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ABSTRACT

The potential contribution of marketing as an approach to persuasion was suggested some thirty years ago (Weibe 1951). Yet behavioral scientists appear not to consider marketing's distinctive approach when they discuss the subject of persuasion. This paper articulates the essential features of marketing persuasion as an approach to behavioral change, and it discusses three kinds of persuasive task distinguished in terms of the kind of change attempted.

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the burgeoning literature on nonbusiness marketing (e.g., Gaedeke 1977, Lovelock and Weinberg 1978a, b, Rothschild 1979, Sheth and Frazier 1982), marketing's distinctive approach to persuasion has not been articulated and, perhaps for this reason, it is not considered when persuasion is the topic for discussion. Even within the discipline of consumer behavior, the essential marketing contribution to the study of persuasion has not been recognized. Consumer psychologists typically construe persuasion in terms of attitude change (and, more recently, information processing e.g., Chestnut 1980), following the lead of basic psychology. Marketing's distinctive contribution to the study of persuasion lies elsewhere and comprises, essentially, the following orientations:

1. Commitment to studying the perspective of potential target persons as the point of departure,
2. Recognition that perspectives are heterogeneous,
3. Willingness to adjust the offering and the definition of target persons in order to optimize the match between offering and target,
4. Cognizance of the competing influences (market and nonmarket) on the target's behavior,
5. Design and implementation of a monitoring system to obtain feedback on specific elements of the program of persuasion.

A theory of persuasion and, more basically, a theory of behavior underlie the distinctive features of the marketing approach. Marketing's theory of persuasion is implicit in the "marketing concept": Don't sell what you happen to make; make what the customer wants to buy. In other words, the likelihood of successful influence is enhanced when the behavior one recommends is something the target wants to do. Accordingly, marketers study potential targets' perspectives with a view to obtaining the information necessary to achieve an optimal match between their offering and the wants of at least some of the potential targets. Because people differ in their personalities and in their current life circumstances they differ in what they want even in regard to the "same" product. Demand is heterogeneous (Smith 1956) and the market is inherently segmented in terms of customer wants. For a variety of reasons marketers may not be able to satisfy all wants equally well. Through research they attempt to understand what potential targets want and to assess the extent to which demand is being satisfied by current market offerings, their own and those of their competitors. The marketer's eventual offering and the persons to whom it is offered i.e., the substance and targets of the persuasive effort, represent the best match possible between the unmet wants of some customers and the capabilities of the marketer, actual and perceived. Further, because of countervailing influence from habit and the efforts of competitors, marketers follow through with an organized program to facilitate the target's compliance. This follow-through is described by McCarthy (1978) in terms of coordin-

ating the four Ps of the marketing mix namely, offering (product), communication (promotion), cost (price), and distribution (place).

THREE TASKS OF PERSUASION

As an approach to persuasion, marketing differs most fundamentally from attempted attitude change in being grounded in a theory of behavior, albeit an implicit theory. In this paper I shall briefly describe a general theory of behavior which is compatible with the orientation and practice of marketing and I shall use this theory as a basis for discussing three kinds of persuasive task and the analytic assignment associated with each task. Rather than continue a labeling system in terms of profit/nonprofit, or business/nonbusiness, I suggest that it is preferable to distinguish the three major persuasive tasks in terms of the kind of change attempted in the target's behavior. The influence agent's task is to attempt to have the target:

1. MODIFY an existing or contemplated behavior e.g., buy XYZ soap, apply to XYZ business school, donate to XYZ charity;
2. STOP (or not start) performing a behavior e.g., stop smoking;
3. START (or not stop) performing a behavior e.g., wear seat belts.

I refer to these three cases, respectively, as the MODIFY, STOP, and START tasks. Note that while it is possible to point to familiar examples to illustrate each one, the assignment of a specific influence attempt to one or other persuasive task may be somewhat arbitrary. For example, persuading motorists to wear seat belts (START), may also be viewed as persuading motorists upon entering the car not to drive off without buckling up (STOP). Unlike Fine (1979) and Rothschild (1979), I do not propose a once-for-all classification of specific contexts for attempted influence. My emphasis on the persuasive task rather than on the context of application suggests that influence agents should consider whether a particular assignment may not implicate more than one kind of persuasive task. Accordingly, a political campaign may be addressed to the voting public (MODIFY) or to the nonvoting public (START), with different strategic implications in each case. Likewise, it is useful to consider an assignment to increase participation in a blood drive as persuading potential donors both to respond when the mobile unit calls (START), and not to fill up their calendars with meetings or be away on a trip (STOP) during the relevant time period. Although the basis I am using for distinguishing the persuasive tasks is relevant whether influence is attempted via face-to-face or mass media communication, in this paper I refer primarily to attempted persuasion via the mass media.

TOWARD A GENERAL THEORY OF BEHAVIOR

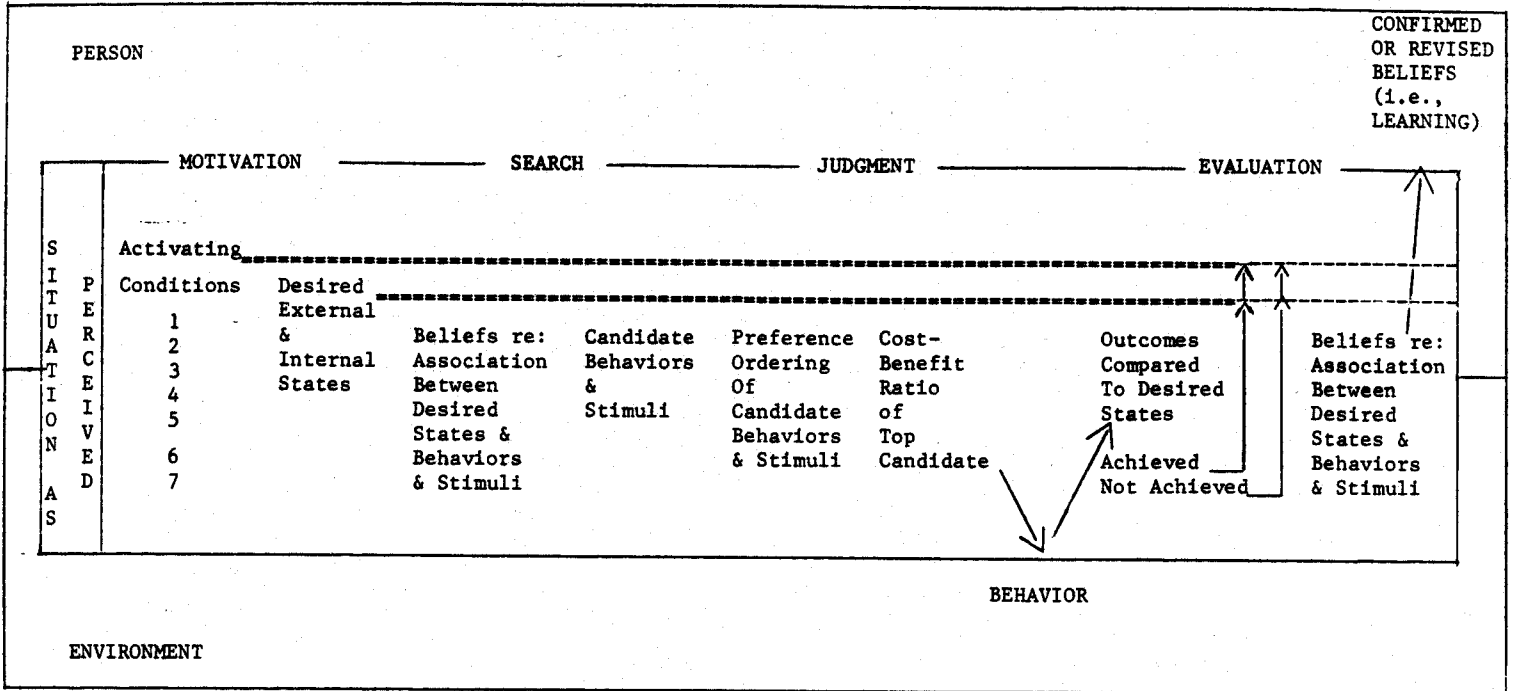
Given that the objective of a persuasive attempt is to influence behavior, it is necessary to consider first how behavior is to be conceptualized. As adults we have an extensive repertoire of behavior -- there is an enormous, possibly infinite, number of things we can do. Yet, from this behavioral potential, we perform a tiny fraction at any one time. What determines our selection of behavior? Overt behavior results from the motivating influences operating at the time, which direct the person's search and processing of information about past behavioral outcomes and the current environment. The answer to the question, Why did I do that? may be stated: Because I wanted something and, among the things I could think to do to get it, that action seemed best and worthwhile. This very general

¹This paper is an edited version of Fennell (1980a).

answer to the question of what determines behavior may be unpacked in many ways. One representation that is useful in developing strategies for persuasion is shown in Figure 1. The two main sources of influence on behavior are found

for behaviors and stimuli with some likelihood of securing the desired states and terminating this particular situation (Candidate Behaviors/Stimuli).

FIGURE 1 DESCRIPTORS OF A SITUATION AS PERCEIVED



within the person and the person's environment, each of which comprises numerous systems. Behavior results from the intersection of person and environment systems to form a situation. Figure 1 shows the main descriptors of the situation as perceived. I shall briefly describe four main aspects of the decision process in a prototypical situation: Motivation, search, judgment, and evaluation (Fennell 1980c, 1983).

Motivation. The situation begins when person and environment elements combine to create an unpleasant state of affairs (Activating Condition). The person senses disparity, beyond some threshold level, between the present and an imagined state of affairs (Desired States) favoring the latter. The person's resources are marshalled in the service of dispelling the unpleasantness i.e., neutralizing the activating condition, which may occur in one of two ways: (1) Cognitive reorganization or reappraisal may defuse the activating condition directly, or (2) Overt behavior may occur which neutralizes the activating condition and terminates the situation. Elsewhere (Fennell 1978), I have described five simple and two complex activating conditions (Table 1); the latter are important special cases where terminating the situation brings an additional source of activation. Most fundamentally, activating conditions select the sample of a person's behavioral repertoire from which the behavior eventually performed is chosen.

Search. Selecting this sample of behavior necessitates a search of memory and the current environment. Stored in memory are outcomes occurring upon the performance of certain behaviors and use of certain stimuli as well as knowledge about the environment e.g., where certain kinds of object are to be found. Additionally, during the currency of a particular activating condition the person experiences incoming stimuli including word-of-mouth, news, advertisements and other kinds of information. Accordingly, memory and the current environment are the source of knowledge and beliefs which are potentially relevant to neutralizing the activating condition (Beliefs). Using noncompensatory processing (Fennell 1980b), the person searches this information, intentionally and/or incidentally (Fennell 1979),

Judgment. If two or more behaviors are being considered, the person needs some way of reducing the pros and cons of each to a single value for purposes of comparison (Preference Ordering), suggesting compensatory processing (Fennell 1980b). Costs of performing the most preferred behavior, or the sole candidate behavior in the event only one is being considered, are assessed relative to the likely benefit to be derived from performance (Cost-Benefit Ratio).

TABLE 1 ACTIVATING CONDITIONS AND CORRESPONDING BEHAVIORAL DIRECTION

Activating Condition	Direction for Behavior
<u>Simple</u>	
1. Current Problem	Solve Problem
2. Potential Problem	Prevent Problem
3. Normal Depletion	Maintain Stable State
4. Interest Opportunity	Explore
5. Sensory Pleasure Opportunity	Enjoy
<u>Complex</u>	
6. Action-Related Problem	Resolve Conflict
7. Satisfaction-Frustration	Restructure Situation

Evaluation. Following performance, the person experiences and evaluates the external and internal outcomes relative to the desired states (Outcomes). Depending on the extent to which the desired states have been achieved, the person's knowledge and beliefs relative to one or more means of ter-

minating this situation are confirmed or revised (Learning).

PLANNING FOR PERSUASION

Information about the situation as perceived, obtained through qualitative and quantitative research among potential targets, aids in the development and selection of the persuasive message(s) and target group(s) as well as in subsequent campaign evaluation. The horizontal (decisional components) and vertical (kinds of activating condition) descriptors of the situation as perceived offer a systematic guide to obtaining information on targets' perspectives. They are helpful in identifying reasons for performance or nonperformance of a behavior of interest and in describing differences among individuals relative to the focal behavioral domain (Fennell 1982a, b, 1983). Elsewhere (Fennell 1980b), I have discussed similarities and differences between my behavioral formulation and the expectancy value approach to attitude. Perhaps the main difference from other decision models that should be noted here is that I have incorporated a representation and analysis of the motivating conditions which determine value in specific situations (activating conditions.). This feature, also, is the main basis for distinguishing among the three persuasive tasks.

MODIFY (buy XYZ brand, apply to XYZ college) aims to have the target select the change agent's version of a behavior which the target currently performs or may perform. This is the case that underlies the marketing concept. Marketers start with an existing customer activity/experience -- the focal behavioral domain. They seek to understand the conditions that activate the focal behavior and to develop a means of neutralizing one or more of these activating conditions. Since they operate in a competitive environment, their offering must be competitive with the customer's other options. STOP (stop smoking, littering) aims to have targets stop performing a behavior which the change agent considers undesirable. In this instance, the change agent has no behavior to recommend to the target, other than the behavior of "not doing." The target is, however, performing the to-be-stopped behavior as a means of neutralizing an activating condition. Accordingly, the change agent must consider whether the target may be induced to use cognitive activity to defuse the activating condition or, if not, to use another, nonobjectionable, behavior to neutralize the activating condition. START (wear seat belts, go for a checkup) aims to have the target perform the change agent's recommended behavior. This means finding or inducing an activating condition which the recommended behavior will neutralize and which is potent enough to outweigh features of the recommended behavior which the target may regard as bothersome. I shall describe each persuasive task in greater detail below.

MODIFY

In the MODIFY case, the change agent's essential message is: Choose (e.g., buy, use, apply to, join, attend) mine; it suits you best. In order to be selected, the change agent is willing to try to match some target group's requirements in a manner that the targets will perceive to be competitive with other options. Accordingly, the specific nature of the offering as well as the persons to whom it is offered may not be known initially, but may be identified through research and analysis. The influence process begins with analysis of the requirements of potential targets. That means gaining an understanding of the activating conditions and desired states currently prevailing among potential targets i.e., the naturally-occurring demand segments. The choice of specific offerings and targets for the offering reflects considerations such as the prevailing state of want-satisfaction, and the change agent's ability, credibly, to offer enhanced satisfaction to at least some targets.

Limitations on the agent's success in meeting the target's requirements trace to difficulties inherent, on the one hand, in identifying what potential targets require and, on the other, in implementing their requirements. The former is mainly a limitation of behavioral science (Fennell 1980b).

Difficulty in implementing the target's requirements, once identified, has different sources depending on the context. In business applications, constraints may be due to the inability of technology to meet the target's requirements profitably. In nonbusiness applications, the profitability limitation is not present but its place may be taken by constraints imposed by funding sources, the special interests represented by management, ideology, or personal belief. For example, politicians seeking votes or financing, symphony orchestras and museums seeking to attract patrons, colleges seeking students, and organizations seeking donations of time or money may study the motivations of, respectively, the voting and political funding public, concert and museum patrons, college applicants, and persons who volunteer time, and donate money to organizations. They may endeavor to tailor their offerings accordingly, but will likely do so only up to a point that is still compatible with their essential mission as they perceive it. Whether imposed by considerations of profit or mission, the outer limit of market size is determined by success in reaching targets who might want the offering if they knew about it. Accordingly, follow-up research will address such topics as lack of awareness, erroneous information, and perceptions of undue cost, as possible impediments to acceptance of the offering.

STOP

In the STOP task, the change agent's essential message is: Don't do this; it's harmful to yourself, others, or society in general e.g., smoking, using drugs, speeding, coughing while a member of an audience, abusing children, littering, polluting, wasting energy. A first question that comes to mind is: Why does the target perform a potentially harmful behavior? One answer is that the target may not know the behavior is harmful. The change agent, then, presents information, factually and/or emotionally, indicating the harmful consequences of the behavior, often in conjunction with varying degrees of explicitness in depicting horrible outcomes attendant on continuing the behavior. The strategy appears to rely on convincing the target that hurt and harm result from the behavior, in the expectation that the target will then do the "right" thing.

From a marketing perspective, the strategy is not compelling because it ignores, first, people's ability to use cognitive activity to protect themselves from disquieting information likely to prevent them from doing what they want to do. Counterarguments readily come to mind such as the fact that not everyone suffers horrible consequences, or that advice and forecasts based on scientific or expert opinion are often tentative, even faddish, and subject to change. Second, the strategy ignores the fact that the behavior it aims to change is currently well established as a means of neutralizing activating conditions which the targets experience. Harmful consequences possibly accruing in the future are not only unlikely to weigh heavily in the balance against the currently experienced discomfort of the activating condition, but may not even come to mind when the activating condition occurs and triggers the target's well-practised behavioral decision sequence. Targets are likely to stop the behavior: When they can use cognitive activity to defuse the activating condition; when they consider and prefer some other behavior as a means of neutralizing the activating condition; when the to-be-stopped behavior is experienced as entailing discomfort greater than that arising from the activating condition; when the to-be-stopped behavior no longer secures their desired states. Currently experienced discomfort from performing the to-be-stopped behavior could arise, for example, from reactions of revulsion to aspects of the behavior itself (e.g., smell of cigarette smoke) or from the notion that the behavior is incompatible with one's self-concept or public image. For these feelings to act as a deterrent they have to be experienced before the behavior is initiated.

More generally, the direction from my behavioral model is to investigate the entire situation in which the to-be-stopped behavior is embedded. This means conducting research to identify the different kinds of activating conditions experienced by persons who currently perform the

behavior, to elucidate their desired states, and their search, judgment, and evaluation processes and outcomes. The likely result of this investigation is threefold: It will be evident that the reasons for performing the behavior are various, that correspondingly varied strategies are indicated for reaching and influencing targets and, third, that the likelihood of success in getting targets to stop varies among the target group as a whole. Following the research, targets are no longer an undifferentiated group defined only in terms of their performance of the to-be-stopped behavior. Instead, they are differentiated in terms of their particular activating conditions as well as other aspects of their situations as perceived. The change agent is then equipped to devise and test correspondingly differentiated persuasive campaigns, and to consider the option of spending scarce resources against selected segments of the target group where the chance of success may be maximized.

START

In the START case, the change agent's essential message is: Do this; your own, others', or society's good requires it e.g., brush teeth (often), get medical checkups/immunization, give time/money/blood, vote, mail early, turn off lights, practise good nutrition, carpool, wear seat belts, use contraceptives. The question may be asked, Why is the recommended behavior not being performed? One answer is that people are unaware of the potential hazards attendant on non-performance. A possible strategy is, then, to expose them to rational and/or emotional presentations of the harmful consequences of not performing the behavior in the hope that, once apprised of the consequences of omission, people will start performing the recommended behavior.

As in the STOP case, from a marketing viewpoint the strategy is not compelling. It considers only a fraction of the possible range of orientations toward the recommended behavior. Assuming knowledge of the negative consequences of omission, there remain numerous reasons why the behavior may not be performed. The target may well believe that unpleasant outcomes will arise in the future, but this information may not come to mind at the time the recommended behavior should be performed (e.g., after a meal for oral hygiene) and even if it comes to mind it must compete with targets' currently experienced activating conditions and behavioral routines already in place (e.g., lunch time errands or relaxation). The recommended behavior entails its own costs in time, effort, inconvenience or discomfort, which are experienced in the here and now and, on that account, may outweigh possible hurt accruing in the future. Furthermore, it may run diametrically counter to some strongly held value e.g., contraception in a culture that values large families. The recommended behavior is likely to be performed when it becomes a behavior which targets think of and choose over others as likely to secure a state they desire without, however, entailing costs disproportionate to the discomfort ensuing from the activating condition it may neutralize.

In the START case we have a behavior looking for a situation. This means that change agents initially have no situation to investigate so far as the targets are concerned. To obtain guidance on how to proceed, change agents can do three things: (1) Study the situation as perceived by persons who currently perform the recommended behavior, (2) Investigate targets' reasons for not performing the recommended behavior and (3) Explore targets' reactions to the perspectives of current performers of the recommended behavior. The likely results of this investigation include the following: It will be evident that reasons for not performing the recommended behavior range from lack of information, through misinformation, thoughtlessness, habit, to serious physical or psychological discomfort; that some targets who currently experience conditions that could well lead to performance of the recommended behavior have been using cognitive coping strategies rather than overt behavior to neutralize these activating conditions; that other targets appear to experience no activating conditions on which change agents could build in attempting to have the target perform the recommended behavior. As in the STOP case, following the research, targets are no longer an undifferentiated group

identified solely as nonperformers of the recommended behavior. They are now differentiated in terms of their reasons for nonperformance, and whether or not they currently experience activating conditions which the recommended behavior could neutralize. Correspondingly differentiated influence strategies are indicated.

From a marketing viewpoint, the most challenging of the analytic segments, theoretically, is the one where targets appear to experience no activating condition-desired state for which the recommended behavior could conceivably become a candidate behavior. It is not at all clear whether it is possible to induce an activating condition, short of coercion, that will generate the behavior which a change agent wants to be performed. Although marketing is often accused of making people do things they would not otherwise have done, the case in point has received scant treatment in the marketing literature.² To the contrary, marketing has been explicitly oriented toward satisfying existing motivations i.e., the MODIFY task.

There are two problems here: (1) Ensuring that the target considers performing the recommended behavior at the appropriate time and (2) Inducing an activating condition that will result in the recommended behavior. Regarding the first problem, information obtained from persons who currently perform the recommended behavior may suggest events or other behaviors with which targets may be made to associate the thought of performing the recommended behavior. The second problem arises because even if an informational campaign creates the desired associations, something more than thinking about the recommended behavior may be necessary if the target is to perform the behavior. For example, the thought of not performing the behavior would have to be experienced as disquieting or anxiety arousing, as it might be if failure to perform the recommended behavior had come to be viewed as an unwelcome departure from the person's notion of what is appropriate.

More generally, the target must want to perform the behavior, that is, must experience an activating condition which the recommended behavior may be expected to neutralize. Change agents seldom have the degree of control over their targets' lives that permits them to create activating conditions with ease, although exceptions may be observed. For example, organizers of campaigns to induce people to contribute money to worthy causes sometimes request organizations to show to their employees movies depicting heartrending scenes related to the cause. The movie is likely to induce discomfort in audience members which some may attempt to dispel by donating money to help alleviate suffering such as they have just seen depicted. Again, taking a cue from promotional practice rather than marketing theory, another possible approach is the use of an extrinsic incentive i.e., an incentive unrelated to the essential function of the recommended behavior. Examples are: Receipt of money, or a chance to win valuable prizes, which have been made contingent on performance of the recommended behavior. This method, on its own, is unlikely to produce enduring behavior unless the change agent is willing to continue to offer the extrinsic inducement, and can find one for which targets do not become satiated. It is possible, of course, that in some cases e.g., a campaign to secure increased incidence of volunteering one's time and services, rewards arising from performance of the activity itself may be sufficient to ensure continued performance once the person has been induced to engage in the recommended behavior.

CONCLUSION

The original domain in which marketing thinking developed provides a context for influence where the assignment is

²The case I am discussing here belongs under "no demand," the second of Kotler's (1973) eight marketing tasks. Kotler's discussion of "no demand" includes some examples which, in my opinion, are more appropriate to a discussion of target selection or of "latent demand," his third marketing task, or of my activating conditions #4 or #5 (Table 1).

readily construed as a MODIFY persuasive task. As they addressed their task of making "what the customer wants to buy" marketers understood the necessity of investigating at first hand the customer's world in which their good or service would be used. They quickly came to appreciate the variety and complexity of human wants and the corresponding heterogeneity of perspectives in any population segment. Acknowledgment of diversity, commitment to primary research to understand varied perspectives, willingness to tailor persuasive communications to reflect the target group's diversity, and to follow through with a coordinated program to facilitate behavioral change -- all are distinctive features of marketing persuasion. They promise to enhance the effectiveness of attempted influence even when the context shifts from one where the MODIFY task is mainly applicable to contexts where the STOP and START persuasive tasks must also be addressed.

A marketing approach has been actively employed in nonbusiness contexts for more than a decade and the assessment of its potential is now less optimistic than before (Bloom and Novelli 1981, Rothschild 1979). My analysis suggests that the range of contexts in which marketing has been employed comprises fundamentally differing persuasive tasks. An appreciation of these basic differences goes a long way toward explaining why the broadening of marketing's range of application would meet with setbacks. A conclusion on the value of the marketing approach to persuasion realistically depends on the merits of the available alternatives. In a comparison with the primary contender, attitude change, marketing must appear superior if only because of its greater scope, that is, its more differentiated approach to behavioral influence. Problems of implementation abound (e.g., Bloom and Novelli 1981) but what other approach is better? Furthermore, tapping marketing's potential to the fullest awaits the deepening (cf. Enis 1973) of marketing through articulating, and then developing the implications of, its implicit theory of behavior (Fennell 1982a, 1983).

Can we sell "brotherhood and rational thinking like ... soap" (Weibe 1951, p. 679)? We can: Consider the persuasive assignment from the perspectives of the MODIFY, STOP, and START tasks (i.e., consider the behavioral implications of our persuasive attempt) and design our research accordingly; Delay formulating our persuasive messages until we have identified and understood the heterogeneous perspectives of our potential targets; Think through and plan for coordination among all the elements in the persuasive campaign; Assess the success of our persuasive effort in terms of its effect on all the critical components of the behavioral decision process. These are some of the characteristics of marketing persuasion and to the extent we implement them we may answer Weibe's question affirmatively.

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