



ATTITUDE COMPONENTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The explanation of how attitudes influence the process of communication has continued to dominate academic discourses. While some scholars are of the view that attitudes play no significant role in the communication process, others assert that communication, indeed, depends on it. The theoretical underpinning behind the paper is the Theory of Planned Behaviour introduced by Icek Azjen in 1991. The theory focuses on the role that cognitive self-regulation plays in the prediction and explanation of an individual's behaviour. This paper is based on the assumption that understanding of attitude components, identified as affect or emotions, cognition or thoughts and behaviour or action, is crucial to proper appreciation of the communication process. Affect as a component has traditionally always been used to describe both negative and positive feelings or emotions that an individual may have and involves four psychological categories of feelings, emotions, moods and passions.

The cognitive component of attitude is made up of beliefs, thoughts and opinions that enable an individual to think and to have general knowledge of a person or an object of interest and is defined as the act or process of knowing, perceiving or relating to mental processes of memory, judgement and reasoning. The behavioural component has to do with an individual's tendencies to behave in a particular way towards an object of interest. It is defined as the way in which any individual acts or conducts himself/herself, especially towards others, and manifests in some four different ways of aggressive, assertive, passive or passive-aggressive forms. Studies have shown that these components not only correlate but support one another in their activities. These interrelationships and understanding of their influence on the reception or rejection of environmental stimuli are crucial to the process of communication.

Keywords: Affect, cognition, behaviour, emotion, mood, sensory stimulation, attitudinal predictors

INTRODUCTION

Attitudes are commonly referred to as summary evaluations of objects, people or issues that can be measured either positively or negatively. Merriam Webster Dictionary (2019) describes attitudes simply as the bodily state of an individual's readiness to respond in a characteristic way to a stimulus such as an object, concept or situation. Eirich and Corbett (2007, p.1) define attitude as "a psychological tendency to view a particular object or behaviour with a degree of favour or disfavour". They argue that while attitudes may be formed through a process of individual subjective evaluations, these processes are usually influenced by affective or emotional and cognitive or knowledge responses. Thurstone (1928), and other early researchers held the view that the attempt to describe attitudes with a single numerical index was improper, and explained that attitudes are multifaceted in nature. They were equally in agreement that there were several attitudinal properties or components which they classified as affect, cognition and behaviour.

Fabrigar, MacDonald and Wegener (2005) align with this definition but assert that attitudes have been routinely characterised in terms of valence and extremity. Valence is a term that is often used to describe or categorise specific kinds of emotions such as fear or anger, which are treated as negative valences, while feelings of joy constitute part of the positive valences. It is described as the intrinsic attractiveness or the aversiveness of an event, object or situation. This disposition of Fabrigar et al (2005) has, however, been disputed by some scholars who insist that valence and extremity cannot adequately capture all the relevant attributes of attitudes. Katz (1960, p.168) who defines attitudes as the predisposition of an individual to evaluate some

symbol, or aspect of his world in a favourable or unfavourable manner stresses that attitudes include “both the affective, or feeling, core of liking or disliking; and the cognitive, or belief, elements which describe the object of the attitude, its characteristics, and its relations to other objects”. The outflow from this definition is that while attitudes may include beliefs, it is not all beliefs that can be considered as attitudes. It is noteworthy that Katz also recognised the presence of the components of affect or emotions along with cognitive or thoughts in the attitude makeup. Bohner and Dickel (2011) who define attitude as an evaluation of an object of thought, explain further that its objects comprise anything that an individual may have in mind, from people to things, mundane to abstract, including groups and ideas.

What has, however, come to be regarded as the umbrella definition of attitude is that offered by Eagly and Chaiken (2007), which is that it is “a psychological tendency, expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or dis-favour”. This is because the definition captures the key features involved in attitude formation which are: tendency, entity and evaluation. The definition that is attributed to Allport (1935, p.6), who is often described as one of the founding fathers of attitudinal studies in psychology, is that an “attitude is a disposition to act which is built up by the integration of numerous specific responses of a similar type, but which exists as a general neural ‘set’ and when activated by a specific stimulus results in behaviour that is more obviously a function of the disposition than of the activating stimulus”. The etymological issues in this definition include ‘disposition to act’, ‘specific responses’, ‘neural set’ and ‘specific stimulus.’ These attitudinal constructs which are not only broad but also generic in nature, determine the upsurge of behaviour. In describing attitude as a complex construct which comprises cognitive, affect and behavioural components, Bagozzi and Burnkrant (1979) argue that these components simultaneously account for intentions of individuals to manifest the attitudes as overt behaviours.

The affirmation of attitude components has been amplified by Petty, Wegener and Fabrigar (1997) who argue that one of the traditional themes in attitude research is the study of the bases and structure of the evaluations. These bases or properties are described as affective, cognitive and behavioural. Fabrigar et al (2005) also align with this tripartite notion of attitudes with three distinct components. Equally, Ostrom (1969, p.1) explains that two hypotheses which were drawn from assumptions of the three components of attitude were tested in three correlational studies. He adds that findings from the study revealed that the hypotheses were not only supported “but the dominant feature was that there was a high inter-correlation between the three components with the uniqueness of each component contributing very little additional variance”.

Theoretical underpinning

A number of theories have sought to define the relationships between attitudes and behaviour. The Theory of Planned Behaviour introduced by Icek Azjen in 1991 is one that clearly explains these interrelationships. The theory is anchored on the relationship between attitudes and different kinds of behaviours. It operates on the premise that intentions to perform behaviours of different kinds can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward such behaviours and their perceived behaviour control (PBC). These intentions along with perceptions of behavioural control account for considerable variance in actual behaviour. It also focuses on the role that cognitive self-regulation plays in the prediction and explanation of an individual’s behaviour. Considered as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which he developed with Martin Fishbein in 1975, Azjen asserts that the Theory of Planned Behaviour was anchored on an individual’s intention to perform a given behaviour. Azjen (1991, p.181) defines intentions as the motivational factors that influence behaviour, stressing that “the stronger the intention to engage in behaviour, the more likely should be its performance”.

This position supports his assumption that behavioural achievement jointly interacts with an individual's intention or motivation along with his or her ability, to translate to behavioural control which inevitably produces performance. The theory also assumes that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were determinants of intention. Azjen's postulation is that an individual's attitude towards a given behaviour is related to the degree to which the person favourably or unfavourably evaluates or appraises that behaviour. This is also the opinion of Li, Mizerski, Lee and Liu (2009) who assert that three major components dominate the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and list them as the attitudinal component, the normative component and perceived behaviour control.

While the attitudinal and normative components were essentially drawn from the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the component of perceived behaviour control is the distinguishing component of TPB. Attitudinal and normative components were often criticised because of the assumption that human behaviours were not only volitional but also rational, which meant that individuals have full control over their behaviours or actions. However, meta-analyses conducted by Sheppard, Hartwick and Warshaw (1988, p. 326) to investigate how effective the models of Azjen were, found that three variables moderated the effectiveness of the model. The meta-analyses were conducted on the basis of (a) "the use of attitudes and subjective norms to predict intentions, and (b) the use of intentions to predict the performance of behaviour".

In his explanation of perceived behavioural control, Azjen (1991, p.188) indicates that the concept of performing a given behaviour was similar to Bandura's self-efficacy concept and probably owes much to it. He argues that Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory posits that individuals' beliefs about their abilities and willingness to exercise them over those events that have effects on their lives were determinants of human motivation and action. The drawback, however, seems to hang on his position that the "relative importance of attitudes, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control in the prediction of intention is expected to vary across behaviours and intentions". Azjen (1991, p. 443) notes that each of these beliefs connected behaviour to a particular outcome while each outcome also has a subjective value. According to him, "normative beliefs regarding different social referents combine to produce an overall perceived social pressure or subjective norm". The understanding that is derivable from this argument is that the social pressure that any individual experiences which seeks to compel him/her to perform any given behaviour or to reject same, is the subjective norm associated with that behaviour.

A number of criticisms have trailed the theory since its introduction. While some have asserted that it is not complete because it features some challenges such as the exclusion of habits and emotions, others accused it of not listing the beliefs that are antecedent to adoption models. Jokonya (2017) is of the view that it may be fruitless to investigate the theory's system and design antecedents until theories have been developed about the individual behaviours and their influence on outcomes. Sniehotta, Pesseau and Araújo-Soares (2014, p. 2) assert that the main thrust of criticisms about the theory has revolved around the fact that it has not been able to adequately account for most of the variabilities in observed behaviours. They note that "the problem of 'inclined abstainers', individuals who form an intention and subsequently fail to act has been a recognised limitation of the theory".

Affect component of attitude

Affect as a component has traditionally always been used to describe both negative and positive feelings or emotions that an individual may have. Ott (2017) describes affect as an umbrella term that covers four psychological categories of feelings, emotions, moods and

passions. This view is shared by Batson, Shaw and Oleson (1992, p. 295) who hold that in psychology, “most often, the terms affect, mood and emotion are used interchangeably, without any attempt at conceptual differentiation”. However, over the years, subtle changes or differentiations are being observed in these definitions. Feeling, for instance, is described in two major ways by Merriam Webster Dictionary (2019). The first is that it is one of the basic physical senses of which the skin contains the chief end organs and of which the sensations of touch and temperature are characteristic, while the second is a sensation experienced through the sense of touch.

On its part, the Dictionary defines emotion as “a conscious mental reaction, such as anger or fear, subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioural changes in the body.” A mood is described as a conscious state of mind or predominant emotion, while passion is defined as the state or capacity of being acted on by an external agent or force. Ekkekakis (2012, p. 322) explains that emotion occurs with prototypical episodes. This is manifested in numerous forms including “(a) core affect, (b) overt behaviour with the emotion, for instance a smile or a facial expression of fear, (c) attention directed toward the eliciting stimulus, (d) cognitive appraisal of the meaning and experience of the particular emotion, and (g) neural (peripheral and central) and endocrine changes consistent with the particular emotion”.

While emotions are associated with excitements, moods have been noted to be typically longer than emotions and are often associated with depression. Ekkekakis asserts that emotional episodes are usually brought about by something, or are reactions by people to something and are generally concerned about something. This means that emotional episodes are usually induced by some object or stimulus of interest to the individual and involves elements such as anger, fear, jealousy, pride or love. According to Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988), moods are measured in two primary or dominant forms which are either as positive affect or negative affect. While positive affect is concerned with how any individual feels: enthusiastic, active or alert; negative affect reflects a general state of distress or sadness that any individual experiences.

Cognitive component of attitude

The cognitive component of attitude is made up of beliefs, thoughts and opinions that enable an individual to think and to have general knowledge of a person or an object of interest. It is defined by Cambridge Dictionary (2019) as the act or process of knowing, perceiving or relating to mental processes of memory, judgement and reasoning. Cognitive components involve areas such as object recognition, reasoning and problem solving. It is, however, necessary to note that cognition is not just a process but a ‘mental’ process. As Brandimonte, Bruno and Collina (2006, p.3) explain, cognition is indeed concerned with how the mental process is “transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered and used”. These mental processes which are capable of operating either independently or otherwise carry out several functions such as perception, attention, memory coding, retention and recall. Other functions associated with cognition are reasoning, decision making, problem solving, planning and executing of actions. Cognitive processes of attitudes have had several definitions and descriptions over the years, but Wegener and Carlston (2005, p. 495) offer a broad definition that seems to capture standard understandings of the cognitive context. They describe it as involving “one of more recurrent mental events that, in concert, add to, alter, or act upon representation in memory with detectable consequences”. Flowing from this definition is the fact that cognitive processes cannot be observed directly but can be decided upon based on their ‘detectable’ outcomes. Since they cannot be so observed it is, therefore, plausible to assume that these processes are latent constructs that can be understood from the perspective of the theories they are embedded in. In spite of this perspective, Newen (2015, p. 8) defines cognitive



processes as “information transfer that typically takes place to connect multiple (or complex) informational inputs to form a minimally flexible cognitive system with a spectrum of minimally flexible behavioural outputs”.

Arising from this definition, it is easy to discern the interdependence of all the aspects of cognition which are represented as perception, memory, learning, intentionality, self-representation, rationality and decision making, or anything in that category. Apart from arguing that cognitive processes can be understood from both the ontological and epistemological purviews, Newen approaches the definition of cognitive science from the perspective of dialectical investigation by developing four perspectives, three of which examined what should best be described as strategic accounts, with the fourth providing the multiple criteria view. The strategic accounts are described as phenomena based, theory based and community based. While the phenomena-based account defines cognitive science on the basis of phenomena under investigation, for instance, memory, reasoning or problem solving, the theory-based account is concerned with theoretical arguments as to how to explain intelligent behaviour. The third approach which is that of community-based account is concerned with how to combine several criteria in explaining what cognitive science is all about. The multiple criteria account is anchored on the use of different cognitive methodologies described as cognitive science, cognitive behaviour, cognitive processes, cognitive systems and cognitive methodologies to specify the cognitive processes (Newen, 2015).

A number of suggestions have been made on operations of the tripartite components of attitude. While Breckler (1984, pp. 1191, 1193) holds the opinion that the three components vary on a common evaluative continuum, he notes, however, that the cognitive component is composed of “beliefs, knowledge structures, perceptual responses and thoughts”. These cognitions or thoughts equally have the potential of changing from favourable to unfavourable, such that it may support or fail to support specific arguments. Although cognitions can be developed through previous communications, Breckler observes that it is not likely that all components of attitude would flow from cognitive processes. He states that, “attitudinal affect may not have verbal or cognitive antecedents... Many behaviours and action tendencies may also be established through non-verbal or non-cognitive mechanism. As a result, the three components of attitude are distinguishable in terms of their development roots”. A study conducted by Greenwald (1982) on the inter-relationship between cognitive and affective processes of attitude revealed that affective reactions to stimuli occurred more rapidly and may be independent of cognitive reactions. The result is likely if the assumption that the cognitive system has capacity to detect the affective system’s reactions with partial success is accepted. This would then mean that if a person is asked to report reactions to stimuli from the affective perspective and he/she employs the verbal or cognitive system to describe his or her reaction, then his/her result would be deemed to have been influenced by the stimuli.

Zajonc (1980) argues that though a number of theories suggested that affect was post-cognitive, and often occurred after cognitive operations had been satisfied, yet several clinical results on impression formation and decision-making point to the fact that affective judgments preceded perceptual and cognitive judgments. He asserts that “thoughts enter feelings at various stages of the affective sequence, and the converse is true for cognitions. Feelings may be aroused at any point of the cognitive process: registration, encoding, retrieval, inference, etc. But this converse relation is not totally symmetrical” (1980, p.154). His position is that affect is always present as a companion to thought or cognition, whereas the opposite is not often true for cognition. This shows that we can express our beliefs or feelings of like or dislike for something without even knowing what that object is.

Equally, when we try to recall or recognise the face of a person or his/her name, the affective quality of the original picture is usually the first thing we see. What is clear is that although affects and cognitions are separate components of attitude, there is a high level of

interrelationships between them. Berg, Manstead, Pligt and Wigboldus (2006) hold the view that both are important in the formation of different attitudes, although one or the other has the potential of being more important or salient. Allport (1935) associates the fact that since 'mental attitudes' often precedes 'motor attitudes' then there is a greater possibility that cognition, which is identical with mental psychology, comes up before behaviour which can be identified with motor attitudes. In sum, attitudinal components seem to share some consistency because an individual who is favourably disposed to an attitude object is almost invariably likely to behave in a manner that reflects that disposition. This is also the position that was canvassed by Larsen, Ommundsen and van der Veer (2008) as they argue that affect, cognition and behaviour tended to move in the same direction and often towards the attitude object.

Behavioural component of attitude

The behavioural component of an attitude has to do with an individual's tendencies to behave in a particular way towards an object of interest. Behaviour is defined by Oxford Dictionary (2019) as the way in which any individual acts or conducts himself/herself, especially towards others, and manifests in some four different ways: aggressive, assertive, passive or passive-aggressive forms. Kroenung and Eckhardt (2011) define it as an overt action that people perform in relation to the attitude object. They also support the assumption that cognitive and or affective processes do precede the development of any initial overt attitude, and can lead to the formation of any such attitude. This is equally the position of Huskinson and Haddock (2006) which is that behavioural information refers not only to past behaviours or behavioural intentions that are relevant to an attitude object but also the ongoing or present inclinations. In effect, this suggests that some behavioural processes have the potential of becoming manifest before the formation of attitudes on the given object of interest.

Bergner (2011) describes it as an attempt by an individual to bring about some action in a state of affairs. This action can either be seen as a change in the given situation or the maintenance of the status quo. He notes that this characterisation of behaviour does not include some reflex movements such as those that involve calculation of mental phenomena. One of the key parameters of behaviour that Bergner (2011, p.148) identifies is performance. While describing behaviour as a procedural aspect that includes all postures or movements, he remarks that every aspect of behaviour must "involve the occurrence of a physical process" which can in principle be described as appropriate to an individual's level of needs. Lazzeri (2014, pp. 67-69), however, takes on the definition of behaviour from four perspectives. These are: (a) behaviour as the occurrence of an organism's action and reaction, (b) behaviour as a class pattern; (c) group behaviour and (d) behaviour as any change or movement of an object. The perspective of occurrence of an organism's action or reaction is described as the response system and records incidental happenings that an organism may be emitting in a spontaneous manner, while class pattern in behaviour presupposes what different individuals may be doing over time in a similar fashion. Group behaviour is concerned with the way organisms behave within the group milieu. It is described by Lazzeri as "something performed at particular moments and places" and exhibits similar features, while behaviour as a change or movement of an object is often employed when inanimate objects such as stones, etc. are observed.

Mawhinney (2010) equally identifies two kinds of behaviour which he names as operant and respondent behaviours. According to him the operant behaviour is so named because it "operates or acts upon the environment", while respondent behaviours are reflexive responses to specific stimuli. Operant behaviours are said to be controlled by consequences because they "increase or decrease the future frequency of the behaviours" that they are found to be following. A typical example of the manifestation of operant behaviour is that of a child who pushes another child down to be able to take that child's toy. This is said to be an indication that the child is likely to be more aggressive in the future. In the case of the respondent behaviour,

an example could be made from the child who is disconcerted by a loud noise or quickly withdraws his/her fingers after being burnt by a hot flame. A number of functions have been assigned to behaviours basically to be able to identify why those behaviours are occurring. The essence of the identification of these behaviours is to assist in guiding and planning for treatment of behaviours that are problematic, choosing socially appropriate replacement behaviours for children and creating plans for certain behaviours. McClellan (2017) lists four of these behavioural functions as sensory stimulation, escape, access to attention, and access to tangibles. He defines 'sensory stimulation' as a person's movements or actions that such individual feels are good for him/her. For example, if a child likes to bite his/her fingers and feels this gives him/her the kind of sensory satisfaction he/she is seeking, the biting of fingers will continue. In the instance of 'escape', this is described as "an undesirable situation or signal that individuals want to get away from." 'Access to attention' refers to prompts or desires for access to social interaction. An infant who cries is seeking attention from the parent or caregiver and will continue to do so until he/she is attended to.

The behavioural function of 'access to tangibles' is meant to crave access to a specific item or activity. The classical conditioning experiment of Ivan Pavlov with the dog is a typical example. The dog's salivating for food every time a bell was rung aptly depicted the issue of access for tangibles. Behaviour can also be described as the sharing of goods, services, emotions and other social outcomes which in turn attract social rewards or negative outcomes to individuals that are involved. This is defined by Stangor, Jhangiani and Tarry (2015) as social exchange. The rewards can take two forms: positive outcomes and negative outcomes. While the positive outcomes include benefits such as praise, affection, love or financial support, negative outcomes can come in form of frustrations, disagreements and guilt. Of significance, however, is the fact that in the instance of social exchange, behaviour is always influenced by the individual's goal of self-concern which may be to minimise the social costs or gain as much social rewards as is possible.

Relationship between attitude and behaviour

The relationship between attitude and behaviour has dominated psychological discourse over the years. Ajzen and Fishbein (1977, p. 889) hold the view that attitudes have a significant relationship with behaviour, but that its prediction would depend on operational conditions. They, however, depart from the notion in some quarters that attitudes were held by people while behaviours were being performed in line with certain entities. According to them, two issues that have become manifest in the attitude - behaviour relationship are: "(a) what are the entities of the attitudinal predictors and the behavioural criteria? (b) What is the degree of correspondence between the attitudinal and behavioural entities?" To them, four perspectives of a given action, target, context and time are crucial in the definition of behavioural entities, with each of the elements being dependent on the measurement procedure adopted by the researcher. The concept of behavioural entity is described as "measures that place the individual on a bipolar evaluative or affective dimension" while behavioural criteria are analysed on the basis of some observable actions performed by the individual and recorded by an investigator. Thus, a given behavioural observation is always analysed on the basis of the action involved, the nature or size of the targets and the various contexts in which the behaviour is carried out.

Equally the time element is important because behaviour that is not performed at the appropriate time can be misconstrued. However, it is noteworthy that each of the four elements can serve as a behavioural entity depending on the measurement procedure. Though there is a surfeit of researches on the relationship between attitude and behaviour, e.g., LaPiere (1934), Wicker (1969), Kelman (1974), Schuman and Johnson (1976); the meta-analysis by Stephen Kraus (1990, p.7) suggests, however, that behaviour can be predicted by an individual's attitude toward the object of interest. In observing that "attitudes significantly and substantially predict

future behaviour,” Kraus explains that “if for example, measures of discriminatory behaviour are obtained for 100 prejudiced and 100 unprejudiced subjects, and the correlation between the attitude (prejudice, or attitude toward an ethnic group) and discriminatory behaviour is $r = .38$, then attitudes will correctly predict behaviour 69 percent of the time”.

Behaviour and communication

Given the current understanding that attitudes can predict behaviour, it is appropriate that the relationships between behaviour and communication be briefly examined. The starting point in this review is that of understanding that the communication process involves observation and decoding of stimuli which are translated either as messages or signals from the environment. Popescu (2012) is of the view that the communication process begins when the transmitter encodes a message that is transmitted through various channels to the receiver. The receiver is, however, free to inoculate himself/herself from the message if it is contrary to his/her attitudinal disposition. This decoding process is essentially a cognitive attitude function because it involves the thinking and knowing elements, and is, therefore, a major determinant of message contents or characteristics. Of considerable importance in the understanding of information behaviour is the attitude of the receiver or recipient of the decoded message.

Johnson, Maio and Smith-McLallen (2005, p. 645) argue that knowledge of the attitude of the message's recipient towards the particular emphasis in the communicated message plays an important role in the prediction of the receiver's post-message attitude. They assert that, “in addition to the obvious prediction that people should agree more strongly with communication that supports their attitude than with communication that refute their attitude, it is possible that people are influenced by different considerations in their processing of pro and counter-attitudinal messages”. This is explained with the example that when an individual receives a message that is in consonance with his/her attitude, that individual's emotional expression could be in the form of a smile, whereas the facial expression of the individual that receives a message that is contrary to his/her attitude would be that of frowning. Johnson et al (2005) explain that a communication that targets attitudes meant to perform certain behaviours is usually more effective in producing behavioural change than the one that targets attitude objects. While the receiver's attitude is vital in communication, the communicator's expectations, beliefs, motives, physical characteristics and feelings are equally salient. This is especially important if the communicator is unwilling to present an open and frank account to the receiver. These variables are significant because they are often present in everyday contexts especially among marketers or salesmen who may often not be totally honest with their claims.

In summary, this paper analysed the psychological processes involved in the attitude-behaviour relationships. These processes are affective or emotional, cognitive or knowledge and behaviour or overt conduct. It also explains the relationship between these tripartite components and communication, in the sense that though affects and cognitions are separate components of attitude, there is a significant relationship between them. When there is congruence between these two attitude components, overt behaviour often occurs to confirm that disposition. An individual's attitude, therefore, determines how he or she decodes stimuli from the environment and encodes for communication with the receivers.

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