

Lesson 5

Social Influence and Persuasion

Lesson Outline

- Attitude Change via Persuasion
- Compliance with Threats and Promises
- Obedience to Authority
- Resisting Influence and Persuasion

Social Influence

- Social influence occurs when:
 1. one person (the source) engages in some behavior (persuading, threatening, promising, or issuing orders)
 2. that causes another person (the target) to behave differently from how he or she would otherwise behave.

Attitude Change

- *Attitude change* is a fairly common result of social influence.
- The influencing source may produce a change in the target's beliefs and attitudes about some issue, person, or situation.
- Compliance occurs when the target's behavior conforms to the source's requests or demands.
 - Some social influences prove ineffective.
 - Sometimes the target may respond with defiance or open revolt.

Forms of Social Influence

- Influence attempts can be either open or covertly manipulative.
 - In open influence, the attempt is readily apparent to the target.
 - In manipulative influence, the attempt is hidden from the target.

Forms of Open Influence

1. Persuasion:
 - The use of persuasive communication to change the target's attitudes or beliefs.
2. Threat
 - The use of threats or promises to gain compliance.
3. Orders
 - The use of orders based on legitimate authority to gain compliance.

Attitude Change Via Persuasion

- Persuasion may be defined as changing the beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors of a target through the use of information or argument.
- Persuasion is widespread in social interaction and assumes many different forms.

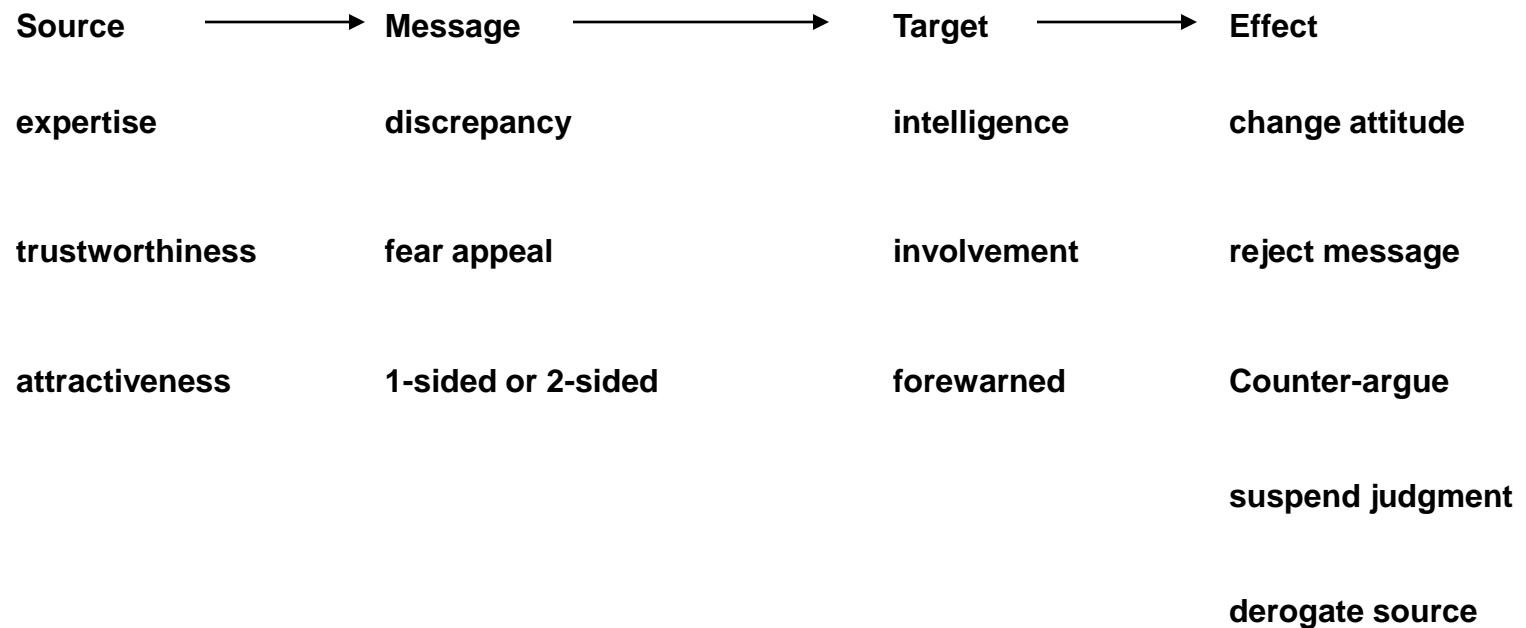
Reactions to Persuasive Messages

- Ignore it.
- Dismiss the communicator.
- Listen to the message but suspend judgment on the issue.
- Misperceive or misconstrue the content of the message.
- Attempt counterpersuasion.

Discussion Question

- You read a report about dehydration and health.
- Would you react differently to the message if the report was written by a Nobel prize winning bio-medical scientist than you would if it was written by a acclaimed food critic?
- If so, why?
- If not, why not?

The Communication-Persuasion Paradigm



Source

- The identity of the source provides the target with information above and beyond the content of the message itself.
- Because some sources are more credible than others, the target may pay attention to the source's identity when assessing whether to believe the message.
- “consider the source”

Communicator Credibility

- **Communicator creditability:** the extent to which the communicator is perceived by the target as a believable source of information.
 - The communicator’s credibility is “in the eye of the beholder”
 - A given source may be credible for some audiences but not for others.

Credibility of the Source

- *Communicator credibility* denotes the extent to which the communicator is perceived as believable.
- Factors that influence the extent to which a source is credible include:
 - Expertise
 - Trustworthiness
 - Attractiveness
 - Likeability.

The Source's Expertise

- A message from a source having a high level of expertise relevant to the issue will bring about greater attitude change than a similar message from a source having a lower level of expertise.

The Source's Trustworthiness

- *Can the source be trusted?*
 - A source may be an expert in the field, but still not very credible.
 - The motives of the source are important.
 - The source's identity is important as this carries information about the source's goals and values.
 - A source with goals and values similar to the target will be more persuasive than a source with dissimilar values.

The Mechanic's Trustworthiness



Social Impact Theory

- **Social Impact Theory:**

The impact of an influence attempt is a direct function of:

1. strength (social status or power of the influencer)
2. immediacy (physical/psychological distance to what the persuasion is about)
3. number of influencing sources.

- A message presented by several different sources is more influential than the same message presented by a single source.

Message Discrepancy

- A discrepant message is a message that advocates a position different from what the target believes.

Emotional appeals:

- (1) Try to arouse basic drives
- (2) Stimulate a need where none was present.

→ The most common emotional appeals involve fear.

Fear Arousal

- Fear-arousing messages are especially useful when the source is trying to motivate the target to take some specific action.
 - This tactic is commonly used by:
 - Politicians
 - Sales persons
- Communications arousing high levels of fear produce more change in attitude than communications arousing low levels of fear.

Persuasion via The Media

- Each year, advertisers spend tens of billions of dollars on media campaigns.
 - Most media campaigns do **not** produce large amounts of attitude change.
- Political media campaigns may produce only a small percentage shift in public opinion, yet it may be enough to get the candidate elected.
- Media campaigns are effective in strengthening pre-existing attitudes.

One-Sided versus Two-Sided Messages.

- A one-sided message emphasizes only those facts that explicitly support the position advocated by the source.
 - A student gives one reason why he/she should take a week off from school.
- A two-sided message presents not only the position advocated by the source but also opposing viewpoints.
 - The student gives the reason why he should and the reason why he should not be given a week off from school.

Target

- Involvement with the issue affects the way the target processes a message.
- A need for cognition, or how much an individual enjoys puzzling through problems and thinking about issues, plays an important role in persuasion attempts.
- Distraction, or anything that prevents the target from giving full attention to the argument, will affect the persuasion attempt.

Compliance with Threats and Promises

- *Compliance* is behavioral conformity by the target to the source's requests or demands.
- Threats and promises are two types of social power that can be used to induce compliance.

Threats and Promises

- A threat is a communication from one person to another that takes the general form, “If you don’t do X, then I will do Y.”
- A promise involves a reward controlled by the source. A person using a promise says, “If you do X , then I will do Y.”

Social Power and Compliance

1. Promise of reward - rewarding desired behavior.
2. Coercion through threat - negative outcome used to assure compliance.
3. Referent power - desire to be like others that we admire compels behavior.

Social Power and Compliance

4. Legitimate power - accepted authority.
5. Information - providing information about desired behavior.
6. Expertise - expert compels behavior.

Obedience to Authority

- ***Authority***: the capacity of one member to issue orders to others.
- People's roles/positions within an organization give them certain rights/obligations.
 - These rights/obligations typically give one person authority over another with respect to certain acts and performances.

Experimental Study of Obedience

- Obedience to authority frequently produces beneficial results
- Obedience facilitates coordination among persons in groups or collective settings.
 - Civil order hinges on obedience to authority.
- In some cases, obedience to authority can produce very negative consequences
 - The orders involve actions that are morally questionable or reprehensible.

Resisting Influence and Persuasion: Attitude Inoculation

- ***Attitude inoculation*** enables target persons to defend their beliefs against persuasion attempts.
 - A refutational defense consists of exposing a target to weak attacks with an opportunity to refute them so they can build up resistance and prepare for stronger attacks.

Resisting Influence and Persuasion: Forewarning

- ***Forewarning*** is simply warning people that they are about to be exposed to a persuasion attempt.
- In order for the forewarning process to work, the targets of the persuasion attempt must care about and be psychologically involved in the issue.
- If they do not care about the issue, the forewarning may have little effect and, in some instances, can even produce greater attitude change.

Reactance

- ***Reactance*** occurs when the target of the persuasion attempt begins to feel that their independence and freedom are being threatened.
- Feeling the need to reassert control, the targets will behave in a way counter to the persuasion attempt in order to demonstrate their independence.