

Attitude Change

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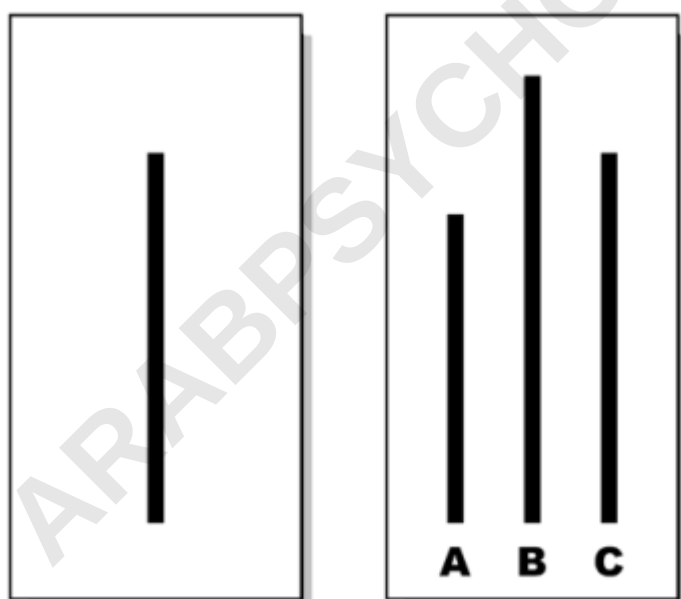
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Attitudes are the evaluations and associated beliefs and behaviors towards some object. They are not stable, and because of the communication and behavior of other people, are subject to change by social influences, as well as an individual's motivation to maintain cognitive consistency when cognitive dissonance occurs-when two attitudes or when attitude and behavior conflict. Attitudes and attitude objects are functions of affective and cognitive components. It has been suggested that the inter-structural composition of an associative network can be altered by the activation of a single node. Thus, by activating an affective or emotion node, attitude change may be possible, though affective and cognitive components tend to be intertwined.

Bases for attitude change

There are three bases for attitude change, which includes compliance, identification, and internalization. These three processes represent the different levels of attitude change..

Compliance



One of the pairs of cards used in the experiment. The card on the left has the reference line and the one on the right shows the three comparison lines.

Compliance refers to a change in behavior based on consequences, such as an individual's hopes to gain rewards or avoid punishment from another group or person. The individual does not

necessarily experience changes in beliefs or evaluation towards an attitude object, but rather is influenced by the social outcomes of adopting a change in behavior. The individual is also often aware that he or she is being urged to respond in a certain way.

Compliance was demonstrated through a series of laboratory experiments known as the Asch experiments. Experiments led by Solomon Asch of Swarthmore College asked groups of students to participate in a "vision test". In reality, all but one of the participants were confederates of the experimenter, and the study was really about how the remaining student would react to the confederates' behavior. Participants were asked to pick, out of three line options, the line that is the same length as a sample and were asked to give the answer out loud. Unbeknown to the participants, Asch had placed a number of confederates to deliberately give the wrong answer before the participant. The results showed that 75% of participants succumbed to the majority's influence and gave the answer the confederates picked. Variations in the experiments showed that compliance rates increased as the number of confederates increased, which plateaus at around 15 confederates. Also, minority opposition, such as if even one confederate gave the correct answer, the likelihood of compliance drops. The basis for compliance is founded on the fundamental idea that people want to be accurate and right.

Identification

Identification explains one's change of beliefs and affect in order to be similar to someone who one admires or likes. In this case, the individual adopts the new attitude, not due to the specific content of the attitude object, but more so because it is associated with the desired relationship. Often, children's attitudes on race, or their political party affiliations are adopted from their parents' attitudes and beliefs.

Internalization

Internalization refers to the change in beliefs and affect when one finds the content of the attitude to be intrinsically rewarding, and thus leading to actual change in beliefs or evaluation towards an attitude object. The new attitude or behavior is consistent with the individual's value system, and tends to be merged with the individual's existing values and beliefs. Therefore, behavior adopted through internalization are due to the content of the attitude object.

The Expectancy-value theory is based on internalization of attitude change. This model describes the states that the behavior towards some object is a function of an individual's intent, which is a function of one's overall attitude towards the action.

Emotion-based attitude change

Emotion plays a major role in persuasion, social influence, and attitude change. Much of attitude

research has emphasised the importance of affective or emotion components. Emotion works hand-in-hand with the cognitive process, or the way we think, about an issue or situation. Emotional appeals are commonly found in advertising, health campaigns and political messages. Recent examples include no-smoking health campaigns (see tobacco advertising) and political campaign advertising emphasizing the fear of terrorism.

Important factors that influence the impact emotion appeals include self efficacy, attitude accessibility, issue involvement, and message/source features. Attitudes that are central to one's being and highly resistant to change while others that are less fixed may change with new experiences or information. A new attitude (e.g. to time-keeping or absenteeism or quality) may challenge existing beliefs or norms so creating a feeling of psychological discomfort known as cognitive dissonance. It is difficult to measure attitude change since attitudes may only be inferred and there might be significant divergence between those publicly declared and privately held. Self efficacy is a perception of one's own human agency; in other words, it is the perception of our own ability to deal with a situation. It is an important variable in emotion appeal messages because it dictates a person's ability to deal with both the emotion and the situation. For example, if a person is not self-efficacious about their ability to impact the global environment, they are not likely to change their attitude or behaviour about global warming.

Affective forecasting, otherwise known as intuition or the prediction of emotion, also impacts attitude change. Research suggests that predicting emotions is an important component of decision making, in addition to the cognitive processes. How we feel about an outcome may override purely cognitive rationales. In terms of research methodology, the challenge for researchers is measuring emotion and subsequent impacts on attitude. Since we cannot see into the brain, various models and measurement tools have been constructed to obtain emotion and attitude information. Measures may include the use of physiological cues like facial expressions, vocal changes, and other body rate measures. For instance, fear is associated with raised eyebrows, increased heart rate and increase body tension. Other methods include concept or network mapping, and using primes or word cues.

Components of emotion appeals

Any discrete emotion can be used in a persuasive appeal; this may include jealousy, disgust, indignation, fear, and anger. Fear is one of the most studied emotional appeals in communication and social influence research. Dillard (1994) suggests that "fear appeals have been thought of as messages that attempt to achieve opinion change by establishing the negative consequences of failing to agree with the advocated position" (p. 295). The EPPM (above) looks at the effectiveness of using fear and threat to change attitudes.

Important consequences of fear appeals and other emotion appeals include the possibility of

reactance which may lead to either message rejections or source rejection and the absence of attitude change. As the EPPM suggests, there is an optimal emotion level in motivating attitude change. If there is not enough motivation, an attitude will not change; if the emotional appeal is overdone, the motivation can be paralyzed thereby preventing attitude change. Emotions perceived as negative or containing threat are often studied more than perceived positive emotions like humour. Though the inner-workings of humor are not agreed upon, humour appeals may work by creating incongruities in the mind. Recent research has looked at the impact of humour on the processing of political messages. While evidence is inconclusive, there appears to be potential for targeted attitude change in receivers with low political message involvement.

Dillard (1994) suggests that message features such as source non-verbal communication, message content, and receiver differences can impact the emotion impact of fear appeals. The characteristics of a message are important because one message can elicit different levels of emotion for different people. Thus, in terms of emotion appeals messages, one size does not fit all.

Attitude accessibility refers to the activation of an attitude from memory; in other words, how readily available is an attitude about an object, issue, or situation. Issue involvement is the relevance and salience of an issue or situation to an individual. Issue involvement has been correlated with both attitude access and attitude strength. Past studies conclude accessible attitudes are more resistant to change.

Dual models: Depth of Processing in Attitude Change

Many dual process models are used to explain the affective (emotional) and cognitive processing and interpretations of messages, as well as the different depths of attitude change. These include the elaboration likelihood model and the heuristic-systematic model of information processing.

Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing

The Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing describes two depths in the processing of attitude change, which includes systematic processing and heuristic processing. In this model information is either processed in a high-involvement and high-effort systematic way, or information is processed through shortcuts known as heuristics. For example, emotions are affect-based heuristics, in which feelings and gut-feeling reactions are often used as shortcuts.

Systematic processing

Systematic processing occurs when individuals are motivated and have high cognition to process a message. Individuals using systematic processing are motivated to pay attention and have the cognitive ability to think deeply about a message; they are persuaded by the content of the message, such as the strength or logic of the argument. Motivation can be determined by many

factors, such as how personally relevant the topic is, and cognitive ability can be determined by how knowledgeable an individual is on the message topic, or whether or not there is a distraction in the room. Individuals who receive a message through systematic processing usually lead to internalization, and thus resulting in longer and more stable attitude change.

According to the Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing, people are motivated to use systematic processing when they want to achieve a "desired level of confidence" in their judgments. There are factors that have been found to increase the use of systematic processing, which these factors are associated with either decreasing an individual's actual confidence or increasing an individual's perceived confidence. These factors may include framing of persuasive messages in an unexpected manner; self-relevancy of the message.

Systematic processing has been shown to be beneficial in social influence settings. Systematic reasoning has been shown to be successful in producing more valid solutions during group discussions and greater solution accuracy. Shestowsky's (1998) research in dyad discussions revealed that the individual in the dyad who had high motivation and high need in cognition had the greater impact on group decisions.

Heuristic processing

Heuristic processing occurs when individuals have low motivation and/or low cognitive ability to process a message. Instead of focusing on the argument of the message, recipients using heuristic processing focus on more readily accessible information and other non-content cues, such as the authority or attractiveness of the speaker. Individuals who process a message through heuristic processing does not result in internalization, and thus any attitude change resulting from the persuasive message is temporary and unstable.

For example, people are more likely to grant favors if reasons were provided. For example, a study shows that when people asked, "Excuse me, I have five pages to xerox. May I use the copier?" held a positive response of 60% whereas, "Excuse me, I have five pages to xerox. I am in a rush. May I use the copier?" held a 95% success rate.

Heuristic processing examples include social proof, reciprocity, authority, and liking.

Social proof is by the means where we utilize other people's behaviors in order to form our own beliefs. Our attitudes change towards in following the majority's response when a situation is uncertain or ambiguous to us, when the source is an expert, or when the source is similar to us. In a study conducted by Sherif, he discovered the power of crowds when he worked with experimenters who looked up in the middle of New York City. As the number of the precipitating group increased, the percentage of pass-bys who looked up as well increased.

Reciprocity is to return a favor someone has done. People are more likely to return a favor if he or she has a positive attitude towards the opposing party. Reciprocities also develop interdependence and societal bonds.

Authority plays a role in attitude change in situations where there are superior-inferior relationships. We are more likely to become obedient to authorities due to factors such as the authority's expertise and potential rewards we may receive. A famous study that constitutes the difference in attitude change is the Milgram experiment, where people changed their attitudes to "shocking their partner" more so when they followed authorities whereas the subjects themselves would have not done so otherwise.

Liking has shown that if one likes an opposite party, the individual is more inclined to carry out a favor. The attitude changes are based on whether an individual likes an idea or person, and if he or she does not like the opposite party, he/she may not carry out the favor or do so out of obligation. Liking can influence one's opinions through factors such as physical attractiveness, similarities, compliments, and contact and cooperation.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model is similar in concept to and share many ideas with other dual processing models, such as the Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing. In the Elaboration Likelihood Model, cognitive processing is the central route and affective/emotion processing is often associated with the peripheral route. The central route pertains to an elaborate cognitive processing of information while the peripheral route relies on cues or feelings. The ELM suggests that true attitude change only happens through the central processing route that incorporates both cognitive and affective components as opposed to the more heuristics-based peripheral route. This suggests that motivation through emotion alone will not result in an attitude change.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Attitude Change

Cognitive dissonance, a theory originally developed by Festinger (1957)], is the idea that people experience a sense of guilt or uneasiness when two linked cognitions are inconsistent, such as when there are two conflicting attitudes about a topic, or inconsistencies between one's attitude and behavior on a certain topic. The basic idea of the Cognitive Dissonance Theory relating to attitude change, is that people are motivated to reduce dissonance which can be achieved through changing their attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors (action). Cooper & Fazio's (1984) have also added that cognitive dissonance does not arise from any simple cognitive inconsistency, but rather results from freely chosen behavior that may bring about negative consequences. These negative consequences may be threats to the consistency, stability, predictability, competence, moral

goodness of the self-concept, or violation of general self-integrity (see Self-Affirmation Theory).

Research has suggested multiple routes that cognitive dissonance can be reduced. Self-affirmation has been shown to reduce dissonance, however it is not always the mode of choice when trying to reduce dissonance. When multiple routes are available, it has been found that people prefer to reduce dissonance by directly altering their attitudes and behaviors rather than through self-affirmation. People who have high levels of self-esteem, who are postulated to possess abilities to reduce dissonance by focusing on positive aspects of the self, have also been found to prefer modifying cognitions, such as attitudes and beliefs, over self-affirmation. A simple example of cognitive dissonance resulting in attitude change would be when a heavy smoker learns that his sister died young from lung cancer due to heavy smoking as well, this individual experiences conflicting cognitions: the desire to smoke, and the knowledge that smoking could lead to death and a desire not to die. In order to reduce dissonance, this smoker could change his behavior-stop smoking, change his attitude about smoking-smoking is harmful, or retain his original attitude about smoking and modify his new cognition to be consistent with the first one-"I also work out so smoking won't be harmful to me". Thus, attitude change is achieved when individuals experience feelings of uneasiness or guilt due to cognitive dissonance, and actively reduce the dissonance through changing their attitude, beliefs, or behavior relating in order to achieve consistency with the inconsistent cognitions.