438 | ,53885 | ,440 | 288,148 | 1 | 367 | <,001 |
| 2 | ,704 ^b | ,496 | ,493 | ,51170 | ,056 | 40,984 | 1 | 366 | <,001 |
| 3 | ,721 ^c | ,520 | ,516 | ,49999 | ,024 | 18,336 | 1 | 365 | <,001 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_A

b. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_A, SACCIA_CONTEXT

c. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_A, SACCIA_CONTEXT, SACCIA_C

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. | Correlations | | |
|-------|----------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|--------------|---------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | | | | Zero-order | Partial | Part |
| 1 | (Constant) | ,664 | ,120 | | 5,539 | <,001 | | | |
| | SACCIA_A | ,695 | ,041 | ,663 | 16,975 | <,001 | ,663 | ,663 | ,663 |
| 2 | (Constant) | ,127 | ,141 | | ,898 | ,370 | | | |
| | SACCIA_A | ,422 | ,058 | ,402 | 7,298 | <,001 | ,663 | ,356 | ,271 |
| | SACCIA_CONTEXT | ,467 | ,073 | ,353 | 6,402 | <,001 | ,650 | ,317 | ,238 |
| 3 | (Constant) | ,271 | ,142 | | 1,905 | ,059 | | | |
| | SACCIA_A | ,545 | ,063 | ,520 | 8,599 | <,001 | ,663 | ,410 | ,312 |
| | SACCIA_CONTEXT | ,565 | ,075 | ,427 | 7,551 | <,001 | ,650 | ,368 | ,274 |
| | SACCIA_C | -,259 | ,061 | -,238 | -4,282 | <,001 | ,431 | -,219 | -,155 |

Legend:

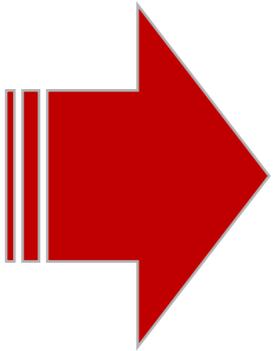
„SACCIA_A“ = Accuracy

„SACCIA_CONTEXT“ = Contextualization

„SACCIA_C“ = Clarity

a. Dependent Variable: TRUST_MEDIA Trust in the News Media

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION PREDICTED TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA



People **trusted** news media that communicated in a way they perceived as sufficiently **accurate**, framed within the relational **context**, and **not overly clear**.

*„Accuracy“
explained 44% of the variance in
„Trust in the news media“*

Trust in the News Media

44%

What they said
seemed accurate to
me.

They did a good job of
making sure the messages
they shared were accurate in
content.

*„Relationship-oriented contextualization“
explained 6% of the variance in
„Trust in the news media“*

They communicated
with me “eye-to-eye.”

6%

Trust in the News Media

What they said
seemed accurate to
me.

44%

Their communication
focused on bringing
people together.

They did a good job of
making sure the messages
they shared were accurate in
content.

*„Clarity“
explained 2% of the variance in
„Trust in the news media“*

They communicated
with me “eye-to-eye.”

6%

Their communication
focused on bringing
people together.

They *did not* express
themselves overly clearly.

2%

What they said
seemed accurate to
me.

44%

They did a good job of
making sure the messages
they shared were accurate in
content.

Trust in the News Media

TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA PREDICTED VACCINATION

Higher trust in news media was significantly associated with higher vaccination status.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,381 ^a | ,145 | ,143 | 1,01614 | ,145 | 61,343 | 1 | 361 | <,001 |

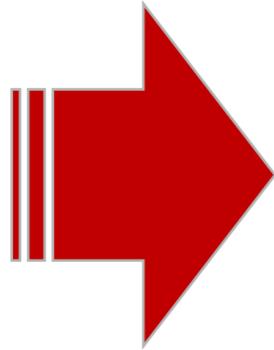
a. Predictors: (Constant), TRUST_MEDIA Trust in the News Media

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1,665 | ,204 | | 8,149 | <,001 |
| | TRUST_MEDIA Trust in the News Media | ,585 | ,075 | ,381 | 7,832 | <,001 |

a. Dependent Variable: VACCINATION Vaccination status

TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA PREDICTED VACCINATION



People with **higher trust** in the news media were **more likely to be fully vaccinated**.

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION DIRECTLY PREDICTED VACCINATION

„Contextualization, „accuracy“ and low „clarity“ were significantly associated with vaccination.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,415 ^a | ,172 | ,170 | ,99997 | ,172 | 75,113 | 1 | 361 | <,001 |
| 2 | ,449 ^b | ,201 | ,197 | ,98357 | ,029 | 13,143 | 1 | 360 | <,001 |
| 3 | ,474 ^c | ,224 | ,218 | ,97065 | ,023 | 10,642 | 1 | 359 | ,001 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel

b. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel, SC_A

c. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel, SC_A, SC_C

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1,622 | ,191 | | 8,509 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | ,578 | ,067 | ,415 | 8,667 | <,001 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 1,148 | ,228 | | 5,026 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | ,379 | ,085 | ,272 | 4,433 | <,001 |
| | SC_A | ,359 | ,099 | ,223 | 3,625 | <,001 |
| 3 | (Constant) | 1,478 | ,247 | | 5,982 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | ,430 | ,086 | ,309 | 5,017 | <,001 |
| | SC_A | ,584 | ,120 | ,362 | 4,883 | <,001 |
| | SC_C | -,374 | ,115 | -,225 | -3,262 | ,001 |

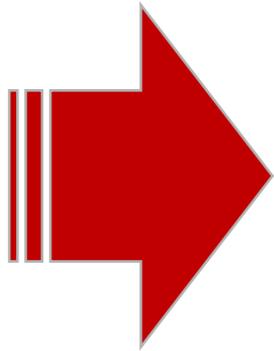
Legend:

„SACCIA_Cx_Rel“ = Relational contextualization

SC_A = Accuracy

SC_C = Clarity

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION DIRECTLY PREDICTED VACCINATION



When adding perceived communication as a predictor, the relationship between trust and vaccination disappeared. This means that **the way in which the news media communicated directly predicted vaccination, not through trust.**

*„Relationship-oriented contextualization“
explained 17% of the variance in
„Vaccination“*

*„Clarity“
explained 2% of the variance in
„Vaccination“*

*„Accuracy“
explained 3% of the variance in
„Vaccination“*

They communicated
with me “eye-to-eye.”

17%

Their communication focused on
bringing people together.

Vaccination

2%

Their message contents
were *not* overly clear.

3%

What they said seemed
accurate to me.

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION PREDICTED CONSPIRACY THEORIZING

Perceived communication inaccuracy was significantly associated with conspiracy theorizing.

Model Summary

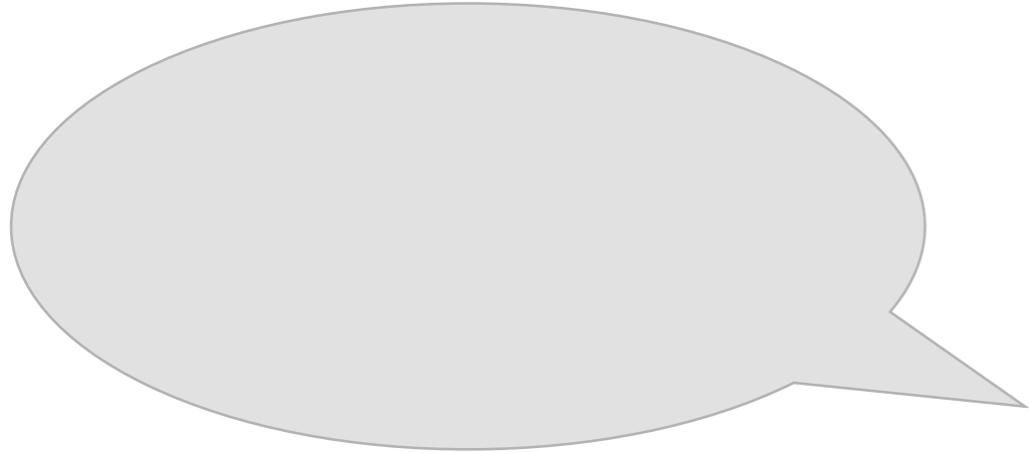
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,369 ^a | ,136 | ,134 | ,71526 | ,136 | 57,720 | 1 | 367 | <,001 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SC_A Accuracy

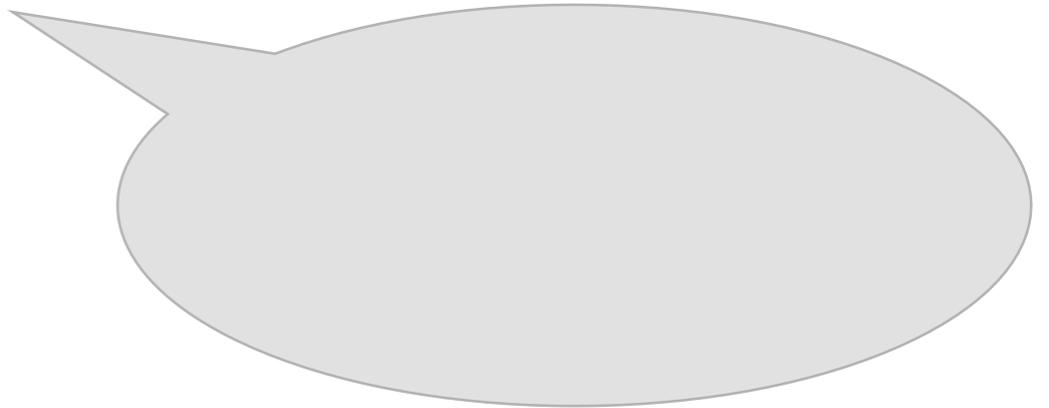
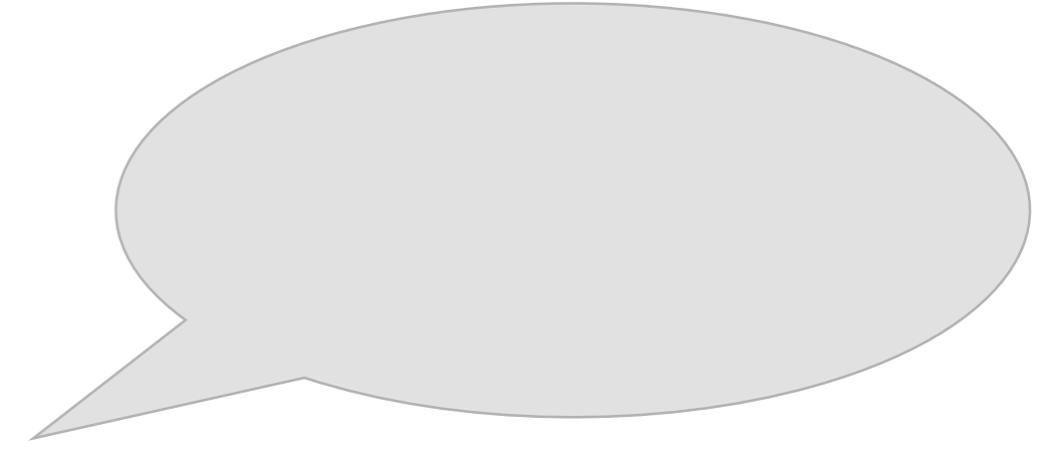
Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3,458 | ,159 | | 21,743 | <,001 |
| 1 | SC_A | -,413 | ,054 | -,369 | -7,597 | <,001 |

a. Dependent Variable: CONSPIR Engagement in conspiracy theories



Conspiracy Theorizing



ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS OF CONSPIRACY THEORIZING

Trust in the news media, anxiety, and depression explained additional variance in conspiracy theorizing.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|---------------|-------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | | df2 |
| 1 | ,369 ^a | ,136 | ,134 | ,71526 | ,136 | 57,720 | 1 | 367 | <,001 |
| 2 | ,439 ^b | ,193 | ,188 | ,69230 | ,057 | 25,740 | 1 | 366 | <,001 |
| 3 | ,476 ^c | ,226 | ,220 | ,67867 | ,034 | 15,852 | 1 | 365 | <,001 |
| 4 | ,487 ^d | ,238 | ,229 | ,67460 | ,011 | 5,413 | 1 | 364 | ,021 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SC_A

b. Predictors: (Constant), SC_A, ANXIETY

c. Predictors: (Constant), SC_A, ANXIETY, TRUST_MEDIA

d. Predictors: (Constant), SC_A, ANXIETY, TRUST_MEDIA, DEPRESSION

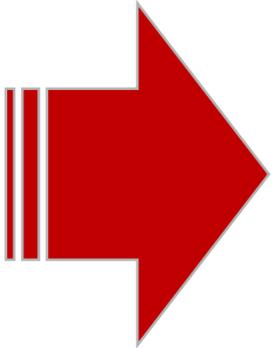
Legend: „SC_A“ = Accuracy

Coefficients^a

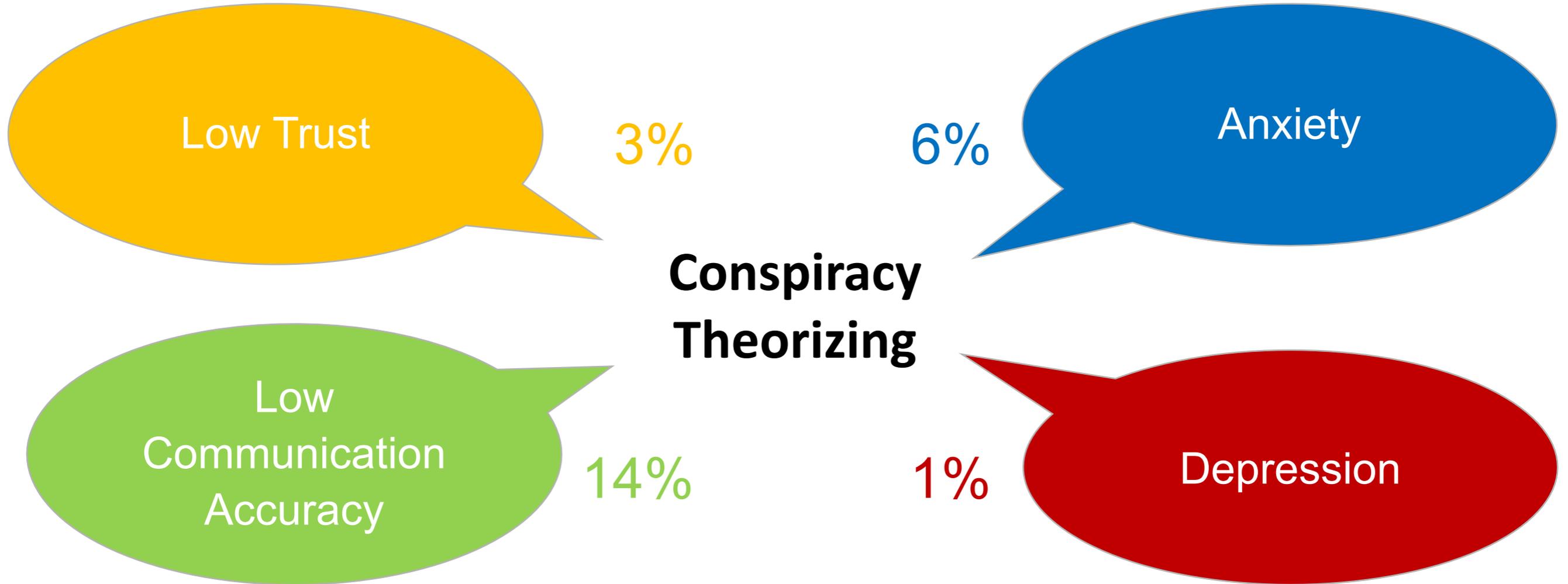
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3,458 | ,159 | | 21,743 | <,001 |
| | SC_A | -,413 | ,054 | -,369 | -7,597 | <,001 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 3,178 | ,163 | | 19,437 | <,001 |
| | SC_A | -,420 | ,053 | -,375 | -7,980 | <,001 |
| | ANXIETY | ,052 | ,010 | ,238 | 5,074 | <,001 |
| 3 | (Constant) | 3,357 | ,166 | | 20,166 | <,001 |
| | SC_A | -,238 | ,069 | -,212 | -3,450 | <,001 |
| | ANXIETY | ,051 | ,010 | ,234 | 5,082 | <,001 |
| | TRUST_MEDIA | -,262 | ,066 | -,245 | -3,982 | <,001 |
| 4 | (Constant) | 3,110 | ,197 | | 15,823 | <,001 |
| | SC_A | -,221 | ,069 | -,197 | -3,209 | ,001 |
| | ANXIETY | ,050 | ,010 | ,230 | 5,018 | <,001 |
| | TRUST_MEDIA | -,274 | ,066 | -,256 | -4,175 | <,001 |
| | DEPRESSION | ,026 | ,011 | ,107 | 2,327 | ,021 |

a. Dependent Variable: CONSPIR Engagement in conspiracy theories

ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS OF CONSPIRACY THEORIZING



Perceived communication inaccuracy, combined with **lower trust** in the news media, **anxiety** and **depression** predicted **engagement in conspiracy theorizing**.



MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE TO THE NEWS MEDIA'S COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS

Anxiety:

73% normal

15% borderline abnormal

12% clinical case

Depression:

28% normal

42% borderline abnormal

30% clinical case

MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE TO THE NEWS MEDIA'S COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS

Anxiety:

73% normal

15% borderline abnormal

12% clinical case

Depression:

28% normal

42% borderline abnormal

30% clinical case



Covid-19 communications
had a **severe impact** on
mental health!

FOPH COMMUNICATION



„SHOULD HAVE COMMUNICATED BETTER“: HOW?

„SHOULD HAVE COMMUNICATED BETTER“: HOW?

| The FOPH should have... | % | The FOPH should have... | % |
|---|----|--|----|
| ... <i>explained more</i> | 10 | ...reached out through more diverse channels | 8 |
| ...been less „one-sided“, more critical | 1 | ... <i>been more consistent with their messages</i> | 2 |
| ...propagated less fear and panic | 2 | ... <i>been less contradictory</i> | 4 |
| ...used more objective facts | 5 | ...been more timely | 2 |
| ...made sure to provide more accurate information | 1 | ...communicated more frequently | 4 |
| ...appeared more „coherent“ to the outside | 2 | ... <i>communicated in a more simple manner</i> | 13 |
| ... <i>been more honest and transparent, e.g. by admitting mistakes</i> | 14 | ... <i>been more clear</i> | 16 |
| ...been less negative | 1 | ...been more energetic / less „careful“ | 2 |
| ...promoted societal coherence rather than polarization | 2 | ...voiced themselves in a less controlling / threatening way | 2 |
| ...been more empathic / adaptive to their listeners' emotional needs | 5 | ...more consequential | 1 |
| ...been more accommodating to listeners' language needs | 3 | ...provided more encompassing information | 1 |

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION PREDICTED TRUST IN FOPH

„Accuracy“ and „contextualization“ were significantly associated with trust in the FOPH.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,665 ^a | ,442 | ,441 | ,51431 | ,442 | 294,393 | 1 | 371 | <,001 |
| 2 | ,703 ^b | ,494 | ,491 | ,49066 | ,051 | 37,636 | 1 | 370 | <,001 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_A

b. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_A, SACCIA_CONTEXT

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Correlations | | |
|-------|----------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|--------------|---------|------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Zero-order | Partial | Part |
| 1 | (Constant) | ,635 | ,140 | | 4,549 | <,001 | | | |
| | SACCIA_A | ,784 | ,046 | ,665 | 17,158 | <,001 | ,665 | ,665 | ,665 |
| 2 | (Constant) | ,282 | ,145 | | 1,941 | ,053 | | | |
| | SACCIA_A | ,482 | ,066 | ,408 | 7,313 | <,001 | ,665 | ,355 | ,270 |
| | SACCIA_CONTEXT | ,435 | ,071 | ,343 | 6,135 | <,001 | ,649 | ,304 | ,227 |

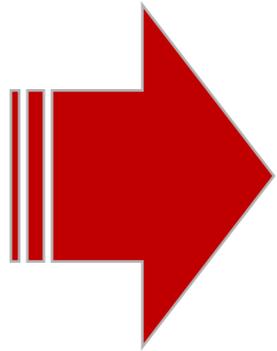
a. Dependent Variable: TRUST_BAG Trust in Health Authorities_Overall (One factor, as suggested by EFA)

Legend:

„SACCIA_A“ = Accuracy

„SACCIA_CONTEXT“ = Contextualization

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION PREDICTED TRUST IN FOPH



The FOPH received **higher trust** when they did a good job of making sure that their Covid-19 communications were **accurate** in content and relationally **contextualized**.

They communicated
with me “eye-to-eye.”

5%

Their communication
focused on bringing
people together.

Trust in FOPH

What they said
seemed accurate to
me.

44%

They did a good job of
making sure the
messages they shared
were accurate in content.

TRUST IN FOPH PREDICTED VACCINATION

Higher trust in the FOPH was significantly associated with higher vaccination status.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,442 ^a | ,195 | ,193 | ,93075 | ,195 | 89,259 | 1 | 368 | <,001 |

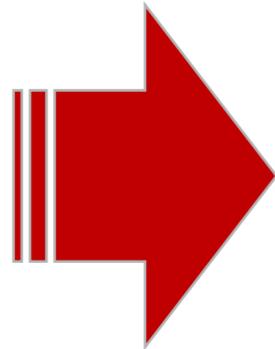
a. Predictors: (Constant), TRUST_BAG Trust in Health Authorities_Overall (One factor, as suggested by EFA)

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1,261 | ,216 | | 5,826 | <,001 |
| | TRUST_BAG Trust in Health Authorities) | ,667 | ,071 | ,442 | 9,448 | <,001 |

a. Dependent Variable: VACCINATION Vaccination status

TRUST IN FOPH PREDICTED VACCINATION



People with **higher trust** in the FOPH were **more likely to be fully vaccinated**.

Trust in the FOPH was predominantly attained by **accurate and relationally contextualized** communication.

PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION PREDICTED CONSPIRACY THEORIZING

Relationship-oriented communication was significantly associated with conspiracy theorizing.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | | F Change | df1 | df2 | |
| 1 | ,272 ^a | ,074 | ,071 | ,73838 | ,074 | 29,607 | 1 | 371 | <,001 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2,963 | ,158 | | 18,792 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | -,288 | ,053 | -,272 | -5,441 | <,001 |

a. Dependent Variable: CONSPIR Engagement in conspiracy theories

Legend:

„SACCIA_Cx_Rel“ = Relational contextualization

Conspiracy Theorizing

*They did not
communicate with me
“eye-to-eye.”*

7%

*Their communication
did not focus on bringing people
together.*

ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS OF CONSPIRACY THEORIZING

Trust in the FOPH, anxiety, and depression predicted additional variance in conspiracy theorizing.

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | Sig. F Change | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|---------------|-------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | | df2 |
| 1 | ,272 ^a | ,074 | ,071 | ,73838 | ,074 | 29,607 | 1 | 371 | <,001 |
| 2 | ,364 ^b | ,132 | ,128 | ,71570 | ,058 | 24,881 | 1 | 370 | <,001 |
| 3 | ,429 ^c | ,184 | ,177 | ,69505 | ,052 | 23,311 | 1 | 369 | <,001 |
| 4 | ,440 ^d | ,194 | ,185 | ,69180 | ,010 | 4,480 | 1 | 368 | ,035 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel

b. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel, ANXIETY

c. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel, ANXIETY, TRUST_BAG

d. Predictors: (Constant), SACCIA_Cx_Rel, ANXIETY, TRUST_BAG, DEPRESSION

Legend:

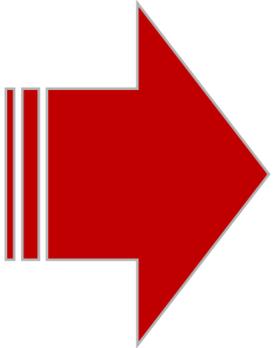
„SACCIA_Cx_Rel“ = Relational contextualization

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2,963 | ,158 | | 18,792 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | -,288 | ,053 | -,272 | -5,441 | <,001 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 2,609 | ,168 | | 15,487 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | -,274 | ,051 | -,259 | -5,343 | <,001 |
| | ANXIETY | ,052 | ,010 | ,242 | 4,988 | <,001 |
| 3 | (Constant) | 3,026 | ,185 | | 16,358 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | -,097 | ,062 | -,092 | -1,571 | ,117 |
| | ANXIETY | ,054 | ,010 | ,248 | 5,272 | <,001 |
| | TRUST_BAG | -,314 | ,065 | -,282 | -4,828 | <,001 |
| 4 | (Constant) | 2,882 | ,196 | | 14,692 | <,001 |
| | SACCIA_Cx_Rel | -,102 | ,062 | -,097 | -1,661 | ,098 |
| | ANXIETY | ,050 | ,010 | ,233 | 4,912 | <,001 |
| | TRUST_BAG | -,330 | ,065 | -,296 | -5,063 | <,001 |
| | DEPRESSION | ,026 | ,012 | ,102 | 2,116 | ,035 |

a. Dependent Variable: CONSPIR Engagement in conspiracy theories

ADDITIONAL PREDICTORS OF CONSPIRACY THEORIZING



Low relational communication, combined with **low trust in the FOPH**, **anxiety** and **depression** predicted engagement in conspiracy theorizing.

5%

Low Trust

6%

Anxiety

7%

Low relationally
contextualized
communication

**Conspiracy
Theorizing**

1%

Depression

MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE TO THE FOPH'S COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS

Anxiety:

71% normal

16% borderline abnormal

13% clinical case

Depression:

32% normal

41% borderline abnormal

27% clinical case

MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE TO THE FOPH'S COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS

Anxiety:

71% normal

16% borderline abnormal

13% clinical case

Depression:

32% normal

41% borderline abnormal

27% clinical case



Covid-19 communications
had a **severe impact** on
mental health!

SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTS



SOCIAL MEDIA USE PREDICTED LOWER TRUST IN FOPH

Trust in FOPH was significantly lower for people who had selected “social media” as their most trusted source of Covid-19 information.

Descriptives

TRUST_BAG Trust in Health Authorities_Overall (One factor, as suggested by EFA)

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------|-----|--------|----------------|------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| 0 Nicht ausgewählt | 342 | 3,0237 | ,65647 | ,03550 | 2,9539 | 3,0935 | 1,00 | 4,00 |
| 1 ausgewählt | 31 | 2,5520 | ,87040 | ,15633 | 2,2327 | 2,8712 | 1,00 | 4,00 |
| Total | 373 | 2,9845 | ,68785 | ,03562 | 2,9145 | 3,0545 | 1,00 | 4,00 |

Robust Tests of Equality of Means

TRUST_BAG Trust in Health Authorities_Overall (One factor)

| | Statistic ^a | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|-------|------------------------|-----|--------|------|
| Welch | 8,660 | 1 | 33,166 | ,006 |

a. Asymptotically F-distributed.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE PREDICTED LOWER VACCINATION

Vaccination status was significantly lower among people who had selected “social media” as their most trusted source of Covid-19 information.

Descriptives

VACCINATION Vaccination status

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------|-----|--------|----------------|------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| 0 Nicht ausgewählt | 674 | 3,2774 | 1,04086 | ,04009 | 3,1987 | 3,3562 | 1,00 | 4,00 |
| 1 ausgewählt | 59 | 2,7119 | 1,21841 | ,15862 | 2,3943 | 3,0294 | 1,00 | 4,00 |
| Total | 733 | 3,2319 | 1,06649 | ,03939 | 3,1546 | 3,3093 | 1,00 | 4,00 |

ANOVA

VACCINATION Vaccination status

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Between Groups | 17,354 | 1 | 17,354 | 15,561 | <,001 |
| Within Groups | 815,219 | 731 | 1,115 | | |
| Total | 832,573 | 732 | | | |

SOCIAL MEDIA USE PREDICTED HIGHER CONSPIRACY THEORIZING

Engagement in conspiracy theories was significantly higher for people who had selected “social media” as their most trusted source of Covid-19 information.

Descriptives

CONSPIRACY Engagement in conspiracy theories

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------|-----|--------|----------------|------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| 0 Nicht ausgewählt | 681 | 2,1777 | ,75882 | ,02908 | 2,1206 | 2,2348 | 1,00 | 4,00 |
| 1 ausgewählt | 61 | 2,5261 | ,83338 | ,10670 | 2,3126 | 2,7395 | 1,00 | 4,00 |
| Total | 742 | 2,2063 | ,77059 | ,02829 | 2,1508 | 2,2619 | 1,00 | 4,00 |

ANOVA

CONSPIRACY Engagement in conspiracy theories

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Between Groups | 6,796 | 1 | 6,796 | 11,608 | <,001 |
| Within Groups | 433,222 | 740 | ,585 | | |
| Total | 440,017 | 741 | | | |

SOCIAL MEDIA USE PREDICTED HIGHER ANXIETY

Anxiety was significantly higher for people who had selected “social media” as their most trusted source of Covid-19 information.

Descriptives

ANXIETY 0-7 = normal, 8-10 = borderline abnormal, 11-21 = ill

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------|-----|--------|----------------|------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| 0 Nicht ausgewählt | 681 | 5,7768 | 3,43042 | ,13145 | 5,5187 | 6,0349 | ,00 | 18,00 |
| 1 ausgewählt | 61 | 7,3115 | 4,38384 | ,56129 | 6,1887 | 8,4342 | ,00 | 18,00 |
| Total | 742 | 5,9030 | 3,54021 | ,12997 | 5,6478 | 6,1581 | ,00 | 18,00 |

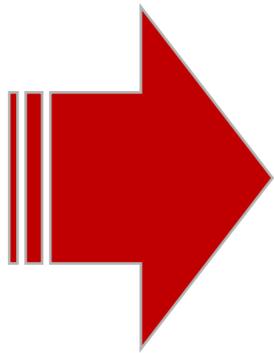
Robust Tests of Equality of Means

ANXIETY 0-7 = normal, 8-10 = borderline abnormal, 11-21 =

| | Statistic ^a | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|-------|------------------------|-----|--------|------|
| Welch | 7,087 | 1 | 66,745 | ,010 |

a. Asymptotically F distributed.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE: SUMMARY OF EFFECTS



People who selected **social media** as one of their most trusted sources for Covid-19 information had significantly **lower trust in the FOPH**, higher **anxiety**, were **less vaccinated** and **more engaged in conspiracy theorizing**.

People's **trust in the social media** was not affected by their **trust in the traditional news media (TV, newspapers, radio)**.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTS



MORE FREQUENT COMMUNICATION WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY ABOUT COVID-19 WAS ASSOCIATED WITH...

In-person:

- Higher depression

Via telephone:

- Higher anxiety

Via video call:

- Higher anxiety

Via text messaging:

- Higher anxiety

Via social media:

- Higher anxiety
- Lower trust in news media
- Higher conspiracy theorizing

MORE FREQUENT COMMUNICATION WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY ABOUT COVID-19 WAS ASSOCIATED WITH...

In-person:

- Higher depression

Via telephone:

- Higher anxiety

Via video call:

- Higher anxiety

Via text messaging:

- Higher anxiety

Via social media:

- Higher anxiety
- Lower trust in news media
- Higher conspiracy theorizing

People who felt **depressed** from the Covid-19 communications engaged in *increased direct communication* with friends and family.

MORE FREQUENT COMMUNICATION WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY ABOUT COVID-19 WAS ASSOCIATED WITH...

In-person:

- Higher depression

Via telephone:

- Higher anxiety

Via video call:

- Higher anxiety

Via text messaging:

- Higher anxiety

Via social media:

- Higher anxiety
- Lower trust in news media
- Higher conspiracy theorizing

People who felt **anxiety** from the Covid-19 communications engaged in *increased mediated* communication with friends and family.

MORE FREQUENT COMMUNICATION WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY ABOUT COVID-19 WAS ASSOCIATED WITH...

In-person:

- Higher depression

Via telephone:

- Higher anxiety

Via video call:

- Higher anxiety

Via text messaging:

- Higher anxiety

Via social media:

- Higher anxiety
- Lower trust in news media
- Higher conspiracy theorizing

People who experienced anxiety, distrust in the news, and conspiratory thoughts in response to the Covid-19 communications engaged in *increased communication in the social media*.

CONCLUSIONS



KEY FINDINGS

The way the FOPH and the Swiss news media communicated during Covid-19 significantly impacted the Swiss population's **mental health**.

KEY FINDINGS

The way the FOPH and the Swiss news media communicated during Covid-19 significantly impacted the Swiss population's **mental health**.

This finding indicates that safer communication during global crisis is not a “soft skill”, but a **public health concern**.

KEY FINDINGS: SWISS NEWS MEDIA

For the health of the Swiss population and more effective pandemic management, in future similar crises, the **traditional news media (TV, newspapers, radio)** are advised to communicate in a manner that will be perceived as:

KEY FINDINGS: SWISS NEWS MEDIA

For the health of the Swiss population and more effective pandemic management, in future similar crises, the **traditional news media (TV, newspapers, radio)** are advised to communicate in a manner that will be perceived as:

- (1) more **honest** (e.g. “no fake news”, admit pandemic uncertainties),
- (2) more **simple** (e.g. less complicated, more “to the point”),
- (3) more **objective** (e.g. less opinions and anecdotes, more facts and effects),
- (4) more **explaining** (e.g. convey the use of measures better, report sources, where the data came from, what they mean – better science communication),
- (5) **less fear-inducing** (e.g. “don’t scare people”, “no fear propaganda”), and
- (6) **less frequent** (“less is more”, weekly rather than daily coverage).

KEY FINDINGS: SWISS NEWS MEDIA

Also the quantitative results support the notion that **traditional news media** are well-advised to prioritize communication that their listeners will perceive as **accurate** in content, because doing so directly influences their listeners' **trust** (in both directions).

KEY FINDINGS: SWISS NEWS MEDIA

Also the quantitative results support the notion that **traditional news media** are well-advised to prioritize communication that their listeners will perceive as **accurate** in content, because doing so directly influences their listeners' **trust** (in both directions).

The findings also evidence that effectively getting the Swiss population's buy-in to vaccinate against Covid-19 predominantly requires **relationship-building communication** on behalf of the news media (i.e. communication that does not convey a sense of superiority, but that brings people together and is perceived as transpiring "eye-to-eye").

KEY FINDINGS: SWISS NEWS MEDIA

News media's **failure** to meet these communication expectations (particularly with respect to accuracy) fuels people to engage in **conspiracy theorizing** – particularly those who experience higher anxiety due to the pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS: FOPH

For the health of the Swiss population and more effective pandemic management, in future similar crises, the Swiss **Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)** is advised to communicate in a manner that will be perceived as:

KEY FINDINGS: FOPH

For the health of the Swiss population and more effective pandemic management, in future similar crises, the Swiss **Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)** is advised to communicate in a manner that will be perceived as:

- (1) more **clear** (e.g. structured lists, clarifying visual aids),
- (2) more **honest and transparent** (e.g. admit and stand by mistakes / misjudgments)
- (3) more **simple** (e.g. simple sentences, be short and precise, not so complicated),
- (4) more **explaining** (e.g. what the reported numbers mean, how each of the control measures are effectively protecting us, why changes are made, etc.)
- (5) reaching out more **broadly** (e.g. using different channels, e.g. apps, bulletins, in-person appearances, and communicating at different times during the day), and
- (5) more **consistent / less contradictory** over time.

KEY FINDINGS: FOPH

The findings show that the FOPH will earn the Swiss population's **trust** through a form of communication that **prioritizes accuracy** and comes across as a **relationship-building effort**.

KEY FINDINGS: FOPH

The findings show that the FOPH will earn the Swiss population's **trust** through a form of communication that **prioritizes accuracy** and comes across as a **relationship-building effort**.

Failure to do so came at the cost of **lower vaccination compliance** and **fueled conspiracy theorizing** – the latter of which particularly affected people with elevated anxiety.

KEY FINDINGS: SOCIAL MEDIA

Higher communication activity in states of **elevated anxiety** is normal.

KEY FINDINGS: SOCIAL MEDIA

Higher communication activity in states of **elevated anxiety** is normal.

But individuals who experienced **higher anxiety** also tended to be more present in the social media, and even indicated the **social media** as their “**most trusted source of information during Covid-19**”.

KEY FINDINGS: SOCIAL MEDIA

Higher communication activity in states of **elevated anxiety** is normal.

But individuals who experienced **higher anxiety** also tended to be more present in the social media, and even indicated the **social media** as their “**most trusted source of information during Covid-19**”.

People who trusted the social media for Covid-19 information, in turn, had **lower trust in the FOPH**, scored **lower on vaccination**, and were more prone to **engage in conspiracy theorizing**.

KEY FINDINGS: SOCIAL MEDIA

In other words:

If the FOPH's communication failed to establish trust, then it resulted in elevated anxiety and depression, caused people to trust the social media as a primary source of information, which in turn contributed to lower vaccination rates and higher conspiracy theorizing.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

More frequent **face-to-face communication** with friends and family was directly associated with **higher depression**.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

More frequent **face-to-face communication** with friends and family was directly associated with **higher depression**.

This finding could be interpreted in two ways:

- 1.) It could mean that people who felt depressed from the FOPH's and news media's Covid-communications spent more time face-to-face with friends and family – possibly as a **healing form** of communication.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

More frequent **face-to-face communication** with friends and family was directly associated with **higher depression**.

This finding could be interpreted in two ways:

- 1.) It could mean that people who felt depressed from the FOPH's and news media's Covid-communications spent more time face-to-face with friends and family – possibly as a **healing form** of communication.
- 2.) It could also mean that people experienced higher depression because they talked more frequently about the FOPH's and news media's Covid-19 communications in direct contact with friends and family. This explanation would suggest that face-to-face communication during global crisis might serve a **catalyzing effect into depression**.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

More frequent communication with friends and family **through digital channels** (phone, video call, SMS) was directly associated with **higher anxiety**.

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- 1.) It could mean that people who experienced higher anxiety from the FOPH's / news media's Covid-19 communications might resort to **more frequent digital communication** with friends and family.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

More frequent communication with friends and family **through digital channels** (phone, video call, SMS) was directly associated with **higher anxiety**.

This finding could be interpreted in two ways:

- 1.) It could mean that people who experienced higher anxiety from the FOPH's / news media's Covid-19 communications might resort to **more frequent digital communication** with friends and family.
- 2.) Alternatively, it could mean that increased digital communication with friends and family might **fuel anxiety** about the FOPH's/news media's Covid-19 communications, again serving a catalyzing effect.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Finally, more frequent communication with friends and family **through the social media** was associated with **higher anxiety** about the FOPH's / news media's Covid-19 communications, **lower trust in the news media**, and **higher conspiracy theorizing**.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Finally, more frequent communication with friends and family **through the social media** was associated with **higher anxiety** about the FOPH's / news media's Covid-19 communications, **lower trust in the news media**, and **higher conspiracy theorizing**.

This finding could be interpreted in two ways:

1.) It could mean that people who incurred higher anxiety from the FOPH's / social media's Covid-19 communications, had lowered trust in the news, and higher conspiratorial thinking were **more likely to use social media** as a form of communication with friends and family.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Finally, more frequent communication with friends and family **through the social media** was associated with **higher anxiety** about the FOPH's / news media's Covid-19 communications, **lower trust in the news media**, and **higher conspiracy theorizing**.

This finding could be interpreted in two ways:

- 1.) It could mean that people who incurred higher anxiety from the FOPH's / social media's Covid-19 communications, had lowered trust in the news, and higher conspiratorial thinking were **more likely to use social media** as a form of communication with friends and family.
- 2.) Alternatively, this finding might suggest that social media use **feeds into** all of the above.

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Either way, this result points to the importance of **mobilizing interpersonal communication into serving a healing rather than harming function** during global crisis...

KEY FINDINGS: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Either way, this result points to the importance of **mobilizing interpersonal communication into serving a healing rather than harming function** during global crisis...

...to safeguard and strengthen **public health**, maximize population **compliance** with pandemic control measures, and promote **societal cohesion**.



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