

Truth to Trust

Turning New Consumer Insights into Impactful Engagement

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Oklahoma Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics | April 9, 2026



THE CENTER FOR
FOOD INTEGRITYSM





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Why do we exist?

To help today's food system build consumer trust

Navigating the Maze



Overview: Research & Engagement Strategy



Evolution of Truth & How We Communicate



Belief-based Research & Insights



Values-Led Engagement – Three Steps

The Evolution of Truth

The Evolution of Truth

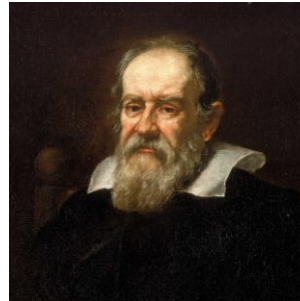
- Advances in communication technology reshape information flow and how we define truth.
- Those who master or control the technology have greater influence.



Religious
Iconography



Gutenberg printing
press put to
commercial use



Galileo launched the
“Scientific Revolution”



Facebook Launches

200-300

1454

1600s

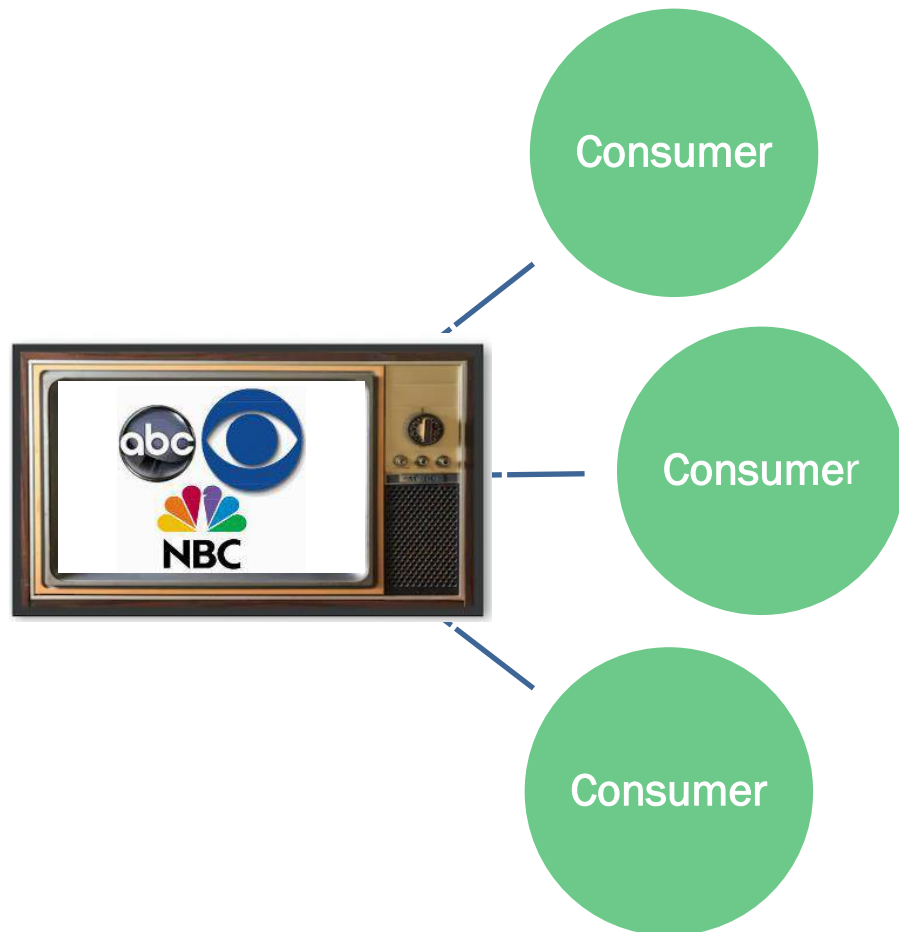
2004

Adoption Accelerates with New Applications

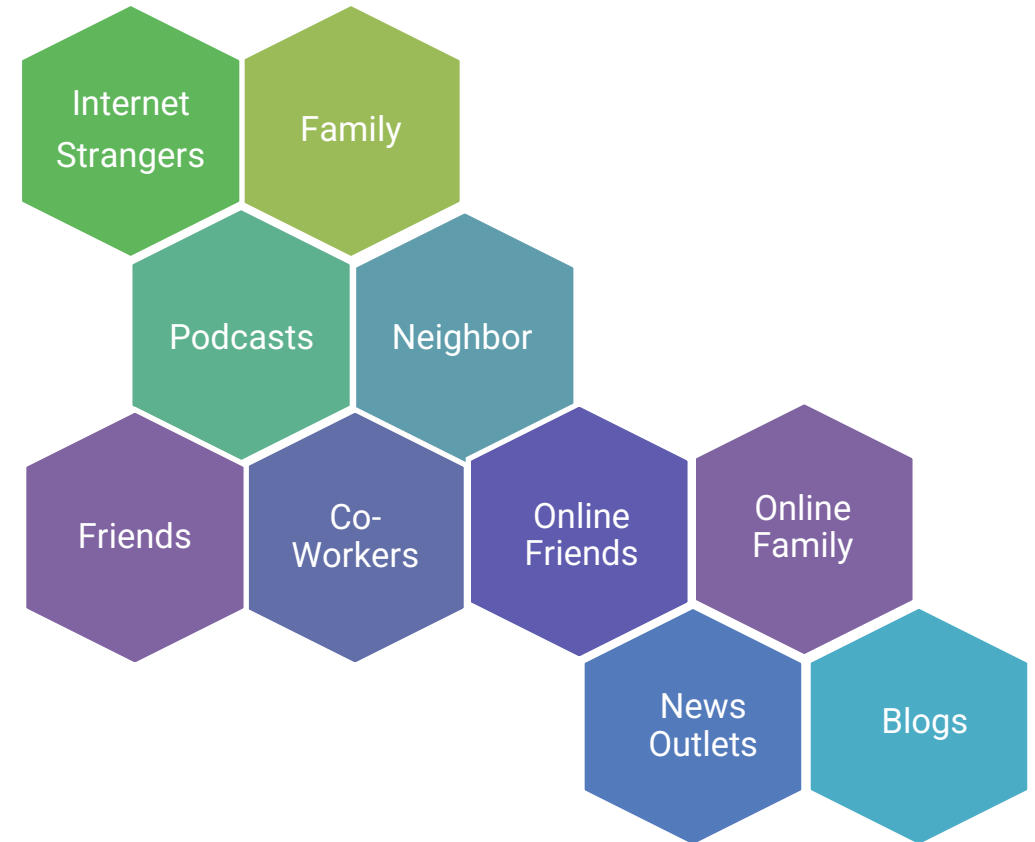


The Impact of Technology

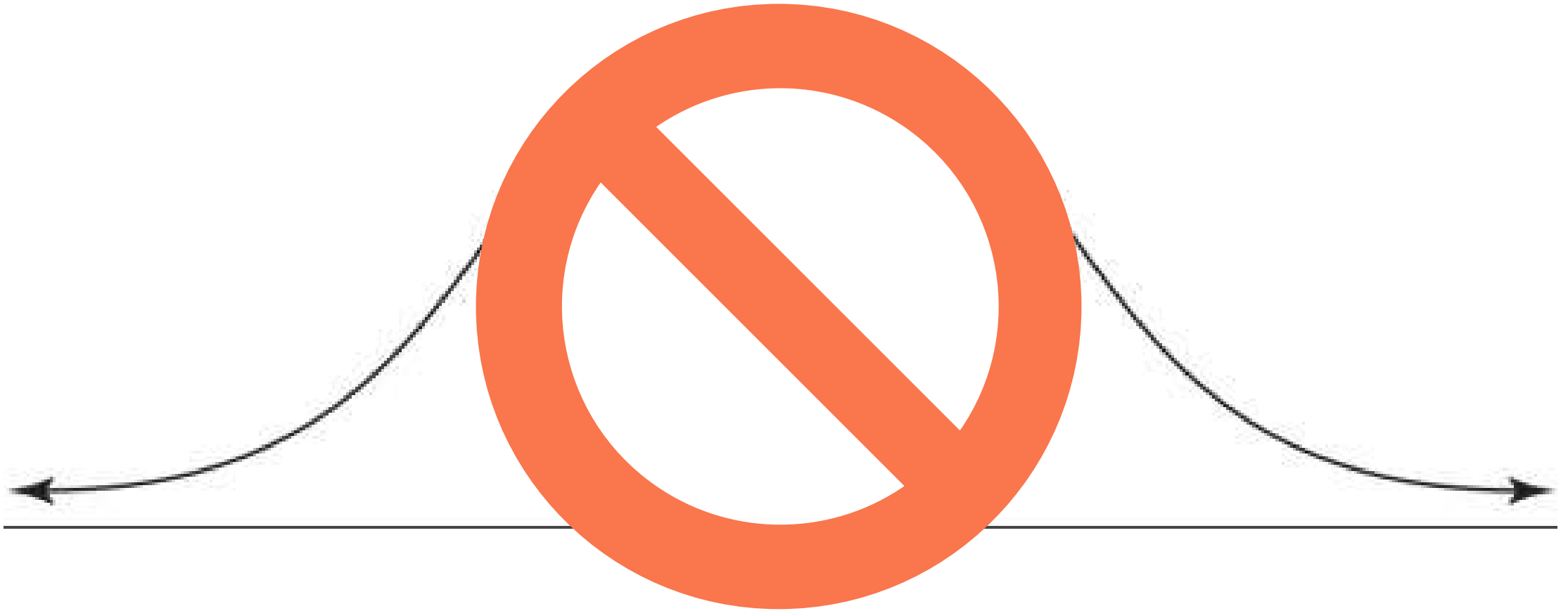
Yesterday: Mass Communication



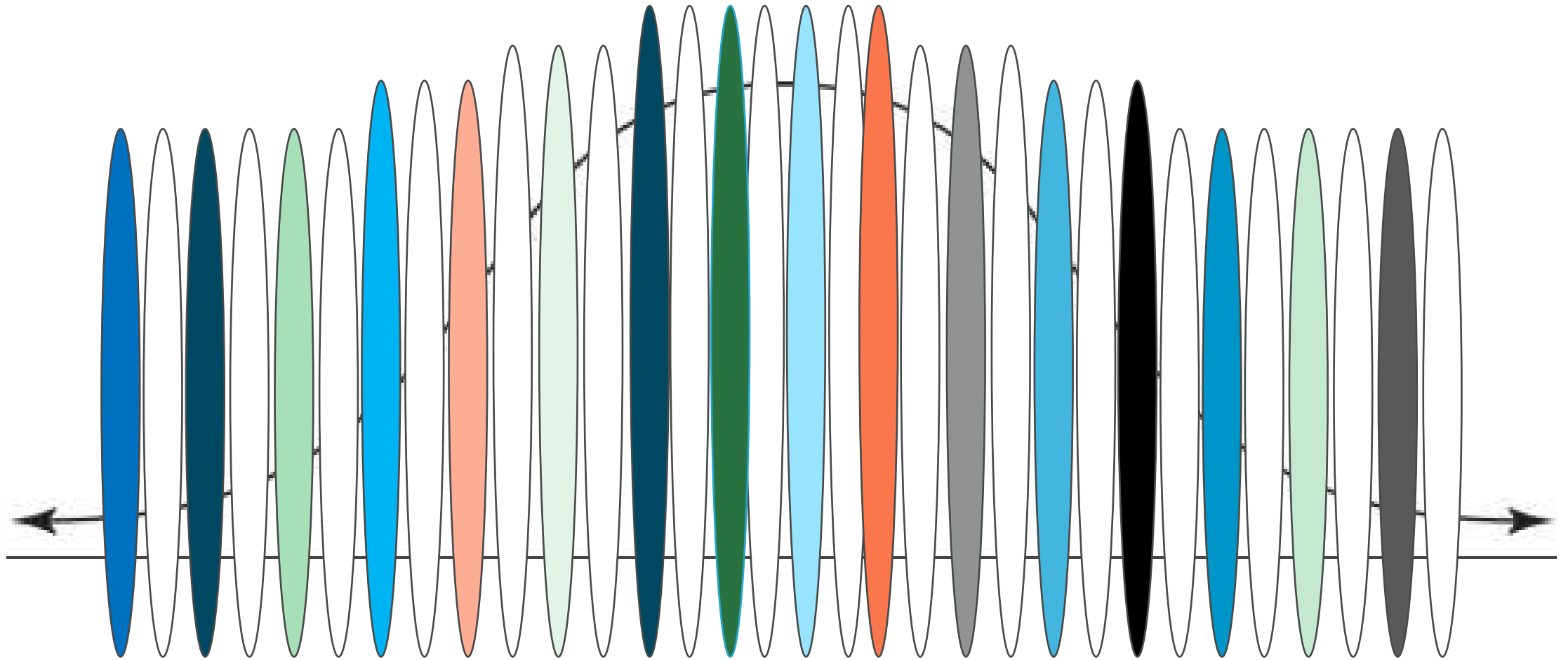
Today: Masses of Communicators



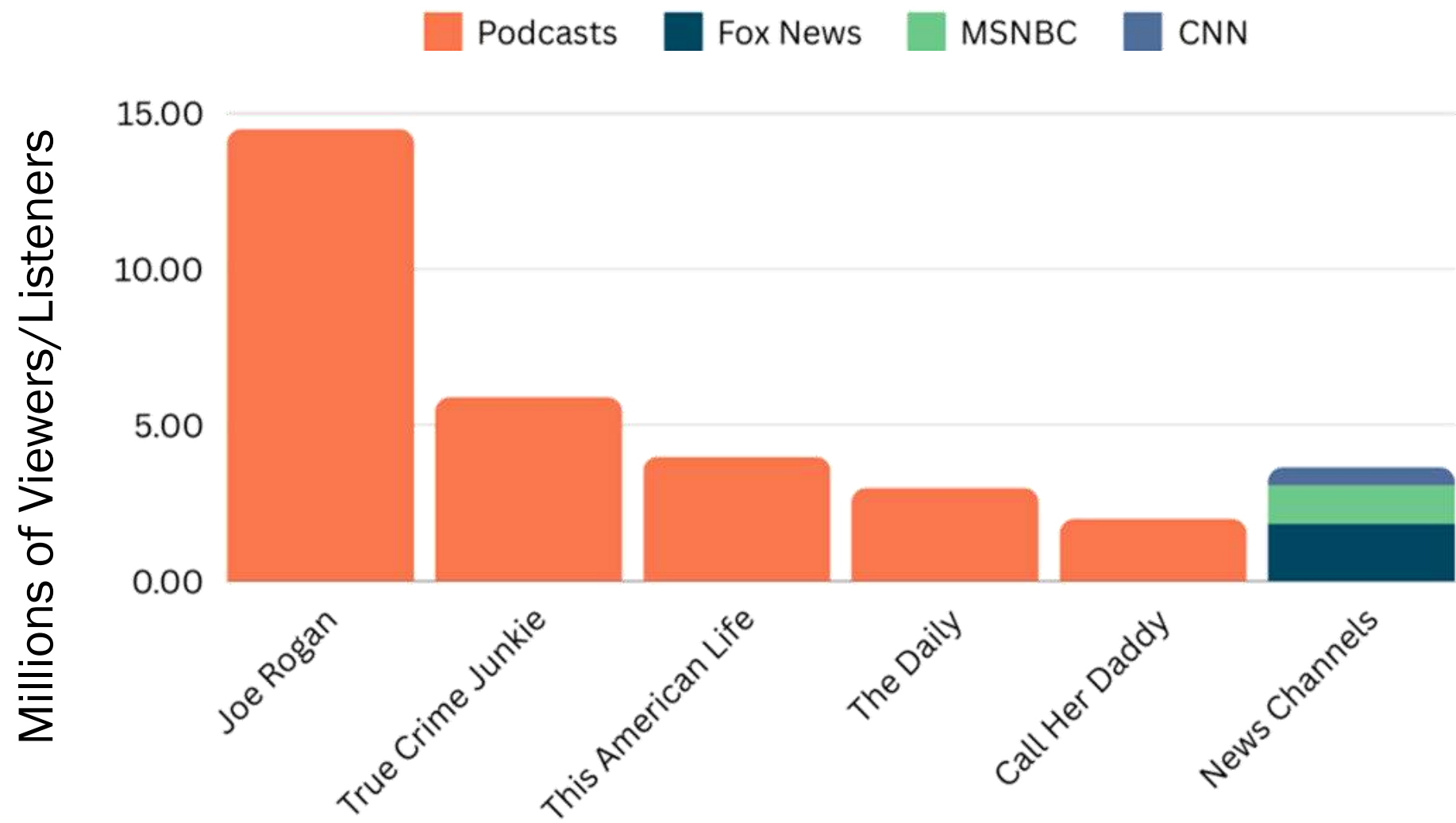
Moveable Middle ...*No More*



Mass Communication → Masses of Communicators

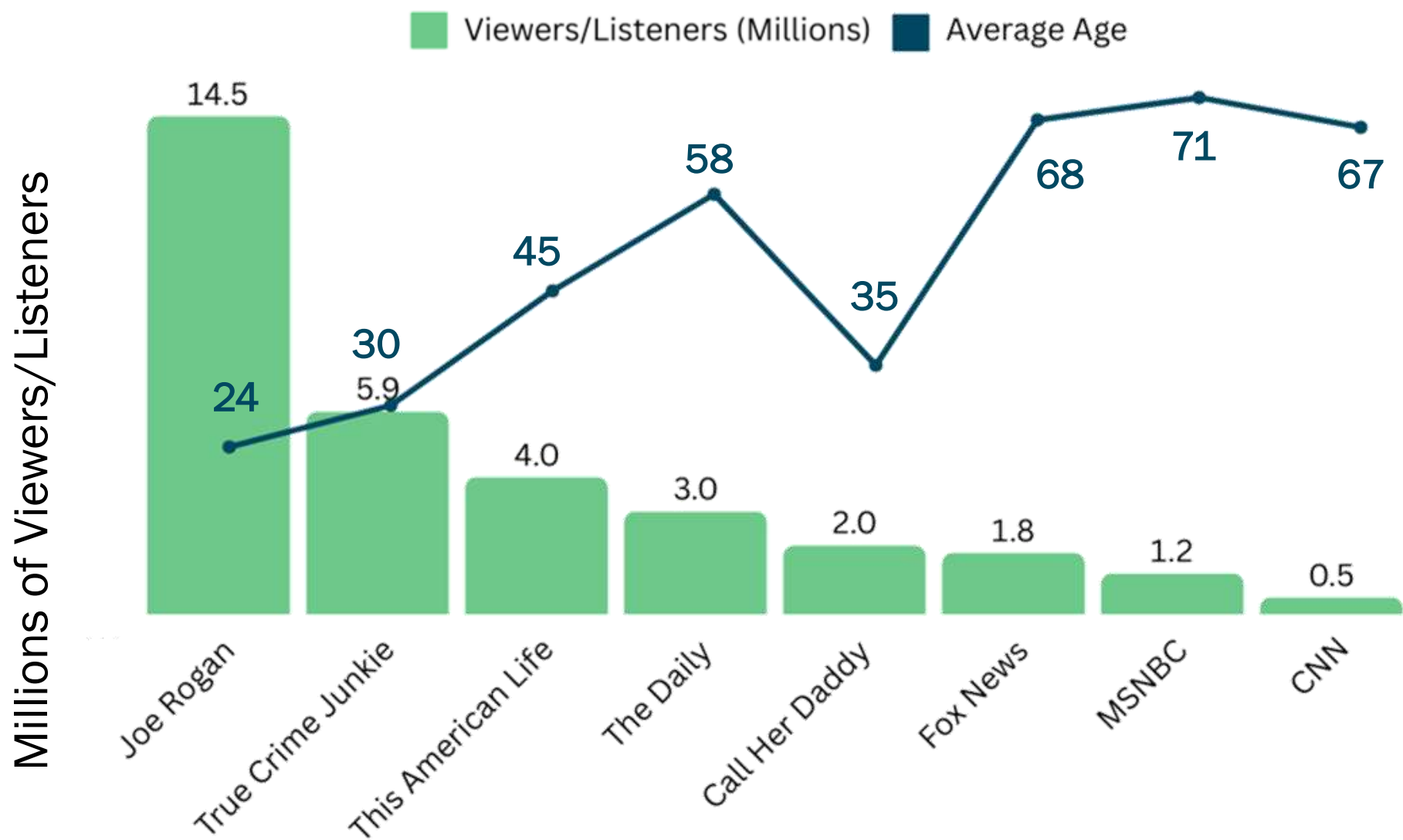


Shifts in Media Users

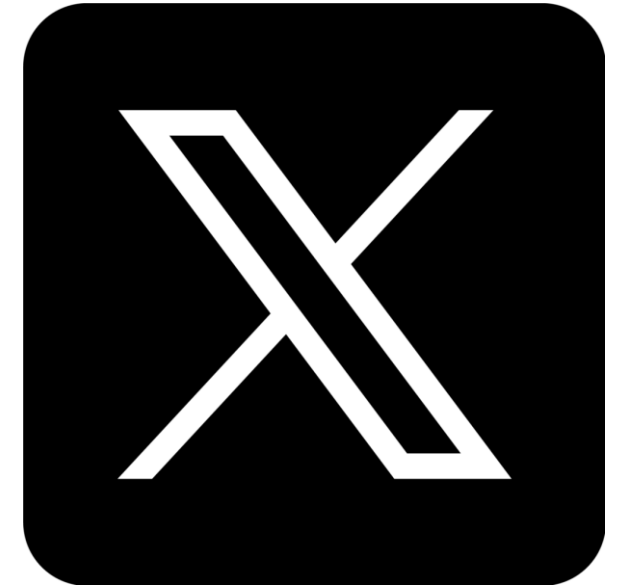


2023. Sources: IMBD, Edison, APM Dist. Descript – average # listeners per podcast.
Average evening audience for cable news networks.

Media Users and Average Age

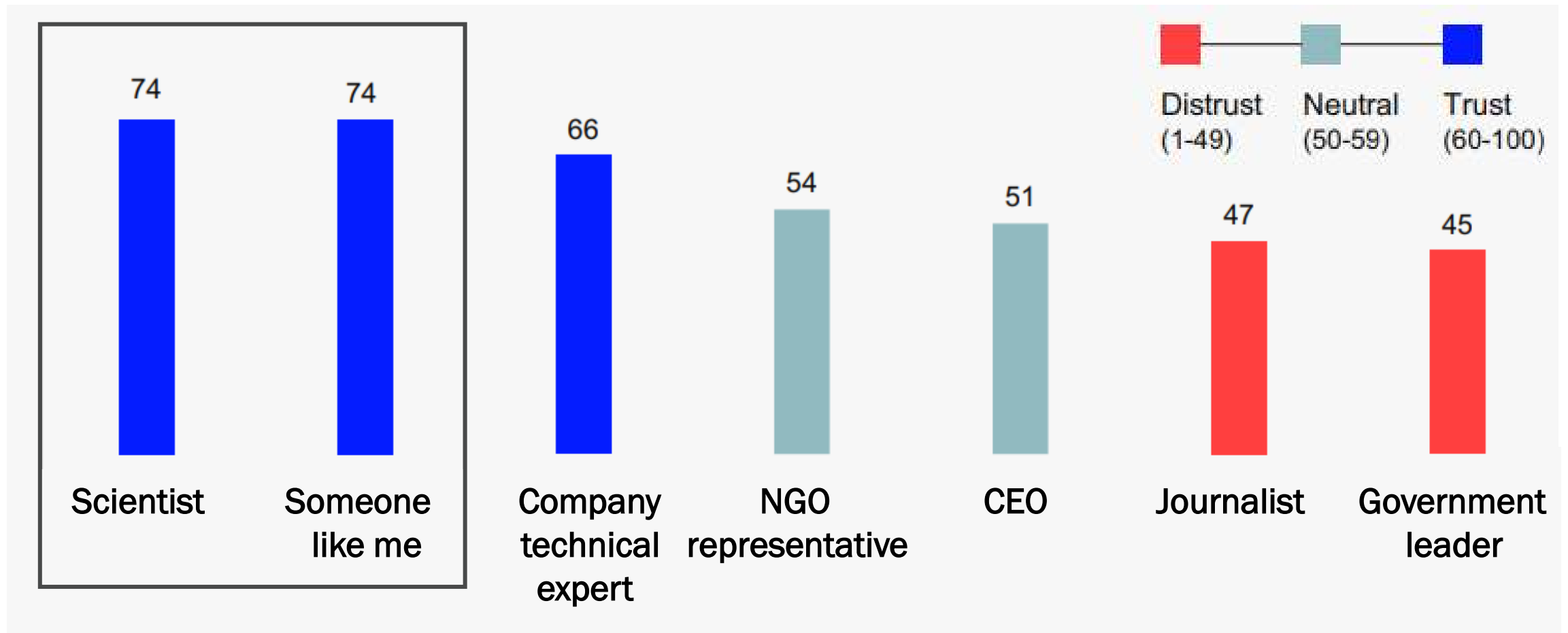


New Digital Environment



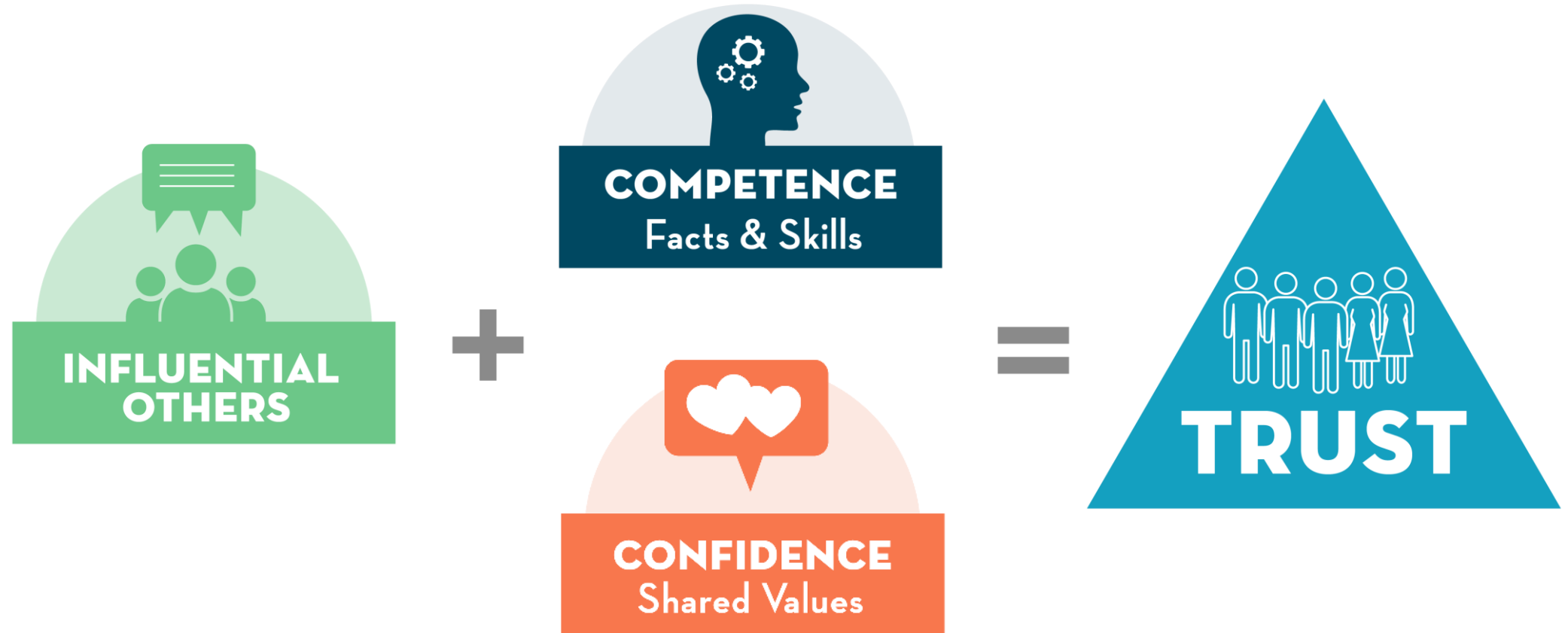
Distribution of Authority

“I trust each to tell me the truth about new innovations & technologies.”



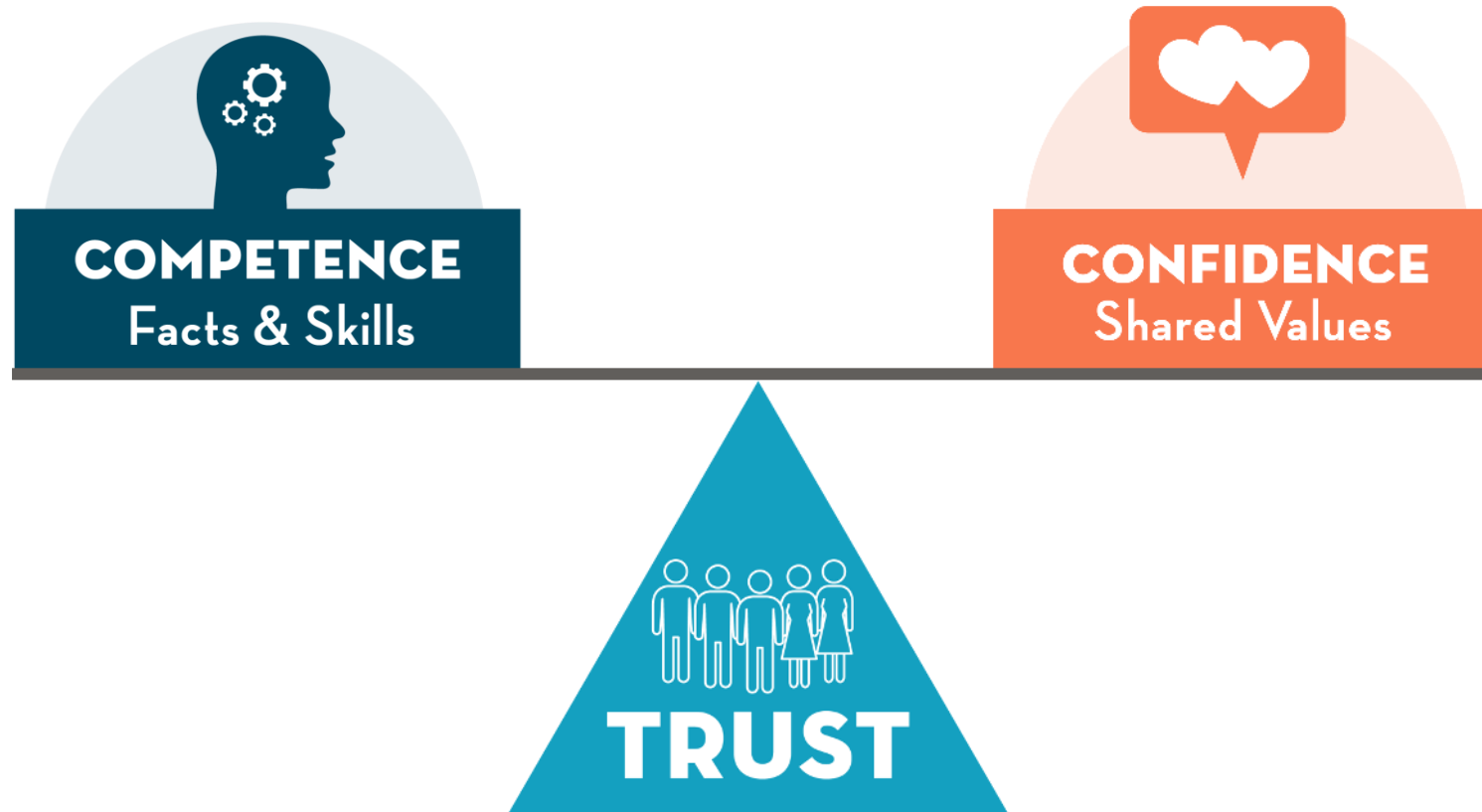
What Drives Trust?

The Trust Model™ (Sapp/Look East)

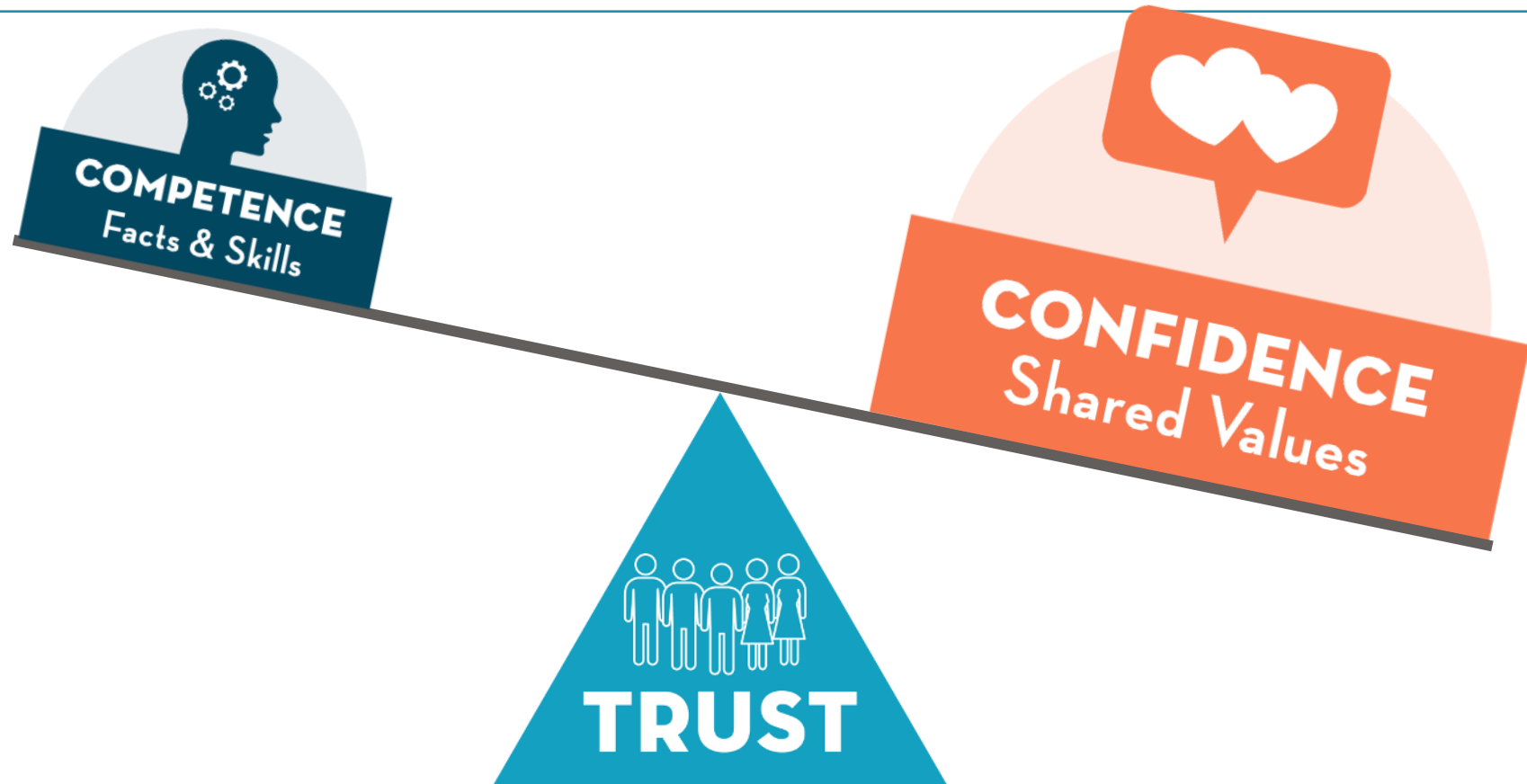


The Trust ModelSM was created based on research conducted in partnership with Iowa State University and published in the December 2009 Journal of Rural Sociology

What Drives Consumer Trust? (Sapp/Look East)



Values: 3-5 Times More Important



Shared values are 3-5 times more important to building trust than sharing facts or demonstrating technical skills/expertise.

Truth Defined: Mapping Consumer Beliefs in Food & Agriculture

How today's consumer defines "what's real"
in a complex food system



Methodology: Belief-Based Research



Imagine a consumer and their interests and concerns about food and agriculture.



We find them across a variety of digital platforms.



We go back two years in their history.



We study:

- Social values
- Political beliefs
- Where they work, live and play
- What they buy, read, share and advocate for
- Much more...



We replicate this across 4,000 consumers; build a model to test and validate the hypothesis.

Belief-Based Consumer Segments



**Progressive
Disruptor**



**Authenticity
Seeker**



Rationalist



**Comfort
Seeker**



Strategist

We identified five dominant groups of consumer beliefs about food and agriculture.

Consumer Self Reporting

Belief Based Research

Core Beliefs

Values

Motivations

Opinions & Solutions



Detailed Consumer Insights



Progressive Disruptor



Authenticity Seeker



Rationalist



Comfort Seeker



Strategist

Demographics:

Age, gender, race, education, population %, share of voice & more

Identity, motivations, beliefs:

- What is true for each segment
- How they act on their beliefs
- Triggers to adopt and reject

Brand affiliations:

Content Needs & Channel habits

- What they watch
- What they read
- Influencers they follow

MAHA-Specific Insights:

- Key beliefs, values and motivations and trusted voices tied to the MAHA movement + related topics and narratives in food and agriculture

A Focus on Three Important Consumer Segments:

Authenticity Seekers, Rationalist & Comfort Seekers



Authenticity Seeker





Authenticity Seeker

► 14% of the population

*“Truth as unfiltered, real
and firsthand.”*

- Authentic firsthand information
- Free from corporate manipulation
- Local, holistic experiences of food production
- Deepest connection with sources



Share of Voice 18%



Authenticity Seeker

WORKING in creative fields like design and fields like childhood ed, social work and holistic healthcare.

45%

Male

55%

Female

- Middle class and above – 68%
- Mostly single and couples without children - 65%
- Largely urban and rural

Race / Ethnicity

White 65%
African American 13%
Hispanic 15%
Asian 4%
Other 3%



College Educated

Spans Age Categories

Age By Generation

Gen Z 13%
Millennials 39%
Gen X 19%
Baby Boomers 29%



Rationalist

► 19% of the population

“Truth grounded in research, reason and science.”

- Avoid sensationalism or politicized narratives
- Value clear and credible research
- Trust in farmers, food scientists, and researchers
- Open to new future-oriented innovations



Share of Voice 15%



Rationalist

WORKING as academics or in STEM fields, government and healthcare professionals.

54%

Male

46%

Female

- Middle class and above – 69%
- Mostly couples with and without children - 55%
- Largely urban and suburban

Race / Ethnicity

White 65%
African American 10%
Hispanic 13%
Asian 9%
Other 3%



College Educated
and Above

Ages 35 – 55 (49%)

Age By Generation

Gen Z 9%
Millennials 46%
Gen X 24%
Baby Boomers 21%



Comfort Seeker

► 43% of the population

“Truth as reassurance—simple, safe and familiar.”

- Trust labels, the USDA or FDA, nutritionists, and grandma
- Credible information doesn't require deep scrutiny
- Trust online influencers
- Look for data that confirms their own food preferences



Share of Voice 27%



Comfort Seeker

WORKING in skilled trades, middle management and teaching or stay-at-home parents.

50%

Male

50%

Female

- Middle class and below – 90%
- Mostly married, with children, including empty nesters - 50%
- Suburbs, medium-sized town or rural areas

Race / Ethnicity

White 52%
African American 16%
Hispanic 21%
Asian 5%
Other 6%



High School and
Some College
Education

Ages 35 – 55 (49%)

Age By Generation

Gen Z 8%
Millennials 35%
Gen X 21%
Baby Boomers 36%

What is Truth?

Authenticity Seeker

To them, truth is ...

- **about authenticity:** raw, unfiltered experiences of real people
- **personal:** what's true for one might differ for another
- **self-defined:** not handed down by government or corporations
- **discovered:** through lived experience and honest dialogue

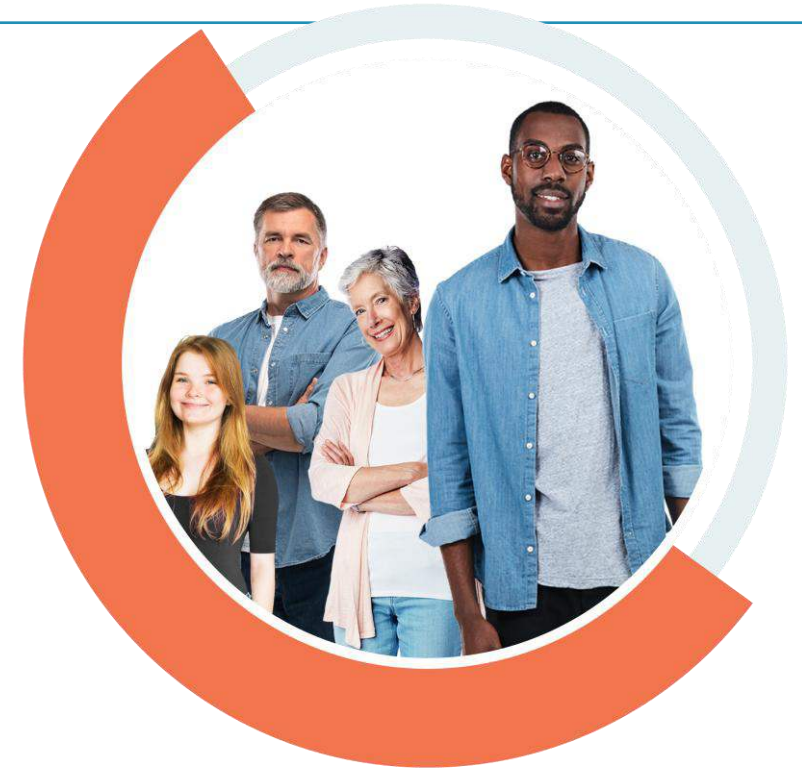


Authenticity Seeker

Rationalist

To them, truth is ...

- **objective, measurable and evidence based:** independent of thoughts or feelings
- **based on scientific method, empirical evidence, and data:** subjective information, personal experience and evidence are misguided
- **rational and based on reason alone:** objective truth is the only way for humanity to reach its potential



Rationalist

Comfort Seeker

To them, truth is ...

- **validated by trusted experts** such as influencers, dietitians, nutritionists, officials
- **interpreted** so it's easier to grasp and less stressful
- **practical guidance** for navigating complex issues



Comfort Seeker

MAHA Specific Insights

MAHA Insights: Trust Snapshot

View MAHA as a long-overdue correction
to a broken food system.



Authenticity Seeker

What Builds Trust

- Transparency, raw storytelling: real farmer voices
- Empowerment through personal food choice
- Proof through farm access or verified certifications

What Breaks Trust

- Top-down or politicized messaging
- Sanitized narratives or “corporate speak”
- Lack of grassroots producer involvement

Trust Drivers

- **Values:** Integrity, empowerment, honesty
- **Formats:** Farm tours, video diaries, grassroots forums
- **Messengers:** Farmers, regenerative ag leaders, peer networks

MAHA Insights: Trust Snapshot

MAHA as anti-science populism wrapped in feel-good rhetoric in lieu of rigorous science.



Rationalist

What Builds Trust

- Peer-reviewed data, clear sourcing
- Technical insights with expert validation
- Innovation as a solution (not rejection of tools)

What Breaks Trust

- Dismissal of institutions (FDA, USDA) without evidence
- Pseudo-science and anecdotal claims
- Blanket rejection of tools like pesticides/GMOs

Trust Drivers

- **Values:** Scientific rigor, objectivity, consistency
- **Formats:** Webinars, infographics, white papers
- **Messengers:** Researchers, extension agents, science communicators, registered dietitians, nutrition experts

MAHA Insights: Trust Snapshot

MAHA as a trustworthy guide that simplifies food choices, without a lifestyle overhaul...
but **that trust is conditional.**



Comfort Seeker

What Builds Trust

- Familiar figures validating small, healthy choices
- Clear, simple guidance via trusted labels
- Personal farmer, “experts”, influencer stories
- “Back-to-basics” tone (care, tradition, safety)

What Breaks Trust

- Fear-based or extreme messaging
- Politicization of food or health
- Confusing science or conflicting advice
- Undermining long-trusted institutions

Trust Drivers

- **Values:** Family, reassurance, simplicity
- **Formats:** Family stories, news clips
- **Messengers:** Emotionally resonant farmers, TV doctors, dietitians, restaurateurs

How to Use the Research

Turning Insight Into Strategy

These segments already exist in your state.

Focus on values, not demographics. Beliefs drive behavior.

- These segments guide your engagement approach, your tone, and narrative activation to build trust more effectively than fact-based messaging alone

Use these insights to identify:

- Who are you engaging?
- What message will resonate?
- How can you show up with credibility?



Progressive Disruptor



Authenticity Seeker



Comfort Seeker

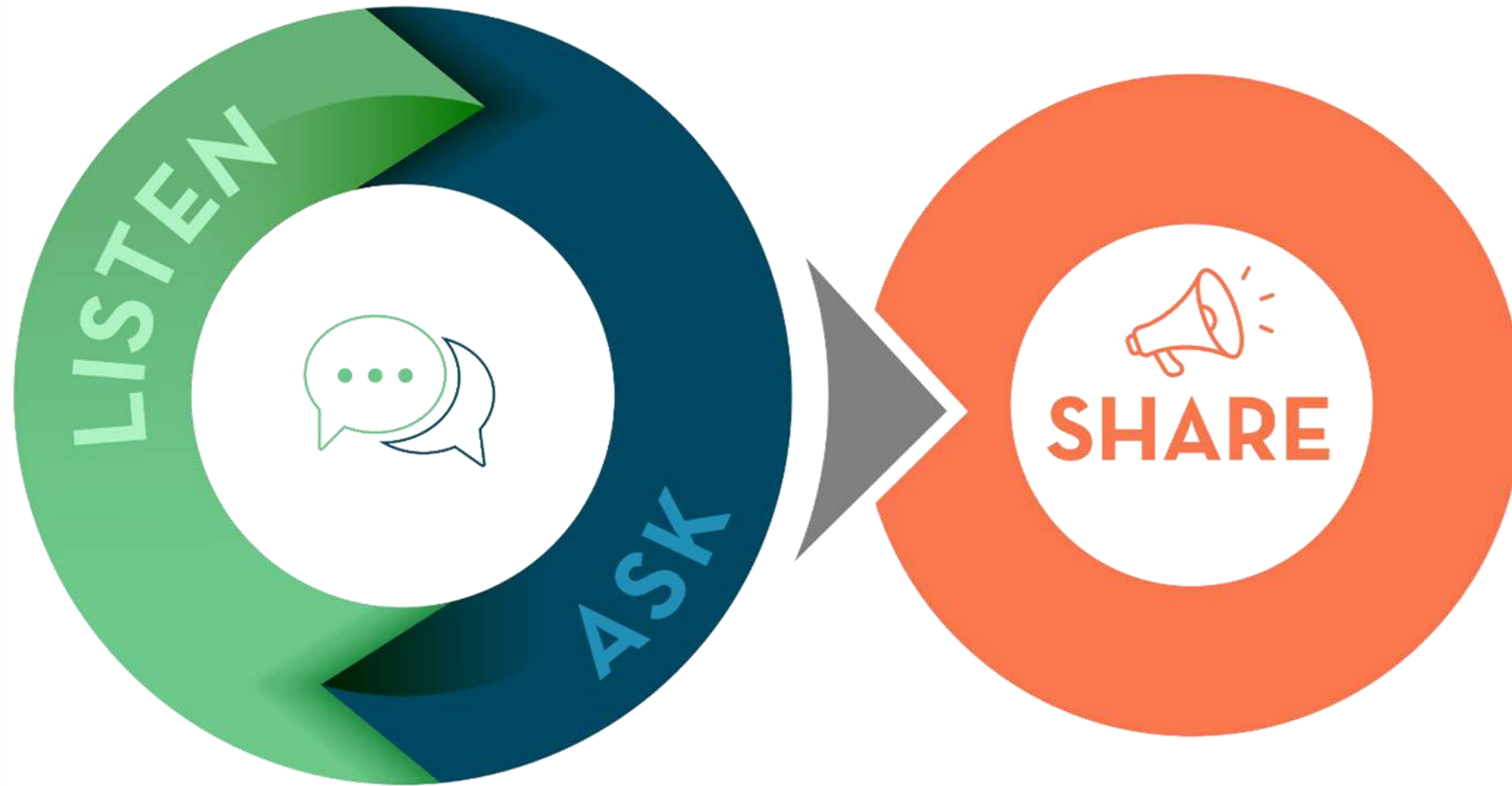


Rationalist



Strategist

Three Step Process



Listen*



*Without
judgment





“ *Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.*

Seek first to understand; then to be understood. ”

Author/educator
Stephen Covey





ACKNOWLEDGE

to demonstrate empathy and
to validate you've heard them.

(NOTE: Doesn't mean you have to agree with them.)



ASK

a question that helps you
learn more about their
perspective.





Share



*Use insights to engage,
connect & build
trust/credibility*



Navigating the Maze



Best Practices



1. **Relevant:** Make it meaningful. *Frame content based on the conversation and values.*
2. **Compelling:** Bring empathy to the subject. Focus on “what’s in it for them.”
3. **Clear:** Deliver the message simply. Avoid industry jargon and technical details.

Be Respectful and Authentic:

Bring Your Best Self. Stay positive. Show them you care. Be open and transparent.

Be a person first; an expert second.



Thank You!

The Center for Food Integrity



CFI Resources



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FoodIntegrity.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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