The Science of Scare Tactics

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Lifesavers
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Three things I hope we can agree on

1) Fear changes thought & behavior.
2) Thought and behavior can be influenced.
3) Science is a good thing.

Handout: go.umd.edu/scare
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Psychological Outcomes

Beliefs & Attitudes
Intentions
Behavior

One should I will I did

https://d.ibtimes.co.uk/en/full/1448999/scream-fear-brain.jpg
https://handouts.umiacs.umd.edu
https://openclipart.org/image/2400px/svg_to_png/195741/Science-Explosion.png
So... do fear appeals work?

“It depends…”

Conceptual Variables

Message

Audience ↔ Behavior

Scary Science

Tannenbaum et al. (2015)
Psychological Bulletin

meta-analysis of 127 experimental studies

participants across 27,372 experimental & control groups

Does Amount of Depicted Fear?

Yes, but afraid is roughly as effective as terrorized.

How scared should you be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Intentions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Efficacy Statements

- Perceived Efficacy
  - Response Efficacy
    - Doing X works
  - Self-Efficacy
    - I can do X

What might future campaigns do to...

- Understand what its target fears more
- Show significant fear of severe outcome
- Focus heavily on susceptibility
- Reinforce response efficacy
- Bolster self-efficacy

Evaluation Options

- Collection methods
  - Survey
  - Observation
  - Laboratory
- Evaluation designs
  - Pre- to post
  - Matched test vs. control
  - Randomized experiments
Randomized Experiment

Will you drive in airplane mode?

The message does not **cause** a change until an experiment finds that it does.