Introduction

Potentially harmful compounds such as phthalates, parabens and phenols are found in a variety of everyday products (Ferguson, Colacino, Lewis, & Meeker, 2017; Harley et al., 2016). Unknown to the general population, many of these harmful chemicals are contained within personal care products such as body wash, shampoo, toothpaste, and deodorant/antiperspirant (Parlett, Calafat, & Swain, 2014).

Prior research regarding perceived risk of consumer products is limited to warning labels for cigarettes, over-the-counter drugs, and FDA black box warnings. Studies on smoking behavior show that people are more motivated to quit smoking when warning labels on cigarette boxes display the harmful health effects. However, if warning labels only list the toxic ingredients without providing an explanation of said effects, the responsiveness to quit smoking decreases (Hammond 2006).

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. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of personal care products in individuals after receiving their possible health effects in a fictitious product report.

Methods

Participants: 157 students were recruited from Lynn University without providing an explanation of said effects, the responsiveness to quit smoking decreases (Hammond 2006). Prior research regarding perceived risk of consumer products is limited to warning labels for cigarettes, over-the-counter drugs, and FDA black box warnings. Studies on smoking behavior show that people are more motivated to quit smoking when warning labels on cigarette boxes display the harmful health effects. However, if warning labels only list the toxic ingredients without providing an explanation of said effects, the responsiveness to quit smoking decreases (Hammond 2006).

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Procedure: After recruiting participants, they attended survey sessions in the Library where they completed an online survey and this survey was administrated in the following order:

Figure 1. Survey Sessions Process

- Recruitment
- Product Use
- Demographics
- Risk Report Interpretation
- Post-Report Questionnaire
- Product Report

Results

Figure 3. Comparison of participants change in perception of healthiness in the short-term before and after receiving risk report by condition.

- Perception of products healthiness in the long term and before and after receiving risk report.

Figure 4. Hypothesis Test Summary.

Discussion

The findings of the study were consistent with the hypotheses. Regarding purchasing behavior, participants in the high risk condition were less likely to indicate future purchase or use of their product after viewing the report compared to the other conditions. The results demonstrate that when consumers have access to such information, consumers could be more likely to avoid products with harmful chemicals that pose high risk.

The product risk reports also affected how participants perceived the level of healthiness when using their products, with both the medium and high risk groups significantly reporting their products as being unhealthy to use. It was originally hypothesized that only participants in the high risk condition would have a substantial change in perception on the unhealthiness of their products. However, since the medium risk group also indicated a change in perception of healthiness, the findings suggest that even products with moderate health effects may concern consumers.

This study has limitations; it is unclear whether consumers would be motivated to access safety reports before purchasing their products.

References


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