

Social Distancing in times of Corona: A longitudinal study on the role of (media-)communication for social norms on social distancing behavior

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Although social norms are often described as “communication phenomena” (Rimal & Lapinski, 2015, p. 39), communicative influences on the emergence and development of social norms are rarely considered in empirical research. Based on the communicative perspective on the theory of social normative behavior (Geber & Hefner, 2019) , we suggest that communication with and observation of referent others as well as media exposure influence descriptive and injunctive norms regarding a certain behavior. In the context of the corona crisis, we conducted a four-wave panel study capturing social norms regarding the adherence to social distancing regulations in Germany. Results show that the perception of social norms stabilizes over time and are only partially influenced by media exposure. With regulations about social interactions in place, individuals seem to need other sources of orientation than interaction with their referent others.