Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 17: Attitudes- Part V

Hello friends, welcome back. Today I will continue my discussion about Persuasion. I started the discussion on this topic in my previous lecture as well. So, in this discussion I am going to talk about some other aspects of Persuasion where I will talk about how, in what, under what circumstances Persuasion is effective, ineffective, what are the motivations or role of motivation that makes the strategy of Persuasion effective or ineffective, what are the factors where a person easily resist to change or resist to any kind of Persuasion. So, let us continue with the cognitive approach to Persuasion. Under what circumstances Persuasion or the strategy of Persuasion is effective? Now this kind of approach actually focus on an individual's level of knowledge and motivation and awareness of the situation.

Suppose I just give an example, a very simple day to day life example that whenever we switch on the TV and watching any program, some commercial ads pop up. Now as soon as the commercial ads pop up, we will sometimes just mute the volume and it is but natural to understand that there is no relevance to that advertisement at that moment of time and we tend to ignore. Now this is a way that where when we do not have any need or we do not have any motivation, then any advertisement can also become very ineffective in terms of persuading any customer or consumer. Now this is a very simple example I am quoting right now, but there are social psychologists have also talked about some two important aspects and approaches that how an individual's cognitive process impact or influence the process of Persuasion in day to day life.

For example, if I say that whenever I am just repeating the example that if even if we are watching television and any advertisement pop up on the screen, if we are muting the volume because we understand it is of no relevance, but yes if any celebrity pops up on the screen of the television and advertising for a product or any campaigning or any social initiative, then we would also stop there and we will try to listen to what the message the celebrity is giving to the public. Now as soon as this message is being popped up, maybe we will think that if this person is saying something some relevance is there or may be the person is right whatever is being said by him and we tend to just follow what the celebrity has sent the message to the public. Therefore we can say that whenever we are motivated towards achievement of the goal or we have some understanding about the topic, then immediately we try to use our cognitions in a more productive manner that how the whole process of information processing has been adopted by that person while absorbing the information, interpreting the information and evaluating the situation. So this is how this cognitive approach has been discussed when we are talking about persuasion in terms of influence or attitude formation. This is one way where I am focusing on the cognitions or the cognitive aspect of persuasion.

But social psychologists have answered this question that how an individual uses his cognitions in day to day life, then they have divided this process into two aspects. The first is systematic versus heuristic processing. If I go to the previous slide again that when you are subjected to a message, the central issue is to provide the key to understanding the entire process of persuasion. What are the motives of an individual? How the person will achieve his goal based on that information available? And what has been offered in the environment when the person tries to evaluate, absorb each and every information, then how the person will try to get convinced from the situation. That means what factors will convince the person to take any decision.

Regarding the same, social psychologists have identified two distinct ways. The first is systematic processing or the central route to persuasion or the other is heuristic processing or the peripheral route to persuasion. So first let us discuss about systematic processing or the central route to persuasion. Now this kind of information processing based on cognition involves careful consideration of message content and the ideas it contains. It talks about all the important and relevant information which is prevalent in the situation and how it requires maximum efforts to absorb and evaluate the information and then getting convinced by the message.

Any person, any leader or any influential person who is conveying a message to us or to a particular group, then it has some impact. But that impact has to remain on an individual based on the motives of the person, the maximum information one has and how that information can be used in interpreting that message in a very rational manner. This is systematic processing or the central route to persuasion. That any message that is coming from the other end, how we are going to get convinced or we are going to accept that message based on our own level of understanding that is knowledge, skill, ability, your ability to interpret, your ability to evaluate that information. This requires more time and this require more efforts to interpret and evaluate.

So this is a very, this requires lot of efforts and time to understand the available message based on the information one has. And the other is the heuristic processing or the peripheral route to persuasion. This is something that if any influential person has given a message to the public or to a group of people, then a person involves in mental shortcuts that if an expert is giving some message, then it has to be trusted or it is very much correct. And this is how we do not use our logic, we do not use our efforts to interpret the information and we are using mental shortcuts that if any celebrity or any influential person has given this message, then I can trust on that person. Or the other way to interpret the information is and we are ready to be persuaded that if any information makes me feel good, then I am in favour of it.

Now this kind of processing will only happen when the person is lacking some information to process or to interpret. And as such circumstances, the person tries to opt for mental shortcuts and take the decision or get persuaded by the communicator. Now for example, another way can be

a very generic understanding of people in day to day life that whatever looks beautiful evokes a positive response and we are being persuaded. This is actually heuristic processing or the peripheral route to persuasion. So this kind of processing requires less effort and allows us to react to persuasive messages in an automatic manner.

There is no time that we are devoting in interpreting the information or message and we are simply focusing on mental shortcuts. Even if anything that appears to be beautiful, if you have some knowledge, then we can interpret that information regarding the beauty of that product or situation and we will try to be dissuaded or persuaded. But when we are focusing on mental shortcuts, then a simple understanding prevails that anything which looks beautiful can be trusted or it evokes positive response. So these are the two types of cognitive approaches which social psychologists have identified in the process of persuasion that is systematic and heuristic processing. Now the next question is that when do we engage in each of these two distinct modes of thought? There has to be some situation where we say that right at this moment a person is engaging in a systematic processing or in heuristic processing.

Again social scientists have identified two types of models. The first is elaboration likelihood model and the other is heuristic systematic model. Now this is elaboration likelihood model is a novel approach, cognitive approach to understand the process of persuasion. In this type of model that is elaboration likelihood model or ELM, the person engage in the most effortful and systematic processing when our motivation is very high. When I started the discussion, I use this word that the process of persuasion is very much influenced by an individual's motives or goals that he or she has to achieve.

If the motivation is very high to achieve the goal or attain some information, gain some information then under such circumstances the individual engage in every type of efforts to process the information in a very systematic manner. That means the route is very much deep and central. It is very much focused to an individual's motivation and it is very much related to persuasive message. This is actually elaboration likelihood model. In this type of processing, an individual has a lot of knowledge regarding the message.

Communicator in fact already has lot of knowledge but when it reaches the target person, the target person also has enough of knowledge about the message and he takes major interest in getting persuaded by engaging in careful thought processing, information processing and sufficiently important to us and believe it is essential to form an accurate view. This is only possible when the person who is being persuaded or who has received the message from the communicator has some goal or high motivation and he requires accurate information processing so that correct decision can be made. This is elaboration likelihood model. As the term implies elaboration likelihood, the person tries to elaborate each and every detail of the information by

the communicator in the message and combine it with the available knowledge to the maximum so that the correct decision making can be made. The other is heuristic systematic model.

In contrast, the person engages in heuristic processing that requires less effort. When we lack the ability to process more carefully, any message that we have received or any person has received and he does not have appropriate information about the message, then definitely people cannot pay much attention to that message and they are engaging themselves in heuristic model of persuasion where they are just using mental shortcuts. For example, any political leader can persuade a group of people during election campaign as they are very much distracted and public do not have much information and they agree to what the political leader has given the message. So, this is heuristic systematic heuristic processing model where the motivation is also low and the availability of the information is also incomplete or minimum. Thus, we must make up our minds very quickly and we have little knowledge about the issue or when a motivation to perform such cognitive work is low.

For example, politicians, sales people or advertisers, they tend to change an individual's attitude and during that process, they are so distracted, the public is so distracted that they do not want to engage themselves in detailed information and they are being easily persuaded while changing their attitude. So, this is heuristic processing for reasons and we describe later it is often easier to change our attitudes when we think in this mode than we engage in a more careful and systematic processing. This is the difference between ELM and heuristic systematic processing whereas, in addition to it strong arguments in favor of the position being advocated are not needed when people do not process those arguments very carefully. If I continue with the example of a political leader or even a sales person who does not who has complete knowledge of the message but the customer do not has the complete knowledge of the product then ultimately the person who the customer will not give counter argument regarding his opinion because he is lacking knowledge and ultimately the sales person or the political leader can impose their persuasion or influence on the customer or the group people. This is how heuristic processing becomes a shortcut depending on the type of person they are dealing with.

If it is political leader and public in mass then definitely heuristic processing is more applicable rather than systematic or ELM model. So, this is the difference between ELM and systematic heuristic model about cognitive approaches to persuasion. So, the difference is that whenever the person or the person who has received the message do not have complete knowledge about the message then under such circumstances it becomes very easy for any sales person, advertiser or political leader to change the attitude of the other person than the person who is having better and more knowledge regarding the message. So, this is about the two models of cognitive approaches to persuasion. Further the discovery of these two contrasting models processing that is systematic versus heuristic has provided an important key to understanding when and how persuasion occurs.

Now what are the situation factors that where these two types of models are also working. When persuasive messages are not interesting or relevant to individuals the degree of persuasion they produce is not strongly influenced by the strength of the arguments. If I am not interested in any message then the argument we give to the other person will not be that effective that is but obvious. Rather when such messages are highly relevant to individuals however they are much more successful in inducing persuasion when the arguments they contain are strong and convincing. If the message is relevant to us and the counter argument we make to the communicator then that arguments are very strong and convincing at the same time.

So the idea is that whenever we are talking about systematic and versus heuristic it all depends on the relevance of the message to an individual. It is not only motivation but also relevance of the message to an individual. If the relevance is low to an individual then the persuasion they produce is not strongly influenced by the strength of the arguments these messages contain. Since the message is not relevant to me any argument that comes to me is not very convincing and we try to resist. But if the message is very relevant to us so any argument along with the message that comes we are ready to counter also and the argument from both the end is strong and convincing.

So this is that applicability and implication of systematic versus heuristic processing or cognitive approach to processing of persuasion. I just repeat that when persuasive messages are not interesting or relevant to individuals the degree of persuasion they produce is not strongly influenced by the strength of the arguments these messages contain. That means they are least influenced by the message that has been received by the communicator. But if the message is relevant to them then they are ready to counter and receive every kind of argument from both the ends. Thus according to these two pathways that is ELM and systematic heuristic processing when the relevance is low individuals tend to process messages through the heuristic mode using various mental shortcuts.

Even in elaboration likelihood model if the relevance is low then heuristic model is more applicable. And these argument strength has little impact in contrast when relevance is high. They process persuasive messages more systematically and in this mode argument strength is very important because the message is very relevant to the person then he will also give a counter argument to the communicator to reach the right decision making. So this is about ELM and systematic heuristic processing. This is a model ELM model the cognitive theory of persuasion where when the message is important the processing capacity is very high and the person engages in central route that is systematic processing and there is attitude change which depends on the argument.

Here at this point when the information is very important or relevant to the person under such circumstances attitude change or formation becomes very difficult because the person who has received the message has to be convinced in such a manner that he is bound to change his attitude. In such circumstances it is also likely that the attitude will not change and the message will be ineffective in on that person. Whereas if the message is unimportant the processing capacity is low because information complete information is not available to the person also then they engage in heuristic processing where they use mental shortcuts to come to the conclusion and attitude change depends upon what triggers them. Now in this situation there can be some distraction at the same time that sometimes people are distracted and they also get convinced and the message becomes influential. But the most important thing is relevance and motivation.

If relevance is high attitude change becomes difficult process. If relevance is low then attitude change is possible but completely based on mental shortcuts. So this is one of the most famous ELM model or the cognitive theory of persuasion. The systematic versus heuristic distinction helps explain why people can be more easily persuaded when they are distracted than when they are not. Under such circumstances the capacity to process the information in a persuasive message is limited.

So people adopt the heuristic mode of thought. As I mentioned just now that even when the person is distracted he is not having a complete or focused information about the message. Under such circumstances the person is generally involved in heuristic processing and they are very much convinced in a very easy manner. This can be a distraction based on the attractiveness of the message as well. Maybe the message seems so attractive and the person gets convinced.

No matter how much information is fake in that message or how much information is required to process that message that is a different issue to be discussed. But whenever a person is distracted then heuristic processing is more active because persuasion may occur because people respond to the skews and not to the arguments being presented. So even the argument is along with the message but they are more interested in using the shortcuts and come to the decision. So we can say that the modern cognitive approach really does seem to provide the crucial key to understanding many aspects of persuasion. This is about the cognitive theory of persuasion based on ELM model, Elaboration Likelihood Model where two types of processing is involved, systematic and heuristic processing model and how an individual's motivation, relevance and distraction are the factors which affect the process of persuasion.

Next I will discuss further in the next lecture. Thank you so much. Thank you.