



2022, vol. 9, issue 2, 76-79

RESEARCH ARTICLE

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7474338>

## PERSUASION, AN IMPONDERABLE FORM OF COMMUNICATION

Alexandra IORGULESCU, Associate Professor, University of Craiova, CCSCMOP, Romania

Mihaela MARCU, Associate Professor, University of Craiova, CCSCMOP, Romania

### Abstract

The intention of this approach is to set clear boundaries between three concepts so widely used in the social and human sciences: persuasion, manipulation, communication. Moreover, we want to join the positions that persuasion is a component of communication, an imponderable shaper of everyday life. A necessary clarification is that persuasion is differentiated from manipulation by the simple fact that the person being persuaded realizes that the message is constructed and conveyed to influence them, differentiating persuasion not only from manipulation, but also from advertising.

*Keywords: persuasion, manipulation, communication.*

### 1 DEFINITIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF PERSUASION

In this sub-chapter we think it is important to present some definitions of the concept of persuasion, i.e. the points of view of some specialists, necessary, we believe, to clearly establish the theoretical coordinates of persuasion.

Charles U. Larson points out that "persuasion is a process by which decisional choices are intentionally limited or expanded through the interaction of messages, sources or receivers and by which attitudes, beliefs, opinions or behaviours are altered through a cognitive restructuring of a person's worldview or frame of reference" (Larson, 2003, p.20).

Jean Noël Kapferer conceives persuasion as "a process consisting of a series of psychological operations: exposure to messages, transformation of sensory stimuli into images, acceptance/rejection of the content of the message, transition from attitude to behaviour, and lasting maintenance of the attitudinal-behavioural change. Persuasion is also perceived as a defeat, as a confusion, as a bowing to the other; it means acknowledging the power of the other, who controls me, because he influences me" (Kapferer, 2002, p.32).

In his turn, the Professor Dumitru Cristea defines persuasion as "an organized and consciously directed way of influencing a person or a group, using logical argumentation, emotionally and motivationally supported, in order to impose ideas, opinions, attitudes or behaviours that were not initially accepted or agreed by those targeted. Persuasion is one of the main forms of exercising social influence, allowing the rational comparison of opinions and the adoption of new concepts and attitudes that prove to be superior, while respecting the interlocutors' right to choose." (Cristea, 2002, p.51).

The essential idea of the previous definitions is related to persuasion as an imperceptible but important form of communication, of a psycho-social nature, which can bring about attitudinal and behavioural change.

Consequently, the effective factors of the persuasive relationship are directly related to the communicator, the message, the communication channel, the listener, and the communication environment.

## 2 COMMUNICATOR, MESSAGE, PERSUASION

*The Communicator* is defined by his/her personality profile, self-confidence, intellectual vivacity, interpersonal style, level of education, personal charm, life experience, social and professional status, recognised prestige.

*The message* takes on particular forms according to its content, the way the content is structured, the weight of various informational, emotional, motivational or "consumer" elements. Here we can also talk about the degree of redundancy of the message, its coherence, completeness, and suitability to the situation.

*The communication channel* is defined by the nature of the means of communication used and their functional characteristics. The listener is characterised by psychological personality traits, the most important of which are suggestibility, self-image, intellectual level, motivational field structure and social status.

There is also a *communication environment*, defined by the particularities of the physical and social environments.

Each of these factors, known as indispensable elements of communication, becomes an influential force on the effectiveness of persuasion. But the essential role is played by the way these elements are configured in a given relational situation. The interactional structure of the factors has a certain value in relation to the value of each factor taken in isolation, which leads to the emergence of specific psychosocial phenomena.

Thus, at the communicator level, the most important characteristics relate to source credibility, presumed intent and personal appeal. The credibility of the source is a factor that significantly affects the communicator's ability to influence the listener in the desired direction. When a persuasive figure appears, those concerned have questions about his moral standing, his background, his achievements. Attitudinal change will be directly conditioned by these factors, as perceived by the audience.

The persuasive force of a message increases if the receivers find that the message puts the sender at a disadvantage or if it does not express the natural attitude appropriate to his status. Conversely, if the communicator's message is in line with his own interests or official position, its persuasive force decreases the more the interests are presumed to be strong. Another way in which the persuasive force of a credible communicator is reduced is to present an opposing viewpoint through another credible communicator. The same applies to the intention of the communicator when he announces that he wants to change the attitudes of his audience. The warning can trigger defence mechanisms that encourage various forms of resistance or even outright rejection of the message.

Declared disagreement with the listener's views can lead to considerable resistance to the communicator's attempt to persuade, especially if it is expressed at the outset of the discussion.

The physical attraction that the communicator exerts on the listener has an appreciable effect on the persuasive force of his message. This effect can be explained by the listener's unconscious desire to identify with a person who possesses special qualities: charm, charisma, humour, intelligence, social strength, or capacity for self-control. A person who is unsure of themselves and their position is more likely to be influenced by a charming communicator who pays them special attention.

At the message level, the factors that can affect his persuasiveness are related to the way related points of view are presented, fear induction, audience involvement and primacy effect. The common question is whether it is useful to present divergent views or only one viewpoint, the one against which the message's conclusions are drawn. The effectiveness of each depends on a number of factors, the most important of which relate to the characteristics of the audience and the nature of the issue presented.

## 3 SIX PERSUASION TECHNIQUES

Of the techniques by which persuasion is used and turned into effective action, we have chosen to detail six. We don't know if they are the defining or mandatory ones for persuasion, but they certainly become interesting and usable.

So, persuasion techniques are based on six tendencies of human behaviour that lead to generating a positive response to a request from someone: reciprocity; consistency; validation; social appreciation; authority; resource scarcity. Thus listed, these tendencies do not seem to convey much useful information. But we will look at each one below, giving examples for easy understanding.

*Reciprocity.* There is a natural human tendency to react positively to a request from someone who has ever offered them something. When someone has offered us help, we feel compelled to reciprocate by offering help when asked. He who does not return the help he has received is ungrateful. It's just that this propensity to respond positively to the request of someone who has offered us something can easily be used against us or for the ulterior motives of the person who favours us. You are a doctor. You receive free supplies of medicines from a drug distributor just to convince yourself of their effectiveness. Or you receive donations to equip the laboratory you work in. Even if these freebies are not accompanied by any express request from the "donor", if you are asked to recommend a company to supply medicines or laboratory equipment, which company will you choose? Receiving products for free triggers in many of us this tendency to return the favour. This is the premise of those who promote their products in supermarkets and offer you products for free. Of course, it's also about promoting the name of the product and actually coming into contact with it, but it's also about the fact that you have received something, free of charge, from a company. Another subtlety of the tendency towards reciprocity is the following: if someone makes a major request of you, but after refusal comes back with a smaller request, you may understand this lessening of the request as a concession and tend to compensate this concession with a concession of your own, i.e. to follow through on the minor request.

*Consistency.* There is a natural human tendency to be consistent, coherent in what one does. We expect others to behave under the commandments of this law, and we are disappointed by those who do not. When a politician promises us blocks of flats but is only in the business of increasing his own housing stock, we are disappointed and show our disapproval.

*Social validation.* When we make a decision independently, those around us may see things totally differently. A simple example is our membership of a group whose views we have to accept. From a young age we learn to conform to the rules of others, often this kind of behaviour is like an initiation and therefore becomes useful. Except that this tendency can sometimes be used against us for manipulation.

*Appreciation.* People prefer to say YES to people they like, trust or respect. Compliments have the gift of increasing the favourable feelings of the interlocutor. It is known that the effect of kind words is guaranteed, even if they are completely gratuitous, i.e. the quality praised does not exist, and the person being complimented knows this. Although many people have a reluctance to express compliments, it is good to know that they work, that there is an automatic mechanism of the human being to change his mood on hearing some nice words about oneself.

*Influence through authority.* Anyone has often been in the position of having to decide, as a pedestrian, whether or not to run a red light when no car is threateningly approaching. In making this decision we may be influenced by another passer-by who has more boldly crossed ahead. In this situation, we can speak of influence by authority, which clearly leads to persuasion.

*Shrinking resources.* People want what is scarce or overdue. A t-shirt that says unique features is probably more desirable than a mass-produced one. If the desired product on a particular site is only available for a short period, it is also likely to be purchased, due to the urgency of the situation, even if there are other similar products in the online shop. Many marketing campaigns are accompanied by messages such as "Available for a limited period only" or "Subject to stock availability", precisely because they are based on this human tendency to want what is scarce and limited. Clearly, with these initial signals, the campaign can prove successful, and the recommended product can run out very quickly.

#### **4 PERSUASION AND EDUCATION**

Each communication situation can also be approached from the point of view of the demands which it places on reception and acceptance. The success of communication, measured by the degree to which the listener shares the communicator's views, depends on the two phases, reception and acceptance. In the process of education, the teacher is vested with authority, so there is no question of acceptance. His or her

pedagogical success depends above all on the pupil's receptive capacities. We say that a communicative situation is a matter of preparation when the difficulties of reception are greater than acceptance, and that it is a matter of persuasion otherwise. The distinction between education and persuasion leads to the idea that, taken as a whole, all acts of communication that incite consumption are educational. The paradox is that the meaning of consumer organisations' communications is also a matter of education: their success depends above all on their dissemination, because once they are known they are accepted. The more intelligent a person is, by virtue of their level of education, the more they are exposed to the most diverse information, the longer they can hold their attention and the better they understand the meaning of messages. Consequently, intelligence and susceptibility to persuasion can go hand in hand, as intelligence facilitates exposure and reception. The nature of the relationship between intelligence and persuasion depends on each individual situation, as the importance of reception or acceptance varies from case to case.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Persuasion concerns attitudes and behaviours, i.e. it directly affects each individual, the field of expression of his own personality, the field of his differentiation, in a word, his freedom. Persuasion has become one of the most controversial contemporary issues, as evidenced by the growing number of debates on advertising, political marketing and information control. These techniques also become a form of manipulation, taking on various forms of application in everyday life. They exist and can be seen in the practices of companies, politicians, etc. They are not laws which, regardless of the receiver, deliver the results expected by those who practice them. Each of us has the ability to distinguish between an honest message and one designed to manipulate.

## References

- Cristea, Dumitru, *Tratat de Psihologie socială*, Editura ProTransilvania, 2002 (Cristea, 2002).  
Kapferer, Jean Noël, *Căile persuasiunii*, Editura Humanitas, 1997, comunicare.ro, 2002 (Kapferer, 2002).  
Larson, Charlea U., *Persuasiunea. Receptare și responsabilitate*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2003. (Larson, 2003).