Optimizing Meta Ads To Recruit More Participants

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1850 MELIORA

50% of studies fail to meet their enrollment and retention goals

PUSH TACTICS

- Traditional media
- Event/street outreach
- Printed materials (flyers)
- Registry outreach
- Email campaigns
- Direct patient contact
- Clinician notifications (BPAs)
- Patient portal messaging
- Display ads
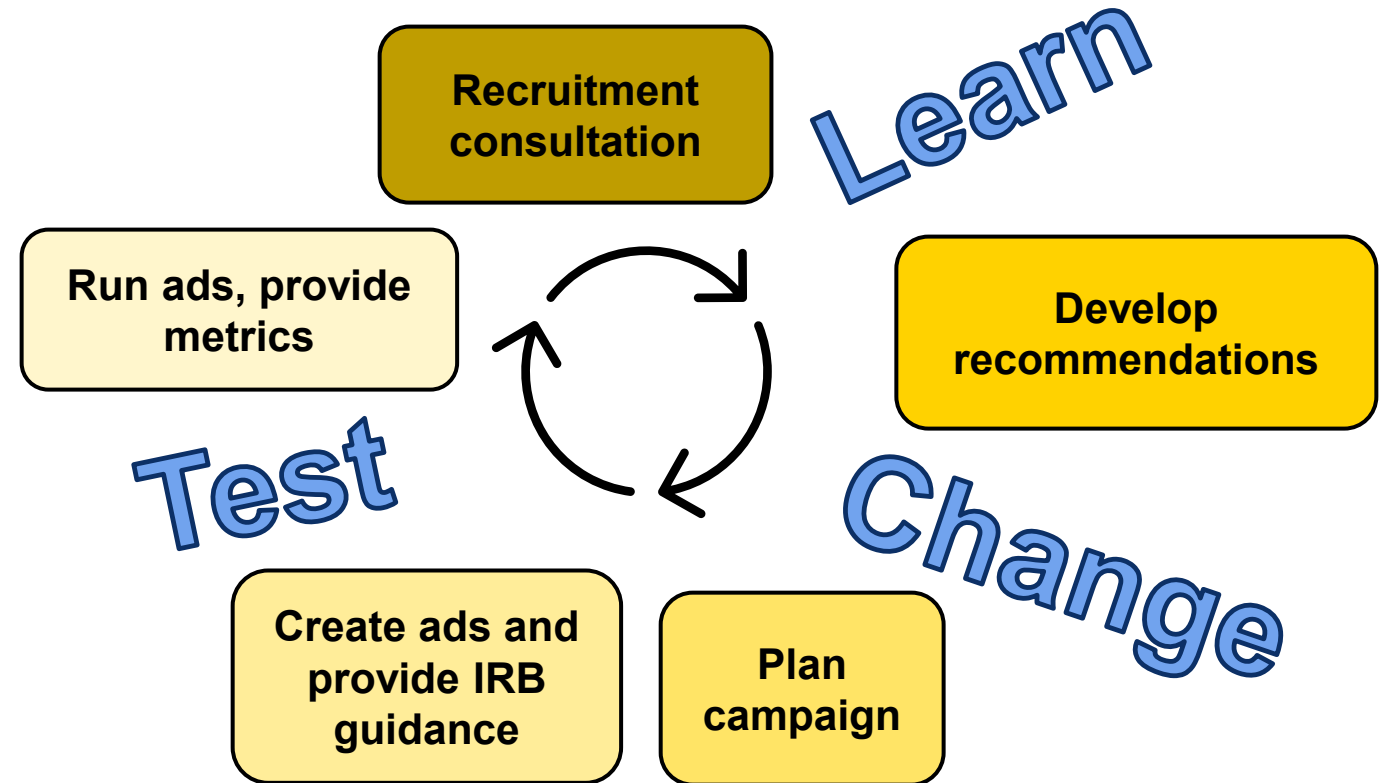- **Social media ads**

PULL TACTICS

- Individual study websites
- Searchable study databases
- Internet search ads
- SEO & AIO

The UR CTSI's mission is to help researchers and their teams produce results faster

- 100+ Meta campaigns since 2019
- Optimized ads reduce costs, boost engagement, and lead to more enrollments.
- Campaign implementation and optimization are cyclical

Learn

Test

Change

Recruitment consultation

Develop recommendations

Run ads, provide metrics

Create ads and provide IRB guidance

Plan campaign

Rochester's Small-Mid Size Market

Barriers to optimization for many research teams

1. Lack of budget for testing
2. No tracking pixels
3. The rush to recruit
4. Too many metrics

Four strategies for optimizing Meta ads

1. Streamline testing
2. Tap into new audiences
3. Identify common themes in high-performing messaging
4. Inform decision-making with key metrics

Strategy 1: Streamline Testing

Leverage Dynamic Ads to Test Creative Automatically

The IRB can review all dynamic content in one document

Case: The UR Information Processing Lab needed older research participants ages 55+

Gender disparity was a concern

Test

A $100 trial using dynamic ads

Learn

Initially received more interest from women than men

Change

Created a targeted ad set for men only
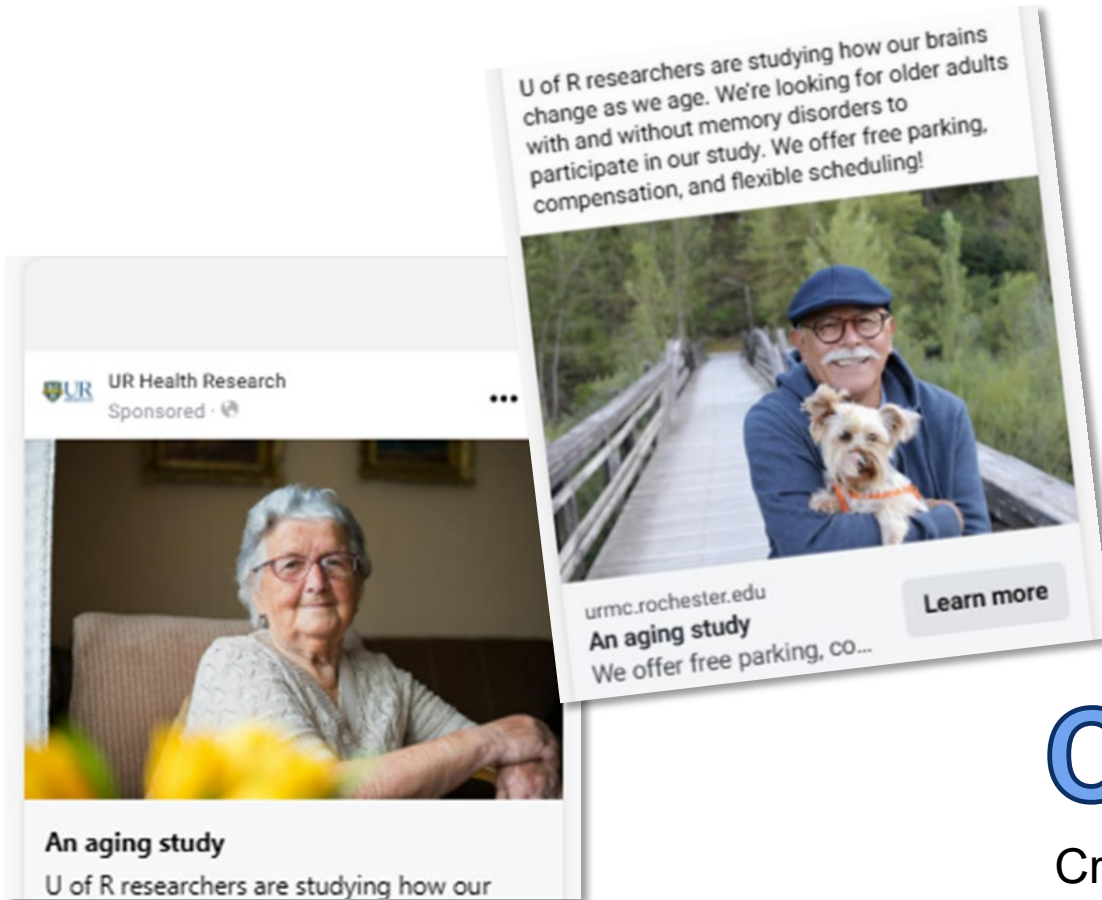
Campaign Results

- The $100 dynamic trial resulted in 80 interested participants
- A separate ad set for men increased the number of male participants, balancing out the gender disparity, but increased costs
- Ultimately $4 per enroll

"…we've been able to recruit more than 300 participants this year thanks to our Facebook campaign. We couldn't be more pleased!"

-Margaret Gardner, research coordinator for the UR Information Processing Lab

Strategy 2: Tap into New Audiences

Social Media is Trending Towards Video

Did you know?

Static image ads never reach Facebook users who are categorized as "only video watchers."

Case: The Vet Sleep Study had an active static image campaign, interested in optimizing further

Barriers to using video

• Limited resources for actual video development

• External IRB has added expense and turnaround time for review

We created a video slideshow

Using dynamic ad content that was pre-approved by the IRB

- You can use the "Create video" option within Facebook Ads Manager campaign builder.
- We used Canva.
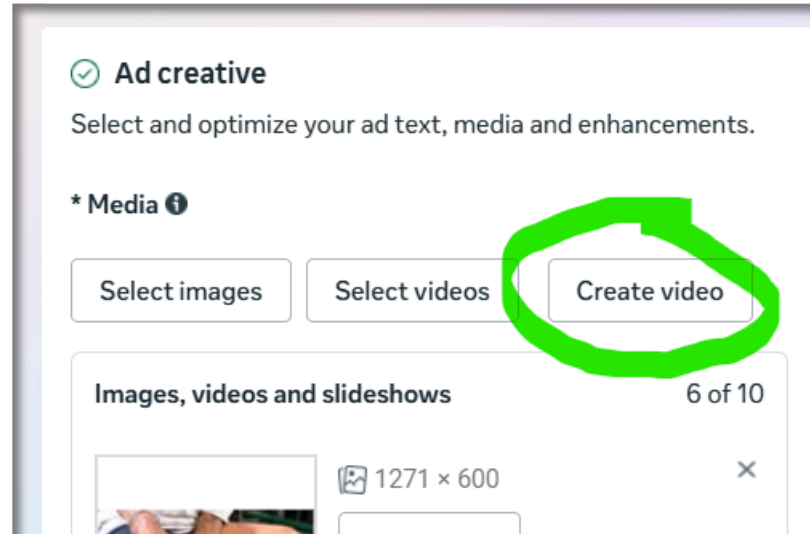
40% Higher CTR with Video Ads

- 5% higher CPC

Ad ↑		CPC (cost per link click)	CTR (link click-through rate)	Frequency	Amount spent
	Dynamic Veterans - Round 3 Images	$0.38	2.12%	1.34	$1,047.64
	Veterans - Video Ads	$0.40	2.97%	1.24	$299.76

Case: The Vet Sleep Study was using a lot of their bandwidth screening people that didn't qualify

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Lookalike audiences help limit wasted ad spend
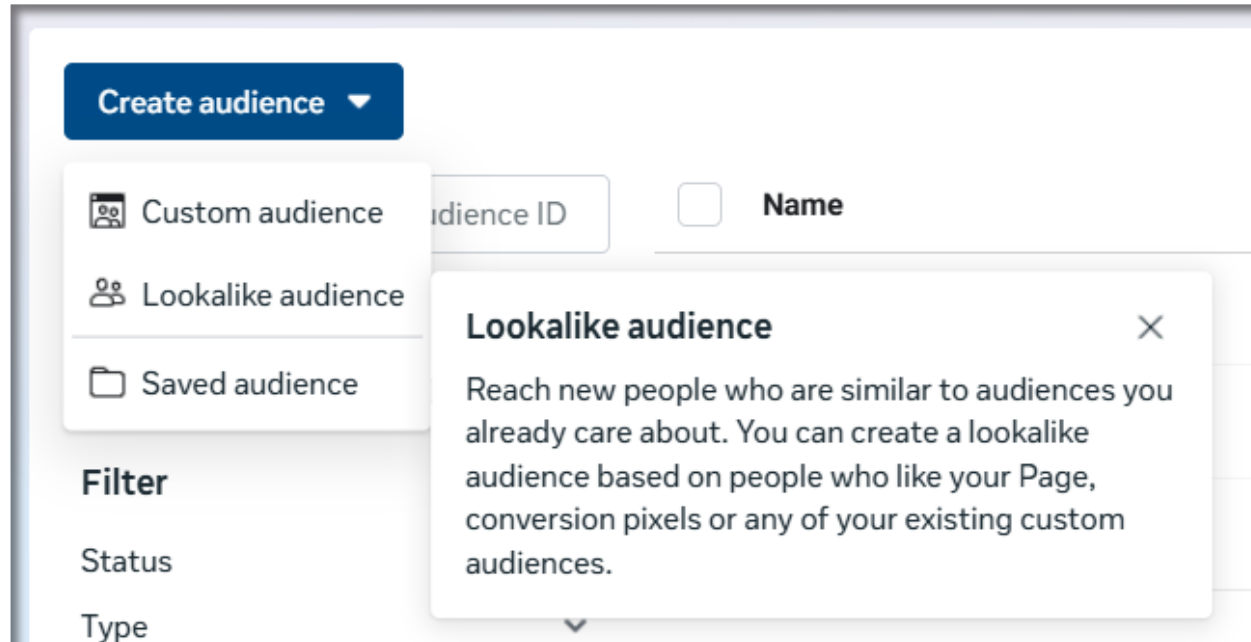
We Optimized Our Audience Targeting By Using Video Engagement

- Built a lookalike audience based on who has **viewed at least 95% of our video**

- This is the only way to build a lookalike audience without a tracking pixel
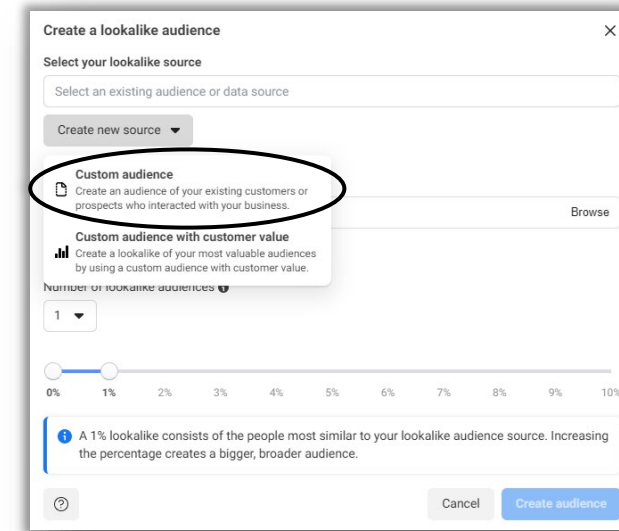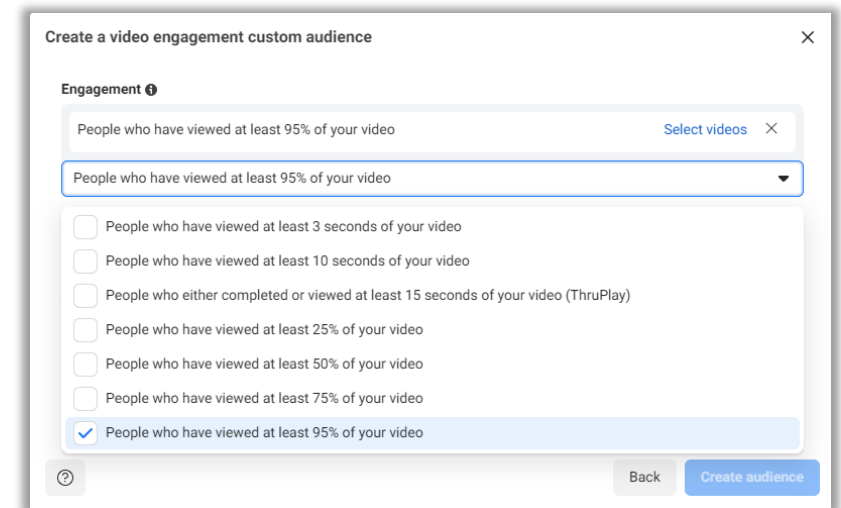
Using a Lookalike audience reduced screening time

A one-month test using our lookalike audience compared to the original audience from the month prior:

50% fewer completed screens

- 131 vs. 282

More total eligibles

- 82 vs. 67

Strategy 3: Identify Common Themes in High-Performing Messaging

Consider different ways to appeal to your audience

- **Does including compensation improve engagement?**

"Participants will receive $50 after completing the study."

- **Could leaning into the credibility of the institution improve engagement?**

"Researchers at U of R are seeking participants…"

- **Does including detailed study activities improve engagement over a shorter description of the study?**

"Participants in this study will be asked to…"

- **Does using words of a lower grade level improve engagement?**

"Do you drink too much and sleep too little?"

Dynamic ads allow you to answer these questions with automatic testing

Try using an AI chatbot to help with writing

Performance breakdowns give you insight into which resonates most

Ad set	Results	Reach	Impressions	Cost per result	Amount spent
Parents of teens (Min Age ... [Unpublished edits]	375 Landing Page Views	211,745	793,237	$7.65 Per Landing Page Vie...	$2,866.93
Headline "Seeking parent and teen pairs"	184	106,426	266,224	$8.62	$1,586.34
Headline "A parent-child study on performance"	86	86,107	159,395	$4.52	$388.74
Headline "Join a study with your teen!"	90	95,803	210,761	$5.86	$527.22
Headline "Help us help teens perform at their best"	15	83,355	156,856	$24.31	$364.64
Results from 1 ad set ⓘ	375 Landing Page Views	211,745 Accounts Center acco...	793,237 Total	$7.65 Per Landing Page Vie...	$2,866.93 Total spent

UR's highest performing ads clearly state the purpose of the study
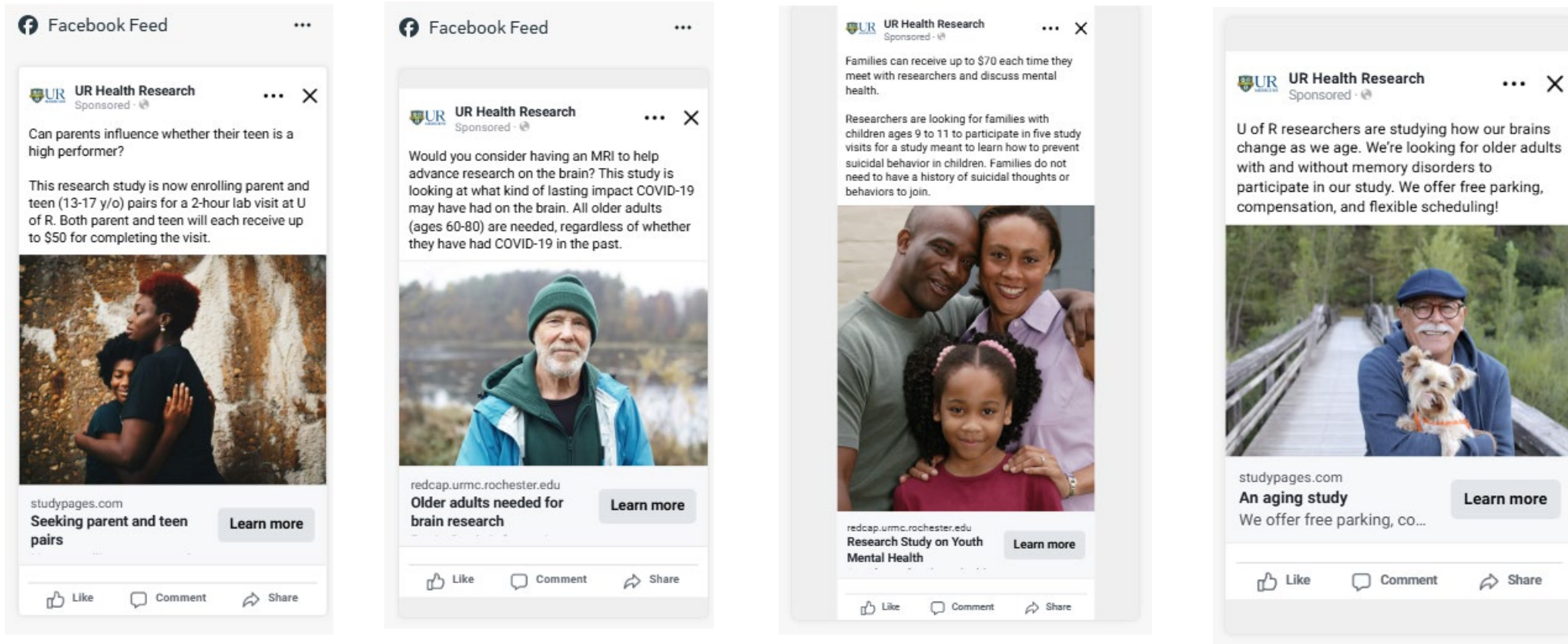
Other common themes among high performers include stating the time commitment and compensation

UR's highest performing images are of a single person conveying a positive emotion

Strategy 4: Using Performance Metrics to Guide Decisions

Track Key Metrics On and Off Meta

Metrics for benchmarking are provided in Meta Ads Manager

- Click-through-rate (CTR)

- Cost per click (CPC)

UR Benchmarks:
$1.00 per click
1.1% CTR

Downstream metrics are key for decision-making and must be tracked/calculated outside of Meta

- Cost per sign-up

- Cost per enroll

93,749 Ad Impressions

2,053 Meta Ad Clicks

314 Sign up button Clicks

102 Signed Up

84 Enrolled
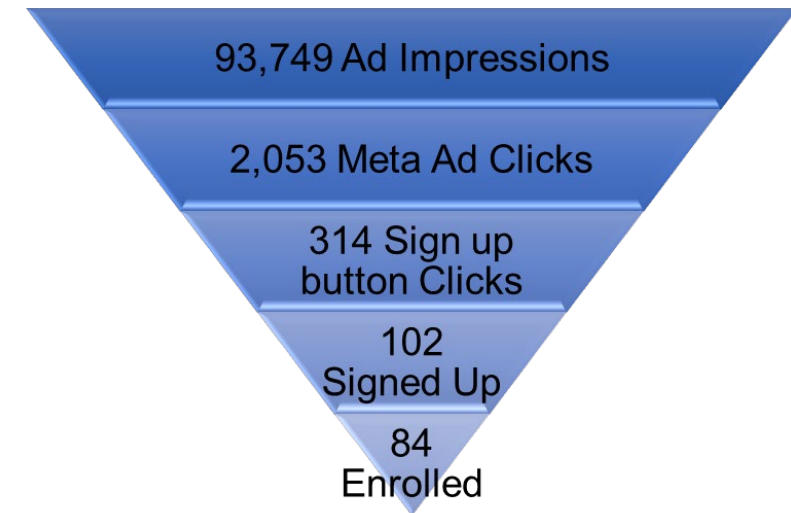
Downstream Metrics Point to the Problem

Low **sign-up metrics** do not necessarily indicate a problem with the Meta ad content or set-up.

Consider:

- Is the landing page loading properly?

- Is the content of the landing appropriate and appear trustworthy?

- Is there continuity between the ad and landing page content?

- Is signing up too burdensome?

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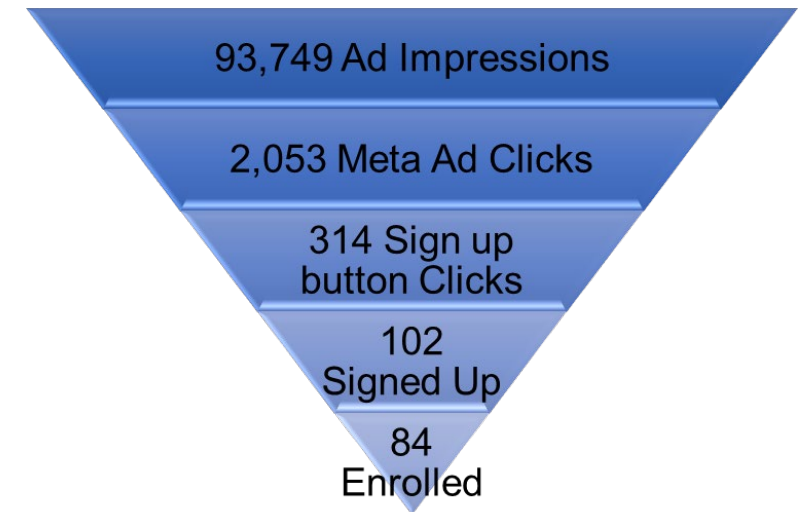
Run a Pilot Campaign to Test Cost per Enrollment

"We didn't budget for ads."
       "How much do Facebook ads cost?"

A small pilot campaign helps researchers make informed decisions

What creative elements work the best?
- Dynamic Breakdown metrics

How much will it cost to enroll one more person using this method?
- Cost Per Enroll tracked by research team

$100 spent over 1 week can be adequate for completing
Meta's learning phase and answering the above

Cost Per Enroll Varies Widely Among Research Studies

- Foot Pain from Diabetes (PDPN) - $1,200 per enroll

- Parkinson's Disease - $330 per enroll

- Long-COVID - $17 per enroll

Recap & Final Thoughts

Optimization is a cyclical process

1. **Creative optimization can be handled by Meta automatically**
   Dynamic ads are key to streamlining this

2. **Incorporating Video Can Improve Campaign Effectiveness**
   And unlocks lookalike audience-building

3. **High-performing content tends to have similarities**
   Identify them and incorporate into future campaigns

4. **It's Usually Downstream Metrics That Inform Decisions**
   Screen and enrollment numbers should be collected by research teams
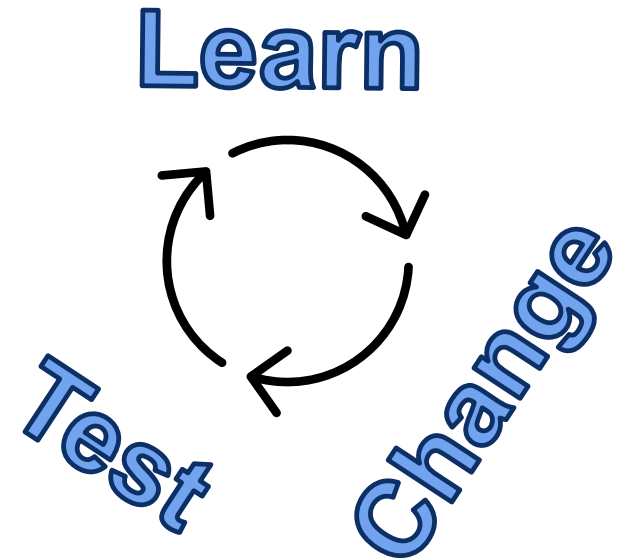
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