

Source Credibility in Social Judgment: Bias, Expertise, and the Judge's Point of View

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Mathematical models of source credibility were tested in five experiments in which judges estimated the value of hypothetical used cars based on blue book value and/or estimates provided by sources who examined the cars. The sources varied in mechanical expertise and in bias; they were described as friends of the buyer or seller of the car or as neutral. Individuals judged the highest price the buyer should pay, the lowest price the seller should accept, and the "true" value ("fair" price) of the car. Data indicated that expertise amplifies the effect of the source's bias. This effect is predicted by a scale-adjustment model, in which the source's bias shifts the scale value of the source's estimate. The weight of an estimate depends chiefly on the source's expertise. The weight of an estimate also depends configurally on the other estimates: Judges instructed to take the buyer's point of view give greater weight to the lower estimate, whereas judges who identify with the seller place greater weight on the high estimate. Simple premises about human judgment give a good account of the data.

Social judgments often require the combination of pieces of information provided by sources who vary in credibility (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; McGuire, 1968). Rosenbaum and Levin (1968, 1969), Anderson (1971), Birnbaum, Wong, and Wong (1976), and Birnbaum (1976) have proposed and/or tested formal theories of source credibility. The present research extends these developments and argues that the concept of *credibility*, used loosely in early persuasion research to mean "believability," can be profitably decomposed into at least three constructs: expertise, bias, and the judge's point of view.

The *judge* is the person (the subject in the present experiments) who combines information provided by one or more *sources* to make an overall evaluation or judgment. The juror, who decides guilt based on contradictory

evidence, the voter, who chooses among candidates who disagree, and the consumer, who evaluates the worth of a product, are examples of people acting as judges.

The *expertise* of the source refers to the perceived correlation between the source's report and the outcomes of empirical verification. Expertise would be expected to depend upon such factors as training, experience, and ability. For example, a doctor whose diagnoses are often confirmed in the post mortem would be considered a more expert source of information about the state of a person's health than would an untrained student.

The *bias* of the source refers to factors that are perceived to influence the expected algebraic difference between the source's report and the true state of nature. For example, a Republican might be considered a biased source of information about a Democrat who is running for office.

The distinction between expertise and bias is like the distinction between regression slope and intercept. For example, a used car salesman might be an expert source of information about the value of his cars; however, the salesman's estimates may be biased upward, since the seller stands to profit by convincing potential

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