

Use these six psychological shortcuts to persuade your audiences

Psychologists studying persuasion have found people instinctively use certain universal shortcuts when making decisions. They concluded that this is because people simply can't analyze all the variables affecting those decisions. This seems especially true in today's information-laden world.¹

According to Dr. Robert Cialdini in his book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, these shortcuts are basically stereotypes or rules of thumb found in all cultures. For instance, when comparing similar items, people assume the more expensive one must be the best. People buy from friends. People watch what others buy. People buy certain brands because it's what their parents used. People buy what they've "always" bought.¹

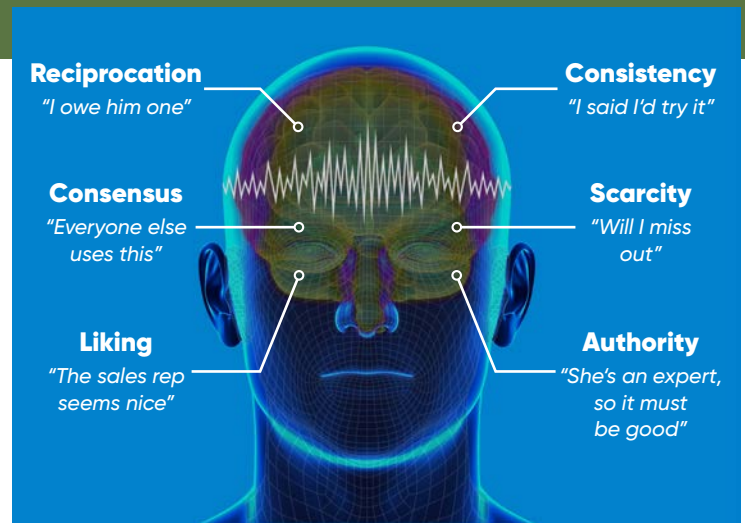
After years of study, Cialdini believes understanding six decision-making shortcuts—and taking advantage of them—can help marketers increase their persuasive power.

The six dimensions of persuasion

Reciprocation is a feeling of obligation to repay a kindness, says Cialdini. This powerful drive, found in all societies, often turns a "no" into a "yes," even for requests that would normally be refused. But acting first is the key to receiving reciprocation. Free samples are the classic marketing tool addressing this drive.¹

Consensus reassures people they're making the right decision because other people have made the same decision. Because most people are imitators, a marketing term like "#1 brand" can be highly persuasive, Cialdini found, especially when targets are unsure of themselves or uncertain about a situation.¹

Liking seems simple—people prefer to say "yes" to someone they know and like. But liking is very complicated, says Cialdini. Attractive people are generally better liked. Similarity in dress, opinion, background or lifestyle can also be important, so understanding your target is key for successful marketing efforts. Familiarity can increase liking—and thus persuasiveness—so high advertising frequency (which ingrains familiarity) can help boost liking.¹



Social psychologists have identified six "voices" in people's heads that influence decision making. These automatic behavior patterns are found in every society and can be used to increase the persuasive power of sales and marketing efforts.¹

Consistency is a person's desire to be (and appear) consistent with what he or she has already said or done. Cialdini's work shows consistency is especially powerful after making a public commitment.¹ So, a target who publicly agrees a product offers more benefits than a competitor may feel compelled to buy or recommend that product.

Scarcity makes people think hard-to-get items are better than readily available items. The fear of losing a hard-to-get item easily influences decisions, says Cialdini. He also found telling people what they stand to lose is more persuasive than telling them what they can gain.¹ The message for marketers: Pain is more persuasive than opportunity. If you don't use this technique, you'll miss out!

Authority can be a powerful influence, because society teaches from birth that obedience to authority is right and disobedience is wrong. But authorities—such as those used in testimonial ads—must be knowledgeable and trustworthy to achieve authority status, according to Cialdini.¹

Using persuasion in marketing

How can marketers make their efforts more persuasive? If there are commonly held objections in your audience, consider preempting them to reduce resistance. Then consider how to address Cialdini's six shortcuts with your prospects: Send them something free (reciprocation). Share information about others buying your brand (consensus). Make them more familiar with your company or sales force (liking). Ask them to agree to try your products (consistency). Tell them what they'll lose by not choosing your brand (scarcity). And, finally, use a trustworthy expert to promote your product (authority).¹

¹ Cialdini, Robert *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. New York, NY: W. Morrow and Company, 1993.

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