Does Social Media Use Predict Belief in Pseudoscience and Government Distrust?

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Social media provides users endless opportunities for consumption of pseudoscientific information. Belief in pseudoscience is a social-psychological phenomenon, as pseudoscience believers often form groups in which their beliefs become central to their social identities (van-Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Believers often feel ostracized by the scientific community (Matute, Yarritu, & Vadillo, 2011) and may thus be drawn to like-minded individuals via social media. We predicted that participants who spend more time on social media platforms will hold more pseudoscientific beliefs and report less trust in the government. Social media users (n = 118) were recruited via Facebook and surveyed about their social media usage and political beliefs. Participants then completed the Pseudoscientific Belief Scale (Fasce & Pico, 2019). Time spent on social media did not significantly predict pseudoscientific beliefs, F(1, 116) = 1.48, p = .227, R² = .01, b = −0.62. However, time spent on social media did significantly predict participants’ trust in government, χ² (df = 1) = 5.23, p = .022, b = 0.23, OR = 1.26 (95% CI = 1.02, 1.54). As social media use increases by 1 scale point, participants’ likelihood of responding that “there are more things that government should be doing” (as opposed to “the less government the better”) increases by 26%. Although pseudoscientific beliefs did not vary as a function of social media use, government organizations might leverage social media as an effective channel for communication to make scientific information public and accessible.