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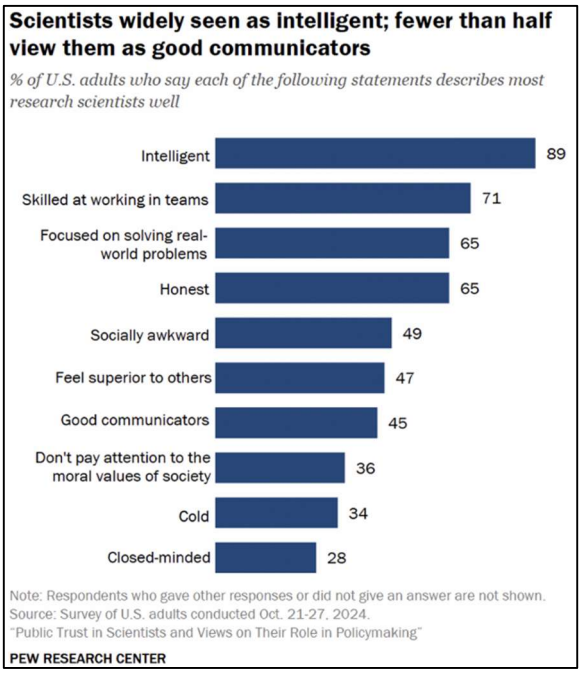
SpeakYourScience

Amplifying and Connecting Emerging Voices for Trust in Science

Peter, Susan, and Harrison Lee, revised on February 24, 2025

The Issue

Public trust in science is under pressure. According to Pew Research in 2023,[1] only **23% of Americans now express strong confidence in scientists**, a steep decline from 39% in 2020. The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer[2] reinforces this concern, finding that while people continue to see scientists as essential to innovation, **many believe science is politicized and poorly managed**, fueling skepticism about the validity of discoveries and how scientific research is governed.

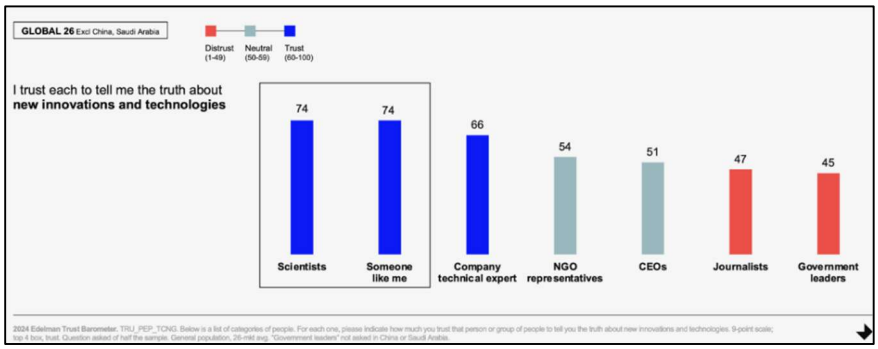


Many recent controversies illustrate this erosion of trust. For example, the COVID-19 vaccination effort, despite being a historic scientific achievement, became mired in political polarization, misinformation, and confusion about safety and mandates. More recently, unfounded claims linking Tylenol use during pregnancy to autism spread widely, sowing fear among expectant parents and undermining confidence in both medicine and public health institutions.

This erosion of trust in science is both perplexing and alarming. To some, it reflects plainly the public's rejection of facts and evidence. However, this is not only about disbelief; it is also a sign that the public is disillusioned with how science is governed and communicated. Globally, **45% of respondents in the Pew Research study say scientists "don't know how to communicate with people like me,"** highlighting a disconnect between expertise and public understanding. And while scientists are overwhelmingly seen as intelligent (89%), only 45% view them as effective or trustworthy communicators.

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/11/14/americans-trust-in-scientists-positive-views-of-science-continue-to-decline/
[2] https://www.edelman.com/trust/2024/trust-barometer

This mismatch reveals a critical gap: despite the fact that so many incredible scientific advances are being made that are relevant to everyone's daily lives, the relatability of science to the public is faltering, and scientists don't really know what to do about it.



The Edelman study furthermore illuminates a shift in authority when it comes to facts and evidence. Strikingly, it finds that 74% trust "someone like me" *as much as a scientist* when it comes to information about new innovations and technologies. In effect, **trust has become decentralized**. Authority is no longer conferred just to experts, institutions, or traditional news sources. Trust is instead dispersed among peers, influencers, and grassroots voices. All this makes the public eager to find channels of influence that seem more authentic. Indeed, 40% of young adults even endorse some form of bottom-up "hostile activism" to drive change.

Fundamentally, today's public skepticism stems from a gap between discovery and deployment—the "translation layer" that makes scientific advances and innovations transparent and relatable. And while there is admirable ongoing work by so many people in science advocacy organizations, public-policy bodies, leading universities, and science-forward philanthropies, scientists and their institutions are bewildered by a changed world—one in which science is politicized, scientists themselves are viewed as compromised elites, and traditional institutions are no longer viewed as impartial. They are often intimidated, not only due to inexperience with a changed media landscape, but by the fact that science now plays a key role in charged political discourse, at times influenced by misinformation. Confronting these realities requires new sensibilities that are challenging for the science advocacy ecosystem today.

Taking Action

The good news is that many, many good people and institutions have great ideas and are working on important initiatives.[3] The question we ask is this: *What can be done to help fill the gaps in relatability and trust?* There is no single answer, of course, but as we've thought about this, our attention has been drawn to an inspiring new generation of science content creators and influencers. These are people (often youthful) with compelling personalities and storytelling that is imaginative, relatable, and authentic. They communicate on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and they are unafraid to tackle highly technical or even controversial topics. In fact, *they often seek them out*. Their authenticity and joy have helped them earn the trust of millions of followers. And yet, while a few might be considered "celebrity" influencers, most are relatively unknown.

There is untapped potential here. We can contribute to the cause of science in the public sphere by **providing dedicated attention and relatively modest financial resources to amplify the voices of emerging science content creators**. Traditional organizations excel at producing knowledge but struggle to translate it into narratives that resonate with diverse, skeptical, and digitally native audiences. Meanwhile, emerging science content creators are relatable and trusted by their followers but lack access to content opportunities, resources, and network to scale their impact.

An opportunity lies in amplifying new voices that bring science out of the laboratory and into today's social world, thereby expanding today's science advocacy ecosystem.

We have conducted some preliminary research to look at the current landscape in science advocacy, and surveyed several successful advocacy efforts. We have also consulted with people in the current ecosystem to learn what works and where needs are the greatest.[4]

Recently, Peter Lee participated in a Microsoft-organized program that brought emerging content creators to Microsoft Research (MSR), to tour MSR's laboratories and connect in-person with leading researchers. In this program, Microsoft arranged for both 1-on-1 and group interactions between creators and researchers, and provided temporary studio space for creating new content. The result was, above all, an incredibly joyful experience, and as a practical matter, an experience that enriched the creators' channels and tangibly helped to grow their audiences.

The Microsoft Research experiment provided concrete evidence that connecting creators and science institutions generates real value for science communication.

[3] A complete landscape analysis of today's science advocacy ecosystem is available in a separate document.
[4] This landscape and gap analysis is available in a separate document.

Getting Started

The conclusion is clear: **connecting emerging communicators, creators, and influencers—to each other, to scientists, and to science institutions—makes a difference**. While this idea may seem obvious in retrospect, implementing it in a way that is effective and scalable, and furthermore does not compromise the independence and authenticity of creators' voices, is helped by sustained, focused attention and funding.

This is not be about defending science; it's about amplifying creators and influencers who share their personal joy as authentic fans of science.

To get going immediately, **the Lee Family are committing their funds and time to launch a small number of pilot efforts** to begin support of creators and influencers, test ideas, see what works, and understand how things could be "packaged" for scale in a manner guided by principles of scientific integrity, nonpartisanship, inclusiveness, collaboration, and joy. We plan to use our professional and personal networks to facilitate connections between new media voices and traditional science institutions. And as we learn and develop proofs of concept, the circle of people and institutions that might open their doors and support this concept would be widened. In time, further programs in a new or existing non-profit organization would be developed to empower a new generation of science communicators and influencers, provide them with resources, and develop the best approaches to rebuilding trust in science across political and cultural divides.

We think it is best to start small, iterate rapidly, and learn, to see if one or more initial programs can deliver positive outcomes for creators, scientists, and institutions, and in a way that is effective, scalable, and financially sustainable. By starting simple and staying focused, we aim to be agile and avoid bureaucratic overheads.

Today we are targeting 4-5 science organizations and/or venues, mainly in the health and biomedical research domains. Initial targets include the Mayo Clinic, the University of Washington Allen School, the Lake Nona Impact Forum, Flagship Pioneering, and the Broad Institute. Using our professional connections to these and other institutions/venues, we are explaining the concept to these institutions with the goal of obtaining their agreements to host a "science creator connection day." Working with these institutions, we will identify points of contact who have the ability and authority to help organize lab tours, arrange one-on-one and group meetings with researchers, set up studio space for video shoots, and other helpful items. Lessons from the early experience at Microsoft Research will be shared, to help evolve the ideas.

We have been identifying 2-3 dozen emerging science content creators, starting with the creators already identified in Microsoft's previous science-creator programs. Each has a

minimum of 50K followers and a primary (but not exclusive) focus on biomedical sciences. Our approach is to recruit them by explaining the concept and providing as much information as possible for the content opportunities. We will then invite them to a visit day and offer full travel and administrative support. A member of the Lee Family will also be on the ground, in partnership with the hosting organization, to work administrative issues and assist in managing the entire event.

After doing the above for the initial organizations, it will be time to step back and assess the early outcomes. This includes not only interviews with the creators and stakeholders in the hosting science organizations, but also preliminary measures of reach and follower growth, subjective assessments of public reactions, and first drafts of a "program playbook" that eventually would facilitate both repeatability and scaling. We would also explore building a community network of emerging voices for science, to engage with each other and perhaps even form forums that address common interests in science. If all this is achieved, then a foundation for taking the next steps to greater impact can be built.

In time, if these early proofs-of-concept are convincing, then expanding the scope of programs can be considered, to include people-centric programs (fellowships, grants), collaborative initiatives (partnerships and campaigns), and enabling tools (content and technology platforms). This would be done in the context of a new private foundation or by providing support to an existing non-profit organization. Either way, this would require a fuller landscape and gap analysis, case studies, descriptions of initial program concepts, layout of potential partnerships, and a business plan.[5]

Conclusion

Science is at a crossroads of public trust. Effective action is needed to steer society to a future where reason, curiosity, and joy prevail over fear, misinformation, and political posturing. The challenge is great, but so is the opportunity. By supporting and amplifying authentic and relatable voices, a contribution can be made that wouldn't just defend science—it would aspire to **humanize** it, **democratize** it, and **make truth contagious**.

[5] Sketches of these items are available in a separate document.

The Pitch to Emerging Science-focused Content Creators

You're making science fun, real, and relatable, and your followers are loving it. But it can be hard find great content, grow, and get taken seriously without support. That's where we want to help. We want to back creators like you with funding and access to the world's leading scientists and labs. Whether you're on TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram, we can help you level up your content and reach new audiences and do so without changing your voice. You bring the creativity, and we'll bring the network.

The Pitch to Working Scientists

You became a scientist to discover truth and beauty, and to improve lives. But today, science is under siege, not because your work isn't rigorous, but because it has become politicized and the standard channels you're used to don't reach the public in ways that resonate. We can help you connect with emerging content creators that can translate your work into stories that people can relate to. This isn't about defending science or turning you into an influencer. It's about connecting your work to a new generation of voices.

The Pitch to Leaders of Science & Higher Education Institutions

The public's trust in science is eroding. This isn't because science is viewed as bad, but because people are disillusioned with how it's communicated and governed. We want your institution's discoveries to reach the public with clarity, credibility, and cultural relevance. To help do this, we want to connect a new generation of communicators to your faculty and translate their scientific work into stories that people can relate to and trust. Together, we can raise a new generation of science fans and help rebuild trust in science.

The Pitch to Parents

*You want your kids to grow up with good information, strong values, and real opportunities. But today, it's hard to know who to trust. We think that science needs to be more understandable, more honest, more connected to everyday life—**your** life. From health and weather to jobs and technology, science can inspire and give your kids a leg up in life. Your kids should see people they can relate to, who explain science in down-to-earth ways, who understand what matters, and who care about the future they will inherit.*

The Pitch to Science Skeptics and Institution-Wary Citizens

You don't need a PhD to know something's off. Science should help people, not confuse them, talk down to them, or hide behind jargon. We know science needs to be honest, human, and useful again. We are connecting scientists to everyday people who speak plainly, ask real questions, and make science relevant to real life. Things like health, safety, jobs, and kids. In other words, we're getting people behind the scenes to get honest looks at what goes on in labs. After all, science belongs to everyone, not just the experts.

The Pitch to Potential Donors

Science is losing the public's trust, and along with that, so are research institutions. People don't find scientists relatable today. We want to help change that by supporting the next generation of science storytellers by connecting scientists with new voices—creators and influencers—that are successful, relatable, and fun. We think this can help make science more believable and more contagious. We can rebuild trust where it's been lost.

The Pitch to Established Science-focused Philanthropies

You've invested in science to solve humanity's biggest challenges, spanning global health to climate to open data. But today, science faces a crisis of trust. We want to help your mission by creating connections that amplify scientific credibility and public resonance. To do this, we are building bridges that connect institutions with emerging science content creators and influencers. We want to do this so that your mission priorities can be better understood, embraced, and defended by the public they're meant to serve.

The Pitch to Influencers and High-Reach Creators

You already influence how millions think, feel, and act. Imagine giving back to our world by using that power to make science more trusted, more human, and more hopeful. We want to help you collaborate with scientists and institutions to tell stories that matter—from climate breakthroughs to health myths to space exploration. We can provide access to experts. You bring the reach and the voice. Together, we can make science trend.

The Pitch to Policymakers

Science should inform policy, but today public trust in science is faltering. We want to help bridge the gap between scientific expertise and public understanding, so evidence can guide decisions with confidence. We are supporting content creators who translate complex issues into relatable narratives that are effective on new media. Let us help make science accessible, to help you lead with clarity, credibility, and public trust.

Acknowledgments

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Samples of Science Creator Content

While there are very good social media channels that have gained tens of millions of followers, such as Veritasium (https://www.youtube.com/@veritasium), StarTalk (https://www.youtube.com/@StarTalk), etc., here we highlight a few emerging creators.

- goodolgab (https://www.tiktok.com/@goodolgab)
    - The science behind a perm (https://www.tiktok.com/@goodolgab/video/7534458080189222166)
    - Can AI help us understand cancer? (https://www.tiktok.com/@goodolgab/video/7581912549214506262)
    - History of science of homosexuality (https://www.tiktok.com/@goodolgab/video/7575850073293212950)
- learningwithseanthesciencekid (https://www.instagram.com/learningwithseanthesciencekid/)
    - The physics of Newton's cradle (https://www.instagram.com/p/DOWQMoIjDpg/)
    - Interview with Dr. Sanjay Gupta (https://www.instagram.com/p/DNqojZfxwOP/)
    - Rubik's Cube algorithm (https://www.instagram.com/p/DOoPmMgkatb/)
- chloe.the.scientist (https://www.instagram.com/chloe.the.scientist/)
    - In vivo CAR-T therapies (https://www.instagram.com/p/DSNfFCKjTZe/)
    - Advocating for yourself (https://www.instagram.com/p/DSDI45kkS90/)
    - On the Nobel Prize for immunotherapy (https://www.instagram.com/p/DPpT0kRj0FI/)
- tiffintech (https://www.instagram.com/tiffintech/)
    - How GPS works (https://www.instagram.com/p/DN0fSSjWqxM/)
    - What is matrix multiplication? (https://www.instagram.com/p/DRXNYNnEfYH/)
    - Can someone unlock your phone when you're asleep? (https://www.instagram.com/p/DNvWktaWm00/)
- dr.cal.ur.science.pal (https://www.instagram.com/stories/dr.cal.ur.science.pal/)
    - CAR-T cells (https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSThVO7Clio/)
    - Nonsense DNA mutations (https://www.instagram.com/reels/DSGx6jJCHVJ/)
- Domain of Science (https://www.youtube.com/@domainofscience)
    - The map of quantum computing (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UlxHPIEVqA)
    - Faster than light (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cadNZJvfl7s)