

Persuasion

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Persuasion is a communicative function that can be pursued in many different settings, ranging from face-to-face interaction to mass communication. Mass media persuasion takes three primary overt forms: commercial advertising (of consumer products and services), pro-social advertising, and political advertising. On each of these subjects, there is extensive empirical research and theorizing (→ Strategic Communication).

Studies of *consumer advertising* have examined such questions as the effectiveness of different advertising strategies, the role of endorsements in consumer advertising, effects of varying the frequency and timing of advertisements, the role of visual elements, and so on (e.g., Kardes et al. 2005; → Advertising; Advertising as Persuasion; Advertising, Endorsement in; Advertisement, Visual Characteristics of). Advertising is commonly one part of a larger marketing effort involving decisions about pricing, product distribution, market segmentation, sales force management, and so forth (→ Marketing).

Pro-social communication campaigns (sometimes termed "social marketing," because such campaigns apply familiar marketing tools to pro-social ends) aim to forward environmental or charitable causes or to advance health-related ends such as encouraging people to exercise, quit smoking, and so forth (→ Environmental Communication; Health Campaigns, Communication in; Social Marketing; Planned Social Change through Communication). Research on health promotion communication has been informed by such theoretical approaches as the → health belief model, the → stages of change (transtheoretical) model of health behavior change, and the → extended parallel process model (→ Health Communication; for collections of studies of pro-social campaigns, see Rice & Atkin 2001; Hornik 2002).

Studies of *political persuasion* (especially, but not exclusively, in the context of election campaign advertising) have examined such subjects as the effects of negative advertising and the role of televised political debates in elections (see, e.g., Mutz et al. 1996; → Election Campaign Communication; Negative Campaigning; Political Advertising; Political Persuasion; Televised Debates). This research is linked with broader work concerned with mass media influences on public opinion generally (see Glynn et al. 1999), including such topics as → propaganda and the interplay of interpersonal interaction and mass media as influences on the public (e.g., the → "two-step flow of communication"; → Public Opinion).

Beyond these three overt forms of mass media persuasion, advocates can also pursue persuasion through two other kinds of media content: news (by means of media advocacy) and entertainment (especially through entertainment education). "Media advocacy" refers to the strategic use of news media coverage to influence opinions on social or public policy questions (→ Media Advocacy in Health Communication). For example, in addition to using paid advertising, a health campaign might supply relevant news stories to local media outlets, or an advocacy group might seek to influence the framing of news stories concerning its particular issue. (For a practical guide to media advocacy, see Wallack et al. 1999).

Especially in the *developing world*, the use of entertainment programming to carry persuasive messages (e.g., about population control or disease prevention) has been particularly notable. For example, a recurring television → soap opera can be used to convey information about HIV/AIDS prevention. A number of these → “entertainment education” campaigns have been especially effective vehicles for persuasion. (For a useful overview, see Singhal et al. 2004.)

In addition to research and theorizing focused on specific contexts of persuasion (e.g., political advertising or changing health behavior), a number of more general theoretical perspectives on persuasion have been developed (for broad treatments of such work, see Dillard & Pfau 2002; O’Keefe 2002; Perloff 2003). Among the more prominent and promising are the → elaboration likelihood model (ELM), → social judgment theory, and → transportation theory. And persuasion has also been illuminated by the application of general models of psychological processes such as → cognitive dissonance theory (often invoked to explain selective exposure to messages) and the theories of planned behavior and reasoned action (two related approaches to understanding the bases of voluntary action; → Planned Behavior, Theory of; Reasoned Action, Theory of).

SEE ALSO: ▶ Advertisement, Visual Characteristics of ▶ Advertising ▶ Advertising, Endorsement in ▶ Advertising as Persuasion ▶ Cognitive Dissonance Theory ▶ Development Communication Campaigns ▶ Elaboration Likelihood Model ▶ Election Campaign Communication ▶ Entertainment Education ▶ Environmental Communication ▶ Extended Parallel Process Model ▶ Health Belief Model ▶ Health Campaigns, Communication in ▶ Health Communication ▶ Marketing ▶ Media Advocacy in Health Communication ▶ Negative Campaigning ▶ Persuasion and Resistance ▶ Planned Behavior, Theory of ▶ Planned Social Change through Communication ▶ Political Advertising ▶ Political Communication ▶ Political Persuasion ▶ Propaganda ▶ Public Opinion ▶ Public Relations ▶ Reasoned Action, Theory of ▶ Risk Communication ▶ Soap Operas ▶ Social Judgment Theory ▶ Social Marketing ▶ Stages of Change Model ▶ Strategic Communication ▶ Televised Debates ▶ Transportation Theory ▶ Two-Step Flow of Communication

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Persuasion and Resistance

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In → persuasion research, the concept of resistance generally refers to → audiences withstanding attempts to change their beliefs, → attitudes, or behaviors. Resistance, however, can actually be conceptualized in multiple ways. For example, it can be thought of as simply an *outcome* of a persuasive attempt (i.e., no change in attitude in the face of a persuasive message). It might also be considered a *motivation*, or goal of the audience (e.g., to maintain or protect their initial beliefs). Resistance might also reflect the *process* through which persuasive attempts are thwarted (e.g., disagreement with a message position or denigration of a message source). Finally, resistance might be reflected by the qualities of either attitudes (e.g., attitude strength) or people (e.g., dogmatic personalities) that limit persuasive effect (see Knowles & Linn 2004).

Regardless of how resistance itself is conceptualized, its role in persuasion is often considered from two different perspectives. First, resistance as the natural, and perhaps unintentional, result of exposure to a persuasive message is examined with the intent of determining how best to minimize this blockage to persuasive effect. Second, given there are persuasive situations in which the intended goal is to reinforce attitudes, or promote resistance to future persuasive attempts that the audiences might face (e.g., messages that might encourage teenagers to start smoking), much attention has focused on how to *generate* resistance to persuasion. Thus, to understand resistance, it is important to consider the factors that might generate resistance to persuasion, means of overcoming those sources of resistance, and the conditions under which resistance might be intentionally induced.

SOURCES OF RESISTANCE

Although resistance to persuasion has been a consistent theme in persuasion research for over 50 years, there does not exist, as yet, a clear typology of the sources of resistance or the means of overcoming them. Still, there are a number of sources that have been examined, some of which focus more on motivational or process orientations to resistance, like reactance, scrutiny, distrust, inertia, and invulnerability, whereas others relate more to the nature of individuals and attitudes themselves (Knowles & Linn 2004).

Sources Relating to Motivational or Process Orientations

One of the most commonly cited sources of resistance is a motivational force known as *reactance* (Brehm 1966). According to reactance theory, when people perceive a request as