CHAPTER

FIVE
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION
5.2 NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY
5.3 PROBLEM OF THE STUDY
5.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
5.5 MAIN HYPOTHESES TO BE TESTED AND VERIFIED
5.6 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN
5.7 VARIABLES INVOLVED
5.8 SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY
5.9 TASK MATERIAL
5.10 PROCEDURE
5.11 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
5.1 INTRODUCTION

Social psychologists and researchers have recently focussed their attention on the research work in the area of social communication, social influence, persuasion and consequent change in social beliefs, opinions and behaviour.

Social communication in a very broad sense can be treated as a message from one person to another. It contains information that is being induced in the receiver to change his attitude. It can influence people to accept new ideas that could change their traditional views, opinions, attitude and behaviour. It can as well equip the people with information to resist the change or defend themselves against false beliefs, propagating distorted news or rumours of various types. Social psychologists have developed a variety of techniques of persuasion that have effectively been used in social communication.
In the process of social communication everyone is subjected to persuasion of one kind or the other. Any persuasive communication is aimed at attitude change and consequently change in behaviour pattern. Social psychologists have developed a number of persuasive techniques through which it might be possible to study why people feel and think differently at one time from how they have felt and thought at an earlier time. In other words, do they really change their attitude or do they change? Which technique is more effective in inducing change or resistance to change?

The present study was based on the inoculation approach (technique of inducing resistance) of McGuire (1961), later on adopted and elaborated by Tannebaum and his colleagues (Tannebaum, 1967). McGuire's inoculation approach stems from a biological analogy. In a typical biological experiment, a person is made resistant to some attacking virus by pre-exposure to a weakened dose of the virus. The mild dose stimulates his defenses, so that he will be able to overcome any massive viral attack to which he is later exposed. The theory, however, assumes that the dose is not so strong that this pre-exposure itself becomes the cause for the diseases. On a similar analogy, in a social situation, a person can be inoculated with some 'defense' so as to make him or his belief resistant to subsequent persuasive attack. The theory assumes that generally a person tends to remain
highly confident about his beliefs. However, if he is exposed to strong counter-arguments, he becomes highly vulnerable against the attack.

5.2 NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Studies in this area of techniques of persuasion and social influence are most essential, since they have immense impact on social life of people. In a developing country like India with a vast number of social problems such as illiteracy, over-population, corruption, conservativeness, traditional customs and rituals, etc. they have drawn the attention of many and mass communication is a major medium to focus on such social problems. However, very often the proposed change is resisted for various reasons. Resistance to any proposed change can be explored with appropriate methods of communication and techniques of persuasion. The present study was based on the inoculation approach of McGuire (technique of inducing resistance) and studied the relative merits of different techniques of resistance to persuasion. These techniques of resistance to persuasion could be used either to change attitude or to defend against 'attacks' or to procreate resistance to persuasion. From this point of view, the present attempt to investigate the relative efficacies of various techniques of persuasion for inducing resistance to attitudinal change was most essential.
5.3 **PROBLEM OF THE STUDY**

The present study was aimed at investigating the relative effectiveness of some persuasive techniques. It has been entitled 'An Experimental study of some variables affecting persuasion and change in beliefs'. The whole investigation was being carried out on the theory expounded by McGuire.

5.4 **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the present study were:

1. To study the general effect of inducing change or resistance to persuasion.

2. To develop and test various techniques of inducing change or resistance to persuasion, in terms of supportive and refutational defense.

3. To examine the effect of two sequences of presentation against 'attack' viz. (i) defense followed by attack (i.e. inoculation sequence) (ii) attack followed by defense (i.e. restoration sequence).

4. To study effect of sex, if any, in inducing resistance against persuasion.

5. To study effect of generation gap, if any, in inducing resistance against persuasion.
5.5 MAIN HYPOTHESES TO BE TESTED AND VERIFIED

The following hypotheses were studied under the proposed investigation:

(i) Technique of supportive defense is less effective than the technique of refutational defense in producing resistance to persuasion, i.e. supportive defense brings about greater change than refutational defense. This prediction stems from the selective exposure postulate. Persons tend to defend their beliefs by avoiding exposure to counter-arguments rather than by developing positive supports for the belief. The presentation of refutational defense gives shook which suggests that an individual's beliefs are not as invulnerable as he thinks. It serves to provoke his interest in utilization of the supportive arguments.

(ii) Inoculation approach would be more effective than restoration approach in building up resistance against persuasion i.e. inducing less change. The sequence of predictions were derived from the postulate that the believer tends to utilize the supportive defense only to the extent that he is being provided to realize the vulnerability of his beliefs. It was assumed that such realization could be provoked by prior presentation either of the refutational defense or especially of the strong attack. McGuire, in his postulate, predicted that the defenses either supportive or refutational, are more effective when
attack follows defense (inoculation sequence) than when defense follows attack (restoration sequence). However, it was also predicted that the superiority of restoration over immunization is greater with the supportive defense than with the refutational defense.

(iii) Males and females would show differential resistance to persuasion. It is predicted that females are more suggestible than males and yield to persuasion or change to a greater extent.

(iv) Different generations would show different extent of change or resistance to persuasion. It was expected that the grandparents would resist the most, the parents next most and adolescents the least on the basis of age-level.

5.6 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The experimental design for the present study was quite similar to that for the experiments reported by McGuire, but further adopted and modified to serve the objective in the present context. Further, McGuire conducted a series of separate experiments, each time studying different variables independently. The present study was designed to test a set of four variables in one experiment using a factorial design (2 x 2 x 2 x 3).
A : Type of technique = A₁ Supp.; A₂ Ref.
B : Sequence = B₁ Inoc.; B₂ Rectr.
C : Sex = C₁ Male; C₂ Female
D : Generation gap = D₁ adolescent; D₂ parents; D₃ grandparents.

5.7 VARIABLES INVOLVED

The present experiment was designed to study the effect of the following four independent variables shown below:

A) Independent variables:

(i) Types of Defense: It was studied at two levels:

a) Supportive defense which contained arguments in favour of belief without even a mention of possible counter-arguments against the belief.

b) Refutational defense which involved pre-exposing the person to counter-arguments against his/her beliefs, with a detailed refutation of these counter-arguments later on.

(ii) Order of Presentation: Order of presentation of defense and attack was studied at two levels:

a) Inoculation sequence: Defense (either supportive or refutational) followed by attack (against his belief showing that attitude towards particular belief was false).
b) Restoration sequence: Attack followed by defense (either supportive or refutational—directly or indirectly supporting his belief).

(iii) Sex: Subject of both sexes were involved.
   a) Male
   b) Female

(iv) Generation gap: Subjects of three generations in the same family were studied:
   a) Adolescents (boys and girls)
   b) Parents (Fathers and mothers)
   c) Grand-parents (Grand-fathers and grand-mothers).

B) Dependent Variables:

The investigator has measured the extent of change after the persuasive technique in each group in comparison to the pre-persuasion position on each of the issue. The pre-and-past scores achieved by each subject became the dependent variable for data analysis.

5.8 SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY

A huge number of male and female adolescent students from various colleges in Gujarat as well as their parents (fathers and mothers) and grandparents (grandfathers and grandmothers) formed the subjects for the investigation. The nature of the experiment demanded to
meet the same subjects in the same family again and again twice, but all might not be easily available; hence the investigator contacted and administered the scale to very many subjects, belonging to the three generations as far as in the same family or in different families of correspond age-level so that the final sample available for the analysis consisted of 400 subjects, in each of three generations, making in all 1200 subjects in order to study the effect of different variables under the proposed investigation as shown in the experimental factorial design (2 x 2 x 2 x 3). Each of 24 sub-groups consisted of 50 subjects, making a total sample of 1200 subjects in all.

5.9 TASK MATERIAL

For conducting the investigation following tools were prepared:

i) Superstition Attitude Scale (SAS): to measure the intensity of belief or attitude towards different superstitions.

ii) Defensive Essays: Two types of defensive essays viz. supportive and refutational essays with respect to the beliefs under study were prepared, to be used as a propaganda to induce defenses in subjects against persuasion.

iii) Attacking Essay: One essay to attack beliefs under study was prepared; this served the purpose of changing the old beliefs.
5.10 **PROCEDURE**

The present experiment was systematically carried out under the following procedure:

(i) **First,** a pre-test in the form of a structured (CSAS) questionnaire was administered to each sub-group to measure subject's existing attitudes towards issues under the study.

(ii) Later on, defensive arguments were conveyed to the subjects, under the inoculation sequence which followed by the attack, OR

Strong attacking arguments were conveyed to the subjects under the restoration sequence which was followed by defensive arguments or counter-arguments as the design required.

(iii) After this defense/attack procedure, the same Attitude Scale was administered to each group to study the overall effect of persuasion under the name of 'post-test stage.'

5.11 **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The scores thus obtained, were analysed statistically by techniques of Analysis of Variance, Analysis of Co-variance and L.S.D. test, in order to find
out the main and the interaction effects, as well as to examine the significance of difference between two means of pairs of sub-groups. The statistical analysis warranted the following inferences:

A: Performance before persuasion

The analysis of pre-test scores revealed that the four main variables, viz. type of defense, order of presentation, sex and generation-gap, were found to be not significant factors before treatment i.e. all groups of subjects assigned to various experimental conditions were found equivalent on their superstition score before being subjected to any persuasive technique. There were however, some significant interactions, but this has little relevance in influencing the interpretation, since all data were further analysed by more refined technique of Analysis of Co-variance which aims to adjust the final performance score on the basis of pre-treatment performance, which in a way serves as a statistical control.

B: Performance after persuasion but before adjustment

The post-treatment scores after persuasion were first analysed by the technique of Analysis of Variance in order to study the effect of experimental treatments, i.e. role of four main variables, as they were before deriving adjusted scores. The results of such analysis again revealed that on the whole, first three variables viz. types of defense, types of sequence of persuasion,
and sex did not seem to play a significant role in influencing the extent of superstitious beliefs of the subjects even after the persuasion, as in case of pre-treatment stage. The only significant variable was the generation gap, parents being found to be most susceptible to change (least resistant) after the treatment and the adolescent group being the least changing (most resistant). At the same time, there were few significant interactions involving also the variable of generation gap along with other variables, showing that whatever part these variables played, was not the independent contribution of any. However, these results are also not authentic, since the above analysis of post-treatment scores by the technique of Analysis of Variance did not take into account the pre-treatment scores for adjustment. In view of this, to be more accurate in analysis and interpretation, the same post-treatment scores were further analysed by the more refined technique of Analysis of Co-variance.

2. Performance after persuasion/after adjustment

The post-treatment means were converted into adjusted means by special statistical formulae and the data were subjected to the Analysis of Co-variance. The adjusted means were further treated by LSD test to study the significance of difference among adjusted means of sub-groups to examine the role of different levels of variables. Such analysis enabled the investigator to
arrive at the following valuable conclusions:

(1) Type of defense which was insignificant before adjustment in post-treatment stage, turned out to be a significant factor after adjustment. The supportive defense was found to be more influential in strengthening superstitious beliefs than the refutational defense and further the change brought about by the supportive defense was significantly greater than that by the refutational defense. In other words, the supportive defense technique of persuasion (message) induced greater change or reduced resistance to effect a change in superstitious beliefs, refutational technique induced greater resistance to persuasion, thus, confirming McGuire's postulate.

(2) Whatever might be the type of sequence or the other of presentation of defense - Inoculation (defense followed by attack) or Restoration (attack followed by defense) - both types of defense induced greater change (less resistance to persuasion), but both types were equally effective, being not significantly different, even after adjustment; Inoculation sequence as per McGuire's view, was not superior, not was the restoration sequence in supportive defense was found superior in inducing resistance, as held by McGuire.

(3) There were no significant sex differences in change or resistance to persuasion even after adjustment, just as it was the case before adjustment. Both males and females equally changed or resisted to persuasion.
In other words, persuasive technique did work out but worked out equally in case of both sexes.

(4) The generation gap was found to be most strikingly significant in effecting change or resistance in superstitious beliefs. The change was greatest in case of parents and the least in case of adolescent, i.e. the parents resisted the least and the adolescents resisted the most. This seems to be unexpected, somewhat strange, since parents are expected to be matured than adolescents.

However, these above inferences about the independent role of main variables have been restricted in view of some significant interactions cited below:

(5) The significant interaction between the two types of persuasive techniques viz. type of defense and type of sequence, reveals that the Supportive-Restoration technique was the most influential in strengthening superstitious beliefs inspite of attack on such beliefs, and it effected also the greatest change (least resistance), while refutational-inoculation technique effected comparatively the least change (greater resistance), as a result of persuasion, as predicted partly from McGuire's inoculation theory -
(6) The significant interaction between defense and sex revealed that females under supportive defense turned out to be most superstitious and yielded maximally to change (least resistant), and least changing were females under refutational defense.

(7) The significant interaction between defense and generation gap points out that parents equally under the refutational defense yielded to maximum change (least resistant) and grandparents under refutational defense yielded least to change (most resistant).

(8) The significant interaction between sequence and generation gap led to conclude that the parents especially under inoculation sequence were found most superstitious, yielding to maximum change or minimum resistance to persuasion, while adolescents under inoculation sequence were found the least superstitious and yielding to the least change (maximum resistance).

(9) The higher order of interactions of (i) Defense X Sequence X Generation gap, (ii) Defense X Sex X Generation gap, (iii) Sequence X Sex X Generation gap, and (iv) highest order interaction of Defense X Sequence X Sex X Generation gap seem to be very difficult to be interpreted and it becomes very
complicated to locate the role of any one level of one variable interacting with the other. However, it can be observed that female parents under supportive defense with restoration sequence were highest on the superstition score and exhibited the maximum change, while female adolescents under supportive-inoculation technique were least superstitious, yielding to minimum change or maximum resistance.

All these significant interactions at the same time support also the general trend of findings on the main effects, that (i) supportive defense was more influential than refutational defense in strengthening superstitious beliefs; (ii) the restoration sequence, though not significantly different from inoculation, tended to be more influential in effecting the greater change; (iii) females, though not significantly different from males, turned to change more; and (iv) the parents were found most superstitious yielding to maximum change, next less changing were the grandparents and the least changing (or most resistant) were the adolescents.

The above results substantiated by the Analysis of Co-variance are more accurate & reliable, no doubt, subject to some limitations of the sample available, especially in three generations.