

CHAPTER 2

WHAT CONSTITUTES PERSUASION?

Prepared by Robert Gass & John Seiter

COPYRIGHT © 2014 PEARSON EDUCATION, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

WHAT IS PERSUASION?

How does “persuasion” differ from similar, related terms?

- influence
- advice
- educate
- compliance gaining
- propaganda
- indoctrination
- brainwashing

PURE VERSUS BORDERLINE PERSUASION

Pure persuasion

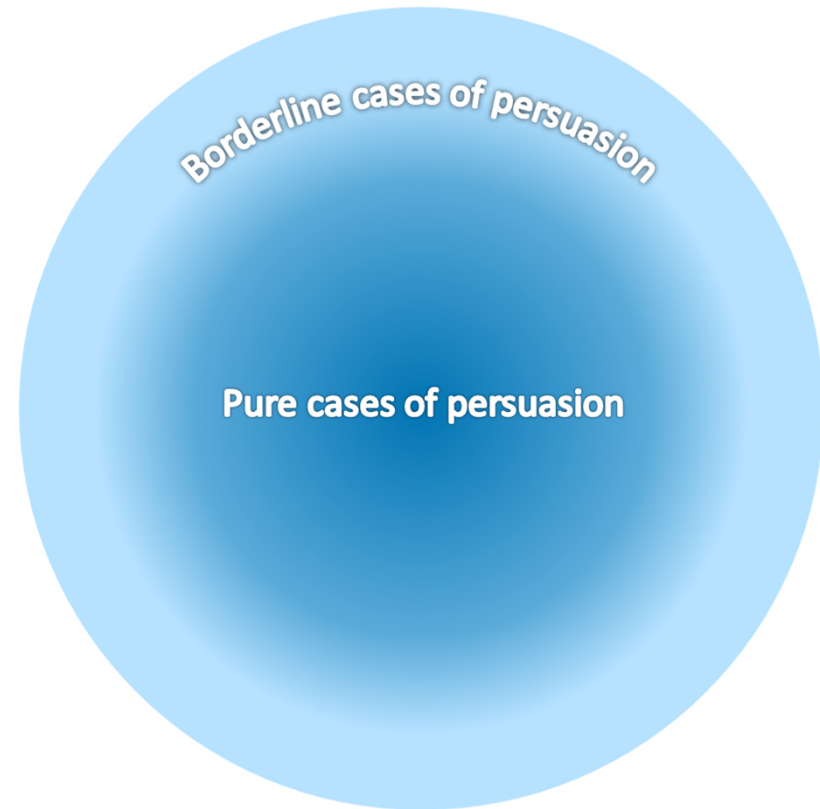
- Obvious, clear-cut cases of persuasion
- a TV commercial
- an attorney's closing remarks to a jury
- a pop-up ad on the Internet

Borderline persuasion

- Less clear-cut cases of influence
- a derelict's appearance
- social modeling of behavior
- persuasive attempts that backfire

PURE VERSUS BORDERLINE PERSUASION

- Pure persuasion is:
 - intentional
 - measured by its effectiveness
- Borderline persuasion:
 - may or may not be intentional
 - may or may not produce the intended effect



LIMITING CRITERIA FOR DEFINING PERSUASION

Litmus tests for defining persuasion

- intentional vs. unintentional
- effective vs. ineffective (or even counterproductive)
- free will and conscious awareness vs. coercion and/or lack of awareness
- symbolic action vs. pure behavior
- interpersonal versus intrapersonal

INTENTIONALITY

Are there cases of “accidental” persuasion?

- Persuaders' goals aren't always clear
- Social modeling of behavior (Bandura) by parents, peers
- Socialization processes such as gender roles, cultural norms
- The unintended receiver effect
- Difficulties in interpreting another's intent
- Interpersonal influence is mutual, two-way

EFFECTS

Has persuasion occurred if nothing changes?

- Persuasion as a product or outcome vs. persuasion as a process or activity
- The activity of persuading occurs even if there is no observable change
- Persuasion is often two-way, not one-way or linear
- Measuring persuasive outcomes can be difficult
- Persuasion may boomerang, producing the opposite of the intended effect

FREE WILL AND CONSCIOUS AWARENESS

Is a free, voluntary choice required?

- Persuasion often operates at a low level of awareness
- Persuasive may occur without another's conscious awareness

Few decisions ever involve completely free choice

- rewards, punishments, incentives, drawbacks
- social consequences for saying no

SYMBOLIC ACTION

Does persuasion exist in the “world of words” and symbolic actions?

- Much of persuasion is visual
- Images carry meaning outside of words
- Much of persuasion is nonverbal
- Not all nonverbal cues are clearly codified
- A person who watched an infomercial with the sound off might still be persuaded

INTERPERSONAL VS. INTRAPERSONAL

Does persuasion require two or more persons?

- Self-persuasion does occur
- A person might talk him/her self into doing (or not doing) something
- New Year's resolutions are designed to increase commitment
- Persuasion involves numerous intrapersonal processes
- attitude formation and change
- desire for cognitive consistency
- counter-arguing

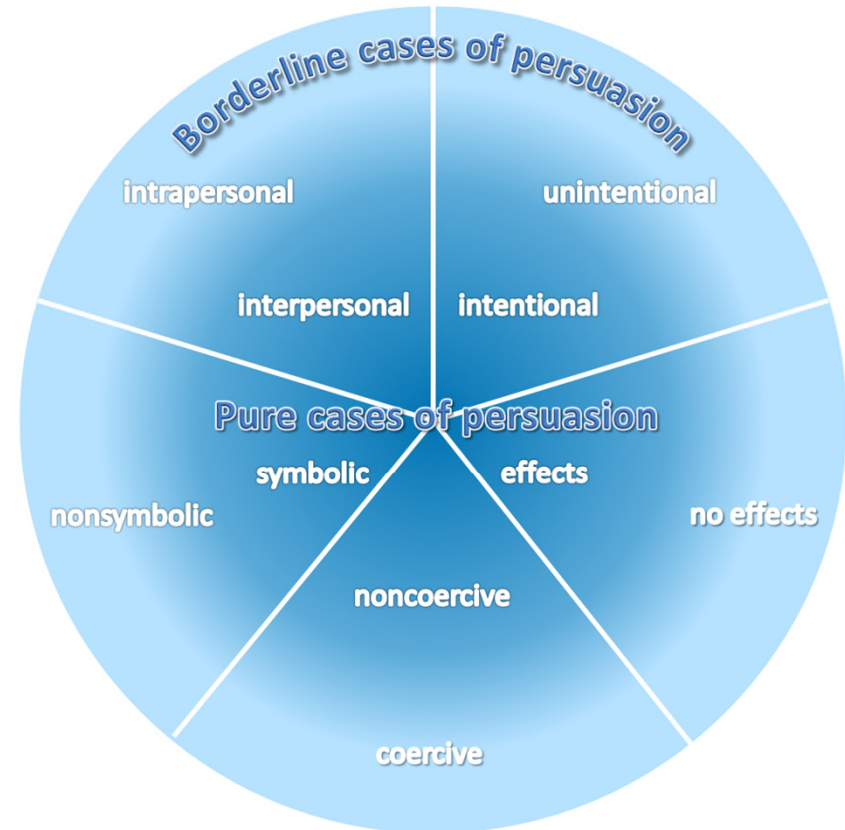
GASS & SEITER MODEL OF PERSUASION

Pure persuasion:

- is intentional
- is effective or successful
- is noncoercive
- relies on language and symbolic action
- involves two or more persons

Borderline persuasion

- is missing one or more of these litmus tests



THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

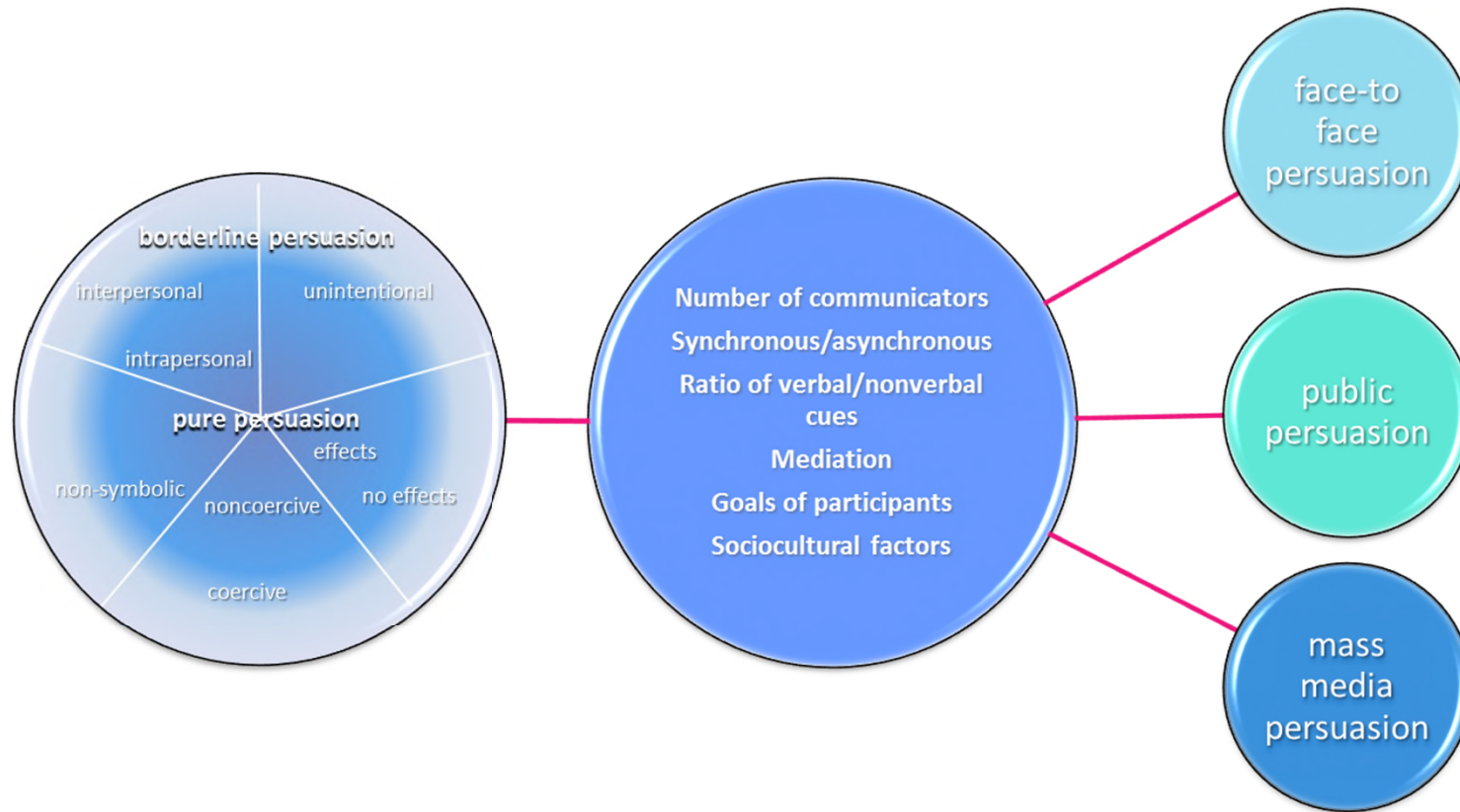
The communication context shapes how persuasion occurs

- Mass media is linear, with delayed feedback.
- Face to face persuasion is synchronous or simultaneous.
- Email, Texting, IM and Twitter lack nonverbal cues.
- Socio-cultural factors affect message processing.
- Participants' goals affect how persuasion functions.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF PERSUASION

“Persuasion involves one or more persons who are engaged in the activity of creating, reinforcing, modifying, or extinguishing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations, and/or behaviors within the constraints of a given communication context” (Gass & Seiter, 2014)

COMPLETED MODEL OF PERSUASION



WHAT ISN'T PERSUASION?

Most human communication involves the *potential* for influence

Things that don't necessarily qualify as persuasion include:

- Breathing, sleeping, sneezing
- Stubbing your toe on a rock
- Torture
- ESP, clairvoyance, and other psychic phenomena
- hypnosis
- Chameleon-like behavior in the animal kingdom

ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL (ELM)

Two basic routes to persuasion: Central and Peripheral

They represent the ends of an “elaboration continuum”

They represent qualitatively different modes of information processing

CENTRAL PROCESSING

The Central route is reflective, requires mental effort, and relies on cognitive elaboration

- Motivation (willingness) to process a message
- Ability to process (understand) a message

Example: Lulu is car shopping

She looks up information comparing safety, reliability, performance, customer satisfaction, mileage, and depreciation for three makes of sporty cars

She scrutinizes the information carefully before making a decision



PERIPHERAL PROCESSING

The Peripheral route is reflexive, based on mental shortcuts:

- credibility, appearance cues, quantity of arguments
- heuristic cues (decision rules): rules for simplifying the thought process

Example: A Christian homeowner hires a plumber because the plumber's ad in the Yellow Pages includes an *ichthys* symbol (sign of the fish)

ELM CONTINUED

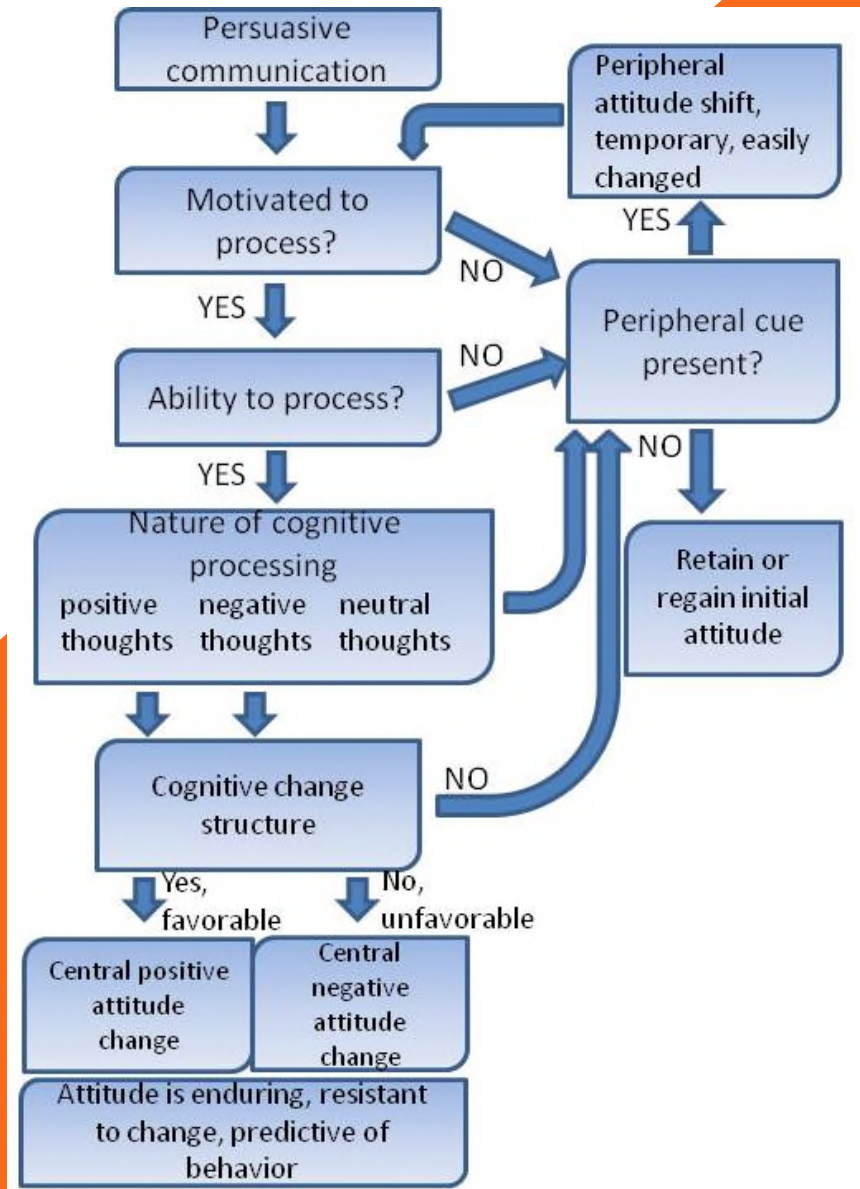
Peripheral cues

- “Experts can be trusted”
- “As seen on TV”
- “Always tip 18%”
- “It’s your watch that says the most about you” (slogan for Seiko watches)
- If a celebrity endorses a product does that mean it’s good?
- Are 10 arguments necessarily better than 3?

The role of involvement

- High involvement increases the likelihood of central processing
- Low involvement increases the likelihood of peripheral processing
- High involvement decreases reliance on credibility (peripheral cue)

Petty & Cacioppo's ELM



PERSISTENCE OF PERSUASION

Persuasion that takes place via the central route tends to be more lasting

Persuasion that takes via the peripheral route tends to be more transitory

HEURISTIC-SYSTEMATIC MODEL (HSM)

Bears many similarities to the ELM

Two basic routes or modes of information processing

Systematic processing is more thoughtful, deliberate, analytical

- Analogous to “central” processing in the ELM

Heuristic processing is more reflexive, automatic

- Analogous to “peripheral” processing in the ELM
- Relies on **decision rules**, e.g., “Never pay retail,” “Buy low, sell high”
- Decision rules are activated under the appropriate circumstances

IS SIMULTANEOUS PROCESSING POSSIBLE?

Is there true simultaneous processing, or simply rapid switching back and forth?

Multi-tasking as an example:

- driving + cellphone (difficult)
- studying + background music (less difficult)

If simultaneous processing exists, does it exist for words? For images?

- Processing two oral or written messages at once?
- Processing a written message and an image?

HEURISTIC CUES MUST BE

Available: stored in memory for potential use

Accessible: activated from memory

Applicable: related to the receiver's goals or objectives

HSM-CONTINUED

Motivation and ability to process a message are key determinants

Sufficiency principle: people don't want to spend too much or too little time/effort making a decision

HSM allows for the possibility of simultaneous processing (both systematic and heuristic)

- Example: Ned thinks Mini Coopers look really cool and, after doing some research, he finds they also perform well in crash tests and have higher than average reliability

UNIMODEL OF PERSUASION

An alternative to dual process models

The unimodel rejects the notion of two distinct types of processing

There is simply more or less processing

- One can think more or less about an issue
- If one thinks more, cognitive elaboration will be higher
- If one thinks less, cognitive elaboration will be lower

less elaboration  more elaboration