PERSUASION: THEORETIC CONCEPTUAL VALENCES

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The modern age has subordinated the whole society, imposing a model in which the individual should deliver not only content, but also form. The process of persuasion is applied daily, in everyday institutional and social contexts, etc., with the aim of convincing the other to believe, think and/or act in a certain way, to accept the “form”. The content disseminated in the public space often includes a persuasive valence, that is why is important to know the conceptual and functional aspects of persuasion, in order to be able to elaborate broad and complex analyses of media or advertising discourse.

Persuasion is a complex process, through which an individual tries to influence/convince another individual or a group to adopt a certain opinion, behavior or action. The purpose of persuasion is to convince a person or a group of people, in order to change certain perceptions, attitudes, preferences, behaviors regarding a certain product, service, current, person, etc., according to their interests or desires or/and the goals of the sender, that is, the one trying to persuade. In the specialized literature, persuasion is defined as “the art of influencing positively”, being used in various spheres such as: advertising, public relations, communication, marketing, politics, etc., applied both in a private setting, in an institutional one or even in the public one.

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he is being manipulated, persuasion is not an aggressive action – it guides, directs in order to adopt/accept an idea, attitude or action.

“Persuasion is the co-creation of a state of identification between source and receiver, as a result of the use of symbols, ... any persuasion involves self-persuasion - we are seldom persuaded unless we actually take part in this process. Persuasion results always from the combined efforts of the source and receiver” (Larson C.U. 26-27).

Therefore, between the one issuing the informational particle and the other who receive, a bond based on some symbols is formed. There should be a connection between sender and receiver that generates mutual recognition and acceptance. Being a process that is based on the act of instrumental communication, the sender intends to convince, focusing on the rhetorical aspects with the aim of creating an impression, a positive attitude towards the sent message, applying various symbols and specific techniques. The sender, who can be a person or a group, participates in the conceptualization, stratification and execution of actions to achieve the goal of “persuading”, to produce changes in the area of emotions, feelings and to generate the change at the level of understanding, perception and reaction of the consumer.

Persuasion “assumes one or more people involved in the activity of creating, intensifying, modifying or suppressing opinions, attitudes, intentions, motivations and/or behaviors within the restrictions of a certain communication context” (Grass R.H., Seiter J.S 53). There should be a connection between the source and the receiver. Persuasion appeals to the human needs, such as: the need for safety, belonging to the group, as well as the elements of personality: behavior, attitudes, feelings, weaknesses, traditions, etc., to know and understand the mentality of the person to be persuaded. Persuasion is a process of guiding people to adopt some ideas, attitudes or actions desired by the persuasive agent. Persuasion is based on “attractive messages” and “attractiveness of the presentation”.

Persuasion is the process of inducing beliefs and values to other people by influencing their thoughts and actions through specific strategies. “Psychology, in its most literal sense, is the study of the soul (by soul we mean the real individual)” (Lopatiuc 66). Therefore, persuasive interventions are developed starting from the ample study of the human soul, the latter also encompassing raw material for the conceptualization of persuasive messages and formats.

In the Treatise on social psychology, persuasion is defined as “an organized and consciously directed way of influencing a person or group, using a logical argumentation, supported affectively and emotionally, in order to impose ideas, opinions, attitudes or behavior that initially have not been accepted or agreed by those concerned” (Cristea 276-303). The effects of persuasion on public opinion can be quite marked, because it is more influenced by the affective component, which weakens individual emotionally and makes him sensitive to persuasion.

The act of persuasion consists in arguing on the basis of emotionality and affectivity, but not on reason and logic. “Persuasion includes studying the affective charge of messages, as well as the role played by the psychological mind-set of an audience, in order to determine the extent to which it will allow itself to stay uninfluenced” (Gugulan 57). Defined as a form of influence, it uses emotion as a tool to reach the desired goal and to promote some ideas, services, products,
people, etc. “As a form of influencing, through the channels of the subconscious, but also through argumentation, persuasion represents a dimension deeply imprinted on the retina of all interpersonal relationships, so intrinsic that it is often indiscernible” (Panea 188). Therefore, persuasion is present at different levels of interpersonal relationships, from the individual to the social level.

“The persuasion is the process of changing the opinions or behavior of some people who are aware that this change is being pursued by exposing them to messages with the aim of influencing their opinions, attitudes or behaviors. It can be said that persuasion is a process of changing attitudes, but based on the strength of arguments” (Grigore 105). When the persuasive agent has as a starting point the emotion and certain common (elements) existing between these two parties, the receiver becomes much more vulnerable and can more easily be exposed to the action of persuasion.

**Theories and principles of persuasion**

To strengthen the concept of persuasion, it is necessary to review a series of theories and principles. The authors Werner J. Severin and James W. Tankard Jr. in the book “Perspectives on mass communication theories: their origins, methods and use in mass media” (171-202). emphasize several theories of persuasion, including:

1. **The concept of attitude** was approached by the psychologist Gordon Allport, who focused on the study of personality. The concept of attitude is perceived as a tool of contemporary American sociopsychology, which highlights the fact that if we manage to change people's attitudes, they are already persuaded.
2. **Hovland's study** - this theory focuses on attitude change both from the perspective of learning theory and from the perspective of stimulation theory, where attitudes are learned and changed through the same processes that occur during learning.
3. **Unilateral and bilateral messages** – the theory reveals that the same message is produced in two versions that differ only by one variable. Carrying out an experiment on the effectiveness of uni- and bilateral messages, it was found that the unilateral message is more effective on people with a low level of education, and the bilateral message is more effective on people with an advanced schooling.
4. **Credibility of the source** emphasizes that choosing a credible source will increase the persuasiveness. This theory demonstrates the importance of the fair and correct choice of the source that is going to talk about an idea or a product.
5. **The appeal to fear** – the theory was consolidated based on the experiments of Janis Feshbach and other researchers, who formulated a model, suggesting that the relationship between the appeal to fear and attitude change is curvilinear. The model shows some low and high levels of fear from a message that will lead to the great changes in attitude.
6. **Inoculation theory** - McGuire and Papageorgis demonstrated that most people have many beliefs that have not been challenged and these can be easily influenced, changed once they are attacked because the person is not used to separate them.
7. **Katz's functional approach** - the author highlights the fact that an attempt to change an attitude can have the opposite effect if it is not based on an understanding of the functions that the attitude serves. The author distinguishes
four major functions through which attitudes can influence personality: 1) the instrumental, adaptive or utilitarian function; 2) the adaptation function of the ego; 3) the value expression function; 4) the knowledge function.

8. **Attitudes and behavior** – this theory focuses on the fact that one of the reasons for a change in attitude may not automatically be followed by a change in behavior, so there will be a tendency for an attitude to revert to its original position after it has been exposed to a persuasive message.

9. **McGuire’s theory** on information processing suggests that attitude change involves six phases:
   - The persuasive message must be communicated;
   - The receiver will take part in the message;
   - The receiver will understand the message;
   - The receiver agrees and is convinced by the presented arguments;
   - The new adopted position is retained;
   - Desired behavior occurs.

10. **Anderson’s theory** regarding information integration, where attitude change is noted as a process of integrating of new information into the old one.

11. **The model of approach probabilities** - the respective theory suggests that there are two ways of attitude change - central and peripheral.
   - the central path is applied when the receiver actively processes the information and is convinced of the rationality of the arguments;
   - the peripheral path is used when the receiver does not waste cognitive energy to evaluate the arguments and to process the information in the message.

The primary objective of persuasion is to change attitudes, therefore these theories are quite valuable for an exhaustive understanding of the process. It is important to analyze the theories of persuasion, which allow us to know the specifics, mechanisms, influencing forms of this action, the role of the persuasive agent, the construction and dimensions of the message.

Another theory profiles the **SMCR Model of persuasion** and is based on the model of the communication act: S (source), M (message), C (channel) and R (receiver). The *source* in persuasion must be one with a credible credit, and its message should be received as truth. Identifying and choosing a source in the act of persuasion is a key point. The message must have a symbolic charge, an affective one, because it is to be infiltrated into the substrates of human mind. The *channel* - it is mentioned that the parallel use of various types of channels can lead to an efficient act of persuasion. In specialized literature, television is considered a persuasive channel, along with the Internet, because it addresses to a vast audience, combines several audiovisual elements and the online environment also provides the public with various integrated convergent products. The *receiver* is the audience that must be able to distinguish persuasion, because persuasive agents are those people who want to achieve certain goals, even sometimes dishonestly. The receiver must have responsibility to analyze the content critically, show discernment and listen actively.

**Rank's persuasive model** is called in studies the intensification/minimization scheme. Therefore, the intensification block can be performed by:
   - *repetition* of slogans, jingles, examples, topics or themes. By saying the same thought several times, it can be easily imprinted in the receiver's mind;
• association, when we interfere with an idea, attach it to the positive or negative value of a fact, event, person, etc. The association is based on 3 basic components:
  a) a cause, an event, a product or an associated candidate;
  b) an object, process, agreed or rejected phenomenon by (c);
  c) public;
• composition – is a tactic to intensify persuasion, used most of the time to create comparisons and contrasts in the media sphere;
  
  If we analyze the second block, we find that the goal of minimization is not to capitalize and highlight, but rather to hide, to cover up the positive parts of the opponent/competitor. Minimization can be achieved by:
• omission – the information is fragmented, it is delivered incompletely. Critical information is bypassed and ignored in order to avoid exposing vulnerable points. Attention is refocused towards insignificant things;
• diversion, which is, in fact, decoy called in the literature „Trojan horse”, a tactic that emphasizes other events that distract attention from the real important things/phenomena.
  
  In this context, the humor can be used as an effective tool;
• confusion, which resides in the fact that some things, explanations, lines are said in a confusing language are artificially complicated, so the receiver has difficulty in understanding the essence of things.

Like other forms of influence, persuasion can be built on valid principles. The authors Septimiu Mihai Marica and Mariana Daniela Marica (128-130). point out several principles of persuasion:
1. Principle based on esteem and respect for the interlocutor - in this context, the foundation of persuasion consists in the esteem shown to the person, whom we hope to convince. Respect can be manifested in various ways. The shown esteem and respect will make the receiver vulnerable to the act of persuasion.
2. Principle based on understanding the reference frame of the other person - the one who is going to persuade a person, a group or a collective must know in depth how to perceive and understand different messages, emerging from the context specificity and action models of the public.
3. Principle based on effective communication and understanding - to have the power of persuasion, we should first know the techniques of effective communication.

American psychologist and university professor Robert Cialdini (Cialdini). identified other principles, calling them „weapons of influence”.
1. The rule of reciprocity - reciprocity will contribute to the individual coming with a feedback, feeling part of an equation of obligation towards the sender.
2. Commitment and consistency - to be persuasive, consistency in actions is needed, it must be systematic and coordinated.
3. The principle of sympathy – the individual will be more easily influenced if the persuasive agent possesses physical attractiveness. Similarities – the sender will tend to have personality and/or behavioral traits specific to the segment it is addressing. It is acceptable for the sender to transmit positive emotions: kindness, light, words of praise.
4. Social proof - the individual is part of society, that's why he identifies with others, often taking over the morals, attitudes and behaviors of others. The social
course will determine in a way the actions of the individual being influenced by the example of the many, by the „crowd”.

5. The principle of authority - the individual will allow himself to be influenced much more easily if the message is transmitted by an authority, a person he trusts and sympathizes with; can be an opinion leader, artist, actor, athlete, etc.

6. The principle of rarity - if the idea is suggested to the individual that he is „exclusive”, „in limited number”, then he will be much more inclined to adopt a favorable behavior.

Conclusion

In a world where mass influence is desired, persuasion has shaped a different way of being and acting. The individual is influenced by persuasive messages from the outside, which produce certain changes in the responsible layer for changes in opinions, attitudes and behaviors.

Bibliographical References


