

THE EFFECTS OF INVOLVEMENT, CONSENSUS INFORMATION, AND ARGUMENT QUALITY ON PERSUASION

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An experiment was conducted to examine the effects of involvement, consensus information and argument quality on subjects' attitudes. A 2(high vs. low involvement) \times 2(high vs. low consensus information) \times 2(strong vs. weak argument) factorial design was employed. It was hypothesized that under the high involvement condition the strong-argument message would be more persuasive than weak-argument one, and the consensus information would have no impact on subjects' attitudes. However, under the low involvement condition an interaction effect between argument quality and degree of consensus would be expected. These predictions were fully supported by various attitude measures. These findings suggest that the high consensus information(majority influence) may enhance subjects' motivation to process the message, but this effect dissipates when subjects were highly motivated to process the message by the high involvement manipulation. However, the relationships between their attitudes and cognitive responses within each experimental conditions have revealed that under the low consensus information condition(minority influence) subjects' attitude changes may be mediated by their elaboration of the messages, but this is not the case under the high involvement condition. This is inconsistent with the prediction derived from Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) ELM. The authors suggest that to reconcile this conflict findings the role of subject's affective responses while processing the message, besides their cognitive responses, should be included in future research.

Key words: persuasion, consensus information, involvement, argument quality, Elaboration Likelihood Model(ELM)