

Psychology: Basics of Persuasion

By Adam Cash from *Psychology for Dummies, 2nd Edition* (Copied from <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/psychology-basics-of-persuasion.html>)

The greatest example of the psychological concept of persuasion comes from the movie franchise, *Star Wars*. Jedi warriors have the ability to influence the thoughts of others by using "The Force" for what's called the "Jedi mind trick".

Persuasion is a powerful force in all social interactions and arrangements. People don't just use it to sell products. There are two paths to persuasion:

- Central route: The central route occurs when the "persuadee" actively processes the potentially persuasive information. In 1991, Bas Verplanken, a professor of social psychology at the University of Bath, found that when people think deeply about something, any associated change in attitude or opinion is more likely to stay changed.
- Peripheral route: This approach involves getting someone to associate an intended message with certain images, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. It relies on the mind's natural ability to associate things. Examples of persuasion via the peripheral route include using showing hard-bodied models to sell gym memberships.

Psychologists Petty and Cacioppo warn that if you're going to try to persuade people, don't warn them that it's coming. Distracting the people you hope to persuade helps because they won't be able to mount a strong counterargument to your claims.

In addition, four key components make up any persuasive argument:

- Credibility of communicator: A message is more likely to be persuasive if someone perceived as credible delivers it.
 - Expertise is often a powerful indicator of credibility. People listen to experts. One thing to keep in mind, though: Just because someone says that she's an expert doesn't mean she necessarily is. When in doubt, always check credentials, including education, training, and experience.
 - People are more likely to be persuaded by someone seen as trustworthy. Such as an actor in a white doctor's coat pitching an herbal supplement for example.
 - Attractive people's messages are more persuasive. The term *attractive* can relate to a person's physical appeal or personality and charisma.
 - Similarity plays a role. The more someone is like you, the easier it is for her to persuade you.
- Delivery approach: Should a persuader appeal to someone's emotion or to reason and critical thinking? Here's a breakdown of these and other message-delivery options:
 - *Reasoned approach*: In 1983, John Cacioppo and others found that when trying to persuade highly educated or analytical people, a reasoned approach is best. These individuals seem to like to think things over, analyzing information before making a decision. They're not necessarily smarter, but they are typically more aware of recent information.
 - *Emotional approach*: Those who don't have the time or inclination to read every consumer review when going to buy a new car are more likely to trust other people

and get swayed by emotional appeals. The thought process is “My sister said she loved her new car. I think I’ll get one.”

- *Fear factor*: Many persuasive messages use fear to scare people away from harmful or unhealthy behaviors. These messages work. There’s only one catch. If you’re going to scare people in order to persuade them, you need to provide concrete information on how to deal with or change their behavior; otherwise, the audience may freeze up or fail to act at all in the face of the fear.
- *Two-sided argument*: A two-sided argument is one that acknowledges the other position, giving the impression of fairness and objectivity. Advertisers have been using this technique for years, conducting “taste tests” and other comparative challenges with their rivals. You know what they’re up to!
- Audience engagement: The best way to present persuasive information is to get your audience to play an active part in processing your argument. Active engagement captures the other person’s attention and carries an expectation that he will comprehend the message, remember it, and then take action. Passive reception of a message, like listening to a lecture, is less likely to have an impact.
- Age of audience: Research has found that older people are less likely to change their attitudes and opinions than younger people. The early twenties are years in which people are particularly vulnerable to persuasion. This is a time in many people’s lives when choices abound and information is exchanged at a rapid rate. They’re exposed to a new world of information, and this can make resisting persuasion more difficult.

With the daily barrage of persuasive messaging that you may encounter, it helps to know how to stay committed to your own beliefs and attitudes. Psychologist William McGuire proposed that a good way to resist persuasion is through the process of *attitude inoculation*, which involves exposing yourself to weak, or weaker, arguments against your position in order to inoculate, or firm up, your resistance to counter-arguments.

This process gives you practice and confidence in refutation. It’s like warming up before a big game. And if you need to inoculate someone else’s attitude or position on an issue, try presenting him with weak opposing arguments.