An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely Hull, Massachusetts, showing a dense grid of buildings and streets along a shoreline. A red arrow points from the right side of the image towards a specific area within the town's grid.

Facts, Terror, Norms: a quick take on the inadvertent impacts of content on communications

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- “A popular Government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.”

James Madison, in a letter to W.T. Berry, August 4, 1822



- Is the message acceptable? wanted?
- Is the message understood?
- What does the message do?

Message



Receiver

Intents

Purposes

Reasons

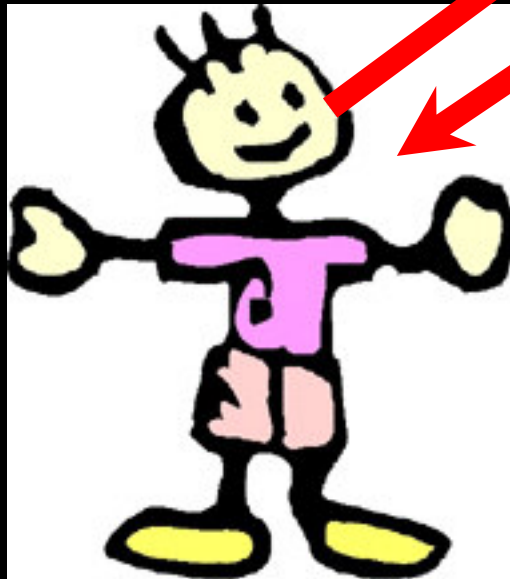
Feedback

Intents

Purposes

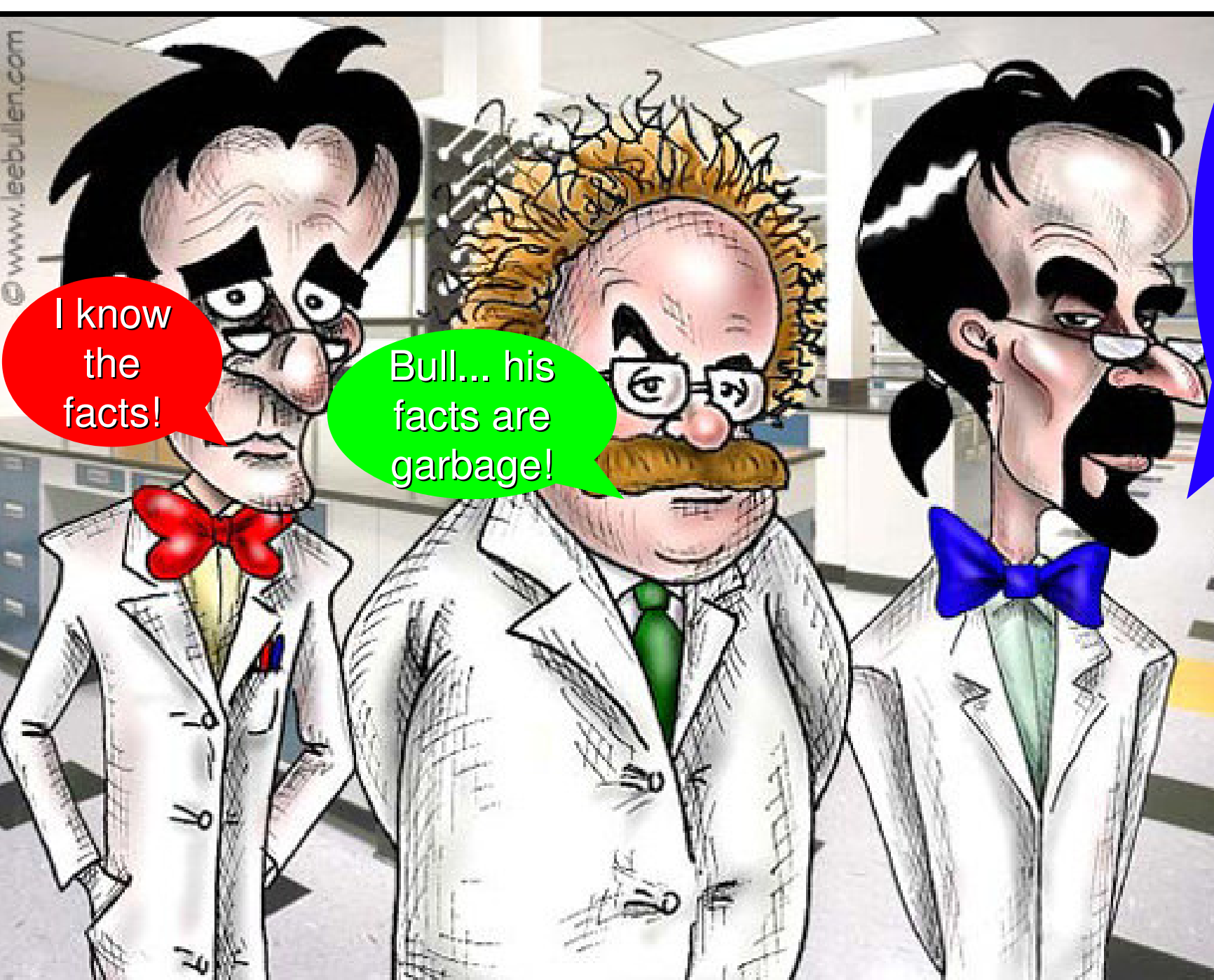
Reasons

Sender



Noise

- Will the sender accept the feedback?
- Will the sender modify their message?



I know the facts!

Bull... his facts are garbage!

Facts from a guy with a red bow tie are clearly not to be trusted

There is a problem with giving "just the facts!"



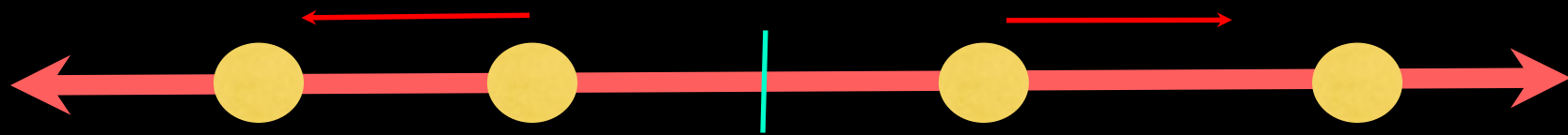
What are the facts?

Death penalty
doesn't reduce
crime

Death penalty
reduces crime



Present “facts” both supporting and challenging beliefs



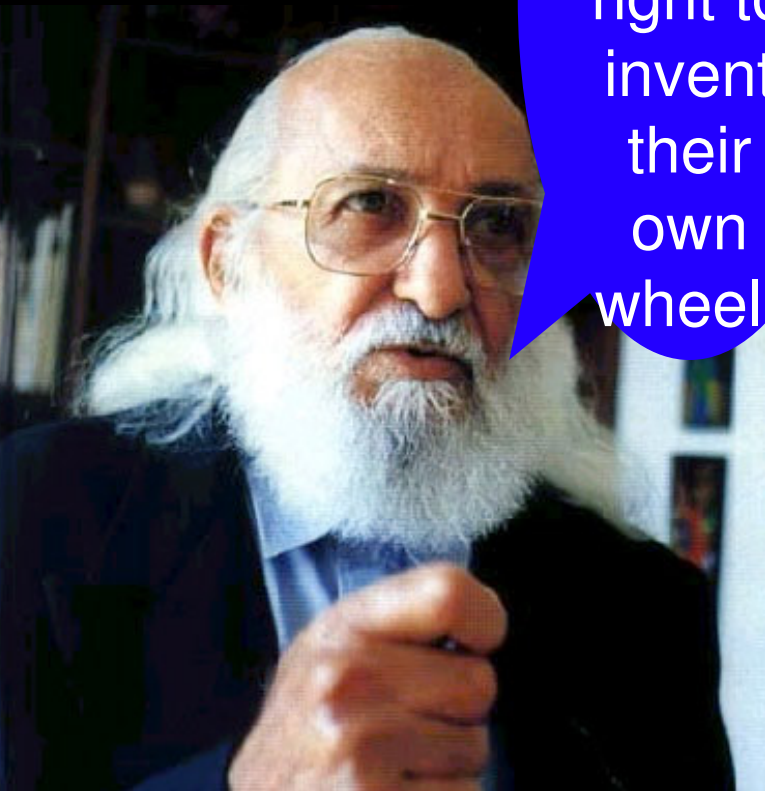
“... many public controversies are intractable in the sense that science is not only unable to resolve the dispute but tends to exacerbate it by providing information that can be used in opposing ways by the sponsors of competing perspectives.” Herrick, 2004

The most general feature of what one does when making an objective claim is giving a **plausible story**. One states one's beliefs... and the reasons for the beliefs, making the case for their viability by persuading an audience of the merits of the claim and subjecting one's beliefs to criticism. What is persuasive... according to the subject matter.....

“Every person has the right to invent their own wheel”

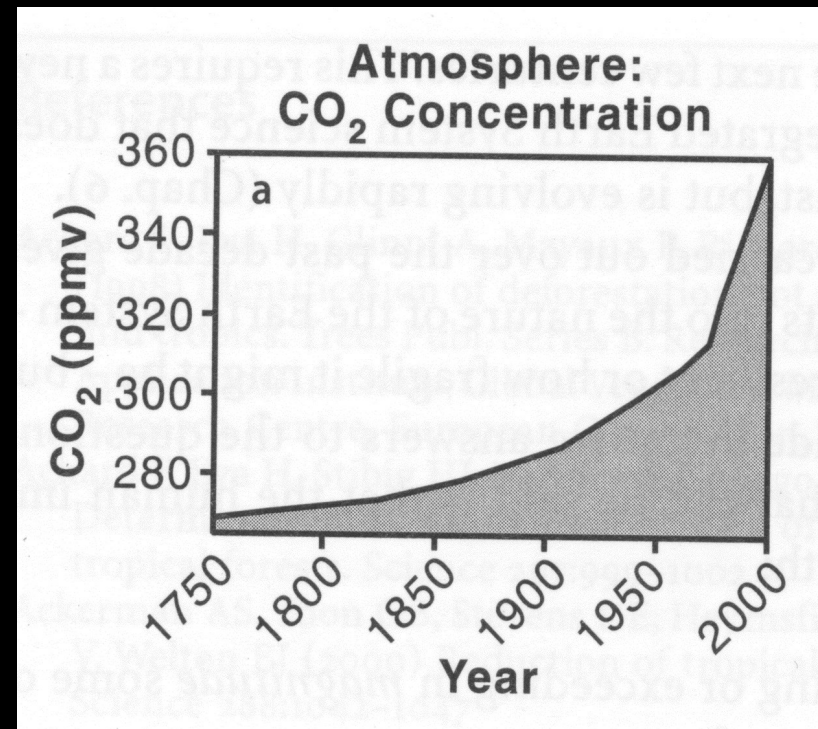
What makes [the claim] objective is that it can be **criticized, tested** or **challenged** in some form. The inquirer makes a case to which the community of inquirers can respond.” (Schulkin, 1992)

Paulo Freire



Ernest Becker & Terror

- "The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity- designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man."



Terror Management Theory

- “... views the self as an essentially defensive construction that functions to protect people from a deeply rooted fear of death that is an inherent by-product of the sophisticated cognitive abilities that make us human”.

The bulwarks of the defensive constructions against existential terror are:

*externally, cultural **worldviews**


•internally, **self-esteem**

Mortality Salience

■ If **worldview** and **self-esteem** provide protection from the potential for death-related anxiety

■ Then reminders of death should intensify efforts to uphold one's worldview and self-esteem.

■ **Increased anxiety is accompanied by increased defense of one's worldview**

 particularly true amongst people with low self-esteem or people high on a dogmatism scale;

 people with high self-esteem seem to have enough of a buffer against regular

After 9/11, President Bush

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CBCnews » updated Tue, 01 May 2007 | 7:04:21 AM ET

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Latest: 'Significant' drug seizures made after searches: RNC



Arctic sea ice melting faster than most scientists project: study

Arctic sea ice is melting three times faster than many scientists have projected, U.S. researchers reported Monday, just days ahead of the next major international report on climate change. **more** »

★ “We objected when people encouraged

☑ “We shopped in the

shook on their green and opened their wallets.”
(8 Sept 02, San Francisco Chronicle p. G1)

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Messages

How **should** you craft your communications?

Should you be **positive** or **negative** in your messaging???

“Negative stimuli have more impact than positive stimuli...”

*greater attention

*greater scrutiny

*greater weight in consciousness

Messages & Social

Norms

Descriptive norms (norms of “is”)

- 👁️ what is commonly done
- 👁️ motivate by providing evidence of what is likely to be effective and adaptive action

Descriptive norms inform via example

Injunctive norms (norms of “ought”)

- ✓ what is commonly approved/disapproved
- ✓ which motivate conduct by promising social rewards and punishments

Injunctive norms inform via informal sanctions

In situations characterized by frequent undesirable conduct, present the **injunctive norm** regarding the conduct

GIVING THE WRONG

message

- Public officials try to mobilize action against socially disapproved conduct by depicting it as “regrettably frequent”
- Puts a counterproductive descriptive norm in the minds of their audiences.

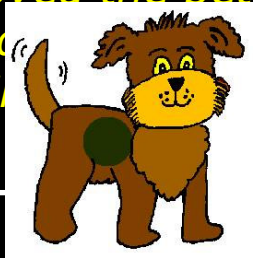


- FDA Commissioner announced that “more than 3 million youths in the US smoke and that 3,000 become regular smokers each day”
- To combat tax cheating, proponents described the problem as rampant and cited the estimated US\$70 billion in losses each year
“Look at all the people who are doing this undesirable thing” also says “Look at all the people who are doing it.”

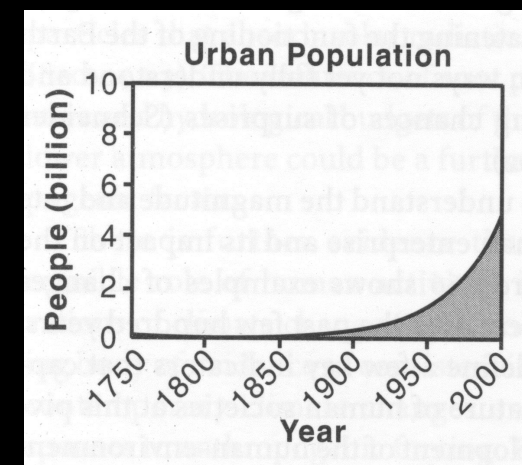
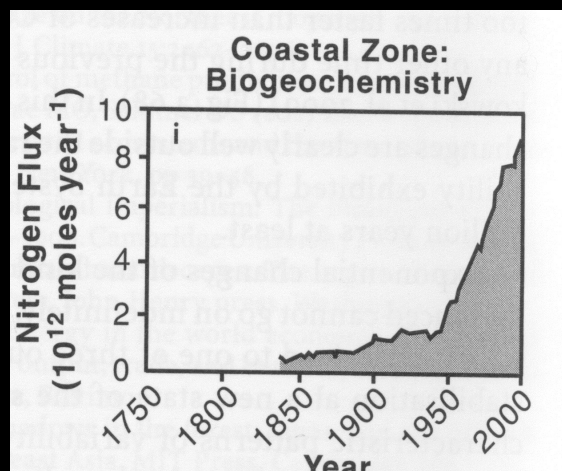
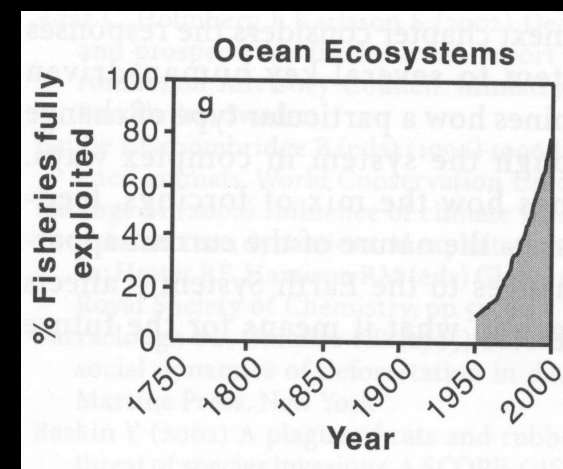
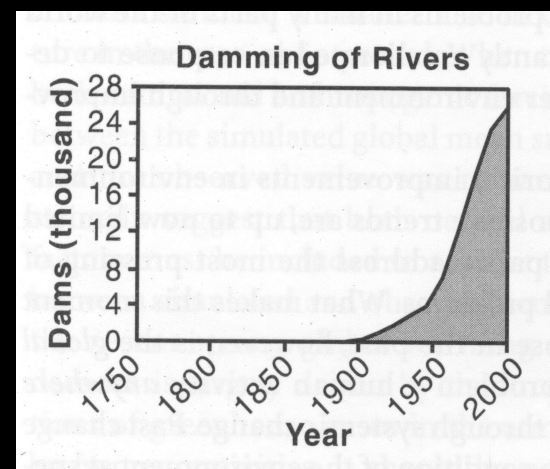
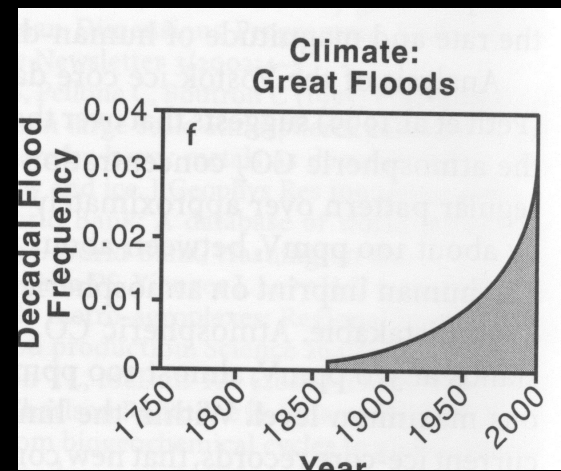
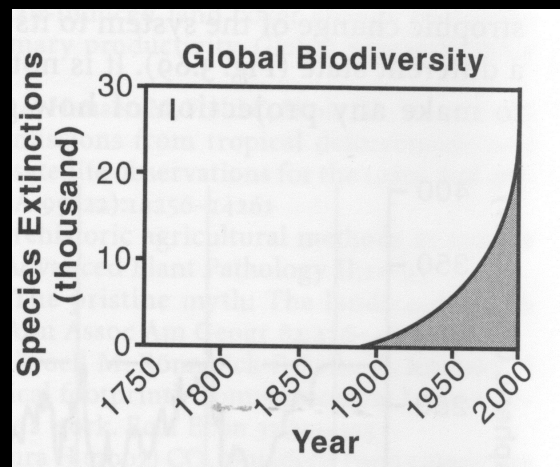
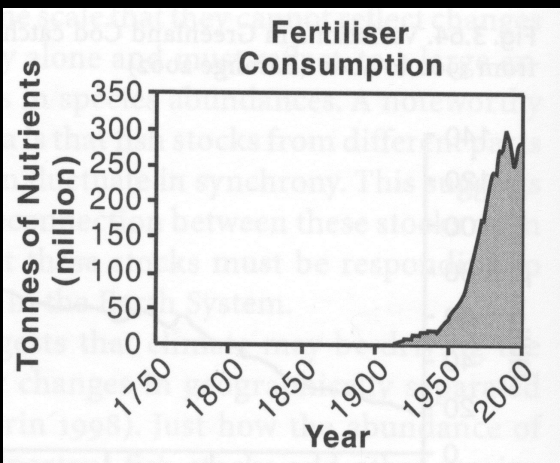
Research in Petrified Forest N.P

Your heritage is being vandalized every day by theft losses of petrified wood of 14 tons a year, mostly a small piece at a time
 Sign in *Petrified Forest National Park*

	Descriptive norm	Injunctive norm
Positive message (weak)	Describe what most 'good' people do <i>Many past visitors have left the petrified wood in the park, preserving the natural state of the Forest.</i>	Tell people what they should do <i>Please leave petrified wood in the park.</i>
Negative message (strong)	Implies many are doing what you don't want done <i>Many past visitors have removed the petrified wood from the park, changing the natural state of the Forest.</i>	Tell people what they ought NOT to do <i>Please don't remove the petrified wood from the park.</i>



Winner



What is the message of indicators?

Persuasion

“Persuasion attempts to win ‘the heart and mind’

Persuasion must induce attitude change, which entails emotion-based change, leading to conformity to your goal.



Persuasion. TOOLS OF

Change

Authority

"Oh we, like, sheep"

Social proof

One way that we decide what to do in a situation is to look to what others are doing or have done

Scarcity

- Items and opportunities become more desirable to us as they become less available.

Reciprocation

All societies subscribe to a norm that obligates individuals to repay in kind what they have received.

Consistency

We seem to have the desire to be, and to appear to be, consistent to our commitments

Liking

People prefer to say "yes" to those they like

Of course, someone monitoring the state of the *Titanic* could have an interesting project measuring the rise of water in the ships' hold and the changing slope of the deck. The monitoring of the environment is useful only inasmuch as it brings us to do something with our knowledge. Who cares about the slope of the deck if the ship is going down and no one is doing or can do anything about it?"
(Kool, 1998)

