

Applying the Stages-of-Change Model to Evaluation of the SMART About Water Program

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The Stages-of-Change-Model (SCM) provides a framework for integrating theories of attitude and behavior change as well as theories on media effects into a coherent form. This model can be useful in the designing of a communication health campaign (Slater, 1999). Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992) present the SCM model as a way for the campaign designer to integrate different theoretical perspectives. Slater argues that many effects theories compliment each other because their focus of change differs from one another. For example, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is clearly a persuasion theory that is concerned with changes in attitudes while the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is more concerned with changes in behavior. Therefore, we can see that the ELM and TRA can be utilized together in an attempt to first influence peoples attitudes and then their behaviors.

The SCM model posits a five stage progression in a campaign for behavioral change. Accordingly, an effective communication campaign needs to address the needs and concerns that are unique to each one of these stages. The first stage in the model is called the Pre-Contemplation stage. Theoretically, individuals in this stage have no awareness of the need to alter their behavior and therefore have no intention of behavior modification. In the second or contemplation stage, people possess the knowledge that a problem exists and are considering action. Preparation is the third stage of the model. In what Slater (1992) has termed the transitional stage, people have the intention of taking part in the behavior, but have not yet adapted it into their repertoire. During the fourth or action stage, people have accomplished some behavior change. Finally, in the fifth stage, the maintenance stage, an individual sustains the new behavior for an undisclosed period of time.

As is obvious from the descriptions above, the SCM framework was developed with ongoing behaviors in mind, such as recovery from addictive behaviors, adopting regular exercise or healthful eating habits. However, the SCM has also illustrated its generalizability to less ritualistic behaviors as it has been applied to other contexts like organ donation, condom use and blood donation. As such, we feel that the SMART About Water Program can utilize a SCM framework from which to view and evaluate its effectiveness. Measurement instruments can be designed in order to determine which stage individuals and community leaders are in. Additionally, it is also possible to determine the amount of change, or movement through the stages, individuals experience from as the SMART About Water Program progresses.