THE APPLICATION OF THE HOVLAND-YALE MODEL IN EXPLAINING THE PERSUASIVE EFFECTS OF MEDIA

Persuasion is the process of changing attitudes. The Hovland-Yale model identifies 4 factors that influence whether a message is persuasive and likely to influence an attitude about it:

(1)   The **Source** or **Communicator** ('*Who* is seeking to persuade?')
(2)   The **Message** itself (*What* are they saying?)
(3)   The **Channel** or **Medium** ('*How* are they delivering the message?)
(4)   The **Audience** ('To *whom* is the message aimed at?')

(1) Factors influencing the persuasiveness of the source

There are many factors which have been shown to be important. Three of them are:

(a) **Expertise/Credibility**: Persuasion is more likely to occur when the source is perceived as being an expert with respect to the message. This is why adverts for hygiene products feature men in white laboratory coats, and why things like anti-wrinkle creams are given scientific-sounding names.

A credible/expert source is more persuasive

Expert sources can influence an audience even when there is a big discrepancy between what they say and what we already believe. For example, a character described as a 'Nobel prize winner' was able to convince an audience that the optimum amount of sleep we need is just one hour: **Bochner & Insko, 1966**)

Hovland & Weiss (1951) investigated the role of the communicator's credibility. They had participants read an article about the possibility of building a nuclear powered submarine (the technology did not exist for this at the time of the study). Half of the participants were told the article had been written by Robert Oppenheimer (who helped invent the atomic bomb), and half were told it had appear in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*. The article supposedly written by Oppenheimer (presumed to be a high credibility source) produced more attitude change than the article supposed written in *Pravda* (presumed to be a low credibility source).

(b) **Attractiveness:** People like attractiveness and tend to agree with people they like. This is why many advertisements feature celebrities endorsing a product.

An advert which combines expertise
with attractiveness

(c) **Slick-talkers:** Some evidence suggests that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source talks quickly rather than slowly. Presumably, quick talkers know what they're talking about, whereas slow talkers don't.

Slick-talking for Britain…

(2) Factors influencing the persuasiveness of the message

(a) **One-sided versus Two-sided arguments:** One-sided arguments are better when the audience is already favourably disposed to the message and if they are 'low' in intelligence. Two-sided arguments are better when the audience is undecided (but emphasise your side of the argument more!) and if they are 'high' in intelligence.

> **McGuire & Papageorgis (1961)** gave some participants a message about the merits of tooth brushing after every meal which *confirmed* their pre-existing attitudes. Other participants heard a balanced two-sided view of the merits of tooth brushing. Two days later, both sets of participants heard a message that attacked their beliefs and attitudes towards tooth brushing. Those who had previously received the two-sided message were more resistant to the subsequent conflicting arguments than those who heard the argument confirming their pre-existing attitudes. This suggests that two sided-arguments make people more resistant to later arguments that contradict the original message. **McGuire (1964)** calls this 'inoculation'.

(b) **Appeals to emotion (especially fear):** Messages designed to *scare* us are most effective when the fear they produce is *moderate*. Messages that do not scare us enough (*low fear*) tend to be ignored, whereas messages that scare us too much (*high fear*) lead to panic, which obscures their factual content Fear messages are also effective when they suggest to us that there is a simple way of coping that will work, and when we believe the message applies to us. For example, AIDS is a killer, 'safe sex' will prevent AIDS, and you will die if you don't practise safe sex.

RAIN CHANGES EVERYTHING. PLEASE DRIVE TO THE CONDITIONS. PAPAKURA

In New Zealand, after a particularly wet season road deaths had risen considerably. The advertisement here bleeds when it rains. When it rains, red liquid pours out of the billboard and out of seemingly cuts on the child's face

Fear messages without the components identified above are likely to be ignored, rejected, or denied. For example, the message might be that smoking kills, and that it is difficult to quit. However, if we know people who smoke but live long lives, then the message is likely to have little impact.

> **Janis & Feshbach (1953)** gave some participants an argument which made 71 references to the negative consequences of not brushing your teeth. Other participants received an argument with 49 references. Yet others received an argument which made 17 references. Attitude change was strongest in the group that received 49 references.

(c) '**Soft sell**': A message is more persuasive if it is associated with as many positive things as possible (classical conditioning).

> **Gorn (1982)** showed participants an advert for a ballpoint pen. One group saw the advert accompanied by a likeable pop song. The other group saw the same advert accompanied by an Indian song (which other participants had previously rated as being disliked). Later, the participants were given the opportunity to choose a pen from several available. Those who saw the advert with the likeable pop song were significantly more likely to choose it, despite the fact that the content of the advert and the characteristics of the pen were exactly the same as for the advert accompanied by the Indian song.

(d) **Mood**: messages are more effective when the audience's mood is good rather than bad.

> **Sinclair et al (1991)** rang students enquiring about the need for exams on graduation. Some were called on a sunny day (presumably they would be in a good mood) and others on a rainy day (bad mood). Regardless of the strength of the argument being presented (weak versus strong), the students in the 'sunny' group were more likely to support the argument for the exams. Interestingly, when asked about the weather, participants did not acknowledge it as a factor in their judgements, suggesting some factors may have an 'unconscious' effect.

(e) **Repetition:** Repeated exposure to a neutral stimulus leads to increased familiarity with it and increased liking of it. This is called the **mere exposure effect**. For example, VHS was an inferior video tape to Betamax, but people were more familiar with VHS. Note, however, that repetition is effective only up to a point. Thereafter, increased familiarity leads to decreased liking (an 'inverted U' effect). Note also that increased familiarity with things we are initially negative towards typically lead to us disliking them more).

There are hundreds of studies looking at factors influencing the persuasiveness of the message. For example, research shows that **organised messages** are more effective because they are more comprehensible than disorganised messages. Other factors include whether it is better to present your message before or after a rival's message. Some research suggests it is better to present yours first (**primacy effect**), whilst other research suggests it is better to present it last (**recency effect**). Whether primacy or recency occurs seems to depend on the **timing of presentations** (i.e. the second message immediately after the first, or after an interval).

(3) The Channel or Medium

The Hovland-Yale model was developed in the 1950s. Back then, research indicated that no one medium was generally more effective than any other, and that each one is suited for different purposes.

With complicated messages, research suggests that print media are often more effective than visual messages, possibly because people can pay more attention to and recap written material.

The internet did not exist when the Hovland-Yale model was at its height, and no one would have predicted its impact on our lives. Social networking and other phenomena would no doubt change the Hovland-Yale model's view about no one medium being more effective than any other. As one advertising executive has put it:

"If you wanted to start a viral campaign for a blender company, I would assume that chopping up a cat or some other cute animal in one of your blenders and posting it on youtube would do the trick. However, I doubt you want that kind of image spread around. The point is, find a way to get people talking about your advertisement and give them the ability to

easily pass the message. For video, youtube.com is the best way to spread it."
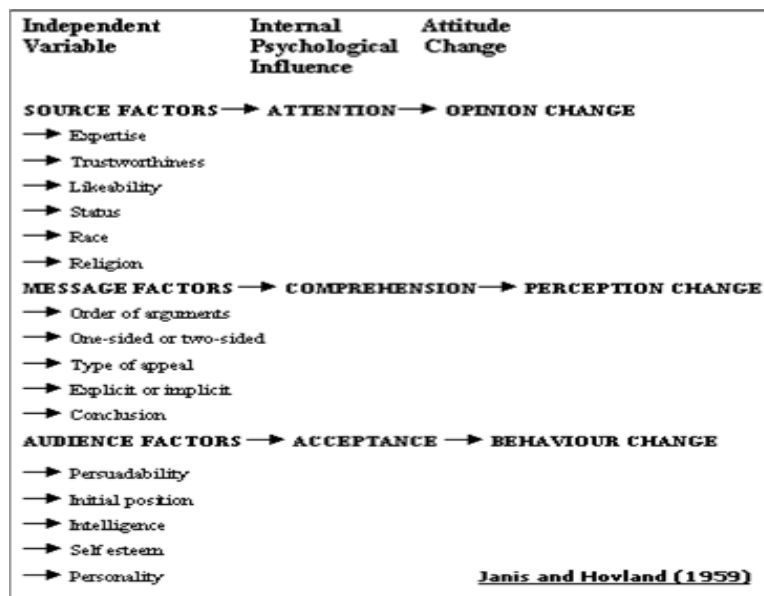
(4) The Audience

(a) **Intelligence and self-esteem:** High levels of **intelligence** and **self-esteem** may increase the understanding of a message, but decrease agreement with it. Conversely, low levels of intelligence and self-esteem may decrease understanding of a message but increase agreement with it. The people who are most readily persuaded as those of 'moderate' intelligence and self-esteem – they understand the message, but are not so convinced of their view that they cannot be persuaded.

(b) **Age:** Whether **age** is an important variable is not clear. The **'lifelong openness' hypothesis** says that age is irrelevant. However, the **'life stages' hypothesis** suggests an inverted U relationship with high susceptibility during early adulthood and later life, but a lower susceptibility throughout middle adulthood.

An evaluation of the Hovland-Yale model

The Hovland-Yale model was the earliest systematic attempt to investigate persuasion. The hundreds of research studies that have been conducted have made a major contribution to identifying the factors *influencing* persuasion. Indeed, much of the research is still relevant today, and has practical applications which are used by 'spin doctors', lobbyists, speech writers, and advertisers.

Independent Variable	Internal Psychological Influence	Attitude Change
SOURCE FACTORS ➔	ATTENTION ➔	OPINION CHANGE
➔ Expertise		
➔ Trustworthiness		
➔ Likeability		
➔ Status		
➔ Race		
➔ Religion		
MESSAGE FACTORS ➔	COMPREHENSION ➔	PERCEPTION CHANGE
➔ Order of arguments		
➔ One-sided or two-sided		
➔ Type of appeal		
➔ Explicit or implicit		
➔ Conclusion		
AUDIENCE FACTORS ➔	ACCEPTANCE ➔	BEHAVIOUR CHANGE
➔ Persuadability		
➔ Initial position		
➔ Intelligence		
➔ Self esteem		
➔ Personality		**Janis and Hovland (1959)**

Hovland's research team discovered many more variables that influence persuasion

The Hovland-Yale model makes clear predictions and is easy to test using laboratory experiments. For example, the same message can be presented by two people (such as an 'expert' and a 'non-expert') and the dependent variable of persuasion measured by means of questionnaires. Such research is highly controlled, and any difference in the dependent variable can be attributed only to the independent variable.

The model is also supported by research findings from studies not done by Hovland or at Yale. For example, independent research indicates that people low in intelligence are more prone to persuasion. When a message is simple, clear and straightforward (and therefore readily received by anyone), the only difference in persuasion should be in the tendency to yield to such a message. People high in intelligence are less likely to yield to persuasive messages because they are confident of their own opinions, and are more likely to critically evaluate the message.

However, the Hovland-Yale model doesn't say anything about the *relative* importance of the factors, or how they might interact with one another for persuasion to occur. As a result, it has not been possible to discover 'general rules' which would produce persuasion.

It is also the case that whilst the early research was conducted in the highly controlled environment of the laboratory, this raises questions about artificiality and ecological validity. Studies conducted outside of the laboratory have not always replicated laboratory findings, suggesting that there may be other factors at work, or that there are very complex interactions between the factors that have been identified.

> Even when men and women are objectively equal on credibility and expertise, research shows that men are more persuasive than women...

Perhaps the biggest weakness of the model, though, is that it *assumes* that persuasion comes mostly from understanding a message, but doesn't say *how* this understanding is achieved. Indeed, the Hovland-Yale model is actually contradicted by evidence which says that persuasion can occur even when a message is *not* fully understood. This would suggest that persuasion can occur for reasons not identified by the Hovland-Yale research.

> In later research, Hovland and his colleagues discovered that some of the factors they identified as being important were not as important as they had thought. Although research showed that people tend to immediately discount information from a low credibility source, over time they would forget *where* the message had come from whilst still remembering the message itself. The hidden effect of a persuasive message even when it comes from a low credibility source is called **the sleeper effect**.