THE PROBLEM OF TRUST IN SCICOMM: TRANSFORMING GLOBAL SCIENCE COMMUNICATION WITH ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL UNCERTAINTIES
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To explore the bond of trust between science communication and lay publics, we gathered a pool of experts including researchers/academics, journalists and scicomm practitioners based in Italy and Belgium. Using the Delphi method we answered the following research questions:

Q1: According to the experts consulted, what are the critical topics, the key factors, the possible risks and the good practices that can affect the bond of trust between general public and science communication?
Q2: Is there consensus among the experts on the above mentioned issues?

METHODOLOGY

RESULTS

CONSENSUS NOT FOUND

- Positive factors increasing trust in SCICOMM among lay audiences
- Necessary scientific awareness starting from school
- Communicate complexity in an open and transparent way
- The habit of critical thinking

CONSENSUS EMERGED

- Concerned domains where trust in SCICOMM plays a key role
- Vaccines
- Climate change
- Role of Pharma companies
- Environmental issues
- Medical sciences
- Communication of health risks
- Public health issues

GOOD PRACTICES THAT COULD PROMOTE TRUST IN SCICOMM

- Activities in primary school to stimulate curiosity and passion for research
- Provide training about communication techniques to scientists and researchers
- Promote scientific literacy in school textbooks
- Joint initiatives between scientific institutions and the media, especially at the local level
- Public events about science

CONCLUSIONS

Our exploratory research provided four sets of qualitative factors which may prove useful for further investigation and local scicomm practice, expressing consensus for topics and practices and uncertainty for risks and opportunities. Such factors emerged from a meaningful pool of experts when asked about the bond of trust in science communication that connects lay public(s) to scientific endeavour(s).

Besides the consensus emerged over key topics and good practices to foster trust in scicomm, the disagreement over root causes for trust and mistrust detected with the Delphi method revealed meaningful factors of uncertainty in the practice of science communication.

These uncertainties confirm that communication models based on the abstraction of a generic “lay audience” are affected by the lack of information about the specific context, community, culture and cultural history, biases, demographic composition, misinformation and social debate characterizing the social system and the target audience where the model is applied.

The qualitative outcomes of this research, combined with previous literature on the topic of trust in scicomm, suggest an opportunity to transform science communication practice with an “adaptive approach” to different contexts and needs, choosing between deficit, dialogic and participative models, covering a wide spectrum of topics, using an extended set of practices.

REFERENCES

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STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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