



# Predictors of COVID-19 Vaccine Acceptance: The Role of Trust and the Influence of Social Media

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## ABSTRACT

The study discusses the predictors of COVID-19 vaccine acceptance in Romania. We implemented a national survey using an online panel ( $N = 1006$ ), representative for the online population of Romania aged 18 or higher, conducted on 13–26 October, 2020, by the national pollster QUESTIA. Results show a predictive model of people's willingness to take the COVID-19 vaccine, in which trust in the actors and institutions involved in the management of the crisis is the strongest predictor, followed by the belief in toxic or misleading narratives about vaccines and the COVID-19 pandemic, and media consumption patterns. Education is a moderator of the relationship between trust and the willingness to vaccinate. Implications for professionals in the social work fields, as well as for policy-makers are discussed. Results could be used as a starting point for developing recommendations for evidence-based health communication in the context of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19 vaccine acceptance; misinformation; vaccine hesitancy; trust; social media

## Introduction

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, public conversation on vaccination issues has gained more and more visibility. As the vaccination campaign unfolded, vaccination-related topics reverberated both among pro-vaccination groups and among those vehemently opposing it. In addition to people holding strong beliefs (positioned either for or against vaccination), there are also those who are hesitant about getting vaccinated.

Vaccine hesitancy is documented as one of the main barriers to full inoculation of the population (WHO, 2014), a goal important for the containment of SARS-CoV-2 infections, and possibly, for ending the global health crisis prompted by COVID-19. Research indicates that vaccine hesitancy is a complex, highly contextual phenomenon, varying according to time, geographical location, and the behaviors of the community (Al-Mohaithef & Padhi, 2020; Yin et al., 2021). Consequently, conducting more studies in various areas on the globe, among which Eastern Europe, is recommended by scholars (Sallam, 2021). In this context, we aim to investigate the predictors of vaccine acceptance in Romania.

At the moment of conducting the research (October 13–25, 2020), there was no authorized vaccine available, although breakthroughs were imminent. Two companies, namely Moderna and Pfizer, were testing the new mRNA technology, establishing themselves as the frontrunners in the competition for a viable vaccine (Brothers, 2020). At the beginning of the research period, Romania recorded 3.109 new daily COVID-19 cases, while reaching a total number of 160.461 COVID-19 cases, 5.535 deaths, and the highest number of COVID-19 patients treated in intensive care units – 686 (Strategic Communication Group, 2020a). On October 21, the highest daily count since the beginning of the pandemic of was reported – 4.848 new coronavirus cases (Marica, 2020;