Attitudes: How does personality affect attitude change in the context of the Elaboration Likelihood Model?

An individual’s attitude towards a particular product or a certain brand is regarded as a strong predictor of whether that person will purchase that product or buy from that brand; such attitudes differ from person to person as they are influenced by the individual’s personality.

One model which describes how attitudes can be altered or changed is the elaboration likelihood model, which was originally proposed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1986). According to this model attitudes can be altered or changed via two different routes; these routes are referred to as the central route and the peripheral route. The central route occurs when the listener elaborates on the message and in most cases the listener can relate to the message and therefore has their own opinions and thoughts on the topic. Their own beliefs are used to create a framework for the message and to elaborate on the new information. In this case the message is meaningful to the listener meaning motivation to listen and process it is high. However, this elaboration may not always lead to attitude change as the listener may not actually understand the provided information. An example of when the central route would be used to change is attitude could be during a political debate, which is something many people would regard as important. For the speech to be more persuasive the speaker would create a balanced argument and include important facts to change the listener’s attitude. This route of persuasion generally creates a permanent attitude change, in particularly explicit attitudes. Furthermore, it is usually assumed that this route is used by an audience which are attentive and critical of information.

In contrast to this, the peripheral route focuses more on the type of listener that has low motivation to understand new information and are motivated by more than just the message itself; cues peripheral to the message are needed. For instance this could be attractive actors or the use of memorable slogans. Individual’s attitudes may also change due to their own body movements, (Wells & Petty, 1980). People will often evaluate a communication by using simple-minded heuristics, or rules of thumb (Chaiken, 1987; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). However, evaluation of the content may be reduced if the communicator has a good reputation and is considered to be an honest person as the listener assumes what they are saying must be true, so as a result do not think critically, they just accept the message and alter their attitude (Priester & Petty, 1995). This route tends to be used by cognitive misers and individuals with a low IQ. This route would be commonly used to create persuasive advertisements for products such as shampoos, which have little importance to the viewer; however, this route generally only creates a temporary attitude change – the person may decide to change brand at any point.