

Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 16 : Attitudes- Part IV

Hello friends, welcome back. Let us continue with the discussion based on theories of attitude formation. In the previous discussion, I talked about classical conditioning. In this lecture, I am going to talk about instrumental conditioning. Instrumental conditioning is a type of learning or theory of attitude formation where the response leads to an outcome and the outcome will define the strength or weakness of that response to occur again in future. A very simple example can be when a child who scores good marks in the classroom, he is being appreciated, he is being awarded by the teacher and the outcome or consequences that the behaviour is repeated in terms of that the child learns to work hard and score better marks again in the next term.

Whereas, another example can be in the same classroom, one child has done some notorious activity in the classroom and the child is being punished by the teacher. In future, the outcome of that response will be because based on the punishment, the child will not repeat that response. That means the response is being weakened based on the consequence of the outcome or the outcome. Similarly, it is about attitude formation as well that whenever any attitude which receives some kind of appreciation or acceptance in any social situation that attitude gains more strength.

If there is more rejection, the person tends to shed off with that attitude because it is a negative attitude and it will not have a positive outcome in future. So, when we are talking about instrumental conditioning based for attitude formation, then attitudes that are followed by positive outcomes tend to be strengthened and are likely to be repeated. Whereas, attitudes that are followed by negative outcomes are weakened, so the likelihood of being expressed again is reduced. Similarly, with the child's example, the child has done something wrong in the classroom, he or she has been punished and the child will not repeat that behavior again. This is instrumental conditioning which is completely based on the consequence or outcome of the response.

Thus, another way in which attitudes are required is through the process of instrumental conditioning because the outcome is dependent or the response is dependent on the outcome or the consequence of that response. Instrumental conditioning is a type of learning in which an individual's behavior is modified by its antecedents and consequence. A person is in the wrong company, he will exhibit wrong behavior and that wrong behavior will have a bad consequence. As soon as the consequence has been identified or realized by the person, the child will not repeat it or the person will not repeat it and he or she will modify his or her behavior while not repeating or weakening that attitude or reducing the tendency to come up with that attitude. Behaviors or attitudes that are followed by positive consequences are reinforced.

That means a child who has done good in the classroom, he is being reinforced based on the reward he has received and the response will be strengthened and it is likely to be repeated. Then behaviors and attitudes that are followed by negative consequences. So, the mechanism of instrumental conditioning suggests that the behavior may change in form that is frequency or strength. If the attitude that is being exhibited frequently and has given positive outcomes, the frequency will increase. The behavior that has led to a positive outcome, then the consequence will be positive and that behavior will be strengthened.

Based on the consequences, new and old attitudes are being formed, reshaped or modified only for positive outcomes. So, this is the base of instrumental conditioning which leads to attitude formation based on the consequences. The most important thing to suggest about instrumental conditioning as given by B.F. Skinner is that whenever any behavior that is rewarded is repeated that form leads to formation of positive attitude, any behavior which has negative consequence leads to modification of attitude or reshaping of the attitude.

So, classical and instrumental conditioning are one of the most basic form of learning or theory of attitude formation which is being applicable in different areas even in marketing, even in corporates where performance of the employee is being enhanced based on developing positive attitude and how the response is being strengthened or the performance is being strengthened. So, this is the applicability of formation of new attitudes based on classical and instrumental conditioning. Further, the conditioning, this kind of conditioning that is instrumental conditioning the impact is very subtle. Every time the child or any person will not receive any applause but there has to be some different kind of indirect rewards that a person or child can receive and develop a positive attitude. For instance, any child who has performed very well or person who has given a very strong opinion may not receive an applause but he can receive that reward with a smile, with the approval or hugs for stating the right views.

So, even a child who has performed well in the classroom may not receive any certificate but yes appreciative words from the classroom teacher or appreciation from the parents is a subtle impact of the consequence of the response and how that response is being strengthened in a very subtle manner. So, it is not only very explicit, the impact is also very implicit when we are talking about attitude formation based on instrumental conditioning. So, we can say that conditioning is a form of learning or attitude formation which becomes strong with the gradual process of social interactions and the person who wants to seek approval at the same time will tend to expand his horizon so that new information can be acquired and the person also develop new views in social situation and receive more appreciation or acknowledgement to strengthen those positive responses or attitude. In fact, social psychologists have also studied in researches that even when children grow up and they join colleges, they tend to join different kind of groups and there to be there for being accepted by those groups they also tend to modify their attitude in a way where they are trying to give opinions similar to the objective of the group and then try to modify their

own opinions even different from their parents. So, this is how instrumental conditioning plays an important role in forming new attitudes or reshaping or modifying old attitudes into new ones.

So, classical and instrumental conditioning are one of the most important theories of attitude formation. The next is persuasion. Since we are discussing about attitude formation based on observational learning, social learning, social comparison, instrumental conditioning or classical conditioning, then persuasion is another tool I would say which leads to attitude formation. It is a kind of influence that a person has because of the other person and it can be defined as an individual's effort to change other person's attitudes through the use of various kind of messages. Either message means any opinion that is being conveyed to the other person or group and how they are being influenced by that message.

It can be any political leader who is addressing a large group of people and how that message by the political leader influences masses of people in the favour of that leader. So, persuasion can attempt to influence a person's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations or behaviours and is often used in the pursuit of personal gains such as election campaigning. As I mentioned an example of political leader who addresses a large number of group for getting favour for his party and how people get influenced or persuaded by that leader. So, persuasion can also be interpreted by using one's personal or positional resources to change people's behaviour or attitudes. In big organizations, people sitting at higher positions, they tend to use the power of their position and their designation to change the view point of the of the whole workforce.

This is a process of persuasion where the other person is getting influenced by one single message received from the other end. Key elements of persuasion. Who says what to whom with what effect? How we will understand that what is the impact of that of a particular message on oneself? We do not have any barometer, we do not have any scale where we can say that this is the degree of impact of the persuasion. But certain elements have been identified by social psychologists where they say that if these elements are present while interacting then definitely persuasion is active. So, this approach yields a number of important elements of persuasion.

The first is the person who is communicating a message is supposed to be a credible person. The credible person here means that the person who is sending message to the other person has to be an expert in his field that whatever he speaks, whatever he talks has some knowledge, has some weightage and significance in the information and the person gets an impression that whatever message has been received from the person is a highly knowledgeable and credible person and the attitude can be easily modified based on that communication. So, the first element is that communicators who are credible. This pertains that people who seem to know what they are talking about or who are expert with respect to the topic or issues they are presenting. The more

they are expert, the more they are persuasive and person who is lacking some expertise will not be able to persuade the audiences.

So, one means by which credibility can be undermined is this is one way to persuade. Now, under what circumstances we can say that the person is not persuasive when the person or the audience comes to know that the person who is communicating is communicating a strong message for his own personal motive. Under such circumstances, the audience will not be getting influenced to change their mind or change their attitude. So, whenever we are talking about persuasion and about their specific elements where it can be effective, then the first element is credibility of the communicator. If the communicator has a personal stake in persuading to adopt a particular position, then under circumstances the person fails to change his attitude because he is not being influenced because the motive has been reflected that is selfish motive.

Consequently, communicators are seen to be most credible when they are perceived as arguing against their self-interest. For example, any leader, group leader who is arguing with the higher authority for the betterment of the group, then there is an influence. If the group leader is only arguing with the higher position for his own personal interest, then it is not persuasion, then it is only a simple act of engaging in satisfying their one own self-interest. So, this is the first element that is credibility. The other is that it has been found by social psychologist that if the communicators are physically attractive, then they have better influence on people than people who are less attractive.

This is the study by Hovland and Waze in 1951 which says that even in the field of advertisements, models are attempting to suggest to us that if they buy their product will be perceived as attractive. So, any model who is endorsing any beauty product will definitely have a very strong impact on the captured market or consumer because any attractive woman is endorsing that product which will have a very strong influence on the targeted population. So, this is the second element based on attractiveness and unattractiveness. The other way is that even attractiveness is there, then likeability is also there. Any person who is likable in the group and expresses his opinion, then his opinion is being respected and people get influenced by them.

So, we are more likely to be persuaded by communicator we like than one we dislike. This is but obvious. In any group situation, social situation, we have one special relationship with one member of the group and we are very much influenced by them. So, that means the person who is a likable person in the group can be a persuasive person. That is the reason that why famous sports celebrities such as co-brand, musicians such as Beyonce novels and actresses such as Catherine Zeta Zones are selected as spokesperson for various products to endorse various products.

In addition, for any social initiative, Bollywood celebrities are being selected to endorse for those initiatives by the government so that people are impressed or convinced by the message they have been given. They have been given by these celebrities and people are likely to follow those celebrities and change their attitude. This is the example. In this example, the big thing is that beauty product is there where so many companies are competing but the most important thing is that how any Bollywood or Hollywood actress is endorsing this product which will help in changing the attitude of the target population. This is another way to talk about the most basic elements of persuasion.

The other is messages that do not appear to be designed to change our attitudes are often more successful than those that seem to be designed to achieve this goal. So, researchers have indicated that forewarning does not typically lessen the extent to which attitude change occurs simply knowing that a sales pitch is coming your way undermines its persuasiveness. This is the element where persuasiveness becomes ineffectiveness. When we know that something is coming to us then we become more aware of that news or opinion and whatever opinion we have, we take that opinion more stronger than what the next will come. So, this actually declines or decreases the impact of persuasion on an individual.

So, here I would just mention the word forewarning that does not typically lessen the extent to which attitude change occurs. So, simply knowing that a sales pitch is coming your way undermines its persuasiveness. The other is people are sometimes more susceptible to persuasion when they are distracted by some extraneous events when they are paying full attention to what is being said. Any person who is approaching a group for changing the attitude but they have been distracted by some other extraneous elements in the situation under that circumstances, the audience or the target group fails to maintain that focus on the opinion of the person and immediately the persuasive tendency goes down. That is this is the one reason that why political candidates often arrange spontaneous demonstrations during their speeches.

So, this kind of distraction generated among audiences members may enhance their acceptance of the speakers points. That means, all of a sudden any politician who just comes at a focal point of the city and tries to convey the message to the public that has more influence than inviting people and then being distracted by some other factors. So, sometimes based on the situation any targeted group or audience can be influenced or attitude can be changed when there is an immediate imposition of that person to pursue for attitude formation. The other is persuasion can also be based on emotions. It can be about fear, it can be about positive or negative emotions.

Suppose we say that any message that arouses strong emotions in form of fear then maybe to avoid that fear the person will not change his or her attitude that also happens. That if any person who tries to create a different kind of fear about a particular product for example, smoking that we tend to convey a message to the customer or to the consumer that you smoke and you it will cause you cancer then it can arouse a type of fear among people and the person will try to escape from those type of negative or fearful emotions. This is how the persuasive tendency also declines. So, here at this element when we are talking about persuasion based on emotions then the communication provides specific recommendation about how to prevent or avoid the fear producing events. Now, under such circumstances even when fear emotion is being evoked and the person tries to escape from that kind of fearful emotion then different strategies are being pursued to avoid that kind of fearful emotion and how a person can be persuaded to avoid or quit smoking.

This is one way where a subtle way of fear has been evoked in the advertisement that quit smoking and protect the environment. This is a very strong message and at the same time it is not fear it is actually an awareness about the consequent of smoking. Whereas in this the fear evocation is there cigarette causes mouth diseases. This is a very strong message which evokes fear among people and people will try to escape with that emotion not quit smoking. Whereas here in this picture the advertisement is giving a very strong message but in a very subtle manner and at the same time the audiences are not experiencing any fearful emotion.

So, research findings have also suggested that if persuasion is an important element in attitude formation then it has to be effective based on sending a message with some positive framing and not negative framing. Although in both the cases positive and negative attitude change can be experienced. So, if we are talking about framing positive messages then it can be in terms of that do this and you will feel better. This has a very positive message and impactful and attitude change is there or attitude formation is there new attitude formation is there. Whereas in negative framing the same message might be if you do not do this you will shorten your life.

Now in this negative framing is existing in this type of picture and in this type of picture advertisement it is a positive framing. This is how attitude formation is taking place. So, the point is that the same health information can be framed in terms of potential benefits of taking a particular action or in terms of the negative consequences that will ensue if you do not take that action. So, the ultimate aim is that positively framed messages are often more effective persuasion devices than fear appeals. Whenever fear is there the person tries to escape from that emotion and attitude formation is the background thing.

If it is very subtle and not fear provoking then more attitude formation is possible because fear is not there but positive framing is there positive framing of the messages is there and positive

attitude change can also be experienced. So, this is how attitude formation can be done based on persuasion and it is very effective if it has some major elements such as the communicators credibility, physical attractiveness and at the same time likability, forewarning. If forewarning is also there that means people know what is about to come to us then people have already made up their mind or made up their opinion or attitude for that issue and people find it difficult to change themselves. The other is distraction, the less is the distraction the more attitude formation is possible. Persuasion can be enhanced based on positive and frame negative framing of the messages.

So, this is how attitude formation is possible based on persuasion, based on classical conditioning, based on instrumental conditioning, social learning, social comparison and observational learning. Next, we will continue about in what manner persuasive tendencies are being declined or there is resistance to change. We will discuss this issue in the next class. Thank you so much. Thank you.