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Peripheral route persuasion definition

Two Routes to Persuasion Petty and Cacioppo (1986a, 1986b) state that there are two paths to persuasion: central and peripheral. The central path to persuasion consists of thoughtful consideration of arguments (ideas, content) in the communication. When a receiver does central processing, he or she is an active participant in the process of persuasion. Central processing has two prerequisites: It can only occur when the recipient has both motivation and ability to think about the message and its subject. If the listener doesn't care about the subject of compelling messages, he or she will almost certainly lack the motivation to do central processing. On the other hand, if the listener is distracted or has difficulty understanding the message, he or she will lack the ability to do central processing. The peripheral path to persuasion occurs when the listener decides whether to agree with the message based on other clues besides the strength of arguments or ideas in the message. For example, a listener may decide to agree with a message because the source appears to be an expert, or is attractive. The peripheral path also occurs when a listener is persuaded because he or she notices that a message has many arguments – but lacks the ability or motivation to think about them individually. In other words, peripheral clues, like source expertise (credibility) or many arguments in a message, are a shortcut. I don't want or can't think carefully about the ideas in this compelling message, but it's a fair gamble to go ahead agreeing with whether the message of the source seems to be knowledgeable or whether there are many arguments in support of the message. This path occurs when the auditor cannot or does not want to give much thought to the message. Peripheral processing receivers are more passive than those that do central processing. Why does it matter which way an audience member takes when they hear or watch or read a compelling message? An important prediction of ELM is that attitudes that change through the central path to persuasion will have different effects than attitudes change via the peripheral path. Petty and Cacioppo explain that changes in attitude resulting mainly from the processing of query relevant arguments (central path) will show greater temporal endurance, greater prediction of behavior, and greater resistance to rebuttal than attitude changes due mainly to peripheral cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, p. 21). It should be obvious that these are important outcomes: Certainly in most cases, persuaders would very much like to know how to make attitude change anymore, have a greater influence on behavior, and be more resistant to change. However, even if central processing has advantages, the recipients do not always oblige us by having the motivation and to think about the message. We need to understand both of these processes of persuasion because both of them occur in recipients. Page 2 Engagement and cognitive responses Several factors influence the type of thoughts that recipients are likely to have. Given elm's assumption that thoughts create persuasion, these factors must therefore influence attitude change. First, the commitment and ability affects the amount of thoughts produced. The more a listener is involved in the topic – the more that topic is prominent, relevant, or important to the listener – the more motivation that the listener needs to think about the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). This makes sense: If a message is about a topic that is important to us, we have a reason (motivation) to pay attention to it and reflect on the ideas in that message. Of course, the less commitment to the subject, the less motivation to think about a message. However, motivation is not enough to ensure that central processing will take place. Recipients must also have the ability to think about the message. If they are distracted, or too tired, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or sick, they will not be able to think carefully about a message. Moreover, if a message is difficult to understand (full of unfamiliar terms, confusing, spoken too fast, or with a thick accent), central processing is unlikely. But having thoughts is not enough for persuasion to occur. Thinking unfavorable thoughts, disagreeing with the message, will not cause change of attitude. One way to encourage favorable thoughts is to stick with your audience. If an audience likes a particular presidential candidate (or type of car, or toothpaste), messages that support that candidate (or that car or that brand of toothpaste) are more likely to create favorable thoughts. Messages for another candidate (or car or toothpaste) are more likely to create unfavorable thoughts. But speakers usually can't swap their subject to match the audience's likes. You are employed to persuade people to vote for a candidate (or buy a health care or a toothpaste). Page 3 Arguments Quality Another factor that affects the type of thoughts recipients have is argument quality or strength. Strong arguments have consistently existed to create more favorable thoughts, and fewer unfavorable thoughts, than weak arguments (Benoit, 1987; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Strong arguments, thus, have been found to be more compelling than weak (Benoit, 1987; Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). In addition, the influence of argument quality is greater on involving than non-participatory topics (Andrews & Shimp, 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). So, persuaders can increase the likelihood that an audience will have favorable thoughts by working hard to include strong, high-quality arguments in compelling messages. Quantity Subjects exposed to a greater number of arguments should produce more favorable cognitive responses than subjects exposed to fewer arguments. Calder, Insko, and Yandell (1974) found that the number of arguments affects cognitive reactions. In addition, several studies have reported that messages with more arguments create more change of attitude than those with fewer arguments (Calder, Insko, & Yandell, 1974; Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Argument quantity, unlike argument quality or strength, is believed to be a peripheral cue. When recipients notice that a message has a large number of arguments, they tend to accept the message. Page 5 Source Factors An important factor in persuasion is the type of source of a message. I will discuss three source factors: expertise, reliability and attractiveness. In general, of course, we are more likely to accept the statements of an expert than a non-expert. The cognitive response model assumes that when accountants believe that the source of a message is an expert, they have less motivation to review (develop counterarguments to) messages attributed to that source. Fewer unfavorable thoughts, in turn, should result in more change of attitude (with opposite messages). Recipients, on the other hand, should be more motivated to think critically about messages from apparently non-expert sources and therefore produce more counter-arguments, reducing persuasion from such sources (see Benoit, 1991; Gillig & Greenwald, 1974; Hass, 1981; Perloff & Brock, 1980). Thus, expert sources can reduce the number of unfavorable thoughts that we defer to the knowledge we assume an expert possesses. Research also shows that expertise affects persuasion only if the source is identified before the announcement, suggesting that credibility affects persuasion by changing message processing or drafting (O'Keefe, 1987; Ward & McGinnies, 1974). Research found that when an audience was told the source was an expert after listening to the message, that information did not increase persuasion. Only if an expert source is identified before a message does expertise help persuasion. Similarly, some recipients were told that the source was not an expert after the announcement. It didn't diminish the persuasion. But when listeners were told that the source was a non-expert before the announcement, it did reduce persuasion. This strongly suggests that knowledge that the source is an expert (or a non-expert) affects how we listen to a message. Source expertise works by influencing our cognitive responses to the message. By the time the message is over, we've already had our cognitive reactions, and knowledge of the source's expertise, or lack of expertise, is too late to make a difference. In other words, knowing that the source is an expert reduces our motivation to engage in central Expertise reassures us, and we do not believe that we need to be critical listeners. However, the knowledge that the source is a non-expert increases our motivation to engage in central processing. We are suspicious and more likely to carefully review messages from non-experts. Not surprisingly, research finds that credibility appeals, which are often peripheral rather than central clues, are more likely to influence attitude change on uninvolved than involving subjects (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981; Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). Highly engaged listeners really care about the subject. The subject of the communication is really important to them. Therefore, highly involved recipients are likely to think carefully about the message no matter who it is from. Knowledge that the source is an expert is unlikely to reduce the motivation of a very committed listener. Thus, like other peripheral clues, source expertise is likely to have more influence on the uninvolved than involved recipients. Another aspect of sources is their credibility. Some sources seem to be biased while others are objective. A spokesman for the NRA is likely to appear biased on the issue of gun control. This does not mean that he or she is sure to lie or distort facts. But of course we expect most individuals will put their best foot forward, focusing on the ideas that help them rather than on the ideas that hurt them. There is also a third kind of source called reluctant testimony, where a source provides evidence against his own interest. One study told some subjects that a prosecutor was in favor of harsher sentences for criminals. Other subjects were told that a prosecutor was in favor of lighter sentences. We expect most prosecutors to be strict, so the first case (prosecutor for harsher sentences) is an example of biased testimony, while the second case (the prosecutor for lighter sentences) is an example of reluctant testimony. Benoit and Kennedy (1999) made certain that subjects perceived the expertise of these sources to be equal, and then varied whether they were considered biased, objective or reluctant. Biased sources were seen as less reliable and produced more unfavorable and fewer favorable thoughts. They were also less convincing. Both objective and reluctant sources were regarded as more reliable (than biased), produced fewer unfavorable and more favorable thoughts, and were more persuasive. There was no difference between objective and reluctant sources. They were equally effective in this study. Here, reliability does not seem to affect motivation, as there was no difference in the total number of thoughts between these three types of sources. Rather, credibility seems to affect the nature of the thoughts. The sources that listeners trusted (objective and reluctant) more favorable and fewer unfavorable thoughts; the source that recipients did not trust (biased) produced fewer favorable and more unfavorable thoughts. So, persuaders would be wise to try to avoid appearing biased and unreliable. Another feature of sources is their attractiveness. Research has shown that physically attractive sources are compelling (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Eagly & Chaiken, 1975; Shavitt, Swan, Lowrey, & Wanke, 1994). Attractiveness should generally act as a peripheral cue. For example, Mills and Harvey (1972) report that, unlike expert sources, attractive sources are as compelling when identified after as before the announcement. Furthermore, Benoit (1987) found that attractive sources did not give rise to any significant change of attitude in relation to an involving substance. Thus, attractiveness effects, like expertise and arguments variety of effects, should be more prominent on the uninvolved than embracing topics. Page 6 Evaluation of ELM ELM is a very powerful theory of persuasion. It recognizes that sometimes the audience is active, thinking about the messages and the arguments in these messages. But ELM also realizes that at other times recipients are passive, persuaded by the peripheral path. ELM identifies two easily understandable conditions that determine whether the listener does central or peripheral processing: Central processing requires that recipients have both the ability and motivation to think about a message. ELM identifies several factors that affect the kind of thoughts listeners are likely to have: engagement, quality arguments, quantity arguments, credibility. Thus, conceptually this is a very good theory of persuasion. The main weakness of this theory is the metaphor it picked. Petty and Cacioppo state that there are two paths to persuasion, central and peripheral. But if someone says, there are two routes you can take from Los Angeles to San Diego: I-5 or I-15, you'd take one or the other – but not both in the same trip. But central and peripheral are not really two choices but the end points of a continuum. A listener can think more thoughts (and be closer to the central end of the continuum) or fewer thoughts (and be closer to the peripheral end). It's not an either/or choice, as the metaphor two paths suggests. In fact, even peripheral processing requires some thoughts. The receiver must notice, for example, this persuader seems to be an expert and then think if an expert says so, it is probably true for peripheral processing to take place. So, Petty and Cacioppo inadvertently created the impression that listeners do either central or peripheral processing, but not both, of the metaphor they chose to explain their theory. Experimental research has provided great experimental support to ELM, quoted some of this research above. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) provide a more global summary of the research related to ELM. The assumption that systematic or central road processing requires motivation and ability has been documented in many studies, using a variety of motivational and ability variables: Compelling argumentation is a more important determinant of persuasion when recipients are motivated and able to process attitude-relevant information than when they are not. There is also significant empirical support for the hypothesis of these models that heuristic or peripheral cues exert a significant compelling impact when motivation or ability to argument processing is low, but little impact when motivation and ability is high (p. 333). Thus, there is a lot of research that supports the ELM strategy for persuasion and attitude change. Page 7: arguments that are strong, compelling, powerful, powerful, compelling arguments quantity: number of arguments in a message biased testimony: a message from a source that speaks in favor of his or her own vested interests central path to persuasion: occurs when the recipient thinks of the content or arguments of a message; requires both ability and motivation to think about the message cognitive, cognition: thoughts or ideas preparation: thoughts favorable thoughts: ideas that agree with the point of a persuasive message involving the subject: the message relates to a topic that is important to the recipient objective sources: sources that have no self-interest in the subject of the message peripheral path to persuasion: occurs when the recipient agrees with a message due to a shortcut or cue (credible source; large number of arguments; arises when the recipient lacks the ability or motivation to think about the message (or both) reluctant testimonies: a message from a source that speaks against his or her own vested interests unfavorable thoughts: ideas that disagree with the point of a message of non-questionable subject: the message relates to a topic that is not important to the recipient Page 8ReferencesAndrews, J. 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