

Personality  
and  
Persuasibility

*Carl Hovland*

新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列

Personality and Persuasibility  
个性与可说服性

Carl Hovland 等著  
[美]卡尔·霍夫兰

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随着中国高等教育的教学改革，广大师生已不满足于仅仅阅读国外图书的翻译版，他们迫切希望能读到原版图书，希望能采用国外英文原版图书进行教学，从而保证所讲授的知识体系的完整性、系统性、科学性和文字描绘的准确性。此套丛书的出版便是满足了这种需求，同时可使学生在专业技术方面尽快掌握本学科相应的外语词汇，并了解先进国家的学术发展方向。

本系列在引进英文原版图书的同时，将目录译为中文，作为对原版的一种导读，供读者阅读时参考。

从事经典著作的出版，需要出版人付出不懈的努力，我们自知本套丛书也许会有很多缺陷，虚心接受读者提出的批评和建议。

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## PREFACE

TWO YEARS AGO the Yale Communication and Attitude Change Program inaugurated the present series of monographs after consideration of the advantages of having studies closely related in theoretical implications within the covers of a single volume. The success of our first volume, *The Order of Presentation in Persuasion*, has encouraged us to bring out a second monograph of similar type.

The present volume deals with "general persuasibility." This term refers to a person's readiness to accept social influence from others irrespective of what he knows about the communicator or what it is that the communicator is advocating. Two lines of inquiry as to the nature of individual differences in susceptibility to influence converge in this volume. The first began with the series of studies conducted by Janis on the personality correlates of persuasibility. The second line of attack, involving a series of studies of developmental aspects of persuasibility in children, was initiated by Abelson and Lesser under the auspices of the Yale program and later supported by a United States Public Health grant and by Adelphi College.

A number of other psychologists associated with the Yale research program have also made significant contributions on individual differences in persuasibility. All the pertinent studies are brought together in this volume.

Four of the authors, Abelson, Cohen, Hovland, and Janis, are members of the Yale Psychology Department. The present locations of the other authors are as follows: Field is a graduate student in Social Relations at Harvard; Elaine Graham is

on the staff of the Bank Street College of Education; King is with the Personnel Assessment Branch of the U. S. Naval Medical Research Laboratory at New London; Lesser is on the faculty of Hunter College; Harriet Linton is on the faculty of the Research Center for Mental Health at New York University; Rife is a student at the Harvard Medical School.

Most of the research focuses on the personality attributes of persons who are moderately persuasible, in contrast to those who are resistant to all attempts at persuasion or those, at the opposite extreme, who are indiscriminately gullible. In these studies, emotional factors, symptoms of personal adjustment, sex differences, and differences in intelligence are systematically analyzed in relation to degree of persuasibility.

Thus this volume presents a series of interrelated investigations, all bearing on a common set of problems. Except for editorial work to provide some uniformity of format, each study is presented in the author's own style. Inevitably there is considerable variation in the type of presentation used by the different authors and in their emphases. However, an attempt has been made to provide guideposts that will indicate some of the interrelations between the studies. There is an introductory analytic essay by the editors which gives the general framework of the problem of persuasibility and specifies how each of the individual contributions to the volume fits into the framework. Following the presentation of the original research investigations, to which most of the volume is devoted, there is a summary chapter in which the editors attempt to extract the common threads and to piece together the over-all pattern that emerges from the various studies. In a final postscript chapter, we present a new set of theoretical categories that seems to be useful for integrating and analyzing the relevant findings on personality differences in responsiveness to social influence.

The editors are indebted to the authors of the individual chapters for their patience and indulgence in accepting criticisms and suggestions. In the evaluation of the materials and in suggestions for presentation, the editors benefited from the wise and incisive criticisms of Fred Sheffield and Leonard Doob. Their careful reading of the chapters helped greatly in the preparation of the entire volume.

We are indebted to Rosalind L. Feierabend for drafting portions of the summary chapter and for suggestions for styling of other chapters as well. Her skillful but gentle rewording has greatly increased the book's readability.

The financial support which enabled these studies to be done is gratefully acknowledged. Our thanks go to the Rockefeller Foundation, for general support of the Yale program, and especially to Leland C. DeVinney, of their Social Science Program, who has continually given us encouragement. Appreciation is also expressed to the United States Public Health Services for their support of the studies by Abelson and Lesser.

The arduous task of preparing the typescript was capably performed by Patricia Stannard with generous assistance from Kristine Christensen and Jane Olejarczyk. Throughout all phases of publication the staff of the Yale University Press has been most helpful. The authors are particularly indebted to Jane Olson, whose imaginative suggestions and conscientious styling were indispensable.

CARL I. HOVLAND  
IRVING L. JANIS

*New Haven, Conn.*  
*December 31, 1958*

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## CHAPTER 1

# *An Overview of Persuasibility Research*

IRVING L. JANIS AND CARL I. HOVLAND

THEORISTS AND RESEARCH INVESTIGATORS in many different areas of human behavior—attitude change, group dynamics, psychotherapy, hypnosis, and social perception—share a common interest in understanding the *predispositional* factors which underlie responsiveness to one or another form of social influence. While these researchers have approached the study of predispositional factors from widely different points of emphasis, many of their findings converge on a few basic variables which have been designated as “persuasibility factors.”

Several studies of personality factors in relation to individual differences in persuasibility were reported by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley in 1953. Since that time further studies have been conducted to provide a more systematic analysis of the personality correlates of persuasibility and also of the course of its development from childhood through adolescence. The present volume reports these newer investigations.

### DEFINITION OF PERSUASIBILITY

By “persuasibility factor” is meant any variable attribute within a population that is correlated with *consistent individual differences* in responsiveness to one or more classes of in-

fluent communications. The meaning of the key terms in this definition will become somewhat clearer if we consider a brief schematic analysis of the communication process involved in successful persuasion.

Whenever an individual is influenced to change his beliefs, decisions, or general attitudes, certain identifiable external events occur which constitute the *communication stimuli*, and certain changes in the behavior of the person take place which constitute the *communication effects*. Communication stimuli include not only what is said, but also all of the intentional and unintentional cues which influence a member of the audience, including information as to who is saying it, why he is saying it, and how other people are reacting to it.

The observable communication effects could be said to subsume all perceptible changes in the recipient's verbal and nonverbal behavior, including not only changes in private opinions or judgments but also a variety of learning effects (e.g. increased knowledge about the communicator's position) and superficial conformist behavior (e.g. public expression of agreement with the conclusion despite private rejection of it). However, our main interest centers upon those changes in observable behavior which are regarded as components of "genuine" changes in opinions or in verbalizable attitudes. This requires observational methods which enable us to discern, in addition to the individual's public responses, those indications of his private thoughts, feelings, and evaluations that are used to judge whether the recipient has "internalized" the communicator's message or is merely giving what he considers to be a socially acceptable response.

We use the term "attitude change" when there are clear-cut indications that the recipient has internalized a valuational message, as evidenced by the fact that the person's perceptions, affects, and overt actions, as well as his verbalized judgments, are discernibly changed. When there is evidence

of a genuine change in a *verbalized belief or value judgment*, we use the term "opinion change," which usually constitutes one component of attitude change. Almost all experiments on the effects of persuasive communications, including those reported in the present volume, have been limited to investigating changes in opinion. The reason, of course, is that such changes can readily be assessed in a highly reliable way, whereas other components of verbalizable attitudes, although of considerable theoretical interest, are much more difficult to measure.

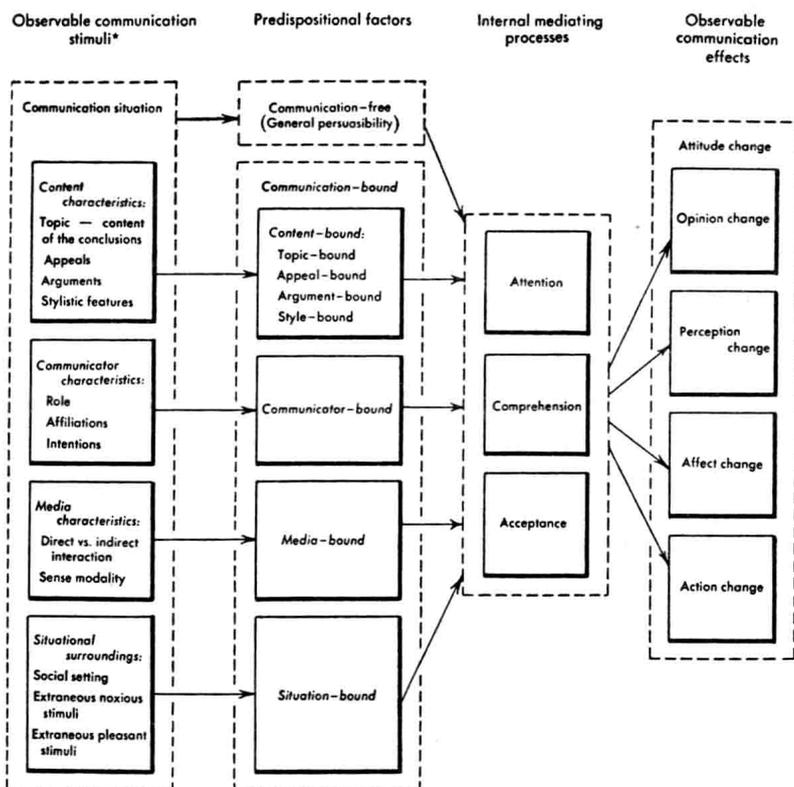
Neither "opinion change" nor "attitude change" is used to refer to those instances of surface conformity in which the person *pretends* to adopt a point of view that he does not really believe. Thus, the area of opinion change with which we are concerned includes studies dealing with what has been referred to as "internalization" and "identification," but excludes those dealing with "compliance" (cf. Kelman, 1959).

Figure 1 gives a schematic outline of the major factors that enter into attitude change. The observable communication stimuli and the observable effects are represented as the two end-points of the communication process. These are the antecedent and consequent events that are observable; they constitute the empirical anchorage for two main types of constructs which are needed in order to account for the interrelationships between the communication stimuli and observable effects: *predispositional factors* and *internal mediating processes*. Predispositional factors are used to account for *individual differences in observable effects when all communication stimuli are held constant*. Constructs referring to internal, or mediating, processes are used in order to account for the differential effects of different stimuli on a given person or group of persons. In other words, internal-processes constructs have been formulated primarily to ac-

count for the different effects attributable to *different types of communications* acting on the *same people*; whereas, predispositional constructs are needed to account for the different effects observed in *different people* who have been exposed to the *same communications*.

Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) have reviewed and an-

Figure 1. Major Factors in Attitude Change Produced by Means of Social Communication



\* The categories and subcategories are not necessarily exhaustive, but are intended to highlight the main types of stimulus variables that play a role in producing changes in verbalizable attitudes.

alyzed the experimental evidence on the effects of low vs. high credibility sources, strong vs. weak fear-arousing appeals, one-sided vs. two-sided presentation of arguments, and other such variations in communication stimuli. From such studies it has been possible to formulate a number of generalizations concerning the conditions under which the probability of opinion change will be increased or decreased for the *average* person or for the *large majority* of persons in any audience. Such propositions form the basis for inferences concerning the mediating processes responsible for the differential effectiveness of different communication stimuli.

Mediating processes can be classified in terms of three aspects of responsiveness to verbal messages (see Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield, 1949; and Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953). The first set of mediating responses includes those which arouse the *attention* of the recipient to the verbal content of the communication. The second set involves *comprehension* or decoding of verbal stimuli, including concept formation and the perceptual processes that determine the meaning the message will have for the respondent. Attention and comprehension determine what the recipient will *learn* concerning the content of the communicator's message; other processes, involving changes in motivation, are assumed to determine whether or not he will accept or adopt what he learns. Thus, there is a third set of mediating responses, referred to as *acceptance*. Much less is known about this set of responses, and it has become the main focus for present-day research on opinion change. At various points in this volume, and especially in the last chapter, we shall return to the distinction between attention, comprehension, and acceptance, in order to discuss the implications of these constructs for research on predispositional attributes.

Two major classes of predispositions can be distinguished.

One type, called "topic-bound," includes all of those factors which affect a person's readiness to accept or reject a given point of view on a particular topic. The other main type, called "topic-free," is relatively independent of the subject matter of the communication. In the discussion which follows, we shall first make some comments about the nature of topic-bound predispositions and about the more general class of "content-bound" factors, including those referred to as "appeal-bound," "argument-bound," and "style-bound." Then we shall attempt to extend the analysis of predispositional factors by making further distinctions, calling attention to a number of content-free factors that are nevertheless bound to other properties of the communication stimuli. These various types of "communication-bound" factors will be contrasted with the unbound or "communication-free" factors to which our research efforts in this volume have primarily been directed.

#### TOPIC-BOUND PREDISPOSITIONS

Topic-bound factors have been extensively studied by social psychologists and sociologists over the past twenty-five years, and many propositions have been investigated concerning the motives, value structures, group affiliations, and ideological commitments which predispose a person to accept a pro or con attitude on various issues. The well-known studies of authoritarian personalities by Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, and others (1950) have provided a major impetus toward understanding attitude change on specific issues, such as racial prejudice, in relation to unconscious motives and defense mechanisms. Some findings which bear directly on topic-bound predispositions have been reported by Bettelheim and Janowitz (1950): Anti-Semitic propaganda (in the form of two fascist pamphlets) was most likely to be approved by men who either had already acquired an intol-

erant ideology toward Jews or who had acquired a tolerant ideology but were insecure personalities with much undischarged hostility. Another pioneering study in this field is that of Smith, Bruner, and White (1956); these authors conducted a small series of intensive case studies for the purpose of determining the personality functions served by holding certain flexible and inflexible opinions about Soviet Russia and communism. Many other studies have been made concerning the personality correlates of readiness to accept favorable or unfavorable communications about specific types of ethnic, national, and political groups (Hartley, 1946; Sarnoff, 1951).

Some recent studies of topic-bound predispositions deal with relatively general factors that are not limited to the modification of attitudes toward only one type of social group. For instance, Weiss and Fine (1955, 1956) investigated the personality factors which make for high readiness to accept a message advocating a strict, punitive stand toward social deviants. The findings suggest that persons who have high aggression needs combined with strong extrapunitive tendencies will be prone to adopt a strict, punitive attitude toward anyone who violates social norms. In order to test this hypothesis in its most general form, it would be necessary to use many different communications to determine whether the specified personality attributes are correlated with attitude change whenever a punitive stand is advocated toward any type of social deviant. If the hypothesis is confirmed, we shall be able to speak of a very general type of topic-bound predisposition.

This example highlights the fact that the difference between topic-bound and topic-free is not necessarily the same as the dimension of specificity-generality. Some topic-bound predispositions may be very narrowly confined to those communications expressing a favorable or unfavorable judgment