

Enhancing the effectiveness of persuasive health messages on Facebook: Effects of tone and social distance on intention to quit smoking

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Abstract

- **Objective**

The anti-smoking persuasion message campaigns currently broadcast to young people via social media focus on motivation. This research aims to understand the effectiveness of the tone of a message shared on social media. We draw on self-determination theory (SDT) to account for motivational processes and on construal level theory (CLT) to understand the role of social influence in this context.

- **Methodology**

A pretest and experimental study were conducted on 203 smokers aged 18–34 years old.

- **Results**

The results show that the most effective combinations for promoting intention to self-educate and quit smoking among young people are either a supportive message tone delivered with a large social distance between message sender and recipient, or a controlling message tone associated with a low social distance.

- **Managerial implications**

This research points to the importance of fostering autonomous (versus controlled) motivation to generate behavioral intentions through persuasive health messaging. The findings can help public health organizations deliver more effective persuasion campaigns on Facebook.

- **Originality**

The original contribution of this work is that it mobilizes SDT in a context of persuasive communication and combines SDT with CLT to better the effects of message tone on motivation and intentions.

- **Keywords:** self-determination theory, social distance, persuasive communication, anti-smoking campaigns, Facebook.

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