Part I Background

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The Nature of Persuasive Campaigns

The term *persuasive campaign* should not be confused with its less admirable cousin, the *propaganda campaign.* By definition, legitimate attempts at persuasion differ from propaganda in several important ways. **Persuasion** is defined as "an effort to gain public support for an opinion or course of action." What is implied in the definition is that the effort is based on truthful and ethical methods. **Propaganda,** on the other hand, is "the attempt to have a viewpoint accepted on the basis of appeals other than the merits of the case." It often uses methods that could be labeled as unethical or manipulative.

Another attempt at drawing a distinction between the terms is to say that persuasion is based on truth, whereas propaganda is based on fiction or exaggeration; persuasion is based on consensus, whereas propaganda tries to set up adversarial relationships or "us against them" scenarios.

In their 1992 book, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* theorists Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell pointed out that the intent of persuasion is to serve the interests of both the persuader and the audience; propaganda, however, generally serves only the interests of the person acting as its source. Jowett and O'Donnell's view is consistent with the longstanding philosophy of public relations programs producing results that are mutually beneficial or "win-win."

Jowett and O'Donnell's work was an expansion of that done during World War II by Columbia University Professor Clyde R. Miller, who founded the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. At first the emphasis was to study the use of propaganda in the war in Europe, but he quickly expanded its scope to include the study of propaganda from all sources, including the Ku Klux Klan, other extremist groups, and the U.S. advertising industry. The institute is still in operation today and identifies—in its publications and on its website—nine common propaganda devices:

1. *Name-calling* is the use of emotional labels that are offered in the place of logic or evidence. Examples of labels applied to individuals include "extremist," "radical," "liberal," "fundamentalist," and "racist." Examples of labels applied to ideas include "social engineering," "radical," "legislating morality," and "counterculture." For example, when critics wanted to generate opposition to President Clinton's proposed health care plan in the early 1990s, they did so in part by referring to Clinton and his wife, Hillary, as representing the "counterculture."

2. *Glittering generalities* represent the opposite of name-calling. Instead of wanting the audience to reject an idea without examining the evidence, a communicator resorting to glittering generalities wants the audience to accept an idea without requiring evidence. What results are generalizations so

extreme that receivers disregard the lack of substance behind the appeals. Examples are claims that begin with "Everyone knows that . . ." and "It goes without saying that . . . ." In political campaigns, examples of glittering generalities include a candidate's charges that his or her opponent's proposals are "all style and no substance" or "based on ideas of the past."

3. *Transfer* is a device by which the communicator wants the audience to take the authority, sanction, or prestige of a respected idea and apply it to a new idea that the communicator wants the audience to accept. Examples include the use of symbols such as the cross, representing the Christian church, or Uncle Sam, representing patriotism and love for the country. If a church publication shows the cross being used to promote helping the poor, it implies that helping the poor is something that Christians should do. If a cartoonist draws Uncle Sam in a manner in which he approves of a proposed new law, it implies that the entire country should be in favor of it.

Transfer is often used as a tactic in political campaigns. In the 2002 senatorial race in North Carolina, for example, the campaign of republican Elizabeth Dole aired television commercials emphasizing that democrat Erskine Bowles once served in the administration of former President Bill Clinton, expecting voters to "transfer" their negative perception of Clinton to Bowles.

The advertising industry often attempts to transfer the authority of science and medicine in making product claims, asking consumers to purchase certain brands because of their association with the latest techniques in science or medicine.

4. The *bandwagon* approach is one in which audiences are encouraged to adopt a certain behavior because "everyone else is doing it" and they "do not want to be left behind."

5. The *plain folks* approach suggests that audiences should adopt an idea because it comes from someone similar to them or reject an idea because it comes from someone unlike them.

6. *Testimonials* are appeals from influential celebrities or authority figures whose expertise may be irrelevant to the product being sold or idea being promoted. A common example is the use of professional athletes to endorse companies or products, including those that are unrelated to the sport for which they are known.

7. *Card Stacking* is a method that stacks the cards in favor of the desired result, presenting one-sided evidence or half-truths. For example, critics of a university's athletic program may point out the graduation rate for the school's athletes is only 45 percent (and therefore the athletic program should be eliminated), but not mentioning (or perhaps not knowing) that the graduation rate for nonathletes is only 42 percent.

The use of *fear or scare tactics* as devices to influence behavior is common in advertising and political campaigns. A communicator using this tactic typically pairs a negative result with the desired behavior required to avoid it. Examples include television commercials showing an accident scene, followed by the suggestion of wearing seat belts, or the scene of a house fire, followed by a pitch for smoke detectors.

8. *Euphemisms* are terms intended to obscure or soften the true meaning of behaviors or concepts. Examples include a company referring to employee layoffs as "early retirement opportunities" or the government referring to a tax increase as a "revenue adjustment."

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEGITIMATE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS

There are three characteristics found in legitimate public relations campaigns. The first is that of *free choice,* meaning the audiences are able to choose freely among several actions: Adopt the ideas or behaviors being advocated by campaign organizers, adopt the ideas or behaviors of another

party involved in the issue, remain committed to their previously held ideas or behaviors, or not take part in the issue at all. Free choice also means there is no coercion involved. Campaign organizers are allowed to be assertive in their work, of course, but in an ethical communications campaign, the final choice must be up to members of the audience.

The second characteristic is *mutual benefit,* meaning that both the communicator and the audience must emerge from the transaction with some benefit. A campaign in which only the communicator benefits is manipulation rather than true public relations.

The third characteristic of a legitimate public relations campaign is that it takes a *multidisciplinary approach.* Instead of dealing only with the mass media, an approach typically used in advertising true public relations campaigns may also apply theories and techniques from fields such as psychology, sociology, and education. For example, a company trying to sell cat litter may find success with traditional advertising and marketing techniques. However, an organization attempting to promote the importance of spaying or neutering cats will have to apply a variety of other communication techniques to be successful.

TYPES OF PERSUASIVE CAMPAIGNS

Persuasive campaigns are used either to resolve problems or to take advantage of opportunities. They can be placed into five categories: political, commercial, reputation, educational, or social action.

The category of **political campaigns** can be subdivided into those that are *candidate oriented* and *issue oriented.* Candidate-oriented campaigns are usually orchestrated by campaign managers and other professionals who use techniques other than those used by public relations professionals. Those techniques include scare tactics, deception, exaggeration, and other forms of communication commonly referred to as *spin.* Because we (and many other public relations professionals) prefer that such tactics not be confused with those used in the public relations profession, candidate-oriented campaigns will not be discussed here.

The tactics used in issue-oriented campaigns, although not completely free of "spin," are generally conducted on a higher ethical plane than those that are candidate oriented. Issue-oriented campaigns are often aimed at attempting to get a proposed governmental action passed or defeated. It could be at the federal, state, or local level. Examples of issue-oriented campaigns at the federal level include those that resulted in the passage of the Brady Bill (handgun control act), the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and the North American Free Trade Agreement. Recent examples of issue-oriented persuasive campaigns at the state level include those involving the spread of legalized gambling, changes to a state's workers' compensation laws, or an increase in the state's sales tax. At the local level, city and county governments often work with private interests to pass measures that provide either for a "local option" sales tax or the public sale of bonds to fund new schools, sports stadiums, or other public works projects.

Commercial campaigns are used to promote a company's new products or services (often called *rollout campaigns*) or a new company as a whole. They may include activities usually thought of as "advertising" or "marketing," but they include public relations techniques as well.

Reputation campaigns (sometimes called *image campaigns*) are those aimed at improving how a company or nonprofit organization is perceived by its publics. Reputation campaigns are different from commercial campaigns because they do not promote specific products or services; they instead deal with the organization as a whole. They often follow a major crisis or other situations generating negative publicity, such as Tylenol's recovery from a 1982 product tampering crisis, Exxon's attempt to recover from the 1989 oil spill in Alaska, or United Way's

recovery from a 1991 financial scandal. More recent examples include Firestone's campaign that accompanied the recall of defective tires and United Airlines' effort to recover from a summer of flight delays caused by bad weather, equipment problems, air traffic control patterns, and labor conflicts.

In other cases, the decline in an organization's reputation may not have resulted from a specific incident, but rather from the accumulation of factors over a long period of time. One example involves the National Rifle Association, which financed a reputation campaign in the late 1980s, after years of negative publicity—mainly caused by its opposition to gun control legislation—contributed to a decline in public perception.

Educational or public awareness campaigns are those conducted by nonprofit organizations or other advocacy groups. Many such campaigns involve medical conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and eating disorders, and attempt either to educate people of a medical condition's warning signs or to make behavioral changes. Other campaigns in this category deal with social concerns such as drunk driving, domestic violence, and child abuse.

In those cases in which the campaign is advocating a behavioral change, it often asks members of its audience to do either of two things: begin doing something they have never done before (such as examine themselves for signs of cancer) or stop doing something that they have done for a long time (such as smoking).

Social action campaigns are those that advocate a social issue or cause. They are similar to issue-oriented political campaigns and use many of the same techniques; the main difference is that they are generally long term in nature. For example, an issue-oriented campaign may be a short-term or closed-ended attempt to pass a specific gun control law, whereas a social action campaign would be a broader, open-ended campaign to continue the effort to pass additional gun control measures long after the initial victory was won (or lost).

Many campaigns fall into more than one category. One example is found in Case Study 1. Johnson & Johnson's "Campaign for Nursing's Future"—designed to enhance the reputation of the nursing profession and address the long-term nursing shortage—has elements of a reputation campaign, a public awareness campaign, and a social action campaign. Another example can be found in the debate over abortion: Advocates and opponents find themselves designing campaigns that are both issue-oriented political campaigns and social action campaigns. In fact, many amendments to the United States Constitution resulted from persuasive campaigns that were both political and social action causes, such as Amendments 18 (prohibition) and 19 (women's right to vote).

APPLYING THEORY IN DEVELOPING PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS

In the popular situation comedy *Cheers,* bar owner Sam Malone found himself struggling in his attempt to repair the bar's aging plumbing system.

"Does anyone here know anything about plumbing?" he asked his patrons. Mail carrier Cliff Claven, the bar's resident know-it-all, was the first to respond.

"The ancient Babylonians built an elaborate system of aqueducts . . ." he said before Sam interrupted. "No, Cliff, what I need is someone to help FIX the plumbing."

"Sorry, Sammy," Cliff replied. "I'm strictly theory on this one."

Like the characters in *Cheers*, many outside the communications field fail to fully appreciate theoretical concepts. College students typically look at the concept of "theory" as a collection of abstract concepts to be memorized for test-taking purposes, then quickly discarded. Admittedly, much of communications theory is nonsense—but much of it is not. This chapter will deal

with theory not as a set of abstract concepts, but rather as valuable insights into how members of target audiences process information and make decisions.

A theory is a set of assumptions used to explain how a process works and to make predictions as to what will result from that process.

Theories are not laws or inflexible rules; they are merely guides. One example can be found in Socrates' ideas about inductive and deductive reasoning. If person X likes person Y, and person Y likes person Z, it is likely that person X will also like person Z. But it does not hold that if person X likes his dog, and his dog likes to dig for bones, that person X will also like to dig for bones.

While the theories that have survived over time, have done so because of their applicability, they are most valuable when combined with the practitioner's real-world experience in applying them.

The authors of this textbook believe it is more important to concentrate on practical applications of public relations work and give students just enough theory to provide some context. Just as architects must understand physics in order to prevent buildings from falling down, public relations professionals must understand how public opinion and persuasion works in order to be effective in their jobs.

GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT PERSUASION AND OPINION CHANGE

In their 1953 book, *Communication and Persuasion,* psychologists Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley explained a number of generalizations about persuasion and opinion change that are just as valid today as they were a half century ago. Among them were:

1. An individual's opinions are more likely to change in the desired direction if conclusions are explicitly stated than if those individuals are left to draw their own conclusions. Some people believe that if all of the facts are laid before audience members, they will make the right decisions. The weakness of that theory is that even highly intelligent audiences frequently fail to see the implications of the facts unless those implications are laid out.

2. Effects of persuasive messages tend to wear off over time. Even when persuasion is effective, the results are seldom permanent. Repetition is often necessary to drive home certain points.

3. Audience members most in need of hearing a message are least likely to hear it. Parents who show up at PTA meetings are mostly those whose children are having the least difficulty in school. Persons who could benefit from social services are the least likely ones to show up at public meetings at which those services are discussed. Promoters must therefore use a variety of communication tactics rather than just a limited number.

4. Audience members are more likely to make the desired choice if both sides of an argument are presented instead of only one side. Audiences tend to be skeptical of an individual or organization that tells them only one side of the story and expects them to accept it without questions. A more effective strategy is to explain both sides of an issue, but then explain why one side should be preferred over the other.

DECISION-MAKING MODELS

In a 1983 study, James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente identified four stages of human decision making. While their study dealt mainly with tobacco usage, the same model could be used to study other personal behaviors, such as those related to alcohol consumption, drug use,

and sexual conduct. Advertising, marketing, and public relations researchers can apply them to purchasing decisions and other consumer behaviors.

The four stages of the Prochaska and DiClemente models are precontemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance. In some cases, a fifth stage of relapse occurs if the maintenance effort is not successful.

In the *precontemplation* stage, communicators must overcome one or both of the following problems: (1) that receivers of the message do not see the proposed behavior as relative to their needs and (2) that receivers of the message believe it is not appropriate or necessary for someone like them. Examples include a television viewer who sees a commercial for computers, cellular telephones, or other technology products, and comments that "I can't imagine any circumstances under which I would ever use one."

At the *contemplation* stage, members of the audience weigh the advantages and disadvantages (or benefits and risks) of the product, service, or behavior being suggested.

In order to get audience members to move from the contemplation stage to the *action* stage, communicators must emphasize the benefits and minimize any perception of drawbacks.

The *maintenance* stage is where many communication campaigns fall apart. Audience members may purchase a product, subscribe to a service, or adopt a new behavior; but unless such decisions are reinforced, the natural tendency is to discontinue the use of a product or service and relapse into old choices or behaviors if the rewards of doing so outweigh the rewards associated with the new behavior that are not sufficient.

THEORIES FROM MASS COMMUNICATION

Because public relations courses are often offered through academic departments labeled as "mass communications," they tend to emphasize theories from that discipline. Most of the theories fall into an area known as "media effects," which is the study of how the journalism and advertising industries influence personal decision making and public policy.

The Magic Bullet Theory

When communications scholars and social scientists first began studying the effects of the mass media in the 1920s, the first major theory they developed was called the "magic bullet theory." It was based on their belief that the media (both news media and entertainment media) were so powerful that they could accomplish almost anything by influencing or manipulating public opinion and social policy. Variations of the theory were also developed, and all were grouped together into a category known as **powerful effects theories**. The concern at the time was that if such theories were true, society would be at the mercy of those persons or companies who controlled the media. Even though the magic bullet theory and most other "powerful effects" theories have since been discounted, they were credible enough at the time for the federal government to establish rules to limit the size of media conglomerates and encourage competition among the media. Today, communications scholars and legal authorities generally agree that the interests of the people are best served by healthy competition among the media and the "marketplace of ideas" principle.

Cumulative Effects Theory

This theory suggests that persuasive campaigns can be most effective when the message comes from a variety of sources and/or is repeated from the same source but over an extended period of time. An example would be a broad-based effort to influence individuals to recycle their

newspapers, aluminum cans, and glass and plastic bottles. A man may hear a message about recycling on the car radio while driving to work in the morning, and it may have little or no effect. But if he receives a second recycling message in an employee newsletter at work, a third when his child brings home recycling information from school, and a fourth in the form of a church bulletin the following Sunday, the accumulation of the four messages results in behavior changes.

To some extent, this theory is in opposition to the magic bullet theory. The theorist most associated with the cumulative effects theory is German social scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.

The application of this theory in public relations work means that professional communicators cannot depend on one communication tactic alone to get their message across; they must use either a combination of multiple tactics carrying the same message, or repeat the same message through one method over an extended period of time.

Two-Step Flow of Communication

In his 1955 book titled *Personal Influence,* researcher Paul Lazarsfeld developed a theoretical model to describe how individuals are influenced to adopt or change their beliefs and behaviors. According to his model, individuals seldom make decisions based solely on their own beliefs; those decisions are influenced by other persons in their lives, such as friends, parents, work supervisors, educators, church leaders, physicians, public officials, and the media. "Two-step flow" refers to the information passing from the source to the **opinion leaders** and then on to the receivers, whether intended to take that route or not. Opinion leaders can exert their influence by speaking, writing, or modeling behavior that is copied by others. *Formal opinion leaders* are those in positions such as elected public officials, or individuals chosen to head unions, special-interest groups, or nonprofit organizations. Journalists often ask them to comment on issues in the news. *Informal opinion leaders* are those people who are not in elected or appointed positions, but are able to influence others because of personal characteristics such as charisma or assertiveness.

Opinion leaders can be male or female and are found in every racial, ethnic, social, and political group. Lazarsfeld estimated that one in every five persons is an opinion leader in some respect.

During one of Lazarsfeld's studies, he asked people who their opinion leaders were and why they listened to them. One waitress in a coffee shop described to Lazarsfeld her opinion leader as "a customer who sounded like he knew what he was talking about."

Lazarsfeld first applied this model to how voters made decisions about candidates and issues in the 1940s, and public relations professionals soon began applying it to fields other than politics. One of those practitioners was Edward Bernays, who wrote in a 1932 article that many opinion leaders are not even aware of their role and the amount of power that they have.

Today, public relations professionals use this model in other types of campaigns by first identifying target audiences for their messages and then determining whom those groups consider their opinion leaders.

The expansion of technology over the last century has changed the nature of opinion leaders. In the early 1900s, for example, opinion leaders were most likely the town bankers, retailers, clergy, union stewards, and schoolteachers. Some of those may still play that role today, but for some groups, their opinion leaders are more remote—television personalities, popular authors, newspaper columnists, national political leaders, and those expressing their opinions to large audiences via the Internet.

Typical opinion leaders in today's society typically share five characteristics.

The first is that they tend to possess a higher degree of education than people around them. The majority have attended college, and many have gone on to graduate school.

The second characteristic is that they consume more media than other individuals, and are usually more informed about current events and social trends. They tend to rely on daily newspapers more than on television for news, and when they watch television, they do so for the purposes of information rather than entertainment.

The third characteristic is that they tend to be active in politics and community affairs. The majority attend public meetings, write letters to newspaper editors and elected public officials, work for special-interest groups, and serve on the boards of community associations and non-profit organizations.

The fourth characteristic is that they are early adopters of new ideas. Within a list of friends, co-workers or other persons considered to be members of a peer group, the first individual on that list to use electronic mail, own a cellular telephone or design their own World Wide Web site, is also likely to be the group's opinion leader.

The fifth and perhaps most important characteristic is that they have the ability to influence people around them, either because of position (such as in the case of parents, employment supervisors or union stewards), or personal qualities such as charisma or assertiveness.

A variation of the two-step model is the **N-step theory**, which states that individuals seldom receive information from only one opinion leader; they are likely to turn to different opinion leaders for each issue on which they form an opinion. Health care marketers know, for example, that elderly patients treat their doctors and pharmacists as opinion leaders on medical issues, and they direct their marketing efforts accordingly. But those same elderly patients are likely to select a trusted public official for information on political issues, and an educated son or daughter for information on social issues.

Agenda-Setting

First described in a 1973 study by University of North Carolina professors Max McCombs and Donald Shaw, the agenda-setting theory suggests that the media—either purposely or not—set the agenda for public debate and discussion.

If applied to public relations practice, the theory would place more emphasis on the media as opinion leaders and active participants in the persuasion process. This is especially true of the newspaper editorial page—perhaps the most important part of the newspaper in terms of influencing public opinion and public policy.

The agenda-setting theory can take two forms. The passive agenda-setting theory states that influence is unintentional: the media does not tell audiences what to think, but it tells them what to think about. Most newspaper publishers are proud of the fact that they are agenda-setters. One publisher describes his newspaper's role as an agenda-setter as "keeping the community in conversation with itself."

The active agenda-setting theory states that the media do in fact tell audiences what to think. The best example of that is the newspaper editorial page, which informs readers "this is what the management of this newspaper thinks" and implies that readers should agree and act accordingly.

One recent book based on the active agenda-setting theory is titled *Mediaspeak: How Television Makes up Your Mind.* In the introduction to the book, the author writes, "We do not see the world as it is. We see it as television presents it to us."

Social Learning Theory

Sociologist Albert Bandura developed this theory that suggests that people adopt not only their opinions by modeling others, but also behaviors, especially those behaviors they see modeled for

them in the media. In researching media habits of children, Bandura demonstrated that children will imitate the violent acts they see on television when they see no punishment associated with the violent behavior. Government officials recognized the validity of Bandura's work when they claimed that a relationship exists between television violence and antisocial behavior in youth.

On the adult level, when individuals observe others being rewarded for exhibiting certain behaviors, they attempt the same behaviors and expect the same rewards. Rewards can be external, such as recognition and praise, or internal, such as a feeling of self-worth or increased prestige.

Public relations professionals working in the area of employee relations have noticed that even negative behaviors will be repeated by others if they see them being rewarded. For example, if complaining about large workloads results in an individual's workloads being reduced, that behavior is likely to be exhibited by others. If employees are allowed to violate safety rules without being corrected or reprimanded, other employees are unlikely to take those rules seriously. Whether the rewards are intentional or unintentional, employers will get the behaviors they reward.

There is also a strong link between consumer behavior presented in entertainment programming, and consumer spending by real persons. In a 1998 study, for example, Harvard economist Juliet Schor, found that for each hour per week spent watching television, the household spent an additional $208 per year. Schor attributed the increase to the depiction of glamorous lifestyles on television and the audience's belief that the clothing, automobiles, and entertainment choices shown on television represented the typical American family, and because of that belief audiences increased their spending in order to "keep up."

Episodic Framing

This theory, also known as the *issue-attention cycle,* states that the media set the agenda for societal debate, but that the agenda is always changing. In short, it says that the media select a topic, pay some attention to it, and then the public follows. But after a while, the public loses interest, and the media move onto another issue. The cycle then starts all over again, with a different topic. The public's attention span dictates how long the media will pay attention to something; the media will keep something on their agenda as long as people keep reading the newspaper stories and watching the television stories.

One example of the issue-attention cycle was media coverage of famine and starvation in Ethiopia. In October 1987, American newspapers and television networks produced a series of stories about starvation in the African country, and treated the topic as if it were a new one. Both, the newspaper, and television stories, overlooked the fact that the conditions had existed for more than a decade. Later, the media lost interest in the issue and began to produce fewer and fewer stories about it until the coverage disappeared altogether. More than a decade later, famine and starvation are still widespread in Ethiopia, but few Americans were aware of it, because of the lack of media coverage.

A variation of episodic framing is *thematic framing,* which is different only because it features a "triggering event." An example of thematic framing is found in the media coverage of the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman in 1994, a crime for which O. J. Simpson was the chief suspect. As part of their coverage of the crime, both print and electronic media produced a number of "sidebars" about domestic violence. Social workers specializing in domestic violence work appreciated the attention the issue received, but questioned why it took a highly publicized murder case to call attention to the issue. They also worried that after media interest in the murder case subsided, their coverage of the domestic violence issue would decline as well, which it did.

Other examples include the increase in attention paid to environmental causes following the 1989 oil spill in Alaska, increased attention paid to "hate groups" and domestic terrorism following the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, and increased attention paid to international terrorism following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon.

Gatekeeping

The gatekeeping model is used to describe the editorial process by which potential news stories are evaluated, and yes/no decisions made as to whether those stories are published or broadcast. The theory was first explained by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and was refined by David Manning White in the 1960s and 1970s.

Gatekeeping is often confused with "censorship," but there is a significant difference. Censorship refers to action taken by a governmental official or other outside authority, while gatekeeping refers to a voluntary process of self-editing.

At first, gatekeeping was treated as though it was a finite event that occurred only one time. Researchers now think of gatekeeping as a process rather than an event. Public relations professionals know that is especially true in the case of news releases, which must pass through a series of gates, including reporters who receive them, editors who approve the reporters' pursuit of those stories, and other editors who makes the final decisions concerning when and how those stories will be published.

Interaction Theory

This theory suggests that the influence a medium has over its audience is proportional to the amount of effort involved in consuming it. The theory was first suggested by education researcher Jean Piaget, but is paraphrased in the Native American proverb that says, "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand." According to educational researcher Ken Spencer, humans remember only 10 percent of what they read, 20 percent of what they hear, and 30 percent of what they see. However, memory improves to 50 percent for those who see and hear something, and 90 percent, if the person is actively involved in the process or event instead of merely observing it.

One example of a medium requiring a high level of effort to consume is the newspaper; it takes some degree of intellectual involvement to read a newspaper to get any benefit from the experience. That is in contrast to more passive forms of media consumption, such as watching television and listening to the radio. This contrast is part of the reason why retention studies consistently show that newspaper readers remember more of the content of stories they read (and are more likely to take action as a result) than television viewers or radio listeners remember from their experience.

An example of the interaction theory being applied in the real world occurred during the investigation into the 1999 murder-suicides committed by two teenagers at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Investigations into the background of the perpetrators, determined that their chief form of entertainment was violent video games, and psychologists claimed those games being interactive in nature contributed to their violent behavior.

In public relations work, the theory can be illustrated by considering the results of staged events involving audience participation. One example is "Take Our Daughters to Work Day," an annual event organized by the Ms. Foundation for Women, in order to expose young girls to career choices.

Klapper's Reinforcement Theory

In response to the "powerful effects" family of theories, skeptical researchers developed a number of theories known as **minimal effects theories**. These theories acknowledged the power of the mass media, but insisted that the media were not as powerful or influential as once thought. One theory that came out of this group is the reinforcement theory developed by Joseph Klapper. It maintains that the media cannot create opinions from scratch, but can be effective in reinforcing existing beliefs and attitudes (or bringing latent beliefs and attitudes to the surface) and encouraging individuals to act on them. German philosopher Immanuel Kant also had a "reinforcement theory," but instead of dealing with the influence of the media, it dealt with the influence of other individuals on the persons in question.

THEORIES FROM PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION

Field Theory

In the early 1950s, sociologist Kurt Lewin developed the **field theory** to explain the processes of decision making and change, in both individuals and organizations. According to Lewin, no decision making or change takes place in a vacuum; it is always influenced by a variety of factors in the environment. Joe Thomas, a professor of management at Middle Tennessee State University, expanded field theory to further study the change process in companies and nonprofit organizations. Thomas categorized factors in the environment as either *driving forces* or *restraining forces,* and developed mathematical formulas to help organizations better deal with change.

In public relations settings, driving forces could include factors such as leadership ability, financial resources, name recognition, and the worthiness or popularity of the organization's cause or mission. Conversely, restraining (or limiting) sources could include staff limitations, lack of financial resources, lack of name recognition, or lack of a popular or glamorous cause.

Cognitive Dissonance

This theory, first explained by Leon Festinger in the 1950s, suggests that media cannot be all powerful as once thought (in the case of the "magic bullet theory"), because audience members tend to ignore or "explain away" messages that are inconsistent with previously held beliefs. Newspaper research studies, for example, indicate that readers tend to predict the content of a story based on its headline, and then read those with which they expect to agree with and ignore those with which they expect to disagree.

Public relations representatives working on campaigns that require influencing public opinion on controversial and emotional issues will often find cognitive dissonance a serious barrier to overcome. One of the strongest characteristic of human behavior is resistance to change.

Kant's Reinforcement Theory

German philosopher Immanuel Kant developed this theory in the 1800s to describe how individuals were influenced to change their behaviors. According to Kant, when a desired behavior is rewarded or reinforced positively, that behavior is likely to be repeated. But Kant found the converse is not true—when undesirable behavior is punished, the behavior does not stop. Instead, the individual will continue the undesirable behavior (often due to rewards coming from other sources), but will try harder to avoid the punishment.

The ongoing battle against youth smoking provides a good example of reinforcement theory. Research has indicated that teenagers seldom respond to "scare tactics" such as warnings about the long-term health problems caused by smoking because those dangers seem too remote to affect them. In some studies, however, teens were influenced to stop smoking (or to not start) by appealing to their vanity. At a time when many teens were beginning to date, thoughts of yellow teeth and bad breath were enough to discourage smoking, while the more serious health problems of the distant future did not matter.

Diffusion Theory

This theory explains the five steps that individuals go through in adopting new ideas or products: awareness, interest, trial, evaluation, and adoption. The theory was first suggested in the 1980s by psychologist Everett Rogers, who claimed that while the mass media are often responsible for individuals moving through the first two steps, the personal influence exerted by friends and family members is more likely to move the person through the third and fourth; only a person's satisfaction with the product or idea can ensure the individual will reach the fifth step.

Activation Theory

This theory, sometimes called the "clean slate" theory, suggests that persuasion is most effective when it does not have to compete with strong, previously held attitudes. Psychologist Carl Hovland theorized that individuals are more likely to change their perceptions if the information provided (by the mass media or other sources) is not contradictory to previous experiences and beliefs.

Unstructured Attitude Theory

This theory, sometimes called the "conversion theory," asserts that in for-and-against issues, especially those to be determined by a public vote, persuasive efforts can be effective with audiences that are slightly in opposition to the idea, but not strongly in opposition. If a large general audience is segmented into five groups, using a continuum of (1) strongly for, (2) somewhat for, (3) no opinion, (4) somewhat against, and (5) strongly against, an individual or group advocating the "for" side of the issue would find their time best spent attempting to influence groups 2, 3, and 4. Time spent communicating to groups 1 and 5 may be wasted, as members of group 1 are already committed to the idea, and members of group 5 will never be, regardless of the strength of the persuasive effort. Even though members of group 2 are leaning in favor of the idea, communicating to them is necessary to prevent individuals in that group from defecting to the other side.

Communicating to group 4 can be time and effort well spent, as those individuals are leaning against the issue, but are still within reach. Even though members of group 3 (the undecided) would appear to be the most likely targets for a persuasive campaign, some political analysts are skeptical about their importance in election issues, because they are often the least likely individuals to vote.

Source Credibility Theory

Another theory developed by Carl Hovland suggests that the major factor in whether or not a message is believed is the credibility of its source, whether a person or organization. The most important factors in source credibility are trustworthiness and expertise. Credibility is increased by establishing a common ground with the audience.

The advertising industry has applied this theory for decades, basing many campaigns on the endorsement of products by professional athletes, well-known entertainers, or other celebrities. The limitation of this theory, however, is that it has a limited life span. Research studies consistently show that credibility exerts a decreasing amount of influence over time.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Psychologist Abraham Maslow developed this model in the 1940s to explain how individuals perceive their level of comfort with their surroundings. The hierarchy is studied in psychology classes and is often used as the basis for studying any subject involving human behavior.

Maslow's hierarchy lists human needs in ascending order: basic (food, water, shelter, transportation), security (physical and financial), social (acceptance, friendship, love, romance, and sex), ego (status, recognition, accomplishment, fame), and self-actualization (education, travel, recreation, development of artistic or creative talent).

Applying this theory, public relations professionals know that it is difficult to persuade an audience to pursue one need when needs on a lower level have not yet been achieved. For example, an individual unable to afford adequate housing or transportation is at the bottom level of the hierarchy and would not pay attention to commercial messages attempting to appeal to his desire for ego or self-actualization.

Conversely, it would be difficult to communicate to audiences at an upper level of the hierarchy about ideas and issues related to a lower level. For example, basic needs such as food and housing are unlikely to cross the mind of an individual with stable employment or being supported by family members.

But Maslow's hierarchy is not as simple as it appears. All five of the categories of needs are present in the individual's mind at all times; they vary only in relative strength. And individuals do not necessarily move from one level to another in a logical fashion. The sudden decline in a person's health or the health of the family's bread-winner may cause an individual to drop to a lower level almost instantly. Corporate downsizing and uncertainty about an employer's future may cause employees to worry about a lower level as well—a factor that should be taken into consideration in employee communications at a time of uncertainty.

Social Norms Theory

The **social norms theory** is based on the belief that most individuals tend to overestimate the degree to which their peers participate in certain negative behaviors. This theory has been found to be especially valid when studying the behaviors of young adults. When college students are surveyed about behaviors such as sex and alcohol consumption, for example, the results indicate that most individuals believe their peers are engaging in those behaviors much more often than they actually are. As a result, they tend to engage in those same behaviors themselves in order to "fit in." These findings are helpful in campaigns in which one of the barriers to be overcome is students' desire to "go with the flow" and their belief that "everyone else is doing it."

Social Exchange Theory

The **social exchange theory** is an approach in which human communication is analogized to commercial transaction. Just as commercial transactions are most successful in those cases in which both sides feel they are getting something out of a transaction, the more successful communication transactions will be those producing similar results In order to be a successful communication, both sides come away believing that what they got out of it was equal to, or

greater than, what the other party got out of it. If one party in the relationship feels otherwise, he or she will seek alternative partners for future transactions, such as donating money to a different cause or volunteering for a different nonprofit organization.

In his successful book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, psychologist and management consultant Steven Covey paraphrased the theory in coining the term "win-win" situation. Long before Covey's book, however, public relations professionals used the term "mutually beneficial outcomes" to describe similar strategies.

Trends and Issues

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Decades of research into communication and persuasion have produced a number of ideas about what "barriers to communication" exist between persuaders and the audiences they are attempting to influence. Among these are:

1. *Stereotypes.* While characteristics such as age, gender, race, gender, or ethnicity can sometimes be used to make generalizations about an individual's behavior and preferences, some assumptions can backfire if they are offensive. Typical stereotypes include older persons being bad drivers or having poor memory skills, women being overly emotional in conflict situations, African Americans preferring certain types of music or food, or Asians having exceptional math skills. While one can always point to examples to illustrate their generalizations, individuals within these groups are not identical and resent being treated as such.

2. *Stubbornness.* As explained in the section on "cognitive dissonance," one of the strongest human emotions is resistance to change. Many individuals simply refuse to accept new ideas even when their value or logic is obvious. To such individuals, it is a sign of weakness to give in to a new thought.

3. *Indifference.* This is often related to stubbornness and is sometimes known as "avoidance." For some individuals, the preferred way to deal with new ideas or controversial issues is to simply not deal with them.

4. *Limitations of Knowledge or Vocabulary.* In some situations, audience members may lack the education or experience to understand the message and respond appropriately. Other audience members may be unfamiliar with some of the ideas or terms used in news stories or publicity materials.

5. *Bad timing.* Even the most effective forms of communication will miss their target if the timing is bad. While many timing problems cannot be avoided, some can. Making major announcements about the future of the company (expansion, mergers, or layoffs) the day before or after a major holiday means that many employees will be off that day and may hear about it through public media first. In companies in which employees work in multiple shifts, it may be difficult to make announcements in a way in which employees receive the information at the same time, but some effort should be made to make announcements as timely as possible for all shifts affected.

Assignment 1

APPLYING THEORY TO THE TEAM PROJECT

Discuss the following questions with your team and prepare a brief written report. Your instructor may provide more specific instructions.

1. Consider the other theories explained in this chapter and how they may apply to your team project. Identify at least two from the mass communications category, and two from the psychology and education category.
2. In light of what you may already know about your client and what you have read about "field theory," what are some of the driving forces and restraining forces facing your clients?

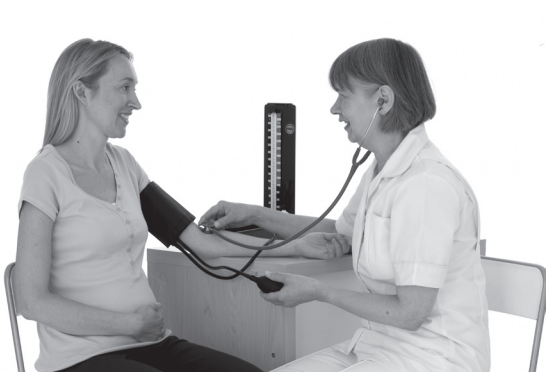
3. Identify the audiences for your team projects (you will do this more formally in Assignment 4 (Chapter 4), but make a tentative list now), and make a prediction as to who are the likely opinion leaders for those groups. At which level of Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" would you expect to find those audiences? Which of the "barriers to communication" explained in the "Trends and Issues" section of this chapter might affect how those audiences react to your client's communication efforts?

CASE STUDY 1

Johnson & Johnson's "Campaign for Nursing's Future"

In late 2001, the U.S. health care system was experiencing one of the worst nursing shortages in its history. Industry experts estimated that more than 110,000 nursing vacancies existed across the country. To respond to the nursing shortage, Johnson & Johnson—the largest manufacturer of health care products in the world—launched the "Campaign for Nursing's Future," a multiyear, $30-million campaign, to enhance the overall image of the nursing profession, as well as to recruit new nurses and nurse faculty.

Components of the campaign included print and interactive advertising of real nurses in action, as well as a comprehensive website, www.discovernursing.com, containing searchable links to hundreds of nursing scholarships, more than 2,000 accredited nursing educational programs, funding resources, and information on more than 100 specialties for individuals who are interested in pursuing a career in nursing. In 2007, the campaign expanded with a growing emphasis on nurse faculty recruitment and retention. Recent additions to the campaign include a new television advertising campaign, which will include nurse faculty ads for the first time, as well as a new website—www.campaignfornursing.com—designed to address nurse and nurse faculty retention with career training and professional development opportunities.



In 2001, Johnson & Johnson unveiled a multiyear, $30-million campaign to help the nursing profession improve its image and recruit the next generation of nurses.

"Johnson & Johnson has always had a special relationship with nurses," said Andrea Higham, director of the campaign. "When we launched the campaign five years ago, we knew we had to act on a crisis that would not only greatly impact nurses, but the larger health care community as well. There is significant data which demonstrates that as nurse staffing levels decrease, or become over-burdened, patient health care quality declines, and patient mortality rates increase. This staffing crisis has a very real impact on anyone who needs health care."

"The nursing community is extremely grateful to Johnson & Johnson for their strong commitment to revitalizing interest in professional nursing careers," said Dr. Geraldine Bednash, executive director of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). "Since the start of the Campaign for Nursing's Future, nursing schools nationwide have experienced significant increases in enrollment and graduations. Now we need to focus on preparing more qualified faculty to accommodate all those interested in entering the nursing profession."

Since its inception, the campaign has distributed more than fifteen million pieces of recruitment materials to schools, health centers, and every high school career center in the country. Additionally, nearly thirty Promise of Nursing fund-raising galas—sponsored by Johnson & Johnson, and hosted in cooperation with local and regional hospitals and health care organizations in cities and regions where the nursing shortage is most acute—have raised in excess of $12 million, funding 800 renewable student scholarships, 250 renewable faculty fellowships, and 150 nursing school grants. All funds raised stay within the cities and regions where the galas have been held.

"We don't believe it to be a coincidence that more of today's students are choosing to major in nursing," Higham added. "Of the ten most popular college majors, nursing has moved from nearly the bottom of the list, into the fourth

ranking over the last few years. We've made great progress, but much more work remains to be done."

In the program's first five years, more than 500,000 men and women have entered the nursing profession. Despite the early success of the program, however, Johnson & Johnson officials admit that much still remains to be done to stave off a long-term health care crisis, as the perfect storm of aging baby boomers, retiring nurses, and a critical shortage of nursing faculty still lead the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration to forecast one million nurse staffing vacancies by 2020.

In 2006, the White House awarded the 2004–2005 Ron L. Brown Award for Corporate Leadership to Johnson & Johnson for the Campaign for Nursing's Future. This award is presented to companies demonstrating a deep commitment to innovative initiatives, which give back to the greater community at large.

Chapter 1 Discussion Questions

1. Find an example of a controversial public issue currently in the news, and assume the role of a public relations firm that has been hired to advocate in favor of the issue. Which theories (from either the mass communications category or the psychology and education category) would help you in your work? Which theories might help your opposition?
2. In addition to the recycling example used in this chapter, what are some other examples of cumulative effects theory at work?
3. Can you think of an example of the social learning theory at work?
4. In light of what you have read about the "framing theory," think about an example of how the media has framed a recent news issue.