

## THE APPLICATION OF THE ELABORATION-LIKELIHOOD MODEL IN EXPLAINING THE PERSUASIVE EFFECTS OF MEDIA

The Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM) was proposed by **Petty & Cacciopo (1981)**. According to them, the most persuasive kind of message has the following characteristics:

- It grabs our **attention**
- It deals with a topic we care about (we are **highly motivated** to attend to it)
- It is pitched at the right level (we can **understand it**)
- It is **convincing** and clearly and strongly argued

The reason this kind of message is persuasive is because *provided we* have the **time** and **opportunity**, we will process it thoughtfully and carefully. That is, there is a high *likelihood* of us *elaborating* it. This is called **Central Route Processing (CRP)**, and is also known as the 'thoughtful' route to persuasion. It is argued that this form of processing leads to long-lasting effects, and is more resistant to counter-persuasion.

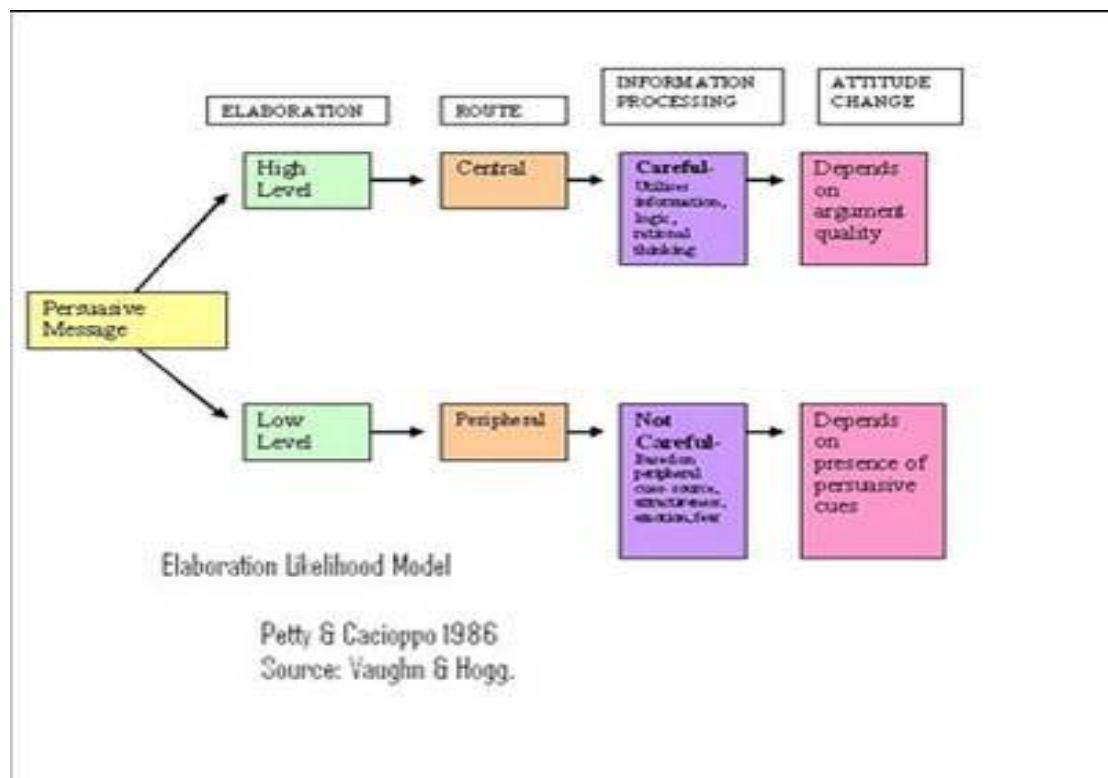
Note that if we start to process a message using the Central Route, (d) is vital. If a weak argument is presented, then all the good work done in (a), (b), and (c) is undone, and the message is rejected completely (this is called a **boomerang effect**). Note also that in CRP, **source factors** are not deemed to be relevant (remember that they are in the Hovland-Yale model). In other words, it doesn't matter *who* is attempting to persuade us.

However, with an awful lot of attempts to persuade us, we simply aren't interested in the message because we consider it to be trivial and unimportant. Advertisers are well aware that we will process some of their messages only in a superficial way, and that there is a very low likelihood of us elaborating them.

So, some messages attempt to persuade us using 'peripheral' cues, and this leads to **Peripheral Route Processing (PRP)**. Some of the most commonly used peripheral cues include:

- Using a **physically attractive/likeable** source to promote a product: We are more likely to say 'yes' to someone we find attractive or like - this is why **celebrities** are often used to endorse products
- Using a **high credibility** source: We are much more willing to follow the lead of someone who is a legitimately constituted expert or authority
- Presenting the message in a **uplifting** way: We are more likely to be persuaded if we are in a good mood than a bad mood
- Suggesting that a product is either **scarce** or only available for a **limited time**: Because we can't have something if it runs out, we want it more
- Suggesting to us that lots of other people have bought the product (**consensus**): We are more willing to buy a product if we have information that other people have bought it. This is why advertisers use phrases like 'largest selling' and 'fastest growing'

Although this type of processing can produce attitude change, it is argued that it is not long-lasting and shows less resistance to counter-persuasion.



## Evaluation of the Elaboration-Likelihood Model

The Hovland-Yale model assumes that people *always* think carefully about attempts to persuade them. However, Petty and Cacioppo argue that whilst we *sometimes* think carefully about attempts to persuade us, there are many occasions on which we don't, and we are passive rather than active information processors (we are '**cognitive misers**'). Therefore, the ELM identifies **motivation** and **ability** as important in determining the kind of processing that a message will produce. Thus, the model can explain why the same message may be persuasive for one person but not for another.

The model is also supported by research findings. For example, **Cacioppo & Petty (1982)** developed the **Need For Cognition scale (NFC)** which measures the degree to which people enjoy thinking about information they receive and analysing problems. Some people search for information to help them better understand the world (**High NFC**), whereas others rely primarily on the opinions of credible others when making their decisions (**Low NFC**).

Since CRP requires thoughtful and careful processing of information, the ELM would predict that people with High NFC would be more influenced by central route messages than people with Low NFC. **Bakker (1999)** tested this using messages about safe sex to a sample of adolescents. For High NFC participants, a written message was more effective in bringing about attitude change, whereas for Low NFC participants a cartoon was more effective.

In another study, **Vidrine, et al. (2007)** asked participants to evaluate a fact-based smoking risk pamphlet (Central Route) or an emotion-based pamphlet (Peripheral Route). The fact-based pamphlet produced the greatest increase in risk perception in High NFC participants whereas the emotion-based pamphlet produced the greatest change in Low NFC participants. Research also supports the idea that Central Route processing leads to long-lasting effects, and is more resistant to counter-persuasion (Chaiken, 1980).

One weakness of the ELM model is that CRP and PRP can occur simultaneously, and overlap with one another. When evaluating a message we may think deeply about its content, and simultaneously be thinking that the speaker is a real expert in their field who is very likeable. Therefore CRP and PRP are not mutually exclusive, and if this is the case the perfect message would be one which contained all the elements that encourage both CRP and PRP.