Chapter 6

Attitude Formation & Change

Presentation Overview

* How do we form attitudes?
* When do attitudes predict behaviour?
* When does engaging in a behaviour lead to attitude change?
* What are alternatives to cognitive dissonance theory?
* How does culture impact attitude formation and change?

How Do We Form Attitudes?

* Attitudes: Positive and negative evaluations of people, objects, events, ideas
* Formed quickly, often unconsciously
* Making something salient can influence an attitude
* Acquire attitudes through information, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, observational learning/modelling
We form attitudes through information we receive from our social environment.

Parents pass on their attitudes to their children.

A type of learning in which a neutral stimulus is repeatedly paired with a stimulus that elicits a specific response, and eventually the neutral stimulus elicits that response on its own.

Mere exposure: The more we are exposed to something, the more we like it.
**Classical Conditioning Continued...**

- Subliminal persuasion: Persuasion that occurs when stimuli are presented rapidly and unconsciously
- Can influence attitude formation and expression

**Operant Conditioning**

- Behaviour that is rewarded increases, and behaviour that is punished decreases
- Can influence attitude formation and expression

**Observation Learning/Modeling**

- Occurs when we form attitudes by watching how others act towards a given object, and in turn adopt those views ourselves
- Most effective when we are observing someone who is similar to us
- We often model what we observe in the media
Attitudes can help us predict what people will do in the future. But, our attitudes are not always a very good predictor of our behaviour.

LaPiere's (1934) classic study: When asked if they would allow Chinese patrons, most hotels and restaurants said, “no.” When a Chinese couple actually arrived, all restaurants served them (184) and only one hotel refused them (1 of 66).

Many things influence the attitude-behaviour link:
- Strength
- Accessibility
- Specificity
- Social Norms
**Strength**

- Strong attitudes are more likely to predict behaviour than weak ones.
- Importance: Attitudes on topics that are highly important to us are more predictive of our behaviour.
- Direct Experience: Attitudes formed through direct experience are stronger and more predictive of behaviour.

**Accessibility**

- The more accessible your attitude, the more predictive it is of your behaviour.
- Having a lot of information about a topic increases the accessibility of attitudes about this topic.
- Situational factors also influence accessibility.
- Situational factors that increase self-awareness makes it more likely you will engage in attitude congruent behaviour.
- Situational factors that decrease self-awareness or impair cognition can weaken the attitude-behaviour link.

**Specificity**

- Attitudes towards a specific behaviour show a stronger link to behaviour than attitudes that are more general.
**Social Norms**

- Social norms: Informal rules a group has for its members
- Influence whether our attitudes predict our behaviour
- Attitudes held by those in our social network are stronger, and more resistant to change
- Two theories emphasize the role of social norms in predicting behaviour:
  - Theory of planned behaviour
  - Prototype/willingness model

**Theory of Planned Behaviour**

- Our behaviour is caused by our attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control
- Behaviour is influenced by intentions (our plans)
- Intentions are influenced by:
  - Attitudes (positive/negative feelings about engaging in a behaviour)
  - Subjective norms (beliefs about whether or not others will support you)
  - Perceived behavioural control (do you believe yourself capable of successfully engaging in this behaviour?)
Prototype/Willingness Model

- Extends Theory of Planned Behaviour: Describes role of social norms, intentions, and prototypes
- Prototypes: Social images of what people who engage in a behaviour are like
- Describes willingness to engage in a behaviour in a given situation
- Describes role of people’s willingness to engage in a behaviour
- Willingness is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, prior experience with this behaviour, and prototypes

The Trans-Theoretical Model of Behaviour Change

- Extends the theory of planned behaviour to readiness to engage in healthy behaviours
- Precontemplation: Not intending to change behaviour in the near future (next 6 months)
- Contemplation: Intending to change behaviour in the near future (next 6 months)
- Preparation: Ready to take action immediate in future (within the next month)
- Action: Have changed behaviour within the last 6 months; working hard to move forward
- Maintenance: Working hard to avoid a relapse; aware of situations that tempt slip back

When Does Engaging in a Behaviour Lead to Attitude Change?

- Our behaviour can form our attitudes
- Severity of Initiation Study (Aronson & Mills, 1959)
  - Sex discussion group
  - Mild initiation vs. severe initiation
  - Boring discussion of secondary sex behaviour
  - Severe initiation group enjoyed discussion most (effort justification)
- Famous theory discussing how behaviour can form or change attitudes: Cognitive Dissonance
**Attitude change occurs to reduce unpleasant arousal (dissonance) you experience when you engage in behaviour that conflicts with your attitude or when you hold two conflicting attitudes**

- There are several ways to reduce dissonance
  - Change your behaviour so it is in line with your attitude
  - Decide the behaviour/attitude is not that important
  - Change your attitude to match your behaviour

**Four reasons we might change our attitude because of dissonance:**

- Insufficient justification
- Insufficient deterrence
- Effort justification
- Post decision dissonance

**Insufficient Justification**

- If you engage in a behaviour that is counter-attitudinal, you must make some kind of a justification
  - If the external justification is high you will attribute your behaviour to external factors and not change your attitude
  - If the external justification is low you must explain your behaviour using internal factors
Insufficient Justification
Continued...

Attitude change can occur if there is insufficient deterrence for not doing something desirable.

Robby Robot Study:

- Kids in room with common toys + 1 cool toy: Robby Robot
- Experimenter leaves room
- Condition 1: Told not to play with robot; threatened with consequences
- Condition 2: Told not to play with robot; no threat

Results: When rated toys, kids in no threat condition said they liked robot less than kids in threat condition.

Insufficient Deterrence/Punishment

- Attitude change can occur if there is insufficient deterrence for not doing something desirable.
- Robby Robot Study:
  - Kids in room with common toys + 1 cool toy: Robby Robot
  - Experimenter leaves room
  - Condition 1: Told not to play with robot; threatened with consequences
  - Condition 2: Told not to play with robot; no threat
  - Results: When rated toys, kids in no threat condition said they liked robot less than kids in threat condition.

Effort Justification

- We have a desire to justify our effort.
- Spending a lot of time and energy on something only to realize it was not worth it creates dissonance.
- Explains many real-world phenomenon:
  - Why we stay in bad relationships far too long
  - Why people are so attached to their fraternity/sorority
  - Why contestants on television report this highly embarrassing experience was so worthwhile.
Justifying Decisions/Post Decision Dissonance

*After making a difficult decision you may experience dissonance because choosing one appealing option means giving up another appealing option.*

*Often resolve this dissonance by changing your attitudes towards both of the alternatives.*

---

Revisions to Dissonance Theory

*Two revisions to the original cognitive dissonance theory are:*  
*“New look” at dissonance theory*  
*Self-standards model*

---

The “New Look”

*Four steps are necessary for people to experience attitude change following dissonance:*  
1. Negative or aversive consequences  
2. Personal responsibility  
3. Physiological arousal and discomfort  
4. Attribution of that arousal to their own behaviour
You experience discomfort whenever you see your behaviour as deviating from an important personal or normative standard. The strategy you use to reduce this dissonance will depend on what thoughts about your self are currently accessible.

*Attitude change will occur, as a way of reducing this dissonance, when no self-relevant thoughts are available or when self-relevant thoughts are available that are directly relevant to the behaviour.
**What are Alternatives to Cognitive Dissonance Theory?**

*Other theories propose alternatives to Cognitive Dissonance theory:
* Self-perception theory
* Impression management theory
* Self-affirmation theory

**Self-Perception Theory**

* People infer their attitudes by simply observing their behaviour
* We do not change our attitudes as a way of resolving tension or justifying our behaviour (cognitive dissonance theory). Instead, we see our behaviour as providing important information about our true attitudes

**Impression Management Theory**

* Individuals are not motivated to be consistent, but rather to appear consistent
* Do not want to be seen as hypocritical so try to show others that our attitudes and behaviours are in line, even if they are not
Self-Affirmation Theory

* You can reduce arousal caused by cognitive dissonance by affirming a different part of your identity, even if that identity is completely unrelated to the cause of the arousal.
* There is a link between self-affirmation and self-esteem.

Which Theory is Right?

* Currently, Cognitive Dissonance theory and Self-Affirmation theory are seen as more likely explanations of behaviour leading to attitude change than Impression Management theory and Self-Perception theory.

How Does Culture Impact Attitude Formation and Change?

* Culture influences attitudes and attitude-behaviour consistency.
Factors Predicting Attitudes

* Collectivistic cultures: More influenced by social norms
* Individualistic cultures: More influenced by information about what they have done in the past

Attitude-Behaviour Consistency

* Consistency between one’s attitudes and behaviour is seen as more important in individualistic cultures
* Individualistic cultures emphasize the role of stable internal traits in predicting attitudes and behaviour
* Collectivistic cultures emphasize the power of the situation

Cognitive Dissonance & Culture

* Most research on cognitive dissonance has been conducted in Western cultures
* Cultures in which such self-consistency is not valued may not experience cognitive dissonance
* Collectivistic cultures may have greater tolerance for attitude-behaviour inconsistencies because their sense of self is based on their social roles and relationships
Cultural differences in factors that create dissonance
* Individualistic: Dissonance when forced to make a difficult decision for self
* Collectivistic: Dissonance when make a difficult decision about friend's preferences

Cultural differences in factors that lead to dissonance
* Individualistic: Caused by a concern about own competence
* Collectivistic: Caused by a concern about possible rejection from others

Copyright
Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd.
All rights reserved. Reproduction or translation of this work beyond that permitted by Access Copyright (The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency) is unlawful. Requests for further information should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd. The purchaser may make back-up copies for his or her own use only and not for distribution or resale. The author and the publisher assume no responsibility for errors, omissions, or damages caused by the use of these programs or from the use of the information contained herein.