College students and Coronavirus: from "killer parties" to "party safe"

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The bad information:
"Covid-19 is an old person's disease"

- Type of information: **misleading info/myth**
  - Young people less affected but not unaffected
  - Can still become ill, die, & can spread the virus!
- Type of persuasion: unreasonable
  - Evidence shows young people are also susceptible
- Where does it come from?
  - Not seeing a strong impact in one's age group

People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus (nCoV-2019).
Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.
WHO advise people of all age to take steps to protect themselves from the virus, for example by following good hand hygiene and good respiratory hygiene.

World Health Organization

#Coronavirus

Does the new coronavirus affect older people, or are younger people also susceptible?

Institution and Problem

- Institution: **Party School University (PSU),** Florida, USA – large school known for its social scene
  - I am specifically representing the **school administration**

- **Problem**: Virus-prevention procedures are in place for classes, but students continue to party as usual
  - Risk of rampant spread of coronavirus on campus/in local community & need to shut down the school

Target audience

- Students in late adolescence/early adulthood

- Many attend PSU for its good-time reputation (motivated to party)

- Brain science: at this developmental stage, amygdala (social rewards) develops at faster rate than frontal cortex (consequence & rational decision-making)

- Cognition: young people tend to be affected by **optimism bias**
  - And tend to feel healthy & to have "subjective invulnerability"

Nope.
No way.
Not me.

Assumptions and Goals

Starting **assumptions**:

1. Partying/socializing serves important role for students (connection, identity formation…)

2. "Abstinence messages" as well as fines/sanctions tend not to work for this population (Santinelli et al., 2006; Matjasko, 2011)

3. Communication should be a two-way exchange of information!

Goal: accept that students will party no matter what, but aim to:

1. Lead students to understand risks of partying

2. Persuade them to do it more safely

3. Crowdsource their input/creativity to make it happen!

COMMUNICATION

MAKE SURE **YOU LISTEN**   AS MUCH AS **YOU TALK**

IS A **TWO-WAY STREET**

Communication Strategy

- <u>Stage 1</u>: contest (advertised via **school social media account**, **posters on campus**, and **student e-mail**): students invited to submit (online, to win money) "party safe" ideas and slogans, to be combined with those pre-formed by the university

- <u>Stage 2</u>: Co-created content, info and strategies on **psu.edu/partysafe**

  - **E-mail** again sent to all students; **posters** created

- <u>Stage 3</u>: **Campus influencers** hired to spread the word in creative/attractive ways

  - On **Instagram, TikTok**, **Snapchat**, **Facebook, Twitter**

  - Mix of static posts, polls, "live"/"stories"; requests for users to tag own photos

Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

Covid-19 presented as a person/thing «you don't want to take home with you» (either to your dorm or to your grandma!)

TARGET → Behavioral beliefs → Attitude toward the behavior

TARGET → Normative beliefs → Subjective norm

Influencers are key!

TARGET → Control beliefs → Perceived behavioral control

Intention «I will choose one of these options»

Behavior

Party safe:
- ✓ Outside
- ✓ Indoors with a mask
- ✓ on Zoom
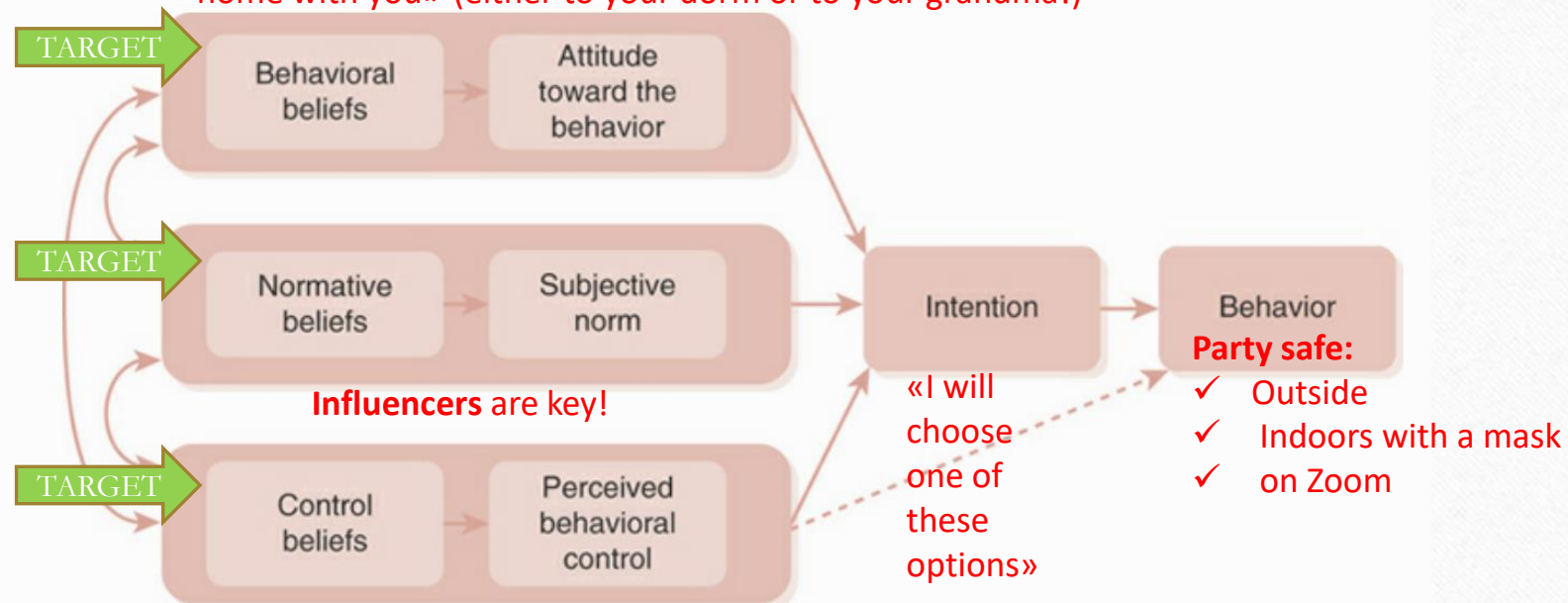
College makes **means** readily available:
- heat lamps and wearable blankets for outside
- «Party masks»
- Organized events on Zoom /licenses for own parties

Additional messages (in influencer posts):

Negative framing (targeting behavioral beliefs):

- "We are not immune" (↑ Susceptibility)

- "Don't think only about yourself, but about who you could spread it to" (↑ Personal responsibility)

- "If we party wrong, we could shut it all down" (↑ Consequence)

Positive framing (targeting normative and control beliefs):

- "We can break the chain" (↑ Behavioral control)

- "We've got this" (↑ Self-efficacy)

- "#PSUstrong" / "in this together" (↑ Unity)

Example social media posts

Credibility

- The school/administration's credibility is somewhat in question, because:
  - We reopened this fall without a clear plan to address parties
  - We have so far only sent e-mails asking students to "be responsible" and "act like adults"
  - We're **lacking in competence & attractiveness**

- How are we working to fix this? Through **stakeholder engagement!**
  - Giving students a voice in the planning
  - Using them as "experts" and co-creators in both creating the guidelines (knowing what can work) and communicating them to their peers

Evaluation Strategy

2 weeks after Stage 3 (messages spread by school and influencers), we will:

1. Look at **social media engagement** (likes/shares/responses to polls)
2. Conduct a **survey** on campus/by e-mail, in which students are asked:
    1. Have you heard about our "party safe" initiative?
    2. (If yes) How did you hear about it? (Social media channel, posters, e-mail…)
    3. Did you visit the psu.edu/partysafe website?
    4. Have you followed the "party safe" strategies? (Yes/No; please explain…)
3. Monitor attendance at digital events & use of provided materials

Assessment

Strengths

- Student participation in planning should help to increase "buy-in"
- Message spread by various channels
- Multiple options to choose from
- Provision of materials to make adoption easy
- Possibility that students will drink less!

Limitations

- The message may not reach all students
- Students likely to become "sloppy" when intoxicated
- Even if done properly, strategies aren't perfect in preventing spread
- Some students will disregard the message/measures completely

Thanks for your attention!

Comments? Questions?

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