Regulatory focus and approach-avoidance behavior

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Introduction

Motor action has an effect on the preference of object. It is widely accepted that attitude has an effect on a person's behavior; however, this study examines the possibility of a reversed relationship of behavior affecting the person's attitude of an object. Specifically, this study observes the influence of arm flexion/extension of motor action on the advertising message preference of that object. To mimic a natural consuming situation, the study used the principle of regulatory focus to persuade consumption of message. Furthermore, the study used arm flexion/extension, which includes the same approach-avoidance motivation as regulatory focus.

Methods

Total of 120 participants completed the study (female: 120, males were excluded to eliminate gender difference). The situational regulatory focus were manipulated into promotion and prevention focus through the task of guessing the name label of the object (Shah et al., 1998; Yang & Kim, 2008). Furthermore, utilizing the regulatory focus frame, the advertising messages were divided into promotion focus message and prevention focus messages. Participants rated each message as “like-dislike”, “favorable-unfavorable”, and “negative-positive” on a 7-point Likert scale. To control the participant’s motor action, the study was conducted 1-on-1. Once the situational regulatory focus was constructed based on the results of the label-guessing task, the participant was asked to use their dominant arm to engage in arm flexion or arm extension. While maintaining the arm motor action, the participants read the promotion focus message and prevention focus message. Then, they rated their preferences for the messages.

Results

The study used a 2 (situational regulatory focus: promotion/prevention) X 2 (motor action: arm flexion/extension) three-way ANOVA mixed design. The regulatory focus message was treated as a within-subject variable while the situational regulatory focus and motor action was treated as a between-subject variable. The analysis revealed that the main effect (F(1, 116)=18.50, p<.001) of the regulatory focus message and three-way interaction effect (F(1, 116)=4.67, p<.05) was statistically significant. In the main effect of regulatory focus message, preference rating for the message was higher in the promotion focus message (M=5.08, SD=1.01) than the prevention focus message (M=4.54, SD=1.16).

For the three-way interaction effect, only in the case of arm flexion did the simple interaction effect of situational regulatory focus and regulatory focus message reveal significance (F(1, 116)=7.20, p<.05). For the situational promotion focus, the promotion focus message and prevention focus message were significantly different (F(1,116)=16.45, p<.001) only in the case of arm flexion. Thus, when arm is flexed in the situational promotion focus condition, the promotion focus message (M=5.18, SD=.84) was more preferred than the prevention focus message (M=4.17, SD=1.01).

Conclusions

The current study used yogurt as the target object, which had a positive preference, but for objects that have a negative preference, the results may differ. Williams & Bargh (2008) show that approach is not always related to positive valence and avoidance is not always related to negative valence. Close distance (approach) to the positive nurturer makes the person feel safe, a positive attitude. Similarly, close distance (approach) to the negative predator makes the person feel unsafe, a negative attitude. However, far distance (avoidance) from the negative predator makes the person feel a positive attitude of safeness while far distance (avoidance) from the positive nurturer makes the person feel a negative attitude of unsafeness. These results may change depending on the subject’s baseline preference of the target object.

Bibliography

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