

PIVOTING FROM TRADITION: AN ANALYSIS OF  
INFLUENCER COMMUNICATION IN COVID-19  
VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for Departmental Honors in  
the Department of Strategic Communication  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas

May 2, 2022

**PIVOTING FROM TRADITION:**  
**An Analysis of Influencer Communication in COVID-19 Vaccination Campaigns**

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## ABSTRACT

I researched and analyzed a portion of influencer communication during the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in 2021. This project investigated Generation Z's social media consumption behaviors and the function of social media influencer communication. I explored each influencer's background and methods of interaction with their followers. I then used this information to understand how they communicated through the lens of vaccination promotion in partnership with the White House.

The scope of this study focused strictly on the vaccination campaigns that occurred in 2021. This centralization interests me because the messaging landscape for strategic communicators is rapidly evolving, especially post-pandemic. Public officials and leaders must rely on social media to deliver their messages, particularly when reaching younger audiences more adept at social media communication. I am interested in how these leaders utilize social media influencers to communicate their messages to a digitally-savvy audience and how they can succeed in doing so in the future. How do you know which influencers to partner with? What platforms are best for reaching specific audiences? Why do social media influencers hold more influence than celebrities and public leaders? How can public leaders utilize social media influencers to their strategic communication advantage? What can strategic communicators take away from the examples of the White House's COVID-19 vaccination campaign?

My analysis of the social media content produced on platforms and the news coverage of the partnerships led to my uncovering of the best practices for strategic communicators when channeling a message through social media influencers. I developed the five-pronged approach, noted in the acronym PIVOT, which stands for partnerships, integration, visuals, organic

conversation, and targeting. In the future, public leaders must consider these five factors when launching social media influencer campaigns intended for Generation Z audiences.

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## Introduction

A two-week lockdown evolved into an ongoing two-year battle with the challenges of COVID-19. During its earliest days in the first months of 2020, the public health issue divided millions of Americans. Global leaders scrambled to brace their countries for the imminent arrival of the virus, imposing quarantines, capacity limits, and travel restrictions. Yet, leaders seldom agreed on the best arrangements to temper the threat of the novel coronavirus. Within days, millions surrendered to the new and unfamiliar changes brought about by the virus, pivoting their lives to suit the new normal.

While social distancing, many spent more time on social media platforms. Leaders and celebrities emphasized metaphorical togetherness in their messages to followers about isolation, social distancing, washing hands, and staying home. However, the information coming from leaders wasn't always consistent. Former President Donald Trump and the Chief Medical Advisor to the President, Dr. Anthony Fauci, had to deliver messages about a virus that had little research. Both executives' differing opinions and information perplexed the public, resulting in an infodemic of swirling misinformation and general confusion. Many turned to social media influencers as sources of accurate COVID-19 information when messages from leaders in the public sector seemed vague, complicated, and conflicting. President Joe Biden and his administration developed a communication strategy to include social media influencers in vaccine awareness and information among hesitant audiences.

This project began with an overarching question: What can future strategic communicators take away from the collaboration between influencers and leaders in the public sector? This project analyzes how public figures messaged alongside influencers in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns.

## Literature Review

*“For time and the world do not stand still. Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.”*

*– President John F. Kennedy*

### Vaccination Campaign

Biden’s push to vaccinate more Americans can be divided into three central tenets: vaccination rates, grassroots efforts, and digital touchpoints.

#### *Vaccination Rates*

During his presidential campaign and shortly following the inauguration, Biden laid out his goals for inoculation rates in the U.S. In a press release from the White House on May 4, Biden vowed to have 70 percent of all eligible U.S. adults vaccinated by July 4 (see Timeline 1). This came after vaccination rates plateaued and a new variant was on the rise. At that time, just over half of U.S. adults received at least one shot of the vaccine. Compared to the rest of the adult population, the 18-24 year demographic had lower overall vaccination rates (see Chart 1). Similarly, the 12 to 17-year-old demographic endured even lower vaccination rates, prompting the Biden Administration to take on a new approach to vaccines.

#### *Grassroots Effort*

The president aimed to achieve the vaccination goals by launching a door-to-door outreach campaign. This was accomplished by reaching the vaccine-hesitant and providing more information and resources about the vaccine, and attracting the attention of those communities with lower vaccination rates. Part of the hesitancy rose out of vaccine misinformation spread on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Vaccine skeptics have their beliefs for several reasons: safety, freedom of choice, religion, and “elite condescension” (Galston, 2021). The

COVID-19 Community Corps, a group of volunteers composed of local organizations, advocacy groups, and corporations, knocked on doors to deliver information about the vaccines.

Sometimes, the grassroots outreach wasn't always feasible, as many still feared contact with others during pandemic surges. Thus, the administration created methods to reach those with low vaccination rates: social media channels.

### ***Digital Outreach***

One key group that lacked vaccination rates was the Generation Z demographic, particularly teenagers. Gen Z is a difficult age group to reach due to the lack of a central platform to message through. The White House sought the help of social media to communicate to teenagers and urge vaccinations.

The Biden Administration contacted Village Marketing, a marketing agency based in New York City, to recruit an army of 50 influencers to promote vaccinations. The goal of picking the influencers was to target Gen Z individuals to receive their shots against COVID-19. This group is challenging to reach due to the decentralization and fragmentation of social media (Lorenz, 2021). These influencers are mainly active on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, with other presences on Twitter and Facebook. Some had further-reaching influence than others, but the essential element was circulating the message on platforms.

The administration brought on influencers including Olivia Rodrigo (@oliviadrodrigo), Christina Najjar (@itsmetinx), Seth Phillips (@dudewithsign), Benito Skinner (@bennydrama7), Ellie Zeiler (@elliezeiler), Manny Guitierrez (@MannyMUA), Brave Wilderness (@bravewilderness), and Jackie Aina (@jackieaina). The group has followings on multiple platforms, usually with more significant followings on one than the other. They each have their interests and personalities that appeal to different sectors of the Gen Z audience: comedy, drama,



makeup, the outdoors, etc. The range of followings on other platforms and the diversification of the audiences allowed the Biden Administration to grasp the attention of Gen Zers.

### **Role of Social Media**

Three groups played an integral role in the vaccination campaign outreach: the federal government, Generation Z, and influencers. Each group utilizes social media platforms with its unique approach.

#### ***Government***

Social media is the new frontier of communication in the public sector, especially in politics and government. The Obama Administration was the first to leverage the power of social media, which has now become paramount to informing the public about policy issues, campaign platforms, and current events. Social media platforms allow leaders to interact with their constituents, foster participation, educate the public, and monitor public opinion on issues (Khan, 2018). During the Trump Administration, social media platforms, such as Twitter, became a primary form of communication from the president to the American people. Many searched social media throughout 2020 and 2021 to seek information about COVID-19, such as government mandates, stay-at-home orders, and vaccine information. The government uses social media for three main reasons: broadcasting press conferences, monitoring public opinion, and combatting misinformation.

The rapid delivery of information, often achieved through press conference clips, was common in the Trump Administration, a presidency that revolutionized how social media acts as a message channel from top leaders down to the individual American citizen. The immediacy is ideal for breaking news and spreading awareness. Yet, the overflow of misinformation mixed

with correct information and the added input from different perspectives frequently make it challenging to get a message across.

Like Trump, Biden's use of social media came with many criticisms. Some argued he used social media as a tool to ensure he "stays on message and avoids gaffes" (Suciu, 2020). His occasional slip-ups on words and phrases made him a target for media scrutiny. The Biden Administration recorded multiple videos of the president delivering cautionary messages to the American people to encourage vaccinations amid skepticism. Several Americans feared his messages on social media were too polished, ingenuine, and tailored for the target audiences. Many condemned the lack of authenticity portrayed by the rehearsed statements. Yet, the Biden Administration uses social media to post press releases, videos, graphics, and urgent messages from the president.

Social media is a platform for monitoring public debate and opinions. It functions as a breeding ground for immense criticism of general issues or other users' views. Individuals created content to express their outlooks on the pandemic, following and interacting with others that express similar sentiments through liking, commenting, reposting, and retweeting messages. On these same platforms, influencers began to share their beliefs and thoughts on the public health crisis. The conversations turned political and polarizing in many cases, often attracting new followers or alienating existing ones.

The Biden Administration was tasked with drowning out COVID vaccine misinformation on social media handed over by the Trump Administration. Biden had goals to end the pandemic and the resulting infodemic that spread as quickly as the virus, if not quicker. Midway through 2021, Biden publicly criticized social media platforms and tech giants, like Facebook, for allowing the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, specifically about vaccinations. The

administration claimed the anti-vaccine messages were “killing people.” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki stated, “our point is that there is information leading people not taking the vaccine, and people are dying as a result” (Kanno-youngs, 2021). The White House tediously balanced the act of drowning out misinformation without distracting from correct information.

A probable solution to tackling this challenge was messaging on social media platforms, as much of the presidential campaign occurred on virtual platforms. In the 2020 presidential election, candidates couldn’t campaign like normal, and social media proved a valuable tool to fill the void left behind by the absence of in-person events. Social media has become an increasingly essential part of peoples’ everyday lives, “meeting people where they are,” even if it is inside their homes (Suciu, 2020). Platforms shepherded people toward information about the virus and the vaccine, regardless of its accuracy.

### ***Generation Z***

Generation Z represents the up-and-coming class of leaders in the digital age. The generation encompasses those born between 1996-2015, who are typically the children of Generation X. This demographic has grown up in the digital era, an era dominated by social media and virtual networks. Navigating social media platforms comes easily to this group, and often these individuals curate the platforms and content themselves. The social network savvy skills were significantly enhanced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding keeping up with current events, Generation Z uses social media in one of three ways: seeking information, communicating with others, and understanding complex issues.

The information-seeking behaviors of Gen Z are intentional and dynamic, often quickly transcending multiple platforms that convey messages in all kinds of media. It is common to “go viral” or achieve nearly overnight fame for a video or image, usually by having millions of

shares, likes, comments, or reposts. Perhaps social media channels' information-seeking makes it harder for communicators to reach the fragmented Gen Z audience. In a study published in the *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Review*, researchers found Gen Z prefers Instagram as the leading social media platform to find information. Given their digital nativeness, Gen Z is more sensitive to detecting misinformation than other generations. These individuals seek a lot of their information from their favorite social media influencers. In a study conducted in Turkey, Gen Z relied heavily on influencers' feelings, thoughts, and experiences about a product or service (Mukh, 2021). This method of researching a decision differs from traditional methods of communication, and the Biden Administration worked to accommodate this method of information seeking in vaccination campaigns.

The immediate and frequent flow of information allows Gen Z to communicate with each other. They are enthusiastic about sending direct messages, reposting, liking, commenting, and sharing content to keep their friends and family updated on events happening. This differs from their Generation X parents, who may prefer a phone call, email, or text message to communicate quickly. Gen Z's enthusiasm for technology and virtual networking makes it easy to use social media as a primary communication channel. Whether posting about themselves, things happening around them, or interacting with brands and companies, Gen Z favors social media communication to adapt to their tech-savvy and on-the-go lifestyles.

Gen Z's hyper-sensitivity to the events around the globe earned them the nickname "citizens of the world." It keeps them connected with the crucial issues, with social media providing a snapshot look into the situation. Yet, it's usually just a snapshot. A potential downside to this immediate retrieval of information is the capacity of young people to deal with complex issues and understand them from multiple angles. The pandemic in and of itself is a

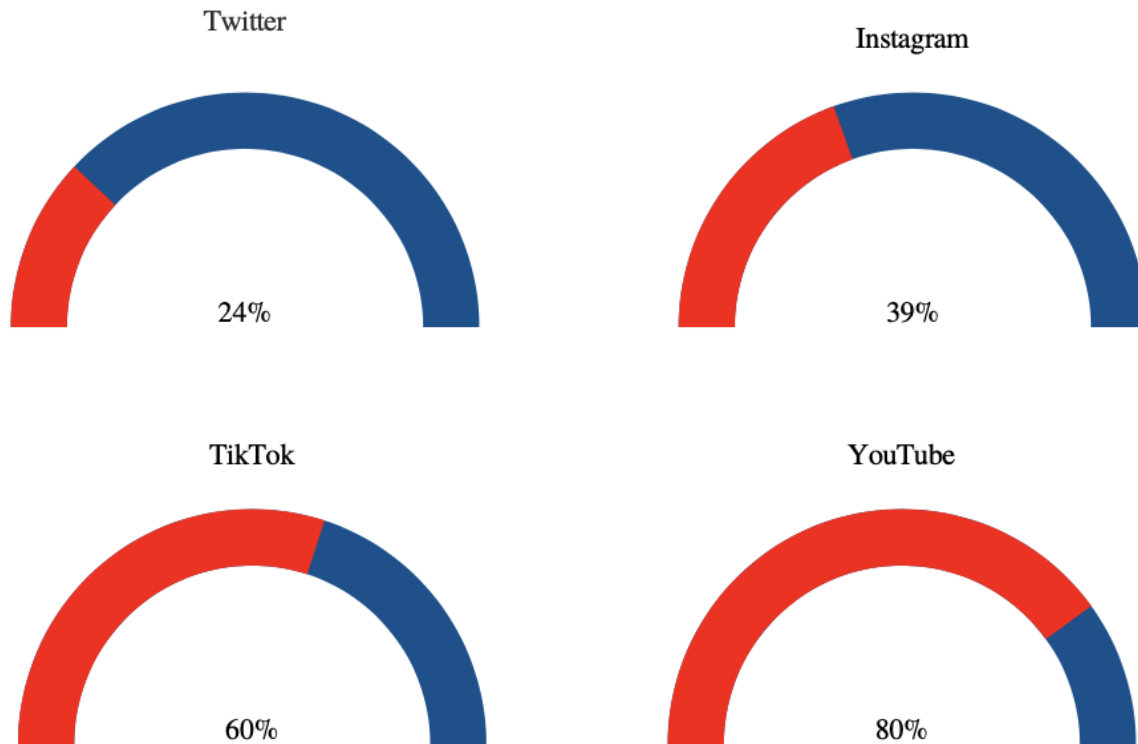
highly complex issue with many different layers and issues at stake. Sometimes, social media cannot capture the overlap of many topics within one more significant problem. Yet, this platform is evolving into a method to simplify complex issues while still providing a more holistic picture.

### *Social Media Influencers*

A social media influencer is a person active on social media platforms with significant followings, usually ranging in the tens of thousands to millions. They play the role of the middleman between regular people and celebrities. The distinction between celebrities and influencers is the reason for fame. Celebrities become famous for their talents, like singing or acting, whereas influencers are famous for their personalities or lifestyles. Influencers usually generate their start on a particular platform, like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. They are referred to by their media, like “Instagrammer,” “YouTuber,” or “TikToker.” There is certainly plenty of overlap between celebrities and influencers. Sometimes, influencers turn into celebrities after time, as they accrue more fame in their career. The abundance of influencers on social media escalated during 2020 and into 2021 as more people spent time on social media. The role of the influencer will be described later in the literature review.

### **Social Media Platforms**

Generation Z makes up the user base of social media platforms everywhere. The biggest Gen Z user bases, from biggest to smallest, are YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. The graphs below depict the percentage of Gen Z users within each platform’s user base (see Charts 2-5).



### ***YouTube***

Started in 2005 and purchased by Google in 2006, YouTube is the American online video sharing platform (“YouTube Founders Now Superstars,” 2006). After Google, YouTube is the second most-visited website and the most popular video-sharing platform available in the United States. YouTube started as a video-sharing site yet has now transformed into a social networking platform. The platform has approximately one billion users each month that watch roughly one billion hours of videos each day (Goodrow, 2017). The organization expanded beyond browsers, now encompassing mobile apps, network television, and links to other platforms. The videos on YouTube include short clips, films, trailers, music videos, live streams, vlogs, and audio recordings and can be recorded for up to 12 hours (Delfino, 2019). Many media corporations expanded their reach to YouTube, including Disney, Paramount Global, and Warner Media.

In the United States alone, 203.8 million users visit YouTube per year. The number of users is expected to grow to 219.3 million by 2025 (Degenhard, 2021). The gender demographic on YouTube is relatively equal, with slightly more men making up the American user base at 54 percent (Ceci, 2022). Roughly 77 percent of Internet users 15 to 25 years old used YouTube in 2020 (Ceci, 2022). It is the ideal platform to post lengthier videos and is a hub for interaction among Gen Zers.

### ***TikTok***

TikTok is a video platform that circulates various short videos ranging from 15 seconds to upwards of three minutes on a continuous loop. This content ranges from pranks, tricks, dance, entertainment, and, more recently, news and information-sharing. It originated in 2016 from the parent company ByteDance in China under the name Douyin (Isaac, 2020). The platform became available internationally after merging with another app, Musical.ly, in August 2018. The uniquely innovative design of TikTok make it the new trendsetter of social media.

During the pandemic, TikTok experienced a significant increase in registered users. Clocking in at 315 million downloads, the Q1 downloads in 2020 set the record for the most downloads of any app in a single quarter (Keselj, 2020). In April 2020 alone, 120 million users downloaded the app. The app became the most downloaded of 2021, with 656 million downloads throughout the year. Instagram fell shortly behind in this category, coming in at 545 million downloads in 2021. TikTok has held the number one spot in this division for three years. The top-grossing app represented \$2.5 billion in consumer spending in 2021 (Cyca, 2022). It is most popular among American Gen Z users, with 37.3 million accounts (see Chart 5). The majority of users are female (57 percent). Yet, the audience of TikTok is increasingly diverse, which makes it an ideal platform for those trying to reach the attention of smaller niche audiences. It is the

most engaging social media app, with a user's average session on the app measured at almost 11 minutes, compared to three minutes for the average Instagram scroll (Cyca, 2022). This increased time spent on the app is attributed to the content and algorithmic nature of the feed.

Users are fed content through a "For You" page (FYP), an explore page that supplies an unlimited range of creators that the user may or may not interact with. Sometimes this content may resemble a user's previously identified interests; sometimes, it exposes users to new perspectives and creators. It promotes all creators, regardless of their followings, through the For You Page function, making it a grassroots platform (Keselj, 2020). The content administered on the For You page is generated by an algorithm that tailors videos' continuous feed to an individual's preferences (Robison, 2020). The algorithm is cultivated by artificial intelligence, which can propagate increased engagement and occasionally lead to echo chambers that foster biases. The influence of algorithms and AI caused controversy among leaders when assessing free speech and the right to privacy. Yet, they are becoming more prevalent on other social media platforms, especially TikTok.

### ***Instagram***

Instagram is a video and photo-sharing app available for iPhone and Android. It allows users to upload photos or videos and share them with followers or a select group of people. Users can view, comment, like, or repost other posts shared by Instagram users. People over 13 can create an account by registering an email address and providing a one-of-a-kind username (Instagram, 2021). Some of the platform's most popular features include stories, which are content posts that only exist for 24 hours, then disappear. Stories can be published and saved on profiles by being placed in a story highlight, which acts as a permanently available folder on a user's profile.



The app launched in October 2010 and rapidly gained recognition in the digital space. As of June 2018, the platform accrued one billion registered users worldwide (Costine, 2018). The app is most popular in the United States and India. The number of registered users in the United States will reach 120 million by 2023. Nearly two-thirds of Instagram users are aged 34 and younger, 31 percent are between the ages of 25 and 34 years, 30 percent are between 18 and 24, and 8.5 percent are between 13 and 17 years (see Chart 2). Nearly 33.3 million Gen Zers make up the Instagram community, making it an attractive marketing channel for brands and companies (Cyca, 2022).

### ***Twitter***

Twitter is a social media platform that connects friends, families, coworkers, and community leaders through quick and frequent messages. The main form of content, Tweets, contains photos, videos, links, and text. These are posted to user profiles and shared on a Timeline, similar to Facebook. Tweets can be seen by followers, promoted by the algorithm, or searched on Twitter search. Tweets can be Retweeted by others, otherwise known as reposting on different social media platforms (Twitter, 2022). The limited 280-character count for Tweets distinguishes the platform from others and makes it an ideal platform for dispersing information in an abbreviated manner.

The app is mainly popular among Millennials, with 38.5 percent of the user base accounting for this generation. The second-largest demographic is 35 to 49-year-olds, representing 20.7 percent of Twitter users. Gen Zers account for 23.7 percent of the Twitter community (Statista, 2022).

The platform's design is ideal for breaking news or updates on current events. Twitter became a central communication channel for Trump during his time as president, delivering

many comments on policies and other political issues. It is a platform used by many organizations to keep the public up to date on events and share news with the world.

### **Social Media Influencers**

A social media influencer is an individual with a significant following on social media platforms. Since the pandemic, they often have partnered with brands and companies to advocate for various products. During the pandemic, many influencers attracted social media users by sharing intimate details of their lives and becoming more transparent with their followers. This includes sharing their day-to-day experiences, like a “day in my life.” Sharing their thoughts and feelings, coping mechanisms for anxiety brought about by the pandemic, and personal anecdotes made influencers more sincere and candid with their followers who experienced the same situations and emotions. The breakdown of the fourth wall and a raw look into the daily activities emphasized camaraderie between influencers and their followings (Kanno-youngs, 2021).

This new degree of honesty enriched the trustworthiness of influencers more than celebrities or national leaders. Influencers often sway the decisions and considerations made by their followers, especially when it seems central leadership lacks an understanding of the circumstances at the micro-level. Particularly with the isolation brought on by the pandemic, government officials can often seem out of touch with reality, disconnected from what is happening in the communities across the nation. Their messages occasionally come off as unrelatable, vague, and perhaps, questionable. Sometimes, these messages make them seem untouchable, so influencers possess a unique capability to humanize critical messages.

The stars on TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, with followings of upwards of millions, have considerable influence on the actions and behaviors of younger individuals. Yet more powerful are those with lesser followings, as little as 10,000, otherwise known as “micro-

influencers” (Kanno-youngs, 2021). These individuals with smaller followings exude a sizable influence on young social media users. Their relatability or down-to-earth nature makes them seem in tune with the events of reality and the contexts situations occur. Typically, micro-influencers accrue followings by engaging individuals with similar interests, beliefs, and lifestyles, often leading the influencer and the follower to make the same decisions.

The realm of social media influencing provides new social environments – fan bases, virtual groups, Q&A sessions – allowing fans to connect and bond over related interests. One of the essential needs influencing provides to followers is a break from the stressors of social life. The infinite nature of the social media universe allows for a temporary escape from reality and a connection to the real world. Ironically, sometimes the boundlessness of social media becomes overwhelming, yet influencing creates a hub of safe spaces. The Biden Administration infiltrated these spaces with information about the vaccine in their push to reach Generation Z.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What was the overall social media communication strategy for the White House’s vaccine campaign?

RQ2: Why were specific influencers chosen to promote vaccinations?

RQ3: How do people communicate on social media in a post-pandemic setting?

RQ4: What are the best practices for social media influencer partnerships and communicating to younger audiences?

RQ5: What can future strategic communicators take away from the collaboration between influencers and leaders in the public sector?

## Method

This project began with research into influencer communication that started at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 and into the vaccine rollouts of 2021. I then narrowed it down to researching influencer communication involving government and healthcare organizations, ultimately deciding on communication from the Biden Administration, which includes Biden and Fauci, during the 2021 vaccine campaigns.

I familiarized myself with the social media consumption behaviors of Generation Z. I mainly looked at a study from the Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Review that observed the persuasion of social media influencers on Gen Z teenagers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I identified these behavior patterns to understand why and how teenagers generally use social media, especially during and after a pandemic.

I researched social media platforms and acquainted myself with how the platforms functioned, what kind of content was produced, and the overall impression of each. I closely followed popular influencers on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to better understand their brand identities, leadership styles, and the types of messages they conveyed to their followers.

Similarly, I closely followed the social media platforms of Biden and Fauci during 2021 to follow the messaging and public response on social media. I supplemented this research by viewing the comments, likes, and views for posts involving influencers teaming up with Fauci or Biden.

I followed government social media accounts on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube. I specifically looked at the content produced by these entities in partnership with

social media influencers. I observed how they communicated, what channels they used, and the style of wording communicated.

I used this information to form insights and opinions about the best practices in influencer communication when promoting health messages on social media platforms, which resulted in the acronym PIVOT. I grouped my findings into five categories: partnerships, integration, visualization, organic conversation, and targeting.

## **Results**

In order to answer the research questions posed for this project, two leaders were examined, Biden and Fauci. After observing the actions taken by the Biden Administration in vaccine campaigns to get the attention of Gen Zers, I developed five key takeaways expressed in the acronym PIVOT: partnerships, integration, visuals, organic conversation, and targeting.

### **Partnerships**

As earlier addressed, people need to have leaders they trust and connect with. It is easier to instill that confidence in an opinion leader if they have similar interests and needs as their audience, which is why micro-influencing has become so successful in marketing to niche groups. The sense of relatability makes it easier for individuals to connect with an influencer — someone who gets it. People seek information from those they trust, which is why Biden sought many influencers to preach his message of vaccinations.

Like Biden, Fauci teamed up with celebrities and influencers to talk about the virus (Folkenflik, 2021). For example, He paired with Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, Stephen Curry, NBA player, Dan Katz, Barstool Sports employee, and Fox News to answer questions and share his knowledge. His interviews continually aimed to offer hope, even during the darkest

times of COVID. Although it seemed as if information about the virus constantly changed, Fauci offered his answers and best guesses, all with an undertone of encouragement.

### ***Olivia Rodrigo***

Olivia Rodrigo's fame and noncontroversial reputation made her the perfect representative to promote the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns and reach Biden's 70 percent goal. A super pop star with a teen-friendly aesthetic and catchy rhythms decorated with witty, relatable contexts made her an icon of the generation. She never pushed the boundaries too far in her career, equipping her for the job to spread vaccine encouragement.

### ***Other Influencers***

Rodrigo was the highest-profile influencer to sign onto the vaccination campaign. In addition, the Biden Administration reached out to other influencers that had vastly different followings. They partnered with makeup artists, YouTubers, comedians, and entertainers to carry out the campaign.

Ellie Zeiler, an 18-year-old TikToker from California, was approached by the White House to vouch for vaccinations. She is famous for her lifestyle and dancing videos on TikTok, attracting a massive following of Gen Z females. She is a trendsetter on the TikTok platform, crafting different dances and exploring the latest fashion trends for her users to follow. She often posts vlogs demonstrating her day-to-day activities and a closer look into her personal life.

Christina Najjar, commonly known by her name "Tinx" on TikTok, is a 31-year-old comedic content creator that became famous during the pandemic. She is revered as the "big sister of TikTok," offering her recommendations, pop-culture commentary, daily vlogs, dating advice, and relatability on various subjects. Her satirical attitude and down-to-earth nature rocketed her fame as a social media influencer, mainly popular among older Gen Zers on TikTok.

and Instagram. She's known for being transparent, hosting her "Ask Me Anything" question and answer videos on Instagram every Monday and Thursday of the week. She lets her followers message their questions, to which she responds openly and honestly. Some of the questions are general, some more personal and private, and some silly. She can be humorous and crack jokes about herself or serious and mature by offering her advice. Given her balanced demeanor, she became the perfect influencer for Fauci to host an Instagram Q&A session with.

Similarly, Fauci partnered with the Try Guys on YouTube, a group of four millennial men running a YouTube channel and creating videos of them getting out of their comfort zones and trying new things. Their casual and playful videos make them entertaining for younger audiences. The group occasionally decorates the channel with more serious matters, like sharing personal anecdotes about harrowing experiences and other struggles. The mix of silly with serious allows them to draw attention to a situation without taking away its importance.

Benito Skinner, known as "BennyDrama7," is a comedian and actor on social media. He is a member of the LGTBQ community and is famous for his impersonations of celebrities and fictional characters, such as Kooper the Intern (see Figure 10). He amuses his Generation Z audience with his acting capabilities, which has earned him a spot on the list of influencers for the campaign. Similarly, Biden posed for a picture with Seth Phillips, otherwise known as "Dude with Sign" (see Figure 8). Phillips became famous for his meme-like posts, posting content of him holding up a cardboard sign with a statement. Most of his content is lighthearted and funny, typically enjoyed by older Generation Z audiences.

The Administration partnered with beauty and lifestyle influencers to promote the vaccinations during a YouTube Town Hall meeting. Manny Gutierrez, also known as Manny MUA, is a makeup artist famous on YouTube who identifies as a member of the LGTBQ

community. He has a large following of Gen Zers and regularly posts on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The White House also partnered with Jackie Aina, a Nigerian-American beauty YouTuber. She is widely known for her advocacy for the visibility of people of color in the beauty industry. The third attendee at the town hall, Brave Wilderness, is a group of men that host a YouTube channel depicting them interacting with animals in their wild adventures. They appeal to a completely different audience than Gutierrez and Aina, representing a demographic that loves the outdoors and wildlife.

Each influencer in the White House campaign has one thing in common: they all have positive reputations. Although they differ vastly in the types of content they post and the segments of the Gen Z audience they appeal to, they are viewed as positive influences without the shadow of a scandal looming over their notoriety. None have actions posted on social media that are public and permanent, negatively impacting their reputation. When teaming up with influencers, strategic communicators must calculate all the factors, like reputation, personalities, and identities, into how the Generation Z audience might interpret a message.

### *Apps*

While vaccination rates fell behind the president's goals, the Biden Administration faced the task of innovating an approach to stopping the spread of misinformation and slowing the transmission of the virus. The critical solution is promoting vaccinations on platforms that weren't solely used for social media networking. In other words, they were hitting the pressure points of Gen Z and meeting people where they were.

The president supported rideshare apps, like Uber and Lyft, by providing free rides for people traveling to get vaccinated from May to July 4 (Pettypiece, 2021). Rideshare apps allow people to match nearby drivers to get them from one place to another. Leading up to the



pandemic, rideshare apps were popular among younger crowds. Another platform the Administration targeted: dating apps like Hinge, OkCupid, and Tinder. Online dating apps are services that match individuals together based on their preferences and interests. In the post-pandemic environment, dating apps are crucial for meeting like-minded people without venturing out. These apps feature badges to display vaccination status and access to premium content for those vaccinated (see Figure 11). Particularly with the pandemic, it is harder for people to congregate and meet each other in person, and the vaccination statuses ease the uneasiness of meeting a stranger in person.

The partnerships with apps and other mobile services allowed the Administration to contact individuals outside of press conferences and public relations efforts on the biggest social media platforms, like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. It became a constant reminder for people to get vaccinated and enjoy premium benefits so that life could get back to normal.

## **Integration**

### ***Reposting***

A popular tactic of integrated marketing campaigns is producing the same message through multiple channels. The same goal can be achieved on social media by adjusting the content format to fit the specific platform. Many social media influencers do this by recording videos or taking photos and reformatting them to whichever platform they wish.

Najjar accomplished this during her conversation with Fauci about vaccinations by first posting the video to TikTok, then to her Instagram. Although her larger following is on TikTok, she still added it to her Instagram feed so her followers there could see it too (see Figure 2). The same strategy was used in the video of Fauci and Rodrigo scrolling through tweets together. The

full video was posted to the POTUS Instagram page and the YouTube page. Both social media platforms have a large Gen Z following (see Figure 3).

Reposting is a simple and easy technique used to garner the most attention on social media platforms. Social media is inundated with massive amounts of content, and the easiest way to break through the clutter is to repeat. Repetition increases the likelihood that a social media user will see the content, interact with it, and take action. As noted in the social media user statistics earlier, not every demographic uses social media platforms in the same manner at the same rate. Thus, strategic communicators must adapt the same social media images, content, and messages to fit different platforms to reach the most significant number of people.

### *Links*

In order to spread the correct information to drown out misinformation, the Biden Administration and CDC integrated links to the vaccine information everywhere. They connected social media users to additional information about vaccinations by including the link to an information center. It appeared in a white banner with an arrow, usually at the bottom of the post (see Figure 4). These links read “Visit the COVID-19 Vaccination Center for vaccine resources” and redirected the user to a new page containing massive amounts of verified information about the vaccine itself and where to retrieve the vaccine relative to the user’s geographic location (see Figure 5). This link was embedded on the dating apps, linked on TikToks and Instagram posts, and spread about by influencers on various platforms. The signature look of the link made it immediately recognizable to users, and they didn’t need to be skeptical of its origin or purpose.

In addition to embedding the links on social media platforms, influencers and leaders urged their followers to visit [vaccine.gov](https://www.vaccine.gov) for more information. During her visit to the White

House, Rodrigo spoke in the press briefing room and encouraged listeners to visit [vaccine.gov](https://www.vaccine.gov) for more details. Similarly, Fauci always urged listeners to look for more information about the vaccine at [vaccine.gov](https://www.vaccine.gov) or the CDC. Sometimes, memes about Fauci circulated on social media platforms featuring a link to vaccine information websites. In his interviews on television or with influencers on social media platforms, his message remained consistent: get vaccinated. No matter the medium, he stayed central to that message and urged the public to seek out more information on the vaccine through [vaccine.gov](https://www.vaccine.gov).

It is essential to provide a consistent message and a central hub of information for people to reference when integrating social media content. Social media is too vast and over-saturated with information. It is challenging to depend on one social media post to reach the maximum number of people. Strategic communicators need to implement plans to craft content to be reposted on different platforms and provide a central hub for accurate and verified information available in an embedded link.

## **Visuals**

Given that social media is a visual platform, strategic communicators need to use images and videos to communicate with the Generation Z audience. It is difficult to capture the attention of Gen Zers without the use of a visual aid because social media is so inundated with information. Visuals break through the clutter and generate buzz around an event or an issue. The campaign used two types of visuals to message about vaccinations: symbols and faces.

### ***Symbols***

The appearance of Rodrigo during her visit went viral on platforms everywhere. The pop star showed off a vintage Chanel power suit in pink (see Figure 6). Her outfit blended the nostalgic styles of fictional characters Elle Woods and Cher Horowitz in the classic millennial

and Gen Z films *Legally Blonde* and *Clueless*. The color wasn't red or blue, as Rodrigo didn't want to polarize the audiences or endorse one party over another (Testa, 2021). Her color choice is reflective of her nonpolarizing personality. It is common for Rodrigo to wear the polished form-fitting fashion of the 1990s and early 2000s. Her outfit resembled the same fashion sense as Jackie Kennedy, who was vastly known as a fashionable First Lady. Rodrigo's style has influenced much of the shopping habits of Gen Z females, a group that enjoys thrift shopping, or "thrifting," demonstrating their appreciation of vintage and secondhand items (Testa, 2021). The positive reaction of media outlets about her style got millions talking on social media.

While posing for photos around the White House, Rodrigo stopped to snap a few selfies outside with Biden (see Figure 7). They posed in pairs of aviator sunglasses in the Oval Office, a trademark of Biden's cool and hip image. They held two thumbs up while filming a video and taking a picture while Rodrigo's hit song "good 4 u" played in the background (see Figure 9). The moment was used to signify that vaccinations are good for people because they will get life back to normal. The same song began trending on TikTok after posting the videos to social media.

Biden posed alongside Seth Phillips (@dudewithsign) to hold up cardboard signs outside of the White House. Phillips posed with a sign that read "Let's Look Out For Each Other and Get Vaccinated," while Biden stood alongside with a sign that read "This Dude Gets It, Folks" (see Figure 8). Biden grinned in the image, whereas Phillips stood more serious. The image represents a moment of making the vaccination campaign funny and genuine.

Symbols resonate more deeply with people because they are memorable and stand out. Rodrigo's pink power suit caught the attention of millions of people and had social media buzzing. Many emulate her style and are curious about her fashion. Biden's signature sunglasses

also represent an element of humor and tradition. Phillips is a meme that has attracted millions of followers. He gets people's attention and makes them laugh and partnering with Biden unleashed the president's playful side while also delivering the vaccine messages through comical channels.

### *Faces*

With a pandemic that required mask mandates and restricted people from mingling throughout the country, seeing faces on social media is crucial when fostering human connection. Rodrigo's visit capitalized on this idea. Her day was complete with a photo op, which included plenty of selfies with the president. These selfies were posted on her social media accounts and the president's accounts. While posing for a picture in the aviator sunglasses, Rodrigo recorded short videos with Biden, giving the camera a thumbs up with the chorus of Rodrigo's song "good 4 u" playing in the background. Additionally, two didn't wear masks for almost all of the visit, which was unusual given the COVID-19 surge that occurred at the time. The public got to see their full faces smiling and laughing: something that didn't often happen amid the pandemic.

Fauci often showed his face during his interviews with influencers. He frequently met with interviewers using the Zoom interface. While meeting with Najjar, Fauci appeared in front of an NIH background, cracking jokes, smiling, and laughing during the conversation (see Figure 1). His image became recognizable to younger generations that weren't familiar with him. He was the face of the battle against COVID-19 and the representative of the push for COVID-19 vaccinations.

He also sat down with Rodrigo to read through tweets about the vaccine. They sat less than six feet apart in the video while they made jokes and explained the vaccine and the reasons for getting it. During the YouTube town hall, each influencer had their own time to ask questions

on the Zoom interface. Biden and Fauci were behind podiums in the same room, but the influencers remained on the Zoom and asked questions. Picturing influencers side by side with Biden and Fauci helps to humanize public leaders and make them seem less intimidating, making the conversation more memorable.

With social media being a highly visual platform, it is necessary for strategic communicators to leverage the ability to share faces. Putting a face with a message or call to action establishes a brand image and sticks better within viewers' minds. Generation Z doesn't necessarily want to see Fauci or Biden on their social media pages; instead, they want to see their favorite influencers talk about the vaccine alongside Fauci and Biden. If they see social media influencers on Instagram, they are more likely to stop and interact with the content. They are less likely to do so when they see COVID-19 vaccination propaganda, which can deter or bore them. Featuring faces and symbols, like a selfie, a pink power suit, a signature pair of sunglasses, or a cardboard sign, can significantly impact the reach and resonance with an audience, particularly on a visual social media platform.

### **Organic Conversation**

Generation Z dislikes formal conversation, preferring shorter and more casual interactions. Social media platforms have enhanced this preference, whether it is through shorter character limits, abbreviated video clips, or snapshots. The more informal the conversation, the better it is to get a message across to young audiences. However, it can be tricky as the discussion must be nonchalant and relaxed instead of forced.

### ***Humor***

Even as vice president in the Obama Administration, Biden made personal connections to those around him through casual conversation and activities. He filmed several entertaining and

humorous videos with Obama, creating a “bromance” between the two that warmed the hearts of Americans. Biden carried this same casualness into his presidency, as he kept up with his social media outreach and informal tactics. He is known for his look with aviator sunglasses and love of ice cream, and while visiting with Rodrigo, he gifted her an ice cream scoop and a pair of sunglasses just like his. He holds up his reputation and identity by using less-than-formal techniques for communicating with the public. It softens his image as a powerful public official without detracting from his stature and level of respect. It is becoming more common for leaders to act easygoing and playful as it reaches younger audiences.

Fauci cracks jokes and delivers information informally during his visits with influencers, which humanizes him like Biden. The back-and-forth light discussion between Fauci and influencers like Najjar, Rodrigo, and the Try Guys illustrates Fauci as just an average guy with a significant job. This dynamic makes him seem less authoritative and more relatable, energetic, and lively. He embraces Gen Z lingo, answers the questions, no matter how silly, and puts himself in the shoes of younger individuals to get them vaccinated. Although Fauci has an extensive resume of working for presidents for several decades, he can still reach even the youngest Americans by understanding their situation and relevant concerns.

During her visit to the White House, Rodrigo sat down with Fauci to read some tweets about the vaccine (see Figure 3). She began the conversation by stating, “the sooner we get vaccines, the sooner we can hang out with our friends and sing songs and all of the fun things” (Avila, 2021). Another tweet read, “Did anyone else spend their Friday afternoon driving to their second vaccine appointment and crying to Olivia Rodrigo, or was that just me.” While reading these tweets aloud, Rodrigo noted her excitement of getting to go on tour, thanks to more people receiving their shots. Fauci chimed in to share his concert experience, which dates back to the

1950s with the Temptations, stating, “I’m sorry. I’m a really old guy.” This interaction reminds viewers that Fauci is still an ordinary individual like everyone else – it humanizes him.

While reading tweets and discussing music, Rodrigo explained common Gen Z lingo to Fauci as they scrolled, such as “Man Crush Monday,” a phrase used to describe the social media trend of expressing admiration for men on Mondays. She explained a Twitter user called Fauci their “man crush.” Some tweets were more educational than others. One read, “Are these chills from my second dose of the vaccine from listening to ‘deja vu’ by olivia rodrigo for the 174759385826th time today,” to which Fauci used as an educational opportunity, noting the immune system is responding well to the virus. The conversation wove important facts with light banter to capture viewers’ attention, especially on a subject that has fatigued throughout the pandemic.

During his conversation with Najjar, Fauci kept the banter light. Like Rodrigo, Najjar referenced famous Gen Z vocabulary, calling the summer of 2021 “happy vax girl summer,” a phrase alluding to a hip hop song popular among Gen Z. She sprinkled humorous bits into the discussion without distracting from the larger message, which was to get people vaccinated. She inquires about the concerns on everyone’s minds and gets the answers, lightening the interview with comedy throughout. Biden’s visit with Seth Phillips also includes that element of humor. The public didn’t necessarily expect a partnership between the two but was delighted to see an alliance forged.

Benito Skinner (@bennydrama7) uses his acting skills to film content impersonating various characters. Like Rodrigo and Phillips, he was invited to the White House to film alongside Jen Psaki. He played the role of Kooper the Intern, following Psaki around the White House and asking questions about the vaccine. He funnily portrayed his character while he



interacted with Psaki. His depiction of Kooper lightened the topic of vaccinations and represented Psaki in a less formal setting than usual (see Figure 10).

The video titled “Try Guys Debunk COVID Vaccine Conspiracies with Fauci” is a Q&A with Fauci, or as the Try Guys jokingly call him, “the Beyonce of Medicine.” This nickname references pop culture and immediately lightens the conversation. The Try Guys cracked jokes and enjoyed laughs with Fauci, brightening the dialogue among them all.

In a society shaped by trends and pop culture jargon, leaders need to be comfortable with using humor to communicate effectively. A comedic reference to a specific song or situation quickly attracts the attention of an audience, especially a Generation Z one. However, humor needs to be used carefully and strategically. Communicators shouldn’t overdo it with the humor or make it come off as ingenuine or fake. It’s more effective to use social media influencers that use humor as a part of their platform when trying to amuse an audience. It also needs to be interlaced with the crucial information, leading to interweaving the silly with the serious.

### *Weaving*

A serious matter like a COVID-19 vaccination campaign cannot be over-saturated with humor. The inclusion of humor is more effective if it is woven in with the facts and essential information. Biden and Fauci achieved this in their visits with influencers as they continued the push to get Generation Z vaccinated. This concept of balance brings the facts to center stage in a lighthearted and relaxed manner.

Fauci and Rodrigo did this while reading through tweets. Although the tweets were funny, Fauci used the opportunity for education about the vaccine. He simply interjected with the vaccine’s ingredients, possible symptoms of vaccination, and the reason for people to get vaccinated. The two also paused a few times to discuss Gen Z topics and terminology. The

woven aspect of the conversation made the subject matter lighter as opposed to stringent and serious.

Phillips' and Biden's signs implemented this same notion. Although the cardboard signs are usually funny, the two took the opportunity to encourage vaccinations in their message. It was the ideal blend of silly and serious while still delivering an important message to a niche audience. It was done in a manner that came off as relaxed instead of forced. During Fauci's interview with Najjar, the influencer added questions related and unrelated to the vaccine. She asked if it was safe to go out for a drink and asked if she looked 26. It provided a moment for the duo to laugh and be informative in their answers.

In the Try Guys video, the YouTubers and Fauci kick off the interview by explaining how technological advancements in recent years allowed for speedy vaccine productions and trials. They deconstruct conspiracy theories, often jokingly, but highlight the interference of conspiracy theories in the push to vaccinate Americans. The video marks an example of camouflaging a critical issue with a series of funny moments without undermining the gravity of the situation.

Strategic communicators need to balance humor and honesty when discussing significant matters articulately. The partnerships of Biden and Fauci with social media influencers highlight this balance and its effectiveness when reaching a Generation Z audience attracted to the use of humor and slang. It is challenging to reach younger audiences on social media if the information is dry and uninteresting. Strategically spicing up the topic of conversations intrigues people more without sacrificing the core message. Communicators and leaders must calculate when it is appropriate to introduce humor into a message and when it will be most effective. The most

successful executions of these humor and weaving strategies result in humanizing a leader and delivering a message to the intended audience.

### **Targeting**

Perhaps the most critical way to reach younger people is specifically targeting their favorite influencers and generational leaders. Gen Zers want to see an adequate representation of social media influencers like themselves. When Village Marketing Agency reached out to influencers on behalf of the Biden Administration, they targeted 50 young, energetic individuals, mostly under 30 years old, with followings in the thousands and millions. The influencers have followings on TikTok and YouTube, connecting with young social media users everywhere in the U.S. The group represents an array of diverse backgrounds and experiences, making it perfect for the microtargeting technique to reach teenagers to get vaccinated. With the advent of social media messaging, two components are vital in reaching the target demographic: variety and specificity.

#### ***Variety***

The White House specifically hired influencers that catered to the Generation Z demographic. These included TikTokers, YouTubers, and others known for a multitude of different personalities and interests. No influencer was the same in their followings. They each were active on other platforms at different rates. They had followings ranging from tens of thousands to tens of millions (see Chart 6). Given the vastness of social media influencing, bringing on influencers of different genders, ethnicities, and industries was key to encompassing all corners of Gen Z. This generation cares primarily about diversity and inclusivity, so making sure to add variety to the influencer mix is key to engaging niche groups of social media users.

Rodrigo represented a large swath of the Generation Z female demographic, as her music, style, and persona resonated heavily with that particular audience. The White House also brought on Ellie Zeiler, another Gen Z female, to help reach teenage girls. Both Rodrigo and Zeiler are acclaimed for their trendsetting in fashion, especially among Gen Z. They used their fame to draw attention to their conversations about the vaccine and the importance of doing so.

Najjar and Phillips represent the older Generation Z demographic. They are both known for their comedic personalities and humorous content. Phillips represents a more extensive group because his content is less specific and general. Najjar appeals to older Gen Z women because her content and persona center on her experiences as a woman in her early thirties. Benito Skinner (@bennydrama7) identifies as part of the LGTBQ community and uses his platform to spread awareness for related causes. He also labels himself as a comedian through his acting and impersonations, again appealing to a broader audience.

Manny Gutierrez (Manny MUA) and Jackie Aina are beauty gurus with large followings on YouTube. Gutierrez identifies as Mexican-American and is also part of the LGTBQ community, and uses his platform to represent and advocate for other members of these groups. Jackie Aina is a Nigerian-American female known for contributing to the online cosmetic community and supporting people of color in the beauty industry. Both Gutierrez and Aina have represented marginalized groups throughout their careers and used their platforms for causes beyond beauty.

Hiring individuals that represent a large demographic and serve as role models to many is key to capturing the attention of specific audiences, especially younger ones. Individuals want to see their role models speaking out about important issues, so crafting a team composed of

various backgrounds, interests, and voices is paramount to expressing a message to specific targets.

### *Specificity*

When building a multi-faceted team, strategic communicators must be specific about who they trust to be vehicles of message distribution. The specificity relates heavily back to partnerships: who is a good fit for the job? By crafting a club of influencers with distinct backgrounds, the Biden Administration could pinpoint all kinds of Gen Zers with diverse backgrounds and interests. The team included influences in the industries of beauty, fashion, music, comedy, drama, and the outdoors. The list was endless and comprehensive of a diversified generation that cares much about uniqueness and individuality.

The Biden Administration brought on older influencers, like Najjar and Phillips, and made sure to appeal to the youngest Gen Zers by hiring Rodrigo and Zeiler. They targeted the LGBTQ community by bringing Gutierrez and Skinner to the team. Each individual represents a unique mix of personalities, backgrounds, and skills, encouraging and influencing different audiences, age groups, genders, and interests. They each serve as role models in their respective ways. This uniqueness and individuality are at the cornerstone of Generation Z: they value what makes them different from one another and express that on social media. The more specific the influencer, the better. By building a team of all kinds of interests, the Biden Administration adequately micro-targeted the most specific Gen Z audiences without isolating others.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This research led to the five strategies organizations can implement when campaigning through social media influencers. In partnerships, organizations and leaders should team up with social media influencers that are noncontroversial, optimistic, and able to capture the attention of the end target audience. They can be role models or opinion leaders for a specific demographic. When conducting a campaign, organizations must integrate their message on all platforms to maximize the amount of reach it has to the target audience. The message should always stay clear and consistent, with links to a central website that provide more information. Organizations must use visuals to promote campaigns. The visuals need to stand out and resonate with the target audience. The visual aspect is paramount to communicating a message, whether an image or video. In essence, a picture is worth a thousand words. The organic conversation aspect refers to the desire of younger individuals to communicate informally with one another. Younger individuals prefer shorter, casual conversations. It is easier to communicate when the setting is nonchalant and not as intimidatingly formal. Lastly, targeting people through the right micro-influencers is key to getting audience members to take action. This is primarily accomplished through partnerships and choosing the proper channels or social media platforms to communicate through.

The project led to five answers to the five research questions proposed at the beginning of the paper. In response to the first question, the White House's social media communication strategy focused on a grassroots effort that emphasized a bottom-up outreach. This was accomplished mainly through partnerships, integration, and targeting. Biden and Fauci partnered with all types of influencers to deliver the message to Americans about vaccinations. They used integrated marketing to provide a central hub of vaccine information on social media platforms

through the banner and reposted content on all social media. They specifically targeted communities with low vaccination rates through their local influencers.

The answer to the second research question is that influencers were chosen to promote vaccinations based on their diverse qualities, skills, and abilities. Each influencer had a specific audience they appealed to, and sometimes this audience was only present on particular platforms. The Biden Administration carried out this plan by cultivating partnerships with these influencers and targeting their needs and interests. Each influencer asked specific questions relative to the needs and concerns of their followings, which aided Biden and Fauci in further promoting the vaccine.

The third research question regards how people communicate on social media platforms in a post-pandemic setting. The answer varies depending on the forum. Instagram is primarily used to communicate with mass audiences and features the broadest range of capabilities. It is used to share photos, videos, and reels and has unique functions to send direct messages to one another. TikTok is a newer platform that widely appeals to the Gen Z population. It is a platform that sparks many of the social trends enjoyed by Gen Zers and is an algorithmic grassroots platform that allows people to become almost instant superstars. YouTube is an excellent platform for going more into depth on specific topics, yet it isn't necessarily used for personal communication. It is ideal for mass communication and education on issues. This answer is essentially due to the integration, visual, and targeting components of PIVOT.

The answer to the fourth research question reveals that symbols, humor, and casual conversation are indispensable when aiming to succeed in communication with younger audiences. In a generation that thrives on interconnectivity and overloads of information, using comedy and pop culture references grasps the attention of the audience the best. It generates buzz

on social media, and the message better resonates with the audience. The use of slang and humor helps to humanize public leaders, usually shown in a formal setting. It brings them down to the level of the audience they are trying to talk to. Visuals, like faces and symbols, and organic conversation, foster these discussions and make them worthwhile.

The answer to the final question is all five components: partnerships, integration, visuals, organic conversation, and targeting. These five core principles are essential to the success of a campaign urging the Gen Z audience to take some course of meaningful action. The action doesn't need to relate to health. This can apply to social justice issues, philanthropic efforts, raising awareness – the list goes on.

Although this paper discusses five critical strategies for reaching younger demographics for strategic communication efforts, it doesn't address all possible methods. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a lot of challenges in a small amount of time. There hasn't been an overwhelming amount of studies conducted to understand how the pandemic changed individuals' social media consumption behaviors, especially Gen Z. Had there been more time available to work on a preliminary research study and survey individuals about their social media usage regarding seeking information about vaccinations from their favorite influencers, the results may have been different. There is a prime opportunity for excellent research on influencer communication, particularly in times of crisis. Given the vastness of COVID, this paper doesn't consider the influencer communication happening outside the scope of the presidential administration. This paper could use the Uses and Gratifications Theory to understand better how Gen Z individuals consume social media.

The frontier of influencer communication is on the rise, and strategic communicators must act quickly to capitalize on these opportunities. Influencer partnerships with organizations



and public officials are becoming more popular as the world moves on from the pandemic. Since the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, the White House has already begun another influencer campaign to voice support for the war in Ukraine, again utilizing TikTok and Instagram as tools to message young Americans. Looking back on the past two years, leaders in the public sector and strategic communicators have faced enormous communication obstacles. Moving forward, they must continue to pivot and adapt their strategies to suit the ever-changing world of communication.

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## Appendix

### Timeline 1. Vaccination Objectives.

- May 4, 2021:
  - Press release from White House reports Biden's goal to have 70 percent of all eligible adults vaccinated by July 4
- July 4, 2021:
  - Deadline to have 70 percent of all eligible adults vaccinated in U.S. (at least one shot)
- August 4, 2021:
  - 70 percent of all adults received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccination
- August 13, 2021:
  - 50% of Americans 12-18 fully vaccinated
- August 23, 2021:
  - Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine approved by Food and Drug Administration

### Timeline 2. Social Media Influencer Engagements.

- May 24, 2021:
  - "President Biden's YouTube Town Hall on COVID-19 Vaccination" posted to The White House YouTube channel
- June 29, 2021:
  - Ellie Zeiler posts conversation with Dr. Fauci on TikTok
- June 30, 2021:
  - Tinx posts conversation with Dr. Fauci on Instagram and TikTok
- July 14, 2021:
  - Rodrigo visits White House.
- August 13, 2021:
  - Biden poses with Seth Philips (@dudewithsign)



Chart 1. 2021 Vaccination Rates in the U.S. (CDC)

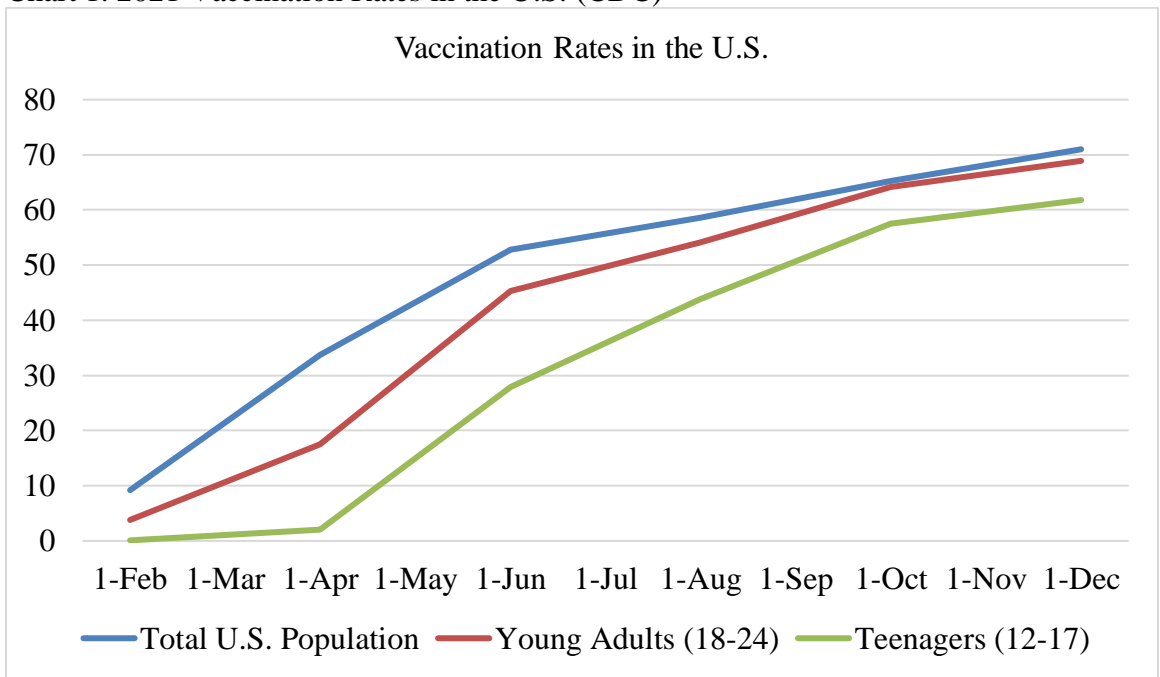


Chart 2. Distribution of Instagram Users by Age. (Statista)

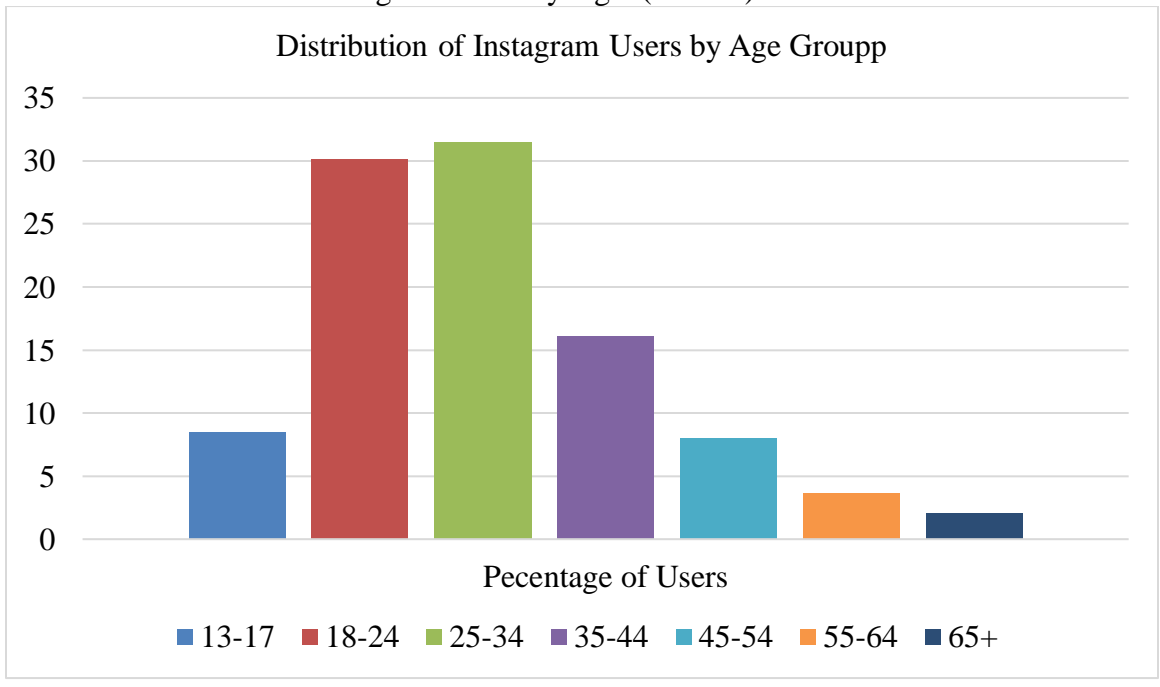


Chart 3. U.S. YouTube Reach by Age Group (Statista)

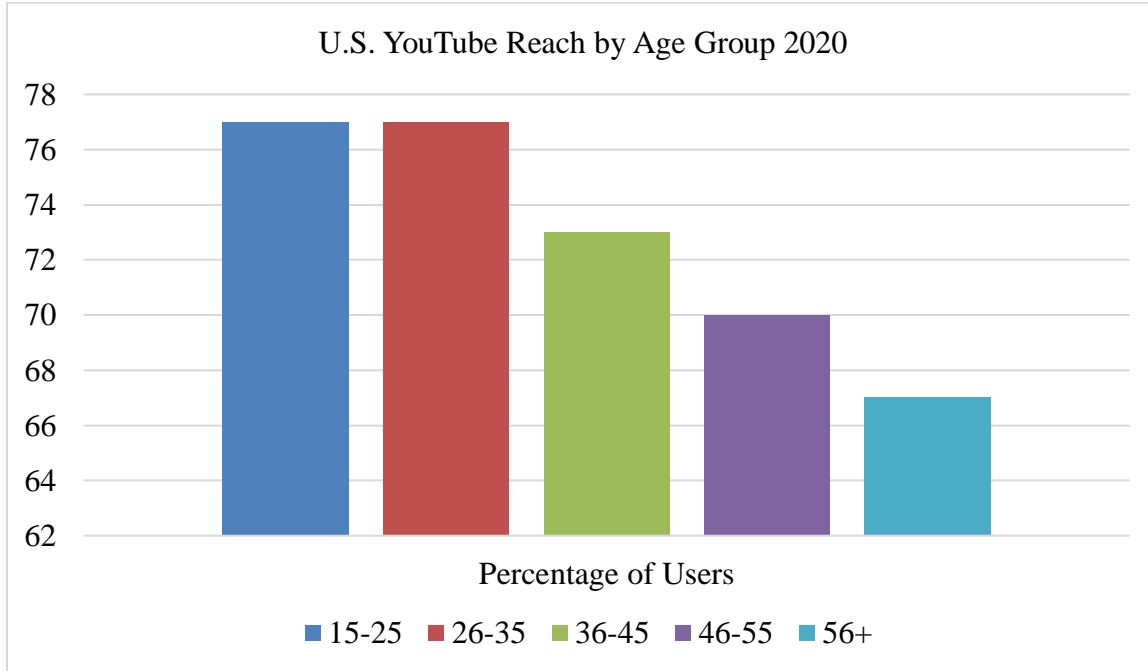


Chart 4. Distribution of YouTube users in the United States as of February 2022, by Gender (Statista)

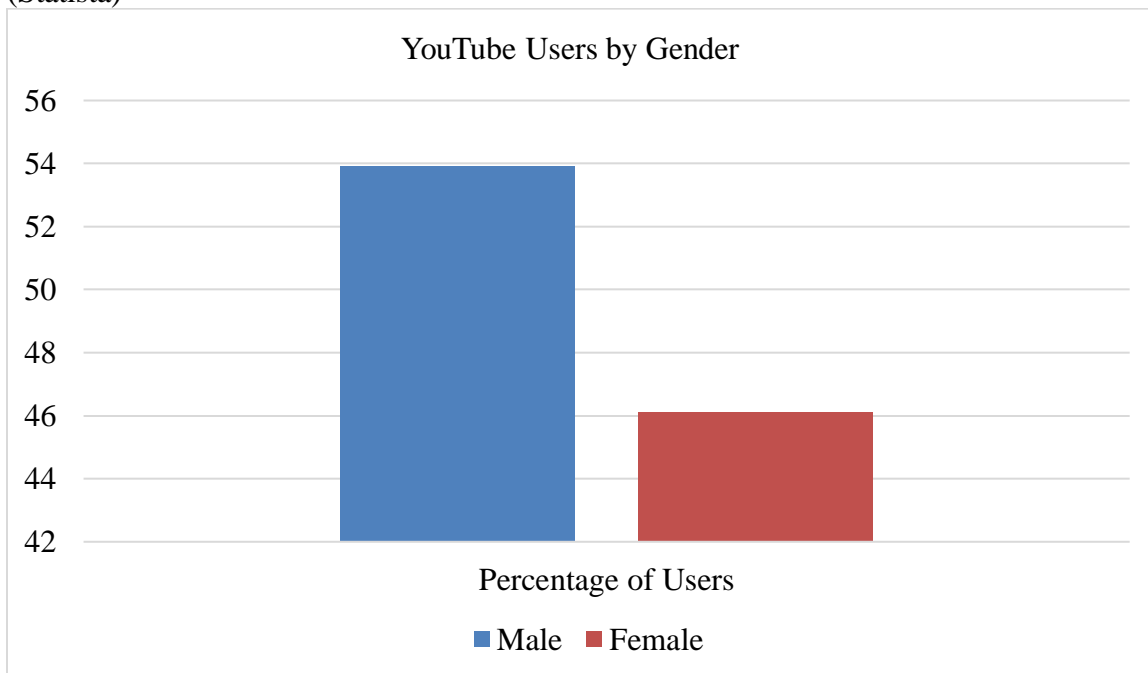


Chart 5. Age Group Distribution of TikTok Users in the U.S. (Statista)

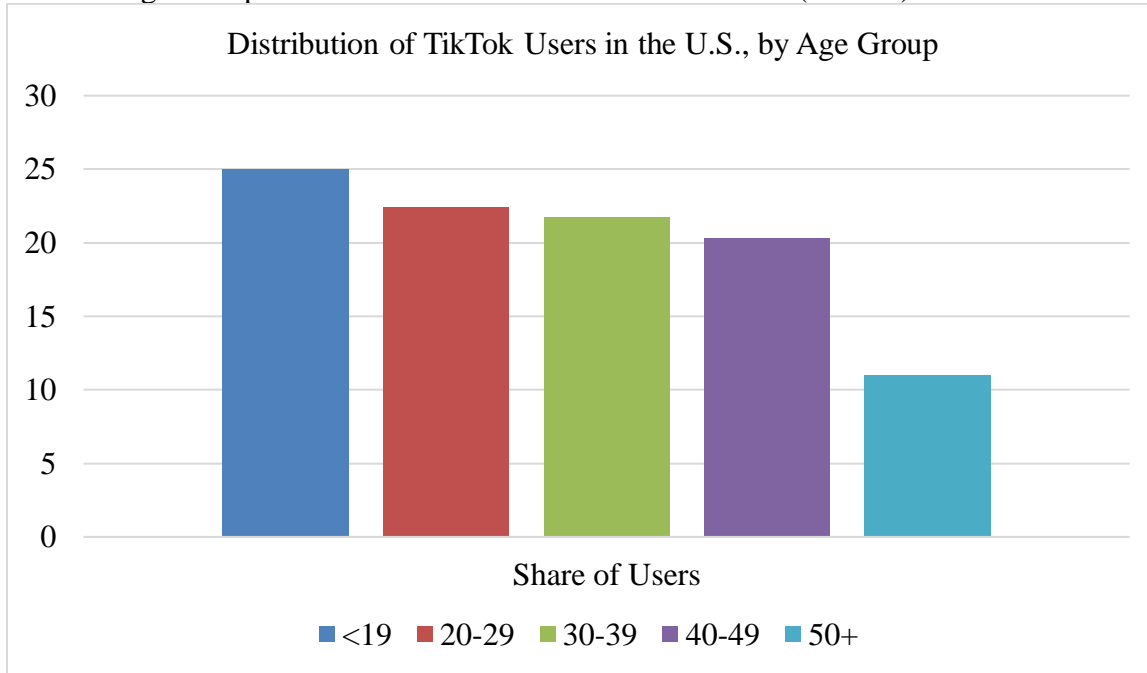


Chart 6. Follower Counts of Influencers

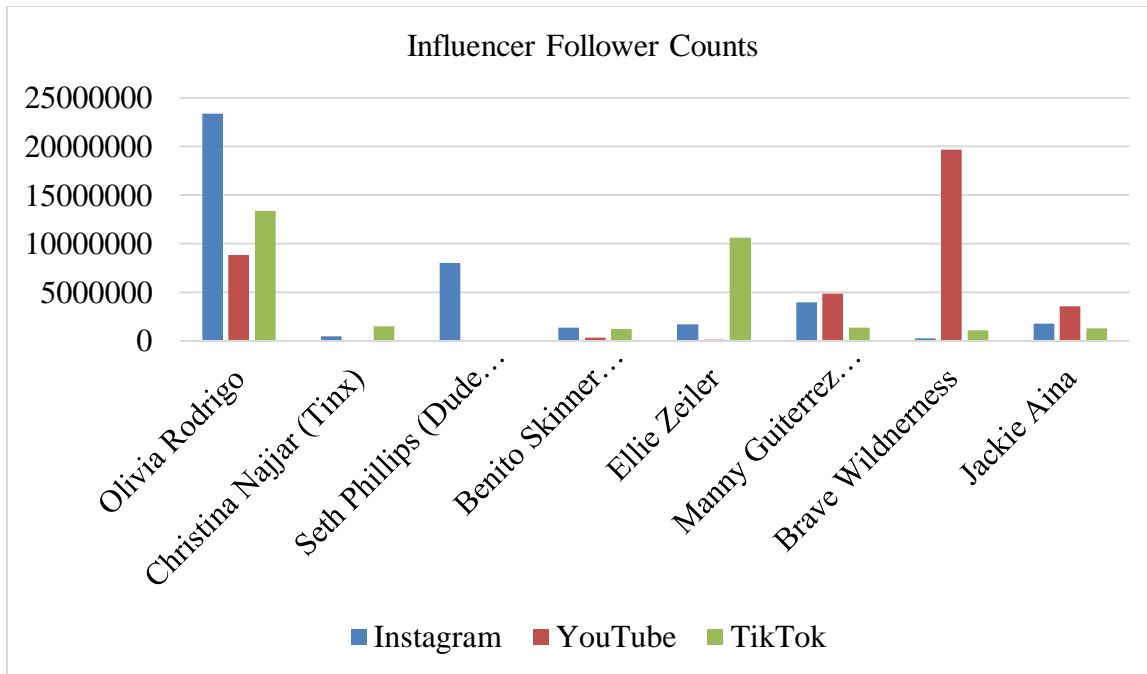


Figure 1. Tinx and Fauci Interview – TikTok



Figure 2. Tinx and Fauci Interview – Instagram



Figure 3. Fauci and Rodrigo Read Tweets -- YouTube



Figure 4. COVID-19 Social Media Banner.

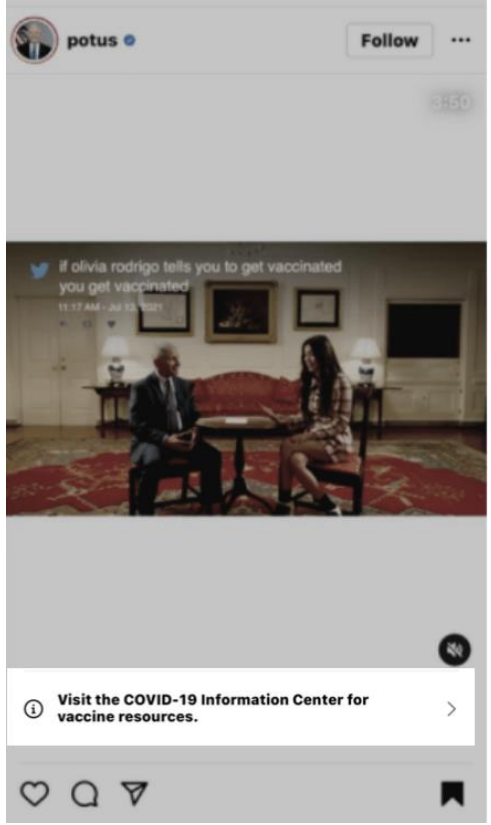
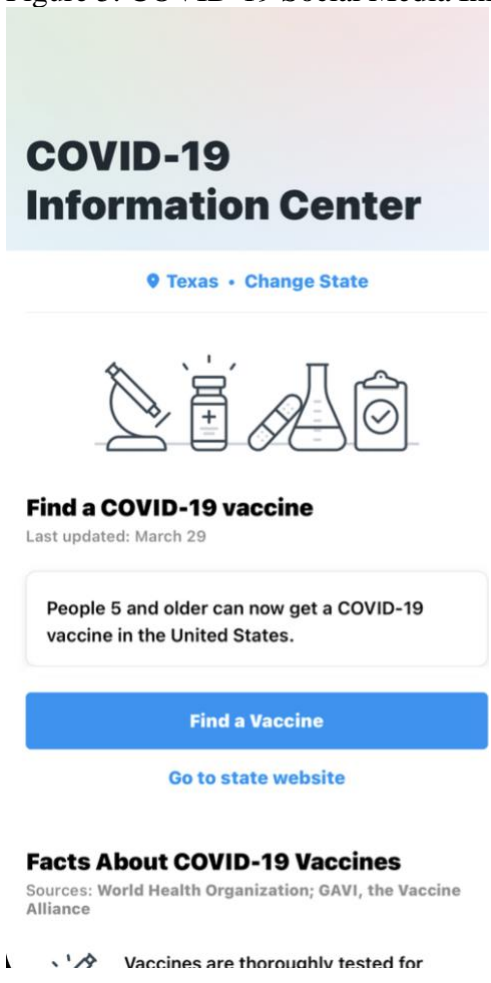


Figure 5. COVID-19 Social Media Information Center




The image shows a screenshot of a COVID-19 Information Center interface. At the top, the title "COVID-19 Information Center" is displayed in bold black text on a light blue background. Below the title, there is a location selector showing "Texas" with a location pin icon and a "Change State" link. A horizontal line separates this from a row of five icons: a microscope, a pill bottle, a bandage, a flask, and a clipboard with a checkmark. Below the icons, the section "Find a COVID-19 vaccine" is highlighted in bold, followed by the text "Last updated: March 29". A white box contains the text "People 5 and older can now get a COVID-19 vaccine in the United States." Below this box is a prominent blue button labeled "Find a Vaccine". Underneath the button is a link "Go to state website". The next section is titled "Facts About COVID-19 Vaccines" in bold, with sources listed as "World Health Organization; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance". At the bottom, a partially visible line of text reads "Vaccines are thoroughly tested for".

# COVID-19 Information Center

📍 Texas • [Change State](#)

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## Find a COVID-19 vaccine

Last updated: March 29

People 5 and older can now get a COVID-19 vaccine in the United States.

[Find a Vaccine](#)

[Go to state website](#)

### Facts About COVID-19 Vaccines

Sources: World Health Organization; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance

⌵ \ ' ↗ Vaccines are thoroughly tested for

Figure 6. Oliva Rodrigo's Pink Power Suit



Figure 7. Biden and Rodrigo Snap Selfies.



Figure 8. Biden and Phillips



Figure 9. Biden and Rodrigo Pose With Sunglasses





Figure 10. Kooper the Intern



Figure 11. Hinge Dating Profile COVID-19 Vaccination Option

< Covid Vaccine


Vaccinated

Partially vaccinated

Not yet vaccinated

Prefer Not to Say

Visible on profile

 Making a selection will not impact who you see in Discover or who can see you.