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The Normative Features of Resistance to Persuasion

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Abstract

Displaying Resistance to Persuasion (RP) seems to convey a negative image of oneself (study 1, self-presentation paradigm, $N = 106$). Targets displaying high resistance were seen as less warm but more competent than targets displaying low resistance (studies 2 and 3, judgment tasks, $N = 189$ and $N = 219$).

Theoretical Background

- RP is the ability to resist to a persuasive attempt (McGuire, 1964), often theorized as an individual trait (Briñol et al., 2004). RP was suggested to be linked with personal values (Briñol et al., 2004). Various processes allowing to defend one's attitude are socially valorized or devalorized (Jacks & Cameron, 2003).
- Western societies promote individualistic values such as to be self-determined, self-reliant, confident, skillful (Shavitt et al., 2010).
- Thus, displaying RP could be socially valorized, leading to prescriptive norms of judgment. Practical implications can be considered (e.g., critical thinking, conspiracy theories, fake news).

Study 1

Method: Online self presentation paradigm (Jellison & Green, 1981). 141 French undergraduate students had to fill a French version of the RP Scale (Bonetto et al., 2018) three times across experimental conditions (no-instruction, positive and negative self-presentation).

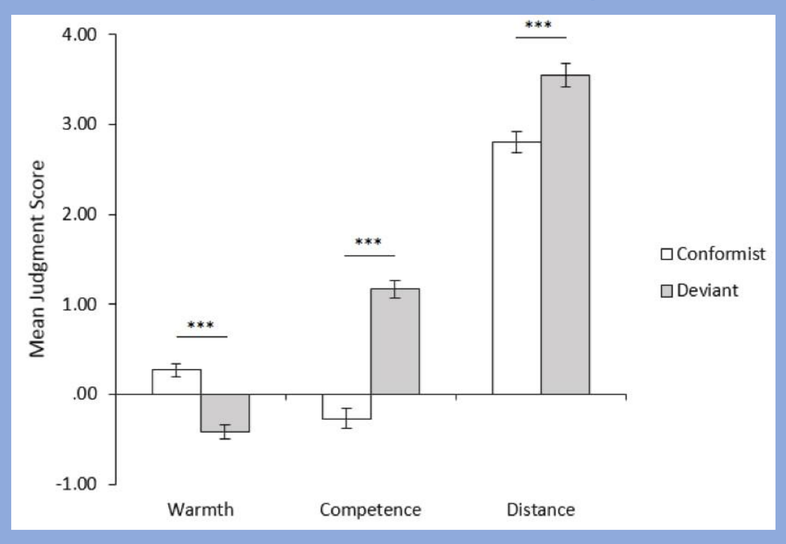
Results and discussion: The RP scale demonstrated stable and adequate internal consistency across conditions ($\alpha_{control} = .81$, $M_{control} = 3.56$, $SD = 0.83$; $\alpha_{positive} = .81$, $M_{positive} = 3.25$, $SD = 1.00$; $\alpha_{negative} = .81$, $M_{negative} = 5.68$, $SD = 1.23$). A One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA was conducted, $F(2, 104) = 122.94$, Wilk's $\lambda = .30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .70$. RP scores were higher in Negative Self-presentation than in Positive Self-presentation, $t(105) = 13.52$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.18$. They were higher in Negative Self-presentation compared to No-instruction, $t(105) = 15.60$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.02$. A significant difference was found between No-instruction and Positive Self-presentation, $t(105) = 2.76$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.34$. Surprisingly, these results reflect a socially undesirable aspect of high RP. Two other studies were designed in order to further corroborate this finding, and to identify the type of social value (warmth vs. competence; Fiske et al., 2007) associated with these normative features.

Studies 2 and 3

Method: Judgment tasks. In study 2 (lab experiment), 181 French undergraduate students were randomly presented the RP scale supposedly filled by a fictive target displaying high RP ('deviant' target) or low RP ('conformist' target). In study 3 (219 French participants, online questionnaire) deviant and conformist targets were presented through a fictive interview excerpt, introduced as a real person. We hypothesized that deviant target should be judged as less warm and less competent than conformist one, which would be indicative of normative feature of RP. Also we hypothesized that participants would distantiate themselves more from deviant profile. Warmth and competence scales (7-points Likert, 8 items) were based on a pre-tested list of adjectives (Le Barbenchon et al., 2005). Social distance between self and target was measured with a 7-points visual scale (adapted from Schubert & Otten, 2002).

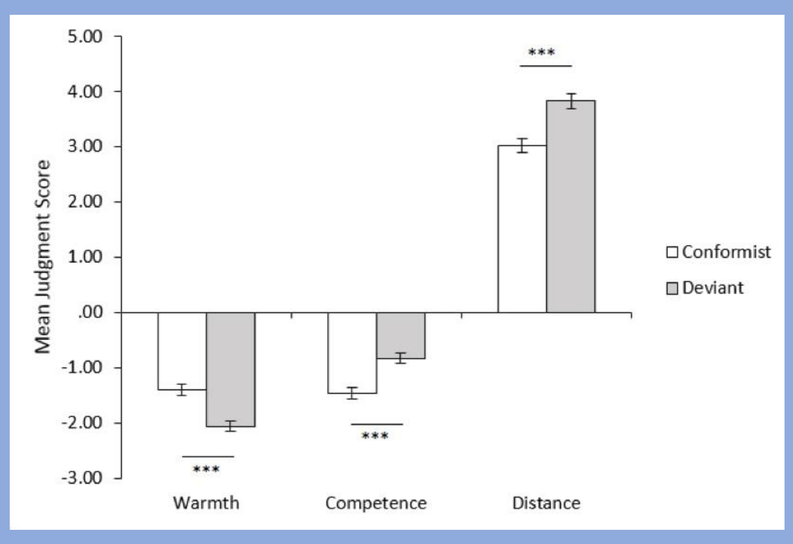
Results of the Study 2: Warmth items demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = .77$; $M_{conf} = 0.27$, $SD = 0.61$; $M_{dev} = -0.42$, $SD = 0.76$), and so did the competence related ones ($\alpha = .71$; $M_{conf} = -0.27$, $SD = 1.00$; $M_{dev} = 1.17$, $SD = 0.89$).

Warmth scores were higher for the conformist than for the deviant target, $t(163) = 6.42$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.00$. However, the exact reverse was true for competence scores, $t(158) = -9.57$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.51$. Participants distantiated themselves more from the deviant ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.30$) than from the conformist target ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(187) = -4.24$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.61$.



Results of the Study 3: Warmth items demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = .88$; $M_{conf} = -1.40$, $SD = 1.05$; $M_{dev} = -2.06$, $SD = 0.93$), and less so for the competence related ones ($\alpha = .63$; $M_{conf} = -1.46$, $SD = 0.95$; $M_{dev} = -0.83$, $SD = 0.95$).

Warmth scores were higher for conformist than for deviant target, $t(217) = 4.93$, $p < .001$, $d = .67$. However, the exact reverse was true for competence scores, $t(217) = -4.83$, $p < .001$, $d = .66$. Participants distantiated themselves more from the deviant ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.54$) than the conformist target ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(217) = 4.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.57$.



Discussion: These results corroborate the presence of normative features of RP. As predicted, we obtained an effect of conformism on warmth and deviant targets were attributed more social distance. Unlike we expected given previous research showing a 'halo effect' on social judgments, the deviant target was perceived as more competent than the conformist one.

General discussion

- Previous studies have found that high-power individuals tend to be less constrained by situational pressures, more resistant to conformism (Galinsky et al., 2008) and that social power is linked with increased resistance (Eaton et al., 2009). Thus, higher RP target could be expected to linked to an high status which implies more competence (Fiske et al., 2007). Low RP could be perceived as characteristic of individual from low-status, non-competitive groups, and signal one's readiness to engage in social interactions, which is linked with warmth (e.g., Adler et al., 2015).
- High RP could be linked to epistemic motivation and low RP to affiliative ones given that they act on display/perception of warmth.
- Norm priming paradigms (Cialdini & Trost, 1998) based on RP may be used in order to induce motivation to engage in counterarguing and resisting persuasion. Also, priming epistemic and affiliative goals may permit to moderate effect of norms related to RP. These applied perspectives could be particularly relevant to deal with critical thinking promotion and fighting against the spread of conspiracy theories and fake news (Bonetto et al., 2018).

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