

Does Beauty Matter in Behavior Change?

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Abstract. The use of motivational textual messages is a popular strategy for encouraging behavior change. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, have afforded tailored visual presentations of the text of such messages, that range in style, by exploring color, illustration, photography, or typography. Following the fact that different text aesthetics can invoke different perceptions about what is written, we suggest that perceived beauty coming from the presentation of textual messages can increase the appeal of changing behavior. Beauty should increase extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, as long as beauty elicits positive affect. In intrinsic, beauty should lead to a relatively enduring behavioral intention, whereas in extrinsic it should increase the intention temporarily. We present our initial hypotheses and an experimental study we plan to conduct.

Keywords: Aesthetics, persuasion, design for behavior change

1 Introduction and Hypothesis

Empirical research confirms what graphic designers claim from their experience [1]: typefaces and color variations can invoke different impressions about a product or message being presented [3]. Typefaces, for instance, can even affect how much effort a task would require [5]. In a study of Song and Schwarz [5], participants read identical instructions for an exercise routine in different typefaces, in an easy-to-read (Arial, 12 points) or a difficult-to-read (Brush, 12 points) condition. The participants who read the text in a difficult-to-read condition estimated that the exercise would take more time and exhibited lower willingness to make the exercise part of their daily routine, than those who read the text in the easy-to-read condition. Simply varying typefaces and color schemes of the background and text color is expected to influence individuals' behavioral intention and willingness to engage in behavior change.

We suggest that perceived beautiful textual presentations, with a high processing fluency, should increase individuals' motivational power through two different paths, depending on the primary motivation of individuals, being extrinsic or intrinsic. The first path suggests that beauty elicits positive emotional responses [6] which, in turn, can affect our cognitive processing as well as our intrinsic motivation for the activity, as long as the activity is intrinsically motivating for the individual [2]. In this sense, beauty, through positive affect, is expected to momentarily activate individuals' in-

trinsic motivation for the activity. The second path suggests that beauty motivates by acting as a peripheral cue. The Elaboration Likelihood Model [4] states that the extent to which we will cognitively process a message depends on how motivated we are to do this (i.e., how relevant the information is to us) and our ability to think about the arguments (e.g., the message's comprehensibility). If individuals are motivated and have the ability to process the message they will process it through the central route. If individuals are not motivated or do not have the ability to process the message they are more likely to be influenced by aspects which have nothing to do with the message arguments, and thus elaborate the message through the peripheral route [4]. As motivation and ability to process the arguments of a message decrease, peripheral cues become relatively more important factors of persuasion [4]. As such, when individuals' are primarily extrinsically motivated to do an activity, beauty might serve as a positive peripheral cue to process the message. If that message is able to induce positive affect, it should increase message persuasion (affecting directly attitudes) and consequently increase the behavioral intention towards the activity.

2 Future Research

In this paper, we suggest that beauty can heighten behavioral intentions and the willingness to engage in behavior change, through two different paths, depending on being extrinsic or intrinsic motivated. Both paths share a common denominator: the mediating role of positive affect. Our current work seeks to design an experimental study that will test these hypotheses. We have designed motivational textual messages of varying aesthetic value through varying typeface families (Handwriting, Serif, and Sans serif) and background and text color (warm and cold colors).

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