FIGURE 7.11
Attitude Change, Argument Quality, and Mood

Arguin quality affected persuasion when participants were sad, but not when they were happy. These findings suggest that positive moods instigate peripheral route processing and negative moods activate central route processing.


There are several explanations for this effect. Some research shows that happy people are less willing to attend to a persuasive message because they fear that doing so will destroy their good mood (Isen, 1984; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). Other research suggests that happy people are less able to attend to a persuasive message because their happy moods distract them and consume a lot of cognitive resources (Mackie & Worth, 1989). Still other research shows that good moods affect persuasion in more than one way. Petty, Schumann, Richman, and Strathman (1993) found that good moods affect persuasion through the peripheral route when involvement is low, but through the central route when involvement is high.

4. Individual Differences: Need for Cognition

So far we have discussed how motivation, ability, and mood states influence whether people process information through the central route or through the peripheral route. A final factor to consider is a personality variable, called need for cognition. Cacioppo and Petty (1982) proposed that people vary with respect to how much they enjoy thinking about problems and issues. Some people like to think a lot and are characteristically in the central mode; other people do not enjoy thinking a lot and are characteristically in the peripheral mode. Table 7.4 presents a scale developed to measure this personality variable.

Although scores on the need for cognition are only weakly related to intelligence, people who score high on the scale do enjoy working on demanding cognitive tasks (for a review, see Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). Moreover, they tend to process persuasive messages through the central route, and the attitudes they form persist longer, are more resistant to attitude change, and are better predictors of behavior than are the attitudes of people who score low in need for cognition (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986; Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992).

C. Summary of the Dual-Process Model

A great deal of theoretical and empirical work has been reviewed in this section. It is apparent that the dual-process model of attitude change enjoys strong support. Numerous investigations have found that there are two routes to attitude change. Sometimes