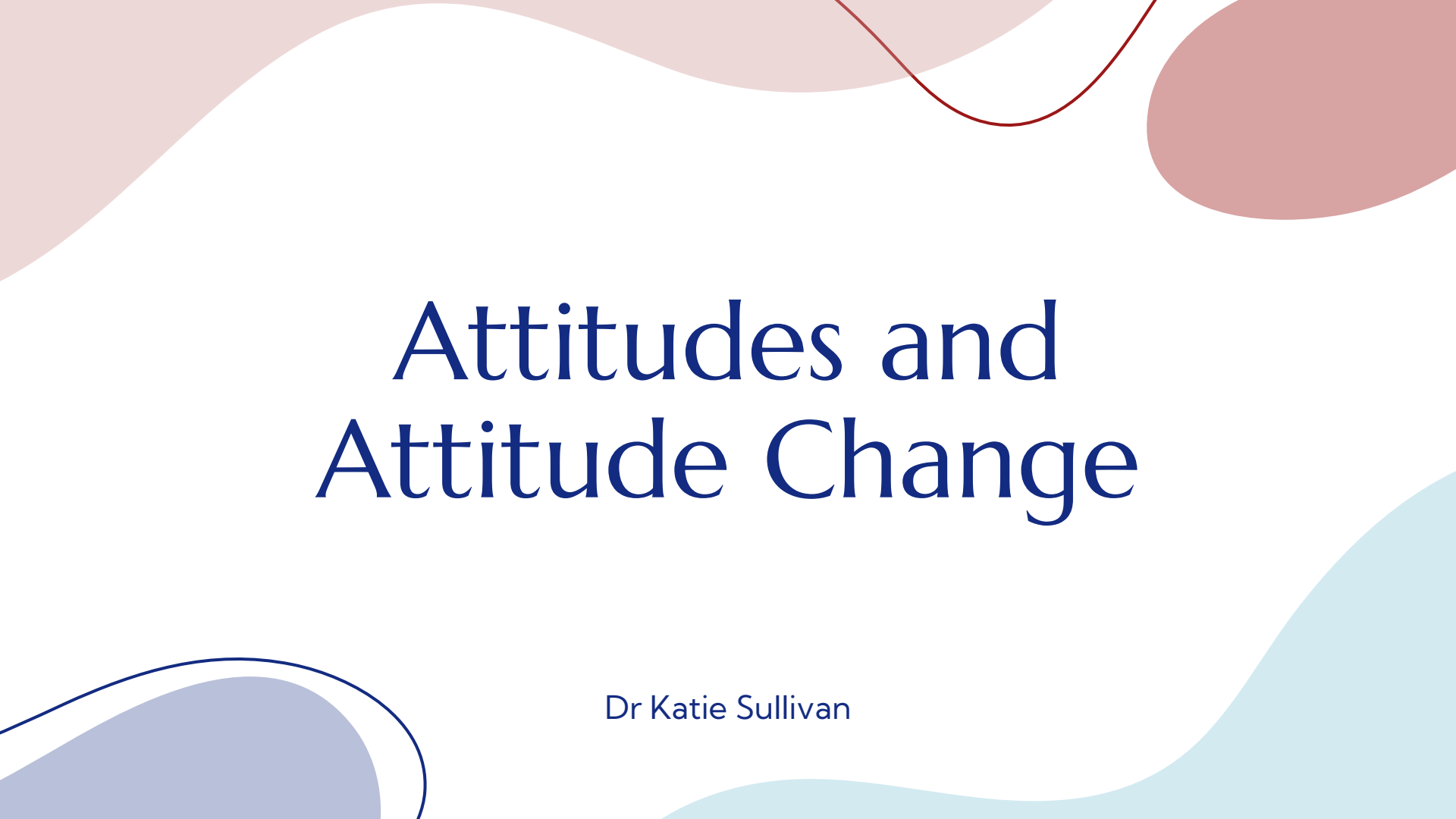




Attitudes and Attitude Change

Dr Katie Sullivan

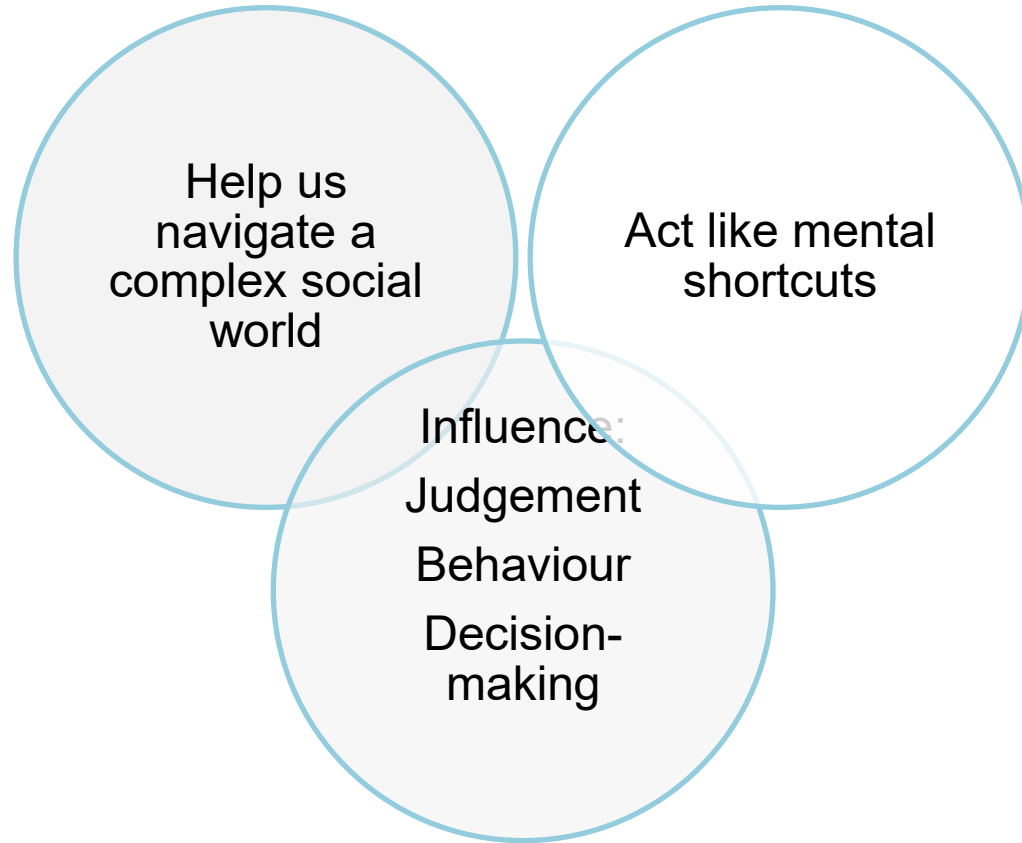
What is an Attitude?

An attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993)

- Evaluation of:
 - Objects
 - People
 - Issues
- They can be:
 - Positive
 - Negative
 - A mix/ambivalent
- They are generally learned, rather than innate
- Attitudes impact many areas of life



Why do Attitudes matter?



Why do Attitudes matter?

Knowledge function

- They help us organise information and make sense of a complicated world.

Value-expressive function

- They help us maximise rewards and avoid negative outcomes.

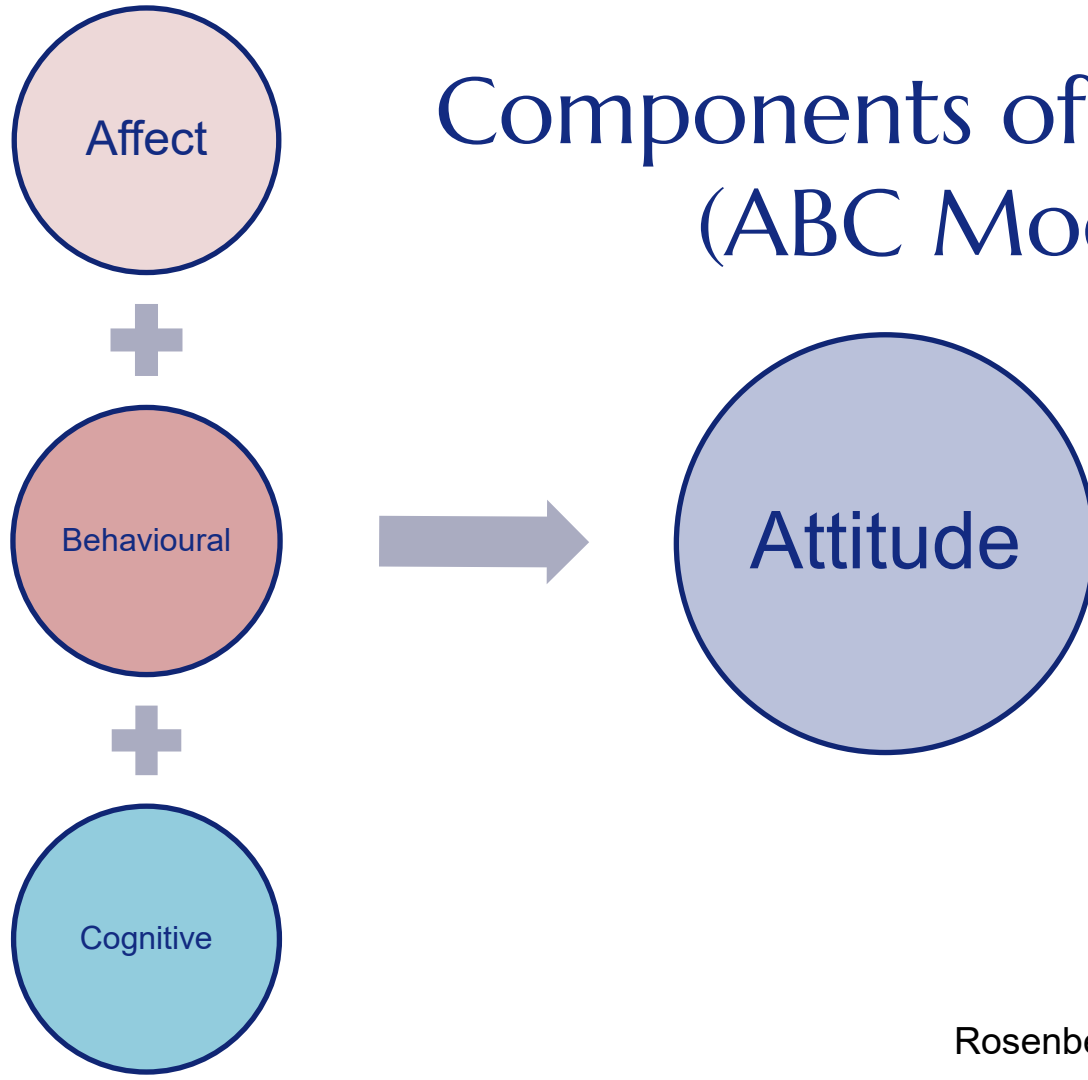
Utilitarian function

- Some attitudes allow us to express important aspects of our identity, values, and beliefs.

Ego-defensive function

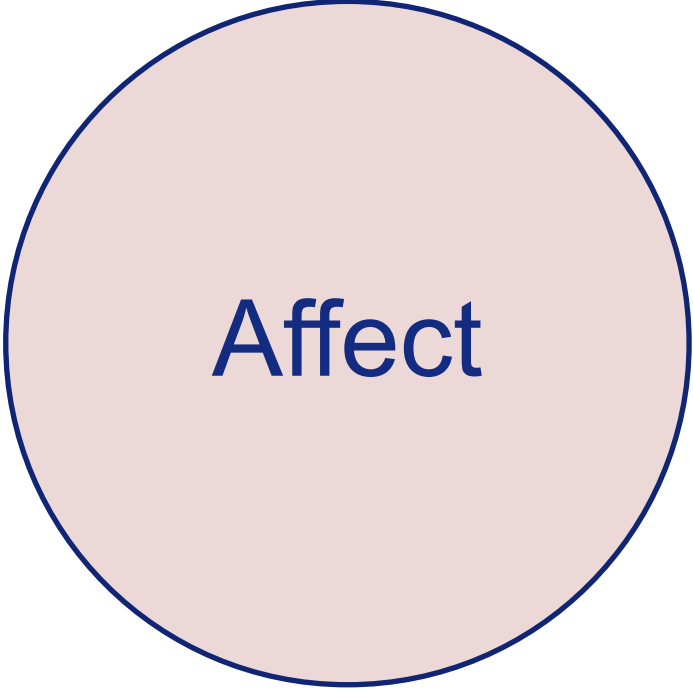
- Sometimes attitudes help protect self-esteem or reduce feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

Components of Attitudes (ABC Model)



Rosenberg & Hovland (1960)

Components of Attitudes (ABC Model)



Affect

The emotional responses we have towards a person, object, group, or issue

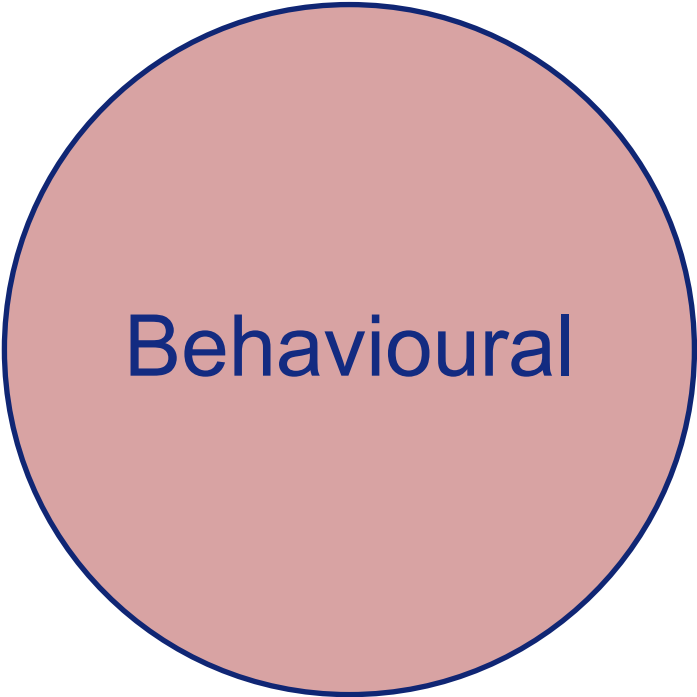
Our feelings influence our attitudes and behaviour before we have had a chance to think things through logically

Emotion is essential for effective decision-making
(Damasio, 1994)

Many of our moral judgements are driven first by quick, intuitive emotional reactions, with reasoning often occurring afterwards to justify those feelings (Haidt, 2001, 2012)

Emotionally charged information spreads more effectively and influences attitudes more strongly than neutral information (Brady et al., 2020)

Components of Attitudes (ABC Model)



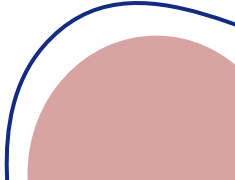
Behavioural

How we act, or how we intend to act,
towards a person, object, issue, or
behaviour

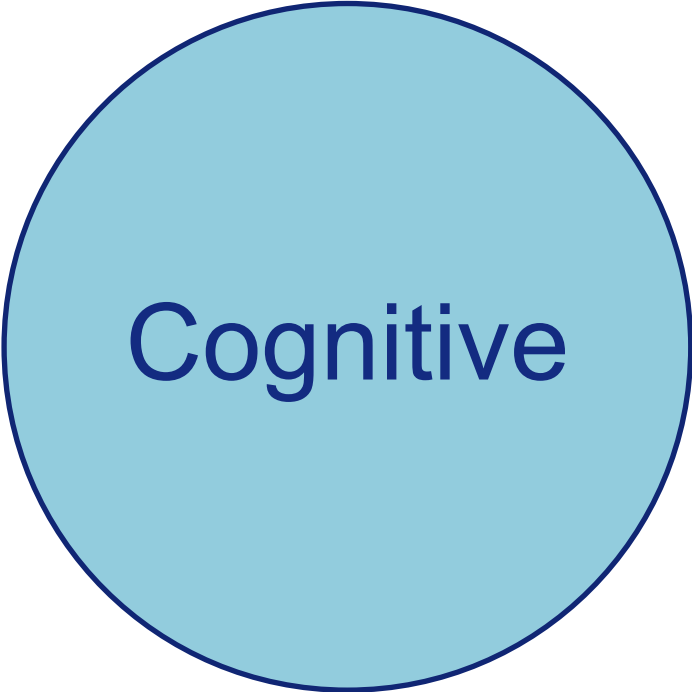
- This can include:
- Observable behaviours
 - Behavioural intentions
 - Patterns of decision-making

Theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)

Nudge Theory (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).



Components of Attitudes (ABC Model)



Cognitive

Beliefs, thoughts, knowledge, and assumptions we hold about a person, object, issue, or behaviour

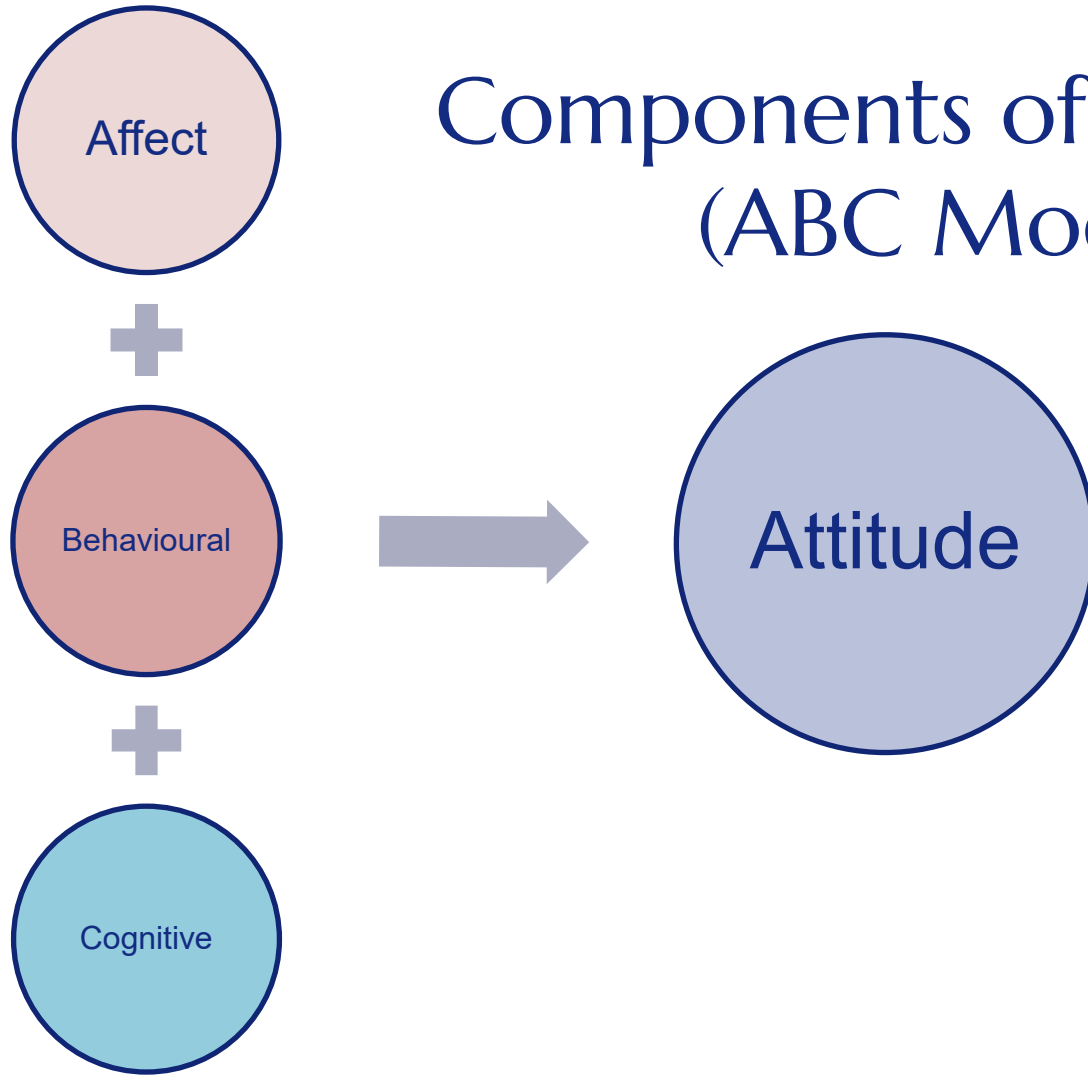
people sometimes continue to hold beliefs even after they have been presented with evidence that contradicts them (Lewandowsky et al., 2012)

Once beliefs become established, they can be surprisingly resistant to correction (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2020)

People do not always evaluate information objectively (Kunda, 1990)

People are more likely to accept information that aligns with their existing identities and group memberships (Van Bavel et al., 2021).

Components of Attitudes (ABC Model)



Attitude types: Explicit

Attitudes that we are consciously aware of and can report directly.

They are deliberate, accessible to awareness, and relatively easy to express when somebody asks us what we think.

Influenced by:

- personal experiences,
- reasoning,
- social norms,
- cultural expectations

Attitude types: Implicit

- Attitudes outside of our conscious awareness,
 - People may not always recognise that they hold them
 - Not always easy to access through introspection
- They are quickly and involuntarily
- Implicit attitudes can influence a range of behaviours, particularly those that occur quickly or spontaneously (Kurdi et al., 2019)
- Implicit attitudes do not always match explicit attitudes
- The effects can sometimes be modest (Oswald et al., 2013)

The attitude-behaviour gap (LaPiere, 1934)

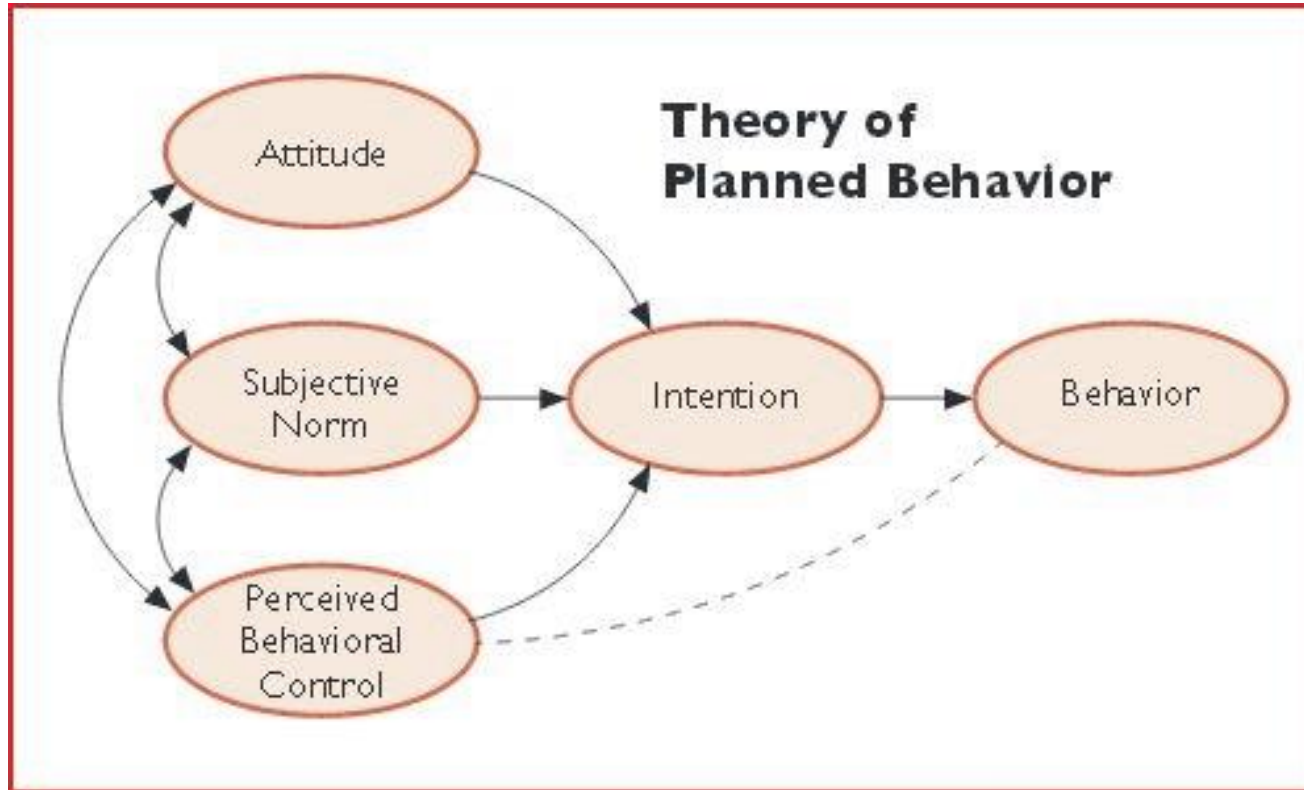
- At a time when anti-Chinese prejudice was widespread in the United States, LaPiere travelled across the country with a Chinese couple.
- During their trip, they visited over 250 hotels, restaurants, and other establishments.
- Despite the prejudice that existed at the time, the couple were refused service only once.
- However, when LaPiere later contacted the same establishments and asked whether they would serve Chinese customers, the majority stated that they would not.
- This revealed a striking discrepancy between what people said and what they actually did.

Why Doesn't Behaviour Always Match Attitudes?

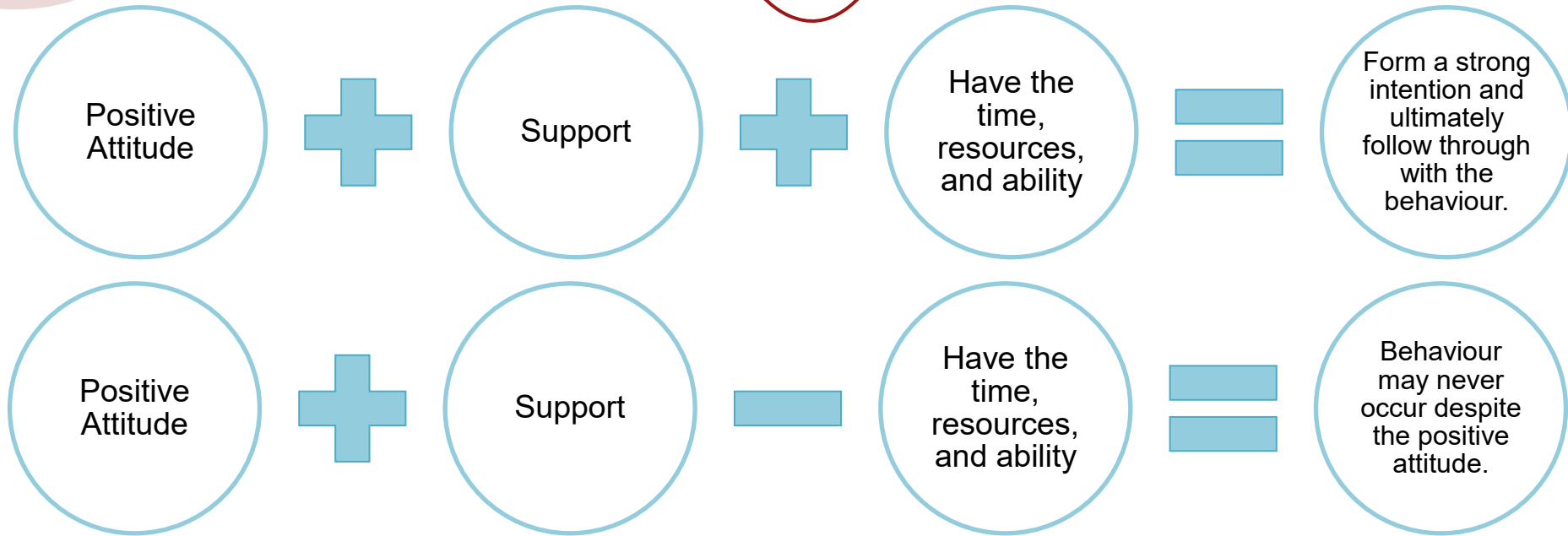
- Behaviour is influenced by many factors beyond attitudes alone.
- Attitudes are only one part of a much larger system influencing behaviour
- For example:
 - Social norms
 - Peer pressure
 - Situational constraints
 - Habits
 - Opportunity



Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)



TPB Continued



- A meta-analysis Found TPB explained substantial variance in behavioural intentions and behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001)
- Meta-analysis found strong support for the Theory of Planned Behaviour across a range of health behaviours (McEachan et al., 2011)

When Do Attitudes Predict Behaviour Best?

Strong

- Important to the individual
- Help with confidence
- Closely linked to values/identity

Accessible

- They come to mind quickly
- Easily activated

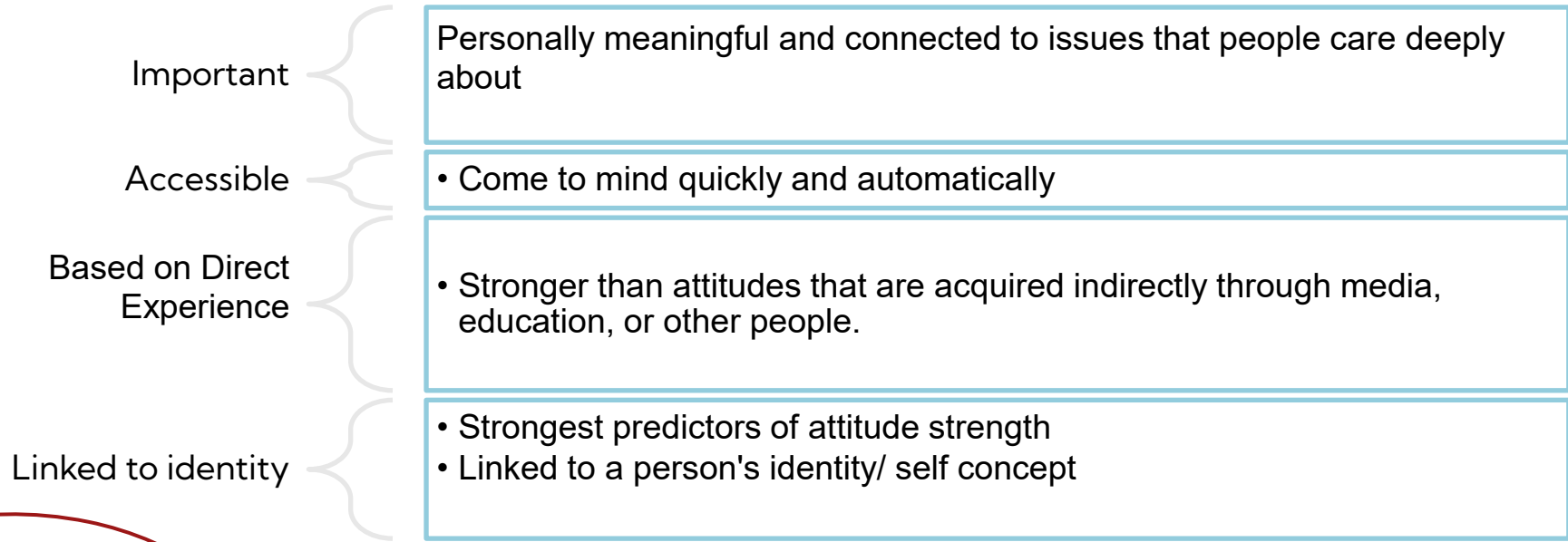
Specific

- Research needs to specifically explore attitudes rather than looking broadly

Based on direct experience

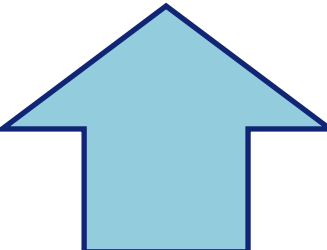
- They will be stronger and more predictable
- Often more accessible, more confidently held, and more resistant to change than attitudes acquired second-hand

What makes an attitude strong?



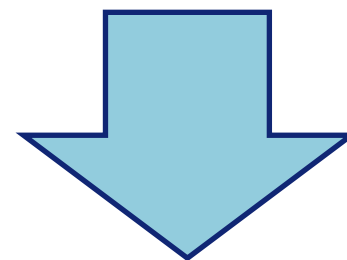
Strong attitudes are consistently better predictors of real-world behaviour, including voting, political participation, and consumer decision-making (Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Howe & Krosnick, 2017)

Strong vs Weak Attitudes



"This issue is extremely important to me."

More likely to act on their views, discuss the issue with others, resist persuasion, remain committed to that position over time

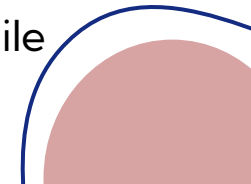


"I don't really mind either way."

Unlikely to influence behaviour, motivate action, or be strongly defended if somebody challenges it.

It helps explain why some people change their minds relatively easily, whereas others hold onto their beliefs even when presented with contradictory evidence.

And it helps explain why some attitudes are powerful predictors of behaviour, while others have very little influence at all.



Task: Attitude Auction

What Would You Do For Your Beliefs?

Explore how attitude strength influences behaviour.

For each of the below issues, you need to indicate much you are willing to take action

Step 1: Choose one attitude you hold strongly (e.g., AI/tech, Animal Welfare, Climate Change)

Step 2: As a group, we will see what you are willing to do for a chosen cause
Raise hand if you would be willing to do it for the chosen issue.

Would you
sign a
petition?

Would you
share
information
on social
media?

Would you
donate £5?

Would you
donate £50?

Would you
spend an
entire
Saturday
supporting
the cause?

Would you
completely
change your
behaviour?

Would you
argue with
friends or
family about
this issue?

Task: Attitude Auction

Discuss in pairs/small groups:

- Which round did you sit down? Why?
- Does this mean you don't care?
- What stopped you?

Group Discussion:

1. Did everybody who supported an issue show the same level of commitment?
2. Why did people stop supporting?
3. Which attitudes seemed strongest?
4. Were any attitudes linked to your identity?

Would you
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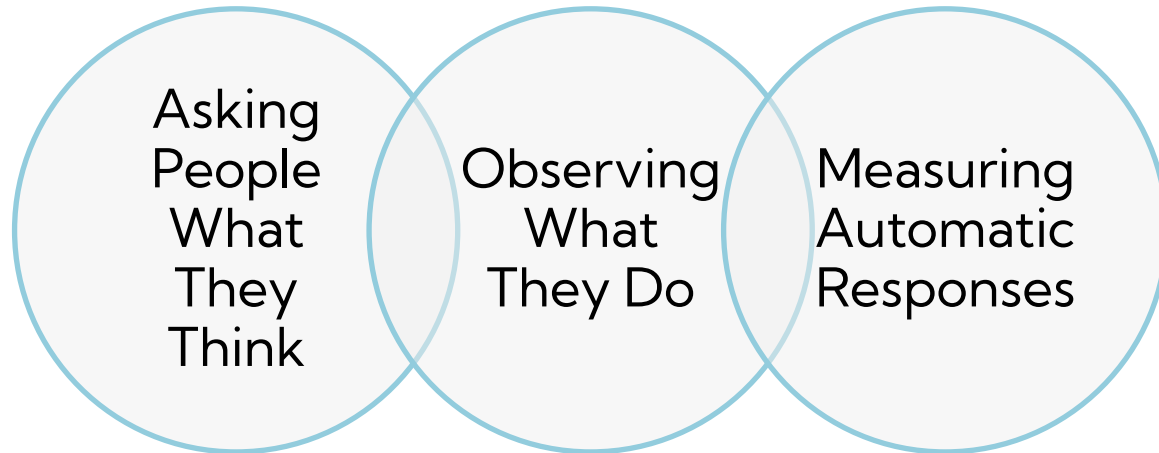
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Measuring Attitudes

- We cannot physically see an attitude in the way we can observe behaviour.
- Attitudes are psychological tendencies expressed through evaluation, meaning they must be inferred rather than directly observed (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).
- Researchers have to find indirect ways of measuring them.



Self-report Measures

Asking people directly about their thoughts, feelings, and evaluations

Examples include:

- Questionnaires
- Surveys
- Rating scales

Extremely popular because they are:

- Relatively quick,
- Easy to administer,
- Allow researchers to collect large amounts of data from many participants.

Useful for exploring in people's conscious beliefs, opinions, and explicit attitudes:

Common examples include:

- Likert scales
- Semantic differential scales
- Feeling thermometers



Self-report Measures

Social Desirability

- People do not always provide completely honest responses.
- Give answers that they believe are socially acceptable or that present them in a favourable light.

Introspection

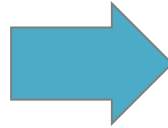
- Relies on people having insight into their own attitudes.
- If people are unaware of certain attitudes, they cannot accurately report them.

Response Biases

- Participants may consistently agree with statements regardless of their content

Behavioural Measures

Attitudes influence behaviour



Behaviour may show a person's underlying attitudes

Examples might include:

- Purchasing behaviour
- Voting behaviour
- Charitable donations
- Social media engagement
- Choices made in experiments

Provide an opportunity to examine how attitudes are expressed in real-world actions. Helping researchers move beyond what people claim to believe and towards what they actually do.

Behavioural Measures

Benefits

Focus on what people actually do, rather than what they say they think

Address some of the limitations of self-report measures

High Ecological Validity

Practical challenges – some behaviours are difficult, expensive, or time-consuming to observe directly

The same behaviour can sometimes reflect very different attitudes

Behaviour is influenced by many factors beyond attitudes

Limitations

Implicit Measures

Attempts to capture automatic evaluations and associations that may operate outside conscious awareness.

Developed to address the challenge of introspection

The most well-known example is the Implicit Association Test, (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998).

Rather than asking people directly what they think, the IAT examines:

- Reaction times
- Automatic associations
- Speed of categorisation

People respond more quickly when two concepts are strongly associated in memory.

Implicit Measures widely used in research on:

- Prejudice/ Stereotyping/ Decision-making/ Intergroup relations

Implicit Measures

Benefits

People are not always aware of their attitudes and may not always report them accurately

Provide a way of studying automatic evaluations that might be missed by traditional self-report methods.

Been used extensively in research

Concerns what these measures actually capture.

Do they measure a person's genuine attitudes?

Do they reflect familiarity with cultural stereotypes?

Or do they measure broader automatic associations that people have been exposed to throughout their lives?

Limitations

Implicit Measures

Implicit attitudes predict some behaviours, but effects are often smaller than originally assumed (Oswald et al., 2013).

Implicit attitudes predict some real-world behaviours, particularly spontaneous and non-verbal behaviours (Greenwald et al., 2009)

that implicit attitudes can predict certain spontaneous, automatic, and non-verbal behaviours, their relationship with real-world behaviour is often weaker and more complex than many people initially assumed.

For example, a person may show evidence of implicit bias on a reaction-time task but still behave in egalitarian ways in everyday interactions.

This highlights the fact that behaviour is influenced by many factors, including conscious goals, social norms, and situational pressures.

TASK: Research Consultant Challenge

UWTSD wants to measure students' attitudes toward climate change. Your research company has been invited to pitch a solution. The university will only fund ONE method. Your job is to convince them that your approach is best.

Self-Report Specialists

- You believe questionnaires are the best method.

Behavioural Researchers

You believe behaviour tells us more than words.

Implicit Researchers

You believe attitudes are not always conscious.

Step 1: Design Your Method

- What would you measure?
- How would you measure it?
- Why is your approach superior?
- What would your method miss?

Step 2: Prepare Your Pitch – You have 60 seconds to convince the university to choose your team

- Why should the university choose your method (strengths)?
- What useful information would it provide?
- Why are the other methods less useful?

Can Attitudes Change?

Explicit

- Conscious and reflective
- Can change relatively quickly
- Influenced by new information, education, and persuasion

Implicit

- Automatic and deeply learned
- Often slower to change
- May return to previous patterns over time

Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler (2000)

People can simultaneously hold implicit and explicit attitudes.

Explicit attitudes may change while implicit attitudes remain relatively stable.

Kurdi et al. (2019)

Implicit attitudes can predict behaviour.

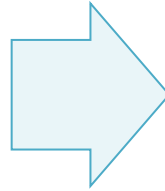
Implicit attitudes often show greater stability than explicit self-reports.

Many interventions were capable of temporarily changing implicit attitudes, but that these changes often weakened over time and did not consistently translate into long-term behavioural change (Forscher et al., 2019)

Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957)

People prefer consistency between their attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour.
When these things don't align, we experience an uncomfortable psychological state

Beliefs conflict with behaviour
Beliefs conflict with other beliefs



Psychological discomfort
Motivation to reduce inconsistency

Dissonance is often strongest when the inconsistency threatens our self-concept
(Aronson, 1969)

People are motivated to reduce dissonance because they want to see themselves as competent, coherent, and able to act effectively in the world (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019)

Boring task (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959)

- Participants were asked to complete a deliberately dull and repetitive task
- Most participants reported that the activity was boring and uninteresting.
- After completing the task, participants were asked to tell the next participant that the task had actually been enjoyable.
- Some participants were paid \$1 for doing this, while others were paid \$20.
- Participants who received only \$1 later reported enjoying the task significantly more than those who received \$20.



Persuasion

Attempts to influence attitudes through communication

Process of changing what people think, feel, or believe through messages, arguments, or social influence.

One of the most influential early programmes of research came Yale University (Hovland et al., 1953)

Their work focused on three key questions:

1. Who is delivering the message? (the source)
2. What is being said? (the message)
3. Who is receiving the message? (the audience)

Source

- People are generally more persuaded by sources that are perceived as credible, trustworthy, or expert.

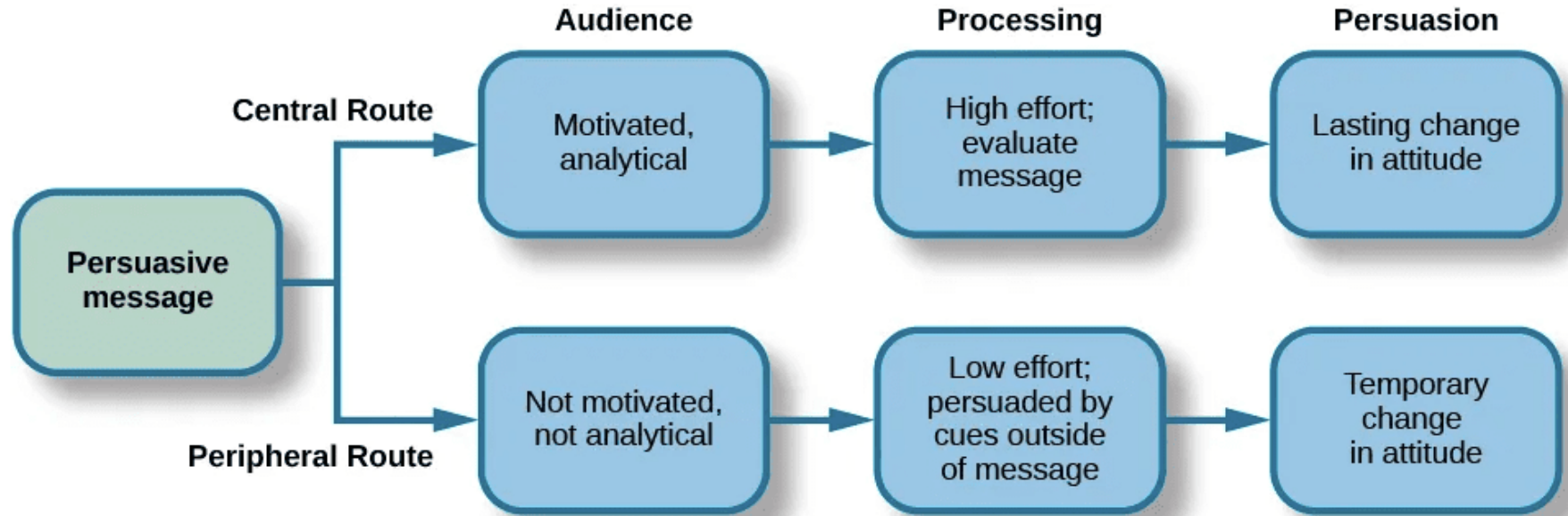
Message

- Factors such as the strength of the arguments, whether the message appeals to emotion or logic, and how the information is presented can all influence persuasion

Audience

- People's existing attitudes, knowledge, motivation, personality, and level of involvement with an issue can affect how receptive they are to persuasive messages.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)



Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Central

- This occurs when people are motivated and able to think carefully about a message.
- Rather than accepting information at face value, they actively evaluate the arguments, consider the evidence, and think critically about whether the message is convincing.
- Attitude changes that occur through the central route tend to be stronger, more stable over time, and more resistant to future persuasion.

Peripheral

- This occurs when people are either unwilling or unable to engage in careful thinking.
- Instead of focusing on the quality of the arguments, they rely on simple cues or shortcuts.
- Attitude changes that result from the peripheral route tend to be quicker and require less mental effort, but they are often less stable and more susceptible to future change

Motivation

More likely to process a message through the central route when the topic feels personally relevant or important to them.

Because the outcome directly affects you, you're much more likely to pay attention to the information and evaluate the arguments carefully.

if the issue feels unimportant or unrelated to your life, you're less likely to put effort into analysing the message.

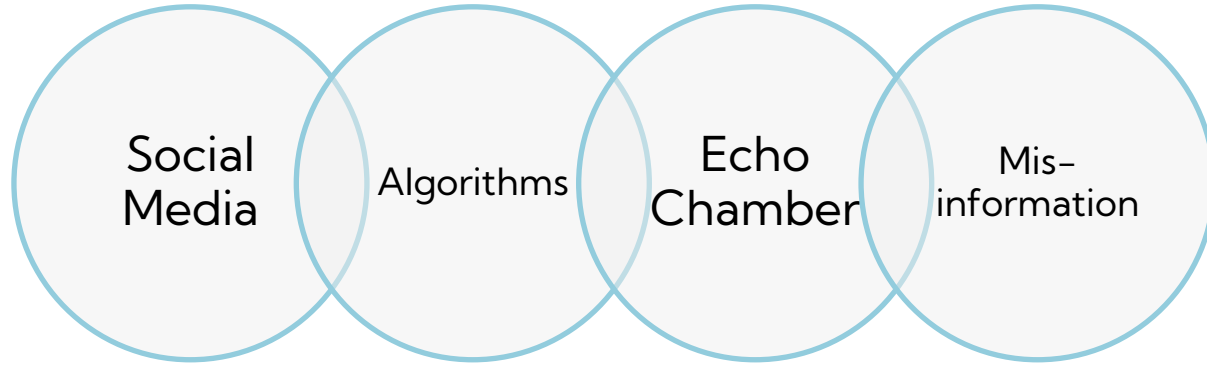
Even if someone is highly motivated, they still need the ability to process the message.

Having enough knowledge about the topic, understanding the information being presented, having sufficient time and attention, not being distracted

if a message is highly technical or full of complex jargon, people may struggle to process it through the central route, even if they want to.

Ability

Persuasion in the Digital Age



Research found that emotionally charged content is more likely to be shared than neutral information. Persuasive messages often spread not because they are the most accurate, but because they provoke a strong emotional response (Brady et al., 2020)

People are often more likely to accept information that aligns with their existing group identities and values. As a result, attitudes can become closely tied to a person's sense of self and group membership (Van Bavel et al., 2021)

Once beliefs are established, corrective information does not always eliminate them, even when the original information has been shown to be false (Lewandowsky et al., 2020)

Reducing Prejudice Through Attitude Change

Attitudes can be modified through:

- Education and knowledge
- Positive intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006))
- Perspective-taking and empathy
- Persuasive interventions (Briñol et al., 2020)

Explicit attitudes

- Often easier to change

Implicit attitudes

- More resistant to change
- May require repeated, long-term interventions (Forscher et al., 2019)

Why Attitudes Resist Change

Identity and self-concept

- When an attitude becomes part of how we see ourselves, changing it can feel like changing part of who we are.

Group Membership

- If an attitude is shared by an important group, changing that attitude may feel like distancing ourselves from the group.

Confirmation Bias

- We tend to seek out, notice, and remember information that supports our existing beliefs while discounting information that challenges them.
- People presented with both supporting and opposing evidence often became even more convinced that their original position was correct (Lord et al., 1979)

motivated reasoning.

- People do not always evaluate evidence objectively; instead, we often interpret information in ways that support our existing beliefs and attitudes (Kunda, 1990).

Identity-protective cognition

- People are often motivated to defend beliefs that are connected to important social identities and group memberships (Kahan, 2017)

TASK: Persuasion Detectives

Can You Spot How Attitudes Are Being Changed?

Social psychologists are often interested in why some messages successfully change attitudes while others fail.

Today, your team will analyse a persuasive message and identify the psychological techniques being used.

Step 1: Examine the Message (3 Minutes) Look carefully at your advert/campaign. Consider: Images

- Wording
- Emotions
- Source
- Overall message

Group A: Social Media Ad



Group B: Health Campaign



Group C: Charity Campaign



Group D: Political Advert/Poster



TASK: Persuasion Detectives Questions

1. **Source: Who is delivering the message?**

- Is the source credible?
- Do they appear trustworthy?
- Are they an expert?
- Are they likeable?
- Persuasion Rating: Weak / Moderate / Strong.

2. **Message: How is the argument presented?**

- Is it emotional?
- Is it logical?
- Does it use fear?
- Does it use statistics?
- Does it tell a story?

3. **Audience: Who is the message aimed at?**

- Young people? Students?
- Parents?
- Voters?
- Consumers?

4. **ELM Analysis:**

- Central Route (Would people carefully think about this message?)
- Peripheral Route (Would people rely on cues such as: Popularity / Attractiveness / Emotion / Expertise).

5. **Overall Effectiveness: How likely is this message to change attitudes?**

- Score: 1–10
- Explain why.

Critical evaluation

Strengths

- Extensive empirical support
- Real-world applications
- Predictive value

Limitations

- Attitude-behaviour gap
- Self-report bias
- Cultural differences
- Not all attitudes are conscious

Open Science/ Replication

- Greater methodological transparency and replication efforts have strengthened confidence in many attitude findings.

Summary

Attitudes
shape
judgement
and
behaviour

ABC model:
Affect,
Behaviour,
Cognition

Implicit vs
Explicit
Attitudes

Attitudes do
not always
predict
behaviour

Theories of
Attitude
Change

Persuasion
can change
attitudes

Attitudes are
shaped by
social and
cultural
contexts