

Elaboration Likelihood Model

Developed by Petty & Cacioppo (1986)

Despite its name, this is actually a useful theory about persuasion and the heuristics of decision making. Elaboration is another term for the amount of rational thought that goes into a decision or attitude change.



They posit an elaboration continuum, the extremes of which are:

Low Elaboration / Emotional Decision

The Peripheral Route to persuasion

When there is less time
When the decision is less important
When the person is in a good mood

A more cursory and **emotional** decision-making process, using superficial qualities and pre-existing ideas.

High Elaboration /high rational thought

The Central Route to persuasion

When the person is motivated AND able to pay attention
When in a bad mood or feeling negative

Conscious evaluation of alternatives, using arguments for and against

The Peripheral route

"Rather than examining issue-relevant arguments, people examine the message quickly or focus on simple cues to help them decide whether to accept the position advocated in the message. Factors that are peripheral to message arguments carry the day. These can include a communicator's physical appeal, glib speaking style, or pleasant association between the message and music playing in the background. When processing peripherally, people invariably rely on simple decision-making rules or 'heuristics'. For example, an individual may invoke the heuristic that 'experts are to be believed', and for this reason (and this reason only) accept the speaker's recommendation." (Perlof, 2003). :

The Central Route

"The central route is characterised by considerable cognitive elaboration. It occurs when individuals focus in depth on the central features of the issue, person, or message. When people process information centrally, they carefully evaluate message arguments, ponder implications of the communicator's ideas, and relate information to their own knowledge and values." (Perlof, 2003).

If you are looking at attitude change, it will be deeper and more effective via the central route. As you might expect attitude change via the peripheral route is much more open to counter-persuasion as it has not been internalised.

People are more motivated to use the central route when the issue has personal relevance to them, so this is a good strategy to lead them into that way of thinking. And there are some people that have this route as a general preference in thinking style.

Clearly this has **major implications in studying consumer decision-making**; marketers often assemble a raft of logical arguments while the consumer can't be bothered and picks the one that has the pretty leaf floating down.

It also has **implications for research method** – somewhat counter-intuitive. The model says that that people in a bad mood will start to use the more rational heuristic – sometimes over-rational and picky, which will not be a useful strategy if you are researching something that has a high emotional component. It is therefore important to have good mood management skills and recognise when to use them.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Perloff R. M. (2003) *The dynamics of persuasion*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates