

From Pixels to Power: Exploring virtual Embodiment and Priming effects in affecting leadership persuasive skills

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 11:00 AM (10 minutes)

In the realm of personal and professional growth, role models exert substantial influence, shaping behaviors and aspirations. Immersive virtual reality gets us closer to role models in an otherwise impossible way, allowing us to “wear” virtual bodies resembling successful characters whose valuable traits we aim to emulate. In previous research, we investigated the attitudinal changes following the embodiment of an avatar resembling a successful leader, i.e., Angela Merkel. In this ongoing study, we explore behavioral and physiological changes in an immersive and arousing virtual scenario, where female participants are asked to give a public persuasive speech. Adopting a within design experiment, participants experience three embodiment conditions: i) the Merkel avatar (Leader Embodiment condition LEc), ii) the Self-avatar (Self-Embodiment condition SEc) and iii) the Self-avatar while exposed to a picture of Merkel (Priming condition P-SEc). For each condition, we measure physiological responses (pitch, heart rate variability), self-attitude (self-related leadership traits, self-efficacy), posture and stage management, public speaking skills and speech length. We designed the experiment to replicate and expand Latu et al. (2013) findings, suggesting participants in P-SEc being more performative compared to a no-priming-condition. Here, we expect better performance in LEc compared to SEc, supporting the Proteus effect literature according to which avatar’s body features shape behavior. Finally, differences between LEc and P-SEc will help to tease apart embodiment from priming, shedding further light on the mechanisms underlying the Proteus effect.

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Primary author: FRISANCO, Althea (Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome and CLN2S@sapienza, Fondazione Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT), Rome)

Co-authors: CANTONI, Chiara (Università di Roma “La Sapienza”); Dr PROVENZANO, Luca (Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome and CLN2S@sapienza, Fondazione Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT), Rome); AGLIOTI, Salvatore Maria (Università di Roma “La Sapienza”)

Presenter: FRISANCO, Althea (Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome and CLN2S@sapienza, Fondazione Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT), Rome)

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