

# Branding the job: The secret weapon to increase vaccination rates

21 May 2021, by Annabel Mansfield

## Words linked to Vaccine brands



Data collected from n=802 Australian unvaccinated adults, April 2021  
Collected by Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, University of South Australia

Credit: University of South Australia

As the global race for COVID-19 vaccination continues, new research from the University of South Australia shows that the uptake of vaccines could be vastly improved if approved vaccine brands received more positive promotion and media coverage.

Conducted by UniSA's Ehrenberg-Bass Institute of Marketing Science, the study examined more than 2400 unvaccinated adults across three countries—Australia, UK and U.S.—to identify if people's willingness to be vaccinated changes when presented with different vaccine brands.

It found that the more positive information people have about vaccine brands, the more willing they are to be vaccinated with that [brand](#). Given that positive stories about brands typically have 2-3 times higher reach than negative stories, this finding is particularly significant.

Lead researcher, Professor Jenni Romaniuk says getting people vaccinated has become a combination of two challenges—getting people willing to be vaccinated at all, and getting people willing to be vaccinated with the available vaccine

brand.

"If we apply brand science to vaccination willingness, we can see how people's awareness and knowledge of vaccine brands influence their uptake of the COVID-19 vaccination," Prof Romaniuk says.

"Our research shows that choice is an important factor that is influencing rates of vaccination.

"About 50 percent of people spontaneously indicated a first-choice vaccine (45 percent in the UK; 54 percent in the US; and 49 percent in Australia), yet unlike the UK or the US, people in Australia don't yet have a choice of vaccine, and are instead allocated a specific vaccine brand.

"This poses a problem, because when people are restricted to a single vaccine brand, the only choices they have are either to remain unvaccinated or wait until their first choice might become available.

"The logical solution would be to offer a wider range of vaccines so people can exercise their right to choose which one they prefer, yet with current supply issues, this is currently impossible.

"In this scenario, the government needs to make the available vaccines far more desirable to the [general public](#) to increase people's vaccine brand willingness—and this can be achieved through positive brand associations, via positive advertising and positive [media coverage](#)."

While the research highlights opportunities for governments to broadly promote vaccine brands, it also highlights the important role that the media is playing in building vaccine brand knowledge.

"Whether intended or not, the outcome of having multiple vaccines available at the same time has created a unique scenario where vaccine brands

are competing for attention and share of mind—not only via government sources, but also via [mainstream media](#)," Prof Romaniuk says.

"Mainstream news about brands is unusual. Unlike paid and controlled advertising, the media report both positive and negative aspects of [vaccine](#) brands, which places them in a very powerful position to swing people's opinions.

"Our research shows that most people (UK, 87 percent; US, 82 percent; Australia, 86 percent) had seen or heard something in the media or via word-of-mouth about vaccines.

"Yet in Australia, people felt negative messages dominated the media (likely as a result of negative [media](#) about AstraZeneca and blood clots) as opposed to positive stories in the UK and US where it is more evenly balanced.

"Our research shows that no single perception was more effective in increasing willingness for any brand. Instead it was the total number of positive associations people had mattered—and this finding was consistent across all brands tested ([Pfizer](#), AstraZeneca, [Moderna](#), [Johnson & Johnson](#)) and in all three countries.

"While creating entertaining advertising can help get attention, it's important that this communicates useful messages—stories that hero the development of specific vaccines, the approval processes a brand went through, and positive user experiences can all contribute to increasing public confidence in the brands on offer."

Provided by University of South Australia

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