

03 - Why do attitudes change

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1. Attitudes Attitudes are “learned predispositions to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way towards a given object, person or event” (Fishbein & Ajzen,1975). An attitude is a combination of beliefs and values. □ Beliefs are based on our knowledge of the world and link an object to an attribute. They are non-evaluative and objective e.g. ‘USA is a nation built on capitalism’. □ Values relate to the importance or desirability of the object. It is largely subjective and has preferential patterns attached e.g. ‘I do not like capitalism’. Values can turn beliefs to attitudes – ‘I dislike American people’. Three-component model of attitudes:
2. Affective component: what the person feels about the object (favourable/ unfavourable evaluations) – e.g. I love chocolate
3. Cognitive component: thoughts, beliefs, knowledge about the object – e.g. Chocolate keeps me active
4. Behavioural component: actual or intended responses to the object e.g. I eat chocolate every day Functions of attitudes: (Katz) □ Knowledge function: attitudes are frames of reference that simplify the world, help make quick appraisals of situations □ Value expressive function: reflect fundamental self-concepts – self-expressive and maintains personal integrity e.g. vegetarianism □ Social adjustment function: help to function in a group setting, social acceptance □ Ego-defensive function protects from character or personal deficiencies – this function makes attitudes very resistant to change Why do attitudes change?
5. Cognitive dissonance theory: (Festinger) People strive for consistency between thoughts, feelings and actions. If there is a discrepancy between different attitudes (cognitive dissonance) or between attitudes and behaviours (attitude-behaviour discrepancy), then this initiates and drives either a change in attitudes (more common) or a change in behaviours.

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