



Journal of the  
Music & Entertainment Industry  
Educators Association

Volume 14, Number 1  
(2014)

Bruce Ronkin, Editor  
Northeastern University

Published with Support  
from



# **Authors Influencing Others to Follow: An Analysis of a Social Media Platform Through the Framework of Persuasion Theory**

Philip C. Rothschild  
*Missouri State University*

## **Abstract**

Technology has not only transformed the music sector of the entertainment industry, it has also transformed the book publishing sector. Just as musicians have opportunities to go direct to the market with their music, an author has an opportunity to reach and engage an audience directly like never before. This paper demonstrates, through an exploratory case study, how authors can use scientifically proven persuasion techniques to influence visitors to reply to their online requests. These requests often originate from the author's social media platform, and come in the form of asking the visitor to like a social profile, comment on a blog, provide a review, share a link, join the tribe, or buy a book, among others. After a brief summary of the publishing sector, the author defines what a social media platform is using a Social Media Framework refined by social media expert Michael Hyatt (Hyatt 2010c, March 25). This will be followed by a review of persuasion research and Cialdini's six principles of social influence (2008). Finally, we examine some of the elements of a successful social media platform and draw conclusions on how these features may influence a response to one of many requests.

Keywords: social media, persuasion theory, internet marketing, publishing, authors, Michael Hyatt

## **Introduction**

According to the Global Entertainment and Media Outlook: 2014-2018 (PwC 2014) global consumer books revenue grew in 2013 after years of decline, as the increase in ebook revenue surpassed the decreasing print revenue. This type of tipping point is not new to those watching another sector of the entertainment industry. While there are some differences in methodology, Peoples (2012) argued U.S. digital recorded music revenue exceeded physical sales in 2011.

The fact is these two sectors of the entertainment industry have much in common. Just as technology has transformed the music industry

(Graham et al. 2004) and allowed unsigned musicians the opportunity to create and build an audience for their music, the book publishing industry has also experienced seismic shifts, allowing book authors to create and build an audience for their books.

While much of the supply chain of the traditional publishing industry is still intact—from agents pitching books to publishing houses, to distribution of books to physical and online retailers—authors can now build their personal brands online and drive sales wherever their books are sold.

Just as Chris Anderson's *The Long Tail* (2006) has been applied to the music industry, it also explains the publishing industry. There are authors who will find themselves at the “head” (titles are found on the shelves of retail stores) and there are authors who will find opportunity “down the tail” (titles of self-published through mid-level published authors found primarily online). Regardless of their level, or placement of their books, authors have a unique opportunity to build a tribe of followers with the social media tools available in today's online environment.

## The Tribe and the Social Media Platform

British novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard is frequently quoted as saying, “Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family: whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one” (Howard 1998, 260). If authors are going to have success in the marketplace, they need a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader (author) and connected to an idea. To become a tribe, people need only a shared interest and way to communicate (Godin 2008). The strategic use of interactive online social media allows for a tribe to communicate clearly in four directions: “leader to tribe, tribe to leader, tribe member to tribe member, and tribe member to outsider” (Godin 2008, 28).

Brian Solis's *Conversation Prism* (2013) depicts how “the social [media] landscape is evolving with increasing acceleration.” The number of social media networks that have vanished and emerged is staggering, and as a result, it can make the process of understanding and building a social media platform difficult.

In an attempt to help others understand how the various social media work together, social media expert Michael Hyatt (Hyatt 2010c, March 25) borrowed from Chris Brogan's (2010) “Simple Presence Framework” and Jon Dale's “Social Media Framework” (2009) to come up with a re-fined version of a Social Media Framework (Hyatt 2010c, March 25).

According to Hyatt, a good social media strategy has three components.

**1. A Homepage:** The homepage is the digital property that one owns. It is unique from the other two components in that it is fully under the control of the author. It usually comes in the form of a website or blog, and it is where the author wants to drive traffic. According to Hyatt (Hyatt 2010c, March 25), “You can control the borders and determine who has access.” The homepage usually integrates social media network features and metrics within its borders, but only if it serves a purpose.

**2. Embassies:** These are the places that are not owned or controlled by the author; instead the author will create profiles with different social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, etc., and engage in conversations with those who congregate there. “You generally need a ‘Passport’ (verified credentials) granted by the site owner to maintain residency or participate in conversations” (Hyatt 2010c, March 25).

**3. Outposts:** An outpost is a location one does not own nor have a regular presence. An outpost comes closest to what Brogan (2010) described as a “listening station.” It is a place you go to listen to the “conversations about you, your brand, your company, or topics that interest you” (Hyatt 2012a, 70). Examples include, Hootsuite where one can monitor mentions of one’s name or product, and Google Alerts, where one can receive scheduled emails that capture mentions on the internet.

The focus of this paper is to analyze the social media platform (and specifically the homepage) of a successful author. The goal is to uncover the elements of a social media platform that might impact the ability of an author to “persuade” his or her website visitors to comply with the author’s online requests. The next section introduces the science of persuasion and is followed by a case study to illustrate the principles of influence underlying social media strategy.

## The Science of Persuasion

For the past six decades, researchers from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and communication have conducted experiments that shed light on certain interactions that lead people to comply to the requests of others. The research from Cialdini (2008) shows that persuasion (or influence) works by appealing to a limited set of deeply rooted human drives and needs. As a result, Cialdini contends that the ability to influence can be taught, learned, and applied.

Cialdini (2008) identified six principles of influence through experimental studies, and by immersing himself in the world of what he called “compliance professionals,” (fund raisers, advertisers, recruiters, marketers, salespeople, health educators, etc.) he asserted these people are skilled in the art of convincing and influencing others to change an attitude or behavior.

According to Cialdini, the six principles of influence are reciprocity, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity, and serve as heuristic cues for decision making. In other words, when processing information or faced with uncertainty, among other conditions, individuals use certain cues, rules of thumb, shortcuts, or surface features to determine whether to comply with a request. What is common across the research on persuasion is that “shortcuts” are as important, and in some contexts more important, than the message’s argument, structure, or quality.

For example, “the personal characteristics of a communicator (e.g., attractiveness, expertise, likability) are factors that influence the extent to which individuals targeted for an influence attempt are swayed by the individual attempting to influence them (i.e., the influence agent)” (Guadagno et al. 2013, 53).

Cialdini’s six principles have been of interest to both researchers and influence practitioners alike. One such area of interest has been in the effectiveness of Cialdini’s principles of influence when applied to online contexts, particularly in text-based interactions in which the communicator is distant from the target of influence (Guadagno et al. 2013).

After reviewing the literature, Guadagno et al. found there has been a dearth of research examining whether or not the influence principles are effective in online settings. Guadagno and Cialdini (2005) found only three of the six principles had been examined in online contexts (i.e., in the absence of a face-to-face condition) and some of the results are contradictory. This prompted Guadagno and her colleagues (2013) to study likability and social validation (social proof) in an online context. The results revealed social validation affected compliance, but communicator liking did not.

One of the chief limitations of the studies of influence in online contexts is the use of primarily text-based computer mediated communication (see Van Der Heide and Schumaker (2013) for a comprehensive review of computer-mediated persuasion). Guadagno et al. (2013) concluded “It is an open empirical question as to whether these results would generalize

to other more interactive online technologies such as Facebook” (p. 58), and further, suggested more research needs to be done via other online contexts, such as social networking sites.

We now turn our attention to using the six principles of persuasion developed by Cialdini as framework for analyzing a more interactive on-line technology as called for by Guadagno et al.—in this case, a social media platform. The goal is to begin identifying, through a case analysis, the features (or “heuristic cues”) present on a successful social media platform of a best-selling author and social media expert. Specifically, we want to uncover how some of the features incorporated on a successful social media platform might serve as a trigger for Cialdini’s six principles of influence.

As discussed earlier, authors have a unique opportunity to influence their visitors through the effective use of a social media platform. Authors, like most online businesses, want to attract visitors to their websites or blogs. The author’s requests come in the form of asking website visitors to say yes—yes to liking, yes to commenting, yes to sharing, yes to subscribing, and yes to buying, among others.

It should be noted that while Cialdini was eloquent in laying out the dangers of persuasive techniques in the wrong hands in his 2008 book *Influence*, this analysis takes no side in determining the motives of the owner of the social media platform under review. The goal is to simply explain why certain features of this social media platform might have an influence on the growth and success of the platform.

### Case Study: MichaelHyatt.com

MichaelHyatt.com is the “homebase” for author and social media expert Michael Hyatt. He is the author of the *New York Times* best-selling book, *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World* (2012). Recently, *Forbes* (2014) magazine named him one of the “Top 10 Online Marketing Experts to Follow in 2014.” Mr. Hyatt is the former CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, now owned by HarperCollins.

Mr. Hyatt explains how his social media platform grew from 2004 through 2012 in his blog post *4 Insights I Gleaned from Building My Own Platform* (Hyatt 2012b, April 23). Mr. Hyatt started blogging in 2004 on topics related to leadership, social media, and publishing, among others. He explains that his social media platform grew from 110 unique monthly visitors in 2004 to over 302,000 unique monthly visitors in 2012 (Figure

1). By any measure, this is significant growth. His subscriber counts and follower figures will be discussed later.

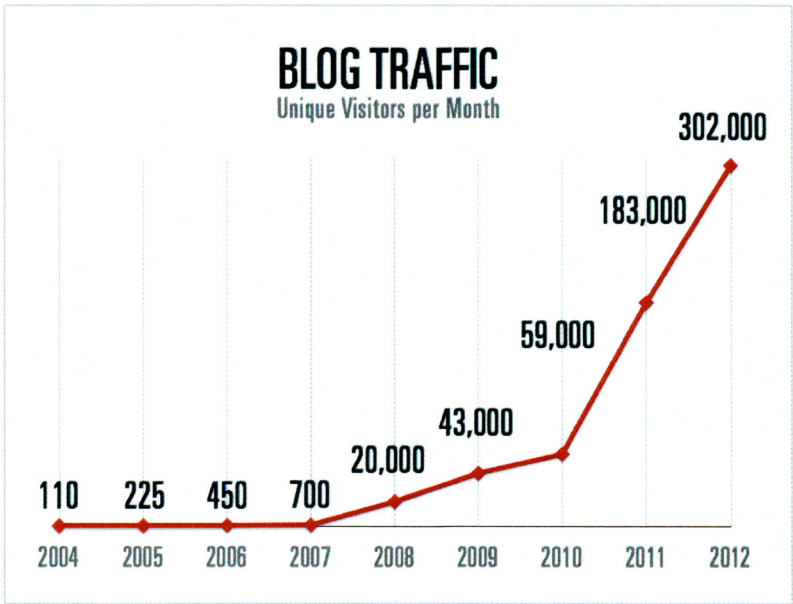


Figure 1. Michael Hyatt unique blog traffic growth (Hyatt 2012b, April 23).

Because of the growth of his platform, and his status as a social media expert, I used Mr. Hyatt’s “homebase” as the online setting for examining evidence of cues that might trigger Cialdini’s six principles of social influence (Figure 2).

What follows is a summary of each of the six principles of social influence. Each principle will be followed by an informed extrapolation of the principle when analyzing elements of MichaelHyatt.com (<http://www.michaelhyatt.com>).

### The Principle of Reciprocity

#### The Rule: *People are wired to repay in kind*

Cialdini (2008) found that if people are offered a gift, a favor, an invitation, or the like, they will feel obliged to repay the gesture. If people



Figure 2. MichaelHyatt.com homebase (Hyatt 2010c, March 25).

are helped, they will feel obligated to help in return. People have been conditioned from a very early age that when receiving a gift or favor—even if uninvited—they should honor the rule of reciprocity. If not, society may sanction one with a label of moocher, ingrate, or freeloader. As a result, people will usually go to great lengths to avoid this and repay the favor in the future.

Cultural anthropologists contend there is a “web of indebtedness” that developed in society that is a unique adaptive mechanism resulting in the division of labor, the exchange of goods and services, and the creation

of interdependencies. This adaptive mechanism has allowed individuals to work together in highly efficient units (Tiger and Fox 1971). Marketers have used these techniques for years. In recent years, we see significant amounts of samples provided free of charge at large gatherings. On college campuses, for example, energy drink companies are using student representatives to give away samples of their most recent flavors. While there is certainly a legitimate desire to expose the public to the qualities of the product, it is also experienced as a gift. As such, the free sample can release the natural indebted force inherent in the gift. While the obligation to repay is activated, there is considerable flexibility in how it is repaid (Cialdini, 2008).

### The Application of Reciprocity: *Give a little to get something in return*

#### The Evidence:

**1. Free Gift:** One of the first things one notices when visiting MichaelHyatt.com is an offer to download a free ebook in exchange for signing up to receive his blog posts by email. It's prominently displayed above-the-fold on the home page, where visitors see the free gift immediately at the top of the page without having to scroll. One thing Hyatt is known for is the quality of these free gifts. They are attractively designed multipage downloads that have substance. *Creating Your Personal Life Plan* was a 94-page ebook that generated 23,326 subscriptions in the first six months it was offered (Hyatt 2011, September 21). The number of subscribers suggests the ebook is viewed by the readers as adding value.

Is it really a free gift? While there is something visitors do have to give-up (an email address) to get the free ebook, they always have the option to opt-out or unsubscribe. This is similar to Cialdini's examples of marketers giving free samples away to expose the public to the product, the act of providing something of value at no real cost is "experienced as a gift."

It also becomes a sample of the kind of content being produced and it can release a natural indebted force inherent in the gift (Cialdini 2008). Hyatt makes it easy for his visitors and tribe to reduce the subtle pressure to repay in kind. His tribe is responsive to his requests as evidenced in several areas discussed later.

**2. The 20-to-1 Rule:** Hyatt suggests a 20-to-1 Rule when using so-

cial media like Twitter and Facebook (Hyatt 2010a, April 21). Other social media experts recommend a 12:1 rule (Brogan, August 12, 2010). This is the ratio of providing helpful resources that are not your own, compared to the number of requests to buy your book, come to a conference, or sign up for a cause. Though Hyatt admits he has broken the rule on occasion, he explains why he and other social media marketers practice *digital generosity*. “Twitter and Facebook are relational tools not transactional tools. Contrary to what many think, social media rewards: 1. Generosity; 2. Other-centeredness; and 3. Helpfulness...if you want to build a social media platform, one where people listen to you, then you have to be a *giver* not a *taker*” (Hyatt 2010a, April 21). A quick scan of Hyatt’s social media feeds see this rule carried out most of the time.

We would expect these two implementations, among others, to have a positive impact on the perception of the author being generous. If the principle of reciprocity applies, we should see high levels of engagement in the form of shares, follows, and comments. This will be addressed later.

## The Principle of Consistency

### The Rule: *People align with their clear commitments*

Consistency is a laudable quality that most people admire in others and aspire to for themselves. Being consistent is often associated with personal and intellectual strength and is at the heart of logic, rationality, stability, and honesty (Cialdini 2008). Those not viewed as consistent are often seen as confused, indecisive, and undisciplined.

“Like the other weapons of influence, this one lies deep within us, directing our actions with quiet power. It is, quite simply, our nearly obsessive desire to be (and to appear) consistent with what we have already done. Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment.” (Cialdini 2008, 81). To resolve these pressures people will respond in ways that justify their earlier decision to commit.

One of several studies completed clearly demonstrates this point. Psychologist Thomas Moriarty (1975) staged thefts on a New York City beach to determine if randomly selected onlookers would put themselves at personal risk to halt a crime. One researcher was listening to his portable music device on his beach blanket, and after some time, left to go to the water. At that point, another researcher, posing as a thief, grabbed the radio

and attempted to run away with it. After running the experiment twenty times, only four of the twenty randomly chosen subjects tried to intervene. However, when the same experiment was repeated another twenty times, there was one simple change. Before taking his stroll this time, the researcher asked a random onlooker to please “watch my things.” Now propelled by the rule for consistency, nineteen out of twenty subjects became virtual vigilantes trying to apprehend the thief.

Cialdini (2008) explains that consistency is a powerful motive because, in most circumstances, consistency is valued and adaptive. Without it, our lives would be difficult, erratic, and disjointed. It is also valued because like most other forms of automatic responses, it offers a shortcut through an ever-increasing amount of stimuli in our culture. Once we have made up our minds—taken a stand, made a commitment to some issue—we don’t have to think hard about it again when bombarded by another or similar request.

This automatic consistency is activated through commitment. Studies by Freedman and Fraser (1966) have shown that if people make a small commitment, they are more likely to respond to larger requests later to maintain consistency. When residents of one neighborhood were asked to display a three inch square sign in their yard that read “Be a Safe Driver” and then two weeks later asked to place a large obtrusive billboard in their yard that read “Drive Carefully,” a surprising 76% complied with the request compared to only 17% who were not previously primed with the smaller request.

In summary, small requests, using a variety of tactics, can lead people to comply with other requests so that they feel like they are being consistent.

**The Application of Consistency: *Make commitments active, public, and voluntary***

**The Evidence:**

**1. Launch Team Commitment:** The clearest evidence of the principle of consistency being used by Michael Hyatt is found when he appealed to his tribe for a favor. Hyatt was getting ready to start the marketing of his book *Platform* (2012a), which would eventually hit the *New York Times* bestsellers list. Hyatt incorporated several of the principles of persuasion (Cialdini 2008) when he made a request of his tribe to join his Platform

Book Launch Team. His request came after years of practicing digital generosity through his 20-to-1 Rule. In other words, he made relational deposits for some time, and was now asking his tribe to respond in kind (Reciprocity) to his invitation. The Launch Team would be limited to only 100 members and there was a limited time to apply (Scarcity). There were 786 people from his tribe who applied, and 100 were randomly selected to be part of this exclusive team (Scarcity) (Hyatt 2012e, August 24).

Hyatt asked members of this Platform Book Launch Team to voluntarily make a commitment to do three things:

- Write a brief book review on Amazon or some other e-tailer site
- Help spread the word about the book in any way you can, to your existing platform and beyond, during the week of May 21<sup>st</sup>
- Share ideas and brainstorm additional ways we might further expose the message to an even greater audience.

There are at least three subtle ways in which Hyatt helped his Launch Team members stay true to their commitments and be consistent (Cialdini 2008).

1. Declarations in Writing: Using an online application form, potential Launch Team members were asked to state how they would get the word out via their social media platform.

2. A Private Facebook Group for Public Declarations: By creating a private group, Hyatt and his Launch Team members would publicly declare what they were doing to promote the book, brainstorm ideas using status updates, post images of accomplishments, and be reminded of the status of sales and deadlines. An added benefit was the camaraderie created among the Launch Team members. Hyatt tried closing down the group after it had fulfilled its purpose and the collective asked that it continue. It became a tribe within a tribe.

3. Public Listing of Team Member Names: Another evidence of consistency-producing triggers came in the form of a public web page listing the name of each team member with a link to his or her blog. Hyatt publicly announcing and displaying the names of all team members is another commitment-inducing cue.

Theoretically, making Launch Team member commitments active (in written form), public (displayed publicly), and voluntary, would lead to a higher level of follow-through as members were motivated to be consis-

tent. In addition to Hyatt proclaiming his Launch Team was a success, and the fact that his book hit the bestsellers list, there is one other data point that can be used as a measure of success. According to Hyatt (Hyatt 2012e, August 24), there were 76 reviews posted on Amazon prior to publication date, and 197 reviews posted within ninety days of publication.

## The Principle of Social Proof

### The Rule: *People follow the lead of similar others*

This shortcut is most often triggered when faced with uncertainty. When people are in conditions that are uncertain, they tend to look to the ways others are behaving to decide for themselves how they should act (Cialdini 2008). Another condition that makes this shortcut even more powerful is when the “others” are similar. Our tendency is to assume that if a lot of people are doing something, then it is the right thing to do.

There have been many studies demonstrating the power of peer pressure. One such study was conducted by Peter Reingen (1982) who was investigating the impact of social proof and similarity on donations to a charity. For this study, a group of researchers requested donations for a charity door-to-door in a neighborhood. In some cases, neighbors were shown a list of others from the neighborhood who had already donated. The longer the donor list, the more likely residents were to give money. In summary, people will do things they see other people doing, especially if those people seem similar to them (Cliffe 2013).

### The Application of Social Proof: *Make it obvious what others are doing and sharing*

#### The Evidence:

##### **1. Social Media and Subscriber Counts Prominently Displayed:**

Hyatt is effective in displaying his social media metrics so others can be influenced to join suit. His total number of subscribers is an impressive 414,884 as of July 14, 2014, and the count includes those who have subscribed to his email feed, or liked or followed him on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, or Instagram. This number is displayed above-the-fold on the home page. This is immediate feedback to the visitor that hundreds of thousands of people find this person or place interesting enough in which to connect.

##### **2. Share Bar at Top and Bottom:** Another area prominently dis-

playing social proof evidence is found at the top and bottom of every blog post. Hyatt refers to this as the share bar. The share bar accomplishes two things. First, it provides an easy way for someone to share, comment, or email the blog post to his or her audience. Second, it displays the number of shares and comments for that post. His most popular post is “The Beginner’s Guide To Twitter.” It shows 588 Comments, 1,397 Facebook shares, 1,791 Tweets, and 243 LinkedIn shares.

What makes these two social proofs significant is that they are system-generated cues. System-generated cues, as you might suspect, are pieces of information that have not been generated directly by the owner of the social media platform, but from the actual behavior of the user, or visitor to the website. Research has shown that individuals do form impressions of people’s attractiveness and general positivity on Facebook according to the number of friends (or followers) they have. (Kleck, Reese, Behnken, and Sundar 2007; Tong, Ven Der Heide, Langwell, and Walther 2008).

While there are ways to manipulate the system to inflate these numbers, it is generally accepted as a reliable indicator of popularity, especially when correlated with the shares and comments on the blog post.

**3. Community Members and Bookmarks:** Another social proof found on MichaelHyatt.com is the list of community members displayed on the right column of the home page. This list provides a brief biography and photograph of seven community members who have agreed to “moderate comments and provide leadership to [the] growing community.” A review of the biographies indicates a heavily male dominated list (6 males, 1 female) with positions and experiences in which visitors may be able to relate. In addition to the community member list, Hyatt also provides a list of bookmarks. This includes a list of links to some of Hyatt’s favorite bloggers and resources. Here again, we see the heuristic value of this list; it becomes a shortcut for determining if the visitor has similar interests.

**4. Links to Reputation Systems:** While not prominently displayed on the home page of MichaelHyatt.com, there are occurrences in which Hyatt links to external feedback-based reputation systems. For example, Hyatt occasionally links to the reviews of his book found on Amazon.com. Resnick et al. (2000) suggests that aggregated feedback systems like this help users establish trust. Research by Resnick and colleagues (2006) established that favorable feedback aggregated by online auction site eBay (<http://www.eBay.com>) generated greater rewards for users with stronger

aggregated reputations. It would be expected, then, that aggregated reviews from peers about a book or author on Amazon.com will provide heuristically valuable information about the target's credibility.

## The Principle of Liking

### The Rule: *People like those who like them*

Another shortcut most are familiar with is based on the principle that people will tend to say yes more often to those people whom they know and like. You can see this principle exploited by many sales organizations. Whether it's a Tupperware party, or some other door-to-door sales company like Shaklee or Amway, there is heavy reliance on using friends or dropping names of friends to open a door or close a sale. Compliance professionals who understand this shortcut of liking increase its effectiveness by emphasizing several factors that increase overall likability:

1. Physical attractiveness tends to create a halo-effect that extends to favorable impressions. Many studies have demonstrated that attractive people are more persuasive both in terms of getting what they request and changing other's attitudes (Mack and Rainey 1990, Eagly et al. 1991).
2. When someone is similar to us we tend to say yes more often to his or her request, often without thinking.
3. Extending genuine compliments and praise to others also makes the sender more likable, even if the praise is not true. (Drachman et al. 1978)
4. Increased familiarity through repeated contact and cooperation, as long as it is positive, facilitates liking.
5. An innocent association with either bad or good things will influence the degree to which people will like us, or dislike us (Lott and Lott 1965). For example, a local news weatherperson is often liked or disliked based on the forecast for the day.

In summary, if people like you because they sense you like them, they're more apt to say yes to requests—and there is a boost if there are similarities.

The Application of Liking: *Design for attractiveness, Uncover similarities, Offer genuine praise*

The Evidence:

**1. Attractive Person, Attractive Design:** While physical attractiveness is always in the eye of the beholder, when analyzing a social media platform, we are looking for cues that would make the platform owner attractive and similar to the visitor.

When trying to influence someone to say yes to following you, you do not want a poorly designed website to get in the way of attracting someone to your personality or your content. Hyatt does an excellent job of ensuring he has a clean professional design that enhances the experience. In fact, Hyatt places importance on design by providing a public Design Guide specific to his site (see <http://michaelhyatt.com/design-guide>). Future research should examine what role design can have on influence.

Hyatt also extols the importance of photos. “The right photo can help establish credibility, build trust, and promote engagement. These are at the heart of connecting in the world of social media and essential if you ever hope to sell someone on what you have to offer” (Hyatt 2013, August 19). Notice the photo on his landing page is what he refers to as a full-face smile. Compare that with a typical business suit photo shoot. This photo, in addition to photos of his family and pets, create subtle cues to the visitors that Hyatt is approachable and, perhaps, similar to them.

**2. Comments and Engagement:** We’ve already mentioned the number of comments and shares found in the Share Bar area of his blog posts. Now, we will turn our attention to both the quantity and quality of Hyatt’s replies to visitors leaving comments. First, we see the sheer volume of his replies to commenters. Hyatt uses Disqus (<http://www.disqus.com>) for his commenting system. Disqus tracks the number of comments made by anyone who has an account. The data reveals that Hyatt has replied to commenters over 15,000 times as of July 14, 2014. This means he has had 15,000 interactions with the readers of his blog alone. (He has tweeted to his followers using Twitter another 40,000 times since April of 2008). An examination of his blog comment replies show a significant amount of compliments and praise directed toward the commenters.

Based on Cialdini’s principles of influence, Hyatt’s “repeated contact” through blog posts (three times per week), replies to comments, and frequent presence on social media like Facebook and Twitter should in-

crease familiarity, which facilitates liking.

**3. Disclosure of Material Connection:** This element on Hyatt's social media platform might fit under the Cialdini principle of liking or authority (trust). At the bottom of every blog post that has links, Hyatt has inserted the following Disclosure of Material Connection statement:

Disclosure of Material Connection: Some of the links in the post above are "affiliate links." This means if you click on the link and purchase the item, I will receive an affiliate commission. Regardless, I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will add value to my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising." (<http://www.michaelhyatt.com>)

Theoretically, this will have one or two effects. It may boost his liking because he is being upfront about his affiliate links—the average consumer may find that a likable quality. Or, it will boost his authority because it suggests he is a credible and trustworthy source.

## The Principle of Authority

### The Rule: *People defer to experts*

People tend to be influenced by both legitimate and perceived authority. With the classic Milgram experiments as support, Cialdini reminds us of the chilling reality that adults are willing to suspend rational and reasonable judgment when faced with a request by an authoritative figure, even if it inflicts pain on others (see *Obedience to Authority* (Milgram 1974) for all the variations of the experiments).

Cialdini (2008) explains that we are trained from birth to obey authority, and that we have come to learn obedience to authority is right, and disobedience to authority is wrong. As a result, when we are faced with uncertainty or a complex environment, our automatic unthinking response (shortcut) will be to say yes to a request from a legitimate authority, or even one who appears to have authority. According to Cialdini (2008), there are several symbols that connote authority, and when present, will trigger compliance. The three kinds of symbols that have been shown to

be associated with authority are titles, clothing (such as uniforms and business attire), and the trappings such as jewelry and fine clothes (see for example Wilson 1968, Hofling et al. 1966, and Lefkowitz et al. 1955). While the Milgrim studies show us the allures and dangers of blind obedience, “information from a recognized authority can provide us a valuable shortcut for deciding how to act in a situation” (Cialdini 2008, 290). In summary, people will have the tendency to defer to experts and those in positions of authority, often underestimating their tendencies to do so.

**Application of Authority:** *Expose your expertise; don't assume it's self-evident*


**Evidence:**

**1. Brand Slogan and Categories:** Hyatt clearly identifies what he is an expert on by placing his brand slogan, *Helping Leaders Leverage Influence*, directly under his name logo. Immediately a visitor recognizes he's all about helping leaders. This is augmented by the clearly identified categories of Personal Development, Leadership, Productivity, Platform, Publishing, and Resources. This clarity becomes a shortcut for decision making about expertise for the first time visitor.

**2. As Featured In:** Directly under Hyatt's head shot is an “As Featured In” graphic that includes all of the logos of media channels in which he has been featured. Corporate logos from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *BusinessWeek*, and *CNN* bring instant credibility. Immediately, one knows he has a national, or larger platform. The subdued two-tone Featured In graphic doesn't scream with bravado. Instead, it complements his approachable photo with an understated confidence.

**3. About Me:** According to Hyatt, his About Me page (Figure 3) is among the top-ten most visited pages of all time (Hyatt 2010b, September 8). On this page he inserts some of his credentials including his *New York Times* bestseller recognition and his role as former Chairman and CEO of a large publishing company. Notably, he wrote the About Me page in first person, and with a conversational style. This is more evidence of his interest in being an approachable authority. Not only does the About Me page provide clues about Hyatt's expertise and authority, it also mentions personal interests, hobbies, and makes reference to his family, all of which can inform the visitor that he is human (Dooley 2012) and has similarities, which boosts liking.

[Home](#)
[About](#)
[Speaking](#)
[Podcast](#)
[Read My Brain](#)
[Store](#)
[Archives](#)
[Contact](#)


**MICHAELHYATT**  
 Helping Leaders Leverage Influence™


 AS FEATURED IN

[The New York Times](#)
[THE WALL STREET JOURNAL](#)
[Forbes](#)
[Businessweek](#)
[CN](#)

[Personal Development](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Productivity](#)
[Platform](#)
[Publishing](#)
[Resources](#)

**About**

I am the author of *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World* (Thomas Nelson). It is a New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today bestseller. Recently, *Forbes* magazine named me one of the "Top 10 Online Marketing Experts To Follow In 2014."



This is my personal blog. It is focused on "intentional leadership." My mission is to help leaders leverage their influence. As a result, I write on personal development, leadership, productivity, platform, and publishing. On occasion, I write about stuff that doesn't fit neatly into one of these categories.

I also have a podcast called, "This Is Your Life." I cover similar topics. My show is consistently ranked in the top ten of iTunes' Business category.

My goal is to create insightful, relevant content that you can put to work in your personal and professional life. If you are in a position of leadership—or aspire to be—then this blog is for you.

I typically post three times a week. To make sure you don't miss my newest posts, you can subscribe via RSS or e-mail.

**My Top Posts**

If you are new to my site, you might want to start with my most popular posts.

**Get Your Free eBook**



Sign up to receive my blog posts via e-mail and get a FREE copy of my NEW e-book on the resources I use. Learn more.

Privacy Guarantee: I will never share your e-mail address with anyone else.

**Total Subscribers**
414,114

**CONNECT ON FACEBOOK?**


 Michael Hyatt   
[View Profile](#)

You may also like:




Figure 3. "About Me" page (<http://michaelhyatt.com/about>).

**4. Upcoming Speaking Engagements:** This is an area that highlights some of Hyatt's speaking engagements. It reinforces his credibility and expertise as a communicator to many different audiences.

**5. My Video Interviews:** On the home page sidebar, Hyatt includes videos of his interviews with some of the top leadership experts in business and ministry. This is a subtle cue that suggests to his visitors he interacts with high-level experts frequently, thus boosting his credibility and authority.

## The Principle of Scarcity

**The Rule:** *People want more of what there is little of*

We have all been vulnerable to the scarcity principle. Opportunities seem to be more valuable to us when they are less available. It could be a product, a service, or even trading cards or collectible coins. As a rule, if it's rare, or becoming rare, it's more valuable. As a result, if the item is of value to us, it will trigger an emotional automatic response to obtain it.

Further, Cialdini (2008) points out that we tend to be motivated by the potential loss of something rather than the potential benefits of something. For example, health researchers (Meyerwitz and Chaiken 1987) found that pamphlets urging women to do monthly self-examinations are more successful if they state the case in terms of what may be lost (e.g., "You can lose several potential health benefits by failing to spend only five minutes each month doing breast self-examination") rather than what is gained (e.g., "You can gain several potential benefits by spending only five minutes each month doing a breast self-examination").

The power of the scarcity principle comes into play from two major sources. One is our weakness for shortcuts and the assumption we make that less of something is a cue to its quality. Second is the notion that as things become less accessible, we lose freedoms. According to psychological reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm 1981), we respond to the loss of freedom to access something by wanting to have it more than before. To illustrate, Cialdini reminds us of the two times reactance behavior is most obvious—during the terrible twos and during the teenage years. When anything interferes with our prior access to something, we will react against the interference by trying hard to possess the item more than before.

We see the use of the scarcity principle most often employed by limiting the quantity of the item, or by creating time limits to access the items. We see it in promotion materials with phrases like "a limited number available" or "time is running out." To kick in the shortcut, Cialdini (2008) suggests there are two optimizing conditions. First, when an item is newly scarce rather than restricted all along, and second, when we have to compete with others for the item.

Application of Scarcity: *Highlight unique benefits and exclusive information*

Evidence:

**1. Launch Team Limited Time, Limited Seats:** As mentioned earlier in the text, Hyatt effectively employed the scarcity principle when he invited his tribe to be one of only 100 members on his Platform Book Launch Team. With a deadline and unique benefits for this exclusive team, he had almost 800 “compete” for the 100 volunteer positions. This fulfilled the two optimizing conditions in which the scarcity principle kicks in: when an item is newly scarce, and when one has to compete with others for the item (Cialdini 2008).

**2. Countdown Clock:** The only other occasion Hyatt uses a limited time offer is when he is offering a new product or service. He has a well-designed countdown clock that appears on his product landing pages, and on his home page side bar during promotional campaigns. In addition to the countdown clock, he also sends emails to remind people of the closing time for the special offer, or the limited number of seats still available.

## Discussion and Future Research

The social media landscape is changing rapidly, and it’s difficult for a social media specialist to navigate, let alone an author, or other creative. Nevertheless, every author—and really anyone who has something to say or sell (Hyatt 2012d, May 23)—has an interest in building an audience using the social media tools available today. Authors want to attract traffic and move online visitors to a deeper level of engagement, in hopes that they may not only become customers, but become members of the author’s tribe.

It is the opinion of this researcher that a well thought out social media platform is the best way to engage visitors over the long term. However, it does require the author, or members of the author’s team, to think strategically about what is communicated and how it is communicated.

An exploratory case study like this is not intended to make generalizations about the effectiveness of Cialdini’s principles of influence in all interactive online contexts. However, by examining the best practices of a social media expert, author, and blogger, my hope is that it prompts authors and other creatives to view themselves as agents of influence.

Future research should examine whether musicians and visual art-

ists, for example, can implement similar practices to build an audience. For authors and bloggers, compelling words found in a regular schedule of blog posts and outbound emails is the currency used to progressively engage readers. Would the fans of musical artists and visual artists be drawn to blog posts and outbound emails? Or, are these fans interested in only news and new releases—the frequency of which may be more irregular. Demographic-related questions may also play a part in the type of social media used to engage. A blog-centric homepage may be a fitting way to engage middle-aged readers who check their email often, but will a blog-centric homepage be appropriate for college-aged music fans who regularly scan and consume short tweets, status updates, and photos instead of blog posts?

It is also important to note that Cialdini spends a significant amount of time in his book *Influence* (2008) discussing the dangers and abuses of social influence techniques, and how to defend against them. Research needs to be done to examine which internet-based techniques are abused, and how they impact the creative's credibility and influence. It's the opinion of this writer that authors should avoid using influence principles to deceive or mislead people. They should always protect the trust that has developed as a result of more intentional interactions.

Borrowing from the field of oratory, Aristotle suggested that it's more than the message that influences people to respond: "The orator must not only try to make the argument of his [*sic*] speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his character look right, and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind" (Roberts, trans. 1954, 25). After all, who our audience perceives us to be can have a profound effect on the success of our persuasive attempts (Van Der Heide 2013).

## References

---

- Anderson, Chris. *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.) New York: Hyperion, 2006.
- Berscheid, Ellen. *Interpersonal Attraction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Reading, Mass.: Longman Higher Education, 1978.
- Brehm, S. S., & J. W. Brehm. *Psychological Reactance: A theory of freedom and control*. New York: Academic Press, 1981.
- Brogan, Chris. "My Twitter Presence." *chrisbrogan.com*. August 12, 2010. Retrieved July 17, 2014. <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/my-twitter-presence/>.
- Cialdini, Robert. "Harnessing the Science of Persuasion." *Harvard Business Review* (October 2001). Retrieved July 16, 2014. <http://hbr.org/2001/10/harnessing-the-science-of-persuasion/ar/pr>.
- Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: Science and Practice*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2008).
- Cliffe, Sarah. "The Uses (and Abuses) of Influence." *Harvard Business Review* (August 2013). Retrieved July 20, 2014. <http://hbr.org/2013/07/the-uses-and-abuses-of-influence/ar/>.
- Dale, Jon. "Using a social media framework to grow your tribe." *JonDale.com*. July 7, 2009. Retrieved July 9, 2014. <http://www.jondale.com/using-a-social-media-framework-to-grow-your-tribe/>.
- Dooley, Roger. "What Your 'About Us' Page Is Missing." *Forbes*. October 24, 2012. Retrieved July 20, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rogerdooley/2012/10/24/about-us-page/>.
- Drachman, D., A. DeCarufel and C. Insko. "The Extra Credit Effect in Interpersonal Attraction." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 14 (1978): 458-469.
- Eagly, Alice H., Richard D. Ashmore, Mona G. Makhijani, and Laura C. Longo. "What Is Beautiful Is Good, But...: A Meta-Analytic Review of Research on the Physical Attractiveness Stereotype." *Psychological Bulletin* 110, no. 1 (1991): 109-128. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.110.1.109.
- Freedman, Jonathan L. and Scott C. Fraser. "Compliance Without Pressure: The Foot-In-The-Door Technique." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 4, no. 2 (1966): 195-202. doi:10.1037/h0023552.
- Godin, Seth. *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.) New York: Portfo-

- lio Hardcover, 2008).
- Graham, Gary, Bernard Burnes, Gerald J. Lewis, and Janet Langer. "The transformation of the music industry supply chain: A major label perspective." *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* 24, no. 11 (2004): 1087-1103. doi:10.1108/01443570410563241.
- Guadagno, Rosanna E. and Robert Cialdini. "Online Persuasion and Compliance: Social Influence on the Internet and Beyond." In *The Social Net: The Social Psychology of the Internet*, edited by Y. Amichai-Hamburger, 91-113. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Guadagno, Rosanna E., Nicole L. Muscanell, Lindsay M. Rice, and Nicole Roberts. "Social influence online: The impact of social validation and likability on compliance." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 2, no. 1 (January 2013): 51-60. doi:10.1037/a0030592.
- Hofling, C., E. Brozman, S. Dalrymple, N. Graves, and C. Perce. "An Experimental Study of Nurse-Physician Relationships." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 143, no. 2 (September 1966): 171-180.
- Howard, Jane. *Families*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998).
- Hyatt, Michael. "The 20-to-1 Rule." *MichaelHyatt.com*. April 21, 2010a. Retrieved July 17, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/the-20-to-1-rule.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. "10 Ways to Create a Better About Page for Your Blog." *MichaelHyatt.com*. September 8, 2010b. Retrieved July 18, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/10-ways-to-create-a-better-about-page-for-your-blog.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. "A Social Media Framework." *MichaelHyatt.com*. March 25, 2010c. Retrieved July 18, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/a-social-media-framework.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. "How to Use Free to Drive Your Marketing Strategy." *MichaelHyatt.com*. September 21, 2011. Retrieved July 17, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/how-to-use-free-to-drive-your-marketing-strategy.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012a.
- Hyatt, Michael. "4 Insights I Gleaned from Building My Own Platform." *MichaelHyatt.com*. April 23, 2012b. Retrieved July 7, 2014. <http://>

- michaelhyatt.com/4-insights-i-gleaned-from-building-my-own-platform.html.
- Hyatt, Michael. "Join the Platform Launch Team and Receive 8 Exclusive Benefits." *MichaelHyatt.com*. May 5, 2012. Retrieved July 17, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/platform-launch-team-invitation.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. "#013: Building Your Platform, Part 1 [Podcast]." *MichaelHyatt.com*. May 23, 2012d. Retrieved July 7, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/013-building-your-platform-part-1-podcast.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. "How to Launch a Bestselling Book." *MichaelHyatt.com*. August 24, 2012e. Retrieved July 17, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/bestseller-launch-formula.html>.
- Hyatt, Michael. "Do You Have the 5 Elements of a Powerful Personal Brand?" *MichaelHyatt.com*. August 19, 2013. Retrieved July 18, 2014. <http://michaelhyatt.com/personal-brand.html>.
- Kleck, Christine A., Christen Reese, Dawn Ziegerer-Behnken, and S. Shyam Sundar. "The Company You Keep and the Image You Project: Putting Your Best Face Forward in Online Social Networks." Presentation at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, Calif., May 23, 2007. Retrieved from [http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/7/2/7/5/p172756\\_index.html?phpsessid=0jhblfr4jift6st69lj e7ckifl](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/7/2/7/5/p172756_index.html?phpsessid=0jhblfr4jift6st69lj e7ckifl).
- Lefkowitz, Monroe, Robert R. Blake, and Jane Srygley Mouton. "Status factors in pedestrian violation of traffic signals." *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 51, no. 3 (November 1955): 704-706. doi:10.1037/h0042000.
- Lott, Albert J. and Bernice E. Lott. "Group Cohesiveness as Interpersonal Attraction: A Review of Relationships with Antecedent and Consequent Variables." *Psychological Bulletin*, 64, no. 4 (1965): 259-309. doi:10.1037/h0022386.
- Mack, Denise and David Rainey. "Female applicants' grooming and personnel selection." *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 5, no. 5 (1990): 399-407.
- Meyerowitz, Beth E. and Shelly Chaiken. The Effect of Message Framing on Breast Self-Examination: Attitudes, Intentions, and Behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, no. 3 (1987): 500-510. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.500.

- Milgram, Stanley. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1974.
- Moriarty, Thomas. "Crime, commitment, and the responsive bystander: Two field experiments." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31, no. 2 (February 1975). 370–376. doi:10.1037/h0076288.
- Peoples, Glenn. "Business Matters: New Report Predicts Digital-Vs.-Physical Tipping Point That Already Happened." *Billboard*. August 16, 2012. Retrieved July 8, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1084124/business-matters-new-report-predicts-digital-vs-physical-tipping-point>.
- PwC. "Global entertainment and media outlook: 2014-2018." *PwC.com*. (2014). <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/global-entertainment-media-outlook/segment-insights/consumer-and-educational-book-publishing.jhtml>.
- Reingen, Peter H. "Test of a list procedure for inducing compliance with a request to donate money." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 67, no. 1 (February 1982): 110-118. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.67.1.110.
- Resnick, Paul, Ko Kuwabara, Richard Zeckhauser, and Eric Friedman. "Reputation Systems." *Commun. ACM* 43, no. 12 (2000): 45-48. doi:10.1145/355112.355122.
- Resnick, Paul, Richard Zeckhauser, John Swanson, and Kate Lockwood. "The value of reputation on eBay: A controlled experiment." *Experimental Economics* 9, no. 2 (2006): 79-101. doi:10.1007/s10683-006-4309-2.
- Roberts, W. Rhys. *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 1954.
- Solis, Brian. "The 2013-2014 Social Media Landscape [Infographic]." *BrianSolis.com*. July 8, 2013. <http://www.briansolis.com/2013/07/the-2013-social-media-landscape-infographic/>.
- Steimle, Joshua. "Top 10 Online Marketing Experts To Follow In 2014." *Forbes*. February 28, 2014. Retrieved July 7, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshsteimle/2014/02/28/top-10-online-marketing-experts-to-follow-in-2014/>.
- Tiger, Lionel and Robin Fox. *The Imperial Animal*. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.) New York: Dell, 1971.
- Tong, Stephanie Tom, Brandon Van Der Heide, Lindsey Langwell, and Joseph B. Walther. "Too Much of a Good Thing? The Relationship Between Number of Friends and Interpersonal Impressions on

- Facebook.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 3 (2008): 531–549. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.00409.x.
- Van Der Heide, Brandon and Erin M. Schumaker. “Computer-Mediated Persuasion and Compliance: Social Influence on the Internet and Beyond.” In *The Social Net: Understanding our online behavior*, edited by Y. Amichai-Hamburger, 79-98. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Wilson, Paul R. “Perceptual Distortion of Height as a Function of Ascribed Academic Status.” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 74, no. 1 (1968): 97-102. doi:10.1080/00224545.1968.9919806.

**PHILIP ROTHSCHILD** is Director of the Entertainment Management Program at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. He earned his Ph.D. from Florida State University. Rothschild is founder and publisher of EntertainmentManagementOnline.com, and is Advisor to the Entertainment Management Association. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of leadership, social media use in entertainment venues, content marketing, event management, and stakeholder management. He has experience as a personal manager in the publishing industry, and provides advice to non-profit theatres, online publications, event management companies, and authors and speakers. His professional memberships include the International Association of Venue Managers, and the Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association.

