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The Distrust of Experts

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Introduction to Research

- This study looks into the underlying factors that have caused Americans to have a low opinion of experts.
- The rise of social media has caused many sources of information that are not backed by relevant education to become accepted by the public. This has caused unfounded vaccine skepticisms as well as other distrust in expertise.
 - Studies have shown that parents who seek information online are more likely to ask for non-medical exemption from vaccines.
- Religious fundamentalism has clashed with science in America often, and whilst they can coexist in many scientists in the wider public there may still be a clash in adherence to religious ideology versus expert opinion
 - The conflict between religion and science is one that only exists in western religions. Eastern traditions do not have the same disconnect between religion and science, even Korean Christianity.
- The greatest interaction that most people will have with expertise is with healthcare professionals. I believe that as a result of negative experiences with the American healthcare system that negativity will then be associated with experts as a whole, as a group of people looking to exploit and take advantage of ordinary people
 - 27% of adults do not trust public health officials.
- The split may be more fundamental in nature. Many accounts put the skepticism towards experts as a result of democratic institutions and the threat of rule by elites. They see this distrust as having been beneficial to democracy, and aligning with ideas of small government common in America

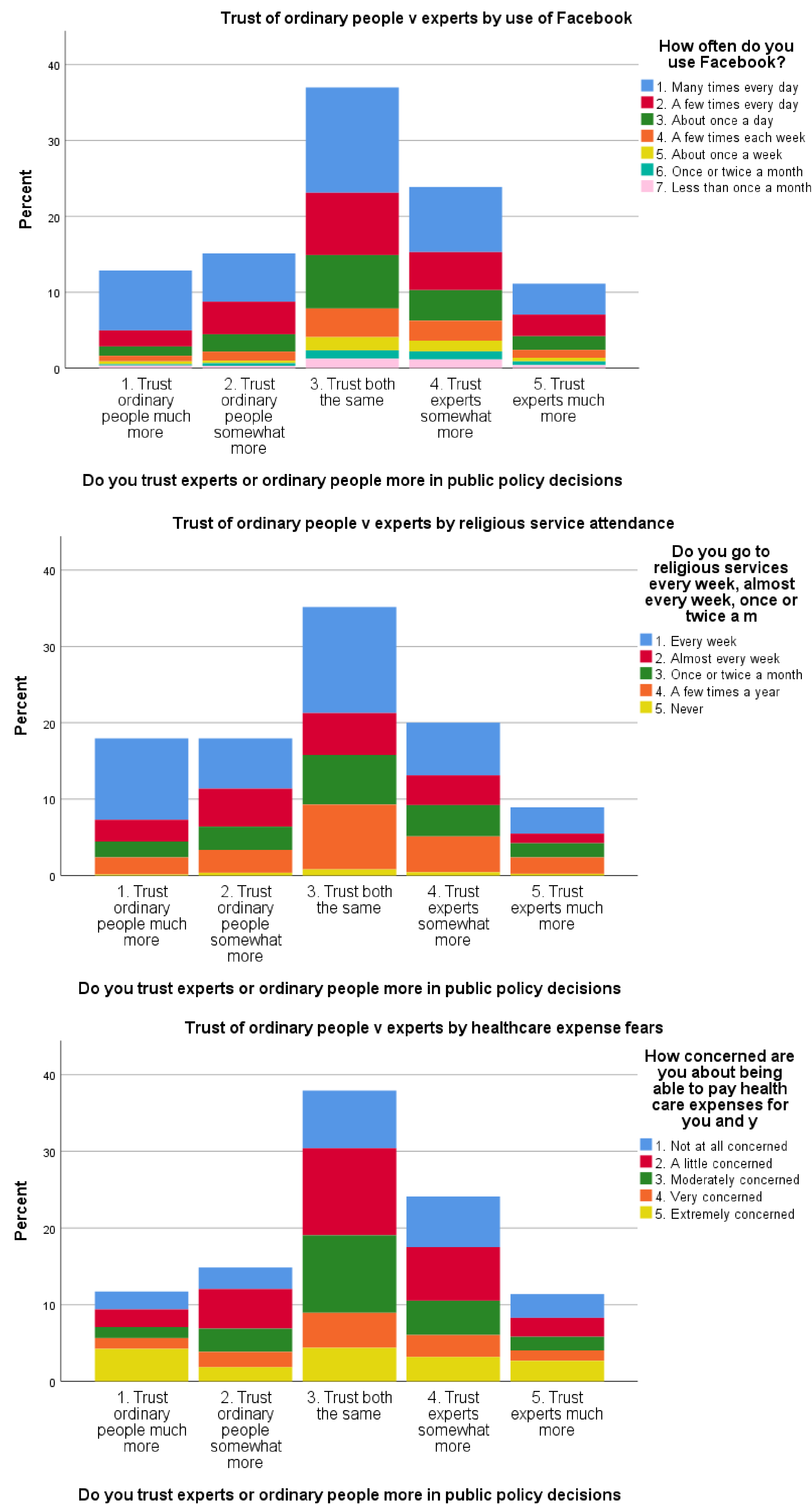
Hypotheses:

H 1: Those that get more information from the internet are less likely to trust experts.

H 2: Those that are more religious are less likely to trust experts.

H 3: Those that have greater difficulties with the American healthcare system are less likely to trust experts.

Data



H 1: Internet

- Greater usage of Facebook puts the valuation closer to equal of ordinary people and experts.
- A correlation of .132 indicates a weak relationship between the distrust of expertise and the usage of Facebook

H 2: Religiosity

- Those that attend church more regularly are more likely to value the opinions of ordinary people over experts
- A correlation of .15 puts this relationship as weak as well

H 3: Healthcare

- There was a negative relationship between concern for paying healthcare costs and trust of expertise as I had predicted
- The relationship having a correlation value of only -.084 means that this was not as strong an indicator as I had hoped

Findings

H 1: Internet

The results demonstrated that individuals that spend more time on Facebook were also less likely to trust experts as I had predicted, though the preponderance is still in favoring neither side over the other.

H 2: Religiosity

The results demonstrated my hypothesis that those more focused on religion in their lives are less likely to trust experts, with those going every week having the lions share of trust in ordinary people.

H 3: Healthcare

I was surprised to see this as the weakest relationship thus far, however it still reaffirms my hypothesis that those which have had difficult experiences with the American medical system are likely to be alienated by it and distrust experts as a result

Conclusions

- The usage of social media, whilst more likely to cause distrust of experts, should not be used as an indicator
- Religiosity is a legitimate source of skepticism towards expert opinion, although it is not a major factor.
- Whilst the fear of paying for healthcare may cause skepticism in expert opinions, it is also likely held by those that have not had bad experiences with doctors but simply lack the funds.
- The preponderance towards valuing expert and ordinary people the same may be throwing off the data, however it is an important indicator of where American attitudes currently are, and that is seeing the opinion of the average person as important as the expert..

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