

Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 18: Attitudes- Part VI

Hello friends. Today I am going to continue my discussion pertaining to attitudes and persuasion. Previously we discussed about attitudes and how attitudes are formed based on some theoretical frameworks. Today I will talk about resistance to persuasion. Persuasion as a way and effort to alter or modify or change the behavior of the other person. There are certain circumstances or situations when a person also resists to persuasion.

Any individual would not like to change his or her own attitude towards any object, event or situation and how the person engages himself to resist to the process of persuasion. So there are several factors that together enhance an individual's ability to resist even highly skilled efforts at persuasion. Maybe the other person has made utmost efforts to change your behavior or modify your attitude or behavior or opinion about any person, event or situation. But there are chances that at that time even the efforts are being overshadowed by an individual's high ability to not to change his own attitude.

So there are certain factors which enables a person to resist to persuasion. So first determining factor is reactance that is protecting one's own personal freedom. Generally it is being said that one should respond to any situation but to resist persuasion social psychologists have talked about reactance. How we react? We oppose to the other person's process or efforts of persuasion and we tend to experience that freedom that I will not change myself. So it is a negative reaction basically to threats that to one's own personal freedom and it often increases resistance to persuasion and can even produce negative attitude change or opposite to what was intended.

Similarly the other person has made some efforts to pursue but you are reacting to that efforts to the efforts of an individual to change and we tend to react in a very negatively manner. We tend to possess a negative attitude towards the efforts of that person who engages in persuasion. So this is reactance that reactance is actually a negative attitude towards the process of persuasion which a person indulges in any form. When an individual perceives such appeals as direct threats to their personal freedom for their image of being an independent person they are strongly motivated to resist persuasion. It is a reaction to the threat to an individual's freedom.

Any person who wants to impose some kind of rule or change any norm in the group and it is threatening an individual's personal freedom that you cannot move in that group freely then definitely it is a threat to an individual's freedom and we tend to react in a very negative manner so that we can resist that change in the norm. So this is reactance a negative attitude in order to

protect one's own personal freedom. Research has indicated that in such situations we do often change our attitudes and behavior in the opposite direction. That means we try to sustain and maintain our own attitude and in order to resist we try to pose a negative attitude towards the efforts that a person has indulged in to change the attitude in terms of persuasion. So there is an opposite direction from what we are being urged to believe or to do.

Indeed when we are feeling reactance strong arguments in favor of attitude change can increase opposition compared to moderate or weak arguments. We tend to give very negative arguments and opinions towards that efforts of persuasion of the other person so that our personal freedom is being saved or protected and at the same time that negative attitude will push the persuasive efforts in a opposite direction. So if anybody wants us to have or develop a positive attitude towards a new norm then we try to actually try to give a very opposite reaction to those change in the norms so that the change that is coming to an individual is being directed in a different direction. The other factor is forewarning. This is that when we come to know that some change is going to come in the environment and we prepare ourselves to resist that persuasion by forming a different kind of attitude of preparing ourselves that how to avoid that persuasion.

So this refers to advance knowledge that one is about to become the target of an attempt at persuasion and it often increases resistance to the persuasion that follows. We prepare ourselves if change is yet to come and we are aware of it we are knowledgeable about a new change that will be introduced in the environment or any social situation we tend to prepare ourselves by preparing behaviors in order to resist that persuasive efforts. For example, when we watch television we expect so many commercials on the screen and we know that what kind of messages every commercial will have on the audiences. So that means every commercial is persuading the audiences as a customer to purchase a particular product. Similarly, when we know and we listen to any political speech at the same time then we understand that the political leader is trying to persuade the mass or the public to vote for him in his favor.

Thus the fact that we know in advance about the persuasive intent behind such message helps us to resist them. That means whenever there is commercial flashed out on the screen we know the message and we tend to be prepare ourselves that how we can resist those commercials or advertisements where we can avoid not to purchase those products. So this is forewarning we understand the message that is lying behind the message in form of persuasion. Forewarning provides us with more opportunity to formulate counter arguments which refutes a message or that can lessen the messages impact. Now how to counter argument we give a very different opinion in form of reaction so that the persuaders message is being declined or it is being refuted.

This is forewarning that how we prepare ourselves to react to the hidden message in a very different form and we tend to give a very different counter argument to the persuader and the

message is being declined. So this is forewarning. Further forewarning provides us with more time to recall relevant information that may prove useful in refuting the persuasive message. For example we are watching television any commercial that has been flashed out on the screen we know about the product but that may be previously this product was not having a good reputation in the market in terms of sales and marketing and if some more changes are also there in the product then based on a previous knowledge and information we tend to take or decide or make a decision rather decision to either to persuade to be influenced by the persuasion of that commercial or not. So this is forewarning where previous knowledge also plays a very important role how to take decision whether to be influenced by that persuasive message or not.

It can be a political leader may be a political leader has a very poor background may be it is a criminal background or he has a background of misconduct and if he is addressing the masses to vote him or her then definitely we try to counter give counter argument so as to dissuade or decline the persuasive message hidden in those speeches and commercials. It is generally effective at increasing resistance simply expecting to receive a persuasive message without actually even receiving and includes attitudes in a resistant direction. That means whenever we have a prior message to hit an individual the person actually knows what the message will come to us and how we have to get influenced or not to be influenced by those messages. This is a feature of forewarning as a determining factor towards resistance to persuasion. Researchers have also revealed that forewarning does not prevent persuasion when people are distracted and in that case people are no more likely to resist the message than those not forewarned of the upcoming persuasive appeal.

This is so obvious that when we are not fully aware of the message that will hit us or we are not having prior information about any product or any event or situation or an individual then it becomes difficult to resist to that persuasion. We may get influenced or persuaded by the person's efforts and we find it difficult to adopt new patterns of behavior or attitude. This is another factor under the umbrella concept of forewarning that even when any individual is distracted it becomes very difficult for an individual to resist persuasion and again more difficulty is being encountered by the person to change his or her attitude. Another is selective avoidance, a tendency to direct attention away from information that challenges existing attitudes. Such avoidance increases resistance to persuasion.

For example, television moving provides a clear illustration of the effects of selective avoidance. People just not only sit before TV, watching TV and absorb all the information or commercials that come on the screen and they tend to absorb it and they tend to imbibe it. But at the same time they tend to mute those commercials which are of not any relevance to the audiences and they will mute off when any commercial which gives some information to them they will try to pay attention to it. Now the point is that whenever we are muting that commercial when it is being aired on the screen then it is a process of selective avoidance that we are selectively avoiding

certain commercials as we tend to decline those messages. So I will just go through this example that whenever we are watching TV and there is a clear illustration of the effects of selective avoidance people not only simply sit in front of the television and absorbing whatever the media decides to dish out.

Instead they channel surf, they mute the commercials, tape their favorite programs or simply cognitively tune out when confronted with information contrary to their views. Now here cognitive tune out means to avoid those commercials or information which is not in parity with one's own thought process. Then immediately we tend to change the channel or we tend to mute the channel. This is selective avoidance where we are selectively avoiding certain information which can hamper our own cognitive process or which can help us to decline any persuasive message that is hidden behind those commercials. So this is selective avoidance.

At the same time there can be opposite to this in terms of selective exposure. If selective avoidance is to resist persuasion then selective exposure is also an opposite procedure to resist persuasion. So when we encounter any information that support our views we tend to give full attention as the term implies that whenever any information that is relevant to us, cognitively relevant to us and it is influencing us then we tend to focus on that information even on television or even on any particular leader's speech. Such tendency is to ignore information that contradicts our attitudes while actively attending to information consisting with us that constitutes other side of selective avoidance that is selective exposure. We deliberately expose ourselves to those information that suits us well.

It is a common tendency of an individual but how it effects an individual decision making ability and at the same time how the person is resisting to persuasion. We filter out relevant information, we select in a very diligent manner that this information is relevant to me and we cognitively use those information in enhancing our decision making or attitude or new attitude formation as well. But at the same time this is something which is opposite of selective avoidance. Such selectivity in what we make the focus of our attention helps ensure that many of our attitudes remain largely intact for long period of time. A piece of information that we already have and when we are exposing in a very selective manner about the information then that makes the storage of information more intact because we are supporting our attitudes with the addition of new knowledge.

We are not declining our information we are enhancing we are updating our storage information about a particular person event or situation that keeps the attitude towards a particular person event or situation in a very intact manner. It is not loosened it is more intact because we are adding more information to keep our attitude intact. So, this is the opposite of selective avoidance that is selective exposure. Such as active defence. Ignoring or screening out information incongruent

with our current views is certainly one of the way of resisting persuasion that we already have discussed till now.

But it has also been suggested that in addition to this kind of passive defence of our attitudes we also use a more active strategy as well. This is an active strategy which is explicit in nature in terms of counter argument or avoidance. We explicitly give arguments to the person who is trying to persuade that why it is not convincing to me and how I refute or decline your message that you are sending to me. This is active defence where that a person indulges in the action and behaviour which is explicit in nature where the person is indulged or involved in a strategy where you are giving a counter argument to the efforts of an individual towards attitude formation. Therefore one reason we can be so good at resisting persuasion is that we not only ignore information that is inconsistent with our own views.

But we also actually process counter attitudinal input and argue actively against it. The other in a very implicit manner we tend to just tune out or dish out any information. We just encounter the other person in a very explicit manner and we engage in the process of counter attitudinal input and argue actively. Giving strong opinion or argument before the other person that is a process of active defence pertaining to resistance to persuasion.

The other is inoculation. This is one of the most important process and factor to resist persuasion. This concept was developed by MacGugger in 1961 to explain more about attitudes and beliefs changes to a larger extent and how to keep original attitudes intact in the face of persuasion attempts. There are chances there are very conflicting situations any individual would encounter when we are in a situation where we are unable to defy or unable to resist any persuasion. But at the same time we are preparing ourselves how to resist that persuasion. Basically inoculation works because it exposes people to arguments make them think about and rehearse opposing arguments.

In one situation hypothetically the person is being persuaded but a person does not want to change his attitude and at the same time he has no clue how to give counter argument or how to resist any kind of persuasion. But may be encountering again the same kind of situation the person would prepare himself he would rehearse that what I have to say in form of counter argument to the other person and involving in the process of inoculation. So it is a process where the person engages in form of rehearsal they prepare word by word how they have to give counter argument to the other person and that is how they resist persuasion and that gives them even a stronger version of their argument. So according to inoculation the process of inoculation when they hear the arguments again even stronger versions they pay less attention to them specially if they believe their opposing argument is stronger. So inoculation has two sets of arguments.

Now whenever the person is appearing in the in another situation while preparing himself rehearsing the based on their arguments the arguments become so stronger that they are able to resist persuasion and at the same time the person who is persuading the individual who is persuading the other person also experiences the strength in the argument that is being given by the other person. So based on this there are two sets of arguments based on inoculation the supporting defence condition that is argument supporting the belief and opinion. In other words the person is giving argument in order to protect his own attitude you are defending your or supporting your own attitude that is supportive defence condition. The other is the refutational defence condition arguments against the belief or opinion. In the first instance you are supporting your attitude whereas in the refutational defence conditioning the argument is against the belief or opinion that means the person is trying to attack or questioning the belief or opinion of the other person who is trying to persuade you.

So this is about supportive and refutational defence condition. This is the most important factor because whenever the person is experiencing the process of persuasion he or she finds lot of difficulty how to give counter argument. But if the person is experiencing same kind of persuasion and again the person tends to rehearse how to cope with those persisting attitude. For example my child was being verbally abused at school and the child was very upset how to cope with that kind of behaviour. To resist that kind of bully the child was facing in the school and the child was persuaded based on bullying factors the mother play acted the same situation at home and she prepared her child to rehearse that how he has to give counter argument so that he can avoid any kind of persuasion.

Now based on this the mother also acted the same way that the classmates were acting in the school towards that child. As soon as the child also experienced the similar condition he also played himself the same kind of argument to those children who were bullying him and finally the child was able to cope with that kind of bullying behaviour of the students of the classmates and finally he was intact with his own attitude for not accepting the bully. So this is inoculation where the person is preparing himself with all the counter arguments the most important is that the person tries to rehearse the practice what they have to speak up in terms of counter arguments how they have to show it explicitly that this is my opinion how I support my attitude and how I do not support your attitude in terms of opinion and belief. This is a process of inoculation which aids or which supports the process of resisting any persuasion. So this is how we tend to resist the other is biased assimilation.

The tendency to evaluate information that disconfirms our existing views as less convincing or reliable than information that confirms these views. Biased assimilation as the term implies that we tend to assimilate collect only though that information which actually supports our own attitude and we tend to disconfirm or we tend to evaluate in a very positive manner only that information which supports our own opinion and we tend to discard that information that is not supporting us.

So as the term implies we tend to collect or assimilate only biased information. Biased information which only supports our information and we tend to discard or disconfirm which is not supporting our attitude.

So it is a way to resist persuasion. The other is attitude polarization. The tendency to evaluate mixed evidence or information in such a way that it strengthens our initial views and makes them more extreme. We have discussed the same issue in the previous slide also that based on our counter argument we tend to strengthen our attitude and opinion. So here in attitude polarization we tend to find evidence or information which strengthens our initial opinion which actually becomes a way to counter argue the efforts of the persuader.

This is attitude polarization. We tend to collect all the information at one point which actually strengthens our opinion and we are strong enough to give a strong message to the persuader that my opinion is more stronger than yours. This is attitude polarization. As the term implies polarization you collect information at one point and strengthen your opinion that is attitude polarization. So based on biased assimilation and attitude polarization our attitudes seem to be beyond the reach of the person who is trying to make efforts to change your attitudes and belief because you are more updated with your information. You are more confirmed with your attitude and information related to your attitude and the person finds it difficult to change your attitude and behavior and you are resisting persuasion.

So this is another way to resist persuasion. The other is cognitive dissonance. As the term implies that whenever any information which is not in congruence with an individual's attitude and belief this creates a state of discomfort and there is a sense of inconsistency within an individual which is termed as cognitive dissonance. So whenever there is discrepancy in what an individual thinks and how the person experiences difference in the situation there is inconsistency incongruency which leads to cognitive dissonance. But how this cognitive dissonance can be reduced so that an individual's attitude and thought process becomes intact and the person becomes strong enough based on his thought process to resist persuasion.

The first is trivialization. This is a technique for reducing dissonance in which the importance of attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with each are cognitively reduced. That means filtering out one's own irrelevant attitudes and behaviors which do not support the person's opinion. We tend to filter out small information that disturbs an individual's intactness or strength of the opinion or attitude and while acquiring new information and strengthening one's own opinion that is trivialization. So this can be achieved by acquiring new information that supports our own behavior and by changing our attitude that are consistent with each other. Now this requires communication and at the same time updating your information.

When the person is approaching only people who have similar attitudes and at the same time when they are enhancing their information or acquiring new information pertaining to their attitudes and behaviors then the irrelevant information can be subsided or cut down to minimum so that cognitive dissonance can be reduced. This involves the process of trivialization. The other is induced or forced compliance. This refers to situations in which individuals are somehow induced to say or do things inconsistent with their true attitudes.

Definitely dissonance will be aroused. What any leader would compel you, force you to speak to the public in a particular manner or send a message in a particular manner then which is against your attitude or opinion then you find lot of difficulty in finding that consistency that what you do and what you say. Your thought process is against what you are being asked to do it. This creates dissonance but as soon as we tend to change our attitudes for not doing it then it creates a sense of consistency or parity in one's own thought and behaviors and there is experience of reduced dissonance. So dissonance will be aroused but when an individual feels pressure to change his or her attitude we are more likely to change our attitudes as other techniques for reducing dissonance are not available and requires greater effort. This is something that we tend to adapt to a new situation and make things in bring things in parity to what is being expected to them.

As soon as this change of behavior is there visible within a person also then there is reduction in dissonance. I repeat that this refers to situation in which individuals are somehow induced to say or do things which are inconsistent with their true attitudes. Definitely there is dissonance and there is a sense of pressure that an individual feels on himself and the more likely to change your attitudes as other techniques for reducing dissonance are not available and requires greater efforts. They tend to adapt to the situation in a way that brings parity in their thought process with that of what is being expected from them. The other is hypocrisy, publicly advocating some attitudes or behavior but then acting in a way that it is inconsistent with these attitudes or behavior.

Again what is being expected from you and what exactly the attitude you have then there is again sense of dissonance. Under such situation individual experiences dissonance and they would adapt indirect modes of modes of dissonance reduction such as distracting oneself or bolstering one's ego by thinking about or engaging in other positively evaluated behaviors. Although it is superficial because it is hypocrisy you are showing outward or explicitly what you are not and inside you want to be what exactly you want to be. But since you want to reduce that dissonance and there are no other resources to reduce that dissonance we tend to become hypocritical in a way that we are doing it but we tend to bolster ourselves that this is what I have done. Now as soon as the person engages in this kind of behaviors then the evaluation of that person becomes positive and the person tend to experience reduced dissonance.

This would remove the discrepancy between one's words and needs and reduce dissonance as an individual is in action to advocate specific behaviors or attitudes. Maybe you are advocating for the other leader but you are not in favor of that leader but ultimately when you are being evaluated positively while being hypocritical then immediately there is sense reduced sense of dissonance. So, this is how we can reduce we can resist persuasion based on the following factors. The first is reactance, the second is forewarning, selective avoidance and selective exposure, active defense, inoculation, biased assimilation, attitude polarization, cognitive dissonance which includes trivialization, induced or forced compliance as the term implies when you comply with the extreme groups then definitely you tend to change your behavior as per the requirement and hypocrisy you are doing what you do what you do not want to do but ultimately when your evaluation is positive we tend to experience reduced dissonance. So, this is how we resist persuasion while indulging in these different kind of behavioral patterns.

So, this leads to either maintaining your attitude or changing your attitude. That is all for this discussion. Thank you so much. Thank you.