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ATTITUDES

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COMPONENTS OF PERSUASION Interest in persuasion has a venerable past. Long before modern psychology, Aristotle described *rhetoric*—the art of persuasive speaking—as a combination of *ethos* (characteristics of the speaker), *pathos* (the appeal of the message), and *logos* (the logic of the argument). Psychologists have expanded Aristotle's view to identify several components of persuasion, including the source, message, channel (the medium in which the message is delivered), context, and receiver (Lasswell, 1948; McGuire, 1985; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Petty et al., 1997). Attending to each of these aspects is crucial to the success of a persuasive appeal, whether the goal is to sell a car or get someone to agree to a date.

Source Speakers tend to be more persuasive when they appear credible (expert and trustworthy), attractive, likable, powerful, and similar to the recipient of the message (Chaiken, 1980; Simons et al., 1970). For politicians, particularly in countries such as the United States where presidential candidates must appeal directly to voters, winning votes is often a balancing act in which the successful candidate must seem likable but authoritative, powerful yet able to understand the concerns of everyday citizens.

Message The type of appeal (e.g., presenting one side of the argument or both) and the way it is delivered also affect attitude change. As we have seen, the match between the recipient's willingness and ability to think about the message and the way the message is delivered is crucial for persuasion. A jingle about a low-fat margarine will not convince someone who has compared the fat content of multiple brands and cares about the difference.

Fear appeals—efforts to induce fear to try to change attitudes—can sometimes be effective, but they can backfire if they induce too much fear and lead people to stop attending to the message and instead to focus on managing their anxiety (Insko et al., 1965). For example, messages about AIDS may fall on deaf ears if they are so frightening that people simply deny the realities. Fear can, however, be useful in inducing attitude change if the recipients of the message believe the danger applies to them and that they can do something to avoid it (see Olson & Zanna, 1993).

Channel The channel of persuasion is the means by which a message is sent—in words or images, verbally or nonverbally, in person or through media such as the telephone or television. Choosing the right channel can be as important as selecting the right message. Because turning someone down for a date is much more difficult face to face than on the telephone, suitors of reluctant “targets” should make their pitch in person. Emotional appeals to contribute to emergency relief funds are more effective when the target of the communication can see starving children with distended stomachs rather than simply hear about their plight.

Context The context in which a message is presented can also influence attitude change (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Soft music in the background may lead an ambivalent “recipient” to agree to a second date, and a roomful of cheering supporters can make a political message seem much more exciting. An important aspect of the context is the presence of competing messages. Things would be easier for Coke if Pepsi did not advertise, and vice versa.

Psychologists and advertisers have devised many methods to increase resistance to contrary appeals. One is to get there first: Being the first to make a pitch renders a persuasive appeal more effective (Insko, 1964; Miller & Campbell, 1959). Another method, called **attitude inoculation**, involves building up the receiver's “resistance” to a persuasive appeal by presenting weak arguments for it or forewarning against it (McGuire, 1961; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962). Thus, much as a vaccine builds the body's defenses through exposure to small, inert amounts of a virus, weak and easily available arguments supporting the other point of view prompt the person to develop counterarguments that serve as attitudinal “antibodies.” Salespeople frequently use

this technique when they know a customer is about to visit a competitor (“He’ll tell you Dell has better customer service, but don’t believe him”).

Receiver Receiver characteristics—qualities of the person the communicator is trying to persuade—also affect the persuasiveness of a communication. People with strong attitudes on a topic are obviously less likely candidates for attitude change, and some people are simply more difficult to persuade in general (see Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Hovland & Janis, 1959). Further, people bias their information processing in order to preserve attitudes they do not want to change (MacCoun, 1998). Coffee drinkers, for example, discount messages about the dangers of caffeine (Liberman & Chaiken, 1992).

Individuals also vary in the extent to which they are likely to attend to and reflect on careful arguments, referred to as the *need for cognition* (Jarvis & Petty, 1996). People who focus on the substance of the arguments, however, do not necessarily form “better” attitudes. People can exercise considerable effort in preserving their biases and carefully attacking arguments that do not support their position.

attitude inoculation building up a receiver's resistance to an opposing attitude by presenting weak arguments for it or forewarning of a strong opposing persuasive appeal