

CMCN 502: COMMUNICATION THEORY

Cognitive Dissonance

ABSTRACT BY

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Every day we experience cognitive dissonance, in making decisions, and taking certain actions. This paper argues that cognitive dissonance is the inconsistency people face while taking actions against their beliefs. The inconsistency is what is referred to as dissonance while consistency is referred to as consonance (Festinger, 1962).

When making a choice, dissonance tends to occur; people can either persuade themselves and try to rationalize their decisions, making it attractive to them, thereby making themselves see the good in their decision (Festinger, 1962). There are two ways in which a person can minimize dissonance - by convincing oneself that the features of the rejected product or decision are not so attractive after all, and that the unattractive features of the product or decision are attractive (Festinger, 1962). The individual can also exaggerate the decision's attractiveness and justify the reason for making that decision to suit its dissonance (Festinger, 1962).

To further bolster this point, Jon Jecker's experiment on the high school girls who were told to rate 12 hit records, showed that people will always look for reasons to rationalize or justify the basis for making a particular decision to reduce the amount of cognitive dissonance they face (Festinger, 1962). After making a decision, dissonance reduction occurs; this helps increase the attractiveness of the decisions a person has made between two items (Festinger, 1962). Furthermore, the degree to which dissonance affects a person is measured by two things: (1) The higher the difference between their public statement and their belief is, the higher the dissonance, (2) The higher the justification for negating their views in public, the lower the level of dissonance (Festinger, 1962).

Festinger and James M. Carlsmith (Festinger, 1962) at Stanford University carried out an experiment on students to measure performance. The students were asked to perform a boring task, after this task the participants were told to tell others (confederate) that this task was interesting. In this experiment, there were two groups of people, those who were given \$1 and the others who were given \$20. This experiment showed that those with less reward showed higher dissonance and tried to change their belief that the task was interesting while those who were given a higher amount showed less dissonance (Festinger, 1962). People reduce the dissonance they feel by renouncing a statement made in the past, changing their actions or their belief. Therefore, the more reasons a person has to change a public statement, the higher the chance of them revoking it and vice versa (Festinger, 1962).

Also, dissonance can be produced by resisting temptation, i.e., not wanting to do that thing we want to do and therefore justifying that after all, they may not be what we want; this theory refers to it as the “Sour grapes attitude” (Festinger, 1962).

For research, quantitative and qualitative methods can be used while adopting this theory. However, the founding researchers of this theory conducted experiments to make conclusions on this theory.

Bibliography

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Twenty Years of Cognitive Dissonance: Case Study of the Evolution of a Theory

ABSTRACT BY

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As the world develops, there is a need for theories to evolve with the present circumstance of current happenings. These and many more have led to the revision of the cognitive dissonance theory. However, this revision does not change this theory's relevance; but makes it more applicable in the contemporary world. Festinger, in 1957, postulated the Cognitive dissonance theory, and since then, there have been several developments of this theory. Festinger argues that cognitive dissonance exists where there is an inconsistency in individual thinking (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). Brehm and Cohen (1962) further added that this inconsistency motivates the individual to take specific actions when there is a high justification for that action (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). Different researchers have built on this theory which has led to revising the concept to be seen as personal responsibility. It is the individual's responsibility to reduce the dissonance elements. However, if there is no sign of personal responsibility in a situation, it cannot be referred to as dissonant (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). Festinger perceived cognitive dissonance in an individual from the perspective of ego-defensive behavior; recent researchers have developed this to mean that people experience dissonance not only from their experience but from others' counter attitudinal behavior (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). Therefore, a person's counter attitude can spark dissonance in other people (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978).

Also, Festinger (1957) agreed with Ewing's 1942 experiment, which found that a piece of information can influence people who believed they were immune to such influence from consuming that information (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). However, Greenwald & Ronis (1978) believes that the audience changing their opinions should not enhance dissonance because they were not responsible for their exposure to the "unexpected disagreeing information" (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). Festinger (1957) also believed that when there is a dissonance, a person tries to

avoid it and rationalize it to feel better about the situation; however, the modern version of cognitive dissonance theory believes that there is no empirical evidence showing selective avoidance of a dissonance thought (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978).

Researchers have also observed that self-esteem is essential in how human beings process information. Due to this, people consider their self-esteem before taking steps towards specific actions (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978). Greenwald & Ronis (1978) believes that this was not taken into full consideration when this theory was postulated. In the words of Greenwald & Ronis, (1978), “We have observed that in the course of these 20 years of empirical and theoretical advance. Dissonance theory has evolved in a direction; of convergence with ideas from the tradition of self-theory.” (Greenwald & Ronis, 1978).

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CMCN 502: COMMUNICATION THEORY

**Feeling displeasure from online social media postings: A study using cognitive dissonance
theory**

ABSTRACT BY

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Jeong, Zo, Lee, & Ceran (2019) used the lens of cognitive dissonance theory to understand the influence of heterogeneous opinions on Social media (Facebook) and how it affects users. They also studied how users manage the negative feelings from social media. In the process of using social media, users face opinions that are contradictory to theirs, and as this happens, people tend to be mentally mature and more tolerant of other people's opinions (Jeong, Zo, Lee, & Ceran, 2019).

Jeong, Zo, Lee, & Ceran (2019) discussed that people develop a strategic behavior to deal with the mental stress that is caused by heterogeneity on social media. People avoid hearing other contradictory opinions and thoughts to reduce the dissonance they feel, this is called selective exposure (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). Also, some people reduce their level of discomfort by responding to counter attitudinal information, this can be referred to as affective behavior (Jeong *et al.*, 2019).

The hypothesis for this study examined the relationship between the consumption of information on social media and how people perceive other contradictory opinions (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). The relationship between perceived heterogeneity and how it affects the psychological state of social media users (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). The relationship between selective exposure and the mental health of individuals who use social media and the relationship between affective behavior and the mental state of those who use social media (Jeong *et al.*, 2019).

To ensure validity in this study, the authors used the social media platform - Facebook. To collect data from respondents they used questionnaires that consisted of a 7-point Likert scale and they

adopted the Projective technique (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). To organize the results from the questionnaire, they used Google Document. They were 425 valid responses and Covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) estimator to test these hypotheses (Jeong *et al.*, 2019).

The results showed that there was a significant relationship between social information consumption and perceived heterogeneity (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). The authors also found that perceived heterogeneity is also related to an uncomfortable psychological state (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). Also, there is a relationship between the uncomfortable psychological state due to the consumption of different opinions (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). Users also tend to adopt both affective behavior and selective exposure to avoid psychological costs (Jeong *et al.*, 2019).

This study focuses on just one platform which is Facebook therefore, it cannot be generalized within the context of other social media platforms (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). Also, other studies can investigate the relationship between specific issues and how they affect the users i.e. political issues (Jeong *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, other researchers can use the result from this study to examine user engagement, the effects of fake news, and opinions on social media (Jeong *et al.*, 2019).

Bibliography

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