

Capitolo 7

Case Study 1

The functions of attitudes: The value-expressive function

According to Katz (1960) [DOI:10.1086/266945], attitudes serve different functions, one of which is the value-expressive function. Value-expressive attitudes show who we are, and what we stand for. Consequently, only important and strongly self-related (central) attitudes should serve the value-expressive function. However, this relationship between the function and the importance of attitudes has not previously been studied.

Attitudes differ in strength (see Holland, Verplanken, Van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 1999; Pomerantz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995 [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.69.3.408]). Strong, central attitudes are attitudes that refer to important attitude objects that are strongly related to the self. These attitudes are often related to important values. According to self-affirmation theory, threatened self-esteem can be repaired by expressing important values. This could also work for “central” attitudes.

Smeets and Holland (2002) investigated the relationship between the value-expressive function of attitudes and the importance of attitudes. In a laboratory study, they assessed attitude centrality towards Amnesty International and the level of self-esteem among participants. One week later, they threatened the participants’ self-esteem. After this manipulation, participants were able to donate money to Amnesty International.

The results were clear: only people with a central attitude towards Amnesty International could repair their self-esteem by expressing their attitude towards this organization. Donating money to the organization had no effect on the self-esteem of participants who did not have a central attitude towards Amnesty International. People with a central attitude who didn’t donate money even showed a lower level of self-esteem than the other participants.

This research showed a relationship between the functions of attitudes and the importance of attitudes.

References

- Holland, R. W., Verplanken, B., Van Knippenberg, A., & Dijksterhuis, A. (2000). Centraliteit van attitudes als sterkte van de associatie tussen attitudes en het zelf. In C. Rutte, D. Van Knippenberg, C. Martijn, & D. Stapel (Eds.), *Fundamentele sociale psychologie, deel 14*. Tilburg, The Netherlands: Tilburg University Press.

- Katz, D. (1960) [DOI:10.1086/266945]. The functional approach to the study of attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24, 163–204.
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- Smeets, R. C., & Holland, R. W. (2002). Attitudes als toegangsbewijzen tot de “dierentuin van het zelf”. In D. A. Stapel, M. Hagedoorn, & E. van Dijk (Eds.), *Jaarboek sociale psychologie 2001*. Delft, The Netherlands: Eburon.

Case Study 2

Heuristics: When it feels good, I must like it. Positive affect in advertisements

The use of humor in advertisements

Advertisements are everywhere around us; on TV and the radio, in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, and so on. As we have seen, generating positive affect in a persuasive message can be helpful. In a lot of advertisements, humor is used. The idea is that when we can laugh about an advertisement, we generate positive affect and consequently like the product more. However, the effect of humor in advertisements has never actually been studied.

Strick, Van Baaren, Holland, and Van Knippenberg (2006) were the first to investigate the effect of humor in advertisements. In two studies they found that the use of humor had two different effects. The researchers found that subjects recognized the name of the product less well, and also more slowly, when it was accompanied by humor. This is explained by the fact that people use cognitive space to process the humorous content, which distracts from the product.

However, subjects evaluated the product in the humorous advertisement more positively, and showed congruent behavior: they more often chose the product that was accompanied by humor. This research shows that the use of humor in advertisements helps to create a positive attitude towards the product, but does not help to make the product name more well known.

Reference

- Strick, M., Van Baaren, R., Holland, R. W., & Van Knippenberg, A. (2006). Humor in reclame: De onbewuste invloed van humor op herkenning, attitudes en gedrag. In R. Holland, J. Ouwkerk, C. van Laar, R. Ruiter, & J. Ham (Eds.), *Jaarboek sociale psychologie 2005*. Groningen, The Netherlands: ASPO Pers.

Case Study 3

Are angry sources with threatening messages more persuasive?

We've all seen public service announcements telling us to stop smoking, stop texting while driving, etc. As you can imagine, there are a huge number of factors that can influence whether or not we are persuaded by such advertisements. In a study by Kim and Niederdeppe (2009) [DOI: [10.1080/10810730.2013.837550](https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2013.837550)], participants watched anti-smoking ads in which the speaker conveyed the same message, but he used either a sad or an angry tone. Which do you think would be more persuasive? A sad speaker or an angry speaker? What about a speaker who was likeable or a speaker who was dominant?

To put this question to the test, the researchers had college students from the U.S. watch one of three anti-smoking advertisements: one with a sadness frame (in which the speaker conveyed sadness while delivering the message), one with an anger frame (in which the speaker conveyed anger while delivering the message), and one in which no emotion was portrayed. In all cases, the speaker delivered a message about how smoking killed his sister and how the tobacco industry was to blame.

After watching the advertisement, the participants made ratings of the speaker (how likeable he was, how dominant, how competent, etc.), of their own emotions, and of their intentions to stop smoking (assuming they were a smoker). The results showed that the sadness-framed message did not influence perceptions of the speaker nor did it influence intentions to smoke. On the contrary, when the speaker delivered an anger-framed message, he was perceived as more dominant and strong (but less likeable) and the participants indicated lowered intentions to smoke.

So, the next time you're watching television and a commercial like this comes on, see if you can guess whether it will be effective. If the speaker delivering the message is angry, then chances are it will.

Reference

- Kim, S.J. & Niederdeppe, J. (2014). [DOI: [10.1080/10810730.2013.837550](https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2013.837550)]. Emotional expressions in antismoking television advertisements: Consequences of anger and sadness framing on pathways to persuasion. *Journal of Health Communication*, 19, 692–709.

Case Study 4

Are people as naïve as persuaders think?

In this chapter, you are learning about the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which makes predictions about when people will be persuaded by superficial cues vs. the strength and quality of the arguments. Does this model just seem to make sense? It turns out that, if you think really hard, you may have known about this theory all along. Not persuaded? Well, read on ...

Researchers from the University of Kent at Canterbury wanted to measure people's intuitive beliefs about persuasion, including people's thoughts about whether they are more or less easily persuaded than others. As you may recall from Chapter 4, people tend to have a pretty positive view of the self and that view extends to people's perceptions of how easily persuaded they are. It turns out, people believe that they are less persuadable than others. After all, being gullible is perceived to be a negative characteristic, and no one likes to associate negative traits with the self. What else do people think?

In this study, Douglas, Sutton, and Stathi (2010) [DOI: [10.1080/15534511003597423](https://doi.org/10.1080/15534511003597423)] asked separate groups of participants to make ratings of either the self or others in terms of how weak-minded they are, how strong-minded they are, and how much they enjoy thinking about things (this item may look familiar because it is tapping *need for cognition*). Because they wanted to tap the beliefs of completely naïve individuals, the researchers selected only non-psychology majors as participants. After making these ratings, all of the participants then viewed a number of advertisements and rated how likely they (or other people) were to be persuaded by the ads. The advertisements were specifically selected because they made use of a number of peripheral cues, rather than central cues.

The results showed that the participants believed that weak-minded people would find the advertisements more persuasive than strong-minded people. In addition they also believed that those who liked to think more (i.e., those who were higher in need for cognition) would be less persuaded by the advertisements. Last but not least, people rated themselves as being more strong-minded, and higher in need for cognition than other people and therefore predicted that they would be less persuaded by the advertisements.

So, naïve individuals, who knew little about psychology, still understood that people who enjoy thinking and people who are of strong mind will be less persuaded. Does that sound like something you've heard about before? Could it be the Elaboration Likelihood Model? It could! It seems that even naïve perceivers have an intuitive understanding of that factors that will lead people to be persuaded by superficial cues. But are people really as resistant to persuasion as they think? Here's a guess: if *everyone* believes that they are not as easily persuaded as others, then who is buying all of those items from the infomercials?

Reference

- Douglas, K., Sutton, R., & Stathi, S. (2010). [DOI: [10.1080/15534511003597423](https://doi.org/10.1080/15534511003597423)]. Why I am less persuaded than you: People's intuitive understanding of the psychology of persuasion. *Social Influence*, 5, 133–148.

Case Study 5

How to resist persuasion? Look me in the eye

In certain cultures, looking someone in the eye is a sign of respect and shows the other person that you are listening to them. It follows that, when you look another person directly in the eye, you should be more focused on the content of their message and therefore more persuaded by whatever they are saying. But is good eye contact really that persuasive?

In research conducted in Germany, Chen, Minson, Schone and Heinrichs (2013) [DOI: [10.1177/0956797613491968](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613491968)]

explored whether people who looked others in the eye were more easily persuaded. In Study 1, participants were asked to watch videos on topics such as assisted suicide, nuclear energy, gender quotas in German businesses, etc. While watching each video, participants' eye gazes were recorded with eye-tracking software. The results of this first study showed that participants who spent more time looking at the speaker's eyes indicated greater agreement with the message. *But*, for those participants who initially *disagreed* with the speaker's message, increased eye gaze led to less agreement with the message and less attitude change.

In Study 2, participants watched a video in which the speaker was arguing *against* the participants' own personal beliefs. Half of the participants in this condition were told to watch the speaker's eyes throughout the duration of the video, whereas the other half of the participants were told to watch the speaker's mouth. The findings from this study again showed that focusing on the speaker's eyes led to less agreement with the message in contrast to those who watched the speaker's mouth.

Why does increased eye contact lead to less persuasion on topics that people already disagree with? The authors reviewed research showing that making direct eye contact also sends the signal that the speaker is dominant and potentially trying to influence you. If you go into a setting in which someone is making direct eye contact, you may already have your guard up because you think that they are trying to persuade you. So, the participants who were asked, in Study 2, to make direct eye contact were more than likely generating counterarguments as they watched the video because they used the direct eye contact by the speaker as a signal that a persuasion attempt was at hand.

So, the next time you want to persuade someone who is against your views, consider using direct eye contact more sparingly, and perhaps you will win them over to your side.

Reference

- Chen, F. S., Minson, J. A., Schone, M., & Heinrichs, M. (2013). [DOI: [10.1177/0956797613491968](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613491968)]. In the eye of the beholder: Eye contact increases resistance to persuasion. *Psychological Science*, 24, 2254–2261.