

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ When is attitude change successfully achieved?
- ☰ Attitude function and attitude change
- ☰ Significance of Elliot and Devine's (1994) experiment
- ☰ Effect of reciprocity
- ☰ Effect of message framing
- ☰ Effect of message framing (continued...)
- ☰ When cognitive dissonance does not produce attitude change
- ☰ Trivialization: downplaying the salience of inconsistencies

When is attitude change successfully achieved?

- We have already seen in the previous lectures that persuasion, through the Yale approach that emphasizes various aspects of the communicator, communication and the audience, leads to attitude change. We also saw the rationale of ELM that emphasizes how the high and low possibility of careful processing of information leads to attitude change through quality of arguments and the persuasion cues respectively. Besides persuasion, we also the role of cognitive dissonance leading to attitude change as it lowers the unpleasantness of being the state of dissonance. In this lecture, we shall learn other important factors that facilitate or dampen the effects of attempts at changing one's attitude.

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Attitude function and attitude change

- Social psychologist have noted that one's attitude may serve various functions for the person holding it. An attitude may help organize and interpret different sets of information (knowledge function). The self-esteem function served by the attitude is the enhanced self-esteem associated with the attitude. The self-identity or self-expression function may help the person express his or her central values or beliefs.
- It has been noted that particularly self-esteem and self-identity functions may help facilitating the attitude change. It is possible that persuading a person in the direction of the person's central values or beliefs is seen to be meaningful by him/her. Also, if the persuasive message makes it clear for the person how an change in his/her attitude may improve his/her self-image, there is a substantial possibility of attitude change.

Significance of Elliot and Devine's (1994) experiment

- Results clearly indicated that cognitive dissonance produces unpleasant feelings as the participants of the control group felt after writing the counter-attitudinal essay. Other groups did not experience as much unpleasant feelings as the control group as control group 1 got the time to change their attitude before expressing their feelings, control group 2 did not experience a dissonance as its participants had to write a pro-attitudinal essay and control group 3 didn't have an opportunity to express their feelings after writing the counter-attitudinal essay.
- The fact that control group 1 showed maximum shift towards a favourable attitude towards the fee hike indicates that attitude-discrepant behaviour motivates the person to change his/her attitude.

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Effect of reciprocity

- One of the ways to gain compliance (making other person accept one's request) is to persuade a person through reciprocity in accepting one's request. Therefore, besides forced compliance (as learnt in an earlier lecture on attitude change), reciprocity may be effective in bringing about an attitude change through persuasion where a person gets persuaded in exchange of persuading the other person earlier.

Effect of message framing

- Tykocinsky, Higgins and Chaiken (1994) have provided some useful insights into how the nature of message framing (for example, telling a college-going teenage student who usually skips his breakfast, 'having breakfast improves your health' or 'skipping breakfast is detrimental to physical growth and health') may either facilitate or hinder attitude change.
- In their study, they hypothesized that people's self-concept may be associated with accepting or rejecting the persuasive message. They first assessed among their participants who usually skipped their breakfast actual:ideal and actual:ought discrepancies (some people are concerned about the discrepancies between their current self and what they would like to be ideally while some people focus on the discrepancies between their self-concept and others would like them to be) and then assessed the impact of positively and negatively framed messages about the effect of taking breakfast on a regular basis on health.

Effect of message framing (continued...)

- Tykocinsky, Higgins and Chaiken (1994) reasoned that positively framed statements ('Having breakfast daily improves one's health.') may annoy the people with Actual:Ideal discrepancy as this would remind them about falling short of their ideal. A negatively framed statement may not do so. They also reasoned that negatively framed statements ('Not having breakfast daily may cause health problems.') may annoy the people with Actual:Odeal discrepancy as this would remind them about falling short of what others expected of them.

Effect of message framing (continued...)

- The results of the experiment confirmed their hypothesis:
 - Actual:Ideal self discrepancies -> negatively framed message was more effective in changing attitude towards 'eating breakfast'.
 - Actual:Ought self discrepancies -> positively framed message was more effective in changing attitude towards 'eating breakfast'.
- The findings clearly point out to the role of persons' self-concept or characteristics in influencing their response to persuasion. Attempts of attitude change may be more effective if these characteristic too are taken into account.

When cognitive dissonance does not produce attitude change

'Adding consonant information' as a response to attitude change

- When faced with a inconsistencies among attitudes or attitude and behaviour about a social object, a person may chose to reduce unpleasant feelings associated with cognitive dissonance by adding more consonant element of thought. For example, if I am told by my some of my friends that the brand of car that I possess are proving to be bad due to its maintenance costs, I may chose to think that in terms of mileage, service costs and service quality, it has so far been very good. In thinking so, I have added consonant elements to my existing favourable attitude towards the brand of my car and my close friends' input does not change my attitude.

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Trivialization: downplaying the salience of inconsistencies

- As observed in an earlier lecture on attitude change through cognitive dissonance, 'trivialization' or downplaying the importance of inconsistencies (in attitudes or in attitude and behaviour) is a way to reduce cognitive dissonance. Simon, Greenberg and Brehm (1995) observed that 'choosing (rather than being assigned) to write a counter-attitudinal essay' and the 'salience of the attitude' (by making the participant think about their own attitude before writing a counter-attitudinal essay) were strongly associated with trivialization if the attitude object was a very important one such as the comprehensive examination for the doctoral students in universities.

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