

Factors and Characteristics of Political Likeability as a Source of Public Relations: Focusing on the Likeability Factors in South Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of public relations is to obtain the “good will” of stakeholders having a strong effect on the good feeling or likeability of public for the organizations of public relations. Bhargava, professor of marketing at Georgetown University, insists that Nelson Mandela could be President of South Africa because of his personal charm and likeability rather than his political experience and competence. This study is purposed to investigate what are the likeability factors which exert a strong influence on the impression and image of politicians and to make a likeability index for South Korean politicians. A survey of likeability was conducted for the Presidential candidates, local government head candidates and work partners in South Korea. The result shows that likeability factors depend on who it is. In other words, likeability factors are different in the manner of subjects and targets. In particular, the likeability factors for Korean President were composed of reliability, communication competence, and problem-solving ability. While, the likeability factors for local government chief were composed of reliability, clean integrity and problem-solving ability. In addition, this study indicates that the likeability index for Korean politicians should be estimated by reliability, strict integrity, communication competence, problem-solving ability and consideration.

Keywords: Good will, Likeability Factor, Likeability, Political Likeability, Public Relations

1. Introduction

The Public Relations can be traced back to the likeability. America's third president and author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, expressed the 'likeability of public' as a PR agenda at Congress speech in 1802. And this conception of likeability is considered as origins of PR today³. The purpose of PR is to secure the “good will” of stakeholders having a strong effect on the likeability of public for the organizations of public relations^{2-5, 8-10}.

According to Likeonomics of Bhargava¹, people trust and choose to believe people they like. In order to be more believable and more trusted, people need to be more like-

able. Besides, from economic point of view, the likeability is currency in the era of social believability crisis. The most important global currency isn't made of paper any more, it's made of relationships and credibility.

In 2005, Tiziana Casciaro, a Harvard Business School professor, and Miguel Sousa Labo, a professor of decision sciences at Duke University, decided to find out just how important likeability was in a business context¹. Together, they conducted a series of surveys at four organizations: a Silicon Valley tech company, a division of an IT corporation, a U.S. university and the Spanish country office of a global luxury goods corporation. Combining them with results from surveys filled out by a large group of MBA students, they ended up with a collected and studied data

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| | Low <----- Likeability | -----> high |
|------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| high ↑ | Competent Jerk Mostly avoided | Lovable Star desperately wanted |
| competence ↓ low | Incompetent Jerk desperately avoided | Lovable Fool Mildly wanted |

Figure 1. Preference level as a work partner (Lovable Fool).

from over 10,000 work relationships. The participants are categorized into two disparate characteristics based on their answers and rating results by peers: the likeability and the competence. And then, they were put in a hypothetical place to choose which type of co-worker they would like to work with. On one level, somehow the results were quite predictable.

Everyone single person answered that they want to work with highly likeable and highly competent individuals (as entitled as “Lovable Star” by study), and none of them wanted to work with individuals with a low competence and low likeability (as entitled as “Incompetent Jerk”). However, some unexpected results came out in the other two cases.

The study demonstrated that when faced with a choice between a more likeable person who had a stronger personal relationship and someone who had better job performance but less likeable, people are more inclined to choose to work with the “Lovable Fool” (high likeability, low competence) rather than the “Competent Jerk” (high competence, low likeability). (Ref. Figure 1)

The conclusion of the study was clear: “When faced with a choice between a ‘competent Jerk’ and a ‘lovable fool’ as a work partner, people usually opt for likeability over ability.” This is not an isolated finding, either. Across the business world and beyond, likeability has a fundamental power to help us build trust in our interactions with others.

In this respect, this paper explores the likeability factors and index which would be applicable to politicians in South Korea. This study aims to figure out the definition and characteristics of likeability and to seek for the likeability factors for Korean politicians through a survey. The study is started with understanding of likeability and analyzing of characteristics of likeability. Therefore, the contents of this research are composed of a literature

investigation, a survey, a research on the likeability factors for Korean politicians.

2. The Definition and Characteristics of Likeability

2.1 Definition of Likeability

The fate of South Africa can be linked to the story of Nelson Mandela who became the President of South Africa thank to his personal charm and likeability⁶. What’s the likeability then? The likeability can be explained by attraction and ability to let others have positive attitude benefiting both emotion and body. But it is not a simple matter of sexual desirability. According to Bhargava¹, the idea of likeability goes far beyond getting people to like you on a superficial level. It is not just about being nice. It indicates how people and organizations lose trust, how they can get it back, and what really takes to be more believable. Because people trust and believe people they like to, so, in order to be more trusted and more believable, politicians need to be more likeable.

Likeable people are more apt to be hired, get help at work, get useful information from others and have mistakes forgiven. The likeability is getting people (the other party) to try their best, to be more motivated and engaged, exerting an effect on having the positive attitude. It is considered as a source of PR which is purposed to acquire the “good will” of public. The likeability is becoming a bigger factor for success at work as PR service enlarges with the growth of social networks services. In particular, the likeability is defined by emotional movement that makes a person likeable, and believable that allows them to be liked, supported, engaged, related and believed with positive attitude which could realize the purpose of PR.

2.2 Characteristics of Likeability

The likeability is characterized by seven explanations as follows. First, being likeable is not same thing as nice. Likeability is enough to compensate for some very real human failings. Second, likeability is based on what you do become you want to. There is a gap in likeability. The likeability gap describes the difference between what someone does because they have to and what they do because they want to. Third, Relationships can be built based on likeability. Building real and meaningful relationships is not the same thing as networking. Relationships don't work when you measure them on a scorecard. Fourth, likeability needs humanity. It is no secret that humble people tend to be more likeable. Fifth, the effect of dislike is stronger than likeability. People say that "satisfied customers tell three friends, angry customers tell 3,000." Over and over, the same pattern turns out to be true. Social media offers an easy outlet for the unhappy, but people sharing positivity is far rarer. The most popular sentiment toward anything isn't love or hate. It is indifference. Sixth, the likeability is influenced by various factors which need to maintain the human relationships. Likeability is linked to reliability, communication, problem-solving ability which need in human relations. For examples, likeability could be decreased as reliability is diminished. Seventh, likeability is only as strong as its weakest part in human relations as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The overcome and diminishment of likeability weakest point can be the best way to maintain the likeability.

2.3 Factors of Likeability

Ivy Lee, as known as a father of PR, founded one of the nation's first public relations firms, Parker and Lee, which used the tagline "Accuracy, Authenticity, and Interest" as their motto in 1905⁵. He advised Rockefeller to carry around dimes in his pocket and hand them out freely to people on the street. A dime (10 U.S. cents) adjusted for inflation was worth approximately 2 dollars by today's standards. For Rockefeller, though, the amount of the money was unimportant. The simple act of personal charity changed how people saw him, and how history remembered him. He transformed his legacy from a detached billionaire to an engaged, kind, and grandfatherly benefactor of society.

Tim Sanders studied how to be more likeable as a person and proposed four "elements of likeability" in his "The

Likeability Factor": friendliness, relevance, empathy and realness⁷. In his mind, these were in "green light order", which meant you had to be friendly before you could be relevant, and so on. Besides, twenty years ago, The Netherlands Study, the Advertising Research Foundation set their research agenda for 1991 and proposed that studying the impact of likeability on advertising research should be a key topic¹. That year, several research studies on the topic were conducted and three authors in the Netherlands decided to launch a 10-year study on the effects of advertising likeability. Their results, published in 2006, proposed that there were four components to advertising likeability: entertainment, relevance, clearness, and pleasantness.

In looking at all the research about how people and organizations become more believable, as well as the impact that social media has had on how we interact with one another and companies, Bhargava uncovered some key principles for what really matters when it comes to being more believable. His aim was to find these principles and then create some sort of acronym to describe them. Finally, he proposed five core principles: T.R.U.S.T.

TRUST = TRUTH+RELEVANCE+UNSELFISHNESS+SIMPLICITY+TIMING

Principle of Truth: In the information overloaded society, everyone wants to obtain only authoritative intelligence and reliable information. There is no more important quality than the real truth, and we live in a time where people are more able to demand it than ever. This is not, however, the same thing as honesty. Sharing the truth is not the same thing as sharing facts. Truth is something more fundamental than just a proof point. In order to be likeable, the most successful people and organizations always find a way to share their truth, and then build on it. For customers who are so used to being lied to and manipulated by advertising, to see a company that is telling the truth and admitting their mistakes is a sensation. For the truth to stand out, the honesty behind it must be unexpected in some way.

Principle of Relevance: The challenge to be relevant requires that you center yourself on the world that someone else already cares about. Relevance is not only about getting someone to care about something; it is getting them to care about it right now. Relevance always has to start with an understanding of what the people you want to influence care most about right now, and why they care about it. Relevance has to start with understanding, and understanding always starts with listening. Without some

insight into what the people you want to influence care about, it will be impossible to find a way to be relevant. For that reason, relevance always has to start with some sort of active listening or way to build understanding.

Principle of Unselfishness: If there is one principle that seems dramatically hard to consistently do, it is behaving in an unselfish way. When an unselfish act starts, it comes from a basis of human empathy. An act becomes unselfish only without the expectation of a “karmic kickback” or end goal of benefitting yourself. People have an inherent ability to be altruistic and this can lead to many positive effects in the world, from sharing experiences to helping others to collecting the world’s knowledge together into a vast encyclopedia of human knowledge.

Principle of Simplicity: Simplicity is the force that has powered the Apple brand to success and also driven politicians to win elections and world-changing social movements to build a following. Simplicity could trump everything else. Simplicity, in other words, could be the ultimate competitive advantage. Complexity can sometimes be described as a good or necessary thing. Usually, it isn’t. When you can simplify an idea or a product or a service, it becomes easier to remember, better to do, and more clear overall. As a result, simplicity can help lead to more trust.

Principle of Timing: Timing is very important because only at certain times public and audiences will be receptive to change and new ideas. Some of the greatest ideas in human history have succeeded or failed based entirely on timing. Timing can be the secret ingredient that explains unexpected success, or unexpected failure. Sometimes having the right timing means taking the chance when it comes. A big part of timing has to do with relating something to the world around it. This is the same principle at the heart of effective PR efforts when a message releases to stories that are already being written on a topic. Timing is an important factor of success in PR.

3. Precedents of Political Likeability

In politics, when reason and emotion collide, emotion wins invariably. If you want to gain voters hearts and minds, you have to start with the heart, otherwise they aren’t going to care much what’s on your mind. Some examples are as follows⁶.

Bill Clinton was widely rated more likeable than Bob

Dole and he went on late-night television to play his saxophone to prove it. George W. Bush, on a person level, was rated more likeable than the stiff Al Gore during the 2000 election. Voters said they would much rather have a beer with “Dubya” than with Gore (yes, they have a poll that actually asked this question). Barack Obama passed his likeability test in his first election against John Mc Cain in part thanks to a resounding endorsement from Oprah and a televised one-on-one game of basketball with Stuart Scott from ESPN.

In South Korea, many research agencies and public opinion poll investigate the likeability of candidates for President and Local government head ahead of the election. “Research View”, Public Opinion Poll Agency, carried out a survey in May 2014 for five Korean Presidents. The result showed that the political likeability was related to the crisis- management ability. “Global Research” conducted a survey on the level of awareness and likeability for four Seoul Mayor Candidates in March 2014. And the result of survey revealed that the candidate having the high level of likeability has been elected as Seoul Mayor. In particular, Seoul citizens preferred ordinary people oriented candidate (43.6%) to well-versed candidate in economy (25.2%), and one with a wide range of experience in administration (13.3%).

4. Research Questions and Results of Survey

4.1 Research Questions and Methods

The primary goal of this study is to find the likeability factors which can evaluate the level of political likeability in South Korea. The following three research questions are key driving elements of this study: (1) What is the likeability factor having great effect on the election of President and Local government head? (2) What are the differences in the likeability factors for Presidential candidate, Local government chief Candidate and work partners? (3) What is the likeability index which could estimate the level of political likeability?

To address these questions, a survey was practiced from 20 to 31 October 2014. The survey was used to verify the likeability factors according to survey targets. In addition, the survey method was used to make a likeability index. The likeability factors were investigated by pretest and classified according to priority by 9 factors as follows: reliability, communication competence, clean integrity,

problem-solving ability, consideration, resemblance, cheerfulness, relevance and appearance.

The survey was conducted for 300 students majoring in media and communication at a university in Southwest Korea. There were 300 completed questionnaires, from 164 female (52.5%) and 136 male (47.5%) respondents (plural response)⁶.

4.2 Results of Survey

The result shows that likeability factors depend on who it is. The respondents of survey were arranged in order of priority as shown. (Ref. Table 1)

- For work partner: communication competence (16.3%), reliability (15.4%), clean integrity (14.6%), problem-solving ability (13.0%), consideration (11.4%), resemblance (10.6%), cheerfulness (9.8%), appearance (4.9%) and relevance (4.1%).

- For Korean politician: reliability (20.2%), clean integrity (17.3%), communication competence (16.9%), problem-solving ability (16.4%), consideration (10.7%), resemblance (9.9%), relevance (4.1%), appearance (2.9%) and cheerfulness (1.7%).

In particular, the 5 powerful factors of likeability for Korean politicians were classified according to priority by reliability (20.2%), clean integrity (17.3%), communication competence (16.9%), problem-solving ability (16.4%), and consideration (10.7%). While, the 5 powerful factors of likeability for work partner were similar to those of likeability for politicians: communication competence (16.3%), reliability (15.4%), clean integrity (14.6%), problem-solving ability (13.0%), and consideration (11.4%).

Meanwhile, when faced with a choice between a competence and a clean integrity as a work partner's char-

Table 1. Preference of likeability factors (unit: %)

| Ranking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Total |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| Work | c.co | relia | c.in | psa | cons | Res | cheerf | app | relev | |
| Partner | 16.3% | 15.4% | 14.6% | 13.0% | 11.4% | 10.6% | 9.8% | 4.9% | 4.1% | 100% |
| Politician | relia | c.in | c.co | psa | cons | Res | relev | app | cheerf | |
| | 20.2% | 17.3% | 16.9% | 16.4% | 10.7% | 9.9% | 4.1% | 2.9% | 1.7% | 100% |

<abbreviation remarks> c.co=communication competence, relia=reliability, c.in=clean integrity, psa=problem-solving ability, cons=consideration, res=resemblance, cheerf=cheerfulness, app= appearance, relev= relevance.

Table 2. Option when faced with a choice between two factors (unit: %)

| Contents/ | Targets | Work partner | Politicians |
|------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| I'd like to choose | Agreed | 46.2% | 61.5% |
| Clean integrity rather | Don't know | 28.2% | 17.9% |
| Than ability | Disagreed | 25.6% | 20.5% |
| I'd like to choose | Agreed | 17.9% | 12.8% |
| Cheerfulness rather | Don't know | 25.6% | 29.5% |
| Than ability | Disagreed | 56.4% | 57.7% |

acteristics, people opted for clean integrity (46.2%) over ability (25.6%). And in same condition, same result for politicians: for clean integrity (61.5%) over ability (21.5%). But, when faced with a choice between competence and cheerfulness as a co-worker's characteristic, people opted for ability (56.4%) over cheerfulness (17.9%). And for ability (57.7%) over cheerfulness (12.8%) as a politician's characteristic. (Ref. Table 2)

In conclusion, the result of the survey revealed that the three powerful factors of likeability for Presidential candidate are reliability (19.5%), communication competence (17.2%) and problem-solving ability (17.2%). While, the three powerful factors of likeability for Local government chief candidate are reliability (20.0%), clean integrity (17.5%) and problem-solving ability (16.7%). And the powerful likeability factors for work partner are communication competence (16.3%), reliability (15.4%) and clean integrity (14.6%).

In addition, this study indicates that the likeability index for Korean politicians should be estimated according to priority by 6 factors which had more than 9.9 percents among the likeability factors: reliability, clean integrity, communication competence, problem-solving ability, consideration and resemblance.

5. Conclusion

This study was based on the problems of public relations which have exerted a strong influence on the image and election of Korean politicians. In order to be more believable and trusted, politicians need to be more likeable for their voters. A study by Casciaro and Lobo showed that most people choose to work with the lovable fool rather than the competent jerk. But most Korean preferred their work partner with communication competence, reliability and clean integrity rather than relevance and good appearance. In specific, they chose reliability, communication competence, and problem-solving ability as likeability factors for Korean politicians.

The survey results of this study pointed out six facts as follows⁶. First, the most important factor of likeability for politicians in South Korea is reliability, not problem-solving ability which is the third likeability factor. Second, the relevance, cheerfulness and appearance are not the impor-

tant likeability factors for politicians. Third, for women, the clean integrity and consideration are more important than the problem-solving ability to choose preferable politicians. Fourth, a direction and strategies to enhance the likeability for politicians in South Korea should be about increasing the likeability factors by decreasing the dislike. In other words, it is necessary to increase the reliability, clean integrity, communication competence, problem-solving ability, and consideration in order to enhance the likeability for politicians. Fifth, the likeability is very competitive advantage for politicians in South Korea. Sixth, the likeability is considered as important motivation of human relations and public relations.

In conclusion, this study indicates that the political likeability is related to reliability, problem-solving ability, communication competence, clean integrity, relevance, appearance, cheerfulness, etc. And the likeability index for Korean politicians should be estimated by the factors of reliability, clean integrity, problem-solving ability, communication competence. It would ultimately contribute to a successful political election and enhancement of politicians' image.

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