

Chapter 5: Communicator Characteristics and Persuadability

Key Terms and Concepts

demographic variables; age, gender, ethnicity, intelligence	latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment
life-stage hypothesis	contrast and assimilation effects
Reinforcement Expectancy Theory	ego-involvement vs. issue involvement
cross-sex effect	dogmatism
collectivistic cultures	authoritarianism
individualistic cultures	social vigilantism
empowerment vs. confianza	cognitive complexity
intelligence	constructivism
traits versus states	constructs
self-esteem	simple vs. complex
anxiety	need for cognition
preference for consistency	verbal aggressiveness
high/low self-monitoring	argumentativeness
Social Judgment Theory	analyzing and adapting to audiences
ego-involvement	situation
anchor point	market segmentation (Box 5.2)

Chapter Summary Notes

- I. Demographic variables related to persuasion include age, gender, ethnicity, and intelligence.
 - A. Age and persuasion
 - 1) Young children are especially vulnerable to persuasive appeals.
 - a. (Box 5.1) Children are highly susceptible to persuasive tactics from strangers. A brief list of the lures and prevention strategies are provided.
 - b. Advertisers use several devices to persuade children and attract children's attention.
 - c. Growing older and parental advice on how to scrutinize persuasive messages can protect children from persuasive trickery.
 - 2) The life-stage hypothesis suggests that there is a curvilinear relationship between age and persuasion, i.e., compared to youthful and elderly people, middle-aged people are less persuadable.
 - B. Gender and Persuasion
 - 1) Males tend to be more persuasive than females, but not because of males' ability or skill.
 - a. Gender stereotypes cause audiences to perceive males as more competent than females and to expect females to be more warm and nurturing than males.
 - b. Women experience a double bind: they must not only perform better than men to be considered equally competent, they are also perceived negatively when they try to be direct, assertive, and forceful.

- c. Reinforcement Expectancy Theory suggests that, when influencing patients, female doctors (compared to male doctors) are at a disadvantage because they are constrained by stereotypes regarding appropriate influence tactics for females.
 - 2) Early studies indicated that women were more persuadable than men, but later studies find no such differences between men and women.
 - 3) If gender differences in persuadability are observed, it may be because:
 - a. Women may be more empowered today than they were when previous studies were conducted.
 - b. A cross-sex effect, in which people are more persuaded by members of the opposite sex than by members of the same sex.
 - c. Men and women may differ in terms of their goals, plans, beliefs, and resources, and these, in turn, may lead to gender differences in persuasion.
- C. Ethnicity, Culture, and Persuasion
- 1) Individualistic cultures are more persuaded by appeals to independence and personal benefit, while collectivistic cultures are more persuaded by appeals to harmony, group goals, and concern for others.
 - 2) People from individualistic cultures tend to view themselves consistently across situations, while those in collectivistic cultures tend to view the self as more malleable.
 - 3) When seeking compliance, cultures also differ with regard to directness, concern for saving face, emphasizing trust, and empowerment.
 - 4) Wiseman et. al. (2009) found that people from Japan may switch cultural orientations depending upon the situation. This finding suggests that collectivism and individualism may not be opposite orientations.
 - 5) Saving face through hinting, setting an example by one's own actions, and feeding people what they relish are three additional influence tactics that reflect cultural values.
- D. Intelligence and Persuasion
- 1) Early research suggested that moderately intelligent people would be more persuadable because:
 - a. Intelligent people would not yield to a message.
 - b. Less intelligent people would not comprehend a message.
 - 2) Recent summaries of research suggest that less intelligent people are the easiest to persuade.

II. Researchers have examined various traits and states as they relate to persuasion in order to classify individuals based on their differences and explain why certain persuasive strategies are employed.

- A. People with moderately high self-esteem are more persuadable than are people with high or low self-esteem.
- B. The relationship between anxiety and persuasion is not clear, though we do know that strong fear appeals should not be used on chronically anxious people.
- C. High self-monitors, compared to low self-monitors, pay close attention to their own and others' behavior in order to behave appropriately in a given context.
 - 1) High self-monitors are persuaded to do things when it makes them fit in or look good.
 - 2) Low self-monitors are persuaded by the quality of a product.
- D. Because people with a high preference for consistency (PFC) strive to be consistent, while those with a low

- preference for consistency do not, high PFCs are more susceptible to the effects of cognitive dissonance.
- E. Social Judgment Theory (SJT) suggests that ego-involved people are difficult to persuade.
- 1) SJT suggest that on all topics, a person has a most preferred position called an anchor point.
 - 2) Positions that a person finds acceptable fall within a latitude of acceptance, positions a person finds unacceptable fall within a latitude of rejection, and positions a person is neutral about fall within a latitude of noncommitment.
 - 3) Ego-involved people have narrow latitudes of acceptance and are difficult to persuade.
 - 4) A contrast effect occurs when a persuasive message is perceived to be farther away from the anchor point than it was to begin with.
 - 5) An assimilation effect occurs when a persuasive message is perceived to be closer to the anchor point than it was to begin with.
- F. Issue involvement affects how people process messages and, in turn, how persuadable they will be.
- 1) An individual's involvement can be ego-related (value-relevant) whereby the persuasive message is gauged by the enduring values rooted in her/his self-concept.
 - 2) Otherwise, an individual can consider her/his outcome-relevant involvement (issue), as defined by her/his current goals and outcomes, when assessing a persuasive message.
 - 3) Issue-involved people scrutinize messages and are persuaded by strong arguments.
 - 4) People who are not involved in an issue are persuaded by peripheral cues.
- G. People who are dogmatic, authoritarian, and social vigilantes think their beliefs are superior to others' beliefs.
- 1) Dogmatic and authoritarian people are close-minded and tend to follow authorities blindly.
 - 2) Research regarding the persuadability of "high dogs" and authoritarian people is inconsistent, though inconsistencies may be reconciled by considering source and message factors.
 - a. High "dogs" and authoritarian people are difficult to persuade unless the persuader is perceived to be an authority or an expert.
 - b. High "dogs" and authoritarian people are more persuaded by strong arguments than by weak ones when receiving persuasive messages from non-experts.
 - c. High "dogs" and authoritarian people may be vulnerable to persuasive messages that are threatening.
 - 3) Social vigilantes try to impress their beliefs onto others, counterargue more, and are more resistant to persuasion compared to their counterparts.
- H. Constructivism suggests that people interpret the world using a variety of constructs.
- 1) Cognitively complex people interpret the world using several constructs and are more tolerant of inconsistent messages.
 - 2) Cognitively simple people interpret the world using few constructs and are less tolerant of inconsistent messages.
- I. People high in the need for cognition enjoy effortful thinking.
- 1) People high in the need for cognition are more motivated to think about persuasive messages than are people low in the need for cognition.
 - 2) People high in the need for cognition are persuaded by strong arguments, while people low in the need are persuaded by peripheral cues.

J. Aggressive communication can be either destructive or constructive (or both), depending on the type of aggression and how it affects an interpersonal relationship.

- 1) Verbal aggressiveness is the tendency to attack others verbally, and it is aimed at damaging another person's self-concept.
- 2) Argumentativeness involves the tendency to refute and defend arguments without engaging in personal attacks.
- 3) Verbally aggressive people do not "edit" their arguments; people who are not verbally aggressive do edit their arguments to avoid violating their ethical standards.
- 4) Yet, aggression may be acceptable in certain situations.
 - a. Political attacks that are truthful, relevant, and appropriate are necessary in helping citizens determine who should be elected into public office.

III. Given the varied nature of audiences, it is important to analyze and adapt to them and the communication situation when trying to be persuasive.

A. Effective audience adaptation requires that persuaders pay attention to situational constraints, and audiences' values, needs, and characteristics.

B. (Box 5.2) Market segmentation is a technique used by marketers to categorize audiences and adapt messages accordingly.

- 1) Marketers generate messages that appeal to specific groups based on factors such as age, zip codes, ethnicity, gender, education, economic status, and career choice.
- 2) The potential to segment consumers is limitless as groups continue to develop in the population.