

Identifying Persuasive Messages to Promote Tobacco-Free Policy Change

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Background: Despite increasing awareness of the dangers of tobacco, including smoking and secondhand smoke, smoking remains a prevalent behavior among young adults. Smoking behaviors on college campuses are particularly puzzling, given high levels of knowledge about the related risks and the availability of campus health services that provide quit resources. Moreover, despite consensus that smoke- and tobacco-free policies are the optimal strategy to prevent secondhand and outdoor tobacco smoke exposure, the vast majority of campuses in the United States continue to be reticent to adopt such policies. In the current study, an interdisciplinary research team utilized models from the field of political communications to examine predictors of support and opposition to smoke-free policy proposals. Specifically, since previous research indicates that the framings of political issues and individuals' emotional states are powerful predictors of policy support, we incorporate framing theory and framing affect into a model of smoke-free policy support.

Methods: An online questionnaire was administered at a Midwestern university, and responses were analyzed to examine relationships between levels of tobacco usage, levels of smoke- and tobacco-free policy support, emotions, and issue framing.

Results: A total of 1304 undergraduate and graduate students completed the questionnaire, 42.9% of whom smoked currently or had smoked in the past. Even controlling for smoking behavior, issue frame variables and emotions emerge as significant predictors of policy support.

Conclusions: Findings from this study will aid the development of informed and effective messaging strategies to foster support for smoke- or tobacco-free policy or other policy proposals.

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