The Role of Emotion in Health Communication

*Foundational Research and Future Directions*

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Overview: Emotion & Health Communication Research in Cancer Control

Media Effects Research
- Emotion as a mechanism for media effects
  - Framing, persuasion

Selective Exposure
- Emotion as a motivation for selective exposure to media
  - Uses and gratifications, mood management theory, social comparison
  - Information seeking, recovery gratifications, coping

(Weaver, 2007; Iyengar, 1982; Reese, 2001)
Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Foundational Research

Framing

- News media coverage of health topics heightens salience of health-related issues and influences the public’s knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Use of frames and angles in reporting
- Commonly used frames/angles
  - Public impact, economic impact, controversy, human interest, personal behavior change

(Weaver, 2007; Iyengar, 1982; Reese, 2001)
Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Current and Future Research

Framing

- Framing health disparities in cancer mortality data
  - disparity or progress frame $\rightarrow$ emotional reaction $\rightarrow$ individual-level screening intentions versus policy implications
- Related concept: gain-frames and loss-frames
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Persuasion

- Discrete emotional appeals
  - Fear appeals: Messages include threat component, which motivates protection/escape behavior; message also provides response information
  - Theory to predict/explain effectiveness of fear appeals, guide message design

- Limited work on other negative emotional appeals
  - Guilt, disgust, anger, regret
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Persuasion

- Investigate content or design features that evoke a broader range of emotions
  - Design elements
  - Effects on health-related KAB
- Positive emotional appeals
- Greater recognition of emotional barriers to health behaviors
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Persuasion

- Understand why emotional appeals boomerang or have unintended effects (Dillard & Nabi, 2006)
  - Arousal of multiple/blended emotional responses
  - Mismatch between message content and core-relational theme of target emotion
  - Message intensity
  - Individual differences influence message reception and response (e.g., coping styles, sensation seeking)
Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Current and Future Research

Persuasion

– Is social media changing the game?
  • Enthusiasm over the ability of social media to widely disseminate health messages cheaply and easily
  • But, audience can enhance or impede effectiveness
  • Social sharing of emotional media content
    – Greater intensity of emotion enhances likelihood of sharing (Rime, 2009)
    – Role of emotion in “viral” videos?
Emotion as a Motivation for Selective Exposure: Foundational Research

- Uses and gratifications paradigm (Katz et al., 1974)
  - Social support, escapism
- Mood management theory (Zillmann, 2000)
  - Stress relief
- Social comparison to media characters (Mares & Cantor, 1992)
  - Self-improvement, self-enhancement, emotional experiences
Emotion as a Motivation for Selective Exposure: Current and Future Research

- Mood management theory
  - Alternative affective needs (e.g., eudaimonia Oliver, 2008)
  - Discrete emotions (e.g., Nabi et al., 2006)
  - Measure post-viewing emotion
- Role of emotion in social comparison to media characters?
- Role of emotion in social cognitive processes?
- Emotion and online information seeking
  - Anxiety and info seeking, retention (Turner et al., 2006)
  - Dissatisfaction (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009)
Emotion as a Motivation for Selective Exposure: Current and Future Research

– Recovery (Reinecke, 2009; Reinecke et al., 2011)
– Coping
  • Connecting via social media
    – Sharing personal illness narratives (Chou et al., 2009)
    – Social support, emotion regulation (Chung & Kim, 2008)
    – Patient social networking (e.g., PatientsLikeMe)
    – Sharing/broadcasting emotion states (3GT, Aurora)
  • Media-generated positive emotions to sustain coping
  • Problem-focused coping and modeling
Conclusions

• Need for systematic inclusion of emotion-related constructs in health communication research

• Need a better understanding of the conditions under which emotion-based messages influence health-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors
  – Moderators of effect of emotion-based strategies

• Need to think about how people use media to manage emotions, cope with stress and implications for health

• Greater inclusion of emotion or affective constructs into health behavior change and media effects theories