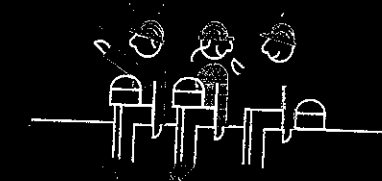
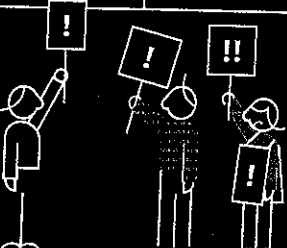
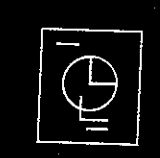
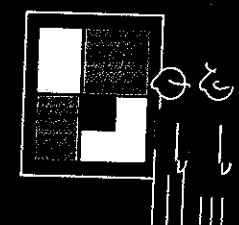
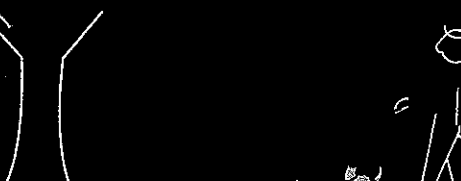
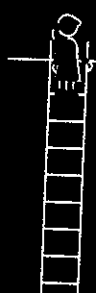
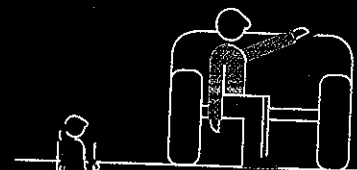


5E



FIFTH EDITION

# Social Psychology

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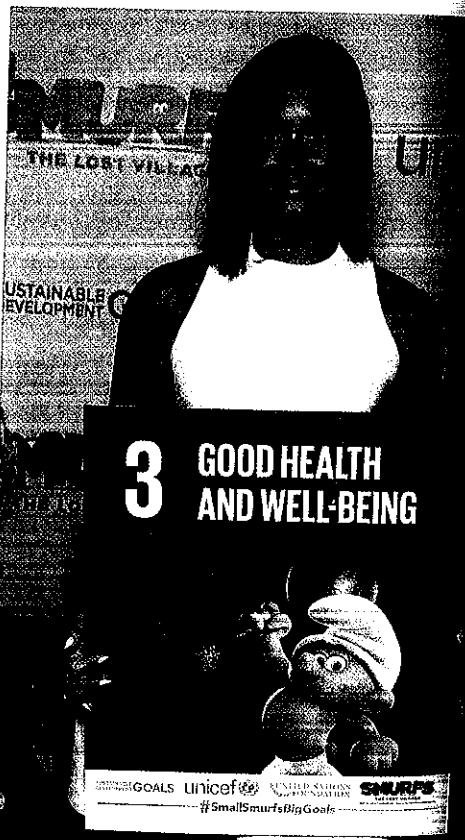


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אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב  
הספרייה



## Persuasion

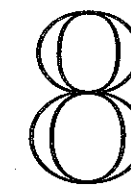


IN 1985, “DON’T MESS WITH TEXAS” bumper stickers began appearing on cars in Texas, beginning the launch of what turned out to be the most successful anti-littering campaign ever conducted in the United States. The campaign, commissioned by the Texas Department of Transportation, was aimed at reducing the cost of picking up roadside litter. Research showed that the main culprits were young, male truck drivers. Aware of the demographic they were targeting, the advertising team had an epiphany. Since most Texans associated the word *litter* with a group of puppies or kittens, a campaign on “littering” wasn’t going to work. The campaign needed a motto that would resonate with the likes of the rough-and-tumble males who thought nothing of throwing their empty beer cans out their truck windows. The slogan “Don’t Mess with Texas” was born.

The slogan not only fit the sensibilities of the target demographic; it also capitalized on a well-known fact—enormous Texan pride. The team astutely recruited well-known masculine icons to disseminate the anti-littering message. Members of the Dallas Cowboys, singers such as Willie Nelson and Lyle Lovett, and the actor Matthew McConaughey were among the first to participate. The spokespersons for the campaign did not plead; instead, rugged football players looked sternly into the camera as they crushed beer cans, threw them into the garbage, and proclaimed: “Don’t mess with Texas!”

The “Don’t Mess with Texas” campaign is a legendary success story in the world of advertising. It’s also a story about the psychology of persuasion—how to influence people’s attitudes and behaviors. The campaign’s success suggests that large numbers of people can be persuaded—something we have seen throughout

CHAPTER



### OUTLINE

Dual-Process Approach to Persuasion

The Elements of Persuasion

Metacognition and Persuasion

The Media and Persuasion

Resistance to Persuasion

Why are some campaigns more effective at changing behavior than others?

Why are we more likely to support social causes endorsed by celebrities?

# Don't mess with Texas®

## ADVERTISING SUCCESS

In 1985, on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation, an advertising agency launched an anti-littering campaign centered around the slogan "Don't Mess with Texas." This successful strategy reduced litter by 72 percent within six years. The trademarked slogan shown here has inspired books, songs, and political speeches and still remains an iconic symbol of Texas pride.

*"The object of oratory alone is not truth, but persuasion."*  
—THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

*"Men are not governed by justice, but by law or persuasion. When they refuse to be governed by law or persuasion, they have to be governed by force or fraud, or both."*  
—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

history. Charismatic leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi have stirred the masses and brought about radical social change, even when lacking significant institutional power or money. And in 2014, the "Ice Bucket Challenge," a promotional strategy aimed at combating the neurodegenerative condition ALS, became a craze that spread worldwide. In addition to raising awareness about the disease, the campaign persuaded people to donate, ultimately taking in over \$115 million, which funded groundbreaking research.

People, however, can be remarkably resistant to persuasion. Many well-designed, well-funded efforts to encourage people to practice safe sex, stop using drugs, or improve their diet have failed (Aronson, Fried, & Stone, 1991). People can be stubbornly resistant to changing their minds, even when their health or economic well-being is affected. This chapter will examine both of these truths: we can be markedly susceptible to persuasion but also impressively resistant to it. ■

## Dual-Process Approach to Persuasion

Over 90 percent of the scientific community believe that people are the cause of the warming of the Earth's atmosphere and that global warming will likely yield catastrophic events—hurricanes that dwarf Irma, rising sea levels that will place parts of the U.S. South and many tropical islands under water, rampant wildfires, and the disappearance of thousands of species. It's also clear that each of us can do many things to cut our own carbon emissions, a primary source of global warming. Here are just a few:

- We can drive our cars less and rely more on bikes or public transportation.
- We can fly less often to our vacation destinations.
- We can eliminate red meat from our diet (you'd be surprised how much that can help).
- We can use energy-efficient light bulbs, toilets, heating systems, and solar panels—all of which right now cost more than the conventional options but will yield many benefits in the long run.
- We can turn off computers and lights when not in use.
- We can buy local produce or grow our own food (which helps reduce carbon emissions because trucking isn't required to deliver the food).

Imagine you're leading a public service campaign to persuade people to adopt these habits. Doing so might not be as difficult as, say, getting people to change their sexual practices to curb AIDS, which some African countries tried with limited success. Still, there are plenty of barriers to modifying attitudes and behavior related to cutting carbon emissions. People would have to alter old habits (driving their cars), give up strong preferences (double cheeseburgers), and adjust their daily routine (taking extra time to use public transportation or bike to work). What kind of campaign would you design? The literature on persuasion suggests that there is no simple, one-solution-fits-all means of persuasion. Instead, social psychologists propose that there are two basic ways to persuade people, or two "routes" to persuasion.

## Elaboration Likelihood Model

In the 1980s, Richard Petty and John Cacioppo developed the **elaboration likelihood model (ELM)** to explain how people change their attitudes in response to persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, 1984, 1986; for related theorizing, see Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). The core idea is that people in certain contexts process persuasive messages rather mindlessly and effortlessly and on other occasions deeply and attentively. Does this notion of dual processes sound familiar? It should. It's analogous to the distinction we made in Chapter 4 between automatic and controlled processing. When applied to persuasion, the key insight is that some types of persuasive appeals will be more effective when the target audience is largely on "autopilot," and other types will be more effective when the target audience is alert and attentive. Indeed, the very name "elaboration likelihood model" captures the idea that in trying to predict whether a persuasive message will be effective, it's essential to know whether the target audience is likely to "elaborate"—think deeply about—the message or process it mindlessly.

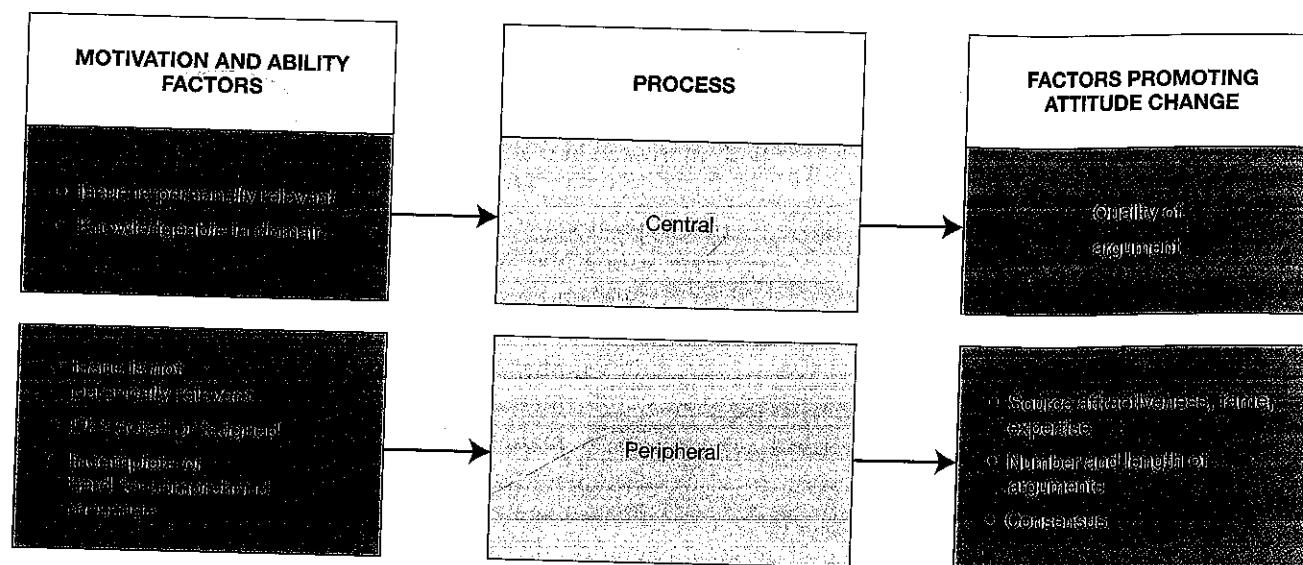
According to the ELM, the **central route** to persuasion occurs when people think carefully and deliberately about the content of a persuasive message (Figure 8.1). They attend to the logic and strength of the arguments and evidence presented in the message; they rely on relevant information of their own—experiences, memories, and knowledge—to evaluate the message. Whether or not all of this high-effort thinking, or elaboration of the message, leads to attitude change, there's a careful sifting of the arguments and evidence presented.

Through the ELM's **peripheral route**, people primarily attend to peripheral aspects of a message—relatively superficial, easy-to-process features of a communication that are tangential to the persuasive information itself. A peripheral cue might be the apparent expertise, credibility, or attractiveness of the person communicating a persuasive message. To be sure, some of these peripheral cues, such as the communicator's expertise or credibility, can be a form of evidence when processed

**elaboration likelihood model (ELM)** A model of persuasion maintaining that there are two different routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route.

**central route** A route to persuasion wherein people think carefully and deliberately about the content of a persuasive message, attending to its logic and the strength of its arguments, as well as to related evidence and principles.

**peripheral route** A route to persuasion wherein people attend to relatively easy-to-process, superficial cues related to a persuasive message, such as its length or the expertise or attractiveness of the source of the message.



**FIGURE 8.1**  
**DUAL-PROCESS APPROACH TO PERSUASION**

According to Petty and Cacioppo's elaboration likelihood model, there are two routes to persuasion: a central route and a peripheral route. The routes are engaged by different levels of motivation and ability to attend to the message, and different types of persuasive appeals are more effective through one route than through the other. Any persuasion variable, such as a source's expertise, can bring about attitude change through either or both central and peripheral routes to persuasion.

in a deliberate, thoughtful fashion. But when persuasion occurs through the peripheral route, the person is swayed by these cues without engaging in much thought.

In the peripheral route, people rely on relatively simple heuristics, or rules of thumb that guide them in how to respond to a persuasive message. Thus, a person's attitude toward red meat might change simply because "an expert says it's bad to eat it," "there are many arguments against eating it," or "a lot of people don't eat it." Or a peripheral cue might change a person's emotional reaction to the attitude object (the focus of the persuasive appeal), leading to a change in attitude on this basis alone. If the source of a message is attractive, for instance, this might make the person feel more positively about the attitude object simply by eliciting general feelings of liking or attraction that rub off on the object itself.

### The Roles of Motivation and Ability

What determines whether we will engage in central or peripheral processing in response to a persuasive message? Two factors matter: motivation and ability (see Figure 8.1). In terms of our *motivation* to devote time and energy to a message: when the message has personal consequences—it bears on our goals, interests, or well-being—we're more likely to go the central route and carefully work through the arguments and relevant information. In terms of our *ability* to process the message in depth: when we have sufficient cognitive resources and time, we're able to process persuasive messages more deeply; in general, the more we know, the more thoughtfully we're able to scrutinize a persuasive message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In contrast, when ability is low—for example, the arguments in a persuasive message are being presented too quickly or are hard to comprehend—we're more apt to rely on easy-to-process, peripheral cues associated with the message, such as the credentials of the message source (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Being tired or distracted also makes peripheral processing more likely. The upshot is that for persuasion to occur via the central route, we have to be both motivated and able to engage in more in-depth processing. If either is lacking, persuasion generally relies on peripheral cues.

In a typical experiment testing the ELM, researchers first generate strong and weak arguments for an attitude issue or object. They then present these arguments as part of a persuasive message. They also vary the potency of various peripheral cues associated with the message, such as the number of arguments offered or the credibility or attractiveness of the source of the message. Finally, they vary a factor, such as the personal relevance of the issue, to manipulate the likelihood that the participants will process the message centrally or peripherally.

If participants process the message via the central route because the issue has a great deal of personal relevance, they should be sensitive to the strength of the arguments—swayed when the arguments are strong but not when they're weak (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, participants who are low in motivation or ability (or both) would be unlikely to discern the strength of the arguments because they're only noticing peripheral cues of the message. So whether or not they change their attitudes is less affected by argument strength.



"You're right. It does send a powerful message."

"Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, provided by the words of the speech itself."

—ARISTOTLE



## NOT SO FAST: Critical Thinking about External Validity

In 1990, the rock band Judas Priest was tried for contributing to the suicide deaths of Ray Belknap and James Vance. Prosecutors alleged that the men had been led down the path to suicide by the subliminal message "Do it" that the band had embedded into one of its songs. Can subliminal messages have such powerful effects? Can they be the basis of a nonconscious, peripheral route to persuasion?

Subliminal stimuli—stimuli presented below conscious awareness—can activate certain concepts and even shape everyday thoughts, feelings, and actions (Dijksterhuis, Aarts, & Smith, 2005). Consider a laboratory experiment in which participants saw pictures of a target person immediately after being subliminally presented with a pleasant image (such as a child playing with a doll) or an unpleasant one (such as a bloody shark). Upon later evaluation of the target person, those who were subliminally exposed to positive images provided more favorable evaluations than those exposed to negative images (Krosnick, Betz, Jussim, & Lynn, 1992).

In another study, participants were told not to drink anything for 3 hours before coming to the experiment (Strahan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2002). Upon arrival, half the participants were allowed to quench their thirst and half were kept thirsty. All of them were then subliminally primed, some with words related to thirst (*thirst*, *dry*) and some with neutral words (*pirate*, *won*). They were then allowed to drink as much as they wanted of each of two beverages. Thirsty participants who were primed with thirst-related words drank significantly more than thirsty participants primed with neutral words. (As expected, the primes had no influence on those who weren't thirsty.)

Findings like these are provocative and attest to the potential influence of subliminal messages on our decisions and behaviors. But are they cause for alarm? Do we need to be on constant alert for the possibility that advertisers, political campaign managers, or rock bands might try to alter our behavior with messages we aren't consciously aware of having seen? Maybe not. Recall Chapter 2's discussion of internal and external validity. Laboratory experiments of subliminal persuasion score high on internal validity, but considerably lower on external validity. In other words, the outside world and the lab differ in a number of important ways that make subliminal effects weaker in daily life.

The focus of the persuasion attempt in the lab is typically something people have no firm opinion about, such as a new sports drink. It's one thing to shift attitudes and behavior with respect to neutral stimuli; it's another thing entirely to shift attitudes and behavior with respect to more familiar, psychologically significant stimuli—such as getting Republicans to vote for a Democratic candidate.

In addition, the subliminal message in lab studies is presented right before assessment of the target attitude or behavior, and the participants encounter no competing messages in the interim. That's almost never the case in the real world. A subliminal command to "Drink Coke" could conceivably motivate people to leave their seats to get a drink; but once in the lobby, surrounded by all sorts of messages, they might be as likely to drink Pepsi as Coke or even get a candy bar.

In fact, no studies have ever demonstrated that subliminal stimuli induce people to do something they are opposed to doing. There's no reason to believe that being subliminally primed with the words "Do it" would lead those not already accustomed to the idea of suicide to kill themselves. The relevant lesson is that while experiments can shed light on potential attitudes and behaviors (while revealing a lot about how the mind works in the process), broad conclusions about the likelihood of a behavior or outcome occurring in daily life require a thoughtful consideration of the external validity of the body of experimental evidence.



**SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING** In a television ad run by the Republicans during the 2000 U.S. presidential election, the word *RATS* was quickly flashed on the screen in a subliminal attack on Al Gore, the Democratic candidate, and his Medicare plan.

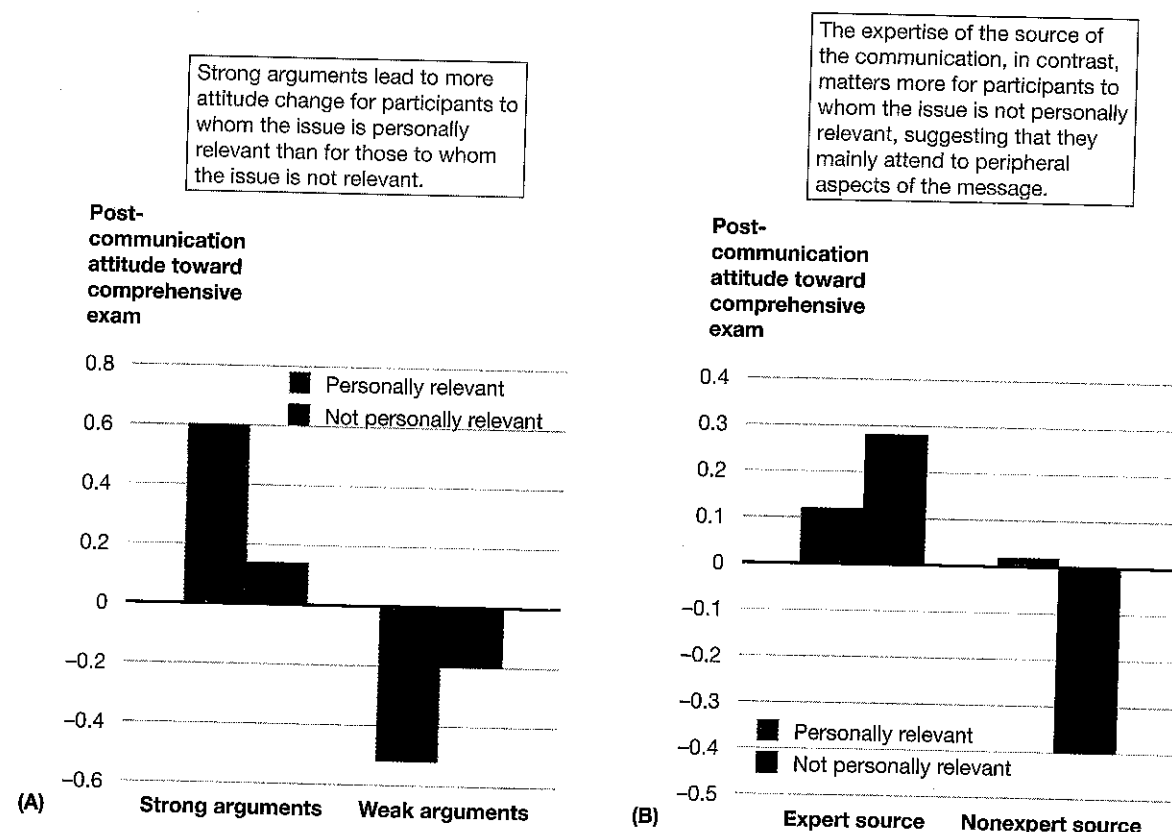
Given this reasoning, consider one study that varied the strength of the arguments, the personal relevance of the issue, and a peripheral cue: the expertise of the person delivering the persuasive message. Participants read either eight weak arguments or eight strong arguments in support of implementing a policy to require a comprehensive exam for all graduating seniors at their university (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). Personal relevance was manipulated by telling the participants the policy would be initiated either the following year, meaning they would have to take the exam, or in ten years (presumably well after the students' graduation). Finally, source expertise was varied: half the participants were told the arguments were generated by a local high school class, and half were told the arguments were generated by the "Carnegie Commission on Higher Education," allegedly chaired by a Princeton University professor.

Take a look at **Figure 8.2A**. Higher values along the vertical y-axis indicate more favorable attitudes toward the comprehensive exam, whereas lower values indicate less favorable attitudes. You can see that when the message was personally relevant to the students—that is, when the exam was to be implemented the next year and these students would have to take it—they were motivated to pay attention to the strength of the arguments. But for students for whom the message was *not* personally relevant—they wouldn't have to take the test themselves—the strength of the arguments didn't matter as much. These participants noticed, and were mainly influenced by, the expertise of the source—whether the arguments

were produced by a high school class or by a professorial committee (**Figure 8.2B**). Students who would theoretically have to take the test the following year were far less influenced by whether or not the source was an expert and more persuaded by strong than by weak arguments. In short, high personal relevance led participants to be persuaded by the strength of the arguments (the central route to persuasion), whereas a lack of personal relevance led participants to be persuaded by the expertise of the source (the peripheral route to persuasion).

It's worth noting, though, that persuasion variables, such as argument strength and source expertise, are not tied to a single persuasion route. In fact, the variables can play multiple roles, influencing persuasion through either the central or the peripheral route, depending on the circumstances (Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Petty, 1997; Petty & Briñol, 2008). For example, the expertise of the person delivering a persuasive message is often easy to discern and may therefore easily change someone's attitude without engaging a thoughtful response—persuasion via the peripheral route. But if someone is highly motivated and has the ability to think carefully, source expertise could function as an argument whose strength is carefully evaluated, such as with someone who's more apt to be convinced by an argument delivered by an expert source than by a nonexpert. This results in more mindful attitude change—persuasion via the central route. Source expertise can also affect persuasion through the central route by influencing the thoughts people generate about the issue at hand (Chaiken & Maheswaren, 1994; Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2007). For example, people may be more likely to think of supportive evidence if the source is an expert.

The upshot remains that there are two basic routes to persuasion—one involving systematic elaboration of the persuasive arguments, the other characterized by less effortful processing of relatively superficial cues. So is one route more effective than the other? Well, for long-lasting attitude change, persuasion through the central route is preferable. Through this route, people will attend to a message carefully and elaborate on it more deeply, increasing the chance of integrating the arguments into their belief system. The end result is attitude change that is more enduring, more resistant to persuasion, and more predictive of future behavior (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Mackie, 1987; Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). By contrast, for immediate acquiescence of an audience not very motivated or attentive, the peripheral route is the way to go.



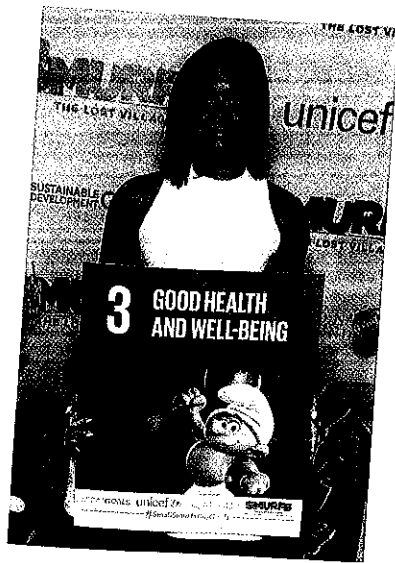
**FIGURE 8.2**  
**CENTRAL OR PERIPHERAL ROUTE TO PERSUASION**

Attitude change can be brought about by (A) strong arguments when people are motivated and by (B) the expertise of the source of the persuasive message when people aren't motivated.  
Source: Adapted from Petty & Cacioppo, 1986.

## ← LOOKING BACK

The elaboration likelihood model describes two ways of processing persuasive messages. When motivation and ability are high (such as when the issue is personally relevant and there are minimal distractions), persuasion is likely to occur through the central route, whereby people are persuaded on the basis of a careful, systematic analysis of a message, such as the strength of its arguments. When motivation and ability are low, on the other hand, attitude change tends to occur through the peripheral route, whereby people are persuaded by easy-to-process cues, such as the sheer number of arguments or the attractiveness of the message source.





**PERSUASION AND CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS**  
Demi Lovato is pictured here at the United Nations headquarters celebrating International Day of Happiness, part of a worldwide movement to increase recognition that happiness and well-being are as important to progress as economic growth.

**source characteristics**  
Characteristics of the person who delivers a persuasive message, such as attractiveness, credibility, and certainty.

## The Elements of Persuasion

Now that you have a sense of the different ways people can process a persuasive message, let's take a look at specific elements that influence whether a persuasive attempt works or not. Many of the studies in this area were inspired by research that Carl Hovland and his colleagues conducted at Yale University in the 1940s and 1950s (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). These researchers broke down persuasion into three elements, or three W's of persuasion: (1) the "who," or source of the message; (2) the "what," or content of the message itself; and (3) the "to whom," or intended audience of the message.

### Source Characteristics

Spokespeople for social causes are often rich, famous, and good-looking. For example, actor Matt Damon is cofounder and spokesperson for Water.org, an organization devoted to getting clean water to impoverished countries. Famous actress and singer-songwriter Demi Lovato has lent her name and influence to many social causes, among them the promotion of health and well-being. What are the effects of having such striking spokespeople? Questions about who delivers a persuasive message have to do with **source characteristics**. Let's take a look at some of the most deeply researched of these characteristics.

**ATTRACTIVENESS** George Clooney, the handsome, award-winning actor, has spoken up on behalf of many causes, among them the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan. Glamorous celebrities often appear in commercials, singing the praises of a particular consumer product or brand. They're also the faces of public service announcements, urging kids to read, stay in school, or avoid drugs. One could argue that relying on the beautiful and famous in these campaigns makes no sense—after all, what does beauty and charisma have to do with, say, the merits of a cause or the quality of a product? But as we've discussed, attractive communicators can promote attitude change through the peripheral route. For example, we tend to like physically attractive people (see Chapter 10), and for good or ill, this simple fact makes us more likely to accept the attitudes they endorse.

Research shows that attractive sources are particularly persuasive when the message isn't personally important to the people hearing it and when those people don't have much knowledge in the domain; in other words, the attractiveness of a source is especially persuasive under circumstances that sway people to focus on peripheral cues (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Wood & Kallgren, 1988). This doesn't mean that finding an attractive person to deliver a persuasive message is a waste of time when your audience is apt to be thinking about the message carefully. Attractive sources can lead to persuasion through the central route by, for example, increasing the favorability of people's effortful thinking about the position being endorsed. In short, it's hard to go wrong with having someone attractive deliver your persuasive message.

**CREDIBILITY** Credible sources are expert and trustworthy. Advertisers try to take advantage of this. For example, there's no shortage of ads for toothpaste, aspirin, and other health-related products that cite testimonials from doctors, known for their expertise and trustworthiness. More generally, the sheer credibility of a message's source can sway opinions under circumstances that

promote the peripheral route to persuasion, such as when the topic is of low personal relevance to the audience or the audience is distracted (Kiesler & Mathog, 1968; Petty et al., 1981; Rhine & Severance, 1970). And when the audience happens to be highly motivated and able to think carefully, source credibility can be taken as a strong argument in favor of moving toward the position the credible source is endorsing. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s credibility as a leader of the civil rights movement undoubtedly served as a strong argument in persuading people to join the movement.

What about all the noncredible messengers who crowd the airwaves these days—the crackpots maintaining that the Holocaust never happened or that AIDS is not caused by sexual contact? Do these messages fall on deaf ears? An early study unfortunately suggests otherwise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Participants first rated the likelihood that a nuclear submarine would be built in the near future (at the time, they didn't exist). Five days later, participants read an essay about the imminence of nuclear submarines and were told the essay was written either by the highly credible physicist Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb," or by a noncredible journalist who worked for *Pravda*, the propaganda newspaper of the former Soviet Union. As you might expect, the Oppenheimer essay led to greater attitude change than the essay by the less credible *Pravda* writer, even though the content of the essay was exactly the same.

Much more surprising, however, was that four weeks later, participants who had read the essay by the *Pravda* writer, although unmoved initially, actually shifted their attitudes toward the position he advocated. This came to be known as the **sleeper effect**—that is, messages from unreliable sources exert little influence initially but over time have the potential to shift people's attitudes (Pratkanis, Greenwald, Leippe, & Baumgardner, 1988). The idea is that over time, people dissociate the source of the message from the message itself. You hear some irresponsible guy on talk radio arguing that the government is preparing to ban the sale of handguns. Initially, you discount the message because of the messenger's lack of credibility. But over time, the message has a chance to influence your views because you have dissociated the source of the message from its content. Down the road, the idea may not seem entirely far-fetched.

Notice, here, that we're talking about how the ineffectiveness of a noncredible source can fade over time, allowing a message from a noncredible source to shift attitudes down the road. So how about a highly credible source linked to a weak message? The weakness of the message will surely hurt persuasion initially, but could the message get dissociated from the credible source over time so that persuasion is ultimately effective in the longer run solely because of the source's credibility? Indeed it can. Recent studies document this new form of sleeper effect whereby you get delayed persuasion by a credible source who is initially linked to a weak message but down the road is dissociated from it (Albarracin, Kumkale, & Poyner-Del Ventro, 2017).



**CREDIBILITY AND PERSUASION**  
Martin Luther King, Jr., is pictured here during the March on Washington in August 1963 as he is about to give his "I Have a Dream" speech. His credibility, due to his leading role in the civil rights movement and having repeatedly put his life on the line, undoubtedly contributed to his ability to persuade.

*"Every time a message seems to grab us, and we think, 'I just might try it,' we are at the nexus of choice and persuasion that is advertising."*

—ANDREW HACKER

**sleeper effect** An effect that occurs when a persuasive message from an unreliable source initially exerts little influence but later causes attitudes to shift.

Lie to Me

The popular TV show *Lie to Me*, which ran from 2009 to 2011, was based on the research of social psychologist Paul Ekman, who did the early studies of the universality of facial expression (see Chapter 6). Lying, of course, is one of the most challenging acts of persuasion: to get someone to believe the opposite of what you actually believe. Ekman, Bella DePaulo, and others have discovered certain clues to discern whether someone is lying or telling the truth. When people lie, they are more likely to show speech hesitations, face touches, micro-expressions of negative emotion, leg jiggles, speech dysfluencies (such as scrambled word order), sudden rises in the pitch of the voice, and increased eye contact (DePaulo, Lanier, & Davis, 1983; Ekman, O'Sullivan, Friesen, & Scherer, 1991; Mehrabian & Williams, 1969; Riggio & Friedman, 1983). Yes, *increased* eye contact. Liars exploit the conventional belief that people can't look you in the eye when they're lying.

How good are people at catching liars? It turns out that most folks are surprisingly inept at this important task. Ekman and his colleagues have presented videotapes of people lying and telling the truth to thousands of people (Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991). Participants simply had to indicate whether each person was lying or telling the truth. Whereas chance guessing would yield accuracy rates of 50 percent, people were correct, on average, only 57 percent of the time. This same research yielded interesting answers about who's particularly good at catching liars. What's your guess? Contrary to what you might expect, those sages of the human character—judges, clinicians, and psychological scientists—proved no better than the average person. The one group that shone in their ability to catch liars was Secret Service agents, probably because they get sound training in the social psychology of lying just discussed.

**message characteristics** Aspects, or content, of a persuasive message, including the quality of the evidence and the explicitness of its conclusions.

**CERTAINTY** Imagine there are two online reviews of a new restaurant. One of the reviews comments, "This is absolutely the best Italian meal you'll ever have." The other review comments, "I don't know, but I kinda feel like maybe this could be the best Italian meal you'll ever have." If you're like most people, you'd be far more inclined to try the restaurant if you read the first review. This simple example illustrates that sources who express their views with certainty and confidence tend to be more persuasive. This is because people generally judge certain and confident sources to be more credible, and as we've seen, source credibility is persuasive.

By and large, then, if your goal is to persuade someone, it wouldn't be a bad idea to express confidence in your viewpoint (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016; Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Tenney, MacCoun, Spellman, & Hastie, 2007). Research conducted in various real-world contexts supports this idea. For example, studies of jurors show that people judge how credible eyewitnesses are based on the confidence they express when they give their testimony (Wells, Ferguson, & Lindsay 1981). This is true despite the fact that the actual association between eyewitness confidence and accuracy is rather weak (Kassin, 1985). In a similar vein, people regard financial advisers who express high confidence in their stock forecasts as more knowledgeable than those who express less confidence, and the more confident advisers are accordingly chosen more often by clients (Price & Stone, 2004).

Message Characteristics

What are the **message characteristics** that make a persuasive appeal most effective? By now you should be able to anticipate the answer from the perspective of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): it depends on the audience's motivation and ability to process the message.

**MESSAGE QUALITY** As you saw in Figure 8.1, high-quality messages are more persuasive in general, especially for people who are strong in motivation and ability. Messages are of higher quality when they appeal to core values of the audience (Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982); when they're straightforward, clear, and logical; and when they articulate the desirable consequences of taking the actions suggested by the message (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976; Leippe & Elkin, 1987).

More attitude change will result if the conclusions are explicit in the message (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949): "Here's the take-away message." And it's usually a good idea to pointedly refute the opposition,

thereby giving the receiver of the message material to use in arguing against any opposing messages (Hass & Linder, 1972; Petty & Wegener, 1998). Finally, messages are more persuasive when sources argue against their own self-interest. For example, Walster, Aronson, and Abrahams (1966) found that a message delivered by a prison inmate advocating longer prison sentences was more persuasive than a message in which the same prisoner argued for shorter sentences. When someone argues for a position contrary to obvious self-interest, the source of the message is seen as more sincere. A real-world example of this might be the case of Patrick Reynolds, whose anti-smoking advocacy is likely seen as more sincere by the mere fact that it goes against his own self-interest (he is the heir to the second-largest tobacco company in the United States).

**VIVIDNESS** When information is vivid—colorful, interesting, and memorable—it tends to be more effective. In fact, vivid but misleading information can often



ARGUING AGAINST SELF-INTEREST

Patrick Reynolds, the grandson and heir of the late R. J. Reynolds (founder of the second-largest tobacco company in the United States), is shown speaking to students about the dangers of smoking. He watched his father and older brother both die of emphysema and lung cancer brought on by cigarette smoking. His anti-smoking speeches have high credibility given his family history and the fact that his arguments, if effective, would ultimately reduce his inheritance.

trump more valid and relevant information that's not as flashy. In a study showing that vivid information conveyed by a personal narrative with emotional punch can be more persuasive than statistical facts, the researchers first assessed attitudes toward welfare (Hamill, Wilson, & Nisbett, 1980). In one condition, participants then read a vivid, gripping story about a woman who was a lifetime welfare recipient. The story was based on one that former U.S. President Ronald Reagan told to great effect about a "welfare queen," a lifetime recipient of welfare who exploited the system to enjoy a life of comfort and leisure. In another condition, participants read facts about welfare: that the average time on welfare was two years, and only 10 percent of recipients received welfare for four years or more. In a third condition, participants read both the vivid narrative and the facts. In this condition, it should have been clear that the case was not typical of welfare recipients in general. Which message led to more attitude change? Participants changed their attitudes more if they heard the vivid story—even when they also had the cold statistics. The facts did little to alter their attitudes.

Vivid images abound in the media, and their power is evident in the **identifiable victim effect**. Vivid, flesh-and-blood victims are often more powerful sources of persuasion than abstract statistics (Collins, Taylor, Wood, & Thompson, 1988; Shedler & Manis, 1986; Taylor & Thompson, 1982). People are more willing to donate to a cause when an appeal is made on behalf of an identifiable individual than on behalf of anonymous or statistical victims (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). Recognizable

**identifiable victim effect** The tendency to be more moved by the vivid plight of a single individual than by a more abstract number of people.

*"The death of a single Russian soldier is a tragedy. The death of a million soldiers is a statistic."*

—JOSEPH STALIN



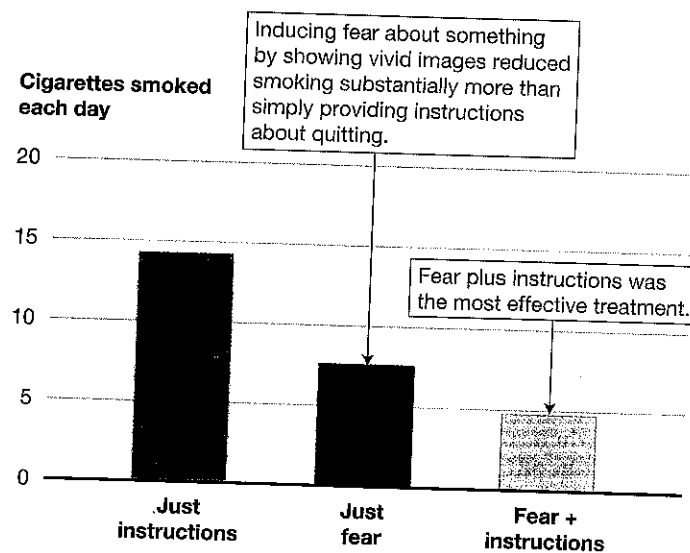
THE IDENTIFIABLE VICTIM EFFECT

People are more inclined to be persuaded to act on behalf of a cause by portrayals of clearly identifiable victims, such as the children in this compelling ad for UNICEF.

victims are more apt to elicit feelings of empathy, thereby leading to a willingness to donate to worthy causes (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Ritov & Kogut, 2011). The identifiable victim effect has limitations, however. For example, Kogut (2011) has shown that in cases where it's possible to blame a victim for his or her plight, making the person identifiable can actually breed negative perceptions of the victim and decrease rather than increase aid.

**FEAR** Suppose you want to persuade people to act in order to avoid some dire outcome. Should you try to frighten your audience about just how terrible the outcome would be, or should you avoid such fear tactics? Let's return to our hypothetical campaign to reduce carbon emissions. Should you scare the daylights out of people with images of wildfires and flooded coastal areas, or should you expose your audience to tamer fare? The ELM offers somewhat competing notions regarding fear and persuasion. On the one hand, intense fear could disrupt the careful, thoughtful processing of the message, thus reducing the chances of long-lasting attitude change. On the other hand, the right kind of fear might heighten people's motivation to attend to the message, thus increasing the likelihood of enduring attitude change (Calanchini, Moons, & Mackie, 2016).

What does the evidence say? In general, it's advisable to make ad campaigns frightening, but make sure they include clear, concrete information about what steps to take to address the source of the fear (Boster & Mongeau, 1984). Supporting this recommendation, Howard Leventhal and his colleagues tried to change smoking habits in one of three ways. They showed some participants a graphic film of the effects of lung cancer, which included footage of a lung operation in which the blackened lung of a smoker was removed. They gave other participants a pamphlet with instructions about how to quit smoking. A third group saw the film and read the pamphlet (Leventhal, Watts, & Pagano, 1967). Participants who only viewed the scary film reduced their smoking more than those who just read the bland instructions. In this case, fear was persuasive. But participants exposed to both the film and the pamphlet decreased their smoking the most. **Figure 8.3** presents participants' self-reports of their daily smoking behavior a month after the intervention. In short, it appears that fear-eliciting persuasive messages that provide information that can be acted on can be highly effective (Leventhal, 1970; Leventhal et al., 1967; Robberson & Rogers, 1988).



**FIGURE 8.3**  
**FEAR AND PERSUASIVE MESSAGES**

Fear, especially when paired with instructions on how to respond to the fear, is likely to lead to attitude change.  
Source: Adapted from Leventhal et al., 1967.

**CULTURE** Not surprisingly, it's important to tailor a message to fit the norms, values, and outlook of the cultural group of your audience. Thus, the message content in the media of independent and interdependent cultures often differs substantially. Marketing experts Sang-pil Han and Sharon Shavitt analyzed the advertisements in American and Korean news magazines and women's magazines (Han & Shavitt, 1994). They found that the American ads emphasized benefits to the individual ("Make your way through the crowd"), whereas Korean ads focused on benefits to collectives ("We have a way of bringing people closer together"). In experimental studies that manipulated the content of advertisements, these researchers found that the individual-oriented ads were more effective with American participants and that the collective-oriented ads were more effective with Korean participants. Related arguments have been made with regard to upper-class individuals, who tend to define themselves in more independent terms, compared with lower-class individuals, who define themselves in more interdependent terms (Carey & Markus, 2016). Persuasive messages that appeal to independence may be more effective among higher-class individuals, whereas messages conveying interdependent themes may be more effective among lower-class individuals.

Along related lines, recall the discussion in Chapter 3 about cultural differences in motivational orientation. Whereas Westerners tend to pursue their goals with a promotion orientation, focusing on the positive outcomes they hope to achieve, East Asians are more inclined to pursue their goals with a prevention orientation, focusing on the negative outcomes they hope to avoid (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). What do such differences imply for how best to frame a persuasive appeal aimed at Westerners versus East Asians? In one study, researchers



**MESSAGE CHARACTERISTICS AND TARGETING**

Persuasive messages are generally targeted to collective concerns in interdependent cultures and individual concerns in independent cultures. Similarly, messages may vary at different times within the same society or culture. (A) During World War II, U.S. Army posters stressed collective concerns. (B) In recent times, army recruitment posters highlight individual characteristics cultivated by military service, such as individual strength.



## The Timing of Persuasive Attempts Matters

Whether you're trying to persuade your parents to help you finance a new car, nudge your romantic partner to take a job offer in a nearby city, or win a debate with a classmate about gun control, it's important to consider the three W's of persuasion: "who" (source characteristics), "what" (message characteristics), and "to whom" (audience characteristics). But what about the "when" of persuasion—that is, the timing of your persuasive attempt? Social psychologist Robert Cialdini has made a compelling case for the importance of the moments *before* a persuasive attempt. Sure, it can't hurt if you're attractive and come off as likable and credible or if your message is brimming with convincing arguments, but Cialdini (2016) argues that what transpires in the pocket of time right before you deliver your persuasive message can determine whether you succeed or fail to persuade. Cialdini uses the term *pre-suasion* to refer to this approach.

The driving idea behind pre-suasion is that what people are paying attention to just prior to encountering a persuasive appeal is critical. You want to sell someone a product? Channel attention to the most favorable feature of that product and diminish attention to rival brands. You want to convince the public to support a war effort? Focus their attention on the suffering that would occur if we didn't intervene rather than on the questionable nature of the facts about the enemy. You want to convince people to bike to work more often? Direct their attention to vivid media images of horrific car accidents. And so forth.

Cialdini outlines a variety of psychological principles and processes that account for why attention is so important to effective persuasion, but the novel insight here isn't that attention matters. What's new are the many and often quite subtle ways we can direct people's attention one way or another in those "privileged moments" right before people are even aware that an attempt to persuade is coming.

Cialdini gives the example of a company trying to get people to try a new soft drink. The traditional approach to persuasion would have the company hiring a celebrity to endorse the drink, citing compelling statistics on the appealing flavor of the drink, and perhaps commissioning commercials likely to appeal to the target audience. But a pre-suasion approach would focus on what you might do before a consumer is even presented with the persuasive attempt to get them to taste or buy the new drink. Researchers Bolkan and Andersen (2009) tackled this very question. They got people to think of themselves as "adventurous" simply by asking them if they saw themselves as "somebody who is adventurous and likes to try new things" (almost 100 percent of those asked responded affirmatively) right before asking them for their e-mail address so they could be sent instructions on how to get a free sample of the new drink. This led to an over two-fold increase in the percentage of people who gave their e-mails (76 percent) compared with when the simple "how adventurous are you?" question was not asked (33 percent). The lesson here? Don't just focus on what you do during a persuasive attempt. It's worth considering the precious moments right before.

et al., 1996; Wegener & Petty, 1994; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). Other work shows that inducing people to feel guilt can increase their compliance to a persuasive appeal—such as an appeal to engage in pro-environment behavior—so long as the message conveys how such behavior helps to repair the environment. In other words, guilt seems to lead to enhanced persuasion so long as the communication offers people a way to alleviate some of their guilt (Graton, Ric, & Gonzalez, 2016).

**AGE** Who is more likely to be persuaded by messages, younger people or older people? As you might have guessed, it's younger people (Sears, 1986). This finding has great real-world significance. For example, one source of former President Reagan's political success was the overwhelming support he received from the 18–25 age-group, the same demographic group that backed President Obama in overwhelming numbers 28 years later in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. This young age-group can be quite malleable when it comes to political allegiances.

Another real-world application of the age effect in persuasion has to do with relying on children as witnesses in legal cases. In child abuse cases, for instance, how seriously the courts should consider the testimony of young children is a

recruited participants from a British university who identified themselves as white British or of East Asian origins (for example, Chinese, Korean) and presented them with a persuasive appeal about the importance of flossing one's teeth (Uskul, Sherman, & Fitzgibbon, 2009). The appeal was framed in terms of either the benefit of flossing or the cost of not flossing. The white British participants were more persuaded by the gain-framed message, whereas the East Asian participants were more swayed by the loss-framed message.

### Audience Characteristics

The work on culture and persuasion illustrates a broader idea: it's important to match the characteristics of the persuasive message to characteristics of the intended audience. In fact, researchers have discovered a range of **audience characteristics** that can influence whether a persuasive message is likely to be effective. Let's consider some of these.

**NEED FOR COGNITION** People differ in their need for cognition, the degree to which they like to think deeply about things (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). Those with a strong need for cognition like to think, puzzle, ponder, and consider multiple perspectives on issues. This is the kind of person you might observe on the subway reading *Scientific American* or working through sudoku puzzles on their smartphone. People with a weaker need for cognition don't find thought and contemplation that much fun. As you might imagine, people with a high need for cognition are more persuaded by high-quality arguments and are relatively unmoved by peripheral cues of persuasion (Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Luttrell, Petty, & Xu, 2017). By contrast, people who have a lower need for cognition are persuaded more by easier-to-process, peripheral cues.

**MOOD** As anyone who's ever tried to win the heart of another can attest, it's easier to persuade when the person you're trying to woo is in the right mood. It's no wonder that sometimes people go to great lengths to create a particular mood in an audience they're trying to sway. Hitler staged enormous rallies for his most important speeches, surrounded by bold Nazi banners, awesome displays of military strength, soaring music, and thousands of supporters chanting and saluting in unison. His intent was to stir the emotions of his audience to make them more receptive to his ideas. Studies have found that people exposed to persuasive messages while eating or listening to beautiful music are more apt to change their attitudes (McGuire, 1985).

The effects of mood on persuasion can also be more nuanced. Duane Wegener and Richard Petty suggest that persuasive efforts tend to be successful when the mood of the message matches the mood of the audience. More pessimistic, counterattitudinal messages (arguing against the prevailing attitude of the audience) tend to prompt greater message processing in sad or depressed people, whereas uplifting, optimistic, proattitudinal messages prompt greater message processing in happy people (Bless

### audience characteristics

Characteristics of those who receive a persuasive message, including need for cognition, mood, and age.



### PERSUASION AND MOOD

The mood of an audience can affect whether a message will lead to attitude change. In Germany in the 1930s, Adolf Hitler staged rallies, like this Hitler Youth rally, to create a mood of strength and unity that would encourage people to support his ideas.

major issue in light of the fact that their attitudes can be readily altered by clever attorneys interested in winning a case, not at getting at the truth (Loftus, 1993, 2003). A further problem concerns the extent of advertising directed at young children. Given that advertising can shape people's attitudes and does so more for the young than for the old, the immense amount of advertising directed at children 16 and younger is a serious concern.

Let's return again to the example of changing people's everyday habits to reduce carbon emissions. How might the literature on persuasion help you design a campaign? Perhaps the most important lesson is to tailor your message to your audience. Certain people—including those for whom global warming is personally relevant, who know quite a bit about the crisis, and who have a high need for cognition—are likely to go through the central route to persuasion, responding to the deeper substance of the message. For people like this, there is no substitute for high-quality messages, ones that are logical and clear, that make subtle rather than heavy-handed recommendations, and that appeal to clear consequences and values.

For many other people, and in many contexts, the peripheral route to persuasion is probably a better bet. For example, the peripheral route is likely to be more effective for younger audiences, for those who know less about global warming, and for people who don't think global warming is relevant to their lives. For such audiences, you might resort to attractive or credible message sources or vivid messages.

## ← LOOKING BACK

The three elements of persuasion are characteristics of the message's source, the content of the message itself, and the intended audience. In general, attractive, credible, and confident sources are effective at persuasion. Messages containing strong (versus weak) arguments will be more persuasive, especially through the central route of attitude change. Messages with vivid or fear-inducing content can also be quite persuasive, as can messages that are framed in ways that are culturally relevant. Audience characteristics include mood and age.

## Metacognition and Persuasion

Beyond the "who, what, and to whom" elements of a persuasive message, a number of social psychologists have begun to examine how **metacognition**—the thoughts we have about our thoughts—can influence attitude change (Briñol & DeMarree, 2012; Petty, Briñol, Tormala, & Wegener, 2007). The idea is that we have primary cognitions, the thoughts themselves, as well as secondary cognitions, reflections on the thoughts we just had. So, for example, in thinking about your attitude toward reducing carbon emissions, you're likely to think about the origins of carbon emissions and their effects on the environment. Accompanying these primary cognitions, though, could be secondary cognitions: for example, assessments of how confident you are in your knowledge about carbon emissions, the ease with which facts about carbon emissions come to mind, or how clear the facts seem to you. Growing research suggests that such secondary cognitions can have their own persuasive impact.

**metacognition** Secondary thoughts that are reflections on primary thoughts (cognitions).

## The Self-Validation Hypothesis

One of the most extensively researched metacognitions has to do with the feeling of confidence (or lack thereof) we have in our reactions to a persuasive appeal. The **self-validation hypothesis** maintains that feeling confident about our thoughts validates those thoughts, making it more likely that we'll be swayed in their direction (Petty, Briñol, & Tormala, 2002). When we have doubts about our thoughts, we might disregard the thoughts entirely or even end up endorsing an opposing attitude (Briñol & Petty, 2009; Tormala, Petty, & Briñol, 2002). For example, we might have a number of arguments against posting the Ten Commandments in the city courthouse, but coming up with these counterarguments is so hard that we end up accepting the idea ("Maybe freedom of speech is more important than separation of church and state"). In this example, we can see that how easily thoughts come to mind affects our confidence in these thoughts. How confident we feel about our thoughts can also arise from our perceptions of the accuracy of a thought or just from how clear a thought is in our mind (Petrocelli, Tormala, & Rucker, 2007). We have greater confidence—and are thus more apt to be persuaded—when we perceive our thoughts to be easily brought to mind, accurate, and clear.

In an early test of the self-validation hypothesis, Richard Petty and his colleagues designed another study in which university participants read a persuasive message arguing in favor of a new campus policy that would require all seniors to take a comprehensive exam before they graduate, and then recorded whether their thoughts in response to the message were favorable or unfavorable (Petty et al., 2002). Participants were then led to feel confidence or doubt by recalling a situation in the past when they had experienced either confidence or doubt. In the condition where participants had recalled an episode of confidence, those who had previously generated mostly favorable thoughts about the comprehensive exam reported more favorable attitudes toward this issue—in other words, they were more persuaded—than those with mostly unfavorable thoughts about the exam. What about the participants who recalled a time of doubt? Their attitudes toward the comprehensive exam were not predicted by the favorability or unfavorability of their thoughts about the exam. That is, they didn't rely on their thoughts to come up with their attitudes toward the senior comprehensive exam—presumably because those thoughts were shrouded in doubt. Thus, just as the self-validation hypothesis would predict, the favorability or unfavorability of one's thoughts influenced persuasion only when they were associated with a feeling of confidence.

## Embodiment and Confidence

How confident (or not) we feel about the thoughts we have in response to a persuasive appeal can also come from nonverbal sources—for example, from whether our posture is upright or slouching, our tone of voice confident or uncertain. In other words, attitudes can be partly "embodied." Recall, for example, the study from Chapter 7 in which participants who listened to radio editorials while nodding their heads up and down expressed more agreement with the editorials compared with participants who were shaking their heads side to side while listening (Wells & Petty, 1980).

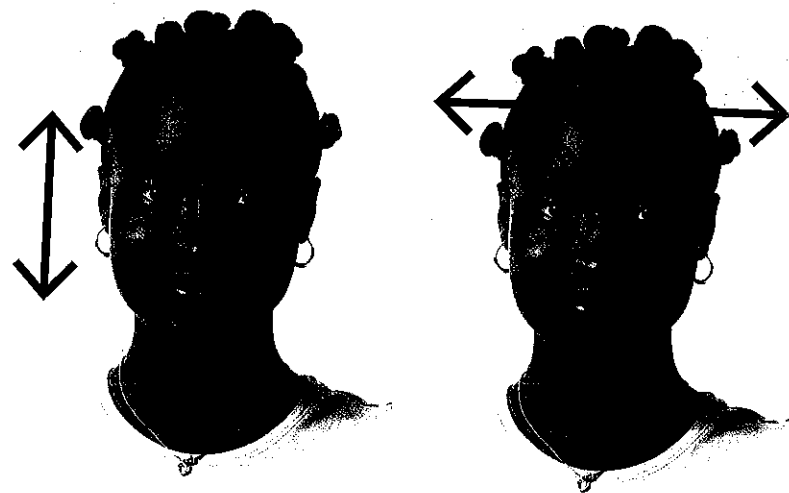


"What's come over Heisenberg? He seems to be certain about *everything* these days."

**self-validation hypothesis** The idea that feeling confident about our thoughts validates those thoughts, making it more likely that we'll be swayed in their direction.

### EMBODIMENT AND CONFIDENCE

Nodding the head up and down while reading a persuasive message can result in more persuasion compared with shaking the head—but only when the message is made up of strong arguments. When the arguments are weak, leading people to have mostly unfavorable thoughts about the persuasive topic, nodding the head can actually lead to less persuasion compared with shaking the head.



The idea behind this research is that nodding and shaking the head can affect attitudes because they are peripheral cues of agreement and disagreement. But the self-validation hypothesis suggests another mechanism to account for findings like these: bodily movements can signal varying degrees of thought confidence, and it's this confidence that determines whether or not persuasion occurs.

Brinöl and Petty (2003) found support for this novel prediction in a study in which participants listened to either strong or weak arguments in favor of a consumer product (headphones) while nodding or shaking their heads. The expectation was that strong arguments about the quality of the headphone would elicit primarily favorable thoughts about the product, whereas weak arguments would elicit mostly unfavorable thoughts. This was indeed the case, but how did the participants' head movements factor in? As you might expect, nodding while listening to the strong arguments led to greater confidence in the mostly favorable thoughts participants generated, leading to more favorable attitudes toward the headphones. In the weak arguments condition, however, students who nodded their heads were actually *less* persuaded than those who shook their heads side to side. This may seem surprising in light of the idea that nodding one's head is a sign of agreement, but the self-validation hypothesis accounts for this counterintuitive finding: namely, nodding led students to feel greater confidence in the unfavorable thoughts they had in response to the weak arguments they were listening to, leading them to feel less favorable toward the headphones. The broad take-home point here is that it's important to understand people's thinking about their thoughts to have a fuller understanding of the dynamics of persuasion.

### ← LOOKING BACK

Metacognitions—the thoughts people have about their own thinking—can influence responses to a persuasive appeal. The confidence people have in the validity of their thoughts is a primary example of a metacognition. Growing evidence indicates that when thought confidence is high, persuasion in the (favorable or unfavorable) direction of one's thoughts is more likely to occur.

## The Media and Persuasion

We live in a media-saturated world. A 2011 compilation of studies found that every day, on average, the American adult watches 4.34 hours of TV and video, surfs the Internet for 2.47 hours, listens to 1.34 hours of radio, and reads newspapers or magazines for 0.44 hour (eMarketer, 2011). These figures have only increased over time. A more recent report indicates that U.S. adults spend, on average, 12 hours, 7 minutes a day consuming media (eMarketer, 2017). All told, over half the waking hours of most Americans are spent taking in various types of broadcast, online, and print media. This far exceeds the time spent in face-to-face social interaction with friends and family.

### The Power of the Media

How powerful are the media in actually shaping our attitudes? Documenting the effects of the media on people's attitudes is no simple task. Researchers have done some experiments, but more typically they've relied on surveys in which people report which programs and ads they've seen. The investigator then examines whether those exposed to certain programs or ads hold opinions that are closer to the advocated positions than the opinions of people who have less exposure to the same media. Retrospective self-reports, however, are notoriously fallible. If participants say they have seen some ad, or say they have not, how can researchers be sure? How can they be sure viewers saw the ad under the same conditions? Most importantly, what about self-selection effects? For example, highly motivated citizens are more likely to tune in to political ads than less motivated citizens (Iyengar, 2004). Any apparent effect of an ad campaign is confounded by these differences in political motivation.

Regardless of these difficulties, many studies attest to the power of the media to influence people's tastes, opinions, and behavior. Interestingly, recent data suggest that the power of broadcast media doesn't just arise from the fact that it reaches a wide audience; it's also the sheer awareness of each person in the audience of this broad reach (Shteynberg, Bramlett, Fles, & Cameron, 2016). That is, when people perceive that they're attending to a stimulus (for example, a televised political speech) simultaneously with many others—a phenomenon known as *shared attention*—they're inclined to process the stimulus more deeply, resulting in persuasion via the ELM's central route.

In addition, researchers are increasingly paying attention to the role of social media in persuasion. Consider the use of social media platforms like Facebook. Although many people use Facebook primarily for social and entertainment purposes, this platform provides a forum for people to express their opinions on political candidates, parenting practices, current events, restaurants, and so on. Facebook and other social media platforms also serve as a source of news for many people, a fact that became especially well-known during and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election due to accusations of the Russian government using social media to meddle in the election. Regardless of the precise ways that people use social media, platforms like Facebook expose us to others' opinions, and growing evidence suggests that such exposure can sway our opinions and behavior (Baek, 2015; Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016; Greenwood, Sorenson, & Warner, 2016). So even though social media might not be the first thing that comes to

mind when you think about persuasive arenas, persuasion may well be occurring more subtly while people are using such forms of media for other purposes.

### The Media and Conceptions of Social Reality

Some researchers have pointed to a more indirect, but arguably more profound and unsettling influence of the media: shaping our very conception of social reality (Eibach, Libby, & Gilovich, 2003). For example, even if specific advertisements don't succeed at getting us to buy specific products, they could still sway us to believe that personal happiness lies in materialistic pursuits. Television and film portrayals of U.S. society can be misleading about, for example, actual levels of racial or socioeconomic diversity in a given region or country. And political ads may not get us to vote for a particular candidate, but they may lead us to conclude that the country is going downhill.

Political scientist Shanto Iyengar and social psychologist Donald Kinder refer to this effect of the media as **agenda control**: media of all types substantially contribute to shaping the information we think is broadly true and important. For example, the prominence given

to certain issues in the news media—crime, traffic congestion, or economic downturns—is correlated with the public's perception that these issues are important (Cialdini, 2016; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In one experiment, viewers in one condition saw three news stories dealing with U.S. dependence on foreign energy sources; in another condition, six such stories; and in a final condition, no stories like this (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). When exposed to no news about dependence on foreign energy, 24 percent of the viewers cited energy as one of the three most important problems facing the country. This percentage rose to 50 percent for the participants who saw three stories on the subject and 65 percent for those who saw six stories. Therefore, a politician in office should hope that news reports focus on things that are going well at the time, and a politician who wishes to defeat the incumbent should hope that the media focus on things that are not going well (Box 8.4).

George Gerbner and his colleagues have explored the agenda control thesis by coding the content of television programs and looking at the attitudes of heavy TV viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). It should come as no surprise that the world depicted on most TV shows scarcely resembles social reality. On prime-time programs, for example, males outnumber females by a factor of 3 to 1; and recent analyses of popular films from 2007 to 2012 find that women have only about 25 percent of the speaking roles (Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, & Pieper, 2013). Ethnic minorities, young children, and older adults are also underrepresented. Crime is wildly more prevalent per unit of time on prime-time shows than in the average American's real life. And heavy TV viewers—those who watch 5 hours or more per day—construe social reality much like the reality they see on the screen. They tend to endorse more racially prejudiced attitudes, assume that women have more limited abilities than men, and overestimate the prevalence of violent crime. These findings could, of



#### AGENDA CONTROL IN FILMS

Sofia Coppola's film *The Beguiled* featured a cast lacking in racial diversity. Coppola was criticized for not including the African-American character who appeared in the book on which the film was based. Such biased media portrayals can result in misleading portraits of the world.

**agenda control** Efforts of the media to select certain events and topics to emphasize, thereby shaping which issues and events people think are important.

## The Hostile Media Phenomenon

Accusations of media bias in coverage of the U.S. presidential race have been commonplace throughout modern history. For example, Richard Nixon maintained that the media were run by an elite Jewish clique. During his run for president in 2008, John McCain claimed the media were treating Barack Obama uncritically, in biased fashion, reacting to him as if he were a rock star rather than looking critically at his political agenda. Meanwhile, his running mate, Sarah Palin, derided the "lame-stream media" for having what she perceived as a consistent "liberal bias." Accusations of media bias, from both sides of the aisle, were particularly heated and frequent during the 2016 presidential campaign. Such accusations have continued since Trump took office, such as ones that arose about media coverage of Trump's controversial comments in the wake of the 2017 white supremacy protests in Charlottesville, VA. And, of course, since he assumed office, President Trump has regularly derided even the mainstream media as presenting "fake news."

The thesis that the media are ideologically biased regularly leads to the publication of best-selling books that appeal to liberals and conservatives alike. An entire organization, Fairness and

Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR; www.fair.org), is devoted to documenting bias in the media (showing, for instance, that conservatives are more likely to appear as experts on such news shows as *Nightline*).

Research by Robert Vallone, Lee Ross, and Mark Lepper (1985) suggests that we all tend to believe the media are biased against our preferred causes. According to these researchers, most people believe they see the world in a reasonable, objective fashion—a fallacy known as naive realism (see Chapter 1). Thus, any media presentation that attempts to present both sides of an issue is going to be perceived as biased by both sides of any controversy. This basic tendency to perceive the media as hostile is a regularity in the political theater of presidential politics, as well as a common feature of our perception of the media. In one telephone survey conducted 3 days before the 1980 U.S. presidential election, among Jimmy Carter supporters who felt the media had favored one candidate in its coverage, 83 percent thought it favored Reagan. In contrast, for Reagan supporters who felt the media had been biased, 96 percent felt the media had favored Carter. One thing we can all agree on: the media are biased!



President Trump  
@POTUS

Follow

If the people of our great country could only see how viciously and inaccurately my administration is covered by certain media!  
-DJT

6:28 AM - 29 Mar 2017

#### PERCEIVED BIAS IN THE MEDIA

The hostile media phenomenon is arguably stronger than ever in today's political and media climate. Accusations of bias on the part of mainstream media seem to accompany reports of any controversial event or issue. The leader of our country himself regularly tweets about such bias against him.



course, be the result of self-selection; perhaps more prejudiced, cynical, and uninformed people watch more TV in the first place. But the results are still worth pondering.

## ← LOOKING BACK

Most people believe that the media are quite effective in directly influencing public opinion. But this influence may often be indirect. The greatest effects of the media seem to involve influencing conceptions of reality and exerting agenda control, making people feel that certain issues are particularly important.

## Resistance to Persuasion

Despite the degree to which we're immersed in media of different kinds on a daily basis, several reviews suggest that the media have only a small effect on what we buy, whom we vote for, and whether or not we adopt healthier habits (McGuire, 1985). Why? Part of the answer lies in the fact that many of the important principles of social psychology—such as the influence of our perceptual biases, previous commitments, and prior knowledge—serve as sources of independent thought and significant forces of resistance in the face of persuasive attempts.

### Attentional Biases and Resistance

The U.S. Office of the Surgeon General issued a report in 1964 linking smoking to lung cancer. This presumably incontrovertible evidence about the related health risks would logically have both smokers and nonsmokers shifting their attitude about smoking. And yet, following the release of the report, 40 percent of smokers found the document to be flawed, compared with 10 percent of nonsmokers. We all like to think we absorb data and information in relatively unbiased fashion (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004). If we learn that a particular practice or habit is dangerous to our health, we should alter our attitude accordingly. But our minds sometimes respond selectively to information in a way that maintains our initial point of view. Let's break this down into two concepts: selective attention and selective evaluation.

Several studies indicate that people are inclined to *attend selectively* to information that confirms their original attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Hart et al., 2009; Sweeney & Gruber, 1984). We tune in to information that reinforces our attitudes, and we tune out information that contradicts them. In one study, students who either supported or opposed the legalization of marijuana listened to a message that advocated legalization (Kleinhesselink & Edwards, 1975). The message contained 14 arguments: 7 were strong and difficult to refute (and thus clearly appealing to the pro-legalization



students), and 7 were silly and easy to refute (and thus very attractive to the anti-legalization students). The students heard the message through earphones accompanied by a continual static buzz. To combat this problem, students could press a button to eliminate the buzz for 5 seconds.

As you might have anticipated, the pro-legalization students pushed the button more often when the speaker was delivering the strong arguments in favor of legalization. They wanted to hear the information that would reinforce their own viewpoint. The anti-legalization students, in contrast, were more likely to push the button while the speaker was offering up the easy-to-refute arguments in favor of legalization. They wanted to hear the weakness of the pro arguments, thereby reinforcing their anti-legalization position.

During presidential elections, people are more inclined to subscribe to and read newspapers, blogs, and websites that support their preferred candidate and avoid those that support the opposition. Such selective attention in turn forms the basis of algorithms that drive the results of people's Internet searches, as well as the content of their social media feeds, leading to the creation of echo chambers (Quattrociocchi, Scala, & Sunstein, 2016; Stroud, 2010). It's this phenomenon that made Donald Trump's presidential victory a shock to many liberals, whose social media feeds, in the days leading up to the election, suggested that Clinton would likely triumph.

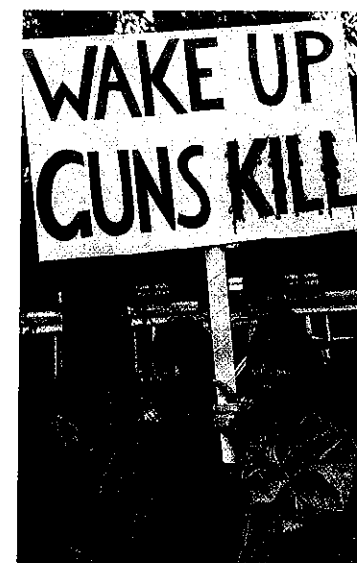
Social scientists of all stripes have discussed the tendency people have to evaluate information—such as the credibility of a source or the soundness of an argument—in ways that support their existing beliefs and values (Kahan, 2012; Kahan, Braman, & Jenkins-Smith, 2011). Someone who believes that the importance of climate change is exaggerated is likely to see more flaws in an article urging steps to combat global warming than is someone who believes that climate change is a defining issue of the times.

Peter Ditto and his colleagues have shown that selective evaluation extends to evidence that violates cherished beliefs about one's personal health. Patients who receive unhealthy diagnoses are more likely to downplay both the seriousness of the diagnosis and the validity of the test that produced it (Ditto, Jemmott, & Darley, 1988). In one study, Ditto and Lopez (1992) gave undergraduates a test of a fictitious medical condition, a deficiency that was supposedly associated with pancreatic disorders later in life. The test was simple: put saliva on a piece of yellow paper and observe whether it changes color in the next 20 seconds. In the deficiency condition, participants were told that if the paper remained yellow, they had the medical condition; in the no-deficiency condition, participants were told that if the paper changed to a dark green, they had the medical condition. You won't be surprised to know the paper remained yellow throughout the study.

Clearly, participants in the deficiency condition would be motivated to see the paper change color, and they should be disturbed by the evidence confronting them—the paper remaining yellow. And indeed, as shown in **Figure 8.4** (see p. 262), these participants took almost 30 seconds longer than those who got more favorable evidence to decide that their test was finished, repeatedly dipping the paper in saliva to give it every possible opportunity to turn green. Given our tendency to selectively attend to and evaluate incoming messages in ways that confirm our preexisting attitudes, it's no surprise that media effects can be weak in producing attitude change. Most messages, it would seem, end up mainly preaching to the choir.

"When I believe in something, I'm like a dog with a bone."

—MELISSA McCARTHY



### SELECTIVE FRAMING

Like selective evaluation of evidence that supports or contradicts one's attitude, people can also frame the same issue—in this case, gun control—in a selective manner. People in favor of gun control frame guns as the main reason for gun-related deaths, whereas those opposed to gun control frame the problem in terms of those who shoot the guns.

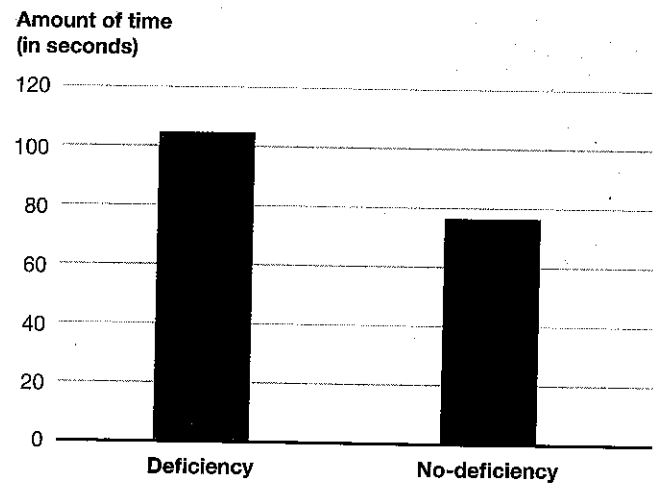


#### PUBLIC COMMITMENT AND RESISTANCE

When people commit to a position on an issue publicly, this can increase their resistance to attempts to persuade them otherwise.

#### thought polarization hypothesis

The hypothesis that more extended thought about a particular issue tends to produce a more extreme, entrenched attitude.



**FIGURE 8.4**  
**SELECTIVE EVALUATION**

People who are personally motivated will be more skeptical of information that challenges cherished beliefs.

Source: Adapted from Ditto & Lopez, 1992.

### Previous Commitments and Resistance

Many persuasive messages fail because they can't overcome the target audience's previous commitments. Antidrug campaigns are aimed at decreasing habitual drug-taking behavior, which is embedded in a way of life and a community of friends centered around drugs. Some forces of resistance to change may be even more formidable than habits—genetics, for example. Research reveals that our political allegiances are passed from parent to child to a degree and seem to be part of our DNA (**Box 8.5**). Ads that try to get people to shift their political allegiances must, in effect, convince voters to abandon these deep commitments.

There's also evidence that public commitments, declarations of one's attitude around a given issue in a public setting, make people resist attitude change. (In addition, public commitments might make people resistant to conformity; see Asch's line judgment studies in Chapter 9.) In some studies, when participants made public commitments to their attitudes—as people do every day when discussing politics and social issues with their friends—they were more resistant to subsequent counterattitudinal messages than control participants (Kiesler, 1971; Pallak, Mueller, Dollar, & Pallak, 1972).

Why do public commitments increase our resistance to persuasion? One basic reason is that it's hard to back down from such endorsements without losing face, even when evidence is presented against the position we publicly embraced. A less obvious reason is that public commitments engage us in more extensive thoughts about a particular issue, which tends to produce more extreme, entrenched attitudes. Abraham Tesser labeled this idea the **thought polarization hypothesis**. To test his hypothesis, Tesser measured participants' attitudes about social issues, such as legalizing prostitution (Tesser & Conlee, 1975). He then had them think for a few moments about the issue. When they stated their opinions about the same issue a second time, they routinely gave stronger ratings; both opponents and proponents became polarized.

## FOCUS ON

### The Genetic Basis of Attitudes

One of the deepest sources of our commitment to strong attitudes and resistance to persuasive messages is our genes. Work by Abraham Tesser (1993) indicates that our opinions and beliefs are in part inherited. He examined the attitudes of monozygotic (identical) twins, who share 100 percent of their genes, and those of dizygotic (fraternal) twins, who share 50 percent of their genes. For most of the viewpoints surveyed, the identical twins' attitudes were more similar than those of fraternal twins. This was true, for example, for opinions about the death penalty, jazz, censorship, divorce, and socialism. Moreover, researchers found that the more heritable attitudes were also more accessible, less susceptible to persuasion, and more predictive of feelings of attraction to a stranger who had similar attitudes. Of course, there is no gene for attitudes about

censorship or socialism; the hereditary transmission must occur through some element of temperament, such as impulsivity, a preference for risk taking, or a distaste for novelty (which might make a person dislike jazz but be more tolerant of censorship).

More recent research by James Fowler and his colleagues found that genes account not only for politically relevant attitudes, as Tesser documented, but also for political participation (Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008). They found that identical twins were more likely to resemble each other than were fraternal twins in sharing party affiliations and in their likelihood of voting in an election. No wonder it's often hard to shift people's political opinions and voting preferences and behavior; doing so would require changing a basic part of who they are.

Similarly, the repeated expression of attitudes has been shown to lead to more extreme positions in a variety of domains, including viewpoints about particular people, artwork, fashions, and football strategies (Downing, Judd, & Brauer, 1992; Judd, Drake, Downing, & Krosnick, 1991; Tesser, Martin, & Mendolia, 1995). But a caveat is in order here. Increased thought about an attitude object can lead to more moderate attitudes for people who previously had little motivation to think about the issue or little preexisting knowledge about it (Judd & Lusk, 1984).

### Knowledge and Resistance

As you learned in reading about the ELM approach to persuasion, prior knowledge makes people engage with persuasive messages through the central route, thereby leading them to scrutinize those messages carefully. People with a great deal of knowledge are more resistant to persuasion; their beliefs and habits (and sometimes emotions) are tied up with their attitudes, and thus their point of view tends to be fixed. This insight has been repeatedly borne out in the experimental literature (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Krosnick, 1988; Lydon, Zanna, & Ross, 1988; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996).

In a study of attitudes about environmental preservation, Wendy Wood (1982) divided students into two groups: those who were pro-preservation and knew a lot about the issue and those who were pro-preservation but knew less about the subject. She exposed these two groups to a message opposed to environmental preservation. Those with a lot of knowledge about the environment changed their stance only a little bit, as they counterargued a great deal in response to the message, relying on what they already knew and strongly believed about the issue. In contrast, the less knowledgeable students shifted their attitudes considerably toward the anti-preservation message.

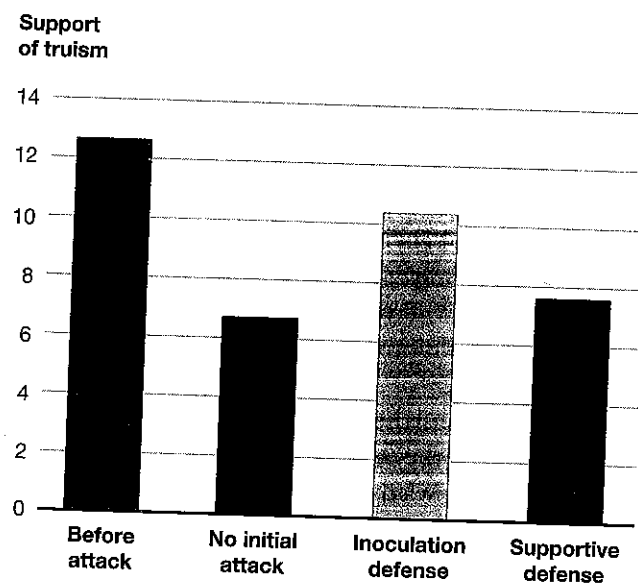
## Attitude Inoculation

Thus far, we've looked at how people's belief systems—their biases and preexisting knowledge—make them resistant to persuasion and attitude change. Social psychologists have discovered some techniques that can be used to strengthen these tendencies.

McGuire developed one such technique, which found inspiration in a rather unusual source: inoculation against viruses. When we receive an inoculation, we're exposed to a weak dose of the virus. This small exposure stimulates our immune system, which is then prepared to defend against larger doses of the virus. McGuire believed that resistance to persuasion could be encouraged in a similar fashion by **attitude inoculation**—small attacks on our beliefs that would engage our preexisting attitudes, prior commitments, and background knowledge and thereby counteract a larger attack (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961).

In his studies on attitude inoculation, McGuire first assessed participants' endorsements of different cultural truisms to confirm a preexisting attitude, such as "It's a good idea to brush your teeth after every meal if at all possible" or "The effects of penicillin have been, almost without exception, of great benefit to mankind" (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961). More than 75 percent of the participants checked 15 on a 15-point scale to indicate their agreement with truisms like these.

Then came the intervention. McGuire and Papageorgis exposed participants to a small attack on their belief in the truism. In the toothbrushing case, they might read, "Too frequent brushing tends to damage the gums and expose the vulnerable parts of the teeth to decay." In some conditions, the researchers had the participants refute that attack by offering arguments against it; this was the attitude inoculation, akin to a small dose of a virus stimulating the immune system. In other conditions, the researchers had participants consider arguments in support of the truism. Then, at some time between 1 hour and 7 days later, the participants read a three-paragraph, full-scale attack on the truism. **Figure 8.5** presents data that attest to the immunizing effectiveness of attitude inoculation.



**FIGURE 8.5**  
**ATTITUDE INOCULATION**

This study showed that using preexisting attitudes, commitments, and knowledge to come up with counterarguments against an initial attack on an attitude makes people more resistant to persuasion in the face of a subsequent attack (third bar) compared with when there was no initial attack (second bar), or when they initially generated supportive arguments in favor of their attitude (fourth bar).

Source: Adapted from McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961.

Applied to a real-life situation, like a smoking prevention program, the idea would be to present people with pro-smoking arguments from peers and advertisements, such as "Smoking is about freedom and maturity," then encourage them to make counterarguments. The hope would be that counterarguing in response to an initial attack would inoculate them, thus making them more resistant to future inducements to smoke. Inoculation techniques would seem to be very useful in today's context given how widely available and easily accessible "fake news" and other forms of misinformation are (van der Linden, Leiserowitz, Rosenthal, & Maibach, 2017).

## ← LOOKING BACK

People can resist persuasive messages by selectively attending to and evaluating information that confirms their original attitudes and beliefs and ignoring or criticizing contradictory information. Attitudes tied up with considerable prior knowledge can be highly resistant to change. Attitude inoculation can make people resist persuasive attempts, because the small attacks give them the chance to muster arguments to use when faced with stronger attacks on their beliefs and attitudes.

# Chapter Review

## SUMMARY

### Dual-Process Approach to Persuasion

- The *elaboration likelihood model* hypothesizes that there are two routes to persuasion. A person's motivation and ability to think carefully and systematically about the content of a persuasive message determine which route is used.
- When using the *central route* to persuasion, people attend carefully to the message, and they consider relevant evidence and underlying logic in detail. People are especially likely to go through this route when motivation is high (the issue has personal consequences) and ability is high (they have a lot of knowledge in the domain). With the central route, people are sensitive to the quality of the persuasive arguments, leading them to be more persuaded when the arguments are strong but not when they are weak.
- In the *peripheral route* to persuasion, people pay attention to superficial aspects of the message. They use this route when they have little motivation (the issue has no bearing on their outcomes) or ability to attend to its deeper meaning (they have little knowledge or are distracted). With this route, people are persuaded by easy-to-process cues, such as the attractiveness and credibility of the message source or the mere length of the persuasive message.

### The Elements of Persuasion

- The elements of a persuasive attempt are the source of the message ("who"), the content of the message ("what"), and the audience of the message ("to whom").

- Sources that are attractive, credible, and confident tend to be persuasive. Although a noncredible source is unlikely to induce immediate attitude change, a *sleeper effect* may occur, in which attitude change happens gradually and the message has become dissociated from its source.
- Vivid messages are usually more persuasive than matter-of-fact ones. An example is the *identifiable victim effect*, whereby messages with a single identifiable victim are more compelling than those without such vivid imagery. Messages that instill fear in the audience can also be effective, as long as they include information about the courses of action one can take to avoid the feared outcome.
- Advertisements in independent cultures emphasize the individual, and those in interdependent societies emphasize the collective.
- Characteristics of the audience affect whether a message is persuasive; they include the need for cognition (how deeply people like to think about issues), mood, and age.

### Metacognition and Persuasion

- *Metacognition*, people's thoughts about their thinking, can play a powerful role in persuasion.
- The *self-validation hypothesis* states that when people have greater confidence in their thoughts, they are more persuaded in the (favorable or unfavorable) direction of their thoughts.
- Bodily movements, such as head nodding or shaking, can indicate the level of confidence people have in their thoughts about an attitude issue or object.

### The Media and Persuasion

- Documenting the effects of media on persuasion can be methodologically challenging, but there is no question that the media can shape opinions, tastes, and behavior to some degree.
- The media are most effective in *agenda control*, shaping what people think about by controlling, for example, the number and kinds of stories presented on various issues.

### Resistance to Persuasion

- People can be resistant to persuasion because of pre-existing biases, commitments, and knowledge. They selectively attend to and evaluate information according to their original attitudes, tuning in to what supports their prior attitudes and beliefs and tuning out whatever contradicts them.

- Public commitment to a position helps people resist persuasion. Just thinking about an attitude object can produce *thought polarization*, movement toward extreme views that can be hard to change.
- People with more knowledge are more resistant to persuasion because they can counterargue messages

that take an opposite position to what they know and believe.

- Resistance to persuasion can be encouraged through *attitude inoculation*, exposing people to weak arguments against their position and allowing them to generate arguments against that opposing view.

## THINK ABOUT IT

1. A new boutique coffeehouse just opened in your neighborhood featuring coffee sustainably sourced from small organic farms around the world. Design two ads for the coffeehouse, one using the central route to persuasion and one using the peripheral route. How do your ads differ?
2. Describe the three elements of a persuasive appeal, and give two examples of each element that influence persuasiveness.
3. Suppose you are part of a global advertising team responsible for creating ads for oatmeal in both South Korea and the United States. Design an ad for each country, and explain why you designed the ads the way you did.
4. What is the self-validation hypothesis? What aspects about our thoughts, besides the positive-negative direction and number of thoughts we have on a topic, influence whether or not we are persuaded by them?
5. Tyrell and his girlfriend, Shea, have very different views on capital punishment: he opposes it, while she supports it. Even after Tyrell presents evidence that capital punishment is both financially wasteful and ineffective at preventing crime, Shea does not change her views. Using what you know about resistance to persuasion, how might Shea be staving off Tyrell's attempts to persuade her?

The answer guidelines for the think about it questions can be found at the back of the book . . . 

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