

# The art of persuasion in a totally digital society

In a completely digital world in which we are bombarded with all kinds of information, capturing the attention of consumers has become an almost titanic task. How can the psychology of persuasion be used to implement successful marketing strategies that lead brands to be on everyone's lips?



In the increasingly diverse and complex digital environment in which we live, users are increasingly expecting more from the brands they interact with. Not only do we have a greater amount of information than ever before, but users are accessing it from multiple devices and this demands increasing personalized and creative experiences from brands.

Today, positioning a product or a trend is not easy, nor is it directly proportional to the budget invested in marketing and advertising. So how can we improve the customer experience? How can we better understand their needs and respond to their behavior so that this translates into higher sales and more consistent loyalty?

These questions pose great challenges for CMOs who, on a daily basis, strive to develop new and

successful marketing strategies. And to achieve this, one of the keys continues to be the implementation of techniques and tools from the world of social psychology or, more precisely, what is called the psychology of persuasion. Understanding the great power of influence as a tool can take companies to the next level, gaining an advantage over the rest. But it is necessary to know how to harness it and understand how it works today.

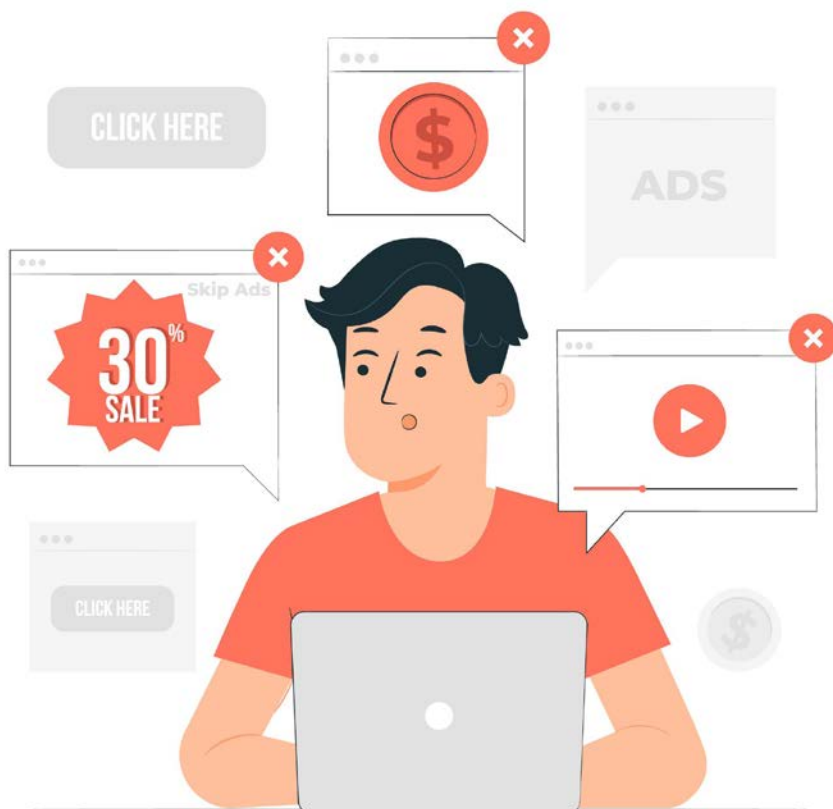
Along these lines, Jonah Berger – author of *Contagious* and a professor at the Wharton Business School – explains that today brands believe that *big data*, digital marketing and social networks are more than enough to sell a product or service well, but the reality is that it's not just about technology. Fundamental support is needed from psychology in or-

der to understand users, their view of the world, and their needs and aspirations.

99% of all decisions are shaped by others, yet unfortunately we often ignore when this influence occurs and how it functions. When do people do the same things as others and when do they do something different? When do other people motivate us to do something and when do they demotivate us? And how by understanding this secret science, can we be more successful, both in our professional and personal lives?

For Robert Cialdini – a renowned American psychologist, writer and professor of psychology at Arizona State University – the capacity to change opinion and persuade people of the need to do something is essential for business. Nevertheless, when it comes to the mechanics of persuasion, many companies find it difficult to do so. According to the specialist, “people like to feel they have freedom and control over their lives, as if they were in the driver’s seat. They like to feel that the choices they make and the actions they take are driven by themselves and their own preferences and opinions, rather than something else. So, instead of trying to persuade people, we have to get them to convince themselves.”

Moreover, the specialist proposes doubling the bet and instead of giving people one choice, you have to give them at least two or three. This changes the role of the listener, who, instead of sitting down and thinking about all the reasons why they don't like what is suggested, they compare the options given to them and think about which one they like the best. This makes it more likely they will choose one in the end. In short, it is a question of guiding the choice by proposing a limited selection.





Continuing with this rationale, Cialdini also maintains that one of the strategies that companies overlook the most is to quickly find common ground with their audience, which creates and elevates the level of trust. People will buy from those they know and can trust. Connecting in a more human way builds trust and this generates loyalty. For the psychologist, when we sell, present, negotiate or communicate ethically and authentically, great things happen. People listen to us attentively, have greater trust and buy our ideas. We develop strong and profitable relationships.

#### **Creating a social currenc**

People care about how others see them and want to look interesting

and knowledgeable. And that is why social media is so successful. On their profiles, people share content that makes their image look better to family, friends and acquaintances. Social networks serve to demonstrate that we are interesting, creative, fun and trendy.

Brands have already understood that it is necessary to turn our customers into our own ambassadors. And for people to talk, organizations need to create a great deal of social currency. They need to provide people with a way to looking good whilst talking about their products, ideas and services.

According to Berger, the things we talk about influence others in

the same way as the clothes we wear or the car we drive, are a sign of our identity. And for brands it is fundamental to make their customers feel smart, special, part of something and knowledgeable about a subject. In addition, it is vitally important that brands find their identity's most remarkable aspect to turn the product or service into something surprising, new or interesting.

#### **Word of mouth in the digital age**

Despite living in a distinctively digital environment, word of mouth is still the main way we communicate and the best tool for making a good impression. And, even though the networks are very

important, most communication is still face-to-face. For Berger, in everyday conversations there are no distractions. As it's just two people talking, the influence and impact is much greater. On the other hand, he argues that people will not even read 10% of their feed, due both to a lack of time and the vast amount of information there is.

But this type of communication can be a bit slow and needs social media to reach more people in less time. In other words, publicity and social media help to create the word of mouth by generating content that is interesting and authentic enough for it to go viral. Nowadays one does not exist without the other, they are two complementary tools that help each other.

According to Berger, getting people to talk about your content is key to it going viral, because people will pay more attention to each other than listening to an advert. For the psychologist, the most important reason why word of mouth is so crucial is the trust that potential consumers have in those who recommend the product or service.

Consequently, more and more brands, aware of the impact on consumer behavior, are altering advertising resources in order to boost word of mouth publicity.

Another important finding is that, compared to writing, talking can encourage emotional expression. This could change the way communicators are perceived and radically alter the consequences of conversation. For example, video product reviews increase the chances of persuasion.

### A question of homophily

Nathalie Nahai is an expert in psychology, persuasive technology and human behavior who believes that brands must keep noise to a minimum in order to attract and maintain the attention of the right people within their circle of customers. Once the brand has their attention, it is much easier to build a lasting relationship build-



ing trust by providing excellent customer experiences.

For her, in order to understand what drives customers, why they choose a certain brand and why they use one product or service instead of another, it is necessary to turn to the concept of homophily which, literally, means love for what is equal. Essentially, it is understood as the tendency that individuals have to associate and sympathize with those who are similar to us.

From a marketing and sales perspective, a brand that engages in homophily generates greater reliability and credibility because

users tend to trust the brands that share their values. By using the concept of homophily we can see how it is possible to really connect with our clients and begin to understand what they are experiencing.

For Nahai, in order to establish a meaningful relationship with consumers, it is necessary to attract the attention of the right people, build relationships with those consumers and create a great experience for them. And the way to achieve these three objectives is to understand and enhance our content and design the psychological aspects that influence the decision making of users.

And if we talk about decision making, it is worth remembering that it is the emotional aspect that has all the advantages over rational thinking. Brands need to generate positive emotional states in their consumers because they are the most conducive to increasing the intent to buy. And to do this, it helps if consumers trust

you by feeling safe, understood and supported. The best way to generate these feelings is by showing homophily.

In essence, defining the perfect target audience or market is a challenge facing all brands in all industries around the world. And it is not enough having a great product or service or having a bulky budget in marketing and advertising. It is necessary to implement social influence strategies that allow us to install our brand where it corresponds with research and scientific evidence. Success is not a matter of chance, luck or coincidence. There is a lot of science behind why things become popular. ▽