

Introduction

Lots of questionnaire based research records an “attitude” as a point on a Likert scale (e.g. between strongly disagree to strongly agree). SP has researched attitudes in a wide range of areas and over a long period of time - e.g. ‘foreign-born’ visitors, ‘coloured immigrants’, childcare, donating blood, use of drugs.

Research is often about an attitude towards something (the object) and what people (in general) with a particular attitude will do - i.e. a link to a person’s future behaviour (e.g. if they will buy something, vote a particular way and so on.)

Chapter presents three papers that look at how far it is possible to use an “attitude” to predict future behaviour.

Different perspectives have different understandings and definitions of what attitudes are. Different methods are used to produce these understandings.

No single contemporary position exists; attitude research has developed and changed over time.

Mainstream definitions:

Allport (1935) - ‘a learned predisposition to respond to an object or class of objects in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way.’

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) - ‘attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour.’

(i) Both definitions argue attitudes are linked to an expression of something or a response.

A questionnaire could therefore be seen as a good mechanism for investigating attitudes based on these definitions.

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(ii) Both definitions imply attitudes are evaluative - e.g. favour to disfavour; positive to negative. Allows quantitative analysis of data to occur.

(iii) Both definitions link an attitude to an object/entity and to what someone then does.

Allport’s use of “respond” => behaviourist, direct cause and effect model.

Eagly and Chaiken’s words are less restrictive => attitudes can be associated to goals or targets that are realised in the future.

Can’t predict absolutely what someone will actually do due to interference of other people’s approval/disapproval.

Marks a difference between behaviour (**Allport**), implied by the use of the word “predisposition” and behavioural intention (**Eagly and Chaiken**), implied by the word “tendency”.

These terms also imply attitudes are a quality/aspect of a stable person - attitudes are enduring and are held before coming across the object/entity concerned that the attitude is held towards.

However, much disagreement as to the nature of an attitude:

Hewstone et al - Attitude = Cognition, affect, conation (thoughts, feelings, behaviour).

Allport - attitude is learned; **Eagly and Chaiken** - attitude is a psychological tendency.

So is it biological, or rooted in the unconscious? Is it part of identity? How is an individual’s attitude connected to those shared by their society - e.g. towards racially different groups?

Why should an attitude endure; what causes attitudes to change?

Have been addressed by researchers experimentally; many answers are speculative however.

Attitudes cannot be directly observed, so they are described in terms of things that can be - a response or an expression for example.

Most mainstream researchers are therefore not concerned with what or where an attitude is; but how it functions in explanatory terms.

Hewstone et al - attitudes are ‘hypothetical, unobservable constructs.

Bem - attitudes cause behaviour, but behaviour can affect attitudes too. E.g. the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

LaPiere (1934) - Attitudes vs Actions

Attitudes are predictors / determine behaviour.

Notes the limitations of questionnaires - his results from questionnaires about whether or not a hypothetical Chinese person will be welcomed (yes/no/undecided forced choice options) are starkly different (and much more negative) than what happens in his experience of real situations at the same places the questionnaire was sent to.

Argues his findings show questionnaires are poor predictors of people’s behaviour towards foreign nationals when they are encountered in person; but are good for predicting the way people might vote.

Reflects attitude in US to racial prejudice - e.g. he expected people who answered the questionnaire to not hide any racism; it was common for businesses to reject customers on grounds of race.

His definition of attitudes focuses on them as individual in nature (partially integrated sets of habits, triggered by specific circumstances, leading to a particular kind of behaviour) - despite calling on researchers to study them in social situations rather than relying on questionnaires.

Little explanation given as to why Americans might express prejudice towards the Chinese in the 1930s.

Ajzen (1988) - From intentions to actions

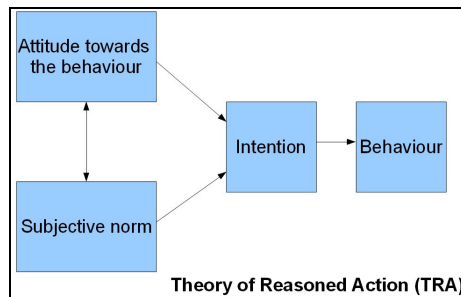
Uses a summary of a study by **Manstead et al (1983)** - Likert scale questionnaire to investigate the (strength of) beliefs which may / may not cause mothers to breastfeed.

Questions asked about behavioural beliefs e.g. how they believed a particular method of feeding might help prevent infection or lead to a better body shape and outcome evaluations - i.e. how much a mother valued a particular effect.

Found a significant difference between the breastfeeding/bottlefeeding groups of mothers on all 6 behavioural beliefs about breastfeeding and also in their outcome evaluations.

Similar analysis carried out on other's opinions about mother's decisions on feeding methods.

Predictive power and usefulness of **Fishbein and Ajzen's TRA model** statistically confirmed by study.



Model implies "intention to act" is based on both an individual attitude and a subjective norm - which is the opinion of a specific other(s) (referents), rather than what the individual believes is general public opinion.

E.g. in **Manstead et al** the referent is the participant's mother/medical advisor and they are asked how important their views are to them. In this study, mothers who breastfed believed referents rated as important preferred this method.

The model therefore argues that individuals hold attitudes in interaction with others who have their own attitudes.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) - Attitudes in discourse

This research puts the wider social context at the centre. Critiques mainstream attitude theory; provides a qualitative discourse analysis study.

Challenges mainstream views to research which suggests participant responses are evidence of attitudes.

Argues an attitude is not an assessable 'mental state' towards 'an object of thought'. Like LaPiere, question the existence of a straightforward link between attitude and behaviour.

1. The critique of **Marsh (1976)**

(i) 'Coloured immigrants' as an object of thought has problems - there are no objective criteria for category membership; therefore, people's object of thought will not be the same. e.g. How would you split 'coloured immigrants' from 'coloured residents'?

(ii) No justification for **Marsh's** transformations of the 'completely unsympathetic -> sympathetic' dimension to 'very hostile', 'hostile', 'unsympathetic' etc. Hostility is active; lacking sympathy is not an active disposition - it is the lack of active sympathy.

These transformations therefore miss subtle distinctions in the participant's discourse.

(iii) Translation - of responses into underlying attitude is problematic. It assumes that it is not only the scale that is being filled in, but that it identifies attitudes - i.e. where on a specific dimension a person locates an object of thought such as 'coloured immigrant' and that this is an enduring position.

The discourse analytic perspective shows that given a different purpose or context, a very different 'attitude' may be communicated. May be systematic variations in what is said => there is no homogenous, internal attitude.

(i), (ii) - A methodological challenge
(iii) - Theoretical challenge

2. Discourse analysis - Polynesian immigrants in NZ.

(i) Context - looking at statements that seem straightforward - e.g. 'I'm not anti them at all you know ...' (object of thought = Polynesian immigrant, dimension of judgement = pro to anti) => sympathetic on **Marsh's** scale is not at all when seen in full context - as the 'not anti them' statement is made contingent on them willing to become like NZers. - if..then..else

(ii) Variability - contradictions appear in discourse - e.g. Bring them to NZ, train them in a skill, encourage them to go back vs Encourage more Polynesians to be skilled people, they would want to stay here, which would be better.

(iii) Constitution - if object of thought is not the same between people then suggesting the attitude is separate from the object of thought (e.g. TRA) makes no sense - as you cannot compare the two resulting 'attitudes'.

Conclusion

Talk is not an expression of an internal mental state - it's what people do in/through talk which is important.

Talk is the social context - interaction between speakers is where meanings (like attitudes) are constructed. It is not new, but comes from ongoing debates - individual speakers take up pre-existing arguments and ideas.

Foucault view of discourse is not just speaking or interaction - but is about the connected meanings that a society establishes and so are used to make sense of what is said/done in it - e.g. immigration only makes sense in the context of sovereign states; accepted ideas of 'us' and 'them'; national identity and so on.

Some responses to the challenges raised by DA

(i) Attitude researchers do not always use Likert scales - but analysis is often statistical even so.

(ii) Theoretical debate between the mainstream view of the person as being integrated, rational & stable (in which case conventional attitude research makes sense) or the DA view that people are composites of different selves that come into being by the particular social context/circumstances they are in at that point in time.

(iii) Majority of attitude research is not DA; the TRA/TPB models hold sway. Mainstream belief is actually that an attitude is a hypothetical, unobservable construct (not something inside a person); and that it is not enduring, but subject to change as variables which affect it change.