

# Good vaccine news counters online skepticism, but only for a limited time

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Researchers at Oxford University's Department of Psychiatry and Sweden's Karolinska Institute have analyzed social media to investigate associations between vaccine-related major news announcements, and attitudes towards vaccines.

They looked at nearly two million tweets from the UK during November

2020 to January 2021, a period that coincided with news on the major [vaccine](#) trials being announced or published, and approvals by the UK Medicine and Health Regulations Authority (MHRA).

They found that each major news announcement related to vaccine releases was associated with a large decrease in negative sentiment on the same day, dropping from around 40% to 20% of all daily tweets.

However, this effect was short-lived, and the proportion of negative tweets reverted back to the background average within a few days. They also observed a similar decrease in negative sentiment when Pfizer/BioNTech announced its phase III vaccine trial results.

Professor Seena Fazel of Oxford's Department of Psychiatry, who led the research, said: "Vaccine hesitancy isn't a new phenomenon, but social media has exponentially increased the ability for rumors, half-truths and outright fallacies to spread globally in seconds.

"This research was informative because it showed that providing clear, positive messaging around new [research](#) does actually combat this negative tide, but that the positive trend lasts for a limited period of time.

"This useful insight can help [policy-makers](#) and health communicators when developing more effective campaigns aimed at promoting vaccine take-up, such as spacing out news announcements and writing content specifically aimed at [social media](#) audiences."

Several COVID-19 vaccines have been approved globally and broad scale vaccination is currently underway, but attitudes towards vaccination and in particular what has been termed vaccine hesitancy, present a [potential threat](#) to achieving coverage and community immunity.

The nearly 2 million tweets from 522,893 persons in the UK was focused on content about vaccines and major scientific news announcements about vaccines. The proportion of tweets with negative vaccine content varied, with reductions of 20–24% on the same day as major [news](#) announcement. However, the proportion of negative tweets reverted back to an average of around 40% within a few days. Engagement rates were higher for negative tweets.

**More information:** Seena Fazel et al, Harnessing Twitter data to survey public attention and attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines in the UK, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-02710-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-02710-4)

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