Influences of the Mass Media

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By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1192-3
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1193-0

To Michael and Patrick

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Eric Penniston, who encouraged me to continue searching for a publisher when I had given up. And I wish to thank the Commissioning Editors at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Without Elisa Duffy's suggestion to break the original too-long textbook into four smaller ones, these textbooks would not have seen the light of day. Adam Rummens worked with me patiently answering all my questions considering publishing and reminding me when necessary, what needed to be submitted. Thanks to Bethany Gadsby for her timely and efficient typesetting. And thanks to Alisa Duffy for her excellent cover designs.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Celia Wall for her continual encouragement and my two sons for their inspiration from their own accomplishments.

CHAPTER ONE

APPROACHES TO SOCIAL INFLUENCE

> *... The student of public opinion needs a theoretical framework which accounts for the adoption and expression of particular opinions on the part of individuals and groups. Such a framework can serve as a guide in the collection of data: it can provide a systematic basis for deciding what information is relevant and what questions should be asked in order to permit the drawing of inferences. Similarly, it can serve as a guide for interpreting the data and deriving implications from them.*
>
> (**Kelman**, 1961, p. 59)

There are many ways to influence another to think or behave as one intends. *Social influence* is a broad notion concerned with how this comes about. Some of these methods are ethical. Some are not. It is considered unethical, and perhaps illegal, for example, to have *forced compliance*, or influence against one's will. Torture has often been used by a government to extract information from unwilling victims. During the Korean War, a number of U.S. prisoners were brainwashed to make public statements that the U.S. was the aggressor in Korea. Once they were released, they reverted to their American attitudes, beliefs, and values. The U.S. treatment of Muslim prisoners suspected of being terrorists involving waterboarding whereby water is forced into a prisoner's mouth in order to get them to provide information is another controversial example of forced compliance.

Conformity

Another form of social influence is change due to group pressure. Groups, real or imagined, place pressure on an individual to judge, believe, or act in concert with them. This is generally termed conformity and, at one time or another, affects most of us.

Solomon Asch (1946, 1952, 1953[1]) investigated conformity by having people make judgments on objective stimuli. Ordinarily it is difficult to determine if a person is making a judgment or holding an attitude based on their own beliefs and perceptions, or is simply conforming to the beliefs and perceptions of others. By presenting objective stimuli and then having individuals make a judgment after learning that others have made an obviously erroneous judgment, one can be sure that conformity pressures, namely pressures to follow the norms of the group, lead to erroneous judgment. Subjects would be shown a slide or cards and then be asked to indicate which line of A, B, and C was closest in length to line X:

A _____
B _____
C _____
X _____

On their own, individuals pick the obvious answer, A. However, when individuals are in a group of three or four who unanimously pick line B preceding them, individuals feel anxiety and the possibility of being ridiculed and rejected by the group. As a result, conformity takes place. Research found that 75% of the subjects conform at one time or another under these circumstances and about one-third conform on any one trial. If one of the confederates does not conform, however, that seems to provide strength to the individual and only 5 or 6 percent conform (**Asch**, 1955).

Milgram (1961) studied conformity in two diverse cultures, France – a culture strongly suggesting individualism, and Norway – a culture strongly emphasizing cooperation and cohesiveness. As hypothesized, Norway showed more conformity than France, but the majority of both groups of participants conformed in the face of group pressures. **Milgram** (1965) found that when two confederates of the experimenter refused to administer a shock when the instruction reached the “very strong” level, only four of 40 subjects still conformed.

Who conforms?

Past experience – Conformity leads to more conformity.

Social Roles – More conformity: the higher the position, the greater the status (one has to conform to maintain one’s position).

Personality – Low in Self-esteem, Low in originality, More anxious, More authoritarian, More "restrictive."

Demographics – Women, Younger, Older, Less intelligent.

[1] This is considered one of the “forty studies that changed psychology” (**Hock**, 1995).

70% of the subjects conformed on at least one of the trials, one-third conformed on at least half of the trials, and 30% conformed on any particular trial. There was more conformity when the group was asked to discuss and reach a decision. However, there was some conformity even when the group was not asked to reach a decision. There was more conformity when the judgments were public. There was more conformity when attraction to the group was high, when identification with the group was high and when there was high cohesiveness. Increasing ambiguity increased conformity. There was more conformity with group sizes up to four. One cohort lessened conformity.

Asch felt there would be even greater conformity when more ambiguous judgments have to be made, as in attitudinal positions concerning controversial issues. **Sherif** (1935) tested for conformity under more ambiguous conditions taking advantage of the *autokinetic light effect*. When an individual stares at a stationary pinpoint of light in a dark room, it appears to move over time. One can get an estimate of conformity by having confederates first make judgments of how much the light moves and then having the experimental subject make a judgment. Under conditions of confederate unanimity, 80% of the subjects will conform to the judgment of the group (**Sherif & Sherif,** 1956).

Conformity can also lead to prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. Online commentators often express uncivil, hateful, and prejudiced comments (**Anderson, et al.** (2013). **Hsueh, et al**. (2015) had a total of 137 undergraduates and adults read an online article and were then exposed to anti-prejudiced or prejudiced comments toward Asians allegedly posted by other users. Explicit prejudice responses were measured with semantic differential items rating Asians. Implicit prejudice responses were measured by the *Implicit Association Test* (IAC) developed by **Greenwald, et al**., (1998). Those exposed to the prejudiced comments posted prejudiced comments themselves. In addition, participants expressed more conscious and unconscious prejudicial attitudes toward Asians once offline.

Edwards, et al. (2007) experimentally varied anonymous online professor evaluations on a RateMyProfessor.com environment. Respondents also viewed a video clip of that professor teaching a course. Those who saw negative or positive comments about the professor had negative or positive comments concerning the instructor's attractiveness and credibility. In addition, those who received positive comments about the instructor reported greater levels of motivation to learn compared to those who received negative or no information.

Walther, et al. (2010) exposed 152 college students to 10 positive or negative peer comments made in response to antimarijuana PSAs. Two of the PSAs had high sensation value and two had low sensation value. Regardless of variations in the PSA's, student evaluations were negative or positive depending on the negative or positive valence of the comments. This effect was increased when the students identified with the commentators, as measured by such statements as *I feel a bond with these people, I see myself as a member of this group,* and *I regard this group as important*.

Those with greater sensation seeking were also more likely to have negative appraisals of the anti-marijuana PSAs. **David, et al**. (2006), for example, had 535 seventh- and twelfth-grade students watch online antidrug ads with either strong or weak arguments, and either online chat following the exposure or no chat. While the strength of argument made no significant difference in the responses, those involved in online chats subsequently had more positive attitudes toward marijuana. In a similar vein, **Dishion & Andrews** (1995), and **Dishion**, **et al**. (1999, 2001), found that social interactions among adolescents with a history of risky behavior can create *deviancy training* and increases in risky behavior, including increased delinquency, especially among older adolescents.

Group Think

Irving Janis, a Yale psychologist and member of the Hovland group which initiated experimental research on persuasion during World War II noted for his research on fear appeals, formulated a theory known as *Groupthink* to account for when a highly cohesive group can make poor decisions. He defined *groupthink* as: *a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action* (**Janis**, 1972, p. 9).

Janis cited the decision-making process of the Kennedy administration leading up to the invasion of Cuba by dissident Cuban refugees trained and supported by the CIA at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. It was thought that the Cuban air force could easily be knocked out, the Cuban army was not well trained and would quickly collapse, and Cuban citizens would quickly join and support the invasion forces. None of these things happened. Other examples of disastrous White House decisions include Roosevelt's complacency before Pearl Harbor, Truman's invasion of North Korea, Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam conflict and Nixon's Watergate cover-up. More recent examples could well include George W. Bush's

invasion of Iraq and subsequent build-up of forces to quell violence there and *MAGA*'s support of former president Trump.

Janis (1972, p. 198) argued that:

> *The more amiability and esprit de corps among members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against out-groups.*

Janis felt that groupthink was most likely to occur when the group was isolated from others, overestimated its own ability, was close-minded to alternatives, and had self-censorship, direct pressure on dissenters, and an illusion of unanimity. Interestingly, the Kennedy administration changed many of these symptoms of groupthink and made perhaps its finest decision during the Cuban missile crisis 18 months later.

In ambiguous situations, individuals unsure of how to behave or what to believe often copy other people or assimilate group opinions. It's assumed that other people know what they're doing and therefore can serve as an example of how to behave or what to believe, especially if they are adopting a majority opinion (**Brown, et al**., 1992; **Stapel & Koomen**, 2000).

Social norms are increasingly spread by online social media (**Crandall, et al**., 2002; **Hogg & Reid**, 2006; **Lee**, 2006; **Yanovitzky & Rimal**, 2006). User comments are used to gauge public opinion and the more extreme the comment, often the greater the influence (**Walther & Jang** (2012). **Blanchard, et al.** (1994) and **Stangor, et al**. (2001) found that prejudicial attitudes toward black students could be significantly affected by a confederate expressing racist or antiracist comments or by telling participants the prejudicial results of a fictitious survey.

Persuasion

It can be argued that all communication involves persuasion of some sort. Politicians are now spending months and even years persuading voters to support them. One must convince receivers that one's messages are credible. It is the general means by which mass media content is supported. Advertising dollars pay for the content that is produced by network entertainment and news show. Newspapers are subsidized by subscription revenue, but also advertising support. Even the Internet is being subsidized, in part, by advertising revenue, perhaps to the chagrin of users who are receiving an ever-increasing amount of *Spam*. This is

generally tolerated by the general public, recognizing that there would be far greater cost to the individual receiver without advertising.

Toleration has its limits, however. What receiver has not complained about the number of commercials and their volume as the FCC has eased regulations. Persuasion is a form of social influence that is often, but not always, considered ethical. Who would argue that *subliminal advertising* is an ethical approach to convincing someone to buy a product? Even the Supreme Court has argued that commercial speech does not have the same protection as political speech under the First Amendment (**Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire**, 1942). Nevertheless, much of the content of the mass media is designed to persuade people, to influence their attitudes toward a product and ultimately to convince them to buy the product. For an overview of various persuasion theories with a discerning discussion of methodologies see **O'Keefe** (2002).

A straightforward definition of *persuasion* is *human communication designed to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values, or attitudes* (**Simon**, 1976, p. 21). Such a definition places emphasis on the characteristics of the message that are most likely to be successful and much of persuasion research is message research. The definition also implicitly recognizes **Berlo's** (1960) dictum that all communication involves intent. Communicators have the intent to influence their receivers in some way, to affect their knowledge levels[2], their beliefs, attitudes and values, and ultimately their behaviors. One can look at characteristics of the source that lead to successful persuasion as well as characteristics of the receiver that are most likely to lead to persuasive change. **Briñol & Petty** (2006) argued that *matching persuasive messages to people's characteristics increases persuasion* (p. S95). Much of the early research on mass communication has been concerned with searching for the *magic bullets* that lead to persuasion.

Attitudes

The focus of much of persuasion research has been on attitudes. No doubt a principal reason for this is the belief that *attitude change is a principal determination of behavioral change* (**Beisecker & Parson**, 1972, p. 5). As such, attitudes were defined early on as a *predisposition to respond* as in, *an attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related*

[2] Under this view, it is recognized that receivers must be convinced of the validity of the knowledge claims and hence persuasion is involved in knowledge gain.

(**Allport**, 1935, p. 110). So, if one wanted to bring about behavioral change of some kind, one first needed to change or reinforce relevant attitudes. This is still the underlying approach of advertising. The study of attitude formation and change is usually conducted in a laboratory where the researcher can control the various factors that can influence attitude relationships. Public opinion polls can measure attitudes toward issues of public concern in society. Which attitudes are relevant to the individual at any one time depend on the situation.

Today, *attitudes* are more likely to be defined in terms of positive or negative feelings, like or dislike, toward some object. They are distinguished from *beliefs*, which are defined in terms of cognitions which people believe to be true. *Values*, in turn, are principles that guide behavior. They are generally shared by the community or culture and are guides for how things should be rather than how they necessarily are.

Factors Affecting Persuasion

Source Credibility

Before receivers can be persuaded by a message, they must find the message credible or believable. Source credibility concerns the perceptions of a source held by receivers. The credibility of different sources can be perceived differently by different receivers. And perceptions can vary over time. The sources can be a person, group, organization, or a mass medium.

For Aristotle, the three modes of persuasion described in described in the *Rhetoric* were *logos* (the logic used to support a claim), *pathos* (emotional or motivational appeals), and *ethos* (the source's credibility or authority). The three qualities of a source which build high credibility described by Aristotle are *perceived intelligence* (or competence), *character* (or trustworthiness), and *good will* (or positive intent) (**Kennedy**, 1991).

Hovland, et al., (1953) identified two independent components of credibility: *expertness* and *trustworthiness*. Messages were judged less fair and less justified when presented by a less credible source. While we would like sources to be both knowledgeable and honest, they are often one or the other, like a used car salesman who knows his industry but might not be wholly honest with us when pushing a particular vehicle, or a well-intentioned individual who doesn't know all the facts but believes what he or she says and isn't trying to mislead us. Few politicians are perceived as both. John F. Kennedy was perhaps one who enjoyed such a

perception during his presidency. President Nixon comes to mind as one perceived as competent but not trustworthy. President Carter was perhaps one perceived as trustworthy and well-intentioned but not competent due to his handling of the Iranian hostages. What of President Obama and President Trump? History will tell. Note that credibility as here analyzed is not simply a characteristic of the source but a *perception* of the receiver. That explains why one source is perceived as credible by one receiver but not by another. In the case of politicians, party identification can be a decisive factor.

Later factor analytic studies found similar dimensions **Berlo, et al**., 1969; **Applbaum & Anatol**, 1973; **O'Keefe**, 2002). Scales such as competent-incompetent, experienced-inexperienced, informed-uninformed, trained-untrained, and qualified-unqualified are loaded on the expertise or competence factor. Scales such as honest-dishonest, trustworthy-untrustworthy, open-minded-closed-minded, and just-unjust are loaded on the trustworthiness factor. Sources are perceived to be credible because they *know* the truth or because they *tell* the truth. **Flanagin & Metzger** (2000, 2003) identified believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness of information as common credibility dimensions.

Research tends to find that expertise appears to have a larger effect on persuasion then trustworthiness (**Wilson & Sherrell**, 1993). However, these studies generally did not distinguish between a person as a source or an institution as a source. **Berlo, et al**. (1969), for example, asked respondents to make comparisons between sources such as Dwight Eisenhower and the *New York Times*. They also found a third factor they labeled *dynamism,* consisting of scales such as *fast-slow, energetic-tired,* and *aggressive-meek*. **Milbourn & Stone** (1973) made the distinction between *source-oriented people* who base their credibility judgments on characteristics of the source and *message-oriented people* who base their judgment on the content of the message.

There are also *phases of credibility* such that a source has *initial credibility* – based on reputation or an introduction, *derived credibility* – produced from the message, and *terminal credibility* – based on the interaction of initial and derived credibility. If a source is perceived as biased or attempts too many persuasive acts perceived credibility can decrease.

As **Petty & Cacioppo** (1986) pointed out, receivers who have limited ability, knowledge, or motivation to think about the arguments are more influenced by the credibility of the source. Earlier research had found that memory for a persuasive message's conclusions persists longer than the

message's arguments **(Hovland & Kelly**, 1953; **Petty & Cacioppo**, 1981b).

After a meta-analysis of five decades of research on source credibility, **Pornpitakpan** (2004) concluded that high credible sources were generally more persuasive than low credible ones. This tends to be moderated, however, by how involved the receiver is with the issue, prior knowledge on the issue, the timing of the identification of the source, and whether the individual agrees with the content of the message.

Kumkale, et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 18 studies with 54 data sets. About half of the studies involved attitude formation, whereas the other half involved attempts to change existing attitudes. They hypothesized that those without a prior attitude would be most likely to resort to the credibility of the source to form a position. They found the effect of source credibility was greatest when receivers possessed neither initial attitudes nor in-depth knowledge on the issues. One of the benefits of having prior attitudes is that they provide *ready aids* for evaluating the issue the next time one encounters it without a need to scrutinize it again (**Fazio** (2000).

Effects of Source Credibility

The effects of source credibility on attitude change would seem to be straightforward, but that turns out not to be the case. There is substantial evidence that high credible sources are more effective when a counterattitudinal message, one that the receiver initially disagrees with, is advocated (**O'Keefe**, 1999). High source credibility has also been found to be more effective than the physical attractiveness of the source, especially when the topic is of low relevance to the receiver (**Maddux & Rogers**, 1980; **Chaiken**, 1986).

However, when a pro-attitudinal message, one that the receiver initially agrees with, a low credible source tends to be more effective (**Chebat**, 1899). The reasoning is that when there is a low credible source advocating a position the receiver agrees with, the receiver is more inclined to more actively defend the position and, as a result, undergo more attitude change in favor of the position. This is also the case when the position advocated is of low relevance to the receiver (**Petty, et. al**., 1981).

The Sleeper Effect

The first study was conducted by **Hovland, et al**., (1949). They found that, contrary to expectations, the persuasive effect of propaganda films shown to American soldiers during World War II increased over time. The participants initially questioned the credibility of the source and thereby discounted the information in the film. However, several weeks later they were significantly more likely to be persuaded by the information in the film.

Hovland & Weiss (1951) conducted a before-after experiment on the impact of a credible source on persuasion. Two groups read the same message describing the feasibility of atomic submarines (well before such existed). One group was told the message was written by J. Robert Oppenheimer, a well-known atomic physicist credited as being the father of the atomic bomb. The other group was told that the article was from *Pravda,* the official newspaper of the Communist Party. Other research compared the effectiveness of a scientific magazine article on antihistamine drugs to a mass circulation magazine and an article on the future of movie theaters in *Fortune* magazine compared to the article written by a gossip columnist. Significant attitude change took place in the group that received the message from the more credible source. No differences in knowledge gain due to source credibility were found.

In addition, a *sleeper effect* was found. Four weeks later differences disappeared. The greater attitude change for the high credibility condition decreased and attitude change for the low condition increased. This was not explained by forgetting since the low credibility condition increased. It was argued that the subjects remembered the arguments but not the source.

To test this possibility, **Kelman & Hovland** (1953) reminded 330 high school subjects of the source at the time of testing and 3 weeks later. The students heard a message on juvenile delinquency presented by a juvenile court judge, an audience member, or a prior juvenile delinquent. They found the sleeper effect when the source was not reinstated but not with reinstatement. People tend to remember what was said more than who said it (**Pratkanis, et al**., 1988).

Other research, however, questioned whether or not the sleeper effect existed in that additional studies failed to replicate the effect (**Capon & Hulbert**, 1973; **Gillig & Greenwald**, 1974). Researchers questioned whether the effect was due to receivers forgetting the source, disassociating the source and the message content, or different rates of source and message forgetting (**Pratkanis, et al**., 1988).

Cook, et al. (1979) revised the hypothesis by arguing that there were four conditions under which the sleeper effect occurred:

1. The persuasive message had an immediate impact on the receiver,
2. A discounting cue questioning the low-credibility source was strong enough to offset the impact of the message,
3. There was sufficient time between measurements of the discounting cue and the message to become dissociated,
4. Dissociation preceded forgetting of both the source and the message.

A meta-analysis of 72 studies generally supported dissociation and presenting the discounting cue of the source after the message (**Kumkale & Albarracin**, 2004). A significant sleeper effect was found for those in the discounting cue condition. The effect was larger for individuals with prior knowledge of the message topic and for those for whom the topic was relevant.

Vivid content, such as that found in narratives, may provide people with experiences more exciting than those in real life and thus might be better recalled. Nevertheless, receivers might need more time to process the content, thereby leading to the delayed effects (**Shrum**, 2009). Receivers tend to accept fictional narratives as realistic and only discount content that is not consistent with the logic of the story (**Busselle & Bilandzic**, 2008).

Jensen, et al. (2011) exposed 147 undergraduates to an episode of *Boston Legal* that contained false information about the effectiveness of allergy auto-injectors in reducing allergic reactions to peanuts. They hypothesized a *delay* in media effects, such that belief in the falsehoods would increase as certain components of the message become disassociated in memory over time. They noted that the sleeper effect was tested in expository messages and support was not consistent. Narrative media messages, however, focus on the plot rather than arguments in the message. As predicted, beliefs in the false information increased two weeks after exposure. The authors argued that delayed message effects in narrative stories are larger and meaningfully different from those found in expository persuasive messages.

Message Credibility

Several studies have found a distinction between the credibility of the source and the credibility of the message (**Atwood**, 1966). **Austin & Dong**

(1994), in an experimental study of 516 college students, found that the perceived reality of news stories was more influential than the credibility of the source. Confidence in the information seems to be more important than confidence in the source of the information. However, **Gibson & Zillmann** (1994) found that respondents were more persuaded on the inadequacy of the safety of amusement parks when the news item included direct statements compared to indirect statements or no testimony at all. **Slater & Rouner** (1996) found that characteristics of a message, such as their aesthetics or actual content, can affect perceptions of source credibility.

Audience Characteristics

Due to food shortages brought on by World War II, the U.S. government commissioned a number of studies to help the public cope with food shortages and rationing and improve the nutritional health of the nation. One of these studies conducted by **Kurt Lewin** (1958) became known as the *sweetbreads study* and established the importance of group influence on individual decision-making. The objective of the research was to increase consumption of such foods as beef hearts, kidneys, liver, and thymus (sweetbreads). Such foods were nutritious, cheaper, and more available than the beefsteaks, pork chops, and ham that housewives preferred for their families.

Three groups of housewives, consisting of 13 to 17 members, listened to a 45-minute lecture extolling the nutritional value of the meats, their economic value, and explained how to prepare them. Three other groups of housewives participated in a discussion during which the same information was included by the discussion leader. Three weeks after the meetings, it was found that only 3% of the lecture group housewives had served one of the meats. However, 32% of the discussion group housewives had served one of the meats. Lewin concluded that it was the active participation in the discussion, asking questions and sharing experiences that had brought about the conversion. The study was marred, however, in that only the discussion groups were told that there would be a follow-up study.

Some receivers are more easily persuaded than others. Research on the effects of intelligence on persuasion is mixed. More intelligent receivers are more likely to be persuaded by sound arguments but are less likely to be persuaded by unsupported generalities or false, illogical, or irrelevant arguments. **Janis** (1954) obtained opinions from 78 male college students on three topics: the number of movie seats in the amount of meat available

in a few years, and the time it would take before a cure to the common cold was found. Four weeks later the students read messages a message on each of these topics providing an estimate as to how long it would take. He found that those who changed the most had low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy and depression. See **Rhodes & Wood** (1992) for a review. Women have traditionally been more easily persuaded than men, although the differences are not great (**Becker**, 1986; **Eagly & Carli**, 1981**; Eagly &Wood**, 1985).

Message Characteristics

One-sided vs. Two-Sided Presentations

A one-sided message strategy is one in which only arguments in favor of the position advocated by the message are presented. A two-sided approach still takes an overall position, but provides some arguments or support for the other side. This is called *comparative advertising* in commercial speech. This approach can also include a *refutation* of the other side as well. Refutational approaches refute counterarguments directly whereas non-refutational approaches attempt to overwhelm counterarguments with supportive ones. Both refutational and non-refutational are perceived as more credible than one-sided messages (**O'Keef**e, 1999).

Hovland, et al. (1949) prepared a radio message arguing that the war against Japan would last several more years, even though the war against Germany had been concluded. The two-sided approach included arguments on the other side in the introduction which were carefully refuted. A before-after research design was used with 214 soldiers in each of the two experimental groups.

Initially, no differences were found between the two groups. However, differences were found when the initial opinions of the men were taken into account. For those initially *opposed* to the conclusion that it would be a lengthy war, the two-sided program was more effective. For those who initially favored the conclusion, the one-sided program was more effective. It was also found that the two-sided approach was more effective with those of at least a high school education. The one-sided program was more effective among those with grade school or less. Thus, a two-sided approach is more effective with better educated and a hostile audience.

After a meta-analytic review of 65 studies of the two approaches, however, **O'Keefe** (1999) concluded that two-sided refutational message are generally more effective than one-sided messages in both advertising

and non-advertising messages, even when educational level and initial attitude are taken into account. Non-refutational messages are generally less effective than one-sided approaches in non-advertising, but not in advertising messages where no differences between the two approaches are found. Additional meta-analyses can be found in **Allen** (1998) and **Crowley & Hoyer** (1994).

In an interesting before-after experimental test of one-sided vs. two-sided message strategies, **Sparks, et al**., (1998) had 68 undergraduates view one of two videotapes on UFO phenomena. One group viewed the introduction to a *48 Hours* segment on UFOs introduced by Dan Rather, followed by a five-minute segment of interviews with people concerning their involvement with the supposed UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. The second group viewed a segment that featured individuals who regularly searched for UFOs in the desert and who had a film of what they claimed was a UFO. This group also saw a segment on scientists who claimed the film was actually a jet plane. Hence, a comparison was made between a one-sided vs. a two-sided approach to the claim that UFOs exist. Results found that the group that received only the one-sided approach had significant attitude change in favor of the existence of UFOs compared to the two-sided group. Males increased their belief in UFOs, no matter which segment they saw, while females decreased their belief.

Explicit vs. Implicit Conclusions

Which is best, to explicitly state the conclusion the source wishes the receiver to adopt, or to omit that and let the receiver figure the conclusion out themselves? **Hovland & Mandell** (1952) presented a message to college students on *devaluation of currency*. Half of the subjects received an explicit conclusion and half did not. The group that had the explicit conclusion showed significantly more attitude change in favor of the topic.

Other research has found similar results, even with well-educated college student's (**Hewitt**, 1972; **McGuire**, 1985). **Stryckman-Johnson & Stryckman-Johnson** (1996) found similar results comparing age public service announcements with and without an explicit recommendation to use condoms. Meta-analyses of such research concluded that explicit conclusion-drawing is more effective. There seems little to gain in leaving the conclusion implicit. It is also more effective to be specific in the recommendations made (**Cruz**, 1998; **Greene, et al**., 1995; **O'Keefe**, 1997, 1998; **Tanner, et al**., 1989).

Message Discrepancy

In a similar vein, the amount of discrepancy between the attitude of the receiver and the position advocated in the message has been investigated. Generally, moderate discrepancies between the two seem to work best. Relatively little change is obtained with extremely small or large discrepancies (**Smith**, 1987; **Whitaker**, 1965). More discrepant positions can be advocated effectively by high credible sources (**Aronson, et a**l., 1963; **Bochner & Insko**, 1966) and when the receiver agrees with the basic position advocated, i. e. when the source is advocating a position more extreme than the position held (**Fishbein & Lange**, 1990; **Lange & Fishbein**, 1983). For issues relevant to the receiver, less discrepancy is tolerated (**Freedman**, 1964; **Rhine & Severance**, 1970).

Eagly, et al. (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on whether or not memory is better for congruent or incongruent information. They found that congruent information is somewhat better recalled, especially when counterarguing is enhanced.

Fear Appeals

Fear is an emotive response caused by perceptions of threat, its severity, and its likelihood of occurrence (**Rogers**, 1983). *Fear Appeals* can be defined as messages that attempt to achieve attitude change by including the negative consequences of failing to agree with the advocated position. In order to be effective, they must generate fear, offer a solution to the issue which is perceived as effective, and the audience member must believe he or she can implement the solution.

Strong fear appeals have graphic depictions such as gruesome films of traffic accidents in driver education classes. Mild fear appeals might simply have verbal descriptions of the negative consequences. Others operationalize fear appeals according to the emotions they listed in the receiver. Graphic depictions might be avoided or discounted and hence not elicit fear (**Boster & Mongeau**, 1984).

Janis & Feshbach (1952, 1953) argued that disturbing emotions such as fear, guilt, and anger have the functional property of a *drive*. Successful fear appeals arouse, then release, emotional tension. Reduction of the emotional tension serves as reinforcement of the reassuring recommendations. **Nabi** (2002) pointed out in her review of emotions that anger is often associated with heightened levels of attention, problem-solving, or retribution toward the anger source. Fear often reduces the level of cognitive processing.

A 15-minute lecture on dental hygiene was presented to senior high school students. The same information was presented in each but with either a strong, moderate, or minimal fear component. The *Strong Fear* condition emphasized painful consequences of tooth decay (cancer and blindness). The *Moderate Fear* condition took a more factual approach (mouth infections, sore, swollen gums). The *Minimal Fear* condition had few references to consequences (cavities were mentioned). A C*ontrol Group* heard a lecture on the human eye. The fear manipulations did produce expected amounts of emotional tension. However, the minimal fear appeal produced the most attitude change toward the recommendations. It was argued that the Moderate and Strong fear appeals produced avoidance which prevented the attitude change.

Later research does not support the conclusion that minimal fear messages are more effective than moderate or strong fear messages (**Boster & Mongeau**, 1984; **Mongeau**, 1998; **Witte & Allen**, 2000). Messages with more intense content generally arouse greater fear. However, this is not automatic since what one person finds fearful might not be arousing to another person. **Boster & Mongeau** suggest that if the fear is perceived as uncontrollable, the *correlation between the amount of fear-arousing content in the persuasive message in conformity with message recommendations is expected to be negative* (p. 339). Nevertheless, strong fear appeals are generally more persuasive than moderate or weak fear appeals, especially if accompanied by high-efficacy messages. Strong fear appeals with low-efficacy messages produce the greatest levels of defensive reactions.

Rogers (1975, 1983); **Rogers & Prentice-Dunn** (1997) proposed a *protection motivation* theory of fear appeals and persuasion. It was argued that fear appeals are effective if they convince receivers of the severity of the threat, their susceptibility to the threat, and their ability to respond effectively to the threat if they follow the recommendations in the message (**Beck & Frankel**, 1981). If the cost of responding to the threat outweighs any of the above, we are less likely to be persuaded. Generally, if the threat is low or not relevant, no need for change arises. If the threat is high and coping strategies seem adequate then the recommended actions tend to be adopted. However, if the coping strategies seem to be inadequate then fear processes take over and people are likely to engage in denial or defensive avoidance of the message (**Roberto**, 2000; **Witte**, 1998; **Witte & Morrison**, 1995; **Witte, et al**., 1998. See **O'Keefe**, 2002, pp. 226-228 for a fuller discussion).

Ordoñana, et al. (2013) exposed 92 subjects to one of four messages concerning taking a tetanus vaccine: high vs. low threat and high vs. low efficacy. The high threat message included more severe language and