Title: The impact of behavioral biases on information consumption and trust during the COVID-19 pandemic

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This thesis examined how messenger bias and information overload in the media influence how individuals trust COVID-related information. The author hypothesized 1) a negative association between information overload and trust in COVID-related information, and 2) that individuals will show a messenger bias such that they are more likely to trust information from trustworthy sources (e.g., scientist) than from untrustworthy sources (e.g., television host).

To test the hypotheses, the author conducted an online survey in France where adults were assigned to one of two conditions. Group 1 received COVID-related information from a trustworthy source (e.g., television host). Group 2 received the same information but from untrustworthy sources (e.g., scientist). The participants then rated their trust in COVID-related statements.

The results did not support Hypothesis 1, however the author suggests that the relationship between information overload and trust may be moderated by messenger bias. The study did find confirmation for Hypothesis 2, suggesting that messenger bias can affect how individuals process COVID-related information.

Overall, the thesis was clear, well-written and well-organized. It deals with an important and interesting topic, with implications for both public health and media studies. The methods were thought out and justified. The results were reasonably clear although I would have appreciated visualizations. Finally, the discussion provides a compelling interpretation of results and highlights their implications for disseminating health related information to the public.

Theoretical background:
The author discusses how dangerous behaviors (e.g., vaccination hesitancy, pseudoscientific remedies) during the COVID-19 pandemic can be traced to a breakdown in trust in institutions and a saturation of information (including conflicting or misinformation). This section is well-researched and provides a clear definition of the phenomena of interest (information overload, messenger bias, trust). The author provides an interesting discussion of significant changes in how individuals access information, and the societal challenges this presents. I also appreciated the nuanced discussion of the different ways of conceptualizing trust. Overall, this section was concise and informative. It identifies knowledge gaps and provides a strong rationale for the study. The two hypotheses are clearly stated.

Method:
The methods are clearly described to the point that they are replicable and are suitable for testing the authors hypotheses. The author also provides adequate justification for the study design and data analysis. The author also conducts additional analyses that are relevant (for

instance the association between the frequency of media consumption and the level of information overload).

Results:
The results were well organized and it was clear how they relate to the hypotheses, although visualizations (bar graphs and scatter plots) would have made the results much easier to follow. It would have also been useful to create a table comparing sociodemographic variables between Groups 1 and 2. Furthermore, there were a few occasions where group differences/similarities are reported without accompanying statistics to show that the differences are significant (just the means are reported). Nonetheless, this section was adequate.

Discussion:
The discussion section is also insightful, well-organized, and concise and provides a clear interpretation of the results and implications of the findings. The author also identifies several limitations of the study. The conclusion provides an effective summary.

Questions:

- **Q1.** How did you determine sample size?

- **Q2.** While I understand that the author could only ask a limited number of questions, I imagine educational attainment might have impacted the results. How might educational attainment moderate the effect of messenger bias or information overload on trust?

- **Q3.** The study recorded the gender and age of participants. Do you think that specific genders or ages are more susceptible to messenger bias or information overload?

- **Q4.** Trust was higher in Group 2 (which were told the information came from trusted sources, such as scientists) compared to Group 1. How might you explain American public attitudes towards Anthony Fauci (a scientist) to Donald Trump (a politician).

- **Q5.** Why might messenger bias moderate the effect of information overload on trust?

- **Q6.** What statistical procedure might you use to determine whether the one variable moderates the effect of another?

- **Q7**. Any directions for future research on this topic?