



LETTERS

PUSHING BACK AGAINST ANTIVAX

Antivaccination movement exploits public's distrust in scientific authority

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Perera and colleagues urge us to learn from the surge of self-organising networks that are driving the rapid spread of antivaccination messages.¹ Better than adopting the social media techniques of this so-called new power, the case for vaccination could get a needed boost by tackling the conditions that precipitated this challenge to the old knowledge order.

There is no shortage of editorialising on the war on science,² the death of expertise,³ post-truth,⁴ and post-fact,⁵ lamenting the downgrading of old power (the scientists, the moderns, the knowers of truth) and the resulting proliferation of misinformation. But vaccine hesitators and refusers—the subjects of many social scientific studies—consistently couch their non-scientific claims about vaccines (as dangerous, unnecessary, ineffective, and so on) in sincere misgivings about conflicts of interest in medical research and healthcare practice and focus on evidence that science does not work in the public interest. This should be the point of focus by the old power, as daily news stories of the mismarketing of opioids⁶ and the medical device scandal⁷ inform public attitudes about the vaccine consensus and other expert pronouncements.

The institutional apparatus of scientific authority has lost the public's trust, and Instagram influencers have filled the void for parents struggling with the issue of vaccines. Despite all the investment in vaccine outreach, parents still frequently claim that they don't know what to do or who to believe. The scientific

consensus is not fulfilling its public function, and this is a problem of scientific governance rather than social media. Those of us invested in public health and science for the people (including vaccination) should direct efforts towards building and maintaining public trust.^{8,9} Perera and colleagues' recommendation to adopt social media influence techniques rings hollow.

Competing interests: None declared.

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