The interactive influence of individuals' initial attitudes and affective-cognitive persuasion on fruits and vegetables consumption

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Introduction

- Poor rates of fruits and vegetables consumption remain despite many promotional campaigns (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

- Having incompatible attitudes with a message's position can increase resistance to it (Clarke, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 2008) but few studies have examined affect and belief separately.

- A pilot study revealed that fruits and vegetables is a cognitive meta-basis topic which creates more interests to process beliefs than emotions (See, Petty, & Fabrigar, 2008).

- Affective/cognitive information are more accessible for affective-/cognitive-based attitudes (Giner-Sorolla, 2004). Thus, a belief-focused message may increase accessibility to recall counter-arguments for those with poorer attitudes to defend their position but not an emotion-focused message.

Research Objective

- Examine how to improve health persuasion via the interactions between one's initial attitudes and affective-cognitive focused message.

Hypothesis

- For those with less positive attitudes, A belief-focused message will be less persuasive than an emotion-focused message, but both message should be equally persuasive for those with more positive attitudes.

Design

- **Participants**: N = 290 NUS students (M_{age} = 21.54, SD = 2.20, 201 females, 89 males).

- **Design**: 2 (less vs. more positive initial attitudes) × 2 (emotion-focused vs. belief-focused message).

Procedures

1. **Initial Attitudes (M = 4.32, SD = 1.19, α = .90):**
   e.g. My attitudes toward eating fruits and vegetables are _____. (1 = negative, 7 = positive)

2. **Message Type:** Participants read one of two messages.

   Emotion-Focused.   *Belief-Focused.*

   Darren always feel happy and the secret to his optimism is simple. He knows that eating fruits and vegetables releases serotonin, "the happy hormone".

   Science has shown that eating fruits and vegetables has many useful outcomes. Indeed, fruits and vegetables has nutrients to boost our body's functioning.

   Eat Healthy Today!   Eat Healthy Today!

3. **Behavior Intentions (M = 5.32, SD = 2.03, α = .97):**
   e.g. I _____ intend/plan/want to eat 4 servings of fruits and vegetables (1 = definitely do not, 9 = definitely do).

Results
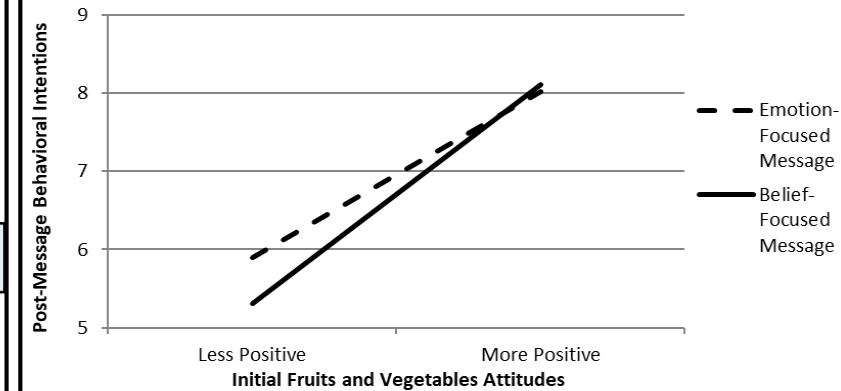
Those with less positive attitudes showed less consumption intentions for belief-focused than emotion-focused message, $β$ = -.17, $t(286)$ = -2.98, p = .003, pr^2 = -.12.

Those with more positive attitudes showed similarly high consumption intentions for both message types, $β$ = .01, $t(286)$ = 0.24, p = .81, pr^2 = .01.

Conclusion

A tailored persuasion may backfire for those with poorer attitudes toward fruits and vegetables.
More generally, one's initial attitudes may affect the efficacy of affect-cognitive persuasion. Thus, one's initial attitudes can guide message tailoring to improve attitudes and behaviors. Future studies can examine this in affect meta-basis topics.

References

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