Consistency– A Premise of Persuasion Process

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Abstract – The work that we propose is an analysis of how the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance is used in order of persuasion. To this end we intend to argue about how the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance involves interruption of natural cognitive processes, cognitive dissonance becomes a mechanism quite strong for making decision or finding solutions to achieve cognitive comfort. For persuasion mechanism involves creating a discomfort by one who wants to persuade, discomfort that causes the availability of the receiver to accept of persuasion, in order to restore consistency. Among persuasive methods used by agents of persuasion to cause discomfort include: loss of prestige group, economic loss, loss of personal prestige, the uncertainty of predictions, feeling of guilt.

Keywords - Consistency of perceptions, cognitive dissonance, need for balance, persuasion.

I. INTRODUCTION

HUMAN beings feel at ease while consistently dealing with perceptions or anticipations concerning different events. When consistence is not obvious, people have a tendency to change themselves, changing rendering of events, as they need a perception of a balanced image of the world. This aspect is exploited by those intending to persuade. Knowing when and where it is likely that this phenomenon happen, persuasive agents offer those that have to be persuaded means to go back to consistency, implicitly, comfort. That is why, it is necessary to know the situations leading to a comfort mood that can become target to persuasion to reinforce attitudes.

Consistency of perceptions or expectations concerning events implies the need compatibility with an existing frame of reference. Defining it represents a key factor in the anticipation of attitudinal modifications. That is why, the one trying to persuade must identify the common reference frame of the receiver to have an incompatibility or an inconsistency that could trigger feelings of psychological unease, followed by changes across the attitudinal scale.

If we refer to the way frames of reference work, we can say that these offer stimuli that can induce mental tension or logical inconsistency, whether a reinforcement of convictions, attitudes or already existent behaviors. Everything concerning mental tension or logical inconsistency is related to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, and what is related to the reinforcement of convictions, attitudes or already existent behaviors designate the phenomenon of cognitive consonance.

The human’s desire of psychological consonance is deeply related to attitudes and needs. People look for a world where predictions could be verified, fellows could approve the same things, and the values and attitudes should not go into any conflict with any behavior. When there is an imbalance, people look for different ways to harmony once again; when, there is balance, they feel safe and are easily motivated to continue activities in the same way. Persuasive agents try to create dissonance, if they wish for the modification of character or consonance, if they intent to keep it. Although every individual is unique, moods and needs, attitudes and desire of a psychological balance are quite similar so that they could be used as first premises to persuade large categories of people.

II. INCONSISTENCY AND DISCOMFORT – MECHANISMS USED TO ACHIEVE PERSUAsion

In 1957 the psychologist Leon Festinger [1], referring to the issue of quantitative and qualitative differences between humans and ideas, draws the theory of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance involves the lack of consensus between opinions, attitudes, values and knowledge of a person [2]. It represents a state of tension appearing when an individual has two opinions at the same time that do not support each other, on the contrary, they exclude each other. Thus, there is a psychological tension produced through the disagreement between two elements of cognition, tension that is hard to bear and that will engender a cognitive dynamics exclusively oriented to reduce dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance creates the tendency and the need of the subject to reduce tense mood and to have a necessary cognitive balance, whether to get some new congruent information previous to initial knowledge [3], whether to change the attitude of the individual toward the object, situation or event that caused the tense state. The diminishing of tension involves more than a simple modification, with a quantitative side: it is about the possibility to change assessments or judgments that can be achieved to a small extent, moderate or big or cannot be achieved at all. A diminishing of dissonance can be done in different ways: by modifying the dissonant element, by diminishing the importance of dissonant element or by adding new elements that could increase cognitive consonance [4].

One of the features of this theory refers to the fact that tension appearing is caused by a dissonance within the individual psychological system. Our attitudes and opinions are constituted of feelings referring to different ideas and the way to relate with anterior experiences or with our
idiosyncrasies, and the dissonance appears as a feeling resulting from the experience of two elements of cognition concerning the world that do not match. Cognitive dissonance appears when the individual notices inconsistency between two or more attitudes or between attitudes and behavior [5].

In a paperwork published in 2002, Septimiu Chelcea [6], brought into attention, within this theory, a series of postulates, like: tension produced by cognitive dissonance creates a psychological discomfort; in order to reduce psychological tension, individuals look for information that could strengthen consonant attitudes and eliminate the dissonant one; the importance and the proportion of cognitions that are in contradictions with the attitude of man generating modifications of dissonance; after the establishment of consonance, people try to reject any information that can produce dissonance.

There are events and contexts that make people to have a feeling of imbalance, most of them being similar and representing the preferred targets of persuasive agents. Among the ways used by persuasive agents to cause discomfort, we can count: the loss of group prestige, economical loss, the loss of private prestige, the insecurity of predictions, a feeling of guilt.

The loss of the group prestige applies to smaller groups, but also bigger ones, from families to professional categories and the inhabitants of a region. It causes dissonance, sometimes even for an entire nation. In such situations, we can’t rack the diminishing of dissonance through humor, excuses or explanations.

The economic loss represents a fear that is widely exploited by persuasive agents, when they realized that the economic value (measured in savings, properties, wages, etc.) is in danger to be diminished and people have a feeling of psychological dissonance or insecurity. Persuasive agents can speculate the fear to lose their job, suggesting the individuals in question to vote for the politicians that promise a decrease of inflation, a budget deficit and also useless expenses. In addition, they can sell investment plans to protect financial security, convincing receivers to join organizations and causes to protect welfare.

The loss of private prestige is related to loss of the others’ respect. This fear to loss of private prestige refers to aging, health or aspect impairment, the dissatisfactions of parents whose children do not have results equalizing their abilities. All these make people vulnerable facing stimuli related to consistence and stability.

The insecurity of predictions refers to situations where we cannot anticipate people’s behavior or the course of events. We face such situations every time we change the environment: school, job, the partner. People permanently face dissonance states, as they cannot anticipate the course of the events in their life and cannot rely upon the accuracy of predictions [7]. In this respect, persuasive agents use the incapacity to anticipate, referring to „products” promising the protection of negative circumstances (disease, loss of job, financial difficulties).

The feeling of guilt comes out of potentially disapproving reasoning of some important individuals, like parents, some of fellows, public opinion. Such self-imposed or inner dissonant feelings can be explained in a different way. Freudian psycho analysts would tell that we are afraid of some symbolic parents’ reprehension, incorporated in our consciousness or superego. Fears bring feelings of shame or hatred towards our own self, and the guilt is a symptom of this shame. The guilt is the very feeling of dissonance.

III. The Need for Consonance and The Persuasion
There are stimuli that are used to instill the consonance and it contributes to strengthening of existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in order to activation of receivers [8]. The means by which to reach consonance are: the guarantee security, the demonstrate predictability and the use of rewards.

The guarantee of the security appeals to our need for balance. As the need for security is one of our primary needs, persuasive agents use different persuasive tactics always promising security: politicians promise to stop the export of jobs by industry employers and provide sustainability of the social security and health insurance, Citizens Council members vow to fight on Public Services in the interest of the community, a church parisioner is guaranteed salvation of his soul.

Demonstration of predictability is a consonance creative tactics associated with ensuring the safety and requires demonstration of predicted modes in which the world operates. Whenever we meet safeguards outlined, we persuade by a stimulus creator of consonance and predictability on. Persuasive agents exploit this means of reaching consonance creating images that enhance the sense of security: security guards, metal detectors, security retention or recovery of economies.

Using rewards or using of positive reinforcement increases the likelihood that a behavior to be repeated. Persuasive agents often use persuasive positive and laudatory statements to strengthen it. The reward helps build a sense of psychological comfort. Even something that does not involve costs, such as assessment work performed or service done is a reward for recipients and tends to increase the likelihood that similar behavior to occur in the future.

IV. Conclusion
Generally, human beings are concerned with the state of cognitive consistence. This is the state in which there is consistency between the opinions, attitudes or behaviors of a human being, which creates a feeling of comfort and harmony. The loss of this consistence is accompanied by the appearance of cognitive dissonance, which produces a state of disharmony that everyone wants to overcome endeavoring in this regard. One of the mechanisms used by agents of persuasion to persuade is just the creation of cognitive inconsistency and
discomfort. This creates a state of cognitive dissonance that any receiver will want to remove it going to accept, unconsciously, the persuasion. The dissonance produced by disagreement between the two elements of knowledge, is unbearable, generating a tension which will cause a cognitive dynamic exclusively oriented towards reducing dissonance. A person who has in his cognitive universe two elements that are cognitive dissonance will not be able to keep this dissonance, but will try to reduce, even if this means accepting a view that is not their own, which not analyzed or which in other circumstances would not have been agreed, that to accept persuasion.

REFERENCES


Cristina Ariton-Gelan was born in Botosani County, Romania, on June 26, 1978. He graduated in Philosophy (2002) and master of "Theories and practices of interpretation" (2004) from the University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iasi, Romania. From 2005 to 2006 she graduated postgraduate courses: "Europe and the European idea. History, culture and perspectives", "European Economic Integration", "Cultural Geography of Europe", "Europe on it's Way to the Constitution", funded by the Centre for European Studies in Iasi, Romania. In 2003 she achieved one semester of master studies at the University of Konstanz in Germany. Since 2007 she is a Ph. D in Philosophy from the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania, with honors distinction Magna cum laude.

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