This report focuses on social media conversations and attitudes in English in the UK between 15 and 28 June 2020. For further details, including methods, please refer to 'Media monitoring report: Social media conversations and attitudes in the UK towards the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak 06 to 19 April 2020'\(^\text{1}\).

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**Conversations about the coronavirus outbreak**

There were a total of 3.22M mentions around the coronavirus outbreak on social media, in the UK in English, between 15 and 28 June 2020, representing a 14\% decrease to the previous two-week monitoring period (see Figure 1). The majority of mentions (32.56M, 79.5\%) came from Twitter.

*Figure 1. Number of mentions around the coronavirus outbreak on social media in English in the UK between 27 January and 28 June 2020.*

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\(^{1}\) Marks T, Larson HJ, Paterson P. Media monitoring report: Social media conversations and attitudes in the UK towards the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak 06 to 19 April 2020. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d4d746d548a4e0001186e38/h/5ebbb69fa8570501f4a4fc05/1589360289531/Media+monitoring+report+UK+COVID-19+6-19April2020+Final+updated.pdf
Key insights

Continuous decrease in volume of social media conversations
Since the peak on 17 March 2020, the number of social media conversations is continuing to decline, with 14% fewer mentions between 15 and 28 June 2020 compared to 01 and 14 June 2020.

Mounting criticisms of the UK government
The second most common keyword after “covid” (165.9k) during this monitoring period was “government” (158.1k). Social media users expressed a variety of frustrations with, and criticisms of, the UK government. These included the UK’s high death toll from coronavirus, the number of U-turns in the government’s strategy, the problems encountered in setting up a coronavirus contact tracing system, the lack of action on the disproportionate impact that coronavirus has had on ethnic minorities, and the lack of support for student nurses and other healthcare workers.

Other prominent topics of conversation
Many social media users expressed concerns that over a million children in the UK are projected to go hungry this summer. Furthermore, a number of people felt that they had been excluded from any coronavirus support by the government (#ExcludedUK), leading to significant hardship for them and their families. There was also continued attention around Black Lives Matter protests and the impact of the coronavirus epidemic on ethnic minorities.

Preventive behaviours, accessing of health services, and anticipating a coronavirus vaccine
There was an increase in interest in face masks during this time period, whereas interest in the other key behaviours either decreased or remained steady. Wearing masks is becoming an increasingly politicised act in the UK. Although there was a drop in mentions about using NHS 111, sentiment towards using NHS 111 became more positive in content. There was widespread condemnation of individuals who visited Bournemouth beach in numbers too large to allow for social distancing. Additionally, there was also anger over the Adria Tour at which several high-profile tennis players competed with minimal social distancing and which led to a number of coronavirus infections. On the topic of coronavirus vaccine trials, there were differing opinions on the involvement of black and other minority groups in the trials.

Social analytics
There was no significant change in social analytics statistics to the previous monitoring period. The main emotion being expressed was love (154.9k), followed by joy (109.1k). Some of the most common hashtags were #Lockdown, #StaySafe, #NHS, #BlackLivesMatter, #Covididiots, #ExcludedUK, and #PlasticPollution (about rubbish left behind at Bournemouth beach). The majority of content was classed as negative (46%) or neutral (39%), with 13% classed as positive. The top Twitter authors continued to be news outlets, such as the BBC, football clubs and public figures such as JK Rowling (the latter two groups largely due to high numbers of followers rather than high numbers of posts).
Preventive behaviours, accessing of health services and anticipating a coronavirus vaccine

We assessed changing levels of interest and sentiment towards five behaviours: social distancing, self-isolation, wearing masks, using NHS 111, and a coronavirus vaccine. Overall interest in these behaviours remained at similar levels to the previous 2-week monitoring period (12.1% of all conversations mentioned at least one of these behaviours between 15 and 28 June 2020 compared with 10.9% between 01 and 14 June 2020).

Between 15 and 28 June 2020, social distancing continued to be the behaviour with the highest level of interest, closely followed by wearing masks (Figure 2). There was a 30% increase in interest in wearing masks whilst for all other behaviours interest levels fell (coronavirus vaccine, self-isolation, using NHS 111) or remained at similar levels (social distancing).

Figure 2. Line graph of change in the total number of mentions of behaviours on social media in English in the UK between 27 January and 28 June 2020.
We further analysed sentiment towards preventive behaviours, including a potential COVID-19 vaccine, and accessing of health services through the automated sentiment analysis provided by Meltwater®, which uses natural language processing algorithms. Wearing masks had the highest proportion of negative posts and the smallest proportion of positive posts (Figure 3). Coronavirus vaccine had the second highest proportion of negative posts. Self-isolation had the smallest proportion of negative posts. Using NHS 111 had the second-lowest proportion of negative posts and the largest proportion of positive posts.

Figure 3. Automated sentiment analysis of posts around the coronavirus outbreak on social media in English in the UK between 15 and 28 June 2020, by behaviour.

By manually reading through social media and news posts, we further identified some common themes underlying negative content for each of these behaviours.

Social distancing
The most prominent topic of conversation around social distancing were posts commenting on pictures of large groups of people at Bournemouth beach, with many calling the beachgoers “covididiots”. There were also some discussions on how social distancing will be maintained when football games and other social events resume. Some social media users and news articles commented on a video of Health Secretary Matt Hancock breaking social distancing rules by slapping a colleague on the back in the House of Commons. There were also reactions, both positive and negative, to Prime Minster Boris Johnson’s plans to reduce the two-metre social distancing rule.

Wearing masks
Wearing masks appears to increasingly become a politicised act. There are two general sides emerging on social media discussions. One side is arguing that they do not understand how anyone could not wear a mask. People arguing for the importance of mask also sometimes attribute rising rates of cases to people not wearing masks in public. In previous reports, social media users had speculated that the high number of cases in the UK was partially the result of people not following social distancing or self-isolation advice during lockdown. People on this side frequently criticised others for not wearing masks and made statements such as “if we all follow these simple rules, we will ALL be safer. This really isn’t complicated”. On the other side of the debate, individuals expressed that they saw masks as infringing on their rights and individual freedoms and as part of a wider trend of government and public health officials forcing other behaviours on them, particularly a future coronavirus vaccine.
The politicised nature of masks has also been noted in the USA and appears to have spilt over to the UK.

**Coronavirus vaccine**
A variety of posts expressed opinions about the participation of black and minority ethnic groups in coronavirus vaccine trials. Some posts argued that these groups should be among the first to get the vaccine as they have higher mortality rates from the virus. Furthermore, some argued that coronavirus vaccine trials will only work if they include black people, as medicines have been shown to have different effects based on genetic, socio-economic and environmental dynamics. Yet some social media users expressed strong opinions against this approach and saw this as another example of unethical medical experiments on ethnic minorities. Another prominent topic of conversation were reports that the UK will not participate in the EU’s coronavirus fast track vaccine scheme. There continued to be a number of posts expressing distrust towards any coronavirus vaccine (often called the “Bill Gates vaccine”) and the medical establishment in general. Some social media users also strongly argued against giving coronavirus vaccines to children, because they saw the vaccine as unsafe and children least at risk from the virus.

**Self-isolation**
One of the posts with the most engagement with was a tweet by the German tennis player Sascha Zverev, apologising to anyone he put at risk and stating that he would proceed to follow self-isolating guidelines. This followed a leaked video showing him partying at a Monte Carlo nightclub after he competed at the widely condemned Adria Tour at which Zverev and several other high-profile tennis players tested positive for coronavirus. There were also concerns around European countries reopening for tourism when many residents are still self-isolating at home, as well as criticisms of staff at the food processing site Rowan Foods not being offered full pay whilst off sick or self-isolating.

**Using NHS 111**
In previous reports, using NHS 111 consistently ranked as the behaviour with the highest proportion of negative content. In this report, less than 30% of posts mentioning NHS 111 were negative, and for the first time, there was a significant proportion of positive posts. The positive posts were largely due to reports that data indicated that 111 coronavirus queries were at their lowest trend for months, indicating no signs yet of increased infection rates after the recent easing of lockdown and protests. Some negative content included reports of people continuing to have trouble to access treatment and tests through NHS 111. One individual, for example, reported being told that they could not be tested as they did not have a car.

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