

Making it Personal: Using ELM to Communicate Better

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The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) takes place on a daily basis in the minds of *just about* everyone. Whether people hear a speech, receive a text, open a letter, or view an advertisement, messages are constantly coming towards them...just *begging* for consideration. But, the truth is, not every message will receive the level of elaboration that it *truly* needs. This leaves practitioners of communication with the task of discovering how to generate the proper response among their audience.

In advertising, brands must reach their target market in a relatable and understandable way. Perhaps this can be accomplished by: creative headlines, easy-to-read font, or eye-catching images; allowing viewers to take a peripheral route of elaboration. But, if the central route is desired by a communicator, crafting compelling arguments and listing legitimate benefits would be more tactical.

Additionally, this model has profound implications for Christian evangelism in the context of an increasingly postmodern culture. Our preaching of God's Word should emphasize that no one is excluded from its truths. Our textbook says,

"as long as people have a *personal stake* in accepting or rejecting an idea, they will be much more influenced by what a message says than by the characteristics of the person who says it." (Griffin et al, 2019, p. 185)

Nowadays, many unbelievers will mentally dodge the idea of God's wrath by claiming: "Well, I don't believe in God or Hell, so that doesn't apply to me." Reminding them that criminals go to jail, even if they reject the premise of prison, can help them realize that *their* soul is in question — not just those who acknowledge God as real.

Furthermore, if their worldview isn't the cause for their unbelief, non-Christians might deny the Gospel due to more peripheral details. For instance, the apostle Paul was criticized for

his less-than entertaining speech and unimpressive stature. "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.'" (2 Corinthians 10:10) Regardless of Paul's looks, physical conditions, or timidity, God gave him wisdom that would guide the Church. Paul's methods included this concept of "making it personal" to the audience. In 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, he explains this approach, and in Acts 17, we see him making the message personal to the "men of Athens". When we convince people that they have a "personal stake" in the message about Christ, they are more likely to consider the evidence rather than superficial details like our appearance or delivery.

References

Acts and 1 Corinthians. (2011). In *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV), containing the Old and New Testaments*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Griffin, E. A., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. G. (2019). *A first look at communication theory*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.