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A Persuasive Communication Framework for Tourism

While persuasion has been considered to be an effective way to satisfy visitors in tourism settings, there are a limited number of studies to explain the persuasive communication frameworks based on tourism settings. The purpose of this study is to explore appropriate persuasive communication frameworks in tourism settings. Both two-way ANOVA tests and a linear regression analysis were used to examine two different groups' environmental messages. Results of this study supported the evidence that American students might perceive higher than Korean students do for cognitive messages. Some limitations are discussed.

Key words: Persuasion, environmental messages, tourism

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Introduction

Persuasion has been considered to be a major concern of mitigating ecological impact and an effective way to satisfy visitors in tourism or recreation settings (Manfredo & Bright, 1991). While persuasive communication is an important tool for managing visitor behavior in both developed and undeveloped tourism or recreation areas (Zinn & Manfredo, 2000), there are a limited number of studies to explain the persuasive communication frameworks based on tourism or recreation settings. Therefore, the purposes of this study are 1) to explore appropriate persuasive communication frameworks in tourism settings; 2) to explore the potential determinants of persuasive communication processes; and 3) to examine two different groups' affective and cognitive responses.

Determinants of a Persuasive Framework in Tourism Settings

A concept of *motivation* is, generally, referred to as the "Need for Closure" in the field of social psychology. The Need for Closure has been described as the desire for a definite answer on a given topic, and it may also be aroused when the judgmental task appears intrinsically unattractive to the individual (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Kruglanski, Webster, and Klem (1993) reported that individuals under high need for closure should be more persuadable, and that prior knowledge and current motivation interact to determine people's reactions to persuasion. It may be plausible that persuasion is substantially affected by motivation, need for closure.

Non-message variables such as *source expertise* have an impact under either central or peripheral routes of persuasive communication processes (Petty, Wheeler, & Bizer, 1999). Lien (2001) indicated that when the elaboration likelihood is moderate people might rely on source expertise to determine the amount of thinking devoted to the message. Consequently, it may assume that persuasion occurs in response to a cue in the persuasion setting such as an expert source (Rosselli, Skelly, & Mackie, 1995).

Prior knowledge refers to the amount of information an individual has regarding the issue in a persuasive message, and it enables an individual to attend effectively to the environment (Ornstein et al., 2006). Bettman (1986) reported that prior knowledge was an important component of a cognitive approach to persuasion. Message receivers with little prior knowledge should be more susceptible to persuasion and increase their attitude change (Chen, 1997).

The *cognitive component* is generally conceived of as containing the encoding of attributes and beliefs about positive or negative attributes of an attitude object (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). People's persuasion beliefs are an important determinant of how they deal with persuasion attempts. The *affective component* of the attitude, on the other hand, contains the encoding of positive or negative emotions and feelings associated with the attitude object (Millar & Millar, 1990). Schwarz and Clore (1983) suggested that people use affect as information just as they use any other criterion. Although the affective, cognitive, and behavioral bases of attitudes can be independent, they are often inextricably interlinked as postulated by the consistency theorists (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Just as Zuwerink and Devine (1996) note that a complete theoretical account of persuasion dynamics needs to incorporate both affective and cognitive processes, this study attempts to examine two different groups' cognitive and affective responses toward messages on the environmental signs.

Research Methods

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Participants in this study were 120 American students at a Midwestern city in the U. S. and 120 Korean students at a small city in South Korea. Interpretative messages were shown to students through PowerPoint presentations in each class. Messages on the environmental

signs consisted of both five cognitive and five affective messages based on Indiana State Parks & Reservoirs. Each message could be shown in about 15 seconds to the student. After messages were shown, students were asked several questions relating to need for closure, source credibility, prior knowledge, cognitive and affective responses, and attitudes. Both two-way ANOVA tests and a linear regression analysis were used to compare both American and Korean students' persuasive communication frameworks on the basis of both cognitive and affective messages on the environmental signs.

Results

49.2% of American students (N = 60) and 50.8% of Korean students (N = 62) viewed affective messages on the environmental signs, while 45.9% American students (N = 56) and 54.1% of Korean students (N = 66) viewed cognitive messages. Ninety-three percent (92.7%) of the respondents were between the ages of 20-29, and 7.2% were between the ages of 18-19. Over sixty-six percent (66.1%) of the respondents were female and 33.9% of the respondents were male.

In Table 1 the ANOVA tests indicated that there was a significant main effect on attitudes between American and Korean students [$F(1, 237) = 236.11, p < 0.001$]. Korean students (mean = 3.68) appeared to be more likely to experience a set of attitudes than American students (mean = 2.90). The ANOVA tests also indicated that there was a significant main effect on the level of attitudes between cognitive and affective messages [$F(1, 237) = 210.32, p < 0.001$]. Cognitive messages (mean = 4.22) resulted in a significantly higher level of attitudes than affective messages (mean = 2.68). To avoid overestimation of effect size, this study reported partial eta squared as the estimate of effect size. The effect sizes of main effects (.50 and .31) and interaction effects (.35) are presented. The effect size

of total influence is .67, indicating that the effect size of the statistically significant differences reported were relatively moderate.

In Table 2 the regression equation was significant ($p < .01$, $R = 0.87$). Need for closure ($p < .01$, $\beta = .37$), source credibility ($p < .01$, $\beta = .73$), and prior knowledge ($p < .05$, $\beta = .26$) were significant predictors of cognitive responses for American students. The explanation of total variance (R^2) reached 75.7%. For Korean students in Table 2, the regression equation was also significant ($p < .01$, $R = 0.50$) and the explanation of total variance (R^2) reached 24.6%. Table 2 showed that source credibility ($p < .01$, $\beta = .46$) was only a significant predictor of cognitive responses for Korean students. Both need for closure ($p > .05$, $\beta = .12$) and prior knowledge ($p > .05$, $\beta = .01$) were not significant predictors of cognitive responses for Korean students.

In Table 3, the regression equation of American students was significant ($p < .01$, $R = 0.56$). While source credibility ($p < .01$, $\beta = .53$) was only a significant predictor of affective responses for American students, both need for closure ($p > .05$, $\beta = .23$) and prior knowledge ($p > .05$, $\beta = -.08$) were not. The explanation of total variance (R^2) reached 30.9%. The regression equation of Korean students was significant ($p < .01$, $R = 0.71$). Both need for closure ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.19$) and prior knowledge ($p < .01$, $\beta = -.47$) were significant predictors of affective responses for Korean students. The explanation of total variance (R^2) reached 49.9%.

Discussion and Limitations

Results of this study supported the evidence that American students with prior knowledge, source credibility, and need for closure might perceive higher than Korean students do for cognitive messages. On the other hand, Korean students with prior knowledge and need for closure may perceive higher than American students do for affective

messages. These findings provided that both prior knowledge and need for closure were effective determinants of persuasive communication processes.

Source credibility was an important effect in persuasive communication processing for two different groups' cognitive ($\beta = .73, .46$) and affective responses ($\beta = .53$) except for affective responses of Korean students ($\beta = -.08$). This is consistent with Petty and Cacioppo (1986), explaining that source credibility is represented as a significant effect in peripheral processing. Findings of this study also suggested the possibility that cognitive messages might be more important tools in enhancing persuasive communication processes than affective messages even if affective responses could play a more central role in persuasion.

Limitations of this study can be found in the lack of evidence of the relationship between source credibility and need for closure. Although DeBono and Harnish (1988) suggested that source variables affected an individual's motivation in a persuasion situation, the relationship between source credibility and need for closure was not supported in this study. It must be also considered an interaction between cognitive and affective components for two different groups' responses. Another limitation is that the reporting of effect sizes is still inconsistent, even though reporting of effect sizes is important for assessing the statistical significance of a test.

Just as participant observation is most appropriate when concerned with human meanings and interactions from the insider's perspective, future research needs to go beyond the present study in measuring persuasive communication frameworks for tourism using qualitative approaches. Findings of this study may provide evidence for exploring a persuasive communication framework for tourism. Exploration of the framework for tourism may enable a deeper understanding of how tourism marketing professionals or practitioners can consider an individual's perception of tourism settings. Additionally, this study may

offer potential persuasive communication strategies in which tourism marketers tend to utilize marketing tools in relation to persuasion theories.

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Table 1
 Two-Way ANOVA tests on Attitude by groups and messages

	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Main effects				
American/Korean students (G)	1	236.11**	0.000	0.496
Cognitive/Affective Messages (M)	1	210.32**	0.000	0.306
Interaction effect (G × M)				
Error	237			
Total	241			
Corrected Total	240			

Note. R Squared = .672 (Adjusted R Squared = .668). ** $p < .01$

Table 2
 Comparison of cognitive regression models toward American and Korean students ($N = 123$)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Korean Students			
Need for closure	0.16	0.15	0.12
Source credibility	0.38	0.09	0.46**
Prior knowledge	0.01	0.13	0.01
American Students			
Need for closure	0.58	0.20	0.37**
Source credibility	0.75	0.08	0.73**
Prior knowledge	0.34	0.17	0.26*

Note. $R^2 = .25$ for Korean students; $\Delta R^2 = .76$ for American students. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 3
 Comparison of affective regression models toward American and Korean students ($N = 125$)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
American Students			
Need for closure	0.48	0.25	0.23
Source credibility	0.44	0.11	0.53**
Prior knowledge	-0.12	0.20	-0.08
Korean Students			
Need for closure	-0.20	0.08	-0.19*
Source credibility	0.03	0.03	0.08
Prior knowledge	-0.30	0.05	-0.47**

Note. $R^2 = .31$ for American students; $\Delta R^2 = .50$ for Korean students. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$