

The Role of Morality in Driving Our Social Support Decisions

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Abstract. Time and again research has suggested and supported the supremacy of warm attributes like *morality* over attributes of competencies. In the present research, we explore whether perception of warmth-*morality* or *prosocial behavior* in others, make us more supportive towards them. In addition we also explore whether the established measures of *likeness* and *positive affect* are crucial in mediating this link between the dimensions of social judgment (*morality* vs *competence*) and social support.

Keywords: Prosocial, Social Support, Competence, Warm, Morality

1. Introduction

Person perception and social judgments are important in determining how we will treat others. From socio-functionality aspect these perceptions determine perceiver's approach-avoidance tendencies towards the target [1]. Historically, research on social judgment has emphasized that "cold" or "warm" target characteristics can solely drive person perception. These now distinct categories have appeared long ago in the work of Asch [2] as "central traits" in the study of impression formation.

In the last five years literature on human social cognition for self, person, and group have united in concluding that social perception is essentially driven along the same two dimensions-warmth and competence [1][3]. Research has highlighted that, it's the social and task functionality aspects of the two domains which make them different. Like *sincere*, *prosocial*, *friendly*, *honest*, and *moral* will come under the dimension of warmth whereas *intelligent*, *ambitious*, *goal-oriented*, *confident* and *able*, will be categorized under competency dimension. These two dimensions have been presented using different terminologies, for instance, social versus intellectual traits [4], or morality versus competence [5].

Although both warmth and competence attributes are considered in social judgment, almost every research has demonstrated the dominance of *warm* attributes over competence. Like, Wojciszke [5] suggested morality (warmth dimension) is more important as this quality in others would determine whether they would help us to attain our goals. This was supported by many researchers, who labeled warm attributes to be more important than attributes of competency [6] [7] in target's evaluation. Warm or moral individuals possess other-profitable traits and are perceived as kind or prosocial, therefore increasing interpersonal likeness. Competent individuals, however, possess self-profitable traits and are perceived as skillful, eliciting admiration and envy [1]. It is therefore interesting and imperative to test the dominance of warm attributes over competence and how far it drives our behavior toward others in different scenarios. In the present study, both judgment dimensions are used in examining whether they will be considered important in driving one's social support decisions.

Social support is defined as all forms of support provided by other individuals that help in coping with stress [8]. Any individual who demonstrates prosocial behavior is perceived more positively [9], and is considered more attractive. Therefore, this gives support to the bi-directional relationship between attractions or liking and supportive behaviors. Research [9][10] therefore suggests that individual's momentary affective state also influences the expression of prosocial behavior.

Summarizing from the aforementioned discussion the present research therefore aimed to test whether warm dimensions would retain its supremacy in determining our judgment of social support. Secondly, whether the established measure of likeness and positive affect would be crucial in mediating this link

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between the dimensions of social judgment (prosocial/moral vs competence) and social support? The following hypotheses are tested:

- Hypothesis 1: Prosocial/moral target will get more social support than competent target.
- Hypothesis 2: Prosocial/moral target will be liked more than the competent target.
- Hypothesis 3: Prosocial/moral target will have high positive affect than the competent target.
- Hypothesis 4: Likeness and positive affect will emerge as mediators of social judgment and social support.

2. Method

2.1. Participants & Design

Two hundred and eight ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.04$, $SD = 3.74$, range = 18-28 years old) undergraduate students (154 females and 54 males), from a local university in Singapore participated in this study in exchange of course credits. These participants were randomly distributed to a 2 (Target scenarios (based on the two social judgment dimensions): competent vs prosocial) x 2 (Order of Response Measurement (ORM): likeness → social support vs social support → likeness) between-subject design condition ($n = 52$).

2.2. Materials

- Target scenarios: The scenarios (competence vs morality consisted of equivalent word length descriptions (100 to 150 words). These scenarios were patterned after Decety and Chaminade's [12] study and consisted of well-balanced lexicons and equivalent events. While remaining as realistic as possible and approximately equal in storyline, specific characteristics of the vignettes were altered in varying degrees. Both the scenarios were adapted according to the participant's gender.
- Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ): SSQ was adapted from Hilmert, Christenfeld and Kulik [13] (2002) study and consisted of seven items along a 7-point scale which measured social support to vignettes (for e.g., *To what extent will you be helpful towards this peer?*, *To what extent will you be emotionally supportive towards this peer?*, *How close do you think you will be towards this peer?*).
- Likeness Scale (LS): The likeness scale was adopted from the Partner Opinion Questionnaire (POQ) as used by Singh et al. [14]. The likeness scale measured responses on 10 items (for e.g., *I would probably enjoy this person's company*, *I would probably like talking with this person at a party*, *I would like to meet this person* etc), each followed by a 7-point interval scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to items.
- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): Positive affect was measured by responses to the *inspired*, *attentive*, *determined*, and *active* items of the positive affect scale of PANAS [15]. Participants rated their immediate feelings using 10 adjectives along a 5-point scale, anchored by 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) and 5 (*extremely*).

2.3. Procedure

Participants, who gave their consent to take part in the study, started the experiment by providing non-identifiable demographic details (such as age and gender) on the first page of the experimental booklet. All the participants were first given the following instructions to read: *Imagine this to be your first day at university and at the end of one of the lectures you hear an announcement about an up-coming orientation event, for the new students, which is to be held at a popular chalet. However, with subsidy from the school, each student will still have to pay S\$100 in order to attend. As this would be there first occasion to meet and to know all the other students, in a more relaxed environment, you and the other students around you are excited. While heading home, Person A (same gender as you), a fellow new student who attended the same lecture, approached you at the bus stop and started chatting. He/She informs you that he/she will be going for the orientation event.*

Participants randomly assigned to the *competence* scenario read the following vignette:

As you get to know person better through the conversation, you find out that this person comes from an affluent family, has been an academic achiever, and has also won numerous awards in inter-school quizzes and swimming.

Participants randomly assigned to the *moral* or *prosocial* scenario received the following vignette:

As you got to know this person better through the above conversation, you learn that this person frequently participates in volunteering work for the less privileged.

After reading the above vignettes participants were handed an experimental booklet which consisted of questionnaires for measuring social support, likeness, and positive affect. Half of the participants receiving the competence and prosocial scenario received the likeness scale before social support and other half received the social support scale before likeness. After full debriefing they were requested to leave.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Factor Analysis and Reliability

Using M plus version 6, we evaluated the fit indices for the three factors of social support, likeness and affect. Results indicated marginal acceptance, $\chi^2(273, N = 208) = 578.09, p < 0.001, CFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .01$. However, this could be also due to random variance. Besides this, our sample is small to reliably estimate such loadings (in this case, there are 7.7 cases per variable; [16]). Further, the *as* of measures of social support, likeness, and affect were .84, .93 and .90 respectively. Hence, same items were retained for further analyses. Further, we averaged the responses of all the items of each scale to get final score on each of the measures.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Social Support, Likeness and Positive Affect for Prosocial/Moral and Competent Targets

	Social Support	Likeness	Positive Affect
Prosocial/Mora			
1	4.88 ^a _x (0.86)	4.88 ^a _x (0.68)	2.43 (0.89)
	4.62 ^b _x (0.85)	4.24 ^b _y (0.96)	2.27 (0.75)
Competent			

Note. The value in the parenthesis below the mean is the corresponding *SD*. The column means with different superscripts and row means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05, N = 208$.

3.2. Hypotheses Testing

As indicated in Table 1, a 2 x 2 between-subject ANOVA showed that prosocial vignette was significantly higher on the ratings of likeness, $F(1, 206) = 30.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ and in gaining social support, $F(1, 204) = 4.87, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .02$ than the competent vignette. No significant difference was found on the measures of positive affect $F(1, 206) = 0.73, p = .18$ or for ORM, $F(1, 204) = 0.73, p = .39$, hence, only supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2.

As there was no significant difference in the perception of positive affect for prosocial or competent individual, it was dropped from further analysis. Hence to test the role of likeness between judgment traits and social support, we conducted mediation analyses by using SPSS macro [17], which simultaneously estimated: (a) the IV effect on the MV; (b) the MV effect on the DV; (c) the total effect of the IV on the DV; and (c') the direct effect of the IV when the MV also predict the DV. It also provides the bias corrected 95% CIs around the indirect effect (i.e., $a \times b = c - c'$) from a nonparametric bootstrap resampling procedure. Results are summarized in Figure 2. Social judgment dimensions predicted likeness (MV), $t = 5.53, p < .001$ and social support (DV), $t = 7.50, p < .001$. After controlling for the effect of likeness, social traits, predicted social support, $t = 2.19, p = .029$. The indirect effect of social judgment through likeness was 0.32 and greater than zero. 95% CI was between 0.18 and .48 and the proportion of the total effect (ab/c) mediated [18] by likeness was 1.23. Therefore, likeness emerged as a complete mediator and hence partially supported Hypothesis 4.

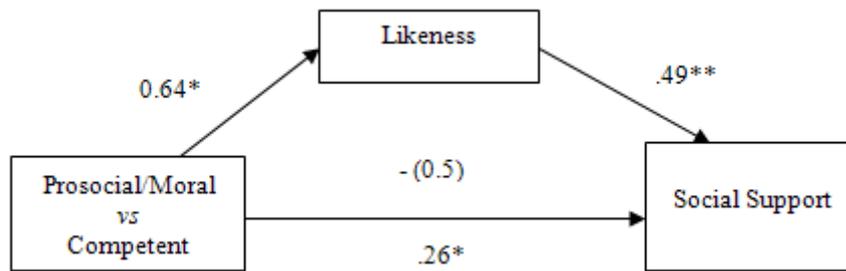


Fig 1. Mediational Role of Likeness

Likeness emerged as a complete mediator of the social judgment dimension (prosocial/moral vs competence) and social support link. Hence, this research once again reinforces the importance of warm dimensions and leads us to say that perception of prosocial behavior or morality in others certainly makes us more helpful towards them and this happens because we like their positive behavior. From the present study, it is also implied that likeness plays an important role in the relationship between social judgment and social support. Positive affect seems to be equally important and seen for both prosocial and competent individual.

This draws attention to another important implication that helpful others could be seen as an important future resource and hence reciprocation of positive treatment could be expected. Future research could extend into this direction and explore this dimension.

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