

Consumer-Product and Sociopolitical Messages for Use in Studies of Persuasion

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The purpose of this report is to make available two sets of persuasive messages—one for fictitious brands of 12 types of consumer products and the other for 20 sociopolitical issues. These communications were developed as part of a research program directed at obtaining reliable persuasion effects.

It is often difficult, but nonetheless advantageous, for researchers to obtain persuasive materials used by other investigators. This article announces the availability of two sets of persuasive communications.¹

CONSUMER-PRODUCT MESSAGES

Message materials have been developed for 12 products: automobiles, cereal, electric fans, electronic calculators, furniture polish, house paint, movie cameras, portable electric heaters, portable radios, screwdrivers, television sets, and 10-speed bikes. The materials consists of three parts: (1) two sets of 72 *brand*

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names (common six-letter surnames), (2) 72 paragraphs about *product attributes* (6 for each product category) selected from *Consumer Reports* and providing information about characteristics that should vary among different brands of products, and (3) 360 one- or two-sentence *brand evaluations*, each of which descriptively assigns a value (poor, below average, average, above average, or excellent) to a brand on 1 of a product's 6 attributes. A communication is constructed by selecting a brand name, product category, and one or more product-attribute paragraphs, each accompanied by a concluding brand evaluation.

The consumer messages have been used primarily in computerized persuasion studies in which subjects encounter many messages in succession (see Ronis et al., 1977). In such message-dense presentations, these messages have been observed to produce strong, immediate persuasion effects that dissipate quickly (typically within minutes). The persuasive effects of these messages have been shown to be sensitive to manipulations of source credibility (Pratkanis et al., under review) and to interactions of measurement delay with level of recipient involvement (Pratkanis & Greenwald, under review), message similarity (Baumgardner et al., 1983), repetition of opposing arguments (Ronis, 1980), and the evaluative nature of the message context (Leippe et al., 1982).

SOCIOPOLITICAL MESSAGES

The sociopolitical issues concern alternative courses of (usually) collective action. Messages have been prepared on 20 policy issues: permissibility of medical malpractice suits, provision of free textbooks in public schools, permission of trade with countries allowing the slaughter of endangered species, requirement of child-proof medicine containers, fluoridation of public water, government subsidy of the postal service, permissibility of aerosol spray containers, the appropriateness of violent T.V. shows for children, requirement of catalytic converters for automobiles, the appropriateness of relying on coal as an energy source, requirement of math courses in college curricula, Puerto Rican statehood, continuation of college athletic scholarships, permissibility of phosphate detergents, permissibility of chemical additives in cereal, requirement of yearly auto inspections, recommended frequency of toothbrushing, adoption of the four-day work week, recommended hours of sleep, and the value of advertising.

Each message advocates one side of the issue. Each message title consists of a question beginning with an auxiliary verb (e.g., "Should public water supplies be fluoridated?"). The body of the message is composed of two paragraphs (about 75 words each). Each sentence of the message presents an argument supporting the advocated side of the issue. The last sentence summarizes the message conclusion. For each message there is a pair of source cues (about 30 words each) that can be used to induce subjects to either discount or accept the message. In studies investigating the sleeper effect in persuasion, Pratkanis et al. (under review) found that all 20 messages produced moderate opinion change that

tended to persist throughout a one-hour session, using the computerized, message-dense procedures.

NOTE

¹ Both sets of persuasive communications can be obtained from the first author (in text or computer-disk format) or can be ordered through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 269-826).

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