

Carson Wagner (Ph.D. '02)

Assistant Professor, E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University (Athens, Ohio)

Dissertation Title

Unobtrusive Measures and Unreasoned Actions: PSAS and the Strength of Drug-Related Attitudes

Committee

Michael Tracey, Chair

Sandra Moriarty

Brett Robbs

Irene V. Blair (Psychology)

S. Shyam Sundar

Abstract

Historically, anti-drug PSA research has focused on self-reported attitudes, but theory and research suggests attitudinal strength of association (SOA) may be more important for predicting behavior. Not only is SOA elicited unobtrusively, it also conveys the likelihood with which evaluations stored in memory can influence both reasoned and unreasoned choices. The present dissertation explores the effects of anti-drug ads on both expressed attitudes and SOA through three experimental studies focusing on the peripheral route to persuasion, which may be most promising for SOA modification due to its associative learning potential. Results of the first two studies demonstrate that traditional, self-report attitude change is easier to demonstrate than SOA alteration and that self-report attitude measures tend to exaggerate PSA effects. Study 3 shows SOA variance across conditions that promote differential ad processing, and it illustrates that these unobtrusive measures better predict persuasion covariates, which in turn helps clarify their role in predicting future drug-taking behaviors.