WHEN SUCCESS IS BAD: THE DARK SIDE OF SUCCESSFUL MEDIA ROLE MODELS FOR THE FORMATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY (SUMMARY)

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Method

To investigate the impact of perceived success and similarity of media role models on entrepreneurial self-efficacy we conducted an online experiment among 131 German students (graduate and undergraduate level). Using a student sample seems to be promising since students at an advanced stage of their study have to make decisions for their future career. This leads to a degree of uncertainty and stress that in turn makes them more open to social comparison and role modeling. Our experiment used a 2 (successful, unsuccessful) x 2 (similar, dissimilar) design. The participants were asked to evaluate a random page of the magazine regarding several design criteria. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental groups and women were exposed to female role models and men to male role models. At the end of the survey we measured entrepreneurial self-efficacy beliefs.

Results and Implications

We used manipulation checks for success and similarity, which show significant differences between the groups indicating successful manipulations. Analyzing the results we found a significant interaction between success and similarity ($F = 4.62, p < .05$). This gives evidence that participants have a decreased self-efficacy when they read about a successful role model perceived as dissimilar. This supports our Hypothesis. In contrast, we did not find a direct relationship between similarity and success and self-efficacy. Summing up, the results reveal a dark side of successful media role models since entrepreneurial self-efficacy was significantly lower if the observer perceived the role model as dissimilar. This is in line with theory. Practical implications arise for educators and policy makers trying to foster entrepreneurship via presenting entrepreneurial role models. If entrepreneurial examples are used in lectures or in campaigns to raise efficacy beliefs they should be carefully selected, i.e. successful role models that are similar to the target group. Subsequently, there is no “one size fits it all”-approach. We did not find a direct relationship of role model success and self-efficacy.

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