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Communicating about COVID-19: Strategies for promoting risk-reducing behaviors on Facebook

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Destigmatizing messages appear to be most effective at promoting COVID-19 risk-reducing behaviors

Communicating about COVID-19: Strategies for promoting risk-reducing behaviors on Facebook

Liz Scharnetzki, Nikki Jarvais, Elizabeth Rintz, Leo Waterston, David Pied, & Paul Han

Introduction

Controlling the COVID-19 pandemic requires effective public health communication strategies that can promote risk-reducing behaviors despite scientific uncertainties about their effectiveness.

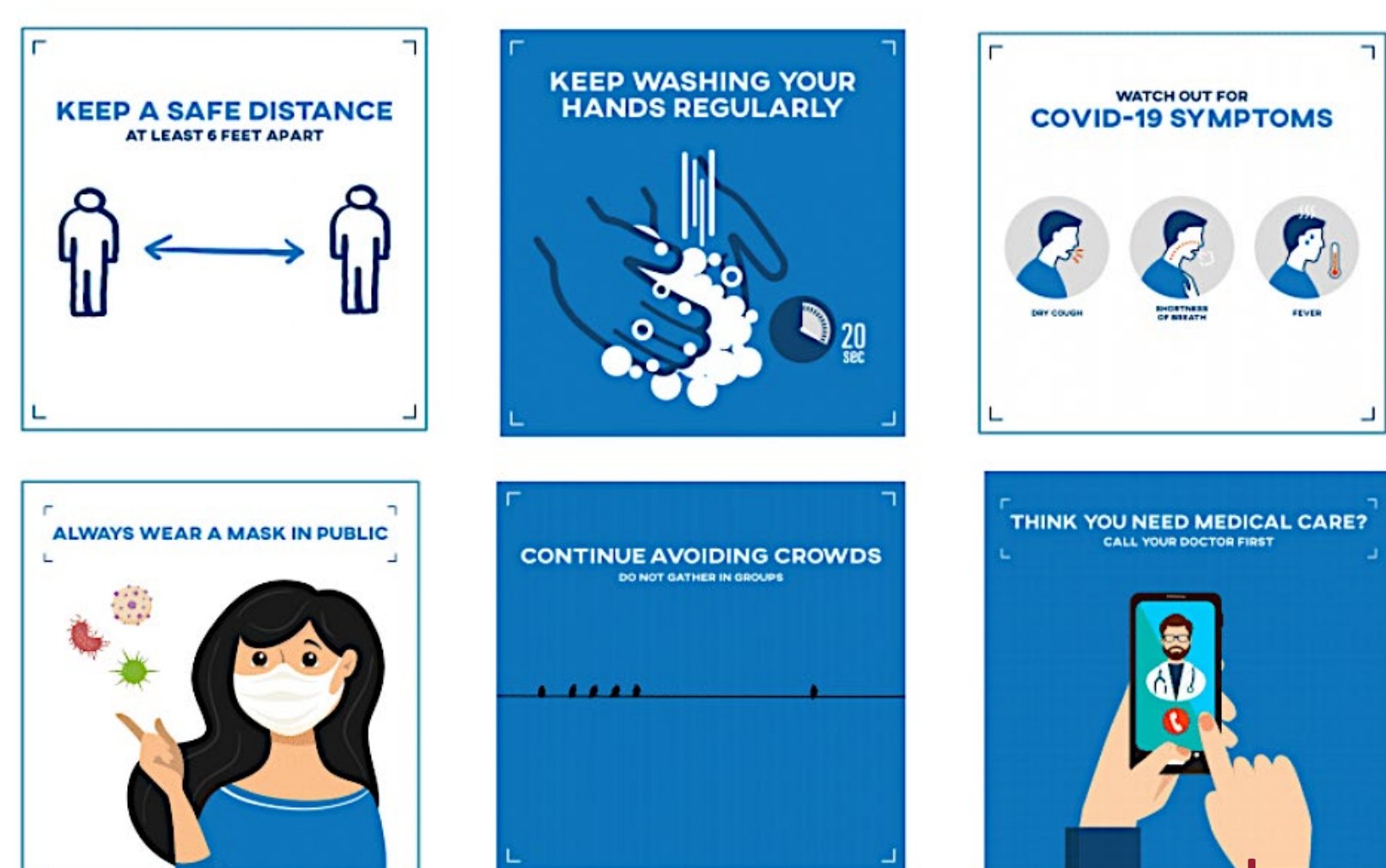
The current project developed and tested different theory-based communication strategies for generating public interest in COVID-19 risk-reducing behaviors.

- Assessed the efficacy of two novel message frames – destigmatizing and uncertainty normalizing - relative to existing strategies

Method

Messages containing the following information about COVID-19 were disseminated on Facebook and Instagram:

Risk-Reducing Behaviors



Theory-based Framing

Uncertainty Normalizing (UN): *We don't know everything about COVID-19, but we know enough to control it*

Destigmatizing (DS): *COVID-19 is nobody's fault but everybody's responsibility*

Hope Promoting: *We will get through COVID-19*

Prosocial: *Make your community safer from COVID-19 by doing your part*

Call-to-Action (CTA)



Results

- Campaign reached >119,000 unique Mainers
- Generated 8,639 website clicks and 433 behavioral pledges, yielding a click-through-rate of 3.85% (exceeding the 0.90% industry benchmark)

CTA: Information Gathering

DS-framed messages drove the most engagement, accounting for 48% of website clicks

Messages about symptom awareness generated 98.5% of all website clicks

- DS - framed messages accounted for the majority of these clicks (47%)

CTA: Behavioral Pledge

DS messages generated the majority of pledges (31%)

Messages about wearing a mask generated 61% of all pledges

- DS-framed messages generated 32 % of these pledges

Discussion

- Promising preliminary evidence showing that the use of theory-based framing strategies and behavioral content in social media messages differentially affects users' motivation to learn about and engage in risk-reducing behaviors.
- Strategies that address stigma appear to be most effective (relative to prosocial and optimistic frames)



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