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PSYCH 586

PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASION

First Exam - Spring 2008

This is an open-book exam. Please answer **6** of the following 8 questions. **Please write legibly and only in the space provided.** Read the questions carefully and restrict your answers to the information requested; there is no need to elaborate beyond the essential. Think before you reply! Good Luck!

1. When threatened by a robber with a gun, people usually hand over their wallets. Is this an instance of persuasion? If yes, why? If not, why not?

The robber scenario does not represent persuasion; it does provide an excellent example of coercion. Social psychologists define persuasion as only existing in a context of "free choice."

2. In the expectancy-value model, attitudes are determined by salient (i.e., readily accessible) beliefs about the attitude object. Now, consider attitudes toward genetically modified foods. Very briefly describe at least two ways in which, according to the expectancy-value model, these attitudes can be changed in a favorable direction.

(1) Provide information to change the judged likelihood that GMF has a certain attribute or outcome (e.g., counter the belief that GMF causes cancer).

(2) Provide information to change the evaluation of an attribute or outcome that is associated with GMF (e.g., if GMF is believed to “less nutritious” that this is actually good because it prevents overweight).

(3) Provide information that leads to the formation of new favorable beliefs about GMF (e.g., that GMF reduces the use of pesticides).

3. Questionnaire measures of prejudice (negative attitude) toward outgroups often fail to predict specific behaviors, such as helping a member of the group. Explain this finding by reference to (a) Fazio’s notion of attitude accessibility, and (b) the principle of compatibility.

(a) According to Fazio’s MODE model, in the spontaneous processing mode, if the prejudice toward the outgroup was not highly accessible (not a strong attitude), no automatic attitude activation would take place and the resulting behavior would indeed be unrelated to the prejudicial attitude.

(b) Prejudice toward the outgroup is a general attitude which does not predict the specific behavior of helping a member of the outgroup very well. The behavior involves unique target, action, context and time elements, but the general attitudes does not take these four specific elements into account.

4. Attitudes can serve different functions for different individuals. Give an example of an attitude function and briefly describe the implications of the functional approach for designing an effective persuasive appeal.

An attitude function could be that a person desires to be a part of his/her community. Persuasive messages are more likely to change attitudes when they are directed at the underlying function the attitude serves. To get a person to volunteer at a homeless shelter, if the attitude serves the community function, it would make sense to address how volunteering would make him/her more involved in the community.

5. Hovland and his associates pioneered experimental research into persuasion processes. Answer the following two questions. (a) What, according to these investigators, was the receiver doing while being exposed to a persuasive communication? (b) In what ways did this view misrepresent the role of the receiver and thereby lead to a misunderstanding of the persuasion process?

(a) According to Hovland et al., the receiver is passively taking in the information that comes from the persuasive communication. The receiver assumes the position of a passive learner.

(b) This was a misrepresentation of the role of the receiver because humans are active processors of information capable of counterarguing the points made in a communication and derogating the communicator.

6. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, attitude change can occur in a central mode and in a peripheral mode. What are the two factors that determine whether the receivers of a persuasive communication process the information centrally or peripherally? Provide examples of each of the two factors.

The two factors that determine whether receivers process message information centrally or peripherally are motivation and ability. How motivated people are depends on involvement (how relevant the issues is to them) and on whether or not they have a high need for cognition. Examples of ability factors are distraction, repetition of the message, and knowledge of the issue.

7. In advertising and other persuasive appeals, people are exposed to the same or a similar message repeatedly. (a) What is the effect of repeated exposure to a message in the Hovland persuasion framework? (b) What is the effect of repeated exposure according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model?

(a) In the Hovland framework, for persuasion to occur, receivers have to learn (attend to, comprehend, and accept) the message arguments. Repetition should make it easier to remember the message and should thus increase persuasion.

(b) In the ELM, the effect of repeating a message depends on processing mode and quality of arguments. In the peripheral mode, receivers don't process the message arguments; repeating the message will have little or no effect. In the central processing mode, repetition provides additional opportunities to elaborate on the message arguments. If the arguments are strong, this will produce additional positive thoughts and more attitude change; if the arguments are weak, repetition will be counterproductive.

8. An attractive (likable) communicator sometimes produces more attitude change than an unattractive or neutral communicator, but at other times, communicator attractiveness has little effect on persuasion. How does the Elaboration Likelihood Model explain these conflicting findings?

Communicator attractiveness can serve as a peripheral cue. In the peripheral processing mode, an attractive communicator (positive peripheral cue) would increase attitude change. However, in the central processing mode, peripheral cues have little effect on persuasion. In this mode, an attractive communicator may be no more effective than an unattractive or neutral communicator.

Also, an attractive source may motivate receivers to process the message (i.e., produce central mode processing). If the message contains strong arguments, this would lead to more attitude change; if it contains weak arguments, this would lead to less attitude change.

BONUS QUESTION: After answering 6 of the 8 questions above, you can address the following question for extra points. Even though we did not discuss this question in class, the materials covered should allow you to answer it.

9. Use the Elaboration Likelihood Model to describe at least two possible effects of a fear appeal.

(1) The fear produced by an effective fear appeal could help motivate the receivers to process the message centrally, thus producing more permanent attitude change. On the other hand, a high level of fear could interfere with message processing (peripheral mode).

(2) Fear produced by a message can serve as a peripheral cue. If it is taken as a warning signal, it could be a positive cue leading to attitude change. If it is simply a negative emotion, it could serve as a negative peripheral cue and reduce attitude change.