



Persuasion: So Easily Fooled

Instructor Manual

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The purpose of this unit is to help students understand what social psychology is, how researchers study it and understand social phenomena, and the applications of social psychology to students' everyday lives.

The third module, Persuasion: So Easily Fooled, provides an overview of the power of persuasion. It explains the paths of persuasion, the criteria of trustworthiness (which ultimately leads to persuasion), and other tricks used to persuade individuals politically, socially, religiously, and financially. By exploring the underlying psychological mechanisms to such phenomena, students also learn how to safe-guard against such persuasion tactics.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)
 - Describe applications of psychology (1.3)
 - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3)
 - Build and enhance interpersonal relationships (3.3)
 - Interact effectively with others (4.3)
 - Apply psychological content and skills to career goals (5.1)
 - Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation (5.2)

- Enhance teamwork capacity (5.3)
- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Persuasion: So Easily Fooled
 - Recognize the difference between the central and peripheral routes to persuasion.
 - Understand the concepts of trigger features, fixed action patterns, heuristics, and mindless thinking, and how these processes are essential to our survival but, at the same time, leave us vulnerable to exploitation.
 - Understand some common “tricks” persuasion artists may use to take advantage of us.
 - Use this knowledge to make you less susceptible to unwanted persuasion.

Abstract

This module introduces several major principles in the process of persuasion. It offers an overview of the different paths to persuasion. It then describes how mindless processing makes us vulnerable to undesirable persuasion and some of the “tricks” that may be used against us. One important note about this topic: students tend to underestimate the effect that persuasion has on them. While many students concede that advertising, peer influence and other persuasive tactics might work on others they are more reluctant to accept the possibility they are similarly influenced. You do not need to convince the students otherwise to effectively teach this material.

Class Design Recommendations

This module of social should be taught in less than a single class period (especially if you are on a time crunch), with the unit as a whole take 2-3 class periods. Please also refer to the Noba PowerPoint slides that compliment this outline.

1st class period (50 min – 75 min):

- Persuasion Overview
 - Definition

- Paths of Persuasion
- Triggers & Fixed Action Patterns (FAPs)
- Source of Persuasion: Triad of Trustworthiness
 - Perceived Authority
 - Honesty
 - Likability
- Manipulating Perceptions of Trustworthiness
 - Testimonials & Endorsement, Presenting the Message as Education, Word of Mouth, The Maven
- Other Tricks of Persuasion
 - Reciprocity, Social Proof, Commitment and Consistency, A Door in the Face, And That's Not All, Sunk Cost Trap, Scarcity and Psychological Reactance
 - Defending Against Persuasion

Module Outline

Introduction

- Persuasion has been defined as “the process by which a message induces change in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors.” It can differ in whether it targets public compliance or private acceptance, is short-term or long-term, whether it involves slowly escalating commitments or sudden interventions and, most of all, in the benevolence of its intentions. Whatever the content, however, there is a similarity to the form of the process itself.

Two Paths to Persuasion

- There are two paths; the central and peripheral routes to persuasion.

- The central route employs direct, relevant, logical messages. It is expected that your audience is motivated, will think carefully about what you presented, and will react on the basis of your arguments. The central route is intended to produce enduring agreement.
- The peripheral route relies on superficial cues that have little to do with logic. It requires low effort from the target and often exploits rule-of-thumb heuristics that trigger mindless reactions.

Triggers and Fixed Action Patterns

- Fixed action patterns (FAPs) are sequences of behavior that occur in exactly the same fashion, in exactly the same order, every time they're elicited by triggers (minute details of the situation that activate FAPs).
- The effectiveness of peripheral persuasion relies on our frequent reliance on FAPs that are triggered by details of the situation. These mindless, rules-of-thumb are generally effective shortcuts for coping with the overload of information we must confront.

The Source of Persuasion: The Triad of Trustworthiness

- Studies have identified three characteristics that lead to trust: perceived authority, honesty, and likability.
- Authority. We assume positions of authority give people special access to information and power. Usually we are correct, which becomes a convenient shortcut to sound decision making. Uncritical trust in authority may, however, lead to bad decisions.
- Honesty. The moral dimension of trustworthiness. A trusted brand or company name becomes a mental shortcut for consumers.
- Likability. Bottom line is that we trust people we like (e.g., celebrity endorsements).

Manipulating the Perception of Trustworthiness

- The perception of trustworthiness is highly susceptible to manipulation. the most common psychological strategies: testimonials, message as education, word of mouth, and the maven.
- Testimonials & Endorsement. Employs someone who people already trust to testify about

the product being sold. Children are especially vulnerable to celebrity endorsements.

- **Presenting the Message as Education.** The message may be framed as objective information.
- **Word of Mouth.** Surveys show we turn to people around us for many decisions. Persuasion professionals may exploit these tendencies.
- **The Maven.** The seeding process begins by identifying so-called information hubs—individuals the marketers believe can and will reach the most other people. Mavens (a) know a lot of people, (b) communicate a great deal with people, (c) are more likely than others to be asked for their opinions, and (d) enjoy spreading the word about what they know and think.

Other Tricks of Persuasion

- **Reciprocity.** Humans are motivated by a sense of equity and fairness. When someone does something for us or gives us something, we feel obligated to return the favor in kind.
- **Social Proof.** If everyone is doing it, it must be right. This principle derives from two extremely powerful social forces—social comparison and conformity. We compare our behavior to what others are doing and, if there is a discrepancy between the other person and ourselves, we feel pressure to change
- **Commitment and Consistency.** Once we have made an initial commitment, it is more likely that we will agree to subsequent commitments that follow from the first (e.g., foot in the door persuasion techniques).
- **A Door in the Face.** Persuader begins with a large request they expect will be rejected. They want the door to be slammed in their face. Looking forlorn, they now follow this with a smaller request, which, unknown to the customer, was their target all along.
- **And That's Not All!** This is a variation on door-in-the-face. Whereas DTF begins with a request that will be rejected, that's-not-all gains its influence by putting the customer on the fence, allowing them to waver and then offering them a comfortable way off.
- **Sunk Cost Trap.** The trap occurs when a person's aversion to loss impels them to throw good money after bad, because they don't want to waste their earlier investment.
- **Scarcity and Psychological Reactance.** People tend to perceive things as more attractive when their availability is limited, or when they stand to lose the opportunity to acquire them on favorable terms.

Defending Against Unwelcome Persuasion

- The most commonly used approach to help people defend against unwanted persuasion is known as the “inoculation” method. Research has shown that people who are subjected to weak versions of a persuasive message are less vulnerable to stronger versions later on.
- Stinging. After viewing and responding to a first set of advertisements, participants were immediately confronted with their gullibility. In a second set of ads, subjects were not only more likely to recognize the manipulation in deceptive ads; they were also less likely to be persuaded by them.
- Anti-vulnerability trainings such as these can be helpful. Ultimately, however, the most effective defense against unwanted persuasion is to accept just how vulnerable we are.

Conclusion

- This module has provided a brief introduction to the psychological processes and subsequent “tricks” involved in persuasion. It has emphasized the peripheral route of persuasion because this is when we are most vulnerable to psychological manipulation.

Difficult Terms

Central Route

Door in the Face

Fixed Action Patterns (FAPs)

Foot in the Door

Peripheral Route

Psychological Reactance

Reciprocity

Social Proof

Sunk Cost Trap

The Maven

Trigger Features

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

Teaching persuasion can actually be a little difficult. It's not because the concepts are hard, it's because people (i.e., students) often think they are immune to persuasion. So getting students to not only learn the concepts, but to actively *apply* them is the biggest challenge in this module. However, having said that, persuasion is a fun topic to teach because it's EVERYWHERE.

First Class

- Discussion/Warm-Up
 - You might consider starting this unit out with students reflecting on their own susceptibility to persuasion (e.g., use Likert-type questions such as: I am easily persuaded by commercials; I buy products based on celebrity endorsements, etc.). The easiest way to do this is to use an i-clicker or similar electronic polling response system, but you can go the traditional route by having them write down or think about their responses to these questions (we like the electronic polling system because results can be immediately aggregated and shared with the class). Typically, students vastly underestimate how often or easily they are persuaded.
 - Now that you've set the stage for persuasion, you can start with the content, such as what persuasion is and the paths of persuasion (central and peripheral routes). To demonstrate the different path routes, find two different ads – one for each path. To really highlight the differences, consider finding ads that try to sell the same idea but do it differently (e.g., some anti-smoking campaigns appeal to emotion and fear by showing the emotional plight of lung cancer patients; others try to persuade through the presentation of information).
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To examine sources of persuasion. The next step is to discuss *who* is trustworthy, and therefore, persuasive (i.e., perceived authority, honesty, and likability). For each of these, you might want to find either print or television ads to demonstrate each concept.
 - To talk about manipulating perceptions of trustworthiness. Once students understand what leads to trust, you can talk about how trust is manipulated (e.g., testimonials) as well as other classic tricks (e.g., foot-in-the-door). Again, using examples will help students understand the concepts and keep them engaged.
 - Here, you might consider the in-class activity suggested below, which helps students identify persuasion techniques on their own.

- Activity: Creating a Persuasive Ad
 - See Activities/Demonstrations (below) for instructions.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To talk about defending against persuasion. Finally, you can talk about how to safeguard against persuasion tactics. Kick this off by asking them about their recent purchases – have they ever bought a product based on word of mouth? Who did they hear it from? Was it possibly “The Maven” at work? Would they rather shop at Wal-Mart or Target (for identical products)? Why? These questions help them reflect that, yes, they too are susceptible to persuasion tactics. You can then contrast this discussion with the answers from the beginning of class. Plus, now that they know they are susceptible, you can finish up the class discussion with how to safeguard against persuasion tactics.
- Activity: Persuasion in Advertising
 - For this activity, you will want to find a few advertisements that students can analyze for the main concepts of persuasion (ideally, you have a variety of ads that highlight the different aspects discussed in class or the module). See Activities/Demonstrations (below) for instructions.

Activities & Demonstrations

Psychology Applied: Persuasion in Advertising: Out of Class or In-Class Activity

This mini-writing activity can be done in or outside of class. For this activity, you will want to find a few advertisements that students can analyze for the main concepts of persuasion (ideally, you have a variety of ads that highlight the different aspects discussed in class or the module).

- Time: 15 minutes
- Materials: Advertisement(s)

- Directions:
 - Show students a few advertisements (infomercials are fun because they are so silly; persuasion campaigns for political and social causes aren't as fun, but are more effective).
 - Once students have seen the video, give them some to reflect and answer a few prompts (examples below).
- Example prompts:
 - What route of persuasion do the advertisers seem to use (e.g., central vs. peripheral)? Specifically, what central or peripheral cues are used?
 - Was the source trustworthy (i.e., have authority, honesty, and likability)? Specifically, what was it about the person that made them appear to be honest, likable, and have authority?
 - Did the ad use any other tricks of persuasion (e.g., reciprocity, That's-not-all, scarcity, etc.)
 - How could you make this ad more persuasive?
- Example stimuli
 - Don't Vote campaign with celebrity endorsements (the title is ironic).
 - A bunch of celebrities try to encourage people to vote. (Caution: this is the uncensored version which is clearly aimed at the college student demographic.)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vtHwWReGU0&index=...>
 - Easy Pour Infomercial
 - In this infomercial, the company uses several persuasion techniques to sell their product.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww02aVW9-K4>
 - Every Infomercial Ever
 - This is a parody of the above infomercial, with a voice-over of a person pointing out

all the obvious persuasion techniques used in the infomercial. This is probably best shown after the real infomercial, since it gives away some of the techniques you want students to identify on their own. (Caution: this video does use strong language.)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-6QncKMf_Y
- A similar version (from <http://jfmuellet.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/persuasio...>)
 - Students critique a web site that attempts to persuade people (e.g., persuading people not to smoke). You can assign the website or let them find their own.
 - One possibility is to assign them to go to JoeChemo.org (an anti-smoking website) and have them interact on the site (take the quizzes, learn about Joe, etc.).
 - Once they have perused the website, have them evaluate how persuasive the website was (using similar prompts as above).

Creating a Persuasive Ad: Out of Class or In-Class Activity

- This activity can be done in or outside of class. For this activity, students will select a cause and create a persuasive ad using the principles used in class.
- Time: 15 minutes
- Materials: None
- Directions:
 - Have your students select a cause (or you can assign them one) and have them make an ad campaign that supports their cause. These campaigns may be social (e.g., persuading people to buy local or organic food; getting people to reduce their carbon emissions), political (e.g., persuading people to vote for a political candidate), or a public service announcement (e.g., stop texting and driving; prevent teenagers from smoking).
 - Design an advertisement for your cause that incorporates at least THREE of the persuasion tactics we discussed in class.
 - First, write a description of what your commercial or ad would look like (who is in the ad, what are they doing, etc.).
 - After designing your ad, make sure to list and explain each tactic and how you applied

it in your ad.

Additional Activities

Lloyd, M. A. (2008). Attitude change factors in television commercials. In L. r. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 240-242). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

In this in-class activity, students identify various attitude change factors used in pretaped commercials and record their findings on a work sheet. The activity is appropriate for introductory and social psychology courses of any size. The activity employs small groups, so a classroom with moveable seats is helpful, but not essential. The instructor must record commercials (three are recommended) that illustrate various attitude change factors and prepare copies of a work sheet. The discussion of the message-learning approach to persuasion (Hovland's Yale model) in an introductory or social psychology text should provide sufficient coverage of the attitude change principles covered in the activity.

Outside Resources

Book: Ariely, D. (2008). *Predictably irrational*. New York, NY: Harper.

Book: Cialdini, R. B. (2008). *Influence: Science and practice* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Book: Gass, R., & Seiter, J. (2010). *Persuasion, social influence, and compliance gaining* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Book: Kahneman, D. (2012). *Thinking fast and slow*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Book: Levine, R. (2006). *The power of persuasion: how we're bought and sold*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Power-Persuasion-Were-Bought/dp/0471763179>

Book: Tavris, C., & Aronson, E. (2011). *Mistakes were made (but not by me)*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Student Video 1: Kyle Ball and Brandon Do's 'Principles of Persuasion'. This is a student-made video highlighting 6 key principles of persuasion that we encounter in our everyday lives. It was one of the winning entries in the 2015 Noba Student Video Award.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Orkt0wiEGt4>

Student Video 2: 'Persuasion', created by Jake Teeny and Ben Oliveto, compares the central and peripheral routes to persuasion and also looks at how techniques of persuasion such as Scarcity and Social Proof influence our consumer choices. It was one of the winning entries in the 2015 Noba Student Video Award.

<https://vimeo.com/123205124>

Student Video 3: 'Persuasion in Advertising' is a humorous look at the techniques used by companies to try to convince us to buy their products. The video was created by the team of Edward Puckering, Chris Cameron, and Kevin Smith. It was one of the winning entries in the 2015 Noba Student Video Award.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-UnkWGCKzU>

Video: A brief, entertaining interview with the celebrity pickpocket shows how easily we can be fooled. See A Pickpocket's Tale at

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/01/video-the-art-of-pickpocketing.html>

Video: Cults employ extreme versions of many of the principles in this module. An excellent documentary tracing the history of the Jonestown cult is the PBS "American Experience" production, Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple at

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/jonestown-introduction/>

Video: Philip Zimbardo's now-classic video, Quiet Rage, offers a powerful, insightful description of his famous Stanford prison study

<http://www.prisonexp.org/documentary.htm>

Video: The documentary Outfoxed provides an excellent example of how persuasion can be masked as news and education.

<http://www.outfoxed.org/>

Video: The video, The Science of Countering Terrorism: Psychological Perspectives, a talk by psychologist Fathali Moghaddam, is an excellent introduction to the process of terrorist recruitment and thinking

<http://sciencestage.com/v/32330/fathali-moghaddam-science-cafe-the-science-of-counterin-g-terrorism-psychological-perspectives.html>

Suggestions from the Society for Teaching's Introductory Psychology Primer

Afful, S.E. (2013). Social. In S.E. Afful, J. J. Good, J. Keeley, S. Leder, & J. J. Stiegler-Balfour (Eds.). Introductory Psychology teaching primer: A guide for new teachers of Psych 101. Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology web site: <http://teachpsych.org/ebooks/intro2013/index.php>

POSSIBLE ASSESSMENTS (Out of Class) PersuasionAsk students to locate examples of compliance strategies (e.g., foot-in the-door, foot-in-the-face) and/or persuasive cues (e.g., central vs. peripheral cues) in magazines or online ads. (Students can locate examples outside of class and discuss in class for 10-15 minutes.) Discuss which strategies/cues employed are more persuasive.

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981041/Social%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Current events/ news:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/23142325/Social%20in%20the%20News>

Video/audio:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981040/Social%20Video>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

http://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

http://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

http://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

http://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

http://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

http://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at http://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/139/Persuasion:%20So%20Easily%20Fooled.ppt?1416599110.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award- winning university teachers.

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