



Attitude: Content, Structure and Function

What is Attitude?

▪ About:

- It is a **psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity** with some degree of favour or disfavour.
- The evaluations which **people make can range from extremely unfavourable to the extremely favourable**, or can be more moderate.
- Attitudes can be **mixed, and with regard to the same object**, may vary from time to time.

▪ Classification:

◦ Explicit:

- If a **person is aware of his attitudes**, and they influence his behaviour and beliefs, his attitudes are explicit.
- Explicit attitudes are **formed consciously**.

◦ Implicit:

- A person **may be unaware of his implicit beliefs** though these still have some influence on his conduct and behaviour.
- Implicit attitudes are **subconscious attitudes**.

What are the Components of the Attitude?

▪ Attitude has **three components**.

◦ **Affective (Emotional):**

- It consists **of the feeling which the object**, person, issue or event evokes. The behavioural part **consists of the manner in which the attitude influences** a person's behaviour.
- **For example:** I am scared of spiders.

◦ **Behavioural (Conative):**

- Conative in **psychology means a mental process** involving the will-impulse, desire or resolve.
- **For example:** I will avoid spiders and scream if I see one.

◦ **Cognitive:**

- It means 'relating to the process of acquiring knowledge through **reason, intuition and perception**'.
- It consists of a **person's thoughts and beliefs** about the attitude object.
- **For example:** I believe spiders are dangerous.

What are the Causative Factors behind the Formation of Attitudes?

▪ Culture:

- Culture exerts **enormous influence on an individual**. Culture in itself includes religion, tradition, customs, prohibitions, rewards and sanctions.
- Socialisation is the process by which culture shapes the attitudes of the people.
- Culture teaches individual beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that are acceptable in one's life and society.
- **For example:** Consuming beef in India is generally considered taboo but in western countries, there is no such restriction.

▪ Family:

- Family is the **most important and closest social group** for a person. It is the nursery for attitudinal formation.
- Parents are more influential among the family system who structure and mould the attitude of a child.
- Extended family and sibling relationships, in particular, play an important role in attitude formation.

▪ Social Groups:

- Several social groups apart from family play an important role in attitude formation which includes **friends, peers, colleagues**, etc.
- Consider the voting pattern in India. There are people who do not listen to candidate's speeches, read newspapers or follow debates. They talk with friends, family, etc. and vote for a candidate. Families, friends and other such social groups most definitely influence the choice of a candidate.

▪ Institutions:

- A man is never alone. From cradle to grave he is under the influence of one institution or the other.
- **For example:** Educational institutions like schools and colleges act as repositories of knowledge, direct and shape the beliefs, values of a person and thus form attitudes.

▪ Familiarity:

- Familiarity **breeds positive attitude**. Man generally has a fear of the unknown, so anything familiar might make him or her feel at peace.
- Familiarity and classical conditioning act on emotions of an individual and therefore shape the affective component of attitudes.

What are the Techniques to Bring Change in Attitude?

▪ Classical/ Pavlovian Conditioning:

- In this technique, the person is **exposed to a positive and neutral stimulus repeatedly** and after some time the response to neutral stimuli becomes the same as response to positive stimuli.

▪ Instrumental Conditioning:

- A process in which a **positive behavior when rewarded has more chances of repetition** unlike the negative behavior which if repeated would lead to punishment and thus less chances of repetition.
- **Example:**
 - Parents celebrating the success of a child by praising them among friends will form a positive attitude of the child towards success. Further, when parents punish the child for their mistakes, it discourages the child from making those mistakes again.

▪ Social Observation:

- This involves **learning from our social environment** such as family, school, media and

its expression.

What are the Functions of Attitude?

▪ Knowledge Function:

- Attitudes have a knowledge function, **which enables individuals to understand their environment** and to be consistent in their ideas and thinking. Most attitudes serve this basic function in some measure.

▪ Utilitarian Function:

- Attitude **helps individuals in maximizing benefits and minimizing disadvantages** while interacting with individuals, groups and situations in their environment. Utilitarian attitudes lead to behaviour that optimizes one's interests.

▪ Performing a Social Role:

- Attitudes help perform a social role, helping in an individual's self-expression and social interaction.
- Subscribing to a given set of attitudes signals one's identification with important reference groups to express one's core values, and to establish one's identity. This social role of attitudes is known as social identity function, it underlies an individual's desire to establish his individual and social identity.

▪ Maintain an Individual's Self-Esteem:

- **Attitudes can serve as defence mechanisms** for handling an individual's internal mental conflict which reflect tensions within the individual psyche.
- The **defence mechanisms hide an individual's true motives from himself** or psychologically isolate him from groups perceived as hostile or threatening.
- Attitudes maintain self-esteem in other ways also. An individual's attitudes toward many things are influenced by his view on how they affect his own self-assessment.
 - **For Example:** Our attitudes toward our friends and social acquaintances depend on whether we regard such association as enhancing or lowering our social standing.

How is Attitude related to the Value System?

- A value system refers to the **order and priority an individual or society grants** to ethical and ideological values.
- While two individuals or groups may share a set of common values, they may not give equal weight or preference to those values.

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VALUES VERSUS ATTITUDES

VALUES	ATTITUDES
Moral principles or moral ethics or standards of behaviour	Opinions or stances about a certain subject matter or a person
A part of a person's character	A part of a person's personality
Showcase a particular person's moral ethics and his/her overall character	Highlight a person's behaviour through the personality
Directly influenced by family, friends, culture, religion, and social interactions	Directly influenced by a person's values
Moral ethics	Can be negative and positive

What is the Difference Between Attitude and Behavior?

Attitude	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attitude is defined as a person's mental tendency, which is responsible for the way he thinks or feels for someone or something. ▪ A person's attitude is mainly based on the experiences gained by him during the course of his life and observations. ▪ Attitude is a person's inner thoughts and feelings. ▪ The way of thinking or feeling is reflected by a person's attitude. ▪ Attitude is defined by the way we perceive things whereas behavior is ruled by social norms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Behavior implies the actions, moves, conduct or functions or an individual or group towards other persons. ▪ On the other hand, the behavior of a person relies on the situation. ▪ As opposed to, behavior expresses a person's attitude. ▪ On the contrary, a person's conduct is reflected by his behavior. ▪ Attitude is a human trait but behavior is an inborn attribute.

How do Attitude Influence Behaviour?

▪ Positive Attitude:

- A person who **has positive attitudes towards work and co-workers** (such as contentment, friendliness, etc.) can positively influence those around them.
 - **Example:** People with a **good attitude are active and productive** and do what they can to improve the mood of those around them.

▪ Negative Attitudes:

- A person **who displays negative attitudes** (such as discontentment, boredom, etc.), will behave accordingly.
 - **Example:** People with **these types of attitudes towards work may likewise affect those around them** and behave in a manner that reduces efficiency and effectiveness.

▪ Selfish Attitude:

- It will **guide an individual's actions in a selfish manner.**
 - **Example:** Holding one's self-interest as the standard for decision making.

▪ Logic or Rational Attitudes:

- It develops rational behaviour.
 - **Example:** A rational person will not act superstitiously and will always try to find rational behind any act.

▪ Egoistic Attitude:

- It will **result in a negative attitude and behaviour.**
 - **Example:** Elder individuals control their younger siblings even if they are wrong to satisfy their ego of being elder.

▪ Attitude based on Values and Beliefs:

- It will act according to the values.
 - **Example:** In India **touching the feet of elders** is guided by an attitude of giving respect to them.

What do we understand by Moral and Political Attitudes?

▪ Moral Attitude:

- Morality refers to **righteousness**. Moral attitudes are **attitudes concerned with righteous manners**. Thus, Moral attitudes is not a neutral concept. It is a bias towards righteousness or virtuousness. Some of the moral attitudes are:
 - Goodness
 - Respect
 - Love & Compassion
 - Selflessness
 - Empathy

▪ Political Attitude:

- Political Attitudes are a **set of which an individual approaches a political problem** and which determines his line of conduct towards that problem.

- It's **also a set of rules & regulations**, customs, traditions, beliefs that influences the political system of that country.
- The sum total of political attitudes of an individual reveals that person's outlook on the political aspect of social living. They define the relationship between the citizen, govt and functions of the political system.
- **Examples:**
 - Voting behaviour of voters in an Elections decided by political attitudes followed by individual and political parties
 - Govt policies were of socialist nature when India got independence but after the **LPG era** in 1990's India opened its economy and followed pro market policy.

What is Social Influence and Persuasion?

▪ Social influence:

- It is an **attribute that can bring change in a person's behaviour, thoughts**, feelings and attitudes that results from interaction with another individual in society.

▪ Persuasion:

- It is **defined as communicative activities that are mediated**. It is the process of changing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs or behaviour of a person.
- It **can be intentionally or unintentionally**, as a result of the way the changed person perceives themselves in relationship to the influencer.
- It is **different from conformity, power and authority**. These are fundamental functions of communication.

What is the Theory of Persuasion?

▪ About:

- In many **commercial and administrative situations**, attitude is formed by persuading people to **change their attitudes, beliefs and habits**.
- It **describes the ideal means of persuading people** to change their beliefs, attitudes and habits.
 - This theory is also known as the **Elaboration Likelihood theory of attitude**.
 - For Example: Governments **may try to induce parents in rural areas to enrol their children in primary schools**.

▪ Factors Determining Success of Persuading People:

◦ Audience Characteristics:

- To change the **attitude of people on any object**, they have to be provided with information which they may not possess.
- It is the **audience who has to receive and process the information**.
 - Their **ability to do this depends on their intelligence**.
 - **People with higher intelligence are unlikely to be persuaded** by one-sided messages.
 - The conventional view is that it is hard to persuade people with high self-esteem to accept new attitudes.
- But the relationship between self-esteem and willingness to change one's attitude seems to be curvilinear.
- It means **thereby that individuals with average levels of self-esteem are more ready to change their attitudes** than those with either high self-esteem or low self-esteem.
- The state of mind and mood of the target audience also influence the manner in which they respond to the message.

- **Source Characteristics:**

- These refer to the person who is delivering the message.
- The variables which **determine how effective a person will be in delivering the message are his expertise**, trustworthiness and attractiveness to the audience.
- The audience, **in order to be convinced, have to be assured that the message is authoritative and authentic.**

- **Cognitive Routes:**

- A message seeking to change an **attitude can appeal to an individual's intellect or logical faculty.**
- This appeal can be either through the **central route or the peripheral route.**
- **Central Route:**
 - In the central route to persuasion, the **individual is presented with the data and motivated to evaluate the data** and arrive at an attitude changing conclusion.
- **Peripheral Route:**
 - In the peripheral route to attitude change, the **individual is encouraged to not look at the content but at the source.** This is commonly seen in modern advertisements that feature celebrities.
 - **Example:** For example, having a popular athlete advertise athletic shoes is a common method used to encourage young adults to purchase the shoes.

Some Quotes Related to Attitude

- Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal, nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude. - **Thomas Jefferson**
- All birds find shelter during a rain. But Eagle avoids rain by flying above the clouds. Problems are common, but Attitude makes the difference. -**A P J Abdul Kalam**
- Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character. -**Albert Einstein.**
- Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement, nothing can be done without hope." -**Helen Keller**

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Questions

Q. A positive attitude is considered to be an essential characteristic of a civil servant who is often required to function under extreme stress. What contributes to a positive attitude in person.? (150 words). **(2021)**

Q. How could social influence and persuasion contribute to the success of Swatchh Bharat Abhiyan? **(2016)**

Q. What factors affect the formation of a person's attitude towards social problems? In our society, contrasting attitudes are prevalent about many social problems. What contrasting attitudes do you notice about the caste system in our society? How do you explain the existence of these contrasting attitudes? **(2014)**

Q. Our attitudes towards life, work, other people and society are generally shaped unconsciously by the family and social surroundings in which we grow up. Some of these unconsciously acquired attitudes and values are often undesirable in the citizens of modern democratic and egalitarian society.

(a) Discuss such undesirable values prevalent in today's educated Indians.

(b) How can such undesirable attitudes be changed and socio-ethical values be cultivated in the aspiring and serving civil servants? **(2016)**

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