Understanding Client Support Strategies to Improve Clinical Outcomes in an Online Mental Health Intervention

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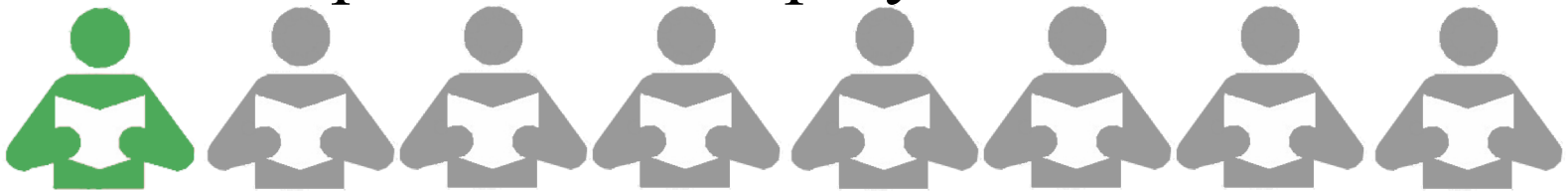
Outline

- Problem
- Solution
- Previous Work
- Research Goal
- Dataset
- Methods and Results
- Discussion

Mental Health Crisis – Widespread!

- Leading cause of suicide and disability.
- Lifetime occurrence

- Current: Depression in employees



- Current: Depression in college students

Mental Health Crisis – Huge Cost!

long-term sickness absence
in England **attributed to mental ill health**

In 2016,
42.7%
employment rate
for those who report mental illness as their main health problem (Mental illness, phobia, panics, nervous disorders (including depression, bad nerves or anxiety. **Compared to 74% of all population**

Total Socioeconomic Cost in England is estimated to be £105 billion.

Mental Health Crisis – Lack of access!

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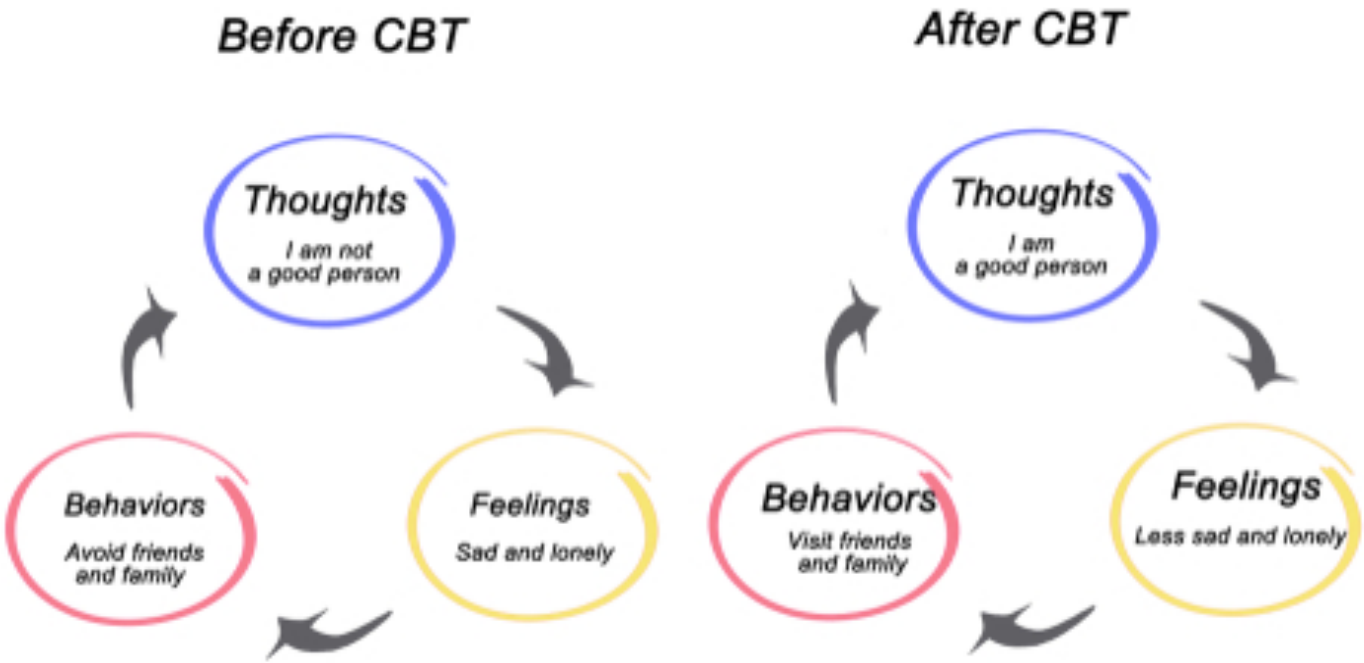
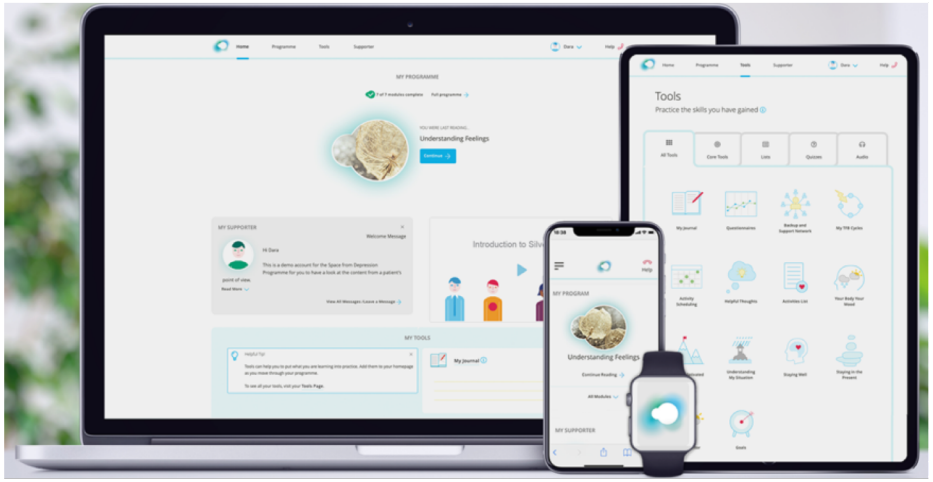
Mental Health Crisis – A Solution!

- Online Mental Health Services.
- CBT → Very structured --> Sofware!
- E.g.
  Internet-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (iCBT)



SilverCloud Health

SilverCloud



Space from Anxiety

Space from Depression

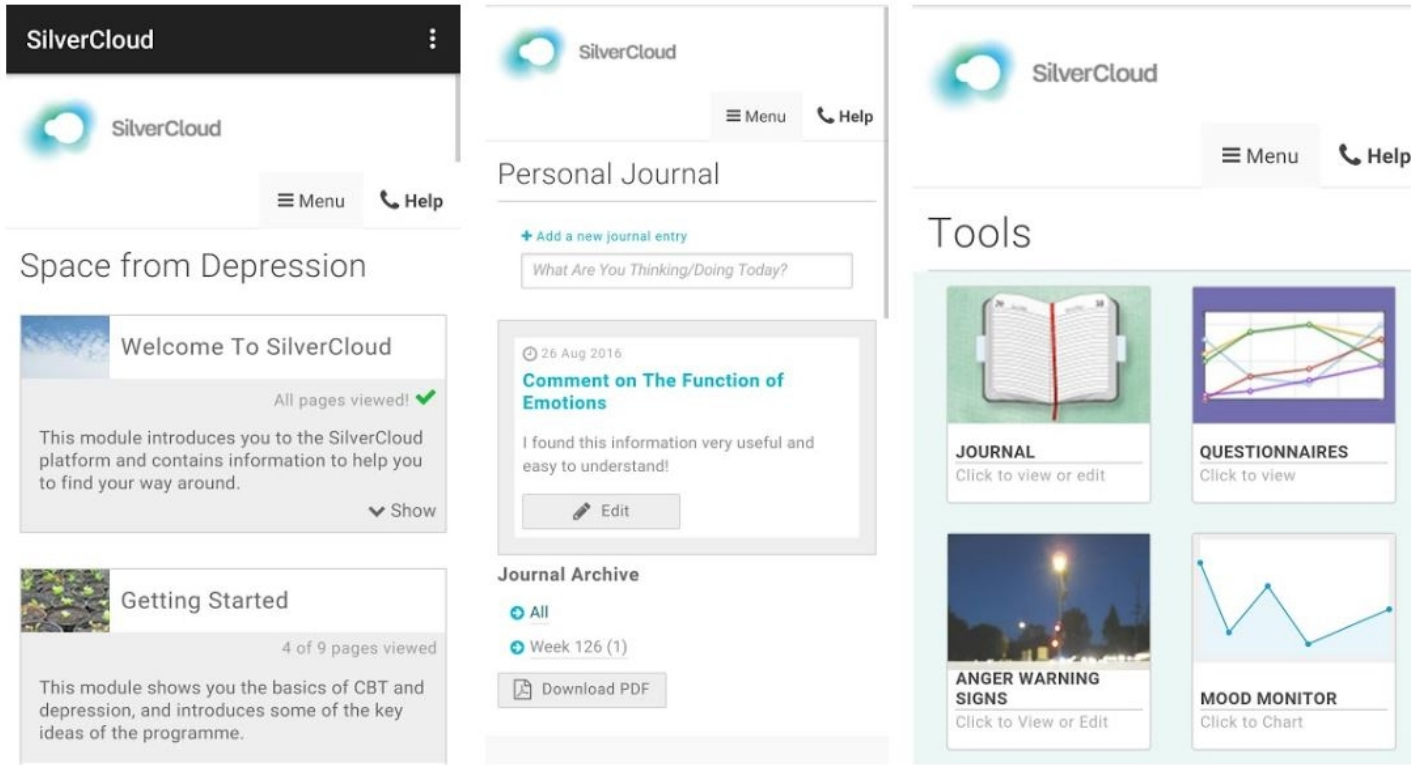
Space from Chronic Illness

Space from Eating Issues

Space from Stress

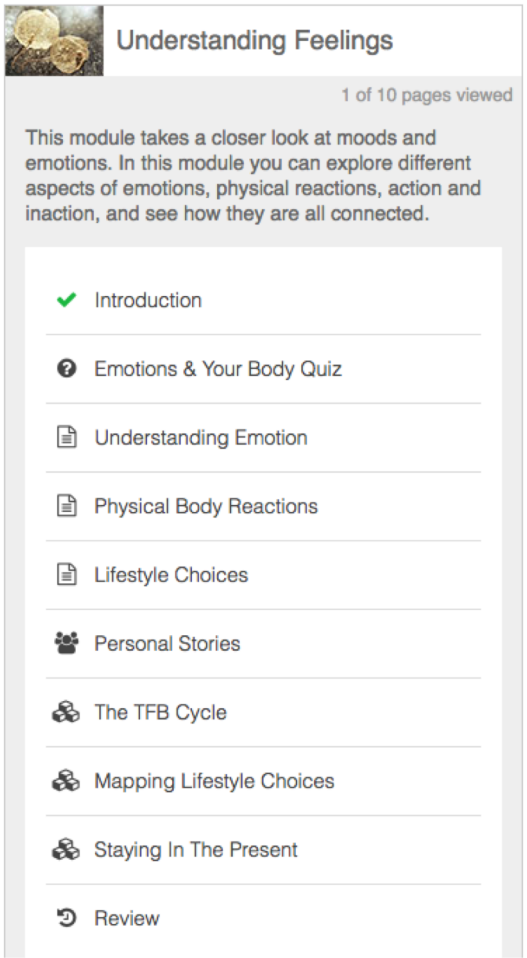
SilverCloud – An Introduction

- Content: a “online course” like structure.
- Tools: accessed any time.
- Supporter



SilverCloud – Content

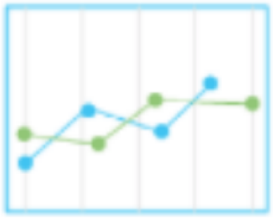
- “Space” or program dependent, and “prescribed”.



SilverCloud – Interactive Tools

- Accessible anytime

My Journal


Questionnaires

Backup and Support Network

Goals

Staying in the Present

Goals

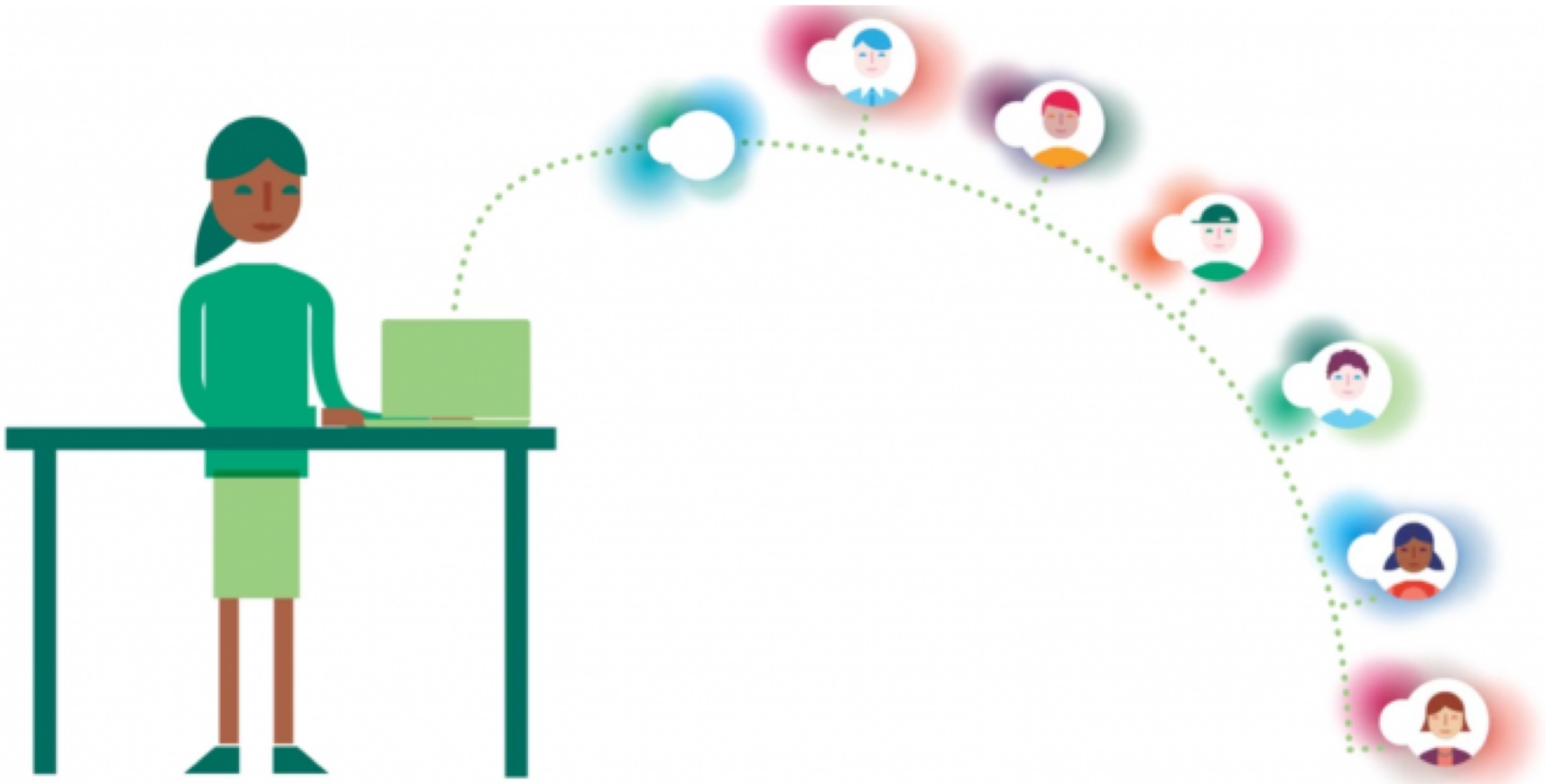
Mood Monitor

My TFB Cycles

Hierarchy of Fears

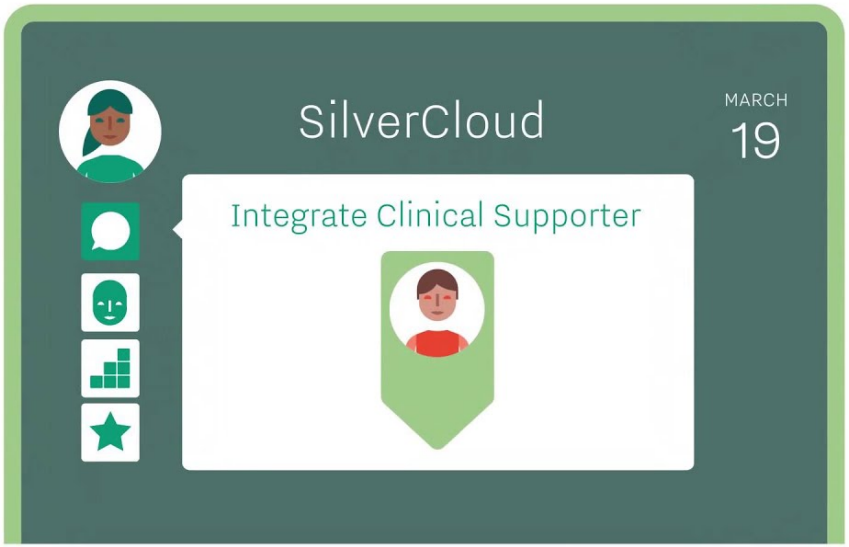
SilverCloud – Supporter

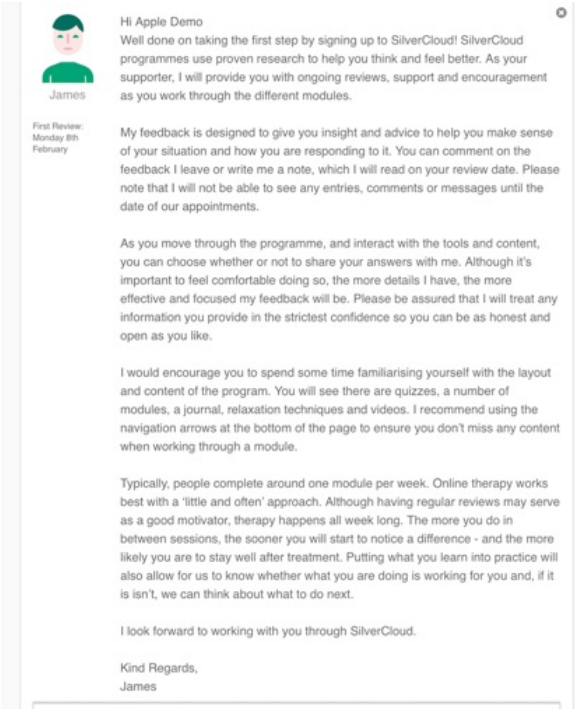
- Adherence and Attrition Issues
  → Human supporter
- Increased accountability



SilverCloud – Supporter (contd.)

- Reviews progress weekly. Provides feedback.
  - Should spend 10 min per message.
  - Should send 6-8 such messages.
  - Other guidelines (e.g. answer questions, promote engagement with platform, be positive)





SilverCloud – Outcome-based

- Clients also fill out weekly surveys that measure symptoms of depression and anxiety.

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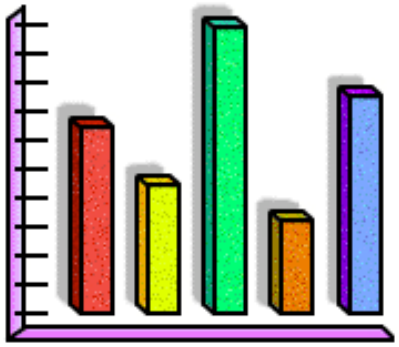
Previous Work – In Short

- Previous work focusses on duration and frequency of human support.



- Little is known about how supporter behaviors impact client outcomes.

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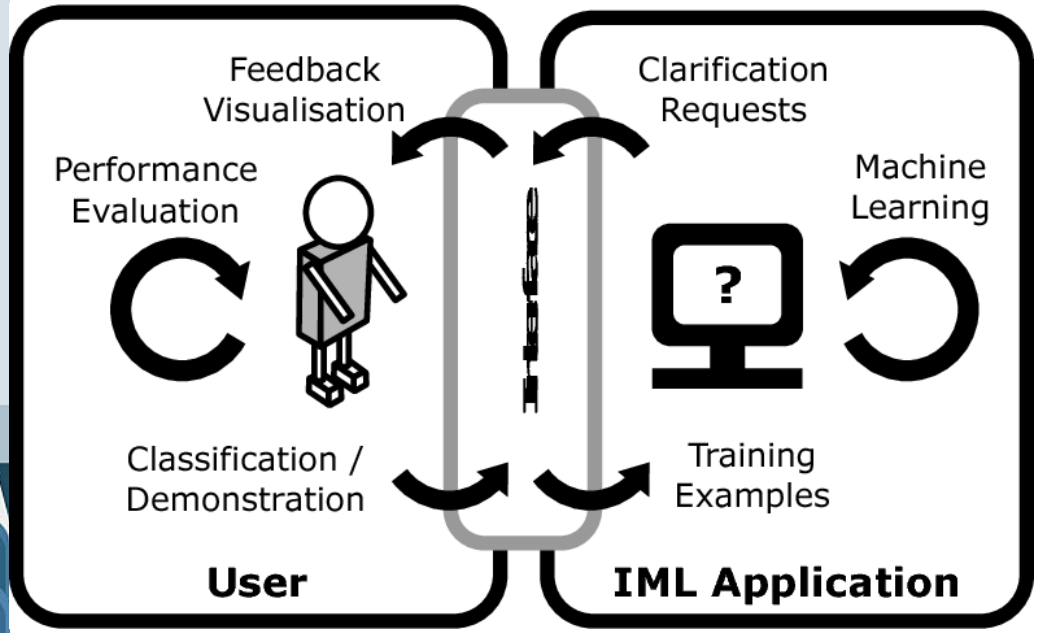
Research Goal

- More nuanced understanding of supporter behaviors:
  - → Better Supporter Training.
  - → ML for Recommending Supporter Behavior.



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Dataset

- Space for Depression and Anxiety.
- >200,000 messages sent by ~3500 supporters to ~50,000 clients.

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- Methods and Results: Clustering Supporters
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Clustering Supporters – Method

Compute 4 outcome measures for each supporter and cluster them using K-means with K=3.

Message-level change	Client-level change
Message-level improvement rate	Client-level improvement rate

Clustering Supporters – Method (contd.)

1. Message-level Change (MC): Average change in scores across all messages sent by supporter *s*.
2. Message-level Improvement Rate (MR): Percentage of messages sent by supporter *s* that were followed by an improvement.

Clustering Supporters – Method (contd.)

Better account for client-level differences:

3. Client-level Change (CC): Compute Message-level Change for each client, and average it.
4. Client-level Improvement Rate (CR): Compute Message-level Improvement Rate for each client separately, and average it.

Clustering Supporters – Results

K-means with K=3

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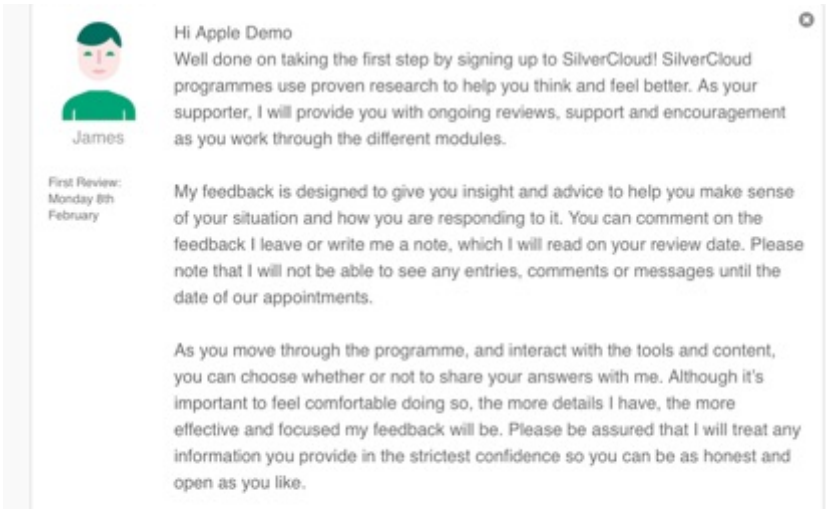
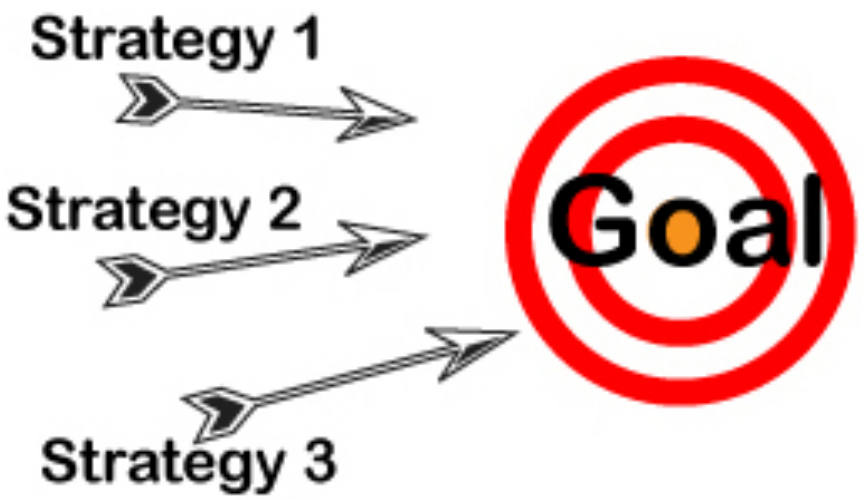
Successful Support Strategies – Features

- Client <Context> Variables:
  - 5 Variables: ContentViews, Shared, MessageNumber, CurrentPHQ-9, and CurrentGAD-7.
  - BINNED

Successful Support Strategies – Features (contd.)

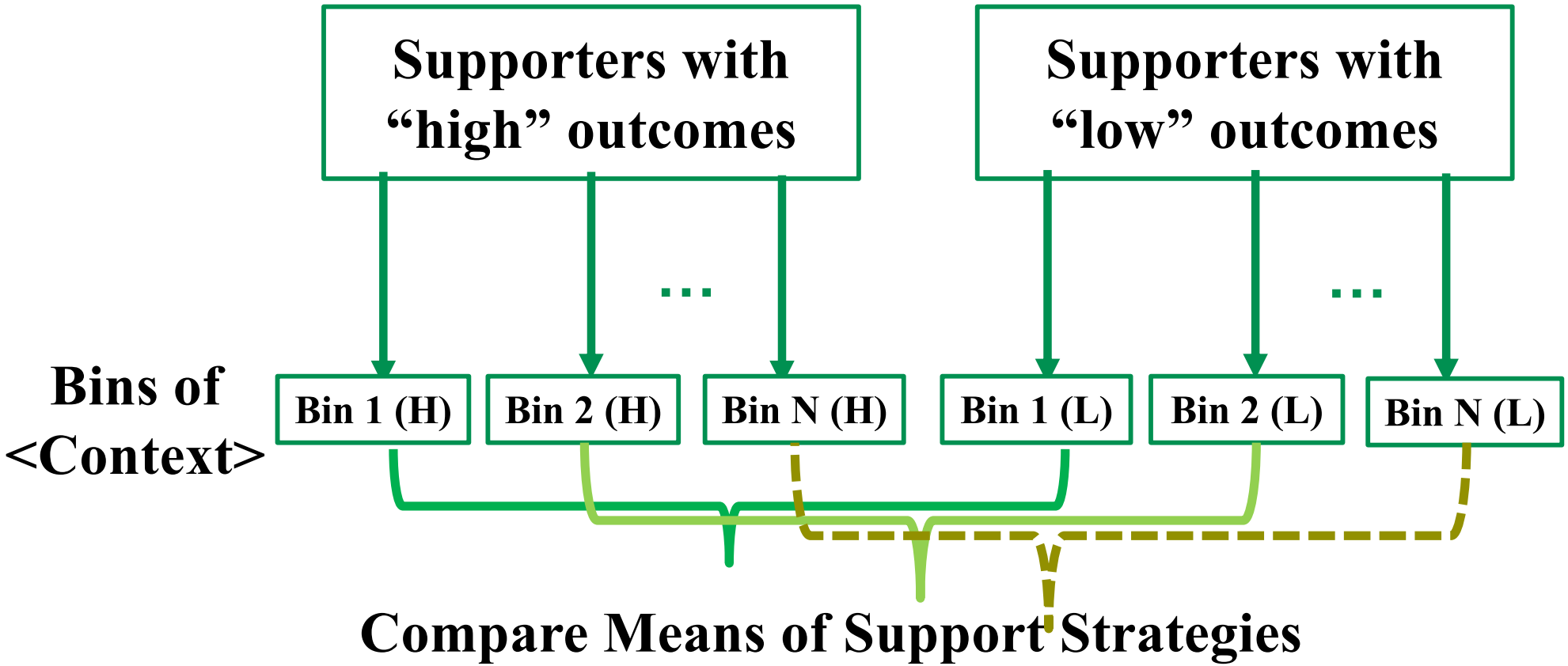




- Support <Strategy> Variables:
  - 23 variables calculated using validated lexicons and NLP techniques.
  - Can be divided into 6 categories: Sentiment, Emotion, Pronouns, Encouraging Phrases, Mental Processes & Behaviors, and Quantity.

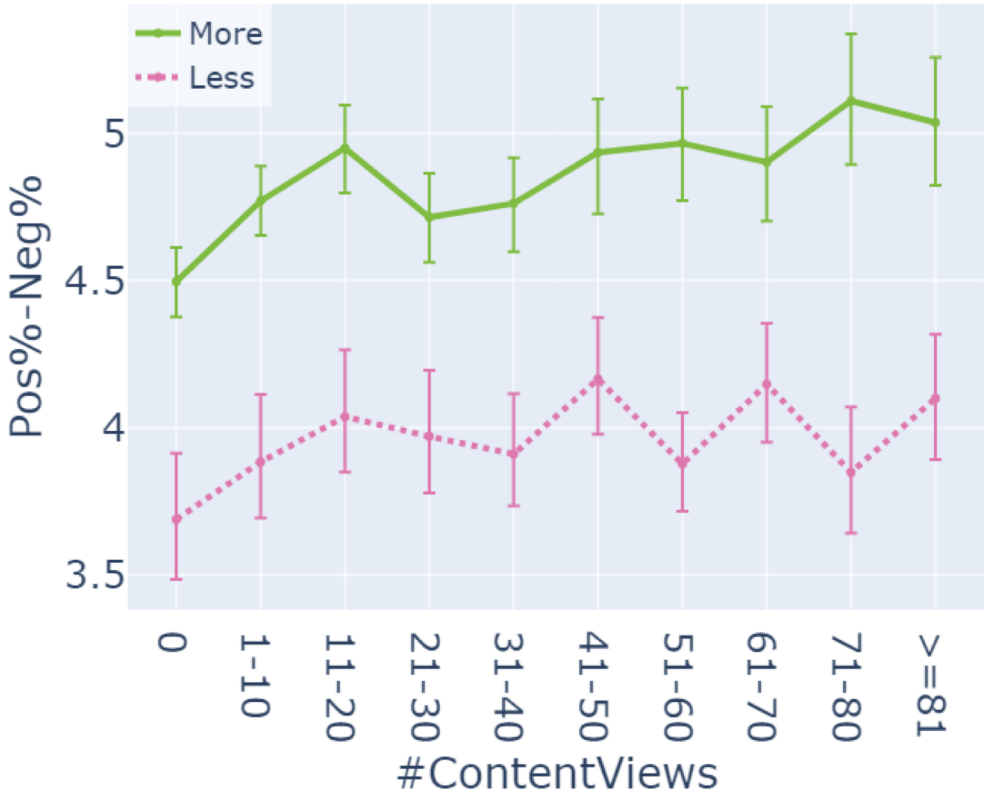
Successful Support Strategies – Method

- For each <context, strategy> pair (NP=23*5=115),
  - Divide messages as follows:



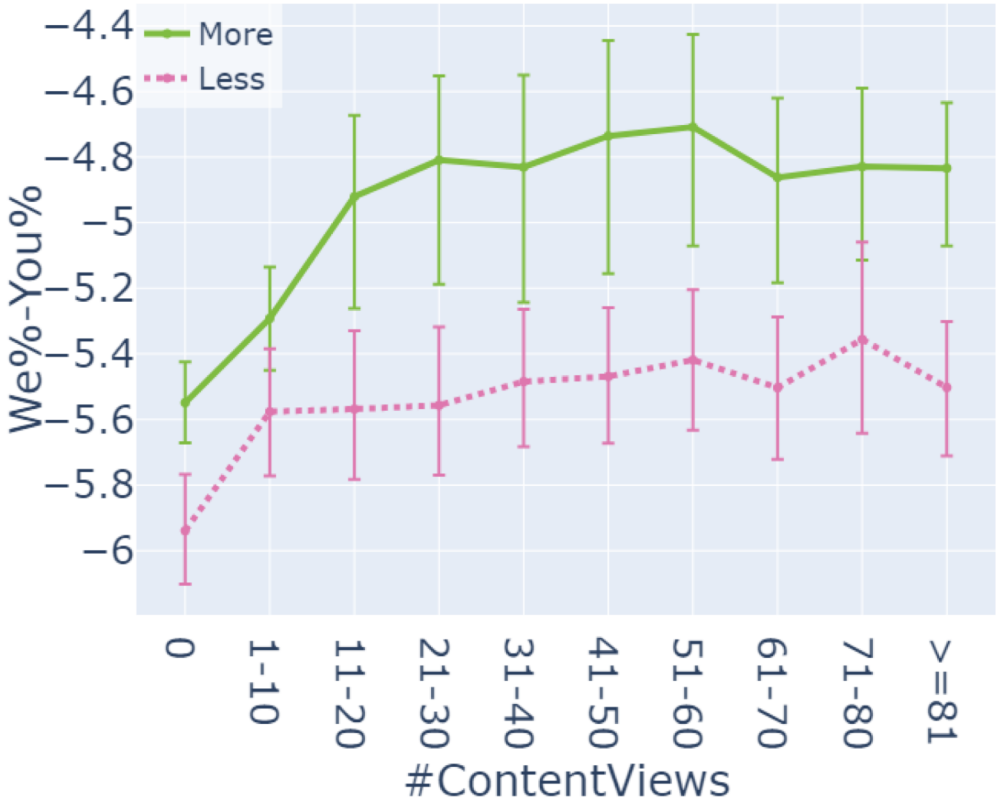
Successful Support Strategies – Results

- More successful messages had:
  - Used **more positive** and **less negative** words.
  - Used **less** words associated with negative emotions such as **sadness** and **fear**.



Successful Support Strategies – Results

- More successful messages had:
  - Used **more 1st person plural pronouns** (e.g. we), and had greater difference between frequencies of 1st person plural pronouns and 2nd person pronouns.

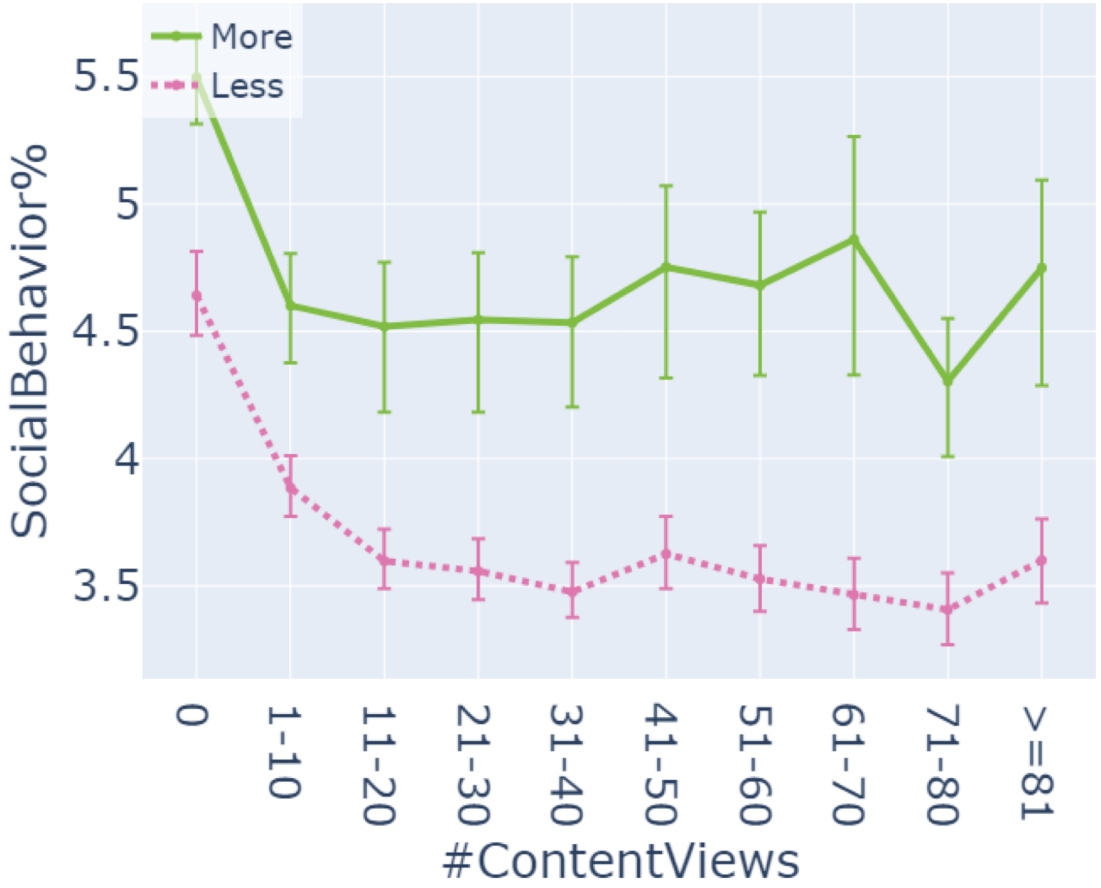


Successful Support Strategies – Results

- More successful messages had:
  - Used **more encouraging phrases** (e.g. well done, good job).

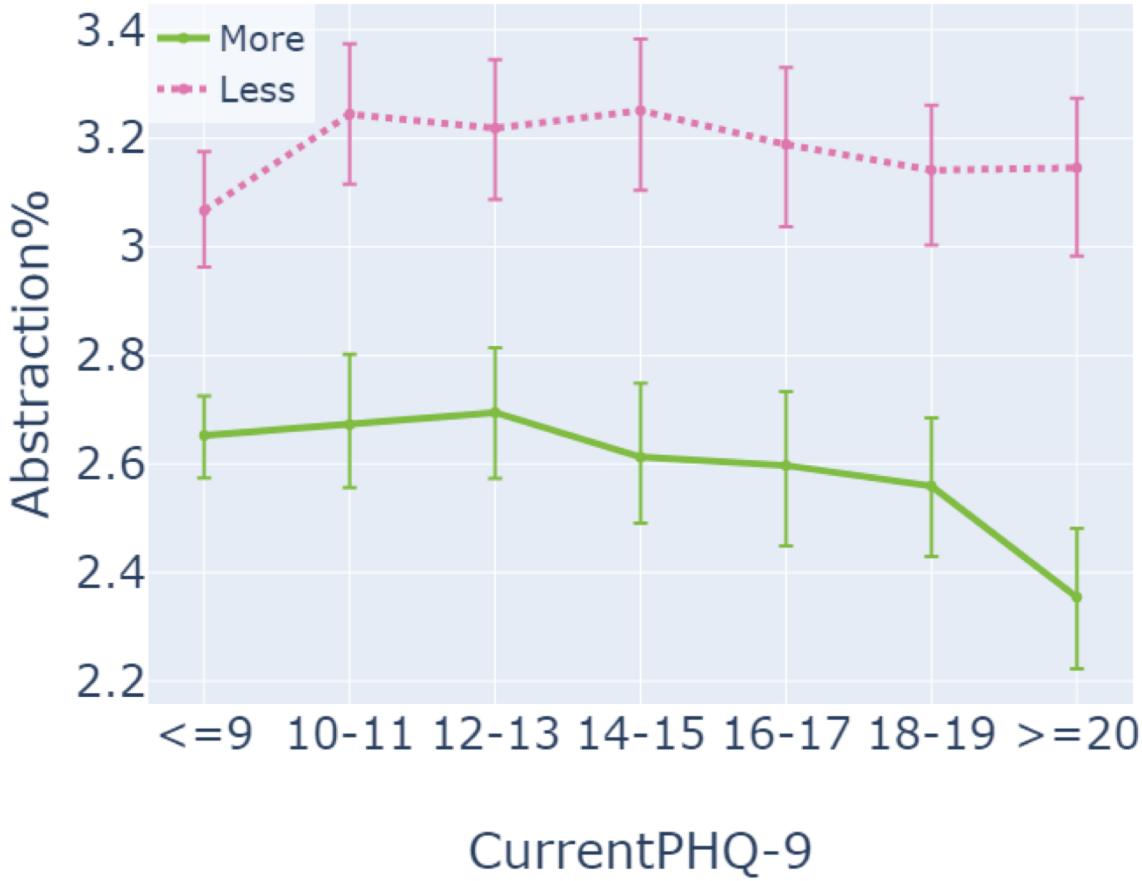
Successful Support Strategies – Results

- More successful messages had:
  - Used **more** words associated with **social behavior (***E.g. help, call, discuss*, and *share.)*



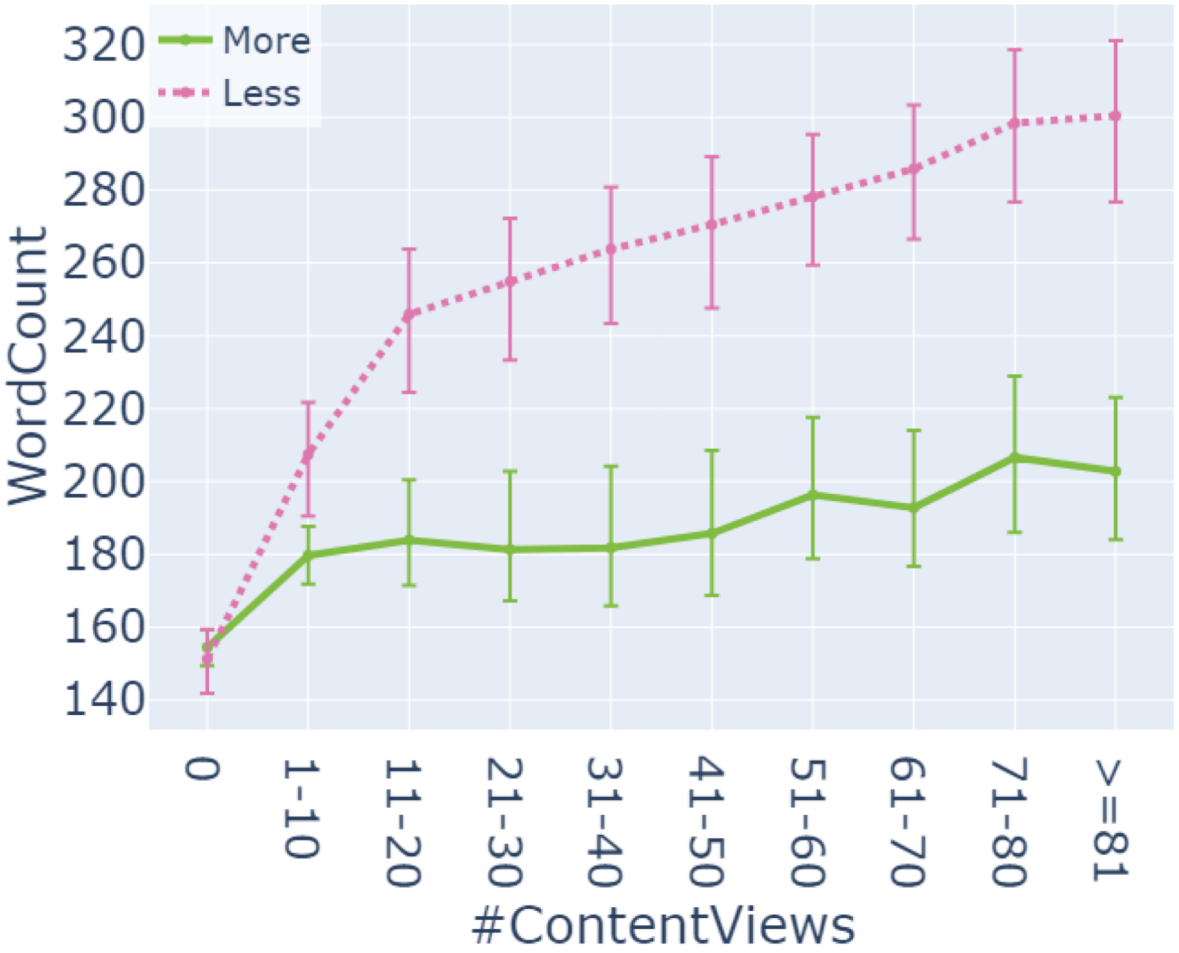
Successful Support Strategies – Results

- More successful messages had:
  - Used **less** words associated with **abstraction.**
    (E.g. think/thought, know, understand, and learn)



Successful Support Strategies – Results

- More successful messages were **shorter**!



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  Salient Context-Specific Support Strategies
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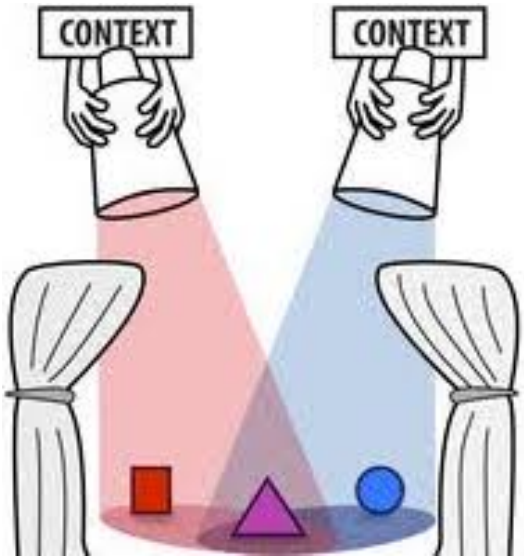
Salient Context-Specific Support Strategies

- Client Context, Supporter Behavior, and Client Outcomes → More complex relationship
  - E.g. Multidimensional Context.

Salient Context-Specific Support Strategies



- Multidimensional Context
  - How may considering the combination of multiple context variables shift how salient a specific support strategy is?
  - Interesting for personalization!

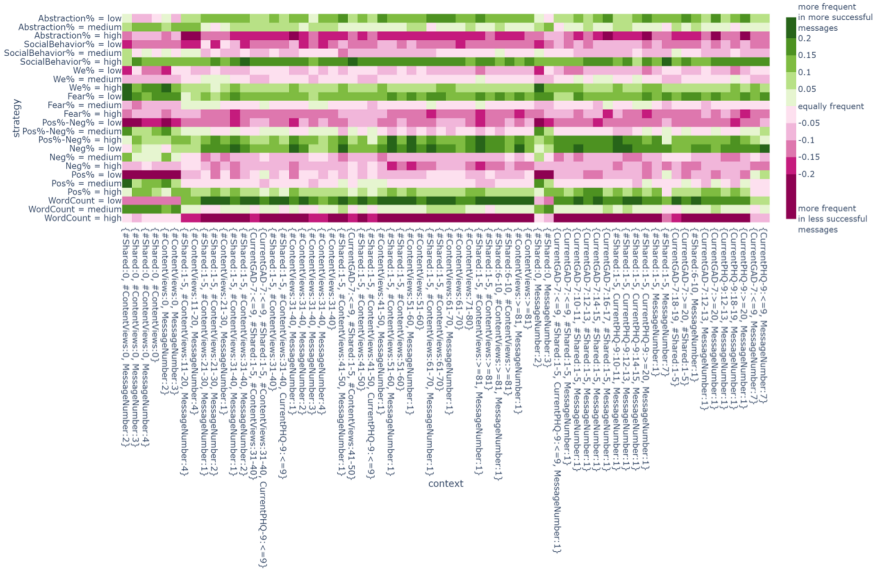
Salient Context-Spec. Supp. Strategies – Results

Salient Context-Spec. Supp. Strategies – Results

Salient Context-Spec. Supp. Strategies – Results

- For **less engaged clients**, writing **longer**, **more positive** and **more supportive** messages is linked with greater outcomes.
- **More engaged clients** appear to benefit more from messages with **less negative words**, **less abstraction**, and **more references to social behaviors**.

See Paper! ☺



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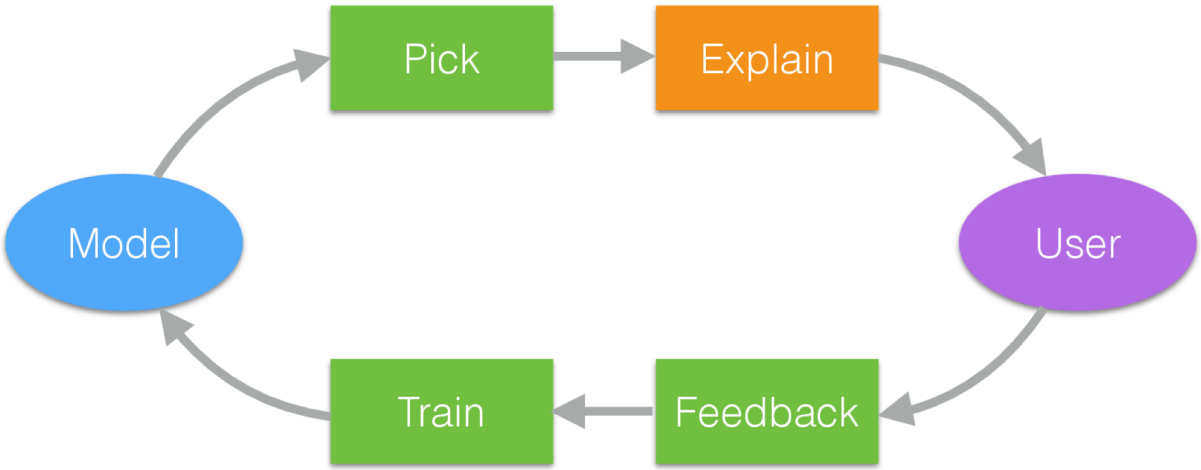
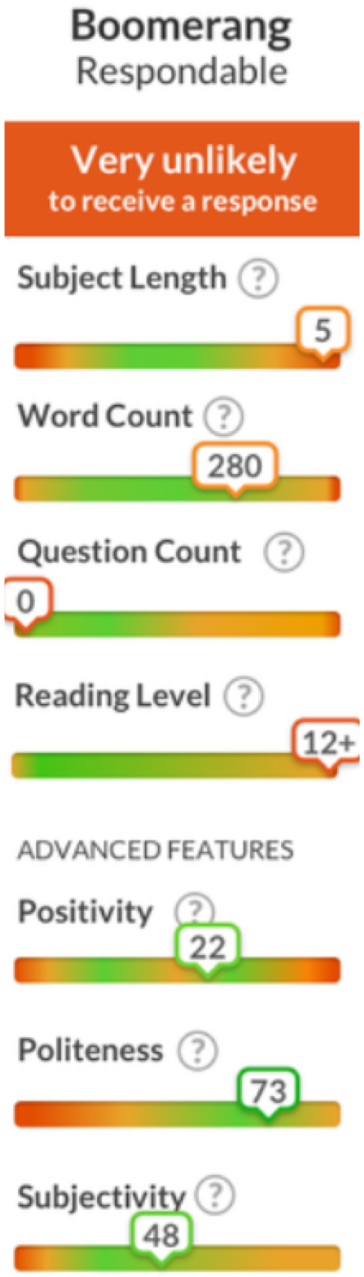
Discussion – Conclusion

- Maintaining the Human Touch & Enhancing Supporter Agency
  - Genuine human connection important for working alliance.
  - Creates opportunities to empower supporters → better training or data-driven tools for supporters.





Thank you! ☺

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