

Sociopsychological factors related to information seeking during the COVID-19 pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

- To limit the risk of contracting COVID-19, it is important for individuals to attain accurate COVID-19 related information. Once equipped with such information, they can engage in risk preventive behaviors.
- The purpose of this study was to examine the sociopsychological factors predisposing individuals' information-seeking intentions. Specifically, we made the following hypotheses using prior literature:

- H1a: Perceived risk will be positively related to affective risk response (anxiety and fear).
H1b: Affective response will be positively related to information insufficiency.
H2: Subjective norms will be positively related to information insufficiency.
H3: Information insufficiency will be positively related to information-seeking intention.
H4: Relevant channel beliefs will moderate the relationship between information insufficiency and information-seeking intentions.
H5: Perceived information gathering capacity will moderate the relationship between information insufficiency and information-seeking intentions.

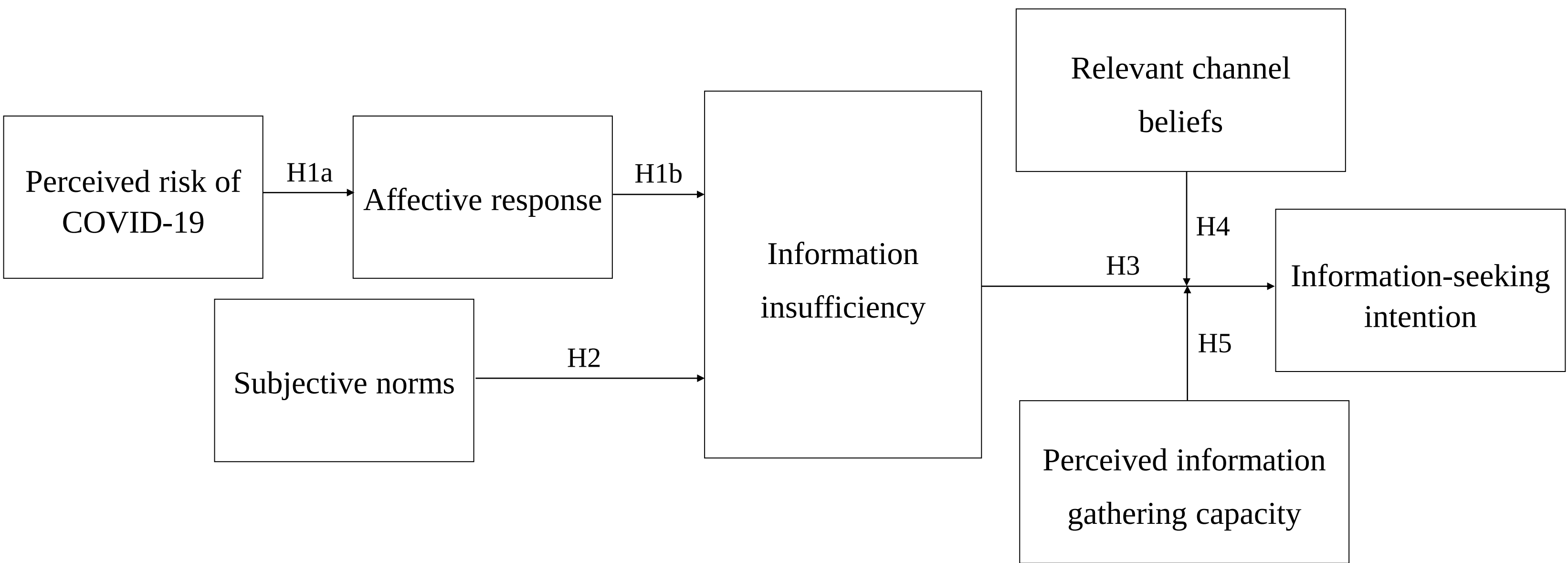


Figure 1. Conceptual model based on the Risk Information Seeking and Proceeding (RISP) model

METHODS

- U.S. residents aged 18 or older were eligible to participate in this study. Study subjects were recruited through Cloud Research. To exclude invalid or implausible responses, we ensured quality checks such as responder consistency in demographic responses over time.

METHODS (cont'd)

- A total of 510 participants providing valid responses were included in our analyses. The average age of the respondents was 46.6 ± 17.8 years; approximately 53.3% were females. Respondents were predominantly Caucasian (80.8%) followed by African-American (10.8%).
- Measures were derived from previous studies to ensure their validity. All measures were reliable with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.96.
- Multivariate linear regression was employed in a hierarchical fashion by controlling for many covariates such as age, gender, race, employment status, education level, and family income. In addition, a bootstrapping analysis with 95% CI and 10,000 resampling was employed using SPSS Process.

RESULTS

- Respondents' perceived risk provoked affective responses such as worry and fear ($b=0.8417$, 95% CI [0.7408, 0.9426], $p < 0.001$), supporting H1a. This finding indicated that individuals with a higher level of perceived risk of COVID-19 were more likely to feel anxiety and fear.
- Affective response was positively related to information insufficiency ($b=0.1857$, 95% CI [0.0859, 0.2855], $p < 0.001$), supporting H1b. This finding indicated that affective responses made individuals realize that their current COVID-19 related knowledge was not sufficient to effectively manage the risk of the disease.
- There was a positive relationship between subjective norms and information insufficiency ($b=0.3032$, 95% CI [0.2149, 0.3914], $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Those who desire to comply with others' expectations were likely to perceive they needed more COVID-19 related information to efficiently cope with the disease risk.
- Information insufficiency was positively related to information-seeking intent ($b=0.1099$, 95% CI [0.0198, 0.1999], $p < 0.01$), supporting H3. Respondents who realized information insufficiency of their COVID-19 knowledge were

RESULTS (cont'd)

- motivated to seek relevant information.
- However, in consistent with hypothesis H4, the moderating effect of relevant channel beliefs on the relation between information insufficiency and information-seeking intentions was not significant ($b=-0.0001$, 95% CI [-0.0007, 0.0003], $p = 0.276$).
 - Perceived information gathering capacity significantly moderated the relation between information insufficiency and information-seeking intentions $b=0.0070$, 95% CI [0.0000, 0.0151], $p < 0.001$), supporting H5. Respondents with a higher capacity of gathering information were more likely to intend information seeking.

DISCUSSION

- Results showed that individuals' perceived risk of COVID-19 provoked affective responses which then subsequently increased information insufficiency. Subjective norms also increased information insufficiency. Information insufficiency in turn led to individuals' intention to seek information. Notably, the relation of information insufficiency to information-seeking intentions was moderated by perceived information gathering capacity.
- Relevant channel beliefs did not moderate the relation between information insufficiency and information-seeking intentions. In this study, respondents regarded channels as trustful and unbiased. Therefore, this finding suggests that when people are generally confident in the credibility of the channels, they seek information whenever they feel a need for information. In this situation, the reliability of channels would not significantly affect information-seeking intents.

CONCLUSIONS

- Study findings suggest the importance of interventions to promote information seeking for population groups such as individuals with a low perceived risk or a low information gathering capacity. Policy makers and clinicians assist the public in obtaining accurate information from reliable sources.