

Target Audience: Christian US Americans (18 and over, Protestant or Catholic)

The United States is known for compassion toward other countries in times of need. We are well-intentioned, and that is admirable. But how many people have died or suffered when that intention was put to use in areas where we had no business going in the first place or where we did not understand the culture? Americans have another opportunity to make an impact in the world as they respond to the Dorje Shugden controversy in Tibetan Buddhism.

A small percentage of Tibetan Buddhists believe Dorje Shugden is a protector spirit. Recently, a centuries-old debate has resurfaced regarding the appropriateness of such spirit worship. Americans of all faiths are being pulled into the debate. In the process, the West Shugden Society (WSS) – the largest Shugden support group world wide - is taking advantage of our values concerning religious freedom (values based on an entirely different history and cultural context).

Buddhism operates on a different view of the universe than most ancient religions. It doesn't acknowledge the existence of a supreme being. Put simply, our world and universe are part of an endless cycle of existence that continues until we liberate ourselves (through meditation, compassion and mindfulness). Tibetan Buddhism in particular allows for the possibility of deities that can impact our lives.

Some Tibetan Buddhists choose to offer prayers to Dorje Shugden, who some call the Dharma Protector.

Just as Christians differ in their opinion about worshipping Saints, the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism does not condone the worship of worldly spirits. The Dalai Lama's advice against Dorje Shugden worship is based on the observation that the sole authority for Buddhists should be the Buddha, not minor deities. The Dalai Lama has stated publicly that, if they will not set aside their differences, then Shugden practitioners simply need to break away from the Gelugpa branch and establish their own sect.

This debate dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1617-1682). Yet, the bulk of the criticism has fallen on the current Dalai Lama. He has been accused of a personal crusade against Dorje Shugden. Nothing could be further from the truth. As researcher Michael von Bruck notes, the Dalai Lama has used historical evidence, political reason, and spiritual insight to address this question – not alleged personal feelings or aspirations of material power.

Recent news has focused on scholar Robert Thurman's rather extreme comparison of the WSS to the Taliban. The comparison is loose at best, since Buddhists do not operate within the Bible/Koran-based religious paradigm. The Taliban are a military faction. The WSS is not. Yet, just as the Taliban represent Islam's dark side, there is a possible dark side to the WSS. How many Americans remember that in 1997, three monks were murdered in Dharamasala, including the Dalai Lama's brother? How

many people are aware that the best evidence from the investigation pointed to Dorje Shugden practitioners?

In a time when Tibet faces modernization and continued pressure from China, Tibetans need to show themselves as a unified people. An unstable Tibet could create a power vacuum. Yet, the irresponsible WSS smear campaign continues. Instead of addressing the issue directly, they have politicized it and garnered support from well-intentioned Westerners who may not be getting all the facts. Americans should boycott the protests of the WSS. The best way we can help Tibetans with this conflict is to seek balanced information and consider whether or not we truly have the cultural experience to address it. For more information on this topic, visit the Dalai Lama's official site: [www.dalailama.com](http://www.dalailama.com).

**Persuasion Analysis #2**

**Topic: Pro Dalai Lama**

**Jeremy dePrisco**

**Issue & Synopsis:**

The issue I am dealing with in my message is the Dalai Lama vs. Dorje Shugden controversy. Since 1996, the Dalai Lama has been opposed to the worship of Dorje Shugden, a protector deity in Tibetan Buddhism. A subset of Tibetan Buddhists feel strongly that it is their right to practice this worship and propitiation, and that the Dalai Lama is abusing his religious position for political means. The controversy actually dates back to the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617-1682), but protests in recent months by the Western Shugden Society (WSS), aided by multimedia attacks, have brought the issue in more focus on the world stage. The Western Shugden Society uses terms like “persecution” and “witch hunt” to describe the Dalai Lama’s “campaign of intimidation, humiliation, and ostracism” toward worshippers of Dorje Shugden. In return, the Dalai Lama considers the followers of Dorje Shugden as a separatist movement within Tibetan Buddhism, and feels it undermines the Tibetan cause.

**Central claim of the argument of this assignment:**

The central claim here is that Americans do not have the cultural competence to address the Dorje Shugden question. Our history and Judeo-Christian roots as a country do not translate very well to this conflict, so we should stay out of it unless we’re willing to take the time to research the topic (as some have).

**Target Audience:**

Christian US Americans (18 and over, Protestant or Catholic) - hereafter referred to as “Americans” for brevity. In general, this group is not likely to have much knowledge or understanding of Buddhism, let alone the various forms of Buddhism and the variants developed in Tibet as the statistics below will demonstrate. This can be used to my advantage because the depth and breadth of the Shugden controversy gets extremely bogged down in arcane terms and mystical concepts that most Americans may write off, or simply misunderstand. It is better to approach the topic from other angles that relate more to their experience as Christians and Americans.

According to the 2001 ARIS study of 50,000 Americans, the number of people who identified as Christian was 76.5%. Other religious groups (including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others) totaled 3.7%. Non-religious individuals totaled 14.1% and 5.4% refused to answer. Of the 3.7% representing non-Christian religions, only 0.5% identified as Buddhist.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics support two points important to this persuasive message. First, that Americans are not likely to be Buddhist in the first place. Second, due to the small percentage of Buddhists in the US, Americans are not likely to even know a Buddhist personally (and therefore be influenced by their views). Thus, the number of Americans who have any direct stake in the happenings within the Buddhist religion is minimal.

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<sup>1</sup> *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)*, by Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Retrieved 9/24/08 from [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research\\_briefs/aris.pdf](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris.pdf)

The ARIS study did not distinguish between *types* of Buddhism. For some perspective, I consulted a 1995 study published by Encyclopedia Britannica, titled “Worldwide Adherents of All Religions by Six Continental Areas”. While their figures encompass the world *six years prior* to the ARIS study, the ratios demonstrated are applicable here. Of an estimated 323,894,000 Buddhists around the world, 56% identified as Mahayana, 38% as Theravada (Hinayana), and 6% as Tantrayana (Lamaism).<sup>2</sup>

It is reasonable to expect a similar ratio in American Buddhists. According to the ARIS study, 0.5% of Americans identify as Buddhists, yet only approx 6% of *that* small amount (0.003%) are Lamaists, the category that includes Tibetan Buddhists. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life study on Religious Affiliation from February 2008<sup>3</sup> shows a similar result. Of the 0.7% US Buddhist population noted in that study, less than 0.3% were Tibetan Buddhists.

Again, all this goes to support my case that a) Americans, in general, are not Buddhist; b) Americans are not exposed to Buddhist concepts, and c) if they are, Americans are probably not exposed to Tibetan Buddhism, except via media outlets.

### **Other demographics**

The Pew Forum study also noted that “immigrants are disproportionately represented” among Buddhists in the US. Likewise, “Buddhism in the US is primarily made

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.zpub.com/un/pope/relig.html> Lamaism includes (Vajrayana/Tibetan/Tantric)

<sup>3</sup> Conducted May 8 and Aug 13, 2007 among a representative sample of more than 35,000 Americans.

up of native-born adherents, whites and converts. Only one-in-three Buddhists say they are converts to Buddhism.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Age, Income and other factors**

Median age for US Americans in 2006 was 36.4. The total number of people 18 and older was 225,663,000, with approximately 109,777,000 males, and 115,885,000 females.

Mean income for US households in 2005 was \$73,304, with a wide distribution.

### **Political Party**

A recent Gallup poll (Sept 8 through 11, 2008) showed that 32% of Americans identify as Republican, 35% as Democrat, and 31% Independent.

### **Influence on US Adult Political Thinking** - (adapted from Pew Forum study on Religion)

- 14% Religious beliefs
- 13% Education
- 34% Personal experience
- 19% Media

The Pew study confirmed strong links between political views and religious affiliation in the US, despite the figures above, mostly in terms of how conservative or liberal respondents were. It also confirmed the link between intense religious affiliation and attitudes toward social and political view. The more religious tend to be more conservative, and more Republican.

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<sup>4</sup> Accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

**Race (in thousands)<sup>5</sup>**

White	239,746,254
Black or African American	38,342,549
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,902,851
Asian	13,159,343
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	528,818

**Educational Attainment**

According to the US Census Bureau, in 2006, 85% of American males are likely to have a high school or higher education, though 29.2% of males had college or higher. 85.9% of American females had high school or higher, and 26.9% were college graduates or higher.<sup>6</sup> So, at best, less than 30% of my target audience would be exposed to the more challenging ideas that come when enrolled in higher education – ideas such as conflicts overseas and religious secularism. Interestingly, according to the Pew Forum study, “25% of Buddhists have obtained a post-graduate education, compared with only about one-in-ten of the adult population overall.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Source: US Census Bureau, Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin Status: 2000 to 2006

<sup>6</sup> Table 218 Educational Attainment by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex: 1960 to 2006

<sup>7</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

## Religious Perceptions & Attitudes

If attitudes are a function of belief, which in turn are a function of values, then this message must appeal to the values of the target audience. I will treat religious perceptions and attitudes in general terms first, then look at the more specific attributes of those perceptions that may impact the subject of the Dalai Lama and the Shugden controversy. The first question we must ask is: “What are Americans’ perceptions and attitudes toward religion?”

For this section, I must again turn to some illuminating quotes from the February 2008 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (emphasis mine).<sup>8</sup> According to the study, “most Americans have a non-dogmatic approach to faith.” “Most Americans agree with the statement that many religions – not just their own – can lead to eternal life.” “Most Americans also have a non-dogmatic approach when it comes to interpreting the tenets of their own religion. For instance, more than *two-thirds of adults* affiliated with a religious tradition agree that there is *more than one true way to interpret* the teachings of their faith, a pattern that occurs in nearly all traditions. The exceptions are Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, 54% and 77% of whom, respectively, say there is only one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion.”

I found it significant that “... those who believe Scripture represents the word of God are roughly evenly divided between those who say it should be interpreted literally, word for word (33%), and those who say it should not be taken literally (27%). And more than a

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<sup>8</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

quarter of adults – *including two-thirds of Buddhists (67%)* and about half of Jews (53%) – say their faith’s sacred texts are written by men and are not the word of God.”

“The diversity in religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. in part reflects the great variety of religious groups that populate the American religious landscape. The survey finds, for example, that some religious groups – including Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and members of historically black and evangelical Protestant churches – tend to be more likely to report high levels of religious engagement on questions such as the importance of religion in their lives, certainty of belief in God and frequency of attendance at religious services. Other Christian groups – notably members of mainline Protestant churches and Catholics – are less likely to report such attitudes, beliefs and practices. And still other faiths – including Jews, *Buddhists*, Hindus and Muslims – *exhibit their own special mix of religious beliefs and practices.*”

Further, 90% of Buddhists agreed there was more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion. I hope to exploit some or all of these attitudes about choice, freedom, multiple interpretations, etc. All of these point to what we’ve come to know as a very dynamic characteristic of American belief.

### **Attitudes toward Buddhism, the Dalai Lama and Dorje Shugden specifically**

One critical point about Buddhism must be stressed before we address attitudes toward Buddhism. If there is one central point on which all forms of Buddhism agree, and which sets it apart from all other world religions, it is that *Buddhists do not believe in an*

*omnipotent creator being*. Likewise, concepts such as “eternal life” and “salvation” have completely different meanings in Buddhism, and are not truly transferable. In fact, as part of a discussion on Buddhism, they can never shake the Western denotative meaning. According to the Pew Forum study, “62% of Buddhists believe in nirvana, the ultimate state transcending pain and desire in which individual consciousness ends.”<sup>9</sup> Further, while some Buddhists believe in concepts such as heaven and hell (36% and 26% respectively), the concepts differ greatly from Christian ideas, and Protestant Christians tend to be more sure of the existence of these places (84% and 74% respectively).<sup>10</sup>

Because the Dorje Shugden controversy involves concepts such as spirits and, some would say, the supernatural, it is worth looking at perceptions of these things in the US. The Pew study found that “79% of all Americans agree that miracles still occur today as in ancient times”, but that the “intensity with which people hold these beliefs varies considerably”.<sup>11</sup> It also notes that “68% believe angels and demons are active in the world”. Though, for Buddhists, “56% **do not** believe that angels and demons are active in the world”.

The media often make outrageous claims calling the Dalai Lama a “god-king” when in fact he is neither a god, nor a king. Many people in the target group have a sense of the Dalai Lama as the leader of *all* branches of Buddhism. This is verifiably not true. As previously noted, Tibetan Buddhism is one of many branches, some of which have significant variations

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<sup>9</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

<sup>10</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

<sup>11</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

in practice. Zen Buddhists do not recognize the Dalai Lama as their leader any more than Protestants recognize the Pope as theirs. Still, this misunderstanding prevails.

Most westerners are exposed to too much of the “feel good” Buddhism of Deepak Chopra and other modern gurus to know anything about serious philosophical conflicts within the religion. Westerners may have a hard time believing that such a schism as the Shugden controversy is occurring in Buddhism today.

To most people in the target group, the Dalai Lama’s designation as a Nobel Peace Prize winner makes him a difficult target for any character attacks. Yet, the West Shugden Society has been somewhat successful in doing so. Still, I believe that the Dalai Lama’s narrative as a young boy fleeing Chinese oppression creates substantial sympathy within the target group because they too have fought Communism and, more recently, terrorism. These characteristics of strong ethos, and a hero narrative, also need to be addressed in the persuasive message.

As for attitudes toward Dorje Shugden, this was the most difficult thing to gauge without significant resources and surveys. I am counting on the target group’s overall ignorance on this topic (lack of any map for this territory). In fact, it is my hope to make them aware of their ignorance and need for more information so that they do not blindly accept the claims of the West Shugden Society.

The aim of my message is mostly to *inoculate* them against competing claims from my own position. In a situation such as this, with such a complex, foreign, and subtle controversy, and given the shortness of the message I must construct, the best I can do is

plant a seed that will perhaps germinate later as the audience comes across future media reports.

### **Audience response expected**

When I first learned of this subject, and of the WSS attacks on the Dalai Lama, this generated a cognitive dissonance within me. It is that same response that I am shooting for with this message.

The intended *attitude changes* are sought via motive appeals to make the audience aware of the Dalai Lama's attempts at reconciliation with Dorje Shugden practitioners. My goal is to show that the Dalai Lama is in a very difficult position just like any other world leader. He did not instigate the controversy and it is not a personal crusade against Dorje Shugden.

I am also seeking a change in attitude where American ideals of freedom of religion are concerned. Far too often, citizens of the US use their experiences as a template for other cultures. This tendency ignores the Platinum Rule and instead we "do unto others as we would have done to ourselves," not taking into account the cultural differences that may make that action inappropriate. Media contributes to this tendency, but it seems to be part of our upbringing and education. I'd like to challenge that tendency in this message.

It is still likely that most people see the Dalai Lama as a positive historical figure. So I've tried to *maintain positive attitudes* towards him while at the same time casting the WSS in a negative light.

The intended *behavior change* is that the audience will think about this subject a bit more, and maybe even support the Dalai Lama's position. Since my message is brief and can not go into subtle detail about the controversy, I am reinforcing the behavior outlined in my demographic findings, namely that my target audience is not very knowledgeable on this subject, and first impressions will count, but they will most likely respond favorably.

### **Applying the Toulmin model**

My opening paragraph makes an intentionally vague reference to the current conflicts in the Middle East. After my intro in paragraph one, my data and background are presented in paragraphs two and three. The central claim is that American values can not be applied to all situations, particularly those that have a different cultural context. My warrant is that we have a history of going into areas and making a mess of things. I address several rebuttals including accusations that the Dalai Lama is seeking more power, or that he doesn't want what's best for his country. The final paragraph asks the audience to, at the very least, become more educated on the topic before just following what the WSS says.

One possible qualifier in this message is how I handled the Taliban reference. I admit that the WSS is not exactly like the Taliban and offer clarification on that upfront so that it could not be used against me later.

### **Approach to evidence**

The approach to evidence is mostly rational because I am asking the listener to consider specific examples related to the activity of West Shugden Society and the Dalai Lama's stance. My appeal is likely to be processed through the central channel of the elaboration likelihood model because these rational appeals touch on tangible feelings or experiences the audience may have had themselves.

### **Logos**

In addition to the appeals to ethos and pathos already cited, I make an appeal to logos in my message. Since the conflict is much older than the current Dalai Lama, he can not be solely held responsible for the entire controversy. There is also logic in my approach to ask the audience to research this topic carefully before making an assumption that the WSS is right in their approach and tactics.

### **Intensify / Downplay**

The main intensification technique used is association. I am trying to associate certain concepts such as religious freedom and democracy with the issue at hand – topics that Americans are passionate about. Except, unlike my previous pro-Shugden message, I am trying to instill a sense of responsibility for our feelings toward religious freedom, and how we would feel if another group far outside of our cultural framework tried to act on our behalf. I am also intensifying the aspect of “choice” as it applies to this controversy. The Dalai Lama has offered a choice.

I am intensifying the negative aspects of the WSS in their alleged association with the murders in 1997.

The main downplay technique used is omission. I am omitting that the Dalai Lama is believed to be the 14<sup>th</sup> incarnation of the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, and as such could – technically – be held responsible for the actions of his predecessors. I am also omitting the fact that the Dalai Lama once practiced Dorje Shugden worship, but stopped in 1996. Shugden supporters often use this as part of their argument against the Dalai Lama. But as in the pro-Shugden message, I felt it would only confuse my central argument by including it in such a short message. I am trying to downplay any similarity with American experience of religious oppression, and have downplayed how many people are impacted by this controversy.

My approach here is *pragmatic*. I am far more likely to come across people who either do not care or are just undecided on this issue. The main idea is to establish common ground on the idea of religious groups and particularly groups in other countries to determine their own destinies. I am trying to use a more concrete example of how religious doctrine can be interpreted multiple ways, and have steered clear of many of the more nebulous sides of this issue (e.g. Whether or not Dorje Shugden is a worldly spirit or deity)

### **Process Premises**

It would be difficult to argue on the basis of “needs” in this persuasive message. So instead I have focused on emotions, attitudes, and consistency. I want to touch on the hot

buttons of independence and freedom of choice that Americans typically have, as well as the utter failures we have seen in recent years when the U.S. gets involved abroad.

### **Type of Organization, and language choices**

My persuasive message follows a basic AIDA format (attention, interest, desire, action). In the beginning I get the audience's attention by comparing the Shudgen issue with other more visible news topics, and include a moderate fear appeal regarding American involvement overseas.

I then develop the audience's interest in the topic by giving them the background and making some statements that are critical of West Shudgen Society.

This leads to supporting points that bring the audience to a desire to learn more about the topic. To satisfy that desire, I give some background on Buddhism (though not too much). This creates additional desire to want to help, so then I attempt to translate their interest into an action: inform themselves about the controversy before making a quick judgment and visit the Dalai Lama's web site for more info.

I took the AIDA approach instead of the Motivation Sequence approach because there is a much less tangible "need" being satisfied in my message. That need may be characterized as a need for consistency, or just a need for religious freedom and choice, but since most Americans are far removed from Buddhism, they have less of a stake in it, and therefore less need regarding Buddhism specifically.

On the Lexile Framework for Reading, my message score was 1150L, which is consistent with a reader who has attained at least a 10<sup>th</sup> grade high school education. This score may be slightly skewed by terms like “Shugden” and “Buddhism” which automatically make the reading a bit more difficult.

I’ve made an attempt to bookend the message with topics that are related (conflicts in the world) to offset the possibility of primacy or recency effects. My goal was to make the message effective regardless of which part people remembered.

### **Cultural images and myths**

Ironically, while I am trying to guard against application of American religious values, I am encouraging American values of choice and independence. As some writers have noted, the Dorje Shugden question detracts from the struggle for independence.

This controversy has some elements of “rooting for the underdog” which Americans have a tendency to do, so that is something I had to guard against. I turned that around to my advantage by citing how the Dalai Lama believe his people must unify given all of the challenges the Tibetans face (modernism, China).

### **God/Devil Terms**

I invoke the devil term “Taliban,” though I try to temper it because it is not a very accurate comparison. This is an ethical point that I considered carefully but felt that it served to clarify why others have used that term in relation to the subject. Had I not admitted (in

the message) that the comparison was suspect, I think it would be an unethical term to use in my message.

The phrase “political vacuum” has become a devil term of sorts. It’s something no one wants to see, and almost always leads to some major military conflict (or at least that is what we are led to believe).

Just as in my pro-Shugden message, I thought about including the commonly-cited reference regarding the Dalai Lama as a Nobel Peace Prize winner, but purposely left it out because that title automatically invites admiration and acts as a god term. I feel that persuaders on this topic tend to rely on the Nobel Peace Prize a bit too much and it has lost some of its power. Since WSS has been chipping away at that award, I thought it better to construct an image of the Dalai Lama as offering choice and caring for the welfare of his people.

**Motive appeals:**

I am exploiting the audience’s fear of the unknown and that there will be a “political vacuum.” In general, unstable political situations invoke emotional responses with most American listeners.