Public Abstract

First Name:Jensen

Middle Name:Joann

Last Name:Moore

Adviser's First Name:Glenn

Adviser's Last Name:Leshner

Co-Adviser's First Name:Esther

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Thorson

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Title:Examining the effects of Blame vs. Attack anti-tobacco messages using the Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing

Previous research using cognitive and persuasive measures posits that traditional Blame anti-tobacco advertisements which conceptualize smoking problems and consequences as caused by the individual are superior to the new Attack ads which challenge the institutions behind tobacco products. The current study utilizes Lang's Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing (LC4MP) to examine Attack vs. Blame and high vs. low Message Sensation Value (MSV) anti-tobacco ads as well as individual Motivation Activation which influences what parts of incoming information are encoded and stored.
A total of 226 participants took part in a 2 (Message Type: Blame/Attack) X 2 (Message Sensation Value: low/high) X 2 (Positivity Offset: low/high) X 2 (Negativity Bias: low/high) X Message Replication (5) X Order repeated measures experiment. Participant Sensation Seeking tendencies and Tobacco Use were also examined. Both cognitive and affective dependent measures were used to examine encoding, persuasiveness, and emotional response including: Secondary Task Reaction Times, recognition memory, response latency, Aad, evaluation of the argument, behavioral intent, hedonic valence, positive affect, and negative affect.
Findings suggest that high MSV Attack ads - like those used by the national Truth campaign - are more effective than Blame ads in terms of encoding, Aad, behavioral intent, and positive valence. Results from the current study showed that STRTs were significantly slower for high vs. low MSV messages while recognition memory was better indicating more resources required to process high MSV messages. STRTs were significantly faster for attack vs. blame messages while recognition memory was better indicating more resources allocated to processing attack messages. Overall, the results indicated that more resources were required to process AHMSV messages as STRTs slowed as recognition memory increased. Furthermore, high MSV messages led to more positive evaluations of the message argument, greater levels of arousal, and more negative emotional responses - each of which has been shown to influence processing and persuasiveness. Consistent with the LC4MP which posits that an individualâ€™s personal motivation leads them to process messages differently. The current study found that aversive activation (i.e. NB) was more influential in terms of anti-tobacco message effectiveness. Thus, while appetitive activation (i.e. PO) can be used as a targeting variable for anti-tobacco messages, NB should be taken into account for message design. By combining measures of message processing with those of persuasion and emotional response the current study offers a broader understanding of how traditional Blame and the new Attack messages influence audiences. Specifically, providing a triangulation (i.e., resources available, persuasiveness, and emotional response) showing that Attack messages are more influential to audience members most at risk, as well as those who are not.