

# Social Media and Pandemic Response in the US

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all response options are radio buttons. Headings are for researchers' use and will not be shown to participants.

This study is conducted by researchers at University College Dublin and has been approved by the university's ethics committee. You must be a US citizen between 18 to 75 years of age to participate in this study. If you do not fulfill these requirements, please do not continue any further. You are not allowed to participate in this study more than once. If you experience a technical error or problem, do not try to restart or retake the study. Rather, send us an email with a description of your problem and we will get back to you. If you have any questions regarding this study, please email [margaret.samahita@ucd.ie](mailto:margaret.samahita@ucd.ie).

This questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers are anonymous; we will publish only aggregate results based on the survey and it will not be possible to trace the identity of any individual participant.

I have read and understood the above and want to participate in this study.

- Yes
- No

What is your age (in years)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

In which state do you currently reside? (select from a list of US states)

It is vital to our study that we only include responses from people who devoted their full attention to this study. Will you pay full attention?

- Yes, I will read each question carefully and answer as best I can. (checkbox)

## Part A. Pre-treatment COVID-19 attitude

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

- 0-10 Likert scale, You can't be too careful (0) to Most people can be trusted (10)

Please tell us, in general, how willing or unwilling you are to take risks.

- 0-10 Likert scale, Completely unwilling to take risks (0) to Very willing to take risks (10)

How willing are you to give to good causes without expecting anything in return?

- 0-10 Likert scale, Completely unwilling to do so (0) to Very willing to do so (10)

What do you think of the federal government's response measures in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Extremely insufficient (1) to Extreme overreaction (7)

What do you think of your state government's response measures in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Extremely insufficient (1) to Extreme overreaction (7)

Sweden's government has so far avoided implementing a lockdown in order to keep the economy going. What do you think of this policy?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7)

The government's highest priority should be saving as many lives as possible even if it means the economy will recover more slowly. What do you think of this statement?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7)

It is becoming more important for the government to save jobs and restart the economy than to take every precaution to keep people safe. What do you think of this statement?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7)

How confident are you in your answers to the questions above?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Not confident at all (1) to Extremely confident (7)

## Part B. Attitude prime treatment manipulation

Please take a careful look at the tweet below.



We would like to ensure you are paying attention.

What is the name of the robot mentioned in the tweet?

- Grillo
- Flippy
- Filip
- Don't know

How many likes did the tweet have?

- 2
- 13
- 86
- Don't know

When was the tweet published?

- July 16<sup>th</sup> 2020
- July 4<sup>th</sup> 2020
- June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020
- Don't know

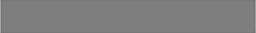
## Part C. Main treatment manipulation

The algorithms used on social media may sometimes present you with posts by complete strangers.  
**You will now be shown 6 tweets.**

**As if you were going through your own social media feed (eg Twitter or Facebook), please consider whether you would "like" or "retweet" each of the following 6 tweets.**

## CONTROL TREATMENT

3 pro-econ with low likes and 3 pro-health with low likes, order to be randomised

[Follow](#) 

We are ready to reopen safely and respectfully of each other's health. For many small businesses, if they do not reopen now, they will never reopen. Our local small business owners can take precautions while operating safely and intelligently.

12:11 PM - 11 Jul 2020

---

1 Retweets 4 Likes

---

  1  4 

[Follow](#) 

If we open up schools, summer activities, and small businesses, the economy will move much faster without any extra tax dollars spent. Time to reopen safely.

5:11 PM - 17 Jul 2020

---

8 Likes

---

   8 



[Redacted name]

Follow



You can't bankrupt the nation to keep furlough going beyond the summer just because you refuse to ease lockdown. Furlough is not the answer. Get the country back to work.

8:11 PM - 15 Jul 2020

4 Likes



[Redacted name]

Follow



Why are people pushing for more relaxing of lockdown and easing of 2m guidance? We still have people dying. People are still being admitted to hospitals. This is not under control! Where are the scientists?

10:11 AM - 18 Jul 2020

4 Likes





[Redacted name]

Follow



COVID 19 cases keep increasing after the easing of the lockdown... the government must take some necessary precautionary measures

1:55 PM - 12 Jul 2020

2 Likes



[Redacted name]

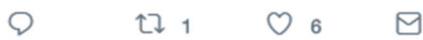
Follow



This idea of quickly opening up the economy is just wrong on all levels. In the US we put lives first. When it is safe we will open up our economy and we will be successful as a country

7:55 PM - 20 Jul 2020

1 Retweets 6 Likes



## PRO-HEALTH TREATMENT

3 pro-health with high likes and 3 pro-econ with low likes, order to be randomised



[Redacted Name]

Follow

▼

We are ready to reopen safely and respectfully of each other's health. For many small businesses, if they do not reopen now, they will never reopen. Our local small business owners can take precautions while operating safely and intelligently.

12:11 PM - 11 Jul 2020

---

1 Retweets 4 Likes

---

  1  4 



[Redacted Name]

Follow

▼

If we open up schools, summer activities, and small businesses, the economy will move much faster without any extra tax dollars spent. Time to reopen safely.

5:11 PM - 17 Jul 2020

---

8 Likes

---

   8 



[Redacted Name]  
[Redacted Username]

Follow



You can't bankrupt the nation to keep furlough going beyond the summer just because you refuse to ease lockdown. Furlough is not the answer. Get the country back to work.

8:11 PM - 15 Jul 2020

4 Likes



[Redacted Name]  
[Redacted Username]

Follow



Why are people pushing for more relaxing of lockdown and easing of 2m guidance? We still have people dying. People are still being admitted to hospitals. This is not under control! Where are the scientists?

10:11 AM - 18 Jul 2020

21 Retweets 69 Likes





[Redacted name]

Follow



COVID 19 cases keep increasing after the easing of the lockdown... the government must take some necessary precautionary measures

1:55 PM - 12 Jul 2020

10 Retweets 55 Likes



[Redacted name]

Follow



This idea of quickly opening up the economy is just wrong on all levels. In the US we put lives first. When it is safe we will open up our economy and we will be successful as a country

7:55 PM - 20 Jul 2020

16 Retweets 82 Likes



## PRO-ECONOMY TREATMENT

3 pro-econ with high likes and 3 pro-health with low likes, order to be randomised



[Redacted Name]

Follow

▼

We are ready to reopen safely and respectfully of each other's health. For many small businesses, if they do not reopen now, they will never reopen. Our local small business owners can take precautions while operating safely and intelligently.

12:11 PM - 11 Jul 2020

---

12 Retweets 77 Likes

---

  12  77 



[Redacted Name]

Follow

▼

If we open up schools, summer activities, and small businesses, the economy will move much faster without any extra tax dollars spent. Time to reopen safely.

5:11 PM - 17 Jul 2020

---

11 Retweets 85 Likes

---

  11  85 



[Redacted name]

Follow



You can't bankrupt the nation to keep furlough going beyond the summer just because you refuse to ease lockdown. Furlough is not the answer. Get the country back to work.

8:11 PM - 15 Jul 2020

11 Retweets 95 Likes



Retweet 11

Like 95



[Redacted name]

Follow



Why are people pushing for more relaxing of lockdown and easing of 2m guidance? We still have people dying. People are still being admitted to hospitals. This is not under control! Where are the scientists?

10:11 AM - 18 Jul 2020

4 Likes



Retweet

Like 4



   
 [Follow](#) 

COVID 19 cases keep increasing after the easing of the lockdown... the government must take some necessary precautionary measures

1:55 PM - 12 Jul 2020

---

2 Likes

---

   2 

   
 [Follow](#) 

This idea of quickly opening up the economy is just wrong on all levels. In the US we put lives first. When it is safe we will open up our economy and we will be successful as a country

7:55 PM - 20 Jul 2020

---

1 Retweets 6 Likes

---

  1  6 

## Part D. Post-treatment COVID-19 attitude

What do you think of the following policies? (each question requires a response on a 1-7 Likert scale, Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

Closing the borders

Prohibiting gatherings

Prohibiting non-essential travels

Closing daycares, schools, colleges and universities

Closing non-essential businesses (bars, stores that are not food or health related, etc.)

Handing out USD 1,000 fines to those who do not comply with social-distancing rules

General lockdown of the population with a ban on leaving the home (except for medical reasons)

Mandatory use of face-coverings in public places

How confident are you in your answers to the questions above?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Not confident at all (1) to Extremely confident (7)

Views about COVID-19 policy response can be roughly split into 2:

1. **Pro-health:** prioritise **the elimination of COVID-19** over economic activities, for example by extending lockdown measures despite economic costs.

2. **Pro-economy:** prioritise **economic activities** over the elimination of COVID-19, for example by opening up the economy despite risks of a second wave.

Which of these two views had more likes in **the 6 tweets shown earlier**?

- Pro-health
- Pro-economy
- Neither (both had about the same number of likes)
- Don't know

Which of these two views has more support in **your own social network (including friends and family members)**?

- Pro-health
- Pro-economy
- Neither (both have about the same amount of support)
- Don't know

How much does public support of a given policy **on** social media influence your own support of that policy?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Not at all (1) to Completely (7)

How much does public support of a given policy **outside** social media influence your own support of that policy?

- 1-7 Likert scale, Not at all (1) to Completely (7)

How often do you discuss policy issues with your friends or family members **on** social media?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

How often do you discuss policy issues with your friends or family members **outside** social media?

- Always
- Often

- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

## Part E. Demographic questionnaire

What is the highest level of education you completed?

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- High school diploma
- Associate degree or certificate
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimate your household's total net monthly income (including salary, pension, social security, sickness benefit).

- Less than or equal to 500 USD
- 500 up to and including 1000 USD
- 1000 up to and including 1500 USD
- 1500 up to and including 2000 USD
- 2000 up to and including 2500 USD
- 2500 up to and including 3000 USD
- 3000 up to and including 3500 USD
- 3500 up to and including 4000 USD
- 4000 up to and including 4500 USD
- 4500 up to and including 5000 USD
- Greater than 5000 USD
- Prefer not to say

In political matters, people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?

- 0-10 Likert scale, The left (0) to The right (10)

Which party did you vote for in the 2016 US election?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Other
- Prefer not to say
- Did not vote

Are you currently employed as an essential worker? (eg healthcare workers, grocery shop employees)

- Yes

- No

Overall, how has your employment been affected since the outbreak of the pandemic?

- No negative affect
- Affected a little eg having to work from home, but no financial impact
- Affected a lot eg number of hours have gone down or taken a pay cut
- I have been furloughed or lost my job

How worried are you about yourself or a family member contracting COVID-19?

- 0-10 Likert scale, Not worried at all (0) to Extremely worried (10)

To what extent have you complied with the following? (each question requires a response on a 0-10 Likert scale, Not at all (0) to Completely (10))

The social-distancing requirements in your state

Public health guidelines (eg wearing face coverings, practicing hand hygiene, not touching your face)

How much do you agree with the following? (each question requires a response on a 1-7 Likert scale, Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

I often change my mind

Once I come to a conclusion, I'm not likely to change my mind

I don't change my mind easily

My views are very consistent over time

## Part F. Media exposure

How much time per day do you spend... (each question requires a response from: never, less than 30 minutes, from 30 minutes to 1 hour, more than 1 hour)

Watching, reading or listening to news about politics and current affairs

On Facebook

On Twitter

How active on social media (including browsing, liking and commenting) are ... (scale between 0 not active at all to 100 extremely active)

... you yourself

... your family and friends

In general, which of these do you rely on most for news about politics and current affairs: (select all that apply)

- Television
- Newspapers (including web version)
- Magazines

- Radio
- Social media
- Podcasts
- Other web sources (not social media)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you trust each of the following? (each question requires a response from: no trust at all, do not trust very much, trust somewhat, trust completely)

The national government

The media

What do you think this study is about?

## Debriefing

Thank you for participating in our study.

This study aims to investigate the impact of social media metrics on changes in attitude regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

The tweets were inspired by real tweets but the photographs and engagement metrics were not real.

As data collection is ongoing, we would like to ask you not to talk about this study with others for now. We would also like to reassure you that all the data you provided is anonymous, and will only be presented and analyzed in group format.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Margaret Samahita ([margaret.samahita@ucd.ie](mailto:margaret.samahita@ucd.ie)) or Laura Taylor ([laura.taylor@ucd.ie](mailto:laura.taylor@ucd.ie)).