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The Relevance of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in the Consumer Buying Process in the Context of Persuasive Advertising

ABSTRACT

The understanding of the consumer's psyche has always been at the epicentre for targeted, niche-specific marketing. The marketers have used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) framework to identify the "route" (central or peripheral) for advertising various products and services. This research tries to understand the ELM from multifactorial perspectives. The diverse responses of 300 respondents have been fed to Python 3.8.8 and various analyses have been carried out (Exploratory analysis, ANOVA, Co-relation) to understand the impacts. The outcomes show that gender and place of residence significantly affect the "route" taken by consumers. The analyses have identified and segregated the product and advertisement features that influence consumers taking either "route" while also finding that the ELM holds even in cases where respondents were exposed to persuasive advertising. The study results can help marketers understand their consumers' psyche and develop more appropriate advertising strategies.

KEY WORDS

Elaboration Likelihood Model. Consumer Buying Process. Central Route. Peripheral Route. Informative Advertising. Persuasive Advertising.

1 Introduction

When studying or attempting to predict consumer behaviour, individual traits can be a variable that may distinguish a person from the next while at the same time also allowing for grouping of persons with the same personality trait. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, studies of personality traits are particularly sizeable contributors in cases where they correlate with the aspect of consumer behaviour being studied.¹ Of these traits, two – the need for cognition and, contrastingly, the need for affect – are perhaps the traits that can tell most about consumer behaviour.² While persons with a need for cognition take joy in the act of engaging in deliberation and evaluation, those with a need for affect rely on the processing of emotions and feelings.

The different pathways that a consumer of a product/service may take in making a purchasing decision were established as part of the study undertaken by Cacioppo and Petty in 1986. They dubbed these types “routes” and used them to categorize customer preferences. The findings were used to divide purchasing behaviour into two categories: the “central route” taken by those who exhibit a high degree of elaboration likelihood and the “peripheral route” taken by those showing low degrees of elaboration likelihood.

Over the years, researchers have been working to decode buying behaviour and the thought process of making a purchasing choice. Marketers use this knowledge to understand better how their customers think and tailor their marketing strategies accordingly. The Elaboration Likelihood Model has been used to deduce the buyers’ thought process when purchasing. The research, however, is focused on evidence and scenarios from the 1980s and does not investigate whether demographic characteristics influence the response. The study does not highlight the features of products and advertisements preferred by users who take the central route over those who take the peripheral route. Furthermore, this study aims to see if ELM holds when customers are subjected to persuasive advertising.

2 Review of Literature

Cognitive Necessities vs Need for Affect

A potential relationship was investigated³ between people’s personality traits and their preferred medium of processing information, verbal or visual. Processing information might be similar on some level for all persons; however, the strategies, previous experience, and skills used to process data can be widely different from person to person.⁴ Some find it easier to process verbal information, like words and phrases, while some prefer visual information, like pictures. According to earlier research, some respond to and retain knowledge from stimuli better when exposed to such stimuli

¹ BURTON, S., et al.: A Scale for Measuring Attitude Toward Private Label Products and an Examination of Its Psychological and Behavioral Correlates. In *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1998, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 293. [online]. [2022-02-12]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246926654_A_Scale_for_Measuring_Attitude_Toward_Private_Label_Products_and_an_Examination_of_Its_Psychological_and_Behavioral_Correlates>.

² HAUGTVEDT, C. P., PETTY, R. E., CACIOPPO, J. T.: Need for Cognition and Advertising: Understanding the Role of Personality Variables in Consumer Behavior. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 1992, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 239. [online]. [2022-02-10]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223653300_Need_for_Cognition_and_Advertising_Understanding_the_Role_of_Personality_Variables_in_Consumer_Behavior>.

³ SOJKA, J. Z., GIESE, J. L.: The Influence of Personality Traits on the Processing of Visual and Verbal Information. In *Marketing Letters*, 2001, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 91. [online]. [2022-02-18]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226484036_The_Influence_of_Personality_Traits_on_the_Processing_of_Visual_and_Verbal_Information>.

⁴ MANTEL, S. P., KARDES, F. R.: The Role of Direction of Comparison, Attribute-Based Processing, and Attitude-Based Processing in Consumer Preference. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1999, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 335. [online]. [2022-02-10]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24099014_The_Role_of_Direction_of_Comparison_Attribute-Based_Processing_and_Attitude-Based_Processing_in_Consumer_Preference>.

individually than as part of a group.⁵ Depending on the person in question, the message processing abilities differ and may even be swayed by factors like perceived value and pre-existing notions⁶, the quantity and quality of arguments regarding the stimuli⁷, the degree of distractions embedded in the environment⁸, knowledgeability⁹, and any recurrence of the stimuli in question.¹⁰ A relationship between personality traits and the preference for information processing can be helpful in advertising and in helping a brand communicate better with its consumers.¹¹ If brands can assess whether their audience processes verbal or visual cues or a combination of both, they can target the advertisements by tailoring them to the consumers' preferences. However, understanding whether a person takes in verbal or visual information is quite a task and not in the purview of marketers. Brands know their consumer's personality traits, whether they harbour a need for cognition or affect. Since the elements of advertisements that have no direct relation to the brand itself are dismissed as secondary cues, a relationship between these traits and the mode of processing information will aid brands in studying their customers and their potential customers better.¹²

Consumer behaviour is based on thoroughly understanding how people make choices.¹³ Motivation and ability are vital influencers, but information processing can also determine whether consumers react positively or negatively to specific messages. Messages that hold particular relevance in the minds of the receiver tend to be perceived better and are retained in memory for much longer than those that fail to establish any personal relevance¹⁴. Quite a few attempts have been made to design models that successfully categorize and, perhaps even,

⁵ PETTY, R. E., HARKINS, S. G., WILLIAMS, K. D.: The Effects of Group Diffusion of Cognitive Effort on Attitudes: An Information-processing View. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1980, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 81. [online]. [2022-03-01]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232509963_The_effects_of_group_diffusion_of_cognitive_effort_on_attitudes_An_information-processing_view>.

⁶ BURTON, S., BISWAS, A., NETEMEYER, R.: Effects of Alternative Nutrition Label Formats and Nutrition Reference Information on Consumer Perceptions, Comprehension, and Product Evaluations. In *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 1994, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 36. [online]. [2022-02-14]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344877565_Effects_of_Alternative_Nutrition_Label_Formats_and_Nutrition_Reference_Information_on_Consumer_Perceptions_Comprehension_and_Product_Evaluations>.

⁷ PETTY, R. E., CACIOPPO, J. T.: The Effects of Involvement on Responses to Argument Quantity and Quality: Central and Peripheral Routes to Persuasion. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1984, Vol. 46, No. 1, p. 69. [online]. [2022-01-28]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232578958_The_effects_of_involvement_on_responses_to_argument_quantity_and_quality_Central_and_peripheral_routes_to_persuasion>.

⁸ PETTY, R. E., WELLS, G. L., BROCK, T. C.: Distraction Can Enhance or Reduce Yielding to Propaganda: Thought Disruption Versus Effort Justification. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1976, Vol. 34, No. 5, p. 874. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232546200_Distraction_Can_Enhance_or_Reduce_Yielding_to_Propaganda_Thought_Disruption_Versus_Effort_Justification>.

⁹ RHODES, N., WOOD, W.: Self-esteem and Intelligence Affect Influenceability: The Mediating Role of Message Reception. In *Psychological Bulletin*, 1992, Vol. 111, No. 1, p. 156. [online]. [2022-02-09]. Available at: <<https://www.gwern.net/docs/iq/1992-rhodes.pdf>>.

¹⁰ CACIOPPO, J. T., PETTY, R. E.: Effects of Message Repetition and Position on Cognitive Response, Recall, and Persuasion. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1979, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 97. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232572343_Effects_of_message_repetition_and_position_on_cognitive_response_recall_and_persuasion>.

¹¹ CACIOPPO, J. T., GARDNER, W. L., BERNTSON, G. G.: The Affect System Has Parallel and Integrative Processing Components: Form Follows Function. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1999, Vol. 76, No. 5, p. 839. [online]. [2022-02-14]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232564098_The_Affect_System_Has_Parallel_and_Integrative_Processing_Components>.

¹² MCQUARRIE, E. F., MICK, D. G.: On Resonance: A Critical Pluralistic Inquiry into Advertising Rhetoric. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1992, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 180. [online]. [2022-02-16]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24098733_On_Resonance_A_Critical_Pluralistic_Inquiry_Into_Advertising_Rhetoric>.

¹³ WEGENER, D. T., CHIEN, Y. W.: Elaboration and Choice. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2013, Vol. 23, No. 4, p. 543. [online]. [2022-02-12]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259142367_Elaboration_and_choice>.

¹⁴ STAFFORD, T. F.: Unintended thought, edited by James S. Uleman and John A. Bargh. The Guilford Press, New York, 1989. In *Psychology and Marketing*, 1994, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 85. [online]. [2022-02-14]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246866229_Unintended_thought_edited_by_James_S_Uleman_and_John_A_Bargh_The_Guilford_Press_New_York_1989>.

predict human behaviour. Evaluative decision-making processes were studied, and a model was developed with a framework involving judgment based on a dual-system approach.¹⁵ Instant gratification was also incorporated to perceive motivational behaviour in subjects who formed positive associations with objects or events that involved rewards.¹⁶

The need to communicate with consumers and do so effectively was pondered upon, and it was suggested that the audience's elaboration levels should be considered. The message characteristics should be altered accordingly to make information processing easier¹⁷. This can be determined by understanding whether the target audience needs cognition or it is driven by a need for affect. Once that is determined, based on the relationship established by¹⁸, the message can contain either a majority of words or images, respectively.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The study of a possible relationship between attitudes and consecutively resulting behaviours was first introduced in the field of social psychology,¹⁹ post which it was extensively worked on²⁰ and further refined as more studies were conducted on elements of the human psyche and its effect on human behaviour.²¹

As a part of a study, the various paths were identified that a consumer of a product/service might take in reaching a purchase decision.²² They termed these modes as "routes". They used them to categorize consumers' attitudes, using the results to organize purchase behaviour into two routes – the "central route" and the "peripheral route". Factors on the lines of consumer's motivation were considered to understand and learn about the features of a product/service and their ability to deduce the potential merits or demerits that the product/service would have on them.

When these conditions prove to be optimum, consumer motivation and their ability to engage in fruitful deduction are high. This is a situation where the authors suggest that the degree of "elaboration likelihood" of said consumer is also high. A high degree of elaboration likelihood

¹⁵ DHAR, R., GORLIN, M.: A Dual-system Framework to Understand Preference Construction Processes in Choice. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2013, Vol. 23, No. 4, p. 528. [online]. [2022-02-12]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259142366_A_dual-system_framework_to_understand_preference_construction_processes_in_choice>.

¹⁶ AARTS, H., CUSTERS, R., MARIEN, H.: Preparing and Motivating Behavior Outside of Awareness. In *Science*, 2008, Vol. 319, No. 5870, p. 1639. [online]. [2022-02-14]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5494983_Preparing_and_Motivating_Behavior_Outside_of_Awareness>.

¹⁷ See: RUCKER, D. D., PETTY, R. E.: Increasing the Effectiveness of Communications to Consumers: Recommendations Based on Elaboration Likelihood and Attitude Certainty Perspectives. In *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 2006, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 39-52. [online]. [2022-02-14]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247837464_Increasing_the_Effectiveness_of_Communications_to_Consumers_Recommendations_Based_on_Elaboration_Likelihood_and_Attitude_Certainty_Perspectives>.

¹⁸ GIESE, J., SOJKA, J.: The Relationship Between Processing Styles and Self-Control Behavioral Characteristics. In *Marketing Letters*, 1998, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 371. [online]. [2022-02-16]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226164361_The_Relationship_between_Processing_Styles_and_Self-Control_Behavioral_Characteristics>.

¹⁹ ROSS, E. A.: *Social Psychology*. [online]. [2022-02-14]. Available at: <https://brocku.ca/MeadProject/Ross/Ross_1919/Ross_1919_toc.html>.

²⁰ WICKER, A. W.: An Examination of the "Other Variables" Explanation of Attitude-behavior Inconsistency. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1971, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 18. [online]. [2022-02-15]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232571670_An_Explanation_of_the_Other_Variables_of_explanation_of_Attitude-Behavior_Inconsistency>.

²¹ HIMMELFARB, S., EAGLY, A. H.: *Readings in Attitude Change*. New York : John Wiley & Sons, 1974. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232544066_Readings_in_attitude_change>; SHERMAN, S. J., FAZIO, R. H.: Parallels Between Attitudes and Traits as Predictors of Behaviour. In *Journal of Personality*, 1983, Vol. 51, No. 3, p. 308. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229735647_Parallals_between_attitudes_and_traits_as_predictors_of_behavior>.

²² CACIOPPO, J. T., PETTY, R. E.: The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 1986, Vol. 19, p. 123. [online]. [2022-02-22]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270271600_The_Elaboration_Likelihood_Model_of_Persuasion>.

means that the consumer is engaged in heedful deliberation of what a product/service has to put forward and considers the cost of that product/service and whether it offers value for money. These consumers take what is termed as the “central route” in making their purchase decision. On the other end of the spectrum, if the conditions are such where they fail to induce any given consumer’s motivation or ability to engage in careful deliberation for the product/service, the authors claim that the degree of “elaboration likelihood” is low. A low degree of elaboration likelihood is associated with those consumers who base their decisions on external factors since they do not possess the motivation or the ability to be attentive to all product features. The route taken by them in their purchasing process has been called the “peripheral route”.²³

Specific implications can be drawn from both the routes helpful to marketers and businesspersons alike, since these provide a view into the consumer psyche, and the best way to advertise to them. Consumers taking the central route are motivated to learn and attempt to formulate associations between what is shown to them and what they remember from experience. These associations are then utilized to analyze the product/service; the conclusions drawn from past experiences, the associations formed, and the information obtained from the analysis are then conjointly studied to ascertain the consumer’s attitude or notion regarding the said product/service. Central routes tend to be long-standing in the consumer’s psyche since they are based upon past experiences, which are then associated with new inferences drawn by the consumer. Such conditions prove to be optimum in predicting consumer behaviour, especially if the associations are reiterated and are used to instil a sense of confidence in the consumer’s pre-existing notions. Those inclined to follow the peripheral route have minimal motivation to learn about the product/service offered and are thus more likely to avoid putting effort into thinking and reviewing their needs before deciding to make a purchase. These consumers do not attempt to form associations based on prior knowledge. Instead, they found their opinions and judgments on external cues, whether positive or negative, shown to them and drew superficial inferences based upon persuasive stimuli.

Cacioppo and Petty emphasized that the two routes, central and peripheral, are not two ends of a spectrum that can distinctly categorize consumers into mutually exclusive groups. Instead, the elaboration likelihood exists on a continuous dimension and depends on how a given consumer intercepts a message. This is furthered by studies wherein the levels of cognition of persons and the scores’ correlation with the beliefs formed and the attitudes perceived by said individuals were examined, finding the relationship to be positive.²⁴

Persuasive Advertising – How, What, and Why?

A dichotomy existed between two modes of advertising – informational and persuasive – wherein the infamous opinion was that informational advertising was helpful to consumers and was well accepted by the significant populace. Still, persuasive advertising was viewed to be manipulative and controlling²⁵. It was concluded by other researchers²⁶ that such a distinction was illogical, and the dichotomy was annulled with the claims that even informational advertisements were,

²³ CACIOPPO, J. T., PETTY, R. E., MORRIS, K. J.: Effects of Need for Cognition on Message Evaluation, Recall, and Persuasion. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1983, Vol. 45, No. 4, p. 805. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/200772918_Effects_of_need_for_cognition_on_message_evaluation_recall_and_persuasion>.

²⁴ HAUGTVEDT, C. P., PETTY, R. E.: Personality and Persuasion: Need for Cognition Moderates the Persistence and Resistance of Attitude Changes. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1992, Vol. 63, No. 2, p. 308. [online]. [2022-02-18]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/211387425_Personality_and_Persuasion_Need_for_Cognition_Moderates_the_Persistence_and_Resistance_of_Attitude_Changes>.

²⁵ See: KOPALLE, P. K. et al.: The Effects of Advertised Quality Emphasis and Objective Quality on Sales. In *Journal of Marketing*, 2017, Vol. 81, No. 2, p. 114-126. [online]. [2022-01-01]. Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2929012>.

²⁶ HUNT, S. D.: Informational vs. Persuasive Advertising: An Appraisal. In *Journal of Advertising*, 1976, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 5. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271944658_Informational_vs_Persuasive_Advertising_An_Appraisal>.

to some extent, persuasive since they provide the information to convince a buyer to make a purchase. So, if informative advertisements were so widely accepted, but were persuasive, then primarily, the purpose of all advertisements was to persuade essentially. Another significant conclusion is that there is no relation between the quantum of information and an advertisement's relevance or practical nature. The method to process information is different among people, so when viewed by other individuals, the same ad will be perceived to be different in informational quantity. Thus, informative and persuasive advertisements do not form a dichotomy but rather a continuum where one complements the other.

Even in the purview of persuasive advertising, it has been long argued that differentiation amidst products while advertising them sets two competitive products apart. This relationship was studied in industries where product differentiation is seemingly low but persuasive advertising is at its peak²⁷. Since the products are almost identical and have minimal differentiation in their features and benefits, persuasive advertising becomes the distinguishing element that sets the two products/services apart²⁸. Similarly, the advertisements turn informative when the case is for highly differentiated products and clearly distinguishing features. They also found a positive relationship between exposure to persuasive advertising and the consumer's readiness to pay. The correlation between product differentiation and persuasive advertising was further elaborated²⁹ by researchers in recent years, and finding that differentiation affects a firm's advertising choices. They take the study a step further by finding that, in a situation where a product/service sees an increase in its valuation, a firm is most likely to hike up the persuasive advertising owing to the subsequent hike in the marginal profit that the firm sees through its advertising efforts. It is established that the cost of advertising spent in attracting new consumers can be considered equal to any value over the marginal cost of the product/service in question. It was first discerned that a relationship in the form of an inverted U-shaped curve existed between the intensity of persuasive advertising and the market share³⁰. The model has been studied further and still holds, giving meaning to the fact that persuasive advertising and relative market share reach a peak that the firm should determine, or they can risk burnout and lose that share of the market. Reverse causality was established³¹ and further elaborated on, claiming that market share can also be impacted by the marginal costs involved in advertising³². When that increases, the perceived quality of advertisements goes down, thus giving way to a market that is more competitive in its make.

²⁷ VON DER FEHR, N. H. M., STEVIK, K.: Persuasive Advertising and Product Differentiation. In *Southern Economic Journal*, 1998, Vol. 65, No. 1, p. 113. [online]. [2022-02-19]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46568626_Persuasive_Advertising_and_Product_Differentiation>.

²⁸ SCHERER, F. M., ROSS, D. R.: *Industrial market structure and economic performance*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990, p. 25. [online]. [2022-02-19]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311718167_Industrial_Market_Structure_and_Economic_Performance>.

²⁹ JIANG, B., SRINIVASAN, K.: Pricing and Persuasive Advertising in a Differentiated Market. In *Marketing Letters*, 2015, Vol. 27, No. 3, p. 579. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2592837>.

³⁰ See: KALDOR, N., SILVERMAN, R.: *A Statistical Analysis of Advertising Expenditure and of the Revenue of the Press*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, p. 32. [online]. [2022-02-22]. Available at: <<https://books.google.co.in/books?id=DUG7AAAAIAAJ&pg=PR3&lpg=PR3&dq=A+statistical+analysis+of+advertising+expenditure+and+of+the+revenue+of+the+press.+Cambridge+University+Press,+1948&source=bl&ots=SrWuSeJHOk&sig=ACfU3U0JSpjDyyNaQopT1ZJkWyo2IPvhdA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjCz67y-4H7AhV6TmwGHQ1YAUUQ6AF6BAGVEAM#v=onepage&q=A%20statistical%20analysis%20of%20advertising%20expenditure%20and%20of%20the%20revenue%20of%20the%20press.%20Cambridge%20University%20Press%2C1948&f=false>>.

³¹ See: BAKHTAWAR, B., LATIF, F., KAMAL, A.: An Analysis of Competition and Displacement of Business Among Media Forms in the Advertising Media Market of Pakistan. In *Lahore Journal of Business*, 2021, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 121-147. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357477704_An_Analysis_of_Competition_and_Displacement_of_Business_Among_Media_Forms_in_the_Advertising_Media_Market_of_Pakistan>.

³² HÄCKNER, J., NYBERG, S.: *Price Competition, Advertising and Media Market Concentration*. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247240509_Price_Competition_Advertising_and_Media_Market_Concentration>.

It was found that scepticism towards persuasive advertising, or even advertising in general, has been around in the minds of consumers for a sizeable amount of time now, some consumer interest groups and policymakers even believe that scepticism is a healthy practice that keeps marketers in check and ensures that no one gets manipulated by any messages³³. This ideology was challenged with findings that consumer scepticism can turn especially harmful when consumers begin to be dubious of direct advertising³⁴. It leads to the consumer assuming that truthful, persuasive advertising is simply “too good to be true” and results in a cynical thought process that plagues the entire audience.

3 Methodology

Objectives of the Study

- To establish a relationship between the routes identified in the ELM and consumer demographics.
- To identify which aspects of persuasive advertising appeal to consumers' need for cognition versus their need for affect.
- To analyze the route opted for by consumers when exposed to persuasive advertising.

Statements of Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant difference in the route taken among male and female consumers.

H₂: There is a significant difference between the route taken by consumers in different age groups.

H₃: There is a significant difference in the route taken by consumers in urban areas and consumers in rural areas.

H₄: There is a significant difference in the route taken among consumers with varying income levels.

H₅: There is a relationship between consumers' level of cognition and the product features they find influential.

H₆: There is a relationship between consumers' level of cognition and the advertisement features they find influential.

H₇: There is a significant difference in the route taken by consumers who prefer informative advertising and consumers who prefer persuasive advertising.

Sampling Size, Sampling Technique, and Data Collection

The study included 300 participants as its sample. The participants were diverse, identifying to different genders, of varying ages, living in other cities, towns, and villages, and having dissimilar monthly incomes. A diversified sample was chosen for the study since the levels of cognition were to be studied in the context of varied demographic characteristics. The sampling technique used for the analysis was convenience sampling since the responses were meant to be diverse and not limited to a specific group of persons. The study is limited to India, although participants were from various cities, towns, and villages.

The study relies on primary data collected through a questionnaire that was disseminated among the participants. The questionnaire included five sections that the participants were asked to answer – demographics, 18-NCS, product features, advertisement features,

³³ BERMEJO BERROS, J.: The New Persuasive Advertising Strategies through Induction Levels of Psychological Processing. In *Mediterranean Journal of Communication*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 217. [online]. [2022-02-23]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354998141_The_new_persuasive_advertising_strategies_through_induction_levels_of_psychological_processing>.

³⁴ POLLAY, R. W., MITTAL, B.: Here's the Beef: Factors, Determinants, and Segments in Consumer Criticism of Advertising. In *Journal of Marketing*, 1973, Vol. 57, No. 3, p. 99. [online]. [2022-02-23]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329447112_Here%27s_the_Beef_Factors_Determinants_and_Segments_in_Consumer_Criticism_of_Advertising>.

and advertisement appeal. The questionnaire was a mix of option-based replies as well as responses on a 5-point scale. The 18-NCS included eighteen statements, nine of which were positively worded while nine were negatively worded. Reverse coding was performed post the collection to streamline all responses.

4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data and Hypotheses mapping

Question	Routes	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7
Gender.	NA	1						
Age.	NA		1					
Residence.	NA			1				
Income level per month.	NA				1			
I prefer complex to simple problems.	18-NCS scores. Aggregate below 54 - Peripheral route; above 54 - Central route	1	1	1	1			
I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires much thinking.		1	1	1	1			
Thinking is not my idea of fun.		1	1	1	1			
I would instead do something that requires little thought than something sure to challenge my thinking abilities.		1	1	1	1			
I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is likely a chance I will have to think in-depth about something.		1	1	1	1			
I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.		1	1	1	1			
I only think as hard as I have to.		1	1	1	1			
I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.		1	1	1	1			
I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.		1	1	1	1			
The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.		1	1	1	1			
I enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.		1	1	1	1			
Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.		1	1	1	1			
I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.		1	1	1	1			
The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.		1	1	1	1			
I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.		1	1	1	1			
I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that requires much mental effort.		1	1	1	1			
It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.		1	1	1	1			
I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.		1	1	1	1			
My purchase decisions are influenced by the features offered (Price, Range of features, Personal benefit)	Central					1		
My purchase decisions are influenced by my inferences from the advertisements I see (Look-and-feel, Brand credibility, Celebrity endorsements, Word-of-mouth)	Peripheral						1	

Informational value (need for cognition)	Central	1
Degree of personalization (need for cognition)	Central	1
Differentiation from competitor's products (need for cognition)	Central	1
Emotional appeal (need for affect)	Peripheral	1
Storytelling ability (need for affect)	Peripheral	1
Advertisement theme and style of editing (need for affect)	Peripheral	1
Informative Advertisement 1 (Image shown)	Central	1
Persuasive Advertisement 1 (Image shown)	Peripheral	1
Informative Advertisement 2 (Image shown)	Central	1
Persuasive Advertisement 2 (Image shown)	Peripheral	1
Informative Advertisement 3 (Image shown)	Central	1
Persuasive Advertisement 3 (Image shown)	Peripheral	1

TABLE 1: Mapping of the Hypothesis with the Data Collected

Source: own processing, 2022

Feature engineering: For analysis, a new feature, 'NCS_SCORE', has been derived by aggregating 18-NCS scores. The values below 54 suggest the Peripheral route and above 54 suggest the Central route.

Technology and Techniques: Python (3.8.8) has been used for analysis of multiple techniques – Exploratory analysis, ANOVA, Co-relations.

High-level analysis of 'NCS_SCORE': The following figure shows the distribution along with the cut-off vertical line drawn at 54. The maximum number of respondents, 192 (64%), have taken the Central route, and 108 (36%) have taken the Peripheral route (see fig. 1).

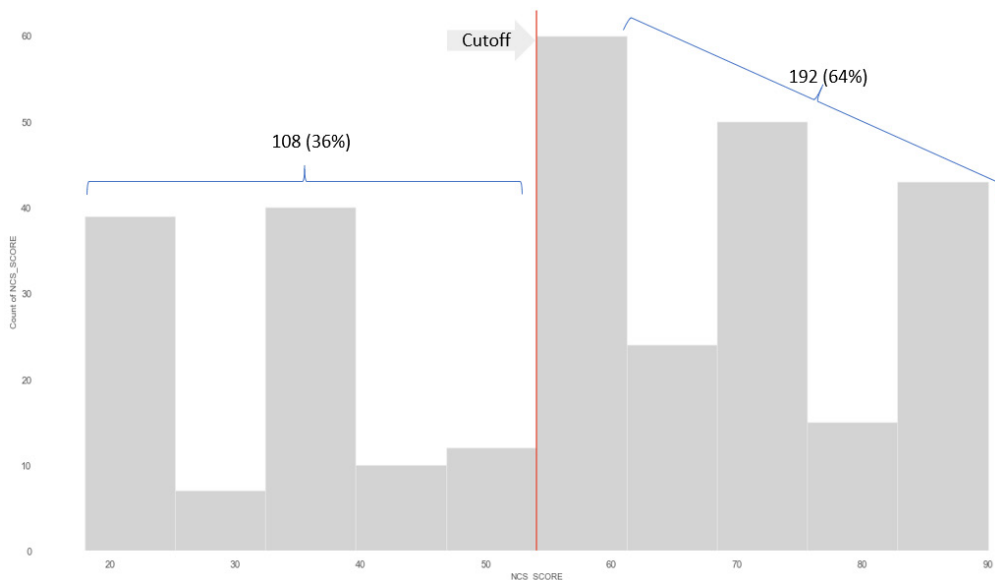


FIGURE 1: Population Distribution

Source: own processing, 2022

Testing Hypothesis 1: The total number of participants is almost equal across both female and male groups. The average score of the female group is aligned with the Central route and the average score of the male group is aligned with the Peripheral route (see fig. 2).

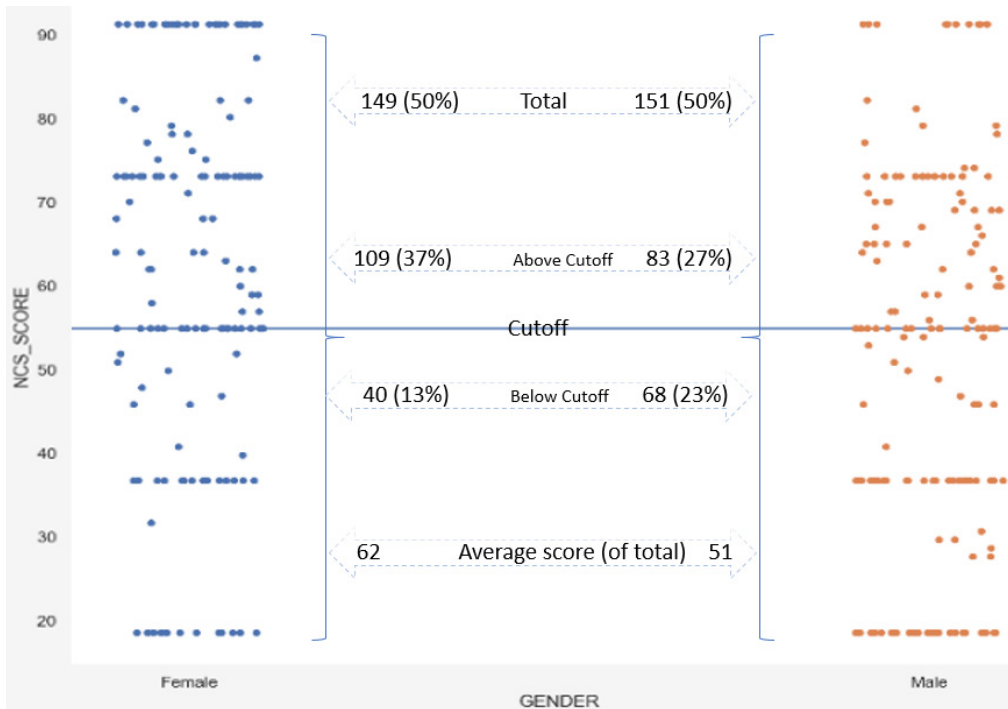


FIGURE 2: Population Distribution – Gender

Source: own processing, 2022

The descriptive analysis suggests a difference between both groups. This can be seen in the following ANOVA table with a p value=0.00.

Overall model F (1, 298) = 17.53, p = 0.00				
	sum_sq	df	F	PR(>F)
C(GENDER)	8404.28	1.0	17.53	3.73e-05
Residual	142900.29	298.0	NaN	NaN

TABLE 2: : Hypothesis 1 – ANOVA

Source: own processing, 2022

Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, and H1 is accepted. **In business terms, gender does matter for the route taken.**

Testing Hypothesis 2: The maximum participants are for the '18-25' age group, minimum for the '30-40' age group, and almost equal across other groups. The average score of all groups is near the Peripheral and Central route boundary with a deviation of -1 to +4 (see fig. 3). It looks like the age groups do not matter for the route taken.

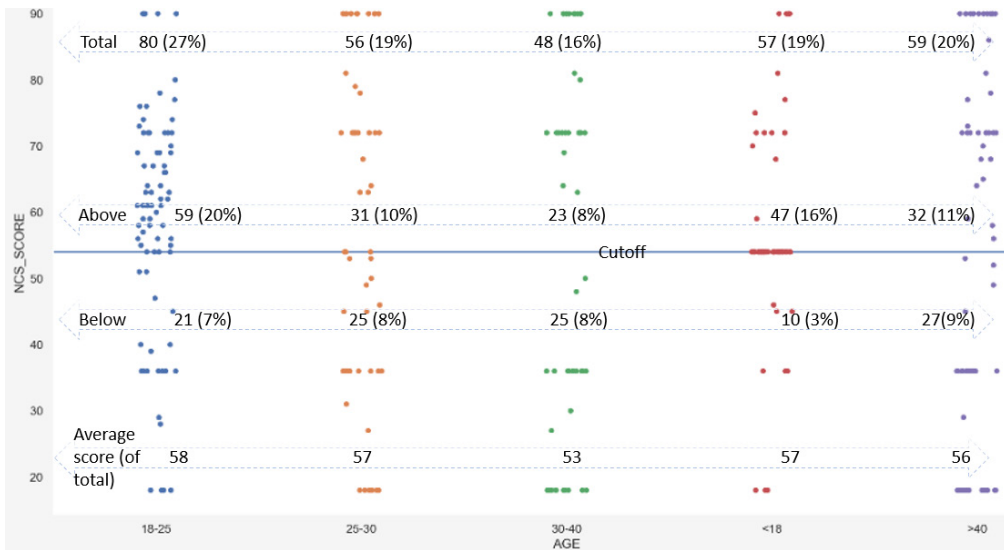


FIGURE 3: Population Distribution – Age Groups

Source: own processing, 2022

Overall model $F(4, 295) = 0.50, p = 0.74$

	sum_sq	df	F	PR(>F)
C(GENDER)	1019.87	4.0	0.5	0.74
Residual	150284.70	295.0	NaN	NaN

TABLE 3: Hypothesis 2 – ANOVA

Source: own processing, 2022

The following ANOVA table with a p-value of 0.74 suggests non-difference among groups with a p-value greater than 0.05. **Hence the null hypothesis is accepted, and H2 is rejected.**

Testing Hypothesis 3: The total number of participants is dominated by the urban group. The average score of the urban group leans towards the Central route and the average score of the rural group is towards the Peripheral route (see fig. 4).

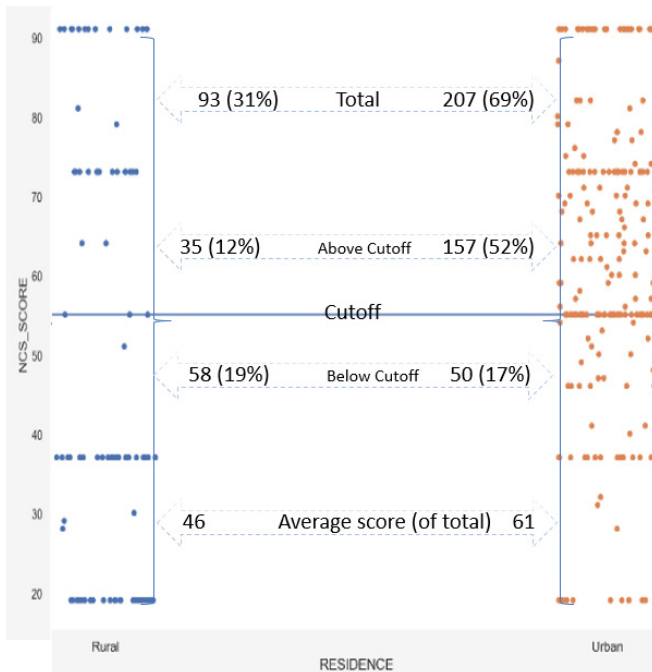


FIGURE 4: Population Distribution – Place of Residence

Source: own processing, 2022

Overall model $F(1, 298) = 31.62, p = 0.00$

	sum_sq	df	F	PR(>F)
C(GENDER)	14515.75	1.0	31.62	4.31e-08
Residual	136788.82	298.0	NaN	NaN

TABLE 4: Hypothesis 3 – ANOVA

Source: own processing, 2022

The descriptive analysis suggests a difference between both groups. The following ANOVA table with a p-value of 0.00 indicates a difference between both groups. **Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, and H3 is accepted.**

Testing Hypothesis 4: The maximum participants are for the '< ₹ 30,000' income group, minimum for '₹60,000 - ₹ 90,000' income group, and almost equal across other groups. The average score of all groups is near the Peripheral and Central route boundary with a deviation of -3 to +8 (see fig. 5).

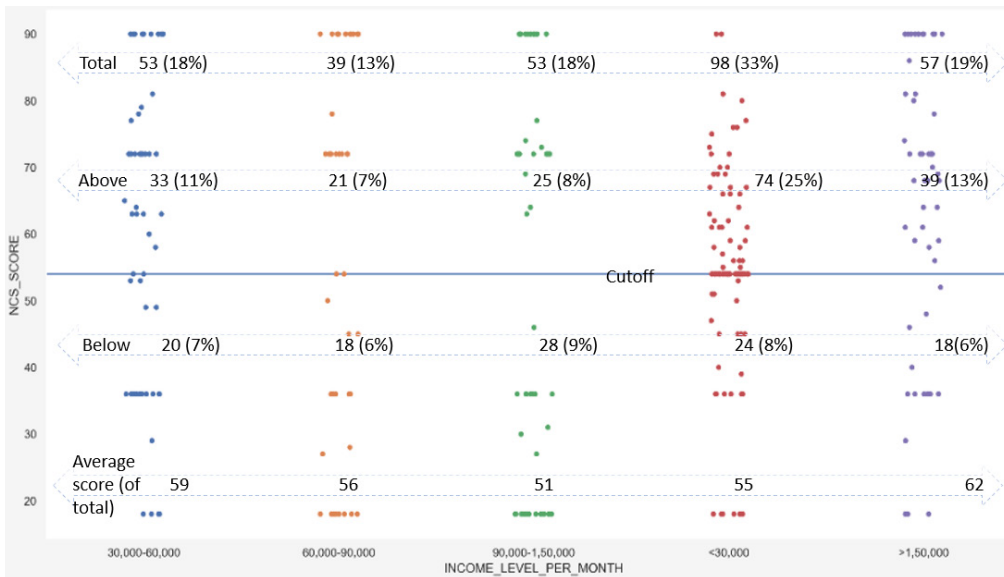


FIGURE 5: Population Distribution – Income Level

Source: own processing, 2022

Overall model $F(4, 295) = 2.10, p = 0.08$

	sum_sq	df	F	PR(>F)
C(GENDER)	4184.13	4.0	2.1	0.08
Residual	147120.44	295.0	NaN	NaN

TABLE 5: Hypothesis 4 – ANOVA

Source: own processing, 2022

The following ANOVA table with a p-value of 0.08 suggests a non-difference among groups with a p-value greater than 0.05. **Hence the null hypothesis is accepted, and H4 is rejected.**

Product feature	Pearson correlation	p-value
Price	0.83	0.00
Range of features	0.87	0.00
Personal benefit	0.86	0.00
Look-and-feel	-0.76	0.00
Brand credibility	-0.78	0.00
Celebrity endorsements	-0.84	0.00
Word-of-mouth	-0.78	0.00

TABLE 6: Hypothesis 5 – correlation

Source: own processing, 2022

Testing Hypothesis 5: As per mapping shown in table 1, cognition (NCS_SCORE) and product features have been tested for correlations as follows.

The results show a high degree of positive correlation between the NCS_SCORE and product features like price, range of features, and personal benefit. Therefore, the higher a respondent scored (higher cognition), the more influential they found “informative” product features mentioned above. Meanwhile, there is a high degree of negative correlation between the NCS_SCORE and product features like look-and-feel, brand credibility, celebrity endorsements,

and word-of-mouth. Therefore, respondents with a low score (lower cognition) found those mentioned above “external cues” more influential. Taken together, these results clearly show that there exists a relation between consumers’ level of cognition and the product features they find meaningful. **Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, and H5 is accepted.**






Advertisement feature	Pearson correlation	p-value
Informational value	0.86	0.00
Degree of personalization	0.85	0.00
Differentiation from competitor’s products	0.85	0.00
Emotional appeal	-0.76	0.00
Storytelling ability	-0.81	0.00
Advertisement theme and style of editing	-0.77	0.00

TABLE 7: Hypothesis 6 – correlation

Source: own processing, 2022

Testing Hypothesis 6: As per mapping shown in table 1, cognition (NCS_SCORE) and advertisement features have been tested for correlations as follows.

The results show a high degree of positive correlation between the NCS_SCORE and advertisement features like informational value, degree of personalization, and differentiation. Therefore, the higher a respondent scored (higher cognition), the more influential they found “informative” advertisement features mentioned above. Meanwhile, there is a high degree of negative correlation between the NCS_SCORE and advertisement features like emotional appeal, storytelling ability, and advertisement theme and editing style. Therefore, respondents with a low score (lower cognition) found those mentioned above “external cues” more influential. Taken together, these results clearly show that there exists a relation between consumers’ level of cognition and the advertisement features they find effective. **Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, and H6 is accepted.**

Product feature	Pearson correlation	p-value
	0.81	0.00
	0.83	0.00
	0.82	0.00
	-0.77	0.00
	-0.77	0.00

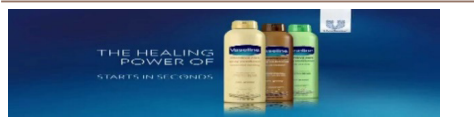
	-0.79	0.00
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TABLE 8: Hypothesis 7 product mapping – correlation

Source: own processing, 2022

Testing Hypothesis 7: As per mapping shown in table 1, cognition (NCS_SCORE) with informative and persuasive advertising have been tested for correlations as follows.

The results show a high degree of positive correlation between the NCS_SCORE and the informative advertisements. Therefore, the higher a respondent scored (higher cognition), the more appealing they found the informative advertisements. Meanwhile, there is a high degree of negative correlation between the NCS_SCORE and the persuasive advertisements. Therefore, respondents with a low score (lower cognition) found persuasive advertisements more influential. Taken together, these results clearly show that there exists a relation between consumers' level of cognition and the type of advertisement they find appealing. **Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, and H7 is accepted.**

Objective	Hypothesis	Test result
Objective 1	Hypothesis 1	Accepted
	Hypothesis 2	Rejected
	Hypothesis 3	Accepted
	Hypothesis 4	Rejected
Objective 2	Hypothesis 5	Accepted
	Hypothesis 6	Accepted
Objective 3	Hypothesis 7	Accepted

TABLE 9: Objectives and Results of Corresponding Hypotheses

Source: own processing, 2022

5 Summary of Findings

The 18-NCS test for cognition assessed the participants' level of cognition and allowed the understanding of the participants' overall psyche. Out of the entire sample, 192 (64%) had the predisposition to take the central route, highlighting that the sample had a relatively high need for cognition rather than a need for affect. Consumer demographics allowed for further insight into the characteristics that might or might not affect their need for cognition versus their need for affect. The analysis showed that the route taken by consumers had seemingly no difference in the context of the age and income levels of the respondents. This is an unanticipated result since these are the two foremost identifying characteristics when consumer demographics are considered. Gender and place of residence seem to cause a difference in the route taken by consumers. Females tended to lean towards the central route, while males tended to take the peripheral route. Likewise, urban consumers have a relatively higher need for cognition when compared to their rural counterparts.

The study further analyzed the elements of products and advertisements that intrigue a given consumer's need for cognition versus those elements that appeal to their need for affect. The analysis found that factors, such as price, range of features, personal benefit, informational value, degree of personalization, and differentiation from consumers' products were positively correlated to the total score. Therefore, the higher the NCS_SCORE (need for cognition, central

route), the more favoured these elements were in the minds of the consumers; those who had low scores (need for affect, peripheral route) tended to overlook these elements. It was also found that look-and-feel, brand credibility, celebrity endorsements, word-of-mouth, emotional appeal, storytelling ability, and advertisement theme and style of editing were negatively related to the NCS_SCORE. Hence, those consumers who scored low (need for affect, peripheral route) favoured these elements more; those with high scores (need for cognition, central route) tended to overlook these elements.

Finally, the research aimed to test the potency of persuasive advertising. This section showed that scores on the 18-NCS had a positive correlation with informative advertisements and a negative correlation with persuasive advertisements. This means that consumers with a need for cognition favoured informative advertisements while those with a need for affect leaned towards persuasive advertisements. Therefore, exposure to persuasive advertisements did not compel consumers with a need for cognition to take the peripheral route rather than the central route.

5.1 Limitations and Future Scope

The Elaboration Likelihood Model is qualitative and depends on variables like “motivation” and “ability to determine the level of elaboration required” and, therefore, the “route” taken. The responses are based on consumers’ opinions of their purchase behaviour and are void of basis or proof. Persuasive advertising is subjective and might not have the same mental effect on all viewers. Hence, the responses for rating its influence are subjective and based entirely upon the discretion of the consumers. The responses were collected through the online medium, and interaction with respondents was minimal. This could affect the reliability of the answers.

Future studies can be conducted on a broader scale and focus on responses from outside of India. Emphasis can be placed on qualitative demographics analysis to determine why the route taken does not differ for age and gender but the place of residence and monthly income. Persuasive advertising can be delved deeper into to assess how those with high cognition can also be swayed from their perspective. The method of content creation may be broken down and analyzed strata-wise for this purpose.

6 Conclusion

The Elaboration Likelihood Model helped to understand the consumer buying process and formulate a relevant marketing strategy as follows:

- For the two routes, age and income level did not play a significant role. The gender and place of residence were found to be particularly tied to consumers’ level of cognition.
- Aspects of products and advertising that appeal to consumers’ need for cognition (price, range of features, personal benefit, informational value, degree of personalization, and differentiation from consumers’ products) versus their need for affect (look-and-feel, brand credibility, celebrity endorsements, word-of-mouth, emotional appeal, storytelling ability, and advertisement theme and style of editing) were successfully identified.
- The consumers with a need for cognition did not change their perception even after they were exposed to persuasive advertising.

It can thus be concluded that the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) does have significant relevance in the consumer buying process today. This holds even in the case of exposure to persuasive advertising. Preferred product and advertisement features can be identified according to the route chosen by consumers, and the proper advertising format can also be determined through ELM.

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