Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Rationale: This lesson orients students to the elaboration likelihood model and its use in persuasion research

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

- Contrast the central and the peripheral information processing routes
- Identify the process and factors that influence the use of central vs. peripheral route processing
- Contrast the most effective message features in the central and the peripheral route
- Identify situations central vs. peripheral route persuasive appeals are more effective

{video}

No visual aid was used for this lesson.

Outline of the Lesson

I. Review of previous session's content
II. Lesson opening:
    A. People don't necessarily pay attention to (or think about) good messages.
    B. How do we know if our audience is going to process our message?
    C. What determines whether they think about the arguments in a message just a little bit or a whole lot?
    D. How do we know when we should use flashy "image"-based appeals and when we should use serious evidence for what we're arguing?
III. Overview
    A. The elements of the Elaboration Likelihood Model.
    B. The two cognitive routes we use to process messages.
    C. Selecting information processing methods.
    D. Matching persuasive appeals to the situation using the Elaboration Likelihood model.
    E. Key findings about the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

Body

I. The elements of the Elaboration Likelihood Model.
    A. Developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1986.
    B. The model that suggests we process persuasive messages in two different ways:
        1. Central route
        2. Peripheral route
    C. We may use both simultaneously, but we tend to favor one route over another depending on a number of factors.
        1. Elaboration: Issue-relevant thinking, Cognitive attention.
        2. Likelihood: The probability that you will spend time thinking about the

object of the persuasive attempt.
3. Central Route of persuasion: Involves high elaboration (in other words, lots of issue-relevant thinking.)
4. Peripheral route of persuasion: Involves low elaboration (in other words, little rational thought is used.)

II. The two cognitive routes we use to process messages.
    A. The Central Route to Persuasion (careful thought)
        1. When elaboration is high, we pay a great deal of attention to message arguments and we think about lots of things that might be relevant to the message.
        2. Central route is used when:
            a. The receiver's degree of involvement is high.
                ▪ Involvement: Relevance to the receiver. Perception that issue has a high impact on receiver. High level of commitment/investment.
            b. There are multiple sources giving multiple messages.
            c. The receiver has a high cognitive capacity.
        3. Even if we can get people to elaborate, there is no guarantee that they will LIKE the message. To maximize positive feelings toward your message:
            a. Include proattitudinal arguments (things the audience already agrees with).
            b. Use language that your audience understands (translate technical terms into appropriate language for your target). If they don't understand you, they'll use the peripheral route.
            c. Use multiple strong arguments with good evidence (quality + quantity).
    B. The Peripheral Route to Persuasion (quick thought)
        1. When elaboration is low, receivers use cognitive shortcuts called heuristics (also called "heuristic cues") to decide whether or not to comply.
        2. Peripheral route is used when:
            a. The receiver's degree of involvement is low.
            b. There is a single source for information. (This creates a greater reliance on heuristic cues.)
            c. The receiver has lower cognitive capacity.
                ▪ Highly distracted, cognitively overloaded, lower in need for cognition.
            d. Types of heuristics used to process messages when using the peripheral route:
                ▪ Source is high in credibility
                ▪ Attractive, likable source
                ▪ Consensus among other receivers of the message
                ▪ Number of arguments (or length of message) rather than content
                ▪ Use of emotion to persuade
                ▪ The information used in peripheral processing is inherently easier for our brains to process (than facts, evidence, reasoning).

III. Selecting information processing methods.
    A. Our choice of route depends on the situation:
        1. Motivation (involvement, etc.)
        2. Ability (knowledge, etc.)
    B. High motivation and high ability tends to result in central route processing.
    C. When one of these is missing, we tend to use peripheral route processing.
IV. Matching persuasive appeals to the situation using the Elaboration Likelihood model.
    A. Some products/services are not as well suited to messages that would rely on central route processing.
        1. Cosmetics/personal grooming products
        2. Clothes, accessories (image-based products)
        3. Hiring seasonal/temporary hourly workers
    B. On the other hand, some products are not as well suited to messages that would rely on peripheral route processing.
        1. Real estate, computers, furniture (or hiring a decorator)
        2. Hiring a CEO
    C. Argument strength
        1. Argument strength is in the eye of the audience.
        2. What YOU think is a strong argument is completely irrelevant.
    D. You have to know your audience well in order to create "strong" arguments.
        1. Cognitive capacity
            a. Audience members' cognitive capacity will affect how they process a message.
            b. Cognitive capacity is a person's ability to think about arguments.
            c. Need for Cognition (NFC) is a person's interest in engaging in effortful thinking.
            d. Cognitive capacity is also affected by how much distraction is in the environment and how much stress a person is under.
            e. And sometimes, we just feel cognitively lazy. Our brains get tired if we've exerted a lot of effort recently.
V. Some Key Findings
    A. Attitudes formed via central processing are more persistent and durable than attitudes formed via peripheral processing.
    B. Increasing receivers' perceived involvement in an issue can promote central processing.

Conclusion

I. Review
    A. The elements of the Elaboration Likelihood Model.
    B. The two cognitive routes we use to process messages.
    C. Selecting information processing methods.
    D. Matching persuasive appeals to the situation using the Elaboration Likelihood model.
    E. Key findings about the Elaboration Likelihood Model.
II. Learning activity
III. Lesson closing

References

Cacioppo, J. T., Petty, R. E., Feinstein, J. A., & Jarvis, W. B. G. (1996). Dispositional differences in cognitive motivation: The life and times of individuals varying in need for cognition. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*(2), 197–253. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.2.197

Gass, R. H., & Seiter, J. S. (2014). *Persuasion: Social influence and compliance gaining* (5th ed.) Pearson.

Learning Activity

Complete one of these two class activity options.

In the Classroom

1. Complete the Need for Cognition scale (Cacciopo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996)
2. L06-elaboration-likelihood-model-activity.pdf
3. Score your responses. Score will be between 18 and 90.
4. Share the results of your discussion with the class.
   1. Average score in one large study of students was 58. How do you compare to this average?

Remote

1. Download this document: L06-elaboration-likelihood-model-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