

## The Persuasion of Positive Contributions

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### Abstract

This paper aims to highlight important theories found in the field of persuasion, and how those key assumptions are used in real-world settings to enhance behaviours such as donating. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates how a poster was created, integrating research findings from the investigation of both the Reasoned Action Approach and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, to promote donating to a local not-for-profit organization, "The Phoenix Society," which battles substance abuse and homelessness in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia, Canada. Further strategies were also applied to induce persuasion and gain compliance, with additional considerations made to attitude functions, associations of thoughts and feelings, and the language used in persuasive messages.

*Keywords:* Elaboration Likelihood Model, Reasoned Action Approach, persuasion

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### **The Persuasion of Positive Contributions**

The Phoenix Society (<http://phoenixsociety.com>) is a registered not-for-profit organization, operating since 1992. Located in Surrey, British Columbia (BC), Canada, the Phoenix Society also extends their assistance for individuals across BC who are trying to move past the vicious cycle of addiction and homelessness. The society's focus is to find viable and long-lasting solutions for individuals caught in the cycle. Individuals who are fortunate enough to receive assistance from the Phoenix Society are provided early-recovery residential addiction services, employment and educational assistance, and long-term home ownership opportunities. This paper describes a poster that was created based on previous research on attitudes and persuasion to persuade individuals to donate to the Phoenix Society.

The poster was intended to persuade people across different ages and backgrounds to donate to the Phoenix Society, thereby helping individuals change their trajectories in life. Theorists who are interested in the functions of attitudes not only investigate why individuals hold certain attitudes, but also examine the needs and motives that the specific attitude serves and fulfils (Perloff, 2020). As highlighted by Clary and colleagues (1994), the decisions to engage in a specific behaviour begins when individuals see the behaviour in terms of their motivations through the exposure of persuasive messages. When messages match the individual's motivations, the likely result is a greater persuasive impact (Clary et al., 1994). For example, for individuals who are persuaded through value-expressive functions, messages should emphasize how one's involvement in something such as donating or volunteering can contribute to social good in society (Clary et al., 1994). Keeping these findings in mind, at the bottom of the poster, the phrase "donate today, to help others change their way!" tries to target the individual's core beliefs and values (see Figure 1). For some individuals, helping others in need, and assisting them on the right trajectory in life might be a personal value. As a result, by having these pre-existing values of caring for others on the poster, these beliefs and values will drive an individual to remain behaviorally consistent with them to prevent dissonance from occurring, possibly resulting from counter-attitudinal behaviour. Similarly, some individuals are not as concerned with fitting in with others, but instead, are more interested in both creating and showing an identity of who they are, along with how they want to be seen by the outside world. By asking potential donors how they would want to be remembered, the poster asks individuals who they want to be, and how they would like to show who they are to others. The

intention behind asking this question was to emphasize to potential donors that if they donate to the Phoenix Society, their donation not only helps individuals in need but also helps create a positive donor identity as well. The message not only speaks positively to their character, but also to how others will view them as human beings if they proceed with donating to the Phoenix Society.

To accomplish further effective persuasion, the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977) was used. The RAA is an extension of the expectancy-value theory, which highlights that an attitude has two combined components: cognition and heart; that is, the strength of beliefs that an object has certain attributes and the subsequent evaluations of the object's attributes (Vallerand et al., 1992). According to the RAA, the best predictor of behaviour is the intention of engaging in the specific behaviour, which is in turn influenced by attitudes towards the behaviour, perceived norms, and perceived behavioural control (Vallerand et al., 1992). While attitudes towards the behaviour include both the beliefs of the consequences of behaviour along with the evaluations of the consequences, perceived norms are perceived social pressures, consisting of perceptions of what other people think we should do (injunctive norms), and of what others have done in the past (descriptive norms; Vallerand et al., 1992). Perceived behavioural control is the degree to which individuals believe they can engage in the behaviour and/or can control their ability to perform the behaviour; and finally, behavioural intention is the intention of executing a specific behaviour (Vallerand et al., 1992). By providing a quick synopsis of the organization's goal below its logo, individuals become aware of the consequences of donating, which is to assist individuals in the community battling with addiction and homelessness in the community. Similarly, the evaluations of the consequences of donating are given to individuals through the statistics of how many individuals have been helped through the society, including the completion rate of substance use rehabilitation. Perceived norms are also targeted in the poster, as asking individuals to follow the footsteps of their neighbours to donate raises the salience of conformity to both injunctive and descriptive norms. Injunctive norms are initial beliefs about whether a specific behaviour will be endorsed by one's significant others, which in this case is to donate to the Phoenix Society, along with the individual's motivation to follow those beliefs held by significant others. For example, an individual who sees this poster might also wonder what their parents and/or partners would like them to do after viewing this poster. If they think that their significant others would expect them

to donate, and the motivation to comply with significant others is high, then there is a higher likelihood that the individual will go proceed to donate. Descriptive norms tell individuals what people do in certain situations, which also depends on the level of connection between others mentioned in the poster. For example, an individual who has great relationships with their neighbours will be more influenced by the poster mentioning donations that were collected in the neighbourhood because not only do they highly identify with their neighbours but as a neighbourhood collectively as well. By presenting the phone number and website address at the bottom of the poster, the hope is that individuals both perceive and believe that they are more than capable of donating resulting from the prior presentation of the outcomes and social norms.

The poster also uses the principles of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Perloff, 2020) to guide people who viewed the poster and processed the message either centrally and or peripherally. The ELM more specifically indicates that people use the central route when examining arguments and messages and think carefully about their content. Individuals using the central route also often go one step further and connect the information gained from the message to their prior knowledge before accepting or rejecting the position of the message (Perloff, 2020). Instead of focusing on the arguments of the message, individuals who peripherally process persuasive messages, pay attention to the simple cues such as the credibility of the persuader or the presence of celebrities (Perloff, 2020). For certain individuals, the presence of statistics in the middle of the poster might elicit central route thinking, as individuals might begin to critically analyze the effectiveness of the donations being sent to the Phoenix Society, and whether the not-for-profit organization, which relies on donations, is making an impact in their communities. In contrast, individuals who process this poster peripherally might be quick to focus on the credibility of the poster content before deciding on whether they will be donating or not. Credibility can act as a quick and reliable persuasion cue that influences individuals' decisions, such as the possibility of a donation to a non-for-profit organization, without requiring them to engage in a serious investigation of the message within the poster. Furthermore, credibility is multidimensional, and so highlighting the key dimensions of credibility may be effective in persuading individuals who will be processing the poster peripherally. One of these key dimensions is expertise, which the Phoenix Society displays around both substance use rehabilitation and homelessness, having been dedicated to finding solutions for these societal issues for approximately three decades. In addition to expertise,

being open and transparent with information is important to perceived credibility. As highlighted by research conducted by Flanagin (2007), products that include longer and more detailed descriptions were associated with greater intention of purchasing the product, along with better reviews following the purchase of the product. Keeping these findings in mind, accurate information within the poster is presented relating to how many people have been helped between the years of 2019 and 2020, including the completion rate of individuals who have been involved through the Phoenix Society's substance use rehabilitation program. Had the poster contained faulty information, the organization may be seen as lacking credibility, and subsequently, the possibility of a potential donation might have been diminished. Caring for others is the basis for the creation of the Phoenix Society and is again emphasized through the quick summary of the organization which contributes to both goodwill and subsequently credibility. Displaying goodwill incorporates exhibiting that the audiences' interests are acknowledged and showing empathy to their needs as well (Perloff, 2020).

The addition of certain illustrations such as the Phoenix Society logo was intentionally added to establish a link between a feeling and the message. The idealized and positive feeling of praise from others that may occur from donating to the Phoenix Society becomes connected to a photo of the organization's logo. By this, the intention is to make individuals more inclined to donate when the logo of the Phoenix Society is seen in future. Ideally, since this poster would be distributed throughout the Lower Mainland of BC, the constant exposure to these associations found in the posters will more likely make individuals process the message of the poster, even if only peripherally, and might influence individuals to donate to the society if they did not donate already upon viewing the poster the first time. Messages are easier to process when they have been viewed before, and repeatedly viewing this poster will increase the likelihood that the message will be viewed as accurate by people (Perloff, 2020).

Research findings from Bem and Bem (1973) on the presentation of job advertisements among women suggest that language is another salient factor that influences perception and affects persuasion. Language that is easier to process and read is more effective and persuasive (Perloff, 2020). That being said, simple vocabulary was used throughout the poster to increase its likely persuasiveness. Furthermore, using rhymes increases the fluency processing which ultimately allows individuals to understand persuasive messages deeply, and allows for the ideas of the message to remain in the mind. In a study done by McGlone and Tofighbakhsh

(2000), the researchers established that rhyming statements were perceived as more accurate compared to non-rhyming sentences when comparing the perception of accuracy between familiar and unfamiliar rhyming statements (e.g., “Woes unite foes”). Individuals believed that a truthful statement has been presented, especially when they have a low motivation to critically analyze the persuasive message and/or have a lack of knowledge about the merits of the message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). At the bottom of the poster, the phrase “donate today, to help others change their way” draws on the use of peripheral processing when comprehending rhymes. The “truthful rhyme” effect occurs because an individual’s perception of the truth results from the aesthetic qualities of the message, which are enhanced by the presence of rhyming (McGlone & Tofiqbakhsh, 1999). Also found by McGlone and Tofiqbakhsh (1999), the elegant phrasing of certain statements sometimes overshadows the meaning of messages, affirming the saying “beauty is truth, truth is beauty.”

Like the Phoenix Society, Beyoncé, a singer, songwriter, and actress who is also fighting against homelessness, has created a charitable foundation combatting homelessness called “Beygood.” Public figures, such as Beyonce, who have an existing link to fighting homelessness and addictions would be ideal celebrity endorsers for the Phoenix Society in future posters or other advertisements. The use of celebrity endorsement can work through a peripheral cue and is most effective when the celebrity’s views are congruent with the message being sent out to the audience (Park, 2016). When a specific not-for-profit organization is searching for a celebrity endorser for their message, they should be mindful to the celebrity’s relevance to the specific cause, as attractiveness, familiarity, and likability may not be sufficient in gaining contributions for social causes (Park, 2016).

To conclude, the poster designed to promote donating to the Phoenix Society targeted multiple different attitude functions to reach a broad range of individuals. Principles from the Elaboration Likelihood Model, mere-exposure effect, Reasoned Action Approach, and findings from research conducted on the fundamentals of language, celebrity endorsement, and attitude functions were also considered during the creation of the poster. The poster also used multiple colour schemes to capture the attention of individuals, to increase the chances of potential donors taking time to read the message. This possibility has been emphasized in Zulkifly and Firdaus’ (2014) study examining persuasion and online consumers where colours such as red, yellow, and black were eye-catching to participants, and led them to read the entire

advertisements. Understanding these principles behind attitudes and persuasion is important especially when trying to change attitudes and behaviour, as in the case of the current poster.

## Figures

**Figure 1**

*“Phoenix Society” Donation Promotional Poster*

The poster is a vertical rectangular graphic with a color palette of orange, red, blue, and white. It features the Phoenix Society logo (a stylized bird) and the text 'PHOENIX SOCIETY'. The main headline asks 'How do you want to be remembered?' and encourages donations. It includes statistics: '1966 people were provided services through the Phoenix Society in 2019-2020' and '70% substance use treatment completion rate'. It also promotes a 'Recovery Banquet' on April 22nd, 2021, and provides a ticket link. The bottom section urges donations and provides contact information.

**PHOENIX SOCIETY**

Our goal is to offer meaningful connections and sustainable solutions to the problems of addiction and homelessness in the community.

**How do you want to be remembered?**

Following the footsteps of generous donors in your neighbourhood and leave a donation, which is one of the most thoughtful gifts that you can choose to make that also leaves an everlasting impact on others!

**1966** people were provided services through the Phoenix Society in 2019-2020

**70%** substance use treatment completion rate

**Please join us for:**  
Phoenix Society's Recovery Banquet  
Thursday, April 22nd, 2021 @ 7pm

**Purchase Tickets at:**  
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/phoenix-societys-recovery-banquet-tickets-151843960373>

**Donate today, to help others change their way!**

Call: (604)-583-7166  
Or visit: [www.phoenixsociety.com](http://www.phoenixsociety.com)

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