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Consensus building through role playing from the perspective of self persuasion

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Engineering public consensus based on voluntary participation in public discussion is a useful, albeit difficult, method to resolve social conflicts. Active participation such as group discussions, public hearings, task force teams and committees for conflict resolution, is more effective in changing attitudes and behaviors than are negative strategies. Even with its importance, the effects and efficiency of positive communication strategies have been underestimated and underutilized by public relations practitioners. This study tried to examine the effects of positive communication strategies on attitude changes by focusing on simulated civic forum. Civic forum may be a useful strategy for public relations practitioners to get public understanding and acceptance about social conflict issues." This study's purpose was to devise an effective way to establish group consensus for social conflicts, from the perspective of self persuasion through role playing. This study examined the effects of self persuasion on social conflict resolution by focusing on counter-attitudinal advocacy participation. An experiment with a 3 (influence technique: no influence, passive exposure and role-playing) x 2 (levels of initial attitude salience: low and high) x 2 (issue importance: low and high) mixed ANOVA design with random assignment was planned. The results indicated that participation in the simulated civic forum (that is, role-playing technique) was a more effective persuasion tool for attitude change than was merely informed of the messages and no influence. Regardless of the issue, participation in the simulated civic forum where subjects were asked to think about the issue from their own perspective and that of the opposites and they were asked to suggest alternatives for conflict resolution, showed more attitude changes in levels of knowledge, understanding, acknowledgement and acceptance. Meanwhile, attitude change was greater when exposed to an issue with low importance than to an issue with high importance. This result provided a useful tip for motivating opinion leaders or an aware public to be involved in role-playing strategies such as used in this study.

Key words: Role playing, self persuasion, consensus building, public relations.

INTRODUCTION

Two main processes underlie social conflict resolution. On one hand, conflict may be resolved cooperatively; on the other, a competitive resolution process usually results in destructive consequences (Judd, 1978; Kimsey, 2006). Democratic society should resolve social conflicts via building public consensus through symmetrical two-way communication (Grunig, 1992). Engineering public con-sensus based on voluntary participation in public discus-sion is a useful, albeit difficult, method to resolve social conflicts. Resolving social conflicts peacefully is one of the important areas public relations specialists deal with.

In the process of conflict resolution negative commu-nication strategies such as coercion, cover-up, avoi-dance, enforcement, etcetera mostly have been utilized by many organizations. This likely leads to destructive consequences (Cropanzano, Aguinis, Schminke and Denham, 1999). Negative strategies bring merely temporary relief, and tend to exert harmful influence on public consensus building. Negative strategies cannot be effective and efficient means for persuasion because attitude and behavior changes are not sufficiently gene-rated by internal motivation to be long-lasting.

Meanwhile, positive communication strategies are those which motivate and encourage public participation in the processes of decision making for social conflicts. In other words, active participation such as group discu-ssions, public hearings, task force teams, committees for conflict resolution and participative decision-making, is

more effective in changing attitudes and behaviors than are negative strategies or such passive reception strategies as lectures and managerial edicts. Positive comm.-unication strategies are supposed to trigger a self-persuasion mechanism process (Miller, 1989). Even with its importance, the effects and efficiency of positive communication strategies have been underestimated and underutilized by public relations practitioners.

This study tried to examine the effects of positive communication strategies on attitude changes by focusing on simulated civic forum. Civic forum is a type of positive communication strategy which brings publics of various interests to participate in public discussion about social issues and motivates them to understand the opposites' position. Civic forum may be a useful strategy for public relations practitioners to get public understanding and acceptance about social conflict issues.

The traditional persuasion process model posits a one-way directional model in which attitude change predisposes behavioral shift. However, in some cases, a counter-directional persuasion process can occur, that is, where behavioral change is followed by attitude change (Miller, 1989). For instance, prior to specific attitude formation about some products or social issues, actions such as a trial of product sample, participation in discussion or attendance at meetings can trigger positive attitude ac-quisition. Contrarily, persuadees' attitudes can be influen-ced by counter-attitudinal advocacy behavior such as forced-compliance experiments or role-playing where persuadees are required to do some advocate behavior opposite to their own predisposition.

Participating in discussions requires respondents to articulate positive features of the discussion object and managerial policies to which they were initially opposed; this is the so-called counter-attitudinal advocacy, in which the self-persuasion process occurs (Miller, 1989). Miller and Burgoon (1973) labeled self-persuasion as counter-attitudinal advocacy based on the active participation paradigm. According to Miller (1989), persuaders induce persuadees to prepare and publicly to present a belief-discrepant message, (that is, a message at odds with their prior attitudes). If this step starts, the acts of encoding and transmitting the message are anticipated to involve the persuadees in a process of self-persuasion. Attitude and behavior changes as a result of self-persuasion can be preferred by public relations professsionals as desirable for building public consensus about social conflicts. The examples are simulated civic forums, self-improvement and self-development, training for leadership in group dynamics, and workshop for problem solving.

Research focusing on the effectiveness of self-persuasion from the point of the participative paradigm has rarely been done by public relations scholars and practitioners (Miller, 1989). This study examined the effects of self persuasion on conflict resolution by focusing on counter-attitudinal advocacy participation. Counter atti-

dinal advocacy has been executed mostly by role-playing experiment. Subsequent parts of the study consist of explanation of role-playing and theories for self-persuasion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role playing

Role-playing refers to one's performing socially prescribed behavior in particular situations by virtue of the social position one holds. According to Coutu (1951), role-playing is different from role-taking in that role-taking is a psychological concept referring to a mental or cognitive process, while role-playing is a sociological concept referring to a social function which all people holding a particular position or status are expected to perform in overt conduct. That is, role-taking means thinking and feeling like someone else – a form of projection; role-playing means acting like oneself, a form of socially expected conduct for one holding a given social position. Roles are created to insure differences in outlook, values and so on. In role-playing, one is asked to identify with a particular viewpoint, to behave in a way that one thinks appropriate for the role character (Klimoski, 1978).

The importance of the ability to take the role of the other for human communication and cooperation has also been stressed by theorists concerned with ways of facilitating resolution of psychotherapy, self-improvement and self-development, training for leadership in group dynamics, or educational purposes (e.g., Cabral, 1987; Cousins, 1999; Kipper, 1996; Krolikowska et al., 2007; Roth, 1979; See Kipper, 1996 for history about role-playing research).

Today role-playing is so widespread that it generally has come to be accepted as a more efficacious technique for education, management, forecasting decisions in conflicts and negotiation processes (Klimoski, 1978). In addition, role-playing offers opportunities to understand different and/or contradictory viewpoints and to become aware of the challenges of untangling and solving complex social, economic and ecological problems. Many experimental studies using role-playing simulation have contributed to understanding public dialogue in social conflicts (Green, 2002; Krolikowska et al., 2007; Tucker and Tromley, 2002; for more study reviews, see Fisher, 1983). Role-playing is used to develop skills such as listening and conflict resolution. Interactive role playing techniques have been shown in practice to be extremely effecttive for teaching conflict-management skills (Krolikowska et al., 2007).

Studies of intergroup conflict resolution mostly have used laboratory learning, discussion and videotape and have reported that role-playing increased awareness and understanding, reduced prejudice and improved attitudes and relationships (for more details, see p.308 in Fisher, 1983). According to Fisher (1983), role-playing simula-

tions are made through the problem-solving phases of identification, diagnosis, generating alternatives, selection of optimal solution, implementation and evaluation. However, in many cases the process is terminated at the stage of generating or selecting and a chosen alternative seldom is actually implemented or evaluated.

Role playing alleviates conflicts by such processes as reducing self-defensiveness, increasing one's understanding of another's views, increasing perceived similarity between self and other and increasing awareness of positive features in another's viewpoint (Muney and Deutsch, 1968). Studies have shown greater modification of attitudes after active role-playing than after passive exposure to the same persuasive materials (Muney and Deutsch, 1968).

Several studies demonstrated the effectiveness of role playing for social conflict resolutions through role-playing techniques. For example, Krolikowska et al. (2007), in the absence of real stakeholders, let students play stakeholders' roles in simulated conflict-resolution negotiations, then later let the students present to the real stakeholders what they had learnt about the situation in Karkonosze from the role-playing simulation and what conflict resolutions they had achieved. They reported that role-playing simulation succeeded in helping participants learn about the complexity of issues and ideas involved in social-ecological interactions and sustainable development.

According to Tucker and Tromley (2002), role-playing increased learners' environmental awareness and helped them to understand better the interplay among environmental, economic, social, legal and political domains during the course of complex, multiparty decision making. Sarup (1981) also examined persuasive advantage of role-playing over passive exposure, as a function of issue importance and found that role-playing is more successful than passive exposure in modifying an attitude of high importance. The high-importance issue related to the desirability of discontinuing the university's health center; the low-importance issue concerned the advisability of keeping the university's departmental offices closed during the noon hour. In addition, Judd's (1978) experimental research in conflict resolution suggested that the perception of similarity of values, goals and actions is both an important determinant and a result of the processes of resolution. Thus, the perception of similarity between conflicting parties has been found to lead to more cooperative choice.

Role-playing is an effective motivator for self reflection, explanation and persuasion on social conflict issues. Theories that explain the self- persuasion process are described in the next section.

Theories for self-persuasion

A variety of theories can explain the process of self-

persuasion, especially the effects of role-playing on attitude change. Two theories - dissonance theory and self-perception theory – usually have been employed as explanation of the process of self-persuasion.

Dissonance theory

One of the more prominent explanations is provided by dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which proposes that people are motivated to form attitudes consistent with their past actions, because inconsistency elicits an aversive internal arousal (Maio and Thomas, 2007). In role-playing, people are supposed to shift their own attitudes to reduce cognitive dissonance arising from the knowledge that one's public behavior is discrepant from one's private beliefs (Janis and King, 1954; King and Janis, 1956; Culbertson, 1957).

The factor governing the magnitude of dissonance is said to be the extent of effort required to engage in attitude-discrepant behavior. Zimbardo (1965) has applied the notion of "extended effort" to interpret the greater effectiveness of role playing over passive exposure as a means of attitude change in terms of dissonance arousal. Counter-attitudinal role-playing brings about more attitude change than mere counter-attitudinal exposure, because of the difference in "effort justification." Justification refers to the magnitude of incentives offered to persuadees for engaging in counter-attitudinal advocacy (Miller, 1989). Cognitive dissonance theorists (e.g., Aronson and Carlsmith, 1968; Festinger, 1957) posit a negative relationship between the two variables: the less the justification, the greater the subsequent attitude change (Miller, 1989).

Besides the magnitude of justification, issue importance is reported as another factor influencing cognitive dissonance magnitude (Sarup, 1981). According to cognitive dissonance theory, a given discrepancy between 2 cognitions should generate more dissonance for a substantially important issue than for a trivial one. Consequently, counter-attitudinal exposure should produce greater attitude change for more important issues than for less important issues (Sarup, 1981).

Self-perception theory

Another explanation is provided by self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), which suggests that people logically infer attitudes consistent with their actions. According to self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), when substantial justification is offered for engaging in counter-attitudinal advocacy like role-playing, persons are likely to infer that their communicative behaviors represent attempts to command reinforcement from the environment, not expression of their actual attitudes. Self-perception theory postulates the hypothesis that the communicator

himself/herself might infer his/her own beliefs and attitudes from his/her behavior if that behavior appears to be free from the control of explicit reinforcement contingencies (Bem, 1972; Maio and Thomas, 2007). By contrast, to the extent that internal cues or cues of reinforcement are weak, ambiguous, or uninterpretable, the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer who necessarily must rely upon those same external cues to infer the individual's inner states (Bem, 1972; Miller, 1989). Like cognitive dissonance-theory, self-perception theory posits the negative relationship between justification and self-persuasion.

On the other hand, in a typical forced-compliance experiment the subject's initial attitude conflicts with the induced behavior. In such a situation, the subject's initial attitude is made more salient to the subject. Self-perception theory predicts that this will diminish the degree to which the final attitude attribution will be based upon induced behavior, hence will diminish the amount of attitude change observed (Bem, 1972). In other words, self-perception theory predicts that if the initial attitude becomes salient, attitude change diminishes. However, dissonance theory predicts the opposite; according to cognitive dissonance theory, initial attitude salience increases the dissonance aroused.

Meanwhile, if behavior is made more salient, self-perception theory suggests that it in turn should produce more attitude change because this would make salient the very source of evidence upon which the final attribution is to be based. Unlike self-perception theory, for cognitive dissonance theory, if behavior is made more salient, this simply makes more salient the second of 2 dissonant cognitions, again arousing more dissonance, leading to more attitude changes (Bem, 1972; Shaffer and Tabor, 1980).

According to the experiment by Shaffer and Tabor (1980) in which participants were required to write counter-attitudinal essays, relatively greater attitude change was shown after participants' initial attitudes had been made highly salient. This outcome accords with dissonance prediction and clearly, is inconsistent with self-perception theory predictions. Participants in the high salience condition rated their essays as requiring significantly more mental effort than did those in the low salience condition, which indicates that the perception of mental effort expended in the participation can be used as a measure of dissonance arousal.

In sum, not only cognitive dissonance theory but also self-perception theory posit negative relationship between justification and self-persuasion. Regarding initial attitude salience and behavior salience, for cognitive dissonance theory, the more salient initial attitude and behavior are perceived by persuadees, the more self-persuasion process is aroused. Meanwhile, for self-perception theory, on one hand, initial attitude salience posits negative relationship with self-persuasion arousal while, on the other, behavior salience to persuadees is suggested to have positive relationship with attitude change.

Regarding variables influencing magnitude in attitude change, three variables are suggested as important from a public relations perspective. In the process of resolving conflict issues, public relations practitioners not only disseminate one-sided or two-sided information to the opposites but also make an effort to include the opposites in the decision-making process by urging their active participation. When it comes to the persuadees this kind of influence technique can cause different levels of justification regarding their own attitude change. Influence techniques for attitude change which public relations practice can utilize include: repetitive message exposures, inducement for participation in citizen forums, public hearings, committees for conflict resolutions, task force team projects etcetera, whose processes are identical to those of role-playing.

In addition, initial attitude salience seems to play a role as a reducer or a facilitator of attitude changes based on self-perception theory and cognitive dissonance theory. Issue importance is a concept aligned with issue involvement, a crucial variable in public relations. The effects of influence technique on each public segmented by issue importance might vary. This study takes three independent variables (influence technique, initial attitude salience, issue importance) and a dependent variable, the magnitude of change in attitude.

Based on the literature review, the hypotheses examined this study included as follows:

Hypotheses

H1: Participation in role-playing will induce greater attitude change than will no or mere persuasion message exposure on the issue under discussion.
H2: Initial attitude salience may moderate the magnitude of changes in attitude. H3: Attitude change will be greater when exposed to an issue with high importance than to an issue with low importance.

METHOD

Participants and design

Students enrolled in introductory public relations, communication, journalism and humanities courses at a large university in Seoul, Korea were recruited. Participants did not receive any extra credit for their participation because participation was a course requirement. 54 person groups participated in the simulated civic forum (that is, role-playing task teams). 76 students were recruited for a comparison group which did not participate in the task teams and was only exposed to the two-sided information on the research topics under discussion. 68 students participated as a control group which did not participate in the role-playing task teams and did not receive any information on the research topics under discussion either.

In total, subjects numbered 200. Males account for 45.5% (n =91), females 54.5% (n = 109). Average age is 23 ranging from 19

Table 1. 3 x 2 x 2 mixed ANOVA design.

Influence Technique		No influence		Exposure		Role-playing		Total
Issue Importance		Low	High	Low	High	High	Low	
Attitude Salience	Low	35	35	39	39	29	29	103
	High	33	33	37	37	27	27	97
Total		68		76		56		200

to 29. Sophomores number 50 (25.0%), juniors 81 (40.5%), seniors 67 (33.5%), others 2 (1%).

To test the hypotheses, an experiment with a 3 x 2 x 2 mixed ANOVA design with random assignment was planned Table 1. Influence technique, the first independent variable, had three levels: no influence, passive information exposure and role-playing. The second independent variable, levels of initial attitude salience, had two levels: low and high. The third independent variable, issue importance, had two levels: low and high. Influence technique and levels of initial attitude salience were between-subjects factors. Issue importance was a within-subjects factor.

To make initial attitude salience high, subjects were asked to think a few minutes about their views on the issue before final attitude assessment. This procedure was skipped to provide low salience of initial attitude for other subjects. This procedure was supposed to elicit attitude salience by several studies (Denham et al., 1999; Duffy and Kavanagh, 1983; Shaffer and Tabor, 1980).

In this study, the objective was to detect a three-way interaction that had at least $\omega^2 = .06$ (medium). Sample size for each cell with power 0.80 and medium effect size at significance 0.05 is 16 (Keppel, 1991, p. 442). Subjects were debriefed regarding the experiments after completing the final measurement questionnaires.

Task and overall procedures

A pilot test was carried out in the form of an opinion poll to select an issue of high or low importance to students and to test predispositions regarding issues. Resultantly, two issues of six were selected:

(1) An issue of university tuition increase as the most important and (2) An issue of university policy for donation admission as the least important. Donation admission means that a student gets an admission through substantial monetary contributions to the university. These are social conflict issues around which most students' attitudes have been negatively formed. Almost every year many university campuses in Korea have seen student groups involved in strong demonstrations against yearly tuition increase. Compared with the issue of tuition increase, the issue of donation admission is of little importance to undergraduates because they had already been admitted. Even with that, pros and cons regarding the issue of donation admission stand out sharply. Subjects for or against the issue of tuition increase are 17 (8.5%) and 183 (91.5%), respectively. Those for and those against the issue of donation admission are 99 (49.5%) and 101 (50.5%), respectively.

The task employed in this study was a simulated civic forum convened to create communication strategies for conflict resolutions around the issues. Individuals in the role-playing teams are asked to discuss the issues together and make a preliminary decision about which side their teams stand by. To increase their commitment and involvement, the experimenter asked subjects to write down some reasons for their decision. After making the decision, role-playing teams are asked to do secondary research, collect appropriate data and information and write a logical analysis report that supports their teams' stands. Then, role-playing teams

are asked to think about the issue from the perspective of the opposite side, collect appropriate information, and write a logical analysis report that supports the opposite group's viewpoints. They are asked to think about what primary areas of conflict exist and then suggest alternatives and communication strategies for resolving this problem. After completing the task, the role-playing teams are asked to fill out questionnaires to assess their attitude change regarding the issues.

While role-playing teams are required to participate in civic forum simulations, passive information exposure comparison groups are just provided by two-sided information composed of counter-attitudinal arguments. The comparison groups are asked to read the counter-attitudinal arguments and to fill out questionnaires to assess their attitude change about the issues.

Stephan's (2008) attitude change process for conflict resolution was applied to this study to measure attitude changes in regard to the issues. Stephan (2008) suggested four elements of communication processes involved in improving inter-group conflict resolution: self-reflection, self-engagement, appreciating differences and alliance building. Self-reflection occurs when individuals examine their own ideas, experiences and perspectives, through which individuals come to understand and reappraise their own views and others'. Self-engagement is a process where individuals are actively involved in the inter-group interaction through personal sharing, inquiry and showing their interest in others. And then, individuals become appreciating differences between theirs and others, willing to listen to others' perspectives and open to different realities. Critical examination of their own views and others and open acknowledgment differences of perspectives motivate individuals to cooperate for alliance building in order to resolute conflicts between two groups.

Based on Stephan (2008) attitude change process, this study centered on the comparative effects of three influence techniques upon four attitude changes:

(1) Degree of knowledge regarding an opposing view-point;
(2) Degree of desire to understand the opposites;
(3) Degree of acknowledgement of opposing viewpoints
(4) Degree of acceptance of and consensus with the others' position.

The items were scored on a 6-point scale (1 = do not degree at all, 6 = agree completely).

Manipulation check

To check whether the issues of tuition increase and donation admission Tables 2 and 3 are high and low in issue importance respectively, four questions for each issue were asked:

(1) The issue is important to me.
(2) I am interested in the issue.
(3) The issue does matter to me.
(4) I am concerned about the issue.

Table 2. Factor Analysis: An issue of tuition increase.

	Understand	Accept	Knowledge	Acknowledge
(1) I cannot understand people with opposing viewpoints	0.799	0.128	0.087	0.237
(2) I cannot understand what the opposites claim	0.843	0.045	0.118	0.176
(3) I cannot figure out why the opposites claim the other way	0.885	0.084	0.129	0.034
(4) I think that the opposites are not negotiable	0.780	0.077	-0.135	0.206
(5) I cannot fully understand what the opposites insist on their own	0.735	0.322	0.053	0.126
(6) I think I should be open to what the opposites claim	0.216	0.785	0.108	0.173
(7) I think I should accept the opposites' suggestions	0.077	0.802	0.092	0.109
(8) I think I should agree to the opposites' opinions	0.261	0.750	0.091	0.116
(9) I think I should concede to the opposites' viewpoints	-0.018	0.799	0.114	-0.054
(10) I have heard what the opposites argue	0.036	0.108	0.912	0.000
(11) I know the details that the opposites claim	0.110	0.043	0.904	-0.102
(12) I think there are many people who have different points of view from mine.	0.027	0.272	0.692	0.280
(13) I think the opposites' viewpoints are only for the minority in society	0.290	0.234	0.212	0.728
(14) I think the opposites' viewpoints are one way oriented and incomprehensive	0.277	0.044	-0.090	0.843
Eigen value	3.58	2.74	2.28	1.53
Explanation variance	25.54	19.57	16.30	10.96
Accumulated variance	25.54	45.11	61.42	72.37
Cronbach alpha	0.89	0.82	0.82	0.65

Table 3. Factor Analysis: An issue of donation admission.

|	Understand	Accept	Knowledge	Acknowledge
(1) I cannot understand people with opposing viewpoints	0.805	0.090	0.101	0.169
(2) I cannot understand what the opposites claim	0.829	0.065	0.084	0.173
(3) I cannot figure out why the opposites claim the other way	0.815	0.173	0.271	0.078
(4) I think that the opposites are not negotiable	0.768	0.076	0.076	0.193
(5) I cannot fully understand what the opposites insist on their own	0.794	0.241	0.112	0.305
(6) I think I should be open to what the opposites claim	0.282	0.714	-0.067	-0.036
(7) I think I should accept the opposites' suggestions	0.101	0.854	-0.023	0.067
(8) I think I should agree to the opposites' opinions	0.243	0.700	0.157	0.321
(9) I think I should concede to the opposites' viewpoints	-0.052	0.749	0.107	0.112
(10) I have heard what the opposites argue	0.132	0.003	0.938	0.004
(11) I know the details that the opposites claim	0.115	0.025	0.932	-0.016
(12) I think there are many people who have different points of view from mine.	0.352	0.193	0.554	0.407
(13) I think the opposites' viewpoints are only for the minority in society	0.533	0.267	0.054	0.638
(14) I think the opposites' viewpoints are one way oriented and incomprehensive	0.303	0.104	0.005	0.828
Eigen value	3.90	2.52	2.21	1.58
Explanation variance	27.87	17.97	15.78	11.25
Accumulated variance	27.87	45.84	61.62	72.87
Cronbach alpha	0.90	0.78	0.82	0.73
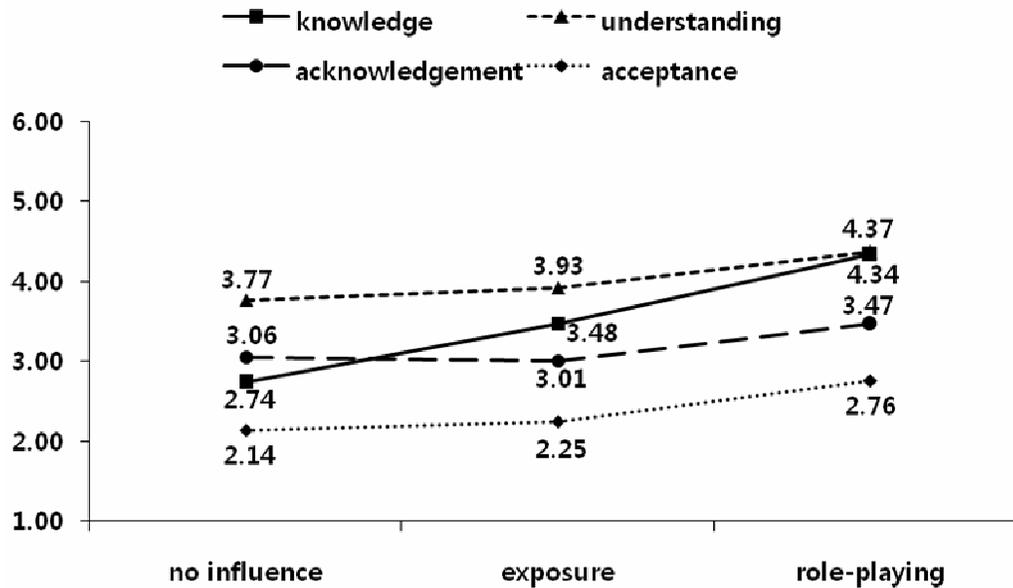
**Figure 1.** The issue of tuition increase.
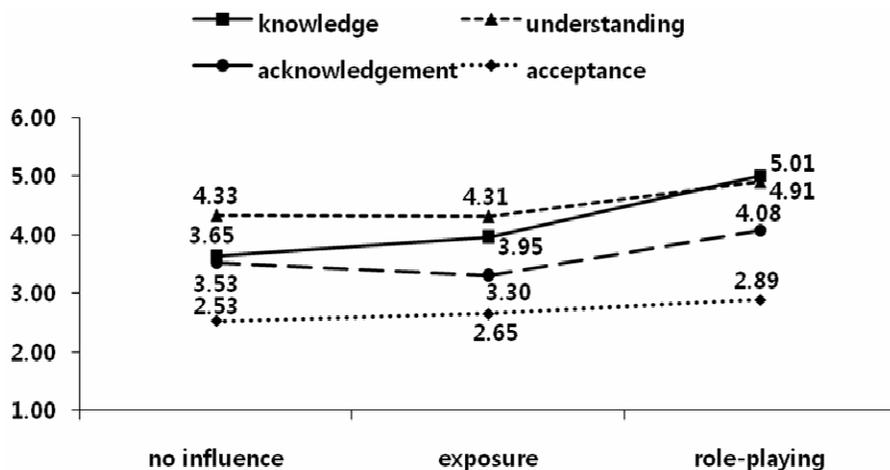
Figure 2. The issue of donation admission.

These were scored on a 6-point scale (1 = do not degree at all, 6 = agree completely). Reliability coefficients for the issue of tuition increase and the issue of donation admission are acceptably high (0.95 and 0.89 respectively), so composite measures were created for use in analyses.

Paired sample t-test was conducted because issue importance was a within-subjects factor. Mean difference between the issue of tuition increase and that of donation admission was statistically significant, which means subjects regarded the issue of tuition increase ($\underline{M}$ = 5.1; $\underline{SD}$ = 0.01) more important than the issue of donation admission ($\underline{M}$ = 2.8; $\underline{SD}$ = 0.15) [$\underline{M}_{diff}$ = 2.28; $\underline{SD}_{diff}$ = 1.4; t = 22.85; df = 199; p < 0.001].

The order effects of the issues on subjects' responses were examined by independent t-test for each influence technique group. There were no statistically significant differences in responses according to the order of the issues. Therefore, we can assume that the differences in responses are not from measurement artifacts.

Analysis

Twenty items for each issue were asked to assess the effects of influence techniques on:

(1) The degree of knowledge regarding an opposing viewpoint;
(2) Degree of desire to understand the opposites;
(3) Degree of acknowledgement of opposing viewpoints;
(4) Degree of acceptance of and consensus with the others' position.

Exploratory factor analyses were conducted and six items were deleted because of low factor loadings which are below 0.6 point. Four factors were identified for each issue and labeled as understanding (for tuition increase $\underline{M}$ = 4.0; $\underline{SD}$ = 1.08; for donation admission $\underline{M}$ = 4.49; $\underline{SD}$ = 1.02), acceptance (for tuition increase $\underline{M}$ = 2.36; $\underline{SD}$ = 0.86; for donation admission $\underline{M}$ = 2.68; $\underline{SD}$ = 0.81),
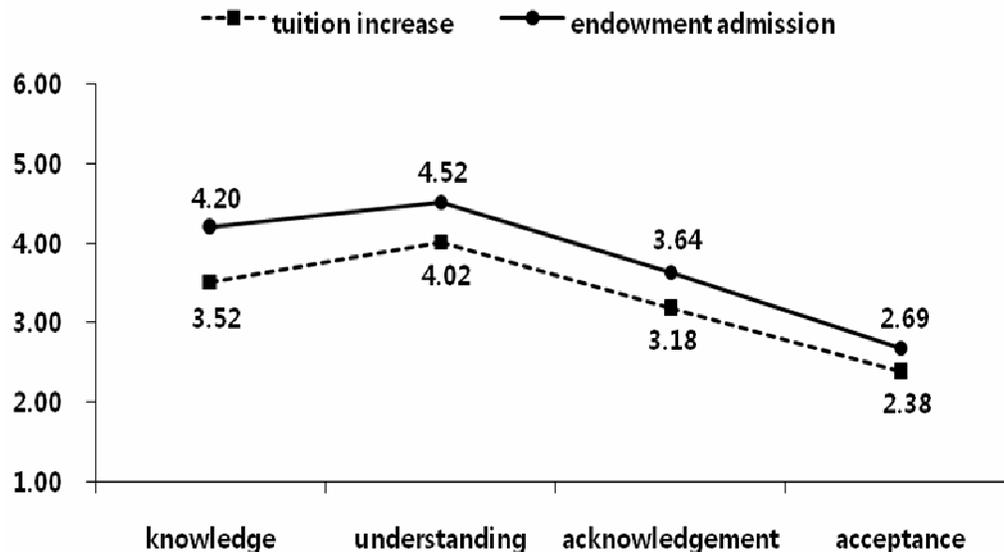
Figure 3. Attitude change by the importance of the issues.

knowledge (for tuition increase $\underline{M}$ = 3.46; $\underline{SD}$ = 1.33; for donation admission $\underline{M}$ = 4.14; $\underline{SD}$ = 1.17) and acknowledgement (for tuition increase $\underline{M}$ = 3.16; $\underline{SD}$ = 1.25; for donation admission $\underline{M}$ = 3.60; $\underline{SD}$ = 1.30) (Tables 2 and 3). Reliability coefficients for the factors of each issue were acceptable (ranging from 0.65 to 0.90), so composite measures were created for use in analyses.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 supposed that influence technique would affect attitudes regarding each issue. Hypothesis 1 was supported for both issues. There was a significant main effect of influence technique on attitude changes [F (2, 194) = 31.09, p < 0.001, r = 0.37].

For the issue of tuition increase, contrast reveals that the simulated civic forum group shows as having a higher level of knowledge than have the other groups [F (2, 197) = 28.66, p < 0.05, r = 0.36]. The simulated civic forum group also shows as having a higher level of under-standing than have the other groups [F (2, 197) = 5.03, p < 0.05, r = 0.16]. Regarding the acknowledgement level, no significant difference exists among groups. For the level of acceptance in the issue of tuition increase, the simulated civic forum group shows as having a higher level of acceptance than have the other groups [F (2, 197) = 9.33, p < 0.05, r = 0.21] (Figure 1).

Regarding the issue of donation admission, the simulated civic forum group shows as having higher levels of knowledge [F (2, 197) = 29.01, p < 0.05, r = 36], understanding [F (2, 197) = 6.02, p < 0.05, r = 0.17], acknowledgement [F (2, 197) = 7.15, p < 0.05, r = 0.19] and acceptance [F (2, 197) = 3.18, p < 0.05, r = 0.13] than have the other two groups (Figure 2).

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 expected that initial attitude salience may moderate the magnitude of changes in attitude to the issues. There was no significant main effect of the attitude salience on the attitude changes [F (1, 194) = 1.38, r = 0.08]. No interaction effect between influence technique and attitude salience was found.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 assumed that attitude change will be greater when exposed to an issue with high importance than to an issue with low importance. Significant main effect of the issue importance on the attitude change exists [F (1,194) = 53.2, p < 0.05, r = 0.46]. Pairwise com-parisons show that attitude changes are more induced in the issue with low importance than with high importance ($\underline{M}_{diff}$ = 0.48, p < 0.001, adjusted for multiple compa-risons, Bonferroni test). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported, although was supported inversely (Figure 3).

DISCUSSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The results indicate that participation in the simulated civic forum (that is, role-playing technique) was more effective persuasion tool when applied to a low importance issue for attitude change than was mere exposure to the messages and no influence. Regardless of the issue, participation in the simulated civic forum where subjects were asked to think about the issue from their own perspective and that of the opposites and to suggest alternatives for conflict resolution, showed more

attitude changes in levels of knowledge, understanding, acknowledgement and acceptance. By providing empirical evidence, this study supported the need to study for verifying the effectiveness of positive strategies such as participative citizen forums, committee organizations, participation in public hearings and in task force teams, etcetera, which can be utilized in public relations.

According to the design of the study, there seem to be four stages in the process of obtaining public consensus. That is, to achieve public consensus on an issue, we should increase

(1) The level of knowledge of the issue at first.
(2) The level of understanding of opposing viewpoints.
(3) The level of acknowledgement that opposing viewpoints can be reasonable and comprehensive.
(4) The level of acceptance of opposing viewpoints and alternatives suggested by those who hold them or by neutral committees.

Results indicated no statistically significant attitude salience effect on attitude change. However, attitude change scores are higher when attitude salience was made high than when attitude salience was made low, which provides supportive evidence for cognitive dissonance theory rather than for self-perception theory. Initial attitude salience means the degree to which subjects recognize and recall their own initial attitudes before deciding on an issue. From the practical point of view in public relations, practitioners can be relieved from two-sided messages with pros and cons regarding an issue or from advocating opposing messages which might get attitude salience to be high. Hypothesis 3 was inversely supported, which means that attitude change was greater when exposed to an issue with low importance than to an issue with high importance. This result does not support cognitive dissonancy theory positing that greater attitude changes are generated for more important issues than for less important issues. Rather than cognitive dissonance theory, self-perception theory seems a more plausible explanation, in that this study had no strong reinforcement cues which might induce subjects to infer they should change their attitudes because they participated in the simulated civic forum. This result provides a useful tip for motivating opinion leaders or an aware public to be involved in role-playing strategies such as used in this study. Simulated civic forum in this study was a form of role-playing activity because respondents was asked to think about the issue from the opposite side, collect appropriate information and write a logical analysis report that supports the opposite group's viewpoints. Public relations strategies utilizing role-playing technique can be applied to small groups like opinion leaders or an aware public who have a high knowledge level but with low involvement in social issues. Although an aware public has low involvement in the issue, once they participate in the program with role-playing technique, their attitudes may change without strong resistance.

Even with its effects and efficacy, there has been much controversy over role-playing as a valid social science laboratory method (Aronson and Carlsmith, 1968; Carlson, 1971; Duffy and Kavanagh, 1983; Freedman, 1969; Spencer, 1978). Most arguments concern the degree of realism, thus generalizability to real behavior, of role-playing behaviors. The issue of to what extent it can be assumed that role-playing accurately mirrors reality, consistently has interested researchers (Martin, 1994). This study also cannot avoid this kind of criticism despite the researcher trying to create an impression that students are dealing with real clients with real problems. In addition, careful interpretation is needed to generalize the results because this study was designed and tested with a single sample from one school and in one class.

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