

INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND HUMANITIES
PSYCHOLOGY
CLASS – XII

ATTITUDE AND SOCIAL COGNITION

Impression formation is the inference we make about people's personal qualities.

Attribution is the process through which we assign causes to the behaviour of people shown in specific social situations.

Impression formation, attitudes and attribution are examples of mental activities relate to the gathering and interpretation of information about the social world, collectively called **social cognition**. Social cognition is activated by cognitive units called schemas.

Schema is defined as a mental structure that provides a framework, set of rules or guidelines for processing information about any object. Schemas are the basic units stored in our memory, and function as shorthand ways of processing information, thus reducing the time and mental effort required in cognition. In the case of social cognition, the basic units are called **social schemas**.

Schemas are in the form of categories or classes. **Prototypes** (function in the form of categories) are an entire set of features or qualities that help us to define an object completely, and in social cognition, category-based schemas that are related to groups of people are called **stereotypes**. These are over generalised, not directly verified, and do not allow exceptions.

An **attitude** is a state of the mind, a set of views or thoughts regarding some topic (called the attitude object) which has an evaluative feature (positive, negative or neutral quality). It is accompanied by an emotional component, and a tendency to act in a particular way with regard to the attitude object. The purpose of an attitude is that it provides a background that makes it easier for a person to decide how to act in new situations.

A-B-C Components of Attitude

Affective Aspect = emotional component

Behavioural Aspect = tendency to act a certain way

Cognitive Aspect = thought component

Attitudes themselves are not behaviour, but they represent a tendency to behave or act in certain ways. They are part of cognition, along with an emotional component, and cannot be observed from the outside.

Beliefs refer to the cognitive component of attitudes, and form the ground on which attitudes stand (e.g.: belief in God or belief in democracy).

Values are attitudes or beliefs that contain a 'should' or 'ought' aspect, such as moral or ethical values.

Four significant features of attitudes are:

- **Valence** – The valence of an attitude tells us whether an attitude is positive or negative towards a subject.
- **Extremeness** – The extremeness of an attitude indicates how positive or negative an attitude is.
- **Simplicity or Complexity** – This feature refers to how many attitudes there are within a broader attitude. An attitude system is said to be simple if it contains only one or a few attitudes, and complex if it is made up of many attitudes. Each member attitude that belongs to an attitude system also has A-B-C components.
- **Centrality** – This refers to the role of a particular attitude in the attitude system. An attitude with greater centrality would influence the other attitudes in the system much more than the non-central or peripheral attitudes would.

In general, attitudes are learned through one's own experiences and through interactions with others.

Process of attitude formation:

- Learning attitudes by association – A positive attitude towards the subject is learned through the positive association.
- Learning attitudes by being rewarded or punished – If an individual is praised for showing a particular attitude, chances are high that s/he will develop that attitude further.
- Learning attitudes through modelling (observing others) – We learn attitudes by observing others being rewarded or punished for expressing thoughts, or showing behaviour of a particular kind towards the attitude object.
- Learning attitudes through a group or cultural norms – Over time, norms may become a part of our social cognition in the form of attitudes.
- Learning through exposure to information – Many attitudes are learned in a social context, but not necessarily in the physical presence of others.

Factors that influence attitude formation:

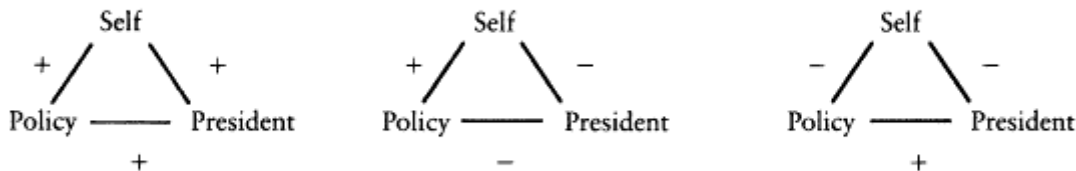
- Family and School environment – learning usually takes place by association, through rewards and punishments and through modelling.
- Reference groups – Reference groups indicate to an individual the norms regarding acceptable behaviour and ways of thinking, thus reflecting learning of attitudes through group or cultural norms.
- Personal experiences
- Media-related influences – These sources first strengthen the cognitive and affective components of attitudes, and subsequently may also affect the behavioural component.

Process of attitude change:

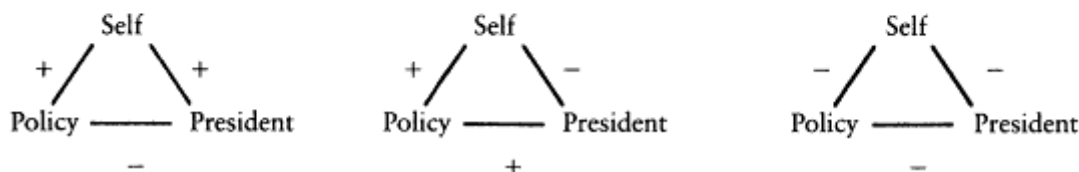
- **Concept of Balance (Fritz Heider)** – Described in terms of the **P-O-X triangle**, which represents the relationships between three aspects or components of the attitude.

P is the person whose attitude is being studied, O is another person, and X is

A. Three Balanced States



B. Three Imbalanced States



the topic towards which the attitude is being studied (attitude object). It is also possible that all three are persons. The basic idea is that an attitude changes if there is a state of imbalance between the P-O attitude, O-X attitude and P-X attitude. Imbalance is found when:

1. All three sides are negative
2. Two sides are positive and one side is negative
3. Two sides are negative and one side is positive.

- **Concept of Cognitive Dissonance (Leon Festinger)** – emphasises the cognitive component. The basic idea is that the cognitive components of an attitude must be consonant (logically in line with each other). If an individual finds that two cognitions in an attitude are dissonant, then one of them will be changed in the direction of the consonance.
- **Two step Concept (S.M. Mohsin)** – According to this, attitude change takes place in the form of two steps.
 1. The target of change identifies with the source. The ‘target’ is the person whose attitude is to be changed. The ‘source’ is the person through whose influence the change is to take place. Identification means that the target has liking and regard for the source. The source must also have a positive attitude towards the target, and the regard and attraction becomes mutual.
 2. The source shows an attitude change, by actually changing behaviour towards the attitude object. Observing the source’s changed attitude and behaviour, the target also shows an attitude change through behaviour. This is a kind of imitation or observational learning.

Both balance and cognitive dissonance are examples of **cognitive consistency**, which means that two components, aspects or elements of the attitude or attitude system must be in the same direction. Each element should logically fall in line with other elements. If this does not happen, then the person experiences a kind of mental discomfort. In such a state, some aspect in the attitude system changes in the direction of consistency.

Factors that influence Attitude change:

- Characteristics of the existing attitude – All four properties of attitude (valence, extremeness, simplicity or complexity and centrality) determine attitude change. In addition, one must also consider the direction and extent of attitude change. An attitude change may be congruent or incongruent.
- Source characteristics – Source credibility and attractiveness are two features that affect attitude change. Attitudes are more likely to change when the message comes from a highly credible source rather than from a low-credible source.
- Message characteristics – The message is the information that is presented in order to bring about an attitude change. Whether the message contains a rational or emotional appeal also makes a difference. The motives activated by the message also determine attitude change. Finally, the mode of spreading the message plays a significant role.

- Target characteristics – Qualities of the target influence the likelihood and extent of attitude change.

Psychologists have found that there is consistency between attitudes and behaviour when:

- The attitude is strong, and occupies a central place in the attitude system
- The person is aware of his/her attitude
- There is very little or no external pressure for the person to behave in a particular way
- The person's behaviour is not being watched or evaluated by others
- The person thinks that the behaviour would have a positive consequence, and therefore intends to engage in that behaviour

In the experiment by Festinger and Carlsmith, students who got only one dollar for telling others that the experiment was interesting, discovered that they liked the experiment. On the basis of behaviour, they concluded that their attitude towards the experiment was positive.

Prejudice can exist without being shown in the form of discrimination, and similarly, discrimination can be shown without prejudice.

Prejudice has one or more of the following sources:

- Learning – Like other attitudes, prejudices can also be learned through association, reward and punishment, etc. People who learn prejudiced attitudes may develop a prejudiced personality, and show low adjusting capacity, anxiety, and feelings of hostility against the out group.
- Strong Social Identity and Ingroup Bias – Individuals who have a strong sense of social identity and have a very positive attitude towards their own group boost this attitude by holding negative attitudes towards other groups. These are shown as prejudices.
- Scapegoating – The majority group places the blame on the minority group for its own social, economic or political problems. The minority is too weak or too small in number to defend itself against such accusations.
- Kernel of Truth Concept – Sometimes people may continue to hold stereotypes because they think that there must be some truth in what everyone says about the other group. Even a few examples are sufficient to support the kernel of truth idea.
- Self-Fulfilling Prophecy – In some cases, the group that is the target of prejudice is itself responsible for continuing the prejudice. The target group may behave in ways that justify the prejudice, and thus confirm the negative expectations.

Strategies to handle prejudice would be effective if they aim at:

- Minimising opportunities for learning prejudices
- Changing prejudiced attitudes
- De-emphasising a narrow social identity based on the ingroup
- Discouraging the tendency towards self-fulfilling prophecy among victims of prejudice

These goals can be accomplished through:

- Education and information dissemination for correcting stereotypes related to specific target groups and for tackling the problem of a strong ingroup bias
- Increasing intergroup contact for direct communication, removal of mistrust between groups and discovery of positive qualities in the outgroup.

However, this is only successful if:

1. The two groups meet in a cooperative rather than a competitive context
 2. The two groups are not different in power or status
- Highlighting individual identity rather than group identity, thus weakening the importance of a group as the basis of evaluating the other person.

Cognition refers to all mental processes that deal with obtaining and processing information. The term **social cognition** refers to all those psychological processes that deal with the gathering and processing of information related to social objects. These include all the processes that help in understanding, explaining and interpreting social behaviour.

The process of coming to know a person is divided into impression formation and attribution.

Perceiver is the person who forms the impression, whereas the individual about whom the impression is formed is called the **target**. The perceiver gathers information or responds to given information about the qualities of the target, organises this information and draws inferences about the target.

Impression formation and attribution are influenced by:

- The nature of information available to the perceiver
- Social schemas in the perceiver
- Personality characteristics of the perceiver
- Situational factors

The process of **impression formation** consists of three sub-processes:

- Selection – We take into account only some bits of information about the target person.
- Organisation – The selected information is combined in a systematic way.
- Inference – We draw a conclusion about what kind of person the target is.

Some specific qualities influence impression formation more than other traits do. The order or sequence in which information is presented affects the kind of impression formed. Mostly, the information presented first has a stronger effect than the information presented at the end, and this is called the **primacy effect** (first impressions are the lasting impressions). However, if the perceiver is asked to pay attention to all the information, whatever information comes at the end may have a stronger influence, and this is called the **recency effect**. The **halo effect** is the tendency to think that a target person who has one set of positive qualities also has other specific positive qualities that are associated with the first set.

The following aspects of **attribution** have been found:

- Internal/External causes to a person's behaviour
- Stable/Unstable factors – Stable factors do not change with time, while unstable factors are those that change.
- Fundamental Attribution Error – There is an overall tendency for people to give greater weightage to internal or dispositional factors than to external or situational factors.
- In general, people attribute success to internal factors (hard work, ability) and failure to external factors (bad luck, difficulty of task).
- Actor-Observer Effect – A distinction is found between the attribution that a person makes for her/his own positive and negative experiences (actor-role) and the attribution made for another person's positive or negative experiences (observer-role). The basic reason for the difference between the actor and the observer roles is that people want to have a nice image of themselves compared to others.

Social facilitation is where performance on specific tasks is influenced by the mere presence of others. Better performance in the presence of others is because the person experiences **arousal**, which makes the person act in a more intense manner. This explanation was Zajonc. The arousal is because the person feels that they are being evaluated. Cottrell called this **evaluation apprehension**. The nature of the task to be performed also affects performance in the presence of others. If others are also present performing the same task, this situation is called **co-action**. In this situation, there is social comparison and competition. Performance is generally better under co-action as compared to when the person is alone.

Social loafing is a phenomenon where the larger the group, the less effort each member puts in. This is based on diffusion of responsibility, which can also be seen in situations where people are expected to help.

Pro-Social Behaviour is behaviour where we help those in need, and this is very similar to altruism, which means doing something for or thinking about the welfare of others without any self-interest. Pro-social behaviour has the following characteristics:

- It must aim to benefit or do good to another person or other persons
- It must be done without expecting anything in return
- It must be done willingly by the person and not because of any kind of pressure
- It must involve some difficulty or cost to the person giving help

Factors influencing pro-social behaviour:

- It is based on an inborn, natural tendency in human beings to help members of their own species, and this inborn tendency facilitates survival of the species.
- Pro-social behaviour is influenced by learning.
- Cultural factors influence pro-social behaviour. In cultures that encourage independence, individuals will show less pro-social behaviour because people are expected to take care of themselves and not to depend on help from others.
- Pro-social behaviour is expressed when the situation activates certain social norms that require helping others. Three norms have been mentioned in the context of pro-social behaviour:
 1. Norm of social responsibility – We should help anyone who needs help, without considering any other factor.
 2. Norm of reciprocity – We should help those persons who helped us in the past.
 3. Norm of equity – We should help others whenever we found that it is fair to do so.
- Pro-social behaviour is affected by the expected reactions of the person who is being helped.
- Such behaviour is more likely to be shown by individuals who have a high level of empathy (the capacity to feel the distress of a person who is to be helped). It is also more likely in situations that arouse empathy.
- Pro-social behaviour may be reduced by factor such as a bad mood, being busy with one's own problems, etc.

- Pro-social behaviour may also be reduced when the number of bystanders is more than one. Each person thinks that it is not her/his responsibility alone to give help, and that someone else may take the responsibility, and this phenomenon is called **diffusion of responsibility**.

Social loafing is a reduction of individual effort when working on a collective task (one in which outputs are pooled with those of other group members). The explanations offered for social loafing are:

- Group members feel less responsible for the overall task being performed and therefore exert less effort.
- Motivation of members decreases because they realise that their contributions will not be evaluated on an individual basis.
- The performance of the group is not to be compared with other groups.
- There is improper coordination among members.
- Belonging to the same group is not important for members, as it is only an aggregate of individuals.

Social loafing may be reduced by:

- Making the efforts of each person identifiable.
- Increasing the pressure to work hard (making group members committed to successful task performance)
- Increasing the apparent importance or value of a task.
- Making people feel that their individual contribution is important.
- Strengthening group cohesiveness which increases the motivation for successful group outcome.

Group Polarisation is the strengthening of the group's initial position as a result of group interaction and discussion. It has been found that groups are more likely to take extreme decisions than individuals alone. This firm conviction is because of the following reasons:

- In the company of like-minded people, we are likely to hear newer arguments favouring our viewpoints. This will make us more favourable towards a particular decision.
- When we find others also favouring a particular decision, we feel that this view is validated by the public. This is called **bandwagon effect**.
- When we find people having similar views, we are likely to perceive them as ingroup, and thus start identifying with the group, showing conformity, and as a consequence our views become strengthened.

Conformity means behaving according to the group norm (expectations of other members). Persons who do not conform (deviants or non-conformists) get noticed more than those who conform. The pioneering experiments on conformity were carried out by Sherif and Asch. They illustrate some of the conditions that determine the extent of conformity, and also the methods that may be adopted for the study of conformity in groups. These experiments demonstrate what Sherif called the **autokinetic effect** and the **Asch technique**.

Determinants of conformity:

- Size of the group – Conformity is greater when the group is small than when the group is large. It is easier for a deviant member to be noticed in a small group. However, in a large group, if there is strong agreement among most of the members, this makes the majority stronger, and therefore the norm is also stronger.
- Size of the minority – When the dissenting or deviating minority size increases, the likelihood of conformity decreases.
- Nature of the task
- Public or Private expression of behaviour – Less conformity is found under private expression than it is seen under public expression.
- Personality – Some individuals have a conforming personality, and such persons have a tendency to change their behaviour according to what others say or do in most situations.

Conformity takes place because of informational influence, i.e. influence that results from accepting evidence rather than reality. This kind of rational conformity can be thought of as learning about the world from the actions of others. Conformity may also occur because of normative influence, i.e. influence based on a person's desire to be accepted or admired by others.

Social influence refers to those processes whereby our attitudes and behaviours are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people. Kelman distinguished three forms of social influence: compliance, identification and internalisation.

In **compliance**, there are external conditions that force the individual to accept the influence of the significant other. It also refers to way in response to a request made by someone. Compliance can even take place without a norm. The following techniques are used when someone wants another person to comply.

- Foot in the door Technique – The person begins by making a small request that the other person is not likely to refuse. Once the other person carries out the request, a bigger request is made. Simply because the other person has

already complied with the smaller request, they may feel uncomfortable refusing the second request.

- The Deadline Technique – In this technique, a last date is announced until which a particular product or offer will be available. The aim is to make people hurry and make the purchase before they miss the rare opportunity. It is more likely that people will buy a product under this deadline condition than if there is no such deadline.
- Door in the face Technique – In this technique, you begin with a larger request and when this is refused a later request for something smaller, the one that is actually desired is made, which is usually granted by the person.

Identification refers to influence process based on agreement-seeking or identity-seeking.

Internalisation is a process based on information seeking.

Obedience is behaviour in response to a person in authority. In such a situation, the subject is not necessarily following a group norm but rather carrying out an instruction or an order. The presence of an authority figure immediately makes this behaviour different from conformity. Reasons for obedience are as follows:

- People obey because they feel that they are not responsible for their own actions, they are simply carrying out orders from the authority.
- Authority generally possesses symbols of status which people find difficult to resist.
- Authority gradually increases commands from lesser to greater levels and initial obedience binds the followers for commitment.
- Many times, events happen very fast, and the subject has no time to think. Therefore they immediately obey orders from above.

Norms represent a set of unwritten rules of behaviour that provide information to members of a group about what is expected of them in specific situations. This makes the whole situation clearer, and allows both the individual and the group to function more smoothly. In general, people feel uncomfortable if they are considered different from others. Behaving in a way that differs from the expected form of behaviour may lead to disapproval or dislike by others, which is a form of social punishment. The norm is seen as reflecting the views and beliefs of the majority, and most people believe that the majority is more likely to be right rather than wrong.

When groups work together to achieve shared goals, we refer to it as **cooperation**. The rewards in cooperative situations are group rewards and not individual rewards. **Competitive** goals are set in such a way that each individual can get their

goal only if others do not attain their goals. A cooperative goal, on the other hand, is one in which each individual can attain the goal only if other members of the group also attain their goal. Although competition between individuals within a group may result in conflict and disharmony, competition between groups may increase within group cohesion and solidarity.

Prisoner's Dilemma game is a two person game in which both parties are faced with cooperation or completion, and depending upon their choices both can win or lose, and is often used to study cooperation and competition.

		Prisoner B	
		<i>Confess</i>	<i>Don't Confess</i>
Prisoner A	<i>Confess</i>	Both go to jail for 10 years	Prisoner B gets 20 years in jail. Prisoner A goes free.
	<i>Don't Confess</i>	Prisoner A gets 20 years in jail. Prisoner B goes free.	Both go to jail for 1 year

Sherif conducted a series of experiments at a summer camp. The experiment consisted of four phases.

- **Friendship formation** – When the boys arrived at the camp, they spent their initial time together.
- **Ingroup formation** – The boys were then divided into two groups by the experimenter. The boys belonging to the two groups lived separately, and members within the group engaged in cooperative projects to increase cohesiveness. Over time, these groups developed their own norms.
- **Intergroup competition** – The two groups were brought together in several competitive situations. This competition brought in tension and hostility against each other as a group, and ingroup cohesion and loyalty became stronger.
- **Intergroup cooperation** – To reduce the hostility generated by intergroup competition, the researchers created a problem which affected both the groups. This intergroup cooperation phase reduced the hostility, resulting in the development of a superordinate goal (a goal to which personal goals were subordinated).

Determinants of Cooperation and Competition:

- **Reward Structure** – Cooperative reward structure is one in which there is promotive interdependence. Each is beneficiary of the reward and reward is possible only if all contribute. A competitive reward structure is one in which one can get a reward only if others do not get it.
- **Interpersonal Communication** – When there is good interpersonal communication, then cooperation is the likely consequence.
- **Reciprocity** – Reciprocity means that people feel obliged to return what they get. Initial cooperation may encourage more cooperation. Competition may provoke more competition.

Social Identity is one's self-definition of who s/he is. This self-definition may include both personal attributes or attributes shared with others. Our personal identities are derived from views of oneself as a unique individual, and social identities derived from groups we perceive ourselves to be members of. Therefore, **social identity** is that aspect of our self-concept which is based on group membership. It tells us what and where we are in the larger social context, and thus helps us to locate ourselves in society.

When we develop a strong identity with our own group, the categorisation as ingroup and outgroup becomes salient. The devaluation of the outgroup is the basis of a number of intergroup conflicts.

Conflict is a process in which either an individual or a group perceives that others have opposing interests, and both try to contradict each other. There is a belief by both parties that the other will only protect its own interests, and that their side's interests will not be protected. There is not only opposition of each other, but they also try to exert power on each other. Groups have been found to be more aggressive than individuals, and this leads to escalation of conflict. The following are major reasons for group conflicts:

- Lack of communication and faulty communication between the parties leads to suspicion and a lack of trust, resulting in conflict.
- Relative deprivation arises when members of a group compare themselves with members of another group, and perceive that they do not have what they desire to have, which the other group has.

Another cause of conflict is one party's belief that it is better than the other, and what it is saying should be done. When this does not happen, both parties start accusing each other.

- A feeling that the other group does not respect the norms of the ingroup and actually violates those norms is a cause of conflict.

- Desire for retaliation for some harm done in the past is another reason for conflict.
- Biased perceptions are the root of most conflicts.
- Competition between groups is also a reason for conflict.
- Perceived inequity is yet another reason. Equity refers to distribution of rewards in proportion to another individual's contributions.

Most conflicts begin in our heads, and explanations of such conflicts can be at structural, group and individual levels.

- Structural conditions include high rates of poverty, economic and social stratification, inequality, limited political and social opportunity, etc.
- Group level factors show that social identity, realistic conflict between groups over resources and unequal power relations between groups lead to escalation of conflict.
- Individual level factors include beliefs, biased attitudes and personality characteristics.

Deutsch identified the following consequences of intergroup conflict:

- Communication between the groups becomes poor. The groups do not trust each other, thereby leading to a breakdown in communication.
- Groups start magnifying their differences and start perceiving their behaviour as fair and the other's behaviour as unfair.
- Each side tries to increase its own power and legitimacy. As a consequence, the conflict gets escalated.
- Once conflict starts, several other factors lead to escalation of conflict.

Strategies to resolve conflicts:

- Introduction of Superordinate Goals - It is mutually beneficial to both parties, hence both groups work cooperatively.
- Altering Perceptions – Conflicts can also be reduced by altering perceptions and reactions through persuasion, educational and media appeals, and portrayal of groups differently in society.
- Increasing Intergroup Contacts – Conflicts can also be reduced by increasing contacts between the groups. This can be done by involving groups in conflict on neutral grounds through community projects and events.
- Redrawing Group Boundaries – This can be done by creating conditions where group boundaries are redefined and groups come to perceive themselves as belonging to a common group.

- Negotiations – Conflict can also be resolved through negotiations and third party interventions. Warring groups can resolve conflict by trying to find mutually acceptable solutions. This requires understanding and trust. Negotiation refers to reciprocal communications so as to reach an agreement in situations in which there is a conflict.
- Structural Solutions – Conflict can also be reduced by redistributing the societal resources according to principles based on justice.
- Respect for other group's norms – It is necessary to respect and be sensitive to the strong norms of various social and ethnic groups.