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Summary on
“Effects of Interdependence Frame and Affective Entertainment Experience
in the Context of Parasports on Attitudes toward People with Disabilities”

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Problem Statement

Media communicators of disability sports organizations in Japan face tremendous challenges in articulating the vision of an inclusive society. Promoters use framing to draw attention to specific components to enhance cognitive processing and gain specific social attitudes. Interdependence frames, indicating mutual understanding between people with and without disabilities, are a recent media frame that address inclusion of people with disabilities. As normalization is a growing trend in Japan, the role of entertaining elements is recognized as a promoter in raising awareness of disability sports and issues. Compared to hedonic experiences, eudaimonic (meaningful) entertainment content induces appreciation, including thought-provoking experiences. Such content may lead to prosocial behavior and destigmatization through psychological responses, such as social comparison-based empathy, self-referencing, meaningful affective responses, poignancy, and meta-emotions.

Theoretical Background

The current research examined two psychological processes of framing effects: belief content change and spreading activation. Changes in belief content, that is, previously inaccessible beliefs added to an individual's belief set, function as a mediator in the psychological process of framing effects. Because the concepts of social inclusion and diversity that disability sports organizations promote are still unfamiliar concepts in Japan, belief content change can be considered as a significant psychological factor of the effects of the interdependence frame. Spreading activation was also recognized as an important psychological process of framing effects, allowing the occurrence of belief content change and positive attitudinal change. Relevant knowledge constructs in the

mind should first be activated for access. Spreading activation occurs when the activation affects other pertinent knowledge constructs and makes the framing effects stronger.

Individuals often engage in social comparison processes, both in their immediate environment and through exposure to mass media, as a means of assessing their relative worth in society. This may include comparing oneself to fictional characters portrayed in media. Specific emotions, such as closeness (i.e., lateral social comparison-based emotion) and pity (i.e., downward social comparison-based emotion), can be evoked by the comparison with the circumstances of para-athletes in media content. As a result, these social-comparison-based emotions can also be seen in the context of disability sports communication.

At the metacognitive level, meta-emotions are responses from the appraisal of primary emotions, change the course of the primary emotions by their appraisal, and contribute to entertainment gratifications. They are classified into two types: meta-emotional enjoyment and meta-emotional normative appreciation. The concept of meta-emotional enjoyment is based on pleasantness and the hedonic drive for pleasure. Meta-emotional normative appreciation is a norm compatibility-based concept that describes how emotions are evaluated in relation to social standards and personal ideals. Further metacognitive appraisal is self-referencing. Media recipients relate media characters to their self-concepts, through social comparison with media characters that reflect themselves and modify their self-concepts, resulting in emotional gratification and prosocial outcomes. Meaningful affective responses are a type of entertainment gratification from the eudaimonic aspect and represent a multifaceted affective construct signifying eudaimonic experience. They underlie a common construct with ambivalent emotions (e.g., “being moved”) and are accompanied by poignancy, a mixture of positive

and negative emotions. These eudaimonic entertainment-specific gratifications foster prosocial attitudes.

The impact of affective and metacognitive responses induced by eudaimonic entertainment on the process of framing effects has received little attention. Smiling cues viewers to contextualize stories as entertaining and humorous, as shown in photos of para-athletes in Paralympic media content. It is unknown whether smiling cues in article images add truth-seeking value, as well as the impact of such images on framing effects.

Research Questions

This study investigates (1) whether the interdependence frame and facial expressions of para-athletes (i.e., smiling or nonsmiling para-athletes) induce eudaimonic entertainment experiences, (2) in which direct and indirect routes of the psychological processes the effects of the interdependence frame and the images inducing eudaimonic entertainment experiences improve attitudes toward people with disabilities, and (3) how the images moderate the psychological processes of framing effects.

Methodology

A web-based quasi-experiment using a 2 (text: interdependence frame vs. no frame [only athletic career]) × 3 (image: smiling para-athlete vs. nonsmiling para-athlete vs. no image) between-subjects design was conducted among 316 Japanese participants with varying knowledge of parasports and disability issues. A randomly chosen online article about a para-athlete was displayed (a total of six article types). It was manipulated using the framing devices of the interdependence frame and comprised images and/or text. The text comprised both the interdependence frame and the athlete's career, or only the athlete's career. Other variables included affective, cognitive attitudes toward and belief

content about people with disabilities, social comparison–based emotions (i.e., closeness and pity), meaningful affective responses, poignancy, meta-emotions (i.e., meta-emotion of enjoyment and normative meta-emotion), and self-referencing, and eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences. The variables of these entertainment experiences were used to check whether the smiling cue and the interdependence frame induced the respective entertainment experiences.

Findings

The findings have illustrated that the interdependence frame and the nonsmiling para-athlete image (vs. no image condition) induce eudaimonic entertainment experience and the interdependence frame and the smiling and nonsmiling para-athlete images (vs. no image condition) improve the affective and cognitive attitudes toward PWDs. The interdependence frame’s destigmatization effects occur through four processes. First, direct positive impact is limited to affective attitude. Second, normative meta-emotion influences framing effects after feeling closeness to the para-athlete in the article. Third, closeness directly impacts cognitive attitude after the mediation of destigmatization framing effects. Fourth, the effect of the interdependence frame goes via the spreading activation and the change in belief content about people with disabilities to the affective and cognitive attitudes. Interaction effects occur only when the frame is combined with an image of a smiling para-athlete; however, this image weakens the frame’s positive effects. This has a significant practical implication, indicating that the smiling para-athlete image commonly seen in the media may not be the best alternative among visual material for Paralympic articles depending on their text content.

Conclusion

The current empirical research, which has a strong praxis orientation, is the first to contribute to clarifying (1) the attitudinal effects of the interdependence frame, (2) the effects of eudaimonic entertainment induced by text and images of written media content in the context of disability sports, (3) how the psychological process of eudaimonic entertainment including social comparison-based emotions and meta-emotions intervene in the framing effects process, and (4) multiple factors explaining the inducement of eudaimonic entertainment gratifications (i.e., meaningful affective responses and poignancy). It deserves special mention that the interdependence frame did not evoke the negative attitudinal effects of pity that previous research had repeatedly warned. If future research confirms the reliability of the interdependence frame's effects, media communicators will be able to maximize the prosocial effects of disability sports media content by producing written media content based on operational definitions of the interdependency frame (i.e., framing devices). The current study has shown the first noteworthy finding in light of this promising practical use of the interdependence frame.

Limitations and Future Research

These findings need careful interpretation due to the limitations of the study.

Data bias may have happened due to online experiment-specific disadvantages. First, it may have occurred through sampling from the survey panel, which may have caused bias because of the incentives for the participants and their experience with surveys. Second, it is difficult to control answering behavior in online surveys, such as long breaks in answering or answering while watching TV. Although this online experiment controlled the insufficient effort responses through minimal answering time,

instructional manipulation checks, and reverse-scored items, it is impossible to completely exclude them. In this sense, the data may be biased to a certain extent. Future researchers should include another instructional manipulation check, such as the items which make participants choose a specific option, or conduct laboratory-controlled experiments.

The generalizability of the results is limited by the sample characteristics (e.g., participants' knowledge level of the subject) and the context of the stimuli (e.g., written media content about the Paralympics in Japan). Therefore, these phenomena confirm that this research cannot be generalized beyond the sample yet. The reliability is also limited due to the novelty of this study: the first-of-its-kind to examine the destigmatization effects of the interdependence frame in the context of disability sports communication through the Paralympic written media content inducing eudaimonic entertainment experience. Future research must increase the reliability and reproducibility of the effects and the psychological processes found in the current research.

The images with the different facial expressions (smiling vs. nonsmiling cues) and a similar composition were selected to use a natural smiling facial expression as a stimulus in the experiment. This methodological choice cannot completely exclude confounding factors, which may influence attitudes and framing effects, such as brightness of the images. To exclude these confounding factors, the facial expressions of the images can be manipulated by an image editor in future research.

The current research showed that the interdependence frame induced destigmatization effects and, unexpectedly, eudaimonic experience; nevertheless, this research was unable to determine which media cues (e.g., specific framing devices) evoked eudaimonic experiences and destigmatization effects. Furthermore, future

research should investigate which elements or causal factors induced the destigmatizing effects and the negative interaction effects of the images. These are the questions that need to be clarified to maximize the prosocial impacts of media message about the interdependence between people with and without disabilities to achieve a fully inclusive society in Japan.

Potential moderators should be included in the analysis to clarify the external and internal conditions where interdependence frame becomes effective. For instance, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have caused public anxiety and fear. Negative emotions motivate audiences to process messages that are relevant to their feelings, which may affect the impacts of the interdependence frame and eudaimonic entertainment experience. It may be beneficial to incorporate this into future research.