The elaboration likelihood model

Understanding consumer attitude change

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From billboards to magazine ads to television commercials, most instances of marketing are an attempt to persuade consumers to have a more favourable attitude towards a product, brand, company or service and ultimately influence purchase decision. Attitudes, as used in this chapter and throughout the literature, are summary evaluations indicating what people like and dislike. Although the end goal of a marketing campaign is undoubtedly to motivate behaviour or consumption of a product, a good first step is to persuade the consumer to have a favourable attitude towards the product. Importantly, not all attitudes are equally effective in guiding behaviour, and we will describe how attitudes can differ not only in their valence, but also in how consequential they are. Understanding both how to change attitudes and make them consequential requires consideration of the basic processes by which persuasion occurs.

In this chapter, we review how persuasion arises, particularly in the domain of marketing and consumer behaviour. To organize the processes and findings presented throughout, we use the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Briñol, 2012) as a conceptual framework. The chapter is divided into six sections: (a) the structure of communication and the three key factors of persuasion, (b) the Elaboration Likelihood Model, (c) the multiple roles that communication factors can have in persuasion, (d) the role of repetition or matching in persuasion, and (e) future directions for consumer persuasion.

Communication factors in persuasion

Persuasion refers to any attempt to alter the contents of someone’s mind. Although persuasion can be used to change many things such as a person’s specific beliefs (e.g., a particular brand of soda has the healthiest ingredients), the literature tends to focus on people’s attitudes, that is, people’s general, summary evaluations (i.e., their positivity or negativity) towards a person, issue or object (Petty, Briñol, & DeMarree, 2007) including products and brands. People tend to behave in accordance with their attitudes—purchasing the products they like, avoiding the ones they don’t—so by influencing relevant attitudes through persuasion, one is affecting the likelihood that people will engage in attitude-relevant behaviour, especially if the attitude induced is a strong one (for a review, see Petty & Kinder, 1988).
novel (Pett, Petty & Wegener, 1992). Likewise, messages offering more arguments in favour of the object can be more persuasive than messages with fewer ones (Silver, Josephs, & Giesler, 2002; see Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a, for a review on number of arguments). The type of information a message or an advertisement presents can also impact its persuasiveness. Such factors include whether the message is simple or complex (Altheimer, Green, & Saxon, 2000; Yalch & Emlor, 1994), concrete or abstract (Ugina et al., 2008; Spanvola & Lee, 2013), contains humour (which varies with culture) (Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993), is low or high in imagery (Petri & Cialdini, 2008), contains stories or narratives (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004), whether its information argues only in favour of the advocated position (i.e., one-sided) or for both sides (i.e., two-sided; Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; Eisen, 2006) or is pro or counter-attributed (see Clark & Wegener, 2013, for a review on message direction). Although early research tended to show that message factors only worked in one direction (e.g., more arguments leading to more persuasion), it is possible for all message features to produce a diversity of results as we will see later. For example, adding more arguments lead to less persuasion if those arguments are weak and people are thinking carefully (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a).

Recipient factors

Recipient factors refer to aspects of the individuals receiving the message (i.e., the audience). These factors can range from demographic features such as one's gender, persistent characteristics such as one's intelligence and personality type (Briñol & Petty, 2003). Even the society in which one was raised, be it individualistic or collectivistic, can influence the effectiveness of a persuasive appeal (Steele, Nelson, & Yee, 1997). Additionally, recipient factors can be more transitory such as whether the audience is momentarily feeling powerful or happy (see Petty & Briñol, 2013a, for a review on emotion and persuasion). Similar to source and message factors, some early research showed that recipient factors produced main effects on persuasion. For example, as intelligence decreased, the likelihood of persuasion tended to increase (Rhodes & Wood, 1992). Conversely, as consumers become more knowledgeable about marketing tactics, persuasion tended to be reduced (Festal & Wright, 1994; Obrant & Spenenberger, 1996), whereas making recipients see that the product is superior (e.g., with pleasant music in an ad) increases persuasion (DeCarlo & Barone, 2009; Gorn, 1982). However, as we describe later in this chapter, these main effect results represent only part of the picture, and they can reverse depending on the circumstances.

Thus, whether it is aspects of the source, the advertisement itself, or the individual who receives the message, there are a multitude of variables that can affect consumer persuasion. However, research over the years has shown that there are some of the same source, message and recipient factors that increase persuasion are also capable of decreasing it. Although researchers questioned about inconstencies like these for decades, an examination of the psychological processes responsible for attitude change can organize and explain these seemingly contradictory results. We turn to these processes next.

Processes of persuasion

Over the past 50 years, numerous theories have tried to account for the psychological processes involved in attitude change (for a historical review, see Briñol & Petty, 2012). At the outset, persuasion researchers tended to focus on a single outcome for any variable (e.g., positive emotion should always increase persuasion) and a single process by which a variable had its effect (see Petty, 1997; Petty & Briñol, 2003); though it was noted, the accumulating research showed that a given feature sometimes increased persuasion whereas at other times it decreased it. Furthermore, some attitude changes lasted longer and were more likely to guide behaviour than other changes.

Contemporary theories of persuasion have been generated to articulate the multiple ways in which variables can affect attitudes in different situations. In the present review, we focus on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1998a; Petty & Briñol, 2012). Other dual process and dual system approaches following the ELM share some similar features (e.g., the heuristic-systematic model) (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989) and the unified model (Kruglanski, 1999, 2002), but the ELM continues to be the one guiding more research on persuasion and attitude strength (see Sherman, Gabor, & Trope, 2012, for other dual process/system approaches to judgement).

The elaboration likelihood model

According to the ELM, we have the very same citations in the previous paragraph, so maybe we can just drop them here the psychological processes responsible for the effects of variables on attitude change can be organized into a finite set that operate at different points along an elab-oration continuum, going from very low (even automatic) thinking to very high. The theory predicts that under low thinking conditions, variables influence attitudes by operating as simple judgement cues or heuristics (e.g., I like your product because I think it's good). When the likelihood of thinking is relatively high, variables can impact the extent of influence of more thoughtful means such as by influencing the direction of the thoughts that come to mind (i.e., whether they are favourable or unfavourable), serving as a piece of evidence (i.e., an argument) to be scrutinized, or impacting the confidence people have in the thoughts they generated and thus how much the recipient relies on those thoughts. The theory further asserts that when elaboration is not constrained to be very low or high, variables can influence attitudes by affecting the amount of thinking that occurs. Thus, as we explain and provide evidence for next, the ELM describes several processes by which variables can affect persuasion in different situations.

Affecting the amount of thinking

One way in which a variable can affect persuasion is through increasing or decreasing the motivation or ability to think about the attitude. For example, people might not have the ability to think about a complex or long message unless it is presented more than once. That is, message repetition is one variable that enables people to engage in greater thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979, 1980; Gorn & Goldberg, 1989; Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991). In contrast, if the speaker talks too fast, thinking about the message is disrupted (Smith & Shaffer, 1998). Increasing thinking tends to enhance persuasion if the arguments are strong but reduces it if they are weak. The reverse is true for reducing thinking. To demonstrate this effect with disrupted thinking, Petty, Wells, and Brock (1976) gave students strong or weak arguments in favour of a tuition increase, while at the same time the students either did or did not have to engage in a distracting secondary task. When strong arguments were presented, disruption disrupted thinking and diminished persuasion by reducing the favourable thoughts that would have been generated. When weak arguments were presented, however, disrupting thinking actually enhanced persuasion by reducing the counterarguing that would have occurred. Following this study, a manipulation of argument quality has been used in many additional studies to gauge the impact a variable has on message processing. That is, the argument quality effect on attitudes should become larger as message processing is increased and...
arguments presented, individuals are likely to be more persuaded by credible sources compared to non-credible sources (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). This can be understood as resulting from the use of a simple heuristic or association such as, "If an expert and trustworthy source supports this position, it must be good". Other variables have shown similar cues effects under low thinking conditions, such as source attractiveness (Clark & Wegener, 1987), source majority status (Harkins, Briñol, & Petty, 2016), length of the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a) or recipient mood (Petty, Schuman, Richman, & Strathman, 1993).

In addition to heuristics, high elaboration consumers can be influenced by simple associative connections, as in the case of evaluative conditioning, where repeatedly pairing an attitude object with something good enhances positive evaluations (Katz &audi, 1948; Staats & Staats, 1958). When thinking is high, one noteworthy feature of variables serving as simple cues is that they impact attitudes in the direction of their valence. For example, if attractiveness of the source and being happy are positively valued, they will result in more positive attitudes. When these same variables serve in other roles, though, their impact on attitudes need not be positive.

High thinking processes

When motivation and ability to think are high, people will engage in careful thought, assessing the relevance and the merits of all of the information available. As already explained, in such situations, the quality or cogency of the information presented will be an important determinant of how effective the persuasion attempt is. Below we articulate additional processes that variables can influence when thinking is high.

Biasing thoughts

When thinking is high, variables can bias the nature of the thoughts that are generated. That is, some features of the persuasion context increase the likelihood of favourable thoughts being elicited, whereas others increase the likelihood of unfavourable thoughts. For example, if people are put in a good mood prior to hearing an involving message, their thoughts will be biased in favour of the message (Petty et al., 1993). On the other hand, instilling "reactance" (Burish, 1969) in message recipients by telling them that they have no choice but to be persuaded on an important issue motivates counterarguing (or negative thoughts), even when the arguments used are strong (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b). Biased thinking, then, whether favourable or unfavourable, often reduces the impact of message quality on persuasion compared to objective thinking.

In general, any time a message takes a position opposed to one's attitudes, values, personal identity or preferred outcome, people will tend to be biased against it. When a message takes a position in favour of those variables, though, people will be biased in favour of it (Petty & Cacioppo, 1990; see Clark & Wegener, 2013, for a review). To be clear, and as noted earlier, when a message is framed as relevant to one's values, identity or preferred outcomes, the extent of information processing is affected, but when a message takes a particular position on them, the nature of the processing can be affected. However, the potential for biased thinking to occur is enhanced when the message itself is somewhat ambiguous so that the recipient can interpret it in either a favourable or unfavourable way (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994).

Serving as an argument

Under high elaboration conditions, variables can also serve as arguments. When processing carefully, all aspects of the communication are scrutinized as to whether or not they provide
evidence for changing an attitude or adopting the advocated position. For example, the attractiveness of a source could be considered an argument for relevant advocates such as for beauty products, but will likely operate through other processes for proposals and products unrelated to looks (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b, cf., Pietro, Mammalari, Kruglanski, & Slovic-Koppler, 2004). Similarly, one’s culture can also moderate whether a variable is treated as a cue or an argument. For example, in independent cultures, where people emphasize viewing the self as unique or distinct to others (e.g., Hui & Triandis, 1986), conscious support for an attitudinal position is perceived as a simple cue and works best when thinking is relatively low. However, in collectivist cultures, where people emphasize viewing the self as interconnected to others, conscious information can be perceived as an argument and works when thinking is high (Aaker & Matsui, 1997).

For a variable to serve as an argument it has to be evaluated as direct evidence for the merits of the attitude object. For example, Martin, Abend, Soekhadi, and Green (1997) examined how participants evaluated a story that was designed to make them happy or sad. Because a core goal of the story was the mood it was supposed to evoke, participants’ moods could be viewed as a relevant argument. Thus, if a story were designed to make people sad, actually feeling sad would be a strong argument in favor of the merits of the story; however, feeling happy would make the story seem less effective. Although negative emotions such as sadness or fear could serve as negative cues for disliking if thinking is low, it can lead to positive evaluations if these are the intended states and thinking is high.

Validation

When thinking is high, there is yet another process through which a variable can influence the degree of persuasion: thought validation. Recent research suggests that people not only have thoughts, but they can have thoughts about their thoughts, or metacognitions (Petty, Brinol, Tormala, & Wegener, 2007; Brinol & DeMartino, 2012). One feature of thoughts that has proven to be useful is the confidence with which people hold their thoughts. That is, two consumers can have the same attitude about the product (e.g., iPhone have long battery life), but one consumer can have considerably more confidence in the validity of that thought than another person. Similarly, two consumers might have the very same thought about a product, but one of them may feel better about that thought (e.g., this thought makes me feel good), using it more when forming a final evaluation about the product (Brinol, Petty, & DeMartino, 2007). According to the self-validation hypothesis (Petty, Brinol, & Tormala, 2002), influencing thought-confidence and thought-like when thinking is high can increase or decrease the persuasiveness of the appeal depending on the dominant direction of thoughts. In support of this idea, Brinol, Petty, and Tormala (2004) found that when the thoughts in response to an advertisement were primarily favorable, increasing confidence in their validity increased consumer persuasion, but increasing doubt in their validity decreased consumer persuasion. When the thoughts to a message were mostly unfavorable, however, increasing confidence in their validity reduced persuasion, but undermining confidence increased it.

Research on self-validation has shown that this mechanism can account for some already established persuasion outcomes (e.g., more persuasion with happy rather than sad mood, with high over low credibility sources, when argument generation is easy rather than difficult), but by a different process than postulated previously (see Brinol & Petty, 2009, for a review). It is worth noting that self-validation processes have two boundary conditions: (1) there must be relatively high levels of thinking, and (2) the confidence should be elicits during or following thought generation rather than prior to it. If confidence is silent prior to thinking, it tends to reduce the amount of thinking by valuing one’s initial viewpoint thereby reducing the need for processing new information (Tiedens & Lindsey, 2004).

Correction for perceived bias

Finally, under high elaboration conditions, variables can lead individuals to notice and respond to a potential bias in their thinking and attempt to correct for such bias. Specifically, because people are motivated to hold correct attitudes, under careful scrutiny they might detect factors that they believe are biasing their judgements and make an effort to correct for them (e.g., if an emotion induction in an advertisement was seen as particularly blatant [DeSoto et al., 2004]). If people have doubt in their thoughts about whether their thoughts might have stemmed from some biasing factor in the situation or some prejudice they have, they could attempt to explicitly correct for their biased thoughts in accordance with the mechanism specified by the Flexible Correction Model (FCM) (see Wegener & Petty, 1997, for a review). This is, people might estimate the magnitude and direction of the perceived biasing effect on their judgements and attempt to adjust for it. To the extent that they correct too much, reverse effects of variables can be obtained (Petty & Wegener, 1993; Wegener & Petty, 1995; Wilson & Brekke, 1994).

For example, in one study (Petty, Wegener, & White, 1998), when people become aware that a likable source might be biasing their attitudes, they become more favourable towards the proposal when it was endorsed by a dislikable than a likable source. Such explicit corrections typically require relatively high degrees of thinking. However, if certain corrections are practiced repeatedly, they can become less effortful and even become automatic (e.g., Glaser & Banaji, 1999, Maddux et al., 2005). Of course, people must be motivated and aware of a bias in order to correct for it (for further discussion, see Wegener & Petty, 1994).

Consequences of different processes

According to the ELM, attitudes formed or changed through high thinking processes are more consequential (stronger) than those changed through low thinking processes (Petty, Hangoedt & Smith, 1998, for a review). That is, although some attitudes are weak and relatively inconsequential, others have greater impact. The term attitude strength is used to describe the quality of attitudes that allows them to persist over time, resist persuasion, and affect information processing and guide behavior (Petty & Wienick, 1995). Some of the factors associated with strong attitudes include the following: low ambivalence (Armitage & Conner, 2000), high accessibility (Bassili & Fletcher, 1991; Fazio et al., 1982; Hedges & Wilson, 1994) high commitment (Keeley, 1971) and high attitude certainty (Bassili, 1996; Rucker, Tormala, Petty, & Brinol, 2014). Possessing these features increases the strength of an attitude and thus the likelihood that an individual will use and maintain that attitude over time.

Importantly, elaboration increases the likelihood that a newly changed attitude will possess the several features of a strong attitude (see Petty et al., 1985, for a review). There are both structural and metacognitive reasons for this. First, as thinking increases during attitude change, people should acquire more support for their attitudes and their attitudes should become more accessible and well-integrated in the knowledge structure. Second, people often become more committed to and confident in their views with greater thinking. Each of these factors would increase the likelihood that an attitude would be consequential.

One example of the link between elaboration and strength comes from a study by Hangoedt and Petty (1992). In this research, individuals who varied in their need for cognition were exposed to a television ad for an answering machine in the context of a television programme.
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Multiple roles for persuasion variables

So far, we have examined the factors of persuasion in the separate contexts of high, low, and unconstrained thinking. However, the same variable that served as a cue under low thinking conditions could serve as an argument under high thinking and affect the amount of thinking when it is unconstrained. Next, we present an example from research on one variable to illustrate how an argument variable can affect attitudes in each of the roles postulated. For our example, consider whether the message recipient is in a relatively happy or sad state. How should this affect persuasion?

First, one's emotional state can affect the amount of thinking one does about a message when thinking is unconstrained. Typically, sadness tends to increase elaborative processing over happiness (Tchr psychotic). In contrast, happiness indicates that things are fine the way they are (Word & Mackie, 1987). However, if thinking is already low (e.g., because of distraction), being happy can increase persuasion compared to sadness through the peripheral route by serving as a simple associative cue or input to a decision rule ("If I feel good, I must like it"). On the other hand, if thinking is high, feeling happy can enhance persuasion by biasing the direction of one's thoughts, increasing the number of positive thoughts one generates toward the appeal ( Petty et al., 1993) or making good consequences seem more likely and bad consequences seem less likely ( Wegener, Petty, & Klein, 1994). If relevant to the persuasive appeal, happiness can also be evaluated as an argument for the attitude object (Martin et al., 1997).

In addition to these primary cognitions, emotions can also affect the perceived validity of one's thoughts when the feelings follow (rather than precede) processing, by increasing or decreasing the certainty one has in one's thoughts. For example, if people feel happy following the generation of positive thoughts, they will rely on them more and be more persuaded, but if happiness follows generation of negative thoughts, people will rely on them more and be less persuaded than if sadness follows thought generation (Brinol et al., 2007).

However, if emotions are made too salient such that individuals perceive them to be biasing their thoughts (e.g., consumers perceive a happy TV programme as affecting their ensuing evaluation of a commercial), the individual will be motivated to correct his or her attitude and effects opposite to the perceived bias (Herkowitz, Jet, & Troccoli, 2000). Importantly, induced emotions can result in the same degree of attitude change regardless of the process (Petty et al., 2013), but when emotion acts under high elaboration to increase persuasion, the

attitude change will last longer, be more resistant to persuasion, and be more likely to persist in presence of a subsequent negative manipulation, but when emotion acts under low elaboration, the

Matching

Up to this point, we have focused on the multiple processes by which communication factors in isolation can impact attitudes and persuasion in different situations. However, these individual variables can also interact with each other in affecting persuasion processes and outcomes. To highlight this interaction, we next focus on the outcomes of a variable within the recipient, message, and/or source match another factor of the persuasion situation (for more extensive reviews on matching, see Brinol & Petty, 2000; Petty, Wheeler, & Beier, 2003; Salovey & Wegener, 2003).

We begin with the well-validated notion that people tend to like things that are associated with themselves more than things that are associated with others (e.g., Kihlstrom, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1988). For example, people overestimate their in-group compared to out-groups (Tafel, 1981) and find their own arguments more convincing than those generated by others (Greenwald & Albert, 1968). People also value and are more interested in things associated with themselves, as shown with self-relevance increasing information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1978b). Furthermore, most people tend to find things associated with themselves easier to process (Brinol et al., 2013). Thus, based on these features (familiarity, liking, and interest), matching a message to the self has the potential to impact attitudes and persuasion through the same multiple processes documented previously.

Currently, many different types of matching have been demonstrated throughout the literature. For example, research has shown that by matching a quality of the message's source, such as the gender, to that of the recipient (e.g., a woman delivering an appeal to a woman) can increase the persuasiveness of the message (see Fleming & Petty, 2000). Other examples of variables that have been found to have the main effect for matching include need for cognition (Kukla, 1987), sensation seeking (Pashigren, Stephenson, Evert, Buchhart, & Frances, 2002), the functional bias of attitudes (Provenza & Gilbr, 2005) and affect versus cognition (Furnham, 1999). Even one's culture can account for this effect. For example, advertisement appeals to one's independence and personal success are more persuasive to people from Western countries (i.e., individualistic cultures which promote traits like these) than people from Eastern countries (i.e., collectivist cultures). However, the opposite is true for advertisements appealing to collective values, like in-group benefits and family integrity (Lin & Shwir, 1994; Zhang & Gelb, 1996). However, without understanding the processes through which matching can increase (or decrease) persuasion, we cannot account for when it will or will not occur. By applying the ELM, even, we can begin to better understand these effects.
Understanding matching with the ELM

According to the ELM, matching can influence attitudes by the same fundamental processes described so far for variables like emotion and source credibility (e.g., see Petty, Hider, & Wheeler, 2009). For example, one of the variables that has been studied the most with respect to matching is self-monitoring, or the degree to which one orientates him or herself towards social approval (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors are very attentive to modifying their behavior to their current social circumstances, whereas low self-monitors are more motivated to be consistent with their internal belief and values. In a study by Petty and Wegener (1999), researchers matched or mismatched advertisements with cognitively or affectively directed arguments to individuals who differed in level of self-monitoring. That is, high and low self-monitors either read social image (e.g., how good a product makes you look) or quality (e.g., how efficient a product is) appeals that contained either strong or weak arguments. For the participants who read advertisements that matched their self-monitoring status (i.e., social image messages for high self-monitors and quality messages for low self-monitors), the strength of the arguments had a larger effect on attitudes compared to those who received mismatched advertisements, an indication that matching enhanced information processing thereby increasing the impact of message quality on attitudes (see also DelBono & Hamshaw, 1988; Fugita et al., 1989; Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1997; Wan & Kucker, 2013; Wheeler, Petty, & Bazar, 2005).

When the likelihood of elaboration is constrained to be low, however, a match between the message and the consumer is more likely to influence attitudes by serving as a simple cue (e.g., DelBono, 1987). For example, if a source simply asserts that the arguments are consistent with a low-self-monitor’s values, if thinking is not high, this simple match to the self can produce persuasion with the reasoning, “If it links to my values, it must be good!” In contrast, when thinking is set to a high level (e.g., a topic of high personal interest; high accountability for a decision), then effects could enable increased persuasion by biasing the direction of thinking. Indeed, some research suggests that high self-monitors are more motivated to generate favourable thoughts to messages that make an appeal to image rather than an appeal to values (e.g., Lavine & Snyder, 1996).

Yet another role for matching is provided by the self-verification hypothesis. For example, Evans and Clark (2012) showed that thought-confidence increased when the characteristics of the source matched (vs. mismatched) the characteristics of the recipient. These researchers showed that high (vs. low) self-monitors relied more on their thoughts when the source was attractive (vs. credible), which increased persuasion for positive but decreased persuasion for negative thoughts (for an additional example of matching increasing thought validation, see Huntzinger, 2013). This metacognitive role would be more likely to occur under relatively high elaboration conditions and when the match follows message processing.

Future avenues in matching research

In this chapter, we have shown matching is relatively prolific throughout the literature; however, there are still areas and applications of matching that have yet to be fully examined. In the final section of this chapter, we discuss areas that matching research has begun to explore but deserve further consideration.

Correcting for matching

Similar to the communication variables discussed previously, if people are made aware of the potential bias induced by matching, they may be prone to correct for it. For example, if a consumer recognizes that an ad is being specifically matched to him or her to increase persuasion, he or she may intentionally correct the opposite direction of the appeal’s intention. In one study, Conner, Grant, and Higgins (2004) manipulated whether or not a persuasive appeal for an after-school program matched the individual’s strategy for goal pursuit (i.e., either promotion-focused or prevention-focused) and whether or not the individuals were made aware of the matching effects of matched messages. Although none participants found the matched message to be more persuasive, those who were made aware of the effect by highlighting the source for their feelings of “rightness” corrected for their bias and actually found the unmatched message more persuasive.

Other research has also revealed that personalized (i.e., matched) messages may not always be more effective—or at least these favorable personalization effects are subject to moderation by external factors (e.g., meta-analyzed in Nurt, et al., 2007). For example, when people don’t see a legitimate reason for why their personal information was used in a highly personalized message, effectiveness is decreased (White, Zaba, Thorborne, & Shavitz, 2008). Similarly, highly personalized messages may not generate desirable responses from individuals who possess independent or collectivist tendencies (e.g., those with independent tendencies: Li, Kalyanaraman, & DelBono, 2011; Kramer, Spalter-Rese, & Thalheimer, 2007). Moreover, when people anticipate feelings of regret associated with personalized products, they may seek standard ones instead (Symn, Kishnamurthy, & Hess, 2008).

When matching decreases (vs. increases) thinking

The thrust of evidence so far has demonstrated how matching often increases influence, and one mechanism for this is that matching increases thinking about the arguments when it is otherwise constrained. The question remains: Where are the boundary conditions wherein matching can sometimes decrease thinking? Petty and Wegener (1999, p. 230) suggested that “if people form stronger expectations about what a message will say, they would be less surprised when the message violates these expectations”. That is, if one expects a persuasive message to match the recipient’s already held views, he or she may be less likely to scrutinize the message due to the belief that he or she already knows what to expect (Hastie, 1984; Miller & Channon, 1991). In contrast, if people are surprised by the position taken, information processing will be increased (Aaker & Petty, 1994). Previously, we reviewed evidence demonstrating how matching could increase elaboration by making the message content seem more self-relevant to the recipient. What happens, however, when matching instead leads the recipient to simply perceive the message content as expected or already known?

Some initial work on this comes from Smith and Petty (1996) who found that if a message matched what people expected (e.g., the participants expected a positively-framed message and received a negatively-framed one), argument quality had a larger impact on attitudes than if the position matched what was expected, implying greater message scrutiny. A cross-cultural study (Aaker & Williams, 1998) also examined this expectancy violation with advertisements for camera films in both the United States and China. In the U.S., consumers are accustomed to ads that use Western-valued emotions (e.g., delight), whereas in China, consumers are accustomed to ads that use Eastern-valued emotions (e.g., columns). Thus, when researchers unmatched ad expectations (e.g., a delight-focused appeal for the Chinese), they found greater argument quality effects than when the ad was matched.

Additional evidence for this mismatching increasing processing effect comes from Ziegler (2011) who put participants in either a good or bad mood and then manipulated the source of a message to have high or low likability. Past research has shown that people come to have
mood-congruent expectations for the valence of a source (e.g., a positive mood leads to expectations of a positive source) (Mayer, Gaschke, Braverman & Evans, 1992). Therefore, a match to expectations in this instance would be constituted under the good mood/favorable source condition leads to more processing than confirmation, the mismatching condition should lead to greater Baker & Petty, 1994; Ziegler, 2002; Ziegler et al., 2002). In brief, these studies show that if expectation violates argument quality effects than matching would – which was exactly what was found (see the matching is to expectations, it is the mismatching condition that leads to greater scrutiny (due to surprise). On the other hand, if matching is to the self, then the matching condition produces the greater scrutiny (due to the enhanced interest from personal relevance).

In addition to surprise and expectancy violation paradigms, there might be other processes and conditions under which matching could decrease thinking. For example, if the confidence that emerges from matching validates the belief that one already knows enough about the topic, or if it increases the sense of validity in one's existing attitude, then matching would be expected to undermine thinking. This would be most likely when the sense of matching precedes the processing of the message.

Matching and self-persuasion

All of the matching research reviewed so far has shown how matching influences responses to messages generated by external sources. However, one new avenue for exploring matching is within the realm of self-persuasion, and specifically, its relation to argument generation (rather than reception). Prior research has shown that matching can influence the number and the content of thoughts people generate in response to persuasive messages generated by others. A relevant question, then, is to what extent matching can also influence the thoughts consumers generate in the absence of persuasive messages.

Imagine for a moment that a consumer is trying to convince him or herself to purchase a new treadmill instead of a television. In the absence of any kind of persuasive appeal from the company, what kind of arguments will the consumer generate to influence his or her decision? In one study by Zhao, Lowery and Han (1992), individuals who were high versus low in self-monitoring were presented with consumer products that could be ambiguously categorized as either utilitarian or social identity based (e.g., watches and sunglasses). Participants were then asked to generate and design ads that would “explicitly appeal to themselves.” Paralleling prior matching effects, low self-monitors constructed ads mostly of utilitarian arguments, whereas high-self-monitors made ads mostly composed of social identity-based arguments.

Another example of this effect comes from Rucker and Galinsky (2009) who examined power. The researchers proposed that powerful people value products for their quality or functional value for their ability to confer status (because these features promote their goals of BMW, the results showed that participants assigned to the high-power condition tended to focus their dogs on performance, whereas those in the low-power condition tended to focus their dogs on prestige. Together, these two studies suggest that people tend to generate arguments that match their own personality or cognitive style, exactly those arguments that tend to be the most effective when generated by others.

In their analysis of self-persuasion, Mao and Thoman (2007) described two types of strategies: episodic and teleological. Episodic strategies try to restructure one's cognition to align with the desired outcome attitude (e.g., reinterpreting undesired attributes of an object to be more positive).

In contrast, teleological strategies attempt to reduce the accessibility of the undesired attitude (e.g., suppressing or distracting oneself from an undesired attribute). Resch and Lord (2011) speculated that episodic strategies would require greater cognitive processing because they involve generating new thoughts, whereas teleological techniques require greater self-control because they require managing current thoughts. Following a matching logic, Resch and Lord (2011) found that when participants high in Need for Cognition used episodic strategies (the more cognitively demanding type), it resulted in greater self-persuasion. However, when participants high in self-control used teleological strategies (a task requiring self-control to maintain active thought suppression) (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), it resulted in greater self-persuasion.

A final illustration of this phenomenon comes from research in which people match the effort they invest in generating arguments with the perceived demands of the task. Specifically, research conducted by Briñol, McCarty and Petty (2012) began with the assumption that people hold the reasonable belief that generating arguments to persuade themselves is more difficult when the task is counter-attitudinal rather than pro-attitudinal, and they further believe that they know their own opinions better than they know the opinions of others (cf., Dunning, 2012). Because of this, when the topic of the persuasion task is counter-attitudinal, people invest more effort in generating a message designed to persuade themselves than in generating arguments to convince another person of the same position. That is, people can be sure that they are opposed but are less sure of the opposition of the other; thus, they work harder to persuade themselves. The reverse is the case when the message is pro-attitudinal. Here, people invest less effort in generating arguments designed to persuade themselves than another person because they are less sure that the other person already agrees. When the impact on actual self-persuasion was assessed, it followed directly from the effort expended on the persuasion task.

In sum, the concept of matching has been demonstrated in the domain of externally oriented persuasion and for self-persuasion. Little work, however, has addressed the relevance of matching for when people spontaneously advocate to others such as in the domain of Word of Mouth effects (Berger, 2014). For example, are advertisements that match a dimension of someone's personality (e.g., extraversion) more likely to be shared subsequently with other people believed to also have that personality dimension (e.g., other extraverted people)? Or more generally, to what extent do people tell others about products and services when they think the others are similar versus dissimilar to them? Future research can benefit from examining whether these and other forms of matching affect the source's willingness to engage in word of mouth influence.

Concluding remarks

We have focused on how source, recipient and context variables can produce (or not produce) persuasion by a variety of high and low effort processes that operate along an elaboration continuum. Although attitude change is possible as a result of relatively low thought processes (e.g., relying on simple cues and inferences), these changes are not as consequential as those induced via high thought processes. In parallel, many of the same psychological processes and outcomes that have been observed in research on receiving and processing external messages have also been observed when consumers generate their own messages in the absence of external information – an area of research worth further exploration. Other important research questions to pursue include: When do people spontaneously attempt to self-persuade themselves? Do they tend to do so through peripheral cues or central arguments? Do matching and mismatching effects work similarly in this context? In sum, the present review not only examined the psychological processes relevant for understanding the influence of single variables; it also addressed...
instances where multiple variables, such as in matching effects, interact to provide a host of outcomes.

References


The elaboration likelihood model


