Age Differences in Clickbait Preference of Health Information

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Introduction

Clickbait refers to online articles that are intended to encourage people to click on links. It is sometimes associated with fake news. **Older adults** are more vulnerable to fake news and clickbait, suggested by literature in political communication (Grinbery et al., 2019; Guess et al., 2019; Loos & Nijenhuis, 2020; Munger et al., 2020). **This study aims to test age differences in clickbait preference in the health information domain.**

Methodology

Participants: 64 younger adults (YA; Age: 19-34, Mean=23.48, SD=2.77 ; 53.12% female) and 67 older adults (OA; Age: 58-89, Mean=68.51, SD=7.93; 65.67% female) from mainland China.

Experimental Design: 2 (age group: YA vs OA) × 2 (message format: descriptive message vs clickbait) between-subject design.

Measure: Attitude: three questions on trustworthiness, forwarding intention and persuasiveness. Cronbach's α was .805 (for YA) and .875 (for OA).

Procedure: Participants read and **evaluated** descriptive or clickbait messages about health topics, then they completed a **recognition** task about health messages at **two time points** (**T1: 15 minutes later; T2: 30 days later**).

Results

Significant two-way interactions between age group and message format were found on **Attitude** ($F(1, 127) = 15.44$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .108$), **T2 Memory Accuracy** ($F(1, 122) = 7.78$, $p = .006$, Partial $\eta^2 = .060$), and **Memory Accuracy Change Ratio** ($F(1, 122) = 5.44$, $p = .021$, Partial $\eta^2 = .043$), but not on T1 Memory Accuracy ($F(1, 127) = .058$, $p = .810$).
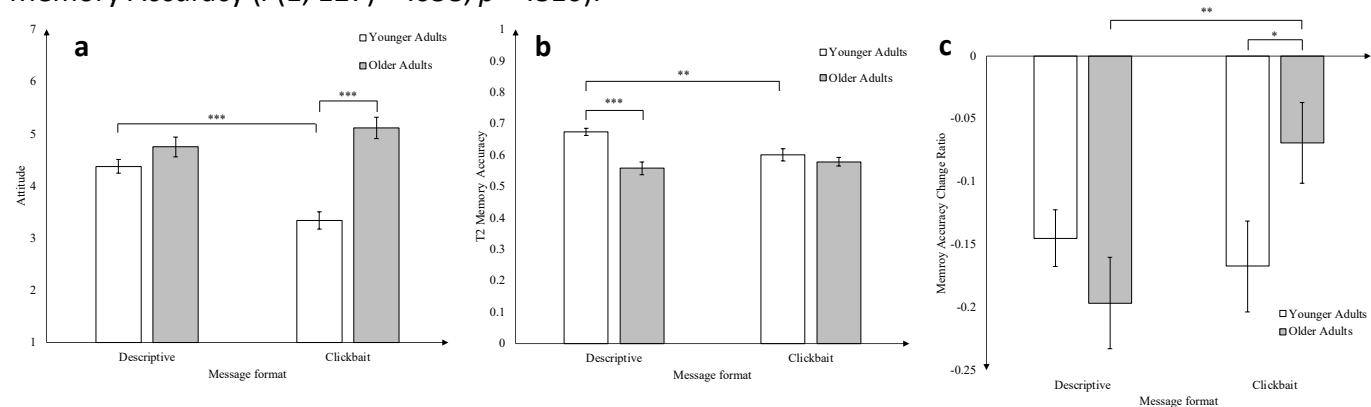

Figure 1. Two-way ANOVA results on (**a**) Attitude, (**b**) T2 Memory Accuracy, and (**c**) Memory Accuracy Change Ratio. Notes: 1) Memory accuracy change ratio is equal to (T2 memory accuracy – T1 memory accuracy)/T1 memory accuracy. 2) * represents $p < .05$; ** represents $p < .01$; *** represents $p < .001$

Discussion & Conclusion

Discussions

1. Older adults relative to younger adults showed a more positive attitude towards clickbait, whereas significant age differences did not exist in descriptive messages.
2. Older adults who read clickbait messages did not perform worse in memory task than younger adults after a 30-day delay, and they also showed less memory decline after 30 days.
3. This is consistent with previous findings that older adults shared more fake news and had a preference to clickbait headlines in political communication.

Conclusion: Older adults' clickbait preference of health information was shown in attitude and memory after 30 days, compared with younger adults.

Link: https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/Z5fT0YfvbvUi