INTERPERSONAL SIMILARITY EXTRAPOLATION BETWEEN DOMAINS

by

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ABSTRACT

There are several ways in which people are influenced by other people. One of these ways is by learning other people’s preferences. Someone whose preferences are perceived as similar/dissimilar to self preferences in a given domain is likely to be perceived as having similar/dissimilar preferences to the self in other domains. In this paper we call this effect similarity extrapolation.

We propose attribute substitution as a psychological mechanism to explain similarity extrapolation. The attribute substitution model, based on Kahneman & Frederick (2002), is represented by a two-stage mechanism in which two attribute substitutions occur: (1) first the agreement between the self and another person in domain X substitutes for a general similarity impression with the self, then (2) this impression, activated in the first stage, substitutes for perceived agreement in domain Y. Thus, extrapolation of similarity would occur from domain X to domain Y through a similarity impression.

As alternative explanations for the effect, we contrast three mechanisms: liking, consensus, and lay theories. The liking mechanism is similar to the attribute substitution model but liking is the attribute that substitutes for agreement from one domain to the other. According to the consensus mechanism, the degree of similarity between the self and another person in a domain may influence people’s natural tendency to infer their own opinions are shared by the majority of the population. By the last mechanism – lay theories – people may indeed believe that agreement in a domain between the self and someone else holds in different domains.

In three studies we rule out liking and consensus as explanations for our findings and we find preliminary support for the attribute substitution model. We propose one additional study to rule out the lay theories explanation, and a final study to find further support for our results regarding the attribute substitution model.