

MASTER'S THESIS

Message Effects on Psychological Reactance: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Message effects on psychological reactance have been well-documented in communication research. To obtain an overall picture of message effects on psychological reactance, this thesis performed a research synthesis by conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis. In the systematic review, a total of 94 articles met the inclusion criteria, which involved 110 studies. The results revealed 58 different message features that were examined in the reviewed studies, mainly focused on health-related topics ($k = 70$), followed by environment protection topics ($k = 14$) and education and/or school activities related topics ($k = 8$). Based on the results of the systematic review, a meta-analysis were performed by employing a series random-effects model for message features: freedom-threatening language and gain vs. loss framing. The results showed that freedom-threatening language induced a higher level of anger ($k = 26$, $r = .22$, 95% CI = [.18, .26]) and negative cognitions ($k = 23$, $r = .18$, 95% CI = [.14, .21]) than non-freedom-threatening language. In addition, gain- vs. loss-framing did not produce significant effects on either anger ($k = 6$, $r = -.03$, 95% CI = [-.10, .04]) or negative cognitions ($k = 6$, $r = -.01$, 95% CI = [-.06, .05]). These findings provide an overall picture of the effects of message features on psychological reactance, which are expected to inspire message design in strategic communication.

keywords: psychological reactance, message effects, meta-analysis, systematic review