
UNIT 2 FORMATION OF ATTITUDE AND ATTITUDE CHANGE

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Factors of Attitude Formation
- 2.3 Attitude Change
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Unit End Questions
- 2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

An attitude is a hypothetical construct in that it can only be inferred through the behaviour of the individual. Attitudes are acquired and they develop out of influence of many factors. On the basis of researches and studies conducted, the psychologists have identified factors that determine development and formation of attitudes. This unit is focussed on the issues of how attitudes are formed, what factors constitute attitude formation and what are the methods by which one can change the attitude.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Explain attitude formation;
- 1 List the factors that contribute to attitude formation;
- 1 Analyse the process of attitude change;
- 1 Describe the role of persuasive communication in attitude change; and
- 1 Explain the role of various factors in attitude change.

2.2 FACTORS OF ATTITUDE FORMATION

Need Satisfaction: Research studies on “Need Satisfaction”, reveal that we tend to develop favourable attitude toward things which help us satisfy our needs. As is well known, whenever something hinders our reaching a goal or stop us from doing something that we want to or frustrate our attempts to satisfy our goals and needs, we feel negatively for those things which stand in our way. For example, in an experimental study it was found that students developed favourable attitudes toward those things which they viewed were instrumental in the attainment of goal. But they had negative attitude toward things that were of no use in goal attainment or which hindered goal achievement.

Social learning: This is another factor that plays an important role in the development of attitude. Process of learning affects the development of attitude

and the way an individual learns other forms of behaviour. Three processes of learning affect development of attitudes and these are (i) Classical conditioning (ii) Instrumental conditioning and (iii) Observational learning. These are being discussed below:

Classical Conditioning: According to classical learning a neutral stimulus comes to elicit an unconditioned response when repeatedly paired with an unconditioned stimulus. Social psychologists opine that it applies to the development of attitudes as well. For example, when a child repeatedly listens from his father that Pakistan is an enemy country, and all the terrorist activities in our country are Pakistan supported, the child gradually develops a negative attitude towards Pakistan, even though initially the word Pakistan was a neutral word for him.

In a classic experiment on the role of classical conditioning in attitude formation, two nation words – Dutch and Swedish were presented before a group of subjects. When the word Dutch was presented it was followed by recitation of positive adjectives like happy, laborious and sacred etc. But the word Swedish was followed by recitation of negative adjectives like dirty, ugly, bitter etc.

At the end of the experiment it was found that subjects had developed positive attitude toward the nation word Dutch as it was followed by positive adjectives and a negative attitude among subjects was evident for the nation word Swedish. It was presumed that repeated pairing with positive words elicited a positive response for nation word Dutch.

Instrumental Conditioning: According to this theory of learning states, we learn those responses that are rewarded and show an increased probability of repeating such responses. However, we tend not to repeat responses that are punished. Studies reveal that children develop attitudes maintained by their parents simply because holding such attitudes is rewarding. Exhibition of attitudes and behaviour similar to parents is often met with reward and praise from parents and dissimilarities or deviation is met with punishment and admonition. Thus children soon learn that holding attitudes similar to that of parents is instrumental in getting the desired results.

Observational learning: A number of behaviours are learned by watching the activities of others and the outcome of such activities. Children growing often watch parents and significant others in the family and society doing things which they follow without questioning the wisdom or logic behind these activities. They follow without question only because they trust in the wisdom of their parents and significant others in the family and society.

Group Affiliations: Group affiliations are an important source of formation and development of attitude. An individual adopts the values, norms, opinions, beliefs and way of behaviour in order to become an acceptable member of that group, because following the line suggested by the group is rewarding. Besides group exerts pressure for conformity to group and nonconformity is met with punishment. According to social psychologists group affiliations affect attitude formation.

Primary group is immediate group of the individual that is family, peer group etc. Such groups have limited number of members and enjoy face to face interactions. Since primary groups are based on close cooperation, affinity and compassion members of primary group often develop similar attitudes. Family members

particularly parents have tremendous influence over development of attitude among children. According to social psychologists attitudinal homogeneity among primary group members can be attributed to four reasons.

Since primary groups are closely interknit, members face too much pressure for conformity to group. Therefore members of primary group are more likely to show attitudinal similarity. Primary groups create conditions where attitudes of one member are favourable to other members which breeds liking among them. This liking breeds further similarity and this similarity in turn leads to attitudinal similarity.

All members of the primary group receive similar or same information. They are more likely to process and analyse the information in more or less similar fashion thus developing attitudinal homogeneity.

Any new member of a primary group is more likely to develop attitudes similar to the group in order to gain acceptance in that group.

Reference group is a group, the individual is not a member of which but he aspires to be like members of that group. Thus such a group is used as standard for reference or comparison. Usually a person identifies with such groups by changing or adopting values, norms, goals similar to that of reference group.

Cultural Factors: Cultural factors also affect the development of attitudes. Every society has its culture and every culture has its traditions, norms, values, religion etc. Thus socialisation of every person is affected by the cultural factors of that society. Studies reveal that people reared in different cultures exhibit different attitudes while people reared in the same culture show similarity of attitudes. For example, a marriage proposal between first cousins is viewed favorably in Muslim culture while in Hindu culture it is viewed with disdain.

In one of the studies it was found that cultural differences lead to development of certain common attitudes among members of a given culture. For example, members of Arapesh tribe are liberal, cooperative, and kindhearted. On the other hand members Mundugumor tribe are usually aggressive, zealous and selfish. Anthropologists concluded that it was due to difference in emphasis on the development of different personality traits among the two cultures.

Personality Factor: Personality traits also have an important role to play in the formation and development of attitudes. Attitudes which are in consonance of personality traits are acquired easily. In a research study it was found that persons with highly organised attitudinal system accept merits and demerits of their personality as a matter of conscience. Some other studies found that people with low IQ and literacy level are usually conservative, suspicious, hostile and has a tendency to attribute their faults to others.

Stereotypes: Every society is characterised with some stereotypes. Stereotypes are simple generalised expectations about people of other groups. For example, it is believed that women as compared to men are more religious and suggestible, it leads to development of certain attitudes towards women.

Given information: Information given to the individual also plays important role in the formation of attitudes. In modern society modern means of communication, particularly radio and television, play important role in shaping the opinions, views

and attitudes about many a issue of public concern. Although not all types of information have equal effect on attitudes.

Self Assessment Questions

1) What factors contribute to attitude formation?

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2) Describe the processes of attitude formation in terms of social learning.

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3) Put forward the three theories of social learning that are related to mattitude formation.

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4) What is meant by group affiliation and how these factors affect attitude formation.

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5) Discuss the cultural factors that affect the development of attitudes?

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6) What are the personality factors that affect the development of attitudes?

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7) How do stereotypes affect attitude development?

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2.3 ATTITUDE CHANGE

As pointed out earlier attitudes are relatively permanent meaning thereby that they are subject to change but slowly overtime. Psychologists claim that attitude change is of two types

- 1) *Congruent change and*
- 2) *Incongruent change.*

When a favorable attitude becomes more favourable after an incident, it is congruent change. However, when attitude change is unfavourable that is direction of change is opposite of the already held attitude, it is called incongruent change. Two factors are important in attitude

Change:

- i) Other things being equal congruent change in attitude is easier to bring about than incongruent change.
- ii) If the strength, stability and consonance among the present elements of attitude is higher, then congruent change is easier to about than incongruent change.

Psychologists have identified a number of factors that affect attitude change which are as:

Changing reference group: Psychologists found that change in reference group leads to change in attitude as well. In one of the experiments Newcomb (1950) found that a group of fresh entrants of girls were conservative as they were coming from a family of conservative parents. However, environment of the college promoted liberalism and one of the aims of college was to promote liberalism among students. In the last year of college it was found that girls had shifted from conservatism to liberalism.

Changing group affiliations: This has direct bearings on change in attitudes. It has been observed that when a person breaks ties with old group and joins new one, he readily adopts norms, values, opinions and beliefs of the new group. Therefore change in attitudes is also there. However, change in attitude or change in group affiliations depend on two things

- 1) characteristics of group, and
- 2) characteristics of membership in group.

By characteristics of the group we mean norms, values and beliefs of the group. If the standards, norms, beliefs and values of new group are more attractive to

the individual then the individual is likely to change his attitudes more readily. Similarly, characteristic of membership refers to the individual's position in the new group. If new position in new group accord greater status and power and prestige, then the individual is more likely to change his attitude in the direction held by the group.

For example, if a leader is changing his affiliations from BJP to Congress Party, he may find himself elevated to the level of national level, certainly he would change his attitudes more in favour of Congress and its policies.

Additional information: Change in attitude is also brought about by information received from means like Radio, Television, and Newspaper. The person also gets information through interaction with others. However, change in attitudes resulting from reception of additional information depends on the nature of social situation in which information is given. Psychologists have delineated three types of such social situations which are as follows:

When the additional information is given in front of several people then when individual is alone, attitude change is faster and greater.

When an individual publically accepts and declares his attitudes and beliefs, he commits himself to those attitudes and beliefs. Such public commitment brings about a sort of rigidity in his attitudinal stand and any additional information is likely to bring change in attitudes. However, in a situation where the individual has not made public his attitudes and values i.e. his commitment is private not public. Additional information will bring more change in attitudes because public is not aware of the individual's previous stand on the issue.

It has been noted that attitude change if advocated through discussion method is more successful instead of lecture method. For example, in one of classical experiments in this regard it was aimed to bring attitudinal shift among housewives in favour of beef consumption as compared to other types of meat. One group of housewives was motivated to discuss the issue among themselves and arrived at unanimous conclusion that increased rate of beef consumption is beneficial for several reasons. Another group of housewives was not allowed to discuss the matter but was given a lecture by an expert on benefits of increased beef consumption.

Later on it was found that 30 % of group of housewives who had discussed the matter and reached a unanimous resolution in favour of beef consumption actually registered a shift in their attitude toward beef consumption.

However, only 3% of housewives subjected to lecture method changed their attitude.

Persuasive Communication: By persuasive communication we mean communication of such facts and information as are attractive and appealing to the listener and has direct bearing on the attitudes of the person.

Change in attitude through persuasive communication depends on four factors:

- 1) Source of communication
- 2) Characteristics and content of communication

- 3) Channel of communication, and
- 4) Characteristics of audience.

By source of communication we mean the person who provides information for attitude change. Studies reveal that there are certain characteristics of source which are effective in producing attitude change and these are:

- i) Credibility of the communicator
- ii) Attractiveness of the communicator
- iii) Content and characteristic of communication.

Credibility of the communicator: A person who is viewed as more trustworthy and expert in the issue on hand is likely to bring about more change in attitude. For example, in a study on two groups of students, one group was told that information given to them comes from a highly credible person who is an expert in the field and can be relied upon. But another group was told that information given comes from a person who is not expert in the field and can not be much relied upon. It was found that student receiving information from highly credible source registered greater change as compared to students receiving information from low credible source. Amazingly with the lapse of time source of information loses its relevance and only content of message is retained. Psychologists call it sleeper effect.

Attractiveness of communicator: This also has its impact upon change of attitude. Attractiveness of communicator has two aspects:

- a) physical beauty, and
- b) similarity.

When the communicator is highly beautiful change in attitude is more. For example, a beautiful heroine advocating use of a particular shampoo is more likely to bring change in attitude, than an ordinary looking woman.

Perhaps this is the reason why most of advertisements have beautiful heroines and good looking men for promoting the products of different companies. People are more influenced by people who are like them. Such people are considered to be one of them, and are less expected to deceive the person. For example in a study on Black students, message from black communicator was more effective than message from a white communicator.

Content and characteristic of communication: There are three dimensions of content of communication which are note worthy, and these include (i) fear arousing appeal (ii) Organisation of communication (iii)) Channel of communication .

1) *Fear arousing appeal*

When some information is aimed at arousing fear or negative emotions but at the same time it provides you with alternatives to reduce that fear, it has been found to be more effective. For example, statutory warning on cigarette packets that cigarette smoking is injurious to health, is an example of this type.

2) *Organisation of Communication*

Attitude change is affected by the way in which communication is organised and presented.

The first issue in regard to organisation of communication is the effect of one-sided versus two-sided communication i.e. should a communicator present just the arguments in favour of the change of attitude in receiver or should the arguments be presented with the counter arguments also?

One other issue in regard to organisation of communication is whether the message should draw its own conclusion or it should be left to the audience.

Another issue in organisation and presentation of communication centers over the primacy vs. recency effect that is, whether the information presented first or information presented last is more effective. Let us deal with these issues one by one.

One-sided vs. Two-sided communication: In order to test the effectiveness of one-sided vs. two-sided arguments, social psychologists conducted an experiment to prepare Allied forces soldiers for a long protracted war against Japanese forces, after the surrender of German forces.

In one presentation soldiers were presented with arguments that described toughness of Japanese soldiers, Japanese weapon system and resources and stockpiles of Japanese forces. In another presentation same arguments were presented but it also contained arguments for the possibility of a short duration war, like the earlier victories of Allied forces, the losses incurred by Japanese forces and lowered morale of Japanese commanders after the surrender of German forces.

Results showed that

- i) None of the two types of communication was more effective than the other. However, one interesting fact that emerged was that one-sided communication was more effective with soldiers who were only high school pass and two-sided communication was more effective with graduate soldiers.
- ii) Secondly, initial stance taken by the soldiers also came out to be an important factor. Soldiers who originally expected the war to be short one, were more influenced by two-sided arguments while those who initially expected the war to be a long protracted one, were more influenced by one-sided communication.
- iii) **Innocking effect:** one-sided and two-sided communications also differ in their ability to “inoculate” people against later counter propaganda. In an experiment two sided communication produced astonishing innocking effect among people. In one experimental study two-sided communication was dramatically effective in innocking the audience. Different groups of subjects who had heard argument that Russia would not be able to produce atomic bomb for next five years were later exposed to counter communication. They differed radically in their receptiveness to the countercommunication, depending upon whether or not the initial message had been one-sided or two sided. Only 2 percent of those who had initially been exposed to one- sided communication retained position advocated by that communication, where as 67 percent of those who had initially been exposed to a two-sided communication retained its position inspite of counter communication.

Primacy versus Recency effect

Whether the information provided first has more effect than the information presented later. When the earlier information is more effective it is known as primacy effect and when information presented later is more effective it is known as recency effect.

Channel of communication: To what extent a communication will be effective depends on which channel of communication is being used. Different channels have differential effect on attitude change.

Radio, television, newspaper etc. are example of mass media directed at communicating with the masses. Communication through mass media is impersonal in the sense that face to face interaction is lacking here. But when a communicator reaches out to audience in person he establishes personal contact with them. It has been found that personal contact more effective than mass media in producing attitude change.

Psychologists found that attitude change is greater when an individual receives information through active participation than when he receives information through pamphlets or posters glued on walls.

Characteristics of audience: Effectiveness of communication aimed at changing attitudes of audience is also dependent upon the characteristics of the audience receiving the message. It has been found that people who are high in self-esteem, self-confidence and are aggressive by nature are less likely to be affected by a communication to change attitude.

Age has also been found to adversely affect change in attitude. Increase in age brings about rigidity and conservatism in thinking thus an aged person is less likely to be affected by persuasive communication.

Enforced contact: One important factor in attitude change is enforced contact. By enforced contact we mean a social situation in which two opposing parties are compelled to interact with each other. For example, when an Indian and a Pakistani are compelled to live in the same room and share other things. It is presumed that such enforced contact allow people to understand each other in a better way through repeated exposure to each other. In such situation people receive first hand information about each other and has the opportunity to test the information received.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

In the preceding paragraphs we studied factors that go in to the development of attitudes. We now know that a number of factors like need satisfaction, social learning, group affiliations, personality factors and cultural factors contribute to the development of attitudes. Thereafter, we discussed the process of attitude change. We discussed the role of group reference, changing group affiliations, persuasive communication and personality factor in bringing about attitudinal change. In persuasive communication we discussed the role of characteristics of communicator and how these affect attitude change. Then we discussed importance of content of the message, its order of presentation and also channel of communication and characteristics of the audience receiving communication. Thus, now we fully and understand the process of attitude change.

2.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss in your own words factor of attitude formation.
- 2) What is the role of persuasive communication in attitude change? Give suitable examples.
- 3) Write an essay on process of attitude change.
- 4) What is meant by Primacy and Recency effect and how do they bring about an attitude change?
- 5) Discuss characteristics of audience and enforced contact as responsible for attitude change.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Baumeister, R. F., & Bushman, B. J. (2008). *Social Psychology and Human Nature*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Crisp, R. J., & Turner, R. N. (2010). *Essential Social Psychology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.