Pandemic Protection Infographic Project

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Project Intro

We are living in the digital age, and as COVID-19 reshapes the way we live, think, and interact with data, information literacy has become more important than ever. Numerous sources and formats abound online, making it easy to find the information we need. Unfortunately, it is also easy to encounter disinformation, or more problematic still, to badly misinterpret good data by viewing it out of context. To aid in this storm of complexity, this project aimed to design two simple infographics, providing both quality information, and a foundational frame to strengthen viewers' information literacy skills.

Specific goals

Towards this end we selected two facets of a topic that is near and dear to most people's lives: personal protection. Specifically, we chose to present information on best practices for mask use and social distancing, because these two topics have a high degree of nuance and can thus be difficult to engage with.

In order to better equip our viewers to understand and integrate this information into their daily lives, we centered our focus around 3 main pillars: Complexity, Communication, and Change. We developed conceptual tools to address each point, as outlined below:

Complexity: COVID-19 began in a state of complexity -- scientists did not know exactly how the virus spread and could do little more than experiment and observe. But over time this process of trial and error solidified into a concrete knowledge base -- albeit a complicated one -- wherein scientists can now model with a high degree of certainty how effective a given measure will be.

The problem is that many of these scientific explanations are still too complicated for the casual viewer. To address this, our project sought to distill this complex information into simplified, bite-size infographics that are more approachable and shareable to a wider audience. Specifically, we created a short acronym to frame viewers' understanding, combining the power of simplicity with the room for nuance required in complex topics.

VAST = Voice, Air, Space, and Time

While not a precise equation, this mnemonic provides a simple guide for otherwise complex decisions.

Communication: Another important change since the beginning of COVID-19 is the way we convey information to one another, as many regular networks of communication have been disrupted. For example, many people rely on interactions with friends and family for both information and emotional support. As these networks go remote, the nature of this communication changes, leaving many with a sense of isolation that interferes with normal channels of processing information. Furthermore, in cases where people rely on linguistic support to communicate, such as interpretation services, the pandemic has raised more problems still.

To communicate most effectively in this context, our group chose to employ three tools to help our message reach viewers: graphical representation, social-media optimization, and multilingual distribution. The first step is complete already; we adapted complex information about [mask use] and [physical space] to infographic form, hoping to create a more user-friendly medium for viewers to engage with. The other two steps -- social media optimization, and translation to additional languages -- will continue at a later data. Paired together, we hope these format choices will help our infographic really sink in and add value for viewers.

Change. The final piece of our project is to encourage an important factor for success in any crisis, especially COVID-19: individual empowerment. With the virus raging worldwide, many may feel the rate of infection is slipping out of the realm of personal control. In order to combat this sense of helplessness, we give viewers tools to take back agency for their own protection. The VAST acronym offers a simple tool for reshaping and rethinking personal space. The mask infographic further expands this realm of control by teaching viewers to choose and care for their own PPE. Our hope is that viewers will find these graphics useful and share over social media, thus propelling the wave of change on a wider scale.

Reflection and Conclusion

In a complex system like this, every step matters. While it is far from perfect, we hope these infographics will be yet one more step in a positive direction. In addition, we will continue to look for opportunities to teach information literacy and help people wrap their minds around a world that is becoming increasingly complex. We welcome feedback on how this infographic, and future graphics, can improve in reaching that goal.

References

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