

The Lecture Contains:

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Attitude Change through Persuasion

What is an change in attitude?

- As we understood in the last lecture, attitude is a relatively lasting evaluation of the an aspect of the social world. An attitude change would mean that our evaluations of an object, person or social event changes. Attitude change is generally brought about with the help of either persuasion or cognitive dissonance. In this lecture, we will focus on persuasion as a process of bringing about the attitude change. Two ways of understanding persuasion will be highlighted: one with the help of the Yale Approach (or the traditional approach) and the Elaboration Likelihood model.

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The Yale approach to persuasion

- Since early 1950s, American social psychologists at the Yale University conceptualized persuasion as a process that is constituted of a network of the communicator, communication and the audience. This approach of understanding persuasion is known as the traditional or the Yale approach to persuasion and famously involves the question, “WHO says WHAT to WHOM and with what effect”. Research based on the Yale approach helped develop insights into the aspects of the communicator, communication and the audience on the attitude change of the audience. Let us try to understand the findings of such an approach.

Expertise of the communicator

- It has been found that the experts are more persuasive than non-experts as the audience attaches more significance to the person who knows the subject under consideration inside out. Generally, we notice in the print or electronic media, the use of experts in the advertisements. We may now understand the reasons why the use of experts boosts the sale of a product.

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Implicit messages

- Studies have revealed the significant impact of implicit rather than explicit messages on the attitude change. It is also known as the Soft-sell often effective in advertisement and politics. The persons or the messages that clearly appears to change our attitude are generally not trusted by the audience. We are more influenced by the messages that apparently are not designed to change our attitude.

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Attractive communicators

- Attractive communicators are more effective more influential than the less attractive ones. This is one of the reasons why the advertisements take a good care of the attractive looks of the persons appearing in these. Also, novelty in the appearance is utilized in the attracting the attention of the audience.

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Distractions may be effective

- Due to the association of some other event with the event that the person may be paying full attention to, it is possible that the person's attitude may be changed. For example, when the face of a smiling baby is given on the advertisement of an electric bulb, it may enhance the positive attitude toward that electric bulb.

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Low self-esteem

People with low self-esteem have been found to be easier to be persuaded but high self-esteem may be a very difficult target for an attitude change through persuasion. However, research has also reported that since people with low self-esteem may be poor in paying attention to the persuasive message, their attitude change too may be difficult.

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Two-sided approach

When the audience has a contrary point of view to the speaker, highlighting his opinion along with acknowledging the merits of the contrary point of view may allow the speaker 'disarm' the listener' and the audience may not be stubborn about rejecting the speaker's point of view. This is also known as the 'two-sided approach'.

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Rapid speaking

Rapid speaking by the communicator is often associated with the his/her image of being knowledgeable about what he/she is speaking. Therefore, rapid speakers (e.g., salespersons or politicians) are often able to persuade or change the attitude of the other person in comparison with the slow speakers.

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Arousal of strong emotions

- Arousing strong emotions (especially fear) among the audience and conveying to them that the change in their attitude may help them rid of the negative emotion, may enhance the chances of the changing the attitude of the audience. Such an approach has been quite helpful in change the health-related attitude of people.

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Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of Persuasion

Conceptual Framework of ELM

Central route

Careful processing of the given information

- Attitude change affected by the quality of arguments

Peripheral route

No careful processing of the given information

- Attitude change affected by persuasion cues

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Differences between central and peripheral route:

High or low relevance of messages: When the relevance of the message is interesting or high for the target person (e.g. information about an MRI equipment to be purchased by a scientist), attitude change may be enhanced by the quality or strength of the arguments. However, if the relevance of the message is low or not of interest for the target person, attitude change are affected more by the persuasion cues rather than the quality of arguments.

Effect of weaker argument : As per ELM, if the strong arguments are coupled with weaker arguments about an object of interest, the audience may spend more time judging the quality of the object. This may lead to a reduction in the capacity of the overall message to persuade the audience.

Impact of Central Route : Research has shown that the attitude change brought about by the central route is long lasting and more resistant to any further change. Also, the attitude change through the Central Route are closely related to behaviour of the person.