The Impact of a Quiz-Style Information Campaign on Covid-19 Prevention in the United States

Researchers:

Sector(s): Health

Fieldwork: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

Location: United States

Sample: 20,000 adults in Michigan

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0005940

The disease caused by the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) has infected and killed millions of people around the world. Individual behavior change is a critical element of containing the spread of the disease, requiring individuals to adhere to recommended health behaviors. In the United States, researchers are measuring the impact of a quiz-style information campaign on people's learning and adherence to Covid-19 health protocols. This study is part of a three-country research program in the United States, Ghana, , and Zambia aiming to generate evidence on the best strategies to effectively communicate health measures.

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The disease caused by the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) has infected and killed millions of people around the world. Human behavior is a critical factor in determining the severity of epidemics, since individuals and societies can either fuel or slow the spread of contagious diseases.[1], To decrease infection rates, people must change their behaviors in accordance with health recommendations. This requires that they learn, trust, and apply various health measures. How can this information be communicated to most effectively inspire people adjust their behavior? In the United States, Ghana, , and Zambia, researchers are conducting three randomized evaluations to test different information campaign strategies to increase adherence to preventive health guidelines and mitigate the spread of Covid-19. Because the evaluations are being conducted in low-, middle-, and high-income countries, they will analyze how individuals' knowledge and decision-making shape different public health patterns and will provide evidence that may be applicable in a range of contexts.

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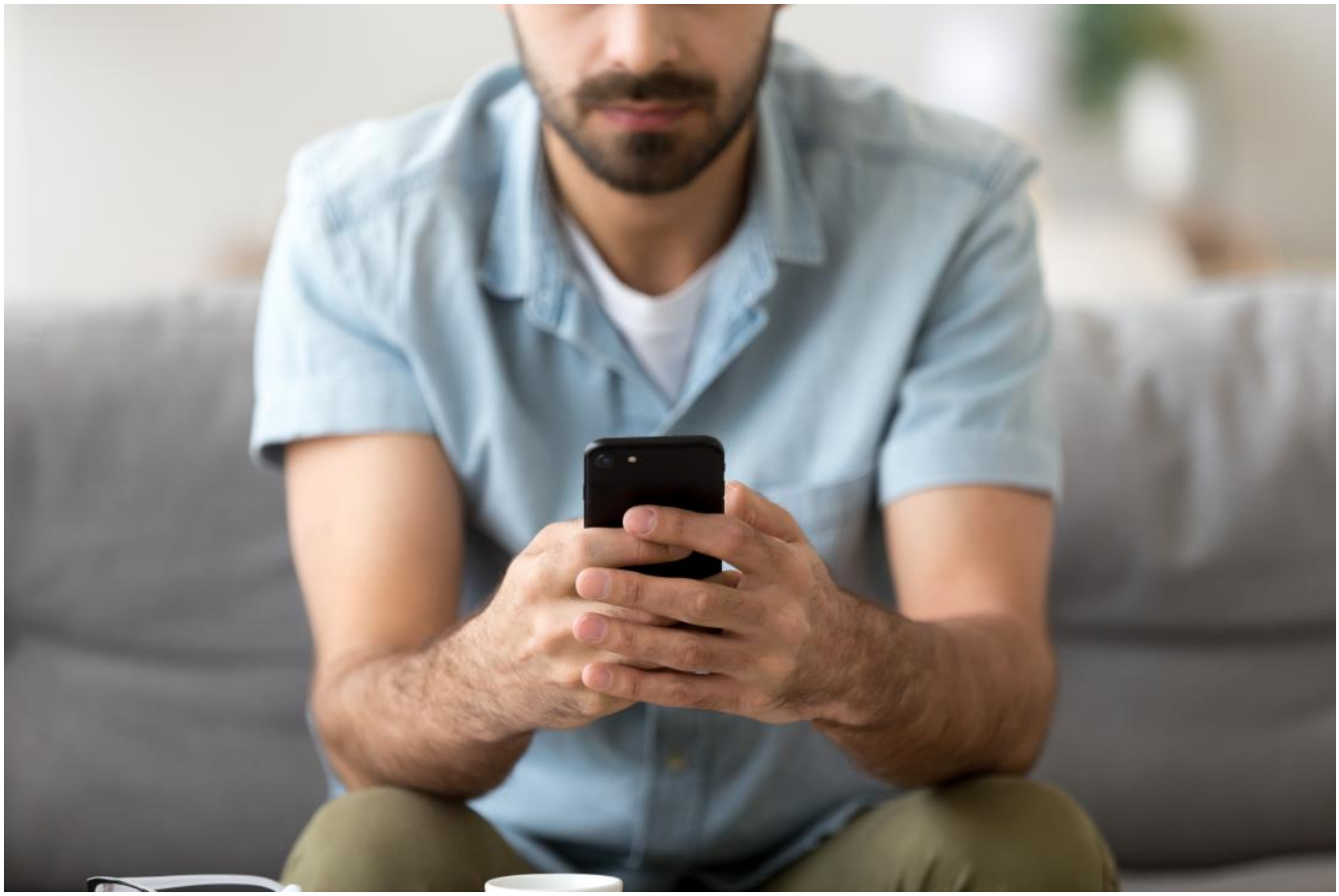
The United States has reported more than 21 million cases and 365,000 deaths[2], due to Covid-19 as of January 2021, the most of any country in the world.[3], Discovered in December 2019. Covid-19 is a contagious respiratory disease whose severity varies among individuals; while some people do not have symptoms but can transmit the virus, others have serious medical complications that in some cases lead to death.

As of January 2021, preventive vaccines are not widely available and the best method of prevention is to wear a mask, wash hands frequently, and keep distance from others.[4] State governments have adopted different strategies to promote these measures among the population. However, there is limited evidence on what types of messaging strategies are most effective at increasing adherence to such behaviors.



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Researchers are testing the impact of a quiz-style information campaign on people's learning and adherence to Covid-19 health protocols. The study focuses on 20,000 adults in Michigan, who will be randomly assigned to receive quiz-style text messages or a text message with direct statements.

Participants in both groups will receive the same information related to: Covid-19 contagion and symptoms; avoiding unnecessary outings and crowded places; use of protective equipment; at-risk populations; and myths about Covid-19 and how to treat it. However, the framing will vary based on the participant's experimental group. For instance, individuals in the direct messages group will receive a text message stating, "Some people with Covid-19 don't show any symptoms, but they can still spread the virus." Those in the quiz-style group will receive text messages with a question, such as, "Does everyone with Covid-19 have symptoms?" Upon responding to the message, they will receive the text: "Some people with Covid-19 don't show any symptoms, but they can still spread the virus."

Researchers will test whether the quiz strategy is more effective based on the hypothesis that the questions stimulate curiosity and therefore attention,[5], in turn increasing the individual's likelihood of remembering and acting on the information. Researchers will measure participants' knowledge, adherence to health measures, and desire for additional information weekly. This intervention is being tested in Ghana as well, to examine the effectiveness of the information strategy across different economic, political, and cultural contexts.

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Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1. Glanz & Bishop, 2010
2. https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html
3. Ibid.
4. World Health Organization (WHO). “Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public”.
5. Loewenstein, 1994