

# 6 Powerful Social Media Persuasion Techniques

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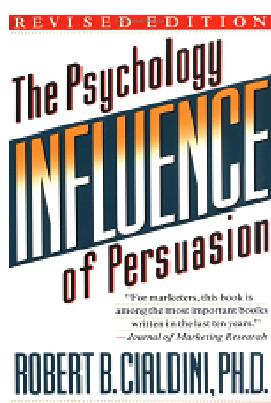
Let's be honest, you don't just want your voice to be added to the conversation; you want your voice to be heard, repeated, and valued—and your message to be influential. Ultimately, you're after influence.

So what better way to understand social media than by looking at the fundamental principles of influence as taught by Dr. Robert Cialdini, professor of psychology and marketing at Arizona State University? In his seminal book, *Influence*, Cialdini covers six “weapons of influence” that are hardwired into our social and cognitive minds. In other words, we can't help but behave in accordance with these laws of social interaction.



Does this sound like something useful to keep in mind during your social media engagements? Well, let's take a look six powerful persuasion techniques:

## 1. Reciprocity



In Cialdini's words, **the rule for reciprocity “says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us.** If a woman does us a favor, we should do her one in return; if a man sends us a birthday present, we should remember his birthday with a gift of our own; if a couple invites us to a party, we should be sure to invite them to one of ours.”

**And so it is in social media:** we're more likely to retweet someone who has already retweeted us. We link to people who have linked to us. And we tend to give a business far more trust after it has provided us with a lot of free value.

Used manipulatively, this turns into autofollow bots that help you amass thousands of followers in a breathtakingly short time—none of whom may actually care what you have to say. Doh!

**Used more positively and constructively, if you focus on initiating reciprocity by providing no-strings-attached value to those in your network, you'll ultimately wield far more influence.** Not because the gift economy is a new fad in marketing, but because following the law of reciprocity is how we're wired as humans.

## 2. Commitment and Consistency

"Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Those pressures will cause us to respond in ways that justify our earlier decision," said Cialdini.

Chances are, you follow too many people on Twitter. And you're signed up for more RSS feeds and newsletters than you can really read. Objectively, purging your list of followers and unsubscribing would eliminate distractions and increase your social media signal-to-noise ratio.

But **most people never make that purge and hardly ever unsubscribe**. Part of it goes back to reciprocity, but a larger part stems from consistency: **you're loath to admit that following and subscribing to those people and newsletters was a mistake**.

On the positive side, how much more likely are you to comment on a blog that you've already commented on before? Especially if you're now "signed in" to comment on the blog during future visits—and if your Gravatar or Disqus headshot shows up next to the comments?

**According to the principle of consistency, you'll want to remind people of their previous positive commitments through perks, public displays, an elimination of friction for increasing their commitment, etc.** It works for Amazon prime, Amazon's 1-click ordering, and Amazon's reviewer system, and it will work for fostering blog comments and a blog community, too.

## 3. Social Proof

**One method we use to determine correct behavior is to find out what other people think is correct.** We view a behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it.

Whether we admit it or not, **most of us are impressed when someone has a ton of blog subscribers, Twitter followers, YouTube views, multiple blog reviews for their upcoming book, and so on**.

Yes, people can game the system (autofollows and such), which can jade our intellectual response, but our core and initial emotional reactions stay the same.

On the positive side, creating a lot of value for others can help companies and individuals gain social proof via reciprocity: writing engaging content for guest posts, offering to interview authors and subject matter experts, and so forth. Not only do these activities provide social proof

in themselves, but they can help you gain a support network capable of “salting” your blog comments, your retweets, etc.

**And when it comes to social proof, tribes matter.** It’s not just about what the mass of people are doing on social media that constitutes proof, it’s what other like-minded people and peers are doing. So according to the principle of “social proof,” you should concentrate your social media efforts on finding and building social proof within your tribe.

## 4. Liking

“We most prefer to say yes to people we know and like,” says Cialdini. Extensions of this principle are:

1. **Physical attractiveness creates a halo effect** and typically invokes the principle of liking;
2. **We like people who are similar to us;**
3. We like people who compliment us;
4. **We like things that are familiar to us;**
5. Cooperation toward joint efforts inspires increased liking;
6. An innocent association with either bad or good things will influence how people feel about us.

How does this work for social media? Well, to start with the virtual equivalent of physical attractiveness, **we give extra credence to attractively designed blogs, messages contained in videos with higher production quality**, and corporations’ landing pages displaying a better sense of social media savvy in their overall design and layout.

Similarly, **individuals involved in coordinating joint ventures for the common good are associated with—and therefore “haloed” by—those efforts**, while at the same time invoking cooperation toward a joint effort, which further increases “liking.” Think of Seth Godin’s efforts at compiling free and thoughtful ebooks and then using the compilation to raise funds for a non-profit. Bryan Eisenberg’s Trick or Tweet efforts from a year ago also come to mind.

As for complimenting others, **what else is a retweet, a trackback, or a positive blog comment than a social compliment?** And yes, those are all activities you should participate in authentically, sincerely, and liberally if you wish to leverage the principle of liking to your advantage.

## 5. Authority

Cialdini talks about “The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of authority...” In his book, he examines how authority can be conferred by (and also manufactured by) titles, clothes, and trappings.

**In social media, authority is less about titles and clothes than about virtual trappings.** In his (fantastic) report, “Authority Rules,” Brian Clark talks about how perceived expertise can

frequently differ from real expertise. Meaning that the guy known for blogging about and offering intelligent commentary on a subject will likely have far more perceived expertise (and therefore influence as an authority) than a genuine but unknown non-blogging expert.

But **perhaps the most direct measure of authority is the number of people who will buy or download a recommended resource based on little more than an authority's endorsement.** How many people would buy a copywriting book simply because Brian Clark said it's a must-read? How many people will download a free PDF on nothing more than Seth Godin's evaluation that it contains important insights?

But one thing social media has seemed to spark is a dawning understanding that **authority is (or should be, at least) limited to a legitimate field of knowledge.** So when a relatively famous figure like Robert Scoble states on his website Scobleizer that search engine optimization isn't important for small businesses, he's "taken to task" on it rather severely.

## 6. Scarcity

Apart from reciprocity, **this is perhaps the most used tool in social media.** When bloggers open up a class or inner circle membership or subscription service, it is never for an unlimited number of customers or for an always open/unlimited time. **Smart bloggers either create or fully leverage already existing scarcity by limiting seats available, length of time to buy, etc.**

Laura Roeder has rather famously made scarcity a centerpiece of a signature technique, wherein bloggers hold competitions with free services as a prize. When contestants don't win, they then value the prize more highly precisely because of the newly perceived scarcity. This makes them more likely to accept a consolation prize of getting the services at a slight discount.

## Parting Recommendations

While the six principles of persuasion started out as "weapons of influence" that were used against us by "compliance professionals," I—along with Cialdini—would encourage you to **practice the positive side of wielding influence.** To sum up many of the recommendations from the post, here are some very positive ways to leverage the principles of influence to increase your social media success:

- **Focus on creating value** and initiating the reciprocity principle by gifting your social media contacts with high-value content, insights, reports, etc.
- **Sincerely flatter your subscribers, friends, and commenters by responding to them** and nurturing your growing community. Actively reach out to people you admire using social media and pay them the compliment of commenting on their blogs, following their tweets, linking to their content, etc.
- **Commit to consistent engagement on the social media platforms you chose to use**, to the point of staying away from new social media platforms that you don't have the resources to actively participate in.
- **Use social proof as credibility cues where appropriate.** Show off your number of subscribers next to the Subscribe button. Possibly use colleagues to "salt" your

comments on important posts, build up your network by guest posting, commenting, and retweeting.

- **Coordinate within your community on larger efforts for the greater good.** You'll probably be psyched at what you create or accomplish, you'll do good and feel good about it, and you'll likely become associated with the effort.
- Put the extra effort in on achieving professional and inspiring design. Dress for success on your blog, website, and social media landing pages.
- **When creating a contest or trying to spark immediate action, use the scarcity principle to positive effect.** But be honest about it—no changing “last day for” dates, no miraculously replenishing supplies, etc

But, hey, I'd be *THRILLED* to add to the list if you recognize any of your tried-and-true techniques as falling *within*—or totally falling *outside of*—these weapons of influence.

**What are your secret weapons of influence?** Let's engage. Please comment below now.

via [socialmediaexaminer.com](http://socialmediaexaminer.com)

great post — connecting Cialdini's principles to social media... I reference his work often when helping people understand social media.