

Mobile fotonovelas as an innovative approach to address social isolation during COVID-19

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Introduction and Objective

On March 19, 2020, 40 million people in California were ordered to stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19.¹ People who were 65 years old or older, with a chronic underlying condition, or a compromised immune system were identified as higher risk groups.² Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP) has 1.2 million Medicaid and Medicare members across Riverside and San Bernardino counties in Southern California. IEHP piloted a mobile fotonovela as part of a texting program in English and Spanish to combat social isolation among older and more vulnerable Medicare members.

The objective was to measure the value of mobile fotonovelas in a text message outreach to help Medicare members stay active, positive and connected while at home.

Table 1: Characteristics of Study Population

	65+	Disabled and 65+	Disabled and Under 65	
Average Age (SD)	70.5 (13.4)	68.1 (11.6)	41.5 (18.1)	54.2 (21.5)
Female	3,037 (6.3%)	20,292 (42.3%)	24,614 (51.3%)	47,943 (100.0%)
Male	1,558 (4.7%)	10,924 (33.2%)	20,462 (62.1%)	32,944 (100.0%)
NA	250 (5.2%)	1,384 (29.0%)	3,137 (65.8%)	4,771 (100.0%)
Grand Total	4,845 (5.7%)	32,600 (38.1%)	48,213 (56.3%)	85,658 (100.0%)
English	18,692 (57.3%)	3,775 (77.9%)	40,499 (84.0%)	62,966 (73.5%)
Spanish	13,908 (42.7%)	1,070 (22.1%)	7,714 (16.0%)	22,692 (26.5%)

Conclusion

- Medicare (65+ and/or disabled) populations engaged at significantly higher rates (14.8%, 12,719/85,658) compared to usual engagement rates (<8%) when presented with a fotonovela within a text message outreach.
- The vast majority (80.2%) of members provided strong positive feedback to the fotonovela.
- Spanish speakers clicked at a rate that was 1.6 times higher than English speakers and this is in sharp contrast with typical text message campaigns where Spanish speakers, on average, have weaker engagement rates.
- The results suggest that mobile fotonovelas are an effective channel that can be used to reduce cultural and linguistic barriers, improve health literacy, share positive tips and suggestions and address social isolation.

Methods

- Members received a link to a fotonovela in the third week of a six-week text message outreach program (Figures 1 and 2).
- The fotonovela consisted of 6 stories but members received a subset of 4 or 5 of these vignettes tailored to their age. All messages and stories were in English and Spanish.
- The stories provided coping strategies, tips and ideas using relatable people in a fun and visual format. The metaphor of a “house” within a “neighborhood” was used in the stories.
- Each story had a theme such as staying connected, cooking together, being active, trying new hobbies (2 versions) and working from home and consisted of approximately 4-5 frames.
- Members were asked to share their feedback in a text-based survey (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Text message with fotonovela

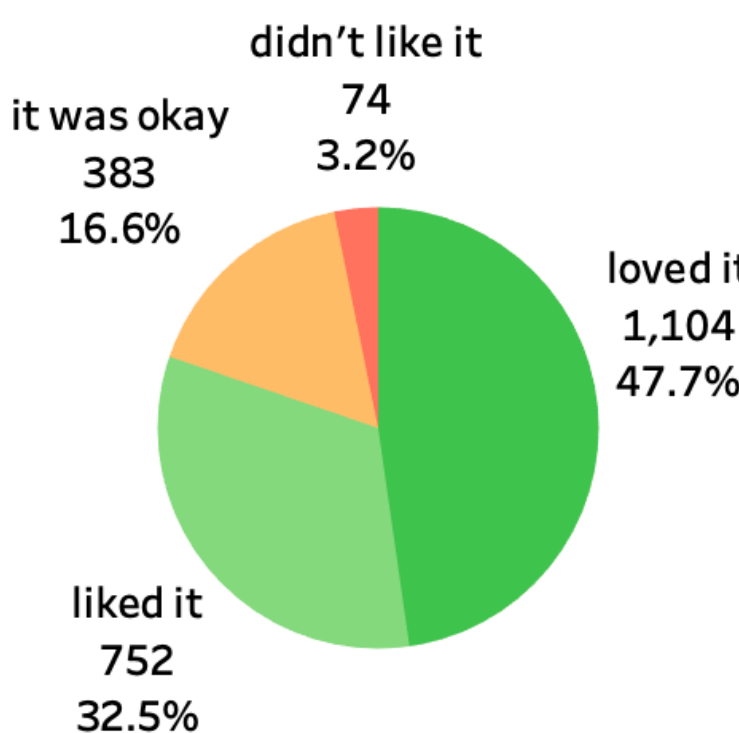


Figure 2: An example story



Results

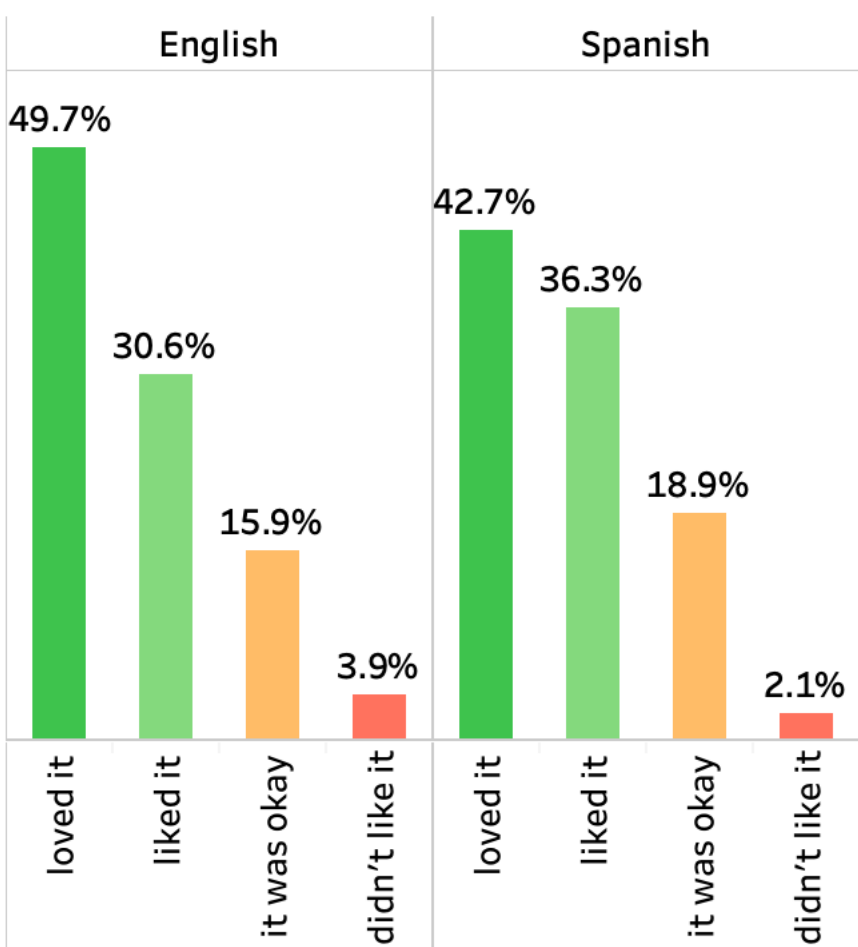
Figure 3: Feedback



A total of 7.5% (6,393/85,658) of members clicked a total of 8,177 times on the link and 36.2% (2,313/6,393) responded to the follow-up question.

80.2% “loved” or “liked” the fotonovela (Figure 3).

Figure 4: Feedback by language



Sample Member Feedback

Me encantó gracias nos ase falta el contacto con la familia

Liked it. It put a smile on my face. Thanks

Great advice! I'm excited, I just found a good YouTube video. Thank you.

Me encanto, es muy interesante muchas gracias por estar pendiente de Nosotros Dios los Bendiga !!!!

That was great ! And my family members are putting some of the activities to good use.

LOVED IT!!! Very well designed, great illustrations, and wonderfully appropriate and I believe helpful!

I loved visiting the different houses with different coping ideas to stay connected and interact safely. Thank you.

Spanish speakers had a 10.3% click rate and were 1.6 times more likely to click on the fotonovela link (2,329/22,692) compared to English speakers with a 6.5% click rate (4,064/62,966). However, both groups were equally likely to enjoy the fotonovela (Figure 4).

References

- Executive Department, State of California, Executive Order N-33-20, dated 3/19/2020..
- CA Dept of Public Health, Self Isolation for Older Adults and Those Who Have Elevated Risk https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Self_Isolation_Guidance_03.16.20.pdf