LORD (1994)


Background and Aim: This study examines the relative efficacy of:
(i) Two different message approaches - positively and negatively framed advocacy appeals constitute the message approaches
(ii) Three source strategies in enhancing citizen beliefs about, attitude towards, and behavioural compliance with community recycling programmes. Message sources examined are: (a) advertising appeals, (b) publicity-generated news items, (c) personal influence appeals.

This study aimed to show that exposure to each of the above message and source strategies yields more favourable attitudes towards recycling and a higher level of participation in recycling programmes than no message exposure. The researchers anticipated that a positively framed message would have a better opportunity of affecting beliefs than a negative appeal, an influence that may be expected to extend to a more favourable attitude towards recycling (because individuals will respond to the feelings of satisfaction and other benefits gained from recycling).

The study therefore had the following hypotheses:
- **Attitude** toward recycling is improved for households receiving an advocacy message, relative to unexposed (control) households (H1).
- Delivery of an advocacy message yields an increase in observed recycling, with households receiving no message (control) showing no significant change in curb side (pavement) collection amounts (H2).
- Consumer beliefs about positively balanced benefits of recycling are more readily formed upon exposure to an advocacy message than are beliefs about negatively framed consequences of failure to recycle (H3).
- Positively framed messages result in more favourable attitudes toward recycling than negatively framed messages (H4).

- Consumer belief in negatively framed arguments about the consequences of failure to recycle is greatest when those arguments are conveyed in the form of a publicity-generated news story and least when they appear as part of an advertising message (H5).
- Among consumers exposed to negatively framed messages, favourable attitude toward recycling is greatest when the message is conveyed in the form of a publicity-generated news story (H6).
- Messages conveyed via social influence (i.e. from a personal acquaintance) result in a more favourable attitude toward recycling in a positively framed than in a negatively framed condition (H7).
An advocacy message from a personal acquaintance elicits a greater increase in recycling behaviour than a comparable message from an advertising or news (publicity) source, with strongest behavioural change arising in the personal influence–negatively framed message condition (H8).

**Method:** Lord states in the original article that this was a quasi-experimental field study. Data were gained from 140 households in a north-eastern metropolitan community in the USA, who were served by a curb side recycling programme: 7 groups of 20 participants received the following different messages: 1. advertisement with a positive message; 2. advertisement with a negative message; 3. newspaper article with a positive message; 4. newspaper article with a negative message; 5. a personal letter from acquaintance with a positive message; 6. a personal letter from acquaintance with a negative message; 7. received no message at all.

Of those who responded to the questionnaire. 57% were female and 43% were male. The mean age was 34.9 years ranging from 19 to 65. Educational background ranged from some high school to graduate degrees and household income ranged from $10,000 to $130,000. Overall, demographics were not significantly different between conditions. The following factors were manipulated: Negative messages described the risks of failing to recycle and some of the possible measures failure could lead to. Positive appeals focused on environmental benefits, savings to the community and personal and social satisfactions arising from full participation in the recycling programme. Both messages reminded recipients of the items that were recyclable. In the advertisement condition, the message had the appearance of an advert from a fictitious company who distributed environmentally friendly products in the region. In the news article condition, it was described as having recently appeared in a local news publication. In the personal influence condition, it appeared in the form of a letter, signed by a student assistant and addressed to a personal acquaintance.

Data was collected in the following stages: On collection day of the first week, the contents of the test household’s recycling bin were discreetly recorded. On the following day, the stimulus message appropriate to the condition they were in was left at their front door (the control group received no message). This was repeated the following week, in order to assess behavioural impact of the test message. The day after the second observation, a questionnaire was given to the adult most responsible for recycling and they were asked to complete it confidentially.

The observation form measured the quantity of items placed in recycling bins by each household and were categorised, e.g. cardboard or glass. The questionnaires assessed how much they believed statements raised by the messages they were given. The truthfulness of statements were rated between ‘definitely false’ and ‘definitely true’. Also, four 7-point semantic differential items measured attitude toward recycling, e.g. harmful-beneficial. Demographic information and attitude toward the message using eight 7-point semantic-differential items, e.g. persuasive-unpersuasive, good-bad, were also recorded.

**Results:**

- **H1** – Overall, this hypothesis was supported. Participants in the experimental groups demonstrated a more favourable attitude toward recycling than control group households.

- **H2** - The combined treatment (experimental) groups showed a significant increase in both the number of recycling categories (mean difference score from the first to the second) and the total number of items put out for recycling. The control group showed no significant change.

- **H3** - The data supports this hypothesis. Those exposed to the positively framed message showed a significantly higher level of belief in statements that constituted that message’s rationale for participation in recycling programme than did individuals in the control group and those exposed to the negatively framed message.
H4 – There were **significant results**. The positively framed message led to a more favourable attitude toward recycling than did the negative appeal.

H5 - Findings did **not support this hypothesis**, as no significant differences between the influence of publicity-generated news story and an advertising message were identified.

H6 – **This hypothesis was partially supported**. Although attitude toward recycling in the negative appeal-publicity condition was significantly greater than that obtained for the same message conveyed by a personal acquaintance, it did not differ significantly from that generated by the advertising source.

H7 – Favourable attitude toward recycling was **significantly higher** among households receiving the positively framed message than among those in the negative-appeal condition.

H8 - The personal negative condition showed the **greatest increase** in recycling behaviour.

**Conclusions:** Consumers prefer **positively framed messages** rather than those that focus on the unpleasantness of the adverse consequences of failure to recycle. We are more likely to believe arguments raised in positive recycling appeals than those raised in negative appeal. Positively framed messages have a more favourable impact on attitude toward recycling than negative appeals. However, a negatively framed message from a **personal acquaintance** exacerbates its negative attitudinal consequences and is the **most effective** way to increase recycling behaviour.

**Evaluation**

- **Usefulness:** These findings have important real life implications, which can be used to increase conservation behaviours, as well as having implications in terms of how to frame messages in order to influence behaviour in a wider context. The importance of recycling cannot be overstated; this study shows that the strategies used in the experimental conditions are all effective to some extent and therefore a combination of positive and negatively framed messages (including a negative message from an acquaintance) would be very useful in changing attitudes to recycling.

- **Validity:** Although variables were manipulated, the study was investigating a curb side recycling programme in a neighbourhood in the USA. Therefore, the study had mundane realism, as day to day behaviour was being investigated and there were also high levels of **ecological validity**, **no experimenter effects** or **demand characteristics**, and high **internal validity**.

- **Individual/Situational Explanations:** The findings clearly support the **situational** explanation side of the debate. The type and source of message significantly improved recycling attitudes and behaviours, compared to the control group who were not subjected to these influences. Therefore, individual attitudes towards recycling can be changed in a range of different situations.

**Exam Style Questions**

Using the research by Lord (1994), explain the factors which influence the tendency to conserve or recycle. (10)

Explain how the research by Lord (1994) could be used to increase recycling or other conservation behaviour. (10)