

Prevention of extremist opinions through breaking entitativity in online communication

Masato KONDO

Following SIDE model (social identity model of deindividuation effects), people tend to conform to prevailing opinion in an anonymous situation, and prevailing opinion means group majority opinion in a group context. If the group majority opinion is desirable, it leads to a desirable result. By contrast, if it is undesirable, it leads to an undesirable result like cyberbullying. Focusing on *entitativity*, a perception of a group as a single entity distinct from its members, we tried to prevent this conform to the group majority while keeping anonymity. In a preliminary study, we chose a scenario where participants did not have an extreme opinion in advance for the subsequent experiments. In the subsequent three online experiments, we examined whether breaking the perceived entitativity would reduce the conform to the group majority. We created two types of conversations about the fire due to COVID-19 based on the scenario: one was for, and the other was against the fire. Participants read one of the conversations and rated how much they agreed with the conclusion of the conversation on a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Perceived entitativity on the screen was manipulated by each comment’s background color (Experiment 1 and 3) and by the background color and arrangement (Experiment 2), then measured by nine items including four filler items on a 5-point scale from “disagree” to “agree”. The results in all experiments showed no significant difference in the conform to the group majority. We could not successfully manipulate the perceived entitativity on the screen as an independent variable. However, the results showed some relation between the perceived entitativity on the screen and conform to the group majority: those with the lower perceived entitativity less tended to conform to the group majority than those with the higher perceived entitativity. Improvements for future studies were discussed.