UNIT 97 – UPSC - Social influence and persuasion

Social influence and persuasion are fundamental functions of communication.

Social influence:

Social influence is described as the change in person's behaviour, thoughts, feelings and attitudes that results from interaction with another individual in society. It can be intentionally or unintentionally, as a result of the way the changed person perceives themselves in relationship to the influencer. It is different from conformity, power and authority. Many psychologists affirmed that social influence is the process by which individuals make real changes to their outlooks and behaviours as a result of communication with others who are perceived to be similar, desirable, or expert. People adjust their views with respect to others to whom they feel similar in accordance with psychological principles such as balance. Persons are also influenced by the majority: when a large portion of an individual's referent social group holds a particular attitude, it is possible that the individual will adopt it as well. Additionally, individuals may change a belief under the influence of another who is perceived to be an expert in the matter at hand.

Social influence has numerous connotations in psychology field. It is usually used to summarise the field of social psychology. It studies, "how thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by actual, imagined or implied presence of others" (Allport, 1968).

French and Raven (1959) presented an early formalization of the notion of social influence in their dialogue of the bases of social power. According to French and Raven, agents of change included not just individuals and groups, but also norms and roles. They viewed social influence as the outcome of the application of social power from one of five bases such as reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, or referent power. A change in reported opinion or attitude (conformity) was considered as an instance of social influence whether or not it represented a true private change

Human social life is characterised by social influences; influences, they are aware of and some they are not. As individuals, they rarely give way to social influence to fit in and at times they do it because they are not sure of the proper way to feel or act and so use others as a resource of information. Social life of individual is also governed by social norms, which are usually accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that are shared among others in a social group. When a social group has well recognised norms, there is a huge pressure for people to maintain such norm.

It is apparent that social influence is a phenomenon that involves a change in behaviour, actions or perspective as a result of a stimulus in environment. It is generally evident in everyday world, from how we adhere to unwritten social norms that systemize human lives to obeying instructions given by an authority figure. Effect of Social influence is especially visible in the long history of humankind, particularly World War II, where individuals were observed to commit immoral acts because they scuffle to act in sync with their personal judgments when faced with external pressure. The changes that precede social influences can be intended or unintended, instant or delayed, explicit or implicit.

Since 1959, researchers have distinguished true social influence from forced public acceptance and from changes based on reward or coercive power. Social scholars are still concerned with public compliance, reward power, and coercive power, but those concerns are differentiated from social influence studies. Current research on social influence generally uses experimental methodology in several areas such as minority influence in group settings, research on persuasion, dynamic social impact theory, a structural approach to social influence, and social influence in expectation states theory.

Minority influence in group settings:

Several studies regarding social influence have concentrated on the power of the majority within groups. Moscovici, Lage, and Naffrechoux (1969) recommended that characteristics such as consistency, autonomy, and rigidity empower minorities to act as influential agents. Additionally, evidence of the power of minority influence was established by Moscovici (1980), who suggested the conversion theory. Evidence exists that firmly establishes the minority as a strong source of influence.

Dynamic social impact theory:

Social impact theory was originated by Bibb Latane in 1981. This theory has three basic rules which consider how individuals can be sources or targets of social influence. Social impact is the result of social forces including the strength of the source of impact, the immediacy of the event, and the number of sources exerting the impact. Social impact theory is described as the idea that conforming to social influence depends on the strength of the group's importance, its immediacy, and the number of people in the group (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert, 2007). According to Aronson et al. (2007) social impact theory envisages that conformity will increase as the strength and proximity increase. The more important the group is to us the more likely we are to conform to it (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, 2007). Argo and colleagues (2005) described social impact theory as people are impacted by the real, implied, or imagined presence or action of a social presence (i.e. another person or group of people). This impact results from three "social forces": number, immediacy and social source strength.

Three areas of social influence are conformity, compliance and obedience.

Conformity:

It is changing how people behave to be more like others. This element plays to belonging and esteem needs as we seek the approval and friendship of others. Conformity can run very deep, as people will even change their beliefs and values to be like those of peers and admired superiors. Conformity refers to the act of changing a particular belief or behaviour to fit in with one's social environment. Main factor that influences conformity is social norms. Social norms are the expected behaviour within a specific culture or society. Once a particular way of doing things is established as a norm, people will start conforming to it as it gives the impression of being the 'right' thing to do. Person who conform to social group have low self-esteem, high need for social support or approval, need for self-control, low IQ, high anxiety, feeling of self blames and insecurity in the group, and lastly, feeling of inferiority.

Numerous researches demonstrate that when a person is confronted with social norms, one will often adjust their behaviour to closer approximation of the perceived norm (Bond & Smith, 1996). Dissimilar to popular belief, conformity is not personality-driven but highly situational (Goldberg 1952). In his experiment, Goldberg observed that conformity usually occurs in the initial stages of exposure and any additional exposure thereafter does not affect the influence. The results from his experiment also demonstrated that the more displeasing the subject initially was to the particular social norm in question, the greater the conformity, as the compromise in this case will be larger.

Factors   that   affect   conformity:

Cohesiveness	Group Size
Social Norm	Situational Norm

Conformity categorized into two parts that include normative conformity and informational conformity. Normative conformity is usually prompted by a need to fit in while informational conformity usually occurs when a person is looking for guidance in a vague situation. While a person involved in normative conformity usually conforms for fear of being rejected by a group. A person involved in informative conformity usually conforms because he is uncertain of the situation, and thus, do not have his own viewpoint in that particular situation to begin with. Finally, while normative conformity usually ends in compliance where the changes are evident in overt behaviour and actions (explicit), the influence of informational conformity usually results in internalization (implicit), where a person adopts the views and opinion of the group for his own.

Sherif (1935) conducted an experiment to measure conformity. The aim of the experiment was to test for informational conformity by placing participants in an ambiguous situation. They were first individually tested before being tested in groups of threes. Results demonstrated that the answers given in a group coincide with the rest even though the answer initially given in the first test was greatly different. Asch (1951 did not agree with the results of the auto-kinetic experiment as there was no correct answer in the experiment. Hence, he conducted another experiment that has an obvious answer to investigate the extent to which an individual would conform to the social pressure from a majority group. Participants in this experiment were placed with other confederates who gave the wrong answer on purpose. The results obtained from this experiment displayed that 75% of participants conformed at least once while only 25% of them did not conform. Interviews held after the experiment revealed that participants went along with the rest of the group for fear of being ridiculed. Some of them said that they genuinely believe the group's answers were correct. This experiment exemplifies both normative influence and informational influence.

Other Studies have revealed that conformity varies across different cultures. People from Western cultures are categorized as individualist while people who are from Asian cultures are classified as collectivities. While the former places greater emphasis on self-development, the latter usually put the needs of family and other social groups above their own. Because of this difference, people who are from Asian cultures tend to conform more (Smith and Bond, 1998).

Compliance:

Compliance is described as a particular kind of response, acquiescence to a particular kind of communication, a request. The request may be obvious, as in the direct solicitation of funds in a door-to-door campaign for charitable donations, or it may be implicit, as in a political advertisement that sellers the qualities of a candidate without directly asking for a vote (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). But in all cases, the target recognizes that he or she is being urged to respond in a desired way. In general term, compliance is where a person does something that they are asked to do by another. They may choose to comply or not to comply, although the thoughts of social reward and punishment may lead them to compliance when they really do not want to comply.

Compliance greatly impact everyday behaviour, especially in social relations. Social psychologists interpret compliance as way of social influence used to realizer goals or accomplish social or personal gains. To study compliance, social psychologists investigate overt and subtle social influences and their relationship to compliance.

Factors that impact compliance are as under:

   i.   Group strength: The more important the group is to an individual, the more likely the individual is to obey with social influence.
  ii.   Immediacy: The closeness of the group makes an individual more likely to comply with group pressures. Pressure to comply is sturdiest when the group is closer to the individual and made up of people the individual cares about.
 iii.   Number: Compliance increases as the number of people in a group increases. Importantly, the influence of adding people starts to decrease as the group gets larger.

iv.   Similarity: Perceived shared characteristics cause an individual to be more likely to comply with a request, particularly when the shared feature is perceived as unplanned and rare.

Obedience:

It is different from compliance, in that it complies with an order from someone that people accept as an authority personality. In compliance, there is some choice. In obedience, there is no choice. Basically, obedience refers to a social influence in which a person follows explicit instructions that were given by an authority figure. In the long history of humankind, the effect of obedience is bold. It is deduced that the most conspicuous feature of obedience is the presence of an authority figure.

Milgram (1963) stated that there are various factors that affect the extent of obedience. Firstly, it was observed that prestige and obedience are positively related. When the experiment was moved to somewhere less prestigious as opposed to the original location (a university), obedience level dropped. Secondly, surveillance was also observed to affect level of obedience. Buffers that prevent the participant from being fully aware of the impact of their actions also increase the level of obedience. It was also observed that authority amplifies level of obedience.

An individual is said to conform if they choose a course of action that is preferred or considered socially acceptable by the majority. Because the individual is influenced by how the majority thinks or behaves is referred to as majority influence. The fact that an individual conforms along with the majority in public, does not necessarily mean they have changed their private outlook or beliefs. Therefore, most majority influence is characterised by public compliance rather than private acceptance.

Factors that affect Obedience:
Milgram and Zimbardo concluded through their experiments that there are many factors affect obedience:

i.   Proximity to the authority figure: Proximity designates physical closeness; the closer the authority figure is, the more obedience is demonstrated. In the Milgram experiment, the experimenter was in the same room as the participant, likely eliciting a more obedient response.
ii.   Prestige of the experimenter: Both researchers have advocated that the prestige associated with Yale and Stanford respectively may have influenced obedience in their experiments.
iii.   Expertise: A subject who has neither the ability nor the expertise to make decisions, especially in a crisis, will leave decision making to the group and its hierarchy.
iv.   Deindividuation: In obedience, people come to view themselves not as individuals but as instruments for carrying out others' desires, and thus no longer perceive themselves as responsible for their actions.
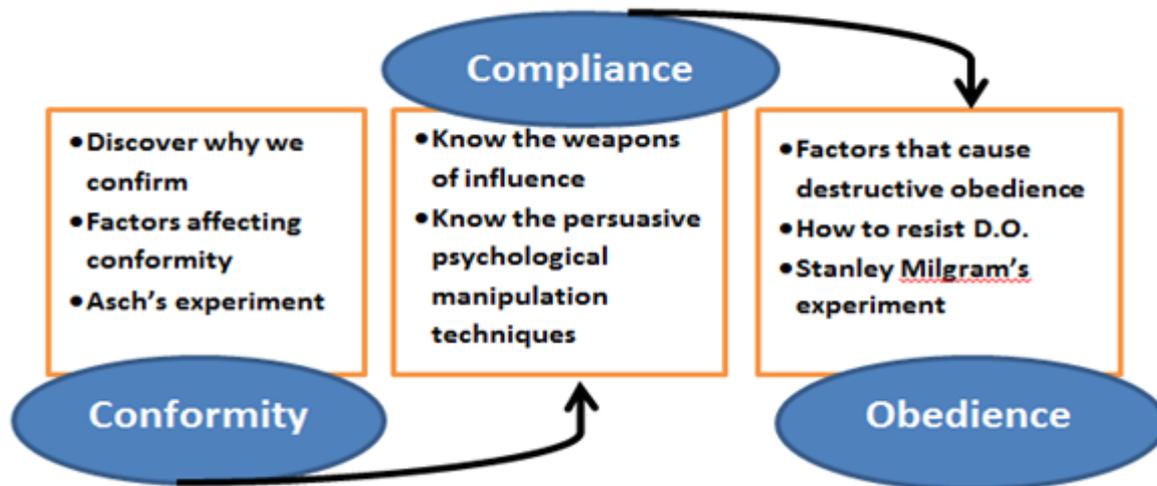
It can be said that Social influence is the ways in which external factors produce change in an individual. It guides the way person form his/her thoughts and organize overt behaviour and actions. Social influence is a phenomenon people experience every day. Because of some noticeable differences, social influence has been grouped into three different categories as conformity, compliance and obedience. While they share various resemblances when compared against each other, and even among each other, they have some distinct qualities. While conformity is generated by social norm, obedience involves an authority figure. Compliance involves an explicit request that is less aggressive as opposed to that of obedience. It can be concluded that though the notions of compliance and obedience are analogous, conformity stands distinctly apart because of its unique stimulus and result.

Persuasion:

Generally, persuasion is defined as communicative activities that are mediated. According to the communication scholar Gerald R. Miller, any message that is aimed to shape, reinforce or change the perceptions, emotions, beliefs, behavioural intentions and behaviours is to be considered as persuasive communication (2002). When tracking historical record, the study of persuasive communication started in Ancient Greece and has a history of more than two eras. Ancient intellectuals like Plato and Aristotle framed rhetoric as a technique for oral persuasion, which was followed by the notable Roman scholars Buintillian and Cicero. Cicero described rhetoric as a speech designed to persuade (Quoted in Burke, 1969,). After many decades, the development of mass media facilitated the broadening of the concept of rhetoric beyond oratory. The philosopher Kenneth Burke was the first to recognize the persuasive potential of nonverbal domains. Burke's work gave rise to the study of persuasiveness in other domains, increasing interest in visual rhetoric, understood as the art of using imagery and visuals persuasively. It is established in literature that persuasion is long term endeavour. It is a way of seeing and being in the world.

In management literature, persuasion is the process of changing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs or behaviour of a person. People respond to persuasive messages in two ways: thoughtfully and mindlessly. When people are in thoughtful mode, the persuasiveness of the message is determined

by merits of the message. When people respond to messages mindlessly, their brains are locked on automatic. Persuasion is mainly dependent upon the attractiveness of the speakers and reaction of the listeners. Persuasion is exclusively related with communication, learning, awareness and thought.

Process of persuasion:

In the process of persuasion, both the persuader and the receiver of the persuasive message are wilfully active. As Bettinghaus writes, "perception of a persuasive message is not a passive process. The receiver is as active in the receiving process as is the source in the transmitting process. The attitudes and beliefs of the receiver mediate the way in which the message will be received and responded   to"
Process   of   persuasion
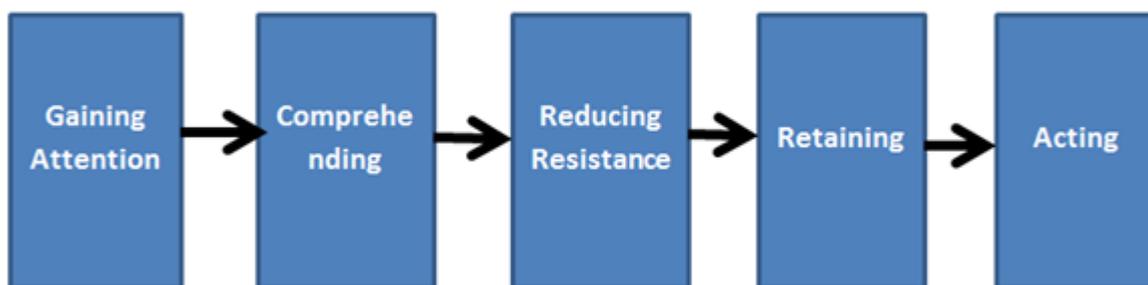
The   process   of   persuasion   involves   a   series   of   consecutive   steps:
The communication is presented; the person pays attention to it; he comprehends the contents of the message and also the basic conclusion being urged. However, for persuasion to be effected the individual must agree with or yield to the point being urged and then finally act on it or in other words carry out the behaviour implied due to the new change in his attitude.

Components of Persuasion:

The components in the communication process are source, message, the context of the message channel, receiver and the audience.

1. "Source" factors include the perceived sender of the communication. The "message" denotes to what person says and includes style, content and organization, while "Channel" designates the medium (e.g. press, radio, television) through which the message is communicated. The source of a persuasive message is the communicator who is presenting it. A source is more persuasive if he or she is seen as credible (believable) and attractive.
   There are two ways for a source to be trustworthy: (a) claiming to be an expert, and (b) appearing to be trustworthy.
2. The Message: Persuasive messages can involve emotional appeals or rational opinions. When time is limited, short emotional appeals may be more effective than rational arguments. There is also evidence that more intelligent audiences are persuaded better by two-sided messages, probably because they more readily recognize that there are two sides to the issue.

3. The Context: Promoters often have difficulty in capacitating the internal arguments that compete with their persuasive messages. When people listen to or read a persuasive message, they are usually free to limit our attention or silently counter argue with its arguments. Research has revealed that when subjects are distracted, they are more likely to accept a persuasive message than when they have been allowed to concentrate on their counterarguments.

4. The Audience: Numerous research concentrated on the recipients of persuasive messages, the audience, to discover when some people are more persuadable than others. Many audience characteristics interact with message variables, such as involvement or intelligence. Intellectual recipients are more persuaded by complex messages, while unintelligent recipients are more persuaded by simple emotional messages.

Persuasive communication can be directed at

1. Cognition: Persuasion can be used to change individuals' beliefs about an object or an issue, which includes attributes, interpretation, definition, outcome, etc.
2. Attitude: Persuasion can be used to change individuals' attitude toward an object or an issue, which refers to the categorization of an object or an issue along an evaluative dimension.
3. Behaviour: Persuasion can be used to alter individuals' behaviour, which is the overt actions regarding an object or an issue.

Famous theorist, Perloff (2003) explained persuasion a symbolic process in which communicators try to persuade other people to change their attitudes or behaviours regarding an issue through the transmission of a message in an atmosphere of free choice.

Prime elements of his explanation of persuasion are that:

1. Persuasion is symbolic, utilizing words, images, sounds.
2. It involves a deliberate attempt to influence others.
3. Self-persuasion is a key. People are not coerced; they are instead free to choose.
4. Methods of conveying persuasive messages can occur in various ways that include verbally and nonverbally via television, radio, Internet or face-to-face communication.

Persuasive psychological manipulation techniques: There are some classic persuasion techniques that are frequently used.

1.	Foot-in-the-door
2	Low ball
3	Door-in-the-face
4	Foot-in-the-mouth
5	That's-not-all
6	Because

7	Hard-to-get
8	Deadline
9	Fear-then-relief
10	But-you-are-free-of
11	A little is better than nothing
12	Attribution technique
13	Touch Technique

Foot-in-the-Door:

The persuasion technique foot-in-the-door, which begins with a small request in order to gain eventual compliance with larger requests. The foot in the door technique assumes agreeing to a small request increases the likelihood of agreeing to a second, larger request (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

Low-Balling:

Low-balling is a persuasion practice that intentionally offers a product at a lower price than one intends to charge. Low-balling is successful technique to convince people to pay a higher price by ensuring buy-in at a lower level. Once people have made a decision to purchase something, their need to be consistent in behaviour assures their choice was right, even if the price is later increased. The low-balling technique is very common in auto sales. Main success factor in low-balling is not only to make the initial offer attractive enough to gain compliance, but also to not make the second offer so excessive that it's refused.

Door-in-the-Face:

The persuasion technique, door-in-the-face begins with a large, typically unreasonable request in order to gain eventual compliance with a smaller request. The door-in the-face technique works by first making a request that is excessive and likely to be refused. Major objective is to get people to agree to the second, smaller request, which may seem very reasonable because it is compared to the first, larger request. Also, when people refuse the first request, they may feel guilty (Robbie Sutton, 2013). The second request gives them an opportunity to get rid of that guilt. So, they are much more likely to say yes.

Foot in the mouth:

In this technique, by telling someone that person feel wonderful, he may make himself feel committed to behave in a way that is consistent with that declaration.

That's Not All (TNA):

This technique of 'That's not all folks' talks about discounts, incentives and little perks. That's Not All process capitalize on the reciprocity principle and involves the persuader giving the person something that will further convince them to comply with the request. In this technique person is offered product at high price, not allowing them to respond for a short while and then offering them a better deal by offering another product or lowering the price (Robbie Sutton, 2013).

Fear than relief:

In this technique, fear is invoked in the other person. Then, when they seek a solution, provide one that leads them in the direction you choose. Fear is invoked by threatening needs. Relief may be gained by doing what you request. Relief may also be given 'freely' to create trust and invoke the rules of social exchange.

Scarcity & Reactance Theory:

Persuasion technique, scarcity uses the perception of limited availability to tempt interest or competition. Research studies on persuasion defined as change in attitudes or beliefs based on information received from others, focuses on written or spoken messages sent from source to recipient. These research based on the assumption that individuals process messages carefully whenever they are motivated and able to do so. There are two types of theories in modern persuasion research that include the elaboration likelihood model and heuristic-systemic models.

The elaboration likelihood model:

The elaboration likelihood model created by Cacioppo, Petty, and Stoltenberg (1985) is most widely used in therapeutic and counselling settings. It designates that the amount and nature of thinking that a person does about a message will affect the kind of persuasion that the message produces. Aspects of the persuasion situation for this model include source, message, recipient, affect, channel, and context. Main importance is the degree to which the recipient views the message's issue as relevant to himself. This model has established its utility in persuading various people to make various types of healthier choices such as in cancer patients, those at risk from HIV/AIDS and adolescents at risk from tobacco use (Robbie Sutton, 2013).

Elaboration   likelihood   model   (Source: Robbie   Sutton,   2013)
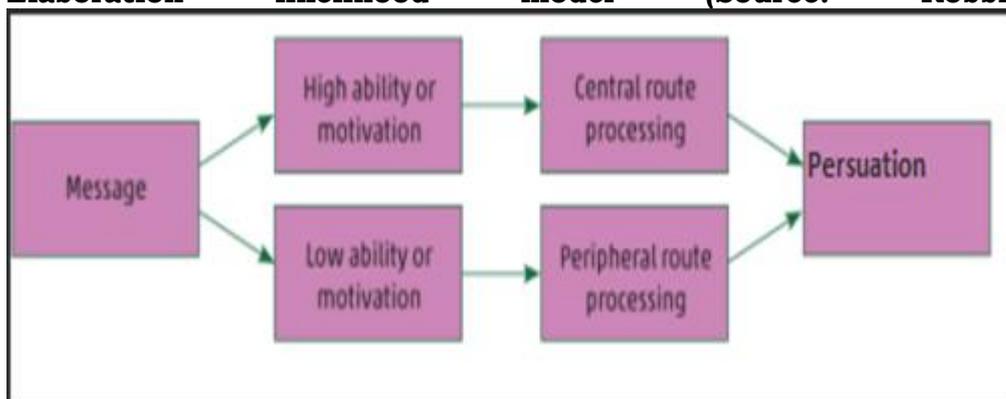
Heuristic-systemic:

Heuristic-systemic models suggest that argument strength will be most effective in persuading an individual when she is inspired and able to attend to the message. When the target individual is not motivated or is unable to attend carefully, persuasion will take place through more indirect means such as nonverbal cues or source credibility. Persuasion that occurs through the systemic

route will be comparatively permanent. Persuasion through the heuristic route is more likely to be temporary (Robbie Sutton, 2013).

Attribution theory of persuasion:

Attribution is a technique by which individuals clarify the causes of behaviour and events. Attribution theory is the study of models to explain those processes. Humans try to explain the actions of others through either dispositional attribution or situational attribution. Dispositional attribution, also known as internal attribution, attempts to indicate a person's traits, abilities, motives, or dispositions as a cause or explanation for their actions. Situational attribution, generally called as to as external attribution, attempts to point to the context around the person and factors of his surroundings, particularly things that are completely out of his control.

Fundamental attribution error is people's tendency to place an unnecessary emphasis on internal characteristics (dispositional explanations) to explain other person's behaviour in a given situation, instead of considering external factors (situational explanations). Generally, people tend to make dispositional attributions more often than situational attributions when trying to explain or understand a person's behaviour. This happens when people are much more focused on the individual because they do not know much about their situation.

In order to persuade others, people tend to explain positive behaviours and accomplishments with dispositional attribution, but their own negative behaviours and shortcomings with situational attributions.

Classical conditioning as a persuasion process:

Conditioning also plays vital role in the persuasion. It is more often about leading someone into taking certain actions of their own, rather than giving direct commands. It is useful in advertisement of products. This conditioning is thought to affect how people view certain products, knowing that most purchases are made on the basis of emotion.

Cognitive dissonance theory in persuasion:

Cognitive dissonance is the mental stress or uneasiness experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory views, ideas, or values at the same time, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values. Human beings continually struggle for mental consistency. Their cognition (thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes) can be in agreement, unrelated, or in disagreement with each other. These mental processes can also be in agreement or disagreement with our behaviours. When people detect conflicting cognition, i.e. dissonance, it gives them a sense of incompleteness and discomfort. People are motivated to decrease this dissonance until their cognition is in harmony with itself. There are four main ways to reduce or eliminate dissonance:

1. Changing minds about one of the facets of cognition.
2. Reducing the importance of cognition.
3. Increasing the overlap between the two.
4. Re-evaluating the cost/reward.

Elaboration likelihood model: Persuasion has usually been associated with two routes. Central route: Whereby an individual evaluates information presented to them based on the pros and cons of it and how well it supports their values. Peripheral route: Change is mediated by how attractive the source of communication is and by bypassing the deliberation process.

Effects of Persuasion:

Miller (1980) suggested that communications exert three different persuasive effects: shaping, reinforcing, and changing responses.

1. Shaping: Attitudes are "shaped" by associating pleasurable environments with a product, person, or idea.
2. Reinforcing: Contrary to popular opinion, many persuasive communications are not designed to convert people, but to reinforce a position they already hold.
3. Changing: This is perhaps the most important persuasive impact and the one that comes most frequently to mind when we think of persuasion. Communications can and do change in attitudes.

To summarize, Persuasion is an effective technique to influence a person's principles, attitudes, intentions, motivations, or behaviours. Persuasion is a process that intended at changing a person's outlook or behaviour toward some event, idea, object, or other person. Systematic persuasion is the process through which attitudes or beliefs are changed by appeals to logic and reason. There are numerous persuasion techniques used in business settings such as low balling, foot in the door, door in the face and others to persuade clients.
In theoretical models, Heuristic persuasion is popular. It is the process through which attitudes or beliefs are changed because of appeals to habit or emotion. Process of persuasion is to change a reader's attitude, beliefs or action in persuader's favour. It is a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to alter their attitudes or behaviour regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice.