

Academic Script

Objectives:

- 1) To study the attitude formation and attitude change strategies.
- 2) To understand the cognitive dissonance theory.
- 3) To study the attribution theory.

Introduction:

People often try to influence others. Salespeople urge customers to buy goods or services; politicians exhort people to vote for them; dating partners try to make a good impression on each other; managers attempt to maintain employees' dedication to work; and advertisers try to raise interest in consumer products. In all of these examples, people try to make others like or dislike particular objects, ideas, individuals, groups or tasks.

Attitudes are tendencies to like or dislike something – such as an idea, person or behavior – and the object of these tendencies (the thing being liked or disliked) is often called the attitude object. Attitudes indirectly or directly affect behavior in virtually every social interaction. This is why the study of attitudes and attitude change is a fundamental area of social psychological research.

Attitude Formation:

Formation/Sources of Attitudes:

Attitudes refer to the feelings and beliefs of “individuals or groups of individuals. But the question is how these feelings and beliefs developed? The point which has been stressed by many people are that attitudes are acquired, but not inherited. A person acquires these attitudes from several sources.

The Attitudes are acquired but not important sources of acquiring attitudes are as discussed below:

1. Direct Personal Experience:

A person's direct experience with the attitude object determines his attitude towards it. The personal experience of an individual, whether it is favorable or unfavorable, will affect his attitude deeply. These attitudes which are based on personal experience are difficult to change.

For example, an individual joins a new job, which is recommended to him by his friend. But when he joins the job, he finds his work repetitive, supervisors too tough and co-workers not so co-operative, he would develop a negative attitude towards his job, because the quality of his direct experience with the job is negative.

2. Association:

Sometimes an individual comes across a new attitude object which may be associated with an old attitude object. In such a case, the attitude towards the old attitude object may be transferred towards the new attitude object. For example, if a new worker remains most of the time in the company of a worker, who is in the good books of the supervisor, and towards whom the supervisor has a positive attitude, the supervisor is likely to develop a favorable attitude towards the new worker also. Hence the positive attitude for the old worker has been transferred towards the new worker because of the association between the old and the new worker.

3. Family and Peer Groups:

Attitudes like values are acquired from parents, teachers and peer group members. In our early years, we begin modeling our attitudes after those we admire, respect or may be even fear. We observe the way our family and friends behave and we shape our attitudes and behavior to align with theirs. We do so even without being told to

do so and even without having direct experience. Similarly, attitudes are acquired from peer groups in colleges and organizations. For example, if the right thing is to visit “Hot Millions”, or the “Domino’s”, you are likely to hold that attitude. If your parents support one political party, without being told to do so, you automatically start favouring that party.

4. Neighbourhood:

The neighbourhood in which we live has certain cultural facilities, religious groupings and ethnic differences. Further, it has people, who are neighbours. These people may be Northerners, Southerners etc. The people belonging to different cultures have different attitudes and behaviours. Some of these we accept and some of these we deny and possibly rebel. The conformity or rebellion in some respects is the evidence of the attitudes we hold.

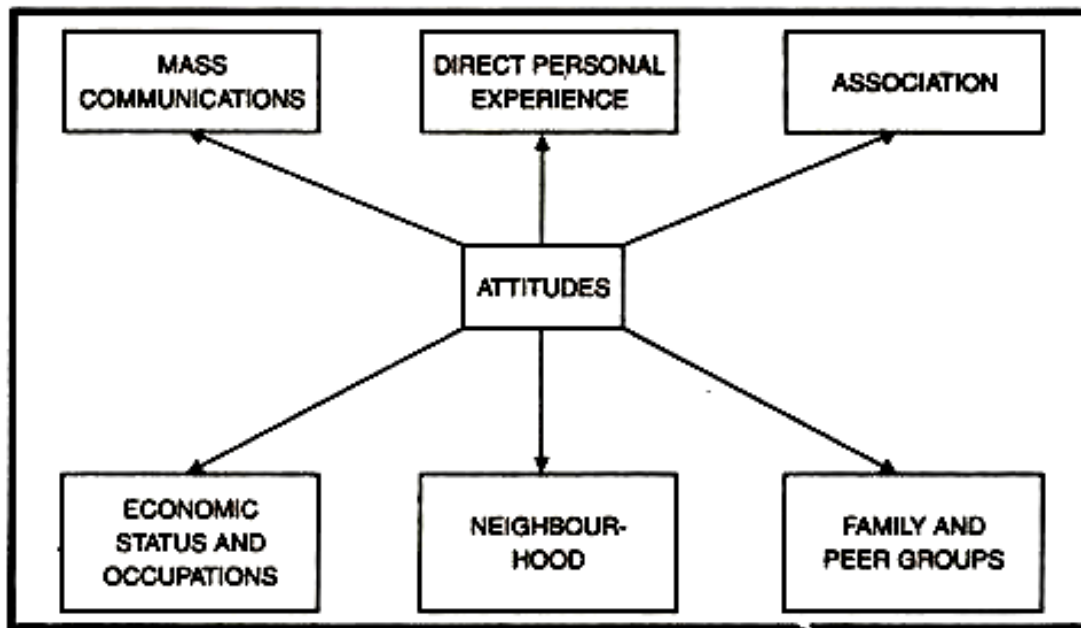
5. Economic Status and Occupations:

The economic status and occupational position of the individual also affect his attitude formation. Our socio-economic background influences our present and future attitudes. Research findings have shown that unemployment disturbs former religious and economic values. Children of professional class tend to be conservatives. Respect for the laws of the country is associated with increased years of higher education.

6. Mass Communications:

Attitudes are generally less stable as compared to values. Advertising messages for example, attempt to alter the attitude of the people toward a certain product or service. For example, if the people at Hyundai Santro can get you to hold a favorable feeling toward their cars, that attitude may lead to a desirable behavior (for them)- your purchase of a Santro car.

All these sources can be illustrated with the help of the following figure:



Attitude Change Strategies:

Changing attitudes is generally *very difficult*, particularly when consumers suspect that the marketer has a self-serving agenda in bringing about this change (e.g., to get the consumer to buy more or to switch brands).

Changing affect. One approach is to try to change affect, which may or may not involve getting consumers to change their beliefs. One strategy uses the approach of *classical conditioning* try to “pair” the product with a liked stimulus. For example, we “pair” a car with a beautiful woman. Alternatively, we can try to get people to like the advertisement and hope that this liking will “spill over” into the purchase of a product. For example, the Pillsbury Doughboy does not really emphasize the conveyance of much information to the consumer; instead, it attempts to create a warm, fuzzy image. Although Energizer Bunny ads try to get people to believe that their batteries last longer, the main emphasis is on the likeable bunny. Finally, products which are better known, through the *mere exposure* effect, tend to be better liked--that is, the more a product is advertised and seen in stores, the more it will generally be liked, *even if consumers do not develop any specific beliefs about the product.*

Changing behavior. People like to believe that their behavior is rational; thus, once they use our products, chances are that they will continue unless someone is able to get them to switch. One way to get people to switch to our brand is to use temporary price discounts and coupons; however, when consumers buy a product on deal, they may justify the purchase based on that deal (i.e., the low price) and may then switch to other brands on deal later. A better way to get people to switch to our brand is to at least temporarily obtain better shelf space so that the product is more convenient. Consumers are less likely to use this availability as a rationale for their purchase and may continue to buy the product even when the product is less conveniently located. (Notice, by the way, that this represents a case of shaping).

Changing beliefs. Although attempting to change beliefs is the obvious way to attempt attitude change, particularly when consumers hold unfavourable or inaccurate ones, this is often difficult to achieve because consumers tend to resist. Several approaches to belief change exist:

1. *Change currently held beliefs.* It is generally very difficult to attempt to change beliefs that people hold, particularly those that are strongly held, *even if they are inaccurate*. For example, the petroleum industry advertised for a long time that its profits were lower than were commonly believed, and provided extensive factual evidence in its advertising to support this reality. Consumers were suspicious and rejected this information, however.
2. *Change the importance of beliefs.* Although the sugar manufacturers would undoubtedly like to decrease the importance of healthy teeth, it is usually not feasible to make beliefs less important--consumers are likely to reason, why, then, would you bother bringing them up in the first place? However, it may be possible to strengthen beliefs that favor us--e.g., a vitamin supplement manufacturer may advertise that it is extremely important for women to replace iron lost through menstruation. Most consumers already agree with this, but the belief can be made stronger.

3. *Add beliefs.* Consumers are less likely to resist the addition of beliefs *so long as they do not conflict with existing beliefs*. Thus, the beef industry has added beliefs that beef (1) is convenient and (2) can be used to make a number of creative dishes. Vitamin manufacturers attempt to add the belief that stress causes vitamin depletion, which sounds quite plausible to most people.
4. *Change ideal.* It usually difficult, and very risky, to attempt to change ideals, and only few firms succeed. For example, Hard Candy may have attempted to change the ideal away from traditional beauty toward more unique self expression

Cognitive dissonance theory:

This theory was given by Leon Festinger. According to cognitive dissonance theory, there is a tendency for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions). When there is an inconsistency between attitudes or behaviors (dissonance), something must change to eliminate the dissonance. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, it is most likely that the attitude will change to accommodate the behavior.

Two factors affect the strength of the dissonance: the number of dissonant beliefs, and the importance attached to each belief. There are three ways to eliminate dissonance: (1) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs, (2) add more consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, or (3) change the dissonant beliefs so that they are no longer inconsistent.

Dissonance occurs most often in situations where an individual must choose between two incompatible beliefs or actions. The greatest dissonance is created when the two alternatives are equally attractive. Furthermore, attitude change is more likely in the direction of less incentive since this results in lower dissonance. In

this respect, dissonance theory is contradictory to most behavioral theories which would predict greater attitude change with increased incentive (i.e., reinforcement).

Application: Dissonance theory applies to all situations involving attitude formation and change. It is especially relevant to decision-making and problem-solving.

Example: Consider someone who buys an expensive car but discovers that it is not comfortable on long drives. Dissonance exists between their beliefs that they have bought a good car and that a good car should be comfortable. Dissonance could be eliminated by deciding that it does not matter since the car is mainly used for short trips (reducing the importance of the dissonant belief) or focusing on the car's strengths such as safety, appearance, handling (thereby adding more consonant beliefs). The dissonance could also be eliminated by getting rid of the car, but this behavior is a lot harder to achieve than changing beliefs.

Principles:

1. Dissonance results when an individual must choose between attitudes and behaviors that are contradictory.
2. Dissonance can be eliminated by reducing the importance of the conflicting beliefs, acquiring new beliefs that change the balance, or removing the conflicting attitude or behavior.

Attribution Theory:

It is a theory which supposes that people attempt to understand the behavior of others by attributing feelings, beliefs, and intentions to them.

"Attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment"

Attribution theory is concerned with how and why ordinary people explain events as they do.

Heider (1958) believed that people are naive psychologists trying to make sense of the social world. People tend to see cause and effect relationships, even where there is none!

Heider didn't so much develop a theory himself as emphasize certain themes that others took up. There were two main ideas that he put forward that became influential.

1. **Internal Attribution:** The process of assigning the cause of behavior to some internal characteristic, rather than to outside forces. When we explain the behavior of others we look for enduring internal attributions, such as personality traits. For example, we attribute the behavior of a person to their personality, motives or beliefs.

2. **External Attribution:** The process of assigning the cause of behavior to some situation or event outside a person's control rather than to some internal characteristic. When we try to explain our own behavior we tend to make external attributions, such as situational or environment features.

Summary:

So friends, let's summarize today's session. In today's session we studied about:

Firstly, attitude formation- It refers to the feelings and beliefs of "individuals or groups of individuals.

Secondly, attitude change strategies- Generally Changing attitudes is *very difficult*, particularly when consumers suspect that the marketer has a self-serving agenda in bringing about this change.

Thirdly, Cognitive Dissonance Theory - According to cognitive dissonance theory, there is a tendency for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions).

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Attribution Theory- It is a theory which supposes that people attempt to understand the behaviour of others by attributing feelings, beliefs, and intentions to them.