

Review Questions

1. Define attitude. Discuss the components of an attitude.

Answer

Attitude is the tendency to react positively or negatively to a person or circumstances and can be defined as state of the mind, a set of views, or thoughts, regarding some topic which have an evaluative feature (positive, negative or neutral quality).

Attitude have three components:

- (i) The thought component is referred to as the cognitive aspect: It consists of belief, ideas, values and other information that a person may possess or has faith in. It makes little difference if the information is correct or incorrect.
- (ii) The emotional component is known as the affective aspect: It is related to person's feelings about another person, which may be positive, negative or neutral.
- (iii) The tendency to act is called the behavioural (or conative) aspect: It is related to impact of various situations or objects that lead to individual's behaviour based on cognitive and affective components. Only this components of attitude is visible.

These three aspects have been referred to as the A-B-C components (Affective-Behavioural-Cognitive components) of attitude. This can be understood by the following example:

Suppose a group of people in our neighbourhood start a tree plantation campaign as part of a 'green environment' movement. Based on sufficient information about the environment, our view towards a 'green environment' is positive (cognitive or 'C' component, along with the evaluative aspect). We feel very happy when we see greenery. We feel sad and angry when we see trees being cut down. These aspects reflect the affective (emotional), or 'A' component of the same attitude. Now suppose we also actively participate in the tree plantation campaign. This shows the behavioural or 'B' component of our attitudes towards a 'green environment'.

2. Are attitudes learnt? Explain how?

Answer

Yes, attitudes are learnt through one's own experience and through interaction with others. There are also some sort of inborn aspect of attitudes, but such genetic factors influence attitudes only indirectly, along with learning. The processes and conditions of learning may be different, resulting in varying attitudes among people.

- (i) Learning attitudes by association: Some students often develop a liking for a particular subject because of the teacher. This is because they see many positive qualities in that

teacher; these positive qualities get linked to the subject that s/he teaches, and ultimately get expressed in the form of liking for the subject. In other words, a positive attitude towards the subject is learned through the positive association between a teacher and a student.

(ii) Learning attitudes by being rewarded or punished: If an individual is praised for showing a particular attitude, chances are high that s/he will develop that attitude further. For example, if a

teenager does yogasanas regularly, and gets the honour of being 'Miss Good Health' in her school, she may develop a positive attitude towards yoga and health in general. Similarly, if a child constantly falls ill because s/he eats junk food instead of proper meals, then the child is likely to develop a negative attitude towards junk food, and also a positive attitude towards eating healthy food.

(iii) Learning attitudes through modelling (observing others) : Often it is not through association, or through reward and punishment, that we learn attitudes. Instead, we learn them by observing others being rewarded or punished for expressing thoughts, or showing behaviour of a particular kind

towards the attitude object. For example, children may form a respectful attitude towards elders, by observing that their parents show respect for elders, and are appreciated for it.

(iv) Learning attitudes through group or cultural norms: Very often, we learn attitudes through the norms of our group or culture. Norms are unwritten rules about behaviour that everyone is supposed to show under specific circumstances. Over time, these norms may become part of our social cognition, in the form of attitudes. Learning attitudes through group or cultural norms may actually be an example of all three forms of learning i.e. learning through association, reward or punishment, and modelling.

(v) Learning through exposure to information: Many attitudes are learned in a social context, but not necessarily in the physical presence of others. Today, with the huge amount of information that is being provided through various media, both positive and negative attitudes are being formed. By reading the biographies of self-actualised persons, an individual may develop a positive attitude towards hard work and other aspects as the means of achieving success in life.

3. What are the factors that influence the formation of an attitude?

Answer

Factors that influence the formation of an attitude:

(i) Characteristics of the existing attitude: All four properties of attitudes mentioned earlier, namely, valence (positivity or negativity), extremeness, simplicity or complexity (multiplexity), and centrality

or significance of the attitude, determine attitude change. In general, positive attitudes are easier to change than negative attitudes are. Extreme attitudes, and central attitudes are more difficult to change than the less extreme, and peripheral (less significant) attitudes are. Simple attitudes are easier to change than multiple attitudes are.

(ii) Source characteristics: Source credibility and attractiveness are two features that affect attitude change. Attitudes are more likely to change when the message comes from a highly

credible

source rather than from a low-credible source.

(iii) Message characteristics: The message is the information that is presented in order to bring about an attitude change. Attitudes will change when the amount of information that is given about the topic is just enough, neither too much nor too little. Whether the message contains a rational or an emotional appeal, also makes a difference.

(iv) Target characteristics: Qualities of the target, such as persuasibility, strong prejudices, self-esteem, and intelligence influence the likelihood and extent of attitude change. People, who have a more open and flexible personality, change more easily. Advertisers benefit most from such people. People with strong prejudices are less prone to any attitude change than those who do not hold strong prejudices. Persons who have a low self-esteem, and do not have sufficient confidence in themselves, change their attitudes more easily than those who are high on self-esteem. More intelligent people may change their attitudes less easily than those with lower intelligence. However, sometimes more intelligent persons change their attitudes more willingly than less intelligent ones, because they base their attitude on more information and thinking.

4. Is behaviour always a reflection of one's attitude? Explain with a relevant example.

Answer

It usually expected behaviour to follow logically from attitudes. However, an individual's attitudes may not always be exhibited through behaviour. Likewise, one's actual behaviour may be contrary to one's attitude towards a particular topic.

It also have found that there would be consistency between attitudes and behaviour when:

- (i) The attitude is strong, and occupies a central place in the attitude system,
- (ii) the person is aware of her/his attitude,
- (iii) There is very little or no external pressure for the person to behave in a particular way. For example, when there is no group pressure to follow a particular norm.
- (iv) The person's behaviour is not being watched or evaluated by others, and
- (v) The person thinks that the behaviour would have a positive consequence, and therefore, intends to engage in that behaviour.

In the days when Americans were said to be prejudiced against the Chinese, Richard LaPiere, an American social psychologist, conducted the following study. He asked a Chinese couple to travel across the United States, and stay in different hotels. Only once during these occasions they were refused service by one of the hotels. Sometime later, LaPiere sent out questionnaires to managers of hotels and tourist homes in the same areas where the Chinese couple had travelled, asking them if they would give accommodation to Chinese guests. A very large percentage said that they would not do so. This response showed a negative attitude towards the Chinese, which was inconsistent with the positive behaviour that was actually shown towards the travelling Chinese couple. Thus, attitudes may not always predict actual pattern of one's behaviour.

5. Highlight the importance of schemas in social cognition.

Answer

A schema is defined as a mental structure that provides a framework, set of rules or guidelines for processing information about any object. Schemas (or 'schemata') are the basic units stored in our memory, and function as shorthand ways of processing information, thus reducing the time and mental effort required in cognition.

In the case of social cognition, the basic units are social schemas. Some attitudes may also function like social schemas. We use many different schemas, and come to know about them through analysis and examples.

Most of the schemas are in the form of categories or classes. Schemas that function in the form of categories are called prototypes, which are the entire set of features or qualities that help us to define an object completely. In social cognition, category-based schemas that are related to groups of people are called stereotypes. These are category-based schemas that are overgeneralised, are not directly verified, and do not allow for exceptions. For example, suppose you have to define a group G. If you have never directly known or interacted with a member of this group, you will most likely use your 'general knowledge' about the typical member of group G. To that information you will add your likes and dislikes. If you have heard more positive things about group G, then your social schema about the whole group will be more positive than negative. On the other hand, if you have heard more negative things about group G, your social schema will be in the form of a negative stereotype.

6. Differentiate between prejudice and stereotype.

Answer

Prejudices are examples of attitudes towards a particular group. They are usually negative, and in many cases, may be based on stereotypes (the cognitive component) about the specific group while stereotype is a cluster of ideas regarding the characteristics of a specific group.

Prejudice generally based on ethnicity, race, gender, caste and the like who mostly tend to show negative feelings towards people belonging to other groups while Stereotype described as classifying people based on their membership in a particular group, based on a certain preconceived belief which can be negative, positive or neutral and can be based on factors like gender, ethnicity, occupation etc.

Stereotypes consist of undesirable characteristics about the target group, and they lead to negative attitudes or prejudices towards members of specific groups. The cognitive component of prejudice is frequently accompanied by dislike or hatred, the affective component while Prejudice may also get translated into discrimination, the behavioural component, whereby people behave in a less positive way towards a particular target group compared to another group which they favour.

Prejudice is not based on a truth and usually originates from the lack of knowledge about a certain group of people while stereotype might be based on a truth. However, a stereotype can originate from prejudice.

7. Prejudice can exist without discrimination and vice versa. Comment.

Answer

Prejudices can exist without being shown in the form of discrimination. Similarly, discrimination can be shown without prejudice. Yet, the two go together very often. Wherever prejudice and discrimination exist, conflicts are very likely to arise between groups within the same society. Our own society has witnessed many deplorable instances of discrimination, with and without prejudice, based on gender, religion, community, caste, physical handicap, and illnesses such as AIDS. Moreover, in many cases discriminatory behaviour can be curbed by law. But, the cognitive and emotional components of prejudice are more difficult to change.

8. Describe the important factors that influence impression formation.

Answer

Impression formation and attribution are influenced by :

- (i) The nature of information available to the perceiver.
- (ii) Social schemas in the perceiver (including stereotypes).
- (iii) personality characteristics of the perceiver.
- (iv) situational factors.

The following aspects have been found in impression formation :

- (a) Selection : we take into account only some bits of information about the target person.
- (b) Organisation : the selected information is combined in a systematic way.
- (c) Inference : we draw a conclusion about what kind of person the target is.
 - Some specific qualities influence impression formation more than other traits do.
 - The order or sequence in which information is presented affects the kind of impression formed. Mostly, the information presented first has a stronger effect than the information presented at the end. This is called the primacy effect (first impressions are the lasting impressions). However, if the perceiver may be asked to pay attention to all the information, and not merely to the first information, whatever information comes at the end may have a stronger influence. This is known as the recency effect.
 - We have a tendency to think that a target person who has one set of positive qualities must also be having other specific positive qualities that are associated with the first set. This is known as the halo effect.

9. Explain how the attribution made by an 'actor' would be different from that of an 'observer'.

Answer

A distinction is also found between the attribution that a person makes for her/his own positive and negative experiences (actor-role), and the attribution made for another person's positive and negative experiences (observer-role). This is called the actor-observer effect. For example, if you yourself get good marks in a test, you will attribute it to your own

ability or hard work (actor-role, internal attribution for a positive experience). If you get bad marks, you will say that this was because you were unlucky, or that the test was too difficult (actor-role, external attribution for a negative experience). On the other hand, if one of your classmates gets good marks in the test, you will attribute her/his success to good luck or an easy test (observer-role, external attribution for a positive experience). If the same classmate gets bad marks, you are likely to say that her/his failure was because of low ability or lack of effort (observer-role, internal attribution for a negative experience). The basic reason for the difference between the actor and observer roles is that people want to have a nice image of themselves, as compared to others.

10. How does social facilitation take place?

Answer

One of the first observations made about social behaviour was that performance on specific tasks is influenced by the mere presence of others. This is called social facilitation. For example, Reena is about to participate in a music contest. She is very talented, yet she is feeling very nervous about the event. If you were in Reena's place, would you perform better in front of an audience, or when you are alone? As early as 1897, Norman Triplett observed that individuals show better performance in the presence of others, than when they are performing the same task alone. For instance, cyclists racing with each other perform better than when they cycle alone. With time more details came to be known about this phenomenon.

(i) Better performance in the presence of others is because the person experiences arousal, which makes the person react in a more intense manner. This explanation was given by Zajonc (this name is pronounced to rhyme with 'science').

(ii) The arousal is because the person feels she or he is being evaluated. Cottrell called this idea evaluation apprehension. The person will be praised if the performance is good (reward), or criticised if it is bad (punishment). We wish to get praise and avoid criticism, therefore we try to perform well and avoid mistakes.

(iii) The nature of the task to be performed also affects the performance in the presence of others. For example, in the case of a simple or familiar task, the person is more sure of performing well, and the eagerness to get praise or reward is stronger. So the individual performs better in the presence of others than s/he does when alone. But in the case of a complex or new task, the person may be afraid of making mistakes. The fear of criticism or punishment is stronger. So the individual performs worse in the presence of others than s/he does when alone.

(iv) If the others present are also performing the same task, this is called a situation of co-action. In this situation, there is social comparison and competition. Once again, when the task is simple or a familiar one, performance is better under co-action than when the person is alone.

11. Explain the concept of pro-social behaviour.

Answer

Throughout the world, doing good to others and being helpful is described as a virtue. All religions teach us that we should help those who are in need. This behaviour is called helping or pro-social behaviour. Pro-social behaviour is very similar to 'altruism', which means doing something for or thinking about the welfare of others without any self-interest (in Latin 'alter' means 'other', the opposite of 'ego' which means 'self'). Some common examples of pro-social behaviour are sharing things, cooperating with others, helping during natural calamities, showing sympathy, doing favours to others, and making charitable donations.

Pro-social behaviour has the following characteristics. It must:

- (i) aim to benefit or do good to another person or other persons.
- (ii) be done without expecting anything in return.
- (iii) be done willingly by the person, and not because of any kind of pressure.
- (iv) involve some difficulty or 'cost' to the person giving help.

For instance, if a rich person donates a lot of money that is obtained illegally, with the idea that her/his photograph and name will appear in the newspapers, this cannot be called 'pro-social behaviour' although the donation may do good to many people.

In spite of the great value and importance attached to pro-social behaviour, people do not show such

behaviour very often. Immediately after the Mumbai blasts on 11 July, 2006, the community stepped forward to help the blast victims in any way they could. By contrast, on an earlier occasion, nobody

came forward to help a girl on a moving suburban train in Mumbai, when her purse was being snatched. The other passengers did nothing to help, and the girl was thrown out of the train. Even as the girl was lying injured on the railway tracks, people living in the buildings around the area did not come to help her.

12. Your friend eats too much junk food, how would you be able to bring about a change in her/his attitude towards food?

Answer

I would like to use the concept of cognitive dissonance proposed by Leon Festinger to bring about a change in her/his attitude towards food.

The basic idea is that the cognitive components of an attitude must be 'consonant' (opposite of 'dissonant'), i.e., they should be logically in line with each other. If an individual finds that two cognitions in an attitude are dissonant, then one of them will be changed in the direction of consonance.

Here the cognitions are:

- (i) Junk food is bad for health.
- (ii) He/she eats too much junk food.

Holding these two ideas or cognitions will make him feel that something is 'out of tune', or dissonant, in the attitude towards junk food. Therefore, one of these ideas will have to be

changed, so that consonance can be attained. In order to remove or reduce the dissonance, my friend must stop eating too much junk foods (change Cognition II). This would be the healthy, logical and sensible way of reducing dissonance.