Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change[1]

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A crucial issue in communication research relates to the *nature* of changes (if any) that are brought about by a particular communication or type of communication. It is not enough to know that there has been some measurable change in attitude; usually we would also want to know what kind of change it is. Is it a superficial change, on a verbal level, which disappears after a short lapse of time? Or is it a more lasting change in attitude and belief, which manifests itself in a wide range of situations and which is integrated into the person's value system? Or, to put it in other terms, did the communication produce public conformity *without* private acceptance, or did it produce public conformity coupled with private acceptance? (Cf. 1, 4.) Only if we know something about the nature and depth of changes can we make meaningful predictions about the way in which attitude changes will be reflected in subsequent actions and reactions to events.

These questions about the nature of attitude changes are highly significant in the study of international attitudes. For example, we may have observed changes in opinion toward certain international issues—e.g., aspects of foreign policy, international organization, or disarmament—among the population of a given country. The implications that we draw from these changes will depend on their depth and on the psychological meanings that can be assigned to them. Let us assume that we find an increase in favorable attitudes toward the United Nations among the population of the United States at a particular juncture. This change in attitude may be due primarily to recent pronouncements by high-placed figures and may thus represent an aspect of "social conformity." On the other hand, the change may result from a series of international events which have led large segments of the population to re-evaluate American foreign policy and to ascribe a more central role to the UN. Depending on which of

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[1] An earlier draft of this paper was written while the author was with the Laboratory of Psychology, National Institute of Mental Health, and was read at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Chicago on August 30, 1956. The experiment reported here was conducted while the author was at Johns Hopkins University as a Public Health Service Research Fellow of the National Institute of Mental Health. Additional financial support was received from the Yale Communication Research Program, which is under the direction of Carl I. Hovland and which is operating under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. The author is particularly grateful to James Owings for his help in running the experiment; to Ramon J. Rhine and Janet Baldwin Barclay for their help in analysis of the data; and to Roger K. Williams, Chairman of the Psychology Department at Morgan State College, for the many ways in which he facilitated collection of the data.

these *motivational processes* underlies the change in attitude, we would make different predictions about the manifestations and consequences of the new attitudes: about their durability, about the number of different attitudinal areas that will be affected by them, and about the ways in which they will be translated into action and will determine reactions to international events. Similarly, our predictions about the subsequent history of the new attitudes will depend on their *cognitive links,* i.e., the particular attitude structure within which the new attitude toward the UN is imbedded. For example, Americans may have become more favorable toward the UN because an important resolution sponsored by the United States delegate has been accepted. The new attitude toward the UN is thus an aspect of attitudes toward one's own nation and its prestige and international success. On the other hand, favorableness toward the UN may have increased because UN action has successfully averted war in a very tense conflict situation. In this case, the new attitude toward the UN is imbedded in an attitude structure revolving around the whole question of war and effective means of preventing its outbreak. Again, we would draw different implications from the changed attitudes, depending on which of these attitude areas was primarily involved in the occurrence of change.

The same considerations apply when we interpret the effects of international communications. For example, if we find changes in the way in which nationals of different countries perceive one another, it would be important to know at what level these changes have occurred and to what motivational and cognitive systems they are linked. These questions are important not only for the analysis of changes in attitude toward various international issues, objects, or events which may have occurred as a result of various kinds of communication or experience but also for the development of propositions about the conditions for change. In international relations, as in other areas of social behavior, one of our ultimate concerns is the exploration of the conditions under which lasting changes occur, changes which are generalized to many situations and which represent some degree of value reorganization.

In the present paper I should like to describe briefly an experimental study which is concerned with some of the conditions that determine the nature of attitude changes produced by communications on social issues. The specific content of the attitudes that were investigated in this study was in the area of race relations rather than international relations. The hypotheses refer, however, to general processes of attitude change, irrespective of the specific attitudinal area. Relationships found should be equally applicable, therefore, to the analysis of international attitudes.

I. *Theoretical Framework*

The experiment reported here grows out of a broader theoretical framework concerned with the analysis of different processes of attitude change resulting from social influence. It is impossible to present this framework in detail in the present paper, but I should like to outline its main features.[2]

The starting point of the theoretical analysis is the observation discussed in the preceding paragraphs, i.e., that changes in attitudes and actions produced by social influence may occur at different "levels." It is proposed that these differences in the nature or level of changes that take place correspond to differences in the *process* whereby the individual accepts influence

[2] A detailed description of the theoretical framework and of the experiment reported here will be published early in 1959 (5).

(or "conforms"). In other words, the underlying processes in which an individual engages when he adopts induced behavior may be different, even though the resulting overt behavior may appear the same.

Three different processes of influence can be distinguished: compliance, identification, and internalization.[3]

Compliance can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from another person or group. He adopts the induced behavior not because he believes in its content but because he expects to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval by conforming. Thus the satisfaction derived from compliance is due to the *social effect* of accepting influence.

Identification can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or a group. This relationship may take the form of classical identification, in which the individual takes over the role of the other, or it may take the form of a reciprocal role relationship. The individual actually believes in the responses which he adopts through identification, but their specific content is more or less irrelevant. He adopts the induced behavior because it is associated with the desired relationship. Thus the satisfaction derived from identification is due to the *act* of conforming as such.

Internalization can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence because the content of the induced behavior—the ideas and actions of which it is composed—is intrinsically rewarding. He adopts the induced behavior because it is congruent with his value system. He may consider it useful for the solution of a problem or find it congenial to his needs. Behavior adopted in this fashion tends to be integrated with the individual's existing values. Thus the satisfaction derived from internalization is due to the *content* of the new behavior.

The three processes represent three qualitatively different ways of accepting influence. A systematic treatment of the processes might, therefore, begin with an analysis of the determinants of influence in general. These determinants can be summarized by the following proposition: The probability of accepting influence is a combined function of (*a*) the relative importance of the anticipated effect, (*b*) the relative power of the influencing agent, and (*c*) the prepotency of the induced response. A variety of experimental findings can be cited in support of this proposition.

Compliance, identification, and internalization can each be represented as a function of these three determinants. For each process, however, these determinants take a qualitatively different form. Thus the determinants of the three processes can be distinguished from one another in terms of the *nature* of the anticipated effect, the *source* of the influencing agent's power, and the *manner* in which the induced response has become prepotent.

In other words, each process is characterized by a distinctive set of *antecedent* conditions, involving a particular qualitative variation of a more general set of determinants. Given the proper set of antecedents, then, influence will take the form of compliance, identification, or internalization, respectively. Each of these corresponds to a characteristic pattern of internal responses (thoughts and feelings) in which the individual engages while adopting the induced behavior.

Similarly, each process is characterized by a distinctive set of *consequent* conditions, involving a particular qualitative variation

[3] A similar distinction, between four processes of conformity, was recently presented by Marie Jahoda (3).

in the subsequent history of the induced response. Responses adopted through different processes will be performed under different conditions, will be changed and extinguished under different conditions, and will have different properties.

Since each of the three processes mediates between a distinct set of antecedents and a distinct set of consequents, the proposed distinctions between the three processes can be tested by experiments which attempt to relate the antecedents postulated for a given process to the consequents postulated for that process. The present experiment was designed to vary one of the antecedents—the source of the influencing agent's power—and to observe the effects of this variation on one of the consequents—the conditions of performance of the induced response.

Power is defined as the extent to which the influencing agent is perceived as instrumental to the achievement of the subject's goals. The sources of the agent's power may vary (cf. 2). The following hypotheses are offered regarding the variations in source of power:

1. To the extent to which the power of the influencing agent is based on means-control, conformity will tend to take the form of compliance.

2. To the extent to which the power of the influencing agent is based on attractiveness, conformity will tend to take the form of identification.

3. To the extent to which the power of the influencing agent is based on credibility, conformity will tend to take the form of internalization.

Now let us look at the consequent side. One of the ways in which behaviors adopted through different processes can be distinguished is in terms of the conditions under which the behavior is performed. The following hypotheses are offered regarding the conditions of performance:

1. When an individual adopts an induced response through compliance, he tends to perform it only under conditions of surveillance by the influencing agent.

2. When an individual adopts an induced response through identification, he tends to perform it only under conditions of salience of his relationship to the agent.

3. When an individual adopts an induced response through internalization, he tends to perform it under conditions of relevance of the issue, regardless of surveillance or salience.

II. *Procedure*

The subjects in this experiment were Negro college Freshmen in a border state. The experiment was conducted in the spring of 1954, just prior to the announcement of the Supreme Court decision on desegregation in the public schools. The social influence situation to which the students were exposed consisted of a fixed communication designed to change their attitudes on an issue related to the impending Court decision. Specifically, each of the communications employed in the study presented essentially the following message: If the Supreme Court rules that segregation is unconstitutional, it would still be desirable to maintain some of the *private* Negro colleges as all-Negro institutions, in order to preserve Negro culture, history, and tradition. Preliminary testing indicated that a large majority of the subjects would initially oppose the message presented in the communication.

The communications were tape-recorded interviews between a moderator and a guest (the communicator). They were presented to the subjects as recordings of radio programs which we were interested in evaluating. By varying the nature of these communications, it was possible to manipulate experimentally the source and degree of the communicator's power, while keeping the message of the communication constant.

Four different communications were used, as can be seen from Table 1, which outlines the basic design of the experiment (see left-hand column).

In one communication the attempt was made to present the communicator in such a way that he would be perceived as possessing high means-control. He was introduced as the president of the National Foundation for Negro Colleges. In the course of the interview it became evident that his foundation had been supporting the college in which the study was being conducted; that he had almost complete control over the funds expended by the foundation; and that he was the kind of person who would not hesitate to use his control in order to achieve conformity. He made it clear that he would withdraw foundation grants from any college in which the students took a position on the issue in question which was at variance with his own position.

In the second communication the communicator was presented in such a way that he would be perceived as possessing high attractiveness. He was introduced as a Senior and president of the student council in a leading Negro university. He was also chairman of his university's chapter of an organization called Student Poll, which recently did a study on the attitudes of Negro college Seniors on issues relating to the Supreme Court decision. He presented the same message as the first communicator, but he made it clear that he was presenting not simply his own opinions but the overwhelming consensus of opinion of the college students represented in the polls. He was portrayed as a representative of one of the subjects' reference groups and as a person who was in a position to supply valid information on the group norms.

In the third communication the communicator was presented in such a way that he would be perceived as possessing high credibility. He was introduced as a professor of history in one of the country's leading universities. In the course of the interview, it became evident that he was one of the top experts on the history and problems of minority groups; that he was highly respected both by his colleagues and by members of minority groups; and that he had a profound concern for the welfare of the American Negro community. He presented the same position as the other speakers, but he made it clear that this position was based on his research and on the evidence of history.

For purposes of comparison, a fourth communication was used in which the communicator was presented in such a way that he would be perceived as possessing low power, that is, as being low in means-control, attractiveness, *and* credibility. He was introduced as an "ordinary citizen," who

TABLE 1*

DESIGN OF THE EXPERIMENT AND PREDICTIONS

EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS: VARIATIONS IN COMMUNICATOR POWER	QUESTIONNAIRES: VARIATIONS IN CONDITIONS OF PERFORMANCE		
	Questionnaire I Surveillance Salience Issue-Relevance	Questionnaire II Non-surveillance Salience Issue-Relevance	Questionnaire III Non-surveillance Non-salience Issue-Relevance
High power, based on means-control.....	H	L	L
High power, based on attractiveness.....	H	H	L
High power, based on credibility.....	H	H	H
Low power.....	L	L	L

* H = high probability that attitude will be expressed; L = low probability that attitude will be expressed.

had no control over the subjects and no special knowledge about the topic. His attractiveness and credibility were further undermined by the fact that he was portrayed as a white man with a southern accent, who had recently come from Mississippi and who did not clearly dissociate himself from a pro-segregation point of view.

Each of the four communications was presented to a different experimental group. There was also a control group, which was not exposed to any communication at all. This group provided a base line for post-communication attitudes, since we did not obtain before-scores from the experimental subjects.

After exposure to the communication, the subjects in each experimental group filled out attitude questionnaires, designed to measure the extent of their agreement with the communicator. The questionnaire consisted of eighteen statements which were directly or indirectly related to the central message of the communication. Subjects were asked to respond to each item on a six-point scale. Scores for each item ranged from 1 for extreme disagreement with the communicator's position to 7 for extreme agreement (the score of 4 was not used, since the scale did not contain a neutral position). A total score for each subject was computed by adding up the individual scores on the 18 items. Thus the range of possible total scores was from 18 (complete disagreement) to 126 (complete agreement).

To vary the conditions of performance, we presented these eighteen statements to each subject on three separate questionnaires. As can be seen from Table 1, it is assumed that issue-relevance was present on all three questionnaires, since the attitude items dealt with the issues involved in the communication. The questionnaires differed, however, with respect to surveillance and salience.

Questionnaire I was completed under conditions of salience and surveillance. In order to maximize the salience of the communicator and the communication, the questionnaire was administered immediately after the communication. In order to maximize surveillance by the communicator, it was made clear—both by the appearance of the questionnaire and by the instructions—that this questionnaire was being administered at the communicator's request and that he would see each subject's answers. Moreover, the subjects were asked to sign their names and to give other identifying information.

Questionnaire II was completed under conditions of salience and non-surveillance. In order to maximize salience, the questionnaire was administered immediately after Questionnaire I, so that the relationship between the questionnaire and the communication was still clearly apparent. In order to minimize surveillance, Questionnaire II was anonymous, and it was made clear to the subjects that their responses would not be seen by the communicator or by anyone other than the research staff.

Questionnaire III was completed under conditions of non-salience and non-surveillance. In order to minimize the salience of the communicator and the communication, the questionnaire was administered from one to two weeks after the communication session, in a different place, under different auspices, and by a different experimenter. The questions were imbedded in a large number of other attitudinal items; and no mention of the communication was made. In order to minimize surveillance, Questionnaire III was anonymous and was in no way tied in to the communication.

III. *Hypotheses*

The specific hypotheses that were tested were as follows:

1. Attitudes adopted from a communi-

cator whose power is based on means-control will tend to be expressed only under conditions of surveillance by the communicator. The mediating process postulated here is compliance.

The specific prediction can be noted in Table 1. In the means-control group there will be a greater amount of acceptance of the communicator's position on Questionnaire I than on Questionnaires II and III, since Questionnaire I is the only one completed under conditions of surveillance. There should be no significant difference between Questionnaires II and III.

2. Attitudes adopted from a communicator whose power is based on attractiveness will tend to be expressed only under conditions of salience of the subject's relationship to the communicator. The mediating process postulated here is identification.

Specifically, it is predicted that in the attractiveness group there will be a smaller amount of acceptance of the communicator's position on Questionnaire III than on Questionnaires I and II, since Questionnaire III is the only one completed under conditions of non-salience. There should be no significant difference between Questionnaires I and II.

3. Attitudes adopted from a communicator whose power is based on credibility will tend to be expressed under conditions of relevance of the issue, regardless of surveillance or salience. The mediating process postulated here is internalization.

The specific prediction for the credibility group is that there will be no significant differences between the three questionnaires, since they were all completed under conditions of issue-relevance.

IV. *Results*

Before proceeding to examine the data which bear directly on the hypotheses, it was necessary to check on the success of the experimental variations. Did the subjects really perceive each of the variations in communicator power in the way in which we intended it? To provide an answer to this question, Questionnaire II included a series of statements about the speaker and the communication to which the subjects were asked to react. An analysis of these data indicated that, by and large, the experimental manipulations succeeded in producing the conditions they were intended to produce, thus making possible an adequate test of the hypotheses.

The findings which are directly relevant to the hypotheses are summarized in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 presents the mean attitude scores for the four experimental groups on each of the three questionnaires. All subjects who had completed the three questionnaires were used in this analysis.

It can be seen from the summary of the significance tests that all the experimental predictions were confirmed. In the means-control group, the mean score on Questionnaire I is significantly higher than the mean scores on Questionnaires II and III; and there is no significant difference between the scores on Questionnaires II and III. In the attractiveness group, the mean score on Questionnaire III is significantly lower than the mean scores on Questionnaires I and II; and there is no significant difference between the scores on Questionnaires I and II. In the credibility group, there are no significant differences between the three questionnaires.

While these results are all in line with the hypotheses, examination of the means in Table 2 reveals that the findings are not so clear-cut as they might be. Specifically, we should expect a relatively large drop in mean score for the means-control group from Questionnaire I to Questionnaire II. In actual fact, however, the drop is only slightly higher than that for the credibility group. This might be due to the fact that the analysis is based on *all* subjects, includ-

ing those who were not influenced by the communication at all. The hypotheses, however, refer only to changes from questionnaire to questionaire for those people who *were* initially influenced.

It was not possible to identify the subjects who were initially influenced, since there were no before-scores available for the experimental groups. It was possible, however, to approximate these conditions by using only those subjects who had a score of 60 or above on Questionnaire I. If we make certain limited assumptions (which I cannot spell out in this brief report), it can be shown that the use of a cutoff point of 60 "purifies" the experimental groups to some degree. That is, the subsamples selected by this criterion should have a higher ratio of influenced to uninfluenced subjects than the total groups from which they were selected. It was anticipated that an analysis based on these subsamples would provide a better test of the hypotheses and would yield more clear-cut results. This did, in fact, happen, as can be seen from Table 3.

Table 3 presents the mean attitude scores for the three high-power groups, using only those subjects who had scores of 60 or above on Questionnaire I. Examination of the means reveals a pattern completely consistent with the hypotheses. In the means-control group, agreement with the communicator is relatively high on Questionnaire I and declines on Questionnaires II and III. In the attractiveness group, agreement is high on Questionnaires I and II and declines on Questionnaire III. In the credibility group, changes from questionnaire to questionnaire are minimal. Analyses of variance clearly confirmed all the experimental predictions.

TABLE 2

EFFECTS OF VARIATIONS IN COMMUNICATOR POWER ON ACCEPTANCE OF INDUCED ATTITUDES UNDER THREE CONDITIONS OF MEASUREMENT

Groups	*N*	Mean Attitude Scores: Quest. I	Quest. II	Quest. III
Means-control (compliance)	55	63.98	60.65	58.04
Attractiveness (identification)	48	56.81	55.94	49.67
Credibility (internalization)	51	59.51	56.39	56.10
Low power	43	49.33	50.58	53.35

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE TESTS

Groups	Sources of Variation	*F*	*p*
Means-control	(1) Between questionnaires	3.6	<0.05
	(2) I versus II and III	5.8	<0.05
	(3) II versus III	1.4	n.s.
Attractiveness	(1) Between questionnaires	7.2	<0.01
	(2) I and II versus III	14.2	<0.01
	(3) I versus II	0.2	n.s.
Credibility	Between questionnaires	2.3	n.s.
Low power	Between questionnaires	2.0	n.s.

V. *Conclusions*

It would be premature to accept the hypotheses tested in this experiment as general principles that have been proved. The experiment does, however, lend considerable support to them. To the extent to which the hypotheses were substantiated, the experiment also gives support to the theoretical framework from which these hypotheses were derived. The mediating concepts of compliance, identification, and internalization seem to provide a unified and meaningful way of organizing the present

experimental findings and of relating them to a more general conceptual framework.

The framework presented here can be applied directly to the analysis of the effects of various communications and other forms of social influence on attitudes and actions in the international sphere. In the study of public opinion, for example, it should help us identify some of the conditions which are likely to produce one or another of these processes and predict the subsequent histories and action implications of attitudes

TABLE 3

EFFECTS OF VARIATIONS IN COMMUNICATOR POWER ON ACCEPTANCE OF INDUCED ATTITUDES UNDER THREE CONDITIONS OF MEASUREMENT*

Groups	N	Mean Attitude Scores		
		Quest. I	Quest. II	Quest. III
Means-control (compliance)	30	78.20	70.76	67.56
Attractiveness (identification)	23	71.30	69.57	59.70
Credibility (internalization)	26	73.35	71.04	69.27

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE TESTS

Groups	Sources of Variation	F	p
Means-control.....	(1) Between questionnaires	5.2	<0.01
	(2) I versus II and III	9.4	<0.01
	(3) II versus III	0.9	n.s.
Attractiveness	(1) Between questionnaires	14.5	<0.01
	(2) I and II versus III	28.4	<0.01
	(3) I versus II	0.6	n.s.
Credibility	Between questionnaires	1.1	n.s.

* Data based on a selected sample, containing a higher proportion of influenced subjects. Criterion for selection was a score of 60 or above on Questionnaire I.

adopted under these sets of conditions. This framework may also be helpful in the study of the social influences which affect decision-making processes and negotiations on the part of various elites.

Some of the concepts presented here might be useful not only for the study of change but also for the analysis of existing attitudes and their motivational bases. Let us take, for example, people's attitudes toward their own country's system of government. Even if we look only at those individuals who have favorable attitudes, various distinctions suggest themselves. For some individuals, acceptance of their system of government may be based largely on compliance: they may go along with the accepted norms in order to avoid social ostracism or perhaps even persecution. For others, attitudes toward their government may be largely identification-based: their relationship to their own nation and its major institutions may represent an essential aspect of their identity, and acceptance of certain political attitudes and beliefs may serve to maintain this relationship and their self-definition which is anchored in it. For a third group of individuals, belief in the country's system of government may be internalized: they may see this political form as fully congruent and integrated with their value systems and likely to lead to a maximization of their own values. Our evaluation of the meaning of "favorable attitudes" on the part of a particular individual or group or subpopulation and our prediction of the consequences of these attitudes would certainly vary with the motivational processes that underlie them. The conditions under which these attitudes are likely to be changed, the kinds of actions to which they are likely to lead, and the ways in which

they are likely to affect reactions to particular events will be different, depending on whether these attitudes are based on compliance, identification, or internalization.

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