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EFFECTS OF EXPECTED FAMILIARITY WITH ARGUMENTS UPON OPINION CHANGE AND SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

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The hypothesis was that persuasive communications are more effective when advertised as containing new arguments than when advertised as containing familiar arguments, holding the actual novelty of arguments constant. The effects of expected novelty of arguments upon selectivity of exposure were also investigated. 148 undergraduates were tested in a simulated jury situation. Expected novelty of arguments was varied by instructions. Opinion change following a persuasive communication was measured. 3 measures of exposure were used: ratings of article titles, selection of 1 title as most interesting, and time spent reading the communication. Opinion change was greater when Ss expected new arguments than when they expected familiar arguments, although the communications used were identical. Anticipated novelty of arguments did not itself affect selectivity of exposure, although acquitters were more selective than convicts, particularly when they expected new arguments.

Numerous students of propaganda have pointed to the audience's prior familiarity with issue and argument as an important determinant of persuasive effects. For example, Klapper (1960) has

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contended that mass communications are considerably more effective on new issues than they are on familiar issues. In the latter case, the propagandist presumably runs afoul of unsympathetic audience predispositions. He is more effective on new issues because such predispositions generally are weak or nonexistent when the audience has little familiarity with the issue. Complementing this point, McGuire (1961; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962) has found in his research on cultural truisms that arguments counter to the subject's position are generally more persuasive when they are new to him than when he has previously been exposed to them.

However, a propagandist is not always in a position to raise a new issue or present a new argument. Many important issues endure long past the time when the audiences of mass communications were first exposed to them. Similarly, as issues persist it becomes more and more difficult to generate entirely new arguments for any given position. Very often, the best a propagandist can do under such circumstances is to try to convince his audience that an old and hackneyed argument is in fact a new and unfamiliar one. For example, a presidential candidate may announce that he is issuing a "white paper" containing his position on an important issue. The white paper itself may actually contain only the same tired slogans he has enunciated throughout the campaign, but it is possible that they have more force because the audience expects them to be novel solutions to old and difficult problems.

The hypothesis proposed in the present study is that propaganda advertised as "new" is more effective than propaganda advertised as containing familiar arguments, even when the actual content of the propaganda is the same in both cases. This prediction rests upon the assumption that expecting new arguments loosens the subject's commitment to his original opinions, and thereby facilitates acceptance of the message. A person who is told to expect new and unfamiliar arguments is being told, in effect, that his present opinions on the issue are based upon partial or inadequate information. He should therefore be less committed to his initial opinions than a person who expects information similar or identical to that upon which his present opinions are based. According to this reasoning, the mere *expectation* of novelty should be sufficient to give propaganda added effectiveness; the arguments do not themselves actually have to be new and unfamiliar.

A second question about expected novelty in propaganda concerns its effects upon selectivity of exposure. A familiar finding is that persons tend to expose themselves primarily to propaganda which is in accord with their existing opinions. However, this finding has held most clearly on long-standing issues (such as those chronically contested by the two major political parties) and among those respondents who are most involved and interested in the issue (cf. Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Schramm & Carter, 1959). Selective exposure effects seem to be most apparent, therefore, when the audience is most familiar with the arguments on both sides of the issue. Perhaps the individual will show more interest in nonsupportive propaganda if he expects it to contain new arguments. That

is, knowing that unfamiliar dissonant arguments exist, but not knowing what they are, may in itself create dissonance. Perhaps this dissonance can be reduced most effectively by exposing oneself to the dissonant arguments and attempting to refute them. According to this analysis, voluntary exposure to information will favor dissonant information when the subject expects novel arguments.

On the other hand, dissonant arguments may be more threatening when they are new than when they are familiar. If it is assumed that selective exposure occurs in part because subjects avoid threatening dissonant information (Festinger, 1957), then subjects expecting new arguments should avoid dissonant information more (and seek consonant information more) than subjects expecting old, familiar arguments. Given these alternative possibilities, no prediction was made about the effects of expected novelty of arguments upon selectivity of exposure.

METHOD

Synopsis

The subjects were recruited in groups of four and five for a jury experiment, and were tested in individual rooms. Each subject read an abbreviated report of a trial and voted on a verdict (acquittal or conviction). Each subject then indicated how much he would like to read each of five articles and designated the one he would most like to read. The subject was next given a persuasive communication and the time spent reading it was recorded. This yielded three measures of exposure (article ratings, first choice of articles, and time spent reading). The opinion change produced by the communication was measured, as was perceived communicator credibility. The major experimental manipulation was expected novelty of arguments; that is, the articles that were rated, as well as the persuasive communication that the subject actually read, were described in advance as containing new arguments or as containing familiar arguments. In addition to this variable, the communication was either consonant or dissonant with the subject's initial vote. This yielded a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design with the independent variables being expected information novelty, communication consonance, and the verdict initially favored by the subject.

Procedure

The subjects were 148 students enrolled in a regular session introductory psychology class at the University of California, Los Angeles. They volunteered for the experiment to fulfill a course requirement. Three of the subjects were not considered in the analysis because they failed to complete the entire experiment, and two were not considered because they misperceived the verdict favored in the persuasive communication.

As each subject arrived, he was seated in an indi-

vidual cubicle, and given a mimeographed report on "The Case of Johnny Burdick." This report included somewhat condensed versions of all the testimony and attorneys' summations from the (fictitious) trial of a juvenile, Johnny Burdick, charged with second-degree murder in the death of his father. His defense was that the death occurred as a result of manslaughter. The subjects were told that the report contained all the essential evidence in the case.

When the subject finished the report, he cast his vote by filling out and signing a ballot form. He was then given a large sign, on each side of which the verdict he favored was written in large letters. This sign remained on the desk in front of him for the duration of the experiment, and would allegedly be placed in front of him at a roundtable discussion with the full jury later in the experiment. This procedure was designed to produce a relatively high degree of public commitment to the initial vote (see Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Hovland, Campbell, & Brock, 1957; Sears & Freedman, 1963, for similar procedures). He was then given an item on how certain he felt about his vote, and three Likert-type opinion items concerning the defendant's guilt or innocence.

The subject was next given a form for rating the interest value of a series of article titles. The instructions on the form stated that the papers had been given at a symposium on the Burdick case at Columbia University, organized by Professor Charles B. Black, and had been authored by various professors in outstanding law schools. Black had selected the authors as representing several points of view, and had suggested the titles of the papers.

The remainder of the instructions were designed to vary the subject's expectations regarding the novelty of the arguments contained in these articles. For the *new arguments* condition, the instructions continued as follows:

[The authors] were asked to discuss only legal approaches and points of law that had *not* been touched upon in the trial, and to avoid the specific arguments raised by the trial attorneys. Thus the authors have attempted to present optimum statements of points which were relevant to the case, but which were not explicitly covered in the trial. In this way Professor Black hoped to obtain new perspectives on the Burdick case.

The parallel instructions for the *old arguments* condition read as follows:

[The authors] were asked to discuss only the specific arguments raised by the trial attorneys and to avoid introducing any new points of law or legal approaches, however relevant they might be. Thus the authors have attempted to present optimum statements of those arguments explicitly covered in the course of the trial itself. In this way Professor Black hoped to obtain more thorough coverage of the kinds of legal approaches used by the attorneys in the Burdick case.

Verbal instructions were given concurrently to highlight the novelty dimension contained in the

written instructions. The only difference between the two conditions was as follows:

As it states here, the authors are all prominent legal authorities, and they were asked to discuss only the legal approaches that did not appear in the court record [new arguments].

As it states here, the authors are all prominent legal authorities, and they were asked to discuss only the testimony and points of law that you read in the court record [old arguments].

The five article titles were: "Weaknesses in the Defense Case," "Weaknesses in the Prosecution Case," "Considerations Favoring Acquittal," "Considerations Favoring Conviction," and "Juvenile Crime: Personal and Social Responsibility." Of these, the first and fourth were consonant with a proconviction vote and dissonant with a proacquittal vote, while the second and third were consonant with a proacquittal vote and dissonant with a proconviction vote. The last article was irrelevant to the vote decision. The first two are described below as "negative," and the second two as "positive"; that is, arguments against or in favor of a position, respectively. The subjects were instructed to rate the titles on the basis of how much they would like to read each paper. A 9-point scale was provided, the end points of which were "greatly interested" and "not interested at all." Each subject was also asked to check the title of the paper he would most like to read.

When the subject had finished rating the article titles, the experimenter returned and explained that the ratings were being collected in order to guide efforts to obtain publishers' releases permitting reproduction of the articles, and that none of the articles listed could as yet be reproduced. She then gave the subject an article that allegedly could be reproduced since it had not yet been published. Very brief instructions were also given to reinstate the novelty variation, as follows:

This article is one we got directly from the author discussing legal approaches that were not raised during the trial [new arguments],

as opposed to

one we got directly from the author discussing the legal points raised at the trial [old arguments].

The instructions given in the two conditions were otherwise identical. Two persuasive communications were used, one advocating acquittal and the other advocating conviction. Both communications were ostensibly authored by Professor William Wallace of the Cornell Law School. The same two communications were used in both the new condition and the old condition.

The subject was told to signal the experimenter when he was finished reading the communication. The time the subject spent reading the communication was measured by having the experimenter note the time to the nearest 5 seconds when she left the subject's cubicle, and again when the subject's signal turned on a signal light in the central cubicle.

TABLE 1
NET OPINION CHANGE

	New	Old	Difference
Consonant communication ^a			
Acquitters	+70.8% ^b (24)	+35.0% (20)	+35.8%
Convictors	+33.3 (9)	+16.7 (12)	+16.7
Dissonant communication			
Acquitters	+40.6 (32)	+28.6 (28)	+12.0
Convictors	+66.7 (9)	0 (9)	+66.7
Total	+52.7 (74)	+24.6 (69)	+28.1

^a The consonant communication advocated the verdict subjects initially favored, and the dissonant communication advocated the opposite verdict.

^b The entry is the proportion of subjects changing in the advocated direction less the proportion changing in the opposite direction.

The subject was given two questionnaires when he finished reading the communication. The first contained 10 Likert-type items on the case, including the 3 given earlier. Opinion change was measured on these 3 items. The second included an item on which verdict Wallace favored, a manipulation check item on the novelty of arguments in the communication, and 5 items for evaluating the communication and communicator (how unbiased, factual, reasonable, and justified by the facts the communication was, as well as how much the subject liked the communication). The manipulation check item read as follows:

In your opinion, approximately what proportion of Wallace's arguments had already been covered in the case report you read earlier?

1. All of his arguments had already been covered.
2. Almost all of his arguments had already been covered.
3. Somewhat more than half of his arguments had already been covered.
4. About half of his arguments had already been covered.
5. Somewhat less than half of his arguments had already been covered.
6. Very few of his arguments had already been covered.
7. None of his arguments had already been covered.

When these questionnaires were completed, the experiment was terminated. Each subject was cautioned not to tell others about the experiment until the end of the semester.

RESULTS

Check on Novelty Manipulation

The persuasive communications used in the new condition were identical in content to those used in the old condition. Only the advance descriptions of the novelty of their arguments differed. Responses to the manipulation-check item indicated that the different advance descriptions were successful in producing differences in perceived novelty of arguments. Those subjects who were told that the communication would contain new arguments rated it as actually containing more new material than did those who were told it would merely cover the same points as they had already read in the case report ($F = 5.73$, $df = 1/135$, $p < .025$).

Opinion Change

It was hypothesized that more opinion change would occur in the new condition than in the old condition. As shown in Table 1, this hypothesis was supported. The net opinion change (see Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949) was +52.7% under "new" instructions, and only +24.6% under "old" instructions ($z = 2.12$, $p < .05$). The greater effectiveness of the new instructions held regardless of whether the communication was consonant or dissonant with the

TABLE 2
NET OPINION CHANGE AND CERTAINTY IN THE INITIAL DECISION

	New	Old	Difference
High certainty ^a			
Consonant communication	+64.7% (17)	+50.0% (16)	+14.7%
Dissonant communication	+21.4 (14)	+20.0 (15)	+1.4
Low certainty			
Consonant communication	+56.2 (16)	+6.2 (16)	+50.0
Dissonant communication	+59.2 (27)	+22.7 (22)	+36.5

^a The median split on certainty in the initial decision contrasted the two most certain responses ("absolutely certain" and "quite certain") with the four least certain responses ("not certain" through "completely uncertain").

TABLE 3
SELECTIVITY OF EXPOSURE

	Acquitters		Convictors	
	New	Old	New	Old
Ratings of articles ^a				
Positive articles	+ .25	+ .23	- 1.11	+ .48
Negative articles	+ .25	- .08	- .50	- .71
<i>n</i>	56	48	18	21
First choices of articles ^b	52.6%	48.6%	13.3%	35.7%
<i>n</i>	38	35	15	14

^a Entry is mean difference between rating of consonant article and rating of dissonant article, with a positive number indicating greater interest in the consonant article.

^b The entry is the proportion of subjects indicating a consonant article was their first choice, among those subjects choosing either a consonant article or a dissonant article (i.e., excluding those choosing the irrelevant article).

subject's initial vote, and regardless of whether it advocated acquittal or conviction.

The superiority of new arguments was due largely to those who were initially less certain of their vote decision. As shown in Table 2, the difference between the new and old conditions was 9.6% for subjects with relatively high initial certainty ($z = .47$, *ns*), and 42.3% for subjects with relatively low initial certainty ($z = 2.44$, $p < .02$). The interaction of novelty and certainty was not significant ($z = 1.22$, $p < .25$).

Selective Exposure

Selective exposure is defined in the present situation as a preference for consonant, as opposed to dissonant, information. No hypothesis was proposed regarding the effects of expected novelty on selective exposure. Selectivity on the article ratings and the first choices of articles was slightly greater in the old condition, but the difference did not approach significance in either case ($F < 1.00$ and $\chi^2 < 1.00$, respectively). These data are shown in Table 3. There was slightly greater selectivity in the new condition in time spent reading the communication, but again the difference did not approach significance ($F = 1.74$, $p < .20$). Hence the novelty variation does not appear to have had any simple and uniform effect upon selectivity of exposure.

The major difference in selectivity was between those who initially voted for acquittal and those who initially voted for conviction. As shown in Table 3, the acquitters showed more selectivity on both the article ratings ($F = 5.87$, $df = 1/139$, $p < .05$) and the first choices of articles ($\chi^2 = 4.93$, $p < .05$). On both measures the convictors tended to prefer dissonant information to consonant information.

The acquitters' greater selectivity was most pronounced in the new-information condition. The interaction of Initial Vote \times Novelty on Selectivity was significant for ratings of positive articles ($F = 4.86$, $df = 1/139$, $p < .05$) and in the same direction but not significant for ratings of negative articles. On the first choices of articles, the acquitters were considerably more selective than the convictors in the new condition ($\chi^2 = 4.54$, $p < .05$), and only slightly more selective in the old condition ($\chi^2 = .25$, $p > .50$).

In short, the acquitters demonstrated greater selectivity than did the convictors, and the difference between the two was greatest when new information was expected. These differences may be described equally well, of course, by saying that acquitters and convictors alike tended to prefer proacquittal information to proconviction information, particularly when the information was thought to contain new arguments. In fact, considering the new-information condition alone, the convictors actually displayed a *greater* preference for proacquittal information (although it was dissonant with their initial votes) than did the acquitters (for whom it was consonant with their initial votes). The difference is significant beyond the .05 level on first choices of articles ($\chi^2 = 3.95$).

DISCUSSION

The major hypothesis of this study was supported. When a persuasive communication was described in advance as containing new arguments it was more influential than when it was described as containing familiar arguments. Those subjects who were told to expect new arguments actually perceived more new material in the communication, despite the fact that identical communications were used in the new and old conditions.

One possible explanation for this result is that the instructions by which novelty was manipulated somehow made the new communications more impressive, or their source more credible. Novelty did not, however, significantly affect evaluations of the communication and communicator ($F < 1.00$). Another possibility is that the new instructions motivated a more careful reading of the communication than did the old instructions. There was no direct check on this possibility, but two pieces of evidence make it seem unlikely. The two conditions did not differ significantly in the length of time spent reading the communication.² Moreover, the four article titles relevant to

² The absence of significant differences on the communication evaluation and time measures might be thought to reflect only their insensitivity. How-

the verdict (and thus closest to the communications actually given) were rated as more interesting in the old condition than in the new condition ($F = 4.26$, $df = 1/139$, $p < .05$). It seems reasonable to infer from this that the old communication was greeted with somewhat more interest than the new communication, and that it was read more attentively, if anything. The greater persuasiveness of the new communication does not appear, therefore, to have been due to differences in communication evaluation, source credibility, or attention.

Perhaps a more plausible explanation is that the subjects in the new condition felt less bound by their previous commitment than did the subjects in the old condition. An initial commitment may become invalidated, in a sense, when it becomes clear that it was based upon only partial information. For one thing, others are less likely to be critical of one's inconsistencies if it is clear that new considerations have been introduced in the meantime. The introduction of new information provides ample justification for eschewing a previous commitment and accepting a persuasive message. Persons expecting familiar arguments, on the other hand, have less justification for changing their opinions, since they presumably had taken all the old arguments into consideration when they formed their opinions in the first place. One would not expect them to be particularly receptive to further information under such circumstances.

The invalidation of a prior commitment should have its greatest effect among those whose public commitment was not bolstered by personal certainty. A person who is unsure of which position to favor is also unlikely to be persuaded by a simple restatement of the very information which originally placed him in conflict. New arguments may, on the other hand, enable him to adopt a position with increased certainty, and therefore should be more persuasive. This interpretation awaits further test, however, since certainty in the initial position was not manipulated experimentally in the present experiment.

The finding that the acquitters showed more selective exposure than did the convicts is of interest mainly with regard to the asymmetry of the present issue (barring individual differences correlated with verdict preferences). Many issues are symmetrical in that the consequences of a ever, in the present experiment the former registered a strong difference between consonant and dissonant communications ($F = 52.35$, $df = 1/135$, $p < .001$), and the time measure differentiated between high- and low-commitment conditions in a previous experiment (Sears & Freedman, 1963). Thus, there is reason to believe the measures are sensitive.

victory by either side are approximately equal in importance. Most elections of public officials are symmetrical in this sense. Other issues are asymmetrical in that the consequences are more significant if one side wins than if the other does. In the present case, the consequences of falsely convicting a boy of murder are probably seen by most people (and the law) as more serious than are those of falsely acquitting him. On such asymmetrical issues, subjects disposed to the position with greater consequences may be inclined to seek and evaluate more exhaustively any available information favorable to the more conservative alternative. Those subjects already disposed to the more conservative position may feel less obligated to dispose of all possible counterarguments, since less damaging consequences ensue if they prove to be wrong. This interpretation is suggested by the tendency for convicts to be even more interested in dissonant information when they think new arguments are available. The present data clearly do not prove the point, but they do suggest a broader sampling of issue differences in future research on the determinants of selective exposure.⁸

In sum, it appears that advertising a propagandistic presentation as containing new arguments enhances its persuasive effects. Expectation of new arguments does not appear to affect selectivity of exposure, except possibly insofar as partisans of the position bearing more serious implications may be more motivated to dispose of novel counterarguments. On the basis of earlier research (Freedman & Sears, 1965) it was concluded that warning subjects of the position to be taken by a propagandist increases their resistance to change. The implication of these two studies is that a propagandist maximizes his chances for persuasion if he advertises his presentation as containing new arguments, but without specifying the precise views he intends to advocate. Conversely, resistance to change is maximized if members of the audience arrive under the impression that they will hear only familiar arguments which support a position highly discrepant from their own. It remains for further research to determine the limitations of these generalizations.

⁸ In this connection, it should be mentioned that the jury setting was selected for this experiment for two main reasons: all prior information on the issue could be controlled and held constant, and it is a sufficiently involving issue to produce relatively high degrees of commitment to an initial position. Many other issues and settings do not meet these two criteria, and different levels of involvement and prior familiarity with the issue might well affect the relationships reported here.

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DIRECTION OF AGGRESSION AND ADAPTATION TO FREE OPERANT AVOIDANCE CONDITIONING¹

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26 male medical and graduate students completed the Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration (P-F) Study and the Rod and Frame Test (RFT) and underwent an operant avoidance conditioning situation in which elimination of shock could be achieved by learning a button-pressing schedule. Learners were significantly higher in extrapunitiveness and lower in impunitiveness and conformity than nonlearners; they also reported more aggressive feeling on a mood adjective check list. No differences on the RFT were found. The results are compared with other literature suggesting that persons who can express anger achieve more than those who deny anger or minimize frustrating situations. The P-F may have untapped predictive potential in situations of adaptation.

Previous papers (Ader & Tatum, 1961, 1963) describe the performance of human subjects in a free operant avoidance conditioning situation similar to that developed for use with animals (Brady, Porter, Conrad, & Mason, 1958; Sidman, 1953). In this situation the subject, with electrodes strapped to his leg, is seated at a table with a button conspicuously within his reach. Virtually no instructions are given. Shock is then administered at regular intervals (the shock-shock interval—S-S), but the shock can be delayed for a fixed interval (response-shock inter-

val—R-S) by a button press. The previous work has found considerable variability in response to this situation. Some subjects fail to learn, or at least to execute, a button-pressing schedule which eliminates shock; of these "nonlearners," some terminate the experiment by removing the electrodes and walking out of the testing room. Among those subjects who learn, time to acquisition is quite varied and seems inversely related to the ratio of the R-S to the S-S interval (Ader & Scibetta, 1964).

The frequency of aggressive comments in post-conditioning interviews with subjects in previous studies suggested that some measure of the typical direction of aggression in persons might re-

¹ Portions of this paper were presented at the 1964 meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association in Philadelphia.