1. Theoretical Framework

Aim of the doctoral research project

To understand antecedents and consequences of interest experience (particular element of the part of interest), very important in students’ academic life.

Theoretical options

Theoretically, we define interest as a temporary emotional state and we refer to appraisal theories of emotion. These theories consider emotion as made up of a cognitive appraisal, a subjective experience, and an action tendency. Their main assets are that they link emotions, cognitions and behaviors and that they allow to understand how interest experience is caused by both rational and individual factors, as well as by their interaction.

Interest as an emotion

Interest has the important features of an emotion:
- Developmental functions / appearance in early infancy
- Signs of interest appear in newborns only a few hours old (Tizard, 1977)
- Interest is the primary affect of early life (Silvia, 2001)
- Facial expressions
- Increased head stillness, slight parting of the lips, widening of the eyelids, greater exposure of the eye’s surface, fewer glances away from the interesting object (Reeve, 1993)
- Vocal expressions
- Quicker rate of speech and wider range of frequency (Johnstone & Scheren, 2000)
- Subjective-experiential qualities
- Salient and distinctive feeling (Silvia, 2001)
- Modal state of consciousness (Tizard, 1977)
- Personality processes
- Interest shapes enduring facets of personality: the interests (Silvia, 2001)

2. General Assumptions

1. Interest experience is mainly induced by the way individual is appraising the object.
2. This appraisal is done with regard to various dimensions. Among these dimensions, novelty-complexity and coping potential are particularly important.
3. This appraisal is influenced by: (a) situational factors: object and task situation, (b) dispositional factors: emotion traits (e.g., curiosity), individual interest, prior knowledge;
4. The object’s appraisal as well as interest involve: (a) some behavioral intentions or action tendencies related to desire knowing and exploring more; (b) an increase in performance in tasks involving the object.

3. Methodology

Participants

Study 1: 125 undergraduate students (107 female, 18 male) from 18 to 22 years-old (M = 18.78, SD = .97)
Study 2: 281 undergraduate students (218 female, 33 male) from 17 to 23 years-old (M = 19.26, SD = 1.61)

Procedure

At their arrival in the laboratory, participants (in groups of 5 to 10) were invited to sit in front of a computer. All the explanations for the experiment were given on the screen.

- Questions measuring different dispositional factors (previous knowledge, individual interest, curiosity);
- Study 1: Reading of 2 short informative texts (= 800 words) – a contextual text and a target text – varying across conditions;
- Study 2: Reading of 1 short informative text (= 800 words) preceded by information varying across conditions;
- Questions measuring their appraisals of the (target) text, their interest experience during its reading, and their exploration intention at the end of each text;
- Questions assessing their understanding and memorization of the presented texts;
- Possibility to receive additional information on the topic of the (target) text (additional text).

4. Hypotheses and Corresponding Results

Hypothesis

The manipulation of novelty-complexity and coping potential should have an influence on the appraisal of novelty-complexity and coping potential should have an influence on the appraisal of novelty-complexity (e.g., previous literature).

Previous knowledge should be negatively related to the appraisal of novelty-complexity and coping potential should be positively related to the appraisal of coping potential (e.g., previous literature).

Individual interest should be positively related to interest experience (e.g., previous literature).

As shown by Silvia (2005), event 1, trait curiosity should be positively related to appraisal of coping potential.

As shown by Silvia (2005), the appraisal of novelty-complexity and coping potential should be related to interest experience.

As shown by Schiefele (1999), curiosity should be positively related to exploration intention.

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5. Discussion

Manipulation of appraisals

Is it possible to manipulate the appraisals of novelty-complexity and coping potential toward an object without using persuasion? Would other designs of designs be more appropriate (e.g., within-subjects design)?

Negative effect of text’s appraised novelty on interest experience

This result is in opposition with the literature (e.g., Berthoz, 1993; Silvia, 2005). So, why would the appraisal of novelty-complexity have a negative effect on interest experience?

Perspectives

- Study of potential moderator(s) of the relationship between novelty and interest experience.
- More detailed study in order to clarify the relation between novelty and interest experience.
6. References


