**Persuasion Model of Communication**

Key Terms: P*ersuasion,* *ethos*, l*ogos, pathos, propaganda*

**I. DEFININTION**

Persuasion is a process of verbal and nonverbal communication that consciously attempts to

influence people in their attitudes, opinions and behaviors, using ethical means that enhance an

open society and an atmosphere of free choice.

Persuasion is intentional communication that seeks to influence people on the basis of both

emotional presentations and rational arguments without the use of coercion, manipulation or

propaganda.

The tools of persuasion are signs and symbols, specifically the words of verbal communication

as well as the symbols, images and other elements of nonverbal communication.

The contemporary understanding of persuasion is closely linked with social psychology, which

houses the study of attitudes and attitudinal change. One important observation from this field is

that people cannot be forcibly persuaded; rather, they persuade themselves. So-called persuasive

messages primarily are stimuli – logical arguments as well as emotional ambiance – which touches

upon people’s desires and leads them to accept or reject the message. When they accept the

message, we say they have been persuaded.

**II. HISTORY**

The study of persuasion is both ancient and modern. More than 4,000 years ago, the Egyptian court

advisor Ptah-Hotep wrote about effective persuasion, specifically the need to link the message to

audience interests. Centuries later, Corax of Syracuse wrote about persuasive speaking.

But it was in Greece where the study of rhetoric flourished. Against the Sophists’ focus on style,

Socrates of Athens and his student Plato believed that truth was the main value in persuasive

communication. That argument continues today, as one group of people believe that advertising,

public relations, political campaigning and other forms of persuasive communication should use

whatever means possible to persuade their audiences, while others urge communicators to be ethical

and accurate and to avoid negative advertising or public relations spinning.

Plato’s student Aristotle studied and taught about persuasive communication. One of his enduring

legacies is the continued use of three concepts of persuasive communication: ethos (the nature and

credibility of the speaker), logos (rational arguments presented to an audience) and pathos (the

emotional state of audiences and the emotional impact of messages).

Meanwhile in Rome, Marcus Tullius Cicero taught persuasive speaking, with particular emphasis on

the value of emotional appeals. Marcus Fabius Quintilianus addressed both the ethical aspects of

rhetoric and the characteristics of an ideal orator.

The early Christian Church preserved and enhanced the concepts of rhetoric. In Northern Europe,

the Saxon theologian Alcuin reinterpreted Roman rhetorical tradition for the Emperor Charlemagne,

and in Roman Africa, Augustine of Hippo developed the art of preaching based on Greek rhetorical

concepts. Centuries later, the Christian monk Thomas Aquinas revisited Aristotle to study the

persuasive nature of religious communication.

The tradition of rhetoric has been strong in Islamic history. The development of “Ilmul Kalam”

(Knowledge of Theological Discourse) and “Ilmul Bayan” (Knowledge of elocution) has

significantly contributed to the Islamic style of communication. The golden period of Islamic

civilization under the dynasties of Ummayads and Abbasids in the Arabian Peninsula and the Moors

in Spain saw great advancement in rhetoric due to debates among scholars of competitive schools of

thought. Likewise, the Ottomans in West Asia, Mughals in South Asia, Safvids in Persia and Sufis in

Southeast Asia have left a treasure of rhetoric literature and tradition.

**III. The 3 Appeals**

**A. Ethos: Persuasion and the Message Source**

Aristotle observed, and contemporary research has verified, that persuasion is more likely to occur

when the audience has a positive relationship with and appreciation for the speaker. Note that three

characteristics, while residing within the speaker, are recognized and granted by the audience:

credibility, charisma and control.

**1. Speaker Characteristic**

1. **Credibility** is the power to inspire belief. It involves several components:
2. **Expertise**. Audience perception that speaker has particular knowledge of what he/she is

speaking about.

1. **Status**. Audience perception of the social position or prestige of a message source.
2. **Competence**. Audience perception that the speaker can remain calm under pressure and is clear

and dynamic in presenting the message to others.

1. **Honesty**. Audience perception that the speaker is sincere and trustworthy in presenting the

information and is doing so for the sake of truth or the good of the audience, rather than for

biased or selfish motives.

Note that a key element in each characteristics is audience perception. It is important for the

audience to understand the speaker’s level of expertise, status and so on.

1. **Charisma** is the magnetic appeal or personal charm that some message sources enjoy over an

audience. Like credibility, charisma is a matter of perception.

1. **Familiarity**. The extent to which an audience already knows (or thinks it knows) the message

source.

1. **Likability**. The extent to which the audience admires what it knows about the source or what it

sees and hears when the speaker begins to communicate.

1. **Similarity**. The extent to which the message source resembles the audience (or the way the

audience would like to see itself).

1. **Attractiveness**. The extent to which the audience appreciates the message source’s physical

looks, demeanor and presence, as well as clothing worn and the setting in which the source is

presented.

1. **Control** is the third element of an effective message source. This is rooted in a speaker’s command

over the audience and on the perceived willingness to exercise that power.

1. **Power**. The raw and recognized ability to dominate and to reward or punish.
2. **Authority**. The right to rule over or direct the actions of another, a relationship more-or-less

granted by the audience.

1. **Scrutiny**. The ability to examine or investigate and thus to pronounce blame, proclaim

innocence, and grant forgiveness.

2. **Sources** For journalists, the implication of these elements of persuasions is that reporters and editors

consider message sources as they prepare news reports. Ideally, the selection is based on several

elements that affect the ultimate credibility of the news report:

a. Sincere and trustworthy; unbiased

b. Recognizable as experts

c. Available to the media

**3. PR and ADS**

There also are implications of this for public relations and advertising. Organizations select as

message sources either organizational officials (presidents, CEOs, directors or other company

spokespersons) or persons outside the organizational leadership (customers, experts or celebrities).

Public relations would use these people as spokespersons and opinion leaders for organizations;

advertising would use them as official advertising or promotional spokespersons. They are selected

on various criteria, including:

* 1. Trustworthy
  2. Recognizable
  3. Affordable
  4. At little risk for negative publicity
  5. Appropriately matches with the intended audience

**B. Logos: Persuasion by Appealing to Reason**

In order to be effectively persuasive, communication needs to be rooted, at least in part, in logic

and rationality. Here are some common principles of the rational side of persuasive communication

1. Types of logical propositions:

* **Factual** proposition states that something exists, based on provable evidence.
* **Conjecture** proposition states that something probably exists, based on reasoned conclusions

drawn from physical evidence, and asks the audience to agree with that conclusion.

* **Value** proposition identifies the virtue of something.
* **Policy** proposition identifies a new course of action and encourages its adoption.Avoid errors of logic such as unwarranted conclusion (a deduction that is not supported by

evidence) or by a false assumption (a conclusion that the audience may not accept).

2. Types of verbal evidence

* **Analogy** uses a familiar situation and allusion to help an audience understand a new idea,

specifically by making a comparison between two things are essentially different but nevertheless

strikingly alike in an important aspect.

* **Comparison** highlights the characteristics or values of something in relation to something else.

Positive comparisons are used with elements the audience already acknowledges and admires;

Negative comparisons are used with elements the audience holds in low esteem.

* **Examples** provide conclusions drawn from related experiences. Related to examples are

anecdotes, which are short stories that make a point, though audiences often recognize them as

being hypothetical or not literally true.

* **Statistics** are mathematical examples intended to make a case based on the hard evidence of

numbers.

* **Testimonies and endorsements** are comments by witnesses and people who have used an

organization’s products or services (testimony) or are involved with its issues (endorsements).

* **Visual supporting evidence** can enhance and clarify the verbal evidence by providing

photographs, charts, graphs and diagrams.

**C. Pathos: Persuasion by appealing to sentiment**

Human beings are not mere thinking machines. Instead, we rely heavily on feelings, and effective

communicators consider how to use both positive and negative feelings in persuasive

communication. Ethos has been defined as the use of emotional messages, but it is significantly

more. Aristotle saw it as the emotional state of the audience, their relationship with both the issue

and the speaker.

**1. Positive Emotional Appeals**

* **Love** appeals can vary from bittersweet poignancy, to family together, from nostalgia to pity or

compassion, from sensitivity to sympathy. Pleasant images can lead audiences not only to

remember the persuasive messages but to be more likely to act on the message.

* **Virtue** appeals can evoke many values that society or individuals hold in esteem. In the range of

virtue appeals are those to justice, loyalty, discretion, bravery, piety, esteem and altruism, as well

as to social or personal progress or acceptance.

* **Humor** appeals are based on amusement and what an audience considers funny. These appeals

often are used to gain attention and to reinforce messages, and they sometimes can make a

speaker more liked by an audience. But humor is difficult to achieve because it varies so much

from one person to another, and from one culture to another. Additionally, humor does not coexist

well with the repetition of messages.

* **Sex** appeals are based on subtle or shocking use of messages related to nudity or sexuality. In

some cultures, such appeals are considered appropriate, particularly for products associated with sexual attraction such as perfume and jewelry. In other cultures, sex appeals are considered

offensive.

**2. Negative Emotional Appeals**

* **Fear** appeals are based on the human tendency toward anxiety or worry. Moderation is the key

to using fear appeals effectively. Communicators have found that the best use of fear appeals is

when they are accompanied by an easy-to-achieve and practical solution to the problems that

audiences are willing to admit to. Younger people have a higher tolerance for fear appeals than

do older people, and research suggests that the effectiveness of stronger fear appeals increases

when audience members have high self-esteem and feel immune to pending doom.

* **Guilt** appeals focus on a personal sense of shame, the antithesis of a virtue appeal. Like fear

appeals, guilt appeals can be effective in moderation and with the appropriate audience.

* **Hate** appeals carry with them particular ethical problems. Social responsibility suggests that appeals to hatred of people are unethical and inappropriate, though admittedly sometime

effective, particularly with audiences that are poorly educated. Less ethically risky are appeals

based on the hatred of socially abhorrent ideas or actions, though abhorrence often is shaped by

political and social issues that do not span cultures well.

III.  **Rank’s Model of Persuasion**

Professor Hugh Rank has articulated an easy-to-understand relationship between two opposing

forces in persuasive argumentation.

* Intensify. One technique is to intensify or magnify the benefits of your product/cause as well as the problems associated with the opposing side. Intensification can be accomplished through three techniques: repetition, association and composition.
* Repetition involves the presentation of a message often enough so that it becomes known and

comfortable. This technique is associated with educational drills, and in its higher forms, with

family customs and religious ritual.

* Association involves the linking of an idea to something the audience already knows and

understands. In a positive context, this would involve something the audience likes, trust and

appreciates. In a negative context, it would involve something the audience dislikes, rejects or

fears.

* Composition is the use of a visual or verbal pattern or presentation that adds to the power of the message. An example of this is the use of background music to an advertising message for the purpose of conveying, for example, a sense of calm or a stirring call to action.
* Downplay. A related (and often simultaneous) technique is to downplay or minimize the benefits of the opposition’s case as well as problem associated with your side. Downplaying can be achieved by three techniques: omission, diversion and confusion.
* Omission is communication that is biased, misleading, or lacking in the full picture
* Diversion is the deliberate intensification of trivial or unrelated information in order to draw

attention away from logical analysis of an issue. Examples of this include nit-picking, hairsplitting, emotional personal attacks, and condescending distracting humor.

* Confusion involves the over-communication of detail to make a message to complex that it

cannot be understood. Associated with this is the use of contradictions, faulty logic,

inconsistencies, and other elements of messages that hampers understanding.

**► Propaganda**

Traditionally, the word propaganda refers to the transmission of information to promote a cause or

social action.

In contemporary usage, the word refers to persuasive social or ideological communication that is

biased and unethical, either incomplete or misleading information as well as outright lies. It is seen as

information, spread primarily through the mass media to a mass audience, in an effort to further

one’s cause or to damage an opponent’s cause. Sometimes called misinformation, propaganda lacks

the honest intent, mutual respect, and commitment to open communication associated with the

proper use of persuasion. Indeed, propaganda is often encountered in situations of heavy control or

manipulation by the media, such as in Hitler’s Germany or the former Soviet Russia. Depending on

a critic’s political bias, charges of propaganda also may be made against the Sharon government in

Israel, the Bush administration in Washington, the Protestant rulers in Northern Ireland, pre- or

post-Saddam regime in Iraq, or virtually any other political or military power.

Communication scholars have categorized propaganda in several ways. Here is the categorization

established by philosopher Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), who saw propaganda as a highly organized

top-down, politically motivated strategy for controlling a population. He observed that the power

and reach of mass media create an environment that makes propaganda possible.

**I. Pre-propaganda** involves the creation of images, stereotypes, ambiguities and social myths that

prepare people for later manipulation and action.

* **Political versus sociological propaganda**. Political propaganda is carried out by a body such as a government or political party with definite goals. Sociological propaganda is based on a general climate of opinion operating subtly, without the appearance of propaganda.
* **Agitation versus integration** propaganda. Agitation propaganda is used to whip up public

support for war or some other goal that involves a high degree of sacrifice. Integration

propaganda seeks conformity to stabilize society and reinforce social cohesion.

* **Vertical versus horizontal** propaganda. Vertical propaganda comes from the top down, often in a coordinated implementation, whereas horizontal propaganda is animated within the masses by large numbers of loosely-organized groups.
* **Irrational versus rational** propaganda. Irrational propaganda is fostered through the use of

symbols, myths, emotive appeals, and so on. Rational propaganda is based on the appearance of

logic, reason, facts and figures, though in reality the facts often subvert or misrepresent the

truth.

Some of the strategies of propaganda include the establishment of demagogues or charismatic

leaders, the co-opting of the media, and the manipulation of language. Following are several

commonly identified examples of such tactics. Note that the propaganda aspect of these techniques

generally involves the relevance and accuracy of the information and whether the impression left on

an audience is an honest one.

* **Glittering generality** refers to the use of “virtue words” that lack definition or that have varying definitions. Examples: “free speech,” “materialistic society.” Ethically, this technique has little use for legitimate persuasive purposes, because its purpose is the mask and mislead.
* **Transfer i**s the technique of taking something with authority, prestige or acceptance and carrying it over to something else for the purpose of giving authority, prestige or acceptance to the latter. It is the association of something with claims of goodness or godliness, purity or political correctness. Example: Photographing a political candidate in front of a religious building, implying that the candidate espouses religious values. This can be a legitimate persuasive technique if the impression is accurate; it becomes propaganda when there is little or no consistency between the person and the value portrayed.
* **Name-calling** is the negative alternative to transfer, in which an opponent is associated with

unsavory people or causes or is made out to be a scapegoat, belittled, or accused of evil thoughts and deeds. Unless the allegations are true and relevant, there is no ethical use of this technique.

* **Testimony** involves having a respected (or hated) figure say that an idea, program or product is

good (or bad). This is a legitimate persuasive technique used in journalism, public relations and

advertising when the testimony is accurate and not misleading.

* **Plain folks** is a technique of implying that the speaker is just one of the people, and his or her

ideas are good because they reflect the audience or the simple everyday person. This technique

takes the focus off the substance and put it on the style and delivery of the presentation. This

makes it an ethically dubious technique.

* **Card-stacking** refers to the selection and use of false, incomplete, illogical or misleading

information in order to produce a good (or bad) impression. There are no legitimate persuasive

uses of this technique.

* **Band-wagon** is the name of a propaganda technique that attempts to persuade on the premise

that everybody else is doing this. Ethically it is valid only to the extent that it is accurate.

Journalists and public relations practitioners use polls as a way of informing people about what

others are doing.

* **Repetition** is the presentation of the same information over and over again. This sometimes in

known as the big lie, an outrageous falsehood that some hearers accept when it is repeated often enough and which is virtually impossible to defend against because it involves a conscious and arrogant manufacturing and misuse of information.

* **Bold assertions** refer to the use of dubious and exaggerated claims, such as the use of the terms “undeniable” or “unquestionably,” which diverts the audience attention from the validity of the information. There is no ethical justification for making unsubstantiated claims.
* **Selective omission** occurs when information is one-sided; that is, when only some facts are

given. The facts are true, but their incomplete nature can mislead the audience. Indeed, that is

the reason for selective omission, and because of that it has no ethical use as a persuasive

communication technique.

* **Quoting out of context** is another propagandistic technique, a particularly reprehensible one

because it co-opts another person in an effort to mislead. Presenting someone’s partial views

often leaves the wrong impression on an audience. As such, it has no legitimate or ethical use in

persuasive communication.