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Anticipatory Opinion Effects

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Most of the research described in previous chapters of this book involved an
examination of what happens to one's opinions after a persuasive message on
some topic has been encountered. Sometimes the messages come from external
sources, and sometimes (as in the active participation experiments described in
Chapter 1) the person constructs his or her own communication. But in each
case, the focus is on what happens after the communication has been received.
The work to be covered in the present chapter, however, involves a different
question: What are the effects of simply expecting to have to deal with a persuade
communication? For example, if the President of the United States wanted to
convince the public that taxes should be raised, would he be more effective if the
public were forewarned of his position, or if his message took them by surprise?

There is considerable evidence that the mere anticipation of presenting or
receiving a communication can produce reliable opinion effects, and under some
conditions these effects can be comparable in size to those resulting from the
actual receipt of a persuasive attack. Compared with the long history of research
on the effects of a message upon attitude, the literature describing the influence
of an expectation upon attitude is relatively recent, beginning systematically in
the early 1960s. Nonetheless, a substantial number of studies have since investi-
gated anticipatory effects, so that we now know quite a bit about them. It seems a
proper initial step, then, to begin with a description of what it is that we now
know about the phenomenon of anticipatory effects in persuasion.
EXPECTATIONS THAT PRODUCE ANTICIPATORY OPINION EFFECTS

We are using the term anticipatory opinion effect to refer to any opinion effect that occurs as a result of simply expecting to have to deal with a persuasive communication. As we will see shortly, sometimes these anticipatory effects take the form of increased persuasion and sometimes of decreased persuasion; sometimes the effects are measured before any communication is presented and sometimes after. Before discussing the determinants and direction of these anticipatory effects, we discuss three different types of expectations with the ability to influence opinion: expecting to present a persuasive message, expecting to receive a persuasive message, and expecting to exchange views on a topic.

Expecting to Present a Persuasive Message

Just as the act of publicly presenting a communication on a topic has been found to influence one's position on the topic (e.g., Cialdini, 1971; Janis & King, 1954; see Chapter 1), so has the anticipation of performing such an act (e.g., Brock & Blackwood, 1962; Greenwald, 1968; Jellison & Mills, 1969). In the instances of studies wherein subjects expected to state publicly a position on an issue, the reliable finding has been attitude movement in the direction of the to-be-advocated position. So when subjects have committed themselves to deliver communications that are contrary to their initial opinions, the commitment has resulted in movement toward the to-be-advocated position (e.g., Brock & Blackwood, 1962); and when subjects have intended to advocate publicly their own attitude positions, the intention has caused them to become even more extreme on the side of their initial positions (e.g., Jellison & Mills, 1969).

A possible explanation for anticipatory opinion shifts of this sort is that the commitment to public advocacy of a topic position might cause subjects to rehearse, generate, and critically evaluate the arguments they will have to use in the public presentation. This consideration of arguments in favor of the to-be-advocated position can lead to opinion shifts. If a person generates and rehearses arguments favorable to his or her initial position, the individual may become even more extreme in that view; but if arguments opposed to the person's initial position are generated and rehearsed, movement away from the initial position would be expected. Further, because one will want to make a good showing (as a communicator) in the eyes of the audience, one may be inclined to view those arguments in favor of the to-be-advocated position as more valid than before.

Data that are consistent with such an interpretation can be found in two studies. In the first (Greenwald, 1968b), subjects were assigned to write an essay favoring either specialized or general education. It was found that subjects merely expecting to write in support of specialized education became more favorable in opinion to specialized education, whereas those expecting to write in support of general education became more favorable to general education. It is also interesting to note that not only did subjects shift their opinions toward the side of the issue they expected to advocate, but they also rated statements favorable to their assigned side as more valid than did a control group. Because subjects wanted to make a good showing in their essays, they may have been inclined to view arguments that favored the to-be-advocated position as more valid than before.

The second study (Cialdini, 1971) showed that intending to advocate a position publicly did not result in opinion change when subjects did not have to construct, rehearse, or critically evaluate topic-related arguments in order to advocate a position. In the Cialdini (1971) experiment, subjects did not have to write an essay, make a speech, or engage in a discussion in order to advocate the assigned position. Instead, they only expected to have to provide a one-word description of opinion (responding "good" to various belief statements). This type of advocacy did not require the processing of topic-related arguments in preparation for a presentation of opinion, and no anticipatory opinion effect was found.

Taken together, the findings of Greenwald (1968) and Cialdini (1971) suggest that the anticipation of advocating an issue position produces opinion change by causing subjects to consider arguments related to the issue and to bias their perceptions of the validity of these arguments. This distortion of the validity of topic-relevant arguments may result from a subject's desire to be seen by the audience (usually the experimenter) as someone able to present a cogent, valid communication on an issue. However, when the vehicle for advocacy does not require a consideration or presentation of arguments, the biasing process does not occur, and no anticipatory change results.

Expecting to Receive a Persuasive Message

By far, most of the data on anticipatory effects in persuasion have come from studies in which subjects expected to receive a persuasive communication. The process whereby subjects are informed of an upcoming communication is called forewarning. Papageorgis (1968) has distinguished two types of forewarning employed by researchers in this area. In the first sort, subjects are told that they will be presented with a message that is designed to influence their position on some topic. We can call this procedure "forewarning of persuasive intent." It is clear to such subjects that someone, either the communicator or the experimenter, is interested in whether they will be persuaded. These forewarnings have led typically to resistance to persuasion (e.g., Hass & Grady, 1975).

In the second kind of forewarning, subjects are informed that they will be receiving a communication, the topic and/or position of which is described. We can call this procedure "forewarning of message content." Here, the subjects are
not told that the purpose of the communication is to persuade them. Forewarn-
ings of this type have sometimes led to resistance to persuasion and sometimes to susceptibility. We discuss the conditions under which each type of effect occurs shortly.

Expecting to Exchange Views on a Topic

The third type of expectation that has been found to lead to position shifts is the expectation of engaging another person in some kind of exchange of views on an issue. These anticipated exchanges are usually cast in the form of discussion or debate. Expectations of this variety have been shown to be quite powerful in influencing opinions. For example, in one experiment, subjects were asked to judge the cause of a behavior for which they had served as either a participant or an observer. When the judgments were to be made privately, participants and observers differed widely in their causal perceptions. But when a discussion of the behavior was anticipated, the actor-observer differences were eliminated (Wells, Petty, Harkins, Kagehiro, & Harvey, 1977). In another study, subjects expected to discuss a jury verdict in an affirmative action case with a partner. When subjects' attitudes toward affirmative action were made salient prior to the expected discussion, subjects moderated their positions in anticipation of that discussion. This occurred both when disagreement from the partner was expected and when no information about the partner was known (Snyder & Swann, 1976).

In the relevant conditions of a study by Deaux (1968), coeds who expected to have to defend their own opinions after watching a movie that advocated a military draft of females changed more as a consequence of that expectation than those who only anticipated having to watch the movie. Sears (1967) showed that the size of shifts resulting from the expectation of discussion was increased if the discussion involved face-to-face communication. Subjects who expected to discuss their opinions on the future of the U.S. economy with an opponent were more persuaded by a predisussion message on the issue than were subjects who expected to communicate with, but not physically face, an opponent. It was also found that expecting to face a highly critical discussion partner led to more change than expecting to face a less critical opponent. In all, it appears that expecting to engage in an exchange of views is a strong and reliable motivator of opinion change.

Determining the Direction of Anticipatory Shifts

One aspect of anticipatory opinion effects that was puzzling during the initial years of research on the phenomenon was the seemingly unpredictable direction that the effects would take. As we noted earlier, some studies indicated that forewarning of the onset of a persuasive communication produced less change in the direction of the message than no such warning, but others indicated that forewarning produced more change in the direction of the expected communication.

Timing of Measurement

The confusion was compounded because some researchers measured the effect of the forewarning on attitude change before any communication was presented, whereas others measured attitudes after the communication. In the typical postcommunication assessment, the subjects were led to expect exposure to a counterattitudinal message on a specific topic; the message was then delivered; and finally, the amount of opinion movement resulting from the message was measured. Both significantly increased (e.g., Sears, 1967) and significantly decreased (e.g., Freedman & Sears, 1965) susceptibilities to the communication have been obtained from this set of procedures.

In the typical precommunication assessment experiment, subjects were informed that a persuasive communication would be provided; but before the communication was delivered, subjects' positions on the issue were measured. In this way, the immediate effect of simply expecting to receive a persuasive attack could be determined. Again, experiments employing this sequence of procedures have demonstrated more opinion movement in the direction of the anticipated communication in some instances (e.g., Cooper & Jones, 1970) but less change in the direction of the communication in other instances (e.g., Petty & Cialdini, 1976). So, although procedural differences in the way anticipatory effects have been measured have complicated the picture, both positive and negative influences of forewarning on opinion movement have been obtained. Thus, the direction of such movement cannot be explained through an examination of whether anticipatory effects have been assessed in terms of pre- or postcommunication attitude change.

Issue Importance

If the timing of the attitude measurement does not influence the direction of the attitude change, what does? One factor that now appears to play a decisive role can be seen in the data of the Allyn and Festinger (1961) experiment, a study that is regarded as the first investigation of the forewarning phenomenon. The study is usually described as showing that high school students who were warned about an antiteenage driving speech were less persuaded by it than were those who were not forewarned. It is the case, however, that with all subjects included in the analysis, there was no significant difference between the groups. It was only when Allyn and Festinger examined separately those subjects for whom having a driver's license was important that the persuasion-inhibiting effect of forewarning became significant.
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Personal Involvement

The relationship is not quite so simple as the previous paragraph would suggest, however. For instance, several studies have found forewarning to increase persuasion on such important topics as the future of the American economy (Sears, 1967) and the likelihood of a third World War (Papageorgis, 1967). It seems that it is one special type of issue importance that influences the direction of preliminary opinion shifts—direct, personal importance. It is when subjects are personally involved with the topic that forewarning reduces opinion movement in the direction of a counterattitudinal persuasive message. When the topic is not of strong personal relevance, forewarning increases such movement. From this perspective, it is not surprising that on such generally important but personally noninvoking issues as the probability of finding a cure for cancer (McGuire & Millman, 1965), the expansion of federal government into state activities (Cooper & Jones, 1970), or man's destruction of the ecological system (Gaes & Tedeschi, 1978), forewarning has led to greater anticipatory change in the direction advocated; whereas on a generally unimportant but personally relevant issue such as raising by 15 cents the fare for New York subways (the subjects were New York City college students), forewarning has led to less persuasion (Hass & Grady, 1975).

Research that has specifically manipulated the personal relevance of the topic has shown the extent to which the subject's involvement with the issue is necessary for forewarning to produce less persuasion. Apsler and Sears (1968) warned their college student subjects of the advent of a communication advocating that a large number of undergraduate courses be taught by teaching assistants rather than professors. Half the subjects were informed that the communication proposed that the new policy should take effect in the next year, thereby affecting the subjects personally; these were the high-involvement subjects. The other half of the subjects were told that the communication argued that the policy should take effect in 12 years; these were the low-involvement subjects. It was found that the forewarning manipulation had opposite effects on the two groups. The low-involvement subjects changed a good deal more in the direction of the message as a result of being forewarned, whereas the high-involvement subjects changed slightly less than the comparable unwarned groups.

Public Commitment

Freedman, Sears, and O'Connor (1964) as well as Jones and Kiesler (Kiesler, 1971) varied the topic involvement of their subjects in a different manner. By arranging for subjects to be publicly committed to their initial issue positions, the personal relevance of the issue was increased. The pattern of results in both studies indicated that forewarning led to greater persuasion with low personal involvement but to less persuasion with high personal involvement. In sum, it now appears that a prime determinant of the direction of anticipatory opinion shifts is the extent to which the topic is personally important (i.e., involving) for the subject. Opinions tend to shift more in the direction of an anticipated message when the topic is not personally involving but to shift less in that direction when the topic is personally involving.

MEDIATION OF ANTICIPATORY SHIFTS

In the first part of this chapter, we described several known features of anticipatory opinion effects. In the next part, we discuss the ways in which researchers in the area, on the basis of these and other such features, have speculated about the basic nature of the shifts and the mechanisms that bring them about. These speculations have differed for anticipatory effects leading to decreased persuasion and for anticipatory effects leading to increased persuasion. Consequently, we consider each category of effect separately.

Factors Leading to Decreased Persuasion

**Forewarning of Message Content**

McGuire and Papageorgis (1962) hypothesized that the persuasion-inhibiting effect of expecting to receive a persuasive attack could be explained in terms of a counterargumentation process. The warning that a counterattitudinal communication is about to be delivered might stimulate one to begin rehearsing and generating thoughts that would counter the arguments of the impending message and support one's own position on the topic. Once fortified in this fashion, one would be better able to resist the attack; thus, persuasion would be reduced. This counterargumentation hypothesis has received confirmation in a number of ways.

**Time to Generate Defenses.** One source of support comes from the apparent fact that forewarning of the content of an upcoming message has produced less change in the direction of the message only when some delay (of at least 2 minutes) has separated the warning and the onset of the message. Consistent with the counterargumentation hypothesis, then, only when subjects have been given sufficient time to build a cognitive defense has forewarning of the content of a persuasion attempt blunted the impact of the attack. Most studies of this sort have simply imposed a delay between the warning and the message (e.g., Allyn & Festinger, 1961; Apsler & Sears, 1968).

Some experimenters, however, have manipulated the amount of time allotted to subjects after the warning but before the message. Presumably, the longer the delay, the more subjects will be able to engage in counterresponding to the anticipated communication, and the more resistance to persuasion will result. Freedman and Sears (1965) tested this prediction with a modification of the Allyn and Festinger (1961) procedure. High school students were told to expect to hear
a talk that strongly opposed teenage driving. Then, 0, 2, or 10 minutes later, they heard the speech. Exactly according to prediction, subjects who experienced no delay were least resistant to the influence of the speech, whereas those who experienced the 10-minute delay were most resistant. Subsequent experiments (e.g., Hass & Grady, 1975; Petty & Cacioppo, 1977) have replicated this effect.

**Anticipatory Counterargumentation.** Additional support for the anticipatory counterargumentation hypothesis can be seen in studies that have measured cognitive responses while subjects were expecting to encounter an attack on their issue positions. In a study by Brock (1967), undergraduates expected to read a communication advocating an increase in tuition at their university. Subjects were forewarned that the communication would advocate either a $10, $125, or $275 increase in fees and were given 10 minutes to write down all their thoughts about the issue before receiving the message. The results indicated that subjects listed counterarguments to the tuition increase in anticipation of the message, and the number of counterarguments recorded increased with communication discrepancy. Correlations between the measures of counterarguing and subsequent message acceptance suggested that anticipatory counterargumentation increased resistance to the communication.

Similar evidence for anticipatory counterargumentation was obtained by Petty and Cacioppo (1977) even when subjects were not specifically instructed to record thoughts on the topic. Instead, in some conditions, subjects were asked to list only those thoughts that actually occurred to them after the warning but preceding the message. In two experiments, subjects who were forewarned of counterattitudinal communications on highly involving topics were changed less by the communication than nonforewarned subjects. The forewarning also caused greater counterargumentation to occur before the communication was received. To further test the counterargumentation hypothesis, these authors included a group of subjects who were asked to list their thoughts about the message topic, although they did not expect to receive any communication on that topic. This group showed resistance to persuasion equivalent to that of a forewarned group, indicating that anticipatory thinking about an involving counterattitudinal advocacy is sufficient to produce resistance.

The preceding experiments suggest that expecting to be exposed to a counterattitudinal message on a personally involving topic produces a tendency to generate arguments favorable to one's side of the topic and unfavorable to the other side. This anticipatory thinking solidifies one's initial position prior to the message and reduces subsequent susceptibility to persuasion.

**Forewarning of Persuasive Intent**

It is informative to note that the anticipatory counterargumentation hypothesis seems only able to explain anticipatory opinion resistance effects when subjects have been forewarned about the content of an upcoming message. In studies that have demonstrated reduced persuasion as a result of warning subjects of the communicator's persuasive intent, a different mechanism appears to apply. Recall that the distinction between forewarning of message content and forewarning of persuasive intent is the one articulated by Papageorghi (1968) and described at the outset of this chapter. Unlike studies employing forewarning of message content, studies examining the effects of forewarning of persuasive intent have not required that a delay period exist between the warning and the message.

For example, Hass and Grady (1975) showed equally strong reductions in susceptibility to a communication when there was no delay and when there was a 10-minute delay between the information that the communication was designed to change attitudes and the onset of the communication. Thus, because there was no time in the no-delay condition for subjects to prepare arguments to counter the persuasive message in advance of the communication (and without a warning of message content, subjects are not even aware of what the communication is about), some mechanism other than anticipatory counterargumentation likely accounts for the increased resistance. One possibility is that a communicator who appears to be specifically interested in persuading the subjects is seen as a less trustworthy source of the truth about the topic. That is, the information presented in the message may be suspect because its primary intent is to persuade rather than to represent reality accurately. The subjects' tendency, then, might be to discount and derogate the arguments of the communication as they are heard.

This explanation suggests that forewarnings of persuasive intent may produce resistance to persuasion by motivating subjects to engage in increased counterargumentation and derogation during the receipt of the message. Several studies support this interpretation. Kiesler and Kiesler (1964) showed that subjects who were informed at the beginning of a communication that it had a persuasive purpose were more resistant than those who were so informed at the end of the communication (when it was too late to increase counterarguing). Watts and Holt (1979) demonstrated that a forewarning of persuasive intent did not confer resistance if the subjects were distracted during the presentation of the message, although it had the usual effect when no distraction was present. The distraction presumably inhibited the subjects' ability to counterargue during the message, thereby eliminating the effect of the forewarning. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) hypothesized that a forewarning of persuasive intent instills reactance in subjects and motivates them to counterargue in order to assert their freedom to hold a contrary attitude. Because greater reactance should be aroused, the greater the personal relevance of the attitude under attack (Brehm, 1966), a forewarning of persuasive intent should produce greater inhibition of persuasion for a counterattitudinal message on a topic of high rather than low personal relevance. This result was obtained. In addition, this study found that high-involvement subjects generated more counterarguments to the message when warned of the communicator's persuasive intent than when unwarned.
Factors Leading to Increased Persuasion

As noted earlier in this chapter, a number of studies have shown that anticipation of exposure to a persuasive message (either self- or externally originated) results in greater opinion movement in the direction of the expected message. It is perhaps important to note that what all these studies have in common is that subjects believed from the outset that their opinions would be monitored. Thus, a critical factor determining whether these anticipatory movements will occur may be whether subjects can infer that their attitudinal reactions to the impending message will be observed.

Direct evidence for this statement can be seen in an experiment by Cooper and Jones (1970, Study 2). They informed one group of subjects that they were about to receive a counterattitudinal message on a specific topic and that the experimenters were interested in measuring opinion change that resulted from hearing the message. A second group of subjects were also led to expect the counterattitudinal message but were told that the experimenters were interested in examining how people can recall and recognize various aspects of a communication. Only the subjects who expected to receive the communication in the context of an experiment on persuasion showed any anticipatory opinion change as compared to a control group. Thus, it was only when the experimenter was monitoring the subjects' opinions that forewarning of the content of a message had an influence on those opinions.

A subsequent study by Cialdini, Levy, Herman, and Evenbeck (1973) indicated that the experimenter is not the only person whose ability to observe a subject's position after receipt of a message can bring about anticipatory opinion change. In this study, the communicator's capability of observing subjects' opinion responses produced an effect on opinion when subjects expected to receive the communication, and this was so even though the experimenter was purportedly not interested in opinion change.

Cooper and Jones (1970, Study 1) also demonstrated that mere knowledge that a persuasive communication existed did not cause opinion change to occur. It was only when such knowledge was combined with subjects' expectations that they would actually be exposed to the communication, and that their opinions would be observed afterward, that subjects shifted their positions on the issue. We now turn to some of the explanations that have been proposed to account for anticipatory opinion changes in the direction of the expected communication.

Self-Esteem

McGuire and Millman (1965) suggested a self-esteem mechanism as the process that accounted for anticipatory shifts. The expectation of exposure to a counterattitudinal message includes the possibility that one will be persuaded by the message, an event that could be damaging to self-esteem. In order to minimize any influence directly attributable to the message, a useful tactic would be to change in the communicator's direction prior to the message, thereby reducing the apparent impact of the message and salvaging self-esteem. Although certain results can be seen as supportive of the self-esteem hypothesis (e.g., Dinner, Lewkowicz, & Cooper, 1972), not all the relevant data have been supportive (e.g., Cooper & Jones, 1970; Deaux, 1972).

Cognitive Consistency

Papageorgis (1967) has proposed a cognitive consistency mechanism to account for the effect. He suggested that the knowledge that an opposing communication is forthcoming informs the subject that someone holds an antagonistic position. This information presumably causes an unbalanced cognitive state and a tendency to restore balance by changing opinion immediately. It now appears, contrary to Papageorgis' formulation, that the mere knowledge that an opposing argument exists does not produce the anticipatory shift; it is also necessary to expect to be exposed to a communication (e.g., Cooper & Jones, 1970; Hass & Mann, 1976). Consequently, the interpretation of Papageorgis (1967) does not seem to be a likely explanation.

Conformity

Another possibility is that the anticipatory shift is due to conformity pressures. Pressures to conform are more apt to be present if a person is actually to be confronted with a counterattitudinal communication rather than merely learning of its existence. Although there are many different conceptualizations and definitions of conformity, most definitions include a component of movement or change in beliefs or behavior due to the influence of another person or group that results in increased similarity between the individual and the other person or group. In general terms, conformity is thought to occur because of the implicit assumption that behaving like others will elicit approval, whereas dissimilar behavior will bring negative consequences (cf. Allen, 1965; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1969). More specifically, conformity in judgments and opinions may occur as a tactic of ingratitude, an attempt to increase one's own attractiveness in the eyes of another (Jones, 1964); or conformity may be an attempt to increase one's certainty about one's own physical or social reality (Festinger, 1954).

Numerous researchers have documented the conditions under which persons will shift their opinions and judgments after learning of the beliefs held by other people (e.g., Hovland & Pritzker, 1957; White, 1975). More germane to the current chapter, however, is that research has demonstrated that persons will shift their judgments to conform to those of other persons in anticipation of hearing those opinions (cf. Fisher, Rubinstein, & Freeman, 1956). This conformity process may explain why expecting to hear a persuasive message can cause anticipatory opinion change in the direction of the communication. The target person may simply change in order to conform with the communicator's expected position.
Moderation

A fourth possibility is that anticipatory shifts are a result of movement toward a more neutral position rather than a conformity shift toward the communicator's expected opinion. Cialdini et al. (1973) noted that all the prior research demonstrating anticipatory opinion shifts in the direction of a communicator had employed communicators whose opinions were on the side of the topic opposite to the subject's own; that is, the expected messages were always counterattitudinal. It seemed conceivable, then, that the repeatedly observed shifts obtained when a persuasive message was expected did not represent movement toward the communicator's opinion after all, but, rather, movement toward a more moderate, middle position on the opinion scale. Because the communicator's position and the middle portion of the scale were always in the same direction relative to the subject's initial position, it was never possible to determine whether the anticipatory change constituted an attempt to conform to the communicator's opinion or an attempt to shift toward the middle of the scale. The latter possibility was termed a moderation shift.

Reasons for Moderation. For a number of reasons, someone expecting a persuasive message may wish to move toward a more neutral point on the topic prior to message receipt. A middle position is quite a flexible one. For example, if one is expecting a discussion on the topic with the communicator, holding a central position enables one to reduce the possibility of an embarrassing defeat in the discussion; such a position allows the greatest number of arguments and counterarguments to be put forth. The middle is advantageous—no matter what the opponent's position—for someone wishing to be viewed as an able discussant, because defensive arguments can be selected from both sides of the issue without the appearance of inconsistency. Further, a moderate stance is usually associated with broad-mindedness—an ideal trait to project in an exchange if one is interested in conveying a favorable impression. Finally, if one wishes to assess the validity of anticipated information in an unbiased fashion, a neutral stance affords just such an opportunity.

Conformity versus Moderation. Cialdini et al. (1973) tested the extent to which a tendency for movement toward the opponent's opinion and movement toward a moderate opinion accounted for anticipatory shifts in their subjects who expected to discuss an issue with a peer. As in the other experiments obtaining anticipatory shifts away from subjects' initial opinions, the topics employed were not of high personal relevance. The conformity and moderation explanations were tested against one another in two ways, both involving the stated opinion of the expected discussion partner.

In the first test, one group of subjects were told that they would discuss a certain issue with a fellow subject. Although the issue was described, the subjects were not told what the other's position would be on the issue. If conformity were the only process operating, then these subjects should not have moved their positions toward the other side of the issue, because they did not know where their discussion partner would stand. The moderation hypothesis, on the other hand, would predict movement toward the center of the scale, because moderation is viewed as advantageous no matter what the other's opinion. In support of the moderation hypothesis, substantial shifts toward the middle of the opinion scale were found in these subjects prior to discussion. A study by Hass (1975) has replicated this finding in a standard forewarning setting where subjects only expected to hear a taped message. Subjects who were informed of the nature of the topic ("The Future U.S. Economic Situation"), but who were not told the communicator's position, showed significant change toward the center of the scale before message receipt.

The second test pitted the two explanations against one another by including a group of subjects who were told that they would discuss the topic with a peer who was on the same side of the issue as they were but who was more extreme. Here, a conformity interpretation of anticipatory shifts would predict that these subjects would move in the direction of the discussant's position and, thus, would polarize their own views. The moderation interpretation, however, would continue to expect movement toward the middle of the opinion scale. Cialdini et al. (1973) found such subjects to shift toward the middle of the scale in anticipation of discussion. Although this result is consistent with the moderation hypothesis, the size of the moderation shift in these subjects was smaller than usual. The reduced magnitude of change caused the authors to suggest that both moderation and conformity pressures were operative.

When the expected opponent holds a view that is similar but more extreme than the subject's, conformity and moderation pressures will work against each other and may result in smaller change; when the opponent holds a position on the other side of the issue, however, the pressures to move toward the middle and to move toward the opponent will not cancel themselves out, and a larger shift will result. Confirmation of the tendency for a similar but more extreme communicator to bring about lessened anticipatory change than a dissimilar communicator can be seen in a pair of experiments by Hass (1975), who again merely forewarned subjects of an impending communication. Hass (1975) argued that if the subjects were comparing their own attitude positions with the extreme stance to be taken by the communicator, they may have felt relatively moderate to begin with and thus felt no need to move further toward the middle of the scale.

THE STRATEGIC NATURE OF ANTICIPATORY SHIFTS

Although theorizing about the character of anticipatory opinion effects has been limited, for the most part, either to effects leading to decreased persuasion or effects leading to enhanced persuasion, one group of workers in the area has generated a general formulation of anticipatory shifts. Cialdini et al. (1973) suggested a conceptualization of anticipatory shifts as different from attitude
change. There were two main findings of that study. First, subjects expecting to
discuss an uninvolved issue with a peer became more moderate on the issue than
did subjects who did not expect to discuss it; further, the moderation tendency
occurred even when the other’s position on the issue was unknown, and even (but
to a lesser degree) when the other’s position was on the same side as the subjects’
but was more extreme. Second, when subjects were then told that they would not
have to engage in a discussion of the issue after all, the changes they had
exhibited while expecting discussion disappeared; they reverted back to their
initial positions without any apparent residual effects.

The first set of findings from Cialdini et al. (1973) suggested that opinion
shifts were tactical in character. The moderation shifts seemed to be attempts to
seize the middle of the opinion scale and thereby afford subjects a safe, defensible
position in the expected discussion. The second finding—that the preliminary
opinion movement disappeared when the anticipation of discussion was
cancelled—implied something else about these shifts. Not only did they seem
tactical in nature, but they appeared to be elastic as well. When the situational
pressures that had brought about a position shift were released, a subject’s issue
position snaped back to its original form much in the manner of an elastic band.
Together, these qualities of anticipatory shifts suggested that they were different
from attitude change as it is traditionally characterized. Attitudes are usually seen
to be relatively durable, consistent tendencies to respond evaluatively to some
object over various situations and points in time. However, the new issue posi-
tions assumed by subjects in anticipation of discussion showed none of the
stability normally associated with an attitude. Rather, they seemed temporary,
plastic, and contingent on the immediate reward context.

From these results, Cialdini et al. (1973) proposed a conceptualization of
anticipatory shifts as strategic maneuvers designed to maximize the rewards of
the impending situation. According to the strategic view, when a moderation
shift will serve to maximize the upcoming situational rewards, a person will
assume a more neutral stance; but when a polarization shift will serve to
maximize such rewards, a person will become more extreme in opinion.
In addition to occurring primarily in the interest of situational utility, the shifts are
conceived as having, by themselves, little or no effect upon true attitude. Like an
elastic band, one’s position on an issue may be stretched and distorted under
situational pressures (e.g., the desire to look good in an imminent discussion of
the issue), only to revert to its initial form as soon as the pressures are removed.
Consistent with the view that anticipatory shifts are strategic in nature, Turner
(1977) found that anticipatory moderation was greater for subjects who were high
in social anxiety (indicating a general discomfort in the presence of others) than
for those who were not socially anxious. Finally, it might be noted that anticipa-
tory shifts do not necessarily represent a conscious strategy of distortion. Subjects
may be completely unaware that they are shifting; or, as Hass, Mann, and
Stevens (1977) explain, subjects may merely be emphasizing a different aspect of
their attitudes within their latitudes of acceptance.

An Experimental Test of the Strategic View
Cialdini, Levy, Herman, Kozlowski, and Petty (1976) conducted two expe-
riments employing several different opinion topics that were designed to test the
strategic conception of anticipatory opinion change. They reasoned that if an-
ticipatory shifts were to be viewed best as tactics designed to maximize situ-
tional rewards, then by manipulating the rewards that would result from the
anticipatory opinion change in a situation, it should be possible to influence the
kinds of anticipatory shifts that occurred. In each experiment, the situational
rewards were manipulated by varying the extent of personal involvement with the
issue. It was felt that when the issue to be discussed was not an important one for
a subject, the prime concern would not be a strong presentation of his or her own
opinion on the topic but would be a strong presentation of a defensible and
admirable position in the discussion. In such a situation, where maintenance of a
positive image is the major situational goal, a moderate issue position would be
most conducive to the achievement of that goal. Consequently, moderation shifts
should occur in anticipation of discussion. When subjects anticipate the discus-
sion of an issue of high personal importance, however, the concern with project-
ing an image should be dwarfed by pressures associated with the topic itself. That
is, one would not wish to take a weak public stand on an issue with which one
was highly involved. In fact, the prospect of having to argue publicly one’s
position on a personally important topic might cause one to become even more
extreme on the topic. Thus, it was thought that the direction of anticipatory shifts
that occur in expectation of discussion would depend on the personal relevance of
the issue for the subjects.

Another way to test the conception of anticipatory shifts as operating only to
enhance the accomplishment of situational goals would be to arrange a situation
in which such ends could not be immediately attained through a change in issue
position. That is, if a person were anticipating immediate discussion, tactical
position shifts would be expected to take place at once, so as to maximize the
receipt of positive outcomes in the upcoming discussion. However, if one were
anticipating a long wait before the onset of discussion, such shifts would be less
likely to occur, because holding a position that is different from one’s true
attitude for an extended time would involve substantial cognitive effort and
would serve no immediate situational purpose. Here, a discussant might be
expected to refrain from anticipatory position change until a time shortly before
the start of discussion. According to the foregoing analysis, then, the expectation
of discussion should produce moderation only when the onset of discussion is
imminent and the topic is not personally important.

Experimental Results
In their two experiments, Cialdini et al. (1976) had half their subjects expect to
discuss a personally important issue and half, an unimportant one; additionally,
half the subjects anticipated immediate discussion, whereas the other half
thought the discussion would occur 1 week later. As predicted, opinion moderation was found only when subjects expected immediate discussion of a noninvolving issue. This result lends support to the contention that the anticipatory moderation shifts of earlier studies were strategic in nature, occurring only in the interest of situational utility. That is, when the situational contingencies did not favor moderation or did not require immediate moderation, no such shifts took place. Subjects in each of the other experimental conditions tended to polarize their positions in expectation of discussion (i.e., they moved away from the middle of the scale, taking more extreme views on their own sides of the issue).

**Opinion Snapback.** A final result was that—as in the Cialdini et al. (1973) study—when the expectation of discussion was canceled, there was a tendency for all subjects to snap back to their initial positions on the issue. This snapback effect again suggests that anticipatory opinion changes are tactical and elastic in character. With the cancellation of discussion, the situational pressures producing the preliminary shifts were removed, and subjects reverted to their original positions. However, the subjects in one experimental condition (i.e., those expecting to discuss a personally important issue immediately) were decidedly less susceptible to a snapback effect than those in the other conditions. The data from these experiments can be seen in Table 10.1.

**Cognitive Responses Produce Resistance to Snapback.** The finding that subjects expecting immediate discussion of a personally relevant issue were resistant to a snapback effect suggested that the manner in which the anticipatory shifts occurred in these subjects made the initial change relatively nonelastic. Perhaps only these subjects were motivated to undertake cognitive activity in support of their new positions. That is, subjects in each of the other conditions were expecting a discussion on a topic of little importance to them, or a discussion that would not take place for a week, or both; thus, they may not have been willing to do the cognitive work necessary to solidify their positions. A cognitive response analysis of persuasion suggests that persisting persuasion effects are a function of one’s cognitive responses to an issue or message. Genuine shifts in an attitude position are said to occur to the extent that one engages in cognitive activity supportive of that position Greenwald (1968b). For example, Petty (1977a) has demonstrated that subjects who memorized their own cognitive responses to a message showed greater persistence of persuasion than subjects who memorized the message arguments or neutral statements. It may have been, then, that for subjects who expected immediate discussion of a personally relevant topic, their tendency to generate and rehearse thoughts that supported their side of the issue caused their anticipatory polarization shifts to become nonelastic, real changes in attitude. The situational contingencies in the other three conditions, however, may not have motivated subjects to do the cognitive work necessary to make their position shifts durable; thus, when the discussion was canceled and the discussion-related influences were removed, the shifts disappeared as well.

In order to test this possibility, the second experiment of Cialdini et al. (1976) included a measure of the kind of cognitive activity the subjects were engaging in while they were still expecting the discussion. Subjects were asked to record any thoughts they were having concerning the discussion issue. It was found that the subjects expecting an immediate discussion on an involving topic exhibited a greater degree of cognitive activity in support of their own sides of the issue. That is, they recorded significantly more supportive thoughts concerning their positions than did the subjects in the other cells. The measure of supportive thoughts consisted of the number of thoughts recorded that either favored the subject’s own position or that attacked the opposing position (see Table 10.1).

In a subsequent experiment, Petty and Cialdini (1976, cited in Petty, 1977) obtained more direct support for the view that the persistence of attitude polarization depends on the generation and/or rehearsal of supportive thoughts. In this experiment, all subjects were led to expect an immediate discussion on a highly involving topic with an opponent. Half the subjects were distracted from thinking about the topic in the predisussion interval, and half were not. Although all subjects showed anticipatory attitude polarization, only the nondistracted group persisted in the polarized view when the discussion expectation was canceled.

**Concluding Remarks**

It may well be that the concept of elastic shifts is relevant to much more of the literature on persuasion than that concerning anticipatory shifts. That is, much of the experimental laboratory literature on attitude change may tell us nothing about the manner in which true attitudes are modified but, rather, may inform us

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**TABLE 10.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polarization and Moderation Shifts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Relevance of Issue</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion anticipated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion canceled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive thoughts</td>
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*Note.* Positive means for the discussion-anticipated and discussion-canceled measures indicate polarization shifts; negative means indicate moderation shifts. Data adapted from Cialdini, Levy, Herman, Kozlowski, and Petty (1976).
only as to when and how people shift their positions on various issues so as to maximize situational outcomes. Thus, it is conceivable that the majority of variables and procedures said to produce attitude change may have little influence on lasting attitude; instead, they may only affect transient, tactical position shifts. Perhaps these variables and procedures bring about new stances that approach the status of attitudes only to the extent that they provide the motivation and opportunity for cognitive activity supportive of the new positions.

Such a possibility is consistent with the conclusions of reviews of the literature on the persistence of experimentally induced attitude change (Cook & Flay, 1978; Petty, 1977a). We do not wish to imply, however, that such a conceptualization of traditional attitude change research renders it unimportant. On the contrary, it is our feeling that a great majority of everyday interaction on one issue or another involves the strategic shifting about of one’s position rather than genuine changes in attitude. Hence, the great part of the research on “attitude change” is just as relevant as ever. However, it is our belief that the research may well embody a mislabeling of the phenomenon under investigation, and that a clearer understanding of the phenomenon’s identity will result in a clearer understanding of the processes involved in its occurrence.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the beginning of this chapter, we defined an anticipatory opinion effect as any opinion effect that occurs as a result of simply expecting to have to deal with a persuasive communication, whether that communication is to be self-originated or externally originated. Three kinds of expectations have been shown to produce such effects—expecting (1) to present a persuasive message, (2) to receive a persuasive message, and (3) to exchange views on a topic.

When a person expects to present a persuasive message but does not expect to hear information on the topic from any other source, anticipatory movement in the direction of the to-be-advocated position occurs. This shift is thought to be due to the anticipatory rehearsal and positive evaluation of cognitive responses that favor the to-be-advocated view. If the person does expect to hear further information on a topic, however—as when he or she is forewarned of the content of an impending message—or if an exchange of views is anticipated, the direction of the anticipatory effect appears to depend on the personal importance of the attitude topic. The effects of forewarning on opinion shifts have been measured both before and after the communication has been presented.

Results from studies employing the postcommunication assessment procedure indicate that when a person expects to receive a counterattitudinal communication on a topic of high personal relevance, resistance to the persuasive message will occur if the person has time to generate counterarguments before being exposed to the communication. Susceptibility to the communication is more likely if there is no time to generate defenses before receiving the message, or if the topic is one of low personal relevance. If a person is forewarned that the communicator has a persuasive intent, resistance to persuasion also occurs and may be due to increased counterargumentation during receipt of the message.

If attitudes are measured before the expected communication is delivered, the direction of the anticipatory opinion change is again determined by issue involvement. On topics of low involvement, anticipatory moderation occurs, but on topics of high involvement, anticipatory polarization is more likely. These anticipatory opinion shifts were viewed as strategic responses designed to facilitate personal rewards.

Anticipatory opinion changes have only been shown to appear when the subject can infer beforehand that his or her opinion response will be evaluated by someone. This finding fits the strategic response model in that the personal goals postulated to bring about the shifts—the protection of public image and the avoidance of a weak public stand on a personally relevant issue—involve the presence of observers of one’s reactions. When such evaluating observers are not present, the reasons for anticipatory change are removed, and the shifts do not occur.

Another major finding of the research on anticipatory opinion movement concerns its elastic quality. When the expectation that leads to anticipatory moderation shifts is removed, the shifts disappear as well. This suggests that the shifts are active responses to the demands of the impending situation. When the new opinions that were strategically stretched to fit the anticipated reward contingencies are no longer useful, subjects snap back to their initial positions. One exception to the temporary quality of anticipatory change has been shown when the demands of the impending situation require both preliminary change and cognitive activity in support of that change. When supportive cognitive responses accompany the anticipatory shifts, the shifts are solidified by the supportive activity and acquire the more durable quality of true attitude change. Finally, it was suggested that the concept of an elastic shift might be relevant to much more of the literature on persuasion than just that concerning anticipatory shifts.