Chapter 3:
Mass Communication, Propaganda, and Persuasion

Mass Communication
- The world is a “global village” – connected by information
- Almost every U.S. household has a TV
- The entire population can be exposed to similar information almost simultaneously

Attempts at Persuasion
- Every time we turn on the TV, open a magazine, or turn on the radio, someone is trying to persuade us to do something
- Those who produce TV news influence our opinions by choosing what is given exposure and how much

Media or Emotional Contagion
- Emotional contagion is the rapid transmission of emotions or behaviors through a crowd
- The public can be inappropriately influenced by information
- Examples include copycat suicides and medical attention sought unnecessarily when drug tampering is reported in the news
Effectiveness of Media Appeals

- Prima facie (first impression) evidence suggests media appeals are very effective
- The more familiar an item, the more attractive it is
- Children ask for toys and food they see advertised on TV
- TV ads are the most effective predictor of voting behavior

Education vs. Propaganda

- Education
  - The act of imparting knowledge
- Propaganda
  - The propagation of a given doctrine
- In "real" life, the distinction is often more subtle that it seems
  - Which we determine it to be depends upon our values

Two Routes to Persuasion

- The goal of both routes of persuasion is behavior change
- Few appeals use one route or the other exclusively
  1. Central
     - Weigh arguments, consider facts, think systematically
     - If the arguments are strong and compelling, then persuasion is likely
     - Leads to more enduring change not because the arguments are so persuasive, but because it gets people to think deeply enough that any changed attitude will be more likely to persist, resist attack, and influence behavior
     - I.e. computer ads systematically comparing features and prices
  2. Peripheral
     - Respond to simple, often irrelevant cues, like the desirability of the communicator
     - When people are distracted or not motivated to think, easily understood familiar statement are more persuasive than novel statements with the same meaning
     - I.e. “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket” has more impact than “Don’t risk everything on a single venture”
     - Often are visual peripheral cues
     - Sometimes it’s just easier to use simple rule-of-thumb heuristics such as “trust the experts”
     - Often leads to superficial and temporary attitude change
     - I.e. soft-drink ads associating their product with glamour, pleasure, and good moods
     - I.e. “You’re gettin’ a Dell!” or “WeebleWobble”
Cialdini’s 6 Principles of Influence

1. Reciprocity
   - A feeling of obligation to repay
   - Tactics not for the merits of the argument
2. Liking
   - People have a positive reaction to those they like
3. Consistency
   - Past actions direct future action
4. Social validation
   - If everyone’s doing it, why shouldn’t I?
5. Authority
   - People often respond positively to models of authority
6. Scarcity
   - Items of opportunities seem more desirable if they seem to be less available

Key Factors in Effectiveness of Communication

1. Source of communication (who says it)
2. Nature of communication (what and how it’s said)
3. Characteristics of the audience (to whom it is said)
2. Increasing Credibility or Trustworthiness (Who)

- Perceived expertise can occur by saying things the audience agrees with, being introduced as knowledgeable on the topic, or speaking confidently.
- Perceived trustworthiness can occur by not trying to persuade the audience (grad students eavesdropped upon), arguing against their own self-interest.
- Trustworthiness and credibility increase when people talk fast.

3. Attractiveness (Who)

- We associate the attractiveness of the communicator with the desirability of the message.
- Endorsements by athletes and entertainers.
- We seem to want to please an attractive communicator by agreeing.
- We tend to change our opinion readily when communicator is attractive, but only on trivial matters (i.e. shaving cream).

Nature of the Communication (What)

1. Reason or logic vs. emotional appeals
2. Statistics vs. personal examples
3. One-sided vs. two-sided arguments
4. Order of presentation of arguments
5. Audience’s original opinion vs. the opinion expressed by communicator

1. Reason or Logic vs. Emotional Appeals (What/How)

- Some evidence that an emotional appeal is more effective.
  - I.e. campaign to support world hunger relief—compelling story or picture of one starving child.
  - It depends upon the audience.
    - Less educated/analytical people tend to be more responsive to emotional appeal.
Fear-based Appeals

- In general, fear inspires behavior change
  - i.e. trying to get people to brush teeth more, smoke less, avoid risk of HIV/AIDS infection, use condoms more, etc.
- Too much fear can lead to denial
- Fear-based appeals are more effective if you lead people not to just fear the severity and likelihood of a threatened event, but also to identify a solution and act on it
- People with high self-esteem are more likely to change behavior immediately
- Specific instructions about behavior change increases behavior change
- Vague warnings are ineffective → “cry wolf” effect of ignoring

2. Statistics vs. Personal Examples (What/How)

- Personal examples get more weight in the decision-making process
- The more vivid the example, the more weight it is given
  - i.e. volvo purchase—consumer reports vs. anecdotal ex. (friend)

3. One-sided vs. Two-sided Arguments (What/How)

- No simple relationship—complex effects
- Two-sided
  - Well-informed audience members are more persuaded by two-sided arguments
    - i.e. defense brings up damaging evidence before the prosecution does
  - Those who disagree with the communicator tend to be more persuaded by two-sided arguments
- One-sided
  - Not well-informed audience members could become confused by two-sided arguments.
  - Those who already agree with the communicator are more persuaded by one-sided arguments

4. Order of Presentation (What/How)

- No simple relationship
- Primacy effect
  - First impressions are crucial
- Recency effect
  - Individuals may best remember the last thing they heard
  - Forgetting creates the recency effect
4. Order of Presentation (Cont.)

- **Time** is the crucial variable – the amount of time separating events
- Separation between first and second communication
- Separation between the communications and the audience’s action
  - If need to respond immediately after both presentations, more likely to remember the last (recency effect)
  - If won’t act on information for a few days, more likely to remember the first (primacy effect)

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5. Audience Opinion (What/How)

- In general, the greater the discrepancy between the communication and the audience’s original opinion, the more opinion change results, especially if the communicator is credible
- However some research suggests a more complex relationship
- The effect of a large vs. small discrepancy depends on whether the communicator is credible
- People are more open to opinions within their “latitude of acceptance”
  - If a particular communicator differs considerably from a person’s own position, it is outside of their L.O.A. and they won’t be much influenced by it
  - The greatest opinion changes occurred when there was a moderate discrepancy between the actual message and the opinions of the individual
  - The greater the discrepancy, the greater the discomfort for the members of the audience
- There are at least 4 ways in which audience members can reduce their discomfort
  1. They can change their opinion
  2. They can induce the communicator to change his/her opinion
  3. They can seek support for their original opinion by finding other people who share their views, in spite of what the communicator says, or
  4. They can derogate the communicator—convince themselves the communicator is stupid or immoral—and thereby invalidate that person’s opinion

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Audience Characteristics (to Whom)

1. Self-esteem
   - People with low self-esteem are more easily influenced than are people with high self-esteem
2. Prior experience (frame of mind)
   - Audience is more receptive when they are happy and relaxed
   - Audience is less receptive if they are forewarned about attempt to persuade
   - **Reactance** can result from overly aggressive attempts to persuade
     - I.e. urged not to sign petition or don’t dye your hair a funny color
Inoculation Effect

- The process of making people immune to attempts to change their attitudes by initially exposing them to small doses of the arguments against their position
- A brief communication that the audience can refute "immunizes" them to subsequent, stronger communications
- The first communication both motivates us and gives us practice in defending our beliefs

Television

- Americans are exposed to a staggering amount of television
- On average, 30 hours a week, 1500 hours a year

Heavy Television Viewers

- Express more racially prejudiced views
- Overestimate numbers of doctors and lawyers
- Believe violence is more prevalent in society than it really is
- Believe old people are fewer and less healthy than 20 years ago

Perceptions of Crime

- Television is virtually our only vivid source of information about crime
- Crime shows are a staple of television
- These shows foster illusions about the certainty of crime fighting and the motivations of criminals
**Attitudes vs. Opinions**

- Opinions are something a person believes to be factually true.
- Opinions are **cognitive** -- they take place in the head rather than the “gut”.
- Attitudes are opinions with an evaluative and an **emotional component**.
  - Assumptions, prejudices, etc.
- Attitudes are much **harder to change** than are opinions.