A Functional Assessment of the Impact of Advantages and Disadvantages of Breastfeeding on Attitude Development

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Method

Experiment 1

Participants & procedure

Participants (N=98 women) were recruited from a student population. Mean age was 29.02 years (SD = 7.08). The experiment consisted of judging a set of statements which were composed of pros and cons of breastfeeding. Pros were: "Breastfeeding is healthier than formula feeding", "Breastfeeding helps you to recuperate more rapidly after pregnancy and has health advantages for the mother" and "Breastfeeding is healthier than formula feeding; it contains all necessary nutrients for a baby and protects against several infections and diseases". Cons were: "When breastfeeding you need to watch out what you eat and be careful with dieting" and "When breastfeeding it is impossible to know whether your baby had sufficient milk". Additionally, one set of statements contained only advantages. Statements were rated on a 250-point VAS with end anchors being "very positive" and "very negative".

Experiment 2

Participants & procedure

Participants (N=318) were recruited from a student population from a distance university. The mean age of the participating women was 31.66 years (SD = 4.64). As in experiment 1, participants rated a set of statements composed of pros and cons of breastfeeding. A between subjects manipulation was performed of the formulation of the cons of breastfeeding, implying that one group received statements composed of advantages of formula feeding instead of disadvantages of breastfeeding.

Results

Based on single subjects ANOVA, three different patterns could be discerned of which one resembles the subtracting type integration rule. An additional analysis on data showing the third pattern confirmed an averaging type integration rule. One pattern showed relatively small main effects for both factors in the overall ANOVA while single subjects analyses revealed no significant effects (with \( p > .10 \)). Overall attitude was mainly determined by women's attitude prior to the experiment. The second pattern is characterized by a relatively large main effect for advantages, indicating that women only take into account advantages when forming an attitude.

Results from the second experiment showed that positively formulated messages (i.e. advantages of formula feeding) generated the most positive attitude towards breastfeeding. Moreover the order of the importance of the stimuli seemed to differ across the experimental conditions.

Conclusions

Our first study showed that three clearly discernable integration strategies were present in our sample. Women showing one of those three patterns differed in way their prior attitude influenced the formation of an attitude towards breastfeeding based on the statements. Women for whom the presented information was more relevant (i.e. who were pregnant or planning to become pregnant) took into account most of the information and showed the expected averaging integration pattern. In study 2 it was found that, even when message content is constant, the valence of the message seems to impact on the attitude as well. In breastfeeding promotion programs, pros of formula feeding should thus be preferred over cons of breastfeeding.