

PRETESTING MESSAGES TO PREVENT DRUNKEN DRIVING: A SOCIAL MARKETING APPROACH TO CAMPAIGN PLANNING

Ron Anderson. Department of Advertising, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1200, Austin, Texas 78712, 512-471-1989, rba@mail.utexas.edu

ABSTRACT

This experiment reports findings for an overall sample of different types of drinkers and nondrinkers, and for a subsample of moderate drinkers who were exposed to one of three public service announcements designed to increase their self-efficacy, or confidence, to prevent a friend from driving drunk under increasingly difficult circumstances. As predicted, the behavioral- and verbal-modeling PSAs impacted drunken-driving prevention self-efficacy more than did a persuasive-efficacy announcement in both samples. All efficacy-information treatments surpassed the controls.

Body

This study investigated the impact of different forms of symbolic modeling and verbal persuasion—two sources of efficacy information—on self-efficacy beliefs and intentions to dissuade a friend from driving drunk among young adults. It reports findings for an overall sample of different types of drinkers and nondrinkers ($N = 241$) and for a subsample of moderate drinkers ($n = 94$). The research is intended to help social marketers identify the psychological constraints [1] that prevent target markets from adopting healthy lifestyles, in this case, preventing a friend from driving drunk. Message strategies are derived from the self-efficacy component of Bandura's [2] social cognitive theory. Research by Anderson [1] found that young adult moderate drinkers hold negative attitudes toward their friends' drunken driving but are reluctant to express their concerns to them because they lack confidence in their abilities to handle the situation properly and because they have not observed the successful performance of this behavior among their age group. The messages seek to remove this constraint by increasing responsible drinkers' confidence, or self-efficacy, to manage this sensitive interpersonal relationship. This approach, then, is consistent with the "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk" campaign theme. According to social cognitive theory, behavioral changes—whether instated enactively, vicariously, persuasively, or physiologically—are mediated by a common cognitive mechanism, what Bandura [2] called self-efficacy, defined as one's expectations of exercising control over troublesome situations or challenging tasks.

This theoretical formulation presumes that observation of the successful performance of threatening activities without adverse consequences eliminates avoidance behavior through perceived self-efficacy. Symbolic demonstrations of how to cope with stressful situations are more convincing than are verbal descriptions of the coping behavior, because they convey more efficacy information and more accurately portray the conditions under which behavior will occur and its consequences. These different forms of symbolic modeling were employed to raise young-adult responsible drinkers' confidence to dissuade their heavy-drinker friends from driving drunk. Verbal persuasion was used to achieve the same result through suggestion and exhortation. Efficacy expectations induced persuasively are typically weaker than those instated vicariously because they are not based on observation, or indirect experience with the situation, but rather on the assurance of a persuader. The impact of these treatment modalities was assessed by producing three televised public service announcements—a behavioral-modeling

announcement, which demonstrated the intervention behavior; a verbal- modeling announcement, which described the intervention behavior; and a verbal-persuasion announcement, which only suggested viewers were capable of performing the advocated behavior. Based on this rationale, the following rank ordering for sources of efficacy information on self-efficacy beliefs and behavioral intentions was hypothesized: behavioral modeling, verbal modeling, verbal persuasion, and control. This rank ordering also was predicted for the most threatening of a series of hierarchically arranged intervention tasks involving a drunken friend. These ordered effects were predicted for both an overall sample of drinkers and nondrinkers and for a subsample of moderate drinkers.

Participants were 173 females and 68 males ($N = 241$) enrolled in several undergraduate communication courses at a large southwestern university. Ninety-nine participants (41.1%) described themselves as moderate drinkers, 76 (31.5%) as light drinkers, 50 (20.7%) as nondrinkers, and 13 (5.4%) as heavy. On the average, they consumed 18.3 drinks per month and ranged in age from 17 to 43 years, with a mean age of 21. One hundred eighty-nine (78.4%) said they had expressed their concern to a friend about his or her drunken driving, and 52 (21.6%) said they had not. Because young-adult responsible drinkers are the target market, a subsample of 94 moderate drinkers was selected for analysis. A moderate drinker was defined as someone who has two or fewer drinks a day, or per occasion, such as at a bar, party, or home, and who never drinks and drives.

Behavioral scenarios were created to indicate the level of perceived drunken-driving prevention self-efficacy. The graded series consisted of four increasingly threatening tasks involving a drunken friend, ranging from low to high perceived threat. For each hierarchical task, participants recorded the strength of their self-efficacy on 11-point Likert-type scales ranging from 0 (not at all comfortable) to 10 (extremely comfortable). They judged how comfortable it would be for them right now to ask a host/hostess or bartender not to serve a drunken friend (least-threatening task); how comfortable it would be for them right now to ask someone they know to help them dissuade a friend not to drive drunk; how comfortable it would be for them right now to express their concern by themselves; and how persistent they would be right now if their friends counterargued with them (most-threatening task). Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this index was .77.

Major Findings for the Overall Sample

The predicted rank ordering for the strength of self-efficacy was largely confirmed. Results revealed a marginally significant difference between the behavioral modeling ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 1.96$) and verbal modeling ($M = 7.07$, $SD = 1.17$; $t[237] = 1.85$, $p = .03$) conditions, and highly significant differences between behavioral modeling and the verbal persuasion ($M = 6.50$, $SD = .94$; $t[237] = 4.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$) and control ($M = 5.44$, $SD = .98$; $t[237] = 8.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .23$) conditions on perceptions of ability to perform the tasks in the behavioral hierarchy. Participants in the verbal modeling condition differed significantly on the strength of their expectations from those in the verbal persuasion ($t[237] = 2.25$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and control ($t[237] = 6.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$) conditions. Participants in the verbal persuasion condition were significantly more confident of their abilities to perform the hierarchical tasks than were the controls ($t[237] = 4.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$). Because self-efficacy theory predicts that only people with a strong sense of perceived self-judged efficacy will persevere in their efforts to overcome highly aversive situations, planned comparisons were conducted to determine which treatment mode engendered the greatest effect on the most-threatening task in the behavioral hierarchy—the counterargument task—which asked participants how persistent they would be in their efforts to dissuade a friend from driving drunk if that friend counterargued with him or her. As expected, results

indicated that participants in the behavioral modeling condition ($M = 7.72$, $SD = 2.35$) would persist significantly more in their efforts than would those in the verbal modeling ($M = 6.63$, $SD = 1.98$; $t[237] = 3.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$), verbal persuasion ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.61$; $t[237] = 5.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$), and control ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.52$; $t[237] = 8.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$) conditions. Participants in the verbal modeling condition differed significantly from those in the verbal persuasion ($t[237] = 2.15$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and control conditions ($t[237] = 5.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$) on this task. Participants in the verbal persuasion condition would persist significantly more in their efforts to resist a friend's counterarguments than would the controls ($t[237] = 2.98$, $p = < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$).

Major Findings for the Subsample of Moderate Drinkers

As with the overall sample, the expected rank ordering for strength of self-efficacy was largely confirmed for the moderate-drinker subsample. The contrast between the behavioral modeling ($M = 7.65$, $SD = 1.64$) and verbal modeling ($M = 7.02$, $SD = 1.21$; $t[94] = 1.76$, $p = .04$) conditions approached significance at the more liberal .05 level. However, there were highly significant differences between behavioral modeling and the verbal persuasion ($M = 6.65$, $SD = 1.08$; $t[94] = 2.64$, $p < .025$) and control ($M = 5.12$, $SD = .81$; $t[94] = 7.41$, $p = .000$) conditions on perceived strength of self-efficacy to perform the tasks in the hierarchy. Moderate drinkers in the verbal modeling condition did not differ significantly on the strength of self-efficacy from those in the verbal persuasion condition ($t[94] = .93$, $p = .17$), but they did differ significantly from the controls ($t[94] = 5.23$, $p = .000$). Moderate drinkers in the verbal persuasion condition differed significantly from those in the control condition ($t[94] = 3.98$, $p = .000$). The predicted order for sources of efficacy information on the most threatening task in the behavioral hierarchy—the counterargue task—was largely confirmed for the moderate drinkers. Recall that this item asked participants how persistent they would be in their efforts to dissuade a friend from driving drunk if that friend counterargued with him or her. As expected, results indicated that moderate drinkers in the efficacy-information conditions would persist more in their efforts to resist a friend's rejection of their concern than would those in the control condition. Individual comparisons revealed that moderate drinkers in the behavioral modeling condition ($M = 7.96$, $SD = 2.39$) would persist significantly more in their efforts than would those in the verbal modeling ($M = 6.81$, $SD = 1.56$; $t[93] = 2.21$, $p < .001$), verbal persuasion ($M = 6.27$, $SD = 1.48$; $t[93] = 3.06$, $p < .001$), and control ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.46$; $t[93] = 6.14$, $p = .000$) conditions. Although moderate drinkers in the verbal modeling condition did not differ significantly from those in the verbal persuasion ($t[93] = .93$, $p = .17$), they did differ significantly from the control conditions ($t[93] = 3.59$, $p < .001$) on the most-threatening task. Moderate drinkers in the verbal persuasion condition would persist significantly more in their efforts to resist a friend's counterarguments than would the controls ($t[93] = 2.42$, $p = < .001$).

REFERENCES

- [1] Anderson, R. B. Cognitive appraisal of performance capability in the prevention of drunken driving: A test of self-efficacy theory, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 1995, 7(3), 205-229.
- [2] Bandura, A. *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*, New York, W. H. Freeman and Co., 1997.