

# Digital inequalities and public health during COVID-19:

## Media dependency and vaccination

*Political and Health Information Seeking Project*

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# Vaccination and digital inequality

- Information about transmission of COVID-19 came out slowly, recommended practices changed overtime
  - Difficult to stay current
  - Unusual dependence on media to obtain accurate, current information
- Digital divide influences ability to use the Internet
- RQ: How do digital inequalities influence willingness to be vaccinated?

# Research Strands

1. Vaccine hesitancy linked to socio-demographics, political leaning, and trust
2. Media systems dependency (MSD) and differences between information sources
  - People come to depend on certain media to achieve their goals
  - Do people trust different media?

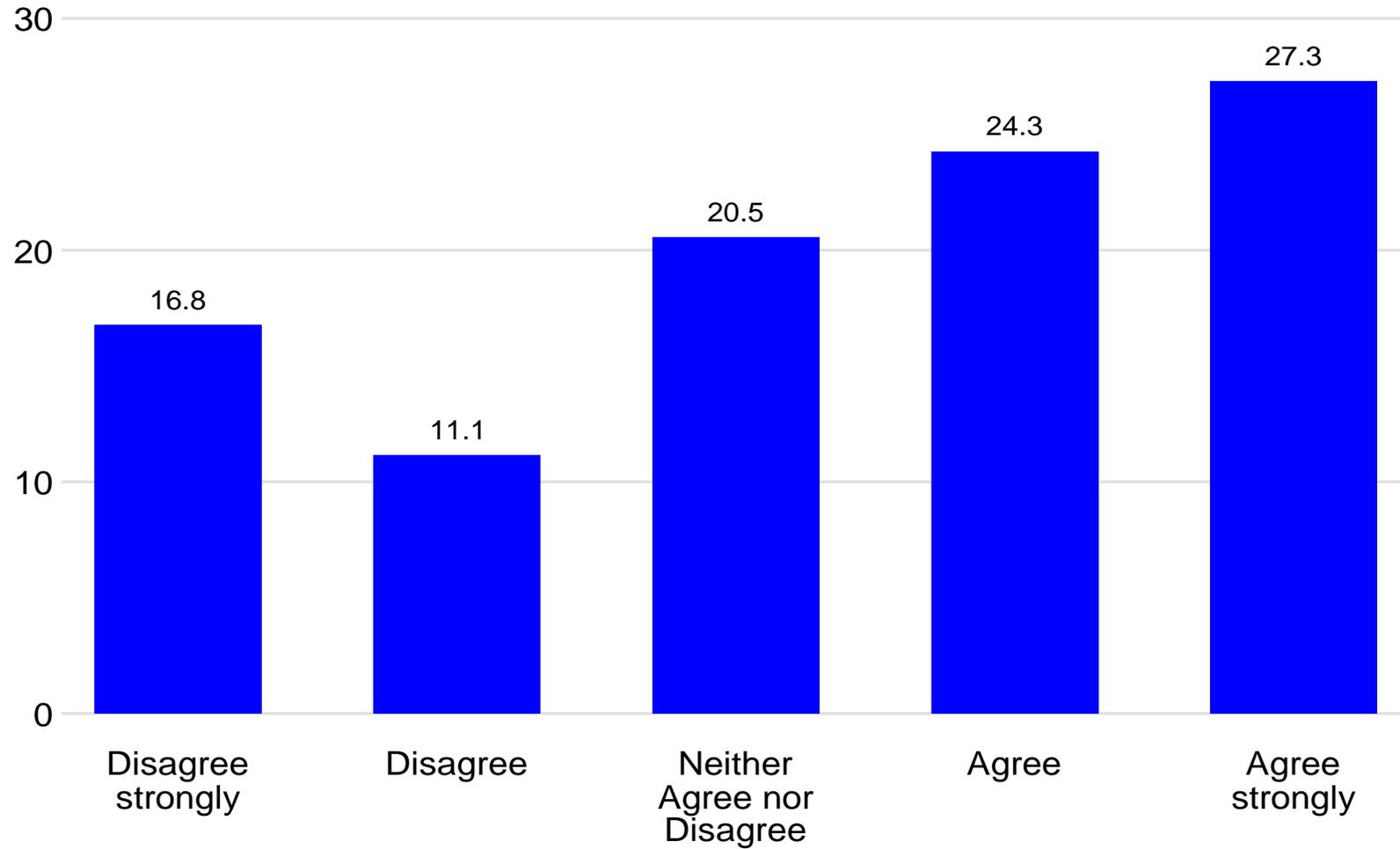
# 3. Digital Inequalities

- Exacerbated during the pandemic
- Linked to information available to people
- Digital inequalities influence access to health information
  - Consequences for willingness to be vaccinated

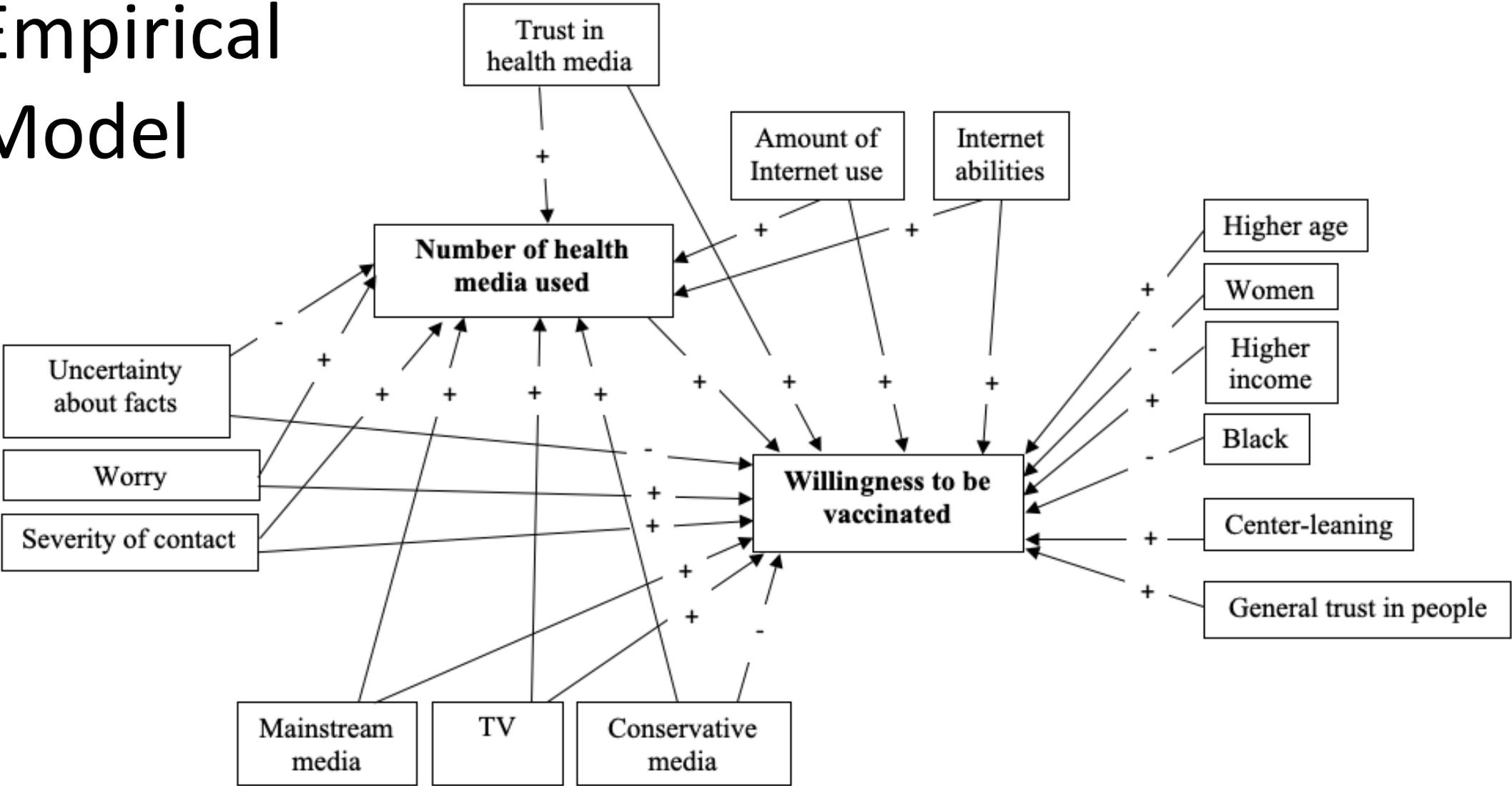
# Data and Methodology

- Survey data from 2,280 adult internet users in the U.S. (Oct-Nov 2020)
- Post stratification weights by age, gender, race, and census region
- Question topics: media use, information seeking, political leaning, amount of Internet use, Internet skills, factual knowledge of COVID-19

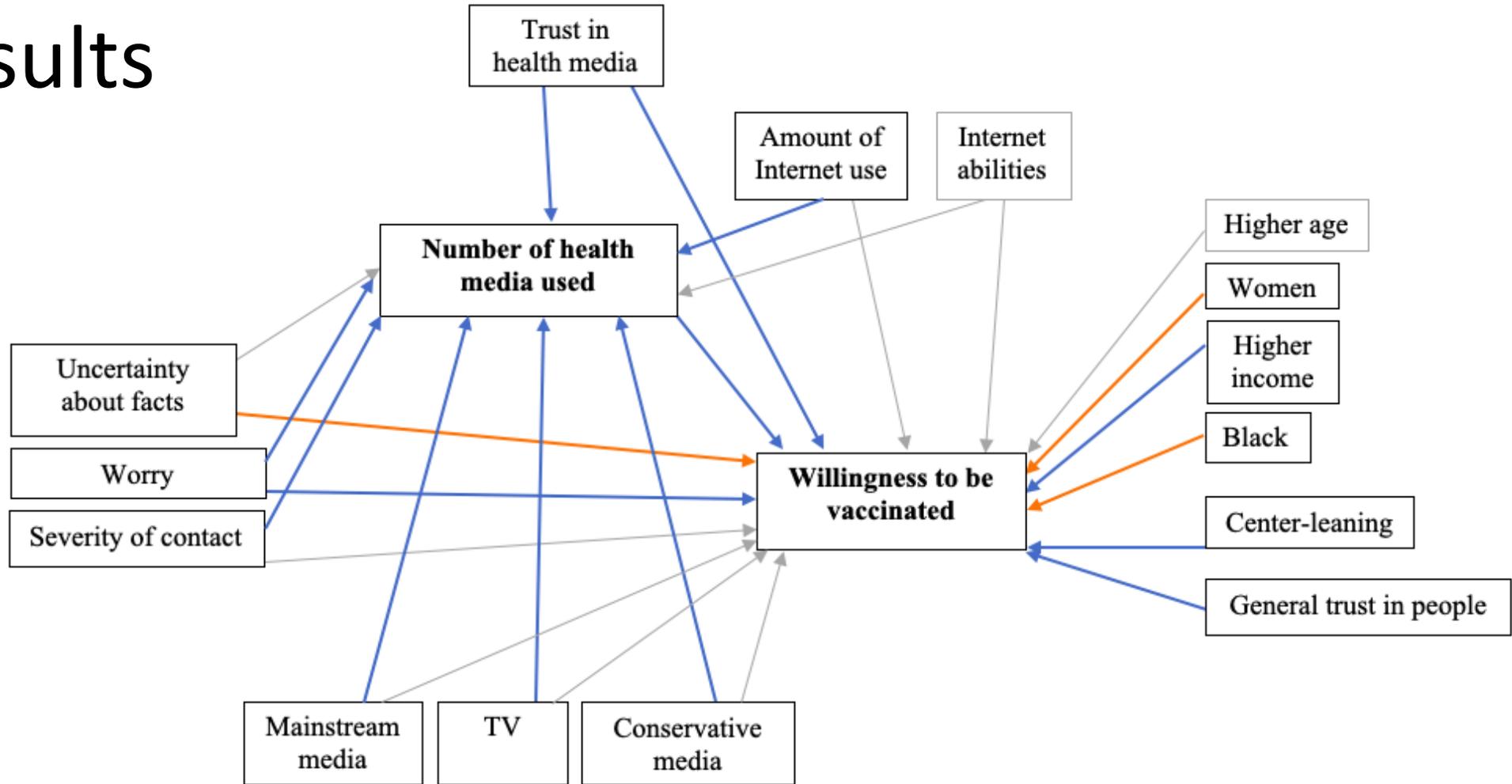
# “I would take a coronavirus vaccine”



# Empirical Model



# Results



Notes: Model was fit with robust standard errors; solid blue line=positive relationship at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; solid orange line=negative relationship at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; gray line=not significant;  $N=1,903$ . See appendix for coefficients and p-values.

# Implications

- Digital inequalities play a role in public health
  - Increased internet use leads to increased health information-seeking online, which reduces vaccine hesitancy
- Mechanism through which Internet access promotes public health
- Digital inequalities are a public health issue
  - Importance of addressing digital inequalities *beyond access & skills*
- Supports a more comprehensive approach to vaccination beyond socio-demographics and prior health beliefs
  - Where and how people find information on public health issues as important as demographics