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It's only scary if it's about me or my child: Different responses to emotional appeals targeting asthma awareness

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Abstract
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It’s only scary if it’s about me or my child: Different responses to emotional appeals targeting asthma awareness

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Abstract

Asthma is a significant health problem in Australia, affecting one in ten children and adults (Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring, 2011). Complacency from the general public regarding the severity of the condition hampers treatment seeking and contemplation of behaviour change (Andrews & Jones, 2009). Emotional appeals, such as fear campaigns, have long been utilised in social marketing; however, the efficacy of emotional appeals in asthma campaigns has not been established. This research examined which emotional appeals were most effective in increasing self-management and donation behavioural intentions.

The first phase of the study involved the development and testing of stimulus materials to encourage asthma sufferers to better manage their asthma and encourage non-asthmatics to donate to asthma causes. Six focus groups (three with asthmatics, three with non-asthmatics), with a total of 32 participants, were conducted. The results from the focus groups were used to modify the advertisements in order to ensure that they were acceptable and understandable to the target audience, and engendered the appropriate emotional and efficacy responses.

An online survey was conducted to test the efficacy of nine different advertisements (variations of high fear, low fear and positive appeals) in changing asthma self-management and donation behavioural intentions; respondents were 386 asthmatics, 90 parents of children with asthma, and 121 non-asthmatics. The self-reported emotional responses demonstrate that our condition manipulation was effective. Among asthmatics we found that the most effective execution for all three response variables was high-fear/low-efficacy, followed by high-fear/high-efficacy for self-management intentions and low-fear/low-efficacy for information seeking intentions. This is counter to the prevailing view in the fear appeal literature that high-fear messages are maximally effective when accompanied by an efficacy message (Witte & Allen 2000); we discuss possible explanations for this finding. Among parents of children with asthma we found no significant difference in behavioural intentions by type of message viewed; it is likely that this reflects a type of ceiling effect, behavioural intentions were improved regardless of the message they were exposed to. Among non-asthmatics (who were targeted with messages about donating to asthma organisations), we found the reverse effect; that is the absence of difference between the three executions reflected lack of intention to donate or to seek information regardless of the message viewed.

References

Andrews, K.L. & Jones, S.C. (2009). “We would have got it by now if we were going to get it…” An analysis of asthma awareness and beliefs in older adults. *Health Prom J Australia*, 20(2), 146-50.