Discuss two or more applications of the Hovland-Yale and Elaboration-Likelihood model of persuasion
24 mark

The Hovland – Yale model states a behavioural change cannot occur without attitude change having taken place. They stated that what affected attitude change is who says what to whom i.e. who the communicator is, how the persuasive message is portrayed and who the audience receiving the message is. This led the model to outline three factors affecting persuasion – source, message and audience factors.

One factor affecting persuasion is the attractiveness of the communicator. Research has shown that attractive communicators are more persuasive than less attractive communicators, for example, celebrities such as Cheryl Cole appear in hair care adverts in order to persuade audiences to buy a brand of product. This is known as the halo effect, where a person who is attractive is perceived as having other positive characteristics such as wisdom and knowledge. In addition to physical features, the perceived expertise of the communicator is important. Audiences more likely to be influenced by an experts, or a person perceived as an expert e.g. a person in a white laboratory coat.

The influence of an expert has been supported by research. Bocher et al asked students to indicate how much sleep was required to maintain good health. When exposed to either an expert or a non-expert opinion advocating a different position, students were swayed far more by the expert source. This was shown even when the discrepancy between their own beliefs and those of the expert were extreme, showing the importance of having an expert in advertisements.

The way in which the message is put across also has an influence on persuasion. Low-fear and high-fear messages do not appear as effective as moderate messages. McGuire suggests that low levels of fear do little to motivate an audience to change, whereas high levels can also rebound and trigger defence mechanisms such as denial because they create so much anxiety in the audience that it interferes with its ability to process information in the message. Witte et al discovered that moderate messages are more persuasive if they outline ways in coping with the danger, e.g. the use of condom in advertisements.

Lewis et al. provided support for the effectiveness of fear-arousing messages in a drink-driving campaign. Participants viewed two advertisements and completed two questionnaires, one immediately after the advertisement and the other two to four weeks later for assessing changes in attitudes and behaviour. They found that although fear-arousing messages were more persuasive in the period immediately after exposure, long-term attitudes change was more likely with positive additions to the message, such as humour.

Audience intelligence also plays a role in persuasion. Rhodes found, in a meta analysis, that low intelligence audiences are less likely to process content of a message and so are more likely to be influenced by it. High intelligence audiences are more confident in their own views and therefore are harder to persuade. High intelligence audiences also prefer to hear both sides of an argument before making a decision and are likely to process the message in more depth, therefore would reject simple one-sided arguments which are more effective for less intelligent audiences. In addition to intelligence, audiences with low involvement in a topic are less likely to be interested in, and therefore less likely to be influenced by, a persuasive message.

Igartua et al. tested the idea that an efficient way to deal with the low involvement of an audience is to insert the messages within an entertainment context. They used fictional short stories to illustrate HIV/AIDS prevention. The findings showed that the better the quality of the fictional story, the more cognitive processing was induced, and a more favourable attitude towards preventative behaviour was stimulated. This shows that by changing the nature of the message, the limitations of the audience can be overcome.