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Activists and Pre-Suasion

Authors: Chris Brown, Brian Martin, Liane Munro, and Dalilah Shemia-Goeke
Affiliation: Swinburne University of Technology and University of Wollongong
Location: Australia
E-mail: cdbrown@swin.edu.au, bmartin@uow.edu.au, liane.munro@gmail.com, and d.shemia-goeke@posteo.de

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Abstract

Activists, to increase their impact and effectiveness, need to be as persuasive as possible. To illustrate how activists can learn from persuasion research, evidence and insights from the book *Pre-suasion* by Robert Cialdini are introduced and applied. Cialdini's core argument is that communicators, through certain techniques, can position their audience to be more open and receptive to their message *before* any part of the message has been delivered. Examples are used to show how pre-suasion techniques can be used within activist groups and when communicating to wider audiences. Pre-suasion raises a number of ethical concerns that activist groups would be wise to discuss.

ACTIVISTS AND PRE-SUASION

Chris Brown, Brian Martin, Liane Munro, and Dalilah Shemia-Goeke

Introduction

Activists need to communicate to each other, to potential supporters, and to opponents. In all cases, it makes sense to be as persuasive as possible in order to attract new members, change public opinion, and convince opponents to reconsider their views, for example. To communicate more effectively, it's possible to learn from the great amount of research on persuasion. One reason is to become more convincing. Another is to be better able to defend against others' persuasive efforts.

In this article, we present ideas from the book *Pre-Suasion* by Robert Cialdini, seeking to extract possible applications and lessons for activists on how to be more persuasive and effective in efforts to achieve social change.

Despite the importance of communication and persuasion, and the vast body of research on these topics, few activist traditions have fully engaged with the field, at least not in a way sufficient to draw on the most useful insights that can inform practice. This applies to Marxism, feminism, pacifism and most other traditions.

Persuasion is big business. Corporations spend vast amounts of money on advertising, including on research into how to make advertising more persuasive (Andrews et al., 2013; Armstrong, 2010). Governments spend large sums on public relations. In the digital arena, companies hire the most talented graduates and pay them to design videogames, social networking apps, and websites that are as attractive as possible. Their effectiveness is seen in the number of people who have behavioral addictions to their electronic devices (Alter, 2017).

Few activists have the resources needed to hire teams of professionals to improve their communication operations. They might have committed supporters who help design websites, write media releases, and produce attractive posters. For research, though, they usually depend on what is done for other purposes — and most research on persuasion is oriented to corporations and governments. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from this research.

Robert Cialdini, a professor of psychology and marketing, wrote a book titled *Influence*, published in 1984. Unexpectedly, it became a bestseller. Cialdini wrote for a general audience, highlighting key ideas from research on persuasion using vivid examples. For example, one tool of persuasion is scarcity: when something is perceived to be in short supply, it becomes more desirable. This principle is regularly used by companies: “Limited edition”; “This offer ends tomorrow”.

Some of Cialdini’s principles can be used by activists, but applying them is not always easy. That’s probably why you have never met activists on the street saying, “The latest on environmental destruction: only a few leaflets remaining” or “Membership in our group: limited time introductory offer.”

On the other hand, there is much that activists can learn from research on and practical insights about communication and persuasion, from a range of perspectives (Elgin, 1989; Goldstein et al., 2007; Hausman, 2000; Heath & Heath, 2008; Jowett & O’Donnell, 1999; Michie, 1998; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992; Reinsborough & Canning, 2009; Rosenberg, 1999; Rushkoff, 1999; Ryan, 1991; Thompson and Jenkins, 1993; Voss, 2016; Wu, 2016). If you know the psychological dynamics underlying tricks that others use to try to persuade or distract you, then you are in a better position to continue with your activism. At the very simplest level, this might be becoming aware of how you’re being distracted by Facebook posts and cat videos.

Although activists seldom have massive resources to pour into their communication efforts, nevertheless, even with a basic understanding of persuasion techniques it is possible to do much better. After all, activists are doing something different than convincing consumers to buy a

particular brand of soap or car; they are doing something more fundamental and potentially significant and uplifting.

Having looked into this issue, we think it is worthwhile for activist groups to learn from communication research and to experiment for themselves with techniques available. To illustrate how this might be done, we chose a newer book by Robert Cialdini.

After writing *Influence* in the 1980s, Cialdini continued his investigations into persuasion and eventually discovered a process that he believes is more fundamental. He calls it "pre-suasion," which is what happens when people are influenced, unconsciously, to be receptive to particular messages. *Pre-suasion* is the title of his book published in 2016.

Here, we begin by outlining the idea of pre-suasion. Then we show how it can be applied to various issues faced by activists, giving several examples, and including a table listing a variety of possibilities. Ultimately, our aim is not to convince you to adopt these particular options or even to accept the idea of pre-suasion, but rather to show the potential value of learning from research on communication and persuasion.

We have consciously chosen to use a more accessible and sometimes colloquial style. We are writing to illustrate how activists can themselves learn from research on communication and persuasion and have adopted an approach that seems compatible with that goal.

Pre-Suasion

You meet someone and they give you a drink. Does it make any difference whether the drink is warm or cool? Of course, this depends on whether you like warm or cool drinks. But here's what researchers have discovered: if it's a warm drink, you're more likely to feel closer to the person who gave you the drink (e.g., Inagaki and Eisenberger, 2013). This is an example of pre-suasion. How does it work?

Cialdini argues that there are many things that you can do, prior to the delivery of any actual information, that can have a significant influence on how your message will be perceived and the degree to which it will be accepted. Hence the term '*pre*-suasion': Persuasion starts prior to the message itself. It is what a communicator does *before* the message, or how the ground is prepared for the seed of the message, that largely determines the communicator's persuasiveness.
The pre-suasive ideas Cialdini covers are not expensive processes demanding long-term commitment. Rather, they are techniques which can be applied just before you deliver your message. And in applying these techniques well, communicators arrange "for recipients to be receptive to a message before they encounter it" (Cialdini, 2016, p. 4).

Cialdini's key idea about pre-suasion concerns the role of attention, in other words what we are noticing at any given time.

Cialdini cites many research studies — including some of his own — showing that when you're paying attention to something, it seems more important than it would otherwise (pp. 33–50). When there's a news report about a terrorist attack, terrorism seems more important than it would

otherwise. The news is a powerful guider of attention, especially for those who consume news media regularly. Already you can see the relevance to activism: peaceful protests don't receive as much media coverage as violent protests, so heavy viewers of the media are likely to think violent protest is more important or more prevalent.

Cialdini also cites studies showing that whatever we pay attention to seems more causal: it seems more influential as the cause of what happens (Hagemann, Strauss, & Leissing, 2008; Robinson & Zebrowitz-McArthur, 1982; Taylor & Fiske, 1978; Zebrowitz-McArthur & Ginsberg, 1981). More news is about people in positions of authority, like presidents and prime ministers, and this makes them seem more powerful. In contrast, there's not so much news about poor people, or about ordinary people involved in grassroots organizing and activism, which means they seem to have less power than they actually do. For example, workers often tend to think that their employers are very powerful and therefore do not dare to take action, although they do tend have impact when they act collectively. This can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy not only for employees: people not in positions of authority in general may not realize how much power they have because their attention is constantly directed at politicians, religious leaders, and celebrities.
If attention is the key to pre-suasion, this has wide ramifications for activists. It is relevant to their meetings and their meeting places, their messaging, their use of symbols and their choice of actions. It is also relevant to how they respond to messages from others, ranging from advertisers to opponents. By being aware of the role of attention in persuasion, activists can become more effective.

Some of Cialdini's ideas are often instinctively applied by nonviolent activist groups, others less so. Therefore, many of the ideas will sound familiar to activists. However, it may still be helpful to raise them because seeing such knowledge backed by evidence may bring more clarity. That said, pre-suasive techniques are often intuitive, and we may use many of them already. Notwithstanding, there are powerful and accessible techniques that might enable activists to substantially increase their communicative efficacy. Below we take some of Cialdini's specific ideas and discuss them in relation to activist groups and campaigns, highlighting either how they are commonly and successfully used, or discussing contexts and scenarios in which their application might be useful and powerful.

Pre-Suasion Examples

In going through *Pre-suasion,* we thought of many possible applications of the ideas to activism. The following examples and vignettes show some ways that ideas about pre-suasion might be applied by activists. There are many other possibilities, some of which are indicated in Table 1 below.

The Order of Evoked Associations Matters

Your group is organising a demonstration to raise the issue of police brutality. Unfortunately, last time the turn-out was not so great. This time you want to do something different so that many more people show up and join the rally for your cause. For the last march you had mobilization videos, blog posts, and leaflets to encourage people to participate. In order to motivate them you showed images of violent clashes and then asked them to take action against these grievances. Sounds

great, right? The trouble is that when threatening images are presented, such as those containing violence, the person may be intimidated and refrain from joining the rally.

So what would be more effective? As the demonstration is about police brutality it is legitimate to show examples of what that means. But according to research, scary and violent images like these that trigger fear increase the inclination of people in that moment to look for the protection of belonging to a group (Goldstein et al., 2011). If cognizant of this typical human response, activists may address it by displaying, demonstrating, or performing an image of togetherness, which might trigger the desire to belong. So, make sure that raising the issue (displaying violence by police) is followed by an image or demonstration which evokes togetherness (a welcoming picture of a group of people standing closely together; a group of protestors singing or dancing together) and only then make your request to join the march.

Broadening Membership

Your group wants to diversify its membership base and not only recruit privileged white students, but engage more working class, migrant backgrounds or people of color. Perhaps you do not want to only mobilize young people but include folks from all ages and walks of life. Or your group has decided that the goal of the next campaign phase is to mobilize and organize more parents or pensioners, as these had been identified as crucial for your cause but are not yet part of the movement. We all know we should try to adjust our wording and messaging more to the audience we wish to reach and yet still often we end up preaching to the choir, reaching out to those who are already our supporters and allies without being able to widen that scope. What can we do to better tailor our messaging to the people we want to reach?

One of the reasons for this may be that while we were drafting that text for the leaflet or post on social media, we were surrounded by that "choir" — our fellow activists who tend to share the same ideas and assumptions. But if we want to tailor our vocabulary more effectively to the people we are addressing, we need to surround ourselves with people like those we are aiming to reach. One option to do that, suggested in the book, is to hang up on the wall pictures of people representing that group you wish to reach out to (pp. 118–119).

This can be done when writing a text, creating a video, or even when planning a campaign addressing that specific audience. For example, during the strategy planning workshop, make sure to hang up posters with pictures of people representing your target group. In this way you will make sure you are primed to keep this particular audience in mind all the time.

Kinship

Cialdini highlights many pre-suasive techniques that have unifying qualities. These techniques can open people up to be more receptive to various types of messaging. An example is the development of a shared language of kinship (p. 178). Cialdini recommends using unifying kinship language and imagery such as *family*, *motherland*, *forefathers*, and *sisterhood* to connect with and pre-suade our audience. This technique is designed to bring thoughts of family—one of our most motivating concepts—into our consciousness, pre-suading people to feel more united. This method can be

applied in a campaign strategy to influence our audience to change their views or become more supportive of our campaign (see also Lakoff, 2009).

Of course, kinship-related language and imagery is not the preserve of well-intentioned movements and campaigns. An indication of its destructive, violent, or exploitative potential is suggested through research which Cialdini himself cites. As he notes: "In one pair of studies, reminding Spaniards of the family-like nature of their national ties led those feeling 'fused' with their fellow citizens to become immediately and dramatically more willing to fight and die for Spain" (p. 178). Far-right groups seem keenly aware of this kind of dynamic. They often deploy this kind of kinship-related language and imagery to foster an exclusive and discriminatory sense of unity and purpose which violently excludes those who do not fit within their accepted notion of kin/country.

Activists, then, in paying attention to the pre-suasive power of kinship, are potentially equipped with a complex but multi-dimensional tool. On one level, it is a tool that provides a critical or analytical lens through which activists can identify, deconstruct, and defend against those who use the power of kinship language and imagery for divisive, discriminatory, exploitative, or violent ends. On another level, activists are able to wield similar language and imagery in a proactive way. That is, they can use kinship-related language and imagery to broaden the sense of family, to expand rather than restrict who is included in concepts of togetherness, and to reveal the contradictions at the heart of those who seek to deploy notions of unity and togetherness to ultimately exclude and distance.

If/When-Then Sentences

Your activist group has decided what action it would like to take. But you have a nagging concern: you've been part of these campaigns before, and you know that things never run as smoothly as you expect. Fellow activists sometimes become fearful or aggressive; opponent groups, police, or security forces can be belligerent; or some in the group tend to be easily distracted, forgetting the core reason that brought people together in this action in the first place.

Cialdini offers a useful technique for this kind of situation because pre-suasion techniques can not only be used on outside or external audiences, but on yourself and your closest allies. One such technique is called the "if/when-then sentence"—the idea that, when embarking on a challenging but important course of action/change, people can mentally prepare themselves to resist the kinds of threats, dangers, and temptations they know will arise. For example, you might be trying to be more diligent with your writing, but every time you sit down you are distracted by your email or the general overwhelming array of digital content easily accessible on your device. To confront this, Cialdini suggests that you might prepare for this temptation/distraction prior to its occurrence. Thus, you might prepare and internally repeat a sentence along the lines of: if/when I find myself opening YouTube videos when I'm trying to write my book, then I will disconnect my internet and commit to my writing for the next hour. It may seem simple, but Cialdini cites social psychological studies that show this simple tool actually works (Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2007; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006, 2009; Hudson & Fraley, 2015; Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2000).

Activists often embark on actions that contain risks, dangers, temptations, and threats. An affinity group, for example, might be leading or participating in a confrontational protest and know that the possibility for violence, both from protesters and police, is possible in such heightened circumstances. If the group has collectively decided on rules of engagement, the if/when-then sentence might form as a useful tool in their training and preparation. For example, to help combat the potential threat of police belligerence, nonviolent activists might collectively decide on a certain sentence, repeat it during training, and deploy it when necessary. Such a simple training and activist tool could help maintain a group's nonviolent discipline, a key factor highlighted in much research on the success and efficacy of nonviolent campaigns (Sharp, 1973, pp. 573–655).

Attention

Sam, a member of an activist group and well connected with others, came across a book titled *Stand Out of Our Light.* The author, James Williams (2018), was formerly a Google strategist. His basic idea is that information used to be scarce but now is abundant. Instead, what is scarce is attention. Companies are grabbing people's attention using every possible persuasive technique, and most people are susceptible, with few resources to resist. People go along with this because of the benefits of information abundance.

Sam was alarmed by one particular point in the book: in various countries, approval of military rule is increasing, especially among the young and wealthy. Williams attributes this to the influence of information and communication technologies—in particular, the way they direct attention towards trivial content which distracts us from more meaningful pursuits and ideals. Technology companies see users as their product: they capture users' attention, for their own purposes, not for the benefit of users.

Sam raised these ideas with members of her activist network, suggesting an informal audit of time spent on screens. The results were alarming. People were spending hours each day on social media, their attention being captured, mainly for commercial purposes. But every person thought it was essential to use social media to keep up with what was happening.

Sam suggested a way to take more control over attention. Each member of the network would monitor an important newsfeed, while unsubscribing to newsfeeds monitored by others. Sam's colleagues said they were reluctant to unsubscribe from newsfeeds because they did not want to miss out on important developments and information. Sam's suggestion was that every week each network member would be responsible for providing a short dot-point summary of important developments, on the newsfeed they were monitoring, to all the others. This would help overcome the fear of missing out and also develop skills in assessing importance.

However, only a few network members could maintain their commitment to this plan. For most, it was too tempting to follow whatever popped up on their screens and too much trouble to write even a short summary. Sam realized the enormous difficulties in taking control over attention, as well as the implications this posed for their activist efforts. The information environment within which they all lived—seemingly abundant but actually very narrow and commercially directed—was dominating even those who were motivated to pursue change. But even more, it was

distracting and diverting public attention away from the issues their group wanted to raise. Amidst such mass inattentiveness, their current protest efforts seemed unlikely to resonate or gain traction.

Pre-Suasion, Ethics, and Activism

Some of us felt uneasy about using methods of pre-suasion. They seem like manipulation. Before discussing this important issue though, it is important to note that educators and writers alike already use pre-suasive techniques to be more persuasive, without being manipulative. For instance, many workshop facilitators use ice-breakers and other methods to foster connections and trust among participants and to prepare them for the topic, thereby increasing their receptiveness to the main part of the seminar. Equally, thinking about a suitable subject title for an e-mail or article means engaging in pre-suasion. Yet, because the reader knows it is happening, the process is transparent and does not feel manipulative.

Although pre-suasion ideas and research such as shared kinship language could be of value when incorporated into a campaign strategy, it is important to note that there are risks associated with the use of these methods within our groups and on our group members. Consider, for example, the use of unifying language to foster a "we-consciousness" amongst group members (Severt & Estrada, 2015; Tuckman, 1965). Much of the research on group cohesion highlights the importance of applying methods such as this in a genuine way to foster group cohesion. As well, one indication of improved group cohesion is the natural and genuine increase of the use of plural pronouns such as "we" and "us" when describing other group members (Forsyth, 2018). However, there is a challenge in authentically applying this research to the internal workings of our activist groups. Because pre-suasive techniques, largely anchored in a sales/marketing paradigm, are designed to influence and manipulate, many group members may see the use of these techniques within our groups as disingenuous. Instead, groups might seek to foster greater cohesion not through any kind of pre-suasive technique, but through sincere and honest connections which better support trust, belonging, and friendship (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lakey, 2010).
We had several discussions about this and many other ethical dimensions of using pre-suasion techniques in activism. Rather than try to give a conclusive summary, instead we here suggest the issues we canvassed, including differences in perspective, in the form of a dialogue.

Linda — I'm uncomfortable with pre-suasion. It seems devious. When we present our ideas, can't we just be open and honest?

Deborah — I agree, it can be used for all sorts of goals. On the other hand, though, it's about how our minds work. The mind is associative and thus what is presented to it will influence how it will perceive the part that follows. Isn't it okay to communicate more skillfully and effectively by drawing on such knowledge?

Chin — Maybe the important thing, if we're thinking of using pre-suasion techniques, is to discuss this in our group to see whether everyone is on board.

Brent — Advertisers and marketers are able to hire experts to develop the most effective means of persuasion, and governments have highly-paid public relations staff. At the very least, we should be aware of their techniques and try to defend against them.

Linda — Defend against them, yes, but using them doesn't feel right. As activists we set a higher ethical standard. We want people to see the truth about the issues, not to manipulate them using their unconscious mental processes.

Deborah — I hear you and I share this perspective. However, we try to be as persuasive as possible already, right? When giving a talk, we prepare carefully, try to speak factually and clearly, and dress appropriately for the occasion. The ways we dress and pronounce words can have a pre-suasive effect independently of what we say, whether or not we want them to. If we're already using pre-suasive methods, why not be good at using them?

Linda — Just because we use pre-suasive techniques unconsciously in an authentic natural way to make connections, doesn't automatically make it okay to use them intentionally to ripen the ground in order to persuade someone into doing or believing something.

Brent — Some pre-suasive techniques are effective even if you tell people you're using them.

Deborah — Yes, we can be transparent about it and still reap the benefits without manipulating anyone against their will. And yet there are many people out there who are concerned about the state of affairs and want to do something about it, but don't know much about how ordinary people can change the world, because others have been more effective in communicating their views. We're up against resourceful communicators. Shall we just leave all that knowledge to corporations and states and watch how they're spreading their worldview while we refuse to make use of how our cognition works?

Linda — I recognize that some of us think we have to use all the tools at our disposal to win against our adversaries. However, the way I see it, if through this article we seem to condone or even encourage activists to use pre-suasive techniques, we need to be clear that they are used to persuade people of the facts. We certainly don't condone their use to mislead or control. If we do then we're no better than our opponents. In my opinion, there is a fine line between pre-suasion and manipulation, and we have an ethical obligation to stay on the right side of that line.

Chin — Cialdini writes about the ethical issues. His conclusion is that using the techniques to manipulate people is actually not effective, as this can ultimately backfire against the manipulator once someone notices it.

Deborah — Maybe we just need to evaluate what we do on a case-by-case basis, just like we assess other things we do.

We agreed that knowing how to defend against pre-suasive techniques was definitely worthwhile. Some of us thought using them within our groups to foster cohesion and unity was possibly okay if we were open about them. Others thought that using pre-suasive techniques on group members was not okay in any circumstance. We all thought it was important to discuss the ethics of particular techniques when using them with other audiences. Others might come to different conclusions.

We've described a number of possible applications of pre-suasion ideas to activism. There are many others, some of which are listed in Table 1 below. These are just suggestions; many other applications could be imagined.

Table 1. Some pre-suasive techniques with possible applications to activist circumstances. In the descriptions, relevant page numbers from Cialdini (2016) are indicated.

Topic	Description	Relevance to activism
	Frontloading of attention	
Privileged moments	Privileged moments are when people are especially receptive to messages, and the key to receptiveness is what they are paying attention to at the time. (19–30)	Meetings and actions are privileged moments. They are good times to offer messages. For example, people attending a rally are likely to be especially receptive to messages about further participation.
Privileged moments 2	For pre-suasion, you don't need to change people's beliefs, just attract their attention. (26)	Use political stunts to attract attention. Encourage people to engage in fun and daring activities.
Channeled attention approach	Altering what's prominent in a person's mind at the moment affects the decisions they make. (26–28)	Develop group communication norms that adopt language to encourage group members to be open to new possibilities, be more helpful, and use shared group language.
Attention and importance	An issue seems more important when you're paying attention to it. (31–50)	When opponents pay attention to activists, it makes the activists seem more important. When opponents attack, use that to gain more attention.
Attention and importance 2	Things that people don't pay attention to are assumed not to have much importance. (48–49)	Some issues drop off the activist agenda because there's no media coverage. If you think they're important, try to bring these issues to people's attention.
Attention and assumed influence	The person at the top of a hierarchy receives more attention and hence is assumed to have a greater influence over events. (66)	Be aware that politicians and media commentators are not as influential as they seem.
Fear	Messages involving elements of fear, paired with information about constructive/accessible steps/actions, can be powerful. (72–73)	Fear and disillusionment can be obstacles to participation. By ensuring that communications not only highlight the damaging results of a problem (e.g., climate change, militarism), but also

		constructive steps, people might be more inclined to participate.
Magnetizers	Attention is drawn to issues that are unfinished, mysterious, and relevant to the person. (88–96)	A bit of mystery (e.g., leading with an unsolved problem, open question) about an action or group might attract more attention.
Association		
Associations	Associations created by language and images are influential when attention is drawn to them. (99–115)	Make associations with actions, groups, and/or activism.
Who we are is where we are with our attention	Who we are with respect to any choice is where our attention is right before we make our choice. (99–115)	Make use of this associative attention effect by thinking hard about the images evoked or presented in a text/talk or video right before you make a request (e.g., to sign a petition or attend an activist meeting).
The importance of words	The use of particular words can have a profound effect on how they are received and actioned by an audience. For example, in the community services sector, people are now referred to as clients or consumers, reflecting and reproducing free-market-type thinking. (100)	Groups could refer to seemingly powerful individuals or organizations with humorous names, helping to strip away their seeming power/authority.
Understand your audience	Images affect the way we think about others. (116–119; 127)	Surround yourself with typical audience members' faces; for instance, in the planning phase of a campaign.
If/when-then sentences	When it is hard to implement the necessary steps/actions to achieve certain goals, if/when-then statements can help to overcome this challenge. (137)	If/when-then statements could be used in group training/preparation to help maintain nonviolence discipline in the face of hostility and aggression.
Persuasive techniques		
Social proof	People feel comfortable doing/feeling something when other people are doing it. (160–164)	Increase recruitment and momentum by showing the participation of similar others.
Experts	Hearing advice from experts leads to people not thinking for	If you want people to think for themselves, tell them about this

	themselves; instead, they think about the messenger. (164)	effect.
Weaknesses	Disclosing a weakness, talking openly about mistakes of the past and arguing against self-interest increase credibility and trust. (165–167)	Start conversations by acknowledging weaknesses and others' negative views; make learning processes transparent and show how the movement has grown from them.
Being together		
Kinship	Language and imagery can bring affinity with others into our consciousness. (176–182)	Use words and pictures in campaigns that bring to mind family, connection, and togetherness.
Family	The brain interprets supporting a family member as helping ourselves. (177)	In public communications, use words such as brothers, sisterhood, forefathers, motherland, heritage, family, and home.
Feelings of togetherness, of closeness	Feelings of togetherness and closeness can be induced by holding something warm or seeing images of people standing close together. (178)	Use welcoming pictures of people standing close together on material to invite people into the movement. In house-meetings for organizing drives, make sure everyone gets a warm beverage. Offer hot beverages on street stands, not only to encourage people to stop and listen to you, but also to create a feeling of closeness while you talk.
Localism	The deep connection with the people we are located near makes us more sympathetic and merciful to people who live in close proximity. (187)	For activist recruitment, link environmental and social justice issues to a shared locality.
Acting Together		
Acting/performing in unitary ways	Acting together, for example performing activities in unison, fosters group solidarity and perceived likeness. (192–194)	Organize synchronized movements at rallies. Use coordinated-movement games in training to deepen group cohesion. Offer neighborhood activities such as dancing or jogging together to create community trust.
Liking	When people feel they are like others, they see them more positively. (194)	Develop imitation and mirroring games for fostering cohesion.

Music for feelings-related arguments	Use music only to convince with emotional appeals, not when you mainly use rational arguments. (197)	Be conscious about when you add music to a video clip to mobilize people.
Emotional or rational wording	To be more convincing, connect rational arguments with words like "I think"; connect feelings-related arguments with words like "I feel." (198–201)	When trying to convince people to become active either face-to-face, on a pamphlet or online, use this advice; also, try to appeal more to people attracted to positive emotions (not only rational arguments and negative emotions).
Reciprocal exchange	Doing favors for each other builds connection and strong relationships. (201)	Build group cohesion and group member relationships through stories of self, affinity groups, sharing meals together, etc.
Reciprocal self-disclosure	When people open up to each other, they bond and create trust. (201–202)	Add 1-on-1 listening exercises to group development units in workshops and meetings.
Co-creation	Creating something hand-in-hand with others creates an affinity with the group. Cialdini: "If co-creation causes at least a temporary merging of identities, then what applies to one partner also applies to the other." (202, 204)	Offer options for people to chip in and contribute; for example, surveys to influence strategy, send in voice message, create a video to tell your story for a campaign, community gardens, story-sharing projects.
Seeking advice	Seeking advice creates togetherness, whereas evaluations push people apart. (205–207)	Ask people for advice on how to tackle an issue (like for a survey and in conversations), to recruit new members or to create sympathy. ln workshops and meetings, encourage giving each other advice (not feedback).

Conclusion

If persuading people is a core component of activism, then it seems important for activists to think closely about how they might better do this. This is what we have tried to do in this article, presenting Cialdini's idea of pre-suasion and extracting potential ideas and applications for those engaged in social change campaigns.

Cialdini's writing is engaging and accessible, providing both evidence and anecdote in support of the key idea that what is said or done before a message is delivered, rather than the message itself, often determines the success, influence, or persuasiveness of the communication. But questions remain in regard to the applicability of Cialdini's work—a work of social psychology growing largely out of a sales/marketing context—for activists. Is the use of pre-suasive techniques ethical? Might it depend on the context in which they are being used? Does the argument, bolstered with

evidence from various settings, offer a robust concept that can genuinely and effectively be applied within the intensity and complexity of activist campaigns? No doubt, activist groups themselves will need to grapple with these and other questions.

Our intention has not been to convince you to unquestioningly adopt Cialdini's ideas. Rather, we have tried to probe the extent to which they may offer some useful ideas or insights for those involved in grassroots campaigns. In this sense, Cialdini's work offers another concept, or a further tool in the toolbox, that activists might want to consider as they seek to be more successful in their campaigns.

We found it stimulating to think through pre-suasion and the various possibilities and conundrums it throws up. At the same time, there is much other communication and social psychology research out there which may offer similarly interesting ideas. Whilst we have chosen Cialdini's *Pre-suasion* for consideration, we encourage activists and groups to identify, study, and apply a wide range of research to support and strengthen their efforts.

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