

The Source of Bias: How University Students' Primary Source of Information Impacts COVID-19 Attitudes and Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that students' primary source of information during the COVID-19 pandemic may influence their attitudes and whether they comply with CDC guidelines. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between students' primary source of COVID-19 information and their level of precaution.

A causal comparative approach was utilized. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted using SAS 9.4 (Cary, NC). The independent variable was the students' primary source of information. The dependent variables included adherence to CDC guidelines via; 1) hand hygiene; 2) mask compliance; 3) physical distancing; 4) students testing positive for COVID-19; 5) vaccination status; and 6) booster status.

This study indicates three statistically significant findings. (1) The proportion of students (95%) who reported hand washing for at least 20 seconds ($p < 0.03$); (2) the proportion of students (96%) who agreed with avoiding contact with those who have tested positive ($p < 0.0001$); (3) the proportion of students (66%) wearing a mask outdoors ($p < 0.04$).

Findings suggest that students' primary source for obtaining COVID-19 information can impact COVID-19-related behaviors. It's noteworthy that only 43% of students considered the CDC as their primary platform. Of those, they were more likely to comply with masking outdoors, avoiding close contact with positive individuals, physical distancing, and receiving the COVID-19 booster.

This study highlights the importance of the source used to seek COVID-19 information as it relates to precautions taken. As misinformation circulates the internet, it's crucial to ensure that the public is aware of where to find reliable COVID-19 recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, misinformation continues to circulate across various platforms. Previous literature has indicated that the primary source of COVID-19 information can influence one's attitudes, precaution, and compliance with CDC guidelines (Kim et al., 2021). This study aims to examine the relationship between students' primary source of COVID-19-related information and the level of precaution exhibited.

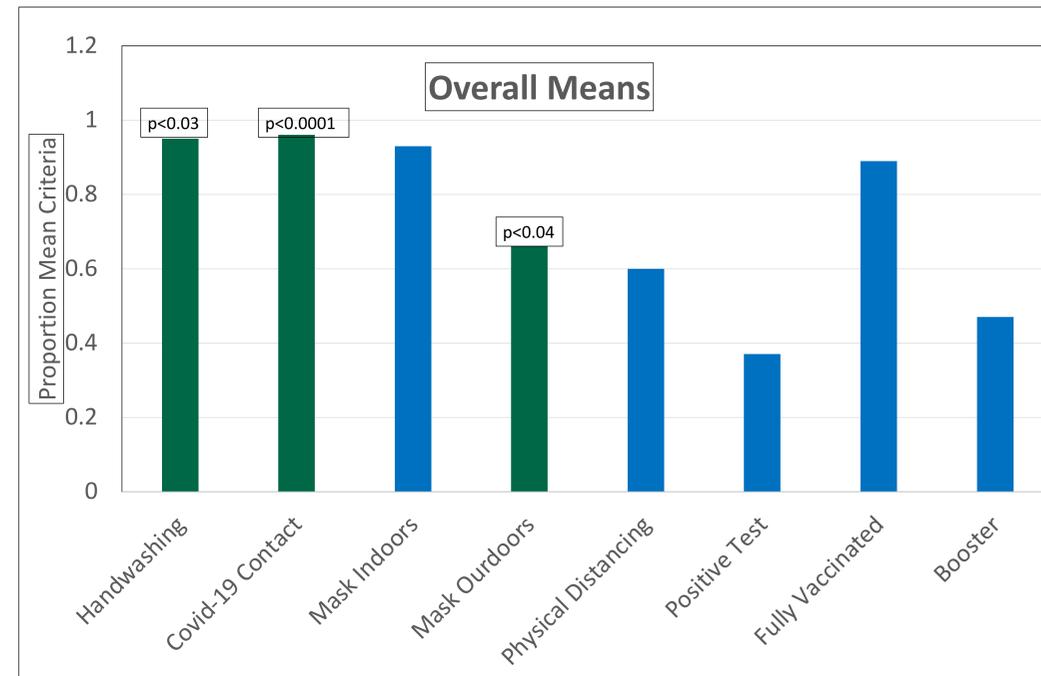
METHODS AND MATERIALS

To conduct this study, 394 students at the University of South Florida completed an online survey. A causal comparative approach was conducted utilizing a MANOVA. The independent variable was the students' primary source of information. The dependent variables included adherence to CDC guidelines via; 1) hand hygiene; 2) mask compliance; 3) physical distancing; 4) students testing positive for COVID-19; 5) vaccination status; and 6) booster status.

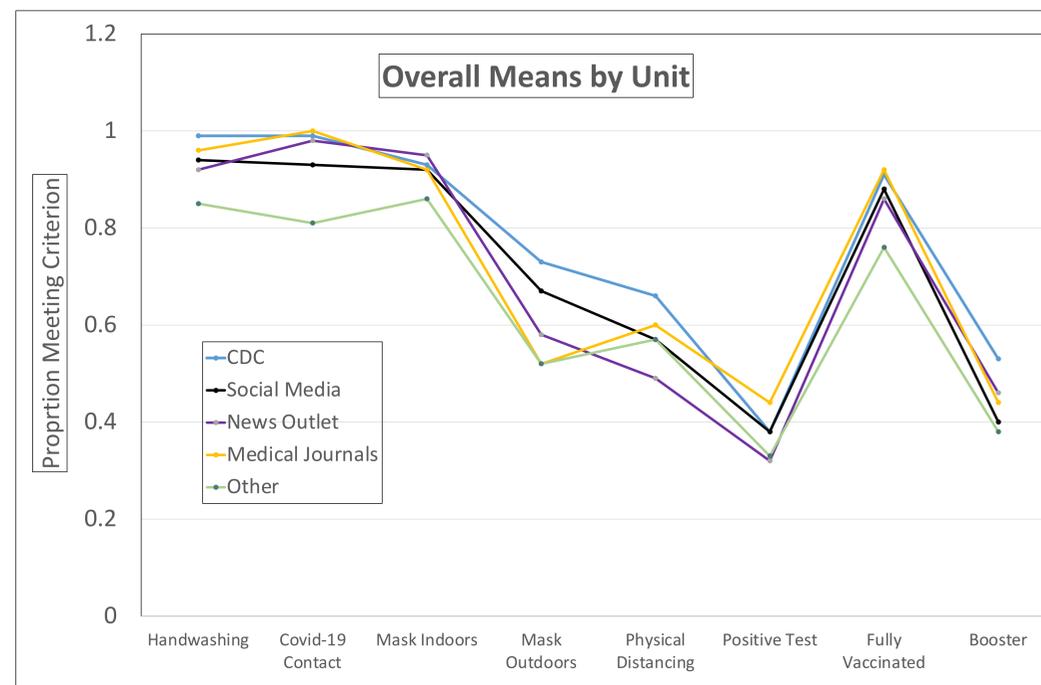
RESULTS

This study indicates three statistically significant findings. (1) The proportion of students (95%) who reported hand washing for at least 20 seconds ($p < 0.03$); (2) the proportion of students (96%) who agreed with avoiding contact with those who have tested positive ($p < 0.0001$); (3) the proportion of students (66%) wearing a mask outdoors ($p < 0.04$).

RESULTS I



RESULTS II



DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that there was a correlation between students' primary source of information and COVID-19 precautions taken. Students who utilized the CDC website as their primary source of information were most likely to wear a mask outdoors, avoid close contact with positive individuals, physical distance, and receive the COVID-19 booster. However, only 43% of students fell within this category. Students who reported "other" as their primary source were least compliant with CDC recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media and news outlets remain as easily accessible ways for the public to gain information. However, the information presented may not always be factual and unbiased. With new mitigation procedures arising alongside new variants, it is crucial that the general public is aware of where to find reliable and relevant COVID-19 information.

REFERENCES

Kim, S., Capasso, A., Cook, S., Ali, S., Jones, A., Foreman, J., . . . Tozan, Y. (2021). Impact of covid-19-related knowledge on protective behaviors: The moderating role of primary sources of information. Retrieved March 7, 2022, from <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0260643>