



# Polarization and positivity effects: Divergent roles of group entitativity in warmth and competence judgments



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## ABSTRACT

Previous studies have obtained mixed results regarding the influence of entitativity on group judgments. The present research aimed to make sense of the inconsistent results by examining the effect of entitativity on warmth and on competence, inspired by Fiske's seminal work suggesting that group judgments are made in terms of two fundamental dimensions. In Study 1, the target group was a novel group; its entitativity was manipulated by an instruction set regarding common goals and interdependence of group members. We described the target group as positive/negative on a warmth (Study 1a) or competence (Study 1b) dimension with segments of behavior statements. In Study 2, we selected four kinds of real social groups as target groups based on the stereotypes that people had held toward them. The entitativity of these four groups was manipulated by pictures depicting the similarity and interdependence of the group members. In both studies, participants rated the target groups in terms of warmth and competence. The results revealed that entitativity exerted a polarization effect on warmth and a positivity effect on competence judgments. The implications about entitativity and formation of and changes in impressions about groups are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Recently, Kim Jong-un's nuclear weapons program made North Korea and its relations with the rest world the focus of global attention once again. North Korea seems highly united, due to its extraordinary state of cohesion among the military and among the elite, regime stability (Kim, 2009), and strict constraints on foreign policies (Yee, 2008). As in the field of social psychology, internal unity and an impermeable national boundary are indicators of entitativity (Campbell, 1958; Crump, Hamilton, Sherman, Lickel, & Thakkar, 2010; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996); North Korea can therefore be seen as a highly entitative country. Are high entitativity nations perceived as favorable or not? The answer is uncertain. If they gather national strength to do things for peaceful purposes (e.g., carrying on economic aid for other countries), they will be seen as kind. However, if they pose a threat to other countries (e.g., working on a nuclear weapons program), they will be considered extremely malicious. Furthermore, whether or not they want to promote or destroy world peace, their strong national cohesion makes it easier for them to carry out their plans. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehensively examine the effect of entitativity on group judgments to understand people's perceptions of entitative groups.

Previous studies on this issue have been inconclusive. Some

researchers (Castano, Sacchi, & Gries, 2003; Thakkar, 2001) found a polarization effect of entitativity on people's perceptions of groups; specifically that positive traits are perceived as more positive and negative traits are perceived as more negative. Others, however, have demonstrated a positivity effect of entitativity on group perception; in other words, both positive and negative traits are perceived as more positive (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016). We assume that this inconsistency arose because these studies focused on different aspects of group perception. Inspired by Fiske et al.'s seminal work suggesting that groups are mainly judged along the two fundamental dimensions of warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), the present research aimed to make sense of the seemingly incompatible results by simultaneously examining the effect of entitativity on warmth and competence judgments.

### 1.1. Entitativity and its effect on group perception

The concept of entitativity was first proposed by Campbell (1958) to integrate several group cues such as common fate, similarity, proximity, and completed boundary. It indicates the extent to which an aggregate is 'groupy' and perceived as an entity. Entitativity determines whether a group has real existence and is meaningful (Crump et al., 2010). Groups

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vary along an entitativity continuum (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998) and people discriminate between group types according to perceived entitativity (Lickel et al., 2000). For example, intimacy groups (e.g., families) are seen as highly entitative, whereas transitory groups (e.g., people waiting at a bus stop) have the least entitativity.

Two feature-clusters contribute to entitativity. One is the similarity or homogeneity of group members (Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002; Effron & Knowles, 2015). The other is interaction among group members, such as shared common goals and outcomes (Clark & Wegener, 2009; Rydell & McConnell, 2005; Welbourne, 1999), interdependence between group members (Crump et al., 2010), and the group's internal organization (Newheiser, Sawaoka, & Dovidio, 2012). Some researchers suggest that similarity is not as important as interaction in entitativity perception (Brewer, Weber, & Carini, 1995; Thakkar, 2001; Welbourne, 1999). However, others believe that both interaction and similarity are key predictors of entitativity and that their relative importance depends on specific social context (Ip, Chiu, & Wan, 2006; Rutchick, Hamilton, & Sack, 2008; Spencer-Rodgers, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2007).

Previous findings on the effect of entitativity on group perception are inconsistent. On one hand, some studies suggest a polarization effect of entitativity on group perception; that is, entitativity is associated with more extreme judgments about groups. For example, Castano, Sacchi, et al. (2003) found that when the European Union (EU) was viewed as an ally, Americans perceiving it as having higher entitativity rated it as less harmful. Conversely, when the EU was viewed as an enemy, Americans perceiving it as having higher entitativity rated it as more harmful. Another study (Smith, Faro, & Burson, 2013) suggested that positive-valence victims who were described as more entitative (i.e., the victims were part of a family) were viewed more favorably than were those with low entitativity (i.e., the victims lacked a group membership), whereas a negatively-valenced-victim group with high (versus low) entitativity was seen as less favorable and given fewer donations. On the other hand, some researchers have found a positivity effect of entitativity on group perception. Specifically, high entitativity can boost people's judgments about the competence of a target group, irrespective of whether this group is stereotypically perceived as competent (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016).

We anticipate these seemingly contradictory results emerge because these studies focused on different aspects of group perception. Specifically, in Castano et al.'s and Smith et al.'s research, participants rated the target group based on intent-related items, such as harmfulness (Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003) or favorability (Smith et al., 2013). Conversely, Callahan and Ledgerwood (2016) asked participants to make group judgments based on capability-related items. The different aspects of group perception measured in these studies almost match the Big Two of social perception; namely, that warmth and competence are the two fundamental dimensions of group perception (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Based on this classic model, the present research focused on both warmth and competence dimensions simultaneously to clarify the divergent roles of entitativity on group perception.

### 1.2. Polarization effect of entitativity on warmth: warm gets warmer and cold gets colder

Previous research suggests that high entitativity magnifies the strength of group-intention attribution, or intentionality (Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003; Malle, 2010; O'Laughlin & Malle, 2002; Sacchi, Castano, & Brauer, 2009). Highly (compared with low) entitative groups must state their intentions clearly to keep all group members acting jointly. Moreover, people are more likely to explain the actions of highly entitative group by the desires of group members rather than backgrounds preceding the desires (O'Laughlin & Malle, 2002). This is because compared with backgrounds, desires imply a higher level of deliberateness of actions (Nelson & Malle, 2000). Moreover, members of

highly entitativity groups are seen as holding collective interests and taking collective responsibility for their actions (Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, & Ames, 2006; Lickel, 2000; Lickel, Schmader, & Hamilton, 2001). Therefore, high entitativity is associated with a higher level of intentionality (O'Laughlin & Malle, 2002).

Given that warmth judgments are based on the perceived intention of groups (Fiske et al., 2002), we assume that entitativity can polarize warmth judgments because high entitativity groups are more intentional relative to groups with low entitativity (Sacchi et al., 2009). Several studies concerning the influence of entitativity on intergroup emotional and behavioral responses support our assumption. High (compared with low) entitativity groups possessing cooperative intentions elicit more attraction and identification (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 2003; Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, & Paladino, 2000). Conversely, highly entitative groups possessing negative intentions are associated with more suspicion (Newheiser et al., 2012) and discrimination (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008; Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006; Newheiser, Tausch, Dovidio, & Hewstone, 2009). Based on these findings and along with Castano et al.'s argument (Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003), we suppose that high entitativity can make positive intentions seem more positive and negative intentions seem more negative. Therefore, we hypothesize that entitativity exerts a polarization effect on warmth judgments (Hypothesis 1). More specifically, warm groups with high (compared with low) entitativity tend to be rated as warmer, whereas cold groups with high entitativity tend to be rated as colder.

### 1.3. Positivity effect of entitativity on competence: both competent and incompetent become more competent

Entitativity can positively predict competence judgments because people think high (compared with low) entitativity groups are more able to carry out their intentions (Rutchick et al., 2008; Yzerbyt et al., 2000). The members of high entitativity groups share common goals (Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004; Kashima et al., 2005) and can achieve their goals faster because they are more likely to take collective action (Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998). Because high entitativity group members are more internally organized and interact with each other more frequently, they are expected to be more efficient at coordinating their efforts and acting upon their plans (Newheiser & Dovidio, 2015; Smith et al., 2013; Wang, He, & Liu, 2016; Yzerbyt et al., 2000).

Several studies indicate that high entitativity groups are associated with positive competence-related traits. For example, messages advocated for by highly entitative groups are viewed as more credible and more persuasive relative to those advocated for by loose aggregates (Clark & Thiem, 2015; Clark & Wegener, 2009). Wang et al. (2016) found that a subtle increase in group entitativity (i.e., facial resemblance among group members) increased people's positive evaluation of group effectiveness. Another study further pointed out that both competent and incompetent groups were rated as more competent when they were represented with a logo (i.e., highly entitative group) than when they were not (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016). Therefore, we expect that entitativity exerts a positivity effect on competence judgments (Hypothesis 2). Stated differently, entitativity positively predicts competence regardless of the initial level of competence of the groups.

### 1.4. Overview of present research

The present research aims to clarify how entitativity influences warmth and competence judgments about groups. Based on the analyses of previous research, we propose that entitativity polarizes warmth judgments (Hypothesis 1) and exerts a positivity effect on competence judgments (Hypothesis 2). To examine these hypotheses, two studies were conducted with experimentally created groups (Study 1) and real social groups (Study 2).

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