

Political Party Collective Norms, Perceived Norms, and Mask Wearing Behavior: A Test of the Theory of Normative Social Behavior

BACKGROUND

- The theory of normative social behavior (TNSB; Rimal, 2008) postulates that people are influenced by others' behaviors, which they glean from messages and experience.
- Recently, the TNSB was expanded to include collective norms, which represent what people actually do, rather than just behavioral perceptions (Rimal & Yilma, 2021).
- Testing this expanded theoretical model, the current study examines two types of collective norms—collective political norms and collective regional norms—as moderators of the relationship between descriptive norms and expectation related to pandemic mask wearing behavior among U.S. adults

TYPES OF SOCIAL NORMS

- Descriptive norms** are people's perceptions about the prevalence of observed behavior.
- Injunctive norms** are perceptions of what is socially desired – or approved of – in a specific situation.
- Collective norms** are conceptualized as actual prevalence of phenomena related to norms in a referent group.

HYPOTHESES/RQs

- H1: Descriptive norms will be positively related to mask wearing expectation.
- H2: injunctive norms will moderate the relationship between descriptive norms and mask wearing expectation such that the relation will be stronger when injunctive norms are stronger.
- H3: Collective regional norms (a) and collective political norms (b) will moderate the relationship between descriptive norms and behavior expectation such that the relationship will be stronger when collective norms are lower.

METHOD

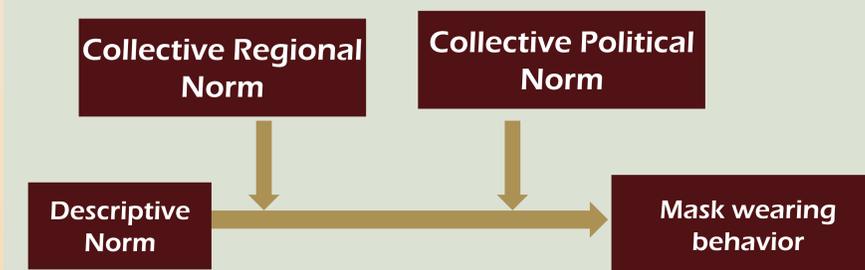
444 participants ($M_{age} = 42.56$; $SD = 18.50$; $Age_{range} = 18-88$) recruited from Qualtrics Panel

KEY RESULTS

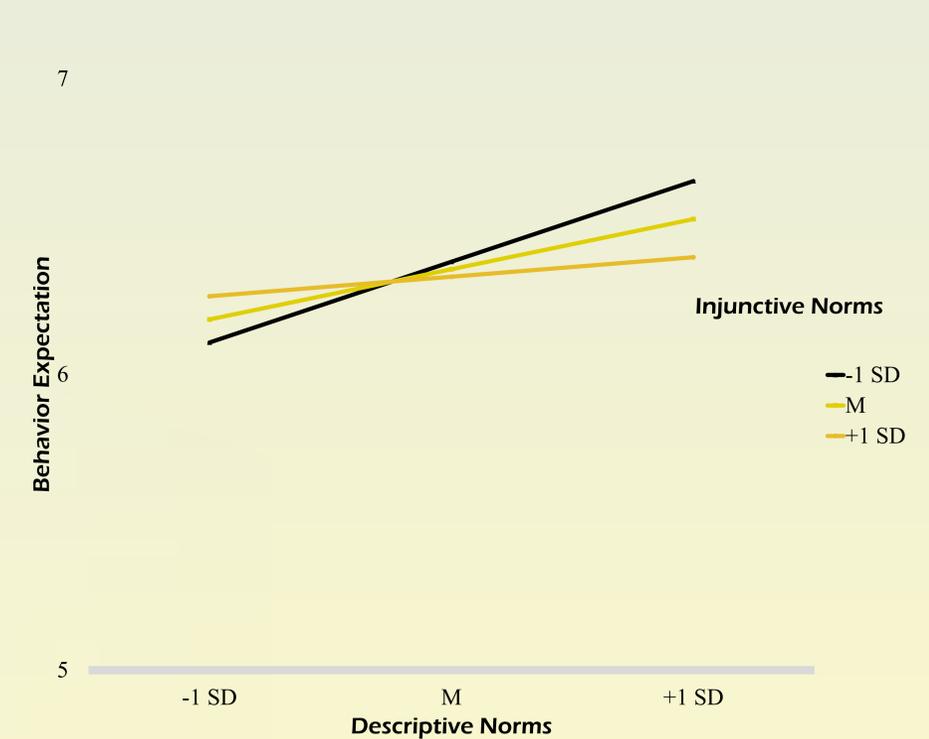


PROCESS Model 1 (Hays, 2019) illustrated that Descriptive norm perceptions were a significant predictor of the mask wearing behavior ($\beta = .86, p < .001$), supporting H1.

- Injunctive norms also significantly moderated the relationship between descriptive norms and behavior expectation (H2); however, counter to expectation, the direction of the interaction effect was negative ($\beta = -.10, p = .001$): the association between descriptive norms and behavioral expectation attenuated as injunctive norms increased.



PROCESS Model 2 demonstrated that the addition of the interaction between descriptive and collective norms for political party improved significantly on the model, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01, F(1, 433) = 8.24, p = .004$. When political party collective norms were low (i.e., less mask wearing behavior was normative), descriptive norms were positively related to mask wearing expectation; however, this interaction was not present for geographically oriented collective norms.



CONCLUSION

The current study adds to the existing literature on social norms and COVID-19 prevention behaviors. We found that when the actual expectation of mask use within a person's political party (collective norms) was low, perceiving that close others, such as friends and family, wear masks (descriptive norms) led to greater expectation to wear a mask. Health communication professionals should design messages that target descriptive norms especially when collective norms of a referent audience are low.

REFERENCES

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- Rimal, R. N. (2008). Modeling the relationship between descriptive norms and behaviors: A test and extension of the theory of normative social behavior (TNSB). *Health Communication, 23*(2), 103-116.
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