

Understanding COVID-19 Vaccine-Related Ageism on Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

- During rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, older adults were often prioritized for inoculation in efforts to reduce mortality.
- However, this prioritization may have contributed to ageism, particularly with the limited supply of initial COVID-19 vaccines.¹
- With an average of 500 million daily tweets, X (formerly Twitter) provides a timely means to examine vaccine-related ageism.

PURPOSE

- To understand COVID-19 vaccine-related ageism on X during the pandemic to inform future vaccination awareness campaigns and policies.

METHODS & ANALYSIS

- Tweets gathered on X (social media platform) using Twint application in Python from Dec. 8, 2020 to Dec. 31, 2021.
- Search terms included range of 3 concepts: ageist labels (boomer, coot, etc.), vaccines, and COVID-19.
- Filters excluded irrelevant tweets (3,677), remaining 1,369 tweets analyzed by coders.
- Thematic analysis used to identify key patterns and themes in the data.

RESULTS: MAIN THEMES

- Blame and Ageist Aggression:** *“Wish Covid-19 could be modified such that it will only w*pe off boomers regardless of vaccination.”*
- Misinformation and Mocking Content:** *“All boomers do on Twitter is spread covid misinformation or blame young people for the state of things while refusing to get the vaccine young people can’t have...”*
- Ageist Political Insults:** *“Think about Biden’s when considering his COVID mask/vaccine policies ... This dementia addled old coot has no idea what ramifications his partisan actions can/have/will cause.”*
- Combatting ageism: advocacy and accessibility:** *“COVID vaccine booking process is awful and not friendly for older adults. We need a much better system.”*

DISCUSSION

- Although some tweets advocated against ageist COVID-19 programming, tweets often described issues of hate speech, false information, and ageist political insults that contributed to intergenerational conflict.
- Further research and targeted awareness campaign strategies are needed to address COVID-19 vaccine misinformation, counter aggressive ageist content, and support intergenerational unity during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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References

1. Bacsu, J. D., Andrew, M. K., Azizi, M., Berger, C., Cammer, A., Chasteen, A. L., Fraser, S. A., Grewal, K. S., Green, S., Gowda-Sookochoff, R., Mah, J. C., McGilton, K. S., Middleton, L., Nanson, K., Spiteri, R. J., Tang, Y., & O'Connell, M. E. (2023). Using Twitter to Understand COVID-19 Vaccine-Related Ageism during the Pandemic. *The Gerontologist*, gnad061. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnad061>