

# The aspects of attitude | analysis



In the early 19th century the term attitude was referring to a person's posture. Someone's physical appearance showed whether he had threatening or defiant attitude. Even though we can still refer to the word in this manner, nowadays attitude connotes the psychological and mental state of a person. The definition of attitudes is, "Attitudes is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p1). The term is part of our commonsense language, and everyone understands and uses it to express attitude towards religion, racism, work politics and many other things. Every day, each of us is exposed to countless stimuli which change and reinforce our attitudes. Psychologists have shown great interest in attitude and through research they have done hundreds of studies covering almost every topic about which attitudes might be expressed. It is not coincidental, that Allport (1935) thought of attitudes as the most indispensable part of social psychology. A few psychologists even considered the whole psychology as scientific study of attitudes (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918).

There are several ways that attitudes could be acquired. Direct experience is one of them. Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975 proposed that people's evaluations of objects are based on the beliefs that they form about these objects, and that influences how much they like or dislike these objects. For example if we watch a movie that has three parts and we do not like the first film, then we may conclude that the other two films will be as bad, despite the good reviews they got. Another attitude arising from direct experience is through mere exposure to an object, which results in greater attraction to that object

either that is positive or negative (Zajonc, 1968). For example when we hear a song for the first time we may have a neutral reaction to it, but after hearing it several times, we will probably either like or dislike the song. However there is a limitation on influence of exposure on attitudes. According to Bornstein, 1989 after repeated exposures to an object, attitudes level-off.

Attitudes are also influenced by classical and operant conditioning. In classical conditioning a previously neutral object evokes a negative or positive evaluation because it is paired with an object which “naturally” evokes a positive or negative reaction respectively. An example of this conditioning is Pavlov’s dog, 1927. Pavlov introduced to his dog a piece of meat and that caused the dog to salivate. The meat was the unconditional stimulus and dog’s salivation was the unconditioned response. Then, before giving the meat to the dog he used a neutral stimulus by ringing a bell without the dog responding, and this was the conditional stimulus. After doing this several times he observed that the dog started salivating when the bell rang. Thus, the dog learned that when the bell rang, it was going to be fed with meat.

In operant conditioning behavior that is associated with rewards is more likely to be repeated, while behavior associated with negative outcomes is not. For example, parents will award their children if they study and get good grades at school. However, if their marks are low and they do not study then the reward is taken away (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010).

Another way we can form attitudes is by observational learning, which occurs when an individual is reproducing someone else's behavior (attitude, emotional responses). For example, young children are very likely to model the figure of their parents. If a mother is working and is successful, then most likely the daughter will be influenced and will try to be like her mother when she grows up (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010).

Other source of learning attitudes is by the mass media. They have a major influence in attitude formation especially in children. There have been several studies to show the effects of television. One of them showed that American children get most of the information about politics from television and that has affected their views on politics (Atkins, 1977; Rubin, 1978). Atkins, 1980 investigated the impact of commercial on children and found that children that watched more hours' television were more likely to believe that cereal and sweets were good for them than the children that did not watch as much television. Also he found out that two thirds of a group of children thought that they will become strong if they eat cereal, because they saw a strong man eating cereal. (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010)

Psychologists have distinguished between two types of attitude structure. Intra-attitudinal structure which refers to the structure of a single attitude and tries to find out how that attitude is represented in memory, and inter-attitudinal, which involves more than one attitude and questions how attitudes are related to different attitude objects in a person's mind (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). These structures can be represented by one, two and three-component attitude models.

One-component attitude model evaluates the object and it either has positive or negative affection towards it. It is very simple since it is only asking us if we like the object or not. Thurstone preferred a one-component attitude model. His approach was holistic; an attitude object had many possible attributes and elements (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010, pg 149).

In a two-component attitude model an attitude consists of a mental readiness to act and has an influence on evaluative responses. There is something inside us that sparks and influences our decision making, either that is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Therefore, an attitude is not something that we can physically examine but we can only infer its existence. According to Petty and Cacioppo, 1986b, this leads to a definition of attitudes as 'lasting, general evaluations of people (including oneself), objects or issues' (Hog & Vaughan, 2010 pg149).

Three-component of attitude model suggests that attitudes can be based on three different sources. Thus an attitude consists of affective, cognitive and behavioural components. The way it works is by stressing the feeling, action and thought of an individual. For example, we consider a person who has a positive attitude toward exercising. When this person exercises he or she has a feeling of distress which serves as the affective basis of an attitude. Next we have the behavioural basis in which the person is acting. If the person goes exercises four times per week then we consider this the behavioural basis. Finally if the person thinks that exercising is healthy, then that would serve as the cognitive component. In this example probably the person the person would have a positive attitude toward exercising, however the three-component model is not always consistent. Someone who thinks a cake is

tasty (cognitive) and often eats cakes (behaviour), he may also think that cakes are full of calories (cognitive). This example shows us that sometimes the attitude towards an object is based more on some components than on others (Spielberger, 2004)

The three component model that we discussed above has been treated as the container of attitudes: cognitive, affective and behavioural. Research will continue to further analyse the concept of beliefs, by measuring the affection towards an attitude object. Recently some researchers, instead of focusing in scaling individuals, they are more interested in finding what people try to hide, hoping to understand how attitudes are structured. Also, an attitude that cannot be detected does not mean that it is not there. In conclusion, attitudes have been described as the most important concept in social psychology, and they will be a major part of social psychology for years to come.