Individual Differences and Perceptions of Personal Care Products

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Abstract

Environmental exposure to potentially toxic compounds is common. Unknown to the general population, many of these harmful chemicals are contained within personal care products like toothpaste, shampoo, and lotion. There is no prior research pertaining to the perceptions of risk linked to personal care product use. As such, the overall purpose of this study was to examine the influences of individual differences (i.e., gender, free will, The Big Five, scientific literacy, and warmth and competence) on these perceptions. Because individual differences have already been used to predict risk perception in other products, such as cigarettes and alcohol, we examined perceptions of usage of these products in order to identify potential similarities. Finally, our study was also concerned with how and why perceptions change when participants are given the opportunity to choose from a series of different products of various risk levels. Participants were randomly assigned to low, medium, or high-risk conditions. They received false reports within their survey, which detailed information about potential personal care product toxicity. Risk perceptions associated with those products were then measured. Preliminary results indicate that participants who received the high risk report, such as cancer or an overall hazard warning, were likely to change their products. However, those assigned to the low risk group were less likely to change products, χ² (2, N = 68) = 6.74, p = .034. These preliminary results support the need for including warning labels on personal care products to inform individuals about potential hazard.

Methods

Participants: 68 students were recruited from Lynn University with IRB approval. Design: After recruiting participants, they attended survey sessions in the Library where they completed an online survey and this survey was administered in the following order:

- Recruitment
- Product Use
- Measures
- Randomized
- Low Risk
- Product Report
- Medium Risk
- Post-Report Questionnaire
- Alternatives Product Report
- High Risk
- Risk Report Interpretation

Results

Figure 1. Levels of Conditions Low, Medium and High

Based on the cigarette warning literature, we suggest that the general lack of awareness about the health risks associated with harmful additives in care products may result in poor product choice.

Figure 2. Survey Sessions Process

Figure 3. Product Risk Report for the Medium Risk group

Figure 4. Hypothesis Test Summary using Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test for Product Report, Product Use, and Product Health Perception

Table: Null Hypothesis Sig.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of concern</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of agreement</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of repeat product use</td>
<td>.010*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of repeat product purchase</td>
<td>.013*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of product health</td>
<td>.000*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product health in the short term</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product health in the long term</td>
<td>.000*</td>
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Discussion

The results of this experiment supported our hypothesis. The findings were statistically significant when comparing the low and high-risk groups and their level of concern with their product. Participants in the high risk condition were more likely to perceive their products are being unhealthy and as such are willing to change their products.

This demonstrates that when consumers are educated about the possible health risks of their product, they are more aware of the consequences of purchasing future products. However, individuals will need to access their safety reports when making decisions about their products. It is unclear whether consumers would be motivated to do this.

However, there are limitations to this study such as the sample size was small. This is an ongoing study, full analysis will be completed after recruiting the desired number of participants.

References


