wO3.4.1. INFLUENCE AND PERSUASION: MEANING AND LIMITS

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Abstract:	This unit introduces learners to what is influence, its virtues and risks, how it is used nowadays on a large scale, and understand the need of an ethical background on its use.
Keywords:	*Influence, persuasion, principles, authority, honesty, likability, problem-solving*

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Aim and objectives

The aim is to introduce what is influence, how it is used nowadays on a large scale.

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of this resource, you will be able to:

LOut2: Identify three principles of influence/persuasion

LOut3: Indicate three strategies that stimulate influence

Keywords

Influence, persuasion, principles, authority, honesty, likability, problem-solving

Contents

1. Introduction

Today, everyone speaks about influence, but often we don't really know what it is about. Are influence and persuasion skills the same? Do these skills take part in the decision-making process? How we use it? And when? These are some questions that we will discuss in this unit.

2. Into a categorization of influence and persuasion

Are influence and persuasion skills the same? What's the relevance of these transferable competences (e.g. soft skills) in the 21st century for museum professionals?

2.1. Are influence and persuasion skills the same?

Let's start by defining both terms. **Influence** is often described as the capacity (of persons or things) to be a compelling force on or to have an effect, changing how someone or something develops, behaves or thinks. By this, influence is considered a solution construction that one does by giving advice or guidance to others, establishing purposes and goals, and improving quality continuously; influence can also be understood as the vision that one has of the best outcome for a situation and, without using force, but dedicating time to win someone's mind and/or heart, one inspires someone to take action.

Even if you are not aware, you will recognize the use of influence in everyday life and, of course, in museum work, specially when you need to find a solution and you think you know the right way, but people you must convince are not convinced at all.

On the other hand, **persuasion** is defined as the act of persuade, the skill to influence other people, situations or realities. Persuasion

is a way, as it can be a speech or writing that uses arguments or emotions to make the listener or reader believe what you are saying, and be influenced by you. By persuasion, you can spur someone to action or to make a decision influenced by you.

Note that, semantically, it's quite common that these terms are used in an interchangeable way. However, from a practical perspective, they are not the same, as one is the goal and the other is the way.

In summary: when you are choosing the right words to communicate an idea to a target audience, orchestrating the perfect conditions in which to interact with others in order to optimize the likelihood of a desirable outcome, you are using persuasion; if, on the other hand, you are training yourself long before getting to action, connecting ideas to bring all the issues to light, establishing your goals and achieve them by giving voice to others in the decision making process, providing them assistance and credit, nurturing relationships and maintaining a track record of success in a particular area, you are influencing.

How long can take the influence and the persuasion processes? Even if it is quite clear to understand their meaning, differences and connections, they both take several time.

Influence is based on trust and credibility consolidated over time, and in that way is a long process. Persuasion also takes time, because you must prepare it quite well before getting to action.

2.1.1. Influence and persuasion principles

Even if one gives different priorities to influence and persuasion skills, there are at least three guiding principles: authority, honesty and likability. Let's analyze them.

First, we'll take a look at the basic principles÷ Let's start by authority. From the earliest childhood, we learn to rely on authority figures for decision-making. Sometimes because of their status, or of is expertise, and sometimes by both reasons, authority figures control us and our access to the thing we want, but also because we grew up believing that respect for authority is a virtue. Parents, teachers, are some examples of this. As adults, we transfer this respect to social designated authorities (doctors, bosses, political and religious leaders, among others) assuming their positions are based on information and power and that is good for us to follow them.

The second principle is honesty. This moral dimension of trustworthiness is fundamental to a right use of influence and persuasion. If you want to succeed, you need to take into account all the internal and external parameters, namely legislation, codes of ethics, or others.

The third principle is likability. Usually, we tend to trust people we like. For example, advertising industry often uses celebrities to promote some products, even if they are not really experts in that specific subject. To like a person is a complex process, and there is not a standard. Studies on persuasion demonstrate that there are three important factors that make us like others: we like people that are similar to us, that pay us compliments, and that cooperate with us towards mutual goals. To harness this powerful principle of likability, be sure to look for areas of similarity that you share with others before you get down to action.

Authority, honesty and likability are the most well-known principles of influence and persuasion. Furthermore, some other four principles can be take in consideration four: reciprocity, scarcity, consistency and consensus.

By reciprocity is intended to make clear the fact that when you receive something (a behavior, a gift, a service, etc.) you usually feel obliged to give back something; people are more likely to say yes to those who they owe, so if you want to influence you must give something first. Attention, for example, is always a good beginning

of the reciprocity process: make people feel listened, so they will listen to you.

Another principle is <u>scarcity</u>, that means that people feel more interested in have some of those things they can have less of. So, you must be clear explaining what can be lost or achieved when you try to persuade someone.

The third operative principle is <u>consistency</u>. Consistency is achieved after small initial commitments, after which you can make your way to a bigger compromise.

Finally, the fourth operative principle is <u>consensus</u>. It is well known that when people feel insecure, often they to look to the behaviors and actions of others to determine their own. So, give examples how people use to solve their problems connecting that with what you have to solve.

In sum, we have described three basic principles and four operative ones that can help you to develop your influence and persuasion skills.

3. Frequent misunderstandings: persuasion versus negotiation and manipulation

As you learned, persuasion is often used as a problem-solving technique, but it is frequently confused with negotiation, and also with manipulation.

3.1. Persuasion is not negotiation

Persuasion can be a useful skill in several occasions, for example when you are discussing ethic or gender issues, when there is a need to change the mind of other people according; it is a gradual process consisting of small movements that take people to open mind, creating desire for more information, and gently move people to your standpoint. It is a subtle process, usually done in a personal basis,

by slowly achieving one's goals, noting, however, that it is quite hard to change opinions.

On the other hand, negotiation can be useful when you are open to change some of your points of view, and is normally expensive in terms of time and mediums, and usually appears explicitly, in a collaborative moment, and it is possible to achieve in a simple meeting or conversation. Negotiation and persuasion are really different problem-solving processes.

3.2. Persuasion is not manipulation

Manipulation is some kind of coercion force to get someone to do something that is not in their own interest. On the other hand, persuasion is the art of getting people to do things that are in their own best interest, and that also benefits you.

The biggest difference between influence and manipulation is how people feel and what is the result for both parties when you get to the point; manipulation is a forceful act, pushing people to do things they don't want to do, and by this is considered a dishonest process. Influence, remember, is always a subtle process, a gentle way of guiding people to achieve a solution that corresponds to the common goals, keeping everyone interests, well-being and feelings.

4. Taking influence and persuasion skills to action: some guidance

After recognizing the differences and similarities between influence and persuasion; understand their basic principles and underlining some possible misunderstandings, we will focus on how to empower influence and exercise persuasion.

4.1. How to improve influence skills?

a) Be flexible – be aware that each person has its own perspective and experience about reality, and what is obvious to you can

be very different for the other people. Try to be flexible, and you'll see that also your world would be enriched by the views and experiences of other people.

b) Build trust – there is not influence without trust, and people just follow others that they can trust. Sometimes you can build trust by showing also your imperfections. Don't be afraid, allow yourself to be vulnerable sometimes. Is not a big deal! There's no such sing as perfect human being; plus, if people know that you are not perfect, they can also feel that there is place for them around you; and also start every interaction with a desire for a win/win outcome, not pretending to be the winner, but hoping to make everybody comfortable with the results.

c) Be honest – as we said before, honesty is a fundamental attitude for an influencer, otherwise persuasion is ineffective. But remember: you don't need to be brutally honest – saying the truth is different from saying all that comes to your mind.

4.2.   How to approach persuasion?

First, you must be aware of the different opinions that will be on discussion. For that, prepare a script for the conversation, knowing that your arguments will cause disagreement, emotional distress or even rejection to listeners. Be realistic: you know by experience that you take time to change your mind, so it will be the same with others.

Then, try to describe what you want to say. Let's call it your "thesis", your statement, the point of view you are trying to argue.

After that, you must find the main reasons that support your thesis and that would convince people. Give some examples for each of your main reasons based on experience; that will be help to support your argument.

Conclude by preparing one or two sentences that summarize your argument, covering the ideas you want people to take away.

You can do an exercise, a kind of persuasion map that can be very helpful. You can find a very simple version of a persuasion map that follows the previous steps mentioned, here:

4.3.   The skills of an influencer

There are some guidelines that you may want to follow or explore if you want to be improve your influence skills. In summary:

- Behavioural flexibility – the larger your repertoire of behaviours is, the more persuasive you'll be.
- Learn to transfer energy – motivate and invigorate others, intellectually and physically.
- Communicate clearly – explain yourself clearly, simplifying the arguments.
- Be prepared – your starting point should always be to know more about the people and situations around you.
- Stay calm during the discussion – control your emotions, stay calm and unemotional.
- Use anger purposefully – use it sparingly, and don't do it from an emotional perspective or with loss of self-control.
- Confidence – if you really believe in your arguments, you will be able to persuade others.
- Persistence – if you keep demonstrating the value of your arguments, you'll be more persuasive.

5. Influencers in the digital era

Over the last decade, the importance of social media grew rapidly. According to the 2019 Global Digital Statshot from "We are Social", 3.500 billion people (45% of the world's population) actively uses social media, and a lot of them do it searching for guidance in decision-making. There's a place for influence, and it is on the Internet. The increasing relevance of influence in social media transformed this skill into a giant business, and the use of persuasion with marketing purposes is growing.

Technology allows a quick and effective interpersonal communication, and we can share information and contents more than ever. This is a collaborative world, where everyone can give their opinions, make his own reviews, and share experiences that can influence users, including museum visitors.

For example, some corporations and brands are investing in influencers to promote their products in a personal and less invasive way. You can imagine the importance of social media influencers knowing that Forbes has an entire playlist on YouTube dedicated to the "business" of influence.[1]

Influencers in social media are people of different kind. For example, we recall the phenomena of using celebrities on social media to advertise their products: the celebrity endorsement of a business can make sales rise; the positive point is that usually celebrities have a lot of fans and followers, but by the other hand they may lack credibility with a product's target audience.

Apart from celebrities, social media influencers can be:

- Industry experts and leaders – this kind of influencers gain respect because of their qualifications, position, expertise or reputation.
- Bloggers and content creators – they are several influential blogs about a particular issue (personal development, health, finance, music, etc.).
- Micro influencers – these are normal everyday people who become known for their knowledge about something.

The micro influencers are becoming more common, as they are often considered to be the influencers of the future. They are not justified by the number of followers, but by the number and quality of their interaction and relationship with people that follow them.

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpndQ-APwbNVnP-mFck8QbGocOCg86VvC

Each of these types of influencers has a specific role on media, and they can be combined for a better result, but all of them have these three characteristics in common:

- Eco effect of their voice
- Big exposure
- Big share of voice

there are huge possibilities of influencing in the 21th century, and that's also because of the rising of the Internet and global communication, that makes the mouth-to-mouth process of influence become global. Internet, without any doubt, enlarged the variety of mediums available.

See this TedX Talk with Franc Carreras, Adjunct lecturer at ESADE, Barcelona, Spain, consultant, startup mentor, author and speaker, considered by Expansion newspaper as one of the main 50 experts on digital transformation in Spain, that can be very inspiring if you want to expand your individual online influence(16m:45s):

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FV_ONI8J0E

6. Synopsis

In this lesson, persuasion and influence skills were described, their limits, but also the distinction between manipulation and negotiation.

Influence in social media is not so different from the previous one; is just a question of scale and mediums; but, by the other hand, if you don't use influence on the web, probably you loose your voice and influence capacity in this global universe.

Remember that persuasion is a tool, and there's no ethics on tools, but on your thinking and intentions. You must be aware of this every time you want to convince others, and the best way to do it is knowing the reality, stay firm in your convictions, be honest and apply a method in which, at the end, everyone wins something.

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8. Further reading

Influence Marketing Hub: a massive information website concerning influencer marketing and social media monitoring, with a very useful resource library.

https://influencermarketinghub.com/

9. Glossary

- **Influence** is the capacity (of persons or things) to be a compelling force on or to have an effect, changing how someone or something develops, behaves or thinks.

- **persuasion** is the act of persuade, the skill to influence other people, situations or realities.