

New research provides insight into COVID-19 vaccine reluctance among social media users

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New research has found that the most reliable indicators of willingness to be vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, are rejection of conspiracy suspicions about COVID-19 and a positive attitude towards vaccines in general. The study by King's College London and the University of Bristol is published in the leading peer-reviewed journal *Psychological Medicine*.

The researchers' analysis was based on a large representative sample survey carried out in November-December 2020. They looked at a range of factors that previous studies had found to be related to hesitancy about getting vaccinated against the coronavirus and found that:

- Women, young people, less-educated people, and members of other than white ethnic groups are more hesitant about getting vaccinated
- People who get their information about COVID-19 from social media are more

hesitant about getting vaccinated

However, the researchers also found that many of these differences can be explained by people's attitudes towards vaccines in general and also by whether or not they suspect that there has been a conspiracy or cover-up connected with COVID -19. In particular, they found that:

- Vaccine hesitancy among people who get their information about COVID-19 from social media is completely accounted for by more negative [vaccine](#) attitudes and stronger conspiracy suspicions
- Vaccine hesitancy among members of other than white ethnic groups and members of low-income households is almost completely accounted for by more negative vaccine attitudes and stronger conspiracy suspicions
- Among those who have negative views of vaccines or who suspect that COVID-19 conspiracy theories may be true, more highly educated people appear to be more vaccine hesitant than less highly [educated people](#)

On the other hand, the researchers found that greater vaccine hesitancy among women and [young people](#) is not explained by conspiracy suspicions or by attitudes to vaccines in general.

Dr. Daniel Allington, lead author of the article and Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Artificial Intelligence at King's College London, said:

"These findings provide a powerful insight into why heavy users of [social media](#) appear to be less confident about being vaccinated against coronavirus: they tend to have more negative attitudes to vaccines in general and they are more

likely to suspect that conspiracy theories about the pandemic may be true."

Dr. Siobhan McAndrew, principal investigator of the research project and Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Social Science at the University of Bristol, added: "This study gives insight into the connections between fundamental characteristics such as ethnicity and education, and attitudes to vaccination against coronavirus. We have found that conspiracist suspicions and attitudes to vaccines in general form part of the connection—attitudes which likely preceded the current pandemic. The question for [policy-makers](#) is how to restore fundamental trust over the long-term, in the interests of public health."

Dr. Vivienne Moxham-Hall, Research Associate at the Policy Institute at King's College London with a background in immunology and health policy, explained: "These findings can inform government and public health organisation's communication about the [coronavirus](#) vaccine. In order to increase vaccine compliance, communication strategies need to account for the polarising nature of [conspiracy](#) theories by providing clear advice to those who may be unsure about vaccine safety and integrity."

More information: Daniel Allington et al, Coronavirus conspiracy suspicions, general vaccine attitudes, trust, and coronavirus information source as predictors of vaccine hesitancy among UK residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Psychological Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1017/S0033291721001434](#)

Provided by University of Bristol

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