
Luther Amos Brock Jr

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AN INQUIRY INTO SELECTED FACTORS OF THE PROCESS OF PERSUASION WITH EMPHASIS ON THE NATURE OF PERSUASION IN WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
The Department of Management and Marketing

by
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B.B.A., North Texas State University, 1952
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January, 1963
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This study presents selected findings advanced by behavioral scientists concerning the process of persuasion and transferences from these findings to the nature of persuasion in written business communication. The purpose of the study is to stimulate better understanding of the theory which lies behind the various persuasion techniques used by contemporary business writers and to suggest areas of behavioral research with which the conscientious business communicator should concern himself in furthering his understanding.

The purpose of the study is achieved through research of the published findings of behaviorists (especially psychologists and sociologists) as well as business-writing theorists and practitioners.

Persuasion is viewed from two vantage points: persuasion as a special quality within certain types of written business communication and persuasion as an all-inclusive communication quality in terms of its presence in every communication medium.

The behavioral factors gleaned from published works and presented in the study reflect those concepts which are deemed especially pertinent to a study of the nature of persuasion in written business communication. The relationship of learning and persuasion is viewed as an area which includes transferences stemming from behavioral findings.
concerning the laws of use, readiness, effect, disuse, and recency as well as the concepts of memory and motive-incentive conditions, including incentives for action: praise and reproof, promise, rivalry, ego involvement, intrinsic and extrinsic means, the communicatee's social attitude and intelligence.

An inspection of the communicatee's emotional reactions to the stimuli of persuasive written communication in business receives attention. Particular emphasis is placed on findings concerning the nature of inadequacy feelings as related to susceptibility to persuasion: compensation, anxiety, authoritarianism, aggressiveness, inner- and other-directed attitudes, social isolation, richness of fantasy, sex differences, and developmental factors.

An examination of selected qualities of the communicator in the process of persuasion reveals behavioral findings concerning communicator credibility, the sleeper effect, the element of prestige, and group influence as related to communicator evaluation by communicatees. Too, the relationship between learning and persuading is developed. Emphasis is placed on certain leadership processes of influence: suggestion, imitation, exhortation, persuasive argument, publicity, logic of events, affectionate devotion, and a typical problem situation. The leadership principles of balance, movement, and inequality are transferred to the process of persuasion in business writing.
Finally, an investigation of certain elements of the persuasive written communication in business reveals four key behavioral issues: primacy and recency in organization, one-sided and two-sided persuasive appeals, logical and emotional developments, and communicator conclusion-drawing as contrasted with communicatee conclusion-drawing. In addition some principles of mass persuasion are reviewed in order to show similarities in persuading through written business communication.

A conclusion is drawn in the study that most of the findings revealed in the behavioral research are being practiced in contemporary business communication. However, several findings suggest that research and experimentation by conscientious writers in business are needed in these areas: ethics of persuasion, mild forms of persuasion in terms of communicatee anxiety, varying degrees of communicatee authoritarianism and aggressiveness, communication source credibility, communicatee susceptibility to authority and peer figures, the timing of persuasive communications, primacy versus recency in the organization of persuasive messages, one-sided persuasive appeals, logic versus emotion, and communicator conclusion-drawing as compared with communicatee conclusion-drawing.
CHAPTER I

THE NATURE AND NEED OF PERSUASION IN WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: AN OVERVIEW

Perhaps no force in interpersonal relations in business is of more significance than that of persuasion. Indeed, in a very real sense the economic order of the United States rests, partially at least, upon business communicators bringing others over to the points of view of such communicators who represent business units.

In viewing persuasion from a broader vantage point, much human activity might be said to revolve around the process of persuasion if one defines it in terms of an energy force from a human or from a situation (created and directed by humans) which entices an individual to act in a desired way as the result of a persuasive stimulus.

Although countless writings have sought inquiry into the methodology of persuasion, little about the elemental findings and hypotheses by behavioral scientists concerning the process of persuasion has been meaningfully transferred to the activity of business writing. Too often, perhaps, a business communicator relies on methodology alone, whereas a conceptual understanding of findings which have led to recommended methodology would enable him to have a more valid understanding
of persuasion and, hence, a sharper tool with which to work.

It is submitted that research concerned with the essence of the persuasion process is warranted. Such research, then, can be related to business persuading. Thus the results of the investigation can provide a structure upon which extensions from the realm of theory about persuasion can radiate to the more practical areas with which the typical business communicator concerns himself. Too, the findings, on their own merit, should be of interest to the writer in business.

When one considers that practically all written business communications are persuasive agents for business enterprises,¹ then the urgency for optimum use of persuasion in such writing is apparent. A business communicator who ignores the roles of persuasion in his writing may well realize that his efforts are fruitless after a time. Whether he is engaged in writing sales-promotion copy or in the preparation of a factual report for top-management members, he must use persuasion in some aspect if his writing is to accomplish desired objectives.

¹In a sense, all business communications are persuasive communications. Persuasion takes many forms, from the emotional sales appeal to a straightforward presentation of facts in a business or technical report. In the case of report writing, objective writing can also be defended on the ground of its being persuasive writing, for objectivity suggests a presentation which is aimed at convincing (persuading) the reader(s) of its credibility. Thus it can be seen that persuasion is a rather all-inclusive concept and that its application to myriad types of business writings is appropriate.
Persuasion is so very basic to life itself that a home-like illustration might serve as a way to link persuasion in its elemental form to persuasion on the business front. As a very fundamental example, the learning process of a child illustrates persuasion in a pointed way: a child who misbehaves is encouraged to act in a way sanctioned by society; if he does not accept this recommended method of acting, typically he receives punishment. Of course, punishment in this just-mentioned sense is not a part of the persuasion involvement on the business scene. Yet the child's "learning" what is expected of him is not completely unlike a consumer, for instance, "learning" about fashions and how he or she is expected to groom himself in order to be in style. The sales-promotion copy writer, thus, exposes a stimulus which often-times is accepted as a semi-warning concerning modes of dress. If the communicatee does not heed the advice, there is a possibility that he will not be considered a stylish individual and, hence, his group acceptance may be somewhat threatened.

The foregoing example, quite naturally, is a rather extreme one. It does serve, however, to illustrate narrowly similarity between some types of persuasion in business and a simple learning process experienced by human beings. The human being's learning process, it should be noted, will be explored in Chapter II of this writing.
If business communicators are to do an optimum job in their communicating, they should have an acquaintance with some of the fundamental concepts, revealed through controlled experimentation, about the process of persuasion. If they rely wholly on methodology which they can find in abundance in many books and articles concerned with persuasion in business, their understanding may be superficial and, for that reason, not applicable to some business-writing situations. Further, the scholarly business writer should find great satisfaction in being acquainted with the theory of persuasion, aside from its pragmatic value. It is submitted that practical areas of knowledge find their roots in theory; therefore, an acquaintance with theory has great value to anyone who is interested in an understanding of the whole of a discipline, as opposed to its surface manifestations.

I. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

This study attempts to explore the printed works of behavioral scientists and, to a lesser extent, business theorists concerning the process of persuasion. This exploration will provide bases for illustrating how transferences from

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2See, for example, "On Writing a Sales Letter," The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter, XLIII (March, 1962). This presentation of the "techniques" of writing persuasively is rather typical of superficial presentations. This is not to say, of course, that the Royal Bank's effort is pointless; it is to say, instead, that it does not present the "why" of persuasion, but only the "how."
exposed theory to practical business-persuasion problems involving written communication can be made. It will also reveal areas in which further research is warranted.

This approach is based on a conviction that the individual business writer who understands the elemental concepts of the process of persuasion can perform his persuasion tasks more productively than one who concerns himself only with superficial techniques of persuasion.

Importance of the Problem

What makes an individual susceptible to persuasion? What qualities are present in the learning process of man, in his emotional and rational processes of thinking, in the communicator's presence, in the makeup of the communication itself, to cause an individual to accept a recommended way of thinking and, as a result, to engage in a communicator-desired action?

Figuratively speaking, ever since Eve tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden, man has found himself in positions that caused him to want to yield, to desire to accept another's point of view. Furthermore, in every case of being persuaded, it is found that the one who is persuaded anticipates a reward. This reward may be realized or it may not be realized; it may be fleeting or it may be long lasting; it may be socially acceptable or it may not be; it may be ethically right or ethically wrong. Nevertheless, a reward in each case is anticipated.
Such anticipation, it is submitted, provides a basis for inquiry into the process of persuasion. In attempting to study man's anticipatory feelings as related to business persuading, research into the human element, aside from the business element, is needed. Too, this research should take the form of an isolation of certain significant components of the persuasion process and the relation of each of these components to business persuasion through written communication.

Limitations of the Study

Elemental emphasis in the study is placed on the transference of certain components of the process of persuasion to the nature of persuasion in written business communication. This emphasis requires these two explanatory points:

(1) Only certain components of the process of persuasion will be reviewed. Quite naturally, they will be the ones which, to this student, seem the most meaningful. The scope of this investigation is broad. Secondary research reveals that the redundancy of research in the area of persuasion by behavioral scientists is most impressive. Thus no attempt is made in this writing to cite every study which has been made about the process of persuasion. Rather, the secondary references which are cited suggest what this student considers to be those rather basic studies which lend themselves well and meaningfully to the transference of findings about persuasion to written business communication.

(2) The transference of findings to business persuading will be made in terms of written business communication only.
A practical reason for this limitation of the study is the writer's experience and graduate work: they have been essentially concerned with written communication. Therefore, a more definitive work can be produced if only written business communication is emphasized. Of course, some reference may be made to oral communication insofar as the persuasion process is concerned. This reference will be made only for the purpose of throwing better light on the nature of written communication.

Another limitation presents itself. Today, in 1962, much is being said about the comparatively new field of motivational research. The work of Ernest Dichter and Louis Cheskin is receiving attention. Although motivational research is directly concerned with persuasion in business, it will be discussed only briefly, commencing on page 9. The reasons for this de-emphasis are these:

1) Motivational research, as it makes itself known today, is in its experimental and growth stage. As yet, it has not made for itself a special niche in the economic and social order. The fact that it is adversely criticized greatly suggests a questioning of its complete validity. This is not to say, of course, that motivational research is meaningless; it is to say, however, that so very much has been said both for and against motivational research that this paper should be refreshing because of an absence of great attention paid to this research type.
(2) When motivational research is discussed, typically the result is a lengthy list of products or services which have been the subjects of motivational research inquiries. For example, both Packard's well-known *The Hidden Persuaders* and Dichter's *The Strategy of Desire* are primarily minute descriptions of good and service accounts which have been turned over for motivational research. Thus there is a tendency for a discussion of motivational research to consist of a slight definition of the field, a mention of the non-directive approach in interviewing, and then a rendition of cases in point. Quite naturally, this approach would be inadvisable in line with the purposes of this writing. Too, if motivational research were touched on to a great extend, it is felt that such emphasis would rob this writing of its primary intent: the transference of certain qualities in the process of persuasion to written communication.

II. SOME ELEMENTS OF WRITTEN PERSUASION

IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

In thinking about persuasion in business communication and in anticipating what lies ahead in terms of techniques

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for business writers to use, the status of persuasion should be viewed as it exists at the time of this writing. Needless to say, the technique of persuasion has changed most impressively over the past century. One can verify this statement in many ways: looking at magazine advertising of fifty or more years ago is one way; reading business letters and other communications written at the turn of the century is another way. Can it be said that the way business writers attempt to persuade today is "better" than the methods used in years gone by? Has the process of persuasion been refined to such an extent that the human being is more capable of being swayed in opinion now more than the human being was in 1900, for instance?

As suggested in the preceding section of this chapter, motivational research deserves the consideration of the conscientious communicator in business. However, since a thorough examination of this comparatively new field is beyond the scope of this dissertation, only a surface examination is warranted.

Motivational research is concerned with the intensive exploration of the psychological forces involved in consumer behavior and product usage. It should be noted that although the consumer figures impressively in any motivational research study, any persuasive attempt involves consumer-type responses: an employee's reactions to management-originated persuasive communication is much akin to reactions to the persuasive attempts of producers of goods and services. In
other words, inquiry into the human being's reactions to persuasive stimuli can be applied in terms of the human being as a worker, as a consumer, as a citizen, etc.

According to Bauer, writing in the Harvard Business Review, any enhancement of the technique of persuasion, including motivational research, is viewed with alarm on the part of those who are subject to such persuasion. And some alarm on the part of persuaders is evidenced also. This alarm stems essentially from a fear of being controlled as well as controlling others. Bauer feels that such fear is unwarranted:

What I have been attacking is the notion of the possibility of omnipotent control over the behavior of large numbers of human beings. That such a notion rears its head repeatedly comes, I believe, from our primitive anxiety over manipulation. This anxiety is caused, on the one hand, by our fear that other people may be doing it to us, and therefore that we have lost control over our own destiny. It comes, on the other hand, from the notion that we may be doing it to others; and here we have a sense of guilt concerning our own motives and behavior toward those others.4

Bauer goes ahead to question basic tenets of motivational research. The fear of being manipulated and, more indirectly, the fear of having the power to motivate are overwhelming to some people. The society pictured in the novel 1984, according to Bauer, has caused some individuals to become quite alarmed at any improved approach to the study of human

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motivation. Subconsciously perhaps, some people feel that the condition described in 1984 is not completely remote and that it could happen. Bauer discredits this unfounded fear. One of the points upon which his thesis is built is that, generally speaking, as communicators develop more sophisticated methods of persuading, communicatees are developing in sophistication at approximately an equal pace.\textsuperscript{5} Thus progress is equated. Yet this observation should not suggest that improved methods of persuading or a better conceptual understanding of the persuasion process is futile and, hence, worthless. Certainly, one must realize that the workings of the human mind are quite intricate and that although many individuals are becoming noticeably sophisticated, from the standpoint of awareness of what is going on in the world of marketing, for instance, this knowledge does not necessarily indicate that they are becoming any less emotional, any less subject to persuasion.

Whereas Bauer does not discredit the field of motivational research (he merely admits its limitations), other business authors see persuasion in a quite uncomplicated light. Bursk, in writing in a 1958 issue of \textit{Harvard Business Review}, states that because certain motivational researchers do not agree on how to apply their findings to the real problem of persuading (selling, for instance), he, the author, has an equal right to present his views concerning persuasion. They are direct and are based on a more conventional ground,

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 106.
he feels. Because his views are of such a contrasting nature, exposing them at this point is worthwhile:

The essence of a strategy would be to minimize resistance and maximize the urge to buy through selling conducted on the rational level—namely, planning and presenting rational goals for people which will lead them to the particular product or brand, in such a way that they satisfy their motivations and even act as their own psychiatrists in the event of any conflict.

Selling of this kind is more effective than deliberate attempts at psychological influencing because it is more in line with the needs and capacities of salesmen, advertising copywriters, and top management; it is more likely to be psychologically sound for the mass of people on the buying end of the relationship; and so secures greater results at less expense.

Apart from the efficiency of the strategy, intensification of selling efforts along lines like these furthers the long-run objectives of both business and society; for it both serves to keep the economy dynamic and contributes to the standard of living of normal, healthy people.6

The foregoing quotation concerns selling; however, what the author expresses can quite easily be interpreted in terms of any kind of business persuading. It is for that reason that his views are presented.

Discussion to this point has been concerned chiefly with persuasion as related to selling and sales promotion. This approach is logical to an extent because persuasion in business is overwhelmingly related to sales efforts (both directly and indirectly). However, after attention has been duly

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directed to persuasion's primary role, an inspection of its other roles is warranted also.

The contrasting views of Bauer and Bursk (previously cited) bring up the often-discussed comparison of rational versus emotional appeals in bringing forth desired action in persuasive communication. Such a distinction, according to Thayer, is a rhetorical one.\(^7\) Thayer points out that the balance of rationality/irrationality is unique to each person. This concept is perhaps another way of saying that the type of appeal or argument must be tailored to the psychological nature of the receiver and to the response or reaction which is wanted. Thayer goes ahead to point out this: "The early part of the process is one in which possible alternatives (those perceived by the receiver) are carefully eliminated by logical argument until two or three alternatives remain. Then the desired alternative is enhanced by emotional appeals."\(^8\)

It would seem, of course, that Thayer is limiting his attention to the more conventional persuasive communications, i.e., sales writing and related forms. However, persuasive communications exist which are not essentially emotional in character, and, hence, are not subject to such characterizing. For example, although business report writers often proclaim the importance of objectivity in effective reporting, business and technical reports can, in a sense, also be classified as persuasive communications. The general format and


\(^8\)Ibid., p. 193.
organization of a report often suggest that the writer is desirous of appealing to his audience in the communication process; he feels the real need to entice his reader(s) into believing the report. (Such believing, he hopes, will bring forth desired action.) From a conceptual standpoint, the quality of belief on the part of communicatees is tantamount to their being persuaded that the report is a valid one. Yet in reporting, seldom does a reporter feel called upon to resort to emotional appeals, as such, in his communication efforts.

Little good is accomplished by attempting to determine the dichotomy line between completely objective writing and emotional or irrational writing. It might be said, thus, that any piece of business writing is a piece of persuasive writing, or, at least, one which contains traces of persuasion.9

The necessity of persuasion in written business communication is evident, indeed. This realization is no more keenly noted in any communication type than in the business letter. Reviewing the finite points about the art or technique of persuading in correspondence writing would not be fruitful in terms of the intent of this dissertation; however, mention should be made that in order for persuasive letters to be effective, i.e., to accomplish the desired objectives (both

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9For a discussion of a rather all-inclusive concept of persuasion, see pp. 175-177.
short- and long-range ones), the reader's mental or emotional attitude toward the proposition must undergo a change:

Bringing about this change, then, is a major objective. . . . This task requires both time and tact in treatment, for changing deep-rooted convictions and feelings is based on slow-moving psychological procedures. Thus, the approach to the situation is based on careful and deliberate planning of logical and artful persuasion.¹⁰

This changing of deep-rooted convictions and feelings, this student feels, is one of the more elemental tenets about the process of persuasion, and one which should not be viewed only in terms of the problem it creates in writing productive business letters. Instead, such changing often enters into any problem dealing with persuasion as related to tightly held attitudes.

In thinking of attitude change, a rather sizable problem presents itself. It is the problem of ethics.

III. A GLANCE AT THE ETHICS OF PERSUASION

Many writings have been published about the ethics of persuasion. Because the nebulous nature of such a subject has been expounded upon rather impressively in other works, a detailed treatment is beyond the scope of this investigation. It would be appropriate, however, at this point to mention at least some thinking concerning ethics as related to business persuasion.

The capacity to exert influence is essential in many areas. For instance, in order for a supervisor (or any manager) to perform his functions successfully, he must "persuade." Although no one would quarrel with this business-management concept concerning the exerting of influence from manager to employee, one might quarrel with this same concept transferred to the communicator-communicatee relationship. That is to say, whereas the employer-employee relationship by its very nature suggests the need for a free two-way flow of communication (including persuasive communication), certain modification may be desirable in the case of written communication which is aimed toward the consuming public. In sales-promotion efforts concerning goods and services, for instance, a dichotomy apparently exists between overt unhealthy persuasion (persuasion bordering on dishonesty in product and service descriptive appeals) and healthy persuasion which acts as an agent to notify consumers of the availability of certain goods and services and their value in terms of satisfying human desires.

Both marketers and consumers are aware of the concept of so-called "harmless trade puffery." Where such an approach ends and where deception begins presents a critical problem, a problem which has yet to be solved on a definitive basis.

These two points offered by Thayer are significant in thinking conceptually about the ethics of persuasion:
First, in a democratic (or any nonauthoritarian) society, such as ours, persuasion and influence are modus operandi. There is simply no other way of conducting a business or social enterprise in a free society. The point is well illustrated in industrial or business "societies," where the initiation and direction of movement (toward goals) is largely a product of the influences in operation.

Second, having admitted this prior point of view, it follows clearly enough that people must be persuaded to believe the truth or to act in an appropriate way in order to avoid the undesirable alternative. Thus, persuasion or promotion or influence could not be considered bad or good per se. It is inevitable. Its results may be judged good or bad, but even this is not certain enough to make a final evaluation of the ethics of most persuasion. The problem is a complex one. Propaganda is bad if carried on by competition; if we do it, it is called "community relations" or "customer relations," or some such virtuous name. But then, if we buy an inferior product, is not the maker of the superior product somewhat to blame?11

A practitioner of persuasion quite often views philosophical questions quite pragmatically: "As long as you employ honest means for ends which are not harmful or destructive to others, you are selling (persuading) legitimately."12 Without doubt, the foregoing quotation, advanced by one of America's copy writers, seems true. On the surface, it is rather basic. Yet business communicators experience difficulty in defining "honesty." With standards of behavior between individuals differing greatly within even the confines of the United

11Thayer, Administrative Communication, p. 192.
States, terms such as "honesty," "harmful," and "destructive" escape precise identification.

Exploring the vast area of the ethics of urging would necessitate an inquiry into several disciplines (theology, for instance) which are beyond the boundaries of this paper. However, being aware of the ethics of persuasion seems to be quite basic to any understanding of what persuasion is and how it occurs.

IV. PREVIEW OF ORGANIZATION

Chapter II, the following chapter of this dissertation, reveals some of the more elemental tenets of the process of learning as related to the persuasion process in business. The laws of use, readiness, effect, disuse, and recency are discussed in terms of how each can be applied to productive business persuading. Also memory implications are reviewed along with certain motive-incentive conditions (praise and reproof, promise, and others) which suggest transferences to written business communication which is of a persuasive nature. Finally, the communicatee's social attitude and his intelligence level are discussed in relation to his learning process in the act of reacting to a persuasive stimulus. The findings advanced in Chapter II suggest that there is, indeed, a real link between one's learning and his susceptibility to persuasion stimuli.
Chapter III provides an inspection of the communicatee's emotional reactions to the stimuli of persuasive written communication in business. Particular emphasis is placed on findings concerning the nature of inadequacy feelings as related to communicatee susceptibility to persuasive stimuli. An individual's assumptive world is reviewed from the standpoint of a concept of the persuadable individual with emphasis on certain personality and social manifestations which are related to susceptibility to persuasion.

An examination of selected qualities of the communicator in the process of persuasion, the intent of Chapter IV, reveals behavioral findings concerning communicator credibility, the "sleeper" effect, the element of prestige and other concepts, which are reviewed and transferred to the activity of business writing.

An investigation of certain elements of the persuasive written communication in business, reflected in Chapter V, reveals four key behavioral issues about which the alert business communicator should be concerned. In addition, some principles of mass persuasion are reviewed in order to show similarities in persuading through written business communication.

Finally, Chapter VI sets forth the most significant behavioral areas which should deserve the keen attention of business writers in terms of research and experimentation. Too, a rather all-inclusive concept of persuasion is reviewed.
CHAPTER II

SELECTED PERTINENT FACTORS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP
OF LEARNING AND PERSUASION AS RELATED TO
WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

To go so far as to say that the business persuader considers himself an educator seems foolhardy. However, this student submits that in the process of persuasion, some connection between an individual's learning process and his susceptibility to persuasive stimuli is to be noted.

Thus before analysis is made of the communicatee's emotional reactions, as such, to the stimuli of persuasion and of the communicator's role in the process, the relationship of learning and persuasion should be viewed.

As Hovland, Janis, and Kelly point out, "the type of learning and the conditions of learning are ordinarily quite different in the case of producing opinion change through persuasive communication than in the case of other learning situations." ¹

The problem of attracting an audience is basic before the nature of learning can make its existence known in persuading. For instance, in business reports, letters, and in

other specialized types of written communications in business, attention must necessarily be directed toward enticing the communicatee to consider the communication worth his while in terms of the time and effort it takes to absorb the writing. Thus, although educational overtones may be involved in the persuasion process, the desire to be educated, so to speak, must be present.

In thinking of learning and persuasion in a conceptual sense, a review of the following links between formal learning and informal learning, as in the case of business communication, is pertinent.

(1) When formal education is given, the communicatees, or the audience, are "set" to learn. They approach the communication situation with an intent to learn in mind. Their emotional and mental qualities are attuned to the learning process. This conditioning rarely exists when these same individuals are faced with a written business communication. Instead of learning, as such, as the objective, they often view the communication reading as an optional experience.

(2) In many educational situations, such as courses in quantitative areas or disciplines which lend themselves well to exact description in the teaching process, a major goal is to teach a large number of facts and propositions. In order to achieve this goal, a great amount of practice on the parts of the learners is required before they can memorize and retain all of the information which they are expected to
learn. As Hovland, Janis, and Kelley state, however, "in the case of persuasive communications . . . the recommended opinion generally consists of a single statement which is within the memory span of most individuals and in many instances a single communication is sufficient to induce opinion change."²

Learning, then, in the case of persuasion oftentimes means not the minute digestion of information, but, rather, a quick absorbance of a single thought unit which is the core of the communication itself. This phenomenon exists perhaps in the case of prestige advertising copy. All marketers and students of business administration are, it is assumed, familiar with the advertising and sales-promotional spirit of the advertising copy of the specialty store, Neiman-Marcus, in Dallas, Texas. Without going into a great analysis of their image-building effort, it can be said that many of their persuasive written appeals center around one sole quality, that of status or prestige. In educating potential Neiman-Marcus customers to patronize the store, then, the educational motive of "this is the store from which you should buy goods if you are to be considered a discriminating and, hence, socially eminent person" is involved. By word of mouth (national public acclaim), the reader of Neiman-Marcus advertising copy might be said to approach his reading from the vantage point of seeking to "learn" what goods lend

²Ibid., p. 16.
themselves to his sought-after status. The copy writers at Neiman-Marcus seem to recognize this somewhat unusual approach to the reading of their advertising copy. They painstakingly make certain that not only the goods for sale but also the phraseology in describing these goods are suggestive of status. A well-thought-out and emotionally descriptive headline can, in view of this reasoning, influence the reader.  

(3) "The retention of verbally mediated skills or of memorized verbal material sometimes suffers interference from the subsequent practice of new responses to the same stimuli." According to the authors of Communication and Persuasion, this type of interference oftentimes happens in the case of persuasive communication. They advance their observation this way:

Shortly after being exposed to one communication, the audience is likely to be exposed to additional communications presenting completely different points of view and designed to create completely different opinions. Hence, the long-run effectiveness of a persuasive communication depends not only upon its success in inducing a momentary shift in opinion but also upon the sustained resistance it can create with respect to subsequent competing pressures.

Particularly in sales writing, the foregoing concept is realized. The business scene is filled with conflicting persuasive claims aimed at the consumer. The consumer, thus, in his learning of the availability of merchandise of various

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3For examples of Neiman-Marcus advertising copy, see any recent issue of The Dallas Morning News.

4Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, op. cit., p. 17.

5Ibid.
sorts and of the attributes of one as compared with another, is frustrated. The truly effective persuasive communication which has increased sales as its goal must, therefore, be one which insures not merely a temporary opinion change but a longer-lived one instead.

This same problem of the conflict of sources of persuasion as related to learning exists in other business communication situations. For instance, a recommendation report from a staff member in engineering in an industrial organization may suggest that worn-out machinery (in his opinion) accounts for a laxity of production in Unit A. Contrariwise, another staff member, one in personnel, in his recommendation report to top-management members, may prove, in his own way, that poor morale is the culprit accounting for laxity of production. Top-management personnel, thus, are torn between conflicting persuasive communications. They "learn" of one approach to the solution of the problems in Unit A; then they "learn" of another approach. Naturally, the timing of the reports and other factors may have their bearing on the final disposition of the matter. However, from the standpoint of top management's learning only, one can see that the reporter who presents the most polished and painstaking presentation (the most persuasive) may be the recipient of the attention of top management. This is not to say that the best persuader is always the one with the correct answer; it is to say, however, that the learning qualities of top-management members
may be influential factors in the final outcome of the quest for a solution.

I. LAWS OF LEARNING AS RELATED TO BUSINESS PERSUADING

Attempts by educational psychologists and other social scientists have been made to reduce the principles of learning to a relatively small number of laws. Although such a listing as follows may suggest that the learning process is a simple one, research indicates that such a reaction is undeserved. Indeed, learning is quite complex. However, for the sake of organization and in order to show some similarities between the processes of learning and persuasion, these laws are presented for consideration.

The Law of Use

"Exercise strengthens a reaction, makes it more precise and free-running, and gives it an advantage over other reactions which have not been exercised."6 The law of use is popularly expressed by the old axiom "Practice makes perfect." The relationship between this law of learning and the persuasion process is apparent: a communicatee who has grown accustomed to relying on the written word has, in a sense, conditioned himself for learning and, indirectly, being persuaded. For example, the consumer who places reliance in

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certain manufacturers' products, General Electric, for instance, will be quite likely to learn (to pay attention to, to be persuaded by) those persuasive communications which General Electric directs at him. This learning may involve the mere recognition of a new format in advertising copy which General Electric introduces; it may involve the reader becoming aware of a new General Electric product; and it may very well involve the loyal General Electric patron becoming enthusiastic about this product (being persuaded to investigate it further in his quest for a consumer good).

Thus in generalizing, it might be said that those communicatees who are constantly exposed to persuasive stimuli (excessive readers, for example) are prone oftentimes to react more strongly and more specifically to persuasive attempts than those individuals who are seldom exposed to such stimuli. This hypothesis is, of course, based only on the law of use; other mitigating factors in the process of persuasion make their presence known.

The Law of Readiness

According to Nelson, this second law of learning should be considered in this way:

7It should be noted with emphasis that this hypothesis is concerned with susceptibility to persuasive stimuli from the standpoint of the learning process only. It is reasonable to assume, this student submits, that those who read most are the best informed and, hence, most objective. Therefore, they may be the least susceptible to persuasion which is not based on rational evidence.
When a conduction (stimulus-response) unit is ready to conduct, for it to do so is satisfying; when it is not ready to conduct, for it to do so is annoying. Thus our reflexes such as the knee-jerk, the eye-wink, or swallowing do not need any "priming" to make them ready. On the other hand, certain learned responses are unready and difficult to start. Some common experiences appear to run counter to the law of readiness. Consider, for example, the feeling tone that accompanies the response "12" to the combination "3 x 4" at the first correct response as compared with the thousandth response. Does not the first seem more pleasant than those responses occurring after the response is well automatized? Again, are our native responses more pleasant than those we have learned?®

The pleasantness suggested by learned responses can be related to the repetition concept in productive business persuading. Particularly in writing aimed at the consumer are to be found certain highly repetitive slogans, combinations of words, and tonal effects. For instance, the now-rather-old "LS/MFT" exemplifies this procedure in business persuading. Certainly, most consumers are quite aware that "LS/MFT" means "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco." And if the word "Ford" were deleted from "There's a Ford in Your Future," a goodly number of consumer-communicatees could rather quickly supply the missing word. According to educational psychologists, this quick reaction—based on learning, not native responses such as swallowing and winking—are quite pleasurable. This law, therefore, suggests the worthwhileness of a business persuader considering the use of key-phrase repetition to gain attention, to elicit pleasure on the part of

communicatees, and, to a minor extent, to add to the technique of persuasion. Not only can such repetition be made an effective part of sales-promotion copy; it can also be used in writing business letters which contain elements of persuasion and in writing business reports (as related to the consistency or repetitive aspect of organization of report data, for example).

The Law of Effect

"When a modifiable connection between a stimulus and a response is made and is accompanied or followed by a satisfying state of affairs, that connection's strength is increased: When made and accompanied by an annoying state of affairs, its strength is decreased."\(^9\) This law, it would seem, is rather basic to business persuading; and it is related rather directly to truth in persuasive copy. Logically extending from this law, one can see that if a consumer-communicatee found that being persuaded often leads to a pleasurable experience, then his resistance to future persuasive communications would be lower than if he had been led astray by deceptive persuasive communication at some time. This is not to say, of course, that he will readily accept all persuasive communications on their face value; the law does suggest, however, that the business persuader oftentimes has a willing learning in the communication process if that

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 21.
learner has been conditioned to rely on what the communicator writes.

A pragmatic example of the law of effect in use is provided in the case of productive direct mail advertising campaigns. For instance, many mail-order companies solicit business from previous customers. The "satisfied customer" concept in merchandising, thus, is a mere extension of this law of learning. A consumer who experiences delight as a result of reacting positively to a persuasive appeal is quite likely to react positively again when a similar stimulus is provided.

The law of effect and the law of use are related. The law of use is concerned more with sought-after learning or conditioning (conquering stuttering, for instance) and, hence, is not quite so pertinent, perhaps, to business persuading as is the law of effect.

**The Law of Disuse**

"When a modifiable connection between a stimulus and a response is not exercised for some time, the strength of the connection is decreased." 10 In business persuading, the communicator who is quite adept at persuading knows that persuading is a never-ending process, that if he relaxes his persuasive efforts for a time his communicatee tends to forget, and thus, the continuing positive responses he anticipates will wane.

10Ibid.
Business organizations are rather conscious nowadays about the so-called "company image" or "product image." They know that to build a favorable image requires their constantly putting before the public certain persuasive communications which act as stimuli within the minds of the public and which aid in the learning of what a company stands for or what a product means in terms of desire satisfaction.

The Law of Recency

All other factors being equal, the more recent the reaction, the stronger is the link between the stimulus and the response.\(^{11}\) Since the law of recency is so very basic, a look at its counterpart is most revealing in thinking about persuasion. That counterpart concerns forgetting, part way and extensively. Nelson asserts that the individual tends to forget for the very real reason that he must continue to learn. Learning never ends, even during sleep; and in order for new information to make its way into human consciousness, certain other information must take its leave. How permanently it takes its leave and what substance traces it leaves behind are questions which behavioral scientists discuss. It can be said, however, that as one leaves a learning experience, he tends to forget quickly and in bulk at first and then to a lesser extent as time progresses. When, however, he is called upon to re-learn after a considerable amount of

\(^{11}\)Ibid.
time has elapsed since his first learning experience, the second learning time ordinarily is much shorter than the first. Thus it can be concluded that traces of the originally learned material do linger behind, no matter how long the interval in calling upon the learned material may be.

The law of recency can be transferred to written business communication quite directly. Advertising campaigns, by their nature, suggest the importance of this law in persuading. The old axiom "Strike while the iron is hot," bears out the substance of such a law. While the human spirit is attuned to a particularly persuasive appeal, the communicator might consider making every effort to induce the desired action. If one persuasive appeal follows another in rapid order, there is reason to feel that the total positive effect may often be impressive, as opposed to a spasmodic presentation of appeals or a longer-interval one.

The law of recency can be related to many types of written business communication. Another quite practical example is that of collection correspondence. Particularly in the latter stages of the collection procedure, the communicator-collector who shortens the interval time between collection appeals and who increases the vigor of the appeals is more apt to elicit the desired action than is he who prepares his last-appeal efforts in much the same way, in terms of time, spacing and substance, as his first efforts at collecting.
II. MEMORY AS RELATED TO LEARNING:  
ITS PERSUASION IMPLICATIONS

A necessary extension of learning is remembering.  
Quite naturally, the business communicator is vitally concerned with communicatees not only learning and being influenced, but also remembering the persuasive stimulus material. Otherwise, persuasion's end result is not that which the communicator desires: action.

Rapaport, in his tome Emotions and Memory, states the following:

The material surveyed . . . shows that in the literature of psychological theory there was an ever-increasing realization that memory was not merely a process of mechanical imprinting on a wax plate, or retention or fading of this imprint, and of isolated resuscitation of the material thus registered and retained. There appears to be considerable agreement that memory processes are subject to the activity of selective forces related to deep strata of the personality, and to the field conditions under which registration and remembering take place and which exist in the retention period.12

Thus certain implications concerning the process of persuasion in business can be drawn from Rapaport's observations. The business persuader should realize that often deep-seated emotional feelings and conflicts on the part of the communicatee account for his remembering well, forgetting easily, or for an intermediate-stage reaction as the result

of a persuasive stimulus which he "learned." Unfortunately (for the business persuader at least), man varies as to his emotional makeup. Therefore, no sizeable generalizations are universally valid as the result of dissecting man's emotional construction. Dichter admits, for example, that his staff at the Institute for Motivational Research, Inc. carries on never-ending research concerning the probable reactions of consumers about a product or service and its persuasive presentation before he can make an overt recommendation to a producer about the ideal means to use in promoting the sale of such products or services.  

It can be said, however, that expert visualization of the readers (communicatees) can lead the way, partially at least, to a presentation of persuasive appeals which is below the surface of conscious recognition. For example, simple observation concerning the use technique of a product can mean much in learning how best to present the product in terms of desire satisfaction. A case in point and one which Packard cites in The Hidden Persuaders is ice cream and its

13It is being assumed here that the persuasive stimulus did affect the communicatee to a degree sufficient for him to react, i.e., he did not ignore the stimulus altogether.

users. Dichter was asked to make a study of the meaning of ice cream to consumers by a client who wished to stimulate ice cream sales. At that time, ice cream was being promoted essentially in terms of its flavor and quality. These appeals, apparently, were not sufficient. Thus, Dichter's staff conducted some depth interviews among ice cream eaters. They found that people often become rather nostalgic when discussing eating ice cream. Comments along the line of "sitting on the back porch at the farm and eating ice cream out of soup plates" abounded.

As Packard phrased it, "It became clear to Dr. Dichter and his motivational analysts that ice cream symbolizes to many of us uninhibited overindulgence or voluptuousness, via the mouth. Armed with this insight, he admonished his ice-cream maker to show in ads his ice cream not in a neat, trip dip on a plate or cone, but in lavish portions overflowing the cone or plate, which would invite viewers to sink their mouth right into it."  

A question arises: Are only so-called motivational researchers capable of observing this consumption pattern, this emotional reflex, so to speak? Perhaps this one example

\[15\] Again it should be noted that The Hidden Persuaders is a treatment of motivational research for popular consumption. However, the example cited here concerning ice cream consumers is pertinent to the content of this chapter, and therefore, worth while, this student feels.

evidences the crux of some major criticism aimed at motivational research as a research type: certain redundancy may well exist; certain research may suggest over documentation for a phenomenon which the ordinary marketer might very well observe with his own service- and profit-seeking eye.

Therefore, in thinking of the relationship of memory and persuasion and in line with Rapaport's observations, business communicators should always try to use reflective thinking based on observations of the world and its ways in writing productive persuasive copy. This is not to say, quite naturally, that a well-planned non-directed interview of consumers is uncalled for or that all the work of motivational researchers is superfluous; it is to say, though, that if the business persuader has some conceptual understanding of human nature and a watchful eye, he can often gain meaningful insight into how best to persuade in terms of emotional appeals.

Reinforcement, according to social scientists, is perhaps the most basic notion in the entirety of the psychology of learning as related to remembering. And its implication is quite important in a study of the process of persuasion. Deese discusses this concept of "reinforcement" or, in layman's language, "reward" in this way:

A reward is a bonus which is given to someone for doing something we like or approve. We generally give such a reward because we want that individual to continue the rewarded behavior. It is fairly evident from casual
observation that rewards are indeed major
determiners of behavior. Most behavior
theorists believe that rewards are the most
important determiners of learned behavior.
At any rate reinforcement or reward is cer-
tainly of the most important concepts in the
psychology of learning.17

Deese further defines reinforcement thusly: "A rein-
forcement is any stimulus which can increase the strength of
a response when it is presented in close temporal conjunc-
tion with the occurrence of that response."18 An example he
cites which is concerned with remembering and one which is
rather typical in the field of psychology is about a rat. In
a controlled experiment, a rat pressed a lever to get a
pellet of food. His pressing the bar is a response, and the
pellet of food is a stimulus. After the rat had been pre-
sented with the food pellet several times after pressing the
bar, the rate at which the rat pressed the bar increased
greatly. If pressing the bar had been followed with the
sound of a buzzer instead of food, probably the rat would not
have pressed the bar so frequently. The pellet of food is a
reinforcement and the buzzer is not. The food is a rein-
forcement simply because it increased the rate at which the
rat pressed the bar while the buzzer did not.19

Transferring the foregoing precept of reinforcement to
the business persuasion scene, this succinct question emerges:

17James Deese, The Psychology of Learning (New York:
18Ibid., p. 12.
19Ibid.
"What is the reward (reinforcement) of being persuaded?"

This question gets quite to the heart of the whole matter of persuasion. It is submitted that a person cannot be persuaded unless he anticipates some pleasurable experience as a result. This experience may be rather immediate or it may be a longed-for, long-range one. For instance, the person who is persuaded to drive a friend to his home does not anticipate an exact reward; instead, more than likely, the pleasurable experience will be only a strengthening of their friendship of perhaps merely a feeling of contribution on the part of the driver. Ordinarily, however, persuasion on the business front concerns a rather direct chain reaction: a stimulus is provided; a communicatee reacts positively; his reaction results in a pleasurable experience. Stated more pragmatically, the Ford Motor Company presents persuasively the Thunderbird in his glory (the stimulus of attention and prestige, for example, is advanced to the potential Thunderbird consumer); the potential consumer reacts positively to the stimulus (he purchases the Thunderbird); the consumer enjoys his purchase—he gains recognition, prestige, pride of ownership, etc. (the reward or reinforcement).

Naturally, when the reinforcement is not that which the communicatee anticipated, the strength of the persuasion process is weakened, at least insofar as future similar persuasion is concerned. Thus the importance of truth and ethical persuasive attempts again make their entrance into the process of persuasion.
III. MOTIVE-INCENTIVE CONDITIONS AS RELATED TO LEARNING

In thinking of the necessary motivation element in learning as related to the process of persuasion, attention should be directed to motive-incentive conditions in human behavior. There are many theories about the origin of human motives. As Deese phrased this recognition:

One comes from the psychoanalysts who like to tell us that the origin of most, if not all, human motivation is in the vital urge most intimately bound up with the sexual drive. Another comes from experimental psychologists who work with secondary reinforcement; they suggest that our motives come from a lot of basic, biological urges. Others have suggested that there are many kinds of motivation, but that in a sense they are all unlearned. 20

According to Deese, however, in studying the learning process (as related to persuasion in this paper, for instance), it is not necessary to be concerned with the origins of motives. Instead, the relationship between certain incentives and learning can be studied without knowing just why the particular incentives are effective. 21

20 Ibid., p. 98.

21 In the final analysis, perhaps all studies of human nature halt when the researchers come to the core of life itself: the human way. That is to say, most studies concerning human nature are no more than keenly thought out inquiries into manifestations of human nature, not human nature itself, for the human being, at this point in time at least, is far too complex an entity for thoroughly comprehensible dissecting.
Five incentives for action, as related to persuasion and learning, present themselves: (1) praise and reproof; (2) promise; (3) rivalry; (4) ego involvement; and (5) intrinsic versus extrinsic means. Each has certain significance in a quest for a workable understanding of the nature of learning as related to the persuasion process.

Praise and Reproof

Although the praise-and-reproof type of incentive is generally considered a verbal one, certain transferences can be made to persuasion in business writing. This incentive type is characterized rather vividly in a pioneering research effort carried on in 1924. Deese reports this experiment thusly:

The classical study of praise and reproof as incentives is that of Hurlock (1924). She used four groups of school children who were of approximately the same level of ability. These children practiced additional problems under different conditions. One group worked by itself without comment from the teacher. The other groups worked together under different incentive conditions. Of these, one was given praise and encouragement for its work; another was reproved or dressed down for its careless and inferior work; and a third group heard and saw praise and reproof given to other children but received none itself. At the beginning of the experiment, all four groups were about equal in their scores on the addition test. As it went on, the control group—the one that worked by itself—did not gain at all from practice. Of the three groups working together, the one that was reproved gained early in practice and could not maintain its gain; and the group that was ignored, like the reproved group, gained slightly at first and then fell back to its original level.22

The foregoing discussion seems to be rather foundational in oral communication. In fact, students of personnel administration ordinarily accept the praise and reproof concept rather thoroughly, particularly with reference to supervisory management techniques. It can be seen also that this same concept can meaningfully be transferred to some types of persuasive written communications in business.

The business manager who is called upon to direct written communications to employees (communications such as directives, routine announcements, requests, etc.) can very well use the elements of praise and reproof in his persuasive writing. Recognizing that persuasion can quite often and quite necessarily be made a part of an instructional or neutral-topic message, an inspection of how Hurlock's approaches, described in the preceding quotation, can be re-routed to the business manager's job sheds light on the value of a working knowledge of praise and reproof to the communicator. Routine written communications can be worded encouragingly (indirectly persuasively, through the use of empathy and a communicatee-oriented point of view); they can be written in severe tones (adversely critical; the opposite pole from persuasion, in a sense). Controlled experimentation, much like that cited by Desse, in business communication would, it is submitted, reveal substantially the same results as the oral testing suggested.
Promise

How does the promise of reward work as an incentive?
"The principle of effect suggests that rewards actually act to preserve behavior which they follow."\textsuperscript{23}

Although most often in industry, a promise (used as an incentive) takes the form of promised money, certainly other promises (valued by the communicatee as worthy of attention) have credit. Thinking of promise as an incentive, Deese states rather trenchantly that "individuals may learn better under a promised reward simply because they are more attentive to what they are doing, and that, in turn, lets them more readily correct their mistakes."\textsuperscript{24}

Advertising copy writers have long recognized the fact that offering an inducement to action leads, quite often, to that action. A promise in such copy often takes the form of promising great enjoyment from the use of the good or service being promoted coupled with another promise of one's money refunded if he is not entirely satisfied. Thus the communicatee is conditioned for the action: he desires the good or service (based upon his basic interest plus his honed interest which was developed through the appeal(s) of the copy). In addition, the further promise of his opportunity to rectify his "mistake" seems worth while to him.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 103. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
There is reason to feel, therefore, that a persuasive communication (particularly a written advertisement) which emphasizes specific rewards (presented in words of low abstraction, for instance) can create within the communicatee's consciousness the desire to read and comprehend the message. Moreover, the concept of reward suggests the need for presenting the reward early in the message—in a banner headline or lead-in presentation, for instance. This early emphasis should insure careful copy consumption on the part of the reader.

Not only is the reward concept functional in the area of sales-promotion writing; it is functional in other writing types also. One can see that the business manager who seeks to inform employees of a new wage-payment system, through the use of written communication, for instance, can present a reward in his copy. He can show workers that although the new payment system will not reveal immediate higher wages, the new system will provide the way for certain economies of operation, perhaps, which ultimately, in turn, might indicate ultimate higher wages. Thus the reward the writer pictures, through an indirect type, can be handled in much the same way (in terms of the concept of emphasis) that the copy writer (cited above) might use it.

**Rivalry**

An incentive that is greatly used in the United States culture is rivalry or competition between individuals and
between groups. Social scientists have studied the effects of rivalry upon various age groups and intelligence-quotient levels. In the case of children, quite often group rivalry can lead the way to high-quality performance. However, according to Desse, the effectiveness of group rivalry as an incentive seems to decrease with intelligence. "As a matter of fact, with high mental ages . . . the effectiveness of group rivalry almost entirely disappears." 25

Transferring the preceding understanding of rivalry as an incentive, one can see that the business persuader must present this incentive discriminately. For example, in writing to routine factory workers, the group spirit seems rather vital. On the other hand, in writing to management members, individual incentive may be more effective than the forceful suggestion of the adhesiveness of groups to which such members belong.

As far as consumer-directed persuasive communications are concerned, a business writer would do well to consider this same concept, that of rivalry, in writing persuasive copy. The discriminating consumer (the upward-mobile, relatively high-intelligence one) might react negatively to an appeal which is based on the so-called herd instinct (which is an extension of the rivalry concept, yet presented in a different light). Instead, he is better influenced by certain suggestions of individualism, which, in its worded sense,

25Ibid., p. 104.
suggests not a total deviation from the group but instead prominence within the group. This prominence within the group can neatly be contrasted with rivalry between groups.

Ego Involvement

Motivation which involves any use of the individual's own estimate of his status in the world is referred to as "ego involvement." This motivation concept has been discussed in management literature for some years, particularly since the emphasis upon human-relations work in management commenced. A clear-cut explanation of how ego involvement manifests itself is presented by Deese: "I would not be at all dismayed to be ribbed about my inability to read Babylonian cuneiform, but I would feel very sheepish indeed about any slight to my ability to read the psychological journals." 26

The action-attaining qualities of the usage of ego involvement as an incentive in persuasive writing are apparent. The sales promotion of the high-priced automobile represents a case in point. Quite often the appeal used in promotional copy is centered around the very core of what ego involvement suggests: the estimate of oneself. Such centering is ordinarily productive because it compels, in a sense, an individual to engage in such consumption which is indicative of his status. This appeal oftentimes is effective, it is submitted, when a semblance of professional and/or social insecurity is

26 Ibid.
present. For instance, the business executive who has striven his entire working life for the presidency of a business organization and who finally is appointed president may very well feel the need for tangible proof of his newly acquired status. On the other hand, certain individuals who have long been exposed to wealth and its appointments may reach a point in life when they no longer emotionally require such status designations. Of course, here are being discussed two polarly extreme cases. The more practical example would, naturally, lie between the two extremes.

It can be said from the foregoing, therefore, that the portraying of the ideal situation of an individual within his life bracket, be it a social or economic one, can prove effective in encouraging him to acquire those symbols which suggest his status attainment and informal membership, so to speak. Appealing in terms of a sought-after status is also oftentimes warranted. In this case, the problem of determining whether communicatees are of the upward-mobile type or of a relatively stable type presents itself, of course.

**Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Means**

"Intrinsic motivation is . . . the kind of motivation that comes from a knowledge that accomplishment of a task is going to satisfy some goal in itself."27 It follows that extrinsic motivation, then, is motivation aimed at getting an

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27*ibid.*, p. 105.
individual to engage in an action which, at a moment, might seem unappealing to him. Extrinsic means take the forms just previously discussed: praise and reproof, promise, rivalry, and ego involvement. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, should be quite easy for the business communicator to apply. By definition, it applies only in cases in which there is ordinarily no natural balking in response to the desired action. For instance, seldom is an extrinsic motivation needed in teaching (or persuading) an adolescent to drive an automobile. A parallel example in business is that of informing wage-earners of an across-the-board increase in wages.

Although this student holds the thesis that all written communication in business should contain traces of persuasion, this communication situation is, of course, almost void of persuasion (in the narrow sense), and, hence, is of no great challenge to the business writer. It might be added, though, that social motives of the business organization which is increasing wages across the board may demand a notification which includes certain suggestions about the worth-whileness of employees' placing their addition in payment into company stock, etc. This motive would, then, rapidly bring this communication type back deeply into the realm of persuasion.

IV. THE COMMUNICATEE'S SOCIAL ATTITUDE, WITH REFERENCE TO THE PROCESS OF PERSUASION, AS A FACTOR IN LEARNING

Various studies by social scientists have suggested rather pointedly the phenomenon of selective perception and recall.
An individual when exposed to a persuasive stimulus which conforms with his social attitudes remembers that stimulus material better than if the stimulus material were contrary to his social views. Further amplification of this realization is deserved at this point.

Certain attempts at quantifying this human reaction and portraying it definitively often prove rather frustrating and futile. As Levine and Murphy point out:

The particular attitude being studied; the number and kind of subjects; their motivations; the difficulty of the material; the affective tone; the degree of conflict between the material and the attitude; the external testing situation, which included the relations of the experimenter and the subjects; changes in the broader field from which the attitude stems—these are some of the variables that would seem to affect the way in which material which supports or contradicts our social attitudes would be learned and forgotten.

The inconsistency of fine points concerning this human reaction, of course, does not invalidate the major thesis which has been reported as the results of controlled investigations. This theory has value in terms of its meaning concerning the process of persuasion in a business environment.

When a business writer attempts to persuade an individual to react positively to a persuasive stimulus (a

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29 Ibid., p. 514.
written communication), he is exposing rather often a reflection of a minute part of the social scene to that communicatee. For instance, sales writing concerned with promoting the sale of boats has a certain socio-economic implication. One has only to drive through a middle-class subdivision of a city to realize that the so-called middle-class family in the United States is quite likely to own a boat of a kind. This consumer pattern has emerged primarily since the end of World War II, since the level of disposable personal income has reached impressive heights. Thus in persuasive copy about boats aimed at the consumer, the reader's concept of a typical boat-owning family may very well be his family or his neighbor's family. If the copy appeal is constructed excessively along lines of prestige and keenly felt status, the reader quite possibly could rebel subconsciously and be adversely affected by the appeal. His rationale in desiring to buy a family boat may be one which reflects the herd instinct: he seeks to emulate his contemporaries, his subdivision neighbors, so to speak. He knows they are not socially eminent nor of the prestige social class; yet they own boats. The persuasive stimulus aimed at him, however, may apparently wish to convince him that he would be upgrading himself and his family socially by the purchase of an instrument which to him means essentially a recreation means, and, subconsciously perhaps, a way of being a part of a loosely organized social structure. Admittedly, a
vague line exists between the desire for prestige (social uplifting) and emulation.

The writer of the boat sales-promotion copy, in view of the foregoing discussion, thus, should emphasize particularly the enjoyment of owning something which provides two pleasurable results: emulation in a social sector and family recreation.

Other examples in persuasive writing in business point out the need for the business communicator's recognizing this theory. A case in point is the advertising philosophy of a retail department store which caters to the masses (wage earners, blue-collar workers, etc.). In all persuasive communications (letters, resale sectors of adjustment letters, announcements, certain advertising copy, to mention a few) which are aimed at the clientele, care should be and often is taken not to present the goods and services of the outlet in too dramatic a way. Although an upward-mobile group can often be influenced positively when the illusion of prestige is presented, a relatively stable socio-economic level may react polarly negatively to such an appeal. The difference, it is submitted, lies in the concept of the future held by these two contrasting loosely-knit social entities. The upward-mobile group often perceives of tomorrow as being better than today; their aspirations mold their reactions. Hence, they like to conceive of themselves as surrounded by evidences today of that which will be real tomorrow. On the other hand,
the working class (day workers, routine factory employees, for instance) quite often are likely to view tomorrow (if they view tomorrow at all) as a duplicate of today.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus when a written persuasive communication is aimed at them from a business unit, it should often reflect utility and its use at present. If traces of an appeal concerned with social upward mobility are apparent, the result on the part of the communicatees is likely to be that of wonderment and frustration—not an acquisitive reaction. This phenomenon seems to escape many sales writers, perhaps because of the current-day emphasis upon using a considerable number of products as symbols of status.

The foregoing discussion should not be interpreted to indicate that profit motives should always have precedence over social motives on the part of the business unit in its communication and persuasion efforts. On the contrary, it is submitted that a business organization engaged in retailing, for instance, should make concerted efforts to produce an image of the worth-whileness of continued education, cleanliness, and other ideal social manifestations in its persuasive attempts. For instance, the copywriter who emphasizes the easy washability of a lady's $5.95 house dress is, in a sense, educating the potential consumer to the need for cleanliness.

\textsuperscript{30} For an interesting discussion of this apparent group-level attitude, see Loyd G. Reynolds and Joseph Shister, \textit{Job Horizons, A Study of Job Satisfaction and Labor Mobility} (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1949).
A contrasting example of this same psychological theory, that of selective perception and recall, is provided in the case of annual reports to stockholders. Many business executives today talk about their "company image," the mental impression which they wish all people concerned (stockholders, consumers, employees and other groups) to hold of the organization. Often this image takes the form of outstanding leadership and other such high-rung positions in the social and economic ladder. This desire for eminence sometimes may be less than desirable in terms of the long-range welfare of the company. For example, a newly organized company (one less than five years of age, say) might be foolish if it attempted to portray the image of maturity and excessive stability which is characterized by a much older business organization. The concept which stockholders have of the company in which they have invested their money, then, would be in conflict with the image the company would try to impress upon them through the annual report. Instead of conceiving of the company as one having reached its maturity, these stockholders might very well wish to perceive of their investments being directed into expansion channels. Therefore, conceivably the stockholders who hold such a mental impression about a company could be adversely affected by an unrealistic image (to them) which the company's management desires them to have. As a result, the readers of the annual report might feel less secure in their investments rather than more secure.
If it can be assumed that the concept of perception and recall includes the elements of positive reaction, then the preceding example should point out vividly the need for the business communicator's determining the image, the social assumptions and contemplations of the communicatees concerning a product, a service, or a company before attempting to persuade or convince.

V. IMITATION OF SUPERIORS IN SOCIAL STATUS
AS RELATED TO LEARNING

In discussing the ways in which certain elements of the process of learning affect the persuasion process, notice should again be taken of the concept of the upward-mobile groups in the social structure and how they are appealed to in persuasive communication. Although recognition is given to informal social classes in the United States culture, drawing distinct division lines is, of course, quite difficult. It can be said, however, that such lines, though they be only faintly seen, nevertheless exist.

Often the thesis in expositions about upward mobility rests on the premise that such striving is mainly for the sake of recognition (ego satisfaction). Certain emotional factors do make their presence known in this struggle. However, behavioral scientists also admit that rationally oriented motives are present. Such rational factors as "softer beds, better food, better drinks, more desirable sex objects, less laborious work, better medical service and therefore less
pain—and, most important of all, greater security in the continued possession of all of these are present.

An interesting question arises: Why do people tend to imitate those above them rather than those below them, i.e., what stimuli in the learning process cause people to react in this manner?

It must be kept in mind that imitators can discriminate between cues which indicate reward and those which do not. For instance, children can distinguish between large and small leaders, can match behavior with the former and do the opposite of the latter. Age-graded groups are likewise distinguished by cues which make their superordinate or subordinate character. The child learns that he is rewarded for imitating the "boy who wears long pants," but not the "small boy who cries every time he falls down" and is still in the baby category. Social classes, similarly, have their characteristic stig mata, which constitute a set of cues for those in subordinate class groups. Indeed, people of superordinate status are popularly referred to as "big shots."

Like other signal points in the process of learning, the foregoing concept, that of imitation of superiors in social status, has its meaning in so far as business persuading is concerned. This meaning, moreover, must be viewed fairly generally. That is to say, this essential admonition makes its entrance: Show readers of persuasive communications that as a result of the desired action, their social status

31 Neal E. Miller and John Dollard, Social Learning and Imitation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 188.

32 Ibid., p. 189.
(or at least certain aspects of it) will acquire greater (upward) significance.  

Exceptions, quite naturally, do not invalidate generalized observations. Business writers can well take heed of the significance of the typical striving for a higher social level. This recognition should lead the way to persuasive copy which quite often suggests the rewards of status—not only the emotional realizations of recognition, praise, acceptance, etc., but also the more rational attainments of less laborious work and, in general, greater security.

Another example concerned with the imitation of superiors is afforded in the case of the industrial manager who feels it is his duty to persuade, through written communication, of the need for better housekeeping on the part of factory foremen. Although his request could be in the form of an order, he, being conscious of the advantages of a human-relations approach to employee-directed communication, may use a more indirect route into the feelings of his communicants. He may wish to develop his copy appeals along lines of the positive result of good housekeeping: the comparison of orderliness in upper-division work areas as compared with work areas on the supervisory management level. Since the foremen-communicants are members of management and quite

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33 This admonition should be compared with an exception cited earlier in this chapter, that of recognizing the many individuals who fall socially and economically within so-called lower ranks and who have no keen desires to leave such ranks and to gain entrance into higher ones. See pp. 49-50.
often seek advancement into middle-management ranks, this comparison may cause them to see how they can make their work areas more "like those of the big shots." Imitation has its satisfaction, according to Miller and Dollard. Conceivably, then, quite often the stimulus of imitation of superiors can provide a clear route toward desired action.

VI. INTELLIGENCE AS RELATED TO PERSUASION

As a concluding part of this chapter on the relationship of certain factors in the learning process to business persuasion, it is well to point out some findings about high intelligence and low intelligence. Stated rather succinctly,

1. Persons with high intelligence will tend--mainly because of their ability to draw valid inferences--to be more influenced than those with low intellectual ability when exposed to persuasive communications which rely primarily on impressive logical arguments.

2. Persons with high intelligence will tend--mainly because of their superior critical ability--to be less influenced than those with low intelligence when exposed to persuasive communications which rely primarily on unsupported generalities or false, illogical, irrelevant argumentation.34

Extending from the foregoing observations, one can see that logic plays an important role in the persuasion process. If communicatees are visualized as high-intelligence people (in the case of readers of technical volumes, for instance) the business persuader should quite often refrain from using highly colorful and overly developed emotional appeals in

his quest for action. Contrariwise, when writing to individuals whose intelligence may be something less than high (in the case of users of fad merchandise, for instance, or in the case perhaps of routine factory employees), the business writer must seriously consider the use of a different type of argumentation, that of emotional appeals.

It should be noted that Hovland, Janis, and Kelley refer to "unsupported generalities or false, illogical, irrelevant argumentation." This reference might bring forth an incorrect connotation. Although these authors have reference essentially to a certain tendency toward deceit, what they have said can easily be transferred to more meaningful words in terms of business persuasion. Instead of "unsupported generalities...." one who is thinking of the process of business persuasion might well substitute "keenly thought-out emotional appeals: pride, status, acquisitiveness, etc." This substitution, it is submitted, will not detract from their thesis; rather, it will mold it into a form which is quite directly applicable to business persuasion.

This chapter has advanced some basic tenets about the process of learning, and they have been extended into the area of business persuasion. The extensions, of course, were used primarily to enhance the meaning of the tenets themselves and were not intended to represent the sole extensions that can be made.
Whereas this chapter concerned the communicatee's reactions to persuasive stimuli from the vantage point of his learning process, the following chapter, Chapter III, will reveal how certain of his emotional responses (especially feelings of inadequacy) make their presence known as a part of susceptibility to persuasive written communication in business.
CHAPTER III

AN INSPECTION OF THE COMMUNICATEE'S EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO PERSUASIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS WITH EMPHASIS ON THE NATURE OF INADEQUACY FEELINGS AS RELATED TO SUSCEPTIBILITY TO PERSUASION

Whereas Chapter II, the preceding chapter, had as its purpose the revealing of certain key components in the process of learning as related to business persuasion through written communication, this chapter will present the results of an inquiry primarily into a major component of human nature which manifests itself in the process of persuasion: personal feelings of inadequacy or inferiority on the part of the communicatee. Too, certain social manifestations which have a bearing on feelings of inadequacy will be reviewed.

This isolation of topic emphasis concerning the emotional reactions of the communicatee to persuasive business stimuli can be justified from the standpoint of its being considered to be quite at the heart of susceptibility to persuasion. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley state this recognition in this way:

Yielding readily to the arguments and conclusions presented in a persuasive communication might be interpreted as a form of social compliance stemming from an inability to tolerate anticipated
disapproval for deviating from the opinions held by others. In any case, the clinical data suggest that persons who are chronically disturbed by feelings of shyness, personal inadequacy, and social inhibitions in coping with everyday situations are predisposed to change their opinions more readily than others when exposed to persuasive communications. A general hypothesis suggested by the particular constellation of personality factors involved is that persons with low self-esteem are predisposed to high persuasibility.¹

Since this dissertation has as one of its purposes the revealing of findings and hypotheses by behavioral scientists concerning the process of persuasion, aside from extremely pragmatic transferences stemming from each separate finding, this student anticipates that the conscientious communicator in business will find the contents of this chapter of value. In fact, it is submitted that the scholarly business writer should see the findings as significant alone (without transferences to business communication), since he should be desirous of having some understanding of the theory behind persuasion practice.

This chapter is relatively narrow in scope. This approach is based on this student's conviction that only through such isolation of topic emphasis can an inquiry into the emotional structure of the communicatee be meaningful. If the broad area of emotions as related to persuasive stimuli were discussed, quite possibly the result would be rather unwieldy and, hence, of limited value in the light of this paper's intent.

¹Ibid., p. 187.
Many behaviorists have conducted research on susceptibility to persuasion, and much of this research has dealt with the relationship of feelings of inadequacy\(^2\) and persuasibility. The desire to "belong," a rather elemental human desire, is directly related to the individual's feeling of inadequacy; indeed, the now-rather-trite, yet still meaningful, saying "No man is an island unto himself" plays its role. In fact, Barry reports that as long ago as 1931, a test was devised which shows that group members tend to be influenced in their judgments by knowledge of majority opinion.\(^3\)

More recent research by Janis and his contemporaries in the area of personality correlates of susceptibility to persuasion produced these two general hypotheses: (1) persons with low self-esteem tend to be more readily influenced than others; and (2) persons with acute symptoms of neurotic anxiety tend to be more resistant than others.\(^4\)

The first hypothesis, just mentioned, can be explained in a number of ways. The relationship between low self-esteem and high persuasibility suggests, for instance,

\(^2\)The terms "inadequacy" and "inferiority" will be used interchangeably.

\(^3\)Herbert Barry, Jr., "A Test for Negativism and Compliance," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXV (January-March, 1931), 373.

that excessive fear of social disapproval might result in strong facilitating motivations with regard to acceptance of persuasive communications. Thus, persons who are rather lacking in a sense of personal adequacy or well-being may have an exceptionally strong need for approval. When these individuals realize that their opinions are not in accord with those which someone else feels or believes, often they fail to rely upon their own judgments because of an inability to tolerate anticipated disapproval. Janis phrases this recognition in this way:

They may tend to be indiscriminately influenced by anticipations of approval from the communicator or from others who are assumed to share his point of view. Excessive compliance might therefore be a compensatory mechanism which leads to chameleon-like changes in response to any new source of persuasive influence. Thus, the compliance manifested by people with low self-esteem might be a defensive form of behavior that permits the individual to agree with everyone in an attempt to guarantee that nobody will be displeased with him.⁵

In this discussion, extreme cases are being considered for purposes of subject isolation. The concept of self-esteem is rather akin to the concept of introversion-extroversion: very few people can qualify for placement at either end of the scale. However, it is submitted that feelings of inferiority are quite prevalent and are contained within everyone's personality make-up to a varying extent. Thus such feelings are of such potency to deserve keen

⁵Ibid., pp. 515-516.
attention in any discussion concerned with emotional reactions of communicatees to persuasive stimuli, and, in this case, such reactions within a business environment.

Although Janis' second hypothesis is not directly applicable to business persuasion, as such, his explanation of its existence and its possible causes should be of some interest to the alert business communicator:

Turning now to the second hypothesis, it should be noted that the observed relationship between acute neurotic symptoms and persuasibility seem consistent with the descriptions of ideological rigidity and inflexibility reported in clinical studies of psychoneurotics. Hoch, for example, asserts that the neurotic individual lacks elasticity in coping with internal and external situations because, "like an intractable pain experience," the impact of emotional conflicts is so dominant that he is unable to throw it off. Newcomb has called attention to the fact that despite wide divergences in theory and technique, practically all schools of psychotherapy agree that attitudes cannot be changed unless the neurotic's defensiveness is reduced. It seems probable that the rigid defensiveness of psychoneurotic personalities underlies their excessive resistance to attitude change.6

I. A SURFACE EXAMINATION OF FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY

The time-worn term "inferiority complex" takes on a rather negative connotation, no matter how the subject is viewed. Furthermore, in thinking of the process of persuasion as related to written business communication, the temptation to use the term abundantly in discussing personality characteristics which suggest a relatively keen susceptibility to persuasion is most real.

6Ibid., p. 516.
Who has the right, from the standpoint of education and training, to discuss feelings of inferiority intelligently? According to Brachfeld, feelings of inferiority belong to psychology and more particularly to pathological psychology. 7

In fact, according to Brachfeld, the field is so very dominated by one certain type of psychologists that other types of behaviorists scorn to interest themselves in the subject. Paradoxically enough, behaviorists often compile learned treatises concerned with an investigation of human nature without once mentioning the concept of inferiority feelings, a condition which quite often is discussed in the biographies of famous men. 8

Naturally, inferiority, as such, is quite different from feelings of inferiority. The pure concept of inferiority, of course, escapes precise identification because it must include a value judgment. No one or no concept can, on its own merit, be justly concluded as inferior. Yet the feelings of inferiority (or inadequacy) can be evaluated independently. That is to say, the one who is the prey of such feelings can be the subject of analysis in a quest for determining the cause.

8 Ibid.
Typically, one who suffers from feelings of inferiority has taken the right to judge himself and to compare his personal make-up (physical, emotional, intellectual, etc.) with others. This comparison leads oftentimes to an exaggerated negative estimate of himself; thus, he sees himself in a light which often no one else might see. Yet this light to him is most real.

Brachfeld cites a case in point concerning how the feeling of inferiority was used in sales promotion:

In a number of Paris newspapers we once saw a curious advertisement accompanied by a series of photographs. The first of these represented the tiny figure of a man standing before three enormous male figures talking to each other; the picture gave an almost surrealist impression of the distress one feels at being small and insignificant. The second photograph represented the same little man kneeling before a gigantic female figure of irreproachable elegance, like Gulliver before the giant daughter of Brobdingnag. In the third photograph the same homunculus, standing on a gigantic basin, stretches his arms towards a bottle of the Lotion X, the sale of which these faked photographs are designed to promote. The last picture shows us our diminutive hero after he has used the lotion in question. This time it is he who is the giant. He stands there with his hands in his pockets, looking down with smiling satisfaction at the former giants and giantesses, who are now reduced to the size of dwarfs.9

The foregoing illustration gets quite to the heart of what inferiority feelings are. The sufferer is looking for a panacea, yet often realizing all the while the futility of his quest. Why should the little man in the preceding illustration feel inadequate? In answering this question,

9Ibid., p. 9.
one would of necessity step into discussions of social orders, folkways, mores, and the like.\textsuperscript{10}

The distinction between "feelings" and "complex" of inferiority is not an absolute one. Often the terms are used interchangeably, although the word "complex" often suggests a deeper problem than "feeling" or "feelings" does. The state, no matter its exact labeling, conditions a human being impressively:

It "falsifies" the ego and impairs the latter's "authenticity." It also causes a decline in sociability, though in its turn it will be prolonged and aggravated by social factors, on the pattern of the "vicious spiral." It is a malady of being, not of having. On the one hand, it limits the radius of activity and inhibits the subject's will; but on the other hand it may, through the paradoxical operation of compensation and over-compensation, drive the subject to pseudo-activity, i.e., to the nervous agitation which masquerades as action. Thus the feeling of inferiority produces in the first place discouragement, and in the second, by ricochet, it may lead to fresh encouragement.\textsuperscript{11}

The spiraling effect of discouragement and encouragement, though rather paradoxical on the surface at least, suggests the need for the quality of encouragement in persuasive business communication, particularly that concerned with sales promotion. Although such encouragement can take on qualities of deception at times, nevertheless such

\textsuperscript{10}It should be noted that the concept of "bigness" has in most cultures been of more positive significance than "smallness," particularly with respect to the qualities of vitality and verity.

\textsuperscript{11}Brachfeld, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 291.
reassurance can produce rather positive results in terms of communicatee action.

The sales writer who pictures dramatically a brighter tomorrow for the user of his product or service is engaging in encouragement. Emphasis in the sales-promotion copy, thus, should be developed in terms of a promise. Yet this promise, the communicatees realize, is an illusive thing and certainly of no contractual nature. At the same time, however, the semi-promise of a "lovlier you" or a "more secure family unit" or "more wholesome meals" presents encouragement and quite often leads to communicator-desired action.

The problem of possible deception, as already mentioned, is an issue with which each business communicator who writes sales-type copy particularly must reckon. His decision will, of necessity, be based greatly on his own estimate of what constitutes forthright persuasion and what does not. For instance, is a business persuader being ethical or unethical when he presents an appeal of youthful beauty to a selected audience made up of middle-age housewives? Is the promoter presenting a stimulus about a desirable condition to which the communicatees should not aspire because of the futility of such aspiration? Since the answers to these questions lie within the area of ethics, naturally they are open to many interpretations and countless discussions. Indeed, they cannot be answered succinctly.
II. THE "ASSUMPTIVE WORLD" CONCEPT AS RELATED TO
SUSCEPTIBILITY TO PERSUASION

Every human being's actions are governed by his
assumptions about the environment in which he lives. These
assumptions are the result of a continuum of experiences.
Through trial and error, through recognition of cause and
effect, and through frustration at the frequent lack of con-
sistency in action and result, an individual develops his
so-called "assumptive world."

Insecurity (a major result of feelings of inferiority
or inadequacy) and an unorthodox or unrealistic assumptive
world are partners. In other words, the individual who
suffers from feelings of inferiority governs his activities
according to certain less-than-true assumptions about his
environment.

Frank, in his tome Persuasion and Healing: A Compar­
tive Study of Psychotherapy, phrases a description of one's
assumptive world in these words:

In order to be able to function at all, everyone
must impose an order and regularity on the welter of
experiences impinging upon him. To do this, he devel­
ops out of his personal experiences a set of more or
less implicit assumptions about the nature of the
world in which he lives, which enables him to predict
the behavior of others and the outcome of his own
actions. The totality of each person's assumptions
may be conveniently termed his "assumptive world."

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12Jerome D. Frank, Persuasion and Healing: A Compar­
tive Study of Psychotherapy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins
In severe cases, one's assumptive world may be so very unhealthy to his well-being that psychotherapy is necessary. The task of the therapist, thus, becomes one of helping the patient to repattern his basic assumptions. Often these assumptions are so deeply rooted that a revamping of them is quite difficult if not impossible. However, the desire on the part of the patient to see the world differently is perhaps the most meaningful aspect in the curative process. If the patient will recognize that his assumptions are based perhaps on wrong information or rather isolated and unusual happenings (contrary to the essential spirit of the world and its ways), then he may gain more insight and eventually new attitudes and assumptions may find their way into his personality structure.

In less severe cases, of course, or in cases which are not exposed to treatment, people still act according to the frames of reference which their lives have developed for them. Quite often, feelings of inferiority, with which this chapter is especially concerned, are the result of early childhood conditioning. This conditioning is, quite naturally, often a non-intentional process, i.e., parents, for instance, do not intentionally work at making their children feel unloved, rejected, etc. Instead, the conditioning is the result of an individual's reactions to the world about him. In addition, the individual's innate personality characteristics, such as extroversion, introversion, emotionalism,
and the like, play their respective roles. A sense of a lack of acceptance or a misunderstanding of what constitutes acceptance, therefore, can well lead to a feeling of being something less than desirable and, hence, inferior.

Inferiority feelings often lead to a sense of dependency on others. The individual conceives of the opinions of others (outside of his own disturbed being) as of impressive value. Frank says:

A person's feelings of dependency on others may spring from his perception of them as possessing information that would be useful to him, or as being able to harm or help him in a variety of ways. Perceived power to harm readily induces outward conformity to escape reprisal, but at the same time generates feelings such as resentment, which may impede genuine acceptance of the power figure's goals or ideas. Perceived power to help seems to be a particularly potent source of influence. Through engendering hope, it directly improves the perceiver's sense of well-being, and heightens his self-confidence, increasing his willingness to modify his attitudes and behavior. At the same time it strengthens his sense of dependence without directly stirring up conflicting emotions.13

The preceding discussion about one's assumptive world and how it relates to feelings of inadequacy are in accord with the basic views of such feelings discussed in the first part of this chapter. Indeed, Frank's views point out quite vividly, and support the original thesis, of how major a role the presentation of hope and encouragement plays in persuasive communication in business. The business communicator who presents rather invitingly goods and services which aid

13Ibid., p. 34.
the communicatee in his estimate of himself is extending a beneficial communication to the recipient.

Specific cases in point include the elemental phraseology and emotional appeals used in communicating about cosmetics, fashion apparel, and other appointments which have as their main purpose the enhancement of the attractiveness of the individual. Advertising copy writers recognize how important this quality of "enhancement of the estimate of oneself" is in promoting the sale of goods and services. For instance, Hoke, in his booklet directed to direct-mail users, gives this advice:

People want personal adequacy. People want bigger houses, bigger cars, a better education; they will join exclusive clubs . . . because they want to feel adequate. How does your product or service satisfy that particular urge?14

III. SELECTED FACTORS OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL MANIFESTATIONS RELATED TO SUSCEPTIBILITY TO PERSUASION

Now that a glance at the concept of feelings of inadequacy has been made, a fairly careful dissecting of some of the key personality characteristics of individuals who suffer with such feelings and certain social manifestations is warranted. Each of the components which is reviewed in this section lends itself to transferences to persuasive written communication in business. Of course, the transferences

that are made do not represent the sole extensions; rather, they are presented in order to make the qualities discussed more precise and meaningful.

The factors revealed in this section are presented in the light of a theory popularly held by behaviorists. This theory concerns the concept of the "persuadable individual." For example, at one time Janis and Field questioned whether there is any general tendency for opinion changes on unrelated topics (as in business communication) to be associated. They concluded from their research that "the results support the hypothesis that there is a general factor in persuasibility; they clearly indicate that the predisposition to change one's opinions is not wholly specific to the topic or subject matter of the persuasive communications to which one is exposed."15

A similar view is expressed by the authors, including Janis and Field, of Personality and Persuasibility: "There is evidence that persuasibility exists as a 'content-free' factor; that is, it exists independently of the subject matter or appeals presented in any particular persuasive communication."16

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Because behavioral research indicates the presence of persuasibility as a content-free factor, the following components should indicate the elemental nature of certain personality characteristics of the inferiority-feeling communicatee and of other social conditions which affect individuals in terms of facilitating the development of such feelings.

**Compensation**

Menninger and Leaf refer to the concept of compensation as "a mechanism that the Ego uses to defend itself against anxiety caused by a feeling of insecurity, by making extra effort in an area of real or fancied weakness."\(^{17}\)

These same authors go ahead to discuss some of the manifestations of compensation: unusual ambition, loudness, excessive determination, and often a rather keen acquisitiveness. Quite often, Menninger and Leaf suggest, the one who compensates is unaware of why he does what he does. For instance, the father who pays considerably more attention to his business than he pays to his children may compensate by giving his children unusually high allowances and expensive gifts, and yet not have an insight into his actions.

The concept of compensation, it can readily be seen, is functional in thinking of business persuasion through written communication. The use of compensation overtones in persuasive

writing does not, of course, suggest a razor-sharp statement as to how a communicatee can compensate by following the action which the communicator wants. Rather, through the use of an indirect approach into the communicatee's subconscious, the business writer can develop his appeal. For instance, in writing sales copy about height-increasing shoes, the writer does well to develop such qualities as "gaining attention," "being a real man," and "attaining that raise in salary" because of greater stature.

Countless illustrations present themselves in discussing the role of the emotional appeal of compensation in persuasive communication. Rather than include a sizeable listing of such illustrations, it might be said instead that any product or service which has a direct effect (or is intended to have a direct effect) upon what an individual thinks of himself or of what he wants others to think of him\textsuperscript{18} lends itself to this persuasion technique.

Sales writing probably makes greater use of compensation as a persuasion technique than do other business-writing types. However, extensions to the activities of writing business letters and reports can also be quite meaningfully made. For example, the manager who is called

\textsuperscript{18}Mention should be made that some psychologists differentiate between an individual's concept of himself and his concept of how others evaluate him. For instance, it is conceivable that a person could fancy himself as something less than keenly intelligent and yet, at the same time, believe that others consider him quite alert.
upon to write a memorandum to employees about a reversal in the business and, consequently, the necessity of eliminating part of the overtime (time-and-a-half payment) which the employees have been enjoying might very well develop within his written communication emotionally phrased references to some of the key fringe benefits: high reputation of the company (employee identification desire) and other selected modes of compensation for the employees affected. By presenting to them a means of rationalization, they are better equipped to justify in their own minds remaining with the company.

**Anxiety**

Janis and Feshbach, in a 1954 study, sought to determine the relationship between persuasive communications which contain strong fear- and anxiety-arousing stimuli and the effect of such stimuli upon people with varying anxiety patterns. It was concluded from the study that people with high-anxiety personalities (those rather insecure-feeling individuals) often do not react strongly to fear-arousing persuasive communications. Interestingly enough, on the other hand when a milder form of persuasion is presented, these same individuals are likely to react strongly because of facilitating responses:

The findings are consistent with the assumption that interfering responses predominate only when the anxiety drive is at a relatively high strength and that facilitating responses may predominate at lower drive levels. According to this assumption, a mild fear appeal could sometimes result in a comparatively greater amount of attitude change on the part of high-anxiety individuals . . . . When a very weak appeal
is used such that it has very little or no emotional
effect on most people in the audience, the high-
xiety individual, by virtue of his low threshold of
xiety arousal, would nevertheless experience at
least a slight increase in anxiety drive. If his
drive strength remains at a comparatively low level,
his responses would tend to be of a facilitating
character. In other words, he may become more strongly
motivated than the others to conform to the communicat-
or's recommendation because he is somewhat more dis-
turbed about what will happen if he rejects them,
although not disturbed to the point where interfering
responses predominate over facilitating ones.\textsuperscript{19}

In the area of oral persuasion, the foregoing research
finding is evident and is practiced considerably. For in-
stance, when a fire occurs within a structure containing a
sizable number of people, the leader in the situation (either
the formal leader or the indigenous leader), if he seriously
considers the gravity of the situation, gives his persuasive
order concerning the best way to leave the fire-threatened
area in calm, though precise, tones. The anxiety of the
individuals whom he is attempting to influence prevents him
from presenting the fear-arousing communication in a strongly
emotional way.

This same concept, that of anxiety and its reactions to
persuasive communication, can be applied to written business
communication, although evidence may suggest that it is not
practiced as greatly as in the case of oral urging. When a
business communicator realizes, through visualization of his

\textsuperscript{19}Irving L. Janis and S. A. Feshbach, "Personality Dif-
ferences Associated with Responsiveness to Fear-arousing
Communications," \textit{Journal of Personality}, XXIII (December,
1954), 164-165.
audience, that his communicatees are likely to be quite anxious, he should take great care in making certain that his persuasive communication is one of moderate or low anxiety.

For instance, a case might be made for the way a business executive should attempt to persuade employees of the worth-whileness of changing their job locations in the case of a plant shutdown. Normally, when a plant is to be closed and moved to another location (in another state, for instance) the informal communication channels (the so-called grapevine) causes employees to become quite anxious about the impending change, and possibly the information about the change becomes somewhat exaggerated and inaccurate. Thus, when the persuasive communication concerning management's desire to maintain present employees but in a different location is finally presented, it should be worded appealingly yet somewhat casually. This hypothesis is, quite naturally, subject to investigation. However, based on the findings just cited and other similar examples in the literature of the behavioral sciences, there is reason to believe that such investigating would be worth while for the business communicator to consider.

Authoritarianism

Although the concept of authoritarianism deals greatly with the relationship between the communicatee and the communicator and, hence, might well be included in Chapter IV,
which concerns the influence of the communicator in business persuasion, inclusion in the present chapter is warranted from the standpoint of its being considered a personality trait which is oftentimes a part of the personality make-up of the "persuadable" individual.

Authoritarianism, as conceived by behavioral scientists, refers to the degree to which people place confidence in the opinions of others who, because of post or designation of a kind, seem to be authorities. Quite naturally, communicatees cannot conveniently be placed at one or the other of the poles on an authoritarianism rating scale. Instead, it is submitted that most communicatees, by the nature of their views concerning so-called authorities, would be categorized somewhere between the two extremes.

For the purposes of a 1955 study made by Wagman, persuasive arguments were presented in two ways: (1) authoritarian-like (copious quotations by "authorities") in a persuasive communication; and (2) non-authoritarian-like (statements of views without references to the sources of such views). The experiment dealt principally with "information about the variable attitudes taken by different cultures toward the same behaviors, an examination of the adjutative value of current beliefs, and a review of the progress of the American Negro." 20

The experimental results, which are of some consequence in relation to persuasive written communication in business, are as follows:

1. The prediction that "under exposure to information techniques aimed at cognitive restructuring, relatively non-authoritarian as compared with relatively authoritarian personalities will show more attitude change (in the direction of the information content)" is demonstrated, with respect to expected direction, for three of the four attitude change measures. For the authoritarian subjects, attitude change opposite to that intended occurs (boomerang effect).

2. The prediction that "under an authoritarian suggestion urging reduction of prejudice toward Negroes, relatively authoritarian personalities as compared with relatively non-authoritarian personalities will show more suggestion acceptance" is confirmed in part . . .

3. The prediction that "under an authoritarian suggestion urging intensification of prejudice toward Negroes, relatively authoritarian as compared with relatively non-authoritarian personalities will show more suggestion acceptance" is demonstrated, with respect to expected duration . . . . In addition, relatively non-authoritarian subjects react in a boomerang fashion.21

Of course, the researchers who dealt with the preceding experiment administered appropriate tests to determine the degree to which the subjects were of an authoritarian personality.

The three findings, which verify partly the hypotheses held by the behaviorists before the study began, suggest that the business communicator would do well to include in his audience-study process (prior to writing) consideration

21Ibid., p. 23.
of the degree of authoritarianism of the communicatees concerned. Of course, such information is rather difficult to determine. However, certain clues do exist. In the area of sales writing, for instance, a careful comparison of advertisements which included testimonials by "authorities" (rather loosely defined) and advertisements which had a quite opposite spirit to their central selling themes might be compared. If each advertisement called for the communicatee to respond in some way (coupon action, for instance), then it might be concluded that those who answered the "authority" advertisements might be considered more authoritarian-like than the individuals who responded to the other appeal used in the experiment. Consequently, then, in answering the authoritarianists, further reference to authorities could be made in the quest for communicator-desired action.

Other examples present themselves. In writing business reports aimed at top-management members, for example, the business communicator might consider the use of rather abundant secondary sources of information in reports which normally deal mainly with internal data. If the communicator determines that the reader-manager is greatly impressed by copious references to "authorities," the writer can watch for meaningful cross transferences from primary data to secondary sources and back again.

Although the concept of authoritarianism is applicable to business persuasion through written communication, it is
admitted that the determination of authoritarian personalities cannot be reduced to a quite reliable quantitative measurement.

Aggressiveness

Weiss and Fine report in a 1955 article in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* that "given proper congruence between the communication appeal and personality predispositions, high aggressives can be changed in opinion, and significantly more so, than low aggressives." Work by certain other behaviorists (Janis, Hovland, Field, Linton, Graham, Cohen, Rife, Abelson, Lesser, and King) suggests, however, that the quality of aggressiveness is rather often a personal reflection on the part of the individual who has low self-esteem. "Many subjects who rate themselves low on self-esteem may have a general tendency toward self-derogation and therefore also rate themselves high on aggressiveness." Thus, there is reason to doubt the complete and universal validity of Weiss and Fine's finding.

If aggressive individuals are more susceptible to persuasion than non-aggressives are (further behavioral research will probably resolve this slight conflict), it might be

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temporarily assumed that the business communicator who seeks to determine the degree of aggressiveness in his communicat-ees might be facilitating the process of persuasion in which he is engaged. Like the concept of authoritarianism, however, the concept of aggressiveness is quite illusive and, thus, escapes test-tube analysis. However, if the communicator can see certain traces of aggression in his audience (possibly one might correlate traces of aggression and extroversion), then he might plan his persuading in terms of his audience being, at the onset, somewhat susceptible to persuasive efforts. Therefore, it is conceivable that the communicator's task might be less difficult if the determination of communicatee aggressiveness is accomplished.

Inner- and Other-directed Attitudes

Giving support, through the use of a somewhat similar personality consideration, to Weiss and Fine's finding concerning the correlation between aggressiveness and persuasibility is a finding advanced by Linton and Graham and reported in Personality and Persuasibility. Inner-direction is defined as a value system stressing personal goals and standards as against other-direction, which places more emphasis on group conformity and adaptation. According to the study reported in the just-mentioned publication, "a significant positive correlation was found between degree of other-direction and degree of persuasibility."24

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24Ibid., p. 236.
One can readily see how the concept of other-direction is a part of personal insecurity as it makes its existence known in most cases. The insecure person (used here in the sense of that individual who feels insecure because of feelings of inadequacy) has great need for group acceptance and, thus, is other-directed. Because he is greatly desirous of acceptance (and therefore, to him, an elevation of the concept which he holds of himself), he may often be quite acquisitive.

This personality characteristic, that of inner- and other-directed attitudes, blends in interestingly and adequately with other concepts just discussed, particularly those of authoritarianism and aggressiveness. Because the blending is so very thorough, it might be assumed that when the business communicator determines his audience's degree of authoritarianism and aggressiveness, he will, as a by-product, so to speak, also determine its measure of inner- and other-direction in attitude formation. The three qualities should mesh neatly. It seems unlikely, for instance, that a business communicator, in his audience analysis prior to communicating, would find his communicatees to be authoritarianists, aggressives, and inner-directed. Rather, the three traits, by their nature, suggest logical organization in personality types.

Social Isolation

A hypothesis concerning the relationship of social isolation and persuasibility has been advanced in the
According to this hypothesis, social isolation correlates positively with persuasibility. This assertion is based on an experiment which indicated that such social isolation of a human being from his peers accentuated an agreement-seeking process and, in turn, led to greater persuasibility.  

Although the business communicator has little, if any, influence on his communicatees' social arrangement from the standpoint of integration or isolation, he can gauge his persuasion efforts, part way at least, according to an inspection of this criterion. For example, research might well indicate, based on this hypothesis of social isolation, that communicatees in sparsely populated areas, under certain conditions, are more susceptible to persuasion than those who live in densely populated sectors.

Another possible adaptation of this hypothesis lies in the area of direct-mail advertising. If a sales writer made certain that a selected direct-mail piece aimed at the consumer (as opposed to the businessman) arrived at a time when the consumer-communicatee was somewhat separated from his peers, an interesting experiment would be conducted. Even though this experiment, because of mitigating factors, might not bear out the hypothesis of social isolation, the hypothesis itself certainly suggests the most beneficial

\[25 \text{Ibid.}\]
aspect of direct-mail advertising: personalization, its value as a class medium (as opposed to a mass medium).

**Richness of Fantasy**

It has been postulated that a relation exists between richness of fantasy and persuasibility on the theory that a major mediating mechanism in attitude change is the anticipation of rewards and punishments explicitly or implicitly conveyed by the communicator. Individuals with a rich fantasy life would presumably, therefore, have greater facility than others in imagining these anticipated rewards.26

Since a rich fantasy life often suggests the individual's need for daydreaming, one can quite readily realize the relationship between such fantasy activity and insecurity. Based on the hypotheses developed in this section of the dissertation, it is assumed, and rightly so, it is felt, that the more secure (rather lacking in feelings of inferiority) a person is, the greater the possibility of his fantasy life being something less than "rich."

Again the business communicator's duty in audience visualization comes into play. Again, it is seen that the procedure which he might follow in determining his communicатees' varying degrees of fantasy living is quite difficult to define. However, when the business communicator is in

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26 *ibid.*, p. 237.
close proximity to his audience (as is often the case in report-writing situations), he does have an opportunity to note, through informal inspection, the presence, intermediate-degree presence, or absence of this quality in his communi-catee(s). Thus, should he find that his communication recipients are prone to engage in forms of fantasy living, he might well assume that the more vivid the word painting (the lower the degree of abstraction, for instance) in report writing, the more susceptible his audience would be to persuasion. Of course, persuasion in report writing suggests not colorful wording from the standpoint of keenly developed emotional appeals for action, but, rather, precise terminology and careful organization and documentation (in the case of secondary-source references).

Sex Differences

Most behavioral scientists advance that women tend to be more susceptible to persuasion than men. Schutte and Steinberg, for instance, commenting on the relationship of insecurity and persuasibility, say this:

Psychologists . . . tell us that men who have a poor self-image (that is, men whose self-esteem is low) tend to be more easily persuaded than those who have a strongly favorable self-image. . . . The difference here between men and women seems to be a result of the pressures of our culture, which allow women less latitude in their responses than men—particularly in their responses to people in positions of prestige or authority. Perhaps for the same reason
women on the average tend to be more susceptible to persuasion than men.\textsuperscript{27}

A study among a group of girls and boys by three research teams bears out substantially the same conclusion:

It has been suggested that personality differences may serve as indicators of levels of persuasibility in boys since the cultural sex role for boys is less definitive in prescribing how to react to persuasive influences. However, the culture seems to demand of girls greater acquiescence in relation to prestigious sources of information and a pattern of frictionless social relationships, with the result that girls on the whole are more susceptible to influence regardless of their personality traits. Especially under conditions of high parental domination, girls may feel less able to act out their rebellious feelings than boys, a difference which carries over into the communication situation, where rejection of suggestions from high-prestige sources would constitute a form of rebellion.\textsuperscript{28}

Since fairly universal agreement exists that women are more susceptible to persuasion than are men, the astute business communicator should well make use of this condition. In his persuasive efforts, he can put into effect stronger appeals when writing to men than when writing to a female audience. By stronger appeals is meant more "reason why" copy and, perhaps, more logic, as opposed to emotionalism. This is not to say, of course, that men are not emotional in make-up and hence, are not susceptible to emotional appeals; rather, it is to say that many men consider themselves as logical beings and, hence, may be prone to greater persuasion.


susceptibility when emotional appeals are supported by certain rational ones.

**Developmental Factors**

Another personality quality of communicatees who are rather susceptible to persuasion is that of certain developmental factors. For instance, these two relationships are postulated between the degree of parental control and the level of persuasibility in the child:

1. Low firmness of parental control (where firm control is defined as the reinstatement of a parental demand once the child has expressed disagreement) tends to decrease persuasibility. Firmness of control, therefore, should correlate positively with persuasibility.

2. The greater the frequency of parental control attempts, the higher the relationship between firmness of control and persuasibility.\(^{29}\)

As in the case of social isolation already discussed in this section, personality developmental factors are beyond the control of the business communicator. However, if the communicator can infer from communicatee activity that his rearing was rather tightly controlled, he might also infer that this particular communicatee may be more susceptible to persuasive efforts than one would be whose upbringing was less disciplined. This is to say, of course, that a determination by the communicator of the intensity of this personality characteristic should direct the writer in the degree of emotionalism, documentation, argumentation

\(^{29}\text{Ibid.}, p. 241.\)
and other persuasive-writing qualities which he would want to incorporate in his persuasive communication, no matter the business type.

Reactions to Propaganda (Persuasion) When Communicatees Know the Intention of Communication

The reaction of communicatees to communication efforts when they know beforehand the intention of such efforts gets quite to the heart of persuasion. One might think, for instance, that communicatees, generally speaking, would resist persuasive efforts greatly when they know the intent of such efforts. However, research with certain elements of propaganda-communicatee\textsuperscript{30} relations does not bear out this suspicion.

Collier, commenting on this relationship in an issue of the \textit{Journal of Social Psychology}, advances the following:

\begin{quote}
Among the numerous assumptions about the conditions under which the effectiveness of propaganda is increased or decreased are two which are closely related. The first is that if an individual or group is unaware of the nature and intent of the propaganda the chances are high for positive effects; the second is the converse of the first, namely, if the individual or group is clearly aware of the nature and intent of the propaganda and has techniques for analyzing it, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30}Propaganda, as used here, does not consider its usually conceived negative character. Instead, it is considered to be any organized effort to spread particular doctrines, information, etc. and, thus, would come within the scope of business persuasion efforts.
chances for positive effects are not only very low but negative effects may result.\textsuperscript{31}

This same author-researcher goes ahead to point out, however, that test results indicate that the originally held understanding does not hold true:

The following two closely related conclusions seem evident from the data:

1. Attitudes of individuals who are well-informed regarding the character and purpose of propaganda and who may at the same time approach it analytically can, nevertheless, be positively influenced by the material studied.

2. The inhibitory quality of the kind of insight with which these subjects approached the propaganda has apparently been overrated in the past.\textsuperscript{32}

These two preceding findings point out that persuasive efforts can and often are rewarding (resulting in positive action by the communicatees involved) even though the communicatees involved know the intention of the communication effort. Although Collier's study dealt with propaganda (as opposed to business persuasion, for instance), transferences to the area of written communication in business are possible.

It might be held that business communicators' duties can rather often be positively productive even in cases in which the communicators feel rather certain that the communicatees know their intention. For example, a personnel


\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 16.
division (staff area) report writer within an industrial organization in submitting a recommendation report to management members may feel that his readers will discount some of his enthusiasm for better personnel practices as a solution to the problem concerned because of the writer's placement in the organization. Collier's finding, however, should part way, at least, convince such a business communicator that his audience, though somewhat wise to the writer's intent, is nevertheless susceptible to well-developed persuasive efforts.

The intent of Chapter III has been to present some key issues involved in the apparent link between feelings of inferiority, certain social manifestations bearing on the essential aspects of such feelings, and persuasion susceptibility. The relation of the findings advanced to written business communication has been shown through the use of selected examples. These examples were included principally in order to make the findings gleaned from the printed works of behavioral scientists quite meaningful. They were not included to suggest the sole means of transfer in each case. It should be emphasized once more that the scholarly business communicator should see the findings as significant alone, since he should be desirous of having some understanding of the theory behind persuasion practice.
Chapter IV, the following chapter, will provide an insight into some of the roles which the communicator, especially the business communicator, plays in the process of persuasion through written communication.
CHAPTER IV

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME QUALITIES OF THE COMMUNICATOR
IN THE PROCESS OF PERSUASION WITH REFERENCE TO
WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

In the process of persuasion, the ultimate effect of
the attempt is, of course, governed by numerous factors.
Up to the present point in this dissertation, inquiries
into several of the key factors have been made. This chap­
ter will further this exploration.

According to behaviorists who have concerned themselves
with the nature of persuasion as a social phenomenon, per-
suasibility, as such, is dependent not only upon the subject
matter of the persuasive communication and the emotional
reactions of the communicatee to the persuasive stimulus,
but also upon how the communicatee perceives the communica­
tor. In other words, the "credibility" of the communicator--
his intent as perceived by the communicatee, his post or
business designation, his reputation (as well as that of the
organization which he represents)--plays a cardinal role in
the persuasion process. Indeed, the composite role of the
communicator is of significant proportions.
I. KEY ASPECTS OF THE COMMUNICATOR'S ROLE

IN THE PROCESS OF PERSUASION

Behavioral findings reveal that communicatees are greatly influenced by the communicator as an individual, aside from the communication he creates. In fact, studies have rather pointedly suggested that when a communication's originator is left unknown by the communicatees, the positive results (communicator-desired action) are less than adequate. However, when personal identity of the communicator is disclosed, the rate of communicatee yielding is increased.¹

Communicator Credibility

As has been stated, persuasibility is the result of many factors in the communicator-communicatee relationship in a persuasion situation. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, in their studies of the persuasion process, paid attention to the communicator and his functions:

An important factor influencing the effectiveness of a communication is the person or group perceived as originating the communication—and the clues provided as to the trustworthiness, intentions, and affiliations of this source. In extreme instances, merely perceiving a particular source as advocating the new opinion will be sufficient to induce acceptance. This is generally referred to as "prestige suggestion." In most of the persuasive communications in daily life, however, the communication includes auxiliary contents, such as appeals and arguments, which operate as incentives for inducing opinion change. In such instances, the nature

of the source may affect the way in which the audience responds to these auxiliary incentives. The aspects of the problem with which our investigations have been concerned are the effects of variations in the trustworthiness and expertness of the communicator on the recipient's evaluation of the presentation and on their acceptance of the position advocated by the communicator.²

These same author-researchers proceed to advance the following results of a study concerned with high-credibility and low-credibility sources of persuasive information:

(1) Communications attributed to low-credibility sources tended to be considered more biased and unfair in presentation than identical ones attributed to high-credibility sources.

(2) High credibility sources had a substantially greater immediate effect on the audience's opinions than low-credibility sources.

(3) The effects of opinion were not the result of differences in the amount of attention or comprehension, since information tests reveal equally good learning of what was said regardless of the communicator; variations in source credibility seem to influence primarily the audience's motivation to accept the conclusions advocated.

(4) The positive effect of the high-credibility sources and the negative effect of the low-credibility sources tended to disappear after a period of several weeks.³

Probably the most interesting and revealing finding is the fourth one in the preceding listing. If both positive and negative effects tend to "disappear" (at least to diminish somewhat) after several weeks, then the business communicator who is deemed a high-credibility source and

³Ibid., pp. 269-270.
who attempts to influence productively should make optimum use of the light in which his communicatees perceive him. It is submitted that he should dwell heavily in his persuasive efforts upon certain elements of prestige and that his efforts should be continuous as opposed to spasmodic. For instance, the communicator who is charged with the responsibility of writing sales copy for a product or service which has a national reputation of high quality (marketing research bears out that certain products do enjoy such a reputation), might develop within his appeals the concept of business age and maturity, national reputation, and the like. Actually, such efforts tend to border on institutional advertising; yet this particular type of institutional sales-promotional effort might tend to increase communicatee action more in the case of high-credibility communicators than would strictly product or service copy. Quite naturally, using any one persuasive theme to an excess can be something less than rewarding; however, making optimum and constant use of a good reputation should lead to desirable ends.

A problem for the routine business writer arises in this connection. In the case of a persuasive communicator who deals with several products and/or services (in the case of a small retail outlet, for instance), the determination of the degree of credibility which the message recipients place on the communicator involved may be rather vexing to
determine. Certain clues do exist, however. A quick check on such factors as (1) returned merchandise, (2) the trend in claims and adjustments in the retail store, (3) the trend in sales, (4) the responses to various past advertising efforts, and other factors should reveal somewhat the feelings of the store's customers about the store itself. Of course, the larger the business institution is, the more definite information the management will have concerning its "image." When the business communicator has a fairly clear understanding of the image, he can gauge his efforts accordingly.

Some studies connected with message-originator credibility have been essentially concerned with the relationship between the communicatee and the so-called propagandist. Oftentimes the word "propaganda" takes on a rather adverse connotation. However, its use in behavioral research does not necessarily concern this negative meaning. Instead, it deals more with persuasive information which the recipients are aware is biased. One such study, conducted by Ewing and reported in the Journal of Social Psychology, reveals several findings, a rather significant one of which in thinking of persuasive communication in business is as follows:

The question was asked at the beginning of the study as to whether a change of opinion implies a submissive relation of subject to propagandist or whether, rather, the change of opinion includes as a component a kind of self-assertion. The fact that the sameness of intent of the propagandist and the bias of the subject was found to be a favorable
condition for change of opinion indicates the importance of self-assertion. That is, the expression of the self allowed by this sameness of intent and bias accompanies a change which is in the direction opposed to both the bias of the subject and the intent of the propagandist. So the self-expression enhances a change of opinion which is opposed in direction to the enhancing intent. If it were a matter of submission to authority, the subject would be expected to submit to the intent of the propagandist or at least not to change his opinion largely in accordance with the degree to which such intent agrees with his own bias. So it would appear that submission to authority is not an adequate description of the relation of subject to propagandist which facilitates change of opinion. The relationship is much more characteristically a matter of self-assertion.  

Thus, it can be seen that there is a possibility for a negative estimate of the communicator's intent by the recipient to work against the objective of the persuader. Even though the bias of the communicator and the communi catee extends in the same direction, the fact that the recipient perceives the communicator as being unduly biased may cause a negative reaction to the persuasive message involved. Ewing in his explanation of this finding, therefore, uses the term "self-assertion" as a means of explanation. The concept is, of course, that the communicatee feels called upon to assert his freedom from the intent of the persuader and, by so doing, changes his opinion.

In the case of positive changes of opinion on the part of the message recipient (changes toward communicator-desired

action), Ewing cites a finding which suggests that when the communicatee's estimate of the message originator is a positive one (he perceives the communicator as being free from bias, as being "correct" in his persuasive appeal), the resulting recipient reaction is positive:

Favorable characteristics of the propaganda material (unbiased, logical, authoritative, in agreement with my experience and observations) are positively related to change of opinion. Since these characteristics were found to depend upon the degree to which the bias of the subject was similar to the intent of the propagandist, they are to be considered merely as rationalizations of the similarity of bias and intent which is the real facilitator of change of opinion. 5

Indeed, what the communicator says is viewed as much in terms of why he says it as to the content of the statement itself. Paralleling Ewing's finding is a succinct summary statement advanced by Pastore and Horowitz: "The demonstration that motive influences the degree of acceptability of a statement finds ready application to many phases of living; the judge who metes out a sentence, or the jury that sifts the evidence, is guided by the evaluation of the intended motive of the defendant." 6

In the case of business persuasion through written communication, naturally the recipient involved in a single persuasive effort is quite aware of the profit motive on the

5Ibid.

part of the persuader. However, the findings just cited suggest that if the communicatee perceives the originator of the message as being sincere and versed in his subject (an authority, so to speak) and not impressively biased, then the results of the persuasive effort can be positive. Extending from this finding, one can readily grasp the importance of the communicator's not only presenting to his audience a worthwhile image but also sizing up his recipients in terms of communicatee desires so that the message can reflect those desires (couched in emotional and/or rational appeals for action). Admittedly, a rather vague line of separation exists between agreement of the communicator and the communicatee (leading to positive action) and agreement of the two in addition to the recipient's evaluating the persuader's attempt as being something less than worth while (leading to negative action or a lack of action).

Additional behavioral research concerning source credibility on communication effectiveness bears out the essential thesis of behavioral scientists just discussed. Hovland and Weiss, for example, present seven significant observations as a result of a communicator credibility study:

1. The effects of credibility of source on acquisition and retention of communication material were studied by presenting identical content but attributing the material to sources considered by the audience to be of "high trustworthiness" or of "low trustworthiness." The effects of source on factual information and on opinion were measured by the use of questionnaires administered before, immediately after, and four weeks after the communication.
2. The immediate reaction to the "fairness" of the presentation and the "justifiability" of the conclusions drawn by the communication is significantly affected by both the subject's initial position on the issue and by his evaluation of the trustworthiness of the source. Identical communications were regarded as being "justified" in their conclusions in 71.7 per cent of the cases when presented by a high-credibility source to subjects who initially held the same opinion as advocated by the communicator, but were considered "justified" in only 36.7 per cent of the cases when presented by a low-credibility source to subjects who initially held an opinion at variance with that advocated by the communicator.

3. No difference was found in the amount of factual information learned from "high credibility" and "low credibility" sources, and none in the amount retained over a four-week period.

4. Opinions were changed immediately after the communication in the direction advocated by the communicator to a significantly greater degree when the material was presented by a trustworthy source than when presented by an untrustworthy source.

5. There was a decrease after a time interval in the extent to which subjects agreed with the position advocated by the communication when the material was presented by trustworthy sources, but an increase when it was presented by untrustworthy sources.

6. Forgetting the name of the source is less rapid among individuals who initially agreed with the untrustworthy source than among those who disagreed with it.

7. Theoretical implications of the results are discussed. The data on post-communication changes in opinion . . . can be explained by assuming equal learning of the content whether presented by a trustworthy or an untrustworthy source but an initial resistance to the acceptance of the material presented by an untrustworthy source. If this resistance to acceptance diminishes with time while the content which itself provides the basis for the opinion is forgotten more slowly, there will be an increase after the communication in the extent of agreement with an untrustworthy source.

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The seventh item in the preceding list meshes with a finding advanced by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley. This concept of delayed reactions to high- and low-credibility sources is often referred to as the "sleeper effect." Its importance requires separate attention; therefore, it will be developed in the next sub-section of this chapter.

Based on the findings revealed thus far in this chapter, one might tend to associate "agreement" with "imitation." Yet research conducted by Luchins in 1944 suggests that the two concepts are not necessarily the same. When a message recipient agrees with the position of the stimulus originator (the business persuader, for instance), he may be using independent judgment. Referring to a persuasive communicator who was a part of a behavioral experiment, Luchins reveals the following:

When A's judgments were correct, what might have appeared to be agreement with A was mostly, in truth, not "agreement." It was a conclusion separately and independently reached by the subject, which happened to be the same as that given by A. To lump all these phenomena under the one heading of "following" or "imitating" is to lose sight of the important differences among them. Closer analysis reveals that actions, all of which on the surface may be viewed as cases of imitation, may have very different psychological bases. It may be that to apply the blanket term of imitation to all cases of apparent following is not a wise procedure.8

Thus, it can be seen that rationality, as a factor, finds its way into the process of persuasion in so far as

the recipient's estimate of the communicator is concerned. Its strength depends principally upon the emotional structures of the communicatee. Determination of message-recipient susceptibility to persuasive efforts is, of course, dependent upon numerous factors.\(^9\)

Although the findings concerning communicator credibility are diverse, certain threads of similarity make their presence known. Furthermore, the research efforts have definite meanings in terms of the process of persuasion in a business environment. One might say that the business persuader who uses the medium of written communication would do well in his audience analysis prior to the actual writing to determine, as best he can with the research tools he possesses, just how his communicatees perceive him and the business organization which he represents. In large firms, various marketing and market studies should provide meaningful information. In smaller firms, some records, research and simple observation and reflection should provide clues. If the communicator is fortunate enough to enjoy a high reputation (hence, be a high-credibility source), then his major problem is basically that of presenting persuasive appeals in such a way that the image already in existence will be a continuing one. Indeed, he can quite easily make optimum use of this beneficial condition. On the other hand, however,

\(^9\)See Chapter III.
if the communicator's research reveals that his audience may view him and his organization as being something less than completely credible, then his chore of reversing the image may be rather sizable.

It is submitted, however, that an unsatisfactory image can be changed. This change requires the efforts of all members of a business organization, of course; the work of only the members who originate externally directed written communications, for instance, is not sufficient. Instead, a keenly developed public-relations program and quite productive sales-promotional efforts, to name only two actions, would have to be initiated.

To bring a less-than-adequate communicatee estimate of the message originator down to a more specific level, it would be worth while to look at a not uncommon relationship between an executive trainee and the management members he serves. Oftentimes, when a young college graduate is serving his first few months (or even years) on a new job in a business organization, he may be considered as "a young squirt" or as "not dry behind the ears" by management members. Because of this estimate of the young man, the work he produces may tend to be discounted somewhat by the individuals whom he is attempting to please. In other words, his supervisor(s) may view him as a low-credibility source because of his age and lack of experience. In his communicating, therefore, the new employee's essential duty might be that of convincing his
superiors of the trustworthiness of the information he submits, for instance, in a business report presented to them. Merely conducting reliable research and writing a report in an acceptable style, it can be seen, is not sufficient. In addition, the aspiring trainee must put forth effort in other areas which will have an effect upon how his business reports will be accepted. For example, he may deem it advisable to present supplementary reports to his superiors in the case of a long, formal report investigation in which he may be involved. A working plan submitted to his superior(s) (the report reader or readers) before research commences is an example. Any extra (uncalled for) effort may often tend to impress upon his communicatees his thoroughness and eagerness; and there is reason to believe that they will gradually, but certainly, upgrade their evaluation of him. Thus, eventually he could become a high-credibility source and his work would be accepted in a new, more positive, light.

Indeed, stress should be placed on all business communicators, no matter the specific business writing type in which they are engaged in originating, being alert to all opportunities to make their communicatees aware of the positive, purposeful intent of such writers.

The "Sleeper Effect"

On page 101 mention was made of the effect of a persuasive communication upon a communicatee subsequent to the reading and comprehending of the communication. This delayed reaction is referred to as a "sleeper effect."
Interesting differences often appear between the immediate and the delayed effects of a communication designed to produce opinion change. Apart from the simple forgetting of the content of the communication, which would lead to a reduced effect with time, certain motivational factors also seem to be at work. Observation of ordinary life situations reveals two opposing phenomena. On the one hand, an individual may be exposed to a communication, and accept the communicator's point of view, but after a period of time he may revert to his previous attitude. On the other hand, an individual may at first reject the communicator's point of view, but after a period of time "come around" to the communicator position. This latter phenomenon has been described as the sleeper effect.

Pertinent to the foregoing observation of the sleeper effect is Weiss's comments:

A definite relation between opinions and retention of the related associations is found. Previous studies have indicated that forgetting of the content proceeds more rapidly when opinions are in conflict with the viewpoint of the communication than when they are in agreement. This result is verified by the present investigation; for the instances of favorable opinion before and after show a consistently better retention of the statement-label associations than do those of unfavorable opinion before and after. This difference appears shortly after the communication is given and increases with the passage of time.

An experiment by Hovland and Weiss suggests that the sleeper effect may be due to the removal from time of a tendency to discount the material presented by an untrustworthy source. In order to test the exact nature of the sleeper effect, researchers "reinstated" the original communication

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in a study in 1953. Noting that time tends to diminish agreement with a high-credibility source and to increase agreement with a low-credibility one, the original communication was presented again to the communicatees after a few weeks' lapse of time. The results of the experiment are these:

1. The intended differences in the "perception" of the three communicators were achieved, as indicated by pronounced and statistically significant differences in the students' appraisal of the competence, fairness, and trustworthiness of the communicators.

2. The initial effect of the communication on the opinions of the subjects was greatest when presented by the "positive" communicator and least when presented by the "negative." The "neutral" was in between the other two.

3. Under "non-reinstatement" conditions there was a decline over the three-week period in extent of agreement with the "positive" communicator and an increase with the "negative".

4. The reinstatement procedure had the intended effect of improving the subject's memory for the communicator in the case of the positive-communicator and negative-communicator groups.

5. Reinstatement increased the extent of agreement with the "positive" communicator and decreased the agreement with the "negative." The magnitude of these effects was approximately equal to that obtained at the time of the initial communication.

6. An analysis of the results is made in terms of the learning and retention of the content of the communication and the effects of "positive" and "negative" prestige communicators on the acceptance of the material communicated.\footnote{Kelman and Hovland, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 335.}
Particular attention should be directed to the fifth item in the preceding list. Since reinstatement brought back the original reactions, it is feasible to assume that repetition is a key factor in the long-term success of an individual or a business organization which enjoys the reputation of being a high-credibility source.

If one reflects a bit upon human nature, it is rather easy to realize that emotional reactions to a one-time stimulus are not long lasting. People tend to revert to opinions and feelings which their assumptive worlds and environmental factors in general have fostered upon them.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, any communicator, be he a business one or one concerned with other social issues, should constantly put before his audience information which will color attitudes and cause recipients to regard the message originator as being trustworthy. In the case of a communicator charged with a remodeling of negative communicator estimates on the part of recipients, of course, his main duty is not the repeating of an original message, which might work against him, but instead the presentation of counter messages and other persuasive efforts which tend to bring forth a major shift in opinion concerning the originator, aside from the communications he develops.

\textsuperscript{13}See pp. 67-70 for a review of the assumptive-world concept.
The Element of Prestige

As long ago as 1934 attention was being directed to the element of prestige as it is concerned with recipient evaluation of the communicator. A study carried on by Bowden, Caldwell, and West dealt with suggestibility and the prestige of its source. The findings reveal that those factors which promote the effectiveness of suggestion are authority, some degree of insight and understanding of the communication situation, and, in some cases, sympathy. In addition, the inquiry suggests that females are more suggestible than males and that the differences between the sexes is greater on the mature levels. Of particular significance in relation to persuasive communication in business is the assertion, based on the study, that mature individuals (in terms of psychological maturity as opposed to chronological maturity) are influenced more by the prestige of professional and civic groups, whereas less mature individuals are influenced more by emotional elements involved in the communication itself.14

Business communicators who are alert to individual differences caused by varying degrees of psychological maturity, thus, are likely to realize that some persuasive messages can be relatively more successful when they are developed with rational appeals instead of the popular emotional ones frequently used in sales writing. Although the more mature individual is still an emotional being, there is reason to suspect that because of his maturity he is susceptible to

14A. O. Bowden, Floyd F. Caldwell, and Guy A. West, "A Study in Prestige," American Journal of Sociology, XL (September, 1934), 203.
persuasive appeals which respect his intelligence and discretion. Contrariwise, of course, there are other communic­atees who, because of less-than-mature personality structures, are more susceptible to emotionally geared appeals.\textsuperscript{15}

No matter the degree of emotional maturity, however, it can be seen, at least from Bowden, Caldwell, and West's research effort, that the element of prestige on the part of the message originator plays a role in communicatee reaction to the persuasive stimulus.

Prestige is, without doubt, a sizable and influential force in the persuasion process. In fact, behavioral scientists assert the element of prestige of the communicator can be so very strong that communication recipients accept his word sometimes without giving adequate thought to the message itself. Commenting on this human inclination, Asch states the following:

The observation that individuals and groups hold and defend views not based on adequate knowledge, that decisions are made and actions taken which have little to do with the actual merits of the situation, and that group forces can produce extraordinary effects in contradiction to the most elementary demands of reason and even of self-interest—facts of this order have constituted the basis of suggestion-doctrine in social psychology. These observations have seemed to gain added importance in recent times when the production of such effects has been harnessed and institutionalized in the form of mass propaganda and advertising. That groups can be whipped by propaganda into a condition of excitement to the point where they see the issues only in the

\textsuperscript{15}It should be noted, of course, that most people react to both types of appeals, rational and emotional, under certain circumstances.
manner that they are posed to them has been taken as a confirmation of the influence of these massive facts.\textsuperscript{16}

A recipient, in evaluating the merits (with particular emphasis upon the element of prestige) of a communicator, is influenced not only by how he perceives the originator in terms of prestige, but also of how the group to which the communicatee is a part perceives him. It is submitted, for instance, that the other-directed individual and especially one who is subject to inadequacy feelings may be substantially influenced by group perception of a communication situation.\textsuperscript{17} Since such an individual is quite desirous of group acceptance, he may, indeed, feel that in order to remain a member of a loosely knit social structure he must accept the views of the group as a whole.

Quite naturally, a message and its originator are closely associated in a communicatee's mind. Indeed, personal disclosure of the communicator can increase the rate of yielding to suggestion or persuasion in some instances.

Lewis, in a 1941 study, for example, sought to determine the strength of the communicator prestige element with respect to political views. The main finding advanced from this study is this: "The 'prestige' of a suggestion, the


\textsuperscript{17}See pp. 81-82 for a discussion of other-direction as related to inadequacy feelings.
source of it, functioned to provide context for the statement; it was often in terms of this context that the statement had its meaning."¹⁸ In other words, in some cases the essential meaning of a message is so closely tied up with the communicator himself (his intent, organizational post, etc.), that if the recipients do not know who the originator of a communication is, the message itself may be somewhat lacking in meaning.

A case in point is that of a top executive who issues a written communication to employees encouraging (not demanding) them to enroll in a certain company-sponsored training program (a supervisory management training program, for instance). If the communication is signed only "The Management," the recipients have no way of knowing if the message came from the president, one of the vice-presidents, the personnel director, or whom. If they perceive of its coming from the personnel director, they might think something along the line of "Oh, he's just trying to build up his own empire." Contrariwise, if they suspect that it came from a line officer, particularly their own immediate superior, their reactions may be keener, more positive, ones. On the other hand, though, if the message is signed by the president, then the communicatees see the message in a quite

different light. Although the communication may not be an
order, as such, still the fact that the president is quite
desirous of their enrolling in the training program may be
sufficient to encourage their accepting the communication
and reacting in terms of the writer-desired action.

Arnett, Davidson, and Lewis hold that the communicator
prestige element is of such intensity in relation to commu-
nication effectiveness that "certain attitudes can be easily
and suddenly changed by a manipulation of the prestige ele-
ment."19

Indeed, human nature manifests itself rather interest-
ingly with respect to the element of prestige on the part
of the creator of a stimulus, be it a written communication
or any other form of expression. Saadi and Farnsworth, for
instance, state that as long ago as 1931 a behavioral study
revealed that artists' names have potencies in determining
the preference value of pictures. In a research effort, it
was noted that when the subjects of the experiment supposed
that a particular painting had been painted by a well-known
artist, it was rated as more beautiful than when it was
assumed to have been created by an unknown painter.20

19 Claude E. Arnett, Helen H. Davidson, and Hallett N.
Lewis, "Prestige as a Factor in Attitude Changes," Sociology
and Social Research, XVI (September-October, 1931), 54.

20 Mitchell Saadi and Paul R. Farnsworth, "The Degree of
Acceptance of Dogmatic Statements and Preferences for Their
Supposed Maker," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology,
XXIX (July-September, 1934), 143.
Transferring the artist-art appreciator relationship to the world of word communication, these same researchers assert the following: "It seems possible to conclude from the present study that, in general, dogmatic statements are more likely to have greater . . . acceptance when they are attributed to well-liked personages than in the situations in which they are attributed to disliked people."21

Without doubt, an individual's perception of the prestige degree of the communicator is a potent force in the acceptance or rejection of a persuasive communication.

**Group Influence as Related to Communicator Evaluation by Recipients**

Whereas some individuals are quite susceptible to persuasive stimuli formulated and directed to them by "authority figures," other communicatees, because of certain personality characteristics, are more susceptible to persuasion by peers. Thus, the group, as well as the individuals who make up the group, plays its role in the process of persuasion.

Hochbaum conducted a study of group influences as related to persuasion susceptibility in relation to the communication process. His finding, reported in an issue of the *American Sociological Review*, suggests something of the nature of the relationship between individuals and the group, as an entity, to which they belong:

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21Ibid., p. 150.
Even though the group-conditions favorable to change of opinions on the part of deviates from a group norm exists, the occurrence of such a change, its extent, and the duration of resistance to pressures to conform will be affected by the deviates' perceptions of their own ability to deal successfully with the issue under question.22

A more recent, yet similar, study of personality characteristics related to susceptibility to influence by peers or authority figures (army generals in this experiment) was conducted by Berkowitz and Lundy. Their essential finding contrasts with Hochbaum's:

The present results indicate that individuals whose opinions tend to be successfully influenced by peers may differ in certain personality characteristics from individuals more successfully influenced by generals. Thus, it has been noted that individuals low on the present measure of interpersonal confidence, in general, tend to be more readily influenced by their peers than by the authority figures. This is most clearly shown in a significant relationship between interpersonal confidence and opinion change when the opinions were advocated by peers, and the absence of this relationship when the identical opinions were advocated by generals. It may be that those with low scores on this personality scale have unsatisfied needs for interpersonal relationships. Since their peers are the likeliest sources of need satisfaction, they are somewhat dependent upon these peers and hence susceptible to influence by them.23

The foregoing observation advanced by Berkowitz and Lundy points out rather vividly once more how strong the personality

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characteristic of inadequacy feelings are in the process of persuasion. From their findings, one can realize a transference to the act of communicating through writing in business. A case might be made for the need for a business communicator's attempting to present himself and his communication on a "peer level" so to speak. Such writing qualities as the "man-on-the-street approach" and "shirt-sleeve English" make their entrance into such a discussion. Naturally, such an attempt can be developed too keenly and, hence, be less than satisfactory in terms of communicatee action. However, there is reason to believe that if a communicator, through his audience analysis, determines a sense of peer acceptance on the part of his recipients, the effort at presenting his communication in a similar light might be worth while.

On the other hand, if the message originator notes that his recipients are more authoritarian-like (as opposed to peer conscious), then certain emotional developments such as prestige and high credibility of information might be fruitful. More than likely, in most persuasion situations in business, the audience consists of more than one individual (with the exception of most business correspondence situations); therefore, the communicator's chore will necessitate directing his message to both authoritarianists and peer-conscious recipients. In such a situation, the

24See Chapter III.
communicator may find it desirous in some instances to create two separate messages to be aimed at the two groups involved.

II. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LEADERS AND PERSUASIVE BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

Research indicates that similarities between characteristics of a leader and a communicator-persuader exist. Since these relationships are of some magnitude, discussion of them is warranted.

Indeed, the power and influence (leader-like qualities) of the communicator, whether he is in the world of business or in some other social situation, are keenly felt. Various types of behaviorists have made their contributions to this area of inquiry. Beck, writing in Leadership and Interpersonal Behavior, phrases this condition in this way:

The study of power and influence forms the meeting ground of several disciplines. Psychologists have considered the conditions of imitation and the influence of the primary group, sociologists the reasons for role differentiation. Political scientists have as their central problem the question of organized power; political philosophers search for justification of the existence of any kind of power. The basic question underlying this ramification of interest is quite simple: How does it happen that one person does what another person incites him to do? It is evident that it does happen, and it is also evident that this power is unevenly distributed.25

The persuader-persuadee relationship exists, indeed, in leader-follower situations. This recognition is advanced by Bass in his work, *Leadership, Psychology, and Organizational Behavior*:

Earlier, we considered the nature of leadership in terms of what A, the leader, does to change B, the follower. That is, A initiates structure for B or alters B's motivation. But how is this done? What means are used by A to initiate structure or to change B's goals? Three ways are suggested. If A has demonstrated his ability to solve problems, A can persuade B. If A has power to reward or punish B, A can coerce B. If A has both ability and power, he can act permissively to bring desired changes in B.\(^2\)

The problem-solving aspect (cited in the preceding quotation) of the leader-communicator's chore in persuading is probably the most significant one of the three ways which Bass suggests for positively influencing message recipients. Phrased in terms of persuasive writing in business, Bass's observation indicates that the business persuader who can advance solutions to recipient problems is on the correct path toward positive communicatee action. This recognition blends adequately with the information concerning personal feelings of inadequacy developed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

The other two ways which lead to communicatee-follower activity suggested by Bass are not especially meaningful in

thinking of written business communication. However, it might be noted that in some business situations, the message originator, because of his organizational post, does have the power to reward or punish his communication recipient and, thus, according to Bass, may coerce the communicatee into desired action. In this situation, though, one cannot say that persuasion, in its truest sense, exists. Rather, the action brought forward is the result of fear, as opposed to desire.

On pages 113 to 116 certain elements of group influence in communicator evaluation by communicatsee were developed. Certain aspects of the relationship between leaders and persuaders are also related to this concept of group behavior. For instance, Jennings states the following:

Several conclusions may be reached concerning intellectual discrepancies between leader and follower. One researcher concluded that the group seems to be led by the average person. Evidently in a democratic society the leader must not be too far detached from the group. Another suggests that every increment of intelligence means wiser government, but the crowd prefers to be ill-governed by people it can understand.27

Thus, again the concept of the communicatee's associating his persuader with his peers in personality formations is noted. Because of rather abundant behavioral findings indicating the importance of the "common man" approach to

persuasion, one might have reason to believe that it is an impressively strong motivator to communicatees.

**Leadership Processes of Influence**

The process of persuasion, as has been suggested before, functions in its elemental form in any interpersonal situation which involves influence by the communicator. These processes of influence are at work in a leader-follower arrangement and they are also at work in a communicator-communicatee relationship in a business environment. Tead, commenting upon the more-or-less universality of this condition says:

> Knowledge of the processes of influencing people has greatly increased in recent years. The use of that knowledge by the leader is only a special case of applying truths which are in one form or another an everyday occurrence.\(^{28}\)

Tead goes ahead to advance these specific processes which a leader can and should use in his effort toward influencing his communication recipients: (1) suggestion; (2) imitation; (3) exhortation; (4) persuasive argument; (5) publicity; (6) reliance upon the logic of events; (7) a show of affectionate devotion; and (8) the creating of a typical problem situation, the pressure of meeting which teaches its own lessons.\(^{29}\)

**Suggestion.** Suggestion, as used by Tead, is usually a "verbal hint, often used to build up or maintain the prestige

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\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 34.
of the leader."30 Used in connection with leadership, as such, it suggests the use of well-known people on boards of directors and other such designations which create a favorable image.

In the case of the business communicator's need for becoming a high-credibility source with respect to his communication recipients, it can be seen that the use of similar symbols aids in the process of persuasion. For example, the use of testimonials in sales copy is a reflection of the suggestion concept. Too, rather less significant factors (such as high-quality stationery in the case of business correspondence) have their place within the confines of the process.

Imitation. "Imitation is, of course, not an active process for the leader. It is rather a support upon which he can frequently rely once his person or his cause has become sufficiently established so that it becomes good form to join him and his group."31 Again, it is seen that the use of testimonials and other positive references tend to bring forth among communicatees a feeling that "everyone is doing it." The herd instinct, thus, can come into play and produce action. It should be noted that whereas suggestion indicates an early-stage process which a leader (or a persuasive business communicator) might use, imitation suggests the activity of taking optimum advantage of any following which the

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30Ibid. 31Ibid.
communicator may have developed. This following, in turn, because of group influences, should lead to still additional followers (active communicatees).

Exhortation. Although exhortation, as used by Tead, deals principally with preaching, oratory and lecturing (oral communication), its use has some value with respect to written communication in business. Tead asserts that such an approach tends to "impart a diffused glow of emotional fervor and enthusiasm." Since the essence of exhortation suggests emotionalism and exuberance, certainly such an effort can be worth while in the process of persuasion. However, as has been noted, unbridled enthusiasm can have reverse effects, and, for that reason, its use must be governed watchfully by a writer in business.

Persuasive Argument. "In relation to leadership in the field of ideas, policies, and methods, where the need is to influence individual minds to agreement on specific issues, persuasion by argument is not only necessary but of utmost importance." Argument used in this connection does not mean, of course, a keen desire to win in terms of a bitterly fought struggle. Instead, it indicates "reasoned consideration of issue, the weighing of all the evidence, the exploring of all possible alternate possibilities and the disposition to abide by the outcome of careful, pooled deliberation."

32Ibid., p. 37. 33Ibid., p. 39. 34Ibid.
This type of process which is used for enhancing the communicatee's estimate of the communicator is, quite naturally, a means not only of presenting a persuasive appeal rather dramatically and, hence, interestingly; it also aids in creating within the communication recipient's mind a feeling of trustworthiness concerning the originator of the message. Such a realization is particularly applicable in the case of business report writing. Thoroughness in reporting, for instance, means not only a readable and reliable report, but also an indication of the credibility of the reporter, aside from his communication.

Publicity. Tead states that publicity, although a rather all-inclusive promotional concept, should be listed along with the other processes he advances:

Publicity as a method of influencing people is not, of course, a separate process, but a technique for supporting some of the other processes here under review. Its value today to build prestige, to multiply the power of exhortation, to interpret facts, attitudes and conclusions to all concerned, is so potentially great that stress should be placed upon it. In the widest variety of organized efforts at leading, attention to sound publicity is essential to success. And this is as true if ten are being led as if there are ten thousand.35

The discussion of publicity which Tead contributes suggests, of course, the very real need for communicators taking advantage of channels of communication, other than the essential one with which they are concerned, for the purpose of

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35Ibid., p. 41.
broadcasting the trustworthiness and worth-while intent of the message originators and of the organized bodies which they represent. In the area of business endeavor, a business writer should make keen use of every effort toward improved public relations which his company instigates. For instance, in written communications aimed at consumers, mention should be made of the various sales promotional attempts being made by the business organization at the time of writing. Perhaps several media are in use at a particular time; integrating these attempts, through the use of copious references by each one of the media to the others, should be fruitful in terms of creating a sharper, more positive, image about the company as well as the business communicator.

**Logic of Events.** In thinking of the concept of logic of events in relation to enhancing communicator credibility and acceptance, the time element makes its entrance. Tead, in discussing the concept in terms of leadership, develops these thoughts:

There come times in every organization when the leader finds he has to wait upon the logic of events to have his followers become aware of a problem or become interested in a proposed solution. However much the leader may be able to anticipate difficulties imaginatively, it is often impossible to make more than a few alert followers also look ahead. People worry about problems only when they can no longer be ignored. We do not naturally look ahead to borrow trouble. The old saw that you should "Never trouble trouble until trouble troubles you" gives expression to a deep human trait.36

36Ibid., p. 42.
Business communicators recognize the importance of correct timing when writing persuasively. As Tead points out, people are usually quite concerned about today, whereas yesterday to them may be only a memory and tomorrow simply a hope. Since present issues receive due attention, the business writer, thus, should gauge his appeals so that they will reach his communicatees at the correct time. A case in point, to mention only one, is a management member who directs a written communication about a change in work schedules or some other not-too-important, yet somewhat detailed, issue about which employees have an option (hence, persuasion implications). If the message is directed too far in advance of the time for employee decision, the possibility of informal communication channels (the employee grapevine) producing negative results is rather real. This is not to suggest that so-called "snap judgments" are always ideal in terms of communicator-desired action; it is to say, however, that communicatees are more likely to pay necessary attention to an issue when it confronts them close to the time for action.

A Show of Affectionate Devotion. The process of affectionate devotion in relation to the communicator's need for developing a worth-while image is recognized as quite potent. According to Tead, "the affectionate devotion of the leader by the led is always a powerful dynamic force."37 This

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37Ibid., p. 43.
concept, like that of imitation is concerned chiefly with making effective use of an already-present reputation, as opposed to the development of one. However, in the case of affectionate devotion, there is a greater degree of loyalty. One might say that followers who have a sentimental feeling about their leader (communicator) are quite prone to accept his persuasive appeals in a positive manner; imitation, on the other hand, suggests more of a group identification urge (the need to accept persuasive appeals in order to do that which other group members do).

In thinking of this concept, that of affectionate devotion, one might step into a discussion of supervisory management practices. The point that a supervisor, because of his key organizational post, is a communicator and, hence, a persuader brings up the worth-whileness of his creating a following among his subordinates in order to influence them productively. Having excessive power in this respect is, of course, something less than keenly desirable in all cases. However, in terms of the ease of persuasion only, one can see how effective a communication relationship would be if the recipients were abundantly devoted to the message originator.

**A Typical Problem Situation.** The last specific process which a leader can use in building a favorable image on the part of his communicatees, according to Tead, is that of creating a typical problem situation:

\[\text{See p. 120.}\]
Consideration of what is perhaps the most efficient method of influencing others in groups has been left to the last. This is the method of helping to create in and around the group of followers a definite set of conditions and circumstances which the followers feel as a problem or difficulty. Its cause could be rendered more effective in many cases by being more deliberate. Here the leader's effort is to have the difficulties themselves prod the followers to explore and adopt a new line of action which will lead to a change of sentiment and purpose in the direction the leader wants to go.\(^{39}\)

Whereas the preceding processes suggested by Tead deal principally with the communicator's task of enhancing his own reputation (and, hence, the quality of his communications), this final one is more concerned with a process of influencing, as such, aside from the building of a favorable communicator image. However, it can be seen, from Tead's statements concerning this quality, that presenting issues to be solved and presenting alternate courses of action can, of course, suggest to the recipients involved the fact that the communicator has insight into the problem and can, in effect, offer certain solutions. In turn, they might regard him higher in terms of credibility because of his insight and ability.

**Some Principles of Leadership Related to the Process of Persuasion**

The foregoing discussion of means whereby the communicator can upgrade his image on the part of his recipients was presented to show some similarities between leadership

\(^{39}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 44.\)
qualities and message-originator qualities. In addition to these qualities, other significant correlations between leading and persuading should be noted.

Titus in his work *The Process of Leadership* advances three elemental principles of leadership. Each is applicable in thinking of the communicator in business and his need for creating a desirable evaluation by his communicatees. Recognizing that "a principle may be characterized as an epitomization of the most general situation arising from the inductive process in a given field of endeavor," Titus presents (1) the principle of balance, (2) the principle of movement, and (3) the principle of inequality.

**The Principle of Balance.** This principle, that of balance, is presented by Titus to suggest some signal points in human behavior. These signal points, which are of a rather philosophical nature, are means of suggesting to leader-communicators certain modes of thinking about influencing others and the roles they play in the relationship. The admonitions are not presented in terms of exact specifications which are to be followed in order to obtain an equally exact goal.

The principle of balance requires reflective thinking about measurements of life activity:

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Such concepts as scales of justice, moderation in all things, and the middle-of-the-road position refresh the memory as to the universality of balance in the lives of men. Through the years, religious leaders and scientific men have been devout worshippers at the shrine of balance and moderation. Saints in the religions of the world have taught their disciples the significance of "moderation in all things." Scientists both by precept and example have urged their students to follow the middle path: "Nothing in excess;" "Neither too much nor too little of anything." Astute politicians have long recognized that work must be done thoroughly, but they have also been convinced that thinking and planning must eventually terminate and that no experiment needs to be repeated endlessly. Neither the superficial nor the exhausted study or program is as satisfactory as the well-balanced activities of the intelligent worker.

As in leading, communicating persuasively requires balance. The business writer, in his effort to create a satisfactory communicator image, can, of course, put forth an undue amount of effort. When such a condition arises, it is submitted that communicatees may be influenced somewhat negatively because of a suspicion that the message originator is being rather defensive, i.e., he is advancing too many reasons for believing and trusting in him and, thus, must have something to hide. At the other extreme, though, is the possibility of a writer not working sufficiently at the communicator credibility concept. In such a situation, his persuasive messages may be quite tempting from the standpoint of appeals used and their developmental nature, but the process of persuasion may very well be ineffective because of the communicatees not holding the originator in sufficiently high esteem.

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41 Ibid., p. 392.

42 It is reasonable to assume, this student feels, that the composition of balance varies with each communicatee.
Not only can it be seen that the principle of balance concerns itself with the communicator's job of image building; its applicability in thinking of the nature of the writing itself can also be noted. Excessive emotionalism, excessive rationality and other extremes are usually not productive for a long period of time because of such constancy. Although a case can be made for repetition being a sound means of persuading, an excess in the use of this valuable persuasion means is not desirable.

The Principle of Movement. Titus, in discussing some of the manifestations of growth in interpersonal relations, moves forward to another principle which is quite applicable to the work of the business communicator. It is the principle of movement:

The concept of movement is more inclusive than that of growth and hence more appropriately entitled to be thought of as a principle. Movement is not restricted to that idealistic portion of experience proudly referred to as growth. It is present in the plans and actions associated with the creation of a new cluster and of a new program. Movement underlies the deliberations of leaders as they consider the possibilities of converting, capturing, or conditioning. Movement also permeates operations whether the program be associated with attack and possible victory or with the activities related to defense and sometimes to defeat.43

Success in any of the endeavors of life, including that of persuasion through written business communication, requires movement. Movement suggests research, experimentation, an

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43Titus, op. cit., p. 415.
uncompromising attitude on the part of the communicator.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, if the business communicator were to relax his efforts at persuading, there is reason to believe the long-range benefits of such an activity would be something less than desirable. Of course, research concerned with human nature is quite frustrating. Whereas many of the solutions to the problems which businessmen face today are being facilitated through the use of electronic data processing equipment, the business communicator who is concerned with the process of persuasion must still rely upon the slow-moving types of inquiry into human behavior. Yet the rewards are there to be realized.

\textbf{The Principle of Inequality.} The age-old understanding that men are not created equally forms the basis for the principle of inequality. Titus points out that the leader (and the business communicator in transference) must recognize that appeals have to be tailored to fit the individual follower (or the business communicatee).\textsuperscript{45} His discussion of this human-nature recognition suggests that further insight into the ramifications of the human way is required. It further suggests that although principles, rules, and procedures for

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\textsuperscript{44}Movement can also be seen more pragmatically as relating to the two needs of (1) organizing the persuasion points within a communication so that each one logically develops the argument and leads to the next point and (2) pacing the persuasive effort strategically so as to dwell on each point the optimum amount of time.

\textsuperscript{45}Titus, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 439.
leading (or persuading) can be formulated, they must be tempered in application. In other words, the exception concept used so very often in discussing management problems comes into play in the process of persuasion.

Since people are not equal in emotional development, in susceptibility to persuasion, the business communicator must accept the chore of as keen an audience analysis as possible. Careless audience-desire determination can well lead to inadequate results. This understanding is particularly applicable when the writer is determining the path to follow in creating within his recipient's consciousness an attitude of high credibility in regard to him and to his organization.

The essential intent of this chapter has been to present an analysis of some of the cardinal qualities of the communicator in the process of persuasion in business writing. As has been stated, the total positive result of persuasive business communication is dependent upon many factors, one of the more important of which is the way the recipient perceives the message originator—the light in which he is held. Often-times, the communicator's message will be viewed and reacted to quite sizably in terms of the credibility of its source.

Indeed, findings clearly indicate that enhancing a firm's image (improving its public relations) should be a part of that firm's communications-improvement effort. In other words, the better the firm's public relations, the better it can communicate convincingly.
Up to this point in this dissertation, consideration of the message originator and the recipient has occupied much attention. It follows, therefore, that now the persuasive business communication, as such, should be analyzed from the standpoint of how it meshes into the process of persuasion. Chapter V, the following chapter, will present a discussion of this element.
CHAPTER V

AN INVESTIGATION OF CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PERSUASIVE
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS

Much has been written about the "how" of persuading through written business communication.¹ Most of this information is approached from the standpoint of formulas and recommendations concerning wording, organization of material, and the like which the business communicator is advised to put into use in his persuasive writing. Although such printed works are of value, they do not, as a whole, acquaint the message originator with a theoretical background concerning the issues involved in the persuasive written business communication.

The intent of this chapter, therefore, is that of presenting some selected and key issues which the scholarly business communicator may find of value in thinking

conceptually about his persuasive writing. Quite naturally, the elements which will be discussed represent only a few among many of the essential aspects of writing persuasively in business. However, this student feels they are of such significance that the type of subject isolation which this chapter reflects is warranted.

Up to this point in this dissertation, consideration of the business writer and the recipient in the process of persuasion, from several vantage points, has been made. To round out this conceptual approach, it is appropriate next to turn to the medium of expression used between the two: the written business communication itself. Of course, the message is only as effective as the communicator's realization of the roles which he and his recipient(s) play in the total persuasion process.

I. SELECTED BEHAVIORAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN PERSUASIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Of the many facets that make up the persuasive written business communication, the literature of the behavioral sciences reveals that the following four constitute some of the key issues which have received the attention of experimenters: (1) the problem of organization of persuasive communications from the standpoint of primacy (that which comes first) versus recency (that which comes last and is, hence, the most recent) to the communicatee involved; (2) whether one-sided or two-sided persuasive appeals (or arguments) are more
effective in terms of gaining desired recipient action, i.e., whether it is better in business writing, for instance, to emphasize almost wholly the salient qualities of the product, service, or idea which is being promoted through written communication; (3) the ever-present problem of developing logical or emotional appeals or a combination of the two in a persuasive communication; and (4) whether the message originator should state concretely the action he desires the communicatee to take as the result of a persuasive communication or whether the long-run effect of the recipient's inferring the desired action is better.

Each of these issues presents itself for inspection in the immediately following part of this chapter.

**Primacy versus Recency in Organization**

Behaviorists have advanced and tested a hypothesis termed the "law of primacy in persuasion." This hypothesis, which has proven itself to be somewhat valid under certain circumstances, suggests that material which is presented first in a persuasive communication will be remembered better and will have a greater influence on communicatee action than will material presented later, particularly at the last of a message. Further, this same hypothesis suggests that in a series of persuasive communications, the first message should contain the most vital information. Commenting on this much-discussed hypothesis, Lund says:

> But if such a law is present, how are we to account for it? For an answer to this question we must
the experimental field and rely on what seems probable in the case. We have noticed that a possible origin of belief and its desirability to the individual is to be found in the contentment and the feeling of stability and adjustment which it yields. Such satisfyingness is nature's device in encouraging belief and a certain amount of unquestioning acceptance necessary to social uniformity and organization. Man is continually therefore seeking points of attachment, and once they are gained he is loath to relinquish his hold. They have become intimate and necessary parts of his ego, and to have them assailed is equivalent to an attack upon his person.

Thus the first time a subject is presented to us we tend to form an opinion, and we do so in accordance with the influences present to shape it. Later such an opinion may gain a certain amount of emotional content if it is contradicted. This follows, not only because of its personal reference, but because we would not have our ideas appear fragile or inconsequential.

Another factor which may be responsible in a measure for the importance of primacy in persuasion is the ideal of consistency, an ideal closely related to the ideal of rationality because of its logical implications. We observe the ideal of consistency the same way as we observe other ideals which have gained general commendation. We feel called upon to be consistent in the same way as we feel called upon to be rational. Once we have committed ourselves we frequently dare not change our positions lest we should be challenged with our former statements.  

Lund's discussion of the law of primacy is concerned, or can be interpreted to be concerned, with two angles to business persuasion through written communication: primacy from the standpoint of one written communication and primacy from the standpoint of a series of written communications.

This same researcher goes ahead to present another bit of evidence suggesting the validity of the law:

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Whether we are Democrats or Republicans, Protestants or Catholics, is frequently observed to be a consequence of paternal or ancestral affiliation. However, it is doubtful whether family ties or family considerations are nearly as important determinants as the fact that we first become familiar with the beliefs and the defenses of the beliefs of our family.

Although Lund's rationale for the workings of the law of primacy seems plausible, it is worth while to inspect this law more keenly from its various sides.

As long ago as 1902, researchers in the various fields concerned with persuasion (such fields as psychology, sociology, and speech) presented their views about the problem of primacy in persuasive organization. Baker, in his book *The Principles of Argumentation*, which was published in that year, gives the following advice to speakers and writers:

The exact nature of the task a speaker or writer sets himself will, of course, affect the order of his persuasive work. When a man wishes simply to persuade people to continue in a course of action, or to carry out a purpose already formed, he may arrange his persuasive work in a climactic order, for even a very slight amount of persuasion will probably move his audience in the right direction, and he will leave them stirred to immediate action by his final effort. If, however, he wishes to urge men to give up doing something to which they have become accustomed, or a purpose already well established in their minds, he must naturally, as in the case of refuting long-established ideas, bring forward his strongest appeal first. When he has stirred his audience by his first strong appeal, he can maintain his effect with other appeals, each of which would not have been strong enough, if given alone at the outset, to rouse the audience.

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3Ibid., p. 190.

Contrasting with Baker's advice is the result of an inquiry made by Jersild in 1929. He advances that "primacy stands out as far superior to recency as an aid to the recall of meaningful material." It should be noted, however, that his thesis is based on the quality of "recall" as opposed to "positive action on the part of the communicatee." Although there is a quite significant relationship between remembering and persuasion, it is doubtful that one should generalize greatly on Jersild's finding.

Abelson maintains that primacy and recency should be considered in the light of the temperament of the audience which receives the persuasive stimulus. Based on his experimentation, he advises that in situations in which the communicator realizes that his recipients are "friendly" (receptive to the persuasive stimulus, as is often the case in business report-writing situations), the major material in the message should be presented last. This recommendation is based on the fact that the audience members, because of a high-interest level, do not become bored with the message and, hence, in some cases become more interested in the communication as they progress in their reading. Contrariwise, according to Abelson, if the message originator notes that


6See Chapter II.
his communicatees are not receptive (unconcerned or even somewhat hostile), then a better organization method is that of presenting the most vital information first. Hence, the attention of the audience is more likely to be captured through the use of primacy than through the use of a reverse order.

Here is the reasoning for this hypothesis: if you say the most important thing first to an interested group, they are led to expect even more important points later on, which may make for disappointment in your audience toward the end of the message.

Starting with the weak points leads the interested audience to develop expectations about what is coming that may be fulfilled by the end of the communication. On the other hand, a group whose motivation for your message is low is not likely to develop interest from hearing weak arguments. Therefore, in a disinterested group your chances of arousing and maintaining interest are best if the trenchant parts of the discussion are at the beginning.7

As has been suggested, evidence compiled by behaviorists suggests that not only is the law of primacy functional in thinking of one communication, but it is also functional in thinking of a series of persuasive messages. Using the criterion of "communicatee likes," one research effort, which is reported in The Order of Presentation in Persuasion, reveals the following:

The results support the hypothesis in that the communicator elicited more total agreement from his audience when he presented the conclusions consonant


The foregoing discussion of primacy and recency in terms of the desires of the communicatee and also the finding advanced by Jersild, about the concept of learning, are made more vivid by an "interference" hypothesis which Janis, Lumsdaine, and Gladstone explain in this way:

An "interference" hypothesis may be formulated as follows: Once a belief is modified by a communication, the newly acquired opinion responses will tend to interfere with the subsequent acquisition of any incompatible opinion responses. According to this hypothesis, people who have been influenced by optimistic propaganda will show some degree of "resistance" to the opinion-change evoked by a subsequent "pessimistic" event. This type of hypothesis may be derived from learning principles, on the assumption that beliefs and their supporting arguments are symbolic habits which follow basic laws of learning.\footnote{Irving L. Janis, Arthur A. Lumsdaine, and Arthur I. Gladstone, "Effects of Preparatory Communications on Reactions to a Subsequent News Event," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XV (Fall, 1951), 491.}

Admittedly, the work by behaviorists concerning the issue of primacy versus recency in the organization of persuasive communications is not altogether consistent. This lack of consistency, however, does not suggest that the studies which have been made are less than worth while in
terms of valid research. Rather, it can be seen that further behavioral research into this element of the persuasive communication is needed. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley recognize this need:

The foregoing considerations suggest that it is doubtful it will ever be meaningful to postulate a Law of Primacy in social psychology which states that the material presented first will be more effective than that presented second. It may turn out empirically that "primacy" is obtained more frequently than "recency," but if so it is due to special combinations of events which can individually produce either primacy or recency, or equal effectiveness of both. It would seem, therefore, that further work might profitably go in one of the other of two divergent directions. It might be directed toward analyzing the conditions obtained under various naturalistic situations and determining the empirical outcomes. Thus studies of debates or political campaigns could be examined to determine which of the factors discussed above predominate and affect the outcome. Or theoretical analysis might be made of various factors responsible for the greater effectiveness of the first or second communication. Such studies might, for example, endeavor to keep all other factors constant and assess only the influence upon belief of the time interval between the first and second presentations. This information would then provide the data needed for predicting the outcome when this combination was known to be involved in a specific situation of interest to the communicator.10

Business communicators have long recognized the need for presenting attention-getting information at the beginning of a persuasive message. Oftentimes, however, this information is not of as great a consequence in terms of concrete description of the item or event being "sold" as information presented further in the communication. Rather, the attention-getting

beginning is merely a means of positively inviting the recipient to read the message. In the area of business report writing, however, it can be seen that the use of primacy and recency is not as regimented as it generally is in sales writing and correspondence. Often the business reporter is faced with the problem of determining what information to place first in a report. If he knows that his communicatee-superior, for instance, is an individual who demands concentrated information, naturally a thumb-nail word sketch of the essential findings will be presented first. If, however, the communicator is not equipped to analyze his audience, then he might be guided by the law of primacy, particularly with respect to a recommendation report.

One-Sided versus Two-Sided Persuasive Appeals

Many persuasive written communications in business deal with the enhancement of the writer's estimate of a good, service, or idea which is in conflict with such an entity held by an opposing force, usually that of a competitor. Many writers of sales (persuasive) copy have the view that in the development of an effective persuasive appeal, the communicator should develop his central selling theme in such a manner that the opposing force will be de-emphasized if not completely

\[11\] Again, it should be noted that a business report is not generally considered to be a persuasive communication, as such. However, this student maintains that all business writing, including business report writing, is persuasive communication. Therefore, referring to the business report writer's activities as being persuasive ones is not inappropriate.
ignored. The rationale for this action is that such de-emphasis causes the message recipient to pay complete attention to what the communicator has to say about the matter under consideration. The recipient, then, has no opportunity even to consider the alternatives (buying elsewhere, for instance) open to him.

Boyd and Lesikar, for example, in discussing the development of the copy in substitute selling acknowledgments, state:

The opening of this type of letter thus takes on a peculiar and subtle function: it must bring into the conversation article B, the proposed substitute, and must let it shine in the same radiance of desirability which advertising and other sales efforts have made to glow about article A in the reader's imagination. As attention is focused on B, it is unconsciously withdrawn from A, the imprint of which in the writer's mind is to be allowed to fade. In order to keep this impression from being engraved more deeply, the writer will reverse usual procedure in order acknowledgments and will refer to this article ordered only in general and non-distinctive terms.12

In writing sales copy which is not concerned with overcoming the communicatee's temptation to demand an originally ordered item, most business writers still hold that discussing competitors' products or services is not worth while or ethical. In the case of writing business reports, the same essential philosophy often prevails: emphasize the positive and de-emphasize or eliminate the negative.13

13 This philosophy does not interfere with the quality of objectivity in reporting. Rather, it is merely a means of controlling emphasis.
Although such a philosophy is often quite functional in written business communication, behavioral findings suggest the desirability of business communicators considering the use of a two-sided presentation in persuasive appeals. Lumsdaine and Janis, in discussing resistance to counterpropaganda produced by one-sided and two-sided propaganda presentations, state the following:

In speculative discussions concerning propaganda effects, the question has often been raised as to whether a persuasive communication is more effective when it concentrates exclusively on the arguments supporting the communicator's position or when it includes some discussion (and/or refutation) of the opposing arguments. Various propaganda strategists have put forth the claim that in appealing for acceptance of any specific belief or policy, no opposing arguments should be discussed because mentioning rival ideas invites comparison, hesitation, and doubt. But experimental evidence . . . indicates that this generalization is not likely to hold true when the audience initially disagrees with the views advocated by the communicator.14

In the preceding quotation, the key phrase is, of course, "when the audience initially disagrees with the views advocated by the communicator." It is submitted that in many persuasive situations in business writing, the message originator approaches the communication neutrally. In other words, he neither agrees nor disagrees. Herein perhaps lies the difference between propaganda as used by behaviorists and the nature of persuasive written business communication.

14Arthur A. Lumsdaine and Irving L. Janis, "Resistance to 'Counterpropaganda' Produced by One-Sided versus Two-Sided 'Propaganda' Presentations," Public Opinion Quarterly, XVII (Fall, 1953), 311.
The authors of *Communication and Persuasion* put forth this question for inspection: What are the relative effects upon opinion change of presenting only those arguments favoring the recommended conclusion and discussing also arguments opposed to the position advocated.\(^{15}\)

Amplifying what Lumsdaine and Janis discuss concerning one-sided and two-sided argumentation, the following is presented by the authors:

One rationale for the results on counterpropaganda would run as follows: Regardless of initial position, a convincing one-sided communication presenting only positive arguments will tend to sway many members of the audience farther in the direction advocated by the communicator. Subsequently, however, these persons hear the opposite point of view, also supported by cogent-sounding arguments. Their opinions now tend to be swayed back in the negative direction, especially if the new arguments appear to offset the previous positive arguments. However, if the initial communication is, instead, a two-sided one, it will already have taken into account both the positive and negative arguments and still have reached the positive conclusion. When the communicatee is then subsequently exposed to the presentation of negative arguments in the counterpropaganda, he is less likely to be influenced in the negative direction. He is already familiar with the opposing point of view and has been led to the positive conclusion in a context where the negative arguments were in evidence. In fact, he has thus been given an advance basis for ignoring or discounting the negative arguments, and thus "innoculated" will tend to retain the positive conclusion.\(^{16}\)

Although the preceding quotation seems to be rather definite in character, certainly the experimental results


\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 111.
upon which this discussion is based are not so universally valid that no exceptions present themselves in the course of events.

How much the audience knows at the beginning of the persuasion process is of vital importance. Abelson feels, for instance, that if the audience already knows the weak points of the communicator's argument, it does no harm to mention them again. He goes ahead to say:

The authors of one experiment conclude that when facts not already known are introduced to support a counterargument, the communicator will be weakening his position. On the other hand, if conflicting facts are extremely salient for the audience, failure to mention them may be interpreted as a sign that the communicator has not carefully considered the other side.17

From the preceding discussion, it seems apparent that further research into this one element, one-sided versus two-sided argumentation, in the area of written business communication (especially from a persuasion standpoint) is needed. This research, to be of consequence, should be through controlled experimentation on the business front. This student feels that the findings advanced by the behavioral scientists cited in this dissertation should provide only a basis, in most cases, for further applied research in business.

**Logic versus Emotion**

Possibly one of the oldest and most widely recognized problems which the persuasive communicator in business faces

is that of determining the balance of logic and emotion in copy development. Realizing that man is essentially an emotional being, many writers, in their printed works about business persuasion through written communication, dwell heavily on the copious use of the many types of persuasive appeals (love of home, sex, enhancement of the ego, the herd instinct, etc.). Importance is also attached to rational appeals (the use of logic, for instance) although in a less enthusiastic way.

The business communicator, in thinking philosophically about this problem of logical and emotional copy development, may tend to polarize to an unnecessary extent. In other words, it is submitted that a persuasive appeal does not have to be totally emotional or totally rational; instead, a blending of the two may be quite fruitful.18

Hollingsworth, in The Psychology of the Audience, makes this statement: "The members of an audience are more alike in their instincts and emotions than in capacity to follow logical reasoning; hence emotional appeals or topics will

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18Some business-writing theorists and practitioners suggest that, generally speaking, the copy writer should develop his emotional appeals for action first and then reinforce these appeals through the development of rational ones. The rationale here is that emotional appeals cause the communicatee to desire to do that which the communicator wants him to do, and the logical appeals give him a means of rationalizing his emotional desires.
more uniformly and generally influence them."19 This recog-
nition gets quite to the heart of the difference between the
two types of appeals. Yet still another question presents
itself for inspection: Where lies the dichotomy between the
two kinds of persuasive appeals, i.e., what is an "emotional"
appeal and what is a "rational" appeal? The answers, indeed,
cannot be answered succinctly.

In thinking of this rather vague distinction between
emotional and rational approaches, Abelson states:

There are . . . studies which indicate the superi-
ority of the emotional type of appeal, and just as many
which find the rational appeal better. Part of the dif-
ficulty in drawing conclusions from the available re-
search lies in the lack of agreement among investigators
on how emotional and rational appeals are to be defined
and distinguished from each other. Also, as one experi-
menter points out, the two kinds of appeals are not
exclusive alternatives.20

Generalizing on the use of emotional and factual per-
suasive appeals is quite dangerous. Many factors (such as
age, sex, income bracket, social stratum, occupation, avo-
cation, geographic location, the product, the channel of
distribution, and others) make their presence known. Evi-
dence does suggest, however, that both approaches and a
combination of the two are workable. The problem is essen-
tially that of determining from the myriad factors which

19H. L. Hollingsworth, The Psychology of the Audience

20Abelson, Persuasion: How Opinions and Attitudes are
Changed, pp. 4-5.
surround a persuasive situation which route to travel in order to reach communicator-desired action.  

Message-Originator Conclusion-Drawing versus Recipient Conclusion-Drawing

Although most business communicators of persuasive material, particularly that related to sales and sales promotion, feel that conclusion-drawing is an essential part of a persuasive message, behavioral scientists have concerned themselves with the alternatives of explicitly determining the conclusion and leaving the conclusion implicit in a persuasive communication. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, for instance, submit the following result of their research effort into this topic:

Greater effectiveness of letting the audience draw its own conclusions might be predicted from the assertion sometimes made that indirect suggestion is more effective than direct, as well as from the frequently cited tenet of the nondirective school of psychotherapy that decisions are more effective when reached

21 The once-popular distinction of rational appeals being directed to the businessman and emotional appeals being aimed at the consumer no longer holds true, this student feels. Of course, the nature of the topics about which persuasion in a business situation is draped may often suggest that rationality may be a key factor in the success of the persuasive communication. This assumption, however, does not preclude the use of certain selected emotional appeals. The businessman is, in the final analysis, also a consumer and, hence, an emotional being. The reverse way of thinking in the case of persuading consumers also holds true: rational appeals are not without value.

22 For instance, the action part, normally the last segment of a sales-type message, is a conclusion drawn by the communicator. In other words, the communicator states in words of low abstraction precisely what he wants the communiquee to do in terms of communicator-desired action.
independently by the client than when suggested by the therapist. On the other hand, the opposite prediction can be made on the grounds that for many members of the audience the conclusion must be explicitly stated to be clearly perceived.23

Of course, these researchers, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, are concerned particularly with persuasive communications which have as their goal essentially the activity of gaining the recipient's acceptance of the issues presented, as opposed to getting the communiquee to engage in overt action. These behaviorists go ahead to present two qualifying conditions relative to conclusion determination. One concerns the kind of communicator and the other the kind of audience involved in a persuasive situation. They point out that one hypothesis, held by some behaviorists, suggests that a communicator who arouses suspicion is likely to have less effect when he draws the conclusion;24 and they also point out that some research efforts have suggested that the degree of sophistication of members of the communicator's audience is likely to be an important factor:

This may be the result of specific knowledge about the problem, or a function of the general ability level of the audience. Thus, with an audience composed of highly intelligent individuals, there may be less need to have the implications of the premises spelled out and less benefit from conclusion drawing by the communicator. On the other hand, with less intelligent individuals, there is the likelihood that they will be


24 Ibid., p. 103.
unable to arrive by themselves at the correct conclusion from the premises alone.\textsuperscript{25}

The level of intelligence displayed in the communicator's audience is of particular significance in the case of business report writing. Unconsciously, perhaps, some business report writers refrain from drawing extremely specific conclusions as the result of a research effort. They fear that such an activity might suggest to the communicatee(s) that the writer feels they are unable to infer correctly from the data and discussion presented in the report. Ordinarily, of course, a business reporter knows his audience's desires in terms of whether to present conclusions and recommendations in his writing or whether to omit them. If, however, because of an inability to determine his audience's wishes (as may sometimes be the case, although few business report writers are faced with the problem), the communicator who is presenting a report to top-management members might do well to consider omitting conclusions. Mitigating factors make their entrance into such a decision, of course. If the communicator is new on the job and is wishing to impress his recipients with the fact that he is a high-credibility source,\textsuperscript{26} then his omitting conclusions could possibly be a detriment to the image he is attempting to create.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26}See pp. 93-105, especially, for a discussion of high-credibility of communication source.
Whereas Hovland, Janis, and Kelley suggest the possible advantages of communicatee inference as far as conclusion-drawing is concerned, Abelson defends the more traditional approach of the message originator's stating his conclusions:

If you want the audience to change their opinions, you lead them up to the desired change, but let them take the last step themselves. The theory is that people are more easily convinced if they think that they made up their own minds and no one told them what to think. Often, however, this tactic doesn't work because of the difficulty of getting even intelligent audiences to see the implications behind the facts when these implications are left unsaid. It is better to draw conclusions for the audience to increase the likelihood that they understand what you are driving at and what you want them to do.27

From the foregoing discussion of conclusion determination in a persuasive communication, it can be seen that further research is needed. This student feels that conclusion-drawing by communicatees may be justified when the communicatees want to draw their own conclusions, as in the case of some business report-writing situations, or possibly in the case of a high-intelligence audience which has not expressed its desire concerning the determining of conclusions. In most business communications, however, the writer would certainly be quite safe if he draws the conclusions for his recipients. By engaging in such an activity, he insures thought transference in its truest form.

II. SOME PRINCIPLES OF MASS PERSUASION RELATED TO PERSUASIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS

Cartwright, in an issue of Human Relations, reports the results of a sizable mass persuasion effort carried on during World War II. This activity concerned war-bond drives and other activities directly related to the war effort. Because the principles of mass persuasion advanced by Cartwright are of particular significance in thinking conceptually about the persuasion process in business communication, this student feels that an inspection of them is warranted in this chapter. Too, the principles tend to bring together much of the information presented in this and the previous chapters of this dissertation.

In the process of persuasion, the communicator is especially concerned with keen adaptation of his message to the personality formation of his recipient. In the message originator's quest for careful analysis of his communicatees, therefore, Cartwright advances that consideration of their cognitive structures is warranted:

It is considered a truism by virtually all psychologists that a person's behavior is guided by his perceptions of the world in which he lives. Action is taken on the basis of a person's point of view of the "facts" of the situation. Alternatives are chosen according to beliefs about "what leads to what." The content and relationships among parts of a person's psychological world may be called his cognitive structure, and it may be stated that a person's behavior is a function of the nature of his cognitive structure. It follows from this formulation that one way to change a person's behavior is to modify his cognitive structure. Certain kinds of changes of behavior, moreover, seem to be possible only if certain changes of cognitive
structure take place. This principle applies to all efforts to influence behavior, whether in a face-to-face situation or by communication through a distance.28

Changing a person's behavior is, therefore, the essence of the nature of persuasion; it is the goal of the communicator. This change of behavior is often that of changing the recipient's behavior from lack of activity to communicator-desired activity; it does not always concern a change from one overt action to another.

Reaching the Communicatee's Sense Organs

In the final analysis, the communicatee governs whether he will be vitally exposed to a persuasive stimulus. Cartwright maintains that people tend to categorize the various persuasive communication media and then react to any one persuasive appeal in terms of the classification into which it falls. "Total stimulus situations are selected or rejected on the basis of an impression of their general characteristics."29 Thus recipients are likely to perceive of the various communication efforts as being, for instance, entertainment, news, politics, advertising, etc. Whether a person will choose one or another stimulus situation depends upon his reaction to the general category. This reaction is quite vividly pointed out with respect to communicatee evaluation of direct mail advertising. Since there has been

29 Ibid.
some rather severe criticism of direct mail as an advertising medium, there is a possibility that some consumer-recipients have tended to classify the medium in a negative way. Thus, when even a quite effective direct mail piece is presented to such communicatees, the stimulus must overcome the resistance built up as the result of the negative designation it has received.

It is submitted that not only has direct mail advertising been subjected to such keen criticism; other advertising media have been adversely criticized also. Of course, as in any other socio-economic activity, criticism is often warranted. However, the act of national criticizing, as such, does condition communicatees rather negatively, and it does, therefore, result in a sizable problem for the message-originator to overcome.

Overcoming the problem of recipient categorizing of media, it can be seen, is one of broad magnitude and is beyond the scope of one specific persuasive communication. Business writers, collectively, can and should put forth effort in molding a different, more positive, image in the communicatees' minds about the various vehicles for the persuasive word in business. Only through such revamping can any one persuasive effort meet with greater success in reaching the sense organs of the persons who are to be influenced.

In line with reaching the recipient's sense organs, Cartwright advances that "the categories employed by a person
in characterizing stimulus situations tend to protect him from unwanted changes in his cognitive structure."  

For instance, people tend to read newspapers whose editorial policy agrees with theirs; indeed, they select persuasive communications in terms of their own likes and dislikes. Audience adaptation, therefore, plays a cardinal role in presenting a business message persuasively.  

Message Acceptance as a Part of the Communicatee's Cognitive Structure  

In line with Cartwright's thesis developed in the immediately preceding discussion, it is seen that once a message is received it will tend to be accepted or rejected on the basis of more general categories to which it appears to belong and that the categories employed by a person in characterizing messages tend to protect him from unwanted changes in his cognitive structure.  

The stability of one's cognitive structure, according to Cartwright, is rather basic to sanity and stability. A frame of reference provides a basis upon which human action is built:  

Anyone desiring to influence the behavior of others must keep constantly in mind a very simple and obvious fact, namely, that everyone, after the earliest stages of infancy, possesses a remarkably stable cognitive structure upon which he depends for a satisfactory adjustment to his environment.  

\[30^{\text{Ibid.}}\]  

\[31^{\text{Ibid., p. 258.}}\]
One's cognitive structure may be quite "incorrect" or "unhealthy," yet without it the human being would not be able to function. When an individual realizes, because of some pressure, that his cognitive structure, or a part of it, does not satisfy his needs, then he becomes subject to change. "Only when a given cognitive structure seems to the person to be unsatisfactory for his adjustment is he likely readily to receive influences designed to change that structure." Cartwright maintains that when a recipient deems his cognitive structure to be less than satisfactory, then a persuasive stimulus will be (1) rejected, (2) distorted so as to fit, or (3) productive of changes in the cognitive structure.

It should not be inferred from the discussion of Cartwright's findings thus far that one's cognitive structure is incapable of change. Rather, it is to be seen that capability of change is inherent within the communicatee and that this change comes about from a recognition of the need by the recipient and not because of the persuasive stimulus itself. The stimulus merely provides a vehicle for expression of the need for a change.

32The terms "incorrect" or "unhealthy" are, of course, subject to human evaluation. What is meant here is that some individuals, because of conditioning, hold views about life which are not best in terms of the ideal adjustment to living; yet, without an adjustment of some kind, they would not be able to function, i.e., they would be in a constant state of flux. The "cognitive structure" concept is quite akin to the "assumptive world" concept. See pp. 67-70.

33Cartwright, op. cit., p. 258. 34Ibid.
What a persuasive effort can do, essentially, is that of presenting routes which lead to need satisfaction. Unsatisfied needs are contained within each person's cognitive structure:

It follows from these general observations about the nature of human motivation that efforts to influence the behavior of another person must attempt either to modify needs (and goals) or to change the person's motivational structure as to which activities lead to which goals. This means that a person can be induced to do voluntarily something that he otherwise would not do only if a need can be established for which this action is a goal or if the action can be made to be seen as a path to an existing goal.35

Communicator-Desired Action as a Path Toward a Communicatee-Desired Goal

The major role in persuasion is that of presenting to the communicatee a means of attaining a goal which he envisions. This goal may be a conscious one or it may be hidden within the recipient's subconscious. In either case, only when a communicatee realizes how he can become happier through the realization of a goal, or, at least, an attempt toward its realization, will he be in a position for effective persuasion. Cartwright advances these three principles:

(1) A given action will be accepted as a path to a goal only if the connections "fit" the person's larger cognitive structure; (2) The more goals which are seen as attainable by a single path, the more likely it is that a person will take that path; (3) If an action is seen as not leading to a desired goal or as leading to an undesired goal, it will not be chosen; and if an action is seen as leading to a desired goal, it will

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tend not to be chosen to the extent that easier, cheaper, or otherwise more desirable actions are also seen as leading to the same goal.36

Although all of the preceding principles are pertinent to persuasive written communication in business, the second one should be noted especially. Cartwright's observation that showing the recipient that many goals are attainable by a single path seems to be somewhat in conflict with a concept held by many business writers. A point emphasized in writing productive sales copy is that of developing a so-called "central selling theme" which is supposed to be a keen development of one elemental appeal, be it an emotional or a rational one. Particularly is this means of operation often recommended with respect to the creation of successful direct mail copy. The rationale is that an individual, when exposed to many "reasons" for action which lead to a specific goal, becomes frustrated and action may be thwarted because of the numerous appeals contained within the communication. When only one basic appeal is used in a specific persuasive communication, on the other hand, the communicatee's entire attention is directed to only one concept which he can absorb without the frustrating experience of being exposed to many appeals.

Appropriateness of the Communicatee's Cognitive and Motivational System as Related to His Behavior at a Point in Time

A person's cognitive structure provides him with a motivational system. This system is one which provides a

36 Ibid., p. 262.
mechanism for the achievement of goals. It can be seen, therefore, that in order for a persuasive communication to meet with success, an appropriate cognitive and motivational system must gain control of the recipient's behavior at a particular time. In other words, the communicatee must recognize his need and must be motivated to accept the stimulus as a means of realizing that need.

Cartwright phrases this condition thusly:

*When a person is asked why he has not actually done a particular thing that he seemingly had accepted as desirable, he may answer that he did not have the time, energy, or financial resources. Such a statement is equivalent to saying that other motivational systems have maintained control of his behavior to such an extent that they monopolized his time and resources.*

In order to get the recipient's emotional structure and cognitive structure working harmoniously and positively (in terms of communicator-desired action) at a particular point in time, Cartwright maintains that one element in the persuasive message is of paramount importance: a low level of abstraction in description. He states that "the fact seems well documented that, unless a proposed action is defined quite specifically, it is probable that it will not actually be carried out in behavior, even though it has been accepted as desirable." Business communicators recognize the need for concreteness of expression with respect to any subject which is to be emphasized in a message; and, quite naturally,

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37Ibid., p. 264.  
38Ibid., p. 265.
emphasis is a key quality in the writing of persuasive copy.

Finally, Cartwright advances that "a given motivational structure may be set in control of behavior by placing the person in a situation requiring a decision to take, or not to take, a step of action that is a part of the structure." 39

Here Cartwright is assuming that the audience analysis prior to communicating has been accomplished and that the message originator has some knowledge, vague though it may be, of his audience members' cognitive and emotional structures. Therefore, the persuasive stimulus is geared to these structures and action is requested, rather specifically, at a definite point in time. In other words, after appeals have been keenly developed, with special attention paid to specificity (as opposed to generality) of wording, then the communicator develops the "action" part of his message in terms of the recipient's taking that action at a precise time.

The necessity of making a decision in regard to a specific action requires that motivational structures of which this action is a part be brought to bear in determining the next step in action. When such a decision is required, the action will be taken if the resultant forces in all activated motivational structures are in the direction of that particular action. This means, of course, that forcing a decision will result in the desired action only if appropriate cognitive and motivational structures have been accepted by the person. 40

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 266.
From the foregoing observations, it can be seen that the purpose of this chapter has been that of presenting some rather important behavioral factors involved in the persuasive written communication in business as well as a description of some principles of mass persuasion which are applicable to a persuasive written business communication.

Emerging from this chapter and the preceding ones are some observations concerning the process of persuasion in written business communication. These observations will be discussed in the following and final chapter, Chapter VI, of this dissertation.
CHAPTER VI
EMERGING OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PROCESS OF PERSUASION AS RELATED TO WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

The point of view taken by this student when research for this dissertation began was that finding results of research studies carried on by behavioral scientists concerning the process of persuasion would be worth while. Therefore, the research technique used was an inquiring one (an objective one) rather than one of seeking to discover behavioral studies which verify, so to speak, the techniques being used by business writers of today. It follows from this attitude that selecting only those studies which are of some consequence in terms of written business communication was necessary; otherwise, the nature of the subject would have led this researcher into multitudinous paths of research, the outcome of which would have been a most unwieldy presentation and, hence, one of questionable value.

Therefore, the essential question which this student had in mind at the beginning of the research project was a two-fold one: What findings have behavioral scientists (especially psychologists and sociologists) advanced in
their literature about the process of persuasion; and which of these findings, if any are to be discovered, are pertinent to the nature of persuasion in written business communication?

A next question which the student had to answer in justifying the research was this: Of what consequence to a business writer would be an inquiry into behavioral disclosures concerning the process of persuasion? It is submitted that an answer to this question lies within an answer which attempts to justify any study which does not have total pragmatic transferences. Some studies, such as this one, are valuable because they induce contemplation and speculation. In turn, it is submitted that contemplation and speculation can well lead to creativity, an important quality couched within the process of persuasion. Perhaps one might think of theoretical findings as apparati of the mind and as ways of seeing the "why" behind the "how." In any case, it is maintained that the conscientious business communicator is eager to approach his writing from an inquiring standpoint; he is prone to question "techniques" and to experiment in his efforts to communicate and persuade. Only through such a questioning and inquiring attitude can progress in any effort be realized.

I. SOME OF THE BEHAVIORAL DISCLOSURES RE-EXAMINED IN TERMS OF THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTATION BY BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

As has been stated, the research efforts and the various hypotheses held by behaviorists which have been discussed in
the preceding chapters were presented because of their pertinency in thinking conceptually about the nature of persuasion in written business communication. The carefully selected material presented was highlighted to a considerable extent throughout the dissertation through the use of descriptions of how transferences to business writing can be made.\(^1\) Most of these transferences reflect the techniques being used by present-day business writers in their persuasive efforts. However, as was noted in several places in the chapters, some findings suggest the need for business communicators' taking a more critical attitude about their "accepted" practices. Thus, in some areas further research and experimentation by business communicators is warranted.\(^2\)

**Ethics of Persuasion**

It is with some hesitation that the problem of ethics in persuasion as a subject with which the business writer should concern himself is presented. This hesitation is based on the conviction that the problem is so very nebulous and, hence, open to so very many interpretations that a "solution" is quite remote. However, it is submitted that the

\(^1\)This highlighting through the use of transferences was done mainly in order to make the behavioral findings more vivid rather than to suggest that only isolated transferences to written business communication are possible.

\(^2\)This recommendation is not to suggest that further research by business communicators in other areas concerned with persuasion is not warranted. Certainly a constantly inquiring attitude by the conscientious communicator is of enormous value in terms of progress.
conscientious business writer should feel a sense of debt to his recipients in presenting his persuasive material honestly and forthrightly. This sense of debt is of paramount significance in relation to the communicator's understanding of the "persuadable individual." The inferiority-feeling communicatee, it has been revealed, is rather susceptible to persuasion; therefore, when the business writer notes, through his audience analysis, that his recipients may be subject to feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, he should take particular care in the selection of appeals and, in general, the way in which he attempts to persuade them.

Use of Mild Forms of Persuasion as Related to Communicatee Anxiety

It will be recalled that a finding advanced by Janis and Feshbach suggests that when communicatees are especially anxious about a subject, the persuasive message aimed at them about this matter, in order to meet with communicator-desired action, should be of a fairly mild form, i.e., there is no need for excessively strong emotional appeals. Janis and Feshbach warn that if the communication is too exciting in terms of appeals used, a possibility exists that interfering responses on the part of the recipients may present themselves.

It is submitted that the business communicator should take note of this finding advanced by Janis and Feshbach and that he should concern himself with an investigation of the
anxiety level of his audiences (particularly with respect to employer-employee communication) before writing.

Varying Degrees of Communicates Authoritarianism and Aggressiveness

Although the typical business communicator is not ordinarily equipped with adequate research tools for determining his recipients' varying degrees of authoritarianism and aggressiveness, further research by business writers concerning these communicatee personality traits is warranted.

If, as Wagman's studies indicate, many recipients are susceptible to persuasion by so-called authorities (authorities in terms of how the communicatee perceives the message originator), then determination of this trait would be of help to the business writer. He would be better equipped to determine his essential approach in persuading. Too, if Weiss and Fine are correct in hypothesizing that high-aggressive individuals are quite subject to persuasion, then determination of this trait by business communicators would be of value. On the other hand, however, if aggressiveness is merely a personal reflection on the part of the individual who has low self-esteem, as other behaviorists maintain, then the quality of aggressiveness is not to be considered separately but, instead, as a part of the concept of the inferiority-feeling individual. In any case, though, the business communicator needs to reflect upon the recipient qualities of authoritarianism and aggressiveness prior to writing.
Communication Source Credibility

Source credibility as related to communication effectiveness, it will be recalled, has received the attention of behaviorists. A high-credibility source (which meshes quite neatly with the concept of authoritarianism) leads to message acceptance. It has been recognized that most business writers realize the importance of high credibility of communication source and that they strive to build a favorable image around their recipients. However, this student feels that greater effort is needed in coordinating the various image-building efforts between the various communication media. For instance, in a business organization a common understanding about the sought-after image between the originators of the various advertising copy (newspaper, television, magazine, radio, direct mail, etc.), the externally directed reports, the internally directed reports, the employee directed memoranda and all other forms of written communication should be evidenced. Only through such coordination will the ideal image be built among the recipients of the firm’s written messages.

It should be noted in addition, however, that the coordinated image-building approach taken should not suggest a defensive attitude on the part of the business organization.

3Message acceptance does not necessarily indicate the appearance of communicator-desired action. However, message acceptance is a forerunner of such action.
The principle of balance, as submitted by Titus, makes its entrance into a discussion about credibility of communication source.

**Communicatee Susceptibility to Authority and Peer Figures**

According to behaviorists, people differ as to susceptibility to persuasion from the standpoint of the status of the persuader. Whereas some individuals are more easily swayed by authority figures, others, in seeking group acceptance (particularly in the case of inadequacy-feeling individuals) are more likely to be persuaded by peers (or "peer-like" figures).

Further research by business writers should be conducted in a quest for determining the value of using an authority approach or a peer-like approach (which oftentimes is a "common-man" approach) in persuading through written communication. Again, the need for keen audience analysis is noted; and again it is submitted that the necessary research tools for such investigations are, in most cases, somewhat inadequate.

This student feels that oftentimes a business writer assumes that because he is writing to a low-income individual, for instance, he should use the "common-man" (peer-like) approach. If he knew more about his communicatee (as is often quite possible in writing to employees, for instance), he might realize that the recipient might be more subject to persuasion by an authority figure than he is by a peer figure.
It should not be taken for granted that income level, social stratum, or any other social designation automatically means that the individual concerned is of a particular personality type. It is submitted, for example, that many people are to be found who receive low incomes and possess little formal education, yet who may not feel inadequate and who may not be highly emotional. In other words, the point of view being taken by this student is that the business writer who assumes greatly may not be doing as effective a job in his communication as he otherwise could.

The Timing of Persuasive Communications

Tead, in discussing the concept of logic of events, points out the need for proper timing in the leader-follower (and the communicator-communicatee) relationship. His essential thesis is that people are usually quite concerned about today, whereas yesterday to them may be only a memory and tomorrow simply a hope.

In line with Tead's way of envisioning the concept of time in relation to leading and communicating, the business writer would do well to consider the impact of communications reaching communicatees at almost the exact time for decision making and action. This is not to say that all persuasive communications should reach the recipients at the time for

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4The word "almost" is used here to suggest that there must be sufficient time for a stimulus to reach the communicatee's sense organs and to induce action.
action; in fact, in some cases (particularly in the case of newspaper and magazine advertising copy when the purpose is to notify of new products, new services, or special events), communicating at a substantial time interval prior to the time for communicator-desired action is warranted. However, this student feels that in persuasive messages from management members to employees, especially, there is a need for business writers judging the possible ill effects of communicating at a substantial time interval before decisions are to be made and action taken.

Primacy versus Recency in Organization

The law of primacy in persuasion, which is held by some behaviorists as valid and viewed by others as of doubtful validity, suggests that the material presented first in a persuasive message should, generally speaking, be of the greatest consequence. It further suggests that in a series of persuasive messages, the first communication should be the key one from the standpoint of content.

Since behaviorists are not in complete agreement as to the validity of the law of primacy, further research is needed, particularly research carried on by business communicators. If, for instance, it is found that primacy is of cardinal value, then it may very well be that in sales messages, the primary appeal (a part of the central
selling theme) should be developed in the first paragraph of the message.  

One-sided versus Two-sided Persuasive Appeals

Of all the findings cited in this dissertation, this one, that of one-sided versus two-sided persuasive appeals, seems to be most in conflict with contemporary practice in business writing. This conflict may, in part, be the result of transference; yet, this student feels that the alert business communicator should seriously consider the findings about one-and two-sided appeals advanced by Lumsdaine, Janis, Abelson, and other behavioral scientists. These scientists note, in their behavioral studies, that two-sided arguments (persuasive appeals) are often quite effective in terms of gaining communicator-desired action because recipients can compare the contrasting views as they are exposed in one stimulus.

Since most business writers advocate the position of developing the communicator's view through keen emphasis (repetition of key words and phrases, low abstraction in wording, action verbs, the communicatee point of view in terms of product or service use, etc.), the suggestion by behaviorists that two-sided discussions are more effective is at variance.

5At present, it is noted that oftentimes the first part of a sales message (be it a direct-mail piece or another type of copy) is essentially an attention-getting sector, although it quite often contains a "reason" for action.
It is felt that business writers should conduct experiments on the business front in order to resolve this conflict. Of course, it may very well be (as in most social situations) that no one method is superior and that the use of one-sided appeals or two-sided ones may rest on other factors (the disposition of the audience, the timing, etc.). However, no matter what the outcome may be, further research may be warranted.

Logic versus Emotion

As with respect to a discussion of ethics in persuasion, this student hesitates to develop a discussion of the use of logical and emotional appeals in persuasive communicating. This much-talked-about area has been the subject of countless writings.

It will be remembered that Abelson maintains that much of the difficulty in drawing conclusions from the available research into the topic lies in the lack of agreement among investigators on how emotional and rational appeals are to be defined and distinguished from each other. Because of this semantic and behavioral problem, therefore, business writers have difficulty discussing intelligently the practice of using emotional and rational appeals in persuasive writing.

This student feels that in order for printed works in the field of business communication to be of greater value than at present, an organized body, made up of business-writing theorists and practitioners, should agree on what
constitutes rational and emotional appeals in terms, perhaps, of the personality types of varying communicatees. This agreement would, in turn, lead to a firmer foundation upon which to build much-needed theory which will lead to more skilful practice.

**Message-Originator Conclusion-Drawing versus Recipient Conclusion-Drawing**

Most business writers feel that one of the main duties of the communicator is to draw conclusions for recipients. This notion is based on the accepted need for stating rather concretely the specific action which the writer wants the communicatee to take.

Research studies discussed in this dissertation, however, reveal that in some cases recipient conclusion-drawing may be of greater importance in terms of gaining communicator-desired action than a reverse procedure. In business report writing, for instance, communicatee conclusion-drawing in the case of high-intelligence audiences and in the case of an overtly expressed desire for such by the audience is warranted, this student submits. Of course, in sales writing, as such, it is noted that conclusions which precede a description of the desired action are worth while.

Further research into the ramifications of these two types of conclusion-drawing, that by the communicator and that by the message recipient, is warranted.
Enhancement of the Business Organization's Image

It should be noted once more that an overall conclusion from the research points clearly to a relationship between the enhancement of a firm's image (improvement of its public relations) and its communication-improvement effort.

Indeed, the better the business organization's public relations, the better it can communicate productively. Therefore, it is recommended that one step toward improved persuasive writing in business is a conscious effort at upgrading public relations, no matter the vehicle or vehicles used for such enhancement.

II. WHAT CONSTITUTES PERSUASION IN COMMUNICATION?

Throughout this dissertation, the expressions "persuasive business writing," "persuasive communication in business" and other such combinations of words have connoted perhaps that certain types of business writing can be labeled "persuasive writing" and that certain other types cannot. Yet, in other strategic points in the dissertation, this student has maintained that all writing in business is persuasive writing. This conflict is an intentional one.

In order to emphasize a point under consideration, this student used expressions such as "persuasive business communication." Then, in order to indicate his feeling about persuasion, viewed from a much broader and more philosophical vantage point, mention was made that all writing (and communication in its elemental sense) is of a persuasive nature.
In order to round out this study of persuasion, it should be noted that Berlo, in his work *The Process of Communication*, advances some thinking concerning the nature of persuasion with which this student is in accord. In discussing the human being's development of his communication ability, Berlo makes these comments:

Our basic purpose is to alter the original relationship between our own organism and the environment in which we found ourselves. More specifically, our basic purpose is to reduce the probability that we are solely a target of external forces, and increase the probability that we exert force ourselves. Our basic purpose in communication is to become an affecting agent, to affect others, our physical environment, and ourselves, to become a determining agent, to have a vote in how things are.

In short, we communicate to influence—to affect with intent. In analyzing communication, in trying to improve our own communication ability, the first question we need to ask is, what did the communicator intend to have happen as a result of his message? What was he trying to accomplish, in terms of influencing his environment? As a result of his communication, what did he want people to believe, to be able to do, to say? In psychological terms, what response was he trying to obtain?6

In defending even objective (factual) statements as being persuasive ones, Berlo says:

The purpose of an observation is to translate the physical world into language statements—statements of fact. The intent of a judgment is not to translate, but to vote. Its aims are persuasive, to affect behavior by making statements of value about the world.7

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7Ibid., p. 228.
Further, Berlo makes these observations:

Statements of fact have a part in persuasive purpose. They direct attention, they structure perception, they suggest a particular way of viewing physical reality. All language utterances have a persuasive dimension. No statements can be said to be nonpersuasive. 8

Even though the preceding attitude about persuasion suggests, especially for philosophical discussion, that all communication is persuasive communication, there are varying degrees of effectiveness.

Persuasion is basic to effective expression. The nature of persuasion in contemporary written business communication reflects many of the behavioral findings advanced in the preceding pages of this dissertation. In other areas, however, further research on the business front is warranted. Indeed, there should be a never-ending quest for improving the persuasive word in business.

8Ibid., p. 234.
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