

Inspiration brought by Hovland's Persuasion Communication Theory to College Counselors

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ABSTRACT

Ideological and political education is a communication activity in essence. Communication theory is also applied for it. Among the researches, Hovland's persuasion model is of referential significance in some ways. New media has a strong impact on the university's ideological and political education, providing a broader field for communication. Counselors should start from shaping personal image, improving persuasive skills, give the function of opinion leader to full play and create education environment, etc in order to strengthen communication effect and increase the efficiency of ideological and political education.

KEYWORDS: persuasive, communication, counselor, work

As a form of mass media, persuasion is defined as “changing one’s attitude by receiving others’ information”[1]. It is also an important form of virtual education. By various types of education such as creating the campus culture, holding theme class meetings, etc, we are aimed to deliver our message to our students so as to persuade them to change their attitude and realize our educational goal. For a school counselor, persuasion exists everywhere. In the era of traditional media, students got information from only single source so students’ attitudes could be easily changed by the counselor’s education concept while in the new media era of cultural diversification and information boom, students in universities can get access to information from a number of channels. School counselors must pay attention to their persuasion skill and improve the persuasion ability so that the information can be spread and taken in by students in order to change their attitudes. On the basis of Hovland's persuasion communication theory, if school counselors in university are of high persuasion capability, they can work on students with higher quality and efficiency.

1. THE PROPOSAL OF HOVLAND'S PERSUASION COMMUNICATION THEORY

The first person proposing persuasion is Aristotle, which was discussed in his classic masterpiece *Rhetoric*. He put forward that in order to persuade others, three elements, orator, content and audience, are essential. The founder of the persuasion theory is D. Cartwright. He proposed the four principles of effective persuasion: information must go into the receiver's sense organs; information must be accepted and acknowledged by the receiver; the receiver must realize action is the way to achieve his or her goal; the receiver must be told about the channel, time and urgency of action.

In the west, among numerous theories on how to transmit information to the public and persuade them, Hovland's persuasion communication theory model was considered as "the most important origin of modern research attitude changing"[2]. Carl Hovland is the experimental psychologist of Yale University, under the teaching of the well-known behaviorist, Hull. In the 1940s, America strengthened the research on communication skill and effect during WWII, during which lots of prestigious socialists were mobilized to attend the research on human communication. Hovland was appointed as the chief psychologist in Research Department of Intelligence and Education Programme of U.S. War Department. During the period, Hovland started to devote to the research on the attitude formation and transformation. This is the problem that how to effectively promote people to accept or change certain attitude. After WWII ends, Hovland went back to university to carry on the research on the change and published *Communication and Persuasion*, concluding some pioneering and influential conclusions with the combination of both theory and practice.

The nature of education activity is an information transmission activity. Under the guidance of Hovland's persuasion communication theory, we can explore the strategy and method of persuasive effect for university counselors from three aspects.

2. ACTUAL CHARACTERIZATION OF COUNSELOR'S IMAGE

From Aristotle to Hovland, spreading persuasive research emphasis much on the image shaping of the conveyor. Aristotle considered the quality of the lecturer is the prerequisite for achieving the lecturer effect. Hovland believed the receiver often judges information content according to the image of the conveyor in their minds. The transmitter decides the content and value of information. The activity of education and transmission depends on the equation that the benefit of communication = audience's benefit + conveyor's benefit, and audience's benefits = information benefit + knowledge benefit + upbringing benefit + aestheticism benefit + others. The personal image of the counselor is an important factor to increase his or her influence, which mostly depends on the credibility and attraction of the counselor.

1. Increase the credibility of the counselor. Hovland's experiment research considered "when the conveyor is thought as credible and reliable, it has the best transmission effect." [3] Based on this, "if the receiver thinks the conveyor is similar like himself or herself, that is, homophily proposed by Rodgers, then it is easier for the receiver to be persuaded" [4]. Referred to the standard for Hovland and Wes all think it is professional authority and trustworthiness. Whitehead did the overall research on the credibility standard and the result showed four factors in improving self-credibility, from the aspects of profession and justice. On one hand, improve your professional degree. Hovland considered, though faced with the same information, due to the difference in the transmitting main body's authority, it will have different effects. The credibility degree is

proportional to authority degree. As the specification of target group, university counselors should not only equip with the basic qualities of “great political knowledge and strong working ability”, but also be specialized in certain aspect and able to direct students from a higher angle with authority, persuading them with their sophisticated culture and knowledge. On the other hand, in handling student affairs and daily exchange with students, they should always hold a fair attitude, follow the rules strictly with no personal preference and selfishness. The consideration should always be to serve the growth of students so that students will feel their teachers both have the professional quality and adhere to a fair position. In this way, it will in turn promote the teachers’ credibility and achieve better educational effect in ideological and political education.

2. Strengthen the counselors’ attraction. Hovland’s attitude persuasive model pointed out, another factor affecting the persuader’s persuasive effect is his or his attraction level, which implies whether he or she has any adorable characteristics and popularity. If credibility can be changed through recognition, attraction level can be used by attitude emotionally, that is, in our traditional concept we believe in trusting your master, following his way. For counselors, the essence of attraction is the creation and display of the internal and external exemplary virtue. The external charm lies in the attraction such as bearing, gesture, etc; as to personality charisma, the teacher should have the sense of responsibility, affinity, relatively strong organizing coordination capability, interactive ability and positive living attitude. Counselors are the teachers that students get touched with mostly at school, whose personality charisma is reflected in everyday life. Only when they have noble moral sentiment and personality traits can they influence and persuade their students in an invisible way.

3. PRACTICAL UTILIZATION OF PERSUASIVE SKILLS

Rational utilization of persuasive skill is the key of advancing the persuasive effect. Communication and psychology expert conducted related experiments in the research on the persuasive effect and proposed that information characteristics affects persuasive effect. Counselors can take advantage of these attitudes to carry out the ideological and political work.

Dual demonstration of information. How to deal with opposite arguments? Hovland and his colleagues conducted the experiment in two manners, in other words, the unilateral message, and pros and cons of the message, and then experimented on the effect. It turned out the latter is most effective for those with higher education degree. University counselors are faced with university students mostly who have relatively higher information processing and judging ability and look at the problem with a dialectical thought. For them, the statement of one party or jaundiced opinion is easier to be criticized. Thus, when counselors carry out the ideological and political education, it will be more persuasive when counselors provide pros and cons of information for students in ideological and political education.

Appeal to fear. Janice and Fish Maher once did an experiment on the effect fear has on attitude, aimed to promote the teeth health care. They divide into groups by the standard of fear degree. The result shows that: the lecture with appropriate degree of frightening information persuades university students most effectively into them following the right way of teeth cleaning. Thus, if counselors use related skills, such as informing them (with pictures, videos, etc) of the result they cause to themselves and others in smoking, the possibility

of university students changing their attitude can greatly be increased. In AIDS prevention propaganda, counselors can also properly emphasize the directive results of the disease, including mental problems, pain and negative effects on social interaction, etc, in order to reach our education goal.

Moderate repetition. In communication, repetition is a very popular skill. Many advertisements use this to market their products. Krugman's research shows that, with 23 times of repetition, an advertisement can merely be taken in 3 times. Repeated message can make audience believe the advertisement is a source of high credibility, be beneficial to the learning in the attitude and sentiment meaning and help audience remember the message itself. Repetition is also a manner we often use in student management. Referring to the issues in security, academic atmosphere and personal interaction of daily management, counselors often emphasize many times in order to improve persuasive efficiency. However, it is also important to get reasonable degree because experiments show that the persuasive effect is the best under the proper repetition while over repetition will only lower the effect. This warns us that repetition should be done within a proper limit, or it will have the opposite effect on students against our original goal.

Move others by affection. Meniffee and Granberg's research and lots experiments display, "emotional appeal is more possible to change attitudes than logic appeal"[5]. In information communication, communicators can strengthen persuasive effect with emotion. In ideological and political education, counselors should give emotional appeal to the full play and promote humanized management and guidance, persuading others with reason and sentiment.

Besides the four persuasive skills above, we should also adopt the manners such as image, humor, etc to improve persuasive effect. Definitely, in practice, we can comprehensively use these persuasive skills in a reasonable and proper way. In the era of big data and new media, we should fully integrate the advancing means of the Internet, new media to promote the education objects changing their attitudes in a full-dimensional, diversified and multi-angle way.

Several problems worth noticing in persuasion

Besides using skills properly, counselors should also take the following four aspects fully in spreading persuasive information and concept.

Lay stress on students' individual difference. The individual difference theory is based on the mode "stimulation-response" and illustrates the receivers from the perspective of behaviorism. It suggests due to difference in environment, experience and education, audience have different ideological quality and psychological condition, thus, they would react differently to information even from the same source. Individual difference requires persuasion to be pertinent and adopting suitable forms according to the difference of persuaded objectives in content and form. In the era of information and diversified culture, university students display distinctive characteristics of "variety, diversification and change" with unique character, which poses great challenges to the method of traditional ideological and political education for university students. This demands counselors should be more pertinent in ideological and political education so brutal inculcation will definitely cause students' rebellion and they would be immune to it. This wouldn't achieve the educational effect but also bury endless danger in the long term.

Cultivate opinion leader and enhance the team's influence power. "Opinion leader" is the communication theory proposed by Lazarsfeld, which refers to the person providing information in a team and guide public

opinion. The opinion leader in university refers to those university students who are active in society or organization with word advantage, influence and appeal. In the process of ideological and political education, counselors should be good at finding out the opinion leaders among students and actively cultivate opinion leaders. "We should play a leading role in the source to prevent non-mainstream opinion mixes up with the mainstream. We should actively domain the main battle in ideological and political education, making opinion leaders really become a carrier and efficient channel for ideological and political education". What's noteworthy is that opinion leaders belong to the "high-IQ group" among university students, who are of high analytic capability and unique perspective. Thus, in the process of cultivating and persuading opinion leaders, we should pay attention that it should be based on respect and quality with the purpose of care, and scientific method and skill. Otherwise, students are easy to become disgusted against such education leading to failure.

Emphasize on the creation of environment. The aim of persuasion is to change the attitude of the receiver showing finally in their behaviour. Festinger believes, "the change of attitude might not bring behavior change. One of the reasons is that the environment factor causing the original attitude still functions. So after knowing the persuasive message, the attitude still can recover to the tendency of the original position". From recognition, understanding to action, the communication effect keeps accumulating, deepening and widening, during which the environment is a key affecting factor. When counselors use persuasive strategy, by the forms of theme class meeting, Internet propaganda, cultural activity and behavior example, etc, with the combination of invisibility and visibility, they can create an education environment and affect the receiver's consciousness by functioning on the receiver's sense, thought and emotion, and further affect his or her will even psychological quality, resulting in the change in behavior.

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