Cognitive Dissonance and the techniques used to gauge an individual's attitude

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Abstract

This paper gives the definition of cognitive dissonance. Also, it outlines the methods put in place to measure a person's attitude. Apart from that, it also lists and describes the ways attitudes can be changed. Furthermore, it discusses the three components of the Tri-component Model of attitudes, defines and explains the halo effect and horn effect, and concludes.

Cognitive dissonance

By definition, cognitive dissonance refers to the feeling of uncomfortable tension resulting in holding two conflicting thoughts simultaneously in the mind. It is also the anxiety resulting from holding incompatible or contradicting attitudes and beliefs among others simultaneously as evident when a person likes somebody but one of his or her habits causes a strong disapproval of the liking.

Cognitive dissonance is a powerful motivator that often leads to changes in a person or the belief or action that causes the conflict. The discomfort present between opposing thoughts is tension-like. Releasing the tension, changing our behavior, changing the conflicting cognition, and adding new cognition to justify our behavior are among the three choices one can take. Dissonance increases with the decision's impact or importance in relation to the difficulty of reversing it.

Common methods to measure a person's attitude

People possess different degrees of likes and dislikes. There is a need to measure attitudes because they are action tendencies. In that way, they hinder or facilitate the actions of an individual, community, group, state, and nation at all levels. Therefore, there are two basic categories of attitude measurement: [1]. The direct measurement involves using the Likert scale and semantic differential. The other is indirect measurement, where protective techniques are used.

Semantic Differential

The semantic differential technique involves asking a person to rate issues or topics based on standardized bipolar adjectives set with a scale representing seven points [6] to prepare this scale one needs to think of opposite meanings of words applicable in describing the test subject. This technique (semantic differential) gives three basic attitude dimensions: information, activity, evaluation, and potency.

Evaluation involves how a person thinks positively or negatively about the topic of the attitude.[1] How powerful the topic is to the involved person is potency, and lastly, activity is concerned with how active or passive the topic is to the involved person. Using this technique a person's feeling (evaluation) regarding an object with behavior consistency is seen.

Use of Protective Techniques

Indirect attitude measures have been implemented to avoid problems associated with social desirability. Indirect methods typically use a protective test. In this test, a person is presented with an ambiguous stimulus. The person is required to interpret the stimulus. The way the person interprets the ambiguous stimulus, his/ her attitude is inferred. In this measure, the assumption is that the involved person will "project" opinions, attitudes, or views thus revealing his/her attitude[i]. Indirect methods provide only general information; therefore, they lack precision in measuring the attitude because of their qualitative nature. The method is criticized because it is neither objective nor scientific.

Use of direct observation

It involves recording the actual behavior of people whose attitudes are being studied. The method is objective and is not practicable where the need to collect data about large groups of individuals arises. Where behavior becomes the outcome of the studied attitude, it may tell where the attitude direction underlies it, and it may not easily provide the attitude's magnitude or strength. The caution that needs to be taken care of is in deciding on the method's suitability to the given situation.

Ways attitudes can be changed

Generating a positive attitude

It can be achieved by getting rid of negativity in life. Consider joining support groups with people who have been similarly motivated to change for the better doing as recommended; there is a chance that a positive change will be noted. A person can gain positive habits and strengthen them.

A positive attitude can also be achieved by staying in a healthy relationship. Looking for the positive in yourself and being kind to others helps generate a positive attitude.

Developing an attitude of gratitude

It is achieved by writing a daily gratitude list by doing this the attention is slowed down in a meaningful way feel grateful if you don't have anything to be grateful about. Also, send thank you cards because it is essential for attitude change.

Practicing meditation or prayers places the mind in the present moment and is vital to cultivating a positive attitude.` People are also advised to stop complaining and recognize the good aspects of their lives. Paying more attention to positive things allows for good experiences. Taking ownership of your thoughts and actions is effective in changing.

Forming new habits

It includes waking up earlier to allow more time to focus on yourself, your goal, and the intention you are employing to change. Avoid time wastage in negative mind traps. It is also advisable to spend time with positive people to prevent feeling drained and depressed by unproductive individuals trying to respond and not to react to situations. It is also a way to change. Dwelling on the past or the future is also not good but instead, try to dwell on the present moment.

The three components of the Tri-component Model of Attitudes

Three components of attitude are described by a tri-component model of attitudes, also known as the CAC model. The components are affective, conative/behavior, and cognitive. The affective model is characterized by an emotional response, which develops as a person is talking with others about a particular subject 4. For instance, if a person is talking about a flying car with another person, they will start thinking about whether it has the features of an airplane and car simultaneously and how they can perform excellently on both functionalities.

The conative or behavioral component features an action response to observing what another person is doing[5]. It is common in children when they learn to do chores or play. If an adult is typing using a laptop and a child is watching, then later on the child will try to do the same thing they observed to their level best of how it was done.

In the third component, the cognitive component, a person assesses a situation to their level best and responds to it according to their opinion. The judgment is based on a person's belief concerning an attitude situation based on the exposure to information about the situation. An example may be when

another convinces a person to smoke cigarettes, but the other person already knows the side effects of smoking cigarettes so he can't accept to take the action.

Horn effect and halo effect

This refers to a cognitive bias causing one to allow one trait deemed good (halo) or bad (horns) to overshadow other behaviors, traits, beliefs, or actions.

Halo and Horn's effect is attributed to the fact that it is closely related to mental models and working together they bring about magnified influence, having mere association at work on one hand. On the other hand, the mental model of implicit personality theory states that individuals believe that there is an interconnection between traits and that the presence of one trait means others are present which is not true[6]. The best defense against halo and horn effects is always following one rule. Regardless of who proposes an idea, the idea must stand regarding merits attributed to it.

In conclusion, the discussion has examined various definitions employed in understanding cognitive dissonance, the methods used to measure attitude, and ways to improve the same. Lastly, it gives an in-depth explanation of the halo and horn effect.

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