



The role of perceived attitudinal bases on spontaneous and requested advocacy[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The attitudes and persuasion literature has extensively examined what makes a message influential, paying much less attention to what makes someone communicate that message in the first place (i.e., engage in attitudinal advocacy). In addressing this, the present research first makes a novel distinction regarding the type of advocacy (requested versus spontaneous). Then, we examine how one's perceived attitudinal base (affective or cognitive) influences intentions to engage in each type of advocacy. Across six studies (four correlational and two experimental, $n = 1040$), this research demonstrates two consistent patterns: perceiving one's attitude to be more cognitively (vs. affectively) based results in greater willingness to engage in requested advocacy, whereas perceiving one's attitude to be more affectively (vs. cognitively) based results in greater willingness to engage in spontaneous advocacy.

1. Introduction

In order to change people's opinions and thus society, you must have more than just a persuasive message: you must have someone willing to deliver that message in the first place. Advocacy, which can encompass a wide variety of behaviors, will be examined as the stated willingness to provide arguments to others in favor of one's own attitude or position (Cheatham & Tormala, 2015). Whether a person's attitude is toward a societal norm, a particular political candidate, or a consumer product, providing arguments to another in support of one's position is an act of advocacy. In an age where social media has given megaphones to virtually everyone, the urgency to understand when and why people are willing to engage in advocacy has not been greater. However, for as much as the attitude change literature knows about the factors that make a communication the most influential (e.g., see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Wegener, 1998), the field has far less understanding about when and why someone would be willing to deliver that communication in the first place.

1.1. Advocacy research

The research on advocacy in social psychology is relatively scant and eclectic. For example, one of the first investigations relevant to advocacy came in Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter's (1956) now classic study, which demonstrated that uncertainty induced in an

attitude resulted in heightened proselytizing—an effect that wasn't replicated in the lab until 50 years later (Gal & Rucker, 2010). More recent work on certainty and advocacy has shown a curvilinear relationship, whereby those who are induced to feel high or low certainty in an attitude are more willing to advocate than those with only moderate amounts (Cheatham & Tormala, 2017). However, even with this research, our understanding of the attitudinal properties that predict advocacy intentions remains limited. To begin addressing this, we first distinguish between two different types of attitudinal advocacy, each with potentially different antecedents.

In considering advocacy, it first begins when an individual decides he or she is willing to advocate. Drawing on work in other fields that has distinguished between *proactive* and *reactive* behaviors (e.g., Berkowitz, 1988; Raine et al., 2006), sometimes, people will decide to engage in *spontaneous advocacy* (e.g., seeking out a friend to convince him/her about a recent political issue), while at other times, the decision to advocate could be a result of someone else's prompting, that is, *requested advocacy* (e.g. arguing for a particular restaurant after a friend explicitly asks for a recommendation). For example, a young woman may read an article about a disadvantageous change to the health care system and subsequently initiate a conversation with a friend to argue her stance (spontaneous advocacy). On the other hand, that same woman could have read the article and initially kept her dissent quiet; however, once a friend asks for her opinion on the matter, she promptly argues for her beliefs (requested advocacy). In daily life, we naturally

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engage in both types of advocacy, and it may be that different antecedents predict these different forms.

Although the present research is the first to examine this basic distinction between spontaneous and requested advocacy, other research has examined one side of it. For example, research by Akhtar, Paunesku, and Tormala (2013) measured people's willingness to advocate in response to a request for their opinions after hearing incompetent arguments from fellow supporters. This research showed that when a sample of adults was explicitly asked to express their opinions after hearing others poorly (vs. strongly) defend a supported attitude, they reported greater intentions to engage in advocacy. However, would those who expressed a willingness to speak upon being cued also be willing to spontaneously advocate for their beliefs? Or, are those engaging in spontaneous advocacy just as likely to advocate when someone specifically inquires about their stance on the matter? This distinction between willingness to advocate when requested versus spontaneously is central to the current research.

1.2. Affective versus cognitive bases of attitudes and the impact on advocacy

Although advocacy itself is a relatively new area of research, prior work has identified a number of variables that make a person more likely to act in accordance with their attitudes (e.g., purchasing attitude congruent products; see Petty & Krosnick, 1995, for a review). Since advocacy is a form of acting in accord with one's attitude, these same variables could presumably affect advocacy (for example, the recent work on attitude certainty and advocacy; Cheatham & Tormala, 2017). The current research examines an important and classic set of variables shown to influence the likelihood of attitude-consistent action, namely, whether an attitude is based primarily on affect or cognition (Breckler, 1984; Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994; Mann, 1959; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960; Ostrom, 1969; Zanna & Rempel, 1988).¹

The affective bases of an attitude refer to the valenced emotions and feelings (e.g., happiness versus sadness) underlying the positivity or negativity of one's evaluation. Cognitive bases refer to the valenced attributes and reasons (e.g., useful versus useless) that underlie the evaluation. For example, a person can be in support of the environment because seeing forests destroyed makes him/her angry (affective base) or because she/he believes protecting the environment is beneficial to the economy (cognitive base). Research has demonstrated that these attitudinal bases are not only conceptually distinct (Breckler & Wiggins, 1989), but also influence behaviors and evaluations separately (Crites et al., 1994).

Previous work on affectively versus cognitively based attitudes has shown that when a task is framed to match the basis of one's attitude (e.g. a cognitively framed task for a cognitive attitude), the individual is more likely to engage in the behavior than if the situation is mismatched (Millar & Tesser, 1986, 1989). In terms of advocacy, first consider when advocating is done in response to an explicit request. In this instance, someone solicits another person for his or her stance on a matter, and this specific entreaty to engage in advocacy could in turn make salient the expectation for a thoughtful or reason-based response. For example, in classic work by Wilson, Dunn, Bybee, Hyman, and Rotondo (1984), asking participants *why* they held the evaluation that they did compelled them to provide a cognitive explanation, even though the evaluations in question were on affective topics (e.g., game playing). Moreover, research on the expectations of social communication (Grice, 1975, 2008) shows that when people engage in "cooperative communication" (e.g., when one person solicits another for his/her opinion), we try to abide by a "maxim of quality" and provide information that is truthful and reliable. If so, one might engage in requested advocacy primarily to the extent that one believes reasons

¹ Research has also established a third basis for attitudes, behavioral information, but because this basis is not relevant to the current research, it is not discussed.

underlie the attitude (i.e., a cognitive basis). In which case, we hypothesize that attitudes associated more with cognition (vs. affect) would lead to greater intentions to advocate upon request.

The situation may be quite different, however, when considering spontaneous advocacy. In this case, the individual is electing to advocate without any kind of prompting from another person. Previous research on affect has shown that affective (compared to cognitive) attitudes are associated with greater attitude accessibility (Giner-Sorolla, 2004; Rocklage & Fazio, in press; van den Berg, Manstead, van der Pligt, & Wigboldus, 2006; Verplanken, Hofstee, & Janssen, 1998). Thus, affectively based attitudes may come to mind more easily and frequently and therefore result in more spontaneous behavior, including advocacy. Beyond accessibility, though, other research has also connected affective attitudes to energization (Davis & Lamberth, 1974; Lombardo, Libkuman, & Weiss, 1972). That is, the emotion underlying the attitude may increase the participant's tendency to spontaneously act on it. However, even if actual affect is absent, the mere perception that emotion is associated with the attitude could exert the same effects. Indeed, research shows that people have extensive knowledge and expectations for how emotions will influence them (e.g., Barrett, Mesquita, & Gendron, 2011; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Ong, Zaki, & Goodman, 2015), and these expectations can guide behaviors and behavioral intentions (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). Thus, whether the emotion actually underlies the attitude or someone simply perceives that it does, these types of attitudes could result in a greater expectation that one would spontaneously approach another to advocate. Thus, we hypothesize that attitudes associated more with affect (vs. cognition) would lead to greater intentions to spontaneously advocate.

Although some prior research has focused on situations in which attitudes are based solely or mostly on affect or cognition, it is important to recognize that people can have both affective and cognitive bases underlying an attitude, and these bases can influence one another (Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1994). What is particularly valuable for distinguishing the unique effects of each basis, then, is the relative comparison between the two. For example, See, Petty, and Fabrigar (2008) measured participants' attitudinal bases and then gave them either an affectively or cognitively worded persuasive appeal. Although most participants had elements of both bases underlying their attitude, those who had relatively more affective attitudes were more persuaded by the affective message, whereas the opposite was true for those who had relatively more cognitive attitudes (see also Haddock, Maio, Arnold, & Huskinson, 2008). With advocacy, then, what may be important in predicting which type of advocacy the individual prefers (i.e. requested or spontaneous) is the extent to which one's attitudinal base is either relatively more cognitive or affective (i.e., which basis is more dominant). As just explained, our core hypothesis is that spontaneous advocacy will be more linked to a relative affective basis whereas requested advocacy will be more linked to a relative cognitive basis.²

1.3. Structural bases vs. meta-bases of affect and cognition

Before turning to the current studies, it is important to note that the literature has identified two different ways of determining how cognitive or affective one's attitude is (See et al., 2008). The first method for measuring one's cognitive or affective attitudinal bases has been called the *structural* or *objective* method. Objective measures of affective versus cognitive bases consider the overall discrepancy between the affective and cognitive valences underlying the attitude and the global valence of the attitude itself (e.g. Crites et al., 1994). The second method for measuring attitudinal bases is called the *meta-bases* or *subjective* method and relies on a self-report of whether a person believes that his or her

² Nevertheless, we will also examine the independent contribution of the affective versus cognitive bases of attitudes on spontaneous and requested advocacy controlling for the other.

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