Beyond Persuasion: Evidence Type Affects Impressions of a Message Source

Jenna Clark[1], Melanie C. Green[2], Joseph J. P. Simons[3]

[1]Center for Advanced Hindsight at Duke University, [2]University at Buffalo, [3]Institute for High Performance Computing, Singapore

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Jenna Clark

ABSTRACT

Persuasion research often focuses on how source characteristics affect attitude change in response to a message; however, message characteristics may also alter perceptions of the source. The Message-Based Impression Formation effect (M-BIF) suggests that perceivers use features of messages to infer characteristics of the source, and that such inferences may have a variety of consequential outcomes. In particular, the choice of narrative versus statistical evidence may have implications for the perceived warmth and competence of a source. In five experiments, narrative arguments led to greater perceptions of source warmth and statistical arguments led to greater perceptions of source competence. Across the two behavioral studies, a matching effect emerged: participants preferred to work on cooperative tasks with partners who had provided narratives, and competitive tasks with partners who had provided statistical evidence. These results suggest that the evidence type chosen for everyday communications may affect person perception and interpersonal interaction.

MATERIALS TEXT

Evidence Type and Person Perception - All Data.xlsx   Materials - Study_1a_Students.docx

Materials - Study_1b_MTurk.docx   Materials - Pretesting_Mturk.docx

Materials - Study_2_Framing_Mturk.docx   Materials - Study_3a_Task Choice_Mturk.docx

Materials - Study_3b_Partner Choice_Students.docx

Pretesting

1   Participants see an argument, either narrative or statistical, about financial decisions.

After reading an argument, participants rated it on several dimensions, using a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Participants were also asked the extent to which the argument seemed to be based on "research or statistics" and "personal experience or stories" on the same 1-7 scale.

Participants then repeat the first three steps for an argument about education, and then again for an argument about weight loss.

At the end, participants complete questions assessing demographics.

Study 1a

2   Participants accessed the survey online via Qualtrics.

They were asked to read a vignette in which the target solicits advice on a topic and the source provides an argument that is either narrative or statistical, and rate this vignette on multiple dimensions.

Participants then completed competence and warmth measures for the source, as well as individual difference measures.

Study 1b

3   Participants accessed the survey online via Qualtrics.

They were asked to read a vignette in which the target solicits advice on a topic and the source provides an argument that is either narrative or statistical, and rate this vignette on multiple dimensions.

Participants then completed competence and warmth measures for the source, as well as individual difference measures.

Study 2

4   Participants accessed the survey online via Qualtrics.

They were asked to read a vignette in which the target solicits advice on a topic and the source provides an argument that is either narrative or statistical.

This vignette was preceded by a 1-line frame to clarify which type of advice the target desired.

Participants then rate this vignette on multiple dimensions.

Participants then completed competence and warmth measures for the source, as well as individual difference measures.

Study 3a

5   Participants were asked to imagine they would be performing a task online with an interaction partner whom they had never met.

Participants then read a narrative or statistical argument on the topic of active learning, ostensibly written by their partner.

The quality of the argument and perceptions of the argument's author were then rated as in previous studies.

Participants lastly chose between two tasks they could complete with their partner, and assessed these tasks on various dimensions.

Study 3b

6   Participants in Study 3b were brought into a laboratory and told they were participating in a study where some participants had been chosen as writers and others as readers. The writers had been asked to write a passage on the topic of active learning, and had agreed to be available at a pre-chosen time to be matched with a reader to complete a task.

All participants actually viewed instructions for the "reader" condition, and were then randomly assigned to either the competitive task or the cooperative task.

After assignment to a task, participants were provided both the narrative and statistical arguments, characterized as the output of two potential partners from the writing session.

The participant then chose a specific partner to work with on their assigned task.

Participants then provided measures of person perception, individual differences, and demographics.