

have neither claimed nor disclaimed these positions as their own. Thus, these positions are neither particularly threatening nor rewarding.

Second, consider that the information that people have on an issue tends to be biased in favor of their own opinions. This should enable them to counterargue opposing communications (those falling in the latitude of rejection) and elaborate upon the positive features of congruent ones (those falling in the latitude of acceptance). The fact that people tend to cognitively bolster agreeable communications and see flaws in discrepant ones has been demonstrated repeatedly. For example, Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall (1965) reported a study in which reactions of Republican and Democratic partisans to the 1960 Presidential Debates were assessed. This study found that people's own stands on the candidates consistently biased their ratings of which candidate performed better in the debates (see also Hastorf & Cantril, 1954).

Importantly, people who have a more highly integrated attitude structure should be better able to engage in biased processing of two opposing communications. For example, in a recent study, Fazio and Williams (1986) studied reactions of partisans to the 1984 Presidential debates. Two results from this study are relevant here. First, consistent with previous research, attitudes toward the Presidential candidates predicted how well people thought the candidates performed in the debates. More interestingly, however, this relationship was stronger for people who had highly accessible attitudes. If we make the reasonable assumption that more highly integrated and knowledgeable attitudes are more accessible than attitudes that are relatively undeveloped (cf. Fazio, 1986), then these results provide support for the view that biased processing is facilitated by a well-developed attitude schema (see also Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982; Houston & Fazio, 1979; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model provides a framework for understanding the effects of the perceived position of a persuasive communication under different relevance conditions. The anticipated effects of message position under high relevance are summarized in Proposition 1 below.

*Proposition 1:* When personal relevance is high, messages falling in the latitude of acceptance (i.e., consistent with one's attitude) are processed in a relatively favorable manner, whereas messages falling in the latitude of rejection (i.e., inconsistent with one's attitude) are processed in a relatively unfavorable manner. Messages falling in the latitude of noncommitment are processed in a relatively unbiased fashion.

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<sup>11</sup>Zanna (in press) has argued that in general people engage in more biased processing of messages falling in their latitudes of rejection than in their latitudes of acceptance. This seems reasonable. The critical ELM proposition is that message position will bias processing mostly when the elaboration likelihood is high. When moderate or low, message position is expected to serve in other roles.

This postulate, of course, suggests that it will typically be very difficult to change people's attitudes on highly involving issues by presenting them with counterattitudinal messages since although the high personal relevance will intensify information processing, the counterattitudinal nature of the message will motivate and typically enable message rejection via counterargumentation. We have been able to produce persuasion in the laboratory with counterattitudinal messages on involving topics because we have developed novel message arguments that are difficult to counterargue and because we have used issues to which people have not given much previous thought.

It is interesting to note that Sherif and Hovland (1961) warned against overgeneralizing their conclusion that communications on ego-involving issues would be ineffective. They noted that "the communications through the mass media probably do not convey factual evidence of overwhelming weight . . . they are primarily attempts at persuasion . . . without the support of incontrovertible factual evidence" (pp. 198-199). This leaves open the possibility, of course, that communications with strong (incontrovertible) arguments could be effective under high involvement as delineated by the ELM and found in our research (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b).

#### *Effects of Opinion Position Under Low Personal Relevance*

In contrast to the situation when involvement is high, when the personal relevance of a message is quite low, people are typically unmotivated to devote the effort necessary to process the arguments in the communication. Instead, they are more reliant on simple cues in the persuasion situation. A hypothesis consistent with the ELM is that the perceived position of a message (whether it is perceived as falling into one's latitude of acceptance, rejection, or noncommitment) may serve as a simple acceptance or rejection cue when people are unmotivated or unable to process the issue relevant arguments in a communication. This idea is stated more formally in the proposition below.

*Proposition 2:* When personal relevance is low, the latitude of acceptance (or a favorable attitude) may serve as a simple agreement cue, whereas the latitude of rejection (or an unfavorable attitude) may serve as a simple disagreement cue. The latitude of noncommitment (or a neutral attitude) is relatively neutral as a cue.

Although no research has examined the cue value of one's attitudes under high and low relevance conditions, some research has supported the view that prior attitudes serve as simple decision cues when the motivation and/or ability to think about an issue are low (e.g., Jamieson & Zanna, 1989; Sanbonmatsu & Fazio, 1990). There are a number of implications of Postulate 2. First, if a message position falling in the latitude of acceptance has some positive cue value

simply due to the position advocated (i.e., the message is seen as correct), other equally salient positive cues (e.g., the mere number of arguments presented; credible source) may have less cue value than they would have had in the latitude of rejection. Conversely, if a message falling in the latitude of rejection has some negative cue value simply due to its position, other equally salient negative cues (e.g., a low credible source) should have less impact than they would have had in the latitude of acceptance. Since messages falling in the latitude of noncommitment have no cue value due to their position, other positive and negative cues should be maximally effective for messages falling in this region.

#### *Effects of Opinion Position Under Moderate or Uncertain Personal Relevance*

So far we have addressed the implications of the ELM for opinion latitudes when personal relevance is either very high or very low. However, in many persuasion situations, the personal relevance of the communication may be ambiguous or uncertain. When personal involvement is ambiguous or uncertain, people may be unsure as to whether or not they should devote the effort necessary to process the message arguments. In these situations, various factors in the persuasion context may determine the extent of processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986a, 1986b). We have already argued that the greater the potential personal consequences of a message, the more likely it is to be elaborated. Consider the potential personal implications of a message portending that one's attitude is correct versus one suggesting that one's attitude is incorrect. Since people tend to overestimate the extent to which their opinions are shared (i.e., the "false consensus" effect; Ross, 1977), it is probably more surprising to be confronted with a message from an unfamiliar source in one's latitude of rejection than one in the latitude of acceptance.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the consequences of accepting a message in the latitude of rejection are typically greater than yielding to a message in the latitude of acceptance (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979b). The former may require considerable cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes, whereas the latter does not. The next proposition addresses the implications of this.

***Proposition 3:*** When personal relevance is moderate or uncertain, messages from unfamiliar sources falling in the latitude of rejection (i.e., inconsistent with one's attitude) will receive greater elaboration than messages falling in the latitude of acceptance (i.e., consistent with one's attitude).

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<sup>12</sup>A consideration of balance theory (Heider, 1946) suggests that when a person knows and dislikes the source, it is probably more surprising to find that the source has an agreeable position.

Discrepant messages are more threatening and will tend to have greater implications for the individual if they prove to be correct. Thus, they will tend to arouse more attention than congruent messages and be associated with greater scrutiny (see also Cacioppo & Petty, 1979a; Schwarz, 1990). There are several possible exceptions to this simple principle. First, at some point the message may become so discrepant that it appears ludicrous (e.g., an advocate of the death penalty who urges that not only should the perpetrator be put to death but so too should all relatives). Messages that fall in this "latitude of incredulity" would likely be rejected with little thinking due to their inherent implausibility. Also, at some point the message may become so threatening that processing is terminated in the interest of self-protection. Third, messages falling in the latitude of noncommitment may receive greater scrutiny than messages falling in the latitude of rejection, because they are the most ambiguous. Although these speculations require additional research, the important point here is that under conditions of ambiguous or uncertain relevance, the position of a message is postulated to serve as a determinant of the extent of message processing.

### Comparison of ELM and Social-Judgment Approaches to Persuasion

Now that we have presented both the social judgment and the ELM approaches to *involvement* and *message position* it is useful to compare and contrast these frameworks. In particular, it is instructive to focus on what may appear to be the most anomalous of our findings (cf. Greenwald, 1982)—that increasing personal relevance may be associated with increased influence even if a message advocates a counter-attitudinal position (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b). Given that we (e.g., Petty et al., 1981) and others (e.g., Leippe & Elkin, 1987) have replicated this finding several times, it is important to understand *why* this result stands in apparent contradiction to the general conclusion reached by the Sherifs—that increasing involvement should *decrease* influence. Two solutions to this ostensible inconsistency have been proposed, that we address in turn.

#### *Solution 1: Two Kinds of Ego-Involvement*

One solution to this controversy, proposed by Johnson and Eagly (1989), is that the different results are due to the fact that different kinds of involvement are present in the social judgment and the ELM studies. They argued that one type, *value-relevant involvement* (VRI), occurs when the topic of a persuasive communication is "linked to important values" (p. 290). This type of involvement was studied largely before 1975 in investigations inspired by social judgment theory. A second type of involvement, *outcome-relevant involvement* (ORI), occurs when the message topic is linked to a recipient's "currently important goals or outcomes" and is the type of involvement studied in the last

decade under the auspices of the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion.<sup>13</sup> A meta-analysis conducted by Johnson and Eagly (1989) of the studies categorized as invoking each type of involvement was said to have uncovered "distinctively different effects [of each type of involvement] on persuasion" (p. 290). That is, the ELM-inspired ORI studies tended to show that increased involvement could be associated with increased or decreased persuasion depending upon argument quality, but the social-judgment-inspired VRI studies tended to show that increased involvement was associated with reduced persuasion (though more so for studies employing weak rather than strong arguments). This analysis is depicted in the bottom panel of Figure 2. Thus, it may be that two kinds of involvement exist with different effects in persuasion settings.

### *Solution 2: Integrative View of Ego-Involvement*

In a comment on the Johnson and Eagly (1989) meta-analysis and conclusions, we argued that their proposed categorical distinction between outcome and value involvement was premature and that the ELM provided a more parsimonious and integrative manner in which to view the effects of involvement on persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1990). That is, we proposed that:

where the topic of a message falls on the personal importance continuum is more critical for understanding persuasion processes than whether the communication topic is one that deals with important values, goals, people, or objects. In all cases, as the personal importance of the topic increases, recipients are postulated to become more motivated to allocate their limited cognitive resources to processing the message (p. 368; see top panel of Figure 2).

How then does the ELM account for the different results found in the ORI and VRI categories of studies? The solution stems from the various confounds that we outlined above as likely to be present when ego-involvement is studied in a correlational manner. Although linking a message to self-relevant values would lead to enhanced information processing activity just as would linking a message to self-relevant goals, the confounding variables would likely *bias* the nature of the information processing activity that took place. For example, if involvement is associated with more extreme attitudes (Sherif & Hovland, 1961), then the message position would be more discrepant for high than low involvement

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<sup>13</sup>A third type of involvement referred to by Johnson & Eagly as *impression-relevant involvement* and by others as *response involvement* (e.g., Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Zimbardo, 1960) is widely accepted as occurring when the self-presentational consequences of one's attitude are salient (cf. Cialdini & Petty, 1981) and is not relevant to the current controversy.

subjects which could motivate increased counterarguing. Furthermore, if involvement is associated with increased attitude-consistent knowledge (Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; Wood, 1982), then high involvement subjects would be more able to counterargue the message than low involvement subjects. In our research on involvement, we have attempted to isolate the effects of personal relevance per se from the effects of its "natural" confounds so that there would be no unfavorable bias present in the high involvement conditions that was absent in the low involvement cases.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 3 depicts the attitude results predicted by the ELM when both the intensity of processing and the direction of processing bias are considered along with the quality of the arguments in a message. The left panel depicts a situation in which the enhanced processing proceeds in a relatively objective manner and the right panel depicts a situation in which the enhanced processing has an unfavorable bias. When the processing is relatively objective, more favorable attitudes are expected when strong arguments receive greater scrutiny, but less favorable attitudes result when weak arguments are evaluated. In contrast, consider a person who is motivated (e.g., because the message takes a very discrepant position) and able (e.g., because the person possesses considerable attitude-consistent knowledge) to counterargue the message. This person's task is advanced to the extent that the message contains weak rather than strong arguments.

If our analysis is correct, we would expect the unconfounded (ORI) studies to show the pattern depicted in the left panel of Figure 3 and the confounded (VRI) studies to show the pattern depicted in the right panel. When Johnson and Eagly separated the VRI and ORI studies (and conditions within studies) into those that employed relatively strong and relatively weak arguments, they found that involvement interacted with argument quality in both data sets. In the ORI studies, increased involvement was associated with more persuasion for strong arguments but with less persuasion for weak arguments. In the VRI studies, increased involvement led to reduced persuasion for both strong and weak arguments, but the reduction was greater for weak than for strong arguments. That is, the ORI studies produced a pattern consistent with the left panel of Figure 3, but the VRI studies produced a pattern consistent with the right panel

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<sup>14</sup>Other confoundings would also work toward inhibition of persuasion in the high versus low involvement conditions. For example, the fact that people have already considered in depth their positions on involving issues makes it less likely that they will carefully attend to and process subsequent communications on the topic (thereby reducing the likelihood of influence). More knowledge may also instill greater confidence in one's opinion, enhancing the threshold for change. The more involving an issue, the more probable it is that people have become publicly committed to a particular position, making the expression of attitude change difficult for a variety of self-presentational reasons (cf. Kiesler, 1971; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971).

of Figure 3.<sup>15</sup> In short, the evidence from Johnson and Eagly's (1989) meta-analysis is consistent with the ELM view that increasing personal relevance enhances message elaboration but that confounding factors in the correlational VRI studies were responsible for the greater message rejection observed. If so, the ELM is capable of explaining the results from studies inspired by social judgment theory as well as the more contemporary work on personal involvement.

### Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have outlined the Sherifs' approach to the role of ego-involvement in persuasion and have compared it to our own conceptualization of self-relevance or importance. Although the models disagree in the *processes* presumed to mediate the effects of self-relevance and message position on attitude change, the frameworks agree that increasing involvement will typically be associated with reduced persuasibility when the message takes a counterattitudinal position. Whereas the Sherifs took a perceptual approach and focused on the judgmental distortions that ego-involvement was thought to enhance, the ELM employs a cognitive approach and has emphasized the manner in which personal relevance influences processing of the persuasive communication itself. Specifically, the ELM holds that increasing personal relevance increases the intensity with which issue-relevant arguments are processed. However, the nature of this processing is determined by other variables. For example, the information processing activity under high involvement would be expected to proceed in a relatively objective manner when a communication falls in a person's latitude of non-commitment and issue-relevant knowledge is low or balanced. When a message is either strongly congruent or incongruent with an individual's own position and attitude-consistent knowledge is high, it is expected that the person will be motivated and typically able to cognitively bolster a consonant communication but counterargue a dissonant one.

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<sup>15</sup>Johnson and Eagly (1990) objected to our depiction of their results as an "unreasonable" inference from their meta-analysis. In contrast, we think that our depictions represent the only reasonable ways to graph the ORI and VRI interactions that they described. Alternative depictions would require the unreasonable assumption that subjects are actually more persuaded by weak than by strong arguments under low involvement conditions. This is inconsistent with common sense and available data.

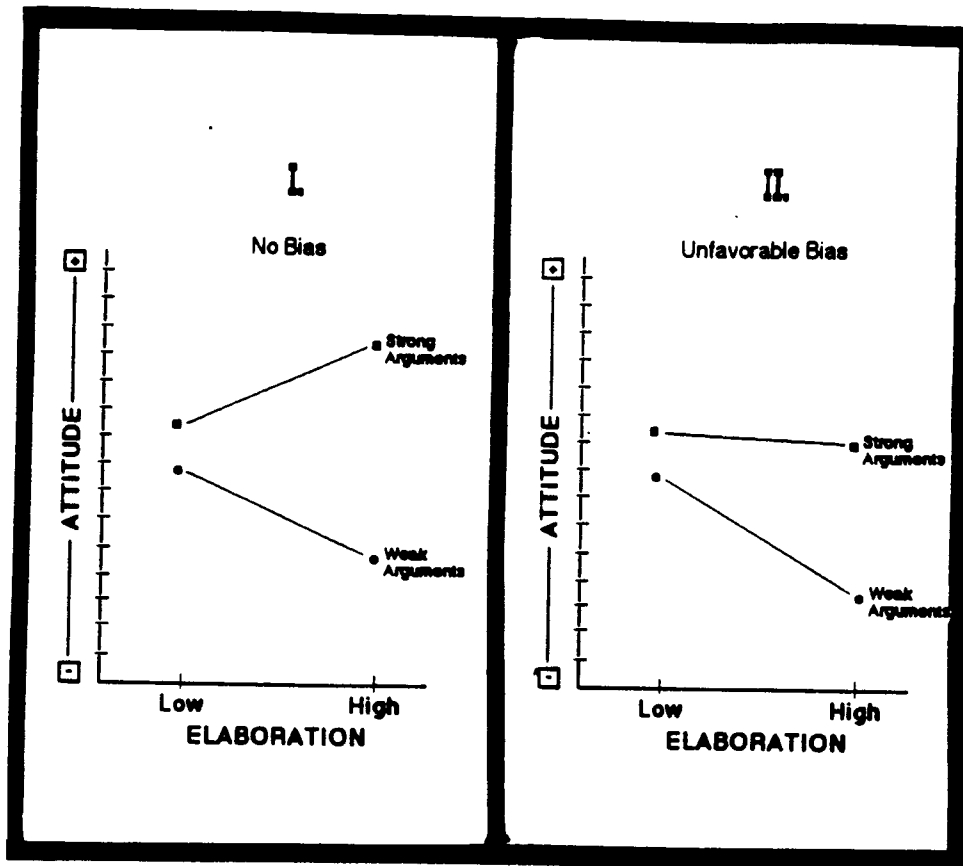


Figure 3. Hypothesized Effects of Information Processing Intensity and Bias on Attitudes in Response to Strong and Weak Messages. Left panel depicts relatively objective processing and right panel depicts processing with an unfavorable bias. From "Involvement and Persuasion: Tradition Versus Integration" by Petty and Cacioppo, 1990, *Psychological Bulletin*, 107, p. 369. Copyright 1990 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted by permission.

Another reason that change in response to a counterattitudinal message is typically more difficult under conditions of high than low relevance is that simple peripheral cues are generally ineffective when involvement is high. However, our research has shown that when strong and compelling arguments are available that a person has not considered previously, attitude changes may be *greater* under high than low relevance conditions, and these changes will be temporally persistent, resistant to counterpropaganda, and predictive of behavior.

In a review of their program of research on attitudes and ego-involvement, Carolyn Sherif (1980) described the typical social psychological study of

persuasion as "confined to elaborately designed experiments in which a college sophomore read, heard, or wrote something on a topic of slight interest" (p. 16). This description of the accumulated persuasion research is informative, thought provoking, and shared by others (e.g., Sears, 1986). In fact, much of the research in cognitive social psychology over the past 30 years can be characterized similarly. However, social psychologists in the past decade showed renewed interest in studying self-relevant topics and issues and the links between personal relevance and information processing. It is now abundantly clear that cognitive processes and outcomes are quite different depending upon the degree of personal relevance of the task. People are motivated to engage in cognitive work when relevance is high, but judgments are more dependent on simple cues when relevance is low (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). Moreover, the different cognitive processes under high and low relevance identified by the ELM appear to hold not only in the domain of persuasion (cf. Chaiken & Stangor, 1987; Cialdini, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1981; Cooper & Croyle, 1984), but also with regard to attributional processes (e.g., Borgida & Howard-Pitney, 1983), person perception (e.g., Fiske & Pavelcheck, 1986), choice processes (Sanbonmatsu & Fazio, 1990) and other domains of social cognition (cf. Cantor & Showers, 1983; Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Although we concur with Hovland's (1959) assessment that personal involvement can be studied in the social psychology laboratory with externally valid results, the renewed enterprise is only in its beginning stages. We can be grateful to the Sherifs for calling our attention to the importance of this endeavor.

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