PERSUASION
Social Influence and Compliance Gaining
Seventh Edition

Robert H. Gass and John S. Seiter
The seventh edition of this field-leading textbook provides an accessible and rigorous presentation of major theories of persuasion and their applications to a variety of real-world contexts.

In addition to presenting established theories and models, this text encourages students to develop and apply general conclusions about persuasion in real-world settings. Along the way, students are introduced to the practice of social influence in an array of contexts (e.g., advertising, marketing, politics, interpersonal relationships, social media, groups) and across a variety of topics (e.g., credibility, personality, deception, motivational appeals, visual persuasion). The new edition features expanded treatment of digital and social media; up-to-date research on theory and practice; an increased number of international cases; and new and expanded discussions of topics such as online influencers, disinformation and “fake news,” deepfakes, message framing, normative influence, stigmatized language, and inoculation theory.

This is the ideal textbook for courses on persuasion in communication, psychology, advertising, and marketing programs. Instructors can also use the book’s downloadable test bank, instructor’s manual, and PowerPoint slides in preparing course material.

Robert H. Gass (Ph.D. University of Kansas) is Professor Emeritus of Communication Studies at California State University, Fullerton. His areas of expertise include argumentation, persuasion, social influence, and compliance gaining. Dr. Gass has published two texts and one edited text (with co-author John S. Seiter) and over 70 scholarly articles, book chapters, published conference proceedings, and professional papers. His text with John S. Seiter, Persuasion: Social Influence and Compliance Gaining, is the best-selling persuasion text in the field of communication studies. Among the awards he has received are Distinguished Faculty Member, Faculty Recognition Award for Scholarly and Creative Activity, multiple Annual Author awards, and Outstanding Scholarship and Creativity Award. He has also done consulting work for the California Dairy Council, the California Dietetic Association, and Caltrans.

John S. Seiter (Ph.D. University of Southern California) is Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies in the Department of Communication Studies and Philosophy at Utah State University. His research focuses broadly on persuasion and specifically on topics such as political aggression, effective approaches to compliance gaining, deception, nonverbal influence, and persuasion in hospitality contexts. His work has been recognized by over ten Top Paper awards at both regional and national conferences. He has coauthored and coedited several books, including Persuasion: Social Influence and Compliance Gaining (now in its seventh edition) and Nonverbal Communication in Political Debates. Previously, Dr. Seiter was recipient of his university’s Lifetime Achievement and Professor of the Year awards.
To Banjo and Julep, my two English Setters, who keep me company when I’m writing at home.

Bob Gass

To Miss Gordon, my second-grade teacher, for knowing that self-concept is the proper starting place.

John S. Seiter

To our wives—Susan and Debora—for doing without us when we were writing and for putting up with us when we weren’t.

Robert H. Gass and John S. Seiter
1 Why Study Persuasion? 1
   Aims and Goals 3
   Persuasion Is Not a Dirty Word 4
   Persuasion Is Our Friend 4
   The Pervasiveness of Persuasion: You Can Run but
   You Can’t Hide 5
   Online Persuasion: Please Like, Follow, or Share Me 5
   Influencers 5
   Tipping Points, Viral Marketing, and Word of Mouth 7
   Nudges: Sometimes Less Is More 9
   eWOM: Digital Buzz 10
   Sponsored Content and Advertorials: Things Are Not What
   They Seem 10
   Opinion Mining and Sentiment Tracking: I Feel You 11
   Gamification: You’ve Got Game 11
   Crowdsourcing and Crowdfunding: Hive Mind and
   Hive Money 11
   Persuasive Technology: My Heart Says Yes, but My
   Watch Says No 12
   Persuasion in the Sciences 14
   Persuasion in the Arts 14
   Other Not-So-Obvious Contexts for Persuasion 14
   Weird Persuasion 15
   Persuasion in Interpersonal Settings 16
   Five Benefits of Studying Persuasion 17
   The Instrumental Function: Be All That You Can Be 17
   The Knowledge and Awareness Function: Inquiring Minds
   Want to Know 18
   The Defensive Function: Duck and Cover 18
   The Debunking Function: P-Shaw 19
   Well-Being and Self-Worth: I Feel Good 19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing Favorable Associations: Jiggling the Web</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brands and Branding: That’s the Life</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Are You Wearing? Brand Personality</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity: Keeping It Real</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause-Related Marketing: The Feel-Good Factor</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloganeering</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorship</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Consistency</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inner Peace of Consistency</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Maintaining Consistency</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Strategies: How to Have Your Cake and Eat It Too</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty: Accept No Substitute</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write and Tell Us Why You Love This Book in 24 Words or Less</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Inconsistency</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalizing on Inconsistency</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance Theory</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance and Buyer’s Remorse</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization of Alternatives</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance, Self-Image, and Culture</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors That Affect the Magnitude of Dissonance</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance and Persuasion: Putting It All Together</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbidden Fruit: Psychological Reactance</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterattitudinal Advocacy: Playing Devil’s Advocate</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m All In: Increasing Commitment</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments Can “Grow Legs”</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 4 Credibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity Selling Power: The Answer Is in the Stars</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell-Ebrities: How Do They Do It?</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch a Falling Star</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Is Credibility?</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Is a Receiver-Based Construct</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Is a Multidimensional Construct</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Is a Situational/Contextual Phenomenon</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Is Dynamic</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ingredients of Credibility</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Dimensions of Credibility</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Dimensions of Credibility</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Factor Analytic Approach and the Real World</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility as a Peripheral Cue</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s What’s up Front That Counts</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Communicator Characteristics and Persuasion

Demographic Variables and Persuasion

Age and Persuasion: Pretty Please With Sugar on Top

Gender Differences and Persuasion: The Times, They Aren't A-Changin'

Ethnicity, Culture, and Persuasion: “Me” and “We” Perspectives

Intelligence and Persuasion: Dumb and Dumber

Psychological and Communication States and Traits

Self-Esteem and Persuasion: Feelin' Kinda Low

Anxiety and Persuasion: Living in Fear

Preference for Consistency: I Wouldn't Change a Thing

Self-Monitoring and Persuasion: Periscope Up

Ego Involvement: Not Budging an Inch

Issue Involvement: What's This Have to Do With Me?

Dogmatism, Authoritarianism, and Social Vigilantism: You Can't Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

Narcissism: How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways

Cognitive Complexity and Need for Cognition

Persuasion and Aggression: Sticks and Stones

Analyzing and Adapting to Audiences

Pay Attention to the Situation

Keep Your Audience’s Mind in Mind

Remember the Importance of Audience States and Traits

Don’t Forget About Audience Demographics

Summary

References

6 Conformity and Influence in Groups

Conformity as Persuasion: In With the Crowd

In the Beginning: Early Research on Conformity Effects

Variables Related to Conformity

Social Proof: Using the Sheep Factor to Persuade Others

Descriptive Versus Injunctive Norms: It Is What It Is, but Should It Be?

Ostracism: Shuns and Guns
Deindividuation, Social Loafing, and Social Facilitation:
  Getting Lost in the Crowd
What a Riot: An Examination of Deindividuation
Social Loafing: Not Pulling Your Own Weight
Social Facilitation: Would You Rather Be Alone?
How Groups Affect Decision Making: To Risk or Not to Risk
Summary
References

7 Language and Persuasion
Symbols, Meaning, and Persuasion: The Power of Babble
  Connotative and Denotative Meaning: That’s Not How I See It
  Ultimate Terms: Speak of the Devil
  Aphorisms and Familiar Phrases: That Rings a Bell
  Metaphors: One and the Same
  The Power of Names and Labeling
  Euphemisms and Doublespeak: Making the Worse Appear the Better and Vice Versa
Language Intensity, Vividness, and Offensiveness
  ###@!!!!##: Profanity and Persuasion
  Stigmatizing Language
  The Effects of Vividness: A Picture’s Worth a Thousand Words
  Language Intensity
Powerless Language and Persuasion: Um’s the Word
Enthusiastic Language: How Amazing Is THAT!!!?
Summary
References

8 Nonverbal Influence
The Direct Effects Model of Immediacy
Types of Nonverbal Communication
  Kinesics: Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,
    Knees and Toes
  Haptics: Reach Out and Touch Someone
  Keep Your Distance? Proxemics and Persuasion
  Chronemics: All Good Things to Those Who Wait?
  Artifacts and Physical Features of the Environment: Dress for Success
  Physical Appearance: Of Beauties and Beasts
Paralinguistics and Persuasion: Pump Up the Volume?
Summary
References
9 Structuring and Ordering Persuasive Messages

Implicit and Explicit Conclusions: Let Me Spell It Out for You
Gain-Framed Versus Loss-Framed Messages: Keep on the Sunny Side?
Quantity Versus Quality of Arguments: The More the Merrier?
The Use of Evidence: The Proof’s Not in the Pudding
Repetition and Mere Exposure: You Can Say That Again
Order Effects and Persuasion: First Things First
Primacy and Recency Effects: The First Shall Be Last, and the Last Shall Be First
An Ounce of Prevention: Inoculation, Message-Sidedness, and Forewarning

Inoculation Theory: Of Needles and Arguments
One-Sided Versus Two-Sided Messages: Both Sides Now
Forewarning: You’d Better Watch Out
Summary
References

10 Compliance Gaining

Actions Speak the Loudest: A Definition of Compliance Gaining
In the Beginning: The Roots of Compliance-Gaining Research
Situation: The “It Depends” of Compliance-Gaining Behavior
Seeking Compliance From Strangers and Intimates
Power, Legitimacy, and Politeness
Who Are You? Individual Characteristics and Compliance-Gaining Behavior
The Study of Compliance-Gaining Goals: Eyes on the Prize
How Goals Bring Meaning to Compliance-Gaining Situations: What’s It All About, Alfie?
Primary and Secondary Goals: Wanting and Eating Your Cake
Problems Facing Compliance Research: Trouble in Paradise
Compliance Gaining in Action: Seeing Is Believing
Summary
References

11 Sequential Persuasion

Pregiving: The Old “I’ll-Scratch-Your-Back-if-You’ll-Scratch-Mine” Approach
Why Is the Pregiving Tactic Persuasive?
The Potential Pitfalls of Pregiving: Return to Sender?
Foot in the Door: The “Give-Me-an-Inch-and-I’ll-Take-a-Mile” Tactic
Why Is a Foot in the Door So Persuasive?
When Does a Foot in the Door Work?
The Door-in-the-Face Tactic: “Ask for the Stars” 284
  Why Is a Door in the Face So Persuasive? 285
  When Does a Door in the Face Work? 286
The That’s-Not-All Tactic: Seeking Compliance by Sweetening the Deal 287
The Low-Ball Tactic: Changing the Deal 289
  Why Lowballing Works 290
“Sorry, We Don’t Have Any More of Those in Your Size, but . . .”: the Bait-and-Switch Tactic 291
The Disrupt-Then-Reframe and Pique Techniques: I’m So Confused 292
Legitimizing Paltry Contributions: Even a Penny Will Help 292
The Evoking Freedom Technique: “. . . but You Are Free to Accept or Refuse” 293
Fear-Then-Relief and Happiness-Then-Disappointment Procedures: The Emotional Roller Coasters of Social Influence 293
Summary (and Then Some) 294
References 295

12 Deception 301
  What Is Deception? Lies and Damn Lies 303
  Telling Lies: The Enactment of Deception 305
    Theoretical Frameworks 305
    What Makes a Liar Persuasive? 310
  Detecting Deception: I Can See Right Through You 312
    Factors That Influence Detection 312
  Summary 319
  References 319

13 Motivational Appeals 327
  Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Motivation 328
  Emotion and Persuasion: Oh, What a Feeling! 329
    Emotions and the ELM 329
    Emotional Marketing 329
    Logical and Emotional Appeals: A Fuzzy Distinction 330
    Anger: Getting Hot Under the Collar 330
  Fear Appeals: If You Don’t Stop Doing That, You’ll Go Blind 331
    The Stage Model: Scared Stiff 332
    The Extended Parallel Process Model: Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself 333
  Negative Emotions: Woe Is Me, Shame on You 335
  Humorous Appeals: Stop Me if You’ve Heard This One 338
    Humor as an Indirect Form of Influence: All Kidding Aside 339
### 14 Visual Persuasion

- **Image Is Everything**
  - 357
- **Overlooked and Under-Appreciated**
  - 357
- **The Power of Images: A Thousand Words**
  - 358
- **How Images Persuade**
  - 359
  - *Iconicity: Bearing a Resemblance*
  - 359
  - *Indexicality: Seeing Is Believing*
  - 359
  - *Syntactic Indeterminacy: Don’t Look for Logic in Images*
  - 361
- **The Art of Persuasion Includes Art as Persuasion**
  - 361
  - *The Paintbrush Is Mightier Than the Sword*
  - 362
  - *Art and Social Change: I Must Protest*
  - 362
- **Cinematic Persuasion: Sex, Drugs, and Popcorn**
  - 366
  - *Acting Out: How Movies Persuade*
  - 367
- **Images in Advertising: And Now a Word From Our Sponsors**
  - 370
  - *Visual Extravaganzas: Now You’ve Got My Attention*
  - 371
  - *Anti-Ads: You Can’t Fool Me*
  - 371
  - *Image-Oriented Advertising: Materialism as Happiness*
  - 371
  - *Shock Ads: Edgy Images as Persuasion*
  - 373
- **Photojournalism as Persuasion: The Camera Does Lie**
  - 374
  - *Playing Tricks With the Camera: Photographic Deception*
  - 375
- **Summary**
  - 377
- **References**
  - 378

### 15 Esoteric Forms of Persuasion

- **Color as Persuasion: The Grass Is Always Greener**
  - 384
  - *Color Coded at Birth: Dyed in the Wool*
  - 384
  - *Colorful Associations: A Blonde Walks Into a Bar . . .*
  - 384
  - *Color and Branding: Big Blue, Red Bull, and Pink (Victoria’s Secret)*
  - 385
  - *Color and Emotion: Mood Indigo*
  - 386
  - *Color and Behavior: Hue Made Me Do It*
  - 387
- **Subliminal Influence: Hidden Messages or Hokum?**
  - 388
  - *The Laboratory Versus the Real World*
  - 388
  - *What Is and Isn’t Subliminal*
  - 389
  - *Subliminal Advertising: Much Ado About Nothing*
  - 389
  - *Subliminal Priming: That Rings a Bell*
  - 390
# Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Persuasion is everywhere—even in the womb!</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Nudging consumers to recycle plastic bottles in Thailand</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Persuasive messages must struggle to cut through the background of media clutter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>A little persuasive acumen just might save you from yourself</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Preliminary model of persuasion</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>“Persuasion” and “coercion” often coexist side by side</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Enhanced model of persuasion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Completed model of persuasion</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Peripheral processing in action</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Heuristic processing is more reflexive than reflective</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Examples of Likert-type scale items</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Examples of semantic differential scale items</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Example of a visually oriented attitude scale</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>It is often possible to infer attitudes from clothing and other artifacts</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The reasoned action approach</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Advertising works by creating association</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Muffin’s dilemma: an illustration of consistency theory</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>A mouse applies consistency theory with a dog</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance in Action</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Celebrity influence on a yoga decision</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Perceived expertise is a prerequisite for credibility</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Illustration of an absolute and a relative sleeper effect</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>High self-monitors: Daffodil Queen contestants eavesdropping</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Illustration of social judgment theory</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Adapting the message to the audience’s frame of reference</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Example of visuals used in Asch’s experiment. Subjects are asked which of the three lines on the comparison card (right) match the line on the reference card (left)</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Charles Barsotti, The New Yorker</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Cartoon by John S. Seiter</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>“Gee, Tommy, I’d be lost without your constant peer pressure.”</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Alex Gregory, The New Yorker</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Cartoon from The New Yorker with doctor telling patient, “Good news. The test results show it’s a metaphor.”</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Dilbert</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Dilbert</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Robert Mankoff, The New Yorker</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.1 *Dilbert*  
8.2 Peter Steiner, *The New Yorker*  
8.3A, B, C Celebrities sporting different body shapes: Can you spot the mesomorph, ectomorph, and endomorph?  
9.1 A butcher and a dog are in court  
9.2 Primacy versus recency effects in persuasion  
10.1 *Calvin and Hobbes* (1995), by Bill Watterson  
10.2 The use of coercive power in the workplace  
11.1 The door in the face tactic gone awry  
12.1 “I knew the suspect was lying because of certain telltale discrepancies between his voice and nonverbal gestures. Also his pants were on fire.”  
12.2 Duping delight in action  
13.1 Stage model of fear-arousing communication  
13.2 A sob song for the teacher  
13.3 Photo of rioters breaching the U.S. Capitol during the January 6, 2021 insurrection in Washington, D.C.  
13.4 The wrong target audience for a sex appeal  
13.5 A warmth appeal using kittens can’t fail  
13.6 *Beetle Bailey*  
14.1 A grim photo of starvation  
14.2 This poster from the Chinese cultural revolution portrays an idealized view of agrarian life  
14.3 Screen capture of de Blasio’s Tweet on *Fearless Girl* statue  
14.4 The AIDS Memorial Quilt, also known as the NAMES Project, is an example of folk art, activist art, and a social movement all in one  
14.5 “What kind of moviemaking do we want to reinforce?”  
15.1 An author aboard his trusty John Deere tractor  
15.2 Product placement is far more effective than subliminal messages  
15.3 “It’s the smell of money.”  
15.4 A fragrance designer for Givaudan-Roure Corp. plies his trade  
16.1 Cartoon featuring the four horsemen of the apocalypse, plus misinformation  
16.2 “How do you respond to critics who say you’re just trying to scare people?”
# Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Illustration of Kleinke’s (1980) Results</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Marwell and Schmitt’s Compliance-Gaining Tactics, With Examples of How You Might Get Your Son, Beaufort, to Clean His Room</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>The Motives Color the Means</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each edition of this text has been a labor of love. Now, seven editions in, we are still as excited and intrigued as ever by the study of persuasion. A good deal of research on persuasion has appeared since the publication of the last edition. We address these new concepts, theories, principles, and processes in this edition. Before highlighting some of the newer areas of research, it is worth noting that events have transpired in the “real world” that also reshaped our thinking about social influence.

Donald Trump’s presidency altered a number of long-held assumptions regarding persuasion. He defied traditional campaign wisdom and proved the pollsters and pundits wrong. His presidency altered basic assumptions regarding credibility (previously, he never held a political office), audience analysis (one-third of Americans and two-thirds of Republicans still believe the election was stolen), and political campaigning (reliance on Twitter; mass rallies; and a simplified, but powerful language style). Whether you love him or hate him, Trump was an influential force to be reckoned with. Despite two impeachments and approval ratings that never topped 49 percent (Gallup, 2021), as of this writing, Trump is still revered by his base. GOP candidates seeking office in 2022 or 2024 will most likely be running in his shadow.

Since the last edition of this text, political polarization has deepened public divides. People have dug in on their positions. These bitter divisions threaten the functioning of democratic institutions, such as the integrity of elections. Moderate politicians are increasingly rare. True swing voters are a vanishing species. As Stanley, Henne, Yang, and De Brigard (2020) emphasized, “people seem decidedly entrenched in their social and political positions, unwilling to change them even in the face of compelling reasons and arguments for alternative positions” (p. 892).

Political polarization highlights the role of resistance to persuasion. One of the traditional theories of persuasion, social judgment theory, goes a long way in explaining this divide. When people have small latitudes of acceptance and large latitudes of rejection, opposing messages are discounted. Considering this, it is hard to imagine that a message from a “stop the steal” believer will penetrate the bubble of a die-hard Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez supporter. Likewise, a message from Nancy Pelosi will most likely fall on deaf ears when it comes to the House Freedom Caucus.

These rifts, of course, complicate efforts to persuade. Advocates can reinforce their adherents’ views by “preaching to the choir.” Changing opponents’ minds, however, is difficult if not impossible. How might a persuader reach across the aisle or bridge the divide if opposing points of view are dismissed out of hand?

Also since the previous edition, we’ve found ourselves living in a “post-truth,” “post-fact” society. Too often, facts presented by one side are met with “alternative facts” by the other. Indeed, one of the few things people on the right and left seem to agree about is that there is little or nothing they can agree on! It’s always been the case that people perceive their own positions as more logical or rational and their opponents’ positions as more emotional or irrational. When people cannot agree on
basic facts, however, meaningful discussions become nearly impossible. What facts and evidence will pass muster with skeptical receivers? How does one persuade in a fact-free world?

Since the last edition, reliance and trust in traditional news outlets, such as newspapers and network TV, has declined. At the same time, dependence on social media for news has increased. Eighty-six percent of Americans report that they receive their news on a smartphone, tablet, or computer (Shearer, 2021). That said, although online news is convenient, it often functions as an echo chamber. People are subjected to targeted news feeds, have limited exposure to alternative views, and often rely on questionable sources. All of these developments pose unique challenges for persuaders. How can persuaders penetrate the bubbles in which people live?

Digital media affects people’s susceptibility to social influence in more sinister ways than before. Aside from biased algorithms, people are manipulated by bots and troll farms, inundated with conspiracy theories, and subjected to misinformation campaigns. Deepfakes are just one of the recent developments on the fake news scene. In this edition, we examine these newer forms of deception as well as traditional deception and deception detection. Unfortunately, many people lack digital literacy skills. The result is that, too often, people are difficult to persuade on some issues (e.g., getting vaccinated) and easy to persuade on others (e.g., vaccines contain microchips; ivermectin, a livestock medication, can be used to prevent or treat COVID-19).

The pandemic altered our views about how best to achieve adherence in the form of mask wearing and willingness to be vaccinated. Research on physician-patient compliance gaining has been going on for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare, however, underlying suspicions by a large swath of the public in the health care establishment. Many people flatly refused to practice social distancing, wear masks, or avoid congregating in close confines, indoors, and in large groups. A distrust of Big Pharma has existed for some time, but vaccine hesitancy or resistance is fairly new. People seem to have forgotten that polio wasn’t cured by herd immunity. A decade ago, Jenny McCarthy and other well-meaning parents wrongly blamed childhood immunizations for the rise in ASD. That theory was debunked, but not before it led to a raft of measles outbreaks across the country. As persuaders, should the CDC and epidemiologists abandon evidence-based reasoning and resort to emotional appeals, such as fear and anger, to counter misinformation campaigns?

Since the last edition, the role of online influencers has increased dramatically. When we wrote the first edition of this text, the job title “online influencer” was not a career option. Today, 86 percent of those aged 13–38 aspire to be influencers (Hahn, 2019). We should be selling essential oils online, not writing textbooks! Over half of consumers report making a purchase based on an influencer’s say so (Suciu, 2020). Consumers find influencers more genuine and authentic. Consumers believe that they have a direct connection with influencers, based on their ability to like, comment, and share. Traditional, scripted commercials have less sway with consumers. Every brand must have an online presence nowadays, and every politician must leverage social media to reach voters. Persuaders must adapt their messages accordingly. A 30-second public service announcement must now be translated into a 280-word tweet or a brief TikTok video.

If this discussion seems to present a bleak picture, rest assured. There is plenty in the realm of persuasion about which to be optimistic. Plenty of good can be achieved
through the process of persuasion. For now, we believe that a firm understanding of social influence is an asset. The more people know about how persuasion works, the better their defenses against unscrupulous persuaders will be. In fact, when seen through an optimistic lens, that which appears bleak might better be framed as opportunity. With that in mind, we hope you catch our enthusiasm for this field of study and turn the pages of this book with an eagerness to understand how persuasion functions and to improve your own ability to persuade others effectively and ethically!

REFERENCES

We would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to everyone at Routledge/Taylor & Francis for their support throughout the process of completing this edition of our text. They are a skilled and talented group. We are especially grateful to Brian Eschrich, Caroline Trussell, and Marie Roberts for their graciousness in answering our many questions and guiding us through the requirements for completing this project. Their patience is officially legendary. We also want to thank Ellie Fountain for painstakingly proofreading and copyediting the drafts of all the chapters.

We are also extremely grateful to the graduate and undergraduate students who offered numerous illustrations of real-life examples of persuasion. In particular, we single out Stephani Bee, who took the lead on the Instructors Manual that accompanies this text, as well as Taylor Halverson for her excellent work. Every time we think we have taught the brightest group of students ever, another sharp group comes along. We also want to thank the many instructors using our book who have sent comments and suggestions for this edition, as well as the many short-course participants who have offered ideas and insights leading up to this edition.

Finally, we are fortunate to be working alongside the best colleagues anyone could ever hope for. Thank you all for making “work” a fun and rewarding place to be!
Why Study Persuasion?

Aims and Goals 3
Persuasion Is Not a Dirty Word 4
Persuasion Is Our Friend 4
The Pervasiveness of Persuasion: You Can Run but You Can’t Hide 5
Online Persuasion: Please Like, Follow, or Share Me 5
Influencers 5
Tipping Points, Viral Marketing, and Word of Mouth 7
Nudges: Sometimes Less Is More 9
eWOM: Digital Buzz 10
Sponsored Content and Advertorials: Things Are Not What They Seem 10
Opinion Mining and Sentiment Tracking: I Feel You 11
Gamification: You’ve Got Game 11
Crowdsourcing and Crowdfunding: Hive Mind and Hive Money 11
Persuasive Technology: My Heart Says Yes, but My Watch Says No 12
Persuasion in the Sciences 14
Persuasion in the Arts 14
Other Not-So-Obvious Contexts for Persuasion 14
Weird Persuasion 15
Persuasion in Interpersonal Settings 16
Five Benefits of Studying Persuasion 17
The Instrumental Function: Be All That You Can Be 17
The Knowledge and Awareness Function: Inquiring Minds Want to Know 18
The Defensive Function: Duck and Cover 18
The Debunking Function: P-Shaw 19
Well-Being and Self-Worth: I Feel Good 19
Two Criticisms of Persuasion 21

DOI: 10.4324/9781003081388-1
ONE OF THE AUTHORS was enjoying a day at the beach with his wife. As he sat in a folding chair beneath an umbrella, he could hear the cries of seagulls and the pounding of the surf. He was relaxed as could be, oblivious to the world around him. Or so he thought. As he reflected more on the situation, however, he realized he was being bombarded by persuasive messages on all sides. A boom box was playing a few yards away. During commercial breaks, various ads tried to convince him to choose a new mobile phone provider, switch auto insurance companies, and try some “flamin’ hot mac ‘n Cheetos” from a fast-food chain. A nearby sign warned that no alcohol, glass objects, or smoking were permitted on the beach. Ten yards away, a family was unpacking their lunch from an upscale Yeti cooler. The author felt a pang of brand envy. Brands were on display elsewhere. Farther down the beach, a couple wore shorts from Pink and Hollister, favorites with millennials and Gen Z. Were they “advertising” those brands? The lifeguards’ truck was a specially equipped Toyota TRD that proclaimed it was the “officially sponsored vehicle of Newport Beach.” Oh, the indignity of being rescued by an unofficial vehicle!

And that was only the beginning. A skywriting plane flew overhead, displaying the message “#ThankYouHealthCareWorkers.” This was soon after beaches reopened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many beachgoers wore face masks. Others did not. Wearing or not wearing a mask was, to some extent, a litmus test of one’s political leanings.

There were oral influence attempts, too. “Would you mind keeping an eye on our things?” a nearby couple asked. I guess we look trustworthy, he thought. His wife asked him, “Do you want to walk down to the pier? They have frozen bananas.” She knew he would be unable to resist the temptation.

Those were just the overt persuasive messages. A host of more subtle messages also competed for the author’s attention. Some yards away, a woman was applying sun block to her neck and shoulders. The author decided he should do the same. Had she nonverbally influenced him to do likewise? A young man with a boogie board ran by, headed for the water. He sported a goodly number of tattoos and piercings. The author wondered whether such body art might dissuade some employers from hiring him. One woman wore a “trikini,” a bikini with a matching face mask. Was it a nod to fashion, a form of virtue signaling, or both? There seemed to be as many persuasive messages, or potentially persuasive messages, as there were shells on the beach.

The preceding examples raise two important issues. First, persuasion and social influence are pervasive. We are surrounded by influence attempts, both explicit and implicit, no matter where we are. As Cascio, Scholz, and Falk emphasize (2015):

social influence is omnipresent, occurring through implicit observation of cultural norms, face-to-face and mediated interpersonal communication, as well as mass
mediated communication. Even though individuals are often unaware of the
power of social influence, research shows its effects on behavior in a wide variety
of circumstances.

(p. 51)

Second, it is difficult to say with any certainty what is and is not “persuasion.”
Where should we draw the line between persuasion and other forms of communication?
We address the first of these issues in this chapter. Here we examine the pervasive nature
of persuasion and offer a rationale for learning more about its workings. In the next
chapter, we tackle the issue of what constitutes persuasion and related terms such as
social influence and compliance gaining.

AIMS AND GOALS

This is a book about persuasion. Its aims are at once academic and practical. On the
academic side, we examine how and why persuasion functions the way it does. In
so doing, we identify some of the most recent theories and findings by persuasion
researchers. On the practical side, we illustrate these theories and findings with a
host of real-life examples. We also offer useful advice on how to become a more
effective persuader and how to resist influence attempts, especially unethical influence
attempts, by others.

If learning how to persuade seems a bit manipulative, remember, we don’t live
in a society populated with unicorns, rainbows, and LOLlipops. The real world is
brimming with persuaders. You can avoid learning about persuasion, perhaps, but
you can’t avoid persuasion itself. Besides, we can’t tell you everything there is to know
about persuasion. Nobody knows all there is to know about this subject. One of the
points we stress throughout this book is that people aren’t that easy to persuade.
Human beings are complex. They can be stubborn, unpredictable, and intractable,
despite the best efforts of persuaders.

Persuasion is still as much an “art” as it is a “science.” Human nature is too
complicated, and our understanding of persuasion too limited, to be certain which
influence attempts will succeed or fail. There is an old axiom that half of every dollar
spent on marketing is wasted, but marketers don’t know which half. One survey (cited in
Benes, 2018) revealed that marketers suspect that a fourth of their ad spending is wasted.
Think how often you flip the channel when a commercial costing millions of dollars
to produce and air appears on television. Think how many candidates for public office
have spent fortunes campaigning, only to lose their elections. Or think how difficult it is
for the federal government to convince people to stop smoking, practice safe sex, avoid
texting while driving, or get a vaccine—behaviors that are in their own self-interest.

The science of persuasion is still in its infancy. Despite P. T. Barnum’s adage that
“there’s a sucker born every minute,” people are uncannily perceptive at times. It is
tempting to believe that if one only knew the right button to push, one could persuade
anybody. In reality, there are many buttons, which must be pushed in the right order,
or in combination, and the order is constantly changing. Even so, persuasion is not
entirely a matter of luck. Much is known about persuasion. Persuasion has been
scientifically studied since the 1940s. Written texts on persuasion date back to
ancient Greece. A host of strategies and techniques have been identified and their
effectiveness or ineffectiveness documented. Persuaders are a long way from achieving an Orwellian nightmare of thought control, but a good deal is known about how to capture people’s hearts and minds. Before proceeding further, we want to address a common negative stereotype about persuasion.

PERSUASION IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

The study of persuasion has gotten a bad rap. Everyone seems to agree that the subject is fascinating, but some are reluctant to embrace a field of study that conjures up images of manipulation, deceit, or brainwashing. There is, after all, a sinister side to persuasion. Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Marshall Applewhite, and Osama bin Laden were all accomplished persuaders—much to the detriment of their followers. We, however, do not think of persuasion as the ugly stepsister in the family of human communication. Rather, we find the study of persuasion enormously intriguing. Persuasion is the backbone of many communicative endeavors. We can’t resist the urge to learn more about how and why it works. Part of our fascination stems from the fact that persuasion is, on occasion, used for unsavory ends. It is therefore all the more important that researchers learn as much as they can about the strategies and tactics of unethical persuaders.

PERSUASION IS OUR FRIEND

Persuasion isn’t merely a tool used by con artists, chiselers, charlatans, cheats, connivers, and cult leaders. Nobel Peace Prize recipients and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists are also persuaders. In fact, most “professional” persuaders are engaged in socially acceptable, if not downright respectable, careers. They include advertising executives, bloggers, campaign managers, celebrity endorsers, clergy, congresspersons, diplomats, doctors, infomercial spokespersons, lawyers, lobbyists, mediators, media pundits, motivational speakers, online influencers, political cartoonists, press secretaries, public relations experts, radio talk-show hosts, recruiters, salespersons, senators, social activists, syndicated columnists, and whistleblowers, to name just a few.

Let’s focus on the positive side of persuasion for a moment. Persuasion helps forge peace agreements between nations. Persuasion helps expose corruption and open up closed societies. Persuasion is crucial to the fundraising efforts of charities and philanthropic organizations. Persuasion convinces motorists to buckle up when driving or refrain from driving when they’ve had a few too many. Persuasion is used to convince a substance-abusing family member to seek professional help. Persuasion is how the coach of an underdog team inspires the players to give it their all. Persuasion is a tool used by parents to urge children not to accept rides from strangers or to allow anyone to touch them inappropriately. In short, persuasion is the cornerstone of a number of positive, prosocial endeavors. Very little of the good that we see in the world could be accomplished without persuasion.

Persuasion, then, is a powerful and often prosocial force. Having highlighted the positive side of persuasion, we address the question of why the study of persuasion is so valuable. The next section, therefore, offers a justification for the study of social influence.
We’ve already mentioned one of the primary reasons for learning about this subject: Persuasion is a central feature of every sphere of human communication. The cartoon (Figure 1.1) takes this idea to the extreme. The same is true of social influence. We can’t avoid it. We can’t make it go away. Like Elvis impersonators in Las Vegas, persuasion is here to stay. Various estimates suggest that the average person is exposed to anywhere from 300 to 5,000 messages per day. There are more ways to persuade than ever before. Indeed, traditional persuasion in the form of political speeches, television commercials, print ads, billboards, and product placements in movies and television is alive and well. So too are protest marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and other forms of symbolic action. In the last two decades, digital media has been added to the mix. You can submit online reviews of products and services; post a YouTube video advocating your message; engage in hashtag activism; advocate a cause via Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram; solicit funding via crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter or GoFundMe; or promote change through a website such as www.change.org or www.dosomething.org. With this in mind, let’s consider the role of digital persuasion.

**Online Persuasion: Please Like, Follow, or Share Me**

Some people seem to spend their every waking moment texting, tweeting, blogging, or posting their views on all manner of subjects large and small. That said, social media isn’t just an entertaining diversion, it is an important tool for influence. Whenever someone likes, follows, posts, shares, tweets or retweets, forwards, or comments on a message, online influence is taking place. One major avenue for online persuasion is via influencers.

**Influencers**

Influencers have always existed in the form of brand spokespersons, op-ed writers, movie critics, lobbyists, and others. More recently, the term *social media influencer* (SMI), or simply *influencer*, has been applied to opinion leaders on social media.
platforms. Influencers can be defined as “individuals who leverage their social and cultural capital on social media to shape the opinions and purchasing decisions of others” (Wellman, Stoldt, Tully, & Ekdale, 2020, p. 68). SMIs are the arbiters of fashion, fitness, and food found on Twitter, Instagram, and other digital platforms. To clarify, when Lionel Messi, the brilliant Argentinean soccer forward, appears in an ad for Adidas, he is acting as a traditional athletic endorser. However, when he posts a photo of himself in fashionable attire on Instagram, where he has 297 million followers, he is acting as an influencer (Fashion alert, 2020).

Keeping It Real: Authenticity Is Key
Why are influencers so influential? For one thing, they enjoy direct lines of communication with their followers. For example, when Billie Eilish posts a photo on Instagram with a hashtag, the message is received directly by her followers. The followers can like, share, comment on the photo, or click on the hashtag. Compare this to a traditional print ad, where a brand hires an advertising agency; the agency designs an ad campaign; a production company is chosen to direct, shoot, and edit the ad; and the final product appears in a magazine.

SMIs also hold sway over their followers because they are perceived as more authentic or genuine than commercial advertisements. As Martineau (2019) observed, “users consider influencers more akin to a close friend than an advertiser or paid endorser” (para. 3). Lerman (2020) emphasized the power that influencers wield, noting that “one well-placed post by an influencer with tens of thousands or even millions of followers can make or break a product—and even sell it out in seconds” (para. 5).

Mega- and Micro-Influencers
Mega-influencers, such as Huda Kattan (@hudabeauty) and PewDiePie (@pewdiepie), have millions of followers with worldwide reach. Micro-influencers have thousands of followers and usually occupy a specific niche. As examples, Peter Dager (@Peterpandem) is a professional esports influencer and former professional Dota 2 player. Live B (itslivb.com) is a vegan foodie who shares recipes and tutorials with followers. While micro-influencers may not be familiar household names, they command loyalty among their niche followers.

Influencers may generate content for free, but they are often compensated in one way or another for their brand mentions. Such paid posts are known as sponsored content. Kylie Jenner, for example, reportedly earned $986,000 per post in 2020 (www.hopperhq.com/blog/instagram-rich-list/). Micro-influencers earn far less, perhaps a few hundred dollars, or they receive merchandise, trips, or gift cards in return (Tosone, 2019).

The Digital Downside: Ignominies of Influencers
There are downsides to relying on influencers’ recommendations. One problem is that social media can blur the lines between a celebrity’s opinion and a paid endorsement. As such, followers may not realize that brand mentions are paid promotions. To alleviate this problem, agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission (www.FTC.gov, 2019) in the United States and the Competition and Markets Authority in the United Kingdom require that all sponsored content be identified clearly. That said, influencers
WHY STUDY PERSUASION?

often play fast and loose with the rules. Recently, for example, rapper Cardi B received a stern warning from the FTC because her Instagram followers had to click on the “more” button to see that her posts were paid endorsements (www.marketingdive.com/news/ftc-fines-detox-tea-company-1m-over-instagram-ads/573703/).

A second concern is that influencers may give bad advice. One study found that influencers offered bad advice regarding weight loss recommendations nearly 90 percent of the time (Forrest, 2019). Influencers also peddled junk treatments for preventing the coronavirus, including inulin tea, an ozone generator, and detox regimens (Pardes, 2020). Unfortunately, false information tends to travel faster on social media than the truth (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Trusting influencers' opinions about music or fashion is one thing. Taking their word for it when it comes to medical advice is quite another.

Yet a third problem is that influencers can commit gaffes and blunders that can rub off on their sponsors. Consider “Aunt Becky,” for example. After Lori Loughlin—the actress who portrayed the beloved TV character on Netflix’s Fuller House—was caught bribing her daughters’ way into elite colleges, she was not invited back for the show’s final season. What’s more, one of Loughlin’s daughters, Olivia Jade, lost substantial endorsement deals. Considering this and other scandals, sponsors are increasingly wary of influencers who attract the wrong kind of attention by promoting fake news, touting conspiracy theories, or making unfounded claims.

Tipping Points, Viral Marketing, and Word of Mouth
Malcolm Gladwell highlighted the key principles of viral marketing in The Tipping Point (2000). According to Gladwell, word of mouth (WOM) can be likened to a virus, which spreads across social networks until the whole society is “infected.” Based on what he calls the law of the few, a small number of influential people can generate a groundswell of support for an idea, brand, or phenomenon. If a message gains sufficient traction, it reaches a tipping point and becomes “contagious.”

A case in point is “Cranberry Dreams,” a TikTok video of an Idaho skateboarder, Nathan Apodaca, who was wheeling his way to work—at a potato warehouse, no less—after his pickup truck broke down in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As he rolled along, he lip-synced Fleetwood Mac’s “Dreams” while drinking Ocean Spray cranberry juice (https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJPFQDHP/). He became an overnight sensation. Within a few days, the video had 30 million views and generated multiple hashtags (#cranberry dreams, #doggface208). People started recreating their own versions of the video (#dogfacechallenge). Jimmy Fallon mimicked the video on The Tonight Show (https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJPFC8GE/). Mick Fleetwood posted an homage to Apodaca (https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJJPqw2m/). Tom Hayes, the CEO of Ocean Spray, hopped on a skateboard, too (https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJJPFn8fM/), then gave Apodaca a brand-new truck painted cranberry red. Ocean Spray sales rose and downloads of the song “Dreams” soared (Shazam searches for the song increased by 1,142 percent).

Über Influencers
According to Gladwell (2000), to reach a tipping point, the right kinds of people must be involved. The first type is maven, who possess specialized expertise. They may be celebrity chefs, fashionistas, fitness gurus, tech geeks, or wine snobs. They are the
early adopters, opinion leaders, or what some call *alpha consumers* (Tatum, 2020). “One American in ten,” Keller and Barry (2003) maintain, “tells the other nine how to vote, where to eat, and what to buy” (p. 1). The popularity of the “Cranberry Dreams” video was aided by mega-influencers such as Jimmy Fallon, who often produces trending hashtags and video challenges.

In addition to mavens, Gladwell states that *connectors* are also essential. Based on the viral metaphor, they are carriers. They have large social networks. They spread the word. Since social circles tend to be overlapping, forwarding messages spreads them increasingly outward from their epicenter. With respect to social media influencers, discussed earlier, the functions of mavens and connectors are often combined; they know what the “next big thing” is and they have a large base of loyal followers. In the case of the “Cranberry Dreams” video, TikTok itself is an immensely popular platform for teens and young adults. This demographic group is responsible for launching many trending topics and viral videos.

The last type Gladwell identifies is *salespeople*. They receive the message from a connector and then talk it up within their own circle of friends. Salespeople tell their friends, “You have to watch this TikTok video of a skateboarder drinking cranberry juice and lip-syncing to Stevie Nicks.”

**Orchestrating the Next Big Thing**

In addition to having the right kinds of people, *context* is critical. The idea must come along at the right time and place. Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok wouldn’t have worked before there was widespread mobile access to the Internet. Amidst the stress of a global pandemic, a video of a carefree skateboarder enjoying a tasty beverage and classic rock was a welcome relief.

An idea also must possess *stickiness*, which means that it is inherently attractive. Without some sort of natural appeal, people won’t gravitate toward the idea or pass it along (Heath & Heath, 2008). The “Cranberry Dreams” video possessed a quirky, intercultural, intergenerational appeal. Apodaca has Native American and Mexican heritage. He’s riding a skateboard in Idaho. He’s listening to classic rock. His choice of beverage is somewhat eccentric. Were he a skateboarder in California, listening to Pennywise while chugging Mountain Dew, the appeal would not be the same.

*Scalability* is another requirement: It must be easy to ramp up production of the idea, product, or message to meet demand. Finally, *effortless transfer* is yet another ingredient in the recipe for an effective viral campaign. A viral campaign must leverage free media, as was the case with “Cranberry Dreams,” a selfie video with a good vibe. Ideas that can be spread by forwarding an email, including an attachment, or embedding a link are easy to disseminate. The more time, effort, or money it takes to spread the word, the less likely the idea will go viral.

**Infectious or Inexplicable?**

Although viral marketing holds considerable potential, it is often a hit-or-miss strategy, with far more misses than hits. What’s more, evidence for the effectiveness of tipping points is largely anecdotal, and there is no guarantee that an idea will gain traction. If one does, its shelf life is often limited. The very concept of viral marketing is something of an oxymoron. A viral campaign is planned to appear unplanned. It is
contrived to seem genuine. As consumers grow wise to the strategy, it will become less effective.

**Nudges: Sometimes Less Is More**

The ubiquitous nature of persuasion is also illustrated by *nudge theory*, developed by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008). They maintain that subtle changes in the way choices are presented to people can influence, or “nudge,” them in the right direction. For example, when men use public restrooms, they aren’t always neat and tidy. They frequently miss the mark, to put it mildly, which increases janitorial costs significantly. To address this, folks at an airport in Amsterdam gave men something to aim for. Specifically, they installed urinals that included a stenciled image of a housefly near the drain. The result? Having a target made all the difference. The men’s aim improved considerably (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). The whale-shaped recycling bin (Figure 1.2) is designed to nudge beachgoers to recycle their bottles.

As another example, school cafeterias tried offering apples at lunch, but most of the fruit wound up in trash cans. All that changed, however, when the apples were sliced rather than whole. How did the children like “them apples”? As a result of this simple nudge, kids were 73 percent more likely to eat the apples (Schwartz, 2016). Similarly, when vending machines listed the calories in snack foods, people were more likely to make healthier choices. Others have suggested that nudges could be used to
reduce suicide rates by nudging gun owners toward safe storage of firearms (Bauer & Capron, 2020).

Although some people have criticized nudge theory for being paternalistic or heavy-handed (Ewart, 2019; Pasquale, 2015), others (Sunstein, 2014) argue that people are free to resist nudges if they wish. Kids can still throw apple slices in the trash. They are simply being provided with options that encourage healthy nutrition (www.nudges.org). Better yet, nudging need not be sneaky. In fact, transparency in disclosing the use of nudges does not appear to diminish their effectiveness (Paunov, Wänke, & Vogel, 2019). That said, some nudges may be perceived more like shoves. To encourage organ donors, for example, some countries have adopted a “presumed consent” policy, meaning that a person must take the initiative to opt out if the person does not want to be an organ donor.

**eWOM: Digital Buzz**

Earlier, we mentioned the effectiveness of word-of-mouth influence. Like WOM, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) also has considerable reach. eWOM can be defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). Social media allows everyone with a smart device to have their say.

A common avenue for online influence is through *brand mentions*. Eighty percent of Twitter users have mentioned brands in their tweets (Midha, 2014). Similarly, many consumers base their purchase decisions, in part, on online recommendations from peers. Another route for influence is through online ratings and reviews. Consumer ratings and comments on Amazon, Rotten Tomatoes, Tripadvisor, Yelp, and other platforms affect purchase intentions. Roughly 80 percent of consumers surveyed read reviews and check ratings before making online purchasing decisions (Nicholas, 2015).

Like WOM, eWOM is most effective when it is perceived as genuine rather than manufactured and peer driven rather than commercially sponsored. It is inexpensive compared to traditional media. And it is self perpetuating.

**Sponsored Content and Advertorials: Things Are Not What They Seem**

The rise of social media has spawned a surge in advertising masquerading as genuine peer-to-peer influence. One type, known as *sponsored content*, includes promoted tweets and Instagram posts, which are essentially paid endorsements. Earlier we noted that posts by social media influencers often contain sponsored content. If Cesar Millan, a.k.a. the “Dog Whisperer,” posted an Instagram pic of himself loading a litter of puppies into a Subaru Forester, the brand promotion would represent sponsored content. A second type, known as *native advertising*, involves ads disguised as news stories. They are “native” in the sense that they are subtle and blend in with their surrounding content. Suppose you were reading an online article about how to register your dog as a companion animal. Sandwiched within the article is a review of the “Best Pet Strollers.” If the review weighed the pros and cons of different models, then promoted a particular brand, it would be a form of sponsored content. Both approaches are effective because many users have difficulty distinguishing such content from genuine material (Wodzynski, 2016).
Opinion Mining and Sentiment Tracking: I Feel You

The Web is an opinion-rich environment. People freely share their attitudes, opinions, and values via social media. And marketers are listening. Many companies, for example, now specialize in opinion mining and sentiment tracking by monitoring social media to gauge the public’s mood in nearly real time (Ravi & Ravi, 2015). Sophisticated algorithms can track how a person, brand, or issue is trending based not only on the number of tweets generated but also on how favorable, neutral, or negative those tweets are (Iglesias & Moreno, 2020).

As sophisticated as such methods seem, a problem with opinion mining is that the data is often “squishy”—that is, people’s comments aren’t always clear or coherent. Furthermore, the tone of a message—that is, whether it is ironic, satirical, or hyperbolic—can be hard for artificial intelligence to decipher. Nevertheless, programmers are getting better at analyzing and interpreting words related to feelings, emotions, and opinions.

Gamification: You’ve Got Game

Parents have known for decades that one way to get infants to eat their veggies is by turning mealtime into a game. “Here comes the airplane,” the parent says with each spoonful of strained peas. A modernized version of this approach, known as gamification, is being used to stimulate consumer interest and involvement (McGonigal, 2011). Gamification applies video-game methods to other contexts to increase consumer engagement. People like to play games. They enjoy the competition. Why else would they spend hours on end playing Candy Crush or Fortnite? Games are entertaining, challenging, and rewarding.

Not only do games transform mundane tasks into fun activities, they can also be used to influence. Through points, badges, leaderboards, and other incentives, gamification keeps people coming back for more. If you like running, the fitness app Strava provides progress reports on speed and distance, records your personal bests, and offer you challenges. It will also compare your performance with other runners, much like a virtual track meet. Likewise, if you are learning a foreign language, Duolingo uses experience points and learning streaks and awards “lingots,” a form of in-game currency, to keep you motivated. Gamification has been used to enhance learning, boost workplace productivity, increase voter turnout, improve patient compliance, promote safe driving, and encourage civic engagement.

Gamification is not without its critics, however. Critics charge that earning badges and points trivializes activities such as learning, working, exercising, or participating in social causes. Moreover, as Ian Bogost (2011), a professor and expert in video games as cultural artifacts, cautioned, “‘exploitationware’ is a more accurate name for gamification’s true purpose” (para. 12). Similarly, Alter (2017) warned that all smart technology, from fitness apps to social media platforms, can be addictive, as users strive to reach 10,000 steps, chase likes, or secure a spot on a leaderboard. Perhaps that explains why 46 percent of teens in one survey said they would rather have a broken bone than a broken phone (Alter, 2017).

Crowdsourcing and Crowdfunding: Hive Mind and Hive Money

Moving a heavy object, like a piano, isn’t easy. To accomplish such a task, you might invite friends to pitch in. Similarly, crowdsourcing makes an online appeal for help in
WHY STUDY PERSUASION?

completing a task or solving a problem. And the results can be astonishing. Consider Wikipedia, for example. The online collaborative encyclopedia, which can be edited by anyone, was one of the earliest crowdsourcing platforms (Lee & Seo, 2016). As other examples, Doritos invited consumers to participate in a “Crash the Super Bowl” contest by generating their own ideas for a 30-second commercial (go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vVIUBU1gZs), and Starbucks’s “White Cup Contest” contest solicited customers’ suggestions for a graphic design for a limited-edition coffee cup. Contestants posted their creations via #WhiteCupContest.

While crowdsourcing has assisted in solving problems in astronomy, legislation, language translation, and urban planning, among many areas, it has its naysayers. Detractors complain that crowdsourcing is exploitative; it relies on the unpaid labor and efforts of others. Another complaint is that the wisdom of the commons isn’t always so wise. For example, when NASA asked people to submit names for a new section of the International Space Station, the crowd chose “Colbert” (after the late-night comedian) over names like “Serenity,” “Earthrise,” and “Tranquility.” NASA went with the name “Tranquility” anyway.

A related strategy, crowdfunding, involves raising money through online donations. Websites such as Kickstarter, GoFundMe, and Indiegogo allow people to ask for donations or start-up funds for a cause or business venture. On the plus side, such crowdfunding gives “the little guy” or an underdog cause the chance to be noticed. On the downside, some of the requests are scams (Fredman, 2015), and most start-ups fail. For this and other reasons, the SEC recently adopted rules regulating crowdfunding practices online.

Persuasive Technology: My Heart Says Yes, but My Watch Says No

Persuasive technology focuses on devices “aimed at changing users’ attitudes or behaviors through persuasion and social influence, but not through coercion or deception” (Persuasive Technology, 2016, para. 1). Smart devices and wearable technology “are not just persuasive but specifically aimed at forging new habits” (Byrnes, 2016, p. 64). Smartwatches, for example, exhort wearers to take action via taps, vibrations, or other haptic cues (Gilmore, 2016). Fitness trackers not only track your daily step count, they encourage you to exercise. Got a big date coming up? An app developed by MIT can tell you if you sound boring, nervous, happy, or sad based on your speech pattern (Lee, 2017). As an alternative, you could always check to see if your date is asleep.

Persuasive technology plays a role in health care too. Hand hygiene, for instance, is critical in hospital settings. Yet healthcare workers wash their hands less than half as often as they should (Centers for Disease Control, 2016). This explains, in part, why roughly 1 in 25 patients develops a healthcare-related infection while being hospitalized (Centers for Disease Control, 2016)! How can technology help? Some hospitals are now using smart badges worn by healthcare workers to monitor hand hygiene electronically (Moylan, 2018). Suppose a nurse treats a patient, then stands in front of a bathroom sink for 30 seconds or gets hand sanitizer from a dispenser. The badge turns green. Now suppose the nurse did not use proper hand hygiene after treating a patient. If she entered another patient’s room, her badge would emit a beeping noise and turn red. Yes, it’s a bit like nagging, but nagging saves lives. Handwashing improved dramatically on wards equipped with the new technology.
Similarly, as part of the Internet of Things, Glowcap pill bottles can alert people when to take their medicine (Orji & Moffat, 2016). Skip a dose and a light will glow or a chime will sound, followed by a text or phone-call reminder. If this sounds bothersome, consider this: For some patients, taking their medicine at the right time each day is a matter of life and death. In fact, as many as 125,000 deaths per year and $105 billion in medical costs are attributable to patients not taking medicine properly (Ruggerio & Wick, 2016).
You may not think of them this way, but scientists are persuaders (Glassner, 2011). The ongoing debate about climate change illustrates the persuasive challenge facing climatologists. Likewise, controversies over how best to identify, prevent, and manage COVID-19 also required persuasion by epidemiologists and virologists. Despite widespread agreement among evolutionary biologists that evolution is a fact rather than a theory, there is a continuing social controversy over the teaching of creationism alongside evolution in public school curriculums. Even in fields such as chemistry, mathematics, or physics—the so-called hard sciences—persuasion plays a major role. In this respect, Thomas Kuhn (1970) argued that all scientists employ “techniques of persuasion in their efforts to establish the superiority of their own paradigms over those of their rivals” (p. 151). Similarly, Mitroff (1974) noted that “the notion of the purely objective, uncommitted scientist [is] naïve. . . . The best scientist . . . not only has points of view but also defends them with gusto” (p. 120). Scientists must do more than conduct experiments and report their results. They also must persuade other scientists, funding agencies, and the public at large of the merits of their work.

Another not-so-obvious context for persuasion is the arts. Not all art is created “for art’s sake.” Art serves more than an aesthetic or decorative function. Artists have strong opinions, and they lend expression to their opinions in and through their work. Consider film as an art form, for example. Movies such as A Girl in the River, Selma, Blackfish, and Philadelphia demonstrate the power of the camera to increase awareness, change attitudes, alter beliefs, and shape opinions (Thompson, 2016). Other art forms have the capability to persuade as well. Playwrights, painters, muralists, sculptors, photographers, and dancers give voice to their political and social views through their art.

Consider painting for a moment. Many of the famous works hanging in museums were created out of a sense of social conscience. Using images rather than words, artists comment on social conditions, criticize society, and attempt to transform the social order. We examine this issue in more detail in Chapter 14, but for now, let’s consider one particular work of art, Pablo Picasso’s Guernica. Through this painting, Picasso offered a moral indictment of war and man’s inhumanity to man. The painting features people and animals, the victims of the indiscriminate bombing of a Basque town during the Spanish Civil War, in various states of agony, torment, and grief. As Von Blum (1976) notes, “the purpose of the painting is frankly propagandistic. The artist’s intent was to point out the inhuman character of Franco’s fascist rebellion” (p. 92). Picasso wasn’t trying to paint a “pretty” picture. He was making a moral statement. The painting has been dubbed by one art historian “the highest achievement in modernist political painting” (Clark, 1997, p. 39). Not only Picasso but also many other artists express persuasive points of view in and through their art.

Persuasion operates in a variety of other contexts, some of which are not so obvious. We highlight a few here as illustrations. Social scientists have studied
bumber stickers as a form of political expression and as an unobtrusive means of measuring attitudes (Endersby & Towle, 1996; Sechrest & Belew, 1983). Scholars have examined the effects of intercessory prayer (offered for the benefit of another person) on recovery from illness (Frank & Frank, 1991; Hodge, 2007). Studies have examined the military’s use of social influence (Cialdini, 2011; King, 2010). Other researchers have focused on 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and other support groups as forms of self-help and group influence (Kassel & Wagner, 1993). Some studies have investigated terrorism as a form of persuasion by examining how jihadists are radicalized and recruited and how effective the use of violence is on the groups who are targeted (Bhui & Ibrahim, 2013; Iyer, Hornsey, Vanman, Esposo, & Ale, 2015; Koch, 2018). As Tuman (2010) observed, “the real goal of the communicated message in terrorism may be persuasion: to persuade audience members that chaos and fear will be their lot in life, to persuade them to pay attention to an issue they have ignored” (p. 37). One of the authors investigated various styles and strategies of panhandling to see which ones proved most effective (Robinson, Seiter, & Acharya, 1992). Research on the study of robotic persuasion is just beginning to emerge. One study found, for example, that having a robot whisper instructions to people increased their motivation to perform a boring task (Nakagawa et al., 2013). Another study focused on the effect of robot-to-human touch as a method of compliance gaining (Shiomi et al., 2017).

**WEIRD PERSUASION**

Sometimes persuasion is downright weird. A case in point involves advertising in space. A venture called Space Marketing Inc. proposed a 1-square-kilometer billboard that would have been launched into a low earth orbit (Wilson, 2016). The billboard would have been roughly the size of the moon in the night sky. The project never got off the ground due to a lack of venture capital. That may have been for the best, because astronomers worried that the reflected light from the billboard would interfere with telescopes on earth. Nevertheless, a Russian company, StartRocket, hopes to have orbiting billboards in place in 2021 (Catherine, 2020).

Yet another case of unusual persuasion involves the In Plain Sight art project. On July 4, 2019, a host of skywriting planes took to the sky to raise awareness about harsh conditions in immigration detention centers (Semotiuk, 2019). “Care, not cages” read one message. “Soy nube de esperanza” (“I am a cloud of hope”) read another (see https://xmap.us/). At the time, 850,000 undocumented immigrants were being held by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, more than 4,000 of whom were children who were separated from their parents. According to one of In Plain Sight’s founders, “The goal of this project is to make visible what is too often unseen and unspoken on the ground: the appalling, profoundly immoral imprisonment of immigrants” (Semotiuk, 2019, para. 1).

Scholars sometimes investigate quirky aspects of persuasion, too. Did you know that participants in a study who consumed caffeine were more easily persuaded than participants who had no caffeine (Martin, Hamilton, McKimnie, Terry, & Martin, 2007)? Now you do. As long as the participants were motivated to pay attention to the message, caffeine consumption increased agreement. Here is another strange
finding: Washing one’s hands not only produces cleaner hands, it also reduces a person’s sense of guilt (Kaspa, 2013). The explanation for this is related to a phenomenon called embodied cognition, wherein physical behaviors often affect higher mental states.

Other researchers found that mixed-handed people were more persuadable and more gullible than purely left- or right-handed people (Christman, Henning, Geers, Propper, & Niebauer, 2008). And Briñol and Petty (2003) discovered that asking people to nod their heads up and down (as if in agreement) made them more agreeable than shaking their heads back and forth (as if in disagreement). What is the point of such research, you ask? Such studies illustrate both the complexities and subtle nuances of persuasion.

Persuasion, then, can be found in obvious and not-so-obvious places. Before concluding this section, we examine one additional context in which persuasion occurs: the interpersonal arena.

**PERSUASION IN INTERPERSONAL SETTINGs**

The extent of influence exerted in the interpersonal arena should not be underestimated. Although we may think of Madison Avenue as all powerful, face-to-face interaction is far more effective. Yet people tend to underestimate the effectiveness of in-person influence compared to other communication contexts. One study, for example, found that people making requests underestimated how successful face-to-face requests would be compared to email requests (Roghanizad & Bohns, 2017). Another study found that people tend to underestimate their influence on others when it comes to questionable requests. Participants were asked to estimate how successful they would be at convincing a stranger to commit a minor act of vandalism (writing the word “pickle” on a page in a library book). Overall, 87 percent of the participants underestimated how persuasive they would be. On average, they were twice as effective as they thought (Bohns, Roghanizad, & Xu, 2014).

Despite all the money spent on traditional advertising and the increasing amounts being spent on new media, most influence attempts still take place in face-to-face settings. Some 90 percent of word-of-mouth recommendations, for example, take place offline (Moore, 2011). On a daily basis, we are bombarded with persuasive requests in the interpersonal arena. Your brother wants you to hurry up and get out of the bathroom. A homeless person asks if you can spare some change. Your parents try to talk you out of getting a tongue stud. Or, worse yet, your significant other uses the “F” word to redefine your relationship: That’s right; she or he just wants to be “friends.” Aahhhh! Naturally, we persuade back as well, targeting others with our own entreaties, pleadings, and requests for favors.

Why is interpersonal influence so much more effective? Because it seems more genuine and less conspicuous. Consider the following scenario:

_The bait:_ Your friend calls up and says, “Hey, what are you doing Friday night?”

_The nibble:_ Anticipating an invitation to go somewhere, you reply, “Nothing much, why?”
WHY STUDY PERSUASION?

You’re hooked and reeled in: “Well, I wonder if you could help me move into my new apartment then?”

At least when you watch a television commercial, you know the sponsor is after something from the outset. In interpersonal encounters, others’ motives may be less transparent. Most communication scholars agree that if you have a choice of media for persuasion, you should choose the interpersonal arena. Our advice: Next time you want to turn in a paper late, talk to your professor in person.

From our discussion thus far, it should be apparent that persuasion functions as a pervasive force in virtually every facet of human communication. Kenneth Burke (1966), among others, has written that humans are, by their very nature, symbol-using beings. One vital aspect of human symbolicity involves the tendency to persuade others. We are symbol users, and one of the principal functions of symbol usage is persuasion.

The recognition that social influence is an essential, pervasive feature of human symbolic action provides the strongest possible justification for the study of persuasion. Persuasion is one of the major underlying impulses for human communication. By way of analogy, one can’t understand how an automobile works without taking a look under the hood. Similarly, one can’t understand how human communication functions without examining one of its primary motives—persuasion.

FIVE BENEFITS OF STUDYING PERSUASION

Given that persuasion is an inevitable fact of life, we offer five primary benefits of learning about persuasion. We highlight these functions next.

The Instrumental Function: Be All That You Can Be

If given the choice, would you like to be more persuasive? We hope so! Because we view the ability to persuade others as an important aspect of communication competence. Communication competence involves acting in ways that are perceived as effective and appropriate (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Competent communicators possess the skills needed to achieve their objectives in fitting ways for the particular situation. Stated differently, competent communicators recognize the instrumental function of persuasion because they understand that persuasion serves as an instrument, or a means to an end.

Competent persuaders need to know how to analyze an audience to adapt the message to the audience’s frame of reference. They need to be able to identify which strategies are appropriate and which will enjoy the greatest likelihood of success. Competent persuaders also must know how to organize and arrange a persuasive message for maximum benefit. These are only some of the abilities required for successful persuasion.

But achieving the desired outcome is only one facet of communication competence. How people go about persuading also matters. Competent persuaders need to be viewed as persuading in acceptable, appropriate ways. Persuaders must be aware of social and cultural norms governing the persuasive situation. For example, parents
who publicly berate their children during a soccer match may be seen by other parents as engaging in boorish behavior.

We are confident that by learning more about persuasion, you will become a more effective and appropriate persuader. Of course, not every influence attempt will succeed. By applying the principles and processes presented in this text, and by adhering to the ethical guidelines we offer, you should be able to improve your competence as a persuader.

The Knowledge and Awareness Function: Inquiring Minds Want to Know

Another good reason for learning about persuasion is because it will enhance your knowledge and awareness of a variety of persuasive processes. Knowledge is power, as the saying goes. There is value in learning more about how persuasion operates. You may not plan on going into advertising for a living, but simply knowing how branding operates is worthwhile in and of itself. You may not plan on joining a cult (who does?), but learning more about what makes persons susceptible to cult conversion is worthwhile nonetheless. Simply from the standpoint of an observer, learning about these topics can be fascinating.

An additional benefit of learning about how persuasion functions concerns overcoming habitual persuasion. Many people rely on habitual forms of persuasion, regardless of whether they are effective. They get comfortable with a few strategies and tactics that they use repeatedly. A good deal of our communication behavior is “mindless,” as opposed to mindful, meaning we don’t pay much attention to how we communicate (Langer, 1978, 1989a, 1989b). Sometimes persuasion operates this way. Just as runners, swimmers, and other athletes need to learn to adjust their breathing in response to different situations, persuaders—to maximize their effectiveness—need to learn to adapt their methods to different audiences and situations. Persuasion isn’t a “one-size-fits-all” form of communication.

The Defensive Function: Duck and Cover

A third reason for learning about how persuasion operates is vital in our view: The study of persuasion serves a defensive function. By studying how and why influence attempts succeed or fail, you can become a more discerning consumer of persuasive messages, unlike the hapless fellow depicted in Figure 1.4. If you know how persuasion works, you are less likely to be taken in. It is worth noting that people tend to underestimate the influence of advertising on themselves and overestimate its effects on others, a phenomenon known as the third-person effect (Davidson, 1983; Jensen & Collins, 2008). Thus, you may be more defenseless than you realize.

Throughout this text, we expose a number of persuasive tactics used in retail sales, advertising, and marketing campaigns. For example, we have found in our classes that after students are given a behind-the-scenes look at how car salespeople are taught to sell, several students usually acknowledge, “Oh yeah, they did that to me.” Admittedly, a huckster could also take advantage of the advice we offer in this book. We think it is far more likely, however, that the typical student reader will use our advice and suggestions as weapons against unethical influence attempts. Box 1.1, for example, offers advice on how to recognize various propaganda ploys. In later chapters of this book, we warn you about common ploys used by all manner of persuaders, from cult leaders to panhandlers to funeral home directors.
19 WHY STUDY PERSUASION?

The Debunking Function: P-Shaw

A fourth reason for studying persuasion is that it serves a debunking function. The study of human influence can aid in dispelling various “common-sense” assumptions and “homespun” notions about persuasion. Traditional wisdom isn’t always right, and it’s worth knowing when it’s wrong. Some individuals cling tenaciously to folk wisdom about persuasive practices that are known by researchers to be patently false. For example, many people believe that subliminal messages are highly effective and operate in a manner similar to that of post-hypnotic suggestion. This belief is pure poppycock, as we point out in Chapter 15.

Of considerable importance, then, are empirical findings that are counterintuitive in nature—that is, they go against the grain of common sense. By learning about research findings on persuasion, the reader can learn to ferret out the true from the false, the fact from the fiction.

Well-Being and Self-Worth: I Feel Good

A fifth benefit of learning about persuasion is that the ability to persuade others improves one’s subjective sense of well-being. There is a sense of satisfaction that
comes from persuading others. Researchers have found that influencing others satisfies five basic needs, which are accuracy, belonging, self-worth, control, and meaning (Bourgeois, Sommer, & Bruno, 2009; Sommer & Bourgeois, 2010). The first need, accuracy, refers to the desire to be right about one's beliefs and attitudes. One of the author's spouses likes to joke, “I married Mr. Right. Mr. Always Right.” Winning someone over is one way of validating one's own views.

Box 1.1 | Persuasion Versus Propaganda and Indoctrination

What are propaganda and indoctrination, and how do they differ from persuasion? To a large extent, it is a matter of perspective. People tend to label their own messages persuasion and the other guy's propaganda. The same applies to indoctrination: We tend to think that our government educates its citizens, but foreign governments, especially those we dislike, indoctrinate their citizens. Understood in this way, propaganda and indoctrination are largely pejorative terms used to describe persuasive messages or positions with which people disagree. Gun control advocates claim the NRA uses propaganda to thwart legislation that would place restrictions on gun sales. Opponents of school prayer think that requiring students to recite a prayer in class constitutes a form of religious indoctrination. When accused of propagandizing, the common defense is to state that one was only engaged in an education or information campaign. Thus, whether a given attempt at influence, such as the D.A.R.E. campaign, is persuasion, propaganda, or indoctrination is largely in the eye of the beholder.

Definitions of propaganda are many and varied, but we happen to think Pratkanis and Aronson’s (1991) definition does a good job of capturing the essence of the term:

Propaganda was originally defined as the dissemination of biased ideas and opinions, often through the use of lies and deception. . . . The word propaganda has since evolved to mean mass “suggestion” or influence through the manipulation of symbols and the psychology of the individual. Propaganda is the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient come to “voluntarily” accept the position as if it were his or her own.

(p. 9)

Different scholars have offered different views on the nature and characteristics of propaganda (see Ellul, 1973; Jowett & O’Donnell, 1986; Smith, 1989). However, there are some essential characteristics on which most scholars agree. These are as follows:

- Propaganda has a strong ideological bent. Most scholars agree that propaganda does not serve a purely informational function. Propaganda typically embodies a strong bias, such as that of a “left-wing” or “right-wing” agenda. The campaign of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to promote animal rights would fall into this category. Propagandists aren’t trying to be neutral or objective. They are working a specific agenda.

- Propaganda is institutional in nature. Most scholars agree that propaganda is practiced by organized groups, whether they happen to be government agencies, political lobbies, private corporations, religious groups, or social movements. For instance, the Anti-Defamation League is an organization founded to prevent libeling and slandering of Jewish people. Although individuals might use propaganda, too (a parent might tell a
child, “Santa only brings presents for good girls and boys”), the term usually is associated with institutional efforts to persuade.

- Propaganda involves mass persuasion. Most scholars agree that propaganda targets a mass audience and relies on mass media to persuade. Propaganda is aimed at large numbers of people and, as such, relies on mass communication (TV, radio, posters, billboards, email, mass mailings, etc.) to reach its audience. Thus, gossip that was shared by one office worker with another at the water cooler wouldn’t constitute propaganda, but a corporate rumor that was circulated via email would.

- Propaganda tends to rely on ethically suspect methods of influence. Propagandists tend to put results first and ethics second. This characteristic is probably the one that laypersons most closely associate with propaganda and the one that gives it its negative connotation.

What are some of the questionable tactics used by propagandists? The Institute for Propaganda Analysis, which was founded in 1937, identified seven basic propaganda techniques, which still exist today (Miller, 1937). These include the plain folks appeal (“I’m one of you”), testimonials (“I saw the aliens, sure as I’m standing here”), the bandwagon effect (everybody’s doing it), card-stacking (presenting only one side of the story), transfer (positive or negative associations, such as guilt by association), glittering generalities (idealistic or loaded language, such as “freedom,” “empowering,” “family values”), and name calling (“racist,” “tree hugger,” “femi-Nazi”).

The need for belonging reflects the desire for social inclusion. People value social connections. Persuading others is one means of establishing and maintaining relationships. People also strive to maintain a positive self-concept or sense of self-worth. The ability to persuade others enhances a person’s self-esteem. The need for control, or perceived control, stems from a desire to shape our environment and exert influence over those with whom we interact. Some people like to be in charge, take over, and have things their way. Others are content to let someone else take the helm. Yet everyone seeks some degree of self-efficacy or a sense that she or he is in control of their life. Last, people want to believe there is meaning and purpose in their lives. One way of demonstrating one’s value or importance is by influencing others.

We hope you’ll agree, based on the foregoing discussion, that there are quite a few good reasons for studying persuasion. We hope we’ve persuaded you that the study of persuasion can be a prosocial endeavor. That brings us back to an earlier point, however: Not all persuaders are scrupulous. At this juncture, then, it seems appropriate that we address two common criticisms related to the study of persuasion.

**TWO CRITICISMS OF PERSUASION**

**Does Learning About Persuasion Foster Manipulation?**

We’ve already touched on one of the common criticisms of studying persuasion: the notion that it fosters a manipulative approach to communication. We address
ethical concerns surrounding the study and practice of persuasion more specifically in Chapter 16. For now, a few general arguments can be offered in response to this concern. First, our principal focus in this text is on the means of persuasion (e.g., how persuasion functions). We view the means of persuasion not so much as moral or immoral but rather as amoral, or ethically neutral. In this respect, persuasion can be likened to a tool, such as a hammer. Like any other tool, persuasion can be put to good or bad use. If this sounds like a cop-out, read what Aristotle had to say on this same point in his *Rhetoric*:

> If it is urged that an abuse of the rhetorical faculty can work great mischief, the same charge can be brought against all good things (save virtue itself), and especially against the most useful things such as strength, health, wealth, and military skill. Rightly employed, they work the greatest blessings; and wrongly employed, they work the greatest harm.

(1355b)

Related to this idea is the fact that tools can be used in good or bad ways, depending on their user. We believe that first and foremost, a persuader’s motives determine whether a given influence attempt is good or bad, right or wrong, ethical or unethical. We maintain that the moral quality of a persuasive act is derived primarily from the ends a persuader seeks and only secondarily from the means the persuader employs. It isn’t so much what strategies and tactics a persuader uses as why he or she uses them.

To illustrate, suppose you asked us whether the use of “fear appeals” is ethically justified. We would have to say, it depends. If a fear appeal were being used to warn sexually active teens of the risks of HIV infection from unprotected sex, we would tend to say the appeal was justified. If a fear appeal were being used by a terrorist who threatened to kill a hostage every hour until his demands were met, we would say the appeal was unjustified. In each case, the motives of the persuader would “color” the use of the fear appeal. Consistent with our tool analogy, fear appeals, like other persuasive strategies, can be used for good or bad ends.

A second response to this criticism was highlighted earlier. The study of persuasion performs a defensive function insofar as it educates people to become more discriminating consumers of persuasive messages. By increasing your awareness of the ploys of would-be persuaders, this text performs a watchdog function. You can use the information contained herein to arm yourself against the tactics of unscrupulous persuaders.

A third response that bears mentioning is that in denouncing the study of persuasion, antimanipulation types are also attempting to persuade. The message that persuasion is manipulative or exploitative is itself a persuasive appeal that advocates a position regarding the “proper” study of communication. When one group claims to know best how human communication should be studied, they are, in fact, standing on the persuasion soapbox themselves.

**Are Persuasion Findings Too Inconsistent or Confusing?**

An additional complaint is that the study of persuasion has led to findings that are overly qualified or contradictory in nature. Empirical investigations of persuasion, it is argued, have not yielded clear and consistent generalizations. There is no “E = mc²,” no “second law of thermodynamics,” no universal when it comes to persuasion.
WHY STUDY PERSUASION?

First, the complaint that persuasion isn’t worth studying because the findings are often inconclusive or contradictory makes little sense. Quite the opposite: We believe that persuasion warrants study precisely because it is so elusive. Underlying this criticism is the expectation that reality is, or should be, simple and uncomplicated. Like it or not, understanding reality is hard work. As we’ve already noted, human beings are complex creatures who rarely respond to messages for one and only one reason. Actually, we find this a redeeming feature of humanity. We rejoice in the fact that we aren’t an altogether gullible, predictable, or controllable species.

A second response to this criticism is simply that persuasion research has revealed a number of significant, relevant generalizations. You’ll find many such generalizations throughout this book. Newer techniques of statistical analysis, such as meta-analysis, have made it possible to reconcile some of the previous inconsistencies in the literature. In this text, we identify a variety of noteworthy, albeit qualified, generalizations that are based on the most recent meta-analyses available.

You’ll notice in this book that we’ve drawn on the people in the trenches themselves to learn how persuasion works in particular contexts and settings. We’ve talked to used car salespersons, funeral home operators, retail clothing clerks, advertising firms, former cult members, door-to-door salespersons, and telemarketers to find out—from the horse’s mouth, so to speak—how persuasion operates.

ETHICAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE USE OF PERSUASION

We would be remiss if we concluded this chapter without emphasizing the importance of ethics in the persuasion process. We wish to underscore the point that the use of persuasion is fraught with ethical concerns. We raise a number of such concerns in Box 1.2 for you to ponder. Our position is that in learning how to become a more effective persuader, you should strive to be an ethical persuader as well. In the final chapter, we address a number of ethical questions related to various strategies and techniques of persuasion discussed throughout the text. We wait until the final chapter to fully examine ethical concerns for two reasons: First, until you’ve learned more about persuasion, you may not fully appreciate all of the ethical issues that are involved. Second, after you’ve studied the full scope of persuasion as we present it in this text, you’ll be in a much better position to place these ethical questions in perspective.

Box 1.2 | Ethical or Unethical Persuasion? You Decide

Instructions: For each of the following scenarios, indicate how ethical or unethical you perceive the persuader or the persuasive strategy to be, based on a five-point scale (with 1 being “highly ethical” and 5 being “highly unethical”).

1. A student pretends to cry in a professor’s office in an attempt to coax the professor into allowing a makeup exam. Is this ethical persuasion?
2. A persuader advances an argument he doesn’t believe in but that he thinks will be convincing to his listeners. The argument isn’t untrue or invalid; it just happens to be one with that the persuader himself does not agree. Is this ethical persuasion?

Continued
3. A car salesperson emphasizes that the model of car a customer is considering has “more horsepower and better mileage than the competition.” The salesperson fails to mention that the car has worse reliability and a worse safety record than the competition. Is this ethical persuasion?

4. A skilled attorney successfully defends a client she knows to be guilty. Is this ethical persuasion?

5. A minister tells his congregation that a vote for a particular candidate is “a vote for the Devil incarnate” and that the scriptures demand that the faithful cast their ballots for another candidate. Is this ethical persuasion?

6. A persuader sincerely believes in the arguments she is presenting, but the facts and information she cites are incorrect and outdated. Is this ethical persuasion?

7. Parents use a fear appeal to convince their child to clean her room. “Santa doesn’t bring presents to children with dirty rooms,” they warn. Is this ethical persuasion?

8. A children’s cereal states on the box, “High in the vitamins kids need” but doesn’t mention that the cereal is high in sugar, too. Is this ethical persuasion?

9. A newlywed husband is upset that his wife wants to go to a dance club with some of her single friends for drinks. “If you go,” he warns, “I’m going to a strip club with some of my friends.” Is this ethical persuasion?

10. A political campaign runs a series of negative attack ads against an opponent not because the campaign manager prefers to but because voter surveys show that negative ads will work, whereas ads that take the political “high road” won’t. Is this ethical persuasion?

**SUMMARY**

We hope that we’ve convinced you of the ubiquity of persuasion in human interaction. The capacity to persuade is one of the defining features of humankind. This fact provides the strongest possible reason for studying persuasion. Given that learning about persuasion serves an instrumental function, a knowledge and awareness function, a defensive function, a debunking function, and a well-being and self-worth function, we believe there is ample justification for studying this topic. Finally, rejoinders to two current criticisms of the study of persuasion were offered. Hopefully, a persuasive case has been made for learning about persuasion.

One other thing: Did we mention that learning about persuasion can also be fun?

**NOTES**

1. The scientific study of persuasion dates back to the 1940s and 1950s, when Carl Hovland founded the Yale Attitude Research Program as part of the war effort. The government wanted to know how to counter enemy propaganda that could affect the morale of troops and how susceptible POWs were to brainwashing.