

PERSUASION CONNOTATIONS AT MACRO-SOCIAL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This approach examines the comparative relationship between persuasion at micro and macro-social level, under the framework of the comparative analysis method. In this sense, after identifying and presenting the concept of persuasion, the similarity of interpretation and persuasion techniques are emphasized. The study first addresses the epistemological and methodological aspect of the social connotations of persuasion. It has as main objectives to ensure the interpretation of the concept, to identify the strategies, to describe the mechanisms by which the persuasion in the public space is reconstructed and to discover the methods of resistance to this type of communication.

The usefulness of studying this type of communication results from the effects it has on the individual and its various inter-human relationships in the macro-social space.

KEYWORDS: persuasion, communication, social, resistance strategies

1. Introduction

Human society lives in a world of communication in which information is transmitted directly or indirectly and with ever more perfect means. In day-to-day existence, communication gives meaning to every individual at both micro- and macro-social level. This communicative act is composed of the visible part: written or spoken (words, phrases, ideas, conversations, gestures, letters, documents etc.) and the invisible part representing the inner world of each individual (emotions, emotional states, ideas and motivations). Inter-human communication is based on convictions, values, beliefs, prejudices, education and habits of each individual (Albu, 2008, p. 13). The company is in a permanent exchange of messages, which aim to influence the ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviours of individuals. This is done through the persuasive character of communication.

Persuasion is inevitable in everyday life that causes individuals to understand, accept

new ways of thinking, perceiving, and behaving. The ability to influence has become the most essential function of the communication process. In the present world, the key to success in our own realization is *“the ability to persuade others, is the main key to wealth, love and happiness”* (Hogan, 1996, p. 16). The force of persuasion offers undoubtedly power to any individual.

The research highlights the active imperative functionality of persuasion connotations at the macro-social level. The implications of such modern communication provide social force to communication in human relationships. Persuasion is an omnipresent process of social communication, it has an interactive character in which both the transmitter and the recipient are involved in communication and are trying to pursue their goals and needs of knowledge. The ability to convince involves three major factors in the communication act: creating the response, strengthening the feed-back and modifying the response.

2. Concept of Persuasion

The concept of persuasion consists of the ability of the transmitter to provide the recipient with arguments (cognitive, motivational, and emotional) to reconsider his/her own ideas, beliefs and attitudes for restructuring and change.

Nowadays, persuasion is a process of opinion attached to social communication. Due to the use of a large mass of communicators, the content is "*structured on the large mental patterns of the target groups, thus having a stereotypical dominance*" (Gavreliuc, 2007, p. 196). Persuasion is not unilateral, but transactional, it involves both sides (transmitter and recipient). Persuasion is defined as "*the continuous and interactive complex process in which a transmitter and a receiver are linked by verbal or nonverbal symbols and in which the transmitter attempts to influence the receiver (persuaded) to adopt a change in an attitude or in a given behaviour because the persuaded has had widened or changed perceptions*" (O'Donnell & Kable, 1982, p. 9).

Of great importance in this communication process are the logical, rational arguments and clear evidence that strengthen and ensure the objective pursued by the transmitter. But to strengthen the persuasion strategy, the message also addresses affectivity. It is necessary to tactfully mix the logic, coherence, emotional experience, ambition and diplomacy in order to gain the confidence and positive feedback from the persuaded.

Many people associate or confuse the concept of manipulation with persuasion. Differentiation must be made very clear, in the case of manipulation, the transmitter cheats to achieve his goals to the detriment of the subject's interest. Thus, the target is unaware of the transmitter's influence and intentions. While in persuasion both sides are consciously and actively involved. The act of perfect persuasion requires self-inducement. In general, persuasion occurs in the private context, from individual to

individual or from group to group, depending on interests, susceptibility, sympathy or relational context.

3. The Strategy of Persuasion

Jean-Nöel Kapferer (2002) defines persuasion as a sequential intra-psychological approach to information. The author proposes a model that does not follow what a message is doing to a person, but what the person does with the message. It emphasizes the importance of mental filters imposed by stereotypes.

The onset of persuasion action is the process of exposure by which the receiver contacts the message. The information must attract the target and anticipate its interest. It follows the decoding of information, which consists of sensory decoding, imaginary construction and comprehension, in the field of semantics. Perception is an act of imaginary construction determined by a sensory stimulus. Thus, there is a defensive perception (which shows how emotionally negatively charged messages are denied at the stage of perception) and subliminal perception (which is manifested at the level of behaviours).

At this stage, persuasion must overcome these two perceptual barriers, delivering a message that does not contrast with the value scale of the receiver and favourably perceives it. The effectiveness of the information transfer consists of the type of the arguments, the speed of the information, the repetition of the message, the means of communication used and the use of symbols familiar to the recipients.

The acceptance process is the next stage in which the receiver submits the message of an active test, the individual analyses and gives his inner responses and, depending on them, changes his attitude, he convinces himself to become persuaded. Attitude is committed to the act of persuasion through the process of integrating cognitive, affective behaviours and attitudes. These are interrelated but not

necessarily determined by each other. An example of this is the attitude towards a political candidate, which is expressed by the answers to the following questions:

– *Think X will follow Y policy?* (cognitive component)

– *Do you like X?* (affective component)

– *Are you willing to get involved to support X?* (intentional component)” (Gavreliuc, 2007, p. 198).

Even if the attitude is motivated, it does not have temporal stability and it is possible to return to the initial form of receiving the message. But it has the ability to provide temporal persistence in memory. The more cognitive activity and internal connections have been activated, the more sustainable will the persuasive effects be. There is the possibility that a single discussion can radically change an attitude, this is called conversion into action and complies with semantic convergence rules, without contradicting the value system of the receiver.

In interpersonal relationships, persuasion is the precise and influential use of language. The word can convince and capture attention through certain language configurations that have psychological effects:

– For example, frequent use of language configurations with *not*, in which people cannot mentally create the image of the word *not*, because it is not a noun. The word can be used in the active language for the purpose of influencing. For example, the following language configurations used by the transmitter: “Do not decide now”; “You do not have to get involved”, they are perceived by the convinced agent’s subconscious without the word *not*. More specifically, “Decide now!” and “You need to get involved”.

– With a productive and efficient effect, there are also the message configurations *perhaps*, *maybe*, and *probably* in the persuasion process.

They mark the authoritarian style, provide delicacy and subtlety to speech, acting similarly to language configurations with *not*: “Maybe you want to get involved in this action ...”; “You may feel sorry if you refuse the offer”.

Non-verbal communication is very significant in the persuasion process and occupies about 60-70 % of the message, the rest of the words being paraverbal. Also, the communication situation must be located and observed in a context that is analysed through proximity, which refers to the space in which we communicate.

4. Persuasion at Macro-Social Level

The process of persuasion is the most common at the micro-social level, but it also has macro-social connotations. Both sides of the process are dependent on each other, with an active participation in the creation of the message. Thus, a leader must always keep in mind the needs of his/her audience, in order to achieve his objectives.

In the work *Persuasion: New Directions in Theory and Research* (Rolloff & Miller, 1980), three types of group manifestations are drawn.

In the first type the answer is formed, through which the transmitter directs the whole process, as a learning process, to the public. The transmitter uses persuasion to show the audience how to behave using recompense. If the answer is positive, it will attract a reward and develop a positive attitude towards what it has learned.

The second type reinforces the answer, in which, if the public behaves positively towards a particular subject, the transmitter encourages him and causes him to believe and act for that purpose. An example of this is NGOs or social support companies.

In the third type there is a change of response, which involves a request to the audience to adopt another attitude. Because individuals modify their attitudes hard, the

transmitter must connect the required request to something already existing to make it easier for audiences to understand.

This determinant element of change is called anchor and represents values, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, norms, or group habits. Anchor is a pre-assimilated element by receiver.

In the macro-social context, ensuring effective persuasion depends on:

- The exciting character of the message. Messages that affect the receiver bring discomfort and cause it to leave the act of communication. Persuasion that gives a state of anxiety cannot bring about an attitude change.

- Intelligibility that offers efficiency and impact. Messages should be built in line with reality to find solutions not just to create a virtual world to attract the audience.

- Initiative. The initiator of the message has an advantage in this message journey.

The action of a possible opponent will be hampered and will try to prove the inaccuracy of the source message. The replica will come on the offensive but on an side axis, when it is necessary to promote a message at a macro-social level in the media.

- Multi-layered organization of the persuasive message. The information of a message must be intertwined in an organized discourse, with pros and cons and the exposure of all faces.

- The nature of the beliefs of the target and their basis (emotionally built attitudes are more sensitive to rational arguments, and cognitively grounded are more permissive to emotional arguments) (Millar & Millar, 1996).

- Transmitting a message that recognizes the role of the ego totalitarian tendencies of the subject (The persuasive message must allow the subjects to reject the information they disagree with and to accept those who come to their own opinions).

- The degree of initial acceptance of the content of the message by the target, which is based on the theory of social justice. *“The level of attitude change is related to the difference between the initial attitude of the subject and the subsequent attitude to be induced”* (Gavreliuc, 2007, p. 204).

The audience will always analyse the message, calculate the costs and benefits of the new change, and if the balance is tilted to change, it will occur. Those familiar with social manipulation will create at the level of social imagery targets that are of interest to the subjects and will influence their assessment in understanding the need for change. The factors presented above must be capitalized positively and together with a transparent and appropriate social knowledge and communication that will fulfil the goals of a free and democratic society.

Persuasion connotations get a meaning when they engage one of the six weapons of conviction: sympathy, reciprocity, social proof, commitment, authority and rarity. In the process of persuasion, the message is not necessarily the one that brings the change, but the time before the message is sent. More specifically, the receiver and the audience need to be trained before they experience it. Thus, before changing behaviour, the mental state of the mind must be changed, and the public's attention shifted. The term *“pre-suasion”* implemented by Robert B. Cialdini (2017) gives the conversation partner a state of comfort before the sender triggers the persuasion process, moves focus attention. It is a strategy that creates the right environment for the next step to work.

In the social environment, persuasive messages are not always exploited in the positive register, and communication strategies for resistance to persuasion must be developed to counter them. When exaggerated, the persuasive agent preserves his/her freedom and rejects the persuasive act:

- selective exposure – is the strategy by which the individual avoids exposure to information that is not in contradiction with their norms, values, and attitudes.

– warning – the individual of a future exposure to a message contrary to his or her own principles leads to an increase in resistance to the information delivered and he/she takes a critical attitude.

– depreciation of the credibility of the source – the persuasive agent exposes the message of the source in a depreciable, non-trusting light, for example the following expressions: not trustful; pursues hidden interests etc.

– distorting the message in an ironic note, minimizing and ironizing the information (Albu, 2007, p. 145).

– the bulk rejection of communication – is the direct and prompt strategy of rejecting the message of persuasion.

– inoculation – is a strategy similar to the medical vaccine, the possibility of resisting an informational virus offers the ability to defend yourself. The agent persuaded fights in a balanced manner and causes the source to bring counter-arguments. Thus, the persuaded agent exposed to a set of weak arguments will be able to reject the strong arguments of persuasive messages (Gavreliuc, 2007, p. 206).

– immunization – is the ability to develop counter-arguments that give freedom to the individual in the social influence network (Gavreliuc, 2007, p. 2016).

5. The Comparative Relationship between Persuasion at Micro and Macro-Social Level

5.1. Similarities

Persuasion involves the use of communication to earn receivers for a cause. Thus, persuasion is not required, but through it the other person is convinced to accept negotiation/change.

At both micro and macro levels, the persuasive agent uses the same strategies when it comes to capitalizing on the subject, uses repetition, association or composition, and when one wants to hide certain defects, it uses diversion, minimization,

omission or confusion. By doing so, it distracts and creates an illusion of the receiver's perception. One of the most important is the quality of the message source that influences persuasion efficiency through credibility. Credibility can be divided into two main elements: competence and objectivity.

Another common element is understanding, sharing the same logical system, but also the individual's decision to move at a given moment in the direction of the promised sense proves that persuasion is an act that can only be achieved through the filter of human consciousness.

5.2. Differences

From the point of view of persuasive discourse, the content of messages at the micro-social level is lower compared to the large number of messages in the macro-social space. In the first case, the dynamics of the message is visible, while in the second case the dynamics and strategies are more subtle and contain more complex reasoning.

The persuasive agent who expresses himself at a macro-social level uses virtuous words that are part of the target's value system and tend to produce a positive image when attached to a situation. It uses slogans materialized in short phrases with high resonance and very attractive. It presents official testimonies that strengthen the presented discourse.

At the micro level, the emotional or expressive function of the language (the use of language markers: use of first person, interjections, exclamations, repetitions expressing insistence) is predominant, the communication code is very common even though the code used at the macro-social level is general, where the linguistic sequence is structured by a system of rules. And the transmission channel is one extended at group or population level. The function of language is conative or impressive when exerting a comprehensive pressure on the receiver to get

him/her to act, to get involved in communication (using language markers: use of second person, vocabulary nouns and pronouns, verbs in the imperative mood, interrogative statements).

From the point of view of the source, at the micro-social level the persuasive agent can be represented by a simple individual, while at the macro level the persuasive agent is represented by an opinion leader who is reliable, trained, strong, responsible and empathic.

At the macro-social level, persuasion is more difficult to achieve because belonging to a group is the most important element that determines attitude. In cases where attitudes are closely linked to social connotations, persuasion must address social factors that influence individuals.

Human society has become a society of the show, so advertising has to progress, and advertising messages become discursive forms that defy natural logic and where the image has a leading role in persuasion. Media messages are developed in relation to specific codes and conventions that allow the transmission of information in an efficient manner. Communication is made more and more with the help of images, the image produces images, not just imitations. Plastic representation is an element often used in macro-social persuasion that produces imperative effects on the lecturer.

5.3. Effects

The equation of persuasive communication involves the same factors in both cases: positioning, presentation and influence that together result in persuasion. And it is governed by six principles: consistency, reciprocity, social proof, authority, sympathy and rarity, which manifest the ability to produce an automatic submission on the part of the receptors, to respond affirmatively, impulsively. Reality shows that accelerated rhythm and the high amount of information will make this form of unwelcome acceptance more and more widespread in the future. It is therefore

important for the members of society to know these strategies of persuasion at the macro-social level.

Persuasion is, ultimately, a driver of growth, of our development as individuals. The differences that exist from one human being to another are both those that generate our loneliness and those that make us want to be close to others, to complement us, to learn from what we do not have as individuals. Our development, education, growth as individuals can only be done in relation to the other. Persuasion intervenes in a relationship as a cohesive force, the power to exchange discourses, reasoning, emotions to obtain a total or partial consensus, and the relationship to become constructive, to generate the evolution of those who compose it.

Persuasion has been used since ancient times as the method of driving. What has changed is the channels through which we can now relate to those we want to convince and the speed with which our messages reach where we want. The impressive number of persuasive messages we are subjected to today, calls for far more subtle strategies, more complex reasoning.

At macro-social level persuasion is sometimes used as a technique behind which manipulation is used, transparency is not used in the influence process, and the benefit is that of the manipulator at the expense of the manipulated one.

Macro-social persuasion has more extensive and lasting effects and well-defined objectives.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this research presents the internal and psychological mechanisms of persuasion but is equally concerned with analysing its social connotations. The complex unit of the persuasion process requires a clear positioning of its specific concepts, making use of differences and meaningful recharges. Interpretation methods are highlighted and alternative solutions of resistance to persuasion are provided.

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