Susceptibility to Persuasive Appeals as a Function of Source Credibility and Prior Experience With the Attitude Object

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Two experiments were conducted to assess the susceptibility of attitudes formed by either direct or indirect experience to proattitudinal or counterattitudinal messages delivered by a highly credible or a less credible source. The results were generally consistent with Fazio and Zanna's (1981) theory of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes and with predictions derived from Petty and Cacioppo's (1981, 1986) elaboration likelihood model. In Experiment 1, direct-experience attitudes proved to be more resistant to a counterattitudinal appeal than were indirect-experience attitudes. Moreover, the final attitudes of direct-experience participants reflected these subjects' cognitive elaborations of the message arguments (i.e., the central route to persuasion), whereas the attitudinal responses of indirect-experience participants were affected more by source characteristics (i.e., peripheral cues). In Experiment 2, direct-experience attitudes became more extreme in response to a proattitudinal appeal, but indirect-experience attitudes did not. In addition, the polarization shifts shown by direct-experience participants were in keeping with these subjects' predominantly favorable elaborations of the message, whereas the attitudes of indirect-experience participants were more closely related to subjects' impressions of the communicator. Thus, direct-experience attitudes were more resistant to attack and, yet, more susceptible to proattitudinal influence than were attitudes originating from indirect experience. An affect-mediation model, which proposes that direct-experience attitudes are more affectively salient and accessible than indirect-experience attitudes, was offered as both a possible extension of elaboration likelihood theory and an alternative interpretation for the results.

Over the past decade, social psychologists have shown a renewed interest in the attitude construct (cf. Eagly & Himmel-farb, 1978), its components (Breckler, 1984), and the relation between verbal attitudes and behavior (cf. Cialdini, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1981; Davidson, Yantis, Norwood, & Montano, 1985). The resurgence of interest in these issues stems, in part, from provocative reviews (e.g., Wicker, 1969) that questioned whether attitudes were at all predictive of behavior. In response to this strong challenge, researchers have subsequently identified a number of personal, situational, and attitudinal variables that play important roles in determining whether preexisting attitudes forecast one's future conduct (see, e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Davidson et al., 1985; Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Snyder, 1979).

One important moderator of attitude-behavior consistency is the method by which an attitude has been formed. Specifically, Fazio and Zanna (1981) have demonstrated that attitudes originating from direct behavioral experience with the attitude object are more predictive of later behavior than are attitudes stemming from indirect experience or hearsay. One explanation for this finding is that direct-experience attitudes are linked to prior behavior, whereas indirect-experience attitudes are not. Thus, by sharing a common dependence on prior behavior, direct-experience attitudes and future behavior should be meaningfully related (Fazio & Zanna, 1981). Another possibility is that direct-experience attitudes may be stronger attitudes. This assumption is bolstered by observations that attitudes stemming from direct experience are more clearly formed and confidently held (Fazio & Zanna, 1978a, 1978b) and are more readily accessible from memory (Fazio, Chen, McDonel, & Sherman, 1982) than are those based on indirect experience. One implication of this latter viewpoint is that direct-experience attitudes are more likely to be evoked and, thus, are more available to guide behavior whenever one encounters the attitude object in the future (cf. Fazio, Powell, & Herr, 1983).

Our purpose in this research is to assess the susceptibility of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes to various persuasive appeals. Fazio and Zanna (1981) have argued that the greater confidence, clarity, and accessibility of direct-experience attitudes should make them highly resistant to counterattitudinal influence. Consistent with this line of reasoning are the findings that (a) explicit behavioral commitments to an existing attitude makes that attitude less susceptible to attack (cf. Kiesler, 1971), and (b) subjects who are capable of retrieving large amounts of attitude-relevant behavior from memory are less influenced by counterattitudinal appeals than are those whose attitude-relevant behaviors are relatively inaccessible (Wood, 1982, Experiment 1). However, these demonstrations do not conclusively establish that direct-experience attitudes are more resistant to counterattitudinal influence than indirect-experience attitudes. This is because the target attitudes in both projects were already formed, and the means of their establishment was not known.

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Another unknown is the relative susceptibility of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes to *proattitudinal* influence attempts. Prior research suggests that people are often persuaded by proattitudinal appeals, particularly when the target attitude is highly self-relevant (Eagly, 1967) or when subjects are publicly committed to their positions (Pallak, Mueller, Dollar, & Pallak, 1972). Thus, the latter observations suggest that clear and accessible attitudes could be more susceptible to proattitudinal influence than somewhat nebulous or less accessible ones.

**A Cognitive Response Analysis**

According to Petty and Cacioppo's (1981, 1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM), a persuasive message might alter existing attitudes in either of two ways. The *central route* to persuasion emphasizes information that a person already has or is able to generate about the attitude object as the primary mediator of attitude change. Presumably, persuasion via the central route occurs as a recipient attends to the arguments contained in a persuasive appeal, interprets and evaluates them, and then integrates these cognitive elaborations into a reasoned and coherent position. By contrast, the *peripheral route* to persuasion describes changes in attitudes induced by peripheral persuasion cues (e.g., source attractiveness, promise of reward) that are in some way linked to a persuasive appeal or the context in which it occurs. The assumption is that such peripheral cues can be sufficiently compelling to bring about a change in attitude without any active thinking about the content of the persuasive message or the information on which one's existing attitude is based. Presumably, persuasion via the peripheral route is most likely to occur whenever (a) the subject is not able or not motivated to elaborate the persuasive message, and (b) salient peripheral cues are present that might induce the recipient to accept the message's conclusion.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argued that attitudes based on direct behavioral experience have necessarily evolved from a thoughtful elaboration of self-generated information that is likely to be clear, involving, and accessible. Accordingly, subjects holding direct-experience attitudes should be inclined to elaborate messages relevant to those attitudes, so that attitude change resulting from message exposure should reflect the central route to persuasion. By contrast, attitudes based on indirect experience (i.e., information from others) are less likely to have been extensively elaborated and, thus, are probably less clear, involving, or accessible than those based on direct experience. One implication of this line of reasoning is that subjects who hold indirect-experience attitudes may be less able or less motivated to elaborate a persuasive appeal, so that attitude change produced by the message may stem more from salient peripheral cues than from message-relevant cognitive elaborations.

Now suppose an attitude formed by either direct or indirect experience is threatened by a counterattitudinal message that is not sufficiently compelling to eliminate the possibility of counterargument. If the ELM analysis of direct and indirect experience is correct, subjects who hold direct-experience attitudes should be more likely to think about and to counterargue the message and, hence, should be persuaded less by it than their counterparts whose attitudes stem from indirect experience. And if this *resistance to persuasion* by the direct-experience participants truly reflects their cognitive elaborations of the message arguments, we might also anticipate that their postmessage attitudes would not be greatly affected by the presence of peripheral persuasion cues such as high communicator credibility. By contrast, the postmessage attitudinal responses of indirect-experience participants, which are presumably based less on issue-relevant thinking and more on peripheral cues, may well be affected by source characteristics. Specifically, indirect-experience participants exposed to a counterattitudinal message from a credible or attractive source should be influenced more than their counterparts who receive the same message from a less credible or less attractive spokesman.

The ELM analysis also allows us to generate predictions about the relative susceptibility of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes to *proattitudinal* influence attempts. Because a well-reasoned proattitudinal communication does not explicitly challenge subjects to defend their existing attitudes, the dominant cognitive activity that one is likely to display when elaborating the message is to generate favorable (i.e., proattitudinal) arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). And if direct-experience attitudes are clearer and more accessible than those based on indirect experience, it follows that direct-experience participants should be better able (or more inclined) to generate favorable thoughts about a proattitudinal communication and, hence, should be persuaded more by it than will indirect-experience participants. However, the notion that any postmessage attitude change is apt to reflect the central route to persuasion for direct-experience participants and the peripheral route for indirect-experience participants implies that the presence of salient peripheral cues (such as high source credibility) will have a much stronger impact on those subjects whose attitudes have originated from indirect experience or hearsay.

**Present Research**

We conducted two experiments to assess the susceptibility of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes to persuasive influence attempts. Participants first formed preferential attitudes toward two brands of low-calorie peanut butter by tasting them (direct experience) or by reading consensual data about the taste preferences of a large number of other people (indirect experience). They were then exposed to a product testimonial from either a highly credible or a less credible spokesperson that either endorsed the product they had *not* preferred (counterattitudinal message: Experiment 1) or the product that they had initially liked best (proattitudinal message: Experiment 2). After reading the testimonial, participants evaluated the source of that message, expressed their attitudes toward the two products, and completed a thought-listing measure to gauge the amount and the direction of their message-relevant cognitive activities.

To briefly review the predictions, we anticipated that attitudes based on direct experience would be more resistant to a counterattitudinal testimonial and, yet, more susceptible to proattitudinal influence than would attitudes stemming from indirect experience. Moreover, the postmessage attitudes of direct-experience participants were expected to reflect their elaborations of the testimonials they read. The final attitudes of indirect-experience participants, on the other hand, were ex-
Experiment 1: Susceptibility to Counterattitudinal Influence

Method

Subjects and Design

A total of 80 introductory psychology students (60 female and 20 male) participated for course credit in an experiment titled "Evaluating New Products." Participants were randomly assigned to four experimental conditions, which were created by the orthogonal manipulations of method of attitude formation (direct experience vs. indirect experience) and communicator credibility (high vs. low), or they were assigned to two no-message control groups. The control subjects formed attitudes by means of direct or indirect experience with the attitude objects, but they were never exposed to a persuasive communication that challenged their positions. Thus, the design was a 2 (method of attitude formation) × 2 (communicator credibility) factorial with two no-message control groups.

Procedure

When the participant arrived at the laboratory, he or she was told that the purpose of the session was to assess consumers' reactions to two new brands of low-calorie peanut butter that were in the final stages of product development. The participant was informed that the marketing and food science departments had contracted with the psychology department to solicit student reactions to these low-calorie products because college students are heavy users of peanut butter and are generally concerned about maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle. The experimenter then noted the following:

There are many different ways in which we come to notice new products and become interested in them. [For example], people often talk about products they use, and on the basis of such statements that we have heard or read, we form impressions of the product in question. Another way of obtaining information about new products is to try them ourselves and make comparisons between these products and the brands that we typically use. Both of these methods create impressions that market researchers call product concepts. The favorability of a product concept is important for it will often determine whether a new product will succeed.

Manipulation of method of attitude formation. Subjects assigned to the direct-experience condition were then told that they would now familiarize themselves with the two low-calorie peanut butters by tasting them. The experimenter placed before the subject two glass jars that were wrapped with white paper and devoid of labels except for a nondescript product identification number on each. Although described as different products, these jars each contained 4 oz (113 g) of the same brand of peanut butter (i.e., Bama). Plastic forks and napkins were placed before each jar, and the subject was instructed to taste each product as many times as was necessary to determine which of them seemed preferable to him or her. At this point, the experimenter gave the subject a Product Information Form to look over as he or she sampled the peanut butters. This form contained a list of ingredients and other characteristics of a Product X and a Product Y (e.g., shelf life, calories per ounce, etc.). This product information was reasonably balanced for favorability (i.e., Product X was described as having slightly fewer calories and slightly less fat than Product Y, whereas Product Y was described as having slightly more protein and vitamins and a slightly longer shelf life than Product X). After the subjects had finished tasting the samples, the experimenter, who had been attending to some paperwork, walked over and casually asked, "Which sample did you prefer?" When the subject replied, the experimenter consulted a coded list and indicated that the sample the subject had selected was the peanut butter labeled Product X on the Product Information Form.

Subjects assigned to the indirect-experience condition were told, "At present, we have no samples of these two products that are suitable for tasting. The samples that we do have are now several weeks old, not very fresh, and may have even become contaminated by sitting out so long." The experimenter then pointed to two jars of peanut butter on an adjacent table and noted the following:

There, at least I can show you what the products look like. For testing purposes we call them Product X and Product Y. Fortunately, tasting the products is by no means essential in order to form meaningful product concepts. In fact, previous market research suggests that truly objective opinions can easily be formed when people read about the ingredients of new products and have information about how consumers other than themselves have rated their tastiness.

At this point, the subject was given a Product Information Form that provided the same information about the two products that direct-experience participants had received and, in addition, consensual data describing the taste preferences of children, young adults, and people in general. These consensual data were heavily weighted in favor of Product X (e.g., the taste of Product X was ostensibly preferred to that of Product Y by 70% of children under 13 years of age and 75% of young adults; Product X had been rated smoother, creamier, and had less after-taste than Product Y, etc.). When the subject had finished reading this Product Information Form, the experimenter casually asked, "Which of these products seems preferable to you?"

After the subject had formed a product preference by tasting the products or by reading the consensual information, the experimenter distributed a brief Product Preference Questionnaire that was introduced as the dependent variable or "data" of the experiment. This instrument asked participants to first indicate which product they would judge as "best overall" by placing a check mark next to either Product X or Product Y. They were then asked to rate on a 7-point scale how confident they were in expressing this preference (1 = not at all confident, 7 = very confident).

Introduction of the counterattitudinal testimonial and the source credibility manipulation. After completing the Product Preference Questionnaire, the subject was given a participation credit slip as if the session was over. The experimenter then asked the subject if he or she might be willing to volunteer, without credit, to read and evaluate one of several product testimonials in order to learn something about how advertising strategy develops. It was explained that the marketing department at the university had solicited a fair number of product testimonials from earlier participants—testimonials that might well be used for developing advertising copy for one or perhaps both brands of low-calorie peanut butters.

1 The preponderance of female subjects reflected the composition of the research participant pool during the academic term in which the experiment was conducted. Male subjects were equally distributed across the four experimental conditions (n = 4 per cell) and the two control groups (n = 2 per condition). Preliminary analyses of the dependent measures revealed no significant main effects or interactions involving sex on any measure in either this experiment or Experiment 2, which follows. Thus, we collapsed across gender in all subsequent analyses.

2 Indeed, a pretest of this information suggested that it was not sufficient, by itself, to make one product seem preferable to the other. Of the 20 subjects who received this information, 17 indicated that they couldn't choose between the two products, 1 said that she thought Product X might be the better choice, and 2 favored Product Y.
peanut butter. The experimenter emphasized that the opinions expressed in the testimonial were personal ones, made by an individual who had neither been paid nor received any other benefit for doing so, and that these opinions did not necessarily represent the views of the research team that had solicited them. All participants agreed to evaluate a testimonial.

At this point, the experimenter handed the subject a neatly typed statement of approximately 400 words that began with the communicator describing himself as a college senior who had worked as a professional product evaluator for a company called Market Facts Inc. during the past summer. The communicator noted that he had first completed an extensive training program that taught evaluators how to recognize subtle differences and distinctions in the sensory qualities of products—distinctions that normal consumers do not ordinarily make. His job with Market Facts had been to compare alternative brands of consumer products such as shampoos, hair conditioners, potato chips, soft drinks, coffees, canned soups, and so forth. Thus, subjects were led to believe that the person making the product testimonial had a special expertise that they did not have.

The manipulation of communicator credibility was then introduced by varying the extent to which the speaker's expertise as a "taster" had apparently contributed to his stated product preference. The highly credible communicator indicated that he had personally tasted both brands of peanut butter on toast, untoasted bread, and crackers and that on the basis of their taste and a knowledge of their ingredients, he did not hesitate to say that Product Y was the superior peanut butter. By contrast, the less credible communicator acknowledged that he had not had an opportunity to taste the two products, but that by carefully studying their ingredients and other characteristics (such as shelf life), he could confidently say that Product Y was the superior peanut butter. The product evaluator then listed five reasons for his strong endorsement of Product Y. In summary, these arguments were as follows:

1. Given the percentage of peanuts in the overall ingredients and the way in which the peanuts are prepared, Product Y is "peanuttier."
2. Given the different amounts of sweetener used, Product Y will be optimally sweet for almost everyone. Product X has too little sweetener, even for a low-calorie product.
3. Product Y has the longer shelf life, an important consideration for consumers who worry about the freshness of the ingredients and other characteristics of the two products (see footnote 1).
4. Product Y is more vitamin enriched than Product X.
5. And while on the subject of nutrition, let's remember that peanut butter is often used as a quick source of energy. Thus, I feel that Product X may actually contain too few calories and too little protein to be of much nutritional value.3

The communicator then concluded his testimonial with the statement, "On the basis of all of these considerations and roughly equal costs, I will say again that Product Y is the better buy and preferable to Product X."

Posttestimonial impressions and attitude measures. After the subjects had read the testimonial, the experimenter distributed a questionnaire on which subjects were ostensibly being asked to give a candid and anonymous appraisal of the convincinglyness of the testimonial and their impressions of the communicator. Subjects first indicated by check mark the product that the communicator had preferred and then rated on a 9-point scale the extent to which the communicator seemed to favor one product over the other (1 = no clear preference, 9 = preferred one very much to the other). Subjects then rated the communicator on eight 9-point bipolar dimensions relevant to his performance as a product spokesman. Two of these dimensions (inept-expert, knowledgeable-not knowledgeable) served as indicators of the communicator's perceived expertise, whereas three others (credible-not credible, reliable-unreliable, trustworthy-untrustworthy) were intended as checks on the manipulation of communicator credibility. The remaining three items (unbiased-biased, sincere-insincere, convincing-unconvincing) were included to further strengthen our claim that we were interested in the apparent convincinglyness of the source and his testimonial.4

Next came the primary dependent measures. Participants were told that the marketing department needed to know something about their personal reactions to the two products in order to place their comments about the testimonial in the proper perspective. The first of four questions asked the subject to indicate on a 9-point scale which product he or she preferred (1 = much prefer Product Y, 5 = no preference, 9 = much prefer Product X). Subjects then rated the likelihood that they would purchase Product X and Product Y when these products become available in the supermarket (for each scale, 1 = would not purchase, 9 = would definitely purchase). Finally, subjects indicated the extent to which they had agreed with the product testimonial they had read (1 = completely disagree, 9 = completely agree).

Thought-listing measure. When subjects had completed the questionnaire, they were told that the research team was interested in the thoughts that they had had while they were reading the testimonial. Using a procedure similar to that of Greenwald (1968) and Cialdini, Levy, Herman, Kozlowski, and Petty (1976), participants were first allowed 2.5 min to list their thoughts, after which they indicated whether each of these ideas was favorable, irrelevant, or unfavorable to the position the communicator had taken.

Debriefing. A funnel-type debriefing (Page & Kahle, 1976) was used to probe for suspicion. No one voiced any concern about the veracity of the original cover story. The one subject (assigned to the direct-experience—less credible communicator condition) who suspected that the purpose of reading the testimonial was to change her attitude was subsequently dropped from the analyses and replaced.

No-message control groups. The 20 participants assigned to the no-message control groups first formed preferential attitudes toward the two peanut butters via the direct-experience (n = 10) or the indirect-experience (n = 10) procedures already described. Then without having read a testimonial, they simply indicated their preferential attitudes and the likelihood that they would purchase each of the peanut butters.

Results and Discussion

Direction and Confidence of Initial Product Preferences

As we had intended, the overwhelming majority of the participants (79 of 80) checked Product X when asked which peanut butter they thought was the better product immediately after the attitude-formation phase (the sole outlier, a woman from the indirect-experience condition, was subsequently replaced). Participants also indicated how confident they were in expressing their product preferences. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of these confidence ratings was significant, F(1, 78) = 10.63, p < .001. Consistent with previous research (cf. Fazio

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3 The 20 pretest subjects who had earlier read the information on ingredients and other characteristics of the two products (see footnote 2) were then given the five arguments in the persuasive testimonial (without any information about the communicator). After reading this information, all 20 subjects (17 of whom did not express a preference after reading about the product ingredients) preferred Product Y to Product X. Thus, it appears as if these five arguments are indeed persuasive.

4 Our grouping of these evaluative items was based on a factor analysis of data provided by 62 pilot subjects from a group-testing session, each of whom read one of the testimonials and rated its source. The eight evaluative items loaded (as described by their groupings in the text) on three factors that seemed to us to be measures of the communicator's perceived expertise, perceived credibility, and perceived convincinglyness.
Perceptions of the Testimonial and the Communicator

The testimonial. All 60 experimental subjects who read a testimonial subsequently checked the box that indicated the communicator had endorsed Product Y, thereby revealing that the testimonial was perceived to be counterattitudinal. A 2 (method of attitude formation) \( \times \) 2 (communicator credibility) ANOVA of the rated strength of the communicator's product preference produced no significant effects (grand \( M = 8.15 \); all \( F_s < 1.2 \)). Thus, participants in all experimental conditions viewed the communicator's favoritism of Product Y to be very strong.

Communicator expertise and reliability. Our intention in manipulating communicator credibility was to expose subjects to "experts" who would differ in their perceived credibility. A 2 (method of attitude formation) \( \times \) 2 (communicator credibility) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of subjects' ratings of communicator expertise and knowledgeability produced no significant effects and suggested that the communicator's perceived expertise was reasonably high in all experimental conditions (grand \( M_s = 8.13 \) and 7.33, respectively, for expertise and knowledgeability). By contrast, an analogous MANOVA of subjects' ratings of communicator credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness produced a significant main effect for the credibility manipulation, \( F(3, 54) = 5.01, p < .01 \). Subsequent univariate ANOVAs revealed that the low-credibility communicator was perceived as less credible (\( M = 4.81 \)), \( F(1, 56) = 8.16, p < .006 \), and less reliable (\( M = 5.22 \)), \( F(1, 56) = 6.07, p < .02 \), than was the high-credibility communicator (\( M_s = 6.31 \) and 6.33, respectively, for ratings of credibility and reliability). Thus, it appears as if communicators were generally perceived as we had intended them to be.

Finally, a 2 \( \times \) 2 MANOVA of subjects' ratings of the communicator on three additional evaluative dimensions (unbiased-biased, unconvincing-convincing, and sincere-insincere) produced a significant main effect for method of attitude formation, \( F(3, 54) = 3.42, p < .05 \). Subsequent univariate ANOVAs revealed that direct-experience participants viewed the communicator as more biased (\( M = 6.63 \)), \( F(1, 56) = 4.11, p < .05 \), and less convincing (\( M = 4.81 \)), \( F(1, 56) = 6.35, p < .02 \), than did indirect-experience participants (\( M_s = 5.22 \) and 6.31, respectively, for ratings of biased and convincing).

Dependent Measures

Subjects' ratings of their agreement with the counterattitudinal testimonial, the strength of their preferential attitudes, and their intentions to purchase the products served as the dependent measures in this experiment. A 2 (method of attitude formation) \( \times \) 2 (communicator credibility) MANOVA of these measures produced a main effect for method of attitude formation, \( F(4, 53) = 4.62, p < .01 \), and a nearly significant interaction between communicator credibility and method of attitude formation, \( F(4, 53) = 2.62, p < .06 \).

| Agreement index. A subsequent univariate ANOVA of the agreement measure produced the same two effects that emerged from the MANOVA. The main effect for method of attitude formation, \( F(1, 56) = 20.00, p < .0001 \), reflects the finding (see Table 1) that subjects who had formed their attitudes from direct experience with the two peanut butters agreed less with the testimonial than did those who had formed their attitudes from indirect (consensual) data. Moreover, the predicted interaction was also significant, \( F(1, 56) = 4.13, p < .05 \). An examination of Table 1 reveals that the credibility manipulation had no effect on the agreement ratings of direct-experience participants, whereas the indirect-experience subjects were more likely to agree with the testimonial when it came from a highly credible spokesperson.

| Strength of preferential attitudes. A 2 \( \times \) 2 ANOVA of subjects' ratings of the strength of their preferential attitudes (i.e., 1 = much prefer Product Y, 5 = no preference, 9 = much prefer Product X) produced a significant main effect for method of attitude formation, \( F(1, 56) = 25.04, p < .0001 \). Direct-experience participants expressed a stronger preference for Product X (\( M = 8.00 \)) than did indirect-experience participants (\( M = 6.63 \)).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicator credibility</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct experience</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect experience</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 15 \) per cell. Means that do not share a common subscript differ at \( p < .05 \) as indicated by Duncan's multiple-range test.

5 Because they had tasted two samples of the same brand of peanut butter with the same sensory qualities, the preferential attitudes of direct-experience subjects were necessarily based on self-generated (rather than product-generated) information. Thus, one implication of these confidence ratings is that the greater confidence with which direct-experience attitudes are typically held may stem as much from a willingness to trust personal, subjective judgments as from any objective knowledge that one might gain from a firsthand exposure to the attitude object.

6 Although very marginal, \( F(1, 56) = 2.81, p = .10 \), the pattern of the interaction effect was in line with the hypothesis. That is, indirect-experience subjects were somewhat less favorably disposed toward Product X if the counterattitudinal testimonial came from the credible (\( M = 6.34 \)) rather than the less credible spokesman (\( M = 6.93 \)), whereas the credibility manipulation had no analogous effect on the direct-experience participants (\( M = 8.06 \) and 7.93, respectively, for the high- and low-credibility communicators).
for Product X than did their counterparts in the control condition, \( t(37) = 2.48, p < .01 \), whereas direct-experience participants who read the testimonial continued to show as strong a preference for Product X as did their corresponding control subjects \( (t < 1, n.s.) \). It thus appears that preferential attitudes formed by direct experience with the attitude objects are more resistant to counterattitudinal influence, despite the fact that they are initially no more extreme than those stemming from indirect experience.

**Intentions to purchase the products.** A set of 2 x 2 ANOVAs of subjects' stated willingness to purchase Products X and Y produced significant main effects for method of attitude formation: for Product X, \( F(1, 56) = 4.04, p < .05 \); for Product Y, \( F(1, 56) = 5.11, p < .02 \). Direct-experience participants expressed a greater willingness to purchase Product X \( (M = 6.9) \) and a lesser willingness to purchase Product Y \( (M = 4.0) \) than did indirect-experience participants \( (Ms = 6.0 \) and 4.9, respectively, for intentions to purchase Products X and Y). The only other noteworthy outcome to emerge from these analyses was a nearly significant interaction between communicator credibility and method of attitude formation for "intentions to purchase Product Y," \( F(1, 56) = 3.92, p < .052 \). Indirect-experience participants exposed to a highly credible communicator were more willing to purchase the initially nonpreferred Product Y \( (M = 5.3) \) than were their counterparts exposed to a less credible communicator \( (M = 4.5) \). The credibility manipulation had no effect on the stated intentions of direct-experience subjects.

The absolute impact of the testimonial on subjects' behavioral intentions was then assessed as follows. First, we subtracted each subject's intention to purchase Product X from his or her intention to purchase Product Y. This yielded a *strength-of-preference* measure for the intentions data that was comparable to the measure of preferential attitude described earlier. Because a preliminary analysis revealed that direct-experience subjects in the no-message control group were more favorably disposed toward purchasing Product X \( (M = 2.9 \) scale points more favorable to X than to Y) than were the indirect-experience control subjects \( (M = 1.1 \) scale points), \( t(18) = 3.62, p < .001 \), it was necessary to adjust the strength-of-preference scores of the experimental subjects to take this premessage difference into account. This was done by subtracting from each experimental subject's score the mean premessage strength-of-preference score of their counterparts in the appropriate no-message control group. The resulting residual scores indicated the extent to which the counterattitudinal testimonial had made participants less inclined to purchase Product X than were their experimental controls, who had never read a testimonial.

A 2 x 2 ANOVA of these adjusted intentions scores produced only one significant outcome: a main effect for method of attitude formation, \( F(1, 56) = 6.94, p < .01 \). After reading the testimonial, direct-experience subjects were no less likely to favor purchasing Product X over Product Y than were the direct-experience control participants \( (M = 0) \). By contrast, indirect-experience subjects who read the testimonial were less inclined than their counterparts in the control condition to favor purchasing Product X over Product Y \( (M = -1.3) \). Thus, the counterattitudinal testimonial had a greater impact on the behavioral intentions of indirect-experience participants than on those of their direct-experience counterparts.

**Thought-Listing Data**

A 2 (method of attitude formation) X 2 (communicator credibility) MANOVA of the number of counterarguments, supportive (promessage) arguments, and neutral thoughts that subjects generated in response to the testimonial produced only one significant outcome: a main effect for method of attitude formation, \( F(3, 54) = 6.97, p < .007 \). Subsequent 2 x 2 ANOVAs of the counterarguments and supportive arguments indexes revealed that direct-experience subjects generated more counterarguments \( (M = 4.42) \), \( F(1, 56) = 17.40, p < .001 \), and fewer supportive arguments \( (M = .60) \), \( F(1, 56) = 10.10, p < .001 \), than did indirect-experience subjects \( (Ms = 2.40 \) counterarguments and 1.96 supportive arguments). Neutral thoughts were few in number \( (\text{grand } M = .32) \) and did not vary across conditions \( (\text{all } F_s < 1.4) \).

Internal analyses were conducted to determine if subjects' cognitive elaborations of the message (as indexed by the number of counterarguments they generated minus the number of favorable thoughts) would predict their postmessage attitudinal responses. As shown in Table 2, the cognitive elaborations of direct-experience subjects reliably forecasted their agreement (or lack thereof) with the counterattitudinal testimonial and the strength of their intentions to purchase Product X rather than Product Y. The corresponding relations, however, between the cognitive elaborations and attitudinal measures were not significant for indirect-experience participants.

**Supplementary Analyses and Implications**

As anticipated by the ELM analysis, direct-experience participants generated many counterarguments to the testimonial—arguments that apparently allowed them to maintain their initial attitudes in the face of an otherwise persuasive appeal (see footnote 3). Moreover, the finding that direct-experience sub-
objects were totally unaffected by the communicator-credibility manipulation lends some additional weight to the argument that their resistance to persuasion reflects their cognitive elaborations of the message arguments.

Although indirect-experience participants also generated a nominally greater number of counterarguments than supportive thoughts on the thought-listing measure, the patterning of their message elaborations did not reliably forecast their postmessage attitudinal responses. And as expected by the ELM analysis, indirect-experience participants were apparently influenced by salient peripheral cues. When we compared indirect-experience participants exposed to the less credible spokesman with those exposed to a highly credible communicator, we found that the latter (a) agreed more with the counterattitudinal testimonial, (b) expressed a somewhat weaker preferential attitude toward the product they initially preferred, and (c) were somewhat more inclined to purchase the product the testimonial had endorsed.

To examine further if source characteristics may have been mediating the attitude change observed for subjects in the indirect-experience condition, we first constructed two source-evaluation indexes for each subject: (a) a perceived-credibility index, created by summing the subject's ratings of the communicator's credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness, and (b) a more global source-impression score that reflected the sum of the subject's ratings of the communicator across all eight evaluative dimensions from the posttestimonial questionnaire. We then correlated these indexes with subjects' responses to the major dependent variables. If source characteristics had a more potent influence on the attitudinal responses of indirect-experience participants, then the correlations between subjects' impressions of the communicator and their posttestimonial attitudes should be stronger for indirect-experience participants than for their direct-experience counterparts. And indeed they were. As shown in Table 3, neither the perceived-credibility nor the global source-impression scores reliably forecasted the postmessage attitudinal responses of direct-experience participants. By contrast, both of these indexes consistently predicted the attitudinal responses of the indirect-experience participants. In other words, the higher the perceived credibility (or the more favorable the global evaluation) of the source, the more subjects agreed with the testimonial, the weaker were their preferential attitudes for Product X (the initially preferred choice), and the less likely they were to indicate a strong preference for Product X when stating their intentions to purchase the product they had evaluated. So here is another line of evidence that suggests the postmessage attitudinal responses of indirect-experience participants may depend to a greater extent on peripheral source characteristics (at least one's impression of these characteristics) than do those of direct-experience participants.

Experiment 2: Susceptibility to Proattitudinal Influence

Experiment 2 assessed the susceptibility of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes to a proattitudinal influence attempt. To briefly review the predictions derived from the ELM, direct-experience participants, whose attitudes are relatively clear, confidently held, and accessible, were expected to generate more supportive arguments to a proattitudinal communication and, hence, to be influenced more by it than were subjects whose attitudes stem from indirect experience. Moreover, we hypothesized that the presence of salient peripheral cues would have a greater effect on the postmessage attitudinal responses of indirect-experience participants than on those of their direct-experience counterparts.

Method

Subjects and Design

The 22 female and 18 male introductory psychology students who participated in Experiment 2 were randomly assigned to four experimental conditions created by the orthogonal manipulations of method of attitude formation (direct experience vs. indirect experience) and communicator credibility (high vs. low). Twenty additional subjects formed attitudes from either direct or indirect experience with the attitude objects but were never exposed to a proattitudinal testimonial. Because the procedures and dependent measures for these no-message control groups were identical in both experiments, the no-message control groups for Experiment 1 served in the same capacity for Experiment 2.

Procedure

The stated rationale for the study as well as the procedures, stimulus materials, and measuring instruments were identical to those used in the first experiment, with one major exception: The testimonial used in Experiment 2 was a proattitudinal communication that strongly endorsed the brand of peanut butter (i.e., Product X) that subjects initially preferred.

In order to make the proattitudinal testimonial consistent with the statement of ingredients and other characteristics that all subjects had read, we had to change some of the arguments on which the communicator based his strong product endorsement. In abbreviated form, the five arguments presented in the proattitudinal testimonial were as fol-

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1 Although these correlational data might also seem to imply that the postmessage attitudinal responses of the indirect-experience participants could have influenced their source impressions rather than the reverse, there are two reasons we are not inclined to endorse this interpretation. First, it seems somewhat implausible that subjects' postmessage attitudes would be determining their impressions of the source when the credibility manipulation was observed to affect all subjects' ratings of source credibility and the indirect-experience subjects' stated agreement with the message. And given the lack of a meaningful relation between the cognitive elaborations and the attitudinal responses of the indirect-experience participants (thus, seemingly ruling out the central route to persuasion), we wonder just how these subjects' attitudes changed if their responses were not mediated by some kind of peripheral cue.
Dividing the participants into Direct- and Indirect-Experience Participants

Table 3
Correlations of Perceived Credibility and Source Impressions With Attitudinal Measures for Direct- and Indirect-Experience Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior experience</th>
<th>Agreement index with</th>
<th>Preference attitudes with</th>
<th>Behavioral intentions with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived credibility</td>
<td>Source impressions</td>
<td>Perceived credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Each correlation is based on an N of 30.

For methods of attitude formation, credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness produced a marginally significant main effect for communicator credibility, F(3, 34) = 2.83, p < .10, that emerged because the highly credible communicator was rated somewhat more reliable (M = 7.50) and trustworthy (M = 7.43) than the less credible communicator (Ms = 6.60 and 7.00, respectively, for ratings of reliability and trustworthiness). The MANOVA also produced a nearly significant interaction between communicator credibility and method of attitude formation, F(3, 34) = 2.89, p < .06, that was significant in the univariate ANOVA of the credibility ratings, F(1, 36) = 5.38, p < .03. Direct-experience subjects rated the highly credible communicator to be more credible (M = 8.10) than the less credible communicator (M = 6.90), whereas indirect-experience participants viewed the highly credible spokesperson to be less credible (M = 6.60) than his (presumably) less credible counterpart (M = 7.70).

The only other significant outcome to emerge from subjects' ratings of the communicator was a main effect for communicator credibility on the evaluative dimension biased-unbiased, F(1, 36) = 4.97, p < .04. The highly credible communicator was viewed as more unbiased (M = 6.50) than his less credible counterpart (M = 4.65).

Dependent Measures

Agreement with the testimonial. A 2 (method of attitude formation) X 2 (communicator credibility) ANOVA of the item that assessed subjects' agreement with the testimonial produced a main effect for method of attitude formation, F(1, 36) = 9.06, p < .005. Direct-experience subjects indicated stronger agreement with the proattitudinal testimonial (M = 8.00) than did indirect-experience subjects (M = 7.00). The analysis also produced a main effect for communicator credibility, F(1, 36) = 11.18, p < .001, which is qualified by a significant interaction effect, F(1, 36) = 4.12, p < .05. As shown in Table 4, the credibility manipulation had a greater effect on the indirect-experience participants, who actually agreed more with the testimonial attributed to the less credible communicator. However, this finding is not totally counterintuitive if we recall that indirect-experience subjects rated the less credible spokesperson to be the more credible of the two communicators from their point of view.

Strength of preferential attitudes. A 2 X 2 ANOVA of the strength of subjects' preferential attitudes produced only one significant outcome: a main effect for method of attitude forma-
Table 4
Mean Agreement With the Position Expressed in the Proattitudinal Testimonial as a Function of Communicator Credibility and Method of Attitude Formation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of attitude formation</th>
<th>Communicator credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct experience</td>
<td>7.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect experience</td>
<td>7.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 10 per cell. Means that do not share a common subscript differ at p < .05 as indicated by Duncan’s multiple-range test.

tion, \( F(1, 36) = 5.08, p < .03 \). Direct-experience participants expressed a stronger preference for Product X (\( M = 8.60 \)) than did indirect-experience participants (\( M = 8.00 \)). To place this finding in perspective, the direct- and the indirect-experience control subjects, who received no testimonial, did not differ in the strength of their preferential attitudes toward Product X (\( M_s = 8.15 \) and 8.00, respectively; \( t < 1 \)). However, direct-experience participants who read the testimonial expressed a stronger preference for Product X than did their counterparts in the control condition, \( t(28) = 1.82, p < .05 \), whereas indirect-experience participants exposed to the testimonial showed no stronger preference for Product X than did their corresponding control subjects (\( t = 0 \)). Thus, preferential attitudes that stem from direct experience with the attitude objects are more susceptible to proattitudinal influence despite the fact that they are initially no more extreme than those originating from indirect experience.

Intentions to purchase the products. A set of \( 2 \times 2 \) ANOVAs of subjects’ stated willingness to purchase Product X and Product Y produced only one significant outcome: a main effect for method of attitude formation on intentions to purchase Product Y (\( M = 8.15 \), \( M = 8.00 \), respectively; \( t < 1 \)). However, direct-experience participants were less inclined to purchase the initially nonpreferred Product Y (\( M = 2.50 \)) than were indirect-experience participants (\( M = 4.00 \)).

Although the experimental subjects all favored purchasing Product X over Product Y, so, too, did the no-message control subjects. As in Experiment 1, we then adjusted the experimental subjects’ strength-of-intention scores (i.e., Intention X – Intention Y) by subtracting the corresponding mean strength-of-intentions score of subjects in the appropriate no-message control group. This yielded a set of residual scores that indicated whether reading the testimonial had made subjects any more inclined to favor purchasing Product X over Product Y. The ANOVA of these adjusted intentions scores produced no significant outcomes. Apparently, the proattitudinal testimonial had little absolute effect on subjects’ willingness to purchase the products they had evaluated.

Thought-listing data. As anticipated by the ELM, in response to the proattitudinal testimonial, subjects generated more favorable arguments (\( M = 4.45 \)) than either counterarguments (\( M = 1.00 \)) or neutral thoughts (\( M = .77 \), \( F(2, 35) = 12.42, p < .001 \). But contrary to expectation, direct-experience participants generated no greater number of favorable arguments (\( M = 4.55 \)) than did their counterparts in the indirect-experience condition (\( M = 4.35; F < 1 \)). Moreover, the number of counterarguments and neutral thoughts did not differ across experimental conditions (all \( Fs < 1.2 \)). Subsequent internal analyses revealed that subjects’ cognitive elaborations of the message (as indexed by the number of supportive arguments minus the number of counterattitudinal ones) were not systematically related to their posttestimonial attitudinal responses (all \( rs < .40, ns \)).

Supplementary analyses of source effects. As noted earlier, the source credibility manipulation was noticeably weaker in this second experiment than in the first. Moreover, its effects might seem rather perplexing in that indirect-experience subjects thought the less credible communicator to be more credible (and they agreed more with his testimonial) when compared with their experiential counterparts, who were exposed to the spokesperson we presumed to be highly credible.

We think that these unexpected findings are attributable, in part, to two characteristics of the persuasive context. First, the target attitudes were not factual issues but, rather, preferential opinions for which there are no objectively “correct” positions. Second, both the indirect-experience subjects and the less credible communicator had reached the same preferential conclusion (Product X is best) on the basis of some of the same kinds of indirect evidence (i.e., product ingredients and other characteristics). Thus, it is conceivable that the indirect-experience participants viewed the logic of the less credible communicator to be more similar to their own than was that of the other spokesperson (who seemed to rely on potentially idiosyncratic sensory judgments)—an impression that may account for their favorable assessments of his credibility and their relatively strong expressions of agreement with his testimonial (see Table 4). Indeed, this interpretation dovetails nicely with research by Goethals and Nelson (1973) who found that when communicators agree with their audience on nonfactual issues, they inspire more confidence if they are in some way similar rather than dissimilar to the message recipients.

To further examine whether subjects’ impressions of the source may have affected their posttestimonial attitudes, we constructed the same two source-evaluation indexes (i.e., perceived credibility and global source impressions) that were used in Experiment 1 and then correlated these measures with subjects’ responses to the dependent variables. The results were clear. As shown in Table 5, neither evaluative index forecasted the final attitudes of direct-experience participants, whereas this same information consistently predicted the attitudinal responses of indirect-experience participants. Although not definitive, these correlational patterns are at least consistent with the notion that indirect-experience subjects were influenced to a greater extent by peripheral source characteristics (or more accurately, by their impressions of the source’s characteristics) than were their direct-experience counterparts.

9 The only correlation to approach significance was that between the cognitive elaborations and preferential attitudes of direct-experience participants, \( r(19) = .39, p < .08 \).
for Direct- and Indirect-Experience Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior experience</th>
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<th>Behavioral intentions with</th>
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<td></td>
<td>credibility</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.49*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Each correlation is based on an N of 20.

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

General Discussion

An ELM Interpretation

Taken together, the results of these two experiments are consistent with Pazzio and Zanna's (1981) analysis of direct- and indirect-experience attitudes and with the predictions derived from Petty and Cacioppo's (1981, 1986) ELM. As anticipated, attitudes originating from direct behavioral experience were more resistant to a counterattitudinal appeal and, at the same time, more susceptible to a proattitudinal testimonial than were attitudes stemming from indirect experience. Moreover, there was considerable support for the ELM assertion that the postmessage attitudinal responses of direct- and indirect-experience participants would reflect different routes to persuasion.

Consider, first, subjects' reactions to peripheral-source characteristics. In Experiment 1, indirect-experience subjects agreed more with the counterattitudinal message and were more inclined to purchase the initially nonpreferred Product Y if the testimonial had been attributed to a highly credible rather than to a less credible spokesman. No such source effects emerged for the direct-experience participants. In Experiment 2, indirect-experience participants were again more susceptible to manipulated source characteristics than were direct-experience subjects, because the former group indicated more agreement with the proattitudinal testimonial when delivered by the person that they had considered the more highly credible of the two product spokespersons. Finally, supplementary internal analyses from each experiment revealed that subjects' personal impressions of the source (and his attributes) reliably failed to forecast the attitudinal responses of direct-experience participants, although they consistently predicted those of subjects in the indirect-experience condition. So as anticipated by the ELM, peripheral-persuasion cues associated with the communicator did seem to have a stronger impact on the indirect-experience participants.

On the other hand, it appears that the final attitudes of direct-experience participants were more closely related to their cognitive elaborations of the message arguments than were those of indirect-experience participants. In the first experiment, direct-experience participants generated many counterarguments and few supportive thoughts, a pattern that seems to explain their resistance to persuasion to the counterattitudinal testimonial. Indeed, internal analyses revealed that the cognitive elaborations of direct-experience subjects predicted their responses to two of the three attitudinal measures, whereas the message elaborations of the indirect-experience participants failed to predict their final attitudes.

Unfortunately, the links between the cognitive and the attitudinal measures were not as clear-cut in Experiment 2. Although direct-experience subjects generated many more supportive thoughts than counterarguments and changed their attitudes in the direction of the proattitudinal testimonial, indirect-experience subjects produced the same pattern of message elaborations without changing their attitudes. Is there any justification, then, for claiming that the attitude change observed for the direct-experience participants was mediated by message-relevant cognitive activities? We think that there is.

Given the distinctive features that characterize direct-experience attitudes (e.g., clarity, confidence, and accessibility), it is likely that these opinions are simply more schematic than indirect-experience attitudes. In proposing this latter distinction, we are defining a schematic attitude as a well-articulated cognitive generalization (or set of generalizations) about the attitude object that provides a framework for interpreting and responding to attitude-relevant information (cf. Markus, 1977; Tesser, 1978). Having made this assumption, we will note that prior research on attitude polarization reveals that merely thinking about an attitude object can cause one's attitude to become more extreme; however, these polarization shifts are observed only of subjects who have well-ingrained cognitive schemata for the attitude object (Tesser, 1978). Moreover, Cacioppo, Petty, and Sidera (1982) found that a proattitudinal message packaged so as to be relevant to subjects' schematic attitudes about the self was rated much more persuasive than the same message framed in a manner irrelevant to subjects' self-schemata. Thus, thinking often results in attitude polarization if the object of thought is in some way schematic for the subject. And if direct-experience attitudes are more schematic than indirect-experience attitudes, the shifts to more polarized positions evidenced by direct-experience subjects in Experiment 2 are quite consistent with the premises of attitude-polarization theory.

An Alternative Interpretation

While conducting this research, we came to the conclusion that direct- and indirect-experience attitudes may differ in yet another important respect, namely in the strength of their affective components. One hint that this might be so stemmed from subjects' responses to the debriefing, for it was invariably direct-experience subjects who had tasted the peanut butters.
who became upset about the deception or dismayed to learn that neither peanut butter was a low-calorie product. Our latter supposition dovetails nicely, we think, with the work of Fazio and his colleagues on attitude accessibility (Fazio et al., 1982, 1983). Fazio and his associates conceptualized an attitude as an association between a given object and a given evaluation (or evaluative category), and they have demonstrated that the strength of this object-evaluation association determines the accessibility of an attitude from memory. Specifically, evaluations that are strongly associated with an attitude object are accessed easily, whereas those that are weakly linked to the attitude object are much more difficult to access. Moreover, Fazio’s work has repeatedly shown that direct-experience attitudes are characterized by relatively strong object-evaluation (or affective) linkages and, indeed, are more likely to be accessed upon observation of the attitude object than are indirect-experience attitudes (cf. Fazio et al., 1982, 1983).

Thus, the work of Fazio and his colleagues and our own causal observations suggested a possible alternative interpretation for the present results. This interpretation is based on the premise that direct-experience attitudes, which we presume to be more affectively charged than indirect-experience attitudes, are more likely to be accessed and to influence subjects’ reactions to an attitude-relevant persuasive appeal. Specifically, we suspect that presentation of the testimonial causes direct-experience participants to quickly access their attitudes, which, in turn, triggers a relatively strong emotional reaction to that testimonial (perhaps negative in tone to a counterattitudinal statement and more positive to a proattitudinal one). These initial gut reactions may then prompt direct-experience participants to (a) discount or ignore peripheral persuasion cues as they (b) carefully scrutinize and elaborate the message, and then actively organize (or consolidate) this self-generated information into a coherent position. Consequently, their final attitudes are likely to reflect their message-relevant cognitive activities. By contrast, indirect-experience participants, whose attitudes are presumed to be less strongly linked to a particular evaluation (or less affectively charged), may not access these attitudes as readily or experience strong emotional reactions to either a proattitudinal or a counterattitudinal message. Hence, they are not as inclined as direct-experience participants to appraise the message in terms of their attitudes or to organize whatever message elaborations they do happen to produce into a coherent position and, thus, will become more susceptible to any peripheral persuasion cues that are present within the persuasive context.

What we are proposing here is a very simple extension of the ELM. Petty and Cacioppo (1981, 1986) have clearly demonstrated that attitude change can be investigated in a more systematic fashion by distinguishing between central (or cognitively mediated) and peripheral (or affectively mediated) routes to persuasion. However, their ELM would seem to imply that most, if not all, affectively mediated changes in attitude are peripheral in nature and, hence, less durable or meaningful. In contrast, we think that affective responses can play a more central role in persuasion: Specifically, strong emotional reactions stemming from affectively salient and accessible attitudes may be an important spark that ignites both the generation and the consolidation of those message-relevant elaborations that underlie persuasion (or the lack thereof) via the central route. Indeed, variables such as high-issue involvement or importance and high self-relevance may lead to central-route processing precisely because important, involving, or self-relevant attitudes are more likely to be accessed and to trigger emotional responses that set message elaboration (and, in particular, consolidation of this self-generated information) in motion. Unfortunately, we assessed neither subjects’ affective responses to the products as they formed their attitudes, nor their emotional reactions to the product testimonials, so that a test of the affect-mediation hypothesis must await future research. Nevertheless, we find this model sufficiently intriguing to wonder whether an elaboration-likelihood approach based largely on “cool cognition,” with little or no consideration of the motivational implications of “hot affect,” might not be incomplete.

References


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