



# INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT

Senior Section

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SOLVED SUPPORT MATERIAL

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Chapter:6 Attitude and Social  
Cognition

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**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.

## 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 (eg: 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.

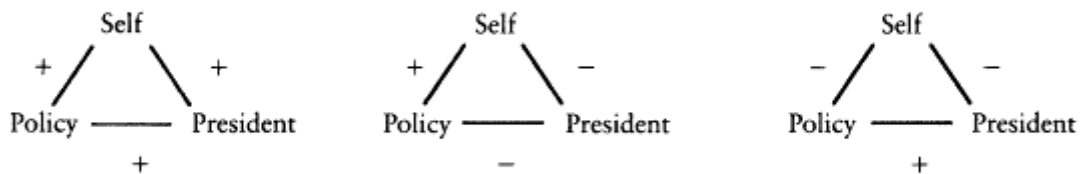
- Personal experiences media-related influences – These sources first strengthen the cognitive and affective components of attitudes, and subsequently may also affect the behavioural component.

Process of attitude change:

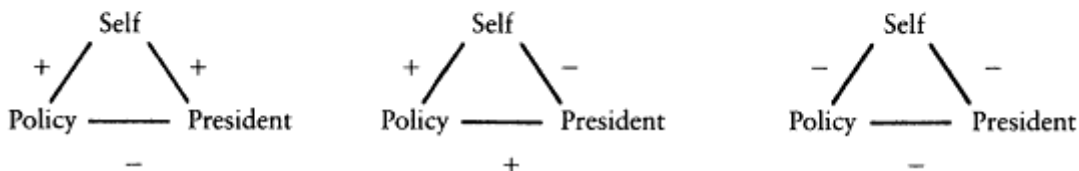
- **Concept of Balance (Fritz Heider)** – Described in terms of the **P-O-X triangle**, which represents the relationships between three aspects or components of the attitude.

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

A. Three Balanced States



B. Three Imbalanced States



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**.

### **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.

### **Impression formation**

**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.

**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**.