

Encouraging Organ Donation Signup Intentions: Effects of Highlighting Social Proximity and Message Concreteness*

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This study investigates how social distance cues and message concreteness influence the effectiveness of organ donation campaign messages. Drawing from the construal level theory, we examined how these message characteristics shape individuals' intentions to register as organ donors, through an online survey-embedded experiment. The mediating role of issue involvement was also explored in effort to understand the underlying psychological mechanisms. Results suggested that concrete messages have the potential to increase participants' intentions to sign up for an organ donation registry. This was serially mediated through perceived message concreteness and issue involvement. Contrary to expectations, the effects of social distance cues on participants' intentions to sign up were not statistically significant. This study extends the theoretical implications for the construal level theory in the context of health communication, particularly organ donation. It also offers practical implications for constructing persuasive organ donation campaign messages that can effectively motivate public participation in organ donation initiatives.

Keywords: Social Distance, Message Concreteness, Construal Level Theory, Organ Donation, Organ Donation Campaign

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1. Introduction

South Korea suffers from a chronic shortage of donated organs. During the year of 2023, 521 individuals donated their organs, whereas over 51 thousand patients were on the waiting list for organ transplant (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2024). Due to this stark gap between the demand for and supply of donated organs, patients in Korea, on average, have to wait 48 months to receive an organ transplant. During this period, 8.4 patients die every day because they are not able to receive a transplant in time. Alarming, the number of patients on the waiting list and the according death toll continues to rise each year (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2024, 2025).

Among different reasons for the low organ donation rate, two noteworthy ones are (1) low levels of perceived involvement and (2) vague sense of fear. First, Koreans, in general, have a low level of involvement with organ donation, such that they believe organ donation is personally irrelevant (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2021); the public rarely considers organ transplants as something that they, or those close to them, would be in need of (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2011). Due to this psychological distance, they often lack motivation to sign up to a registry to become potential organ donors.

Another hurdle is the vague fear about organ donation. According to a national survey on organ and tissue donation, 30.8% of respondents stated that they are scared of the idea of organ donation yet they were unable to explain the specific reason for this fear. One underlying reason for this unexplainable fear may be the lack of a clear understanding of the process of organ donation or transplant. In fact,

only 5.7% of Koreans reported that they are aware of the organ donation process (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2021). Moreover, among those who were not willing to become an organ donor, 33% associated organ donation with body damage (Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, 2018).

Tackling such misconceptions about organ donation is not an issue that is easily solvable (Lee, 2015). Despite continuous effort, organ donation campaigns in Korea have not been particularly successful. Campaigns have often focused on illustrating the heroic aspects of organ donors, or the emotional sense of accomplishment of those who signed up for an organ donation registry (for examples of previous campaigns, see: KDCAkorea, 2019; Ministry of Health and Welfare TV, 2020, 2023). Considering Koreans' low perceived involvement with organ donation, conveying the heroic stories of posthumous donors and affective benefits of signing up (e.g., feeling good) are likely ineffective in making people feel that organ donation is particularly relevant to them (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2011, 2021). Moreover, although systematic exploration remains unexamined, existing campaigns appear to rarely deliver concrete information and instructions about organ donation (e.g., where and how to sign up for an organ donor registry, facts about the donation and transplant procedure). This, potentially, is ineffective in increasing the public's knowledge of organ donation, combating related misinformation, and ultimately, increasing the number of registrants.

Prior research has examined diverse campaign strategies such as framing (gain vs. loss) and emotional versus rational appeals, showing that message design can significantly influence knowledge, attitudes, and

intentions regarding organ donation (e.g., Feeley & Moon, 2009; Morgan et al., 2010). However, findings across contexts remain mixed, highlighting the need for further theory-driven investigations that can situate message strategies within particular sociocultural contexts.

In the context of South Korea, previous studies demonstrated that entertainment media (e.g., national TV programs) could enhance engagement and intentions regarding organ donation by fostering narrative involvement and parasocial relationships (Bae, 2008; Lee, Park, Choi, & Kim, 2009). Studies also examined message design strategies like framing and source characteristics on attitudes and behavioral intentions (Min & Lee, 2023; Park & Lee, 2021; Sun, 2015), which found small to medium effect sizes.

The current study builds on this line of research on organ donation campaigns and examines how message factors such as social distance and concreteness/abstractedness can help encourage organ donation signups in South Korea, based on the construal level theory (CLT; Liberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). In the sections that follow, we first provide a brief overview of the construal level theory, discuss how the social distance dimension can be particularly relevant in this context. We also introduce the framework and empirical backgrounds regarding message concreteness, and the potential mediating role of issue involvement.

1) Construal Level Theory

The CLT posits that perceived psychological distance affects how individuals process or think about

an entity or event (Liberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman et al., 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). It argues that people tend to think more abstractly about things that are psychologically distant, and more concretely about things that are psychologically proximal. An entity/event is considered distant when it exists or takes place in the remote future (temporal), to people less like the self (social), in a distant place (spatial), and with a low likelihood (hypothetical). The CLT and its constructs has been applied and tested across various contexts such as health risks, climate change, organ donation, decision making, and advertising, as well as examined in meta-analysis studies (Ahn, 2015; Brügger, Morton, & Dessai, 2016; Choi, Park, & Oh, 2012; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013; Soderberg, Callahan, Kochersberger, Amit, & Ledgerwood, 2015; Song & Park, 2009).

At the core of the CLT is the idea that the greater the perceived psychological distance, the more likely individuals are to use a high-level construal to process information in an abstract, idealized, and decontextualized manner; on the contrary, the less the perceived distance, the more likely they are to use a low-level construal to process the information in a concrete, specific, and contextualized manner (Liberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman et al., 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). For example, if someone plans to sign up for organ donation tomorrow (low temporal distance), they are likely to think about the signup process in concrete, detailed terms, such as visiting the website and filling out forms. In contrast, if they plan to sign up within the next year (high temporal distance), they are likely to focus more on abstract, value-based aspects of organ donation, such as saving lives and leaving a legacy.

2) Social Distance and Mental Construal

South Korean culture is deeply relational and family-centered, which means that organ donation decisions are often understood in terms of close others (particularly family). National surveys confirm that organ donation tend to be perceived as irrelevant unless it directly involves one's family (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2011, 2021), suggesting that reducing perceived social distance may be a particularly effective strategy in the Korean context. Thus, in this study, we focus on the social distance dimension of CLT, given its relevance with the context of organ donation. According to the CLT, thinking about a socially distant entity (e.g., stranger, the general public) will lead people to form high-level construals, meaning information will be processed in an abstract and idealistic manner. In contrast, thinking about a socially proximal entity (e.g., family, loved ones) will lead to low-level construals, with which information processing will be more concrete, practical, and context-specific (Liberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman et al., 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Research has shown that individuals are more willing to engage in information processing when an entity is perceived as socially proximal or like the self. For instance, undergraduate students tend to be more receptive to anti-smoking messages when the smoker is primed to be their best friend versus an average college student (Ma & Nan, 2018). Similarly, reductions in perceived social distance with climate change (i.e., whether climate change will impact people close to me) tend to increase intentions to engage in climate actions (Jones, Hine, & Marks, 2017). Similar findings regarding perceived social distances

have been demonstrated in various other contexts as well, such as soft drink consumption, online hate speeches, vaccination intentions, and donation willingness (Ahn, 2015; Jarmolowicz et al., 2018; Jeong, 2019; Kogut, Ritov, Rubaltelli, & Liberman, 2018).

Likewise, studies have shown that reducing perceived psychological distance is an effective strategy to increase people's involvement, which, in turn, promotes their intentions or behaviors. Indeed, a comprehensive literature review on message tailoring suggests that underlining the personal relevance or immediacy with an entity can effectively increase individuals' involvement regarding health behaviors (Noar, Harrington, & Aldrich, 2009). Applying this to the context of organ donation, stressing the intimate relationship between the message recipients and potential patients in need is likely to encourage intentions to sign up for an organ donor registry. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Participants who read a message that features socially proximal beings (i.e., low social distance) will indicate greater intentions to sign up for an organ donor registry, compared to those who read a message that features socially remote beings (i.e., high social distance).

3) Message Concreteness

The degree to which messages employ concrete versus abstract information can be an important factor in communicating the effectiveness of organ donation. Message concreteness refers to "how specific and particular a message is, or the extent to which a message details the information needed by the reader" (Miller, Lane, Deatrick, Young, & Potts, 2007, p.

225). Concrete messages tend to be more descriptive, providing more details and instructions that a message recipient may need for them to put things into action; these messages tend to be more effective in various contexts, especially when uncertainty or doubts need to be overcome for the recipient to implement an action (Hansen & Wänke, 2010; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). For example, smokers display higher attentiveness to the warning labels on a cigarette package when the labels are written in concrete and straightforward language (Wright, 1979). Similarly, health promotional messages receive more attention and positive evaluation when written in concrete language, compared to when written in abstract language, because concrete messages decrease the readers' anxiety (Miller et al., 2007).

An organ donation campaign message can use either abstract or concrete language. For example, an abstract campaign message could emphasize why someone should consider becoming an organ donor by illustrating the values of organ donation (e.g., 'Organ donation is the most precious gift one can give to others'). A concrete campaign message, on the other hand, could focus on explaining the signup procedure or how simple it is to sign up (e.g., 'It takes less than 5 minutes to sign up to be an organ donor. Visit this website and fill out your information').

The Korean public, in general, has low levels of knowledge regarding organ donation (Park, 2023; Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2021). Thus, providing specific and tangible information through concrete messages will likely increase intentions to donate their organs (Horton & Horton, 1990). Reading a message that provides concrete knowledge about organ donation will potentially enable individuals to

combat vague fear and anxiety regarding organ donation, and ultimately increase behavioral engagement.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited:

H2: Participants who read a concrete message about organ donation will indicate greater intentions to sign up an organ donor registry, compared to those who read an abstract message.

4) Interaction Between Social Distance and Message Concreteness: Matching Principle

The CLT posits that the effectiveness of a persuasive message can be enhanced when the psychological distance of the information matches the construal level of the recipient, which is often referred to as the matching principle (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Lutchyn & Yzer, 2011). That is, distant events/entities are better processed when described in high-level, abstract terms, whereas proximal events/entities are more persuasive when framed in low-level, concrete terms. This is because matching psychological distance and construal level facilitates consistent mental representations, which leads to the message to be processed more fluently (Higgins, 2000; Lee, 2019). The matching principle has been tested in different contexts, including environmental campaigns (Bashir, Wilson, Lockwood, Chasteen, & Alisat, 2014; Griffioen, Handgraaf, & Antonides, 2019; Yun, Kim, & Song, 2025), medication adherence (Mo, Park, Jang, & Lee, 2025), anti-alcohol campaigns (Park & Morton, 2015), and vaccine message receptivity (Saxton, Colby, Saxton, & Pasumarti, 2024).

Especially, previous research suggests that emphasizing psychologically proximal events or entities, in conjunction with concrete language, enhances per-

suasive impacts of a message. For example, Bashir and colleagues (2014) found that a message using concrete language (i.e., instructions on how to reduce plastic use) was more effective than an abstract message (i.e., why reducing plastic use is important) in increasing behavioral intention when participants perceived climate change to be temporally proximal. Moreover, Park and Morton (2015) reported that a promotion-focused message (i.e., abstract) was more effective than a prevention-focused message (i.e., concrete) in reducing alcohol consumption for a socially distant entity. A meta-analytic review also showed that a message that emphasized personal consequences of following health advice (low social distance), written in vivid language, was most effective in increasing intentions to comply with health advice (Keller & Lehmann, 2008). Based on these findings, it is expected that an organ donation campaign message featuring socially proximal beings (e.g., family) written in concrete language will be most effective in encouraging signup intention.

In the same vein, the matching principle also suggests that messages featuring psychologically distal entities (e.g., the general public) that use abstract language will increase persuasion (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Lutchyn & Yzer, 2011). Although this notion has been supported in previous studies (e.g., energy conservation, Griffioen et al., 2019; cancer prevention messaging, Kim, 2019), its applicability to the context of organ donation requires further empirical examination. Most pre-existing organ donation campaigns in Korea tend to use abstract language (e.g., ‘seed of hope’) and emphasize how becoming a donor will benefit the society as a whole (i.e., remote social distance), which have had limited success in increas-

ing signups. According to the matching principle, the combination of abstract language and high social distance cues should lend effective messages. However, in the context of organ donation campaign messaging in South Korea, such messages may backfire, potentially making it easier for people to perceive organ donation as irrelevant and inconsequential. Thus, it is predicted that a campaign message that features socially remote beings (e.g., the general public) written in abstract language will be least effective in encouraging signup intention.

H3: There will be an interaction between social distance and message concreteness, such that (a) participants who read a concrete message that features socially proximal beings will have the greatest intentions to sign up an organ donation registry, whereas (b) those who read an abstract message that features socially remote beings will have the least intentions to sign up.

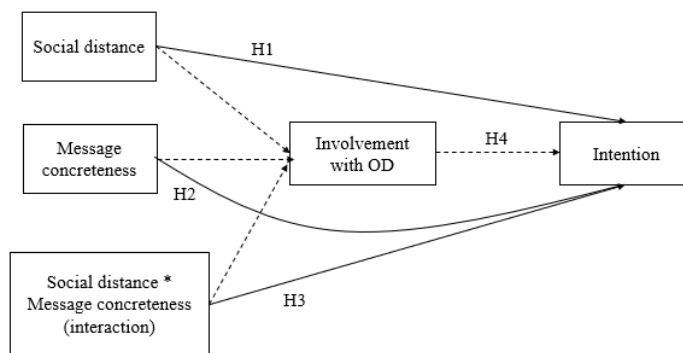
5) Mediating Role of Issue Involvement

Issue involvement refers to an individual’s perceived level of interest, significance, and personal relevance for an event, and their motivation to be engaged in the event (Mittal & Lee, 1989; Olsen, 2007; Zaichkowsky, 1985). It has been recognized as an important factor that influences and mediates various behavioral outcomes (Bae, 2008; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Lai & Chen, 2011; Park, 1996). This is because greater issue involvement encourages more systematic processing of message content and stronger emotional engagement, both of which facilitate behavioral intention (Cho & Boster, 2005; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Prior research suggests that message features that reduce psychological distance - such as focusing on socially proximal others and using concrete language - can increase perceived personal relevance, thereby enhancing issue involvement (Spence, Poortinga, & Pidgeon, 2012; White, MacDonnell, & Dahl, 2011). Applying this to the context of organ donation, messages depicting close others (e.g., family) or using concrete language may make the issue feel immediate and personally consequential, heightening involvement. This heightened involvement is likely to translate into greater motivation to act, thereby increasing intentions to sign up as an organ donor (Bae, 2008; Kang, Cappella, & Fishbein, 2006). Thus, issue involvement is expected to mediate the effects of social distance and message concreteness on intentions to sign up for an organ donor registry.

H4: Involvement with organ donation will mediate the relationship between (a) social distance and intentions to sign up, and the relationship between (b) message concreteness and intentions.

See <Figure 1> for the overall conceptual model.



<Figure 1> Proposed Conceptual Model

Note. Dotted lines (H4) denote indirect effects of social distance, message concreteness, and their interaction term on intention via involvement

2. Method

1) Participants

A nationally diverse quota sample of 266 South Koreans who have not signed up for an organ donation registry was recruited for the purpose of this study (52.6% female; age $M = 39.38$, $SD = 10.65$; education level 75.2% bachelor's degree, 16.9% high school graduate, 5.6% master's degree, 1.5% associate degree). Participants were recruited via Embrain, an online research firm based in South Korea that has a nationwide panel that consists of 3 million individuals.

2) Design and Procedure

An online survey experiment was conducted, with a 2 (social distance: distal, proximal) \times 2 (message concreteness: abstract, concrete) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions that encouraged individuals

to become a potential donor. After reading the stimuli, participants answered a set of survey items that asked about their involvement with organ donation and behavioral intention to sign up on an organ donation registry. The stimuli and survey items were presented in Korean.

3) Message Manipulation

(1) Social distance

Social distance was manipulated by highlighting the potential recipients of organ donations as either psychologically proximal beings (e.g., oneself or family members) or psychologically distal individuals (e.g., neighbors or Korean citizens in general). For example, the title of the message in the proximal condition reads: “Why wait? Sign up on an organ donation registry and save yourself and your family’s lives.” On the other hand, in the distal condition, it reads: “Why wait? Sign up on an organ donation registry and save your neighbors’ and citizens’ lives.”¹⁾ Similarly, the closing message, the proximal condition mentions: “Likewise, by undergoing a simple registration process, you can save your family, and even yourself. Is there anything worthier?” In the distal condition, it mentions: “Likewise, by undergoing a simple registration process, you can save your local community, and even Korean citizens. Is there anything worthier?”

(2) Message concreteness

We manipulated message concreteness through variations in language and content related to the societal values of organ donation and registration procedure details. The abstract condition highlighted the idealistic aspect of organ donation through statements such as: “By joining this noble promise (of signing up), you can help patients reignite the flame of life. Imagine a terminal cancer patient shedding tears of joy after being given a new chance at life through a transplant.” Moreover, throughout the message, abstract language was used (e.g., “becoming an organ donor will enable patients’ lives to bloom like a flower”). The registration process was briefly introduced, but the instruction itself focused more on the idealistic values of organ donation.

In contrast, the concrete condition highlighted the specific and practical values of organ donation through statements such as: “By signing up, you can help reduce transplant wait time by up to 70 days. Imagine a terminal cancer patient returning to work, school, and home after a successful transplant surgery.” Additionally, the registration procedure was elaborated thoroughly with specific details, in a step-by-step manner.

The message length was carefully adjusted so that the difference in word count among the stimuli was less than 10%. The full text used for all stimuli can be found in Appendix A.

1) “Saving oneself,” as implied in the message stimuli, was based on the idea that signing up as an organ donor contributes to expanding the donor registry pool. As more people participate, the pool grows larger, making it easier to match donated organs with recipients, thereby shortening the transplant process.

4) Measurements

(1) Perceived Social Distance

Participants were asked to think about the relationship between themselves and the potential beneficiary of organ donation indicated in the message they just read. Then, on a 7-point Likert scale, they answered six items (Dibble, Levine, & Park, 2012), to which they reported how socially proximal or distal they perceived the beneficiary to be (e.g., “I have a close relationship with the beneficiary”, “My relationship with the beneficiary is important in my life”), with higher values indicating more proximal perceived social distance ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.35$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$).

(2) Perceived Message Concreteness

Items from previous research were adapted to assess the concreteness or abstractness of the message stimuli in the context of organ donation (Feldman, Bearden, & Hardesty, 2006; Pounders, Lee, & Mackert, 2015). Five items were used to assess perceived message concreteness, which include: “The message provided detailed information about the organ donation signup process” and “In the message, the explanation of the organ donation signup process was abstract/concrete.” All items were assessed on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree), with higher numbers indicating higher message concreteness ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.90$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$).

(3) Issue Involvement

Involvement with organ donation was assessed with five items on a 7-point semantic differential

scale (Zaichkowsky, 1985), with higher values indicating greater levels of issue involvement. The items include: “Signing up an organ donation registry is unimportant/important,” “means a lot to me/means nothing to me (reverse-coded),” and “trivial/significant” ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.00$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$).

(4) Behavioral Intention

Intention to assign up as a potential organ donor was measured using four 7-point Likert scale items from Feeley and Servoss (2005) and Kopfman & Smith (1996), such as, “I will consider the possibility of becoming an organ donor,” and “I intend to become a potential organ donor.” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.13$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$).

See Appendix B for the original items in Korean.

3. Results

1) Manipulation Check

T-tests revealed that both social distance and message concreteness were successfully manipulated. Those assigned in the proximal social distance condition displayed significantly lower perceived social distance between themselves and the patients in the message ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.38$) than those in the distal condition ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.29$), $t(264) = -2.42$, $p = .02$. We note again that higher numbers in the social distance scale refers to lower perceived distance (i.e., more proximal social distance). Additionally, those in the concrete message condition perceived the message to be significantly more concrete (M

= 4.87, $SD = .91$) than those in the abstract condition ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .91$), $t(264) = -2.66$, $p < .01$.

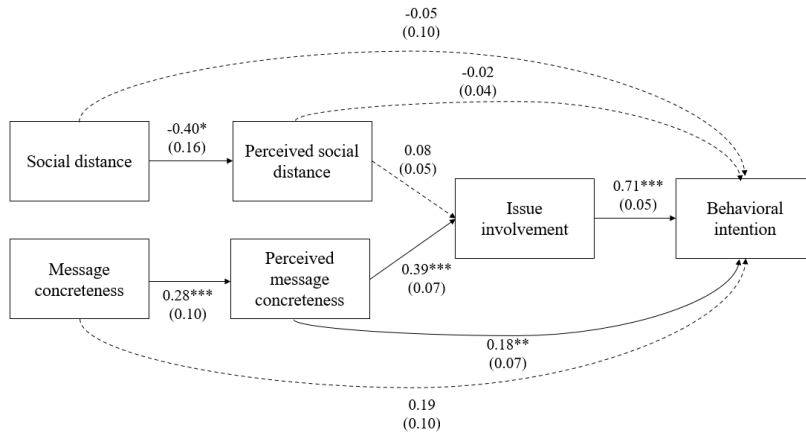
2) Hypotheses Testing

A 2×2 factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the impact of social distance, message concreteness, and their interaction on behavioral intention. The analysis did not reveal a significant main effect for social distance, $F(1, 262) = .60$, $p = .44$, $\eta^2 = .002$; H1 unsupported. On the other hand, there was a significant main effect for message concreteness, $F(1, 262) = 5.67$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .02$. As predicted, participants who read a concrete message displayed higher behavioral intention to sign up an organ donation registry ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.10$) than those who read an abstract message ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.17$; H2 supported). The interaction between social distance and message concreteness was not significant, $F(1, 262) = .51$, $p = .47$, $\eta^2 = .002$ (H3 unsupported). See Appendix C for the means and standard deviations of each experimental condition; see Appendix D for the ANOVA results table.

To test the indirect impact of social distance and message concreteness on behavioral intention via issue involvement (H4), path analyses were conducted using the lavaan package in R (v0.6.19; Rosseel, 2012) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Overall, indirect effects were nonsignificant (social distance factor \rightarrow issue involvement \rightarrow intention: $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .50$; message concreteness factor \rightarrow issue involvement \rightarrow intention: $b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .31$). Neither social distance ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .50$) nor message concreteness

($b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.13$) nor their interaction ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .30$) was significantly related to issue involvement, whereas issue involvement was positively related to behavioral intention ($b = 0.75$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$). Consistent with the ANOVA results presented above, the total effect of message concreteness on behavioral intention was significant ($b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .02$), whereas the corresponding direct effect was nonsignificant ($b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .07$). From this, we can infer that issue involvement explains a noticeable variance of behavioral intentions (albeit not impacted by the message). Both total ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .19$) and direct effects ($b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .61$) of social distance on behavioral intentions were nonsignificant.

Since message factors were not significantly related to issue involvement, a post-hoc analysis was conducted to examine if the effects of message factors might be mediated by involvement through perceived social distance/message concreteness. That is, we wanted to test the possibility of the messages increasing behavioral intentions through issue involvement, only when they successfully increase the related perceptions. Again, a path analysis was conducted using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012) to check for serial mediation, visualized in <Figure 2>. Consistent with the manipulation check described above, the social distance message factor increased perceived social distance ($b = -0.40$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .02$), and the message concreteness factor increased perceived message concreteness ($b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .004$). In turn, perceived message concreteness ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$) was positively related to issue involvement, whereas perceived social distance was not ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .10$).



<Figure 2> Path Analysis Results

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Unstandardized coefficients (b) and standard errors (SE) are reported.

Dotted lines indicate non-significant paths

Finally, issue involvement was positively related to behavioral intention ($b = 0.76$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$). Overall, the indirect effect was significant for the ‘message concreteness factor \rightarrow perceived message concreteness \rightarrow issue involvement \rightarrow behavioral intention’ serial mediation ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .02$), but nonsignificant for the ‘social distance factor \rightarrow perceived social distance \rightarrow issue involvement \rightarrow behavioral intention’ mediation ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .19$). Additionally, we also find ‘message concreteness factor \rightarrow perceived message concreteness \rightarrow behavioral intention’ mediation to be marginally significant ($b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .05$).

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the effects of highlighting different social distances and

the level of message concreteness in the context of organ donation campaigns, partly based on the CLT. Results demonstrate that message concreteness influences behavioral intentions (H2); specifically, concrete messages, compared to abstract ones, resulted in greater intentions to sign up for an organ donation registry. However, it is worth noting that while participants in the abstract message condition had lower mean scores, this still hovered over the midpoint of the 7-point scale, indicating that general intentions were moderately positive across the board. Contrary to what was hypothesized, we did not find main effects of the social distance message factor (H1), nor an interaction between the two message factors (H3).

We also did not find a mediation effect of issue involvement (H4). The nonsignificance of the indirect effects was mainly driven by the nonsignificant impacts of the message factors on issue involvement, although issue involvement was significantly asso-

ciated with intentions to sign up for an organ donation registry.

Lastly, we conducted a post hoc serial mediation analysis to discern whether the mediating role of issue involvement may differ depending on whether the message factors successfully increased perceptions of social distance/message concreteness. Results suggested that, while the indirect effect of ‘message concreteness factor → issue involvement → behavioral intentions’ tested above was nonsignificant, a serial mediation of ‘message concreteness factor → perceived message concreteness → issue involvement → behavioral intention’ was statistically significant.

In short, results demonstrate that concrete messages have the potential to increase public intentions to sign up for an organ donation registry. Unlike expected, the effect of concrete messages was not mediated by issue involvement. However, the post hoc analyses suggest that when concrete messages successfully increase perceived message concreteness, that in turn, can increase behavioral intentions through issue involvement.

The absence of effects of social distance cues is somewhat contrary to what would be expected by the CLT. There are several possible speculations we offer on why the effects of social distance cues remained nonsignificant despite theoretical expectations. As explained in the Introduction, one of the main barriers to organ donation is related to the unexplainable fear towards it (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2021). Public perceptions of organ donation are likely associated with various uncertain and abstract concepts such as death and the afterlife, which are likely less addressable by manipulating social distance cues; other psychological factors and types of construal

should therefore be considered. As reviewed in the beginning, CLT suggests that mental construal depends on a multitude of dimensions, including social, temporal, spatial, and hypothetical distances. In this study, we focused on social distance as a message factor given its relevance in the organ donation context. However, future research may benefit by examining whether other factors of psychological distance posited by the CLT may have noticeable impacts on attitudes and engagement regarding organ donation. Previous research has also suggested that the applicability of CLT may vary across contexts and individual traits. For instance, factors such as compassion, efficacy, and locus of control have been identified as variables that can impact the dynamics of the theory (e.g., Huang & Zhang, 2023; Tang & Li, 2025).

Additionally, our findings may also be suggesting that members of the Korean public have already developed relatively stable beliefs about the (ir)relevance of organ donation to their own lives, potentially limiting the influence of message-based manipulations. For future research, examination of a more effective approach that can increase the sense of relevancy will be necessary.

Lastly, it is also possible that the null effects observed in this study may simply be due to a message manipulation that is not strong enough - especially to elicit statistically significant effects from a one-time exposure - rather than the inapplicability of social distance cues in the organ donation context.

Additionally, our results did not align with the theoretical expectations of CLT’s matching principle. While this may be due to a lack of statistical power (further discussed in the following paragraph), it may

also provide some theoretical implications. The matching principle posits that message persuasiveness increases when message concreteness matches the construal level of the issue/entity. In our study, whether the concrete messages facilitated low-construal processing remains unanswered. While our manipulation check showed that the concrete messages were perceived as more concrete than the abstract messages, participants' level of construal regarding organ donation as a whole may remain unchanged. Future studies should carefully distinguish construals about a specific communication instance versus issue-as-a-whole, and further examine whether the matching principle holds in the organ donation context.

This study is not without limitations. First, while the study was sufficiently powered to detect small to medium main effects, a simulation-based power analysis suggested that we were potentially underpowered to detect fully attenuated interaction effects. This does not completely undermine our findings, as the sample provided sufficient power to detect a good range of interaction patterns; however, the nonsignificant interaction should be interpreted with caution given the possibility of insufficient power.²⁾

While we employ an experimental design to examine causal relationships, there are inherent limitations to drawing causal inferences, especially when it comes to our mediation models. Although the ordering of the mediation model was theoretically informed, the serial mediation model should be interpreted with

caution, given the cross-sectionality of the data. Additionally, while the use of intended actions is established within the field, it is important to note that we do not directly assess whether the messages lead to tangible actions. While intentions are a meaningful precursor to behavioral engagement, they do not always translate to actual actions (Sheeran, 2002).

Message effects in the organ donation context may also be contingent on various factors not accounted for in this study. We encourage future studies to examine the role of potential moderators that may drive differences in message effects, such as prior attitudes, source cues, or individual traits, such as need for cognition or value orientations. We also note that the topic of organ donation can be culturally-sensitive. It is thus important to examine the effectiveness of various messaging factors including message concreteness and social distance in diverse cultural contexts.

Lastly, participants were recruited via quota sampling. While this approach helps approximate national demographic distributions, caution is warranted in generalizing the findings to the entire population, given that it is not a true probability sample.

Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Morgan, Movius, & Cody, 2009), our study highlights the necessity of providing concrete and detailed information on the organ donation process in order to increase public engagement with organ donation. For practitioners, it is suggestible that - instead of abstractly stating the idealistic values of organ dona-

2) Given that we expected a fully-attenuated interaction (H3) and have assumed a small effect size (e.g., Anker, Feeley, McCracken, & Lagoe, 2016; Snyder et al., 2004), a priori power simulation suggested that $n = 266$ would be sufficient when the ratio of the interaction effect to the main effect exceeds approximately 80%, but would be underpowered for those that are smaller.

tion (e.g., ‘eyeball donation enables patients to see the new world’) or focusing on the emotional rewards (e.g., ‘feel the accomplishment of helping others’) - it would be more effective to provide specific instructions and information about the sign up processes. A step-by-step guideline on the organ donation sign-up process, which individuals can actually follow, could be particularly helpful. Lastly, we would

like to note that in real-world campaign design practices, message concreteness is rarely used in isolation but typically operates alongside various other communication factors. To strengthen the practical implications of this line of research, it is important to carefully examine how the effects of message concreteness are amplified (or attenuated) when it is combined with other communication factors.

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장기 기증 장려를 위한 메시지 전략: 사회적 거리와 메시지 구체성을 중심으로

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본 연구는 사회적 거리 단서(social distance cues)와 메시지 구체성(message concreteness)이 장기 기증 홍보 캠페인 메시지의 효과성에 어떠한 영향을 미치는지를 탐색하였다. 구성 수준 이론(construal level theory)에 근거하여, 본 연구는 온라인 설문 실험을 통해 이러한 메시지 특성이 개인의 장기 기증 등록 의도에 미치는 영향을 조사하였다. 또한, 이슈 관여도(issue involvement)의 매개적 역할을 분석하여 메시지 효과의 심리적 메커니즘을 이해하고자 하였다. 연구 결과, 구체적인 메시지는 대중의 장기 기증 등록 의사를 높일 잠재력이 있는 것으로 나타났으며, 이러한 효과는 지각된 메시지 구체성(perceived message concreteness)과 이슈 관여도를 통한 순차적 매개를 통해 설명되었다. 반면, 사회적 거리 단서는 장기 기증 등록 의사에 통계적으로 유의한 영향을 미치지 않았다. 본 연구는 헬스 커뮤니케이션, 특히 장기 기증 분야에서 구성 수준 이론의 함의를 확장하고, 설득력 있는 캠페인 메시지 설계에 대한 실질적 시사점을 제공한다.

주요어: 사회적 거리, 메시지 구체성, 구성 수준 이론, 장기 기증, 장기 기증 캠페인

Appendix A : Example Stimuli

1. Abstract × High Social Distance Condition

미루지 마세요!

장기기증 서약서에 서명하고 이웃과 시민의 생명을 구하세요

- 불의의 사고는 어느 누구에게나 일어날 수 있습니다.

목숨을 위협하는 사고와 질병은 예고 없이 당신의 이웃 주민을 비롯한 국민 누구에게나 일어날 수 있습니다. 안타깝게도 어느 정부 기관 자료에 따르면, 장기이식 대기 환자들은 새 삶을 선물 받기까지 매우 오랜 시간 동안 대기해야 하며, 대기 도중 많은 수의 환자들이 삶의 여행에 마침표를 찍습니다.

그러나 당신은 사후기증 서약이라는 값진 약속에 동참함으로써 환자들이 보다 빨리 삶의 불꽃을 다시금 피울 수 있도록 기여할 수 있습니다. 말기 암 진단을 받았던 한 시민이 기증을 통해 새로이 태어나 기쁨의 눈물을 흘리는 것을 상상해보세요! 장기기증 서약을 통해 당신의 이웃 주민과 한국 국민들이 건강하고 생산적인 삶을 사는데 기여할 수 있습니다.

- 아름다운 약속을 통해 새 생명을 선물하세요!

한 명의 기증자가 여러 명의 환자들에게 삶이라는 소중한 선물을 할 수 있다는 걸 아시나요? 당신이 선물한 그 따뜻한 마음은 건강을 되찾은 환자들 속에 자리잡아 오랜 시간 함께하게 됩니다.

등록 절차에 대해 잘 몰라서, 혹은 등록이 까다로워 보여서 선뜻 서명하지 못하고 계셨나요?

걱정 마세요! 아래 설명을 따라오시면, 당신도 이웃과 시민에게 새 생명을 선물하는 아름다운 약속을 할 수 있습니다.

- 간단한 등록 절차를 통해 약속에 동참하세요.

간소화된 등록 절차 덕분에 언제 어디서나 쉽게 서명 가능합니다. 인터넷에서 “장기기증 희망 등록 신청”을 검색하여 뜨는 링크 중 하나를 골라 접속하세요.

본인 인증 후 희망하는 기증 종류를 선택하고, 집 주소를 기입하세요. 아름다운 약속의 증거로서 장기기증등록증과 스티커가 배송지로 배송됩니다.

온라인 서명 외에도 다양한 방법이 있습니다. 가까운 장기기증 등록기관에 문의하세요! 당신이 온라인 장기기증서에 서명하는 그 순간, 환자들 앞에 새로운 삶이 꽃피게 될 것입니다.

이렇듯 간단한 장기기증 절차를 통해 당신의 지역 사회, 더 나아가 대한민국 국민의 생명을 살릴 수 있습니다. 이보다 가치 있는 일이 있을까요?

사후 희망기증자로 등록하고 수많은 환자들에게 삶의 희망을 선물해주세요. 당신의 그 손길이 이웃 주민의 생명을 구할 수도 있습니다.

문의: 질병관리본부 장기이식센터

2. Concrete × Low Social Distance Condition

미루지 마세요!

장기기증 서약서에 서명하고 당신과 가족의 생명을 구하세요

- 불의의 사고는 당신과 당신의 가족에게도 일어날 수 있습니다.

목숨을 위협하는 차량 전복 사고와 불치병 진단은 예고 없이 당신 자신과 사랑하는 부모님, 형제, 자매를 비롯한 누구에게나 일어날 수 있습니다. 안타깝게도 보건복지부 질병관리본부에 따르면, 장기이식 대기 환자들은 이식 수술을 받기까지 1100일 가량 대기해야 하며, 대기 도중 매일 3명의 환자가 사망합니다.

그러나 당신은 사후기증 서약 절차를 밟음으로써 이식 대기 시간을 70일까지 단축하는데 기여할 수 있습니다. 말기 암 진단을 받았던 당신의 사랑하는 어머니가 성공적인 이식 수술 후 직장, 학교, 그리고 집에 돌아가는 것을 상상해보세요! 장기기증 서약을 통해 당신의 가족, 그리고 당신 스스로가 건강하고 생산적인 삶을 사는데 기여할 수 있습니다.

- 장기기증 서명을 통해 9명의 생명을 살리세요!

한 명의 기증자를 통해 9명의 환자들이 이식수술을 받을 수 있다는 걸 아시나요? 안구, 신장, 폐, 췌장 등을 이식 받은 환자들 중 80%가 3년 이상 생존율, 50%가 10년 이상의 생존율을 가집니다.

등록 절차에 대해 잘 몰라서, 혹은 등록이 까다로워 보여서 선뜻 서명하지 못하고 계셨나요?

걱정 마세요! 아래 설명을 따라오시면, 당신도 가족의 생명을 구하는 장기기증서약자가 될 수 있습니다.

- 1분의 시간, 3~4번의 클릭만으로 서명에 참가하세요.

간소화된 등록 절차 덕분에 언제 어디서나 온라인으로 쉽게 서명 가능합니다.

Step 1. 구글, 네이버, 다음 등 포털사이트에서 “장기기증 희망 등록”을 검색하여 질병관리본부 장기이식센터 (<https://www.konos.go.kr>) 링크에 접속 후, “온라인 기증희망 등록하기”를 클릭하세요.

Step 2. 간단한 휴대폰 인증 후 (1) 사후각막기증 (2) 뇌사시 장기기증 (3) 인체조직 기증 중 희망하는 기증 종류를 선택하세요 (다중 선택 가능).

Step 3. 선택 완료 후 집 주소를 기입하면, 10일 이내에 장기기증등록증과 스티커가 주소지로 배송됩니다. 온라인 서명 외에도 팩스 및 우편을 통한 서명도 가능합니다. 가까운 장기기증 등록기관에 문의하세요! 아래 링크에서 지역별 장기기증 등록기관을 찾을 수 있습니다. (<https://www.konos.go.kr/konosis/common/bizlogic.jsp>)

이렇듯 간단한 장기기증 절차를 통해 당신의 가족, 더 나아가 당신 스스로의 생명을 살릴 수 있습니다. 이보다 가치 있는 일이 있을까요?

사후 희망기증자로 등록하고 12만명의 환자들을 고통으로부터 구하세요. 당신이 서명한 장기기증서약서가 스스로의 생명을 구할 수도 있습니다.

문의: 질병관리본부 장기이식센터

Appendix B : Items in Korean

1. Perceived Message Concreteness

아래 진술을 읽고 귀하의 생각과 가장 비슷한 숫자에 동그라미 표시를 해 주십시오.

- 나는 주어진 메시지를 읽고 장기기증 서약 절차를 머릿속에서 수월히 재현해낼 수 있었다.
- 주어진 메시지는 장기기증 서약에 대해 충분히 상세한 정보를 제공했다.
- 전반적으로, 주어진 메시지는 장기기증 서약에 대해 잘 설명했다.
- 주어진 메시지 속 장기기증 서약 절차에 대한 설명은 [추상적이다 (1) ~ 구체적이다 (7)]
- 주어진 메시지 속 장기기증 서약 절차 과정에 대한 설명은 막연하고 불분명하다.

2. Perceived Social Distance

귀하 자신과 메시지 속 장기기증 수혜자의 관계를 떠올리며 아래 문항들을 답해 주십시오.

- 나와 메시지 속 수혜자 간 관계는 친밀하다.
- 나와 메시지 속 수혜자는 중요한 개인사를 서로 공유한다.
- 나와 메시지 속 수혜자는 강한 연대를 가진다.
- 메시지 속 수혜자와의 관계는 내 인생에 있어 중요하다.
- 나는 중요한 결정을 내릴 땐 메시지 속 수혜자의 의견을 고려한다.
- 나와 메시지 속 수혜자는 많은 일들을 함께 한다.

3. Issue Involvement

다음 보기 중 귀하의 생각과 가장 유사한 보기를 골라주십시오. 장기기증 서약은 나에게...

- [중요하지 않다 (1) ~ 중요하다 (7)]
- [관련이 없다 (1) ~ 관련이 깊다 (7)]
- [의미가 크다 (1) ~ 의미가 없다 (7)] (reverse-coded)
- [필요없다 (1) ~ 필요하다 (7)]
- [사소하다 (1) ~ 중대하다 (7)]

4. Intentions to Sign Up

다음은 장기기증에 대한 귀하의 의사를 묻는 문항입니다.

- 나는 사후 장기기증자로 등록하는 것을 고려해볼 것이다.
- 나는 사후 장기기증자가 될 의향이 있다.
- 나는 장기기증 서약서에 곧 서명할 계획이 있다.
- 나는 미래에 장기기증 서약서에 서명할 계획이 있다.

Appendix C : Means and Standard Deviation for Issue Involvement and Sign-up Intentions by Experimental Conditions

Social Distance	Message Concreteness	n	Issue Involvement <i>M(SD)</i>	Sign-up Intention <i>M(SD)</i>
Low	Concrete	71	4.56(0.96)	4.56(1.15)
	Abstract	62	4.37(1.04)	4.13(1.18)
High	Concrete	67	4.42(0.93)	4.35(0.99)
	Abstract	66	4.34(1.09)	4.12(1.16)

Appendix D : Factorial ANOVA Results

Dependent Variable: Issue Involvement				
Predictor	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Social Distance (A)	1,262	0.44	.51	.002
Message Concreteness (B)	1,262	1.09	.30	.004
A*B	1,262	0.21	.65	.001
Dependent Variable: Sign-up Intention				
Social Distance (A)	1,262	0.60	.44	.002
Message Concreteness (B)	1,262	5.67	.02	.021
A*B	1,262	0.51	.27	.002

Note. η^2 = partial eta squared.