

THEORIES OF PERSUASION

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Persuasion is a ubiquitous function of human communication, pursued in a variety of settings from face-to-face interaction to mass media. In the context of mass media, persuasion is most commonly pursued through advertising—for consumer products and services, for political candidates, for prosocial causes (e.g., encouraging exercise or recycling), and so forth. But other forms of mass media content can also be put to the service of persuasive ends. For instance, persuaders can engage in “media advocacy,” encouraging news stories that serve their interests, as when managers of a community-wide media campaign aimed at increasing regular exercise arrange to have relevant stories appear in the local newspaper (Wallack, Woodruff, Dorfman, & Diaz, 1999, provide a practical guide to media advocacy). And persuaders can blend social influence with entertainment, as when a recurring television soap opera is used to convey information about disease prevention or population control (for an overview of such “entertainment-education” campaigns, see Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004.)

Regardless of the particular vehicle for mass media persuasion (advertising, news, entertainment) and regardless of the particular medium involved, the nature of mass media persuasion can be illuminated by considering general theoretical frameworks for understanding the process of persuasion. Such frameworks can both clarify how persuasion can work and (as a natural corollary) provide guidance for effective persuasive message design. Broadly interpreted,

theoretical work on persuasion dates back millennia, to classical treatments by Aristotle and Cicero. In the 20th century, the spread of mass media coincided with the rise of social scientific attention to processes of social influence. For example, in the 1950s, one of the most prominent research programs in persuasion was Carl Hovland's behaviorism-based Yale School (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949). In the ensuing years, a variety of different general theoretical perspectives on persuasion have been articulated. These can usefully be glossed as forming three broad kinds of approaches: attitude theories, voluntary action theories, and theories of persuasion proper. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of these perspectives; more detailed treatments are available elsewhere (e.g., Dillard & Pfau, 2002; O'Keefe, 2002; Perloff, 2003).

◆ *Attitude Theories*

Persuasion involves changing people's mental states, often as a precursor to changes in their behavior. A variety of different mental states can be seen as relevant targets for persuaders, but persuasion research has especially emphasized attitude, understood as the general evaluation of an object (a product, candidate, policy, etc.). Because attitude change is often key to persuasion, theories of attitude have been mined as sources of insight into persuasion processes. Three examples of such theories are discussed here: belief-based models, functional models, and cognitive dissonance theory.

BELIEF-BASED ATTITUDE MODELS

Belief-based models of attitude describe the underlying bases of attitude as consisting

of one's salient beliefs about the attitude object (e.g., beliefs about properties of the object). One common conception of how beliefs combine to yield an attitude is an "expectancy-value" image: Each belief has some associated evaluation (representing the perceived desirability of the attribute) and is held with some degree of certainty or strength (indicating the perceived likelihood that the object has the attribute). Across beliefs, these two facets of belief (the "value" of each attribute and the "expectancy" of its association with the object) jointly determine the person's overall attitude toward the object (see, e.g., Fishbein, 1967).

This image of underlying attitude structure immediately suggests a number of alternative—not mutually exclusive—strategies for attitude change. A persuader might try to add some new salient belief (of appropriate valence) about the object, change the evaluation of some existing belief, or change the strength with which some existing belief is held. Naturally, different persuasion situations will require different approaches. In one circumstance, the target audience might evaluate the outcomes of the persuader's advocated policy just as the advocate wishes, but needs to be convinced that the proposed policy will actually produce those outcomes; in another circumstance, the audience may already agree about what attributes the policy has, but disagree about the evaluation of those properties. A campaign aimed at encouraging positive attitudes toward regular exercise for cardiovascular health faces different challenges depending on whether the audience thinks their cardiovascular risk is already low (and so they don't value reducing it further) or thinks that exercise won't really reduce their risk. Thus, pre-campaign research can potentially yield valuable information about which beliefs are the most appropriate persuasive targets for influencing attitudes (see, e.g., Chang, 2006).

FUNCTIONAL MODELS OF ATTITUDE

Functional models of attitude are based on the insight that attitudes can serve various psychological functions, such as defending the person's self-image, organizing information about the attitude object, and expressing the person's values (e.g., Katz, 1960). A number of different schemes have been put forward that identify and elaborate these various functions, but there is no consensus yet on any one detailed analysis (see, e.g., Maio & Olson, 2000). However, one broad distinction embodied in nearly all functional attitude classifications is that between symbolic and instrumental (utilitarian) functions. Attitudes serving symbolic functions are focused on the symbolic associations of the object (what the object symbolizes or represents); attitudes serving instrumental functions are focused on the intrinsic properties of the object (appraising the object in terms of intrinsic attributes or consequences). For instance, a person's attitude toward a given automobile might serve mainly instrumental functions (and so be based on beliefs about gas mileage, luggage capacity, etc.) or mainly symbolic ones (and so be based on beliefs about what sort of personal identity is projected by driving the car, how driving the car makes one feel, etc.).

From this perspective, the key to successful persuasion is the matching of the persuasive appeal to the attitude's functional basis. For example, if an audience's attitude toward the death penalty is based largely on symbolic considerations (e.g., about what makes for a moral society), persuaders may not find it useful to advance instrumentally focused arguments about whether the death penalty does or doesn't deter crime. Studies of consumer advertising have, unsurprisingly, found that instrumentally oriented appeals (emphasizing intrinsic product qualities) are more persuasive than symbolically oriented appeals

(emphasizing image-based considerations) when the audience's attitudes have an instrumental basis; by contrast, with attitudes that have a symbolic basis, symbolically oriented appeals have been found more persuasive than instrumentally oriented appeals (e.g., Shavitt, 1990).

As one might suspect, the nature of the attitude object constrains the kind of function served. Some objects (such as air conditioners or aspirin) easily accommodate only an instrumental function, others (such as class rings) only a symbolic function. But some objects (automobiles, watches, sunglasses) readily permit multiple attitude functions, with corresponding variations in what makes for effective persuasion: Different advertisements will be wanted for persons whose automobile attitudes are based on beliefs about gas mileage and frequency-of-repair records than for persons whose attitudes are based on beliefs about the image projected by driving a given car. For such multifunction-capable attitude objects, the individual-difference variable of self-monitoring can play an important role in influencing attitude function. High self-monitors are generally more concerned than are low self-monitors about the image they project; hence their attitudes are more likely to have symbolic bases and are more likely to be successfully influenced by image-oriented, rather than product-quality-oriented, persuasive appeals (e.g., DeBono & Packer, 1991; Snyder & DeBono, 1985).

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

A number of attitude theories have been based on the general idea that people strive to arrange their cognitions (attitudes, beliefs, etc.) in psychologically (subjectively) consistent ways (e.g., balance theory; Heider, 1946; see Basil & Herr, 2006, for an application). The most influential and extensively studied consistency-based approach

has been cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones, 2002).

Dissonance theory focuses on the relationships among a person's cognitions (attitudes and beliefs). Any two cognitions might be consonant (consistent) with each other (e.g., as when a person donates money to the Red Cross and believes that the Red Cross does good work), dissonant with each other (e.g., as when a person smokes cigarettes but believes that smoking causes cancer), or irrelevant to each other (e.g., the belief that the Red Cross does good work and the belief that smoking causes cancer). Two cognitions are dissonant if the opposite of one subjectively follows from the other. For example, the belief that "smoking causes cancer" implies that one ought not smoke—and so a smoker who believes that smoking causes cancer has two dissonant cognitions (namely, "I smoke" and "smoking causes cancer").

The occurrence of two (or more) dissonant cognitions gives rise to dissonance, an uncomfortable motivational state. People try to avoid experiencing dissonance—or, failing that, seek to reduce it. Dissonance can be reduced in a variety of ways, including by adding new consonant cognitions (e.g., a smoker might come to think "smoking reduces my anxiety") or by minimizing dissonant ones ("smoking isn't really that expensive"). The amount of dissonance experienced is influenced by the relative numbers of consonant and dissonant cognitions (the larger the number of dissonant cognitions relative to consonant ones, the greater the dissonance) and by the importance of the cognitions (the more important the cancer-causing aspect of smoking is perceived to be, the more dissonance the smoker will feel).

Dissonance theory has yielded a number of persuasion-relevant applications. For example, research has found that making salient the inconsistencies between people's attitudes and their actions ("hypocrisy induction") can lead people to bring their attitudes and behaviors into alignment (e.g., Aitken, McMahan, Wearing, &

Finlayson, 1994; Stone, Aronson, Crain, Winslow, & Fried, 1994), that advocacy of a counterattitudinal viewpoint can lead people to be more accepting of that view (the classic study is Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; for some recent applications, see Roehrig, Thompson, Brannick, & van den Berg, 2006; Stice, Shaw, Becker, & Rohde, 2008), and that having people predict whether they will perform some normatively desirable behavior can increase the likelihood of their engaging in the behavior (the "self-prophecy" effect; e.g., Spangenberg & Greenwald, 1999; Spangenberg, Spratt, Grohmann, & Smith, 2003). With respect to mass media persuasion, however, the most relevant applications of dissonance theory concern people's propensities for information exposure.

Dissonance theory suggests that people will prefer to be exposed to information that is supportive of (consistent with) their current attitudes rather than to non-supportive information; non-supportive information might arouse dissonance, which people generally try to avoid. This "selective exposure" hypothesis naturally raises the possibility that people might generally seek out only those media sources that confirm their prior beliefs. If there is a strong tendency to avoid non-supportive information, then persuaders may sometimes find it difficult to obtain exposure for their messages.

The research evidence indicates, however, that a preference for supportive information is only one of a number of competing influences on information exposure—and it is not so powerful as to override other influences. For example, people are willing to seek out non-supportive information if the information appears to be useful to them, if they are striving to be fair to all sides, or if they are simply curious (for reviews, see Cotton, 1985; D'Alessio & Allen, 2007; Frey, 1986; Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008). Thus, although the preference for supportive information may represent a challenge for mass media persuaders, it is a challenge that often can be

surmounted (for example, by emphasizing the utility of the information).

◆ *Voluntary Action Theories*

The behaviors that persuaders characteristically seek to influence are voluntary actions, ones under the actor's control—buying a product, voting for a candidate, adopting a program of regular exercise, and so forth. A number of theories have aimed at identifying the factors that influence voluntary action. Because the factors influencing behavior provide natural foci for persuasive efforts, these approaches offer insight into persuasion processes.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one factor that commonly figures in explanations of voluntary action is attitude (though sometimes in a refined form). Thus, the previously discussed attitude theories can figure as elements in, or underpinnings of, these broader models of voluntary behavior. Whereas the attitude theories discussed earlier were efforts at explaining what underpins attitudes, theories of voluntary action are aimed at explaining volitional behavior (and attitudes might be one part of such explanations).

THEORY OF REASONED ACTION

The theory of reasoned action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) begins with the observation that the best single predictor of a person's voluntary action is the person's intention concerning that behavior. For example, getting people to vote for one's candidate in an election requires, at a minimum, that people *intend* to vote for the candidate. (Appropriately measured, intentions can be quite good predictors of subsequent behavior; see, e.g., Eckes & Six, 1994; Kim & Hunter, 1993.)

Hence the focus of the TRA is on factors that influence behavioral intentions. The TRA suggests that a person's behavioral

intentions are influenced jointly by two considerations. One is the person's "attitude toward the behavior" (the person's evaluation of the action in question), which is distinct from other kinds of attitude. From the perspective of the TRA, with respect to (for example) consumer purchasing, what matters is not the person's attitude toward the product, but the person's attitude toward *buying* the product. The attitude toward the product and the attitude toward the act of buying the product are related but distinguishable; for instance, a person might have a positive attitude toward an expensive automobile but (because of the cost) a negative attitude toward purchasing that automobile. The second consideration is the person's "subjective norm," the person's assessment of whether significant others (people who are important to the person) desire one's performance of the behavior. Thus the TRA depicts behavioral intentions as potentially shaped by both personal (attitudinal) and social (normative) influences.

These two factors can vary in their relative impact on intention—and this relative impact may vary from behavior to behavior and from person to person. For a given behavior or audience, attitudinal considerations may weigh more heavily than normative ones, but for a different behavior or audience, the reverse may be the case. The TRA thus provides a means for persuaders to identify useful foci for persuasive messages. For example, if adolescent tobacco use is influenced more heavily by normative than by attitudinal factors, then campaigns designed to discourage such behavior should presumably give special attention to normative considerations.

The TRA also provides an account of the determinants of these attitudinal and normative factors (that is, an account of what underlies each of these), which can supply even further direction to persuaders. One's attitude toward the behavior is described as based on one's salient beliefs about the behavior (specifically, based on the evaluation of each belief and the

strength with which each belief is held, combined in an expectancy-value fashion as described previously); changing the attitudinal component thus involves adding some new salient belief or changing the strength or evaluation of existing beliefs. One's subjective norm is described as based jointly on the normative beliefs ascribed to particular important others (e.g., what I think my mother wants me to do, what I think my best friend wants me to do, and so on) and on the degree to which one is motivated to comply with that person (how much I want to do what my mother wants me to, etc.). Changing the normative component thus involves adding some new salient referent other or changing the normative belief ascribed to, or the motivation to comply with, existing referent others.

This framework provides a basis for systematically considering just which message themes should be emphasized in a persuasive campaign. For example, Booth-Butterfield and Reger (2004) used the TRA to guide their mass media campaign aimed at changing the milk consumption patterns of high-fat milk users. Because previous research had indicated that milk consumption was more strongly influenced by attitudinal than by normative considerations (e.g., Brewer, Blake, Rankin, & Douglass, 1999), the campaign's messages were aimed at influencing attitude (not the subjective norm) and indeed did produce corresponding changes in behavioral beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. (For other examples and further discussion of the TRA, see Ajzen, Albarracin, & Hornik, 2007; Fishbein & Yzer, 2003; Silk, Weiner, & Parrott, 2005.)

THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

The theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) is an elaboration of the TRA; the TPB adds a third predictor of behavioral intentions, namely, the person's perceived control over the behavior (that is, whether the person thinks it is easy or difficult to

perform the action). The merit of this addition can be seen by considering behaviors such as exercise: People might think that exercising is desirable (positive attitude toward the behavior) and that significant others think they should exercise (positive subjective norm), but believe themselves incapable of performing the behavior—expensive specialized equipment is needed but not owned, the gym is far away, exercise can't be fit into one's schedule, and so forth (negative perceived behavioral control). Plainly, in such a circumstance, reiterating the advantages of exercise is unlikely to be a successful avenue to persuasion. Instead, the perceived obstacles to behavioral performance need to be addressed. Thus, akin to the TRA, the TPB identifies potential points of emphasis for persuaders and so offers some systematic guidance for the development of effective messages. For example, Stead, Tagg, MacKintosh, and Eadie (2005) reported that the TPB was useful in designing a mass media campaign to reduce speeding in Scotland. (For other examples and further discussion of the TPB, see Armitage & Christian, 2003; Babrow, Black, & Tiffany, 1990; Hardeman, Johnson, Johnston, Bonetti, Wareham, & Kinmonth, 2002.)

PROTECTION MOTIVATION THEORY

Whereas TRA and TPB are intended as general models of voluntary behavior, protection motivation theory (PMT) was developed to illuminate the processes behind one specific kind of behavior, namely, protective behaviors such as safer-sex practices, skin cancer prevention behaviors, and smoking cessation (Rogers, 1975; Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1997). PMT depicts protection motivation as a function of two factors: threat appraisal (the person's assessment of the potential threat) and coping appraisal (the person's assessment of a given "coping" response, that is, a given protective behavior).

Each of these factors, in turn, has two determinants. The determinants of threat appraisal are perceived threat severity (the perception of how bad the problem is) and perceived threat vulnerability (the perception of how likely one is to suffer the threat). The determinants of coping appraisal are perceived response efficacy (how effective the behavior is in conferring protection) and perceived self-efficacy (one's perception of one's ability to perform the behavior). Each of these underlying determinants has been found to be related to protection motivation in the expected ways; for example, as a threat is perceived to be more severe or as a protective behavior is perceived to be more effective, people are more likely to intend to adopt the protective action (e.g., Floyd, Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 2000; Witte & Allen, 2000).

As should be plain, PMT can offer guidance to persuaders concerning the appropriate content for persuasive messages. Messages might focus on threat severity, threat vulnerability, response efficacy, or self-efficacy (or more than one of these), but different foci will be appropriate in different circumstances. For example, guided by PMT, Pechmann, Zhao, Goldberg, and Reibling (2003) found that of seven message themes commonly found in antismoking advertisements aimed at adolescents, only three—all concerning threat severity (specifically, social disapproval risks)—dependably enhanced intentions not to smoke; messages emphasizing self-efficacy, for instance, were apparently not very effective. (For other examples and further discussion of PMT and related ideas, see McKay, Berkowitz, Blumberg, & Goldberg, 2004; McMath & Prentice-Dunn, 2005; Witte, 1998.)

STAGE MODELS OF BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

A number of stage models of behavioral change have been developed with the purpose of illuminating the processes by

which persons change some recurring behavior (e.g., by quitting smoking or undertaking regular exercise). The general idea is that behavioral change involves passing through a sequence of distinct stages.

Perhaps the best-known stage model is the transtheoretical model of health behavior, so named because putatively it integrates a number of different theoretical perspectives (Prochaska, 1994; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2002). It identifies a number of distinct stages in a person's adoption of a given health-related behavior such as engaging in an exercise program. In the precontemplation stage, a person is not even thinking about undertaking an exercise program anytime soon; in the contemplation stage, the person is at least seriously thinking about doing so; a person in the preparation stage is ready to change and may have undertaken planning or other preparatory action (such as signing up for a health club); in the action stage, the person has undertaken the exercise program; finally, a person who has continued to engage in exercise for some time is said to be in the maintenance stage.

The relevance of such models for understanding persuasion arises from the idea that at different stages, distinct considerations underwrite movement to the next stage, and thus different messages are appropriate for those in different stages. For example, for persons in the precontemplation stage, the persuader's challenge may be to get the audience thinking about the target behavior (i.e., moving the audience from precontemplation to contemplation). By contrast, for persons in the preparation stage, persuaders will presumably want to help the audience translate their plans and intentions into actions. Hence stage-matched interventions are expected to be more successful than mismatched interventions (e.g., Slater, 1999).

Unfortunately, a satisfactory conceptualization of the stages involved in behavioral change has proved more elusive than one might have imagined, with corresponding uncertainties about the

degree to which such stage models can be used as a basis for understanding the design of effective persuasive messages (e.g., Adams & White, 2005; Bridle et al., 2005; Herzog & Blagg, 2007). At least in part, this state of affairs reflects the complex evidentiary issues attendant to stage models (Weinstein, Rothman, & Sutton, 1998), but it also surely reflects the relatively weak empirical support thus far (e.g., West, 2005).

◆ *Theories of Persuasion Proper*

Theories of attitude and theories of voluntary action provide insight into persuasion by clarifying the underlying mental states (beliefs, attitudes, etc.) that a persuader might want to change. But other theoretical frameworks focus on the process of persuasion itself (e.g., McGuire, 1985, 2001). Two such frameworks are discussed here: social judgment theory and the elaboration likelihood model.

SOCIAL JUDGMENT THEORY

Social judgment theory (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965), which grew out of a broader approach to attitudes, begins with the idea that people commonly have assessments (judgments) of the various positions that might be held on a given issue. Consider, for example, gun control, where positions might vary from one extreme (no restrictions whatsoever) to the other (no private ownership, say), with many intermediate positions possible. A given person might have one particular position as their most preferred view, but the person may well find some other positions also acceptable, some others objectionable, and some others neither acceptable nor unacceptable. These judgments represent the person's latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment

(respectively) on the persuasive issue. These judgmental latitudes are said to be influenced by ego involvement (the degree to which a person's identity is related to his or her stand on the issue), such that as ego involvement increases, the size of the latitude of rejection increases and the sizes of the latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment decrease.

The judgmental latitudes are taken to be important to persuasion in two ways. First, they are said to influence the perception of what position is being advocated by a message. At least with relatively ambiguous messages, perceivers may distort what position is seen to be advocated, by perceiving the message to advocate a position either more discrepant (a "contrast effect") or less discrepant (an "assimilation effect") than it actually does. Contrast effects are most likely when the advocated view falls in the latitude of rejection; assimilation effects are more likely when the advocated view is in the latitude of acceptance. For views that fall in the latitude of noncommitment, both assimilation and contrast effects are possible (though the former are more likely). These perceptual biases reflect the anchoring effect of the perceiver's initial attitude, with some messages brought perceptually closer to the anchor (assimilation) and others pushed farther away (contrast).

Second, the perceived location of the message's advocated position is said to influence receivers' reactions to the message. Messages that are perceived to advocate positions in the latitude of acceptance or the latitude of noncommitment are likely to produce attitude change in the advocated direction; those that are seen to advocate positions in the latitude of rejection are likely to yield little or no change (or perhaps even change in the direction opposite that sought).

As should be apparent, social judgment theory emphasizes that persuaders will want to know not only a receiver's most-preferred position but also the structure of

their judgmental latitudes. Since two receivers might have the same most preferred position but rather different assessments of the other available positions, effective adaptation of persuasive messages will require some attention to judgmental latitudes.

Social judgment theory is now something of a historical relic, in the sense that it is not a site of active research work; this largely reflects difficulties in the conceptualization and measurement of ego involvement. Even so, the theory's contributions—especially the ideas of judgmental latitudes and assimilation and contrast effects—continue to be found useful in guiding formative campaign research (e.g., Smith, Atkin, Martell, Allen, & Hembroff, 2006) and in illuminating political campaign communication (e.g., Diamond & Cobb, 1996).

ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) suggests that there are two fundamentally different sorts of processes underlying persuasion, represented as two broad “routes to persuasion.” Which one is activated depends on the degree of “elaboration” (issue-relevant thinking) in which the receiver engages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). One is the central route, in which the outcomes of persuasive efforts are the result of the receiver's thoughtful consideration of issue-relevant material (e.g., the message's arguments); when central-route processes are engaged, the quality (strength) of the message's arguments are likely to be key determinants of persuasive success. The other route to persuasion is the peripheral route, in which persuasive outcomes arise from less thoughtful processes, such as the receiver's use of some heuristic (a simplifying decision rule); for example, instead of carefully considering the arguments and evidence, a receiver might reach a

conclusion based on the communicator's credibility or likeability or on the reactions of others to the message. These are not two mutually exclusive routes, but rather the prototypical forms representing the extremes of an elaboration continuum; at intermediate levels of elaboration, both central-route and peripheral-route processes may be at work (see also the heuristic-systematic model, which offers another version of a “dual-process” image of persuasion; e.g., Chaiken, 1980, 1987.)

The likelihood that a receiver will engage in elaboration (issue-relevant thinking) is a joint function of factors influencing elaboration ability (such as prior background knowledge, the presence of distraction in the communication setting, and so on) and factors influencing elaboration motivation (such as receiver involvement, that is, the personal relevance of the topic). So, for example, when a topic is not involving and there is some distraction present, receivers may rely on heuristics such as the communicator's apparent expertise (and thus high-credibility communicators will be more successful than low-credibility communicators). By contrast, when the topic is personally relevant and receivers are able to attend closely to the arguments and evidence, the impact of variations in communicator expertise will diminish and the effect of argument quality variations will increase (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981).

The central and peripheral routes differ not only with respect to the factors influencing persuasive outcomes, but also with respect to the consequences of whatever persuasion is obtained. Persuasion achieved through central-route processes is likely to be more enduring (less likely to decay over time, more resistant to counterpersuasion) and to have greater influence on subsequent behavior than is persuasion accomplished through peripheral-route processes (see Petty & Wegener, 1999, pp. 61–63).

Because persuasion processes differ depending on the receiver's degree of

elaboration, campaign planners may find it important to consider the audience's likely degree of engagement with campaign messages. For example, there may be important differences between people actively seeking health information and those who more passively scan the media environment for such information (e.g., Niederdeppe et al., 2007; Shim, Kelly, & Hornik, 2006). As the audience's degree of elaboration varies, different message formats may be optimal (e.g., Bakker, 1999). And persuaders need not assume that the audience's degree of elaboration is inevitably fixed in advance; on the contrary, messages might be designed to influence elaboration ability or motivation, as when the personal relevance of a topic is emphasized in an effort to increase elaboration motivation (for further discussion of the ELM and some research applications, see Kruglanski & Thompson, 1999; Petty, Cacioppo, Strathman, & Priester, 2005; Slater, 2002.)

◆ *Conclusion*

A recurrent theme in theoretical treatments of persuasion is the importance of adapting persuasive messages to audiences. Different theoretical frameworks can be seen to emphasize different potential bases of adaptation. For example, functional attitude models suggest the importance of distinguishing symbolic and instrumental functional motivations; stage models emphasize identification of the audience's current stage of change; the theory of planned behavior, by specifying three distinct possible influences on intention (attitude, norm, perceived behavioral control), permits a persuader to identify the key targets for persuasion in a given circumstance; and so on.

But delivering an adapted message to an audience requires the ability to reach that audience, and in this regard developments in mass media technologies have in recent years made for some important practical

challenges for mass media persuaders. This can usefully be illustrated by considering U.S. television advertising. Even as late as the mid-1980s, three big networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) dominated U.S. television, with the result that consumer advertising could reach a large number of people relatively efficiently. But the penetration of cable television has meant that television viewers are now spread across hundreds of channels (Webster, 2008)—and the size of the television audience is threatened by the growth of the Internet. Television advertisers additionally face the prospect of substantial time-shifted television viewing—with the accompanying ability to skip commercials—which has revived practices aimed at integrating advertising and media content (such as product placement; see, e.g., Kolsky & Calder, 2008). In short, as a result of technological developments, mass media advertisers confront growing challenges of finding and engaging target audiences (see Metzger, this volume).

On the other hand, new communication technologies may well afford more efficient and effective vehicles for delivering well-adapted persuasive messages to target audiences. Mass media have always provided opportunities for adaptation: Television advertising can be placed on programs that attract audience with the desired demographic characteristics, direct mail can be targeted to particular zip codes, and so forth. But recent technological developments may enable even more finely tuned adaptation than was ever available previously. For example, cable television advertising might be addressable specifically to those customers whose past viewing habits suggest that they might be likely consumers of the advertised product, online advertising can be shaped to reflect the user's characteristics and history, interactive Web sites can provide individualized information and appeals, and so forth (for discussion and examples, see Dijkstra, 2008; Kreuter,

Farrell, Olevitch, & Brennan, 1999; Rimal & Adkins, 2003; Yardley & Nyman, 2007). Precisely because tailoring messages to target audiences will be a continuing concern for mass media persuaders, general theoretical perspectives on persuasion can serve as a continuing source of guidance and insight.

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