How do passengers influence drivers' propensities for angry driving? Different effects of supervisors versus friends

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

A lot of researchers discussed the influence of passengers on drivers' behaviors without reaching a consistent conclusion. This study aimed to offer some new evidence concerning this issue. The study examined different effects of supervisors and friends as passengers on drivers' propensities for angry driving. In Study 1, drivers were asked to freely imagine a passenger either as their supervisor or friend. Results showed that compared with driving alone, drivers' propensities for angry driving increased when the passenger was a friend but decreased when the passenger was a supervisor. These findings were consistent with the generally accepted social norm. In Study 2, drivers read a description about either an aggressive supervisor or a cautious friend. Results showed that the effects of passengers on drivers' angry driving propensities were correspondingly reversed, indicating that a clearer behavior standard conveyed by a passenger had a stronger effect on drivers. Self-monitoring propensity showed a main effect on drivers' propensities for angry driving in a standard-free situation. And self-monitoring propensity moderated the effect of a passenger's role on angry driving propensities in a standard-set situation. Impression management processes were discussed with respect to these findings.

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1. Introduction

People are social animals. We often feel social influence from others, groups, and societies. Drivers and passengers make a small car a social situation and cast social influence on each other. Under such influence, drivers' behaviors are changing. Driver's behavior is one of the major factors that cause road accidents (United States General Accounting Office, 2003). How do passengers influence drivers' behaviors? Do passengers promote safer driving or induce more risky driving behaviors? A lot of researchers discussed this issue without reaching a consistent conclusion. Many studies found that passengers usually exerted negative influence on drivers' behaviors. For example, the presence of passengers increased drivers' risky behaviors as well as accidents (Simons-Morton et al., 2005; Williams and Wells, 1995). In some studies, researchers found that the presence of a single passenger doubled the accident risk when driving alone, and that the risk increased still with more passengers (Chen et al., 2000; Doherty et al., 1998).

However, the presence of passengers is not always raising violence. Arnett et al. (1997) found that compared with driving alone, high-school students drove more safely with family members or friends present. Preusser et al. (1998) found that passengers' negative influence existed only when drivers were teenagers. Elder

passengers and female passengers were also found to promote cautious driving (Baxter et al., 1990). Concerning such inconsistency of the influence of passengers on drivers, researchers tried to take a second look at and explore deeper into passengers' characteristics, including age, gender, passenger–driver relationship (Arnett et al., 1997; Baxter et al., 1990; Conner et al., 2003; Hingson and Howland, 1993; Ouimet et al., 2010). Parker et al. (1992) found that subjective norm, not simply the presence of passenger could predict drivers' intention to commit driving violations. We argue that what affects a driver's behavior is not the passenger characteristic itself, but the driver's perception, or social cognition of the passenger. Social cognition includes *reasoning and judgment* of (1) self and others (e.g., "M is a young female and disapproves violence"), and (2) the relationship between self and others (e.g., "A is my best friend"). And such social cognition helps adjust people's behaviors (Yue, 2009). Researchers pointed out that driving was a kind of behavior that undertook social psychological functions such as promoting status in front of passengers (Møller and Gregersen, 2008). Thus drivers would form a social cognition of the passenger and guide their driving behaviors through an impression management process, which could offer a more consistent explanation of drivers' behaviors under passenger influence.

1.1. Impression management in driver–passenger interaction

Impression management is the process through which we try to manage the impression others form of us (Kenrick et al., 2010;

Leary and Kowalski, 1990). People actively change their behaviors for the purpose of fitting expectations from social situations and smoothing the interpersonal interactions, or the purpose of getting favorable appraisals and awards for themselves (Tedeschi et al., 1974).

Impression management consists of two components: impression motivation and impression construction (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Impression motivation is a process that people are motivated to control impressions of other under certain conditions. When there are passengers present in a car, the driver may perceive himself/herself as "in the eye of public", which raise the impression motivation. Yet different passengers raise the driver's impression motivation to different levels. Despite the family relationship, there are two important relationships in people's daily interactions, one is with supervisors and the other is with friends. Here we limit one's supervisor to someone that has an officially higher rank than the person and usually takes direct or indirect supervising responsibility on the person, mostly in working settings. From our daily experience, there is usually a larger interpersonal distance between supervisor and subordinate than between friends. Moreover, the supervisor often holds a large amount of resource that the subordinate might need and the subordinate usually could not diminish the power of his/her supervisor over himself/herself. In contrast, people usually choose those with similar attitude or value as friends (Lau et al., 1990). Affective-related social support or emotional understanding is more possible to be induced between friends (Yue, 2006). Thus compared with a friend passenger, a supervisor passenger would raise more impression motivation of a driver and would have more influence on the driver's behavior.

Impression motivation only determines the extent to which people are willing to change their behaviors. The second factor of impression management, impression construction, also affects people's behaviors (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Impression construction process includes the person's expected image in front of others and the corresponding behaviors to achieve the image. In other words, one would form a specific image he/she expects to present in front of specific others (i.e., the impression management object) and adjust his/her behaviors to fit the image. The expected image is formed based on the perception of what the management object values. Such perception might come from the object's characteristics, roles, words, daily behaviors, etc. Sometimes even negative behaviors would emerge as an impression management result (Jellison and Gentry, 1978; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Because many impression management results are presented as certain behaviors, in this paper we describe such perception as a kind of "behavior standard". During interpersonal interactions, an impression management object usually conveys his/her own value through a specific "behavior standard". Individuals would use the perception and judgment of this behavior standard to guide impression construction process. Impression construction thus is a process to present oneself based on received behavior standard. As a result, whether an individual could clearly perceive the behavior standard has a direct effect on the results of impression construction (usually specific behavior presented to the object). If an impression management object reveals a clear standard, individuals could fit the standard and present themselves correspondingly. When the object fails to convey a standard, individuals also need to present a reasonable and positive image. In this case, the behavior standard would be mainly determined by the specific social norm in the situation. Thus, the presence as well as the content of a behavior standard is of great importance to individual's impression management process.

Applying to driver–passenger interactions, research found that the existence of passengers could impel drivers to reduce non-desired behaviors (Ellison-Potter et al., 2001). But what are non-desired or desired behaviors? When a passenger does not deliver his/her behavior standard directly, the driver could not smoothly form an expected image in front of the passenger and thus would choose a desirable image according to the passenger's role. Specifically, when the passenger is a supervisor of the driver, we predict that the driver would construct his/her image as a mild and safe driver with low propensity for angry driving behaviors. When the passenger role is friend, the driver would perform more casually due to a lower impression motivation, which could result in high propensity for angry driving behaviors when encountered with an angry situation. This prediction is similar to the results from a qualitative study, in which the drivers interviewed mentioned different impression management goals with respect to different interaction objects. For example, drivers reported slowing down the speed to show responsibility when a parent or a client was in their cars, while speeding up to show off driving skill when a friend was aside (Fleiter et al., 2010). When the driver could clearly perceive a passenger's behavior standard, it is expected that the driver would change his/her own behaviors accordingly. Thus a reversed behavior standard would lead to reversed propensity for angry driving. This clear standard, rather than the passenger role, would dominate the impression construction direction.

1.2. Self-monitoring: individual differences in impression management

Self-monitoring, which refers to the extent to which an individual concerns with environmental cues and self behaviors, and the ability of adjusting self-presentation in social interactions, is closely related to the impression management (Snyder, 1974). Gangestad and Snyder (2000) posited that the main goals of self-monitoring were to maintain positive self-image and to help impression management. A great amount of research has been conducted on the construct and scale-development of self-monitoring and an agreement was reached that self-monitoring generally consisted of two major components, self-monitoring ability and self-monitoring propensity (Briggs et al., 1980; Gangestad and Snyder, 2000; Lennox and Wolfe, 1984; Li and Zhang, 1998). A person with high self-monitoring ability *can* exercise control over impression management process (e.g., sensitive to specific social cues and knowing what is proper to do or to say under a certain circumstance), while a person with high self-monitoring propensity *does* exercise control over impression management process (e.g., taking value of being liked by others and actively changing behaviors to fit the environment) (Li and Zhang, 1998). Self-monitoring affects people's behaviors of impression management, such that high self-monitors are more cautious in choosing an image strategy which has a potential to be undesirable. The results of impression management process could also be different with different levels of self-monitoring. For example, high self-monitors were more likely to get liked when using ingratiation and low self-monitors were likely to be regarded as toadies (Turnley and Bolino, 2001).

Applying to driving situation, high self-monitors would adjust their behaviors flexibly according to passengers, while low self-monitors would behave more according to the determination of inner-self. As a result, we expected that high self-monitors would display more differences in the driving behaviors with different passengers present. Moreover, the two components of self-monitoring would cast different effects on driver's behaviors in different situations. Specifically, when a passenger delivered a clear behavior standard, the driver could easily behave according to the standard. Thus, self-monitoring propensity rather than self-monitoring ability would exert more effect on drivers' behavior propensities. The comparative dominance of the two components would be reversed when there was no clear behavior standard.