

Conservatism, Conspiracy Mentality, and Social Media as Factors Related to Attitudes Towards Face Masks and Vaccines

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Summary

The present study sought to identify factors that influence attitudes towards commonly recommended public health measures, such as face masks and vaccines. Specifically, conservatism, conspiracy mentality, media literacy, and social media use were investigated as they relate to attitudes and behaviors towards face masks and vaccines in a rural Canadian setting. One hundred and eight participants were recruited from Brandon University introductory psychology classes and were provided a 1% bonus mark in their class as an incentive to participate. Participants completed several previously established self-report measures of the variables of interest online using Microsoft Forms. A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. The results found conspiracy mentality and economic conservatism to be significant predictors of face mask perceptions and vaccine attitudes. Those who are more economically conservative and more susceptible to belief in conspiracy theories held more negative attitudes towards face masks and vaccines. Media literacy and social media use were not consistently found to be significant predictors of face mask perceptions and vaccine attitudes or behaviors. However, the subfactor of media literacy, automatic versus mindful thought processing, was found to be a predictor of face mask perceptions. This indicated that those who enjoy thinking and are more motivated to consume various media sources held more negative perceptions towards face masks. None of the factors significantly contributed to the prediction of vaccine eligibility behaviors. Further, face mask behaviors differed across social conservatism levels.

Those who were not at all likely to wear a face mask if restrictions had been lifted, held lower social conservative ratings. Additional exploratory analyses revealed that with more negative attitudes towards vaccines, the longer the wait times between becoming eligible for the vaccine to receiving first dosage. These findings have implications for how public policy should approach addressing concerns over COVID-19 public health precautions. More efforts are needed to combat the spread conspiracy theories and address the economic concerns of the public.