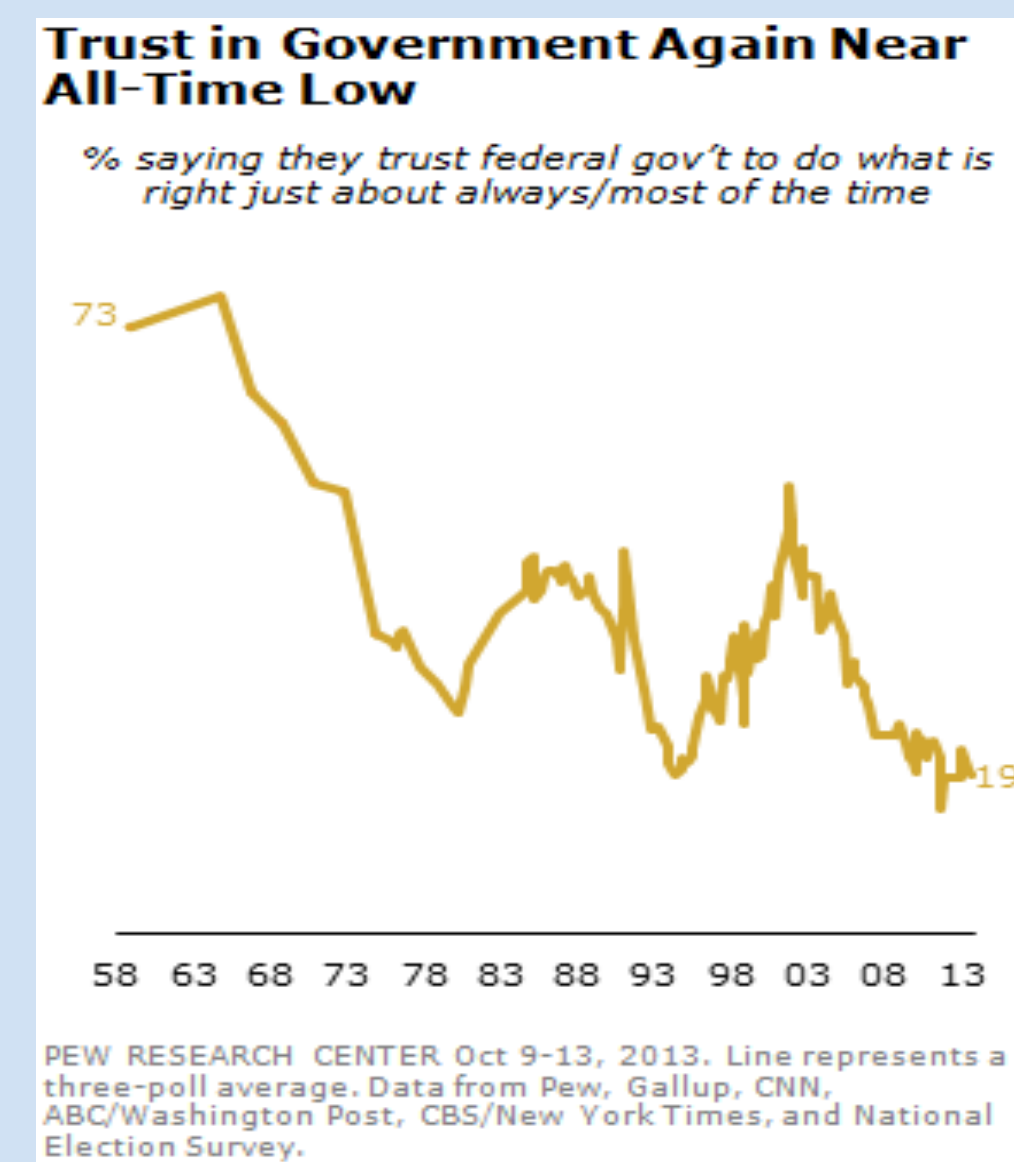


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Background

- The US Federal Government utilizes health campaigns to communicate with the public about high priority health issues
- Government agencies invest significant amounts of time and resources into these campaigns
- Communication models indicate that persuasive communication relies on the message, channel, receiver and destination
- When designing communication campaigns, government agencies should optimize the credibility of the message and the source of the message
- Limited research examines trust in government relating to health and communication of health information
- This research seeks to understand factors relating to perceived credibility of government sources in message communication.



Results: Emergent Themes and Illustrative Quotes

Integrity of the Agency

- "I would be fearful that they have become less objective and been drawn into the political rigmarole around smoking."
- "When they retire they end up going to work for the people that they were supposed to be monitoring, and then you wonder was there a, 'Hey, let our drug goes through and we'll give you a swanky job when you retire?'"

Competence of the Agency

- "I think I trust it with drugs. ... if they're demanding, 'We need ten years' worth of research to show that this medication actually does this,' then I have more confidence."
- "I think I trust them. Because there is so much they research I would rather go with something FDA approved than not."

Motives of the Agency

- "...their main mission is with good intentions. The information they give out I would take as credible, since they want to protect our air and the water."
- "I guess that it's publicly funded. That there isn't a corporation that's running it. So the people that are there are not being funded to give out a certain image or information of a product."

Media Portrayal of the Agency

- "I mean, if you just think about the media has been portraying all these things in the news about what the government has been doing wrong, and pulling the wool over your eyes."
- "...the only thing I've seen portrayed was just not cool."

Skepticism or Mistrust towards the Agency

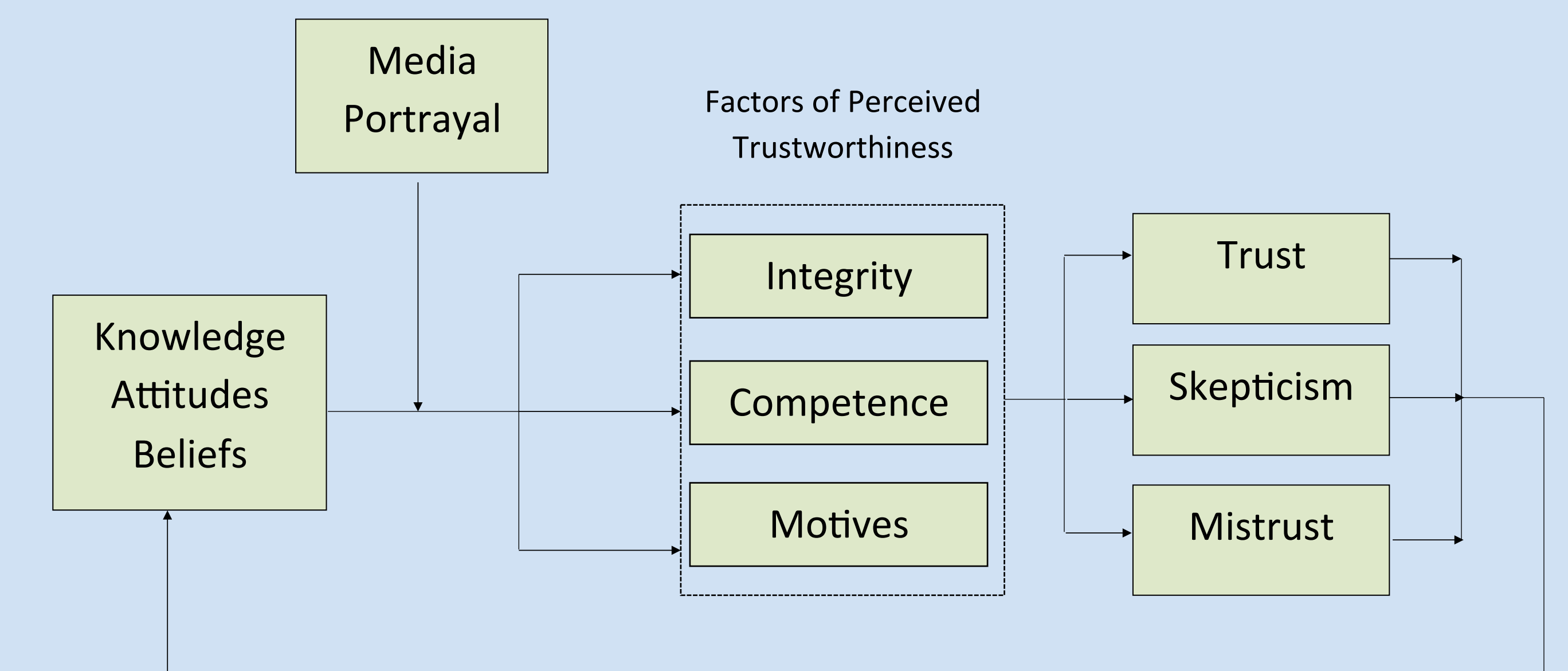
- "Well, everything is basically a high risk; you never know who's being truthful with you, whether you're looking at them in person, the internet or on the phone...."
- "...they're just not being honest with it. So much money is going into cancer research and everything; why haven't they found a cure? I think it's they don't want to find a cure"

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Discussion

- Government health agencies were perceived as trustworthy based on three main criteria:
 - Integrity** was evaluated on fulfillment of the agency's mission without bias, and with fiscal responsibility.
 - Competence** was evaluated primarily on the agency's past performance
 - Motives** were evaluated on the intention of agency staff, the mission of the agency, and whether they were perceived to be motivated by profit.
- Many participants discussed hearing about different agencies in **news media and entertainment**
- Participants reported **skepticism or mistrust** when they had limited knowledge of the agency, or when they disagreed with certain agency actions

Figure: Factors that Influence Agency Trust



Methods and Demographics

- Conducted six focus groups to see where participants get health information, and attitudes on trust in government
- Eligible participants included adults 18-65 able to understand English, and did not have cognitive or visual impairments
- 90-minute sessions conducted by research staff trained in qualitative research methods
- Approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Study #13-2822).
- Part of larger study on source credibility in communication about tobacco and health

Variable	Total (N=41)
Age M (SD)	
Years	33.1 (11.2)
Range	18-58
Sex n (%)	
Female	23 (56.1)
Race n (%)	
White	25 (61.0)
African American	10 (24.4)
Asian	4 (9.8)
American Indian	1 (2.4)
More than One Race	1 (2.4)
Hispanic Origin n (%)	
Non-Hispanic	35 (85.4)
Hispanic	6 (14.6)

Strengths and Limitations

- Diverse population recruited to participate and robust qualitative methods are strengths
- Questions relevant to trust occurred during overall discussion of tobacco and health messages

Conclusion

- Given the government resources spent on health messaging to the public and the potential public health benefit offered by mass communication, understanding of public trust in government health organizations and the messages they disseminate is essential.
- Without trust, health messages transmitted by government agencies could be ignored or discounted.