

## Chapter 2: What Constitutes Persuasion?

### Key Terms and Concepts

terms closely related to persuasion

pure persuasion

borderline persuasion

source-centered views

intent criterion (intentionality)

intent litmus test for persuasion vs. social influence

socialization processes

unintended receiver effect

difficulty of determining intent

effects criterion

receiver-oriented definitions

persuasion as a process vs. a product

linear view of persuasion

boomerang effect

free will and conscious awareness criterion

persuasion and coercion as closely related

unconscious criteria in decision-making

freedom/coercion is often a matter of degree

product planting and WOM operate at a low level of awareness

symbolic action criterion

advertising relies on images more than words

looking at text alone is fragmented

interpersonal versus intrapersonal persuasion

self-persuasion (denial, rationalizing) is possible

Gass and Seiter model of persuasion

contextual features of persuasion

number of communicators

synchronous vs. asynchronous communication

ratio of verbal to nonverbal cues

nature and type of media

goals of the participants

socio-cultural factors

Gass and Seiter definition of persuasion

Not everything is persuasion

sneezing, tripping, torture, psychic phenomena

Dual Process models of persuasion

the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM)

central route, or central processing

peripheral route, or peripheral processing

motivation to process a message

level of involvement

need for cognition

ability to process a message

central processing and persistence of persuasion

Heuristic-Systematic Model of persuasion (HSM)

systematic processing

heuristic processing

decision rules

heuristic cues

simultaneous processing

sufficiency principle

Unimodel of persuasion

### Chapter Summary

I. There is no clear consensus on what the term “persuasion” means.

A. Different definitions emphasize different aspects of persuasion.

B. Some definitions emphasize “pure” cases of persuasion, while others include “borderline” cases of persuasion as well. Consider the hypothetical situations in Box 2.1.

II. Various definitions of persuasion may be categorized according to five limiting criteria.

A. Source-oriented definitions emphasize intentionality as a defining characteristic of persuasion.

B. Some authors distinguish between persuasion and social influence, based on an intent criterion; e.g., persuasion is intentional, social influence is not.

C. Problems with relying on an intent criterion include:

- 1) Influence may be accidental or unconscious, or may operate at a very low level of awareness.
- 2) Persuaders aren't always aware of their intentions.
- 3) Unintended receivers may be influenced by persuasive messages.
- 4) There are difficulties involved in determining a persuader's intent.
- 5) There may be intra-audience effects, e.g., receivers persuade one another.
- 6) An intent requirement emphasizes a linear view of persuasion.

D. Receiver-oriented definitions emphasize effects as the defining characteristic of persuasion.

E. Problems with relying on an effects criterion include:

- 1) An effects criterion emphasizes persuasion as a product, or outcome, rather than a process.
- 2) An effects criterion entails a linear view of the persuasion process, from the source to the receiver. In reality, influence attempts are often mutual or reciprocal.
- 3) There are inherent difficulties in measuring or assessing persuasive effects.

- 4) The success of an influence attempt depends on the point of view of the perceiver.
- F. Definitions of persuasion can be based on the amount of free choice or free will granted to receivers.
- G. Problems with relying on free choice or free will as a limiting criterion include:
  - 1) It is difficult to clearly differentiate persuasion from coercion.
  - 2) Coercion can involve positive inducements and incentives, not just negative sanctions.
  - 3) Most influence attempts contain both persuasive and coercive features.
  - 4) The degree of coerciveness is largely in the eye of the beholder.
- H. Some definitions use symbolic action as a limiting criterion for defining persuasion.
- I. Problems with limiting persuasion to symbolic action include:
  - 1) Nonverbal cues contain persuasive potential.
  - 2) Behaviors and physiological processes may hold persuasive implications.
  - 3) Limiting persuasion to symbolic action excludes a host of non-symbolic features that affect persuasive outcomes.
- J. Some definitions restrict persuasion to interpersonal (two or more) encounters, as opposed to intrapersonal processes.
  - 1) Numerous examples of self-persuasion can be found.
- III. The role of context must be considered in any definition or model of persuasion.
  - A. The context determines the nature of the persuasion process that is operating (linear, two-way, delayed, etc.).
  - B. Context-based factors that affect the nature of the persuasion process include:
    - 1) the number of communicators.
    - 2) whether communication is synchronous or asynchronous.
    - 3) the ratio of verbal to nonverbal cues that are present.
    - 4) the nature and type of media.
    - 5) the goals of the participants.
    - 6) socio-cultural factors that shape participants' message construction and perceptions.
- IV. The authors define persuasion as "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."
- V. A completed model illustrating the authors' definition of persuasion is found in Figure 2.3
- VI. Not all human behavior is persuasive, although nearly all human behavior carries persuasive potential.
  - A. It is possible to examine communication without probing into the persuasive element.
  - B. Although the authors' consideration for persuasive forms of communication is wide-ranging, it is also limited for purely practical reasons.
- VII. Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides a useful explanation of how persuasion operates.
  - A. Central processing involves active mental effort or "issue-relevant thinking," while peripheral processing involves focusing on non-message related cues or heuristic cues.
  - B. Whether central or peripheral processing is used depends on receivers' motivation and ability to engage in central processing.
  - C. High involvement increases receivers' motivation to engage in central processing.
  - D. High need for cognition increases receivers' likelihood of engaging in central processing.
  - E. Persuasion via the central route is more persistent, or long-lasting than persuasion via the peripheral route, and more resistant to counter-persuasion.
- VIII. Chaiken & Eagly's Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) of persuasion provides another useful model of how persuasion occurs.
  - A. Systematic processing is thoughtful and deliberate (analogous to central processing).
  - B. Heuristic processing relies on the application of mental shortcuts (analogous to peripheral processing).
    - 1) heuristic cues, or simply "heuristics," such as the quantity of proof or credibility, simplify the thought process
    - 2) decision rules, such as brand loyalty, simplify decision making
  - C. Both motivation and ability are determinants of the extent to which heuristic or systematic processing will be used.
  - D. The HSM posits that simultaneous processing is possible, e.g., both systematic and heuristic processing take place.
  - E. The sufficiency principle posits that individuals balance their need for systematic and heuristic processing based on the importance of the issue.

IX. Kruglanski & Thompson's Unimodel of persuasion provides an alternative perspective to the previous dual process models on how persuasion occurs.

- A. It rejects the notion of two distinct types of processing.
- B. There is simply more or less processing; if one thinks more, cognitive elaboration will be higher. If one thinks less, cognitive elaboration will be lower.
- D. The Unimodel has generated attention to whether and how dual processing occurs.

## **Exercises and Learning Activities**

### **Exercise 2-A, What Constitutes Persuasion?**

**Principle Illustrated:** The scope of persuasion

**Purpose:** To cause students to reflect on their own intuitive, "armchair" definitions of persuasion. Students should begin to think not only about how broadly or narrowly they define persuasion, but also which limiting criteria are implicit in their definitions.

**Time Required:** 15-45 minutes (depending on which variation of the exercise is used)

Note: This exercise works best if it is done before students have read Chapter 2. Once they have read the chapter, they are more likely to recite textbook doctrine rather than venture their own ideas and opinions.

**Directions:** Box 2.1 in the text (see p. 24) offers seven hypothetical situations and asks about each: Is this persuasion? Listed below is a summary of the central definitional issue embodied in each situation. Break the class into groups of 4-5 students each. Require each group to reach consensus on whether persuasion has or hasn't occurred. Then bring the class back together and have the groups share their rationales for categorizing each scenario as they did. The discussion will reveal students' implicit criteria for defining persuasion.

*Scenario 1:* What degree of awareness or intentionality is required of senders and receivers in order to conclude that persuasion has occurred?

*Scenario 2:* Should the term "persuasion" be used to differentiate those influence attempts that are successful or effective from those which are unsuccessful or even counterproductive?

*Scenario 3:* Is persuasion limited only to "symbolic" communication or can it include "signs" and "symptoms" as well?

*Scenario 4:* Is all communication inherently persuasive? Is it possible not to persuade?

*Scenario 5:* Does persuasion require two or more persons? Does persuasion include intra-personal thought processes?

*Scenario 6:* Should the term "persuasion" be used if third parties, unintended parties, or anyone other than the target audience is influenced?

*Scenario 7:* What is the difference, if any, between persuasion, coercion, propaganda, manipulation, indoctrination, etc.?

### **Exercise 2-B, Definition/Conceptualization Exercise**

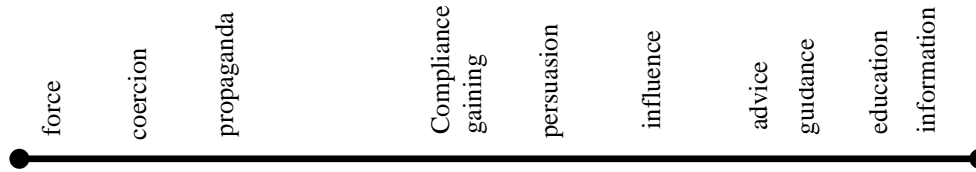
**Principle Illustrated:** Conceptualizations of persuasion

**Purpose:** To get students thinking about terms that are closely related to persuasion and the relationship of those terms to one another.

**Time Required:** 15-30 minutes

**Instructions:** Provide students with an alphabetical list of terms (we print them on 8 ½" X 11" cardstock) related to persuasion and ask them to place each along a continuum. In addition, ask students to place what they perceive to be closely related terms closer together on the continuum, and what they perceive to be less closely related terms farther apart.

Possible terms include: advice, coaxing, coercion, compliance gaining, force, guidance, hinting, inducement, influence, information, manipulation, persuasion, propaganda, teaching. An illustration of one possible arrangement using some of these terms is provided below:



Compare students' continuums with one another. Ask them *why* they placed the terms where they did. In providing their answers, students will discover their implicit, "armchair" definitions of these terms. Their answers will provide insights into how they conceptualize persuasion and persuasion-related terms.

### **Exercise 2-C, Class Discussion/Lecture Supplement**

**Principles Illustrated:** The Elaboration Likelihood and Heuristic Systematic models of persuasion

**Purpose:** To gain a better understanding of how and why people process and respond to persuasive stimuli.

**Time Required:** 5-10 minutes

**Directions:** After defining and explaining the principles of the ELM and HSM, test the class's understanding of the two models by asking them to identify the processing route (or routes) traveled by the receivers in the following scenarios (make sure that the class also understands *why* each person chose the route she/he did).

*Situation 1:* Drs. Smith and Jones are primary care physicians attending a medical supply convention to review the latest technologies and products. The first seminar they attend is geared toward infant and toddler care. The seminar's first speaker is an expert in "cradle cap" care (a condition where infants develop yellow, scaly, and oily patches of skin on their skulls), and discusses in detail the effectiveness of the latest creams, ointments, and shampoos developed to treat this condition.

Dr. Smith, who sees babies daily, listens carefully to the description of each product and ultimately decides to order several packages of Canus Lil Goats Milk Shampoo, the product proved most effective in clinical trials. Dr. Jones, on the other hand, very rarely sees babies at his practice, doesn't pay much attention to the speaker, and goes with Johnson's Baby Shampoo, telling himself that Johnson's is a "proven name."

*Key:* Dr. Smith followed the central route because he was able and motivated to elaborate on the information presented; Dr. Jones traveled the peripheral route because he was able but unmotivated to spend time thinking about the quality of a product he would almost never use.

*Situation 2:* Bianca and Brittany, two out-of-state freshmen attending Keg State University, were famished after spending the moving into their new dorm room. The young women were in the mood for quality cuisine, but had no way of knowing for sure which restaurants near the campus served good food. After surveying several eateries, Bianca suggested they eat at Gustavo's Gourmet Buffet, because the food was "very expensive." Brittany, though, said she thought the food would be best at Duke's Diner, because it was the most crowded of the restaurants they'd seen.

*Key:* Bianca and Brittany are forced to travel the peripheral route because they lack the information needed to make an informed decision (friends, local newspaper reviews, etc.). Bianca uses the decision rule "expensive = good" to make her decision, while Brittany uses social evidence as a peripheral cue to defend her recommendation. Central processing would be involved in they looked up and read restaurant reviews online, although simply going with a five-star rating on Yelp.com or Urbanspoon.com could still rely on peripheral processing if they didn't read the reviews carefully.

*Situation 3:* Tran is a well-read, analytical fellow who likes to solve problems. Tran's best friend, DeShawn, is also extremely intelligent but doesn't like to "waste time" thinking about issues that don't directly affect him. Last Friday, the pair watched a debate on CNN between a domestic drug company representative and free market activist over how to regulate prescription drug imports for senior citizens. After carefully weighing the arguments made by

both speakers, Tran decided that he agreed with the drug company representative's position that foreign drugs must be regulated for safety reasons. DeShawn, however, disagreed, saying, "The big drug companies just want profits. That's all they care about."

*Key:* Tran travels the central route because he has the ability to do so but also because he has a high need for cognition. DeShawn also has the ability to travel the central route, but is unmotivated to do so because he does not have a high need for cognition. DeShawn therefore, relies on a decision rule (i.e., "all drug companies care about is money") to decide where he stands on the issue.

## **Test Questions**

### **Multiple Choice Questions**

1. Pure persuasion means

- a. all the ingredients for what most people would consider to be persuasion are present.
- b. the source succeeded in persuading the receiver completely.
- c. there are underlying motives behind the message.
- d. the sender is well-intentioned, or has the receiver's best interests at heart.

Answer: A

Page 25

2. Borderline persuasion refers to

- a. influence attempts that are ethically suspect.
- b. influence attempts that are only partially successful.
- c. less traditional or obvious forms of influence.
- d. attempts to influence border patrol agents and immigration officers.

Answer: C

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3. A litmus test for distinguishing persuasion from social influence is

- a. social influence is coercive, persuasion is not
- b. social influence requires conscious awareness, persuasion does not
- c. persuasion is intentional, social influence is not
- d. persuasive is effective, social influence is not

Answer: C

Page 26

4. You see two unsavory-looking characters standing near an ATM machine and decide to go elsewhere to make a cash withdrawal. Their threatening appearance best represents

- a. pure persuasion
- b. borderline persuasion
- c. coercion
- d. third person effect

Answer: B

Page 25

5. You advise a friend to enroll in Professor Windplenty's class because "he's an easy 'A.'" A stranger in the registration line overhears you and decides to sign up for the same professor. This is an example of

- a. peripheral persuasion
- b. the "grapevine" effect
- c. the bystander phenomenon
- d. the unintended receiver effect

Answer: D

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6. A problem with a linear view of persuasion is
- a. the role of the source is ignored
  - b. the effect of the message is ignored
  - c. the possibility for mutual influence is ignored
  - d. persuasion as a product or outcome is ignored

Answer: C

Page 27

7. An effects orientation to defining persuasion emphasizes

- a. the receiver
- b. the source
- c. the message
- d. the outcome

Answer: D

Pages 27-28

8. Which two limiting criteria for defining persuasion are primarily receiver-based?

- a. intent, effects
- b. effects, free choice
- c. free choice, symbolic action
- d. intent, free choice

Answer: B

Page 27, 28, 31

9. "Persuasive communication represents any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or others" (James Stiff, 2003). The above definition relies on which two limiting criteria?

- a. intentionality, interpersonal
- b. intrapersonal, symbolic action
- c. intentionality, free will
- d. effects, conscious awareness

Answer: A

Pages 26, 31

10. Daniel O'Keefe (2002) defines persuasion as "a successful intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuadee has some measure of freedom." His definition presumes that:

- a. persuasion may be accidental
- b. persuasion must be effective
- c. persuasion must be ethical
- d. self-persuasion is common

Answer: B

Page 27

11. The idea that persuasion requires free choice or free will focuses on

- a. the receiver
- b. the source
- c. the message
- d. the outcome

Answer: A

Page 28

12. The unintended receiver effect illustrates one problem with relying on \_\_\_\_\_ to define persuasion

- a. intentionality
- b. effects
- c. free will
- d. symbolic action

Answer: A

Page 27

13. What is the relationship of persuasion and coercion, according to Gass & Seiter?

- a. Persuasion is the antithesis of coercion
- b. Coercion is a subset of persuasion
- c. Persuasion is a subset of coercion
- d. Persuasion and coercion are close relatives

Answer: D

Page 29

14. A definition which limits persuasion to symbolic action

- a. would say all persuasion exists in the world of words
- b. would say most behavior is persuasive in nature
- c. would say protests, marches, demonstrations, and sit-ins were part of persuasion
- d. would say physical characteristics such as height or attractiveness are part of persuasion

Answer: C

Page 30

15. Which of the following influence scenarios represents persuasion through symbolic action?

- a. Art sees a picture of a malnourished African child in his local newspaper and decides to donate \$100 to an international charity organization.
- b. A human resource executive decides not to hire a particular job candidate after learning of her criminal history.
- c. Participants in a social scientific study rate a taller speaker as more credible than a shorter speaker even though the two speakers delivered speeches of the same quality.
- d. A passer-by observes a protest march by members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and afterwards decides to volunteer to help at the local animal shelter.

Answer: D

Page 30

16. In the Gass & Seiter model, the outer circle represents \_\_\_\_\_ persuasion, while the inner circle represents \_\_\_\_\_ persuasion.

- a. pure, borderline
- b. borderline, pure
- c. symbolic, nonsymbolic
- d. free choice, free will

Answer: B

Pages 25, 32

17. The Gass & Seiter model maintains that \_\_\_\_\_ determines the nature of the persuasion process.

- a. ethnicity
- b. the message
- c. the context
- d. the source

Answer: C

Pages 32-33

18. Which of the following is the best example of synchronous persuasion?

- a. A door-to-door solicitor tries to sell a vacuum cleaner to a resident
- b. An email message encourages you to upgrade your software
- c. The envelope for a mail-in promotion proclaims, "You may already be a winner"
- d. A television commercial says a pick-up truck has the most horsepower in its class

Answer: A

Page 32

19. A preacher reminds his congregation that even though forgiving a sinner may not be easy, it is the Christian thing to do. This is an example of

- a. changing existing attitudes and beliefs
- b. creating new attitudes and beliefs
- c. reinforcing existing attitudes and beliefs
- d. extinguishing existing attitudes and beliefs

Answer: C

Page 34

20. Petty and Cacioppo's ELM postulates that there are two routes to persuasion:

- a. a pure route, and a borderline route
- b. an ethical route, and an unethical route
- c. self-persuasion and other persuasion
- d. a central route, and a peripheral route

Answer: D

Page 36

21. Which of the following groups of receivers would tend to rely less on credibility as a peripheral cue and more on the content or substance of a message?

- a. alumni of a college where a tuition hike was being considered
- b. students at a college where a tuition hike was being considered
- c. faculty at a college where a tuition hike was being considered
- d. students at a different college than the one considering a tuition hike

Answer: B

Page 36

22. Which group of receivers would be most likely to engage in peripheral processing?

- a. receivers with high involvement and a high need for cognition
- b. receivers with high involvement and a low need for cognition
- c. receivers with low involvement and a high need for cognition
- d. receivers with low involvement and a low need for cognition

Answer: D

Pages 36-37

23. In the terms used in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, a person low in the need for cognition is more likely to be persuaded via the \_\_\_\_\_ route to persuasion.

- a. serial
- b. parallel
- c. central
- d. peripheral

Answer: D

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24. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, a person with high involvement in an issue would tend to be persuaded by

- a. credibility
- b. the central route
- c. peripheral route
- d. heuristics cues

Answer: B

Page 36

25. Buying a television based on its brand name, or purchasing a product based on a celebrity endorsement are examples of

- a. systematic processing
- b. parallel processing



- c. heuristic processing
- d. central processing

Answer: C

Page 38

26. One way to help ensure a persuasive message will have a lasting effect on receivers is to:

- a. increase their intelligence
- b. increase their peripheral processing
- c. decrease their self-monitoring
- d. increase their involvement in the issue

Answer: D

Page 37

27. \_\_\_\_\_ is to Chaiken & Eagly's HSM model what \_\_\_\_\_ is to Petty & Cacioppo's ELM model.

- a. heuristic processing, systematic processing
- b. systematic processing, central processing
- c. central processing, systematic processing
- d. heuristic processing, central processing

Answer: B

Page 38

28. Which of the following is the best example of asynchronous persuasion?

- a. A teenager asks her parents to purchase concert tickets for her sixteenth birthday
- b. A television commercial claims that a juicer is three times more durable than its competitors
- c. A salesperson in the fragrance department encourages you to try a new perfume
- d. The cashier at a department store asks if you would like to donate to a charity

Answer: B

Page 32

29. Central processing involves all of the following except

- a. heuristic cues
- b. cognitive elaboration
- c. greater motivation
- d. ability to process information

Answer: A

Page 36, 38

30. Beverly needs a new surround sound system. She has researched the type of system she wants and is motivated to find the best system to fit her budget. The \_\_\_\_\_ suggests that she will strive to find out as much as she can about surround sound systems, but only as much as she needs to make a decision, no more, no less.

- a. processing potential
- b. efficiency maxim
- c. information effect
- d. sufficiency principle

Answer: D

Page 38

31. The Unimodel postulates that there is one route to persuasion whereby

- a. systematic processing overrides heuristic processing
- b. there is less cognitive elaboration
- c. decision rules are the main components
- d. there is simply more or less processing

Answer: D

Page 39

32. Parents commonly instill beliefs, impart values, and model behavior for their children, without knowing they are doing so. This is an example of

- a. ulterior motives
- b. social modeling
- c. relational goals
- d. symbolic effects

Answer: B

Page 26

33. Quincy wants to speak to his professor about his last paper. He intends to challenge the professor about his grade. Shortly into the conversation, Quincy realizes he misunderstood the assignment. Rather than challenge the grade, he decides to ask for a chance to rewrite the paper. This best reflects the notion that

- a. people's goals may change during a persuasive encounter
- b. a reliance on peripheral processing rarely produces compliance
- c. a reliance on central processing rarely produces compliance
- d. people's need for identity management far outweighs other persuasive tactics

Answer: A

Page 26

34. Which of the following is not a contextual factor of persuasion?

- a. number of communicators
- b. synchronous vs. asynchronous communication
- c. degree of success
- d. ratio of verbal to nonverbal cues

Answer: C

Pages 27, 32-33

## **Essay Questions**

1. What is one of the primary weaknesses of relying on intentionality as a defining characteristic of persuasion?
2. What are the limitations of using an "effects" standard as the basis for a definition of persuasion?
3. Do Gass & Seiter believe there is such a thing as self-persuasion? Why or why not?
4. Provide a hypothetical or real-life example of central or systematic processing, and a hypothetical example or real-life example of peripheral or heuristic processing.
5. Is there such a thing as "accidental" persuasion? Why or why not?
6. Which limiting criterion identified by Gass & Seiter do you think is most important for defining persuasion, and why?
7. What differences are apparent among the dual-process models and the Unimodel of persuasion?
8. Based on Gass and Seiter's conceptualization of persuasion, what isn't persuasion?