

BRIEF SUMMARY

Southwell, B. G., Gilkerson, N. D., Depue, J. B., Shelton, A. K., Friedenber, L. M. & Koutstaal, W. (2010). Aging and the questionable validity of recognition-based exposure measurement. *Communication Research*, 37, 603–619.

Growing evidence suggests that basic exposure measures, such as recognition-based items, might not operate identically among older and younger adults. We present two studies relevant to this debate. Study 1 provides experimental confirmation of the recognition decline hypothesis, finding an interaction between age and exposure in predicting recognition memory for an advertisement related to global warming. Study 2 assesses television news project evaluation data to explore whether verbatim detail recognition difficulty explains Study 1 results. The two studies provide complementary evidence, not only illustrating recognition decline among the elderly but also providing careful control of exposure in Study 1 and the use of multiple messages, realistic viewing scenarios, and free recall data in Study 2. Taken together, the studies offer a cautionary tale for campaign evaluators. On a broader theoretical level, the results suggest a fruitful path for communication research focused on the nuanced and potentially critical moderating role of age.

KEYWORDS: exposure, aging, measurement, media effects, memory
