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COM 31800: Principles of Persuasion

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Chapter 1 Notes: Persuasion in Today’s Changing World

The world is filled with information, we must wade through it in order to find information that helps us in our persuasive efforts, but most of it can be ignored.

**The Seven Faces of Persuasion** characterize the factors and processes involved in persuasion that are central to our modern life. Each faces can change the context of the messages we receive every day.

**Interactive Media** – media which we can actively participate in to send communications.

These media can be used to both humanize and dehumanize us. A good example is the capability of the internet to track our views and watch-time, as well as where we decide to visit. From there this information can be translated into raw data, making us just statistics.

**Cultural Diversity** is another huge aspect to persuasion, it ranges from your race, ethnicity, and cultural background to your sexual preference, as well as educational level and religious beliefs. Cultural Diversity is important since the gap it creates between people and make communications indecipherable or worse, misunderstood. All of our decisions will be contingent on our cultural values and psychological needs.

**Propaganda/Advocacy** are becoming even more widespread with the advent of the internet. **Advocacy** is the act of promoting a given belief or cause. **Propaganda** is a set of messages designed to influence large numbers of people. Although it also **presents facts selectively in order to produce an emotional, rather than rational response to the information provided**.

**The Seven Faces of Persuasion**

These are going to be the most pervasive problems regarding persuasion, but this is not a conclusive list.

The advent of technology has made us the most receptive we have ever been the propaganda and persuasion. It has also enabled us to output our persuasions at unprecedented rates. However, we are not meant to ignore all of this information, we should take time to consider all parts of an argument.

The overflow of information and the idea that certain things can improve our life can alter our ways of thinking. Citing the Subway vs. Burger King research in the 2007 Ithaca Paper.

The Seven Faces are as such:

* Persuasion in the 24/7 Networked World
* Persuasion and Its Ethical Challenges
* Persuasion at Work in a Media-Saturated World
* Persuasion, Advocacy and Propaganda
* Persuasion as Protection against Deception
* Persuasion in a Results-Demand World

**Persuasion and Its Ethical Challenges Today**

Duplicity and deceit have existed since the dawn of man as a way to achieve our goals. Today we face an even greater problem than our other citizens deceiving us, but we also face people in power deceiving us. From world class corporations bilking the innocent out of their savings, to religious leaders molesting children, and even government officials lying to us about their actions in wars.

On the whole, even individuals have lower standards for honesty and ethical behavior.

It is these reasons that we must arm ourselves with critical thinking and rationality.

**Persuasion at Work in a Media-Saturated World**

Currently, the internet has flooded our lives with information that we have to wade through. As such it is incredibly feasible to spread information across the world at alarming rates and things can quickly become permanent fixtures on the internet.

**Persuasion, Advocacy and Propaganda**

In our world of ethical crises and deluges of media and information, people have found their own way to advocate their own agenda. Advocacy and Propaganda litter the internet. This advocacy can range from absurd to heavy-handed propaganda. While propaganda holds a lot of negative baggage, advocacy could be seen as the angel on shoulder. Although advocacy and propaganda share some traits, propaganda is delineated because it exhibits these traits.

* It is ideological or it carries and promotes a belief or system of attitudes that are dogmatic. That system is the only acceptable system.
* Use of mass media to spread rapidly, creating a fanatical group.
* It will conceal the information about itself, i.e.
  + source of the message (political party, religion).
  + true goal of said source (attainment of power, discrimination, violence against opposing groups).
  + other perspectives
  + techniques used to promote (subliminal cues, music, uniforms, impromptu meetings etc.).
  + The result of the success of the group’s goal. (tyranny, surveillance, abolishment of personal rights)
* It attempts to create mass uniformity of belief and behavior, instilling mob psychology.
* Through these propaganda will circumvent reasoning, causing a substitution of the emotional argument with hatred of stereotypes.

Advocacy is the act of promoting an issue without these attributes that transmute it into propaganda. The key for the audience is to accept these arguments into your mind and distinguish advocacy and the ethical arguments from propaganda and the non-ethical arguments.

**Persuasion in a Multicultural World**

Different cultural values will cause people to operate on different levels. Whether this be when they get to work, how they plan a project, and how they react in the case of a major failure at work. It is important to examine the complexities that are inherent with multicultural communications. Especially in the world where this culture extends not only to where one is from, but also what they believe in and their sexual preference.

**Persuasion as Protection in a Deceptive, Doublespeak, and Dangerous World**

While we as humans have become better at lying over the centuries, we have not been so lucky as to say “No.” to scams, swindles, and political deception.

Response-ability, is your ability to wisely and critically respond to the persuasion you encounter and to make wise and ethical decisions when you both process and craft your own persuasions.

**Doublespeak** is the type of language which is evasive, ambiguous, and high-flown. In this manner it is able to deceive others. This can come from phrases such as “deep-chilled, not frozen.” In the case of restaurants, or fast-food chains selling meat. This phrase is actually a euphemism, which is a phrase or words that are meant to distort or soften reality.

Part of learning to defend yourself is understanding the methods of attack implemented by those who would deceive you. The “half-truth” method for doublespeak is when you are only told half of the story. If someone tells you that they are “Making progress”, you might accept a deception, what does “Making progress” mean? It could be very incremental or slow progress, but this is not made obvious to you.

The “Bogus Issue” is a method of double speak in which the deceiver will craft an issue that is inconsequential in order to justify their methods or actions.

Using jargon is also doublespeak, it can be used to confuse or convince the deceived, since jargon is technical or specialized language.

In order to combat doublespeak, you should ask yourself. When accepting information or persuasion.

1. Who is speaking to whom?
2. Under what conditions?
3. Under what circumstances?
4. With what intent?
5. With what results?

Weakness or a lack of ease in your answers can indicate that your being deceived through doublespeak.

Scams are one of the most prevalent methods of deception. A scam being defined as “A fraudulent business scheme – a swindle”

Scams first begin with the scammer persuading the victim to let themselves be scammed, and that the scammer is credible and trustworthy. The scammer must also make it appear as though the scheme will yield rewards to the victim. This is normally done through statistics and testimony. The scammer then persuades the victim to make a financial commitment. Other kinds of scams involve the misuse of charities to get money from others. This commitment must be preceded by credibility on the part of the scammer. Usually in the form of donor list, or other statistics.

**Identity-Theft** is one of the biggest problems that is endemic especially to the internet. This normally involves the victim receiving a message in which information is ask of them, this is where the scammer will get their info. This can range from phony weight-loss, to winning lotteries, and even Nigerian princes moving to America.

**Self-Protection** is the only way we can leverage a defense against the people who would aim to deceive us. The first step is to be skeptical and responsible.

**Persuasion in a Results-Demanded World**

With the increasing pace of the world, we have begun to demand results with less patience. This affects how we accept persuasive efforts. This results oriented world forces us to make ourselves vulnerable to judgement, since failing to persuade is the same as not persuading at all. The results-oriented approach that we must assume has to criteria for success, those are efficacy and the persuasive gains. In order for persuasive to be considered a success it must produce something tangible.

Efficiency is another criterion for the result-oriented world. If you cannot efficiently persuade for a meaningful amount of reward then you are not an effective persuader. We need to plan our persuasion as though it is a war of attrition. The goal of us as persuades is to be patient, skeptical, and critical until the outcome is apparent.

**Defining Persuasion: From Aristotle to Elaboration Likelihood**

The Greeks were some of the first peoples to systematize the use of persuasion, naming it “rhetoric”. They studied it extensively, and used it just as much. Aristotle was one of the primary theorists, he defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case, the available means of persuasion.” From there he classified persuasions components, **artistic proofs** and **inartistic proofs**. The artistic proof is controlled by the persuader and includes the choice of evidence, the organization of the persuasion, the style of delivery, and language choices. Inartistic includes that which isn’t controlled by the speaker, this would be the time, occasion, time allotted, and the speaker’s appearance.

According to Aristotle there are three basic types of proof, such as ethos, pathos, and logos.

* Ethos is the credibility of the speaker, why do they have a reason the speak on this subject.
* Pathos is the emotion that the speaker can summon from the viewer
* Logos is logical appeal that the speaker makes to the viewer.

Aristotle also described a **common ground** where the shared beliefs, values, and interest between the persuader and persuade would make persuasion more effective. Additionally it gives the persuader the opportunity to make specific assumptions and use specific patterns or types of languages, emotions, and logic to persuade.

With the assumption, we can use **enthymemes**, which is the method of arguing in which the final point to be made is withheld, and instead you let the user or audience to make the connection.

Roman students also added their own elements to persuasive speaking. Cicero identified five elements;

1. Inventing/discovering evidence and arguments
2. Organizing them
3. Styling them
4. Memorizing them
5. Delivering them skillfully

The idea of persuasion would be changed radically after WWII, Winston Brembeck and William Howell describe persuasion as “The conscious attempt to modify thought and action by manipulating the motives of men toward predetermined ends.”

In the 70s Burke made the discovery that persuasion is “the artful use of the resources of ambiguity”. Burke also believed that if receivers of a message felt that they were being spoken to in their own language, they will self-identify with the message and the persuader. This in essence forces the receivers into a common ground. He also noted that this identification will occur most quickly when the receivers are enraptured in a story, like a drama, or other narrative.

Here in the book, the author uses the combined redefining of persuasion to develop their own. “Persuasion is the process of **co-creation** by sources and receivers of a state of identification through the use of verbal and/or visual symbols.” This definition requires both the intellectual and emotional investment of the receiver which will lead to the identification with the persuader.

All persuasion is based on appeals to things acceptable to the persuadee, thus inducing action. Since it is called a process of co-creation, persuasion consists of self-persuasion at some level.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model** is the theory which organizes the persuasion model. Psychologists Richard Petty and John Cacioppo suggest this cognitive model in which persuasion takes one of two routes.

**Central Information Processing Route** is the route taken when the receiver will interact with the message and seek out more information regarding the subject. This route is used when making bigger decisions such as buying a car or home.

**Peripheral Information Processing Route** is the route taken when the information only requires a moment to be processed without direct focus or research on the decision. Information will be processed by this route almost instantly, and it prompted by seemingly irrelevant or minor cues. At any given moment there are millions of these cues available to us, but we will only focus on a few of them and process the rest subconsciously. Our peripheral route acts like a sponge, taking up whatever persuasive information that is available and either use it immediately or use it later as we need it, but we never focus on it in a meaningful way. This route will contain shortcuts for decision-making and mostly includes emotional and not logical appeals.

The Elaboration model will focus on the process that occur during persuasion and not the variables of persuasion.

Since we must selectively focus on some of the information, we will ignore all else letting it enter our subconscious while taking what is on our focus studying it. However, persuasion will be more successful on information that has been elaborated on, while it will be less successful with less elaborated information.

**Criteria for Responsible Persuasion**

While persuasion occurs under various circumstances, three conditions seem to increase the chances that responsible receivers will make wise and knowledgeable decisions.

1. Equal access to media of communication
2. Transparency with agendas
3. Transparency with Potential fallout from advocated policies

**The SMCR Model of Persuasion**

* S – Source: The encoder of a message
* M – Message: Which is meant to convey the source’s meaning through any of the codes
* C – Channel: Which carries the message and may have distracting noise
* R – Receiver: That who decodes the message, trying to sift out noise and adding interpretation.

Emotional messages need to be examined closely since they tend to be more biased, incomplete, propagandistic, or unethical.

Persuasion and Other Theories of Influence

ELM is weak in the fact that it does not include the possibility of Mindless behavior, it focus solely on voluntary behavior. A key concept in the **theory of reasoned action** is the concept of **behavioral intention**, this is the result of individual influences such as our feelings, attitudes, or predispositions and cultural norms. Our ability to withstand outer influence on our behavior is the basis for behavioral intentions. The other portion rests on our cultural norms or patterns. At it’s essence, Reasoned Action states that anyone will use their reasoning abilities to balance their individual beliefs and values with those of our surrounding culture when making an action.

Narrative theories are based on the human instinct for story telling. As such we both feel the need to tell stories and are more receptive to story like persuasions.

Influence refers to the ways in which some kinds of things alter a person’s attitude or behaviors. When fans adopt the styles of their idols, they are undergoing “behavior modeling”.

Persuasion always includes a degree of choice, **coercion** on the other hand uses physical or psychological force to gain compliance. Peer pressure is a minor form of coercion. **Propaganda** is another form of influence, it is usually psychological versus logical, and it is typically highly effective. Propaganda is created deliberately and uses mass media to convert others to an ideology. Advertising may cause you to oppose and ideology, it is typically benign and will use facts, however propaganda is far more malignant. Persuasion is contingent on the changing of behavior through co-creation, common ground, and interactive communication.

**Rank’s Model of Persausion – A First Means of Self-Protection**

Hugh Rank developed a method of analysis to help create doublespeak literate people, thus arming people against the propaganda that they are assailed by each day. This method is called the intensify/downplay model. There are four major persuasive strategies and six tactics. The persuader’s goals are implemented in the strategies they decide to use. The four strategies used by persuaders:

* Intensify their own good points
* Intensify the weak points of the opposition
* Downplay their own weak points
* Downplay the good points of the opposition

Persuaders will also use tactics such as **repetition, association,** and **composition** to intensify their own good points or bad points of the opposition. The tactics of **omission, diversion,** and **confusion** are used to downplay their own bad points or the oppositions good points.

A persuader will either want to look good or want their opposition to look bad.

Composition requires a bit more work than association and repetition. Composition requires altering the image of a target. You could, for example, change U.S.A. to U.$.A. to create a more money centric view of the United States. This can also be done through the use of pictures, changing the perspective is one way to do this.

Omission is the practice of leaving out critical information to avoid highlighting their own shortcomings or competitors’ strengths.

Diversion is the method of shifting attention away from an opponent’s strengths or one’s own shortcomings but this time not through omission but by using substitute issues to divert the receiver’s scrutiny.

Confusion is where Jargon comes in, by using jargon you can confuse and obscure the true meaning of your words. Additionally the use of red herrings can misdirect the receiver logically.

**A Method of Self-Protection**

Rank offers some advice about how to detect the flaws of persuaders who use various tactics to intensify or downplay: “When they intensify, you downplay. When they downplay, you intensify.” By noticing or recording the ways the sender of the message is manipulating the message you can become more alert to these tactics and strategies.