

Social Psychology

Lesson 8: Persuasion

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Topics:

- Routes to Persuasion
- Elements of Persuasion
- When Shouldn't We Resist Persuasion?

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1

Define persuasion and distinguish it from conformity and obedience.

2

Name the two paths to persuasion and describe the cognitive processing involved in each.

3

Identify and describe the key elements of persuasion.

4

Identify instances in which persuasion serves a beneficial role and should not be resisted.

“Speech has power. Words do not fade. What starts out as a sound ends in a deed.”

–Rabbi Abraham Heschel, 1961



Persuasion

- The process by which a message induces a change in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors.
- It is neither inherently good nor bad; it is usually the persuasive message's content and purpose that elicits our judgments of good or bad.



If bad or harmful:

➔ **propaganda**

If good:

➔ **education**

Attitude change follows a series of stages:

01

Attend the message

02

Comprehend the message

03

Accept the message



How it Differs from Conformity and Obedience?

SOCIAL INFLUENCE	TYPE OF PRESSURE	SOURCE OF INFLUENCE	STATUS OF INFLUENCER	CORE MOTIVATION
PERSUASION	Explicit arguments & appeals	Anyone (friend, media, speaker)	Lower, equal, or higher	Agreement with the message
CONFORMITY	Implicit, unspoken social norms	A peer group or crowd	Equal status	Desire to fit in or be right
OBEDIENCE	Explicit, direct commands	An authority figure	Higher status	Respect for authority or fear of punishment

Routes to Persuasion

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

a dual-process theory describing how individuals process persuasive messages.



- Central Route
- Peripheral Route

A. Central Route

- High-effort processing; focuses on facts, logic, and message quality.
- Occurs when people are motivated and able to think about an issue and respond with favorable thoughts.

Example: Booking a Vacation

- ☑ Researching the best competitive rates.
- ☑ Reading multiple user reviews
- ☑ Evaluating specific amenities and value.

B. Peripheral Route

- Low-effort processing; influenced by surface-level "cues" (e.g., attractiveness, celebrity, or music).
- Occurs when people focus on cues that trigger automatic acceptance without much thinking.
- People use simple rule-of-thumb heuristics such a “trust the expert”

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

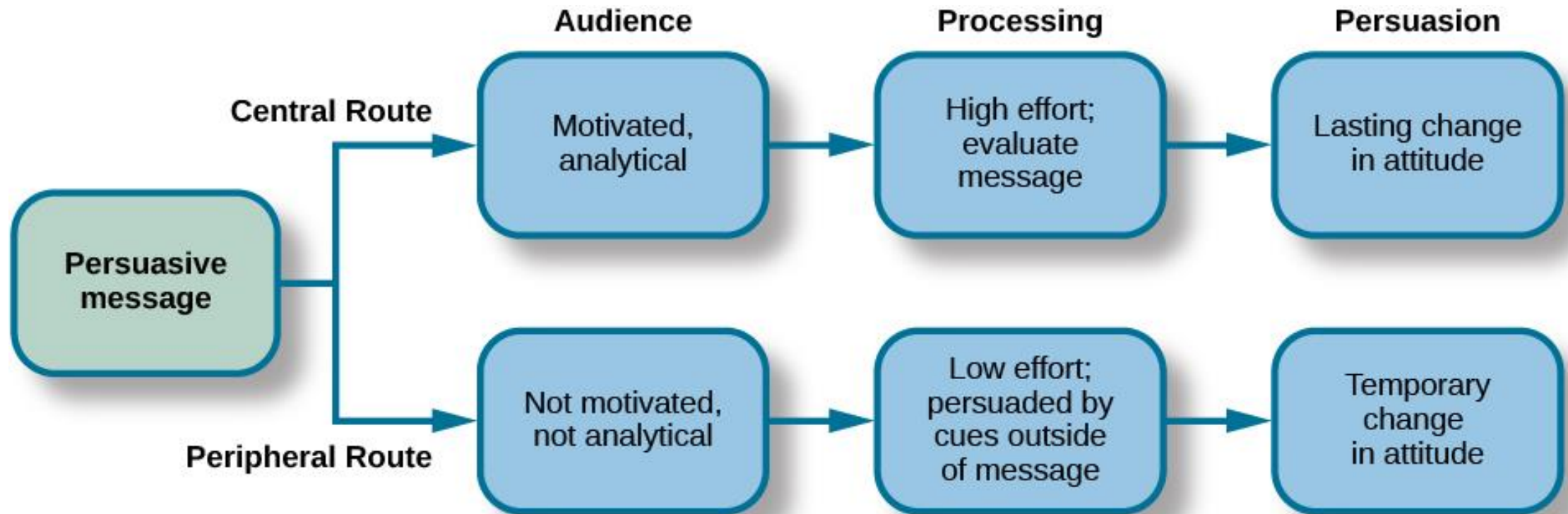
“Don’t risk everything on a single venture.”



+itch due to dandruff; no visible flakes, with regular use



Routes to Persuasion



Source: Myers, D. G. & Twenge, J. M. (2021). *Social Psychology 14th ed.* McGraw-Hill Higher Education

Yale Communication Model

- Proposed by Carl Hovland and colleagues in 1949.
- This framework proposes that message persuasion is contingent upon three primary variables: the source, the substance, and the target.

Elements of Persuasion



01

The Communicator

02

The Message

03

The Medium/Channel

04

The Audience

01. The Communicator



- WHO is saying something affects how an audience receives it.

What makes a communicator more persuasive than others? **CREDIBILITY**

PERCEIVED EXPERTISE

knowledgeable and well-informed regarding a specific topic

SPEAK CONFIDENTLY AND FLUENTLY

speaker who avoids hesitations (like "uh" or "um") and speaks with conviction

PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS

being honest, objective, and sincere

What makes a communicator more persuasive than others?

■ **Attractiveness and Liking**

having qualities that appeal to an audience

■ **Similarity**

in background, values, associations, appearance, or other factors

Experiment on Similarity

- **Experimenter:** Mackie and colleagues (1990)
- **Task:** Student participants were asked to read a persuasive essay on an environmental issue written by either a fellow schoolmate (in-group) or a student from another university (out-group).

Result:

In-Group Source:

- Triggers deep engagement and critical thinking.
- Arguments are scrutinized and taken seriously.

Out-Group Source:

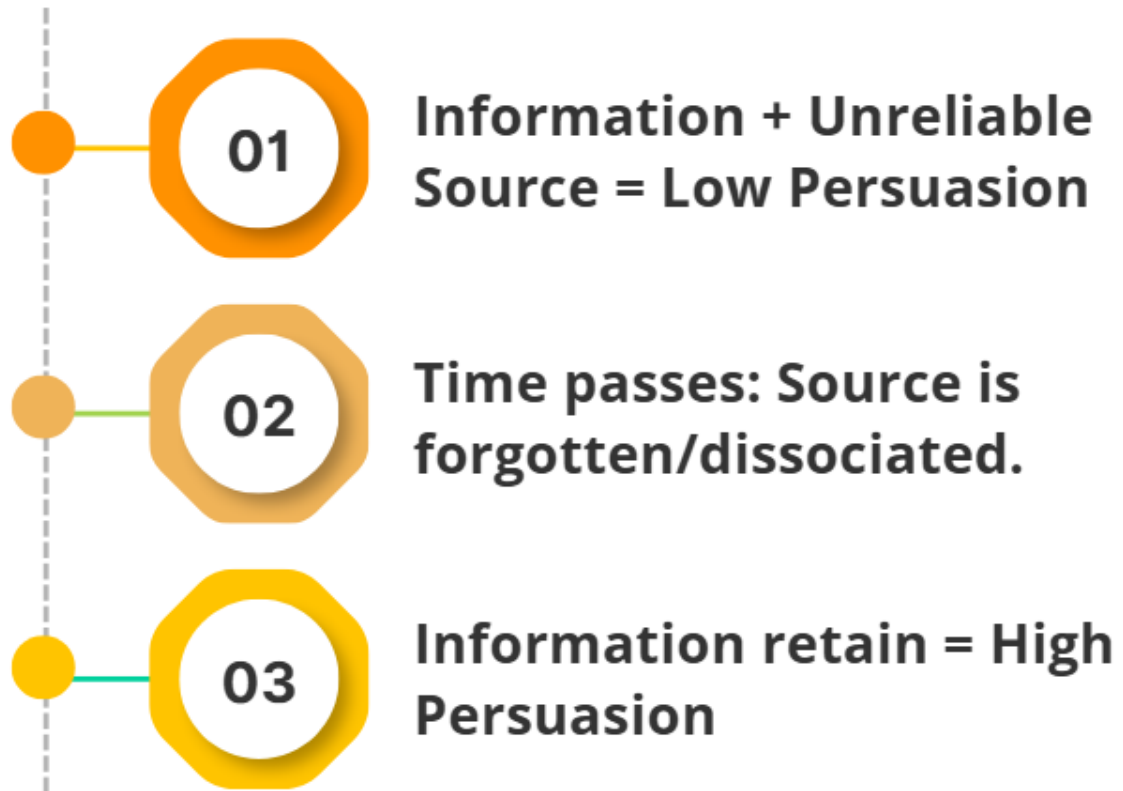
- Triggers immediate dismissal.
- Arguments are rejected regardless of logic or strength.

The Sleeper Effect




- A message's impact increases over time, even if it was initially dismissed.
- This often occurs when the message is accompanied by a "discounting cue," such as a source that lacks credibility.


The Sleeper Effect: How it works?

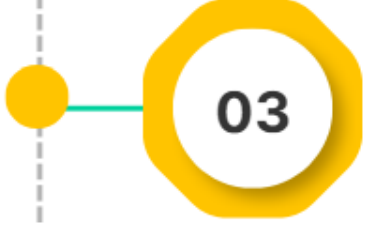


Sleeper effect is less likely if you know who is speaking before the message begins, rather than finding out the source at the end.

Example of Sleeper Effect

- 

01 An anonymous flyer makes a claim about a candidate. You ignore it because the source is suspicious.
- 

02 Time Passes: You forget you ever saw that specific flyer.
- 

03 Two months later, you remember the "info" from the flyer, but because you forgot the source was unreliable, you now accept the information as true.

02. The Message

- It matters not only who says something but also **WHAT** that person says.
- Two characteristics of message:



01. Content

“What”

Tactics / Words / Visuals

02. Construction

“How”

Placement / Length / Repetition

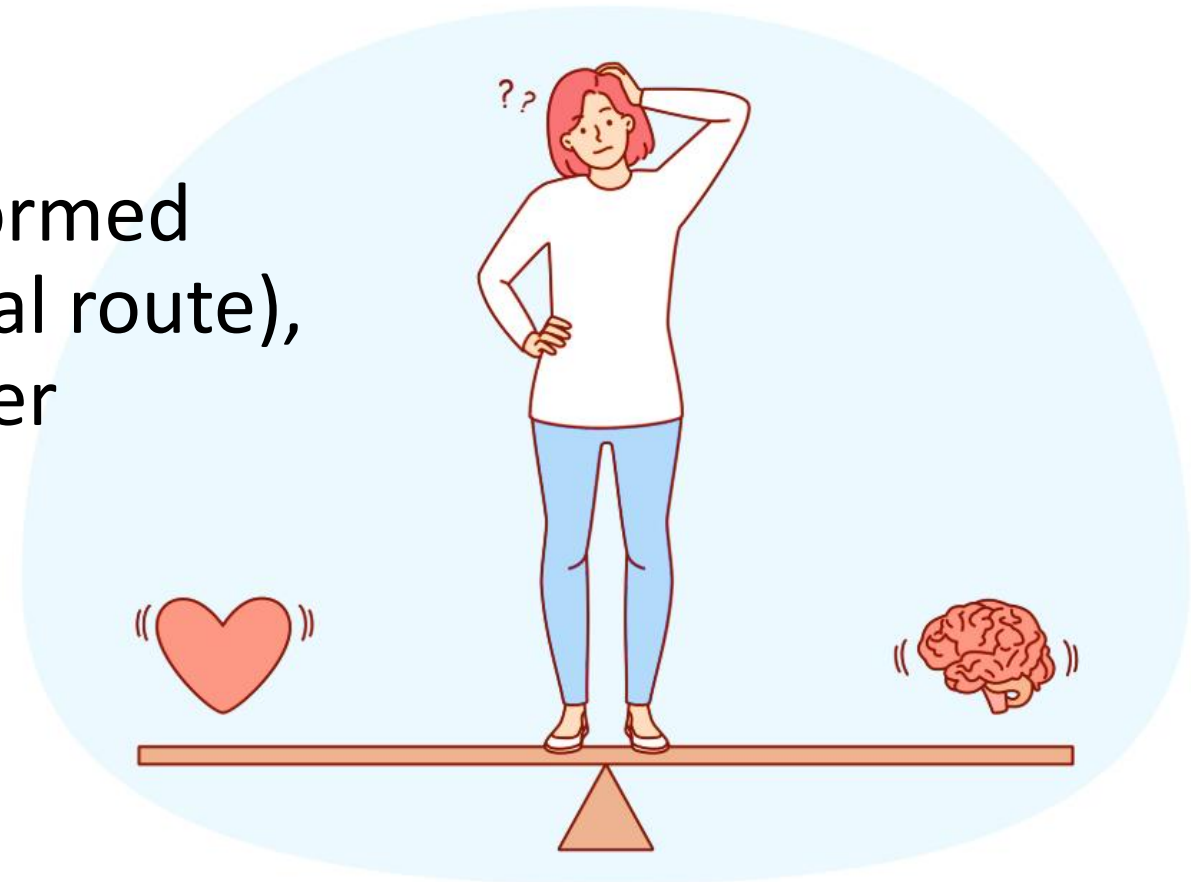
Reason Vs Emotion

- Well-educated or analytical people are more responsive to rational appeals than are less educated or less analytical people.

Engaged/Analytical: Persuaded through Central Route

Uninterested: Persuaded through Peripheral Route

- When people's initial attitudes are formed primarily through emotion (peripheral route), they are more persuaded by later emotional appeals.
- When the initial attitudes are formed primarily through reason (central route), they are more persuaded by later intellectual arguments.



The Effect of Good Feeling

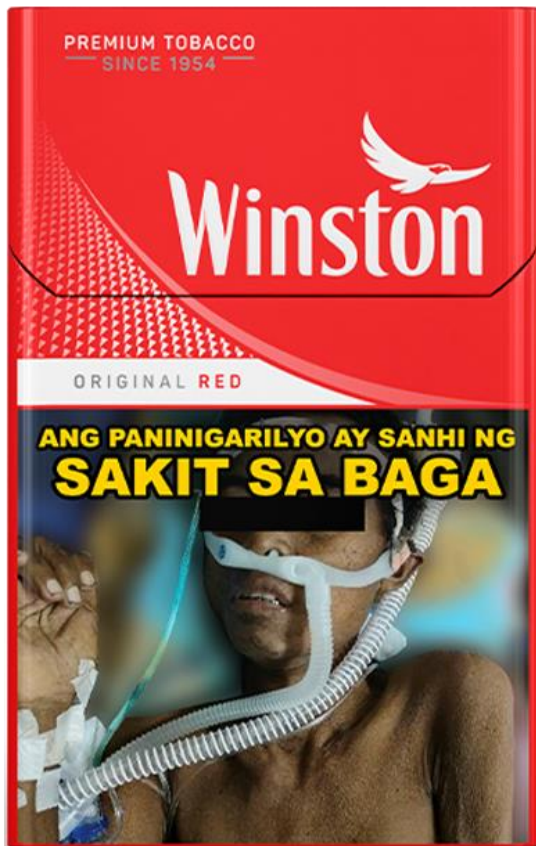
- **Good Moods** Increase susceptibility to persuasion. Positive emotions signal that "all is well," leading to less critical, effortless thinking.
- **Unhappy Moods:** Lead to greater rumination and skepticism. Unhappy individuals are more likely to scrutinize and reject weak arguments.

Experiment:

- **Researchers:** Janis, Kaye & Kirschner (1965).
- **Hypothesis:** An "extraneous gratification" (eating food) during a message will increase its acceptance
- **Participants:** 216 male college students.
- **Conditions:**
 - **Group A:** Read 4 persuasive messages while eating "desirable food" (peanuts and Pepsi).
 - **Group B:** Read the same 4 messages with no food present.
 - **Group C (Control):** Was not exposed to any messages.

Findings: Group A showed significantly more opinion change in favor of the messages compared to those in the no-food condition.

The Effect of Arousing Fear



- Messages can also be effective by evoking negative emotions.
- Ex. Cigarette packaging
- 80% of Canadian youth reported that graphic labels made smoking less attractive.

The Effect of Arousing Fear

- Claude Levy-Leboyer (1988) found that graphic visuals changed French youths' attitudes toward alcohol more effectively than text warnings.

Outcome:

French government integrated these high-impact visuals into their national television advertisements.

The Effect of Arousing Fear

- Banks & Salovey (1995) compared messaging styles of breast cancer detection for women aged 40–66.

"Mammograms save lives" → 50% compliance

"Not getting a mammogram can cost your life" → 67% compliance

-
- Displaying ultraviolet (UV) photographs that reveal hidden sun damage such as premature freckles and aging spots significantly increases sunscreen usage. Fear of losing physical attractiveness is a more powerful motivator than the fear of developing skin cancer (Williams et al., 2013).

How to maximize fear appeal?

01

Highlight the seriousness of the threat.

02

Provide a clear, actionable solution the audience feels capable of doing.

Two-Sided Appeals

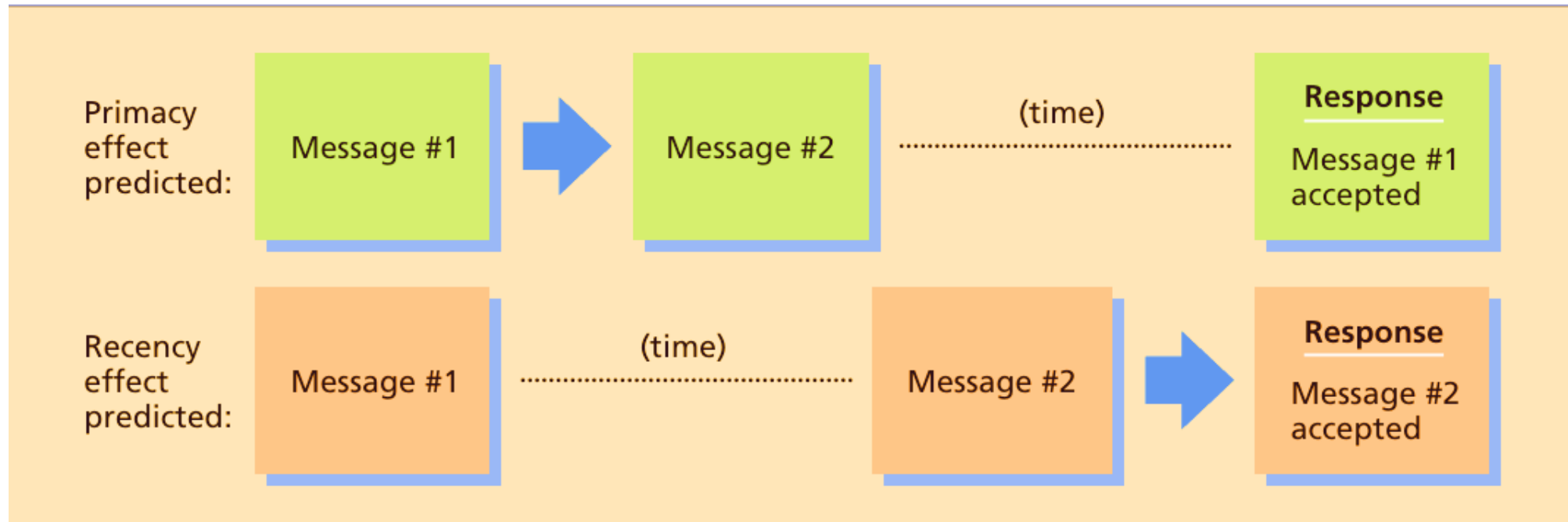
- Most effective for people who are well-informed or who are going to hear counterarguments in the future.
- Two-sided messages are more effective in persuading those who initially disagree.

Order of the Message

Time between messages will influence whether primacy or recency effects are strongest.

- **Primacy effect** – information presented early is most persuasive
- **Recency effect** – information presented last sometimes has the most effect

Primacy Effect Versus Recency Effect



Source: Myers, D. G. & Twenge, J. M. (2021). *Social Psychology 14th ed.* McGraw-Hill Higher Education

Repetition

- Repeating a message increases its persuasive power.
- Frequent exposure of an initially positive or neutral object will increase liking
- Burnout may occur with overexposure.

03. The Medium / Channel

Channel of communication – the way the message is delivered – whether:

- ☑ face-to-face
- ☑ newspaper
- ☑ movies
- ☑ word of mouth
- ☑ billboard advertisements
- ☑ radio
- ☑ internet
- ☑ mail
- ☑ television
- ☑ magazine

Personal vs. Media Influence

Two-step flow of communication

– from media to opinion leaders to everyday people.

Comparing Media

Persuasiveness Hierarchy:

The more "lifelike" the medium, the more persuasive it is:

1. Face-to-face

2. Video

3. Audio

4. Written

Comparing Media

- While **video** is most persuasive for simple topics, **written text** is best for comprehension and recall of complex information.

Comparing Media

Chaiken & Eagly (1983) found that:

Easy Messages

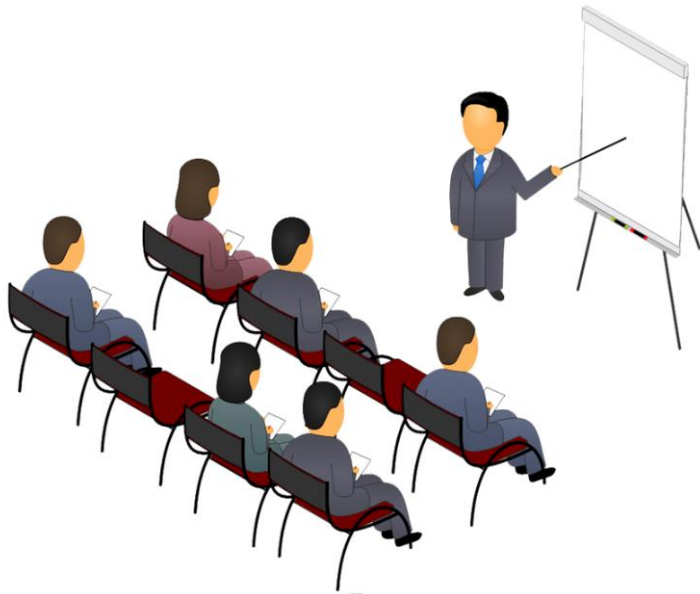
Effective via Video

Difficult Messages

Effective via Writing

04. Audience

Two important characteristic:



1

Age

2

Cognitive engagement

A. Age

Two explanations:

Life cycle

→ attitudes change as people grow older

Generational

→ attitudes do not change

Research evidence mostly supports the generational explanation.

B. Cognitive Engagement

- If audience are forewarned about a message, they are less likely to be persuaded by it.
- Persuasion is also enhanced by a distraction that inhibits counterarguing .
- Participants who read a message while also watching a video were less likely to counterargue (Jeong & Hwang, 2012).

When Shouldn't We Resist Persuasion?

Examples:

- ☑ Getting tested for HIV
- ☑ Doing self-breast examinations

Effectiveness depends on
Message Framing:

- **Gain Frame**

➔ what is gained by acting

- **Loss Frame**

➔ what is lost by failing to act

Reference

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Images

- All graphic images were taken from Canva at <https://www.canva.com>