

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ What is your first reaction towards the following?
- ☰ The Nature of Attitude
- ☰ The Nature of Attitude: Example
- ☰ Formation of Attitude
- ☰ Attitude Formation through Classical Conditioning
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- ☰ Attitude Formation through Operant Conditioning: Example
- ☰ Attitude Formation through Social Comparison : Example
- ☰ Attitude Formation through Social Comparison : Example

What is your first reaction towards the following?

- Reservation in higher education
- Naxalite movement
- Pre-birth child sex-determination
- Special economic zones
- Politics as a career option
- Sunil Gavaskar
- Globalization of Indian economy
- Mahatma Gandhi

How would social psychologists interpret your reactions?

•The reactions that you gave are termed as attitude. Our spontaneous views or reactions to the objects, persons and events in social world can be positive or negative and social psychologists term them together as **'attitude'**.

•In this lecture, **we will develop an understanding about the nature and formation of attitude.**

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The Nature of Attitude

Attitude is defined as the lasting evaluations of various aspects of the social world. As this definition shows, attitude has **two major implications** for human lives. **First**, attitude functions as schema (cognitive frameworks that hold and organize information about specific concepts, situations and events) and **secondly**, attitude influences our behavior. Let us take an example to understand the nature of attitude.

The Nature of Attitude: Example

Rahul, a college student, has extremely negative views about the **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)**. He thinks that SEZs are not a solution to the problems related to our economic growth. He tells his friends and teachers that we need to boost our agriculture on which the lives of more than 70% of Indian are dependent for their livelihood. In stead of doing this, if we start focusing unnecessarily on SEZs, the sizeable profit will go primarily to the individuals and not to the nation. He is also perturbed and angry about the mass scale displacement of villagers caused by such SEZs. He participates in the protest march against SEZs and has started writing letters to the editors of reputed newspapers focusing on the ill effects of SEZs on the farmers.

What We Learn from the Example

Clearly, Rahul has a negative attitude toward the building of SEZs in India. The arguments that he shares with his friends and teachers clearly show that his attitude are acting as schema (cognitive frameworks that hold and organize information) about the SEZs. His attitude not only has an impact on his emotions (his anger about villagers' displacement due to the SEZs) but also his behavior (participating in protest march and writing articles against SEZs).

Formation of Attitude

Following are the ways through which **attitude is formed**

- Learning through classical conditioning
- Learning through instrumental conditioning
- Attitude formation through social comparison
- Genetic factors associated with attitude formation

Attitude Formation through Classical Conditioning

• Classical conditioning is a basic form of learning in which a **stimulus, initially neutral, acquires the potential to evoke responses through repeated pairing with another stimulus**. For example, a footballer may not show any emotional response to a pair of shoes that he purchased. However, it so happened that each time he used this particular pair of shoes, his team won. This led him to associate happiness and comfort with that pair of shoes.

• Having understood the concept of **classical conditioning**, let us now understand how it shapes attitude.



Attitude Formation through Operant Conditioning

Instrumental conditioning is another basic form of learning in which responses that lead to positive/rewarding outcomes or that is instrumental in avoiding negative/aversive outcomes are strengthened. For example, a child observes that his mother feels happy when he completes his homework. This makes him regularly complete his homework. Taking another example, after returning from the school, the child used to throw his school bag on his bed rather than keep it on his study table. This used to make his mother irritated. When the child started keeping his school bag at the right place, he found that his mother stopped being irritated toward him. This made him regularly keep his bag at the right place. Let us now see how this principle of learning may lead to the formation of attitude.

Attitude Formation through Operant Conditioning: Example

The role of instrumental conditioning in the formation of attitude can be easily seen particularly in case of children. A girl child's behavior of showing nurturance and care towards her brothers is appreciated by the parents. The girl child develops a positive attitude towards nurturing her brothers. Taking another example, a lowly ranked employee in an office can not resist the pressure from his seniors to share bribe. To avoid facing their hostile behaviour toward him, he starts accepting bribe and this gradually leads him to develop a positive towards taking bribe.



Attitude Formation through Social Comparison : Example

Social comparison theory developed by Leon Festinger (1954) forms another basis for the development of attitude. According to this theory, we compare ourselves to others in order to determine whether our view of social reality is or is not correct. Thus, due to our desire to hold 'right' views, our attitude is shaped by the social information that we seek from people we admire or respect.

Attitude Formation through Social Comparison : Example

Let us understand attitude formation through social comparison with the help of a study conducted by Maio, Esses, and Bell (1994). They presented Canadian visitors to a large science centre with information about a fictitious group that had applied for migration to Canada. Two different sets of visitors were given contrasting information about the migrant groups. One group was told that the migrant group had been assigned high ratings on personality traits (friendliness, industriousness, honesty and intelligence) and values (education, equality, family, freedom, law and order) by the people in England and the other group was given the information that the migrant group was given low rating in terms of these personality traits and values. As a result of this, the visitors who were given positive information about the migrant group expressed more favorable attitude towards the migrants than those who were given negative information about the migrants.

Genetic Factors Associated with Attitude Formation

Although there are limitations in generalizing the studies conducted on identical twins (monozygotic) to general population, some indication of the impact of genetic factors on attitude formation have been observed. A study conducted by Hershberger, Lichtenstein, and Knox (1994) showed that the identical twins were more similar in their perceptions of the work climate (in the organizations where they worked) than non-identical (dizygotic) twins. The study indicates the role of genetic factors in shaping the attitude towards workplace. Geogre (1990) further explained that the genetic factors may affect attitude formation as these influence more general dispositions such as tendency to experience positive or negative emotions towards events or objects in an individual's social world.