

Persuasion

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Persuasion is a form of social influence. It is the process of guiding oneself or another toward the adoption of an idea, attitude, or action by rational and symbolic (though not always logical) means.

Methods

Persuasion methods are also sometimes referred to as persuasion tactics or persuasion strategies.

Weapons of influence

Robert Cialdini, in his book on persuasion, defined six "weapons of influence":

Reciprocity - People tend to return a favor. Thus, the pervasiveness of free samples in marketing and advertising. In his conferences, he often uses the example of Ethiopia providing thousands of dollars in humanitarian aid to Mexico just after the 1985 earthquake, despite Ethiopia suffering from a crippling famine and civil war at the time. Ethiopia had been reciprocating for the diplomatic support Mexico provided when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1937.

Commitment and Consistency - Once people commit to what they think is right, orally or in writing, they are more likely to honor that commitment, even if the original incentive or motivation is subsequently removed. For example, in car sales, suddenly raising the price at the last moment works because the buyer has already decided to buy.

Social Proof - People will do things that they see other people are doing. For example, in one experiment, one or more confederates would look up into the sky; bystanders would then look up into the sky to see what they were seeing. At one point this experiment was aborted, as so many people were looking up that they stopped traffic. See conformity, and the Asch conformity experiments.

Authority - People will tend to obey authority figures, even if they are asked to perform objectionable acts. Cialdini cites incidents, such as the Milgram experiments in the early 1960s and the My Lai massacre in 1968.

Liking - People are easily persuaded by other people whom they like. Cialdini cites the marketing of Tupperware in what might now be called viral marketing. People were more likely to buy if they liked the person selling it to them. Some of the many biases favoring more attractive people are discussed, but generally more aesthetically pleasing people tend to use this influence excellently over others. See physical attractiveness stereotype.

Scarcity - Perceived scarcity will generate demand. For example, saying offers are available for a "limited time only" encourages sales.

Relationship based persuasion

In their book *The Art of Woo*, G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa present a four-step approach to strategic persuasion. They explain that persuasion means to win others over, not to defeat them.

Thus it is important to be able to see the topic from different angles in order to anticipate the reaction others have to a proposal.

Step 1: Survey your situation - This step includes an analysis of the persuader's situation, goals, and challenges that he faces in his organization.

Step 2: Confront the five barriers - Five obstacles pose the greatest risks to a successful influence encounter: relationships, credibility, communication mismatches, belief systems, and interest and needs.

Step 3: Make your pitch - People need a solid reason to justify a decision, yet at the same time many decisions are made on the basis of intuition. This step also deals with presentation skills.

Step 4: Secure your commitments - In order to safeguard the longtime success of a persuasive decision, it is vital to deal with politics at both the individual and organizational level.

Propaganda

Propaganda is also closely related to Persuasion. It's a concerted set of messages aimed at influencing the opinions or behavior of large numbers of people. Instead of impartially providing information, propaganda in its most basic sense presents information in order to influence its audience. The most effective propaganda is often completely truthful, but some propaganda presents facts selectively to encourage a particular synthesis, or gives loaded messages in order to produce an emotional rather than rational response to the information presented. The desired result is a change of the cognitive narrative of the subject in the target audience. The term 'propaganda' first appeared in 1622 when Pope Gregory XV established the Sacred Congregation for Propagating the Faith. Propaganda was then as now about convincing large numbers of people about the veracity of a given set of ideas. Propaganda has been a human activity as far back as reliable recorded evidence exists.

Conditioning

Conditioning plays a huge part in the concept of persuasion. It is more often about leading someone into taking certain actions of their own, rather than giving direct commands. In advertisements for example, this is done by attempting to connect a positive emotion to a brand/product logo. This is often done by creating commercials that make people laugh, using a sexual undertone, inserting uplifting images and/or music etc. and then ending the commercial with a brand/product logo. The thought is that it will affect how people view certain products, knowing that most purchases are made on the basis of emotion. Just like you sometimes recall a memory from a certain smell or sound, the objective of some ads is solely to bring back certain emotions when you see their logo in your local store. The hope is that by repeating the message several times it will cause the consumer to be more likely to purchase the product because he/she already connects it with a good emotion and a positive experience.

Emotional Appeal vs. Factual Appeal

Understanding the receiver and what they want to hear plays a huge role in the information and the delivery of the message. Several things can be taken into consideration when trying to persuade someone. For example when to use emotional or factual appeal. A survey was done in the 1950's during election time. Two leaflets, one factual and one emotionally charged were given to voters. The results found that the socialist party received the highest number of votes then in all previous years. This could be attributed to usage of emotional benefits vs. factual evidence in favor of the socialist party. Intelligence plays a role in deciding which technique to use. If the recipient is knowledgeable or informed on the topic, emotions should have little to no effect. If the receiver isn't knowledgeable or uninformed they are more willing to make an on the spot opinion.

List of methods

By appeal to reason:

Logical argument
Logic
Rhetoric
Scientific method
Proof

By appeal to emotion:

Advertising
Faith
Presentation and Imagination
Propaganda
Seduction
Tradition
Pity

Aids to persuasion:

Body language
Communication skill or Rhetoric
Sales techniques
Personality tests and conflict style inventory help devise strategy based on an individual's preferred style of interaction

Other techniques:

Deception
Hypnosis
Subliminal advertising
Power (sociology)

Coercive techniques, some of which are highly controversial and/or not scientifically proven to be effective:

Brainwashing
Coercive persuasion
Mind control
Torture

Neurobiology of persuasion

Attitudes and persuasion are among the central issues of social behavior. One of the classic questions is when are attitudes a predictor of behavior. Previous research suggested that selective activation of left prefrontal cortex might increase the likelihood that an attitude would predict a relevant behavior. Using lateral attentional manipulation, this was supported.

An earlier article showed that EEG measures of anterior prefrontal asymmetry might be a predictor of persuasion. Research participants were presented with arguments that favored and arguments that opposed the attitudes they already held. Those whose brain was more active in left prefrontal areas said that they paid the most attention to statements with which they agreed while those with a more active right prefrontal area said that they paid attention to statements that disagreed. This is an example of defensive repression, the avoidance or forgetting of unpleasant information. Research has shown that the trait of defensive repression is related to relative left prefrontal activation. In addition, when pleasant or unpleasant words, probably analogous to agreement or disagreement, were seen incidental to the main task, an fMRI scan showed preferential left prefrontal activation to the pleasant words

One way therefore to increase persuasion would seem to be to selectively activate the right prefrontal cortex. This is easily done by monaural stimulation to the contralateral ear. The effect apparently depends on selective attention rather than merely the source of stimulation. This manipulation had the expected outcome: more persuasion for messages coming from the left