

## **THE POWER OF PERSUASION IN DIGITAL ADVERTISING: EXAMINING THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores central route processing in modern advertising, drawing on Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). This study employs a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews. Based on the study, central route processing occurs when consumers critically evaluate persuasive messages based on argument strength, particularly for high-involvement products such as automobiles and financial services. The digital advertising landscape, including e-commerce platforms, search engine ads, and personalized marketing, enhances central processing by providing extensive product information and comparisons. While peripheral route processing, driven by heuristics and emotional appeals, is dominant in social media advertising, central route processing fosters long-lasting, resistant, and behaviour-predictive attitudes. The interplay of both routes in dual processing strategies maximizes advertising effectiveness, ensuring engagement across diverse consumer segments. As technology evolves, advertisers must leverage central processing to build trust, brand loyalty, and informed decision-making. However, the limitations of the Elaborations Likelihood Model, including its binary distinction and contextual variability, highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of consumer persuasion in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Power of Persuasion, Digital Advertising, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), created by Petty and Cacioppo in 1980, is still a key framework for studying persuasion and attitude change in communication research (Shahab, Ghazali, & Mohtar, 2023). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) says persuasion happens via the core and peripheral paths. These paths depend on the person's drive and ability to process information. It offers insights into how commercials influence consumer attitudes and behaviours (Sattorov, 2024). Studying these paths helps us grasp persuasion's role in today's marketing. The ELM says that people use central route processing when they have the motivation and ability to examine persuasive communication (Wagner & Petty, 2022). This pathway is marked by a high level of cognitive involvement, where the individual assesses the quality and significance of the arguments.

This strategy is often employed in current advertising for high-involvement products like electronics, autos, and financial services, where buyers need thorough information about product features, benefits, and performance (Podobed, 2024). Research shows that persuasive ads aimed

to motivate audiences lead to lasting attitude changes because these people are more likely to absorb the message into their decision-making (Petty et al., 2022). Luxury car ads that highlight exceptional engineering, comfort, and safety ratings appeal to consumers seeking solid information to help them buy. The peripheral technique to persuasion uses surface signals to change attitudes with little cognitive attention (Xiu et al. 2024). When people can't understand complex material, they focus on external factors like the spokesperson's charm, humour, or the message's emotional impact. In low-involvement settings, consumers are less likely to critically examine the message substance, making peripheral cues more powerful.

This study examines how the ELM applies to digital advertising, identifying its strengths, limitations, and the role of central and peripheral processing in consumer decision-making. “Campaigns are designed to appeal to both analytical and less engaged audiences. To attract less engaged audiences, health product ads use bright images and appealing words while using scientific data to appeal to those who prefer evidence-based communication. This integration makes ads appeal to a variety of demographics, boosting their overall impact. Modern advertising campaigns must tailor messages to appeal to different cognitive styles (Braca & Dondio, 2023). Digital media's rise has dramatically affected the Elaboration Likelihood Model's use in advertising, providing new approaches to handle central and peripheral processing pathways (Karoline et al., 2023). Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are becoming key platforms for influencer-driven marketing and attractive content, with influencers providing peripheral cues that affect consumer attitudes and behaviours. This tactic works well with younger people, who are more likely to trust and imitate social media stars.

Despite its benefits, the ELM has been criticised and limited to modern advertising. Critics say the difference between central and peripheral channels oversimplifies human cognition and ignores how multiple processing modalities interact. Also, the rapid growth of media tech and the rise of multitasking have created new challenges for advertisers trying to engage and keep audiences (Miklosik Evans, 2020). In today's media-saturated environment, consumers are often exposed to several messages simultaneously, diluting the power of persuasive efforts and complicating the usage of the ELM framework. The ELM is still useful for grasping modern advertising's persuasion methods. The dual-route model is a thorough framework for investigating communication construction, transmission, and reception in many contexts. Advertisers may use ELM data to design advertisements that engage people, foster good attitudes, and encourage good conduct. As media technologies change, more research is needed to adapt the ELM for new platforms and communication strategies to keep it relevant in the shifting advertising scenario.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Based on this study, the following objectives guided this study:

- i. Identify the key challenges and limitations of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in the context of modern advertising
- ii. Examine peripheral route processing influence consumer decision-making in modern advertising
- iii. Identify central route processing in modern advertising campaigns

- iv. Explain the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)
- v. Explain the interaction between central and peripheral processing in shaping consumer attitudes toward advertisements

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is one of the most commonly employed theoretical frameworks for investigating persuasion and attitude change. The paradigm, created by Petty and Cacioppo (1981) proposes a dual-process hypothesis for persuasive communication. It mainly says that persuasion can be central or peripheral. The core route comprises extensive consideration of message substance and argumentation, which needs the recipient to be highly motivated and cognitively adept (Winger, 2022). In contrast, the peripheral route is based on superficial indications, such as a spokesperson's attractiveness or the perceived credibility of a source. It happens when people lack drive or the ability to engage fully with the message. The ELM has been studied and used in advertising, health communication, politics, and psychology for over 40 years (Srivastava & Saini, 2022).

Petty and Cacioppo's (2023) ELM work was a response to prior persuasion models that ignored how people hear persuasive messages. The ELM argued that the route of persuasion is affected by people's elaboration likelihood, or the extent to which they engage in critical analysis, unlike linear models, which highlighted a single path to attitude change. When elaboration is likely, people are more motivated to pursue the central route, thoroughly evaluating arguments and facts. This method is linked to long-term attitude changes that are resistant to counter-persuasion and predictive of conduct. When elaboration is unlikely, individuals take the peripheral path, developing conclusions based on heuristics or surface-level signals like endorsements or photographs. Peripheral attitudes can cause short-term changes, but they are usually less persistent (Bhandari & Pan, 2021).

The ELM's dual-process paradigm is empirically supported. Chaiken (1980) found that people often use heuristics, or mental shortcuts when their motivation or ability to absorb a message is low. Shehata et al. (2021) also showed the core and peripheral channels in an experiment with source credibility and message strength. The study found that highly motivated participants were more influenced by argument quality (central route), while less motivated individuals relied on the communicator's trustworthiness (peripheral way). This pioneering work made the ELM a reliable model for studying how motivation and ability affect message processing. The ELM's adaptability and versatility are its strengths. The model is commonly used in advertising to gauge customer responses to marketing. For instance, Cacioppo and Petty (1985) found that buyers who are very invested in a product, such as a car or a house, are more likely to process ads through the central channel.

But for low-involvement items like snacks or soft drinks, clients often depend on peripheral indications like attractive packaging or celebrity endorsements. This finding is vital for marketers as it highlights the importance of tailoring advertising strategies to the target audience's interest in

the product. Research on emotional appeals supports the ELM's usefulness in advertising. Batra and Ray (2019) explored the interaction of cognitive and emotional reactions in advertising, showing that emotions commonly work as peripheral cues to alter attitudes when elaboration is weak. For example, humorous, musical, or emotional ads may influence those who are not inclined to engage with the main themes. When consumers are very driven, like when making a big financial investment, logic and facts take precedence. These findings emphasise the ELM's dual-process character and ability to explain changes in consumer behaviour across settings. ELM has also aided our understanding of political persuasion.

Political campaigns often use core and peripheral channels to sway voters, depending on the audience and situation. Valentino, Hutchings, and Williams (2004) found that negative emotions like fear and anger often function as peripheral cues, boosting message salience in political ads. However, their study indicated that politically engaged voters are more prone to absorb campaign messages centrally, thoroughly scrutinizing candidates' promises and arguments. This dual-process model explains why political campaigns often mix emotional appeals and logical arguments to reach diverse groups. The ELM's capacity to explain why persuasive messages work or don't is one of its most important achievements. Keller and Lehmann (2008) found that celebrity endorsements, a common peripheral cue in advertising, depend on audience involvement (Gong, 2021). In their study, low-involvement consumers were more likely to be affected by endorsements, whereas high-involvement consumers concentrated on the product's quality. This data backs the ELM's claim that peripheral signals are more effective when elaboration likelihood is low, whereas centre arguments are more relevant when elaboration likelihood is high.

The ELM is widely used but has been criticized. One critique is that the model separates primary and peripheral channels, yet real-world persuasion often mixes both. Kitchen et al. (2014) say the ELM's binary approach may oversimplify persuasion's complexity since people can process central and peripheral cues simultaneously. For instance, a client may be drawn to an ad by a peripheral cue, like a celebrity spokesperson, but engage in core processing if the content is relevant or persuasive. The link between the two channels suggests that persuasion is not always linear but may involve dynamic interactions between central and peripheral factors. The ELM has been updated to fit digital and social media advertising. Sundar and Kim (2019) explored how algorithm-driven customisation influences elaboration likelihood, discovering that tailored advertising is more likely to be processed through the central route since they are regarded as relevant to the consumer's interests. But they also said that peripheral clues, like the ad's aesthetics or the platform's perceived trustworthiness, nevertheless shape customer feelings. These results show that the ELM is still relevant in today's media, but it needs to be updated to reflect digital communication.

Technological advances have also given us new peripheral cues like social proof (likes, shares, reviews). Cheung et al. (2012) found that online reviews often serve as peripheral cues, improving trust and purchase intent. However, when buyers are eager to assess a product, they tend to analyse the reviews' content, leading to central processing. This dual-process concept shows the ELM's ongoing relevance in explaining how digital consumers navigate complex online spaces. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is still a prominent framework for investigating persuasion and attitude change. Its contrast between central and peripheral channels helps us understand how

people absorb messages in advertising, health communication, politics, and digital media. The model's adaptability and empirical data have secured its place in the literature despite criticism for oversimplifying persuasion's intricacies. Future studies should look into how the ELM can be linked with other theories and applied to emerging technologies, ensuring its continued relevance in a dynamic media ecology.

### **Central Route Processing in Modern Advertising**

According to Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) defines core route processing as a cognitive pathway to persuasion that occurs when people carefully and actively examine persuasive materials. Central route processing depends on argument strength in an ad, while peripheral route processing focuses on weak cues like attractiveness or endorsements (Willians et al., 2024). Central route processing is still crucial to understanding how customers choose high-involvement goods and services, as advertising has altered with digital platforms, data-driven targeting, and consumer awareness. Central route processing happens when a customer is motivated and able to research an ad. Motivation is usually based on the message's relevance to the customer, while ability is based on the consumer's cognitive ability to absorb and evaluate the information (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Marketers often provide detailed information on features, benefits, and competitor comparisons when selling high-involvement products like cars, health insurance, or financial investments. Clients are urged to weigh the arguments to ensure their choice matches their goals, values, and tastes (Cacioppo et al., 1983). In contrast to peripheral route processing, have frequently demonstrated that central route processing creates attitudes that are more persistent, resistant to counter-persuasion, and predictive of behaviour (Petty et al., 1995).

Central route processing thrives in today's ad economy, especially for highly engaging goods and services. Liu & Gao (2025) observed that e-commerce and review sites often enhance central route processing by giving customers lots of product knowledge, user reviews, and comparisons. In the consumer electronics sector, e-commerce ads frequently give thorough technical data, user reviews, and product comparisons to facilitate central route processing. Smart customers often research to make informed decisions. This is especially important in digital contexts because buyers may actively seek and compare information, unlike in traditional advertising. Search engine ad clickers are frequently highly involved, as their queries signal interest or want to buy (Jansen & Resnick, 2025). Ads are most effective when they answer customers' enquiries and develop deeper connections by offering relevant information like costs, features, and benefits (Theodorakopoulos, 2024).

Unlike social media advertising, which employs visuals and influencers to attract idle users. But message quality, source trustworthiness, and client preferences affect central route processing in advertising. Central processing success depends on message clarity and power. Arguments that are relevant to the consumer's needs, supported by evidence, and make sense are more likely to affect a positive attitude and behavioural intention (O'Keefe, 2016). Pharmaceutical commercials generally include detailed descriptions of the drug's benefits, risks, and clinical trial results to sway health-conscious buyers. However, weak, unfounded, or unclear arguments may backfire, producing resistance and doubt (Petty & Wegener, 2022). Source reliability is also vital to central route processing in advertisements. Research demonstrates that clients are more likely to employ



central processing when the source is respectable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy (Hovland & Weiss, 2018; Kelman, 2020). Ads with expert endorsements (from scientists, business professionals, or satisfied customers) are more likely to motivate consumers to engage in central processing. Online evaluations and ratings are essential for authenticity in the digital era.

Keller and Lehmann (2006) found that effective car advertising combines data and technical features (the centre route) with emotional appeals like celebrity endorsements or aspirational images (the peripheral approach). This two-pronged method ensures the commercial appeals to a large audience, regardless of their level of engagement or cognitive ability. Advertisers can change messaging as digital ad tech evolves, boosting central route processing. Personalised advertising uses data analytics and machine learning to tailor content to the audience's needs, wants, and history. Personalised email ads that include the recipient's name, previous purchases, and relevant product recommendations are more likely to be centrally handled (Ansari & Mela, 2024). Retargeting advertising that shows things customers have previously viewed on e-commerce sites can also stimulate central processing by rekindling interest and delivering more information.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) discovered that opinions generated through central processing are more likely to result in emotional attachment and brand trust, both of which influence consumer loyalty. Brands that teach consumers about their beliefs, sustainability practices, and goods usually create long-term relationships with their target market. Tesla and Patagonia, for example, use ads to emphasise their tech and environmental accomplishments to appeal to tech-savvy and eco-conscious consumers. Central route processing is still crucial to understanding persuasion in modern advertising, especially for complicated goods and services. Central processing promotes long-lasting, change-resistant, and behaviour-predictive attitudes by including consumers in a critical evaluation of message content (Sharp, 2023). Communication's efficacy is affected by the message's quality, the source's credibility, and the consumer's motivation and information processing skills. The interplay of core route processing with peripheral processing highlights the intricacy of modern advertising approaches, even though it is more crucial in circumstances where clients are pushed to make knowledgeable judgements (Dirwan, 2023). As technology changes advertising, marketers must use central route processing to develop trust, loyalty, and connection with target consumers.

### **Peripheral Route Processing and Dual Processing in Modern Advertising**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) supports two key modern advertising ideas: peripheral route processing and dual processing. These ideas explain how people process persuasive messages and how advertisers construct campaigns to change attitudes and behaviours. Peripheral route processing is a cognitive process in which people make decisions based on surface signs, such as a spokesperson's attractiveness, emotional appeals, or catchy phrases, rather than engaging in an in-depth, critical evaluation of the message's content. Dual processing uses core and peripheral persuasion channels, either together or separately, according to the audience's motivation and information processing skills. These theories are key to understanding how consumers interact with increasingly digital and complex ads. This review combines scholarly studies on peripheral route processing and dual processing, exploring their relevance, applicability, and consequences in modern advertising.

Peripheral route processing works ideal in low-involvement contexts, where consumers lack the motive, talent, or opportunity to analyse an ad's content. Heuristics, or mental shortcuts, help people find the message. Heuristics may include cues like the source's genuineness or attractiveness, the message's emotional tone, or the product's perceived attraction (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For instance, a buyer may buy a product endorsed by a celebrity because to their fondness for the celebrity rather than the product's benefits. Peripheral route processing is a modern advertising method that emphasises peripheral indications and is useful when customers' attention spans are short, and they are inundated with information. Research shows that emotive ads activate peripheral processing. Liu (2025) showed that emotional appeals like joy, nostalgia, or panic can provoke strong feelings that change attitudes and behaviour without solid reasons. Emotional storytelling is often utilised in advertising to connect brands and customers. Luxury ads can inspire feelings of success and longing, while insurance ads can cause worry by showing hazards. Emotional appeals work well in the peripheral pathway because they require less thought and avoid critical thinking. Today's ads often use social evidence as a peripheral trigger.

Social proof says people are more likely to embrace a popular or supported behaviour or attitude (Bowden-Green, 2024). In ads, social proof might be testimonials, user-generated content, or data showing a product's popularity. A digital ad that says, "9 out of 10 customers recommend this product" uses social proof to entice purchasers. User-generated content on social media, such as product photographs, can also act as a beneficial peripheral cue in buying decisions. Mohammed (2024) found that online reviews and ratings strongly affect low-involvement purchases because they give customers a heuristic instead of long product appraisals. However, peripheral cues have several downsides. Peripheral route processing has a major flaw: attitudes established this way are less stable, resistant to counter-persuasion, and predictive of behaviour than those formed through central route processing (Rabindranath & Singh 2024). Buyers who buy a product based on a celebrity endorsement may not be loyal to the brand because they made a superficial decision rather than a thorough evaluation of the product's attributes. This constraint shows that ads should combine peripheral and central messages to be more effective. Modern advertising sometimes uses dual processing, which combines central and peripheral channels, to overcome the limits of a single route. Dual processing recognises that customer's interaction with an ad varies depending on their motivation, capacity, and opportunity to absorb information. Car ads can give precise specs and performance data for those who want to judge things centrally, and they can also appeal to those who rely on peripheral cues with attractive graphics and emotional pleadings. This dual approach lets the ad reach more people, regardless of their engagement or intelligence.

Social media ads benefit from dual processing since platforms let advertisers engage prospects through many channels. A fitness product's social media post could have a video showing how it works (central cue), influencer endorsements, and user-generated content (peripheral cues). This cue combination lets advertising reach both people actively looking for fitness gear and those casually scrolling through social media. De Vries et al. (2012) found that social media messages that combine emotional or social cues with informational content are more likely to be shared and engage users, showing the importance of dual processing in digital advertising. Dual processing is also needed in a crowded, data-rich setting to solve ad difficulties. With ads bombarding them daily, consumers are hard to capture and hold. Dual processing lets advertisers reach consumers on two levels, ensuring their message is absorbed even while they're distracted. For example, a

new smartphone's outdoor billboard may have a simple, attractive design to attract attention (peripheral processing) and a QR code that connects to a website with full product specs for those who wish to learn more (central processing).

This method makes the ad effective for all consumer engagement levels. Modern advertising persuasion still uses the peripheral pathway and dual processing. Peripheral route processing works best in low-involvement situations, where consumers judge based on emotional appeals, social proof, and source credibility. The limits of peripheral processing—its susceptibility to counter-persuasion and lack of performance—show that ads should use both central and peripheral stimuli. Dual processing, which integrates both channels concurrently or sequentially, is a complete technique for targeting a varied audience in a complex and dynamic advertising environment. Advertisers may create effective, lasting ads that build real consumer relationships by mixing facts with emotional and visual appeal. Peripheral and dual processing ideas will remain vital to good ad design and implementation as advertising adapts to tech advances and shifts in consumer behaviour.

#### **Emerging advertising trends that enhance persuasion mechanisms in several ways:**

**Enhanced Relevance and Engagement:** Algorithmic personalization ensures that advertisements are tailored to individual user preferences, behaviors, and contexts. By analyzing data such as browsing history, purchase behavior, and social media activity, advertisers can create messages that resonate more deeply with consumers. This relevance increases engagement and the likelihood of persuasion (Tucker, 2021).

**Dynamic Creative Optimization:** Modern advertising platforms continuously refine creative content through techniques like dynamic creative optimization. This means that different elements of an ad (e.g., images, text, calls-to-action) are adapted on the fly to suit the viewer's profile, thereby maximizing the ad's persuasive impact (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019). While algorithmic personalization enhances advertising effectiveness, it also raises important ethical concerns. The collection and use of personal data for tailoring ads have sparked debates about consumer privacy and potential manipulation. Researchers like Acquisti, Brandimarte, and Loewenstein (2015) have highlighted the delicate balance between personalisation and privacy, suggesting that transparency and robust data protection measures are essential to maintain consumer trust.

**Risks of Echo Chambers:** Another emerging concern is the formation of echo chambers, where consumers are exposed predominantly to viewpoints that reinforce their existing beliefs. This selective exposure can limit the diversity of information and may inadvertently increase polarization (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). This phenomenon calls for further investigation into how personalization algorithms might be adjusted to promote a more balanced information diet.

**Regulatory and Future Directions:** As personalization technologies evolve, so does the regulatory landscape. Scholars such as Martin and Murphy (2020) emphasize the need for updated ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks that address the nuances of algorithmic targeting.



Future research is likely to focus on enhancing algorithmic transparency and developing methods to mitigate potential biases while still delivering personalized content effectively.

### **The challenges and limitations of the ELM in modern advertising**

The ELM's binary split of central and peripheral pathways of persuasion is a fundamental concern in current advertising. While the model provides a valuable framework for understanding the two stages of message elaboration, it has been questioned for simplifying the intricacies of persuasion. In real-world advertising, audiences often engage in a continuum of cognitive processing that does not fit the central-peripheral distinction. Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) say the ELM does not consider simultaneous or overlapping processing when people assess a message's core points and peripheral information at once simultaneously. For instance, a luxury car ad may have technical details (central route) and aspirational images (peripheral route), and buyers may assess these features at once. This limitation implies that the ELM's strict segmentation of processing processes does not accurately reflect the complex nature of consumer decision-making in modern advertising.

Another major shortcoming of the ELM in modern advertising is its focus on individual cognitive processes, which may neglect the social, cultural, and emotional components of persuasion. The ELM's focus on individual cognitive elaboration ignores current advertising's use of methods that target community identities, cultural values, and emotional experiences. For example, Escalas and Bettman (2005) emphasise the importance of brand tales in fostering emotional bonds with consumers, noting that these narratives often operate at a symbolic level beyond cognitive judgment. Ads that appeal to cultural pride, nostalgia, or social affinity may persuade clients based on shared emotional memories rather than rational argumentation or peripheral facts. These considerations raise doubts about the ELM's relevance in today's advertising since emotional and cultural resonance usually outweigh cognitive processes.

The growing complexity and interactivity of modern media settings further challenges the ELM's explanatory power in advertising. Digital media, social media, and user-generated material have diversified and fragmented consumers' interactions with persuasive messages. Unlike traditional advertising, which is one-way and passive, new digital advertising requires active participation, including sharing, commenting, and creating content. Sundar et al. (2016) say that the ELM doesn't adequately handle the new aspects that digital media's interactivity introduces into message processing. When presented with an internet advertisement, for example, people may engage in both core processing (reading comprehensive assessments) and peripheral processing (noting the number of likes or endorsements the product has received). The ELM's basic form, designed for linear communication channels, challenges the dynamic, multi-directional interactions common in digital advertising.

The ELM's inability to account for emotions in persuasion is another concern in current advertising. The approach recognises that emotional appeals may serve as peripheral cues, but it does not consider how emotions affect cognitive processing and decision-making. Modern ads use emotive stories, visuals, and sensory experiences to build strong bonds with consumers. Bagozzi et al. (1999) say that emotions are vital to persuasion because they affect how people interpret,

assess, and react to messages. Even without a good reason, ads that evoke joy, anguish, or empowerment can sway clients' feelings and actions. The ELM's focus on cognitive elaboration is challenged by this emotional aspect of persuasion, highlighting the need for models that consider both cognitive and emotional processes.

Technological advances like tailored and algorithm-driven marketing show the ELM's limits in modern advertising techniques. Personalised ads employ data analytics and machine learning to tailor messages to consumers' tastes, behaviours, and demographics. This amount of personalisation blurs the line between core and peripheral processing, hindering ELM use. A tailored email campaign may include product details (central cue) and emotional appeals (peripheral cue), making it hard to tell which persuasion channel is better. Lambrecht and Tucker (2013) discovered that personalised ads are extremely effective because they mix relevance and emotional resonance, engaging clients on numerous levels of processing. This study shows that modern advertising often functions in a hybrid fashion, confusing the ELM's binary structure.

The ELM's use is questioned by modern advertising's global and multicultural nature. In a more connected world, advertisers often target various audiences with different cultures, values, and communication styles. However, the ELM doesn't fully address the cultural dimensions of persuasion, which are vital to how messages are received and processed. Cho et al. (1999) found that cultural differences in information processing methods affect consumers' core or peripheral path. In collectivist cultures that value social harmony and collective unity, peripheral indications like social proof and endorsements may be more important than underlying causes. Central processing may be preferred by individualist cultures that value liberty and critical thinking. These cultural disparities question the ELM's universality and stress the need to include cultural elements in persuasive models.

The ELM faces ethical concerns in modern advertising. Ethical concerns concerning peripheral cues and emotional appeals arise as advertisers utilise more complex methods to sway clients. Commercials that exploit customers' anxieties, vulnerabilities, or biases may persuade them temporarily but threaten long-term trust and trustworthiness.

Despite these limitations, the ELM remains a powerful framework for studying persuasion in advertising, particularly when linked with other theories and models. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the Dual Process Theory of Emotion and Cognition (Evans, 2008) offer new insights into persuasion's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural parts. Researchers and practitioners can better understand how advertising messages affect attitudes and behaviours in various dynamic situations by integrating the ELM with these frameworks. The Elaboration Likelihood Model has greatly improved our grasp of persuasion and is vital to advertising research. However, its use in modern advertising is limited by issues like the binary distinction between central and peripheral processing, the focus on individual cognitive processes, the limited integration of emotions and culture, and the inability to account for the complexity and interactivity of digital media environments. To address these restrictions, academics and practitioners must adapt and develop the ELM to reflect the realities of modern advertising, taking into consideration research from related theories as well as the dynamic, emotive, and multicultural components of

persuasion. This keeps the ELM up to date-and effective in directing ad strategies in a changing world.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing in-depth interviews to explore the persuasive power of modern advertising through the framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). A purposive sampling method was employed to select eight participants who are regular consumers of both digital and traditional advertisements. The selection criteria included factors such as age, industry, and frequency of advertisement exposure to ensure a diverse range of perspectives.

The use of qualitative research is justified as it allows for a deeper exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, and cognitive responses to advertising, which may not be fully captured through quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Given the study's focus on subjective experiences, qualitative methods provide richer insights into the mechanisms of persuasion.

A sample size of eight participants aligns with the principles of focus group discussions which allow between eight to twelve for interviews and this allow for, in-depth conversations while ensuring thematic saturation. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, ensuring that the study's four guiding objectives were effectively addressed.

Ethical considerations were central to the data collection process, with participants providing informed consent before participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study to uphold ethical research standards.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Objective 1: Key Challenges and Limitations of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in Modern Advertising**

#### **Interpretation**

The respondents highlighted several challenges and limitations of ELM when applied to modern advertising. A recurring issue was the dynamic nature of digital platforms, which often blend central and peripheral cues, making it difficult to distinctly categorise consumer responses. Additionally, five participants emphasised that with information overload in the digital age, consumers often engage in heuristic-based decision-making, bypassing the need for deep elaboration. Moreover, three participants mentioned that emotional appeals frequently override logical processing, suggesting that ELM may not fully capture the complexities of modern consumer behaviour.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings suggest that while ELM provides a valuable theoretical framework, its application in modern advertising has limitations. Digital marketing landscapes often present consumers with an overwhelming amount of content, making it challenging to engage in high-effort cognitive processing. Furthermore, emotional appeals, particularly in video and influencer-driven content, may trigger impulsive consumer behaviours that do not align neatly with either central or peripheral route processing. These insights imply that advertising strategies must account for fluid consumer engagement, where a single advertisement can simultaneously engage both high and low elaboration routes depending on context and timing.

### **Objective 2: Peripheral Route Processing Influence on Consumer Decision-Making in Modern Advertising**

#### **Interpretation**

Six of the participants expressed that peripheral route processing plays a crucial role in their decision-making. They noted that factors such as celebrity endorsements, aesthetic appeal, and brand familiarity significantly influence their choices. One participant explained that they often purchase products impulsively after seeing visually appealing advertisements on social media, even without engaging with the detailed information provided. This finding aligns with the notion that consumers with low motivation or ability to process information tend to rely on peripheral cues. Participants also noted that short-form video content, such as TikTok and Instagram reels, encourages quick decision-making with minimal cognitive effort.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Peripheral route processing appears to dominate consumer decision-making in fast-paced digital environments. Advertisements leveraging visually engaging content and social proof (e.g., celebrity endorsements, user-generated reviews) can effectively influence consumer attitudes and behaviours without requiring extensive cognitive engagement. This aligns with the evolving nature of digital media consumption, where consumers are more likely to engage with short, persuasive messages rather than detailed, logic-driven content. Consequently, advertisers must strategically design content that captures attention within seconds while subtly reinforcing brand messaging to enhance long-term recall.

### **Objective 3: Central Route Processing in Modern Advertising Campaigns**

#### **Interpretation**

Four respondents reported engaging in central route processing when purchasing high-involvement products such as electronics, insurance policies, or educational courses. These participants noted that they prefer advertisements that provide factual, well-structured information, such as comparison charts, expert reviews, and in-depth product specifications. One participant shared that they often research multiple sources before making a decision, particularly for

expensive items. However, participants also mentioned that modern advertising rarely relies solely on central route processing, as marketers often integrate emotional storytelling and brand identity to appeal to consumer values.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings confirm that central route processing remains relevant in advertising but is primarily applied to high-involvement purchases. Consumers seek reliable, well-substantiated information when making significant financial commitments, emphasising the importance of transparency and credibility in advertising. However, the presence of emotional and aesthetic elements, even in high-involvement product advertisements, suggests that persuasive strategies benefit from a hybrid approach. By merging rational appeals with engaging narratives, advertisers can enhance both message retention and consumer trust, thereby optimising the impact of central route processing.

### **Objective 4: Interaction Between Central and Peripheral Processing in Shaping Consumer Attitudes**

#### **Interpretation**

The data revealed that central and peripheral processing often interact in complex ways, shaping consumer attitudes toward advertisements. Seven participants expressed that while they might initially engage with an advertisement through peripheral cues (e.g., humour, catchy slogans), central processing often influences their final decision when making significant purchases. One participant provided an example of buying a fitness subscription: they were initially drawn in by an influencer's endorsement (peripheral processing) but eventually made the purchase after reading customer reviews and comparing features (central processing). This suggests that the interplay between central and peripheral routes is crucial in shaping long-term consumer attitudes and purchase decisions.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The integration of both central and peripheral routes in consumer decision-making underscores the dynamic nature of modern advertising. Advertisements' ability to initially capture attention through peripheral cues before encouraging deeper engagement aligns with evolving marketing strategies that prioritize both attraction and retention. This suggests that advertisers should not view central and peripheral processing as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary forces that work together to maximise persuasive impact. Future research could further investigate how different advertisement formats optimise this interplay, particularly in the realm of digital and interactive media.

### **Advancement of Knowledge on Persuasion in Advertising**

This study advances existing knowledge on persuasion in advertising by integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) with modern digital advertising strategies. Traditional persuasion theories focus on central and peripheral processing as separate pathways. However, this



study highlights the increasing interdependence of these routes due to technological advancements. By examining peripheral route processing through emotional appeals, social proof, and algorithmic personalization, the study provides insights into how digital and social media platforms enhance persuasion. Additionally, the research underscores the growing importance of dual processing in complex advertising environments, demonstrating how advertisers leverage both rational and emotional elements to maximize engagement. The study contributes to advertising literature by contextualizing ELM in the digital era, addressing the role of personalized content, interactivity, and algorithm-driven targeting in consumer persuasion.

### **Study Limitations**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Firstly, it relies heavily on qualitative synthesis rather than empirical testing, limiting its ability to quantify the effectiveness of dual processing in various advertising contexts. A small sample size or lack of controlled experimental data may hinder the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study does not extensively explore cultural differences in persuasion, which could affect the applicability of ELM across diverse audiences. The complexity of digital advertising environments, including AI-driven personalization and interactive media, is not fully accounted for within the traditional ELM framework. This limitation suggests the need for more empirical studies to validate how different consumer demographics engage with dual processing in digital contexts.

### **Future Research Directions**

To build on these findings, future research should focus on several key areas:

1. Testing ELM in AI-Driven Advertising Environments:
2. Expanding on Peripheral Route Processing in Social Media Ads:
3. Examining the Role of Emotions in Persuasion:
4. Investigating the Dual Processing Model in Cross-Cultural Contexts:

### **Addressing Ethical Implications of Algorithmic Personalization:**

### **Conclusion**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is still useful for studying persuasion in modern ads. The ELM shows how people process persuasive messages based on their motivation and cognitive abilities by distinguishing between core and peripheral channels. Central route processing works well for high-involvement products and services, where customers actively seek information and critically judge the quality of arguments. In contrast, peripheral processing relies on heuristics and surface signals, making it suited for low-involvement contexts or audiences with less cognitive engagement. As advertising evolves, especially in the digital age, the strategic combination of central and peripheral tactics is vital to attract a wide range of customers. Social media and digital tools have improved the effects of peripheral cues like influencer marketing and social proof while allowing deeper engagement via central processing of personalised, data-driven material.

## Recommendations

- i. Advertisers should design ads that use both central and peripheral hints to engage customers at multiple levels.
- ii. Use machine learning and data analytics to tailor ads to users' interests and habits.
- iii. Social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer unique dual-processing engagement opportunities.
- iv. To fix the model's flaws in fragmented media consumption scenarios, future research should examine how multitasking and simultaneous media exposure affect message processing. Adding attention and cognitive load theories to the ELM will make it more useful in modern ad research

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