Unit 3  Persuasion

This unit deals with the nature of communication and its various modes, including persuasion and its negative counterpart, propaganda. The unit also deals with dialog as a mode of communication. Additionally, it also provides an overview of conflict and communication and the role of intercultural relationships in conflict.

Learning Outcomes: Students who complete Unit 2 will be able to:
- differentiate between the persuasive and dialog models of communication
- explain characteristics of ethos, logos and pathos
- recognize various types of propaganda

Key Concepts for Unit 3
- Definition and conceptualization of persuasion
- Conceptualization of ethos, logos and pathos
- Definition and conceptualization of propaganda

Three Models of Communication

The information model focuses on objectivity. The purpose of the message sender is to increase knowledge or enhance understanding, and the role of the audience is to learn something new. In applied situations, the information model is associated with journalism or public relations.

The persuasion model focuses on advocacy. The purpose of the message sender is to create, modify or reinforce attitudes and behaviors, and the role of the audience is to evaluate the message and then to accept or reject it. In applied situations, the persuasion model is associated with advertising and public relations.

The dialogue model focuses on relationships. The purpose of the message sender is to create environment of mutual trust and to both share information and seek it about the other partner in the communication relationship. The role of the audience is reciprocal, that is, to engage in a simultaneous process of sharing information and seeking insight into the communication partner. In applied situations, the dialogue model sometimes is associated with public relations. This also is the model most associated with intercultural and inter-religious relationships.

Persuasion Model of Communication

Persuasion has been variously defined as communication with a specific purpose and perspective.
- 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.

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.
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.

Credibility is the power to inspire belief. It involves several components:

- **Expertise.** Audience perception that speaker has particular knowledge of what he/she is speaking about.
- **Status.** Audience perception of the social position or prestige of a message source.
- **Competence.** Audience perception that the speaker can remain calm under pressure and is clear and dynamic in presenting the message to others.
- **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.

Charisma is the magnetic appeal or personal charm that some message sources enjoy over an audience. Like credibility, charisma is a matter of perception.

- **Familiarity.** The extent to which an audience already knows (or thinks it knows) the message source.
- **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.
- **Similarity.** The extent to which the message source resembles the audience (or the way the audience would like to see itself).
- **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.

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.

- **Power.** The raw and recognized ability to dominate and to reward or punish.
- **Authority.** The right to rule over or direct the actions of another, a relationship more-or-less granted by the audience.
- **Scrutiny.** The ability to examine or investigate and thus to pronounce blame, proclaim innocence, and grant forgiveness.

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:

- Sincere and trustworthy; unbiased
- Recognizable as experts
Available to the media

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:

- Trustworthy
- Recognizable
- Affordable
- At little risk for negative publicity
- Appropriately matches with the intended audience

▶ Logos: Persuasion by Appealing to Reason

In order to be effectively persuasive, communication needs to be rooted, at least in part, on logic and rationality. Here are some common principles of the rational side of persuasive communication.

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).

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.

► 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.

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 co-exist 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.

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.

► 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, hair-splitting, 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.

To help inoculate people against the excesses of persuasion in political, commercial and other situations, Rank suggests that people reflect on their own role in the transmission of persuasion. Recognize that people seek benefits, and analyze how advertisers and other would-be persuaders promise benefits. Rank also observes that there is a growing world-wide inequality between the many “persuadees” (average consumers and citizens) and the professional persuaders (advertisers, politicians, and elites with training, money and media access).
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.

- **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** is 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.
Intercultural Aspects of Persuasion

Some social psychologists studying the nature of persuasive communication have focused on the relationship between persuasion and culture. Some studies in particular have focused on American and Arab cultures as the two significant patterns of persuasive communication [R.S. Zaharna in Bridging Cultural Differences: American Public Relations Practices & Arab Communication Patterns, Public Relations Review, 21 (1995), 241-255].

In commending on cultural preferences as they relate to persuasion, Zaharna draws the following conclusions, which can help avoid misunderstanding based on the interpretation of language:

- Arabic uses repetition frequently and expansively, whereas American English tends to use repetition sparingly and mainly for emphasis.
- Arabic speakers make frequent use of imagery such as metaphors, stories and analogies, whereas American English speakers tend to insert facts and figures to illustrate a point.
- Arabic speakers use over-assertion while Americans tend toward understatement.
- The nature of Arab culture causes the language to be more closely tied to artistic, cultural and spiritual emotions than to concrete realities; whereas the American preference is to link words and actions.

Relevant Web Sites


www.govst.edu/users/ghrank – Professor Hugh Rank’s on-line resources on persuasion

www.pertinent.com/articles/persuasion/index.asp – A collection of articles about persuasion

jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/topicpersuasion.htm – Educational site with readings on persuasion
APPENDIX TO UNIT 3

► Relevant Books

► Unit Quiz
Define dialogue.
Define consensus-building.
Give an example of the persuasive technique of association.
Give an example of the persuasive technique of diversion.

► Freewrite and Discussion
Explain the difference between persuasive communication and propaganda.
Explain how the ancient Greek concept of rhetoric is still relevant today.
Explain the relationship between logos and pathos.
Explain the relationship between intensifying and downplaying in Rank’s Model of Persuasion.
Identify and evaluate a contemporary example of the name-calling propaganda technique.

► Exercises
Ask students to work in teams to identify a topic of current significance. Each team should offer a position on this issue, with arguments supported by an example of each type of verbal evidence.
Ask students to research an issue of social or political significance. Outline the major arguments presented on each side, and analyze each argument to identify any elements of propaganda being presented.