

Chapter 1: Why Study Persuasion?

Key Terms and Concepts

persuasion as an art and science	instrumental function
pervasiveness of persuasion	communication competence
word of mouth (WOM)	knowledge function
buzz marketing	habitual persuasion
tipping points	defensive function
“the law of the few”	third person effect
mavens	debunking function
connectors	counter-intuitive finding
salespeople	manipulation
context	“tool” analogy of persuasion
stickiness	meta-analysis
stickiness	propaganda
scalability	indoctrination
effortless transfer	
gamification	

Chapter Summary Notes

I. Persuasion is everywhere; it is ubiquitous.

II. Persuasion can be thought of as both an art and a science.

A. While much is known about processes of social influence, the scientific study of persuasion is still in its infancy.

B. Persuasion isn't evil or manipulative. It is an essential, indispensable feature of human interaction.

III. Persuasion is worth studying because it is pervasive; it is inevitable and unavoidable.

A. It is part and parcel of the “people professions.”

B. The average person is exposed to hundreds, if not thousands, of ads per day.

C. Buzz marketing, also known as word of mouth (WOM) has gained favor because it is cheap, self-perpetuating, and effective.

1) Social media are increasingly important channels for persuasion.

2) Sentiment tracking relies on social media to identify topics, brands, and threads that are trending.

D. Support for an idea, a brand, or a phenomenon by the influential “law of the few” creates momentum that ultimately becomes the tipping point, or a self-perpetuating persuasive message.

1) Malcolm Gladwell (2000) suggests that certain people act as mavens, connectors, and salespeople.

- 2) Context, stickiness, scalability, and effortless transfer are essential for reaching a tipping point
- 3) There are no guarantees that viral marketing will succeed, just as there are no guarantees that any persuasive campaign will succeed.
- E. Gamification is designed to increase consumer engagement via active participation.
- F. Persuasion is found in not-so-obvious places like the natural sciences, the arts, and a variety of other communication contexts.
- G. Weird persuasion is often aimed at generating controversy or buzz and, hence, free publicity.
- H. The interpersonal arena is where influence attempts are most prevalent and have their greatest impact.

IV. Learning about persuasion serves four basic functions:

- A. Learning about persuasion performs an instrumental function by enhancing the student's ability to use persuasion effectively and appropriately.
- B. Learning about persuasion fulfills a knowledge function by increasing the student's understanding of how persuasion works.
 - 1) People are often unaware of their own habitual patterns of persuasion.
- C. Learning about persuasion serves a defensive function by making the student a more discriminating consumer of persuasive messages.
 - 1) People tend to underestimate the influence of advertising on themselves and overestimate its effects on others, a phenomenon known as the third-person effect.
- D. Learning about persuasion performs a debunking function by alerting the student to false or outdated notions of how persuasion works.
 - 1) Many common sense notions about persuasion are mistaken.
 - 2) Persuasion research has yielded insightful, counter-intuitive findings.

V. Two common criticisms regarding the study of persuasion merit consideration:

- A. Some claim that studying persuasion is tantamount to teaching manipulation.
 - 1) Persuasion research focuses on the means of influence, which tend to be amoral, rather than moral or immoral.
 - 2) Persuasion can be likened to a tool, such as a hammer. The tool itself isn't good or bad. The end or purpose for which the tool is used may be good or bad.
 - 3) A persuader's motives, more than the persuasive means, determine how ethical or unethical a given influence attempt is.
 - 4) The study of persuasion performs a defensive function, arming people against unscrupulous influence attempts.
 - 5) People who denounce the study of persuasion are themselves advocating a persuasive position.
- B. Some claim that persuasion findings are overly qualified or contradictory.
 - 1) Human behavior is complex, so one should expect a certain amount of complexity in how persuasion operates.
 - 2) A number of meaningful, yet qualified, generalizations have been established through meta-analyses.

VI. An important part of the process of learning how to persuade involves learning how to persuade ethically.

VII. (Box 1.1) Persuasion, propaganda, and indoctrination are related terms.

A. Propaganda and indoctrination have a pejorative meaning and are usually used to refer to persuasion used by the opposition.

B. Four basic characteristics of propaganda are identified, along with some common propaganda techniques.

VIII. (Box 1.2) The advice on what to watch out for when buying a car illustrates the defensive function of persuasion.