

UNIT 83 – UPSC - Attitude Content, Structure, Function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour

Attitude

Attitude is described as the appraisal of various facets of the world. It can be assessment of an idea, object, and action. The attitude may be strong such as attitude towards drinking behaviour. People usually have strong opinion for or against drinking. It may be weak in some circumstances. The formation of an attitude may be related with a belief system. According to theorists, an attitude is "a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols" (Hogg, & Vaughan 2005). Eagly, and Chaiken stated that attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour" (1993, p. 1). Famous psychologist Gordon Allport labelled attitudes as "the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology" (Allport, Gordon, 1935). Attitude can be shaped from a person's past and present.



Eminent psychologist, Jung defined attitude as a "readiness of the psyche to act or react in a certain way" (Main, 2004). Attitudes very often come in pairs, one conscious and the other unconscious. Within this broad definition Jung defines several attitudes.

Structure

Rosenberg and Hovland expressed tripartite view and stated that an attitude contains cognitive, affective, and behavioural components²¹. Empirical researches did not support clear distinctions between thoughts, emotions, and behavioural intentions associated with a particular attitude (Eagly, et, al., 1998). A disapproval of the tripartite view of attitudes is that it requires cognitive, affective, and behavioural associations of an attitude to be consistent, but this may be improbable.

Therefore some views of attitude structure see the cognitive and behavioural components as derivative of affect or affect and behaviour as derivative of underlying beliefs (Fazio, et, al., 2003).

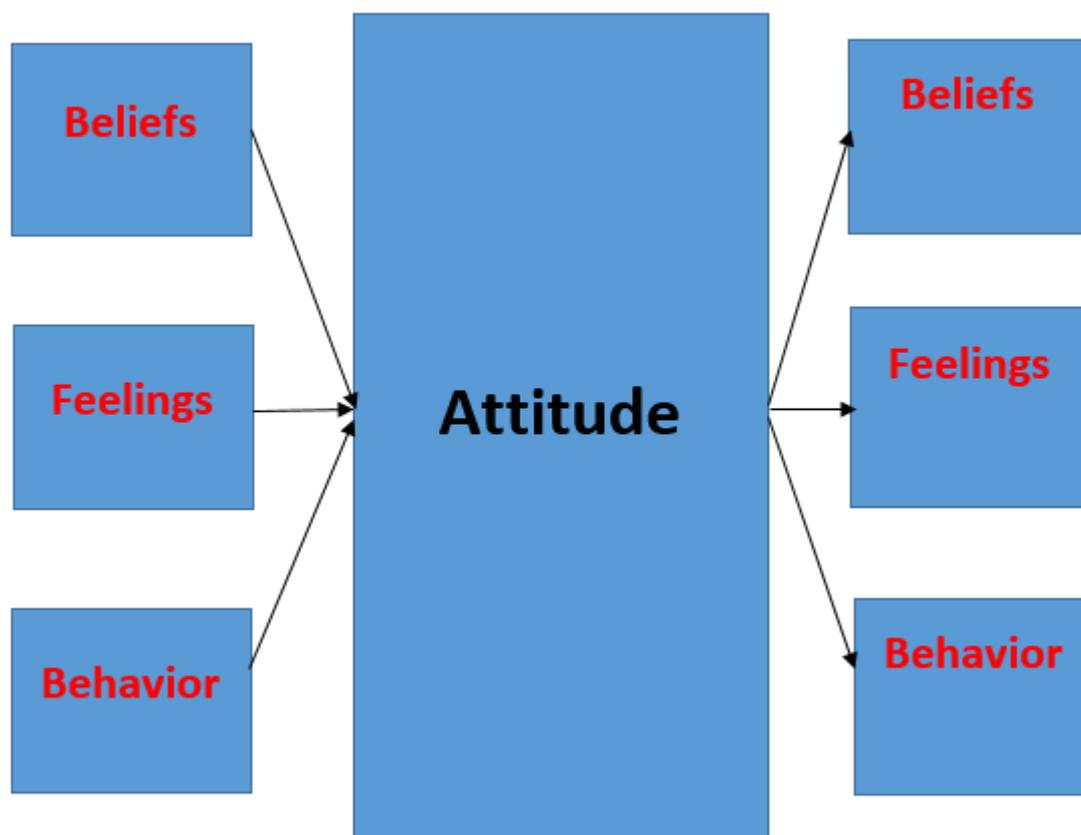
Component models of Attitude: Every attitude has three components that are represented in what is called the ABC model of attitudes: A for affective, B for behavioural, and C for cognitive. Although every attitude has these three components, any particular attitude can be based on one component more than another. This multicomponent model is the most significant model of attitude.

Cognitive component: The cognitive component of attitudes denotes to the beliefs, thoughts, and attributes that people would associate with an object. Many times a person's attitude might be based on the negative and positive attributes they associate with an object.

Affective component: The affective component of attitudes is related to feelings or emotions of people linked to an attitude object. Affective responses influence attitudes in a number of ways. For example, many people are afraid /scared of spiders. So this negative affective response is likely to cause you to have a negative attitude towards spiders.

Behavioural component: The behavioural components of attitudes are associated with past behaviours or experiences regarding an attitude object. The idea is that people might infer their attitudes from their previous actions. This idea was best articulated by Bem. An important feature of attitudes is their ability to sum up several types of psychological information. Three-component model of attitude structure states that beliefs, feelings and behaviours form three distinct types of psychological information that are strongly tied to attitudes:

The three-component model of attitudes



Effects of beliefs: It is debated that persuasive messages such as advertisements often change attitudes by changing people's beliefs about the object of the message. Effect of feelings occurs even when the attitudes are measured in a different context. Initiation rituals have often been prerequisites for acceptance into social groups.

Functions of Attitude

Attitudes serve particular functions for persons. The attitude aids to develop a self-concept of an individual. It helps in guiding our actions towards people, ideas, objects etc. Attitude can serve knowledge function. It can also serve ego-defensive function.

Major Function of Attitudes are as under:
Attitudes can serve functions for the individual. Daniel Katz (1960) outlines four functional areas:

1. Knowledge: Attitudes provide meaning (knowledge) for life. The knowledge function denotes to individual need for a world which is consistent and relatively stable. This permits people to predict what is likely to happen, and so gives sense of control. Attitudes can benefit people organize and structure their experience. Knowing a person's attitude helps to predict their behaviour.
2. Self / Ego-expressive: The attitudes expressed by people help communicate who they are and may make them feel good because they have asserted their identity. Self-expression of attitudes can be non-verbal also. Therefore, attitudes are part of identify of an individual, and help to be aware through the expression of feelings, beliefs and values.
3. Adaptive: If a person holds exhibits socially acceptable attitudes, other people will reward them with approval and social acceptance. Attitudes are to do with being a part of a social group and the adaptive functions helps us fit in with a social group. People seek out others who share their attitudes, and develop similar attitudes to those they like.
4. The ego-defensive function is described as holding attitudes that protect self-esteem of an individual or that justify actions that make them feel guilty. Positive attitudes towards ourselves, have a protective function in helping us reserve our self-image.

The basic notion behind the functional approach is that attitudes help a person to mediate between their own inner needs (expression, defence) and the outside world (adaptive and knowledge).

Attitude and behaviour interact in a different way based upon the attitude in question. To comprehend different types of attitudes and their probable implications is useful in predicting how individuals' attitudes may govern their behaviour.

Daniel Katz uses four attitude classifications:
Utilitarian: Utilitarian denotes to an individual's attitude as derived from self or community interest. An example could be getting a raise. As a raise means more disposable income, employees will have a positive attitude about getting a raise, which may positively affect their behaviour in some circumstances. Knowledge: Logic, or rationalizing, is another ways by which people frame attitudes. When an organization appeals to people's logic and explains why it is assigning tasks or pursuing a strategy, it can generate a more positive disposition towards that task or strategy (and vice versa, if the employee does not recognize why a task is logical).

Ego-defensive: People have a tendency to use attitudes to protect their ego, resulting in a common negative attitude. If a manager criticizes employees' work without offering suggestions for improvement, employees may form a negative attitude and subsequently dismiss the manager as foolish in an effort to defend their work. Managers must therefore carefully manage criticism and offer solutions, not simply identify problems. Major Mechanisms include:

1. Denial
2. Repression
3. Projection
4. Rationalization

The ego-defensive notion correlates with Downward Comparison Theory which maintains the view that derogating a less fortunate other increases our own subjective well-being. We are more likely to use the ego-defensive function when we suffer a frustration or trouble. Value-expressive: People develop dominant values over time. These values are not always obvious or simple. The attitude may be formed by direct experience or observation.

Relation between Attitude and Behaviour

Many psychology studies have demonstrated that attitudes can positively or negatively affect a person's behaviour, irrespective of whether the individual is aware of the effects. A person may not always be aware of his or her attitude or the effect it is having on behaviour. A person who has positive attitudes towards work and colleagues (such as contentment, friendliness, etc.) can certainly influence those around them. These positive attitudes are generally manifested in a person's behaviour. People with a good attitude are active and productive and do what they can to improve the temper of those around them.

In similar manner, a person who shows negative attitudes (such as discontentment, boredom, etc.), will behave accordingly. People with these types of attitudes towards work may likewise affect those around them and behave in a manner that reduces competence and success.

In theoretical studies, Martin Fishbein (1975) had given important contribution to the study of behavioural prediction from attitudes. He argues that there is no good reason to believe that an overall measure of attitude toward an object will necessarily predict a particular behaviour. He affirmed that attitude is a hypothetical concept abstracted from the totality of a person's feelings, beliefs and behavioural intentions regarding an object. Thus an isolated specific behaviour may be unrelated, or even negatively related to the overall attitude. Fishbein upholds that, in order to predict a specific behaviour, we should not focus on people's overall attitude toward the object of that behaviour, but on their attitude toward the behaviour.

Two dominant theoretical approaches are explained in relation to behaviour with attitude. These are the theory of reasoned action and, its theoretical descendant, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen I, Fishbein M. 1980).

Theory of Reasoned Action

The theory of reasoned action is a model for the expectation of behavioural intention, spanning predictions of attitude and predictions of behaviour. The subsequent separation of behavioural

intention from behaviour allows for explanation of limiting factors on attitudinal influence (Ajzen, 1980). Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen formulated the Theory of Reasoned Action which led to the study of attitude and behaviour (1980). The theory was "born largely out of frustration with traditional attitude behaviour research, much of which found weak correlations between attitude measures and performance of volitional behaviours" (Hale, Householder & Greene, 2003).

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Behaviour is normally influenced by more than attitudes alone. The theory of planned behaviour was developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985 through his article "From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behaviour." The theory was established from the theory of reasoned action, which was proposed by Martin Fishbein together with Icek Ajzen in 1975. The theory of reasoned action was in turn grounded in numerous theories of attitude such as learning theories, expectancy-value theories, consistency theories and attribution theory (Lynn, et, al., 2012). This theory of reasoned action suggested that if people assess the suggested behaviour as positive (attitude), and if they think their significant others want them to perform the behaviour (subjective norm), this results in a higher intention (motivation) and they are more likely to do so. Ajzen (1991) developed a model of attitude-behaviour relations that documented the impact of social norms. According to this theory of planned behaviour, actual behaviour is influenced by behavioural intentions to perform or not to perform the behaviour. These intentions, in turn, are influenced by:

1. The attitude towards the behaviour- the individual's evaluations of the positive and negative consequences of performing the behaviour.
2. The subjective norms regarding the behaviour- the individual's desire to behave in the same way as people who are important to him think he should behave.
3. Perceived control over performance of the behaviour- the extent to which the individual believes he can control whether he performs the behaviour.

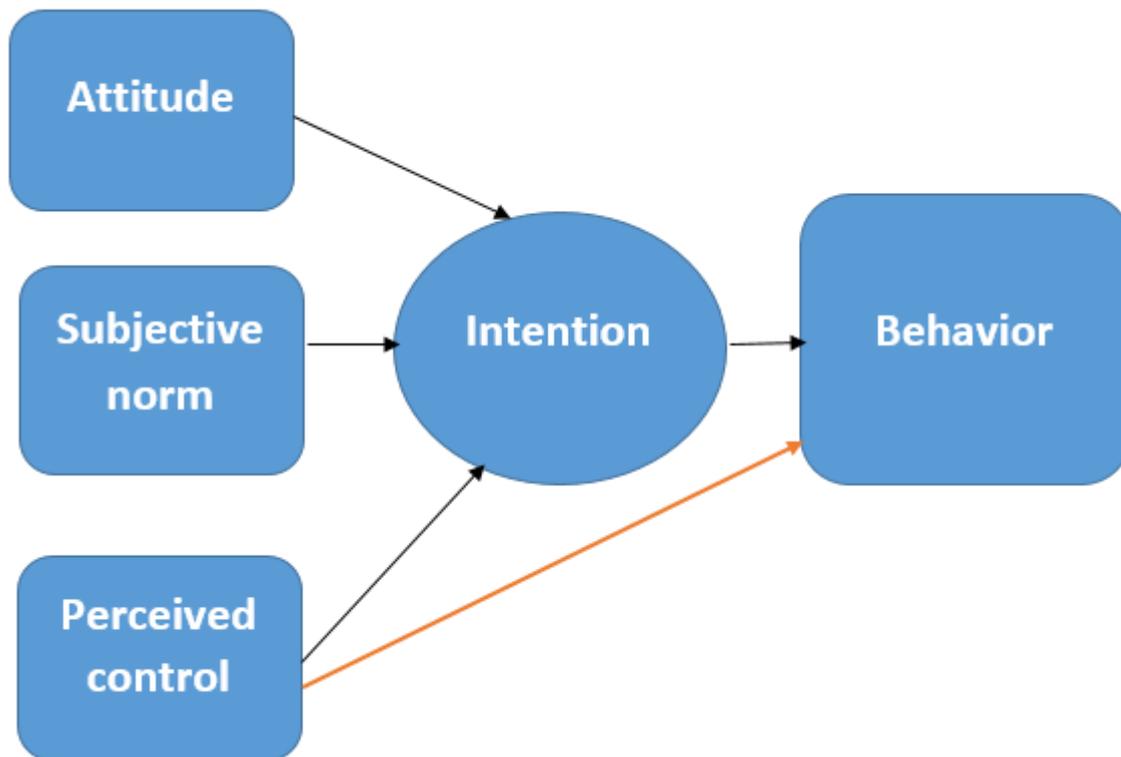
This theory reveals that when attitudes and subjective norms support target behaviour and perceived control over the performance of the behaviour is high, intentions to perform the behaviour should be stronger. People who form strong intentions should be more likely to perform the behaviour. Bulks of theoretical studies have supported these predictions (Conner and Armitage, 1998). But it has been criticized on the ground that the theory neglects several additional important predictors of behaviour such as a sense of moral obligation to perform the target behaviour and the pattern of the individual's past behaviour in similar situations (Ouellette & Wood, 1998).

Theory

of

planned

behaviour



A high link of attitudes and subjective norms to behavioural intention, and consequently to behaviour, has been confirmed in many studies (Elizabeth A. Minton, 2014). The theory of planned behaviour contains the same element as the theory of reasoned action, but adds the component of perceived behavioural control to account for barriers outside one's own control (Madden, 1992).

Attitude about particular behaviour depends on many factors as evaluations of the likely consequences of the behaviour and social norms concerning the behaviour. It can be illustrated through example where an individual may have a positive attitude for inter cultural marriage, but there are certain social norms in society, and he may display negative behaviour such as condemn such practices to conform social norms. Sometimes, people may not like to have certain attitudes. But such a tendency may lead to mismatch among people in the society who are living together. At that time, people try to develop attitudes according to situations. This has been elucidated by effective theory known as 'Balance theory' (Heider, 1958). The basic principle of this theory is that there is a tendency to maintain or restore balance in one's attitude structures. Because unbalanced attitude structure leads to uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings.

Although the influence of attitudes on behaviour is not clearly visible, two theories such as Cognitive dissonance and Self- fulfilling prophecy are available to understand the direction of attitudinal influences. Cognitive dissonance refers to the feeling of inconsistency in feelings, beliefs and behaviour (the three components of attitudes). This feeling makes people uncomfortable. So they get inspired to rectify the situation by modifying their behaviours that cause dissonance or disagreement. For example, in a hospital setting, a nurse may have a negative feeling to work in a Tuberculosis ward with a belief that her health will be affected. But she will not display this negative attitude directly in her behaviour, but try to get a change from that ward itself or remains absent from her duties. Another dominant theory related to attitude is self-fulfilling prophecy

which is described as the process by which people try to convert their attitudes, beliefs and expectations-into reality.

Factors that influence attitude strength:

Scholars have revealed that people are more expected to behave according to their attitudes under certain conditions:

1. When their attitudes are the result of personal experience.
2. When they are an expert in the subject.
3. When they expect a favourable outcome.
4. When the attitudes are repeatedly expressed.
5. When they stand to win or lose something due to the issue.
6. Attitudes can change to match behaviour.

In many instances, people may actually modify their attitudes in order to better align them with their behaviour. Cognitive dissonance is a phenomenon in which a person experiences psychological agony due to conflicting thoughts or beliefs. In order to reduce this tension, people may change their attitudes to reflect their other beliefs or actual behaviours.

To summarize, theoretical models have shown that attitudes are overall evaluations of stimuli that are derived from the favourability of an individual's affects, cognitions, and past behaviours. There are many ways individual behaviour could influence attitude (Dolores, 2014). Attitudes are normally positive or negative, but they can also be ambiguous at times. Attitude has influence on behaviours. This has been well explained by theoretical models. Attitude-behaviour relations are strongest when attitudes are measured at the same level of specificity as the target behaviour. Contemporary models of attitude-behaviour relations describe how attitudes predict behaviour in conjunction with other variables (e.g. social norms, perceived control) that influence behaviour. These models also specify how accessible attitudes automatically influence behaviour. Classic theories propose that attitudes change when an influential message provides motivational incentive to change the attitude. People tend to be more influenced by message arguments when they are motivated and able to process the arguments. When motivation and ability are low, people may rely heavily on heuristic cues (e.g. source expertise) to determine their new attitude.