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appeared in Ferguson (1988).

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Message Design

Theories of Persuasion

A classical model of persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, differentiates between persuasive efforts that stimulate conscious processing of messages and those that work on the unconscious mind (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The model reflects research by Krugman (1965, 1977) and Langer (1978), who spoke of a continuum of awareness in how people process messages. This awareness can range from "mindless" to "mindful" thought: "Mindful message processing assumes that receivers will be active in making distinctions, assigning meanings, and creating categories, while mindless processing relies on distinctions and meanings previously developed . . . or on triggering emotion" (Pfau & Parrott, 1993, p. 175). That is, triggers in the message content (often visual) transport the audience to an earlier experience and evoke an emotional reaction to that experience.

Persuasion can use either approach. That is, it can stimulate conscious or unconscious engagement of audiences in processing messages. The typical advertisement seeks to bypass conscious thought process. Because few distinctions exist between products, advertisers cannot appeal, ethically, to logical thinking. Therefore, they seek to create emotional responses to products based on packaging and presentation. Information campaigns, however, generally seek to stimulate active consideration of message content.

Strategies that ask audiences to engage in active thinking processes are considered in this chapter. Specifically, the following discussion considers the persuasion literature on the development of message content, the organization of content, and strategies for achieving change.

Message Content

In this section, I discuss the results of persuasion studies under the following headings: supporting materials, one-sided versus two-sided arguments, explicit versus implicit conclusions, visual content, negative content, emotional appeals, fear appeals, creativity and humor, and reference group appeals.

Supporting Materials (tangible)

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Studies have determined that some kinds of supporting materials are more effective than others in effecting attitude change. Examples, illustrations, and case histories have a greater impact than statistical or other data summaries (Taylor & Thompson, 1982). Argument by example is the most difficult type of argument to refute. Koballa (1986) concluded that attitudes formed on the basis of examples and case histories were more stable over time than attitudes stimulated by data summaries. Publicizing the case of a celebrity with a manic depressive disorder or a first lady with alcohol dependency can have a greater impact on the public than the most pretentious statistics. Similarly, specificity in messages is persuasive. To say that computers can be dangerous is much less convincing than to say that a computer virus can cause the failure of monitoring systems in hospitals, the collapse of a subway system, and disaster for those who rely on air traffic control systems.

One-Sided Versus Two-Sided Argumentation

Research has found that two-sided arguments are more effective than one-sided arguments in gaining audience acceptance of a message (Jackson & Allen, 1987). That is, the most persuasive messages present both points of view but refute the opposing arguments. Well-educated audiences and audiences who hold contrary points of view, in particular, respond better to messages that acknowledge both points of view before stating a biased perspective. An audience with a preexisting knowledge of the subject area also has a greater need for two-sided argumentation (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Providing support to this conclusion was an analysis of trends

in smoking among Americans. This study demonstrated that the greatest reduction in cigarette smoking took place in the United States between 1967 and 1970, a period in which broadcast media was mandated to give equal time to cigarette advertisements and public service advertisements. No decline in smoking rates occurred during the period of time in which the government completely banned cigarette commercials from the airwaves.

Anticipating that the audience may come into contact with opposing views at some future date, the persuader can choose to "inoculate" the audience against the contrary views (Hovland et al., 1953; McGuire, 1961). Many situations offer appropriate opportunities for inoculation (Reardon, 1991):

Political candidates can effectively forewarn voters of tactics their opponents might employ to damage their credibility. Corporations planning huge layoffs, rate hikes, relocation, or other major changes can offset some of the shock and anger of employees and customers if the need for such changes is introduced prior to the action. (pp. 54-55)

Some health communication campaigns also employ inoculation strategies. For example, a study in Helsinki, Finland, found that a social inoculation campaign against tobacco advertisements influenced the attitudes of fourth- and sixth-grade children for a period of time after the campaign (Haukkala, Uutela, Vartianen, Burton, & Johnson, 1994). As in other situations in which people disagree on a topic, the most effective inoculation occurs when the communicator combines supportive and refutational arguments (Tannenbaum, Macaulay, & Norris, 1966). That is, the communicator prepares the listener with counterarguments in case the listener has to defend his or her position at some future date. When audiences hold compatible views, however, the communicator can proceed to reinforce those beliefs without the need to address opposing points of view (Hovland et al., 1953).

Explicit Versus Implicit Conclusions

Some studies have examined whether sources should include explicit conclusions and recommendations or let the audience draw their own conclusions. The majority of studies have suggested that messages (especially in fear-arousing situations) should specify how the audience should think or act in response to the message (Cope & Richardson, 1972; Fine, 1957; Leventhal, Watts, & Pagano, 1967). Some studies, however, have found that factors such as intelligence, education, previous acquaintanceship and in-

volvement with the topic, and self-esteem can mediate how audiences respond to specific suggestions (Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983; Hovland & Mandell, 1952).

Visual and Vivid Content

Visuals can act as a powerful persuader. For example, some researchers have determined that visuals can have a positive impact on belief in a particular brand of product and expressed intention to purchase the product (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). In fact, the larger and more concrete the visual, the more positive the response (Rossiter & Percy, 1983). Sometimes "vivid" stimuli have a stronger impact on attitudes than does "pallid" information because they evoke more emotion and they are more concrete in their imagery. Nonetheless, Taylor and Thompson's (1982) review of 50 studies, which had tested the effectiveness of vivid stimuli, suggested inconclusive results.

Positive Versus Negative Content

Commercial advertisers tend to design messages with positive content (Monahan, 1995). Political campaign consultants, however, argue that emotional messages with negative content have a greater ability to persuade than more rational messages with positive content: "People are more apt to vote against than for something; it is easier to appeal to emotion than to logic. Negative ads are a form of gossip, and word-of-mouth publicity multiplies the message" (Nugent, 1987, p. 49). Others argue that negative advertising can be more informative and credible than its positive counterpart: "The superior informativeness of negative political advertising suggests that it can be especially useful to voters in developing their images of candidates, and in differentiating between those candidate images" (Garrazone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990, p. 301). Advocates claim that some negative political advertisements provide accurate, substantive information about candidate qualities, positions, and performance that force candidates to respond to the issues (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991).

Critics, however, claim that negative advertising creates negative feelings toward both the sponsor and the competitor (Merritt, 1984; Naisbitt, 1961). A dramatic example illustrating this point occurred in Canada in the 1990s. The Conservative Party of Canada designed an attack advertisement to take votes away from the Liberal candidate for prime minister, Jean Chretien.

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Paralysis on one side of his lower face causes Chretien to talk out of only one side of his mouth, an unfortunate characteristic for a politician. Playing on this disability, the Conservatives aired a negative campaign advertisement that depicted the Quebec politician as retarded and dishonest. The day after the initial broadcast of the advertisement, the Conservative Party received hundreds of telephone calls from irate Canadians, including many Conservatives. Some volunteers called to say that they did not want to be associated with a party that would sponsor such a political commercial. In fast retreat, the Conservatives pulled the advertisement. The damage was done, however. When the votes were counted at the end of the campaign, the Conservatives were not even able to qualify as an opposition party. They won only a handful of seats, despite the fact that they had won the last election with an impressive majority. Although there were many reasons for the defeat, Canadians viewed the poor judgment exercised in airing the negative advertisement as typical of what the Conservatives had come to represent.

Garrazone (1985) discussed the kind of boomerang effect that can occur with negative political advertising when voters perceive that they are being put under undue pressure to vote a particular way. The public becomes cynical toward the political process and distrustful of those who are conducting the negative campaign. This type of reaction is most likely when the candidate has not yet established a favorable image with the public (Merritt, 1984). This was the case in Canada when Kim Campbell's party attempted to use the negative political advertisement against the much more popular Jean Chretien. Despite the risks, American politicians have made negative advertising a part of their political history (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991).

Emotional Appeals

Some believe that the use of highly emotional techniques can be enough on its own, even without negative content, to elicit unwanted and irrational responses (Baggaley, 1988; Zielske & Henry, 1980). Moreover, people tend to resent a paternalistic or lecturing tone (Stephenson, 1967). Others, however, argue that a certain level of emotional engagement is necessary if people are to think about a topic at all. They believe that people are more receptive to messages with an affective dimension (Reeves, Newhagen, Maibach, Basil, & Kurz, 1991). Such appeals encourage people to consider important social topics. If an individual feels threatened by the content of a message, however, he or she may not respond with greater receptivity. In fact, the

individual may block subsequent messages (Forest, Clark, Mills, & Isen, 1979).

Fear Appeals

Empirical studies have demonstrated the limitations of fear appeals. The majority of leading campaign researchers and designers cited in Backer, Rogers, and Sopory (1992) do not believe that strong fear appeals work. They observe that strong fear appeals (based on threat of injury or death) lead to defensive avoidance of the message. Appeals that predict social embarrassment or rejection tend to be more effective with teenagers. Teenagers fear that friends and parents will learn about their undesirable behaviors. Appeals based on less consequential, but high-probability, outcomes have more effect than appeals based on more serious, but less likely, outcomes (Atkin, 1992). Wilde (1993) summarized the view of many when he said that "mild or intermediate fear appeals can be useful, provided that the audience has the immediate opportunity to take the advocated action so that the induced state of anxiety will effectively be reduced" (p. 987). Despite these cautions, two meta-analytic studies of fear appeal research have demonstrated that when a communicator does succeed at inducing fear, the persuasive effectiveness of the message is greater than it would be otherwise (Boster & Mongeau, 1984; Sutton, 1982). Boster and Mongeau's review of the literature suggests that strong fear appeals may not work because the designers of experimental research into the effectiveness of fear appeals rarely succeed at creating strong fear in audiences, and they question the ethics of trying to induce high levels of fear in a laboratory situation. O'Keefe (1990) explains that it may be necessary to tone down a message to produce high levels of fear, if audiences are unlikely to pay attention to highly gruesome messages. Boster and Mongeau argue that different audiences react in different ways to fear appeals, depending on age, levels of existing anxiety, and other factors. Increasing the fear level of already anxious personalities only serves to intensify their resistance to change (Janis & Feshbach, 1954). Arkin (1992) noted that fear appeals may be more effective at achieving short-term than long-term results. Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) suggest that it is better, in framing fear appeals, to emphasize what the audience will lose rather than what they will gain. Nonetheless, the messages must also assure the audience that they can escape the negative consequences if they follow the advice given in the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

Creativity and Humor

To succeed, public service announcements and advertising messages should be unique and entertaining. The benefits of humor are more questionable. Occasionally, humor produces a positive residual effect; that is, the "affect generated by the humor can place the persuadee in a favorable frame of mind for the receipt of the persuasive message" (Johnston, 1994, p. 132). Also, humor can prompt the audiences to yield to simple requests (trying a new brand of coffee or subscribing to a newspaper). Perry and colleagues (1997, p. 36) demonstrated that "overall, the more humorous the commercial, the greater the benefit for the product advertiser," unless the sponsored program has humorous content. In the latter instance, the commercial must be more humorous than the program to be effective.

Despite these findings, comparison tests have shown that humorous appeals do not produce any more attitude change than nonhumorous appeals (Johnston, 1994). Moreover, humor rarely persuades people to change serious behaviors, such as alcohol or other drug use, smoking, and reckless driving habits (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994). Despite rave reviews, the Alka Seltzer campaign of the late 1960s and early 1970s failed to sell the product (Pfau & Parrott, 1973). Humor can even decrease the credibility of a source (Bryant, Brown, Silberberg, & Elliott, 1981; Munn & Gruner, 1981). Paradoxically, advertising companies that win awards for creativity and humor often go out of business (Ogilvy, 1985). Commercials that rely on a gag or punch line wear out faster than those with a narrative approach (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994). Repetition of humorous messages offends audiences and consumes valuable air time or copy space. Effective use of humor in mass media contexts depends on its relevance to the persuasive goal and its suitability to the audience (whether the audience can appreciate the humor).

Reference Group Appeals

The term *reference group* refers to a group to which someone belongs or to which the person aspires to belong (Patton & Giffin, 1981). Dewar's advertisements, which appeared for years on the back cover of the *New Yorker* magazine, illustrate the use of this technique. Each week, the magazine featured a different person who had ties to different reference groups. The reference groups reflected varying regions of the country, ages, occupations, hobbies, and interests. The common factor was that all the individuals in the advertisements qualified as "yuppies" (upwardly mobile, relatively young,

highly successful men and women) and, of course, all drank Dewar's. Similarly, information campaign designers can associate their products with credible sources from various reference groups. This approach works particularly well with youth.

Organization of Messages

The organization of messages also affects their persuasive impact on audiences. The following discussion considers the relevance of different patterns of organization, climactic versus anticlimactic ordering of arguments, and primacy versus recency effects.

Psychological Ordering of Information

Monroe (1945) presented one of the best accepted patterns of organization for persuasive messages: (a) attention, (b) need, (c) satisfaction, (d) visualization, and (e) action. To engage in successful persuasion, the source must obtain the audience's attention, convince the audience that a need or problem exists, suggest solutions that can satisfy the need, help the audience to visualize a future with or without the solutions, and outline specific steps of action. Monroe's motivated sequence is only marginally different from Dewey's (1933) reflective-thinking pattern, which substituted an evaluation step for the action step at the end of the sequence. In the spirit of inoculation theory, the evaluation step anticipates objections to the proposed solutions.

Primacy Versus Recency Effects

Primacy-recency studies examine the advantages of presenting first or last in a persuasive situation (e.g., a debate) or the advantages of placing an appeal at the beginning or the end of a persuasive statement. In general, research findings are mixed. Conflicting and inconclusive results have characterized this field of study from its beginnings (Cromwell, 1950; Ehrensberger, 1945; Hovland, Harvey, & Sherif, 1957; Jersild, 1928; Lund, 1925). The current wisdom tells us that there is no general advantage to either position. Nonetheless, in some specific circumstances, one may be more advantageous than the other to the persuader. For example, if audience members are not committed (i.e., if they have unstructured attitudes), they will be more favorable toward the first speaker and more swayed by appeals placed early