

## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an interdisciplinary account of persuasion, a form of communication in which, I argue, persuader and target aim to strike a balance between benefiting from communication and protecting themselves from deception. The unifying research framework is Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which treats cognition as relevance-oriented, and inferential intention recognition as central to communication.

In Chapter 1, I review previous pragmatic accounts of persuasion and show that while they may explain how the target understands the persuader's message, they shed little light on why this message is believed or disbelieved. In Chapter 2, I examine the causal role of intentions and their effects on the mental lives of persuader and target. I argue that the goal of the persuader is to induce in the target the intention to perform a specific action. In Chapter 3, I review some accounts in the social psychology literature of how this goal can be achieved.

Chapter 4 is concerned with rationality issues: what techniques can a rational persuader use, and how can a rational audience strike a balance between benefiting from communication and guarding against the risk of manipulation? Chapter 5 reconsiders these questions from an evolutionary perspective, and argues that adaptive strategies for persuasion and counter-persuasion are special cases of more general evolutionary tendencies.

Finally, I apply the proposed framework to marketing and discuss the accelerated evolutionary effects that persuasive/defensive strategies and cultures of consumption have on each other. I conclude that these strategies, as both artifacts of culture and facilitators of cultural transmission, provide interesting insights into human cultural evolution.

CONFIDENTIAL

The information contained in this report is confidential and should be treated as such. It is intended for the use of the recipient only and should not be disseminated to other personnel without the express written consent of the originator. This report contains information that is classified as CONFIDENTIAL in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order 11652, dated August 14, 1950, and Executive Order 11652, dated August 14, 1950, which prohibit the unauthorized disclosure of information that is classified as CONFIDENTIAL. This report is prepared for the use of the recipient and should not be disseminated to other personnel without the express written consent of the originator.

*[Handwritten signature]*

The information contained in this report is confidential and should be treated as such. It is intended for the use of the recipient only and should not be disseminated to other personnel without the express written consent of the originator. This report contains information that is classified as CONFIDENTIAL in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order 11652, dated August 14, 1950, and Executive Order 11652, dated August 14, 1950, which prohibit the unauthorized disclosure of information that is classified as CONFIDENTIAL. This report is prepared for the use of the recipient and should not be disseminated to other personnel without the express written consent of the originator.