Sensation Seeking, Information Exposure, and Message Sensation Value

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Three T’s

1. **Theory**: Activation Model
2. **Trait**: Sensation Seeking
3. **Targeting**: SENTAR
We seek or maintain a level of activation at which we feel most comfortable.

Attention to a message is a function of
- Need for stimulation or cognition
- Stimulation provided by the message
Theory

- Individuals will...
  - attend messages that fulfill need for activation
  - turn away from messages that fail to generate enough arousal for more exciting stimuli
  - turn away from messages that generate too much arousal for less exciting stimuli
Theory (Aggie version)

- Threshold of comfort
- Too much? Too little?
  - Seek alternatives
- Just right?
  - Do nothing.
- “Optimal” level of arousal
Activation Model

- Exposure to Communication
- Optimal Level Not Achieved or Maintained
- Optimal Level Exceeded
- Continued Exposure
- Optimal Level Attained Resulting in Positive Affect
- Seeks Less Arousing Content
- Seeks More Arousing Content
1. **Theory:** Activation Model
2. **Trait:** Sensation Seeking
Sensation Seeking

- A personality trait related to: “the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 27).
Trait

- “thrill-seekers”
- Individual difference variable, biological roots
- Social, physical, and legal risks are stimulating
- Aversion to boredom and routines
- Bungee jumping, party-ers, live life in the “fast lane”
- Risky sex, drug use
Sensation Seeking and Lifetime Substance Use
Fayette County Grades 8 to 11
Biological Basis

- SS connected with activity in the mesolimbic dopamine pathway
  - Thought responsible for producing reinforcement.
  - Implicated as a critical link mediating drug reward.
- SS associated with levels of monoamine oxidase (MAO-B)
  - Brain-specific enzyme which breaks down dopamine and other neurotransmitters.
  - Lower levels of MAO-B, higher sensation seeking.
Biological Basis

- High SS are drawn to the stimulation and mood altering effects from drug use.
- High SS are responsive to drug effects than LSS.
Trait

- High SS: distinct media preferences
- Message Sensation Value
  - The degree to which content and formal features of a message elicit sensory, affective, and arousal responses.
- HSS prefer high message sensation value
- HSS have higher “optimal arousal” level
- HSS prefer/need more stimulation
Message Characteristics

- highly novel
- creative
- intense
- dramatic
- physically arousing
- produces strong emotions
- graphic or explicit
- unconventional
- fast-paced
- suspenseful
- use of closeups
- strong sound efx
- strong visual efx
- not preachy
Trait

Message Sensation Value

- Visual: cuts, special effects, slow motion, unusual colors, intense imagery
- Audio: sound saturation, music, sound effects
- Content: acted out, unexpected format, surprise/twist ending
Trait

Perceived Message Sensation Value

- Novelty
- Emotional arousal
- Dramatic impact
1. **Theory**: Activation Model
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Targeting: SENTAR

1. **Target Audience**: high sensation seekers
2. **Message Design**: high sensation value prevention messages to reach high SS
3. **Pre-Campaign Research**: focus groups, extensive pretesting of ads
4. **Purchase & Placement**: Purchase TV time in high sensation value shows to air prevention messages
Targeting: Ad Campaign

“Two Cities” Study

- Lexington, KY & Knoxville, TX
- Controlled time series design with switching replications
- 100 adolescents/month for 32 months in both cities (n = 6,371)
- Baseline data: 8 months prior and 8 months after
Anti-Marijuana Campaign

- 7th through 10th grade initially
- Same cohort for 32 months
- Systematic random sampling with geographic and grade stratification
- In-home interviews
- Laptop administration (sensitive items)
- Parents could not be in the room
Anti-Marijuana Campaign

- Lexington:
  - Campaign 1: January to April, 1997
  - Campaign 2: January to April, 1998

- Knoxville:
  - Control: January to April, 1997
  - Campaign 1: January to April, 1998
Anti-Marijuana Campaign

- 4 month TV ad campaign
- 5 professionally produced HSV PSAs
- 3 Partnership for a Drug-Free America HSV PSAs
- Purchased $60,000 advertising time
- Equal donated time
- Strategically placed ads
Advertising Frequency

- 753 paid PSAs
- 1,245 donated PSAs
- ~500 PSAs/month
- ~114 PSAs/week for 17 weeks
- 70% of targeted group exposed to 3 campaign ads per week
Knox County

% Using Marijuana Past 30 Days

Knox Campaign 1
Fayette Campaign 1
Fayette Campaign 2

M HSS LSS
J JASON DJ JASON DJ
F M A M J J A S O N D J
M A M J J A S O N D

Knox Campaign 1
Fayette Campaign 2

% Using Marijuana Past 30 Days

M J J A S O N D
J JASON DJ
F M A M J J A S O N D
M J J A S O N D
Campaign Worked?

- Yes, teens in the control county (Knox) *increased* marijuana use while the campaign county (Fayette) *decreased*

  **AND**

- Other substances (alcohol, tobacco) continued to increase
**Campaigns and Effects**


Theoretical Perspective – Activation Model


Measurement


**Articles**

**Mediators and Moderators**

**Message Sensation Value**