

Mood and Persuasion: Independent Effects of Affect Before and After Message Processing

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THE PRESENCE OF POSITIVE AFFECT during the encoding of a persuasive message results in a weaker effect of argument strength on attitudes than the presence of negative affect does; this pattern is reversed, however, when mood is present at judgment (Bless, Mackie, & Schwarz, 1992). These findings can both be explained by the notion that positive mood reduces systematic processing, whereas negative mood enhances it (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991). Thus, the presence of positive mood during encoding should decrease message elaboration and thereby reduce the impact of argument strength on subsequent judgments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, positive mood during judgment should facilitate the recall of a simplified representation of the message, whereas negative mood during judgment should facilitate the recall of a detailed representation of the message. The former process is likely to result in more extreme judgments (Linville & Jones, 1980); thus, judgments that are made in a positive mood should reflect argument strength to a greater degree than judgments that are made in a negative mood.

In the present study we further explored the effects of mood on elaboration and judgment, using a different persuasive message and two neutral-mood control conditions. The subjects were 104 students at the University of Mannheim, Germany. The design was a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Time of Mood Induction: exposure, judgment \times Mood: happy, sad \times Arguments: strong, weak) factorial, plus two control conditions. To induce mood we asked the subjects in

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the exposure conditions to recall a life event that was either happy or sad. The subjects then read a persuasive message that contained eight arguments advocating the fluoridation of drinking water. Next the subjects performed an affectively neutral memory task. Finally, the subjects indicated their attitudes about fluoridation on a six-item scale with responses that ranged from 1 to 9, Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$. In the judgment conditions, the order of mood induction and the neutral task was reversed. The control subjects received no mood induction but performed a neutral task both before and after they read the message. The subjects indicated their current mood before message exposure and before they made their attitude judgments.

The results indicated that the mood inductions were successful before both encoding and judgment. Consistent with the results of Bless et al. (1992), the impact of argument strength was least pronounced when the subjects were in a happy mood during encoding ($M_s = 5.08$ and 4.50 for strong arguments and weak arguments, respectively) and most pronounced when the subjects were in a happy mood during judgment ($M_s = 6.98$ vs. 3.43 for strong arguments and weak arguments, respectively), resulting in the predicted three-way interaction, $t(75) = 1.72, p < .05$, one-tailed.

A comparison between the subjects who were in a happy mood during encoding and the control subjects, who were in a neutral mood throughout ($M_s = 6.56$ and 3.88 for strong arguments and weak arguments, respectively) yielded a significant Mood \times Argument Strength interaction, $t(92) = -1.89, p < .04$, one-tailed, providing support for the notion that positive affect decreases the systematic processing of message content. Contrary to expectation, the argument effect also seemed to be less pronounced for the subjects who were in a sad mood during message elaboration ($M_s = 5.44$ and 3.56 for strong arguments and weak arguments, respectively), than for the control subjects, $t(92) = -0.73, ns$. The differences between the mood-at-judgment-conditions and the control conditions were in the predicted direction but were nonsignificant, $t(92) = 0.70$ and -0.31 for happy and sad mood, respectively.

These results replicate and extend the findings of Bless et al. (1992, Experiment 1). Comparisons with neutral-mood conditions indicated that happy mood during encoding reduces the systematic processing of message content (Schwarz et al., 1991), but there was no evidence that a sad mood increases systematic processing.

Although it is difficult to define "neutral" mood, the impact of mood on information processing does seem to be more definitive at the positive end of the sad-happy continuum. This asymmetry may be attributable to the fact that negative mood is associated with a greater variety of processes (e.g., searching for causal explanations for one's affective state, Bohner, Bless, Schwarz, & Strack, 1988) than positive mood is, possibly counteracting systematic processing. Future researchers of the effects of

