CHAPTER 16

Socio-psychological tradition

Elaboration Likelihood Model

of Richard Petty & John Cacioppo

Like a number of women whose children are out of the home, Rita Francisco has gone back to college. Her program isn't an aimless sampling of classes to fill empty hours—she has enrolled in every course that will help her become a more persuasive advocate. Rita is a woman on a mission.

Rita's teenage daughter was killed when the car she was riding in smashed into a stone wall. After drinking three cans of beer at a party, the girl's 18-year-old boyfriend lost control on a curve while driving 80 miles per hour. Rita's son walks with a permanent limp as a result of injuries sustained when a high school girl plowed through the parking lot of a 7-Eleven on a Friday night. When the county prosecutor obtained a DUI (driving under the influence) conviction, it only fueled Rita's resolve to get young drinking drivers off the road. She has become active with Mothers Against Drunk Driving and works to convince anyone who will listen that zero-tolerance laws, which make it illegal for drivers under the age of 21 to have *any* measurable amount of alcohol in their system, should be strictly enforced. Rita also wants to persuade others that young adults caught driving with more than 0.02 percent blood alcohol content should automatically lose their driver's licenses until they are 21.

This is a tough sell on most college campuses. While her classmates can appreciate the tragic reasons underlying her fervor, few subscribe to what they believe is a drastic solution. As a nontraditional, older student, Rita realizes that her younger classmates could easily dismiss her campaign as the ranting of a hysterical parent. She's determined to develop the most effective persuasive strategy possible and wonders if she would have the most success by presenting well-reasoned arguments for enforcing zero-tolerance laws. Then again, couldn't she sway students more by lining up highly credible people to endorse her proposal?

THE CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL ROUTES TO PERSUASION

Ohio State psychologist Richard Petty thinks Rita is asking the right questions. He conducted his Ph.D. dissertation study using the topic of teenage driving to test the relative effectiveness of strong-message arguments and high source credibility. He found that the results varied depending on which of two mental routes to attitude change a *listener* happened to use. Petty labeled the two cognitive processes the *central route* and the *peripheral route.* He sees the distinction as helpful in reconciling much of the conflicting data of persuasion research. Along with his University of Chicago colleague John Cacioppo, he launched an intensive program of study to discover the best way for a persuader to activate each route.

Central route
Message elaboration; the path of cognitive processing that involves scrutiny of message content.

The central route involves message elaboration. Elaboration is "the extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant arguments contained in a persuasive communication."[1] In an attempt to process new information rationally, people using the central route carefully scrutinize the ideas, try to figure out if they have true merit, and mull over their implications. Similar to Berger's characterization of strategic message plans, elaboration requires high levels of cognitive effort (see Chapter 10).

Peripheral route
A mental shortcut process that accepts or rejects a message based on irrelevant cues as opposed to actively thinking about the issue.

The peripheral route offers a mental shortcut path to accepting or rejecting a message "without any active thinking about the attributes of the issue or the object of consideration."[2] Instead of doing extensive cognitive work, recipients rely on a variety of cues that allow them to make quick decisions. Robert Cialdini of Arizona State University lists six cues that trigger a "click, whirr" programmed response.[3] These cues allow us to fly the peripheral route on automatic pilot:

1. Reciprocation—"You owe me."
2. Consistency—"We've always done it that way."
3. Social proof—"Everybody's doing it."
4. Liking—"Love me, love my ideas."
5. Authority—"Just because I say so."
6. Scarcity—"Quick, before they're all gone."

Message elaboration
The extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant arguments contained in a persuasive communication.

Figure 16–1 shows a simplified version of Petty and Cacioppo's elaboration likelihood model (ELM) as it applies to Rita's situation. Although their model with its twin-route metaphor seems to suggest two mutually exclusive paths to persuasion, the theorists stress that the central route and the peripheral route are poles on a cognitive processing continuum that shows the degree of mental effort a person exerts when evaluating a message.[4] The elaboration scale at the top represents effortful scrutiny of arguments on the left-hand side and mindless reliance on noncontent cues on the right. Most messages receive middle-ground attention between these poles, but there's always a trade-off. The more Rita's listeners work to discern the merits of strict zero tolerance enforcement, the less they'll be influenced by peripheral factors such as their friends' scoffing laughter at her suggestion. Conversely, the more her hearers are affected by content-irrelevant factors such as Rita's age, accent, or appearance, the less they will be affected by her ideas. We'll work down the model one level at a time in order to understand Petty and Cacioppo's predictions about the likelihood of Rita's message being scrutinized by students at her college.

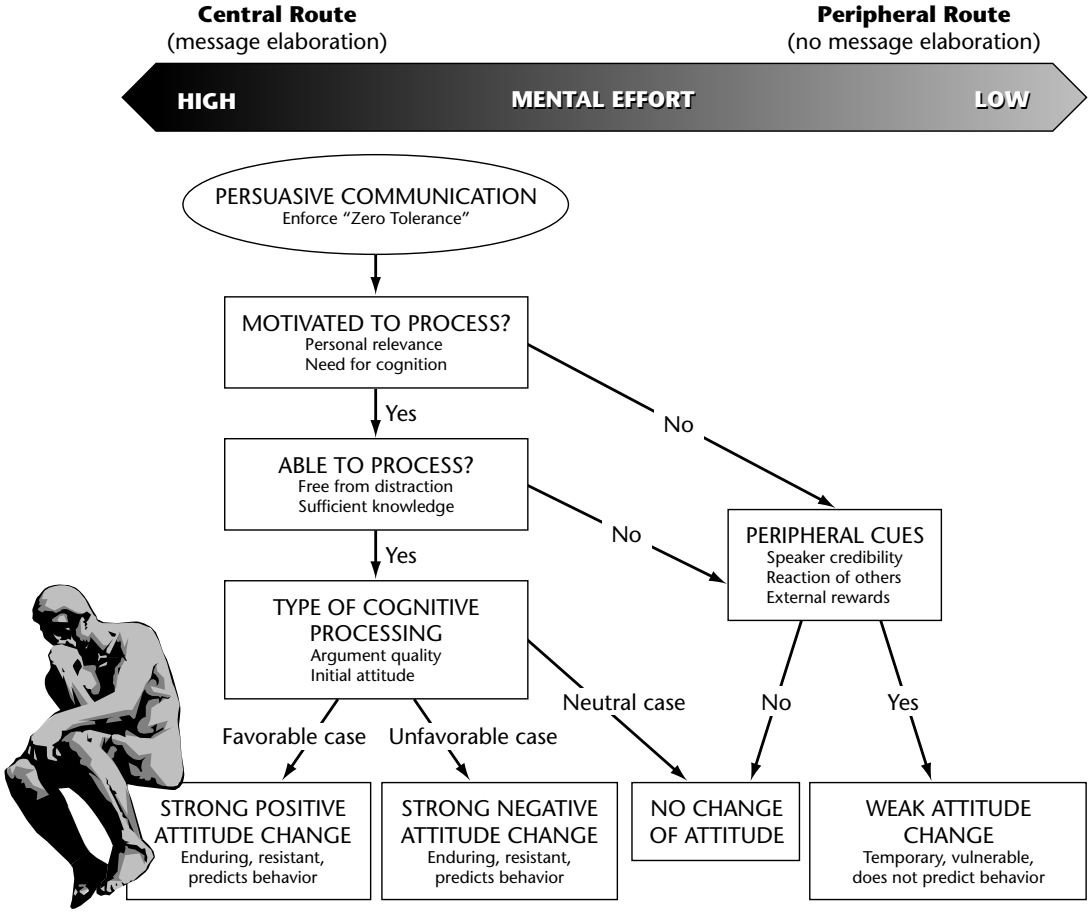

FIGURE 16–1 The Elaboration Likelihood Model

Adapted from Petty and Cacioppo, "The Elaboration Likelihood Model: Current Status and Controversies"

MOTIVATION FOR ELABORATION: IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

Petty and Cacioppo assume that people are motivated to hold correct attitudes. The authors admit that we aren't always logical, but they think we make a good effort not to kid ourselves in our search for truth. We want to maintain reasonable positions.

But a person can examine only a limited number of ideas. We are exposed to so many persuasive messages that we would experience a tremendous information overload if we tried to interact with every variant idea we heard or read about. The only way to solve this problem is by being "lazy" toward most issues in life. Petty and Cacioppo claim we have a large-mesh mental filter that allows items we regard as less important to flow through without being processed very carefully. But statements about things that are personally relevant get trapped and tested. In the terminology of social judgment theory (see Chapter 15), we're motivated to elaborate only ideas with which we are highly ego-involved.

There are few things in life more important to young Americans than the right to drive. A license is the closest thing our society has to an adolescent rite

of passage; for some it is a passport to freedom. It seems unlikely, therefore, that students would regard Rita's zero-tolerance proposal as trivial. Yet threatening the loss of license may have less personal relevance to students who don't drink, or to those who already make sure they don't drive when they drink. And if students over 21 aren't worried about who's driving on the road, they too may feel that Rita's proposal has little to do with them. So ELM's authors would regard teenage students who drive after drinking a few beers as especially motivated to grapple with arguments about automatic driver's license suspension.

Petty and Cacioppo maintain that as long as people have a personal stake in accepting or rejecting an idea, they will be much more influenced by what a message says than by the characteristics of the person who says it. But when a topic is no longer relevant, it gets sidetracked to the periphery of the mind, where credibility cues take on greater importance. Without the motivation of personal relevance, there probably will be little elaboration.

The theorists do recognize, however, that some people have a need for cognitive clarity, regardless of the issue. In fact, they've developed a *Need for Cognition Scale* to identify individuals who are most likely to carefully consider message arguments.[5] Four of the items state:

Need for cognition
Desire for cognitive clarity; an enjoyment of thinking through ideas even when they aren't personally relevant.

I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.

I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

Thinking is not my idea of fun.

If you substantially agree with the first two statements and take issue with the last two, Petty and Cacioppo would anticipate that you'd be a person who works through many of the ideas and arguments you hear.

ABILITY FOR ELABORATION: CAN THEY DO IT?

Once people have shown an inclination to think about the content of a message (motivation), the next issue is whether they are *able* to do so. Since Rita's immediate audience consists of young men and women who have duly impressed a college admissions officer with their ability to think, you would imagine that the question of ability would be moot. But issue-relevant thinking (elaboration) takes more than intelligence. It also requires concentration.

Distraction disrupts elaboration. Rita's classmates will be hard-pressed to think about her point of view if it's expressed amid the din of a student union snack bar where you can't hear yourself think. Or perhaps she presents her solution for highway safety when students are trying to concentrate on something else—an upcoming exam, a letter from home, or a mental replay of the winning shot in an intramural basketball game.

Rita may face the same challenge as television advertisers who have only the fleeting attention of viewers. Like them, Rita can use repetition to ensure that her main point comes across, but too much commotion will short-circuit a reasoned consideration of the message, no matter how much repetition is used. In that case, students will use the peripheral route and judge the message by cues that indicate whether Rita is a competent and trustworthy person.

TYPE OF ELABORATION: OBJECTIVE VERSUS BIASED THINKING

As you can see from the downward flow in the central path of their model (Figure 16–1), Petty and Cacioppo believe that motivation and ability strongly increase the likelihood that a message will be elaborated in the minds of listeners. Yet as social judgment theory suggests, they may not process the information in a fair and objective manner. Rita might have the undivided attention of students who care deeply about the right to drive, but discover that they've already built up an organized structure of knowledge concerning the issue.

When Rita claims that the alcohol-related fatal crash rate for young drivers is double that of drivers over 21, a student may counter with the fact that teenagers drive twice as many miles and are therefore just as safe as adults. Whether or not the statistics are true or the argument is valid isn't the issue. The point is that those who have already thought a lot about drinking and driving safety will probably have made up their minds and be biased in the way they process Rita's message.

Biased elaboration
Top-down thinking in which predetermined conclusions color the supporting data.

Petty and Cacioppo refer to biased elaboration as top-down thinking in which a predetermined conclusion colors the supporting data underneath. They contrast this with objective elaboration, or bottom-up thinking, which lets facts speak for themselves. Biased elaboration merely bolsters previous ideas.

Objective elaboration
Bottom-up thinking in which facts are scrutinized without bias; seeking truth wherever it might lead.

Perhaps you've seen a picture of Rodin's famous statue, *The Thinker,* a man sitting with his head propped in one hand. If the thinker already has a set of beliefs to contemplate, Petty and Cacioppo's research shows that additional thought will merely fix them in stone. Rita shouldn't assume that audience elaboration will always help her cause; it depends on whether it's biased elaboration or objective elaboration. It also depends on the quality of her arguments.

ELABORATED ARGUMENTS: STRONG, WEAK, AND NEUTRAL

If Rita manages to win an unbiased hearing from students at her school, Petty and Cacioppo say her cause will rise or fall on the perceived strength of her arguments. The two theorists have no absolute standard for what distinguishes a cogent argument from one that's specious. They simply define a strong message as one that generates favorable thoughts when it's heard and scrutinized.

Strong arguments
Claims that generate favorable thoughts when examined.

Petty and Cacioppo predict that thoughtful consideration of strong arguments will produce major shifts in attitude in the direction desired by the persuader. Suppose Rita states the following:

> National Safety Council statistics show that drivers in the 16–20 age group account for 15 percent of the miles driven in the United States, yet they are responsible for 25 percent of the highway deaths that involve alcohol.

This evidence could give students cause for pause. They may not be comfortable with the facts, but some of them might find the statistics quite compelling and a reason to reconsider their stance. According to ELM, the enhanced thinking of those who respond favorably will cause their change in position to *persist over time*, *resist counterpersuasion*, and *predict future behavior*—the "triple crown" of interpersonal influence.

However, persuasive attempts that are processed through the central route can have dramatically negative effects as well. If, despite her strong convictions, Rita isn't able to come up with a strong argument for changing

the current law, her persuasive attempt might actually backfire. For example, suppose she makes this argument:

> When underage drinkers are arrested for violating zero-tolerance rules of the road, automatic suspension of their licenses would allow the secretary of state's office to reduce its backlog of work. This would give government officials time to check driving records so that they could keep dangerous motorists off the road.

This weak argument is guaranteed to offend the sensibilities of anyone who thinks about it. Rather than compelling listeners to enlist in Rita's cause, it will only give them a reason to oppose her point of view more vigorously. The elaborated idea will cause a boomerang effect that will last over time, defy other efforts to change it, and affect subsequent behavior. These are the same significant effects that the elaborated strong argument produces, but in the opposite direction.

Rita's ideas could produce an ambivalent reaction. Listeners who carefully examine her ideas may end up feeling neither pro nor con toward her evidence. Their neutral or mixed response obviously means that they won't change their attitudes as a result of processing through the central route. For them, thinking about the pros and cons of the issue reinforces their original attitudes, whatever they may be.

PERIPHERAL CUES: AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE OF INFLUENCE

Although the majority of this chapter has dealt with the central cognitive route to attitude change, most messages are processed on the less-effortful peripheral path. Signposts along the way direct the hearer to favor or oppose the persuader's point of view without ever engaging in what Petty and Cacioppo call "issue-relevant thinking."[6] There is no inner dialogue about the merits of the proposal.

As explained earlier, the hearer who uses the peripheral route relies on a variety of cues as an aid in reaching a quick decision. The most obvious cues are tangible rewards linked to agreement with the advocate's position. Food, sex, and money are traditional inducements to change. I once overheard the conclusion of a transaction between a young man and a college senior who was trying to persuade him to donate blood in order to fulfill her class assignment. "Okay, it's agreed," she said. "You give blood for me today, and I'll have you over to my place for dinner tomorrow night." Although this type of social exchange has been going on for centuries, Petty and Cacioppo would still describe it as peripheral. Public compliance to the request for blood? Yes. Private acceptance of its importance? Not likely.

For many students of persuasion, source credibility is the most interesting cue on the peripheral route. Four decades of research confirm that people who are likable and have expertise on the issue in question can have a persuasive impact regardless of what arguments they present. Rita's appearance, manner of talking, and background credentials will speak so loudly that some students won't really hear what she says. Which students? According to Petty and Cacioppo, those students who are unmotivated or unable to scrutinize her message and therefore switch to the peripheral path.

Listeners who believe that Rita's twin tragedies have given her wisdom beyond their own will shift to a position more sympathetic to her point of view. The same holds true for those who see her as pleasant and warm. But there are students who will regard her grammatical mistakes as a sign of ignorance, or they'll be turned off by a maternal manner that reminds them of a lecture from mom. These peripheral route critics will become more skeptical of Rita's position.

"In the interest of streamlining the judicial process, we'll skip the evidence and go directly to sentencing."

Note that attitude change on this outside track can be either positive or negative, but it lacks the robust persistence, invulnerability, or link to behavior that we see in change that comes from message elaboration.

Nicely illustrating the fragility of peripheral route change, Holly wrote the following entry in her application log:

> In his short story "Salvation," Langston Hughes recounts his childhood experience at a religious revival in his town. For days the old ladies of the church had been praying for the conversion of all the "little lambs" of the congregation. After working the congregation to a fever pitch, the preacher gave an altar call aimed at the children, and one after another they cried and went forward to be saved from hell. The author and his friend didn't feel anything, but after what seemed like forever, his friend went up so all the hubbub would finally stop. Langston knew that his friend hadn't really been converted, but since God didn't smite him for lying, he figured it would be safe for him to fake it as well, which he did. When the revival was over, the congregation calmed down and everyone went home praising the Lord. Langston says that was the day he stopped believing in God.

The preacher relied on peripheral cues. Langston went forward because of the expectation of authority figures, heightened emotion, and conformity pressure. But there was no elaboration of the message, no grappling with the issue, and certainly no encounter with God. The result of this peripheral route processing was as ELM predicts—his "salvation" didn't even last through the night.

PUSHING THE LIMITS OF PERIPHERAL POWER

Understanding the importance of role models for persuasion, Rita scans the pages of *Rolling Stone* to see if singer Dave Matthews might have said something about teenage drivers. The music of the Dave Matthews Band is widely acclaimed by students at her college, and Matthews recently put on a live concert near the school. By somehow associating her message with credible people, she can achieve change in many students' attitudes. But it probably won't last long, stand up to attack, or affect their behavior. Petty and Cacioppo say that a fragile change is all that can be expected through the peripheral route.

Yet what if Dave Matthews' tour bus were run off the road by a drunk teenage fan, and a band member met the same fate as Rita's daughter? Would that tragic death and Matthews' avowal that "friends don't let friends drive drunk" cue students to a permanent shift in attitude and behavior? Fortunately, the band is still intact, but a high-profile tragedy in the sports world suggests that the effect of even powerful peripheral cues is short-lived at best.

In 1991, basketball superstar Magic Johnson held a candid press conference to announce that he had tested positive for HIV. At the time, such a diagnosis seemed like a death sentence; the story dominated network news coverage for days. University of South Florida psychologists Louis Penner and Barbara Fritzsche had just completed a study showing that many people had little sympathy for AIDS victims who had contracted the disease through sexual transmission. When asked to volunteer a few hours to help a patient stay in school, a little more than half of the women and none of the men in the study volunteered. Penner and Fritzsche extended their study when they heard of Magic Johnson's illness.[7] They wondered if the tragedy that had befallen this popular star and his pledge to become an advocate for those with the disease would cause students to react more positively toward people with AIDS.

For a while it did. The week after Johnson's announcement, 80 percent of the men offered assistance. That number tapered off to 30 percent, however, within a few months. The proportion of women helping dipped below 40 percent in the same period. Penner and Fritzsche observed that people didn't grapple with the substance of Magic Johnson's message; rather, they paid attention to the man who was presenting it. Consistent with ELM's main thesis, the researchers concluded that "changes that occur because of 'peripheral cues' such as . . . being a well liked celebrity are less permanent than those that occur because of the substantive content of the persuasion attempt."[8]

Penner and Fritzsche could have added that the effects of star performer endorsements are subject to the sharp ups and downs of celebrity status. For example, the Dave Matthews Band has been so environmentally "green" that a Ben and Jerry's flavor of ice cream was named after one of the band's songs. Yet that image was besmirched when their tour bus dumped 80 gallons of human waste through a grated bridge over the Chicago River. Much of the foul-smelling

sewage doused tourists having dinner on the deck of a sightseeing boat passing under the bridge. So any comment by Matthews on safe and sane driving might be treated with derision rather than help Rita's cause.[9] Nike feared the same reaction when Tiger Woods publicly fell from grace.

Although most ELM research has measured the effects of peripheral cues by studying credibility, a speaker's competence or character could also be a stimulus to effortful message elaboration. For example, the high regard that millions of sports fans had for Magic Johnson might for the first time have made it possible to scrutinize proposals for the prevention and treatment of AIDS without a moral stigma biasing each idea. Or the fact that Johnson's magic wasn't strong enough to repel HIV might cause someone to think deeply, "If it happened to a guy like Magic, it could happen to me." Even though Figure 16–1 identifies *speaker credibility, reaction of others,* and *external rewards* as variables that promote mindless acceptance via the peripheral route, Petty and Cacioppo emphasize that it's impossible to compile a list of cues that are strictly peripheral.[10]

Speaker credibility Audience perception of the message source's expertise, character, and dynamism; typically a peripheral cue.

To illustrate this point, consider the multiple roles that the *mood* of the person listening to Rita's message might play in her attempt to persuade. Rita assumes that her classmate Sam will be a more sympathetic audience if she can present her ideas when he's in a good mood. And she's right, as long as Sam processes her message through the peripheral route without thinking too hard about what she's saying. His positive outlook prompts him to see her proposal in a favorable light.

Yet if Sam is somewhat willing and able to work through her arguments (moderate elaboration), his upbeat mood could actually turn out to be a disadvantage. He was feeling up, but he becomes depressed when he thinks about the death and disfigurement Rita describes. The loss of warm feelings could bias him against Rita's arguments. Petty suggests that Sam might process her arguments more objectively if his original mood had matched the downbeat nature of Rita's experience.[11] Many variables like *perceived credibility* or the *mood of the listener* can act as peripheral cues. Yet if one of them motivates listeners to scrutinize the message or affects their evaluation of arguments, it no longer serves as a "no-brainer." There is no variable that's always a shortcut on the peripheral route.

CHOOSING A ROUTE: PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR THE PERSUADER

Petty and Cacioppo's advice for Rita (and the rest of us) is clear. She needs to determine the likelihood that her listeners will give their undivided attention to evaluating her proposal. If it appears that they have the motivation and ability to elaborate the message, she had best come armed with facts and figures to support her case. A pleasant smile, an emotional appeal, or the loss of her daughter won't make any difference.

Since it's only by thoughtful consideration that her listeners can experience a lasting change in attitude, Rita probably hopes they can go the central route. But even if they do, it's still difficult to build a compelling persuasive case. If she fails to do her homework and presents weak arguments, the people who are ready to think will shift their attitude to a more antagonistic position.

If Rita determines that her hearers are unable or unwilling to think through the details of her plan, she'll be more successful choosing a delivery strategy that emphasizes the package rather than the contents. This could include a

heartrending account of her daughter's death, a smooth presentation, and an ongoing effort to build friendships with the students. Perhaps bringing homemade cookies to class or offering rides to the mall would aid in making her an attractive source. But as we've already seen, the effects will probably be temporary.

It's not likely that Rita will get many people to elaborate her message in a way that ends up favorable for her cause. Most persuaders avoid the central route because the audience won't go with them or they find it is too difficult to generate compelling arguments. But Rita really doesn't have a choice.

Driver's licenses (and perhaps beer) are so important to most of these students that they'll be ready to dissect every part of her plan. They won't be won over by a friendly smile. Rita will have to develop thoughtful and well-reasoned arguments if she is to change their minds. Given the depth of her conviction, she thinks it's worth a try.

ETHICAL REFLECTION: NILSEN'S SIGNIFICANT CHOICE

ELM describes persuasion that's effective. University of Washington professor emeritus Thomas Nilsen is concerned with what's ethical. Consistent with the democratic values of a free society, he proposes that persuasive speech is ethical to the extent that it maximizes people's ability to exercise free choice. Since many political, religious, and commercial messages are routinely designed to bypass rather than appeal to a listener's rational faculties, Nilsen upholds the value of significant choice in unequivocal terms:

> When we communicate to influence the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of others, the ethical touchstone is the degree of free, informed, rational and critical choice—significant choice—that is fostered by our speaking.[12]

For Nilsen, truly free choice is the test of ethical influence because "only a self-determining being can be a moral being; without significant choice, there is no morality."[13] To support his claim, he cites two classic essays on the freedom of speech. John Milton's *Areopagitica*[14] argues against prior restraint of any ideas, no matter how heretical. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*[15] advocates a free marketplace of ideas because the only way to test an argument is to hear it presented by a true believer who defends it in earnest.

Philosophers and rhetoricians have compared persuasion to a lover making fervent appeals to his beloved—wooing an audience, for example. Nilsen's ethic of significant choice is nicely captured in the courtship analogy because true love cannot be coerced; it must be freely given. Inspired by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's description of the ethical religious persuader as lover,[16] I have elsewhere presented a typology of false (unethical) lovers:[17]

> *Smother lovers* won't take no for an answer; their persistence is obnoxious.
> *Legalistic lovers* have a set image of what the other should be.
> *Flirts* are in love with love; they value response, not the other person.
> *Seducers* try deception and flattery to entice the other to submit.
> *Rapists* use force of threats, guilt, or conformity pressure to have their way.

In differing degrees, all five types of unethical persuader violate the human dignity of the persons they pursue by taking away choice that is informed and free.

Nilsen obviously would approve of persuasive appeals that encourage message elaboration through ELM's central route. But his standard of significant choice is not always easy to apply. Do emotional appeals seductively short-circuit our ability to make rational choices, or does heightened emotion actually free us up to consider new options? Significant choice, like beauty and credibility, may be in the eye of the beholder.

CRITIQUE: ELABORATING THE MODEL

For the last 20 years, ELM has been a leading, if not *the* leading, theory of persuasion and attitude change. Petty, Cacioppo, and their students have published more than a hundred articles on different parts of the model, and their initial dual-process conception has stimulated additional research, application, and critique. In a recent status review, the theorists state that "the term 'elaboration' is used to suggest that people add something of their own to the specific information provided in the communication."[18] Consistent with their definition, Petty and Cacioppo have elaborated their original theory by making it increasingly more complex, less predictive, and less able to offer definitive advice to the influence practitioner. This is not the direction in which a scientific theory wants to go.

I have been unable to capture all of these elaborations in a short chapter, but Miami University communication researcher Paul Mongeau and communication consultant James Stiff believe that Petty and Cacioppo face an even greater problem. They charge that "descriptions of the ELM are sufficiently imprecise and ambiguous as to prevent an adequate test of the entire model."[19] One place this stands out is in ELM's silence as to what makes a strong or weak argument.

Petty and Cacioppo define a good message as "one containing arguments such that when subjects are instructed to think about the message, the thoughts they generate are fundamentally favorable."[20] In other words, the arguments are regarded as strong if the people are persuaded but weak if folks are turned off. Like my childhood friend described in Chapter 3, ELM seems to have its own "never-miss shot." Until such time as the ELM theorists can identify what makes a case weak or strong apart from its ultimate effect on the listener, it doesn't make much sense to include strength of argument as a key variable within the model.

Yet even if Petty and Cacioppo's theory is too vague or their view of argument strength is too slippery, their elaboration likelihood model is impressive because it pulls together and makes sense out of diverse research results that have puzzled communication theorists for years. For example, why do most people pay less attention to the communication than they do to the communicator? And if speaker credibility is so important, why does its effect dissipate so quickly? ELM's explanation is that few listeners are motivated and able to do the mental work required for a major shift in attitude. The two-path hypothesis also helps clarify why good evidence and reasoning can sometimes have a life-changing impact but usually make no difference at all.

Attitude-change research often yields results that seem confusing or contradictory. Petty and Cacioppo's ELM takes many disjointed findings and pulls them together into a unified whole. This integrative function makes it a valuable theory of influence.

QUESTIONS TO SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS

1. Can you think of five different words or phrases that capture the idea of *message elaboration?*

2. What *peripheral cues* do you usually monitor when someone is trying to influence you?

3. Petty and Cacioppo want to persuade you that their elaboration likelihood model is a mirror of reality. Do you process their arguments for its accuracy closer to your *central route* or your *peripheral route?* Why not the other way?

4. Students of persuasion often wonder whether *high credibility* or *strong arguments* sway people more. How would ELM theorists respond to that question?

A SECOND LOOK

Recommended resource: "Richard E. Petty, John T. Cacioppo, Alan J. Strathman, and Joseph R. Priester, "To Think or Not to Think: Exploring Two Routes to Persuasion," in *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives,* 2nd ed., Timothy Brock and Melanie Green (eds.), Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005, pp. 81–116.

Full statement: Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change,* Springer-Verlag, New York, 1986.

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Message arguments versus source credibility: Richard E. Petty, John T. Cacioppo, and R. Goldman, "Personal Involvement as a Determinant of Argument-Based Persuasion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* Vol. 41, 1981, pp. 847–855.

Effects of evidence: John Reinard, "The Empirical Study of the Persuasive Effects of Evidence: The Status After Fifty Years of Research," *Human Communication Research,* Vol. 15, 1988, pp. 3–59.

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Mindless cues: Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice,* 4th ed., Allyn and Bacon, Needham Heights, MA, 2001.

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Status and controversies: Richard E. Petty and Duane Wegener, "The Elaboration Likelihood Model: Current Status and Controversies," in Shelly Chaiken and Yaacov Trope (eds.), *Dual Process Theories in Social Psychology,* Guilford, New York, 1999, pp. 41–72.

Critiques of ELM: "Forum: Specifying the ELM," *Communication Theory,* Vol. 3, 1993. (Paul Mongeau and James Stiff, "Specifying Causal Relationships in the Elaboration Likelihood Model," pp. 65–72; Mike Allen and Rodney Reynolds, "The Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Sleeper Effect: An Assessment of Attitude Change over Time," pp. 73–82.)