

Study Guide

Invisible Persuaders The Battle for Your Mind

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Summary and Objectives

This is a program about the invisible clues we use to make judgments. Judgments about people, about what to buy or drive or eat, about who to trust. The video helps viewers develop a radar-like early warning system to detect subtle and usually invisible attempts to persuade.

The video assumes that attempts to persuade surround us, but the most effective are invisible. The very invisibility of these persuasion devices makes them effective -- the stealth bombers of mind twisting.

Invisible Persuaders reveals some of the most common techniques so viewers can develop increased awareness and thereby make freer decisions. What are some of these invisible persuaders? They include:

Sound: Why do "sporty" cars aimed at younger consumers have engines that growl? Why are vacuum cleaners so noisy?

Labels: Can a label applied by society to a group actually change how the group perceives itself and how it behaves? Why are brand names such a powerful marketing tool?

Position: Why do stores raise some prices during a sale?

Repetition: Can the mere fact of repetition influence a message? Are "top 40" songs played so often on rock stations because they're popular or are they popular

because they're played so often? Why does fashion seem to operate in repeating cycles of popularity, decline, and revival?

Color: Consumers expect products to be a certain color. Can a mere color change judgments about a product?

Packaging: Why are boxes of candy sold in movie houses so big? Does an attractive looking person have an edge over a plainer looking one?

Script Excerpts from *Invisible Persuaders*

We make decisions based on clues. But, we're not always aware which clues we use. Professional persuaders know -- marketers, sales people, pollsters, politicians, merchandisers. And they use these invisible clues to influence your opinions and decisions. This program is about detecting invisible clues and developing an early warning system, (a sort of radar) to spot attempts to persuade and influence.

They say, "never judge a book by its cover." But we do. In fact, not only do we judge books, we also judge cars, objects, and even people by their "covers" or packages.

Research shows people who want a "sporty" car are more likely to buy one with an engine that has some "growl" in it. That throaty roar is a clue customers use to judge power, so engineers design it into the exhaust system. That sound is an invisible persuader.

We find similar clues influence almost any purchase. For example, have you noticed that vacuum cleaners are

fairly noisy? It's not because quieter motors don't exist. Marketers have learned that people view a quiet running vacuum cleaner as less powerful. The sound is a marker -- a clue. Many consumers believe it **has** to be noisy in order to be powerful.....

...much like the belief once commonly held that medicine has to taste bad in order to be effective. We also judge people by invisible clues, especially when forming first impressions.

Research shows we believe attractive looking people are smarter, happier, and more successful than more ordinary or homely people. You might say, that's a stereotype, prejudice, it's unfair. You're right. But let me tell you about some classic experiments.

Two groups of teenagers watched a videotaped lecture. They were asked to rate the teacher. But the viewers did not know there were two versions of the same lecture. In one tape the teacher looked her attractive self, but in the second she was made up to look homely. Her hair was pulled back tightly, dark circles were smudged under her eyes, her face was pale, and facial shadows looked "hard."

When asked to evaluate the lecture, those who saw the attractive teacher rated her presentation more interesting and enjoyable than those who saw the homely version. They even thought the attractive teacher "tried harder." Yet the teacher gave exactly the same lecture on both tapes.

Imagine this situation. You walk into a phone booth and find a quarter on the shelf by the phone. You use it for your call. As you leave the booth, an attractive woman says, "I think I left a quarter in this booth. Did you find it?"

What would you say?

Now imagine the same situation, but a plainer looking woman:

Would your response be the same to both the plain and attractive women? Experimenters staged this exact situation. They found 87% of the subjects --- BOTH MEN AND WOMEN -- returned the quarter to the attractive woman, while only 64% returned it to the plain looking woman.

Studies show under some circumstances defendants who don't fit the jury's stereotype of how a criminal "should look" stand a better chance of going free or receiving a light sentence.

A job applicant who dresses well has a better chance of acceptance than an equally qualified applicant who dresses inappropriately.

Position is another hidden persuader. You've no doubt seen ads for a "storewide sale." Believe it or not, many stores actually raise selected prices for a sale. Since shoppers believe a "sale" means low prices they are more likely to buy on impulse. And since the merchandise is "positioned" as part of a sale, shoppers assume the price is a bargain.

And, yes we judge people by the "size of their package" as well. Studies show that overweight people are less likely to be admitted to colleges, less likely to be hired for a job (and make less money when they are hired) and are less likely to be promoted.

One study estimated that businessmen sacrifice \$1,000 in salary for every pound overweight. All

this in spite of the fact that most research shows many obese people cannot simply eat less and become thin.

Even something as simple as glass cleaner or windshield washing fluid has to look like something that cleans glass. So manufacturers add color -- often blue. That blue isn't the natural color of the cleaner. It's added as device to shape decisions. The color helps define the product and persuades shoppers of its value. The color of most consumer products is a marketing device; carefully chosen to send the right message.

The power to name is the power to control. The owner names the business, a parent names the child, early explorers named countries and claimed them for the homeland. If you create a name that is recognized you control how others view what you label.

A survey asked people this question:

How much do you think we spend on welfare?

- A. Too much money
- B. Too little money
- C. About the right amount)

The results found that only 22% selected B, too little money.

But watch what happened when one word, the label "welfare," was changed to "assistance to the poor." The new question looked like this:

How much to you think we spend on assistance to the poor?

- A. Too much money
- B. Too little money
- C. About the right amount)

The results now? 61% selected B, too little money. That's three times as many people. The change in labels changed their opinion.

Brand names are labels that shape how we judge products. Researchers conduct experiments in which they ask unsuspecting consumers to compare products without brand names -- colas, for example. They find that people usually cannot identify their favorite brand once the label is removed.

In one test volunteers evaluated an unknown brand of adding machine and a well-known brand. Half the group judged the machines with NO brand names showing on either machine. In this blind test, users judged the unknown brand as a superior machine. But the other half compared the same two machines with brand names showing. The second group found the machine with the well known brand to be superior.

In other words, the label blinded their judgment. That's why companies often spend more money to strengthen their brand names than to improve the product itself. They know a strong brand name can be more valuable than a superior product.

In another experiment subjects viewed a film of a multiple-car accident. After the film, half the subjects were asked "About how fast were the cars going when they *smashed* into each other?" The other half were asked, "About how fast were the cars going when they *hit* each other?"

Subjects who were asked at what speed the cars *smashed* judged the cars as traveling much faster than people asked at what speed the cars *hit*. And, a week after seeing the film were more likely to state they saw broken glass at the accident scene, even though none was shown in the film.

Words carefully chosen to persuade and influence are so common they often go unnoticed. Words are windows through which we view the world, and sometimes the windows distort our vision.

Some recent changes in everyday language represent attempts to take control of labels assigned by society. If you could not hear, which would you rather be called -- "deaf" or would you prefer the label "a person with impaired hearing." The label "deaf" defines you by the lack of hearing. But the second description starts with the key words "a person."

There's a difference between a cripple and a person with a handicap. Or between being a disabled employee or an employee with a disability. The label "disabled" or "handicapped" defines the person in terms of one physical trait.

Remember we said to name is to control. That's why minority groups achieve equality only when they can name themselves -- when they select the label the majority uses.

The term Indian is a label for Native Americans

mistakenly conferred by Europeans in an error of geography. Would you like to be described by an old geography mistake?

The word "Negro" is borrowed from Spanish. It was once a label of respect, but not one selected by people labeled as Negro. More recent labels such as Black, African-American, or Person of Color represent attempts to control labels and change perceptions.

Another often invisible clue that influences your decisions is repetition. Within limits, the more you hear or see something, the more you become comfortable with it. I can tell you're skeptical. Let me tell you about some experiments:

Psychologists showed subjects Turkish words like these (on screen: "iktitař" and "afworbu", "jandara") and asked them to guess if each meant something good or something unpleasant. The subjects saw some of the words repeatedly, some occasionally and others rarely. The results showed that the more the subjects saw the word, the more they judged it as meaning something pleasant. In other words, familiarity bred acceptance. The more the word was repeated, the more acceptable it became.

Mushrooms with the familiar "Campbell" brand name represents the safe and familiar. Unbranded (even if its only a banana or a mushroom) represents the unknown. We are willing to pay more for bananas, jeans, or shoes branded with a name that has become comfortable through repetition.

This raises an interesting question about pop music and

hit records. Are hit songs on top forty radio stations popular because they're repeated or are they repeated because they're popular? Our persuasion radar suggests some of the popularity comes from repetition. It also explains why the same song, heard a year or more later, so often sounds merely ordinary. Of course, we don't like everything that's repeated. But repetition is an invisible persuader that often escapes our detection.

Understanding repetition helps explain fashion cycles. A fashion five to ten years before its time is often considered shameless or indecent. A year before its time it becomes merely daring or shocking. Then it becomes "in" or "hot." A year or so later it becomes dated or "out." Sometimes it reappears years later to become quaint or nostalgic.

But that first change from "shameless" to "hot" is a matter of repetition. At first sight we say, "that's absurd." But trend setters resist ridicule and the more we see the fashion the more familiar it becomes. Just like those Turkish words, with repetition comes an easy acceptance. Repetition is a basic tool of advertising. The repetition itself has the power to influence.

Activities and Discussion Guide

1. Explain each of the three experiments shown in the video and explain what it reveals about invisible persuaders. Here are the three experiments:

A. *The Lecture:* Two groups of teens see the same classroom lecture. The first group sees an attractive woman lecturer. The second group sees the same

B. *The Phone Booth and the Found Quarter:* A quarter is left in a public phone booth. Most people who use the booth, use the found quarter for their call. As they exit the booth, a woman approaches and says she left a quarter in the booth and asks, "did you find it?" Again, half the people were approached by an attractive woman and half by a plainer looking woman. How did people react to the request? Was the difference in behavior limited to men only?

C. *Turkish Words:* The third experiment involves a study in which volunteers see Turkish words such as "iktitaf," "afworbu", and "jandara." Viewers are asked to guess if each word means something good or something unpleasant. Some of the words are shown repeatedly, some occasionally, and others only once or twice. How does the repetition of the words influence the viewers judgments?

2. In one example in the video, a waiter explains a special offering of a "smoothie" available in three sizes. How does the manner of presentation encourage the diner to accept the \$12.95 "you-keep-the-glass" offer?
3. The video shows oversized packaging for candies sold at movie houses. Why are "theater packs" so large?
4. The video explains that many labels are selected to influence opinion as well as describe. Explain how each of these "labels" is an "invisible persuader."
 - Quarter pounder
 - Storewide sale
 - Defense Department
 - Wetlands
 - Cripple or person with a disability
 - Indian or Native American
 - Negro or Black or Person of Color

5. The program points out that repetition is a form of invisible persuasion. Discuss: Are hit songs on top forty radio stations popular because they're repeated so often, or are they repeated so often because they're popular?

6. The video suggests that the power of repetition plays a role in fashion cycles. Here is the cycle described in the video: "A fashion five to ten years before its time is shameless or indecent. A year before its time it becomes merely daring or shocking, then it becomes "in" or "hot." A year or so later it becomes dated or "out." Sometimes it reappears years later to become nostalgic." What is the role of repetition in this cycle?

7. Find examples of consumer products in which color is used as a persuasion device.

8. The video suggests people are judged by their size. It refers to a study suggesting that businessmen sacrifice one thousand dollars in salary for every pound overweight. Another study, not mentioned in the video, concludes that U.S. executives over six feet tall earning an average of \$4,200 a year more than executives under five feet five inches. Discuss.

9. Discuss the following fact in light of the idea of labels as persuaders: In the 1930s the hip measurement for a size eight dress was 34 inches. In the 1990s the hip measurement for a size eight dress is 38 inches.

10. The video shows a blind taste test of colas. Conduct your own experiment in which subjects taste different brands of cola. Ask Pepsi drinkers to identify which of the four brands is Pepsi. Ask Coca-Cola drinkers to select "the real thing" from four brands.

Discuss invisible persuaders at work in shaping soft drink choices. Discuss how cola advertising works as a cultural force shaping drinking patterns. How would our drinking patterns be different today without huge ad budgets spent on "cola wars"?

11. Peer pressure is another invisible persuader. The mere presence of other people can change behavior. Ask your students "do you wash your hands after using a public restroom?" Next ask, "Are your hand washing habits changed by the presence or absence of other people in the restroom?"

Guide to Discussion Questions

A. *The Lecture*. In the lecture experiment, students rated the more attractive teacher as more interesting and enjoyable. They even thought the attractive teacher "tried harder." Remember, both lectures were the same words delivered by the same person.

B. *The Phone Booth and the Found Quarter*: 87% of the subjects, both men and women, returned the quarter to the attractive woman, while only 64% returned it to the plain looking woman.

C. The study found that repeated exposure to the strange words increased their acceptance rating. Subjects were more likely to rate repeated words as "good."

A series of three laboratory studies not mentioned in the video also concluded that the more a person is exposed to an item the more attractive it becomes. Subjects were shown nonsense words, Chinese

ideographs, and photos of students from a college yearbook. Each was repeated from zero to twenty-five times. Subjects rated the nonsense words, the ideographs, and the people as "more attractive" after repeated exposures.

2. The waiter and the special smoothie is based on common restaurant merchandising tactics. The point of the special is to increase the price of the average meal and thereby increase profits. The waiter "forces" the \$12.95 you-keep-the-glass special by positioning it as the most logical choice. The small size is presented as "too small" and the "super colossal" size is obviously not intended for one person. The diner's "choice" is exactly the one desired. The "catch" here is the waiter does not mention the price of this "special" and most people don't ask.

3. Theater packs are large so they take up as much space as possible in the candy display. The packages, which contain lots of air, also give the impression of abundance which helps justify their high price. The large boxes give more space for the product name and/or picture.

4. Note that each of these "labels" is accurate, but each carries a slightly different meaning.

Another example of the power of a label can be seen in the placebo effect. Doctors through the ages have reported success by prescribing sugar pills or giving injections of sterile water. They do not tell the patient the nature of the prescription and find that such "placebos" sometimes work. The placebo effect

is an example of an invisible persuader. The belief of

the patient in the doctor and in the power of medicine is translated into actual bodily change.

5 - 6. The power of repetition. Ask students why today's "hit" records stay popular for such a short time. Shouldn't good music remain popular for at least a few years?

The video suggests that unusual fashions are at first considered "strange" or "weird" much like those Turkish words. But after repeated sightings they become more familiar and acceptable.

The power of repetition explains why commercials are repeated so often. Many advertisers agree that an ad works best only after the potential consumer has seen it at least three times.

7. Some examples of consumer products in which color plays a role: the red sports car, the color of soft drinks (all of which are basically clear without the addition of coloring agents), glass and household cleaning liquids, mouthwash, shampoo, liquid soap, ice cream (especially flavors such as mint and peach), and the trend toward various clear products.

8. There is considerable "size bias" in how we judge people. People view tall men and slender women more favorably, giving them an edge in society, love and career. In a study reported in the

journal, *Sex Roles* (Vol. 15, pp. 667-81) 18 teachers of 388 students in kindergarten through fourth grade rated each child's academic, athletic and social skills. The teachers rated the larger boys

higher on all counts. At the end of the year they gave the bigger boys better grades. Girls who weighed more were rated lower and received lower grades.

9. The label "size 8" has its own power. Clothing manufacturers have used this technique of re-defining sizes because they find it helps sell clothes. Most consumers view the size as a statement of fact -- a measurement. Marketers see it as a label that can be manipulated to increase sales.

10. Be sure the four drinks are the same temperature . Temperature influences taste perceptions. Our own taste tests find that most cola drinkers feel confident they can select their favorite brand but only about one in three or four succeed. Pure guessing will lead to a one in four success rate.

Ask students to judge which brand tastes best. A consumer magazine that tried this with over seventy teens found that *RC* was rated higher than *Coca-Cola* by a two to one margin. They also found various store brands rated highly.

11. A study on this question appeared in the journal *Perceptual and Motor Skills* (Vol 62, No. 1). The researchers watched 39 women in a public restroom. They arranged for someone to