

Social Judgement Theory

- I. Three latitudes: Acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment.
 - A. Social judgment theory says that at the instant of perception, people compare messages to their present point of view.
 - B. Individuals' opinions are not adequately represented as points along a continuum because degrees of tolerance around their positions must also be considered.
 - C. Muzafer Sherif established three zones of attitudes.
 - 1. The latitude of acceptance.
 - 2. The latitude of rejection.
 - 3. The latitude of noncommitment.
 - D. A description of a person's attitude structure must include the location and width of each interrelated latitude.

- II. Ego-involvement: How much do you care?
 - A. Ego-involvement refers to the importance of an issue to an individual.
 - B. The favored position anchors all other thoughts about the topic.
 - C. High ego-involvement can be defined as membership in a group with a known stand.
 - D. Three features are typical of high ego-involvement.
 - 1. The latitude of noncommitment is nearly nonexistent.
 - 2. The latitude of rejection is wide.
 - 3. People who hold extreme views care deeply.
 - E. Moving from the cognitive structure of a person's attitude, attention shifts to the judgment part of the theory.

- III. Judging the message: Contrast and assimilation errors.
 - A. Social judgment-involvement describes the linkage between ego-involvement and perception.
 - B. Contrast occurs when one perceives a message within the latitude of rejection as being more discrepant than it actually is from the anchor point. This perceptual distortion leads to polarization of ideas.
 - C. Assimilation, the opposite of contrast, occurs when one perceives a message within the latitude of acceptance as being less discrepant than it actually is from the anchor point.
 - D. Although Sherif is unclear as to how people judge messages that fall within the latitude of noncommitment, most interpreters favor a neutral reading.

- IV. Discrepancy and attitude change.
 - A. If individuals judge a new message to fall within their latitude of acceptance, they adjust their attitude to accommodate it.
 - 1. The persuasive effect will be positive but partial.
 - 2. The greater the discrepancy, the more individuals adjust their attitudes.
 - 3. The most persuasive message is the one that is most discrepant from the listener's position, yet still falls within his or her latitude of acceptance or latitude of noncommitment.
 - B. If individuals judge a new message to be within their latitude of rejection, they may adjust their attitude away from it.
 - 1. For individuals with high ego-involvement and broad latitudes of rejection, most messages that are aimed to persuade them and that fall within their latitudes of rejection have an effect opposite of what the communicator intended.
 - 2. This boomerang effect suggests that individuals are often driven, rather than drawn, to the positions they occupy.

- C. Sherif's approach is quite automatic.
 - 1. He reduced interpersonal influence to the issue of the distance between the message and the hearer's position.
 - 2. Volition exists only in the choice of messages available to the persuader.

- V. Practical advice for the persuader.
 - A. For maximum influence, select a message right on the edge of the audience's latitude of acceptance or noncommitment.
 - B. Ambiguous messages can sometimes serve better than clarity.
 - C. Persuasion is a gradual process consisting of small movements.
 - D. The most dramatic, widespread, and enduring attitude changes involve changes in reference groups with differing values.

- VI. Attitudes on sleep, booze, and money: Evidence supporting SJT.
 - A. Research on the predictions of social judgment theory requires highly ego-involved issues.
 - B. A highly credible speaker can shrink the listener's latitude of acceptance.
 - C. Application of the theory raises ethical problems.

- VII. Critique: A theory well within the latitude of acceptance.
 - A. The theory has practical utility for persuaders.
 - B. The theory offers specific predictions and explanations about what happens in the mind when a message falls within someone's latitude of acceptance or rejection.
 - C. Like all cognitive explanations, social judgment theory assumes a mental structure and process that are beyond sensory observation.
 - D. While it has not been widely tested empirically, research does support it, validating its claims while proving the theory falsifiable.
 - E. Despite these reservations, social judgment theory is an elegant, intuitively appealing approach to persuasion.