Why We Believe in Democracy: Testing Theories of Attitude Functions and Democracy

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This study tested different attitude function theories, as well as hypotheses democratic theorists have developed regarding the bases of pro-democratic attitudes. Two hundred and sixty-six undergraduates explained why they believed in democracy, rating the aptness of 40 sentences operationalizing attitude functions, as well as the persuasiveness of six arguments framed in terms of these functions. Factor analysis suggested the existence of either four or six distinct attitude functions. Functional saliences were weakly predictive of persuasiveness ratings, and regression analyses revealed semipartial correlations between functions and age, estimated parents' income, and attitude strength. Implications were drawn for both functional theory and democratic theory and practice.

During the last five years, many researchers have used functional theories of attitudes to describe and explain attitude formation, maintenance, and change. The promise of functional theories is their ability to explain "why people hold the attitudes they do" (Snyder & DeBono, 1989, p. 339). This promise has not only inspired modern functional theorists (Abelson & Prentice, 1989; Anderson & Kristiansen, 1990; DeBono, 1987; Herek, 1986, 1987; Pryor, Reeder, & Vinacco, 1989; Shavit, 1989, 1990; Snyder & DeBono, 1989), it has also drawn the attention of affective and cognitive attitude theorists (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, in press; Edwards, 1990; Fazio, 1989; Millar & Millar, 1990).

All functional theories share a common premise: Attitudes form and remain because they serve various psychological functions for the individual. From this premise, functional theorists have hypothesized that if one wishes to persuade, one should present a message that serves the specific function(s) salient for the receiver (Herek, 1986; Shavit, 1989; Snyder & DeBono, 1989). On this premise and hypothesis, modern functional theorists agree.

Nevertheless, it is appropriate to speak of functional theories, because there is not complete agreement on the set of functions that an

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attitude may serve. Modern functional theorists share a common theoretical inheritance (e.g., Katz, 1960, 1968; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956) but posit different sets of functions. Abelson and Prentice (1989) and Pryor et al. (1989) suggest two categories of attitude functions (and subfunctions, in parentheses), including instrumental and symbolic (social identification and self-expressive) functions. Shavitt (1989, 1990) presents three functions: knowledge, social identity (social adjustment and value expressive), and self-esteem maintenance. Snyder and DeBono (1989) distinguish four functions—ego defensive, knowledge, value expressive, and social adjustment functions. Finally, Herek (1986, 1987) and Anderson and Kristiansen (1990) believe attitudes can be nonfunctional, evaluative (experiential-specific, experiential-schematic, and anticipatory-evaluative), expressive (social-expressive, value expressive, and defensive), and complex, serving multiple functions.

Although each of the above authors has obtained experimental results supporting a particular conception of attitude functions, none has attempted to test these different schemes against one another. In this study, I endeavor to conduct such a test in two ways. First, I use a factor analysis to determine which schemes best organize a large number of reasons for holding a given attitude. Second, I compare the ability of these schemes to predict which of a series of messages subjects find most persuasive. This second step also provides a test of the aforementioned hypothesis that receivers are more receptive to messages that match salient attitude function(s).

Constructing a Comprehensive Set of Attitude Functions

Before attempting to operationalize the various attitude functions, I constructed an exhaustive set of functions, using the distinctions made by modern functional theorists. The analyses themselves determine whether a more parsimonious conception of attitude functions is appropriate.

Of all the distinctions presented above, only Herek’s (1988) differentiation between three kinds of evaluative functions can be set aside a priori. Although Herek’s subfunctions are, indeed, different, they serve indistinguishable functions, each being the evaluation of the costs and benefits of an attitude-object. The distinctions Herek makes differentiate not functions but kinds of information (experiential vs. hypothetical) and cognitive processes (schematic vs. nonschematic). Thus, in terms of the functions of attitudes, these subfunctions are identical.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function type</th>
<th>Function served by holding expressing the attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal utility</td>
<td>Helps maximize subjective personal utility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social utility</td>
<td>Helps maximize subjective social utility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Value expressive</td>
<td>Expresses a genuine belief or value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social adjustment</td>
<td>Eases social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social identity</td>
<td>Forges social identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-esteem maintenance</td>
<td>Protects ego from threatening objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. ego decisive</td>
<td>Associates ego with favorable objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ego bolstering</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

A six-function scheme adequately incorporates all of the modern conceptual distinctions. This set includes personal utility, social utility, value expressive, social adjustment, social identity, and self-esteem maintenance functions, as shown in Table 1. This includes the previously identified functions and three functions implicit in previous theories. The self-expressive and social adjustment functions are equivalent to those described by Snyder and DeBono (1989). The self-esteem maintenance function, with ego defensive and ego bolstering subfunctions, is identical to the self-esteem maintenance function posited by Shavitt (1989). The latter subfunction serves a positive, affirming function, whereas the former is purely protective.

The personal utility, social utility, and social identity functions are all somewhat novel and require elaboration. First, there is conceptual ambiguity about the function that has been labeled instrumental (Abelson & Prentice, 1989), knowledge (Shavitt, 1989; Snyder & DeBono, 1989), evaluative (Herek, 1986), utilitarian (Katz, 1960), and object-appraisal (Fazio, 1989; Smith et al., 1956). These conceptual cousins have different eccentricities yet an essentially common character: Attitudes serving these functions help us perceive the environment in a way that maximizes our subjective interests.

But does this utility function maximize our personal or our social utility? Some functional theories suggest a self-interested utility function (Shavitt, 1989; Herek, 1986), whereas others are altogether unclear on
this point (Abelson & Prentice, 1989; Snyder & DeBono, 1969). It is widely assumed that people often hold attitudes based on social utility calculus (Schwartz, 1986), and a great deal of evidence has supported this common-sense assumption (e.g., Mansbridge, 1990). Even the poor take into account the welfare of family, friends, and community when developing attitudes. Therefore, I include both personal utility and social utility functions in the exhaustive set of attitude functions.

It is also unclear whether attitudes serving a social adjustment function are posed or genuine. For instance, in attempting to apply functional theory to their heuristic systematic model, Chaiken et al., (in press) speculate that impression-motivated attitudes can become "genuine" (p. 44). At that point, do attitudes begin to serve the value-expressive function? Perhaps, but in the interests of creating an exhaustive set of functions, I include a social identity function. An individual can obtain a sense of belonging through the expression of attitudes resembling those held by a liked social group. These attitudes establish not individual identity (value expressive) but social, communal identity. They constitute an attempt to identify one's peers, not to facilitate smooth peer interaction (social adjustment).

Democracy as an Attitude-Object

Four criteria were used to select the attitude-object for this study. First, the object had to have academic and social significance beyond the confines of functional theory. For instance, Herek's (1967) work on the functions served by attitudes toward homosexuals has significant implications for the study and eradication of homophobia, and Pryor et al.'s (1990) research on attitudes toward persons with AIDS could serve a similar purpose. Second, attitudes toward the object had to have meaning for the vast majority of participants; otherwise, the object would be nonfunctional. Third, the object had to have the potential to serve all six of the attitude functions presented above. Fourth, it had to be possible to construct a persuasive message about the object for each of the different attitude functions.

An attitude object that appears to meet these four criteria is democracy. With regard to academic importance, political theorists and political psychologists have sought to understand why people believe in democracy (Binford, 1983; Lane, 1962; Rosenberg, Ward, & Chilton, 1988; Schwartz, 1986). These theorists contend that people believe in democracy for different reasons, and some reasons may foster more resilient democratic beliefs and behaviors than others. As for social significance, democracy is an extremely important subject matter. Democratic attitudes are of particular concern, as some modern critics believe that "thin" (Barber, 1984) or "economic" (Schwartz, 1986) rationales have undermined more ethical, altruistic reasons for believing in democratic social change. This study addresses these academic and social issues by delineating the different functions served by democratic attitudes, assessing the relative saliences of these functions for a Midwestern student population, and exploring connections between functions and other variables, such as age and attitude strength.

Regarding the second criterion, democracy is a strongly held belief in American culture (Lappe, 1989; Merelman, 1984). As for the third criterion, Schwartz (1986) believes that people have traditionally believed in democracy for altruistic (social utility) and ethical (value expressive) reasons, but an increasing number of us believe in democracy out of self-interest (personal utility). Binford's (1983) three types of democratic citizen bear a rough resemblance to attitude functions: for the socially adaptive democrat, a belief in democracy might serve a social adjustment, social identity, or ego bolstering function; for the cognitive democrat, it might serve a social utility or social identity function; and for the character-rooted democrat, it serves a value expressive function. Finally, political psychologists have stressed the role of the ego (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) and self-esteem (Lane, 1962; Sniderman, 1976) in the formation of authoritarian and democratic beliefs, suggesting the potential for democratic beliefs to serve a ego bolstering function and possibly even an ego defensive function.

Fourth, it should not be too difficult to construct persuasive messages about democracy for the different attitude functions. The persuasive messages employed in this study will be pro-attitudinal or "response-reinforcing" arguments (Miller, 1980). Democratic theorists have recommended democracy for as many reasons as there are attitude functions. Democracy's advocates have told us to embrace democracy out of self-interest (Schumpeter, 1976), altruism (Schwartz, 1986), moral virtue (Dahl, 1989), social identity (Rousseau, 1762/1950), and a desire for self-enhancement (Patterson, 1970). With regard to the social adjustment function, Binford's (1983) work suggests its relevance, but no democratic theorist, to this author's knowledge, has framed a rationale for democracy in these terms. On balance, however, it should be relatively easy to produce naturalistic pro-democratic arguments. Taken all
Table 2

Graduate Agreement Scores and Item Locations in Six- and Four-Factor Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function the item was designed to operationalize</th>
<th>Six-factor</th>
<th>Four-factor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wording of item</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Personal utility function**
- ...I think that other systems would keep me from getting what I want.
- ...it benefits me personally.
- ...it lets me get what I want out of life.
- ...it allows me to get as much out of government as I can.
- My...is based on my desire to safeguard my own personal well-being.
- My...is based on my concern for my own welfare.

**Social utility function**
- ...I think it will help safeguard the well-being of others.
- ...I think that other systems would keep other people from getting what they want.
- ...it allows all social groups to get as much out of government as they can.
- ...it benefits society as a whole.
- My...is based on my desire to develop a sense of identification with other people who believe in democracy.
- ...I want to identify myself with the community of people in this country working for democracy.
- My...gives me a social identity—a sense of "who I am" in the world.
- ...I want to identify myself with the people across the globe, like those in Eastern Europe, who believe in democracy.
- ...I do not want to identify myself with undemocratic groups.
- My...is based on my desire to become a part of the global community of people who believe in democracy.

**Self-esteem maintenance: Ego defensive subfunction**
- ...I hate to think how I might behave in an authoritarian country.
- My...reflects my concern that others secretly desire authoritarian government.
- ...I get anxious thinking about how I would behave if I were part of an undemocratic government.
- ...I believe in democracy to counterbalance the democratic beliefs that I also have.

**Self-esteem maintenance: Ego bolstering subfunction**
- ...participating in a democratic system might help me to develop my self-esteem.
- ...it makes me feel like I am a capable, worthwhile person.
- ...it makes me feel good about myself.
- ...it makes me feel like a valuable and important person.
- ...it is based on the idea that regular people like me are important and competent; that makes me feel good about myself.

**Note.** Sentences starting with ellipses began with the phrase, "I believe in democracy because..." Those starting with "My..." began with the phrase, "My belief in democracy." IN = instrumental function, PU = personal utility function, SU = social utility function, VE = value expressive function, SA = social adjustment function, ED = ego defensive function, EB = ego bolstering function, \( \kappa \) = Item excluded due to \( \kappa < .4 \) (\( \kappa \) = Cohen's kappa), --- = Item dropped after test for cohesiveness of factors.
around, democracy is an excellent attitude-object for the purposes of this study.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 189 female and 77 male undergraduate college students enrolled in Communication Arts and Afro-American Studies courses at a large Midwestern university. Eighty-eight percent were of European-American descent, and 81% were between 19 and 22 years old. Forty-six percent reported their parents' estimated annual income as ranging between $41,000 and $50,000, with 21% reporting below and 33% reporting above this range. Thirty-eight percent described themselves as liberal, with 38% moderate and 18% conservative. Participants received nominal extra-credit for their participation.

Measuring the Functions of a Pro-democratic Attitude

To operationalize the six possible attitude functions, 39 sentences were written, each stating why one believes in democracy. There were 9 sentences for the self-esteem maintenance function (5 ego defensive and 4 ego bolstering) and 6 for each of the other functions. To determine the face validity of the sentences, six graduate students familiarized themselves with the six attitude functions and sorted the sentences into six piles, one for each function. Thirty of the sentences appeared to be adequate representations of their respective functions, Cohen's kappa > .79 (see Fleiss, 1981).

Adding 12 new sentences, a set of 42 sentences was created. Eighteen undergraduates performed the same sorting task with the 42 sentences. Undergraduate agreement scores, however, were substantially lower than graduate scores for identical items. These differences probably reflected the graduate students' greater task motivation, theory comprehension, and familiarity with sorting tasks. Accordingly, it was decided to recruit six new graduate students to sort the 42 sentences, resulting in the agreement scores in Table 2. Fleiss (1981) characterizes kappas of .40 to .60 as fair, .60 to .75 as good, and over .75 as excellent. Using this standard, 2 sentences should be thrown out, 3 sentences have fair scores, 4 have fair/good scores, and the remaining 33 have excellent agreement scores.

Participants initially reported whether they "generally agreed" with the statement, "Democracy is the best form of government." Those who disagreed performed an unrelated task. (All but 8 of the 274 students recruited for the study agreed with the statement, supporting the earlier assumption that the vast majority of participants would believe in democracy.) Next, in an attempt to heighten attitude function salience, participants wrote a paragraph explaining why they believed in democracy.

Participants then read the 40 randomly ordered sentences one at a time, rating each on a 5-point scale ranging from "Not true for me at all" to "Very true for me." Participants then read and rated the persuasiveness of six arguments, using a 10-point scale ranging from "Not persuasive at all" to "Extremely persuasive." The six arguments were of equivalent length, but each was framed in terms of a distinct attitude function (see Table 3). A sorting procedure with six graduate students resulted in excellent agreement scores for all six arguments, Cohen's kappa > .79.

Demographic and Attitude Strength Measures

Participants also provided general background information, including age, gender, racial/ethnic heritage, parents' estimated annual income, and political identity. The latter measure included six possible answers—a 5-point continuum ranging from "progressive or radical" to "strongly conservative" and the answer, "I don't really have any political views," a label that only 5% of the participants gave themselves.

Last of all, participants answered three questions about the strength of their pro-democratic attitudes (see Table 4). These questions reflected the idea that attitudes consist of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Miller, 1980). Thus, participants reported (a) the degree to which they believe democracy is the best form of government, (b) the strength of their positive feelings toward democracy, and (c) the extent to which they behave in a manner consistent with their belief in democracy.

Results

Assessing the Adequacy of Democracy as an Attitude-Object

Statistical analyses tested whether democracy met the first three
Table 3

Response-Reinforcing Arguments Framed in Terms of Six Attitude Functions

**Personal utility**
Democratic government provides the surest means by which you can get what you want. The freedom it provides lets you choose your lifestyle. The social utility it gives you bargain for the economic and political goods you desire. Naturally, you should do what serves your own interest, so you should believe in democracy.

**Social utility**
Our natural, altruistic concern for one another is the basis for the democratic ideal. Democracy serves the interests of the whole society. It is the best means whereby your friends and family, as well as myriad other social groups, can realize their goals. Since you genuinely want others to live prosperous, happy lives, you should believe in democracy.

**Value expressive**
Democracy is the logical extension of the most basic human values—liberty and equality. True democracy recognizes the inalienable freedom and dignity of every human being, granting equal political power to all democratic citizens. If you wish to remain consistent with your most fundamental moral and political beliefs, you should believe in democracy.

**Social adjustment**
Anywhere you go, you will be surrounded by people openly supporting democracy. If you join them in singing the praises of democracy, you will have an easy social life; on the other hand, you may become ostracized if you choose to criticize the democratic ideal. Clearly, if you want to get along with friends and neighbors, you should believe in democracy.

**Social identity**
In this modern age of social disintegration, it's hard to find a group or movement with which to identify yourself. Nevertheless, by developing a strong belief in democracy, you can align yourself with a growing popular movement to establish democracy. If you want to identify with a prominent social group, you should believe in democracy.

**Self-esteem maintenance: Ego defensive & bolstering**
Participating in a democracy gives you a sense of self-respect. As an active democratic citizen, you will replace your weaker qualities—ignorance and greed—with ones in which you can take pride. You will develop your general knowledge and learn the virtues of cooperation and compromise. If you want to feel good about yourself, you should believe in democracy.

Table 4

Three Measures of Pro-Democratic Attitude Strength

1. Recall that on the first page of the questionnaire, you stated that you "believe democracy is the best form of government." To be more specific, which of the following statements best represents your personal belief in democracy? (choose one)

   1 = I don't actually believe in democracy that much.
   2 = I believe democracy is a good form of government.
   3 = I believe democracy is a great form of government.
   4 = I believe democracy is the best form of government.
   5 = I believe democracy is, by far, the best form of government.

2. Consider the emotional strength of your belief in democracy. How strong are your positive feelings toward democracy?

   1 = very weak
   2 = weak
   3 = mild
   4 = strong
   5 = very strong

3. Consider the extent to which your belief in democracy affects your life or lifestyle (e.g., your conversations, how you spend your free time, your political actions and participation, your career plans, etc.). What is the degree to which your belief in democracy affects your behavior?

   1 = no effect whatsoever
   2 = little effect
   3 = some effect
   4 = strong effect
   5 = tremendous effect

criteria outlined above for an adequate attitude object. Regarding the first criterion, attitude strength ratings suggested that very few participants had a weak attitude toward democracy. Referring to Table 4, only three participants gave a rating of 1 ("I don't actually believe in democracy that much"), and two thirds gave a rating of 3 (democracy is
“good”) or higher. Remarkably, only five subjects ranked the emotional strength of their belief in democracy as less than 3 (“medium”), and almost two thirds gave a ranking of 4 (“strong”) or 5 (“very strong”). The behavioral component of the attitude was also of modest strength, being ranked as 1 (“very weak”) by only four students and 2 (“weak”) by just one fifth of the participants.

As for the second criterion, it is impossible to determine whether democracy served the full variety of attitude functions until the 40 items are grouped into distinct functions. Therefore, this issue is discussed below, in conjunction with relative function salience.

The third criterion was that one can construct persuasive arguments regarding democracy in terms of each attitude function. To assess the extent to which pro-democratic attitudes met this standard, mean scores were obtained for the six arguments (1 = “Not persuasive at all” and 10 = “Extremely persuasive”). High to average means were obtained for value expressive (M = 7.7), personal utility (M = 6.6), social utility (M = 6.2), and self-esteem maintenance (M = 4.7) arguments. The social identity (M = 2.8) and social adjustment (M = 2.5) arguments ranked the lowest; however, in a subtest involving 172 of the participants, these arguments were scored higher than at least two other functions by one fifth and one tenth of the participants, respectively. Thus, it appears that none of the pro-attitudinal arguments were universally unconvincing; even the two weakest arguments were relatively persuasive for at least some participants.

Distinguishing Functions Through Factor Analysis

A series of factor analyses were performed on the 40 attitude items to determine the distinct functions of pro-democratic attitudes. Rather than relying solely upon a particular factor solution, different factor solutions were generated and compared. A nine-factor solution was obtained using the standard eigenvalue = 1 cut-off, and scree cut-offs were identified after the second and fourth factors. Existing functional theories suggested solutions consisting of two factors (Abelson & Prentice, 1989), three factors (Shavitt, 1989), four factors (Snyder & DeBono, 1989), and six factors (Table 1, above). Thus, drawing on the logic of factor analysis and preexisting theory, varimax rotation was used to obtain solutions with two, three, four, six, and nine factors.

The two-factor solution combined social adjustment, social identity, ego bolstering, and ego defensive items into the first factor, suggesting their commonality as symbolic functions. However, the three highest loadings on the second factor were value expressive items, followed by a mix of personal utility, social utility, and other value expressive items. These results clearly conflicted with two-function models (Abelson & Prentice, 1989; Herek, 1986), making it difficult to interpret the two-factor solution.

The three-factor solution produced a social adjustment/social identity/ego bolstering factor, a social utility/value expressive factor, and a personal/social utility factor. There were no clear parallels between these groupings of items and Shavitt’s (1989) three-factor solution, again making interpretation difficult.

The four-factor solution generated a social adjustment/social identity/ego bolstering factor, a value expressive/social utility factor, a personal/social utility factor, and a personal utility/social identity/ego defensive factor. In some respects, this solution resembled to the four functions described by Snyder and DeBono (1989). The social adjustment function subsumed the social identity and ego bolstering items. The social utility items, construed as operationalizing a “morality” function, joined with the value expressive items. The personal/social utility factor was interpreted simply as an instrumental function. This suggested that there may have been two subtypes of social utility items. In fact, the two social utility sentences that joined with the personal utility items said that people should “get what they want.” The ones that combined with value expressive items speak of “well-being,” “welfare,” and “benefit[ing] society as a whole” (see Table 2).

The greatest difficulty with the four-factor solution was the fourth factor. The fourth function in Snyder and DeBono’s (1989) model was an ego defensive function, but the fourth factor in this solution had only one ego defensive item in it. With a generous interpretation, the wording of these five sentences could be construed as a weak ego defensive function. For example, “I do not want to identify myself with undemocratic groups” might suggest an uneasiness reminiscent of phobias or paranoia. The difficulties in such an interpretation are apparent and resurface in the results below; however, the four-factor solution was the most interpretable thus far.

The six-factor solution resulted in a social adjustment/social identity factor, a value expressive factor, a personal/social utility factor, an ego bolstering factor, a social utility factor, and an ego defensive factor. The value expressive and social utility factors had direct parallels in the six-factor scheme presented in Table 1, and the ego bolstering and ego
defensive factors resembled the subcomponents of the self-esteem maintenance function. The social identity function was subsumed by the social adjustment factor (the identity items had the lowest loadings on the factor). The personal/social utility factor could be interpreted as a personal utility factor, the two highest loadings were on personal utility items, and five of the seven items in the factor were personal utility sentences. In sum, a six-factor solution was readily interpretable, splitting self-esteem maintenance into ego defensive and ego bolstering functions and placing the social identity function within the social adjustment function.

The nine-factor solution was, in less technical terms, a mess. One might have recognized a social adjustment/social identity factor, an ego bolstering factor, a personal/social utility factor, and two separate value expressive factors, but the rest were small, enigmatic combinations of items. Simply put, it was difficult to make any theoretically meaningful interpretation of the nine-factor solution.

Testing the Cohesiveness of the Factors

The four- and six-factor solutions were the most readily interpretable in terms of functional theory. The cohesiveness of each factor within these two sets was assessed in five ways. For a factor to be cohesive, its items had to have, after reflections, (a) the same correlation directions (positive or negative), (b) similar correlation magnitudes within the factor, (c) similar correlations with each other and the factor, and (d) similar correlations with the other factors within their respective set of factors. As a final check, the reliability of each factor was measured, and (e) the factor’s alpha coefficient had to decrease with the removal of any of its items.

Using these five criteria, four items were removed from the four-factor set, and two items were removed from the six-factor set. This resulted in the final sets of items for the four- and six-function schemes, as shown in the two righthand columns of Table 2.

Testing the Relative Predictiveness of the Four- and Six-Factor Solutions

Having identified two interpretable and cohesive factor solutions, it was possible to compare the predictiveness of these two schemes. As noted above, functional theorists concur that the perceived persuasiveness of a message depends, in part, upon (a) the attitude function(s)

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Function framing the attitude-reinforcing argument</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Function framing the attitude-reinforcing argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four function</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six function</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IN = instrumental function, PU = personal utility function, SU = social utility function, VE = value expressive function, SA = social adjustment function, SI = social identity function, SE = self-esteem maintenance function.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

salient for the receiver and (b) the function(s) that frame the message. Thus, it seems appropriate to test the relative predictiveness of the four- and six-function sets in these terms.

Participants’ self-ratings on the items within each function were summed and these sums were divided by the number of items within the function to obtain a mean functional salience score (minimum score = 1.0; maximum score 5.0). These salience scores were treated as independent variables, and the participants’ persuasiveness ratings for the six pro-attitudinal arguments were used as dependent variables. Given the high intercorrelations of the functions within both the four- and six-function sets (see Appendix A), regression analyses were used to obtain semipartial correlations between the independent and dependent variables.

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 5. Both sets of functions were weakly predictive, having equivalent and significant $R^2$s for all the persuasiveness ratings except those for the social adjustment argument. The true test of these two schemes, however, was the analysis of their semipartial $r$ values after all functions had entered the regression equation. If a function is both predictive and distinct from other functions, participants’ functional salience scores for that function should have (a) a significant positive semipartial correlation with the persuasiveness ratings of the corresponding pro-attitudinal argument
and (b) no significant semipartial correlations with the other persuasiveness ratings.

For some functions, these two criteria must be altered slightly. In the four-function set, the value expressive function should correlate with both the value expressive and social utility arguments, and the social adjustment function should positively correlate with both the social adjustment and social identity arguments. In the six-function set, the ego bolstering function could positively correlate with both social identity and self-esteem maintenance arguments, but neither of these fully corresponds to the function. For both schemes, the ego defensive functions within both sets might be expected to have a weaker positive correlation with the self-esteem maintenance argument, since this argument attempts to tap both ego defensive and ego bolstering functions. Finally, the aforementioned difficulty with constructing a persuasive pro-attitudinal argument in terms of the social adjustment function might be expected to attenuate the positive correlation between this argument and the salience of the social adjustment function.

With these qualifications in mind, Table 6 provides the semipartial correlations needed to evaluate and compare the four- and six-function models. The four-function scheme mostly met the first criterion, as the instrumental, value expressive, and social adjustment functions correlated with the predicted arguments. The social adjustment function correlation with the social adjustment argument was not statistically significant, but the correlation was noticeable and the highest of any function with that argument. The ego defensive function also failed to correlate significantly with the persuasiveness of its respective argument.

Nevertheless, the four-function scheme did not meet the second criterion. The value expressive and social adjustment functions had significant correlations with the self-esteem maintenance argument, and the ego defensive function significantly correlated with the personal utility and value expressive arguments. These problems with the fourth, vaguely ego defensive factor were mentioned before, but the ambiguity of this factor would better explain the absence of correlations. In any case, the more serious difficulty was the correlations between the self-esteem maintenance argument and the value expressive and social adjustment functions. These do not, in any straightforward way, square with the four-function theory of attitudes.

The six-factor model has similar strengths and weaknesses. As in the four-factor scheme, each function correlates with predicted arguments, excepting the anticipated nonsignificant correlations between the social adjustment and ego defensive functions and their respective arguments. However, this model may come much closer to meeting the second criterion. There are three unpredicted correlations, but two of these reflect the conceptual similarity of the social utility and value expressive functions. As in the four-function model, the most theoretically perplexing correlation is between the ego defensive function and the persuasiveness of the value expressive argument.

Overall, there was a rough fit between functional salience and ratings of argument persuasiveness. More specifically, both four- and six-function schemes fared well on the first criterion, but the four-factor model produced more unpredicted and problematic correlations.
Relative Function Saliences

Functional salience scores provide additional, qualified support for the claim that democracy was an appropriate attitude object for this study. It was originally assumed that pro-democratic attitudes could serve a variety of functions. Three of the functions in the six-function scheme appeared salient for a large percentage of the participants: 84% had scores at or above 3.0 ("medium") for the value expressive function, 77% for personal utility, and 73% for social utility. Although the other functions were less prominent, 67% of participants had salience scores above 2.0 ("weak") for the ego bolstering function, 50% for social adjustment, and 42% for ego defensive. Results for the four-function scheme were similar.

Not surprisingly, the functions that were salient for a larger number of participants tended to be the most salient functions for individual participants. The value expressive function was the primary function for 36% of the participants, personal utility for 35%, and social utility for 26%. The other functions were each primary for less than 3% of the participants.

Correlations Between Demographics/Attitude Strength and Function Salience

Appendix A provides a table including all bivariate correlations between the variables reported herein. Note that scatterplots were produced for all zero-order correlations relevant to the issues discussed herein. These plots suggested neither clear distortion nor curvilinear relationships among the variables.

The three attitude strength measures were all significantly correlated ($p < .001$), including belief with affect ($r = .50$), belief with behavior ($r = .22$), and affect with behavior ($r = .33$). (These three attitude components, however, do not combine to form a very reliable "attitude strength index," $\alpha = .57$; analyses involving this "attitude strength index" should be interpreted with caution.) Otherwise, only two significant correlations existed among all possible pairings of attitude strength, political views, and demographic variables. Participants reporting more conservative political views reported higher levels of positive affect toward democracy ($r = .22, p < .001$), and those reporting higher estimates of their parents' income reported a stronger belief in democracy ($r = .15, p < .01$).
Due to the high correlations within the two attitude function sets, semipartial correlations were obtained to analyze the relationships between function salience and demographics/political views/attitude strength. There were neither significant nor nearly significant semipartial correlations between function salience and ethnicity and political views. There were many statistically significant relationships between function salience and age, parents' estimated income, and attitude strength, as shown in Tables 7 and 8. In addition, the social utility function was less salient for men than women, $r = .16, p < .05$. Incidentally, this correlation parallels similar findings in the psychology of gender, such as those of Gilligan (1982).

Despite the fact that the study involved a narrow age range, with 90% of the participants between 19 and 23 years of age, two of the functions correlated with age. For older participants, the value expressive function (in the four-function scheme) was more salient and the ego defensive function (in the six-function scheme) was less so.

Those participants who reported higher estimates of their parents' income also tended to have higher personal utility function salience (in the six-function scheme) and a more prominent ego defensive function (in the four-factor scheme).

All three components of attitude strength had significant semipartial correlations with at least one function. Within both the four- and six-function schemes, the salience of the value expressive function positively correlated with the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of attitude strength. Within the six-function scheme, the ego defensive function negatively correlated with all measures of attitude strength, and the social utility and ego bolstering functions correlated with some of the measures of attitude strength. Within the four-factor scheme, the only additional correlations were a positive relationship between the social adjustment function and the behavioral component and a negative correlation between the ego defensive function and the attitude strength index.

Discussion

Implications for Functional Theory

The results of the factor analysis suggest that two- and three-function schemes are too broad, overlooking or incorrectly combining distinct and meaningful attitude functions. At the same time, the factor analyses and semipartial correlations between function salience and persuasiveness do not unambiguously identify an optimal set of attitude functions. The four-function scheme has a more tenuous fit with the data, but it also has the advantage of parsimony. The six-function scheme's predictiveness may not be worth the concomitant increase in theoretical complexity.

If one adopts the four-function scheme, it is important to recognize the conceptual boundaries suggested by this study. First, the instrumental function concerns only personal utility. Attitudes that serve others' interests fall within the value expressive function (the value expressed is benevolence). Personal utility must also include both material and psychological rewards, as the personal utility function subsumes the ego bolstering function. Second, the social adjustment function includes both attitudes that are mere affectations and those that are relatively genuine, giving the individual a sense of social identity or membership.

In addition, the semipartial correlations between the functions and the pro-attitudinal arguments raise some theoretical questions: Why did the value expressive function and the social adjustment function (in the four-function scheme) positively correlate with the persuasiveness ratings of the self-esteem maintenance argument? If there is some relationship among self-esteem, social adjustment, and expressing values, why did it not appear at other points in the analysis?

Also, why does the ego defensive function negatively correlate with the value expressive argument and positively correlate with the personal utility argument (in the four-function scheme)? As for the first correlation, perhaps ego defense and value expression are, to some degree, opposites. In fact, the discussion of democratic theory, below, proposes such an opposition. With regard to the other correlations, one might ask what the difference is between maximizing one's self-interest and defending one's ego. Is not the latter a subset of the former? The answer is not a simple "yes," because by this logic, the ego bolstering function should also have positively correlated with the personal utility argument. In fact, the ego bolstering function's correlations with other variables are quite different from the correlations for the personal utility and ego defensive functions.

While the relationships between function salience and persuasiveness ratings raise questions about functional theory, they also lend support to one of its primary hypotheses. The correlations reported above suggest that function salience predicts a significant portion of
persuasiveness. This finding, using a novel attitude object, broadens the base of support for this central claim of functional theory.

Implications for Democratic Theory and Practice

Choosing democracy as an attitude object makes the results of this study significant for more than just functional theory. This study’s findings have a number of implications for democratic theory and practice. First, democratic theorists have sought to understand and critically scrutinize the reasons that people believe in democracy. Relative function salience is important in this regard, as the social adjustment and ego defensive functions were two of the three least prominent. Acknowledging the limitations of self-report data, most participants appear to have a “genuine” belief in democracy. Their attitude is not a facade erected to disguise true beliefs or protect the ego.

Second, those who view the development of self-esteem as an integral part of democracy (Patzman, 1970; Sniderman, 1976) should notice that the ego bolstering function was salient for half the participants. This raises questions of causation: Does holding a pro-democratic attitude, in and of itself, bolster one’s self-esteem? Do people high in self-esteem more readily adopt a pro-democratic attitude?

Schwartz (1986) and others who lament the erosion of the ethical foundations of democratic beliefs might point to the salience of the personal utility function. The vast majority of students partly believed in democracy because it appeared to serve their personal interests. At the same time, all but a few of the participants believed in democracy because it expressed their moral and political values and/or their concern for the welfare of society. Self-interest is one reason why participants believe in democracy, but it is accompanied, and possibly overshadowed, by altruistic and moral rationales.

The fact that the social utility function is salient for 90% of the participants indirectly suggests the potential effectiveness of altruistic appeals, such as those made by Cohen and Rogers (1983). The salience of the value expressive function for four fifths of the participants suggests that moral arguments might be similarly effective (Barber, 1984; Schwartz, 1986). In addition, the high ratings that participants generally gave to the value expressive and social utility arguments provides direct support for these hypotheses.

The positive correlation of age with the salience of the value expressive function (and negative correlation with ego defensive salience) might indicate that exposure to moral arguments directly or indirectly related to democracy has a profound effect on students’ attitudes during college. The reader is reminded that these indications of changing political consciousness are drawn from a sample of predominantly middle-class, European-American college students. Nevertheless, these findings parallel the experiences of many cultures. In recent history, college students in Mexico City, Paris, Beijing, and Berkeley have spurred social change within their respective countries, showing visible signs of rapid increases in political maturity.

Perhaps the most important findings are the correlations between function salience and attitude strength. Functional theories have treated these two variables as orthogonal, and this makes sense as a generalization. But functional theorists have also argued that certain attitude objects lend themselves more readily to certain functions (Abelson & Prentice, 1989; Shavitt, 1989), and this may be the case for a belief in democracy.

Democratic theorists have argued that democracy finds its strongest foundation in altruism (Laswell, 1951; McCluskey & Zaller, 1984; Schwartz, 1986), broader moral and political beliefs (Binfold, 1983; Rosenberg et al., 1988), and positive self-esteem (Lane, 1962; Pateman, 1970; Sniderman, 1976). These theorists have not connected their work with functional theories, but their “foundations of democracy” correspond with the social utility, value expressive, and ego bolstering functions, respectively. If one accepts these parallels, then the findings of this study lend strong support to these democratic theories. The salience of the social utility function positively correlates with the strength of the cognitive and affective components of pro-democratic attitudes. The value expressive function is highly correlated with the strength of all three components, including cognition, affect, and behavior. Similarly, ego bolstering function salience positively correlates with both the affective and behavioral components of attitude strength. In sum, if one’s favorable attitude toward democracy has its origins in altruism, conscience, or positive self-esteem, one’s attitude may be relatively strong.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest the importance of attitude functions in the persuasion process, generally finding the hypothesized positive
correlations between function salience and argument persuasiveness. This study also provides the first test of the validity of the different functional theories. Results do not unambiguously support a particular conception of attitude functions, but they do suggest that there are at least four, if not six, distinct attitude functions. There appear to be a social adjustment function, encompassing both posed (social adjustment) and genuine (social identity) attitudes, and an ego defensive function. In addition, there is a personal utility function, which may or may not subsume an ego bolstering function, and a value expressive function, under which one might place the social utility function. If one has to choose between the four- and six-function schemes, the parsimony of the four function approach probably outweighs the relative precision of the six-function scheme.

As for democratic theory and practice, the results of this study suggest that some functional foundations are sturdier than others. Positive attitudes toward democracy may or may not be strong when based on a desire to serve one's own interests, ease interaction with others, or protect one's ego. Altruistic, moral, and ego bolstering bases may be stronger. Therefore, if one seeks to bolster college students' positive attitudes toward democracy, it may be advisable to frame pro-attitudinal arguments in terms of benevolence, moral virtue, and positive self-esteem. At the very least, one should not despair: The prominence of the value expressive function among the older undergraduates in this study might have been the direct result of such persuasion.

APPENDIX A

Overall Means, sds, Ns, and Correlations*

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Note: For SEX, 0 = Female, 1 = Male. For ETHNIC, 0 = White, 1 = Nonwhite. IN = instrumental function. PU = personal utility function. SU = social utility function. VE = value expressive function. SA = social adjustment function. ED = ego defensive function. EB = ego bolstering function. INSTR denotes instrumental function. *Missing data deleted pairwise.

References


