

Persuader Characteristics: Credibility

Rationale: Credibility of the source is one of the most important factors in the success for a persuasive attempt.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Define credibility and its dimensions
- Describe the Halo Effect and its relationship to credibility
- Describe the Sleeper effect and its relationship to credibility
- Provide examples of cues audiences use when evaluating source credibility through:
 - The central route
 - The peripheral route

{video}

No visual aid was used for this lesson.

Outline of the Lesson

- I. Review of previous session's content
- II. Lesson opening:
 - A. Credibility is a source characteristic that affects persuasion.
 - B. Credibility is the #1 factor in persuasion.
- III. Overview
 - A. Defining credibility
 - B. The Halo Effect
 - C. The Sleeper Effect
 - D. Building your own credibility

Body

- I. Defining credibility
 - A. Credibility is a person's "believability" and their ability to inspire trust.
 - B. Facts about Credibility
 1. Although credibility is a characteristic of the source (or the speaker), it is conferred by the audience.
 - a. In other words, you can't say (with certainty) "I'm credible." Only your audience can say, "This person is credible."
 - b. Credibility changes depending on the audience and the situation.
 2. Credibility is dynamic: you can gain or lose it.
 3. Credibility is a heuristic or peripheral cue we use under conditions of low motivation or ability (ELM). If we are motivated and able, credibility is only one component we consider.
 4. Credibility is Multidimensional
 - a. Lots of characteristics can contribute to someone's credibility (or hurt it).
 - b. The most important characteristics are called the "primary

dimension."

- Competence/Expertise
 - Experienced, informed, trained, skilled, intelligent, expert
 - Character/Trustworthiness
 - Honest, trustworthy, fair, just, unselfish
 - Goodwill
 - Cares about me, wants the best for me
- c. There are other characteristics that are still somewhat important. These form the "secondary dimension" of credibility.
- Composure
 - Poised, relaxed, calm, composed
 - Sociability
 - Good-natured, cheerful, friendly
 - Extroversion
 - Bold, verbal, aggressive, talkative

II. The Halo Effect (Thorndike, 1920)

- A. The "halo effect" happens when credibility that we have in one area carries over and helps us be persuasive in an unrelated area.
- B. An actor from a daytime serial ("soap opera") appeared in a 1986 commercial for cough syrup. ("I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV.")

III. The Sleeper Effect (Hovland & Weiss, 1951)

- A. The Sleeper Effect refers to the phenomenon of attributing credibility to a very low credibility source as time passes.
- B. We tend to forget important credibility cues over time, particularly if we're not aware of them before we hear the information.
- C. Immediately after a persuasive communication event:
 - 1. A high-credibility source will create more positive attitudes toward the issue.
 - 2. A low-credibility source will produce less-favorable attitudes toward the issue than the audience originally had (discounting cues).
- D. High credibility messages lose impact over time.
- E. Over time, in low credibility messages, audiences disassociate the source of the message from the message itself and attitudes become more favorable.

IV. How to Build (or Enhance) Your Credibility

- A. Be prepared
- B. Cite evidence
- C. Explain expertise
- D. Build trust
- E. Adapt language
- F. Speak powerfully
- G. Increase involvement
- H. Have yourself endorsed by a source that the audience considers credible

Conclusion

I. Review

- A. Defining credibility
- B. The Halo Effect
- C. The Sleeper Effect
- D. Building your own credibility

- II. Learning activity
- III. Lesson closing

References

- Gass, R. H., & Seiter, J. S. (2014). *Persuasion: Social influence and compliance gaining* (5th ed.) Pearson.
- Hovland, C. I. & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15(4), 635-650. <https://doi.org/10.1086/266350>
- Thorndike, E. L. (1920). A constant error in psychological ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 4(1), 25-29. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0071663>

Learning Activity

Complete one of these two class activity options.

In the Classroom

1. Divide into small groups
2. Identify a well-known children's story character that your entire group is familiar with (examples: Santa Claus, Pippi Longstocking, Paddington Bear, Willie Wonka, Tinkerbell, Mr. McGregor, Little Red Riding Hood)
3. Identify a persuasive attempt that character might make (include both the goal and the audience).
4. **Part 1: Primary and secondary characteristics**
 - a. Discuss the following questions as a group:
 - Which primary characteristics listed in the lecture notes apply to the character in this situation? Which do not?
 - Which secondary characteristics listed in the lecture notes apply to the character in this situation? Which do not?
 - b. Share the results of your discussion with the class
5. **Part 2: Central and peripheral cues**
 - a. Audience evaluations of source credibility can also be described through the lens of the ELM.
 - b. Discuss the following questions as a group:
 - What cues to the character's credibility (or lack of credibility) would operate through the central route?
 - What cues to the character's credibility (or lack of credibility) would operate through the peripheral route?
 - c. Share the results of your discussion with the class

Remote

1. Download this document: [L10-persuader-characteristics-credibility-activity.docx](#)
2. Answer the questions in the document
3. Upload the completed activity document here

Variations and Accommodations

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities. Please contact your instructor if any accommodations are necessary