

Attitudes

Introduction

- How do people behave? How can people change their behavior?
- 3 important items; attitude -> intention -> behavior
- Attitude – an association between a behavior or object and an evaluation
 - Formal definition; not the same as how most people use it
 - 3 components/tri-partite model;
 - Beliefs
 - Feelings
 - Behavioral tendencies
 - Things that are NOT attitudes
 - Values (broad/abstract, not linked to a thing or behavior)
 - Opinions (verbal expression of an attitude; opinions might be different from actual attitudes)
 - Schemas (mental expectations of situations; doesn't have the same feeling part as attitudes)
- Since WW2, a lot of interest in attitudes; formation, effect, change
- In recent times the focus has been on the application of our knowledge; (i.e. regular exercise, stopping smoking, political campaign influence, advertising effectiveness, etc)

The Attitude-Behavior relationship

- Do attitudes influence behavior? Attitudes are related to behavior but it's complicated and not as direct as one might think
 - Chinese study, recycling example

- Principle of Compatibility - Attitudes and Behavior will be related when they are measured in the same way
 - 4 concepts; Target, Action, Time, Context
- Attitudes are unreliable predictors of behavior because other variables may become important
 - Link between hearing a persuasive message and changing behavior involves many steps
 - Presentation, Attention, Comprehension, Yielding, Retention, Behavior
- Some variables that contribute to the weak relationship between attitude and behavior
 - Theory of Reasoned Action – intention to engage in behavior or not being a determinant for engaging in a behavior or not
 - Attitude influences intention which influences behavior, but attitude does not influence behavior directly
 - i.e. Social pressure, subjective norm; we might not want to engage in some behavior but we do so anyways
 - Perceived Behavioral Control – our sense of our absolute ability to engage in the behavior
 - Confidence in execution + structural factors influence whether we actually engage or not
 - Some cases where perception of behavioral control is accurate, so it becomes actual behavioral control; that behavioral control can influence directly in terms of behavior
 - Attitudes and behaviors don't happen in isolation, rather they're in a social context
 - Limits on behaviors to engage in at any time
 - No point in forming intention if one can't act the behavior
- Things that can increase the relationship between behavior and attitude; number of points one can intervene
 - Intentions to implement
 - i.e. if-then plans, thinking about barriers of execution and plans to subvert it
 - Increasing the importance of outcome
 - "Which belief can I impact to improve the translation of attitudes through to intention (and subsequently behavior)?"
 - Similar for subjective norms, normative beliefs, motivation to comply
 - Other important related behaviors
 - Theory of Reasoned Action

- Theory of Planned Behavior
- A strong understanding of all the factors is important; just concentrating on attitude doesn't work
 - For a lot of behaviors, attitude is actually quite a weak predictor of intention and behavior

Attitude Change

- We often consider ourselves rational and that we will only be persuaded by a well thought out message, but we are actually persuaded by a variety of factors, including the content of the messages
- Yale attitude change model – a study of which conditions people are most likely to change their attitudes in response to persuasive messages
 - Audience - i.e. self-esteem, gender, age
 - Channel - i.e. print form, in-person, video
 - Communicator - i.e. attractiveness, credibility,
 - Message - i.e. uses fear (or not)
- Credibility
 - Those high in credibility are often more persuasive to us than those in low
 - i.e. often why cosmetic advertisement actors wear laboratory coats and safety goggles
 - Hovland & Weiss study (1951)
 - Sleeper Effect – a delayed increase in the effect of a message, accompanied by a discounting cue
 - Discounting cue – happens when received, where less weight is given to an uncredible communicator
 - Disassociation – happens later, uncoupling of who the communicator is; message stays but communicator forgotten
 - In essence, if we can understand the message, who said it doesn't matter so much over time, as we forget where the message came from
 - We can be influenced by unreliable information without realizing
 - concern regarding i.e. election campaigns, advertising, jury trials; where information is retained for an extended period and a judgment is required

- **Attractiveness**

- Ethos suggests that attractive and likable people will be more persuasive
 - Probably not innate; more likely that since they're attractive and likable, they get talked to a lot → they get more communication practice, making them more optimistic or and fluent
 - chicken or egg first
 - Possible that attractiveness acts as a decision cue
- Debono and Telesca (1990)
 - Self-Monitoring – how attuned one is to social signals
 - Study results; low self-monitors were more influenced by the attractiveness (regardless of the content)
 - Study results; high self-monitors were more influenced by the content of the message (regardless of the attractiveness)
 - Suggests attractiveness serves at least 2 purposes
 - For those driven by internal values and ideas/low self-monitors, seems to be a simple cue to persuasion
 - For those more attuned to external social cues, helps grab our attention and gets us to think more carefully about the message

- **Fear**

- Australian grim reaper commercial, Australian car crash commercial
- Janis and Feshbach (1953)
 - Those who got the low fear message felt the most to conform
 - Boomerang effect - fear can have the opposite effect
 - Protection motivation theory – people protect themselves based on 2 factors; threat appraisal and coping appraisal (how one can respond)
 - For fear to increase the persuasiveness of a message, it needs to include
 - Severe threat (threat appraisal)
 - Affects you (threat appraisal)
 - Effective response (coping appraisal)
 - That one can response (coping appraisal)

The Persuasion Process

- Are we hopelessly at the whims of advertisers?
- What circumstances does the content of a message influence our attitudes?
- Dual process models – set of models in attitude change that describe how we are influenced by persuasive messages
 - Heuristic systematic model – not covered
 - Elaboration likelihood model - attitudes influenced differently depending on which route is used
 - 2 distinct modes/routes to persuasion, requires different amounts of thinking
 - Central – when the recipient has the motivation and the ability to think about the message; attitude changed based on quality of argument
 - Peripheral – when the recipient doesn't; attitude changed based on emotional appeal
 - Elaboration measured by looking at the number of positive and negative thoughts one has about a message; e.g. if one can generate lots of pros and cons about a message, then that would be a high degree of elaboration
 - In an ideal world we would always use the central route; it takes a lot of time and effort though and we wouldn't be able to get through the day
 - Underlying assumption is that recipients like to put in the minimum amount of cognitive effort possible; also known as cognitive misers/mental sluggards
- Cognition – the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding thorough thought, experience and the sense
 - e.g. conscious brain stuff
- Cognitive dissonance – perception of contradictory information and the mental toll it takes
 - Leon Festinger (1950) cult study
 - Cognitive dissonance theory – one would rather receive a small reward rather than a large one
 - Festinger thought this because we want to maintain cognitive consistency; so we would be motivated to reduce any inconsistencies
 - Festinger thought we could reduce dissonance reduction by
 - Changing a cognition (e.g. changing what we currently think)

- Generating new cognitions (e.g. thinking new things)
 - Minimizing the importance of inconsistent cognitions (e.g. ignoring stuff)
 - The precise method we use for dissonance reduction depends on the constraints of reality
 - The most readily changeable cognition is the attitude
 - Once behavior has been performed in front of someone else it is difficult to deny it
 - Festinger thought cognitive consistency is more fundamentally determinant than reinforcement
- **Testing cognitive consistency**
 - Festinger (1959)
 - Those paid \$1 rated the task as most enjoyable compared to the ones who paid \$20 or nothing at all
 - A changeable variable is the reward; behavior is fixed, (saying the tasks were fun) attitude (thinking the tasks were boring)
 - \$1 was the least cognitively consistent (behavior and reward); so the theory goes that one was motivated to restore cognitive consistency (in this case, it was by changing ones attitude about the task)
 - comparatively, \$20 was consistent with reward even if behavior wasn't (this is known as a job) and control only had 1 pair cognitions (behavior and attitude) which was consistent/no dissonance
 - Fried grasshopper study (Zimbardo, 1965)
 - The participants asked by the mean experimenter had the most change in attitude – another example of dissonance
- **Dissonance theory for behavior change**
 - Persuasive messages can help influence attitudes, but effect sometimes tenuous
 - Dissonance theory suggests ones own behavior influences their attitudes, the most because persuasion is from within
 - The problem with the Festinger and Carlsmith study was Induced compliance - getting participants to act in counter attitudinal ways to change their behavior
 - Feelings of hypocrisy could be used to motivate behavior changes
 - Self-concept approach – Elliot Aronson's revision; idea that people generally have a positive self-concept, and feeling like a hypocrite is inconsistent
 - Hypocrisy – feeling that ones behaviors are different than ones attitudes
 - Aronson thought that when the positive self-concept is threatened, one will be motivated to restore a positive self-concept
 - Dickerson (1992) study

- Dissonance theory forms the basis of clinical interventions such as motivational interviewing
- One of the things that makes dissonance such a powerful motivator of attitude change is that the persuasion comes from within oneself