

Mitigating the impact of misinformation: Examining the effectiveness of emotion-based interventions on false news sharing

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Introduction

Background:

- False news can spread farther than true news online [1].
- However, people are worse at discerning true from false news when considering sharing it than when considering if it's accurate [2]; factors other than accuracy may affect the spread.
- Moral-emotional content relates to false news spread online [3].
 - Anger is a moral emotion [4] that may relate to false news sharing.
- This warrants an intervention against false news sharing that brings attention to emotion in online information.**
- Studied interventions include the accuracy nudge and the training message, which ask people to consider the accuracy of online information [5, 6]. These inform the current study,

Research Questions

- Does a simple intervention which brings attention to emotionality in a news headline decrease likelihood of sharing false, but not true, news?*
- Is this intervention more effective when it is coupled with a training message than when it is not?*

Methods

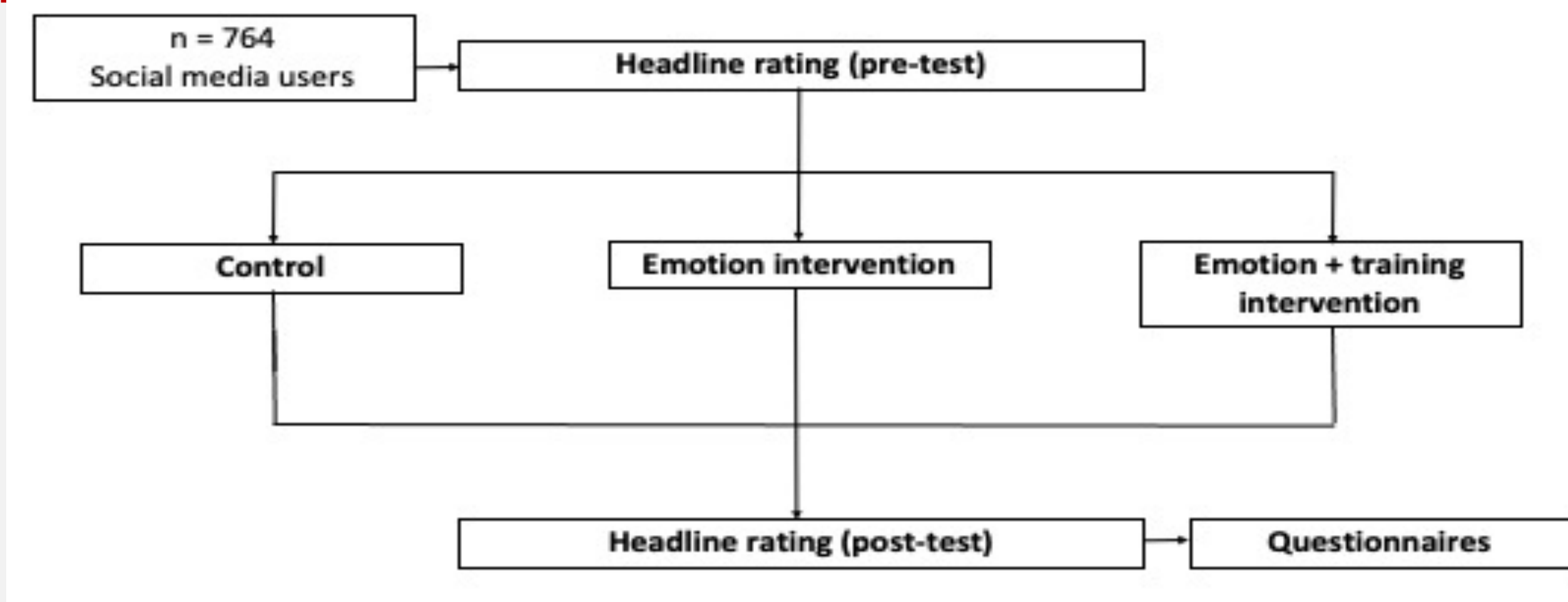
Sample: 764 social media users recruited from MTurk

Materials/Measures:

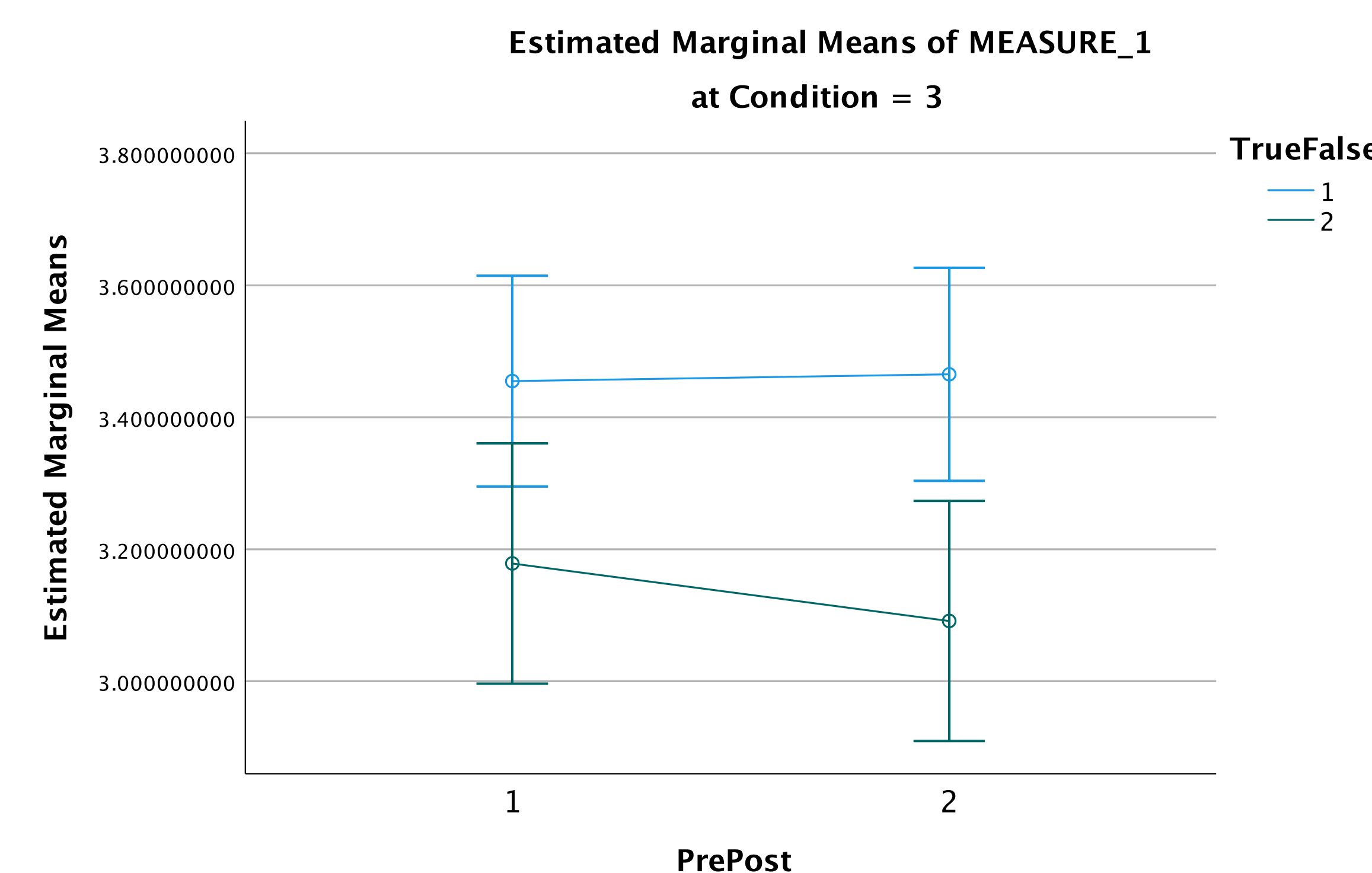
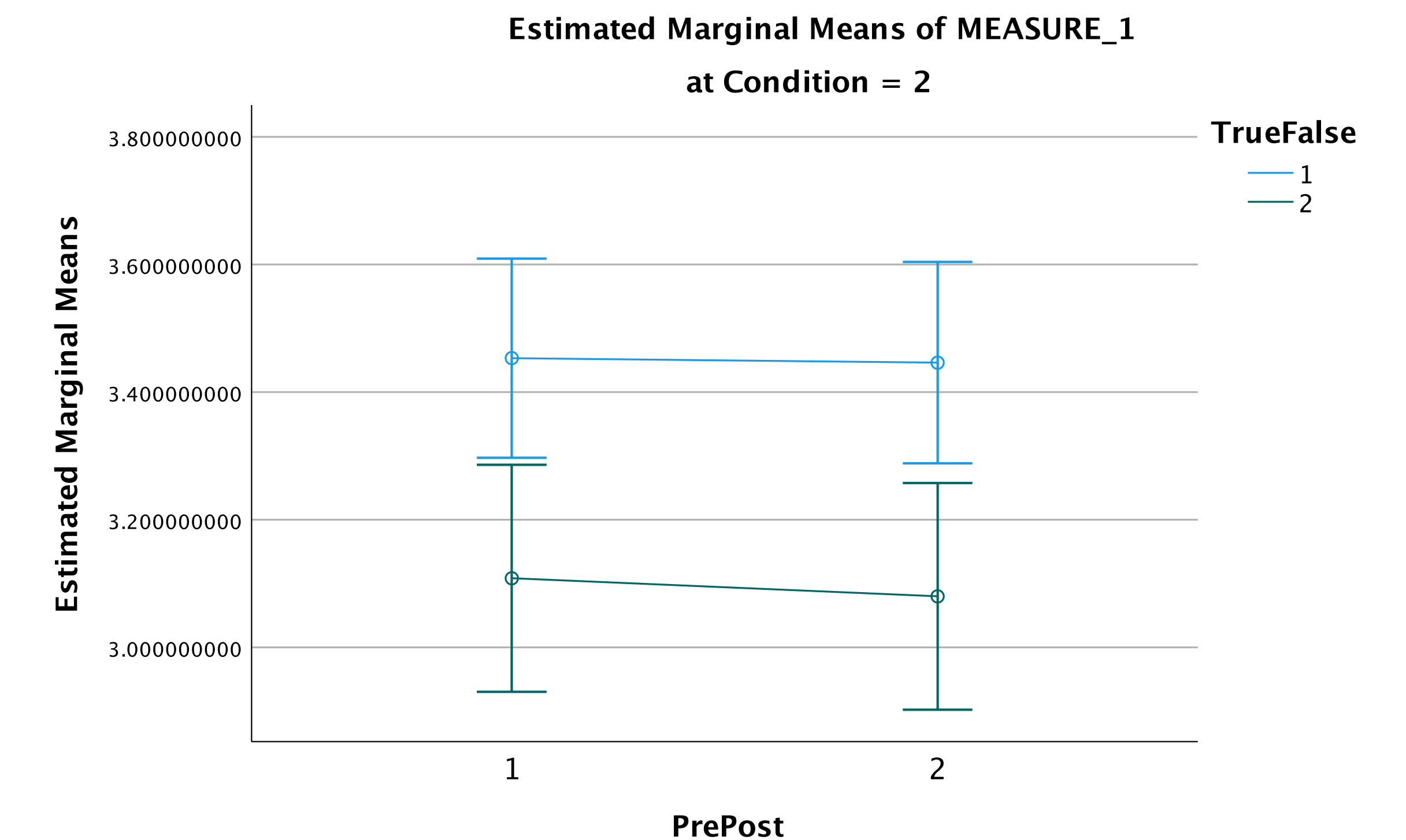
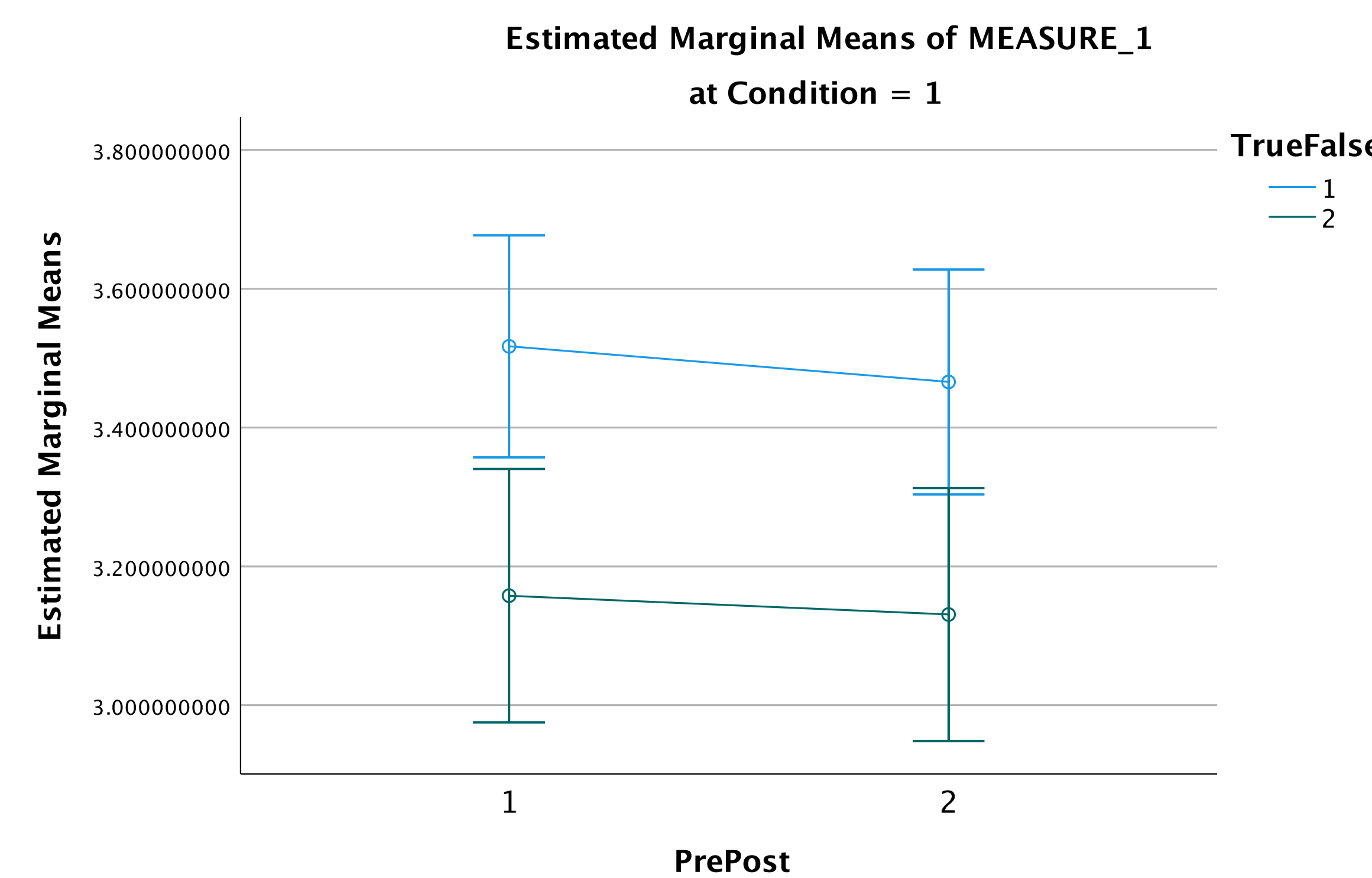
- Headline-rating task
 - Rating likelihood of sharing of 20 headlines (10 true, 10 false) on a four-point scale from "Extremely unlikely" to "Extremely likely"
- Emotion intervention
 - Rating emotionality, especially anger, in one headline unrelated to COVID-19 on a four-point scale from "Not at all emotional" to "Very emotional"
- Emotion and training intervention
 - Emotion intervention with four-sentence message about the link between negative emotion and false news
- Questionnaires
 - E.g. 6-item Need for Cognition Scale, Trust in Science and Scientists Inventory



Procedure:



Results & Analyses



- Negative correlation between raters' emotionality ratings and likelihood of sharing ($r = -0.315$)
- Three-way mixed ANOVA (time point x headline veracity x intervention condition)
 - Main effect of veracity – higher likelihood of sharing true than false news
 - No other main effects or interactions
- Three two-way repeated measures ANOVA (time point x headline veracity for three conditions)
 - Main effect of veracity for all three
 - Interaction in emotion and training intervention – decreased likelihood of sharing false, but not true news from pre- to post-test

Discussion

Conclusions:

- Evidence that directing attention to emotionality in news and explicitly explaining its link to false news improves discernment between true and false news when deciding whether to share it
- Effectiveness is unclear given low effect size and lack of difference between conditions
- No evidence that directing attention to emotionality alone improves sharing discernment.
- Social media users appear to be good at discerning true from false news headlines

There may be cues in the posts that indicate unreliability (e.g., a lesser-known website name)

Emotional headlines were less likely to be shared

Implications and Future Directions

- Development of educational interventions which direct attention to emotionality in false news

References

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