

Attitudes

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Attitude is the expression of favor or disfavor towards a person, place, thing or event. It is an individual's own view regarding a certain subject. Multiple factors are responsible for attitude formation. Additionally, attitudes can be learned and unlearned through various methods throughout our lives.



Background of Attitudes

Attitude is a set of beliefs, ideas, and behavioral tendencies towards the objects, events, or other people. Attitude can be positive or negative and can be influenced by a number of different factors, some of them are listed below:

- **The family** has a very important role in developing one's attitude towards certain things. For example, if one's family and parents are highly qualified in academics, the person will develop a positive attitude towards studies.
- **Psychological factors** like beliefs, ideas, culture and the surrounding environment. For example, if a child starts believing that his parents are always scolding him, he is going to develop a negative attitude towards his parents.
- **Society:** If something is considered to be wrong in one's society, the person will eventually develop a negative attitude towards it.
- **Economic factors:** Individual develops favorable attitudes towards those

people and objects which satisfy his wants (this includes salary, work) and unfavorable attitudes towards those who do not satisfy.

Attitude Evaluation

Since multiple psychological models have been proposed to evaluate the structure of attitudes, it will be tedious to study each of them, therefore, only the two well-known models defining the attitude structure are described below:

ABC Model

The ABC model comprises the following components:

- **Affective component** refers to the emotions, perceptions, and feelings towards the object. For example, "scared of snakes." A person feels the emotions of fear and anxiety upon seeing the snake (attitude object).
- **Behavioral component** refers to the behaviors or actions towards the specific attitude object. For example, If a person is scared of snakes, he will "run away, scream, call for help or will climb a tree." This behavior/action is due to past experiences with the snakes or may be innate.
- **Cognitive component** refers to the knowledge and beliefs one has about the attitude object. For example, "snakes are dangerous." The knowledge that the snake is dangerous will form the attitude towards it.

MODE Model

The MODE model stands for **Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants** of attitude-behavior relation. It states that attitudes can be measured in two different ways:

- **Explicit measure:** These attitudes are formed at a **conscious** level and can be deliberately formed that can guide decisions and behavior. The explicit attitudes are mostly affected by the recent events and the person is aware of his or her attitudes.
- **Implicit measure:** These attitudes are **unconscious** beliefs that influence our decisions and behavior. These are often derived from past memories that are deep-seated in our unconscious cognition.

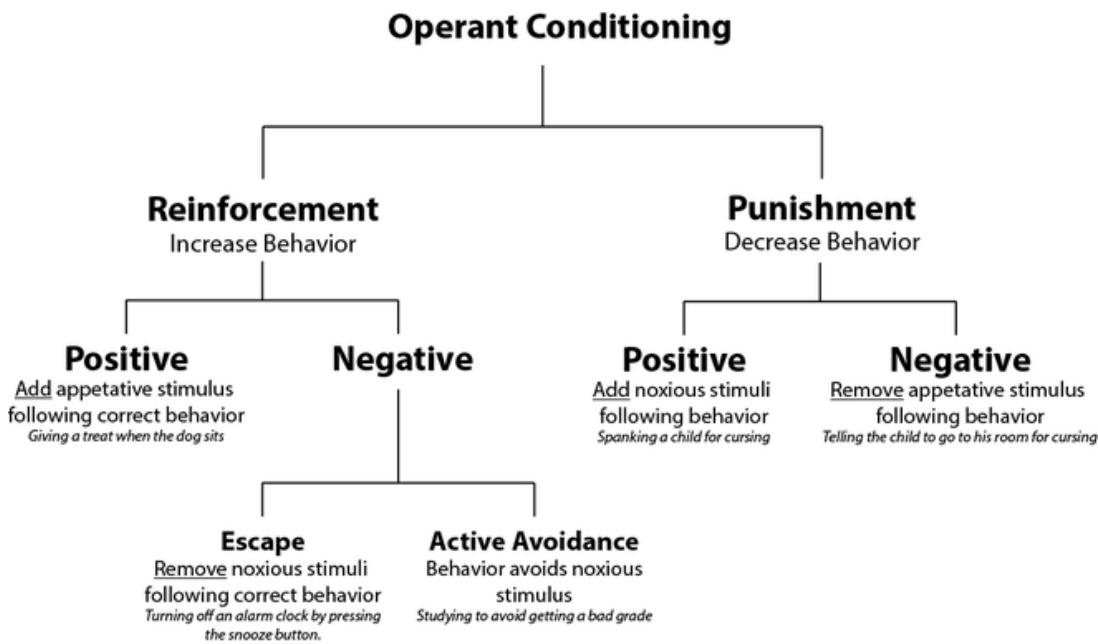
Learning Theory of Attitudes

The learning theory of attitudes states that attitudes can be learned and unlearned through the use of principles such as classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning.

Classical conditioning involves learning a new behavior or attitude through the process of association between different factors. Simply, the two factors are **linked together** to produce a newly learned response. For example, if a person likes a certain perfume, he will find the specific person attractive who is wearing that perfume.

Operant conditioning involves learning a new behavior or attitude after **receiving the consequences/results** (by the use of reinforcement) of the desired response. The behavior can be increased or decreased depending upon the consequences of the response. For example, a salary bonus (consequence/reinforcement) after completing the

task in due time will encourage the repetition of that attitude and behavior. Similarly, deduction of salary on coming late in the morning will encourage the employees to avoid coming late and be punctual.



Positive presence of a stimulus

Negative absence of a stimulus

Reinforcement increases behavior

Punishment decreases behavior

Escape removes a stimulus

Avoidance prevents a stimulus

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Observational learning (also known as modeling) involves learning by **watching and imitating** others. For example, a child learns to play basketball by observing other children playing the same game.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The cognitive dissonance theory states that **we have an innate powerful desire to keep all our attitudes and beliefs consistent and in harmony**. Whenever there is any inconsistency, conflict or disharmony between the attitudes or behaviors (dissonance), this produces a feeling of discomfort and this **dissonance has to be eliminated**.

For example, If a person smoking (behavior) knows that smoking causes cancer (cognition), it will create dissonance and psychological stress that should be eliminated or reduced.

The cognitive dissonance can be reduced by one of the following three methods:

1. The first method is to **change the behavior or attitude**. For example, quit smoking.

2. The second method is to **get the latest knowledge** that outweighs the older belief or knowledge. For example, if there is new research which proposes that smoking alone will not cause cancer and there are other factors that play a role its pathogenesis, then this will reduce the dissonance in a person whenever he smokes.
3. The third method is to **minimize the importance of cognition** (belief). For example, a person can believe that this life is short and should be enjoyed to the fullest then he will continue to smoke even though smoking is injurious. This way minimizing the importance of cognition would reduce the dissonance.

The classic story of the hungry fox and sour grapes also illustrates the cognitive dissonance. When hungry fox sees the grapes hanging on a tree, he gets tempted to eat them but since they are hanging too high, he cannot reach them. So, he comes up with the excuse that grapes are sour. In this story, the fox is reducing its dissonance by believing that grapes are sour and not worthy of repeated attempts to catch them.

References

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