

The Art of Advertising for the Arts

Some people value the arts for the personal pleasure it brings them. Others appreciate its contribution to the cultural development of society. However, if you urge such people to provide a more tangible form of support, such as through your fund for the arts, most of them will back away. To secure donations, you must convince a broad portion of the public to support the arts more than just in spirit. There are several persuasion techniques you can use to swell their interest.

Overall, you must frame your ad campaign by considering two kinds of thinkers: those who follow “central” or “peripheral” routes to persuasion. Individuals who rely on the central mode of thinking focus on, analyze, and judge the content and strength of a persuasive message. In a peripheral route, people look for superficial “cues,” such as the length of a message or the attractiveness of an ad design, that merely imply the merits of an argument (Petty, et al, 115-118)¹. To induce sufficient aid for your cause, you must aim the ad campaign at both of these types of thinkers.

Let us start with those who are harder to convince: the central-route thinkers. You can garner their support by showing the validity of your campaign’s message. Keep in mind, however, that some of these people already refuse to support your cause. For instance, some individuals have financial concerns and prefer to limit their charity options. Others do not wish to fuel the production of potentially offensive works. Do not

¹ Petty, Richard E., John T. Cacioppo, Alan J. Stratham, and Joseph R. Priester, “To Think or Not to Think” [from course packet].

ignore the circumstances or opinions of such individuals. Instead, deflate their negative attitudes and the reasons for their refusals.

There are a couple of ways to carry out this goal. Naturally, you can respond to their positions directly: if they say A, you say not A but B. Neutralizing counterarguments will be more effective, though, if the audience can actually see the opposing stance. To this end, you can use the inoculation procedure: present a weak contention against your own cause. Granted, the mere suggestion of your opponent's ideas seems undesirable. However, you are providing an argument weak enough for viewers to counter with their own notions (Kenrick, et al, 159)². For instance, if one of your ads states, "All artists starve—why prolong their pain?", your discerning audience should detect the absurdity of such fatalism. Likewise, if another ad declares that "all" art today is "immoral" and leaves it at that, perceptive individuals should find this sweeping, unsupported statement shaky. Even if these people do not become pro-art advocates, they will at least see flaws in the anti-art stance. Like a vaccine, the inoculation procedure will build up their resistance against your opponent's side. If the individuals already have criticisms in mind, then when they encounter stronger anti-art arguments, they will see flaws in those positions more easily than before (Kenrick, et al, 159).

Instead of encouraging dissension with others, you can focus on the harmony of your targets. People desire a sense of consistency in what they say, do, and believe. They will alter their attitudes and behaviors to maintain this consistency (Kenrick, et al, 174). In the case of your campaign, you can change negative views toward the arts if you emphasize an aspect of the issue people normally support. If you stress not the material output of the artists but the freedom of expression the field affords them, then

² Kenrick, Douglas T., Steven L. Neuberg, and Robert B. Cialdini, Social Psychology: Unraveling the Mystery (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999).

you will strike the democratic nerve that most Americans possess. To remain consistent about their beliefs, many of these people will temper their opposition to the arts and uphold the greater ideal. Also, in regard to the arts' potential to offend its audience or promote bad taste, you should emphasize that it is just that: potential, just as there exists the potential for artists to produce something sublime. A point like this one can induce moderate arts supporters to find internal consistency by strengthening their views. Although this method involves less intellectual objectivity than the previous ones do, a central-route thinker will still focus on the validity of your arguments before making a decision.

You can also show the personal relevance of the arts to the members of this audience. The greater the impact of an issue on a person's life, the greater his interest in and reflection upon the message. Like the others above, this technique involves an assessment of argument quality, particularly when the personal relevance of the message is high. This scenario makes sense, for a person will have greater motivation to evaluate a message if it heavily pertains to him (Petty, et al, 121-123).

On a more subjective level, the personal-relevance method will combat not opposition to the arts so much as apathy toward it. However, there are several ways your publicity campaign can make the arts seem relevant to the individual. The ads can remind people of their own creative impulses and the enjoyment they find in fulfilling them. For the socially aware, the ads can present the arts as a safe outlet for the energies of society's juvenile and adult delinquents. Such an emphasis on personal and practical concerns will open more minds to your cause.

Now let us turn to the peripheral-route thinkers. Because this audience is not as astute as the previous one, you should make it easy for such individuals to mentally evoke your ideas. First, familiarize these people with your fund by repeatedly exposing them to the issue (Kenrick, et al, 168). This step entails the transmission of your

message through various means: flyers, posters, and possibly television and radio commercials. The greater the public's familiarity with the fund, the more concrete and accessible it will find it to be. You should also focus people's imaginations on a particular idea (Kenrick, et al, 168). If you spark positive reflections about the impact of the arts on society (e.g., via the personally relevant images I described earlier), those people may persuade themselves the cause is worth their money. For those who take the arts for granted, however, your ads can ask them to imagine a world in which nothing from the arts exists: no music, no sculpture, no paintings, no films, no dance. Such images might help them realize how creatively and culturally barren the world would be without the arts and, by extension, without their support for that field.

Another idea that applies to peripheral-route thinking is the balance theory. This theory, a part of the consistency principle, states that individuals desire attitudinal harmony and cognitive balance. If tension results from a dissonance between any of a person's views, he will adjust one of them to recreate the balance (Kenrick, et al, 174-175). By that logic, you can stir up positive thoughts toward the arts if another part of your ads produces similarly positive feelings. For example, you can find a well-liked celebrity to endorse your cause. That way, if the subject does not support the fund but likes the celebrity, he will have to change his view of one or the other to achieve cognitive balance. If his stance on the arts is weak and he relies more heavily on the cues of your messages, his favorable attitude toward the celebrity should extend to the arts (Kenrick, et al, 175).

Similarly, your cause will become literally more attractive if the ads present a physically beautiful spokesperson or a pleasing design. Individuals who will not or cannot engage in deep thinking will seek balance by developing a penchant for the arts simply because the celebrity apparently has one. Meanwhile, raise the quality of your visual presentations to the level of artistic or cinematic projects. Those you impress with

your ads may, through association, support the cause the ads feature (Petty, et al, 136). Hence, to persuade peripheral-route thinkers, an investment in a popular, attractive spokesperson and an appealing design might be worthwhile.

To sum up these strategies, aim for both the central- and peripheral-route thinkers. For the more perceptive crowd, defuse counterarguments, force individuals to be ideologically consistent, and emphasize the personal relevance of the issue. For the superficial thinkers, make the ideas mentally accessible and refine the surface allure of the ads. Granted, the employment of these methods will require much research, time, and energy. However, until you know which strategies work in practice, you should apply the ones that work in theory. If you want to persuade the public to financially support the arts, you have to treat your public service campaign as an art in itself.