

Short-Positive Informative Texts Are Ineffective to Change Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Attitude change is one of the main topics in the history of social psychology. Several factors such as authority, persuasiveness, personality traits, and a variety of arguments, determine whether persuasion attempt will be successful or not. In this study the effects of different information styles on negative attitudes toward an ethnic group were investigated. The effects of information on both implicit and explicit attitudes were measured. Results showed that short informative passages did not affect negative implicit and explicit attitudes.

Keywords: *Attitude change, positive information, implicit attitudes.*

Studies about persuasion have shown the effect of persuasion depend on whether the attitude is implicit or explicit (Berry, 2016, Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, for a detailed review see Brinol, Petty & McCaslin, 2009). In general, it is assumed changing implicit attitudes is more difficult than changing explicit ones. This assumption was confirmed by several studies. For instance, Gawronski and Strack (2004) found that when the participants worked on an article contrary to their attitude, the explicit attitude was influenced by article writing, but implicit attitudes were not. Brinol, Petty, and Harcajo (cited in Brinol, Petty & McCaslin, 2009) also showed that participants who read positive informative text on vegetables also changed their implicit attitudes measured by the Implicit Attitude Test (IAT). In a similar study (Blair, Ma & Lenton, 2001), the participants were asked for a female imagery opposite to the stereotypes of the participants and found that this manipulation reduced the negative implicit attitudes towards women.

In this study, whether positive information would create a change in implicit and explicit attitudes of Turks towards Kurds was investigated. The purpose of this study was to reveal the effect of positive information on implicit and explicit attitudes using short informative texts with different characteristics. The first hypothesis of this study was that the mixed-general information condition, in which the negative input was first made but then the

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positive information was given without giving the ethnic group name, would affect the implicit and explicit attitudes more positively than the other conditions. The second hypothesis was that the general-only positive condition (when only positive information was given with ethnic identity (Kurdish)) would be the least effective one to change attitudes.

These two hypotheses were based on three assumptions. First, the findings of persuasion studies have suggested that individuals are more susceptible to stimuli containing both positive and negative information (two-way) and that they are more likely to accept such messages (Dipboye, 2010; Jones & Brehm, 1970). In addition, such messages will lead people to think more carefully. Spending more time will also cause the implicit attitudes of participants to change. Secondly, since the general information message does not include any ethnic identity accusations, it is less likely that negative stereotypes will emerge (or less likely to trigger stereotypes). Finally, Turkish people with prejudice toward an ethnic group (out group) stated that they did not want to communicate with the Syrians and the Kurds in the future (Şenyurt, 2018). If this result is interpreted as a general tendency for ethnic prejudice towards out-groups, reducing this generalized tendency, via positive informative texts, will specifically reduce the negative implicit and explicit attitudes towards the Kurds.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 60 university students studying in different departments of Abant İzzet Baysal University participated in this study for course credit. The average age of participants was 19.88. A significant proportion of the participants were women (85%), their lives spent in large cities (53.3%), Muslims (96.7%) and Turks (85%; see Table 1). The participants were assigned to the five conditions: 2 (Specification of information: General and specific) X 2 (Positive and mixed) experimental conditions and one control condition.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

		N	%
Ethnicity	Other	2	3.3
	Kurd	7	11.7
	Turk	51	85
Religion	Other	2	3.3
	Islam	58	97.6
Marital Status	Single	81	98.8
	Married	1	1.2
Living Place	Metropolis	32	53.3
	Town	6	10
	Village	5	8.3
	City	17	28.3

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		N	%
	Less than 300 Euro	15	25
	300 – 600 Euro	29	48.3
Monthly Income	600 – 1000 Euro	13	21.7
	1000 – 1500 Euro	3	5
	More than 1500 Euro	0	0

Procedure

Data was collected in a laboratory that included individual computers. At the beginning, the participants were told that they would read a short text (positive informative text) and then they would be subjected to a computer application that lasted about 15 minutes.

The participants were then informed about the use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT). After the completion of the IAT, the participants also used computer to identify positive / negative adjectives, ethnical-religious affiliation questions and demographic questions.

Positive Information Manipulation

In this study, the effects of different types of information on implicit and explicit attitudes were examined. The four statements have been formed by cross-matching the fact that the information is general or specific and that the information contains only positive information or both negative and positive information. Here are the statements used in the study.

General-Positive: The existence of different social/ethnic groups in society is an important factor that increases cultural diversity.

Specific-Positive: Kurds' presence in society is an important factor in increasing cultural diversity.

General-Mixed: Although it is seen as a source of problems, the existence of different social/ethnic groups in society increases cultural diversity.

Specific-Mixed: Although the Kurds seem to be a threat to Turkish culture, the presence of Kurds in society is important for cultural diversity.

IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST

In this study, a Turkish version of Implicit Association Test (IAT) was used (Şenyurt, 2018). The original form of IAT was developed by Greenwald (1998) and is one of the most used techniques to measure implicit attitudes around the world. Lower D-scores in IAT is assumed to reflect higher negative attitudes toward a group.

Other Measures

In order to measure the level of ethnic commitment of the participants, following questions were asked: "How closely do you belong to your ethnic identity?" In order to measure religious belonging, the question "How much do you belong to your religious identity?" was asked. The participants answered both questions on a Likert scale of 11 (0: Never, 10: Totally).

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In addition, the question "Are you prejudiced against persons from different ethnic groups?" was asked in order to measure participants' attitudes towards persons from different ethnic groups. In order to measure the prejudices of participants against people from different religions, the question "Are you prejudiced against people from different religions?" was asked. The participants answered both questions on an 11 point Likert scale (0: not at all, 10: very much).

In order to measure the level of contact of the participants with other ethnic groups, the following questions were asked:

- 1- How often do you meet a Kurdish person?
- 2- How often do you want to meet a Kurdish person?
- 3- How often do you have quality communication with a Kurdish person?
- 4- How much do you want to have a Kurdish friend?
- 5- How often do you want to spend time with a Kurdish person?

The first question ("How often do you meet a Kurdish person?") was asked to measure the amount of past contact. The third question (How often do you have quality communication with a Kurdish person?) was asked to measure the past quality contact. Other questions were aimed to measure future contact desires, open attitudes and prejudice assessment.

RESULTS

All analyzes were performed using SPSS 21. Correlation analyzes were calculated with Pearson correlation coefficient. Group differences were calculated using one way variance analysis (ANOVA). The normal distribution of the variables was checked by skewness and kurtosis values (Table 2). In determining the extreme values, Mahalanobis distance scores were used.

Table 2: Normality analysis

	N	Min.	Max	Mean	SD	Skw.	Kur.
Dscore	59	-.94	.27	-.40	.28	.18	-.54
EtC	59	0	10	7.79	2.30	-1.47	2.41
RC	59	0	10	7.57	2.37	-1.18	1.36
EP	59	0	10	2.42	2.45	1.02	.55
RP	59	0	10	2.50	2.58	.95	.08
CF	59	0	10	6.13	2.73	-.36	-.76
DC	59	0	10	4.86	3.13	-.09	-.95
QC	59	0	10	5.77	3.43	-.46	-1.12
Friend	59	0	10	5.61	3.05	-.44	-.64
Time	59	0	10	5.30	3.03	-.17	-.78
KNeg	59	0	9	3.69	2.04	.16	-.10
Tneg	54	0	7.56	4.02	1.88	-.39	-.38
Kpos	59	0	10	4.88	2.35	-.08	-.24
Tpos	53	0	10	6.67	2.09	-1.40	3.58

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EtC: Commitment to ethnic identity, RC: Commitment to religious identity, EP: Prejudice against people from different ethnic groups, RP: Prejudice against people from different religion, CF: Contact frequency with Kurds, DC: Desire to contact with Kurds, QC: Past quality contact with Kurdish people, Friend: Desire to have Kurdish friend, Time: Desire to spend time with Kurdish people, Kneg: Negative adverbs against Kurds, Tneg: Negative adverbs against Turkish people, Kpos: Positive adverbs against Kurdish people, Tpos: Positive adverbs against Turkish people

The ANOVA results showed that information types did not have any baseline and interaction effects on the D-score ($p > .05$). In addition, the D-scores of participants who received information manipulation did not show any difference from the control group. There was no effect on the varieties of information types on positive and negative adjective preferences for Kurds, the time to pass, the desire to be friends and future communication desire variables ($p > .05$).

As a result of the correlation analysis, there was a significant negative correlation between D-score and ethnicity ($r = -.35, p < .01$). On the other hand, prejudice ($r = .84, p < .01$), past quality communication ($r = -.57, p < .01$), and a tendency to spend time in the future ($r = -.54, p < .01$) were significantly correlated with ethnic prejudice (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1- Dscore	1									
2- Ethnic	.25	1								
3- EtC	-.35**	-.09	1							
4- RC	-.01	.12	.57**	1						
5- EP	-.05	-.07	.03	-.01	1					
6- RP	-.23	-.02	.06	-.02	.84**	1				
7- CF	.06	.25	.09	.01	-.19	-.22	1			
8- QC	.16	.31*	.09	.07	-.57**	-.48**	.52**	1		
9- DC	-.08	.23	.12	-.02	-.48**	-.34**	.76**	.68**	1	
10- Friend	.12	.41**	.05	.03	-.48**	-.38**	.48**	.88**	.62**	1
11- Time	.09	.33*	.05	.01	-.54**	-.44**	.47**	.86**	.62**	.92**

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

EtC: Commitment to ethnic identity, RC: Commitment to religious identity, EP: Prejudice against people from different ethnic groups, RP: Prejudice against people from different religion, CF: Contact frequency with Kurdish people, DC: Desire to contact with Kurdish people, QC: Past quality contact with Kurdish people, Friend: Desire to have Kurdish friend, Time: Desire to spend time with Kurdish people

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study have shown that information types had no effect on implicit and explicit attitudes. This may be because the information messages are short, the information is not convincing because they are not consistent with the patterns, the individuals are not motivated to change their attitude after they have been confronted with their attitudes, or because they have not had enough time to change their attitudes.

In addition to this, it is common sense and common knowledge of the past literature that the stereotypes are not influenced easily from snap information or texts. In other words, it is difficult to change prejudices and attitudes that are formed through long years. Research conducted within the framework of contact theory suggests that there must be extra conditions in order to the contact to be effective. The information provided without fulfilling these conditions does not diminish prejudice; on the contrary, it may increase the possibility of negative attitudes and behaviors by making the ethnic identity more salient.

According to the strong situation hypothesis developed by Snyder and Ickles (1985), the behavioral effects of instant variables are weaker than the environmental or strong variables. In this respect, the weak information is less likely to affect chronically prejudices and attitudes. According to Fiske and North (2005), factors affecting IAT scores are positive external-group-negative internal group exposure, difference education, stereotypical contrasting images, and social influence. Use of specific examples instead of using sentences in subsequent studies, use of visual material or training in a pre-test and post-test design may help in determining effective methods for reducing negative stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that positive informative text was not strong enough to create an attitude change towards ethnic out-groups. It was also obvious that the type of the texts (whether they are only positive or mix texts) has no effect on implicit and explicit attitudes. Future studies should focus on the effects of longer texts and/ or trainings in a pre-test post-test design to uncover effective strategies to fight with prejudice.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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