

Chapter 2: What Constitutes Persuasion?

Key Terms and Concepts

terms closely related to persuasion	synchronous vs. asynchronous communication
pure persuasion	ratio of verbal to nonverbal cues
borderline persuasion	nature and type of media
source-centered views	goals of the participants
intent criterion (intentionality)	socio-cultural factors
intent litmus test for persuasion vs. social influence	Gass and Seiter definition of persuasion
socialization processes	Not everything is persuasion
unintended receiver effect	sneezing, tripping, torture, psychic phenomena
difficulty of determining intent	Dual Process models of persuasion
effects criterion	the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM)
receiver-oriented definitions	central route, or central processing
persuasion as a process vs. a product	peripheral route, or peripheral processing
linear view of persuasion	motivation to process a message
boomerang effect	level of involvement
free will and conscious awareness criterion	need for cognition
persuasion and coercion as closely related	ability to process a message
unconscious criteria in decision-making	central processing and persistence of persuasion
freedom/coercion is often a matter of degree	
product planting and WOM operate at a low level of awareness	Heuristic-Systematic Model of persuasion (HSM)
symbolic action criterion	systematic processing
advertising relies on images more than words	heuristic processing
looking at text alone is fragmented	decision rules
interpersonal versus intrapersonal persuasion	heuristic cues
self-persuasion (denial, rationalizing) is possible	simultaneous processing
Gass and Seiter model of persuasion	sufficiency principle
contextual features of persuasion	Unimodel of persuasion
number of communicators	

Chapter Summary Notes

- 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.
- C. The Unimodel has generated attention to whether and how dual processing occurs.