Chapter 4: Credibility

Key Terms and Concepts

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Chapter Summary Notes

I. Ethos or credibility is a key ingredient in persuasion.
   A. Advertisers frequently rely on celebrity endorsers to boost their company’s image.
   B. A Q-score is a measure of an endorsers selling power
   C. The third-person effect refers to people’s tendency to think they are less persuadable than others
   D. An effective endorser will increase brand equity, or the value attached to the brand.
   E. The match-up hypothesis proposes that a celebrity “fit” the brand she/he endorses.
   F. The meaning transfer perspective supports the match-up hypothesis on the grounds that the celebrity endorser projects his/her public persona onto the brand, thus creating identification with consumers.
   G. If a celebrity endorser becomes embroiled in a scandal, the sponsor’s image may suffer as well.

II. Credibility can be defined as “judgments made by a perceiver concerning the believability of a communicator” (O’Keefe, 1990). This is extended to include institutions as well.
   A. Credibility is a receiver-based phenomenon. It exists in the eye of the beholder.
   B. Credibility is a multidimensional construct; credibility isn’t one thing, it is a composite of several different factors.
   C. Credibility is situational or contextual. Communicator credibility may vary from one situation to the next.
   D. Credibility is dynamic. It can change over time, even during a single persuasive message
III. Factor analytic studies have identified several underlying dimensions of credibility.
   A. Primary dimensions of credibility are nearly universal.
      1) Expertise (competence, qualification) is one of the primary dimensions of credibility. Of the three primary
dimensions, expertise usually plays the most important role.
      2) Trustworthiness (character) is one of the primary dimensions of credibility.
      3) Goodwill (perceived caring) is one of the primary dimensions of credibility.
   B. Secondary dimensions of credibility tend to be more situation-specific.
      1) Dynamism or extroversion refers to the energy level or enthusiasm of a source.
      2) Composure refers to how calm, cool, and collected a source is.
      3) Sociability refers to how likeable, friendly, and good natured a source is.
   C. Empirical research suggests these underlying dimensions are highly applicable to real-life settings.

IV. Credibility tends to function as a peripheral or heuristic cue in persuasion.
   A. Receivers with low involvement are more likely to rely on credibility.
   B. Receivers with high involvement are less likely to rely on credibility, and more likely to scrutinize message
      content.

V. To maximize credibility’s effectiveness, a source’s qualifications must be identified prior to a persuasive
message.

VI. The “sleeper effect” refers to a situation in which a message attributed to a lower credibility source becomes
more persuasive over time compared to a message attributed to a high credibility source.
   A. A discounting cue has the potential to prevent message effectiveness.
   B. The sleeper effect operates through a process of disassociation, whereby a message becomes separated from
its source in the minds of receivers.
   C. Although it has been empirically documented in laboratory settings, it is difficult to produce an absolute
sleeper effect in real-world settings.
   D. Studies have found a relative sleeper effect in which both messages have lost favor over time, but the high
credibility message has lost far more favor than the low-credibility message.

VII. The concept of credibility can be extended to organizations and institutions as well.
   A. Institutions carry out public relations campaigns to manage their public image.
   B. Departments, divisions, and staffs have been assigned the duty of maintaining an organization’s credibility.
   C. Corporations and other institutions whose images have been tarnished by scandal or adverse circumstances,
must engage in image restoration strategies.

VIII. In interpersonal settings, the concept of credibility can be likened to Impression Management Theory and
facework.
   A. Impression Management Theory explains how a person tries to project a positive self-image to others.
   B. In attempting to project a favorable image, individuals persuade others to see them a certain way while they
are simultaneously vulnerable to influence attempts by others.
   C. Facework involves negotiating one’s social standing and social worth in the eyes of others.
   D. Impression management and facework are inherently persuasive inasmuch as they entail goal-directed
communication.

IX. Ten guidelines are offered in order to enhance one’s credibility as a persuader.
   A. Be well-prepared and well-organized.
   B. Cite evidence for your position, and cite the sources for your evidence.
   C. Explain your background and qualifications to your listeners prior to presenting a message.
   D. Establish trustworthiness by demonstrating that you have your listeners’ interests at heart.
   E. Display goodwill (perceived caring) toward your audience.
   F. Improve your likeability, or your L-factor, by conveying warmth and immediacy.
   G. Adopt a language style suitable to your audience and the occasion.
   H. Avoid a powerless style of communication: “ums” and “uhhs,” tag questions, qualifiers, and hesitations.
   I. Create identification by emphasizing your similarities with your listeners.
J. Increase receiver involvement in order to counter perceptions of low credibility.
K. Secure the endorsement of a high-credibility source.

X. (Box 4.2) The halo effect occurs when individuals regard the attractiveness and articulate manner of others as signs of credibility.
   A. Ted Bundy did not fit the stereotypical image of a serial killer.
   B. Being aware of the credibility trap of the way someone talks, the way they dress, or whom they know may prevent one from stumbling into danger.