

INFLUENCE AS A FUNCTION OF COMMUNICATOR DISCREPANCY AND HIS PRESTIGE¹

MIRZA S. SAIYADAIN

Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India

Studies in the field of persuasion and communication have used known sources to test the effect of credibility on influence. What pattern of opinion change occurs when *Ss* themselves identify the credibility of the communicator, is the concern of this study. PROCEDURE: In a reading comprehension-test-situation *Ss* made their judgements about their degree of agreement with the author on an issue. RESULTS: (1) Opinion change was found to be curvilinearly related with low prestige source. (2) Variation in the prestige of the communicator did not make any significant difference. (3) The two curves interacted significantly showing that at some points the means of the two sources are significantly away from each other.

Most of the studies that have experimentally manipulated communicator-communicatee discrepancy and influence have found increasing linear relation (Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Bochner & Insko, 1966; Fisher & Lubin, 1958; Hovland, Harvey, & Sherif, 1957; Hovland & Pritzker, 1957; Zimbardo, 1960). Several studies have found a curvilinear relation (Aronson et al., 1963; Freedman, 1964; Insko, Murashima, & Saiyadain, 1966).

Would the variation of the prestige of the communicator effect opinion change? Hovland (1959) has suggested that with respected communicator the greater the discrepancy the greater will be the change; but under conditions where there is some ambiguity about the credibility of the communicator, the greater the attempt to change the greater would be the resistance. Despite the knowledge that involvement with the issue may account for the change, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the credibility of the communicator

does effect the opinion change (Hovland, Harvey, & Sherif, 1957; Fisher & Lubin, 1958; Hovland & Pritzker, 1957; Goldberg, 1954; Zimbardo, 1960).

These studies have not dealt with the negative communicator as the source of message. If Hovland's generalization is valid it should hold in situations where both negative and positive sources are used. Studies by Aronson et al. (1963) and Bergin (1962) provide confirmation to this line of reasoning. These studies show that for a less credible source increasing discrepancy produces increasing change up to a point; but with extreme discrepancy the degree of change decreases.

Insko, Murashima, & Saiyadain (1966) have suggested that extreme discrepancies produce too much inconsistency in already held cognitions. Therefore derogation of the communicator becomes the source of reducing dissonance thus produced. In other words, the disparagement of the source determines the resulting change in opinion. The highly credible source, as against negative source, is not easily disparaged. In such cases the discrepancy is reduced by changing one's own opinion in the direction of the communicator.

Most of the studies that have experi-

¹ The study was supported by a grant from The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. The author is grateful to Prof. Ishwar Dayal for his suggestions and comments.

mentally manipulated the credibility of the communicator have done so either by picking the generally known sources or by getting the sources from within the experimental groups. No attempt is made to get the possible contents of the communication and the communicator identified by a controlled group. If the universe itself defines the communicator and the communication the chances are that the error produced by arbitrarily matching the communicator and the message may further be reduced. This study was aimed to improve the design in this particular direction.

Three hypotheses were formulated. First, there is a curvilinear relationship between influence and discrepancy. Second, the total amount of influence is greater with high than with low prestige. Third, the differences between the means of the two sources would be greater at some points than others along the discrepancy dimension.

METHOD

One hundred and sixty two undergraduate students of liberal arts section participated in this study. They were given a three-page booklet. First page gave the instructions. They were told that it was a test of reading comprehension, and that they would be required to read one-page communication on page 2 of the booklet. The reading time was 10 minutes. After they finished reading they answered some questions given on page 3. To provide further support to the cover story the reading was timed by a stop watch. Exactly after 10 minutes they turned the page and answered the questions.

There were six questions in all. Three were opinion questions, referring to the degree of agreement with the author, assessment of the author's competence, and assessment of the meaningfulness of the message. Two questions were about the identification of the author and his stand on the communication. Last question dealt with what they thought the purpose of whole exercise was.

Independent Variables: There were two independent variables, the author and his stand on the communication. In a pretest comparable Ss were asked to rate 12 professions of their like and dislike on a five-point prestige scale. They were also asked to write in a sentence or two why they have rated some professions high and some low on the prestige scale. The first part of the exercise was meant to identify two extreme prestige sources (communicators) and the second to get the possible contents of the message (communication). The second part, in fact, gave the context in which they saw high and low prestige professions.

The professions with the highest average score (Doctor, $\bar{X}=4.27$) and the lowest average score (Clerk, $\bar{X}=1.71$) were chosen.² Their means were found to be meaningfully apart from each other ($t=5.506$, $p<.001$). The communication was developed on the lines provided in the second part of the exercise. It argued that no matter how strong are the forces of evil some peace on earth could still be achieved. The communication was supposed to be written either by the doctor or by the clerk. The discrepancy was manipulated by assigning different percentages of peace that could be achieved which in fact, represented the communicator's stand. These stands were in five steps of 20 percent each. In a pretest it was found that when a controlled group was asked to indicate the amount of peace that could be achieved, the average judgement was 19.35 percent. We rounded it to 20 percent and with the constant increase of the same percentage ended up with five steps of 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100 percentages. In other words, there were five levels of discrepancy on the same communication which remained constant for both high and low prestige sources.

Dependent Variables: Dependent variables were the degree of agreement with the author, assessment of the competence of the author in terms of what he has said, and the assessment of the

² In an earlier survey when Ss were asked to write 10 high and 10 low prestigious persons it was found they referred to professions and not persons as originally told. Therefore for purpose of this study high and low professions were taken.

TABLE 1
Means and standard deviation estimates

		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
High prestige	Means	7.00	7.14	7.57	6.79	7.64
	SDs	1.652	3.115	1.764	2.597	1.799
Low prestige	Means	6.21	6.57	7.93	8.43	6.65
	SDs	2.100	3.115	1.645	1.365	2.632

message in terms of how much sense does it make. Degree of agreement with the author was measured on a 10-point scale, while assessment of author's competence and meaningfulness of the message were measured on 5-point scale. All three scales were unidimensional.

RESULTS

Of 162 *Ss* tested, seven were eliminated because they had some idea that the experiment was concerned with influence effect. Another 15 *Ss* were randomly eliminated to get equal number of subjects ($N=14$) in each of the 10 cells. Table 1 gives mean influence scores and standard deviation estimates for each of these 10 cells.

Table 1 indicates that in the low prestige condition the mean increases with increasing discrepancy and then drops down as predicted in the first hypothesis. Influence in high prestige source, however, is not consistent with the prediction. The curve drops down at the 4th level but increases again showing cubic type of curve. Standard deviation estimates ideally should have increased with increasing discrepancy, but they do not show any such trend.

An overall analysis of variance is given

TABLE 2
Analysis of variance

Source	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean squares	<i>F</i>
Discrepancy	73.2437	4	18.3107	3.68**
Prestige	.4281	1	.4281	.09
Interaction	82.2148	4	20.5537	4.13**
Within	647.0000	130	4.9768	

** $p < .01$

in Table 2. In agreement with the first hypothesis there is significant discrepancy effect ($F=3.68, p < .01$). Our second hypothesis that there is greater total amount of influence with high than low prestige is not confirmed ($F=.09$). However there is significant interaction effect ($F=4.13, p < .01$). In other words, the differences between two means are greater at some points than the other.

More directly related to our hypotheses are trend analyses presented in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 gives trend analysis for high prestige data. Our first hypothesis

TABLE 3
Trend analysis
(High prestige data)

Source	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean squares	<i>F</i>
Linear trend	1.2113	1	1.2113	.21
Deviation	6.4168	3	2.1389	.37
Quadratic trend	.4410	1	.4410	.08
Deviation	7.1871	3	2.3957	.42
Within	372.7148	65	5.7341	

TABLE 4
Trend analysis
(Low prestige data)

Source	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean squares	<i>F</i>
Linear trend	10.5148	1	10.5148	1.83
Deviation	37.2852	3	12.4284	2.16
Quadratic trend	26.4196	1	26.4196	4.59*
Deviation	21.3804	3	7.1268	1.24
Within	374.2858	65	5.7565	

* $p < .05$

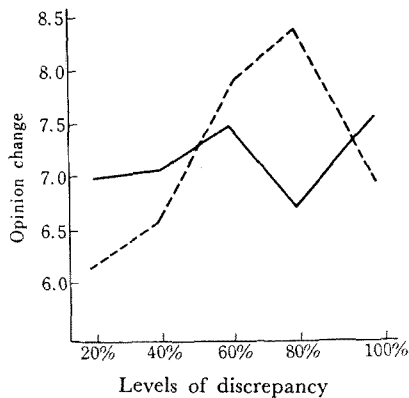


FIG. 1. Mean influence curves.
Solid line (High prestige)
Dotted line (Low prestige)

does not seem to be confirmed. Quadratic trend is not significant ($F=.08$). The curve is neither linear ($F=.21$) nor cubic ($F=.46$). In accordance with our first hypothesis there is significant quadratic trend ($F=4.59$, $p<.05$) for low prestige data. Deviation from linearity in this case barely misses .05 level of significance (see Table 4).

The curves are presented in Fig. 1. It can be seen in Fig. 1 that high prestige curve looks more cubic while low prestige curvilinear.

DISCUSSION

The predicted curvilinear relationship is supported for only low prestige data ($F=4.59$, $p<0.5$). High prestige curve statistically shows no clear cut trend. However there are reasons to assume that the curve is more linear than cubic. The mean influence consistently increases with increasing discrepancy except at 4th level. The sudden increase at 5th level is more than the combined mean of 3rd and 4th levels ($\bar{X}=7.18$). Not only this the combined mean of 4th and 5th levels is higher than the 3rd level ($\bar{X}=7.21$) showing increasing influence with increasing discrepancy.

Our data, therefore, partially supports the first prediction.

We expected that the total amount of influence for high prestige would be more than low prestige. The results obviously do not support this assumption. It may be recalled that the comparable *Ss* rated the sources on a prestige scale and also explained why they have done so. This, it seems, referred to their description of professions as they perceived them in that particular context. But when it came to the agreement with the same sources *Ss* probably did not perceive them in the same context. It seems, therefore that professional credibility is more situation and context bound. Our analysis shows that the degree of agreement for high prestige source fails to show any significant relationship with the competence of the author ($r=.120$) or the meaningfulness of what he has said ($r=.179$). If, for an author like doctor, this would have been a medical message probably his competence and the meaningfulness of the communication would have shown better relationship with the degree of agreement. However this is not the case with low prestige source. Degree of agreement seems to go with the author's competence ($r=.464$, $p<.01$) as well as with what he has said ($r=.299$, $p<.05$).

Our prediction that the two curves would interact is supported by the data. The means of two curves are different at various points on the discrepancy dimension. Theoretical expectations were that the influence would be higher for high prestige source on all levels of discrepancy. In other words, the ideal influence effect would be where curves do not cross each other. Fig. 1 reveals that it is not so. The curves, in fact, cross each other, showing significant differences at some but not all points. At zero discrepancy level the mean of high prestige source is significantly more than the low prestige source ($t=4.566$, $p<.01$) as the means at extreme discrepancy ($t=4.647$, $p<.01$). For pur-

pose of generalization we conclude that high prestige source is more influential than low prestige source at no discrepancy point. Furthermore, in extreme discrepancy it is still the high prestige source that elicits more conformity.

Why we did not get significantly more influence effect for high prestige source at all the levels as compared to the low prestige source probably has to do with the discrepancy levels themselves. As pointed out by Bochner and Insko (1966) we normally use an equi-distance scale for any discrepancy dimension, which is more like an interval or ratio scale. However in terms of psychological meaningfulness it is probably neither a ratio nor an interval scale. In such cases the chances are that at middle levels the discrepancy may not be as sharp as at extreme levels. In fact individual tests for each discrepancy level, in this study, fail to show significant differences in means at middle levels unlike extreme levels. This suggests that any further research in this area should be preceded by an appropriate scaling of the discrepancy dimension.

SUMMARY

In a reading-comprehension-test situation subjects made judgements about the degree of agreement with the author. Opinion change was found to be curvilinearly related with low prestige source only. Variation in the prestige of the communicator did not make any significant difference. However the two curves interacted significantly showing that at some points the means of the two sources are significantly apart from each other.

REFERENCES

- ARONSON, E., TURNER, J. A., & CARLSMITH, J. M. 1963 Communicator credibility and communication discrepancy as determinants of opinion change. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **67**, 31-36.
- BERGIN, A. E. 1962 The effect of dissonant persuasive communications upon change in self-referring attitude. *J. Pers.*, **30**, 423-438.
- BOCHNER, S., & INSKO, C. A. 1966 Communicator discrepancy, source credibility and opinion change. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, **4**, 614-621.
- FISHER, S., & LUBIN, A. 1958 Distance as a determinant of influence in a two-person serial interaction situation. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **56**, 230-238.
- FREEDMAN, J. L. 1964 Involvement, discrepancy, and change. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **69**, 290-295.
- GOLDBERG, S. C. 1954 Three situational determinants of conformity to social norms. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **49**, 325-329.
- HOVLAND, C. I. 1959 Reconciling conflicting results derived from experimental and survey studies of attitude change. *Amer. Psychologist*, **14**, 8-17.
- HOVLAND, C. I., HARVEY, O. J., & SHERIF, M. 1957 Assimilation and contrast effect in reaction to communications and attitude change. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **55**, 244-252.
- HOVLAND, C. I., & PRITZKER, H. A. 1957 Extent of opinion change as a function of amount of change advocated. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **54**, 257-261.
- INSKO, C. A., MURASHIMA, F., & SAIYADAIN, M. 1966 Communicator discrepancy, stimulus ambiguity, and influence. *J. Pers.*, **34**, 262-274.
- ZIMBARDO, P. G. 1960 Involvement and communicator discrepancy as determinants of opinion conformity. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, **60**, 86-94.

(Received Feb. 10, 1969)