

Stories of Regret and Death: A Social Media Experiment

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BACKGROUND

- COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most critical public health issue that we are facing.
- Unfortunately, the responses of general public in terms of the adoption of disease-prevention behaviors has been partisan in the U.S. (Allcott et al., 2020).
- There has been inconsistencies in messaging surrounding vaccinations, which has led widespread vaccine hesitancy, and hence low vaccination rates, especially among Republicans.
- This underscores a need to identify messaging approaches that speaks to bi-partisan audiences.

- Thus, the current study utilized the theory of regret regulation (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007) to understand the impact of a regret appeal in COVID-19 booster vaccine intention and explore the differences among republicans and democrats.

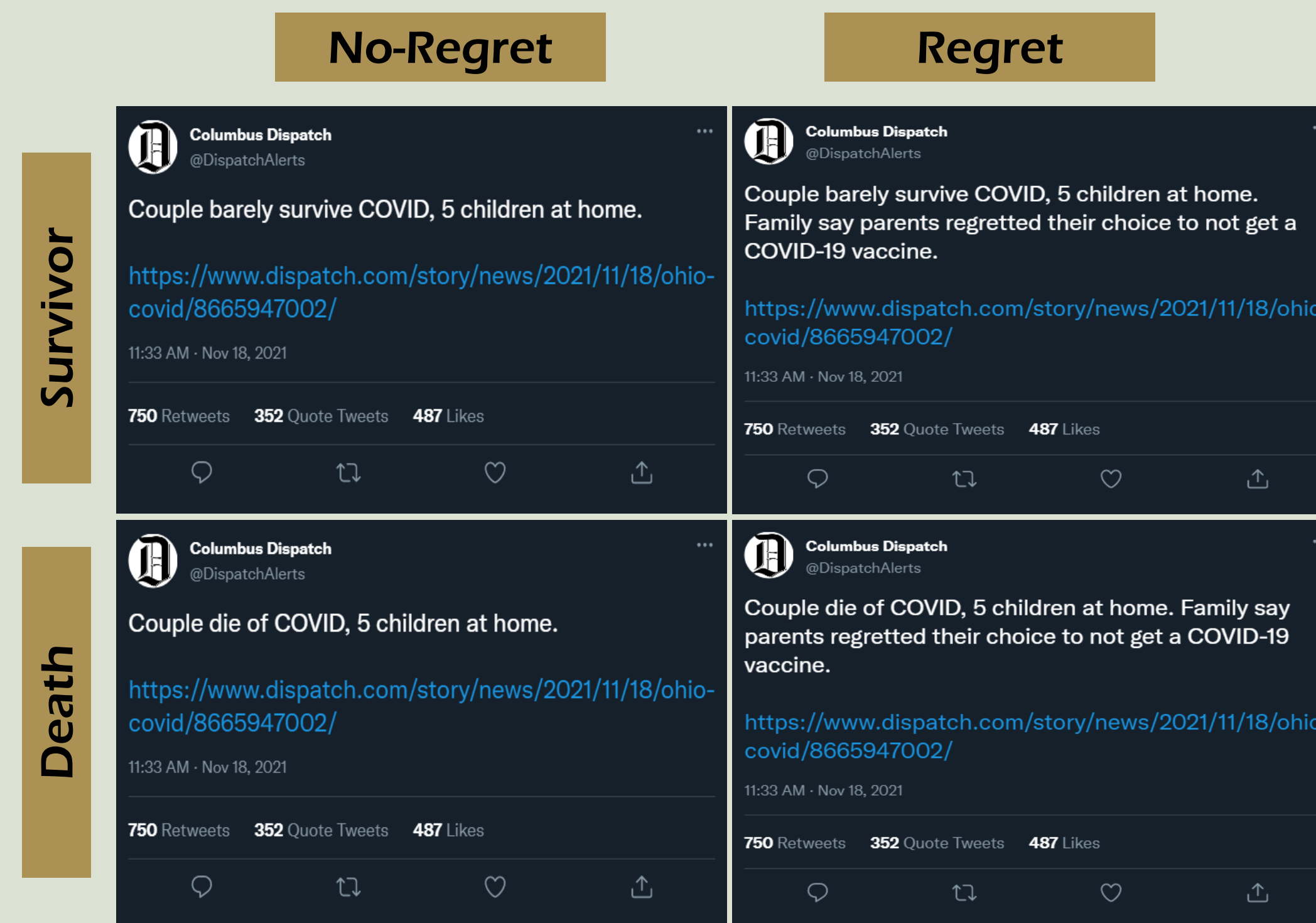


HYPOTHESES/RQs

- H1: Participants exposed to tweets with regret will depict greater a) anticipated regret b) COVID-19 booster vaccine intention.
- H2: Participants exposed to tweets with death will depict greater a) anticipated regret b) COVID-19 booster vaccine intention.
- RQ1: Does political party affiliation moderate the relationship between regret tweets and COVID-19 booster vaccine intention?
- RQ2: Does political party affiliation moderate the relationship between death tweets and COVID-19 booster vaccine intention?
- RQ3: Does political party affiliation moderate the chain relationship between regret/no regret tweet and booster vaccine intention via replotting and anticipated regret?

METHOD

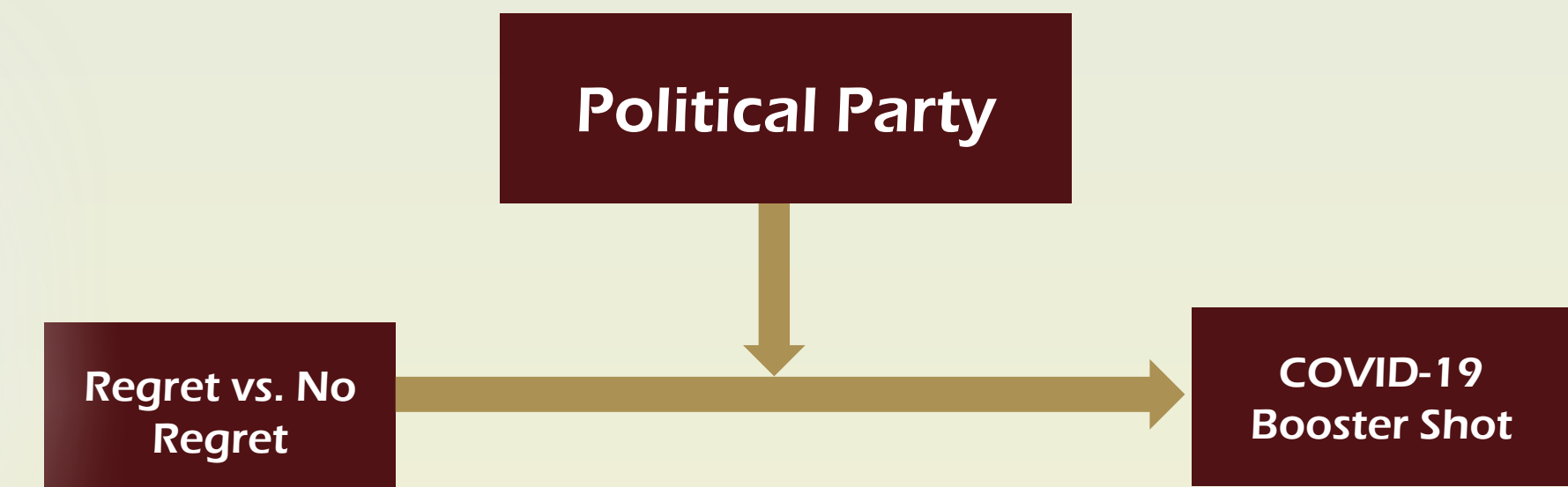
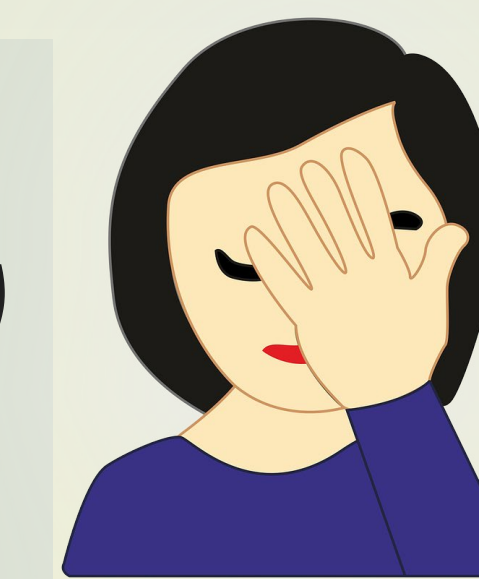
944 participants ($M_{age} = 45.50$; $SD = 16.56$; $Age_{range} = 18-86$) recruited from Qualtrics Panel in a 2 (No Regret/Regret) \times 2 (Survivor/Death) between-participants message experiment.



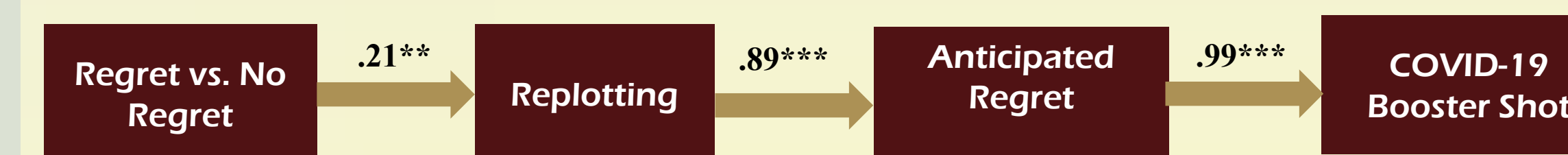
KEY RESULTS



- Regret/no regret tweet produced significantly different anticipated regret, $F(1, 940) = 4.18, p = .04, Cohen's d = .13$
- Survivor/death tweet produced significantly different anticipated regret, $F(1, 940) = 15.86, p < .001, Cohen's d = .13$



PROCESS Model 1 (Hays, 2019) illustrated that the effect of regret/no regret tweet on COVID-19 booster shot intentions was only significant for Republicans (coefficient = .68, SE = .26, $t = 2.58, p = .01$), but not for democrats (coefficient = -.07, SE = .23, $t = -.32, p = .75$).



PROCESS Model 93 (Hays, 2019) showed significant causal chain relationship between regret/no regret message and booster vaccine intentions via anticipated regret and replotting. These pathways were significant for both democrats and republicans, with stronger impacts for republicans.

CONCLUSION

- Regret appeals might be an effective bipartisan means of reaching the entire population, with strongest impacts on Republicans.
- The results demonstrate that the regret appeals impact through cognitive replotting (i.e., actively contemplating different ways in which unwanted outcome could be avoided) and anticipated regret in participants aligning with both political parties.

REFERENCES

Allcott, H., et al., (2020). Polarization and public health: Partisan differences in social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic. NBER Working Paper No. W26946.

Hayes, A. F. (2019). Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis. New York: Guilford Press.

Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2007). A theory of regret regulation 1.0. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 17*(1), 3–18.