

The Effects of Envy on Preference for Self-improvement Products

선망이 자기향상제품에 대한 선호에 미치는 영향

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ABSTRACT

This research examines whether the feeling of envy leads to preferences for products enabling self-improvement even if the domain is not related to the original source of the envy. Depending on the motivations, two forms of envy may exist, benign envy with a positive spirit and malicious envy with a negative spirit. Across two studies, the current research finds that an increase in the desire for self-improvement products is only observed for individuals feeling benign envy and not observed in those feeling malicious envy. Further, the present work demonstrates the effect is moderated by message framing. Specifically, individuals triggered by benign envy are likely to purchase more self-improvement products only when they are exposed to positive message framing. When a negatively framed message is given, benign envy effect is attenuated. Overall, these findings theoretically examine the relationship between envy and consuming self-improvement products. Further, this research suggests implications for marketers leading consumers to engage in purchasing self-improvement products or self-improvement behaviors.

Keywords: Envy, Benign Envy, Malicious Envy, Social Comparison, Self-improvement, Message Framing

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초 록

본 연구는 선망이라는 감정이 자기향상제품에 대한 선호에 영향을 줄 수 있음을 보여준다. 선망은 선의적 선망(benign envy)과 악의적 선망(malicious envy)으로 구분되는데, 본 연구에서는 특히 선망을 느낀 상황과는 관련이 없는 맥락에서 소비자가 자기향상제품에 대한 선호를 보이는데 대하여 살펴보고자 하였다. 나아가 메시지를 제시하는 방식에 따라 선망이 자기향상제품의 선호에 미치는 영향이 다르게 나타날 수 있는지 알아보려고 하였다. 실험 결과, 악의적 선망을 느낀 경우보다 선의적 선망을 느낀 경우에 자기향상제품에 대한 선호도가 높은 것으로 나타났다. 또한 메시지 프레이밍의 조절효과가 확인되었다. 메시지가 긍정적으로 주어졌을 때에는 악의적 선망을 느낀 경우보다 선의적 선망을 느낀 경우에 자기향상제품에 대한 선호가 높게 나타났다. 하지만 메시지가 부정적으로 제시되었을 때에는 악의적 선망을 느낀 경우와 선의적 선망을 느낀 경우 간 유의한 차이가 나타나지 않았다. 본 연구는 자기향상제품의 선호에 영향을 주는 선망의 효과를 살펴보고 이를 조절하는 메시지 프레이밍의 효과를 증명하였기에, 자기향상제품에 대한 효과적인 광고 메시지 전략 수립에 활용될 수 있을 것이라 기대한다.

핵심주제어: 선망, 선의적 선망, 악의적 선망, 사회비교, 자기향상, 메시지 프레이밍

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1 . Introduction

Let us suppose that you considered buying an iPad for a long time. You kept holding off buying it because it was expensive. What if one of your friends bought it yesterday? The high price of the iPad did not mean anything when you did feel envious. People sometimes just want what others have. “Keeping-up-with-the-Joneses”(Frank 1999) is one of the terms describing that consumers’ preferences depend on other’s possessions. A hidden meaning behind keeping-up-with-the-Joneses is that people compare their situation to that of others who are better off than the self and take action to resolve this difference. Among several determinants of the preference for products or services that others possess, feeling envy can play a role as a primary motivation.

Envy is an emotion due to an upward social comparison and is accompanied by the desire to bridge the difference with someone in a superior state(Parrott and Smith 1993). Interestingly, envy may actually have two faces, positive and negative, which can elicit different behavioral expressions (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). Envy works as a stimulant that leads people to do better to get what others have, whereas it is also an emotional pain that leads people to drag others down with themselves(Lange and Crusius 2015; Tai, Narayanan, and McAllister 2012). The current research will particularly focus on the sense of envy, which is the emotion stemming from comparing oneself to the other.

Feeling envy directly affects consumer choice and judgment. It is reported that the sense of envy is created when individuals notice someone has better products than their own(Frank 1999). Benign envy makes people pay more for the product possessed by the envied person(Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010). This is because people feeling benign envy tend to encourage themselves to better

off than others, whereas people feeling malicious envy tend to drag others down(Crusius and Lange 2014). That is, a behavioral response from the individual (i.e., envier) may vary depending on the type of envy.

Building on the previous studies, the present research postulates that feelings of envy can play a substantial role in preference for the self-improvement product. A specific emotional response such as envy is elicited by a particular event, and this emotion influences behavioral decision-making(Fredrickson 1998; Zeelenberg, Nelissen, Breugelmans, and Pieters 2008). By providing evidence of the effect of feeling envy on the desire for self-improvement alternatives, the current research contributes to the literature regarding motivational consequences of specific emotions.

This research proposes that benign envy compared to malicious envy drives people to prefer self-improvement products. Importantly, we posit a message framing as a boundary condition of the effect of envy on preference for self-improvement products. Specifically, the present research shows that this envy effect is qualified by message framing. When a positively framed message was used, preference for a self-improvement product would be more pronounced after experiencing benign envy rather than malicious envy. However, when the message is framed negatively, the difference in preference for a self-improvement product between benign and malicious envy conditions would not appear. That is, the present research shows that the effect of envy on the consumers’ preference for the self-improvement products can be mitigated or augmented by message framing. We turn next to our theoretical overview and hypotheses development.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Envy

Envy is an emotion that “occurs when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it”, and it is often considered as a negative feeling(Parrott and Smith 1993, p. 906). Jealousy is considered as a negative emotional response similar to envy. However, prior research offers the possibility of distinguishing envy from jealousy (박기완, 전성희 2016; Smith and Kim 2007). A definition of envy emphasizes on unpleasant feelings due to an upward comparison between the self and the other. Unlike envy, jealousy arises in the triad, contain the fear felt toward the rival(Parrot and Smith 1993). Considering the impact of specific emotion on consumer judgment and decision-making, we focus on the role of envy in our social environment which tends to foster competition between individuals. Envy occurs when individuals compare themselves to the envied target and it stimulates their subsequent behavior (Crusius and Lange 2014; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Rik Pieters 2010).

Envy was thought to be avoided because it is seen as being malicious and destructive(Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007; Smith and Kim 2007). However, envy may not only be a negative emotion although many studies and empirical findings on envy have shown its destructive implications. A distinct implication of envy has been pointed out by stating its two different meanings: malicious envy and benign envy(Hellen and Saaksjarvi 2012; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). According to Smith and Kim(2007), envy is composed of three components on affective dimension as follows: inferiority, longing, and resentment. In particular, feelings of resentment or hostility are more associated with

malicious envy while benign envy involves a longing or admiration towards the envied target. Thus, the two types of envy can be distinguished on the basis of hostility towards people that are superior in a domain that is important to oneself; an unhostile feeling leads to benign envy, whereas a hostile feeling leads to a negative result, called malicious envy(Hellen and Saaksjarvi 2012). That is, envy results from comparing one’s achievement or possessions to another’s but arises from a different motivation.

Prior research on envy also argues the perceived deservingness is one of the important aspects to be considered in distinguishing between benign envy and malicious envy. For example, if the other person succeeds through his/her efforts, people feel benignly envious, but when a person succeeds even he/she does not deserve credit for the success, people feel malicious envy(Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). Individuals may merely feel relative deprivation if they have a chance to succeed as well, yet people feel envy if they think obtaining a desired outcome is beyond their capabilities(Crosby 1976; Smith and Kim 2007). That is to say, envy arises from inequality in comparison to the superior other(Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010) and whether a person feels benign envy or malicious envy is determined by the perceived deservingness of the envied target’s advantage.

Lange and Crusius(2015) suggested that when people feel envy, not only in motivation but also in the behavior towards others is represented differently. The dark side of envy, referred to as malicious envy, let people experience envy in a negative way toward others such as feeling jealous and angry. Maliciously envious individuals attempt to pull down and harm the superiors(Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). People usually take action against those who harm them, and thus, harm the one who is envied(Zizzo and Oswald 2001). Wert and Salovey(2004) mentioned that

envy can be expressed by gossiping in the form of social comparison, wherein people talk about a person in his/her absence. While prior researches have focused on destructive role of malicious envy, Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2010) have argued that there is an alternative consequence that can be caused by malicious envy. Feeling malicious envy may activate social differentiation to deal with malicious envy. Social differentiation occurs when people try to cope with the threat to the identity by the search for the difference with others (Lemaine 1974). In line with this, a feeling of malicious envy may increase a desire for a similar but clearly differentiated product (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010).

The bright side of envy, referred to as benign envy, can lead to a strong desire to acquire whatever is envied (Foster 1972). Benignly envious individuals try to develop themselves to draw level with superiors. It may inspire the envious person to do better in a specific domain that he/she considers important. Thus, benign envy arouses relatively constructive and imitative performances that are sanitized by affection and respect. Crusius and Mussweiler (2012) demonstrated a positive influence of feeling benign envy on competition in negotiations. Understanding how others attain better outcomes in a negotiation leads those feeling envy to change their actions to achieve similar outcomes. Further, the feeling of envy has been used to motivate people to pay more for a product in an experimental setting (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010). Those who felt benign envy were willing to pay more for a product that a fictional person in the scenario had.

2. Envy and self-improvement

The current research introduces a new downstream effects of feeling envy based on upward social comparisons, which

triggers a desire for self-improvement. Both benign and malicious envy elicit behaviors associated with self-improvement but in a different manner. Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski (2018) argued benign envy activates a process-focused self-improvement goal while malicious envy facilitates an outcome-focused self-improvement goal. For instance, people who feel benign envy prefer products in which enable them to make more efforts in self-improvement tasks. By contrast, malicious envy leads people to focus on the outcome in self-improvement activities and prefer products that emphasizing the amount of improvement they can achieve. Self-improvement refers to the “motivation to pursue outcomes that will facilitate bettering some self-relevant aspect of the self, including personal attributes or performance in domains important to the self, such as the intellectual, moral, social or physical self” (Allard and White 2015, p. 403). When people feel negative emotion or have negative thoughts towards their self-relevant attributes, they fail to identify the self properly (Neff 2011). In particular, when people perceive self-deficit, they tend to have a desire to improve the self. Individuals try to improve the self in the area in which the gap exists between the actual self and the desired one (Kim and Gal 2014). According to Smith and Kim (2007), envy is felt when a person does not favorably compare to another on a self-relevant aspect important to the self. In addition, other researchers proposed that when one realizes another’s performance is better in a certain domain which is important to them, the negative emotion called envy was elicited from this comparison (Tesser and Collins 1988).

Individuals tend to experience some sort of envy when they compare themselves to others and feel inadequate with themselves (D’Arms 2002). Upward comparisons, in particular, usually trigger envious feelings because we feel that we compare unfavorably with others (최진명 2019; Van

de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010). These upward social comparisons have been called “keeping-up-with-the-Joneses,” which describes a person who is longing for another’s possessions (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). That is, people struggle to get the possessions others have, and the idiom keeping-up-with-the-Joneses captures the phenomenon that emerges as a result of envy. Allard and White (2015) emphasized guilt, rather than envy, and suggested that guilt promote people to prefer self-improvement products. In their work, however, envy was treated as a uni-dimensional concept, but there are two types of envy. Further, the deservingness of the envied target’s advantage was not considered. That is, they may not deliberately capture the role of envy. Interestingly, Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski (2018) demonstrated feelings of envy stimulate people to have a desire to improve themselves, which in turn leads to greater preference for self-improvement products.

Taken together, envy may work as a motivating tool that activates people to obtain what others have. Prior research suggests that an upward social comparison motivates people to improve themselves (Wert and Salovey 2004). If the person believes that he/she is not as good as another person on an important personal attribute, comparison can lead to envy. Thus, benign envy is an emotion that is elicited through an upward social comparison which promotes individuals to make efforts to self-improve (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010).

Benignly envious individuals try to develop themselves to raise their own level for following superiors (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). Furthermore, benign envy rather than malicious envy leads people to study more, do better in tests (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010), and focus on the development of one’s own outcome (Crusius and Lange 2014). Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski (2018) demonstrated that people who felt benign envy

prefer the product that can facilitate their efforts for the self-improvement while people with malicious envy prefer the product that allows them to directly attain the self-improvement goal. Moreover, Silvester (2006) have asserted that marketers use upward comparison as a trigger to sell products, which means that they draw consumers’ attention on what others have. Therefore, in the consumption context, when people feel benignly envious toward others, a product that is designed to help their self-improvement will be more preferred. Taken together, the following hypothesis is offered:

H1: Benign envy (vs. malicious envy) leads individuals to exhibit an increased preference for self-improvement products.

In the next section, we suggest a critical boundary condition of this benign envy effect on preference for self-improvement products.

3. Envy and message framing

Inspired by the prospect theory, the ‘framing’ effect is used to define specific product attributes (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 1982). Previous research has presented how the framing effect influences consumers’ judgment and decision-making. According to Levin and Gaeth (1988), framed product attribute information influences consumer judgment. They have demonstrated that people evaluate the product differently depending on the way the product message is given. People who read the framed product information prior to the product use evaluate the product based on either positively or negatively framed information. Likewise, being influenced by generated frames is an important part of the consumer information process (김태엽, 이진용 2017).

In the marketing literature, message framing has been identified either by focusing on the positive aspects of product use or the negative sides of not using the product (Donovan and Jalleh 1999). While Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) showed a negatively framed message is effective in persuasion, a positively framed message is more effective depending on the situational context. For instance, in a situation of adaptation to the socially appropriate behavior, Teng et al.(2019) demonstrated relative effectiveness of message framing. Whereas a positively framed message was more effective for individuals with promotion focus, a negatively framed message was effective for individuals with prevention focus. People with promotion focus tend to pursue their goal and achievement. This motivational orientation is parallel with feeling benign envy, since people feeling benign envy also tend to pursue self-improvement. Yi and Baumgartner(2009) suggested there is a match between the regulatory focus and the message framing. This implies that when people are primed with a promotion focus, a positive frame is more effective in persuasion. However, a negative frame was persuasive to the people with a prevention focus.

In the context of product acquisition, Tsai(2007) concluded that individuals who consider themselves to be independent of others (i.e., independent self-construal) have a propensity to employ a promotion focus. Moreover, they tend to be more responsive to a positively framed advertising message. The findings of prior research suggest that a positive message frame can be more persuasive and effective than the negative frame when people have a desire for self-improvement as a consequence of benign envy. Thus, we expect a positive message frame matches feelings of benign envy rather than malicious envy. To reduce the gap with better-off others, benignly envious people are motivated to move themselves up, whereas maliciously envious people are motivated to

pull others down(Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009). Feeling benign envy (vs. malicious envy) motivates people to move upward, and a product that encourages people to improve their performance in positively framed messages will lead individuals to prefer self-improvement products. However, a negatively framed message emphasizes the negative aspects when individuals don't use/choose the products. Thus, negatively framed messages do not fit with the motives of an individual who is experiencing benign envy.

Based on our conceptualization, we propose a moderating role of message framing on the effect of envy. Benignly envious people may struggle to be better off than the superior other. When they are exposed with a positively framed message, they will prefer the self-improvement product since the message fosters their self-improvement motivation. In contrast, when the message describes negative sides, individuals who felt benign envy will not show a greater preference for self-improvement products. Hence, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H2: Message framing will moderate the effect of type of envy on the preference for a self-improvement product.

H2a: For positive message framing, individuals feeling benign envy will exhibit stronger preference for a self-improvement product than individuals feeling malicious envy.

H2b: For negative message framing, there is no significant difference in the preference for a self-improvement product between individuals feeling benign envy and individuals feeling malicious envy.

In the next section, we present two studies to test these

hypotheses. Study 1 tests consumers' preference for a self-improvement product depending on the type of envy. Study 2 shows that benign envy effect is attenuated for consumers who is exposed to the negative framed message.

III. Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to examine whether benign envy (versus malicious envy) would increase one's preference for a self-improvement product. As such, it is expected that individuals who feel benign envy are more likely to purchase and pay more for the self-improvement product than those who feel malicious envy.

1. Method

A total of 60 Korean consumers (23 male, $M_{age} = 25.7$ years) participated in this study in exchange for a small gift. Participants were randomly assigned to a benign envy or malicious envy condition, with 30 participants per condition.

This experiment consisted of two ostensibly unrelated tasks. Using the cover story of the task of recollection and memory for feeling envy experience toward others, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two feeling-recall conditions. In the benign envy condition, they were asked to write in detail about a recent time when they felt admiration and positive envy toward others (adapted from Crusius and Lange 2014; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2011). In the malicious envy condition, they were asked to write about a time in their past when they felt resentment and negative envy toward others. Participants were given a part of the fictitious person's diary to help them recall a similar emotional experience. In the benign

envy condition, the success of the fictitious person was the result of his hard work; in the malicious envy condition, the success was rather undeserved because of the lack of effort.

Participants were then asked to move on to the next task, which is described as an evaluation of a new model of an electric bike to find out their preference for a self-improvement product. The electric bike was positioned as a self-improvement product having improvement-related features such as a number of functions for effective exercises and increasing muscle mass. Participants rated their purchase intention for the electric bike on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Further, they were asked to report the maximum price they were willing to pay for the electric bike, which we expected to be the highest in the benign envy condition. All measures of the above case were followed by manipulation checks, testing the validity of the manipulation by asking participants based on their recalled experience from the first task as to whether they thought the envied person deserved the benefits that he/she received (1 = very undeserved, 7 = very deserved). In addition, participants indicated how much benign envy they experienced toward the envied person, and how much malicious envy they experienced toward the envied person (all on scales from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much). Finally, participants were asked to report their demographic information.

2. Results

Manipulation checks

As predicted, parallel comparison using an independent *t*-test revealed that participants in the benign envy condition showed more positive envy and admiration than those in the malicious envy condition ($M_{benign} = 5.77$ vs. $M_{malicious} = 2.50$;

$t(58) = 9.24, p < .05$). In contrast, participants in the malicious envy condition showed more negative envy and resentment than those in the benign envy condition ($M_{\text{malicious}} = 5.57$ vs. $M_{\text{benign}} = 2.27; t(58) = -9.75, p < .05$).

For the perceived deservingness of the envied person's advantage, participants in the benign envy condition found that the advantage that the envied person enjoyed was deserved contrary to the belief of those in the malicious envy condition ($M_{\text{benign}} = 5.37$ vs. $M_{\text{malicious}} = 3.07; t(58) = 4.96, p < .05$). In sum, the envy manipulation was effective.

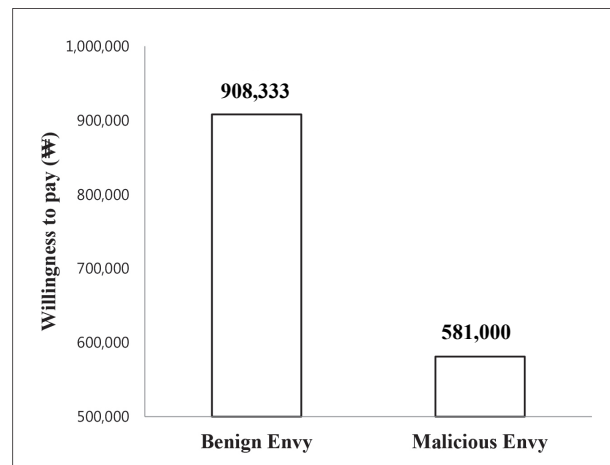
Purchase intentions

A single factor, between-subjects design with two conditions (benign envy vs. malicious envy) was used. An independent t -test comparisons were conducted to test the significance of differences between two conditions. As shown in Figure 1, the results were in the predicted direction and significant ($t(58) = -2.74, p < .01$). To be specific, participants in the benign envy condition reported a higher purchase intention for a self-improvement product ($M = 4.90$) than participants in the malicious envy condition ($M = 3.70$). The one-sample t -test against the midpoint suggested that participants in the benign envy condition indicated higher purchase intention ($M = 4.90; t(29) = 3.07, p < .01$). Participants' mean estimates, that is, intentions to purchase a self-improvement product in malicious envy condition did not significantly differ from the midpoint ($p > .1$). These findings showed that only benign envy and not malicious envy increased one's preference for a self-improvement product. As shown in Figure 2, a similar result arises for willingness to pay ($t(58) = -3.68, p < .01$). Participants in the benign envy condition were willingness to pay more for the self-improvement product ($M = ₩908,333.33$) compared to the participants in the malicious envy condition ($M = ₩581,000.00$).

⟨Figure 1⟩ Mean purchase intention for self-improvement product as a function of the type of envy (Study 1)



⟨Figure 2⟩ Mean willingness to pay for self-improvement product as a function of the type of envy (Study 1)



3. Discussion

Study 1 provided support to the notion that benign envy triggered preference for a self-improvement product compared to malicious envy, even though it occurred in a different domain. This suggests that people were willing to buy and pay more for a self-improvement product if they were

benignly envious and not if they were maliciously envious.

Study 2 tests the boundary conditions of this effect by manipulating the framing of the messages because each type of envy has its own direction. The preference for a self-improvement product would be different based on the type of envy, depending on whether the message focuses on self-improvement. Therefore, Study 2 replicates and extends our findings by examining the moderating effect of message framing.

IV. Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to examine the combined effect of the type of envy and message framing on the preference for a self-improvement product. Our conceptual framework proposed that with negative message framing, there will be no difference with the respect to the preference for a self-improvement product between participants in the benign envy condition and those in the malicious envy condition. There should be a higher preference for a self-improvement product only when participants felt benign envy in the case of positive message framing.

1. Method

A total of 120 undergraduate and graduate students (67 female, $M_{\text{age}} = 25.8$ years) at a major university in South Korea participated in this study in return for a small compensation. Study 2 used a 2 (envy: benign envy vs. malicious envy) \times 2 (framing: positive vs. negative) between-subjects design.

As in Study 1, participants were told that the purpose of the first task was to recollect an emotional experience from

the past. They were asked to read each scenario about a fictitious person who landed a dream job. Participants were then asked to recall and describe in detail an experience when they felt benign envy or malicious envy.

To measure the preference for a self-improvement product, participants were shown an electric bike that was positioned as a self-improvement product. An example of positive framing is “If you purchase this electric bike, you can get an effective aerobic exercise by changing the pedal strength or comfort of riding”. In contrast, an example of negative framing is “If you do not purchase this electric bike, you will not be able to get an effective aerobic exercise by changing the pedal strength or comfort of riding”. After they read the benefits of the product, participants reported their purchase intention for the bike using 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). They were then asked to report the maximum price they were willing to pay for the electric bike. To check whether the manipulation was successful, we asked several questions, “Message from the advertisement shows positive results,” and “Messages from the advertisement show negative results” on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). As in Study 1, participants indicated whether they thought that the envied person deserved the advantages he/she enjoyed (1 = very undeserved, 7 = very deserved), how much positive envy they experienced, and how much negative envy they experienced (all on scales from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much). Finally, participants were asked to complete some demographic questions.

2. Results

Manipulation checks

The manipulation of envy and message framing was successful. An independent *t*-test was used to check the

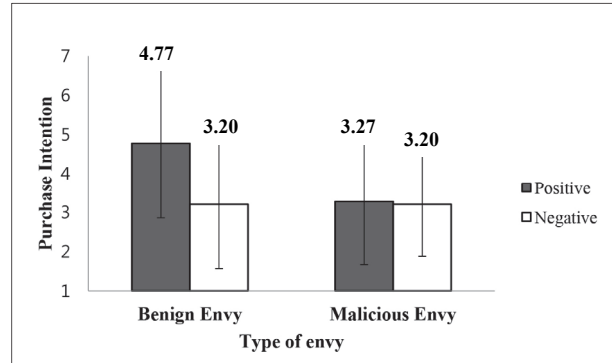
manipulation of envy and message framing. First, for the manipulation of message framing, participants in the positive message framing condition found that an advertisement presented a positive and gain-framed message compared to those in the negative message framing condition (positive message: $M_{\text{positive}} = 5.52$ vs. $M_{\text{negative}} = 2.77$, $t(118) = 12.63$, $p < .05$; gain-framed message: $M_{\text{positive}} = 5.77$ vs. $M_{\text{negative}} = 2.97$, $t(118) = 12.68$, $p < .05$). In contrast, participants in the negative message framing condition found that an advertisement presented a negative and loss-framed message compared to those in the positive message framing condition (negative message: $M_{\text{negative}} = 5.05$ vs. $M_{\text{positive}} = 2.18$, $t(118) = -12.38$, $p < .05$; loss-framed message: $M_{\text{negative}} = 5.62$ vs. $M_{\text{positive}} = 2.27$, $t(118) = -15.57$, $p < .05$).

As shown in Study 1, for the manipulation of envy, participants in the benign envy condition showed more admiration than those in the malicious envy condition ($M_{\text{benign}} = 5.60$ vs. $M_{\text{malicious}} = 2.82$, $t(118) = 12.23$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, participants in the malicious envy condition showed more resentment than those in the benign envy condition ($M_{\text{malicious}} = 5.62$ vs. $M_{\text{benign}} = 2.63$, $t(118) = -13.38$, $p < .05$). Moreover, the result revealed the main effect of envy on the deservingness of the envied person's advantage in that participants in the benign envy condition found that the envied person's advantage was deserved than those in the malicious envy condition ($M_{\text{benign}} = 5.75$ vs. $M_{\text{malicious}} = 3.17$, $t(118) = 10.14$, $p < .05$).

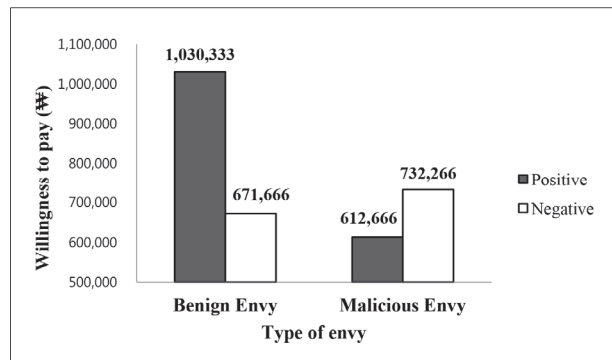
Purchase intentions

Results from a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on purchase intention revealed a significant main effect of the type of envy ($F(1, 116) = 6.38$, $p < .05$), message framing ($F(1, 116) = 7.56$, $p < .01$) and a significant interaction between the type of envy and message framing ($F(1, 116) =$

⟨Figure 3⟩ Mean purchase intention for self-improvement product as a function of the type of envy and message framing (Study 2)



⟨Figure 4⟩ Mean willingness to pay for self-improvement product as a function of the type of envy and message framing (Study 2)



6.38, $p < .05$; see Figure 3). Further, while a main effect of message framing on the willingness to pay was not significant ($p > .1$), the same analysis on the willingness to pay showed a significant main effect of the type of envy ($F(1, 116) = 5.40$, $p < .05$) and a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 116) = 9.68$, $p < .01$; see Figure 4). Specifically, in the positive framing condition, participants reported higher purchase intentions and willingness to pay for a self-improvement product in the benign envy condition versus malicious envy condition (purchase intention: $M_{\text{benign}} = 4.77$, $M_{\text{malicious}} = 3.27$; $t(58) = 3.31$, $p < .01$; WTP: M_{benign}

= ₩1,030,333.33, $M_{\text{malicious}} = ₩612,666.67$; $t(48) = 1.91$, $p < .01$). In the negative framing condition, the difference between benign envy and malicious envy conditions was not significant (purchase intention: $M_{\text{benign}} = 3.20$, $M_{\text{malicious}} = 3.20$; $p = .1$; WTP: $M_{\text{benign}} = ₩671,666.67$, $M_{\text{malicious}} = ₩732,266.67$; $p > .1$).

3. Discussion

The results of Study 2 provided evidence for the proposition that message framing moderated the preference for a self-improvement product. As predicted, when product benefits were framed positively, individuals tend to self-improve because they fitted with the motives of self-improvement. However, people who were in the negative message framing condition showed no difference in the preference for a self-improvement product for benign envy and malicious envy conditions. More importantly, results replicated those of Study 1 in that benignly envious people were likely to purchase and pay more for the self-improvement product.

V. General Discussion

The current research examined the relationship between envy and self-improvement more thoroughly. The findings of this research showed how feeling envy influences consumers' decision-making for a product that has self-improvement attributes. The results of two studies show that the recollection of feeling envy experience motivated people to show their intention to purchase the self-improvement product. Study 1 supported our main hypothesis that feeling benign envy leads to an intention to purchase and pay more for a product enabling self-improvement product. Study 2 replicated this effect and showed a moderating effect of

message framing such that only benign envy increased the preference for a self-improvement product when participants were exposed to positive message framing. This is because the motive of feeling benign envy, which is leveling oneself up, coincides with the positively framed message. On the other hand, this effect was not shown when participants were exposed to negative message framing. In conclusion, the current research suggests that feeling envy influences consumers' intention to purchase self-improvement products. When the feeling of envy is reactivated through recollecting an experience of envy, people are willing to try the product that makes them feel improved in a certain way.

The current research has theoretical and practical implications. First, the results of the current work extend the findings of prior research in the marketing literature. Previous studies have shown that envy can lead to self-improvement motivation. The present research further examines that envy has an influence on consumer preference for self-improvement products. Therefore, focusing on the role of envy, the experiments presented in this research show product preference may be determined by specific emotion in unrelated contexts. Second, the present research demonstrates the moderating role of message framing. This work suggests that with the two dimensions of envy (benign and malicious) and different types of message framing (positive and negative) will result in different preferences for products enabling self-improvement.

Moreover, the findings of these studies have important implications for marketers and policymakers. This research sheds light on the effect of envy, which increases the preference for consumption choices aimed at self-improvement. The results can be utilized by marketers and policymakers, encouraging consumers to select self-improvement products or engaging in self-improving behaviors. For instance, a consumer can decide to purchase

a product having self-improvement attributes under the influence of a commercial using the right function of envy. According to the current research, leading one to purchase a self-improvement product could not be related to the direct domain of feeling envy. Therefore, a major company that has diverse categories of products may apply this research's results by grouping products into a unique set, instead of individual products.

There are four limitations of the current research that may stimulate future research. First, despite the use of an electric bike as a self-improvement product, we did not measure the average exercise time per week for each of the participants, while a prior study measured it as a covariate. Future research may ask participants to indicate their average exercise time or frequency. These observations will help to control the individual differences in exercise behavior. Second, the present work only focused on the effect of envy on the preference for self-improvement products. Previous research manipulated various negative emotions in relation to envy and compared those effects on the behavioral responses. To deepen our insights, future research is needed. Additional experiments may be performed to investigate the difference among emotions on the product preference. Third, the current work was run exclusively on only in batches of 20s; therefore, it could be hard to make a generalization. Fourth, while participants' envious feelings were measured as a manipulation check, the general tendency of people to compare to others was not captured. Alternatively, it is possible to expect that the effect of envy occurs differently depending on how people perceive degree of interdependency. The results would be different if a person barely compares himself to others or has low interdependency. Future research could also seek to improve our understanding of the mediation effect of feeling envy. Moreover, because the finding of this research focused the

effect of envy as an independent variable, it will be interesting to examine how envy influences and mediates the preference for self-improvement products.

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