

Introducing a Method of Message Evaluation Using the Science of Persuasion



There is a wide and deep body of research focused on understanding why we believe certain claims and why we reject others. You might believe that “product X, filled with omega-3 fatty acids, helps support brain and cardiovascular health” or you might not. Maybe you believe that “additive Y helps clean your car’s engine while you drive.” The notion of “deceit detection” is a fundamental behavioral science driver: our brains approach marketing content through the lens of initial skepticism, and this phenomenon is hard-wired into us.



The “science of persuasion” identifies four behavioral drivers

1 Factual content



Does the message contain “facts” that are what we expect the message to contain? For example, messages about the latest HDTV that talk about how much electromagnetic radiation they emit would not align with the information we typically use to assess an HDTV, and hence would trigger our skepticism.

2 Confirmation bias



Does the message align with what we already believe? For example, if I were to tell you that a certain product is non-organic and therefore healthier, you would be immediately skeptical because our worldview is that organic products are better for us.

3 Social proof



Who is the messenger? Claims made by third parties (#1 dentist recommended) are inherently more credible than claims made by the product manufacturer.

4 Cognitive ease



Messages and claims that are easier to understand, that avoid complicated terminology, that are written simply and succinctly tend to be more persuasive.

At BEESY Strategy, we have taken this framework regarding persuasion and have created a new approach to message evaluation: we have developed the persuasion equation that we use to understand how and why specific messages are more or less persuasive. The approach lies in decomposing messages into specific components that reflect the four drivers above. We then score each message according to those drivers.

FACTUAL CONTENT	+ CONFIRMATION BIAS	+ SOCIAL PROOF	+ COGNITIVE EASE	= PERSUASION	MESSAGE	PREFERENCE INDEX
				115	Message 1	124
				117	Message 2	117
				113	Message 3	116
				113	Message 4	116
				114	Message 5	116
				113	Message 6	111
				113	Message 7	110
				106	Message 8	109
				105	Message 9	108
				101	Message 10	108
				109	Message 11	106
				96	Message 12	104
				105	Message 13	104
				94	Message 14	102
				100	Message 15	101
				98	Message 16	101
				87	Message 17	101
				98	Message 18	100
				87	Message 19	99
				104	Message 20	99
				101	Message 21	95
				94	Message 22	94
				90	Message 23	92
				93	Message 24	91
				96	Message 25	90
				92	Message 26	89
				95	Message 27	88
				95	Message 28	87
				77	Message 29	80
				82	Message 30	80
				83	Message 31	64

The remarkable finding is that this message scoring is highly predictive of persuasive power in market research results ($R^2 > 0.7$).

What this means is that when we conduct quantitative message evaluation studies, not only can we determine your most persuasive messages, but we can also identify why those messages are working and why others are less effective. The strategic value is that we can use a specific message test to develop a **style guide** for your brand that provides ongoing advice as you build subsequent messages into the future.

This approach to message evaluation provides insight into your message set that has not been possible before. Which messages work for what audiences? But more importantly, **why do they work?** What can we learn about how you should construct messages going forward? Each message test becomes a deeply strategic piece of research.

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