



Role of Social Distance in Brand Activism (#StopAsianHate) from the Construal Level Theory Perspective



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OVERVIEW

Racism is a pervasive global issue with far-reaching societal impact. As both individuals and collective entities can contribute to achieving racial justice and equality (e.g., anti-Asian sentiment and hate incidents since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased by 150% during this period. This study adopted **construal theory** and found that perceived closer distance from Asian Americans led to a higher sympathetic response that resulted in higher activism-participation willingness and a higher purchase intention. Significant moderating effects were also found based on the campaign's participatory strategies. Consumers who viewed social media posts with a low participatory strategy (high construal) (vs. a high participatory (low construal) strategy) were more likely to participate in the advocated activism, and they would purchase the company's products through the underlying sympathetic mechanism.

H1: The closer distance individuals perceive themselves from Asians, the more sympathy they generate after seeing the anti-Asian activism social media campaign.

H2: Those with the farther (closer) social distance to Asian Americans sympathized more with the post with the low (vs. high) participatory strategy.

H3: Those with the farther (closer) social distance to Asian Americans are more likely to (1) participate #StopAsianHate activism (2) be willing to purchase products by the advertiser when they view the post with the low (vs. high) participatory strategy, mediated via sympathetic responses.

METHOD

Study Design and Procedure

A between-subjects online experiment with two fictional CSR campaign messages on social media: low vs. high participatory strategies (n=170).

Variables and Measures

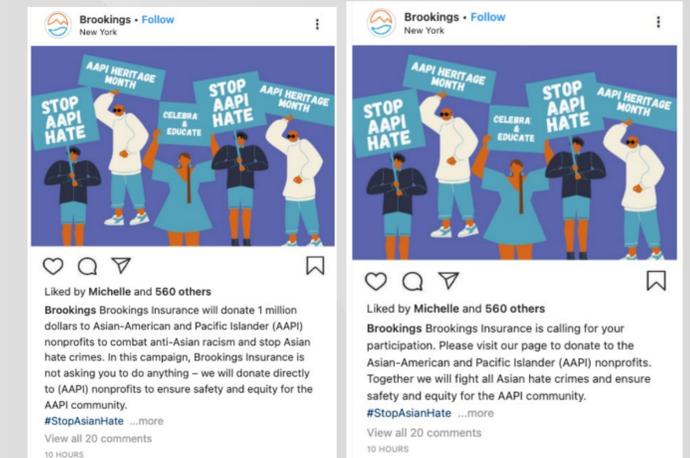
Social Distance. "Socially close/Socially distant"

Sympathy. "based on the social media campaign (Instagram post) that you saw, please indicate how strongly you would feel sympathy."

Participation. "I would make a public post of a photo using the hashtag #StopAsianHate on social media,"

Purchase Intention. "I would consider using the product/service produced by Brookings Company,"

Stimuli Example



RESULTS

Pretest. The Perpetual Foreigner stereotype significantly accounted for the perceived distance from the Asian racial group, $\beta=.30$, $t(113) = 4.6$, $p < .001$.

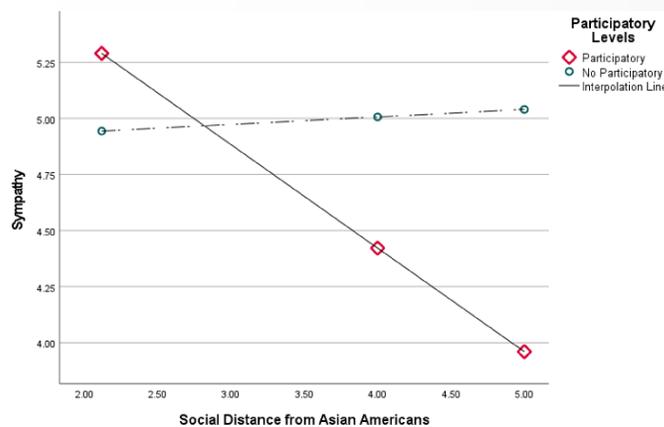


Figure 2. Interactions between Distance and Participation Levels on Sympathy

Table 1. Model Summary: Responses to sympathetic responses

	Sympathy
	<i>b</i>
Participatory Levels (PL)	-3.93**
Social Distance (SD)	-1.40
PL x SD	.50*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

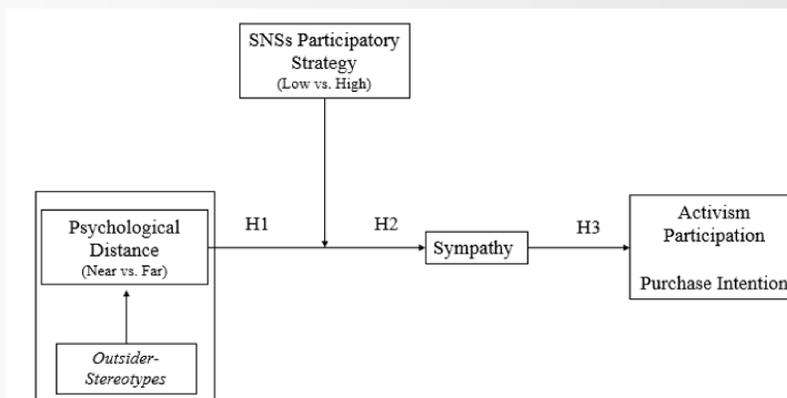


Figure 1. Conceptual Model: Moderated Mediation Model on Activism Participation

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Findings

• **H1, H2, H3** were supported.

Discussion

- As the campaign is highly participatory, only those who have a same construal level (low construal) in relation to the issue had a high sympathetic response.
- Sympathetic response did not fluctuate based on the levels of social distance from Asian Americans when the campaign did not ask for consumers' participation in the activism.
- If a company wants to use a strategy that can stimulate consumers' participations in the activism regardless of their social distance from the issue, low participatory strategy might be more effectively.
- For those who felt close to Asian American consumers, practitioners can have the freedom to choose either low or high levels of participatory CSR campaign messages.
- For those who felt far distant from Asian Americans, the CSR campaign messages may want to emphasize the company's active participation (the company makes donations).

Further Study

• Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings of Study 1 by investigating the effects of social media share participation in socially responsible campaigns. The study collected 166 responses through MTurk. The results showed that closer social distance led to higher willingness to participate only with the high participation strategy (social media sharing) ($b=-.14$, $SE=.07$, 95% CI [-.28, -.02]), and not with the low participation strategy (advocacy message) ($b=-.13$, $SE=.07$, 95% CI [-.25, .01]). Furthermore, in the high participatory condition (social media sharing promotion), social distance levels led to increased purchase intentions through sympathetic responses ($b=-.22$, $SE=.10$, 95% CI [-.43, -.01]).