

# On Enhancing the Persuasiveness of Low Credibility Sources: The Use of a Partial Incongruity Strategy

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## 《摘要》

A field experiment was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of a persuasive strategy--partial incongruity strategy--in enhancing the persuasiveness of low prestige sources. Two hundred and two subjects from a major city in New England participated in the study. Through the manipulation of various versions of specially designed messages, the researcher examined the effectiveness of the partial incongruity strategy in inducing message acceptance among subjects holding different initial attitudes on an issue. In addition to the audience's pre-existing attitude, audience's

self-perception of knowledgeable ability on the issue was also examined as a component of the individual's pre-disposition which served to indicate the intensity of the pre-existing attitude. Results from the analyses support the hypothesis that the use of "partial incongruity strategy" did enhance the persuasiveness of a communication attributed to a low prestige source. In addition, the study also suggests that the persuasive strategy will work most effectively when the following two conditions are met: (1) the "partial incongruity" portion presented in the message must produce a sufficiently large discrepancy between the message and the source so as to create an impression of "unselfishness," and to win over the audience's trust; and (2) the audiences must not hold an extremely opposing position on the issue.

## INTRODUCTION

It has consistently been found that the audience's perception of the communicator (or source) affects its interpretation of the communicated message and also the persuasive efficacy of the communication. A prevailing view concerning this issue is that high credibility sources are more persuasive or, at least, as persuasive as low credibility sources under different situations.<sup>1</sup> However, when a communication source has long been regarded as less trustworthy, can anything be done to increase its persuasive efficacy? What techniques or strategies can be used to enhance the influence of a low credibility source? This study aims at exploring on this issue.

Sternthal, Phillips and Dholaka have suggested the use of content incongruity and of new evidence in order to enhance the persuasive power of low credibility sources.<sup>2</sup> Walster, Aronson, and Abrahams's study has also indicated that the influence of a low credibility source may be enhanced when the low credibility source presents messages that are incongruent with its own best interest.<sup>3</sup> Their study demonstrates that a communicator's effectiveness depends both on his (or her) appeal. That is, the more selfish a communicator's proposal appears to be, the more his (or her) effectiveness will decline. Hovland and Mandell also raised a similar proposition claiming that suspicion concerning a communicator's motives would decrease the communicator's effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> However, their hypothesis was not supported. Results from the experiments by Walster et al. seem to have provided substantial evidences in support of Hovland and Mendell's hypothesis. It was pointed out that, regardless of the abstract prestige, the high credibility source loses its effectiveness just as rapidly as does the low credibility source when it advocates a position in its own best interest.

Interaction between source credibility and other variables indicates that contextual factors have an important mediating effect on the influence of source credibility. These contextual factors include the timing of the source identification, message factor, and the audience's individual differences (i.e. predispositions, psychological state). This study examined two contextual factors and their individual as well as joint effects on inducing message acceptance. The two contextual factors under investigation are (a) partial incongruity strategy (message factor), and (b) the audience's predisposition (individual differences).

Therefore, the major objective of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a partial incongruity strategy as a persuasive technique in enhancing the acceptance of messages attributed to low credibility sources, controlling audience's predisposition.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, who first studied the concept of source credibility in the 1950s, defined source credibility in terms of two components: expertness and trustworthiness. Expertness refers to the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions; while trustworthiness refers to the degree to which an audience member perceives the assertions made by a communicator to be valid ones. Expertness is seen more specifically as a task-related variable whereas trustworthiness is a more general characteristic.

Despite the large amount of research on source credibility since then, trustworthiness and expertise have endured as the primary underlying dimensions in subsequent studies over the years.<sup>5</sup> An audience member's pre-existing attitude on an issue has been constantly found to be a predominant factor which determines how susceptible an individual is to a persuasive communication.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the initial attitude on an issue, the audience's self-perception of knowledgeability on that issue, which may indicate the intensity of the attitude, also matters. This concept is, though has some distinction, related to ego-involvement since it indicates an individual's level of firmness on the stand she or he chooses to assume toward an issue. However, no previous research has ever explored on this aspect.

Sherif, Sherif and Nebergall define ego-involvement as "the arousal of the individual's commitments or stands in the context of appropriate situations." (p. 60.) When ego-involvement is increased, the latitude of rejections is increased.<sup>7</sup> To the extent that the individual is personally involved in an issue, his (or her) own stand serves as an anchor for his (or her) appraisals of any communication regarding the issue. Owing to the anchoring effect of the individual's own stand, evaluation of a communication is subject to the "assimilation-contrast effects."

"Assimilation-contrast" effects refer to the systematic variations in judgement governed by the similarities and differences between the anchor and the attitude objects being appraised. To be more specific, if the position

advocated in a communication is not too discrepant from the receiver's own pre-existing attitude, there will be an assimilation effect; that is, the position in the message will be perceived as nearer to the receiver's own stand than it actually is. On the other hand, if the position advocated in the communication diverges sufficiently far away from the receiver's "latitude of acceptance," then the advocated position in the message will be seen as farther away from the receiver's own stand than it actually is. In brief, the greater the discrepancy between the individual's own stand and the advocated position, the greater the displacement away from the individual's own position (contrast effect).

When only a small discrepancy presents, there will be a tendency for displacement toward the individual's own stand (assimilation effect). Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif found a curvilinear relationship between the amount of displacement and the message discrepancy. The displacement will shift positively toward the advocated direction when the message discrepancy falls within the receiver's latitude of acceptance, and negatively opposite to the advocated direction when it falls in his or her latitude of rejection.<sup>8</sup>

Generally speaking, an individual's attitudes toward a communication and its source are not divorced from his attitudes on the topic. If the source is perceived high in prestige, the possibility of his extending the range of assimilation is greater. Findings from previous research have demonstrated that audiences respond differently to message conveyed by sources of different prestige levels.<sup>9</sup> When a discrepant message is attributed to a high prestige source, the individual is less likely to derogate the source. If the position advocated in the communication is not too discrepant, the individual will tend to modify his or her own attitude and to accept the position advocated. However, when the discrepancy is too large to be accepted, another possible alternative to be adapted will be to dissociate the message from the high prestige source. But, when the source prestige is low and there is considerable discrepancy between the position advocated in the communication and the individual's own stand, he or she may merely disregard the communicated message as "nonsense" and stick to his or her initial position. Johnson and Steiner have

reported that low credibility sources have little "influence potential" because the audience does not take them seriously as valid information sources.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, awareness of issues in the news fluctuates within broad limits. It is one thing to be informed and something else to have an opinion. Rokeach stated that often when a man has a piece of information, some useful concepts and a grasp on the nature of social causation, he might employ some well-formulated belief system to give the information "meaning;" that is, to draw inferences about what is going on and what should be done.<sup>11</sup> Rosenberg also presents evidence to show that opinions often come before information and reasons.<sup>12</sup> People may learn strong feeling of favor or disfavor about some attitude object without knowing much about it, or without having much in the way of supporting knowledge.

And these people will collect information selectively to develop cognitions which are consistent with their mental picture of the social reality. In other words, they will go through the process of selective exposure, selective comprehension, and selective retention to further strengthen their own predispositions. In this sense, the audience's self-perception of expertise is built up through a process of selective information absorbing, which, in turn, works to confirm to his or her initial position on the issue.

## **HYPOTHESIS AND MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES**

The hypothesis proposed in this study is in the following:

H: The use of "partial incongruity strategy" in the communication will enhance the low credibility communicator's persuasiveness when the subjects hold less extreme attitudes and have low self-perceived knowledgeability on the issue; however, little effect will be expected when the subjects hold extreme attitudes and have a high self-perceived knowledgeability on the issue.

The three independent variables being investigated are:

1. The audience's pre-existing attitudes toward the issue.

2. The audience's self-perception of knowledgeability on the issue.
3. Message factor--the use of partial incongruity strategy.

### **Attitudinal Object: Kaohsiung Incident**

The issue or the attitude object that was chosen for this study is the "Formosa Incident," which is also known as the "Kaohsiung Incident." (See Appendix A.) It was a riot involving many major political dissidents in Taiwan. The incident involved a mass rally and violent clash with police, and the following arrest of the major political dissidents who held the mass rally. From the very beginning, the whole issue was very controversial and complicated. It was very difficult to tell what was true and factual from the discrepant stories and arguments given by both sides.<sup>13</sup> Some people blamed the political dissidents for bringing forth the turmoil and disorders in the society, others blamed the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT, or the Nationalist Party) for deliberately staging the riot and using it as an excuse to eliminate the political dissidents in Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> However, the fact that different opinions were held among the overseas Chinese provided a very good condition for the experiment. It was easier to find subjects who were holding extremely opposing views toward the issue and thus increased the variation in the variable of audience's pre-existing attitude.

### **Pre-existing Attitude on the Issue**

The first independent variable--audience's pre-existing attitude--was measured by a seven-point Likert scale which is composed of twelve attitude statements. High scores indicate that the subjects hold a favorable and positive attitude toward the ruling party (KMT) in Taiwan; whereas low scores indicate a negative attitude toward the ruling party.

The median of the overall attitude scores for each item was used as a cutting point to divide the subjects into two groups: Pro-KMT and Anti-KMT.

Cronbach alpha was computed for the scale, the resulting Cronbach alpha

based on the twelve items has a very high value of .82.

### **Perceived Knowledgeability on the Issue**

The second independent variable--self-perception of knowledgeability on the issue--was also measured by a seven-point scale consisting of ten items. High scores indicate that the individual has a strong confidence in his or her own knowledge and understanding of the issue. And, vice versa. The median score was used as the cutting point to divide people into the high- and low-perceived expertise groups. The resulting Cronbach alpha has a value of .88.

### **Message Manipulation--The Partial Incongruity Strategy**

The partial incongruity strategy refers to a persuasive technique of presenting, in part of the communication, a position incongruent with the communicator's best interest so as to create an impression of "impartiality," and "unselfishness." However, the stand congruent with the communicator's interest is still resumed in the conclusion part of the message.

The message strategy was manipulated at four levels as the following:

1. Version A1: A pro-KMT editorial which contains no partial incongruity approach. The entire article states a clear stand in support of the ruling party and blaming the political dissidents. The editorial was attributed to The Central Daily, which is known as the official mouthpiece of the ruling party KMT.
2. Version A2: A pro-KMT editorial using the "partial incongruity" strategy by praising the positive role played by the political dissidents in the beginning paragraphs, but ending with a conclusion still favorable and supportive of the ruling party KMT. This editorial was also attributed to the party owned daily paper, The Central Daily.
3. Version B1: An anti-KMT editorial which blamed and criticized the ruling party KMT's deeds from the beginning till the end of



the article. The editorial was attributed to The Chinese Daily (Hua Ch'iao Jih Pao), which is associated with the leftist wing and known for its anti-KMT stand.

4. Version B2: An anti-KMT editorial using the "partial incongruity" strategy by praising the KMT party's performance in Taiwan during the past decade, but ending with a conclusions criticizing the ruling party's deeds and reactions in the political incident. The editorial was also attributed to The Chinese Daily.

Through this device of a systematic variation on message manipulation, the author attempted to examine whether the "partial incongruity" strategy could increase the effectiveness of persuasive communications attributed to low prestige (in this case, less trustworthy) sources. Both The Central Daily and The Chinese Daily were regarded as low prestige or less trustworthy sources because of their political affiliation with a certain political party. Since partisan papers generally speak in the interest of a particular political party, readers tend to downgrade the two newspapers as less trustworthy news sources especially when political issues are involved.

### **Dependent Variable--Message Acceptance**

The message acceptance was measured in terms of the perceived "objectivity," "fairness," and "justifiability" of the message. The subjects were asked to check on a seven-point scale to indicate their evaluation of the editorial on these three aspects. The sum of the scores on the three items was used as an index to reflect the audience's overall acceptance of the message. High scores indicate a high level of message acceptance. The Cronbach alpha is .72.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

A quasi-experimental design was utilized in this study. First, subjects were

asked to fill out a self-administered questionnaire in which questions on their attitude toward the political incident and on their perceived knowledgeability toward the issues were asked. Then, through a randomization procedure, each subject was given one of the four specially designed editorials to read. After reading the editorial, they were asked to evaluate the editorial in terms of "objectivity," "fairness," and "justifiability."

The subjects participated in the study were primarily overseas Chinese who either went to school or worked in the metropolitan area of a major New England city. In total, 202 completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed. The researcher attended big social parties held by the Overseas Chinese and asked them to participate in the study. With the aid of the chairpersons of the Chinese student associations and of some active members of the Chinese community, many of them agreed to participate in the field experiment. The sample was more of a purposive and convenience sample. Those young, highly-educated Chinese people, who either came to the U.S. for graduate study or just recently found a job and settled down in the area, were the focal target population of this study. Since these people tend to have closer ties with Taiwan, they would have more interest in and more concerns for the political incident in question--"Formosa Incident." Therefore, it is possible to find sufficient number of subjects who held strong attitudes on the issue to participate in the study. This was a sampling strategy used to insure that there was a wide variation of attitudes toward the issue, namely, the Formosa Incident, among the participating subjects.

### **Data Analysis**

The basic design of this study was a  $2 \times 2 \times 4$  factorial design. The three factors are labeled: (1) the audience's pre-existing attitude, (2) the audience's self-perception of knowledgeability on the issue, and (3) message strategy at four levels (Pro-KMT: version A1 and version A2; Anti-KMT: version B1 and version B2).

Three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were run in examining the main

effects as well as the interaction effects of the three factors. Two separate ANOVA runs were done for both the Pro-KMT editorials and the Anti-KMT editorials. These results are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 Evaluation vis-a-vis A1 and A2 Messages

| Source of Variances                | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F value | Significance |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Main effects                       | (2198.66)      | (3) | 732.89      | 24.53   | 0.000        |
| (A) attitude                       | 2191.67        | 1   | 2191.67     | 73.35   | 0.000        |
| (B) self-perception                | 145.65         | 1   | 145.65      | 4.8     | 0.030        |
| (C) message factor                 | 5.71           | 1   | 5.71        | 0.19    | 0.663        |
| Two-way interaction                | ( 660.19)      | (3) | 220.06      | 7.37    | 0.000        |
| A × B                              | 591.35         | 1   | 591.35      | 19.79   | 0.000        |
| A × C                              | 17.52          | 1   | 17.52       | 0.59    | 0.450        |
| B × C                              | 51.98          | 1   | 51.98       | 1.74    | 0.190        |
| Three-way interaction<br>A × B × C | 12.02          | 1   | 12.02       | 0.40    | 0.530        |
| Between group variance             | (2633.50)      | (7) | 376.21      | 12.59   | 0.000        |
| Within group variance              | 2808.74        | 94  | 29.88       |         |              |
| Total                              | 5442.24        | 101 | 53.88       |         |              |

Table 2 Evaluation vis-a-vis B1 and B2 Messages

| Source of Variances                | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F value | Significance |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Main effects                       | (2254.47)      | (3) | 751.49      | 42.38   | 0.000        |
| (A) attitude                       | 1640.09        | 1   | 1640.09     | 92.50   | 0.000        |
| (B) self-perception                | 7.30           | 1   | 7.30        | 0.41    | 0.523        |
| (C) message factor                 | 424.62         | 1   | 424.62      | 23.95   | 0.000        |
| Two-way interaction                | ( 419.47)      | (3) | 139.82      | 7.89    | 0.000        |
| A × B                              | 362.59         | 1   | 362.59      | 20.45   | 0.000        |
| A × C                              | 11.60          | 1   | 11.60       | 0.65    | 0.421        |
| B × C                              | 69.07          | 1   | 69.07       | 3.90    | 0.051        |
| Three-way interaction<br>A × B × C | 13.99          | 1   | 13.99       | 0.79    | 0.377        |
| Between group variance             | (2925.32)      | (7) | 417.90      | 23.57   | 0.000        |
| Within group variance              | 1631.25        | 92  | 17.73       |         |              |
| Total                              | 4556.57        | 99  | 46.03       |         |              |

According to the results in Table 1 regarding message acceptance on the two versions of pro-KMT messages, significant main effects of pre-existing attitude and of self-perceived knowledgeability (F-values=73.35, 4.87) were observed. There was also a significant interaction effect between the audience's attitude and self-perception of knowledgeability (F-value=19.79). However, the use of partial incongruity strategy in the message does not have any effect on the audience's acceptance of the Pro-KMT editorial A2 (F-value=0.19).

By contrast, the results in Table 2 regarding message acceptance on the two versions of anti-KMT messages, have shown that both the pre-existing attitude and the message manipulation had significant main effects ( $F$ -values=92.50, 23.95), however, the self-perceived knowledgeability seemed to lose its power on affecting the audience's acceptance of the message ( $F$ -value=0.41). In addition, the self-perception of knowledgeability shows significant interaction effects with both the audience's attitude and with the message manipulation ( $F$ -values=92.50, 23.95). No three-way interaction effects were found in either of these analyses.

Figure 1 presents the two-way interaction effects between the audience's attitude and its self-perception of knowledgeability of message acceptance. Figure 2 is a raw data scatter plot of these two variables. Both figures seem to indicate the audience's self-perceived knowledgeability on the issue tended to either intensify or modify the influence of attitude on message acceptance. To be more specific, the subjects holding a more extreme attitude tended to report a high level of self-perceived knowledgeability and also tended to be more extreme at the message acceptance scale. Whereas, those subjects with a moderate attitude tended to report a low level of self-perceived knowledgeability and were also scored less extremely on the message acceptance scale.

×: High Self-perceived Knowledgeability  
 ▲: Low Self-perceived Knowledgeability

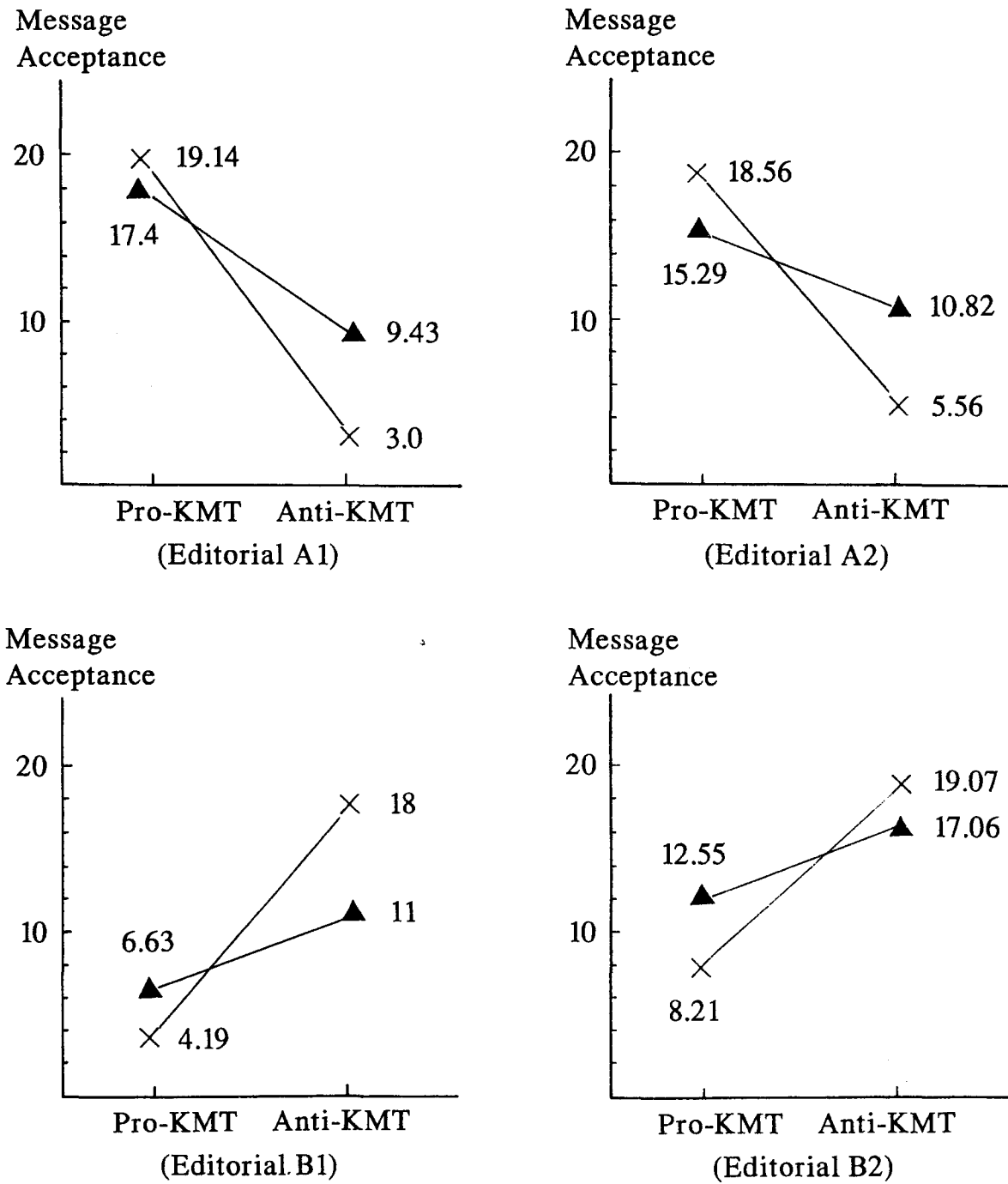


Figure 1 Graphs of Two-way Interaction Effects of Attitude and Self-perceived Knowledgeability

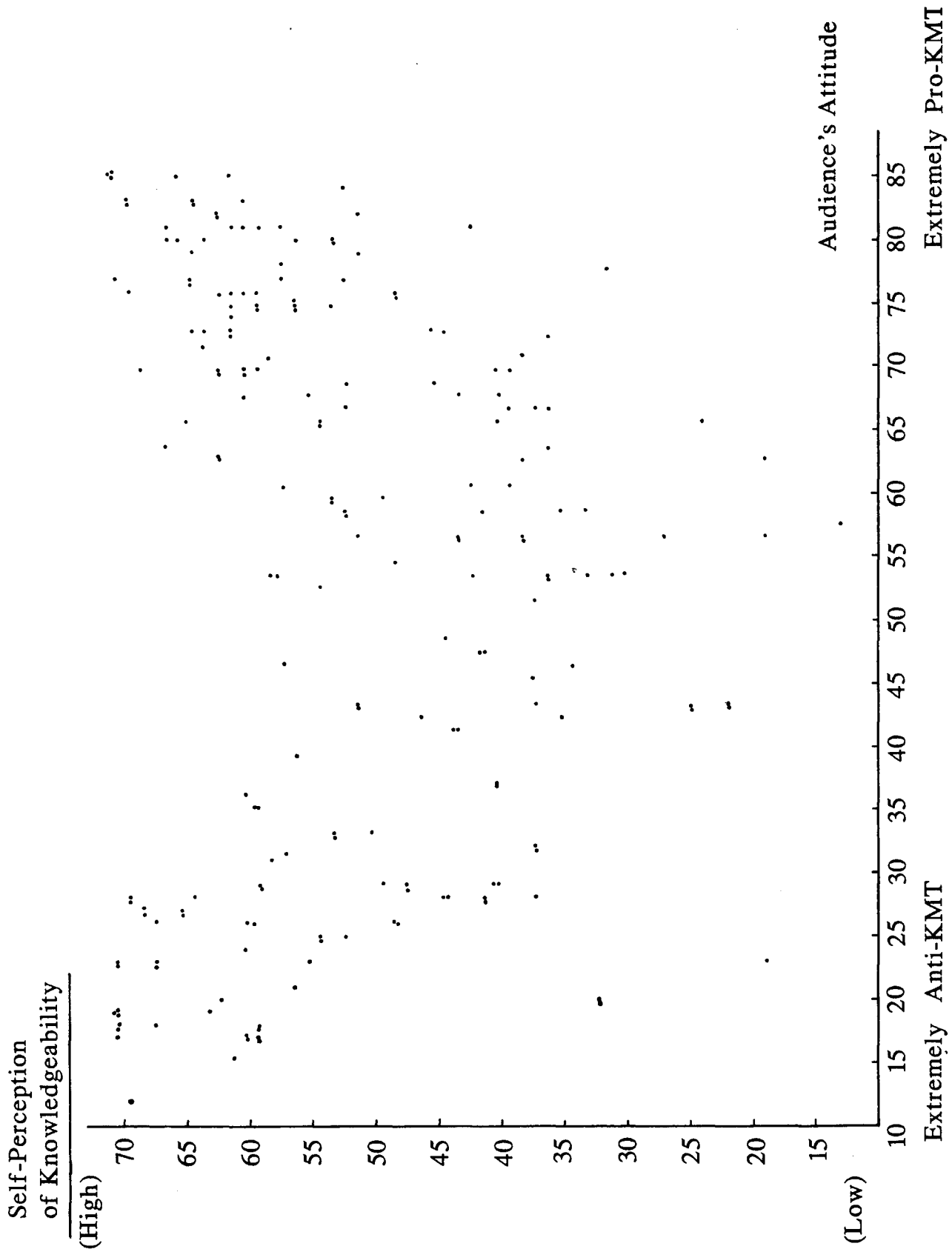


Figure 2 Scatter Plot of the Two Predictor Variables (Attitude By Self-perceived)

Table 3  $ETA^2$  Values for Each Factor in the ANOVA Tables

|                             | Table 1/w messages<br>versions A1 and A2 | Table 2/w messages<br>Versions B1 and B2 |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Main effects</b>         |  |  |
| (A) attitude                | .403                                     | .360                                     |
| (B) self-perception         | .027                                     | .002                                     |
| (C) message factor          | .001                                     | .093                                     |
| <b>Two-way interactions</b> |  |  |
| A × B                       | .109                                     | .080                                     |
| A × C                       | .003                                     | .003                                     |
| B × C                       | .010                                     | .015                                     |
| Between group variance      | .484                                     | .640                                     |

Notes: The  $ETA^2$  values for the three-way interactions are even smaller than those that appear in the Table 3, so they are not presented in the table.

Table 3 presents the  $ETA$ -square value for each independent variable, which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent measure (i.e., message acceptance, explained by each variable respectively. According to the results shown in the three tables, the subject's pre-existing attitude toward the issue turned out to be the most predominant factor in influencing the individual's acceptance of the Pro-KMT or Anti-KMT positions advocated in the different versions of the editorials. The message factor, however, seems to have a dubious effect--editorial B2 (Anti-KMT editorial with partial incongruity strategy) was more successful in inducing a higher level of acceptance among the readers, but editorial A2 (Pro-KMT editorial with the



partial incongruity strategy) did not work really well.

In order to compare the level of message acceptance among the subjects holding either an extreme attitude or a moderate stand, the subjects were broken down into two groups using a 30 % -40 % -30 % cutting method. That is, the subjects who had an attitude score within the top 30 % and the bottom 30 % were classified to either the extremely Pro-KMT or the extremely Anti-KMT categories; whereas, the subjects holding an attitude score falling in the middle 40 % range were classified to the moderately Pro-KMT or the moderately Anti-KMT groups. Student t-values were computed so as to tell whether the difference in the message acceptance scores for the extreme- and the moderate-attitude groups is significant beyond the .05 level.

Table 4 T-values of the Message Acceptance Differences Between Versions A1 and A2 Among the Moderately and Extremely Anti-KMT Subjects

|                              | n  | Mean   | S.D.  | t-value | df | p<br>(1-tail) |
|------------------------------|----|--------|-------|---------|----|---------------|
| Moderately anti-KMT subjects |    |        |       |         |    |               |
| Message A1                   | 9  | 9.222  | 2.108 | -2.72   | 16 | <.05          |
| Message A2                   | 9  | 13.889 | 4.702 |         |    |               |
| Extremely anti-KMT subjects  |    |        |       |         |    |               |
| Message A1                   | 13 | 5.615  | 4.976 | -0.55   | 28 | >.05          |
| Message A2                   | 17 | 6.412  | 2.830 |         |    |               |

Table 5 T-values of the Message Acceptance Differences Between Versions B1 and B2 Among the Moderately and Extremely Anti-KMT Subjects

|                              | n  | Mean   | S.D.  | t-value | df | p<br>(1-tail) |
|------------------------------|----|--------|-------|---------|----|---------------|
| Moderately anti-KMT subjects |    |        |       |         |    |               |
| Message B1                   | 9  | 6.222  | 3.993 | -3.67   | 14 | <.05          |
| Message B2                   | 7  | 13.857 | 4.298 |         |    |               |
| Extremely anti-KMT subjects  |    |        |       |         |    |               |
| Message B1                   | 15 | 4.267  | 1.580 | -3.00   | 31 | <.05          |
| Message B2                   | 18 | 8.667  | 5.477 |         |    |               |

Tables 4 and 5 present the message acceptance mean scores on the four versions of the editorials among the two groups of subjects--those who held extreme attitudes and those who held moderate attitudes. The results from Table 4 show that the use of the "partial incongruity" strategy in both the Pro-KMT and Anti-KMT editorial did induce a higher level of acceptance from those subjects who held a moderately opposing view (t-value=-2.72, df=16; t-value=-3.67, df=14). For those subjects who held extremely opposing views, the use of the partial incongruity strategy was not as successful in inducing a higher level of acceptance.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results from the ANOVA tables (Table 1 and 2), it seems that the persuasive strategy did not work equally well for the two versions of editorials. Editorial B2 (Anti-KMT editorial with partial incongruity portion) was more successful in winning acceptance from those readers who held opposing views than was the editorial A2 (Pro-KMT editorial with partial incongruity

portion). One tentative explanation is that the "partial incongruity" portion in the beginning paragraphs of the Pro-KMT editorial A2 was not distinctive enough as that presented in the Anti-KMT editorial B2. The subjects did not see a clear incongruity between the message and the source in the Pro-KMT editorial (message A2).

In other words, the use of the partial incongruity technique in the Pro-KMT editorial was not distinctive enough as to create an impression of "unselfishness," and of "impartiality." As a result, it failed to induce greater message acceptance among the subjects who held an opposing view.

From scrutinizing the incongruity portions presented in the two versions of the editorial A2 and B2, it seems clearly that the discrepancy between the message and the source in editorial A2 (Pro-KMT editorial) is not as discernable as that in the editorial B2 (Anti-KMT editorial). This is probably the reason why editorial B2 was more effective in creating an impression of "unselfishness" and in inducing a higher level of message acceptance than was editorial A2.

In addition, results from this study have further demonstrated that the use of such a persuasive strategy--partial incongruity strategy--worked differently among those subjects with extreme attitudes and those who held moderate attitudes. Subjects holding a moderately opposing position were found to be more susceptible to the persuasive technique than were those who held a more extremely opposing position. This difference in the message acceptance among the two groups of subjects is not unexpected. It can be explained by Sherif's theory of "assimilation-contrast" effect. When an individual holds a less extreme attitude, his or her latitude of acceptance is wider in relation to his or her latitude of rejection. Therefore, that individual is more apt to accept the advocated position which is not too discrepant from his or her initial stand. In contrast, those subjects holding an extreme attitude would be more likely to contrast the message as a result of his or her wide "latitude of rejection," and therefore, were less susceptible to the persuasive technique of partial incongruity strategy.

Although the audience's pre-existing attitudes seemed to be the most predominant predictor variable in accounting for the variance in the message acceptance; nevertheless, the self-perceived knowledgeability also contributed by either intensifying or modifying the effect of attitude on message acceptance. The intercepted lines in the graphs (Figure 1) clearly show that there are interaction of knowledgeability. To be specific, those subjects with high self-perceived knowledgeability on the issue tended to be more extreme at the message acceptance scale.

In a sense, the self-perceived knowledgeability served well as a component of the audience's predisposition. It indicates the strength or the intensity of the attitude held by the individual. Those who reported having a high level of self-perceived knowledgeability on the issue were also likely to be the ones who held a more extreme attitude (either pro-KMT or anti-KMT). On the other hand, those who admitted having a low self-perceived knowledgeability on the issue were likely to take a less extreme stand on the issue. The scatter plot of the two variables--attitude by self-perceived knowledgeability (Figure 2)--shows a clear curvilinear trend. Although there may be cases when people take a neutral stand and report having a high level of self-perceived knowledgeability about the issue. However, such cases were rare at least with this set of data.

## CONCLUSION

Results from the study have provided empirical evidence in support of the hypothesis. The significant effect of message manipulation indicates that the use of "partial incongruity strategy" can enhance the persuasive efficacy of the less trustworthy sources. The results also suggest that audience's predispositions are very powerful determinants on its susceptibility to persuasive communications. This is consistent with many previous research findings.

Besides, the degree of the message discrepancy presented in the incongruity portion was found to induce different responses from the audiences. In brief,

the incongruity portion in the message must produce a sufficiently large discrepancy between the message and the source so as to create the impression of "unselfishness." Otherwise, the audiences may not discern an incongruity and discrepancy between the source and message at all. Without a discernable incongruity section, the persuasive communication may not be able to enhance the persuasiveness of the communication attributed to a low prestige source.

Variation in the degree of message discrepancy was not intended and expected in the original message design. However, it turned out that the unexpected variation in the level of message discrepancy provided us with more insight on the "partial incongruity strategy" manipulation. The fact that the incongruity imbedded in the two message versions is of different level it may be viewed as a flaw in the message design because the degree of discrepancy produced by the incongruity portion in the two versions of editorial A2 and B2 were not controlled at the same level. Nevertheless, this "flaw" in the message design turned out to be an unexpected strength because it provides more insight into the manipulation of the persuasive technique. Awaiting that the degree of message incongruity may influence the effectiveness of the partial incongruity strategy in enhancing the trustworthiness of the communication source may help the researcher in the design of similar kind of persuasive messages with more caution and sophistication.

Finally, if I were asked "Can the use of partial incongruity strategy enhance acceptance of a message attributed to a low credibility source among the recipients who hold an opposing view?" My answer would be a conditional "yes." The following two conditions must be met: (1) the partial incongruity portion presented in the message must be discernable to the extent that it can create the impression of "unselfishness," so as to enhance the perception of trustworthiness, and (2) the audience must not hold an extremely opposing stand. In brief, this persuasive technique may have some success in inducing greater acceptance of a message attributed a low credibility source among those people who have moderately opposing positions if the message is designed in such a way that it presents a distinctive incongruity against the communicator's

(or source's) best interest so as to create an impression of "unselfishness" and "trustworthiness."

## FOOTNOTES

1. C. Hovland, I. Janis, and H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
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## APPENDIX A

The so-called "Formosa Incident" or the "Kaohsiung Incident" involved a mass rally and violent clash with police force, and the following arrest of the major political dissidents in Taiwan who sponsored the mass rally. The mass rally and a torch parade was held on December 10, 1979, in Kaohsiung, the sec-

and largest city in Taiwan. The rally and the parade were sponsored by the publishers and staffs of a major anti-KMT monthly magazine, *The Formosa Monthly*, under the name of "commemorating the World Human Rights Day." Most of the activists are also known as the main stream of the political dissidents in Taiwan. Though the local government authority did not grant a permit for the parade, the torch parade and the mass rally was held in a heavy-traffic street spot anyway.

When the unarmed militant forces tried to bar and stop the parading crowd, there was a violent clash between them. The Taiwan government charged that while about 30,000 bystanders watched, some 3,000 political activists staged a night torch parade in defiance of a police order. It said that some of the radical activists then attacked the unarmed police with iron bars and injured 183 of them. None of the political activists were injured in the clash because the policemen were on the strict order of "no fighting back" for fear of expanding the turmoil.

Three days later, the government started to arrest the political dissidents who were actively involved in the mass rally and parade. Eight of them were charged for "sedition," and the rest of them for "disturbing public order." The anti-government activists in the U.S. blamed the ruling party (Kuomintang, or KMT) for deliberately arousing the conflict itself and using it as an excuse to "round up once and for all the political dissidents in Taiwan." Therefore, they started to take terroristic actions as well as lobbying the U.S. senators into investigating the human rights condition in Taiwan.