Public Abstract

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Title:Emotional and cognitive processing of traffic safety messages

This study examines the role of framing and empathy in persuasive messages. Twenty professionally produced traffic safety public service announcements (PSAs) were used as stimuli in a 2 (frame: gain v. loss) x 2 (empathy: high v. low) x 5 (message) repeated measure experiment. The 53 participants were instructed to watch each PSA presented in a random order while psychophysiological measures were recorded to index real-time cognitive and emotional processes engaged while viewing the messages along with various self-report items. Results show that viewers allocate the most cognitive resources to gain-framed high empathy messages followed by loss-framed high empathy messages. Loss-framed high empathy messages are the most arousing, while gain-framed high empathy messages are the least arousing suggesting a difference in how these types of messages are processed. Implication for the study of mediated empathy and the construction of traffic safety messages are discussed. ?