

## **Dynamics of Vaccine Skepticism Among Turkish Youth**

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To receive a vaccine shot, or not to receive a vaccine shot, has become a life or death decision of sorts, and the range of alternatives contending for public attention, if not trust, pose a puzzle for individual processes of practical reasoning and argumentation. This is especially true for young people. With the goal of examining how vaccine hesitancy is articulated and dealt with in personal narratives, we conducted in-depth oral interviews (online) with twenty-seven first-year university students—enrolled in more than fifteen universities spanning most of Turkey—in 2021. We quickly observed that individuals' decision-making processes are directly affected by the rhetorical strength of the public media narratives circulating among youth. Practical decisions are made depending on the argumentative plausibility of these narratives, bringing to mind Michael Bamberg's (1997, 2020) positioning theory that suggests a three-tiered analysis: story content (story), storytelling interaction (discourse), and social norms. In the Turkish context, the sharp divides and fissures on the level of social norms explain the dynamics of youth vaccine skepticism. Our paper outlines the variants of such skepticism in the midst of Covid-19 and related uncertainties.

Specifically, the vaccine-skeptic participants in our interview pool share narratives that reflect widely-circulated conspiracy theories that mostly appear in a form of "argument from explanation" (Floris & Walton, 2016), depending on our participants' value orientation. Specifically, participant students oscillate between nationalistic versus cosmopolitan value judgements. We can name these as master narratives. Interview participants who conform to nationalistic values frame their position as skeptics with anti-capitalist, anti-big pharma discourses. These participants express readiness to reconsider this positioning in the case that the Turkish government develops its own vaccine; i.e., Turcovac. On the other hand, the participant students who reflect a cosmopolitan value-orientation mostly frame their positions via scientific discourse, referencing the noticeably rapid development of Covid vaccines. Stories of lab-leaks and related accounts were also shared in lieu of explanations in this process of accounting for vaccine hesitancy. We recorded that the underlying concern for this grouping is the uncertainty surrounding the long-term side-effects of vaccines. However, in their interviews, cosmopolitan youth tended to show willingness to leave aside their skeptical position in the case that vaccine restrictions or bans are imposed on travel abroad, especially Europe, or even on local daily activities like visits to shopping malls.