

Impression formation study



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Abstract

This report is based on impression formation. A study was conducted to see if the order of information presented about a hypothetical person to a participant has an effect on their impression final first impression of that person.

Participants from London Metropolitan University (80 participants) were put into two groups, in which they were asked to rate their impression of a hypothetical person with a list of given adjectives (positive and negative), first they are given words that describe this hypothetical person, the describing words were identical, just presented in different orders, depending on which one (of the two) groups the participant was placed in. It was found that a more positive opinion was described for the hypothetical person in which the participants heard positive to negative adjectives compared to that of the negative to positive adjectives.

Intro

A topic that has been explored in psychology is how people come up with first impressions, and what information is important to help form impressions. The question asked here was simply; how do people form impressions of theirs based on limited information. The founder of research into this field was Asch (1946), who was worried about the principles behind forming impressions. Asch (1946) conducted a study where, he had two groups, in which both were given lists of words in different orders according to which group the participants were assigned to.

Asch found that the group given the positive words followed by the negative words developed a more positive first impression than the group who received the words negative words then given the positive words. He concluded that the first words are the words that are most important and are the traits that are remembered this is called the primacy effect. However other research shows that the primacy effect isn't always the one remembered, and the most recent (recency effect) adjectives may be the adjectives that influence the participant.

This may happen in situations where the participant has been given too much information; or they are tired and lack motivation and if these factors are not present, the more common effect is the primacy effect. It was concluded that the primacy effect is the main view to how people form impressions and it was stated that the first adjectives used are the most important and have a lot more influences than the later adjectives. The aim of this experiment is to build on the findings of Asch's configural model and this study aims to replicate the results achieved by Asch.

This study will employ the same design, two groups under different conditions. The lists of words are as follows, positive - negative intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious. Negative - positive envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious and intelligent. Thereafter the participants were asked to describe the hypothetical person with a set of adjectives (positive and negative, and asked to apply these to the hypothetical person (generous-mean, sociable-unsociable, reliable-unreliable, polite-rude, pleasant-unpleasant).

From these it was worked out whether the impression was more positive or negative. There are different sorts of hypothesis which could have been explored. It has been decided that hypothesis will be directional, casual hypothesis. The hypothesis of the experiment is that, Participants who are given traits, positive - negative will have a more positive view of the hypothetical person. Which means that the participants given trait negative - positive traits will have a more negative view to that hypothetical person.

Method Participants

The amount of participants used was a figure of 80 participants, this was divided into two groups of 40, one group which would receive the traits negative - positive and the other to receive positive to negative. The participants were students at London metropolitan university, which consisted of an age range 17 to 44 years, Mean = 21. 35, Standard Deviation = 4. 67. There were 56 females and 24 males. The participants were treated in accordance to the ethical principles of the BPS and gave consent and were told they could withdraw at any point.

Materials and/or Apparatus The materials used in this experiment included a computer, the size of the screen was 17 inches, where trait lists were used, and the trait list for the positive - negative group goes as follows; intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious. The other group received the exact same words, just backwards which goes as follows; envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent. The words were viewed on a white back ground with a font size on 28 and font type of Calibri.

The other apparatus involved included an online questionnaire. Procedure The participants were told they would be shown a screen of words, and were told that after viewing the words they should form an impression of a hypothetical person and will have to answer an online questionnaire which according to the hypothesis should help us gain results which will contribute to research towards primacy effect. The participants were shown their respective trait lists, depending on the group they were assigned to. Each word was shown for 3 seconds with an interval of 1. seconds between trait adjectives, after being shown the words the participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire which consisted of 6 questions. To test the hypothesis, we must calculate the mean score and standard deviation for all participants in both groups. Starting with the positive - negative and ending with the negative to positive group. Results The results of the experiments are as follows; the group that received the positive to negative traits, mean average was $M= 3.4$ and the standard deviation $SD= 0.84$.

The results for the group which received the trait adjectives from negative to positive had different results, the results are as follows, the mean was $M= 2.72$ and the standard deviation $SD= 0.83$ Discussion The hypothesis at the start stated the group which was given the positive - negative traits would develop a better and more positive impression, then the group who received the traits in the order of negative - positive. This has proven to be the case as the higher the mean number, the more positive the impression formed and noted by the participants, through answering the questions of the online questionnaire.

The results which support the hypothesis support the theory of the primacy effect, which is consistent with and supports Asch's (1946) previous work. However just looking at the results of the experiment without no averages or means, a couple of scores stood out, where participants in the positive to negative group formed an impression of the hypothetical person, which didn't support the hypothesis, there was also scores from the negative - positive group which didn't support the hypothesis, which means recency effect was something that also took place in this experiment.

Future research could include the same experimental design, however, it might be better if the research produced more qualitative data, this could be accomplished, by simply changing the online questionnaire into an interview, where the thought of the impressions formed can be noted, this may help can a better overall understanding, and would be a lot more useful than some of the statistics presented.

References

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