Consumers’ Use of Persuasion Knowledge: The Effects of Accessibility and Cognitive Capacity on Perceptions of an Influence Agent

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This article examines conditions that influence consumers’ use of persuasion knowledge in evaluating an influence agent, such as a salesperson. We propose that persuasion knowledge is used when consumers draw an inference that a persuasion motive may underlie a salesperson’s behavior. These motive inferences then affect perceptions of the salesperson. We propose that two factors, the accessibility of persuasion motives and the cognitive capacity of the consumer, affect whether consumers use persuasion knowledge. When an anterior persuasion motive is highly accessible, both cognitively busy targets and unbusy observers use persuasion knowledge to evaluate the salesperson. When an anterior motive is less accessible, cognitively busy targets are less likely to use persuasion knowledge, evaluating the salesperson as more sincere than are cognitively unbusy observers. Several experiments find support for the predictions.

The “Persuasion Knowledge Model” (PKM) postulates that consumers develop knowledge about persuasion and use this knowledge to “cope” with persuasion episodes (Friestad and Wright 1994). Persuasion knowledge refers to consumers’ theories about persuasion and includes beliefs about marketers’ motives, strategies, and tactics; effectiveness and appropriateness of persuasion tactics; psychological mediators of tactic effectiveness; and ways of coping with persuasion attempts. Consumers’ persuasion knowledge is expected to “hover” in readiness to help in the formation of valid attitudes about an influence agent or a product (Friestad and Wright 1994, p. 10). Thus, a basic idea of PKM is that a consumer is able to use her persuasion knowledge to identify that an agent is attempting to influence her and to try to manage the persuasion episode to achieve her own goals.

The Persuasion Knowledge Model is an important consumer behavior model, and identifying factors that either inhibit or encourage the use of persuasion knowledge is a critical step in its further development. Although research demonstrates that consumers may possess persuasion knowledge and draw inferences about marketers’ motives and goals (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994; Campbell 1995, 1999; Friestad and Wright 1995; Kirmani 1990; Kirmani and Wright 1989), little is known about when consumers use their persuasion knowledge (though see Sujan 1996). Therefore, it becomes important to investigate conditions under which consumers are likely to use persuasion knowledge.

The purpose of this article is to identify and test factors that influence consumers’ use of persuasion knowledge in an interpersonal sales setting, such as a retail interaction between a salesperson (the influence agent) and a consumer (the influence target). Specifically, we focus on when consumers draw upon their persuasion knowledge to infer that a salesperson’s behavior arises from a persuasion motive. We propose that the use of persuasion knowledge in such a setting will be affected by two factors: the accessibility of anterior motives and the cognitive capacity of the consumer. Our basic proposition is that when the situation makes anterior motives accessible, or consumers have unconstrained resources, persuasion knowledge will be used to infer an underlying persuasion motive and will thus influence the evaluation of the salesperson. In contrast, when anterior motives are less accessible and consumers are

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cognitively constrained, persuasion knowledge will not be used in evaluating the salesperson.

PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE IN A SALES CONTEXT

A major task faced by consumers is that of understanding and coping with marketers’ actions in order to form valid attitudes about influence agents (Friestad and Wright 1994). Consumers thus build knowledge structures about marketing, including marketers’ motives and tactics. As Friestad and Wright (1994) point out, persuasion knowledge is not a schema; rather, it is a loose set of beliefs or intuitive theories about persuasion, and these beliefs may be accurate or inaccurate. Consumers’ knowledge about persuasion includes beliefs about persuasion motives, such as acquiring information, an object, or authority to do something; changing someone’s opinion; persuading someone to do something, such as buy a product; and persuading someone to change a behavior or existing relationship (Rule, Bisanz, and Kohn 1985; Schank and Abelson 1977). Consumers’ knowledge structures also include beliefs about persuasion tactics, such as asking, bargaining, threatening, and appealing to emotions; and using deception, expertise, reason, and flattery (e.g., Cody, McLaughlin, and Jordan 1980; Falbo 1977; Rule et al. 1985).

In short, persuasion knowledge includes ideas about persuasion motives, that is, what the influence agent is attempting to achieve, as well as ideas about persuasion tactics, that is, how the agent tries to achieve it. The focus of this article is on consumers’ inferences about persuasion motives. We propose that consumers may use their persuasion knowledge to infer the extent to which the motives underlying an influence agent’s (e.g., marketer’s) behavior involve the intent to persuade. In a personal selling context, for instance, a consumer may use persuasion knowledge to consider the extent to which a salesperson’s remark reflects the ulterior motive of persuading the customer to buy the product.

The psychological state in which an individual considers that the actor may have a hidden motive for behavior has been defined as “suspicion” (Fein 1996). Suspicion of the underlying motives of an actor can result in less favorable perceptions of the actor (Fein, Hilton, and Miller 1990; Vonk 1998, 1999). For example, in a study on ingratiation in an organizational setting, Vonk (1998) found that an unequal power relationship between an ingratiator and the target of the ingratiation cued suspicion. As a result, when making inferences about the ingratiator, observers took into account the target’s power to influence the ingratiator’s outcomes. When the target had power to affect the ingratiator’s outcomes, observers were suspicious of ingratiating behavior and made attributions about the motives of the ingratiator for engaging in the behavior. When observers inferred that the ingratiator had ulterior motives for the behavior, the ingratiator was perceived as “slimy,” that is, manipulative and insincere.

Similarly, accessing persuasion knowledge in a sales interaction can be thought of as raising suspicion that the salesperson’s behavior is motivated by the intent to persuade. The consumer who thus wonders about the salesperson’s motives may infer that the salesperson has ulterior persuasion motives and these inferred motives may influence impressions of the salesperson. Thus, a consumer may use persuasion knowledge to consider the motive for a salesperson’s flattery remarks. If a consumer infers that the salesperson’s remarks are motivated by persuasion, the consumer is likely to perceive the salesperson as less sincere relative to a consumer who does not infer that ulterior motives underlie the remarks; because the remarks are inferred to be motivated by the intent to persuade, perceptions of sincerity are discounted.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of how people may perceive influence agents such as salespeople. Persuasion-
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Knowledge usage is reflected by inferences of ulterior motives; these inferences, in turn, will affect perceptions of the salesperson's sincerity. We propose that two conditional factors—the consumer's cognitive capacity and the accessibility of ulterior motives—will interact to affect consumers' inferences about persuasion motives underlying the salesperson's behavior.

Cognitive Capacity of Consumers

Research shows that when drawing inferences about individuals based on their behavior, people first draw a correspondent inference about the behavior (called characterization) and then correct the correspondent inference with information about situational constraints, such as ulterior motives (Gilbert and Malone 1995; Gilbert, Pelham, and Krull 1988). Whereas the characterization stage appears to be largely perceptual and fairly automatic, the correction stage requires higher-order attributional processing (Uleman 1987; Winter and Uleman 1984; Winter, Uleman, and Coniff 1985). Therefore, making higher-order inferences about possible situational constraints or ulterior motives that can influence the individual's behavior requires greater cognitive capacity (Fein 1996; Gilbert et al. 1988).

Since using persuasion knowledge in our context involves making inferences about motives, we propose that the use of persuasion knowledge is likely to occur during the correction stage, and thus requires cognitive capacity. To illustrate, consider a situation in which a consumer is shopping in a store and a salesperson compliments the consumer. The initial correspondent inference that the salesperson is sincere may be fairly automatic. This initial inference may then be modified based on an inference about the salesperson's underlying motives. The consumer may use persuasion knowledge to infer an ulterior persuasion motive, that is, that salespeople typically do or say things in order to make a sale. In this case, the use of persuasion knowledge would likely lead to less favorable evaluations of the salesperson's sincerity.

Given that using persuasion knowledge would seem to require cognitive capacity in most circumstances, persuasion knowledge is less likely to be used in forming an impression of a salesperson when the consumer has competing cognitive demands. One factor that affects an individual's cognitive capacity is the individual's role or perspective. Research shows that targets of an influence agent's activities are likely to be more cognitively constrained than are observers (Gilbert, Jones, and Pelham 1987; Gilbert et al. 1988). The target of a persuasion attempt appears to be cognitively constrained (or "cognitively busy") because s/he devotes mental resources to the interaction. The target may be busy consid-

erably how s/he will behave and how the other person (i.e., the agent) is likely to react to those behaviors, thinking about alternative possibilities, and assessing the potential outcomes of the interaction. In contrast, a consumer who is simply watching the interaction between others is not as cognitively busy because s/he is engaged in fewer mental tasks. Most important, cognitively busy targets are less likely to consider situational constraints for the agent's behavior than are unbusy observers, who have the cognitive capacity to engage in inferential processing (Gilbert et al. 1988). Since suspicion triggers higher-level attributional thinking, we extend the literature to suggest that cognitively busy targets are less likely than unbusy observers to use persuasion knowledge to draw inferences about the salesperson's persuasion motives.

While the target versus observer role is expected to result in a difference in the propensity to use persuasion knowledge in evaluating a salesperson, there are conditions under which cognitively busy targets will be able to use persuasion knowledge. Specifically, factors that make the use of persuasion knowledge less effortful will attenuate the target-observer difference. We consider one such factor, the accessibility of ulterior motives.

Accessibility of Ulterior Motives

Accessibility refers to how readily a construct is coded in terms of a given category (Higgins 1989). The accessibility of a construct is affected by various factors, including expectations, strength of association, frequency of activation, and recency of activation (Higgins and King 1981). Thus, the accessibility of an ulterior motive is likely to be affected by how strongly associated that motive is with the influence agent. A salesperson is by definition one who sells, and the motive of selling is strongly associated with salespeople (Thompson 1972). The goal of influencing someone to buy something has been identified as one of the goals of a persuasion schema and is likely to be the persuasion motive that is most strongly associated with salespeople (Rule et al. 1985). Therefore, in interpreting a salesperson's behavior, the motive of influencing the customer in order to make a sale or a commission is likely to be more accessible than other motives, for example, building relationships or making customers feel good. Consistent with this, the research of Sujan, Bettman, and Sujan (1986) shows that consumers are more likely to associate clothing salespeople with a focus on selling the product (i.e., a product orientation) than with a focus on determining customer needs (i.e., a customer orientation). In short, the ulterior motive of selling is often likely to be the most accessible motive for a salesperson's behavior; other motives, such as building a long-term relationship with customers, are likely to be less accessible.

Since accessible motives come readily to mind, using persuasion knowledge when faced with situations, agents, or tactics that are strongly associated with persuasion motives is likely to require less cognitive capacity than situations that are more weakly associated with persuasion.
Therefore, both the accessibility of ulterior motives and the cognitive capacity of consumers will influence the likelihood that a consumer makes an inference of ulterior motives. When an ulterior motive is not highly accessible, such as when a salesperson’s behavior is not strongly associated with selling, persuasion knowledge is less likely to be used by the busy target than by an unbusy observer of the interaction in considering whether an ulterior motive exists. The target is more likely than an observer not to draw an inference about ulterior motives and thus to perceive the salesperson as sincere. In contrast, the unbusy observer is more likely to use persuasion knowledge to infer that the salesperson is motivated by a desire to persuade and thus to modify initial perceptions of sincerity. When an ulterior motive is highly accessible, such as when a salesperson uses a tactic that is strongly associated with selling, cognitive capacity is unnecessary for persuasion-knowledge application. In this case, both the busy target and the unbusy observer are likely to modify their perceptions of the salesperson by inferring an ulterior persuasion motive and are likely to doubt the sincerity of the salesperson. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: When an ulterior persuasion motive for an agent’s behavior is highly accessible, both the busy target and unbusy observer are likely to use persuasion knowledge to infer an ulterior persuasion motive and perceive the influence agent as less sincere. When an ulterior motive is less accessible, the busy target is less likely than the unbusy observer to use persuasion knowledge and thus will perceive the influence agent as more sincere than will the unbusy observer.

The prediction that targets are less likely than observers to use persuasion knowledge in evaluating influence agents is somewhat counterintuitive. One might expect that the target of a sales attempt would be more likely to use persuasion knowledge because the target would be motivated to form an accurate impression of the salesperson. However, the process suggested here is one of the target’s ability rather than motivation. The target’s cognitive constraints inhibit him/her from engaging in deeper processing and using persuasion knowledge to take into account underlying persuasion motives.

We present two studies that directly test the hypothesis and the proposed process. The first examines the proposed interaction between cognitive capacity (i.e., the consumer’s role as target or observer) and accessibility of an ulterior motive. The second study provides a different manipulation of cognitive capacity as well as measures of persuasion-knowledge mediation.

**STUDY 1**

**Procedure and Design**

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that cognitive capacity and accessibility would affect evaluations of a salesperson. The experiment employed a 2 (consumer role: target vs. observer) × 2 (accessibility of motives: low vs. high) between-subjects design. Subjects were 93 undergraduate students from a western university who received payment for participating in the study. Subjects were randomly assigned across treatments.

All subjects were told that they would read about an interaction that involved someone named Pat and that they were to form an impression of Pat. Subjects read a half-page scenario that asked them to imagine they had gone to a department store to buy a jacket (i.e., a blazer or sports coat). The scenario described an interaction between a salesclerk named Pat and either themselves (subject is target) or another customer (subject is observer). After reading the scenario, subjects answered questions about their perceptions of the salesperson. The scenarios are in Appendix A.

Like many experiments in psychological research (e.g., Greenberg 1967; Weiner 1980), as well as studies in marketing and consumer behavior (e.g., Folkes 1984; Suprenant and Solomon 1987), all four studies reported in this article use role-playing scenarios. While this limits the richness of the interactions, it provides control and allows clean manipulation of experimental factors. More important, research has found that subjects find salesperson scenarios to be believable and understandable (e.g., Bitner 1990). Also, it creates a more conservative test of our hypothesis since it may be less cognitively demanding than actually interacting with a salesperson.

**Experimental Manipulations**

Consumer role was manipulated by changing the perspective of the subject. Half the subjects were instructed to imagine themselves participating in the interaction, and the scenario referred to "you" (subject is the target). The other half of the subjects were instructed to imagine themselves observing the interaction while also shopping in the store, and the scenario was written in the third person, referring to "the consumer" (subject is the observer).

Accessibility of ulterior motives was manipulated by how readily the salesperson’s behavior could be attributed to an ulterior persuasion motive. We expected that the default assumption would be that most clothing salespeople are motivated by the desire to sell the product or make a commission. Therefore, this motive is likely to be highly accessible when the salesperson uses ingratiolation while a consumer is considering a purchase (Cialdini 1993; Whittaker 1994). However, when the salesperson makes a flattering remark after the consumer has made a purchase, less accessible persuasion motives must be generated. These might include customer satisfaction, relationship building, or making the customer feel good so that s/he will return to the store. Thus, the experimental scenario depicted a salesperson who used flattery either prior to the purchase decision (ulterior motive of selling highly accessible) or after the purchase decision (ulterior motive less accessible).

A separate manipulation-check study was conducted to verify that making a sale was more accessible than other
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FIGURE 2

STUDY 1: PERCEIVED SINCERITY

![Graph showing perceived sincerity versus accessibility of motive](image)

motives for the sales situation described in the experiments. Nineteen subjects read the first part of the sales scenario (stopping after Pat, the salesclerk, greets the customer, but prior to the flattering remark) and then were asked to write down what they thought the salesclerk’s primary goal would be in the situation. After writing down the primary motive, subjects turned the page and were asked to circle the number that best indicated the extent to which different motives represented the salesclerk’s goal (1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree). Of the 19 subjects, 15 indicated that the salesclerk’s primary motive would be to make a sale. Only four wrote something other than a sales motive as the salesclerk’s primary motive. Thus, the proportion of subjects who indicated that the salesclerk would have an ulterior persuasion motive to make a sale was significantly greater than chance (z = 2.52, p < .01). Additionally, subjects were significantly more likely to infer that the salesclerk’s motive was “to make a sale/earn a commission” (M = 6.53) than to infer that the motive was “to satisfy the customer” (M = 4.95; paired comparison t = 4.1, p < .001) or “to build a good relationship with the customer” (M = 4.16; paired comparison t = 5.46, p < .001). These results verified that making a sale was the most highly accessible persuasion motive for the experimental scenario.

Results

Manipulation Checks. A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of consumer role on perceived participation (F(1, 89) = 10.93, p < .002). As expected, targets indicated that they imagined themselves participating in the interaction (M_target = 4.07) more than observers, who indicated that they imagined watching the interaction (M_observer = 5.85). There were no other significant effects on perceived participation.

Also as expected, a significant main effect of accessibility appeared on the perceived sales motive (F(1, 89) = 5.99, p < .02). The salesperson was perceived as flattering the customer in order to make a sale more when the motive was accessible (flattery prior to purchase) than when the motive was less accessible (flattery after purchase) (M_target = 5.54, M_observer = 4.68). There were no other significant treatment effects, indicating that the timing manipulation successfully influenced the accessibility of the persuasion motive.

Salesperson Sincerity. It was hypothesized that when an ulterior motive was less accessible, the busy target would be less likely than the unbusier observer to apply persuasion knowledge and therefore would perceive the salesperson as more sincere. In contrast, when the motive was accessible, both the target and observer would apply persuasion knowledge and have equivalent (less favorable) perceptions of the salesperson’s sincerity. Supporting this, a 2 × 2 ANOVA
(see Fig. 2) revealed a significant interaction effect on perceptions of the salesperson’s sincerity ($F(1, 89) = 4.71, p < .03$). Planned comparisons showed that, as predicted, when the motive was less accessible, the busy target perceived the salesperson as more sincere than did the unbusy observer ($M_{target} = 5.15$, $M_{observer} = 4.41$; $F(1, 89) = 4.41, p < .04$). When the motive was accessible, there were no significant differences in the salesperson’s perceived sincerity ($M_{target} = 4.45$, $M_{observer} = 4.77$; $F(1, 89) = .90$, NS). There were no other significant main or interaction effects.

Discussion

The pattern of results supports Hypothesis 1, suggesting that both the consumer’s role in the sales interaction and the accessibility of ulterior motives affect whether persuasion knowledge is used. When an ulterior motive was less accessible, only the unbusy observer applied persuasion knowledge, while the busy target took the salesperson at face value. Thus, the busy target evaluated the salesperson as more sincere than did the unbusy observer. When a persuasion motive was accessible, however, both the busy target and unbusy observer applied persuasion knowledge, resulting in perceptions of the salesperson as less sincere. These results are consistent with the notion that application of persuasion knowledge requires cognitive capacity unless ulterior motives are highly accessible.

Although the results support the notion that using persuasion knowledge requires cognitive capacity when motives are less accessible, study 1 has some shortcomings. For example, it is possible that the role manipulation may have created unintended motivational differences, such as the level of involvement or self-referencing (Burnkrant and Unnava 1995). Moreover, according to the ingratiation literature, targets respond more favorably than observers to the ingratiate because they are motivated to believe good things about themselves and therefore believe that flattering comments are true and that the ingratiate is honest and likable (Gordon 1996; Howard, Gengler, and Juin 1995; Jones and Wortman 1973). These potential confounds present alternative explanations for the predicted results. To test directly the process proposed in the conceptual development and to avoid these potential confounds, in study 2 cognitive capacity was manipulated directly by varying the cognitive demands placed on subjects.

A second limitation of study 1 was the absence of direct measures of the underlying process—i.e., direct measures of the usage of persuasion knowledge. We did not include such measures in study 1 because such measures could themselves cue the application of persuasion knowledge. However, direct measures would allow more detailed examination of the underlying process. Therefore, in study 2 we attempted to measure directly the extent of persuasion-knowledge usage. These measures appear after measures of perceptions of the salesperson to ensure that the measures of persuasion-knowledge usage did not activate persuasion knowledge post hoc, thereby influencing the measures of salesperson sincerity. Thus, the objectives of study 2 were to generalize the findings of study 1 by using a different, direct manipulation of cognitive capacity and to measure directly subjects’ use of persuasion knowledge.

STUDY 2

Procedure and Design

The experiment was a 2 (cognitive capacity: busy vs. unbusy observer) × 2 (accessibility of motive: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Subjects were 100 undergraduate students from a southwestern university, randomly assigned across treatments.

All subjects were given the “observer” instructions used in the first study and were instructed to imagine observing the interaction between Pat and a customer. The scenarios were the same as the unbusy observer scenarios in study 1, except that eight numerals were added. For instance, the scenario stated that the person had seen “15 different jackets,” that there were “eight racks of clothes in the department store,” “four three-way mirrors,” and so on.

Cognitive capacity was manipulated by the number of tasks the subjects were asked to perform while reading the scenario, as is typical in psychology studies (e.g., Gilbert and Osborn 1989; Vonk 1999). Both cognitively busy and unbusy subjects were asked to form an impression of Pat (primary task); busy subjects also had a secondary task of remembering the sequence in which any numerals occurred in the text and rehearsing this sequence as they read the scenario. This manipulation is consistent with the definition of cognitive busyness as entailing an additional resource-consuming task (Gilbert and Osborn 1989). The secondary task used more cognitive resources, but did not distract subjects’ attention from processing the scenario; rather, the secondary task involved paying attention to the scenario in order to memorize numbers related to understanding the scenario.

Measures

Both the perceived sincerity measure and the manipulation check for accessibility were the same as in the previous study. The manipulation of cognitive capacity necessitated new manipulation checks, which included three measures: (1) the proportion of subjects who correctly recalled the sequence of numerals, (2) the number of correct numerals recalled, and (3) a self-rating on a nine-point scale of whether subjects were concentrating on the sequence of numerals (1) or forming an impression of Pat (9). Higher recall of the numerals for busy subjects would demonstrate that they had divided their cognitive resources between the different tasks of remembering the numerals and considering the interaction between Pat and the salesperson.

The usage of persuasion knowledge was assessed in two ways. First, after completing the ratings of the salesperson and the recall measures, subjects responded to an open-ended question that asked them to write an essay about Pat. The responses were coded for suspicion thoughts, that is,
thoughts that indicated suspicion about Pat’s behavior. These included thoughts about Pat’s motives (e.g., to make a commission, to make the customer feel good), ulterior intent (e.g., Pat’s a fake), or use of flattery (e.g., Pat said it looked good because it was more expensive). The proportion of suspicion thoughts relative to total thoughts was one measure of persuasion knowledge.

The other measure of persuasion-knowledge use came after the open-ended question and consisted of a rating of whether subjects inferred persuasion motives underlying the salesperson’s use of flattery while they read the scenario. It was important to ask subjects to recall what they had been thinking while reading the scenario rather than at the time of the questions, in case the measures of salesperson sincerity—or the measures of application of persuasion knowledge themselves—cued persuasion knowledge post hoc. The item was, “While I read the story, I thought it was pretty obvious that Pat was trying to persuade the customer” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). This reflects an inference about Pat’s motives and intent to persuade.

Results

Manipulation Checks. Results of a CATMOD revealed a significant effect of the cognitive capacity manipulation on the likelihood that the sequence of numerals was correctly recalled ($x^2 = 12.60, p < .0001$), and a $2 \times 2$ ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of capacity on the number of numerals recalled and on the rating of task focus (numerals recalled: $F(1, 96) = 69.37, p < .0001$; task focus: $F(1, 96) = 29.00, p < .0001$). Compared to busy subjects, busy subjects had better recall of the numbers, and they focused less on forming an impression of Pat (sequence: $M_{busy} = .46, M_{unbusy} = .02$; numerals recalled: $M_{busy} = 4.98, M_{unbusy} = 2.44$; task focus: $M_{busy} = 3.79, M_{unbusy} = 6.08$). There were no other significant treatment effects on the three measures. Thus, the cognitive capacity manipulation was successful.

Results of an ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of accessibility on subjects’ agreement with the statement that the motive underlying the salesperson’s remark was to get the target to buy the product ($F(1, 96) = 17.41, p < .0001$). As in the previous study, the salesperson was perceived as flattering the customer in order to make a sale more in the accessible motive condition than in the less accessible condition ($M_{accessible} = 5.39, M_{inaccessible} = 3.92$). There were no other significant treatment effects on this measure, indicating that the accessibility manipulation was successful.

Salesperson sincerity. Results of an ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of accessibility ($F(1, 96) = 19.23, p < .0001$), qualified by a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 96) = 7.66, p < .007$) on perceptions of the salesperson’s sincerity. The salesperson was perceived as less sincere when the motive was more accessible ($M_{accessible} = 3.85; M_{inaccessible} = 4.71$). In addition, planned comparisons showed that when the motive was less accessible, the busy observer perceived the salesperson as more sincere than did the un-

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY 2 CELL MEANS</th>
<th>Less accessible motive</th>
<th>Accessible motive</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Busy observer</td>
<td>Unbusy observer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent variable:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Salesperson sincerity</td>
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<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td>(.69)</td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
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<td>Persuasion knowledge:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion of suspicion thoughts</td>
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<td>.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1.48)</td>
<td>(.48)</td>
<td>(.50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wondered whether Pat was trying to persuade</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
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<td>(1.80)</td>
<td>(1.80)</td>
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*Note.*—Standard deviations are in parentheses. *Measured on seven-point scales.

busy observer ($M_{busy} = 5.06, M_{unbusy} = 4.31$; $F(1, 96) = 7.52, p < .007$). When the motive was accessible, there were no significant differences on perceived sincerity ($M_{busy} = 3.70, M_{unbusy} = 4.00$; $F(1, 96) = 1.29, NS$). See Table 1 for the cell means. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported, and the results mirror those of study 1.

Persuasion knowledge. Separate ANOVAs on the two measures of persuasion-knowledge usage showed a significant main effect of accessibility on the rating measure (trying to persuade: $F(1, 96) = 44.13, p < .0001$), qualified by a significant interaction effect on both measures (suspicion thoughts: $F(1, 96) = 7.45, p < .008$; trying to persuade: $F(1, 96) = 10.97, p < .002$). The pattern of means and cell contrasts were similar to that of the ratings of Pat’s sincerity. Since the interaction effect showed the same pattern as the dependent variable, we assessed whether persuasion knowledge mediated the treatment effects on perceived sincerity. The mediation testing procedure outlined in Baron and Kenny (1986) calls for three steps: (1) showing that the treatments affect the dependent variable, (2) showing that the treatments affect the potential mediators in the same way as the dependent variable, and (3) showing that including the mediators as covariates in the ANOVA on the dependent variable weakens the significant interaction effect. We have already demonstrated that there is a significant interaction effect on the dependent variable (sincerity) and on the po-

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2Planned comparisons showed that when the motive was less accessible, persuasion knowledge was used more by the busy than busy observer (suspicion thoughts: $F(1, 96) = 6.89, p < .01$; trying to persuade: $F(1, 96) = 2.72, p < .10$). When the motive was accessible, this difference was eliminated or even reversed (suspicion thoughts: $F(1, 96) = 1.44, p < .24$; trying to persuade: $F(1, 96) = 8.74, p < .004$).
tential mediators (suspicion thoughts, trying to persuade). In terms of the third step, ANCOVAs with each of the persuasion-knowledge measures as covariates showed that both served as mediators. Both measures were significant as covariates (suspicion thoughts: $F(1, 94) = 5.55, p < .03$; trying to persuade: $F(1, 94) = 26.06, p < .0001$) and weakened the interaction effect (suspicion thoughts: $F(1, 94) = 4.19, p < .05$; trying to persuade: $F(1, 94) = 1.82, p < .18$). In fact, the previously significant interaction effect was eliminated when the "trying to persuade" measure was used, providing strong evidence of mediation. Thus, persuasion-knowledge use mediated the effects of cognitive capacity and accessibility on perceptions of salesperson sincerity.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended the results of study 1, providing additional evidence that cognitive capacity affects the use of persuasion knowledge when underlying persuasion motives are not highly accessible. The predicted pattern of results occurred under a direct manipulation of cognitive capacity that was not confounded by possible differences in involvement or vanity. This supports the conceptual model that cognitive capacity interacts with accessibility to affect persuasion-knowledge usage. The study also provided evidence that use of persuasion knowledge mediates the effects of accessibility and capacity on perceived sincerity.

The significant impact of cognitive capacity when motives are less accessible strongly suggests that the use of persuasion knowledge occurs during the correction rather than characterization stage. A process of different characterizations of the salesperson's behaviors would not explain the interaction of accessibility and cognitive capacity. Cognitive capacity differences should impact the correction stage because correction is more effortful than characterization (Gilbert et al. 1988).

In these studies, accessibility of ulterior motives was manipulated by the behavior of the salesperson, that is, by the use of flattery prior to or after a purchase decision. An interesting question is whether increasing the accessibility of ulterior motives prior to the target's entering the sales situation can increase the likelihood that motives are considered even when cognitive capacity is limited. Investigation of this issue would provide insight into boundary conditions for the busy target's application of persuasion knowledge. Therefore, in the next study, we focus on whether the busy target may use persuasion knowledge even when the salesperson's behavior does not make motives accessible. Specifically, we increase the accessibility of ulterior persuasion motives through contextual priming. Contextual priming, that is, the activation of a construct in one task, increases the likelihood that the construct will be used in judgments made in another, unrelated task (Higgins 1989). We suggest that busy targets may be more likely to use persuasion knowledge when it has been primed prior to the encounter with the salesperson and that this priming can be unrelated to the sales situation or to salespeople.

Another objective of the next study is to examine directly the proposed role of inference of persuasion motives in the impression-formation process. While study 2 provides support for the mediating role of persuasion knowledge, it relies on self-report measures of persuasion-knowledge use. It is possible for such measures to be inaccurate or potentially affected by demand artifacts. Therefore, in the next study, we manipulate whether the salesperson actually has an underlying persuasion motive. We propose that when motives are not primed externally (and thus the persuasion motive is less accessible), the busy target will not make a distinction between a salesperson who has a possible underlying persuasion motive and one who does not, thereby regarding both as equally sincere. However, when an ulterior motive is primed externally, the busy target should use persuasion knowledge of motives such that a salesperson with a possible persuasion motive is perceived as less sincere than a salesperson without a persuasion motive.

STUDY 3

Procedure and Design

The experiment was a 2 (accessibility of ulterior motives: primed externally, not primed) × 2 (salesperson's motive: present, absent) between-subjects design. Subjects were 99 undergraduate and graduate students randomly assigned to treatments. All subjects were presented with the instructions and scenario for the target role used in study 1 (see App. A), and all read the scenario in which motives are less accessible, that is, flattery after sale.

The accessibility manipulation was in the form of an unrelated task in a separate booklet handed out prior to the task of evaluating Par. All subjects were presented with two booklets; the two used different fonts and were presented as two different studies. The first booklet was disguised as a study on the comprehension of business articles. In the not-primed condition, the booklet contained two short decoy articles, one on numbers of jobs in the field of direct marketing and the other on the design and production of an electric vehicle. In the primed condition, an article on companies' charitable donations was embedded between the two decoy articles. This article was expected to increase the accessibility of ulterior-persuasion motives because it discussed how some companies gave donations to charities for ulterior motives, namely, to receive tax deductions and to improve customer relations, and that this was a form of persuasion (App. B). Note that the prime is unrelated to salespeople: rather, it involves a company's motivations for doing good, for example, giving to charity. We chose this strategy for several reasons: (1) it makes accessible the notion that ulterior-persuasion motives exist; (2) it does so without priming salespeople, which makes it clearer that it is motives rather than sales schemas that are in operation; and (3) because of the different topic areas of the prime and
the main study, subjects are unlikely to draw a connection between the two. A separate manipulation-check study examined the effectiveness of the priming manipulation. Twenty-six subjects were given the priming booklet; 13 were randomly assigned to the no-prime condition, while 13 read through the prime booklet. After exposure to the priming booklets, subjects were asked to indicate their agreement with different reasons why companies make donations to charities (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The priming condition significantly affected subjects’ ratings of companies’ ulterior-persuasion motives for charitable donations. Subjects in the prime condition more strongly agreed that “companies use charitable giving as a way to influence or persuade their target customers” (M = 6.62) than did subjects who were not exposed to the prime (M = 5.54, t(24) = 3.14, p < .001). Likewise, priming resulted in higher agreement that “companies give to charities because they think charitable giving results in increased sales” (M = 6.62) than did no prime (M = 5.38, t(24) = 3.13, p < .01). Thus, the prime manipulation successfully increased the accessibility of ulterior-persuasion motives.

The presence or absence of the salesperson’s motive was manipulated by whether the salesperson who makes the flattering comment is the store salesperson (motive present) or a salesperson from another store who happens to be in the store (motive absent). In either case, the remark comes after the purchase decision, when the customer is paying for the jacket.

Measures

We measured perceived sincerity and persuasion-knowledge use as before. The manipulation check for motive was a single item measure: “Pat had an ulterior motive for saying the jacket looked good” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Results

Manipulation Check. Results of an ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the salesperson-motive condition on the motive manipulation check (F(1, 95) = 8.65, p < .005). Subjects in the motive-present condition agreed more that Pat had an ulterior motive than did subjects in the motive-absent condition (M_present = 4.82, M_absent = 3.73). There were no other significant treatment effects. Thus, the motive manipulation was successful.

Salesperson Sincerity. Results of an ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on perceptions of the salesperson’s sincerity (F(1, 95) = 8.34, p < .005). There were no other significant treatment effects (see Table 2 for the cell means). Planned comparisons showed that when a motive was present, priming led to perceptions that the salesperson was less sincere than did no priming (M_primed = 4.14, M_unprimed = 4.86; F(1, 95) = 6.17, p < .02). When a motive was not present, priming made no difference (M_primed = 4.85, M_unprimed = 4.42; F(1, 95) = 2.49, p > .12).

This shows that, consistent with our predictions, when the salesperson potentially had an ulterior motive, making motives accessible prior to the sales encounter increased subjects’ use of persuasion knowledge.

In addition, when subjects were primed, they rated the salesperson as less sincere when a motive was present than when a motive was absent (M_present = 4.14, M_absent = 4.85; F(1, 95) = 6.10, p < .02). In the not-primed condition, there were no significant differences on perceived sincerity across the two motive conditions (M_present = 4.86, M_absent = 4.42; F(1, 95) = 2.56, p > .12). These results support our model. In particular, subjects for whom motives were accessible considered motives to evaluate the salespeople. In other words, they were able to distinguish between a situation in which motives were relevant (i.e., present) and irrelevant (i.e., absent). On the other hand, subjects did not make any distinction between the salesperson with a motive and the one without a motive when ulterior-persuasion motives had not been primed.

Persuasion Knowledge. Results of an ANOVA showed a marginal interaction effect on the rating of persuasion-knowledge usage (F(1, 95) = 2.90, p < .10). Planned comparisons showed the same pattern as perceived sincerity. When a motive was present, priming made subjects more likely to infer that Pat was trying to persuade than did no priming (M_primed = 4.52, M_unprimed = 3.58; F(1, 95) = 3.88, p < .05). When a motive was not present, priming made no difference (p > .70). In addition, when persuasion motives had been primed, subjects were more likely to think Pat was trying to persuade when a motive was present than when a motive was absent (M_present = 4.52, M_absent = 3.56; F(1, 95) = 4.16, p < .05). In the not-primed condition, there were no significant differences across the two motive conditions (p > .70).

Mediation testing revealed that “trying to persuade” was a significant covariate in the ANCOVA with accessibility and motive as factors (F(1, 94) = 13.85, p < .003). Moreover, including the covariate weakened the interaction effect
(F(1, 94) = 5.71, p < .02). Thus, there is evidence that persuasion knowledge mediated the effects on sincerity.

Discussion

This study shows that making motives accessible prior to an encounter with a salesperson increases the busy target’s use of persuasion knowledge in evaluating the salesperson. Moreover, once persuasion motives are primed, the busy target used persuasion knowledge only when the situation called for it, that is, when the salesperson potentially had an ulterior motive for flattery. This provides direct evidence for the role of motives in the process model. Finally, the findings reinforce the role of accessibility in our process model, using a different operationalization of accessibility from the previous two studies.

In study 4, we broaden the scope of the research to assess whether increasing the accessibility of other types of persuasion knowledge, for example, knowledge about general persuasion tactics, will have the same effect on the use of persuasion knowledge as the accessibility of persuasion motives. Since the PKM discusses several different types of persuasion beliefs that together comprise persuasion knowledge (Fiestad and Wright 1994), an interesting question is whether any type of persuasion knowledge leads to suspicion of motives, or whether it must be specific knowledge about persuasion motives.

In addition, whereas in study 3 we focused on increasing the busy target’s use of persuasion knowledge, in study 4 we also examine conditional boundaries for the unbusy observer’s use of persuasion knowledge. In particular, we investigate whether decreasing the accessibility of persuasion knowledge will suppress the unbusy observer’s likelihood of using such knowledge, even though the unbusy observer has the necessary cognitive capacity for higher-order inferencing. Since priming one construct can decrease the accessibility of other constructs (Higgins 1989), we examine whether priming a nonpersuasion construct suppresses the accessibility of ulterior motives. Both of these issues help set boundary conditions for our model.

STUDY 4

Procedure and Design

The experiment was a 2 (cognitive capacity: busy vs. unbusy observer) × 3 (prime: none, persuasion tactic knowledge activated, persuasion knowledge suppressed) between-subjects design. The manipulation of cognitive capacity was the same as in study 2 (i.e., “busy” subjects were assigned a secondary task of remembering numerals), and the after-sale flattery scenario was used across all conditions.

The priming manipulation involved an unrelated task in a separate booklet prior to the main task. As in the previous study, the priming booklet used a different font from the main study and had a different title page, and all subjects had multiple booklets (see description below). There were three levels of priming. The no-prime condition was the same as the less accessible motive condition used in study 2 (see App. A); this created a control group. The persuasion tactic knowledge activated condition was intended to prime persuasion tactics (not persuasion motives). Subjects were told to imagine that they would be studying for a final exam for which they needed their roommate’s help. The roommate was very busy, and they needed to persuade him or her to help them study. Subjects were asked to list ways in which they would make sure that the roommate helped them. Thus, subjects generated persuasion tactics to achieve the persuasion goal of “getting someone to assist you.” We expected that this task would prime persuasion knowledge because subjects had to generate persuasion tactics (e.g., bargain for a favor). However, ulterior motives would not be primed since it is unlikely that someone perceives himself or herself as having a suspicious ulterior motive.

In the persuasion knowledge suppressed condition, subjects imagined a scenario in which they were going to study with their roommate for the final exam and were asked to list ways in which they would make sure that they would not be interrupted while studying. This task was not expected to prime persuasion knowledge; because there was no persuasion goal, persuasion knowledge was not relevant to completing the task. Rather, generation of nonpersuasion tactics (e.g., turning off the TV) was expected to suppress persuasion knowledge by priming knowledge of nonpersuasive tactics.

Subjects were 122 undergraduates who were paid for participation. Subjects agreed to participate in a one and a half hour session involving several different studies. Subjects came to a large auditorium where they were given a packet containing a variety of booklets for different studies; the order of the booklets was rotated. Because all subjects had a stack of questionnaires, it was unlikely that anyone would notice that some subjects (i.e., those assigned to the “no-prime” group) had one fewer questionnaire than others. Therefore, it was not necessary to give the control group a decoy “priming booklet.” The study packets were handed out randomly to ensure random assignment of subjects across treatments. Subjects were told to complete booklets in the order given, and proctors ensured compliance.

Measures

The cognitive capacity manipulation checks were the same as those in study 2. The manipulation check for priming was the number of persuasion tactics listed by subjects in the prime protocols. The tactics that the subjects generated in response to the priming task were coded using a relevant subset of Rule et al.’s (1985) taxonomy of tactics. These included asking, invoking role relationship, informing, reasoning, bargaining, threatening, invoking personal expertise, flattering, appealing to emotions, and asserting. Nonpersuasion tactics included relocating, eliminating distractions, and enhancing comfort. Nonpersuasion tactics were changes that subjects made to their own behavior, for example, going to the library to study, rather than persuasion tactics, which were meant to influence others.
CONSUMERS’ USE OF PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE

TABLE 3
STUDY 4 CELL MEANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control (no prime)</th>
<th>Persuasion activated</th>
<th>Persuasion suppressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Busy observer</td>
<td>Unbusy observer</td>
<td>Busy observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sincerity</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(74)</td>
<td>(1.21)</td>
<td>(1.65)</td>
<td>(1.18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wondered</td>
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<td>whether</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat was</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trying to</td>
<td>(1.51)</td>
<td>(1.92)</td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persuade</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell sizes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.—Standard deviations are in parentheses. All measures are on seven-point scales.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. Results of a CATMOD revealed a significant effect of cognitive capacity on the likelihood of successfully recalling the numerals in the scenario ($\chi^2 = 19.11, p < .0001$), while a $3 \times 2$ ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of capacity on the number of numerals recalled and on the rating of task focus (numbers recall: $F(1, 116) = 35.41, p < .0001$; task focus: $F(1, 116) = 51.71, p < .0001$). Compared to unbusy subjects, busy subjects had better recall of the numbers and focused less on forming an impression of Pat (sequence: $M_{busy} = .47$, $M_{unbusy} = .03$; numbers: $M_{busy} = 4.37$, $M_{unbusy} = 2.32$; task focus: $M_{busy} = 3.93$, $M_{unbusy} = 6.69$). There were no other significant effects on these measures. Thus, the capacity manipulation was successful.

To assess whether the priming manipulation affected the accessibility of persuasion tactics in the two primed conditions, a $3 \times 2$ ANOVA was run on the tactics generated by the prime. The no-prime control group was excluded from the analysis (since they were not asked to generate any tactics) and an arcsine transformation was used on the proportion measure. There was a significant main effect of the prime on the proportion of persuasion tactics generated ($F(1, 116) = 83.46, p < .0001$) and no significant effects on the number of total thoughts. The proportion of persuasion tactics was significantly greater in the persuasion-activated than in the persuasion-suppressed condition ($M_{prime} = 76$ percent, $M_{passive} = 16$ percent). The most commonly cited tactic in the persuasion tactic activated condition was bargaining, (e.g., trading studying for a favor), representing 43 percent of total thoughts. Other common strategies were to ask (e.g., simply asking the roommate for help) and to provide a reason (e.g., explain how important it is to me), representing 16 percent and 8 percent of thoughts, respectively. Flattery accounted for only 2 percent of thoughts. The most common tactics cited in the persuasion knowledge suppressed condition were eliminating distractions (e.g., turning off the telephone or TV) and relocating (e.g., going to the library), representing 35 percent and 25 percent of thoughts, respectively. The greater proportion of persuasion tactics generated in the persuasion tactic knowledge activated condition indicates that persuasion knowledge about tactics was more accessible in the persuasion-activated than persuasion-suppressed condition. Moreover, there were no mentions of persuasion motives in either of the two primed conditions. Thus, the prime manipulations were successful.

Salesperson Sincerity. We expected that in the control group, the busy observer would perceive the salesperson as more sincere than would the unbusy observer, replicating the result from the first two studies. In the persuasion-suppressed condition, we expected the unbusy observer to fail to infer underlying persuasion motives, leading to more favorable evaluations of sincerity of the salesperson compared to the unbusy observer in the control group. However, we did not expect the persuasion-suppression condition to affect the busy observer, who would not use persuasion knowledge anyhow. In the persuasion tactic activated condition, the unbusy observer should have the same salesperson perceptions as in the control group, since the unbusy observer already uses persuasion knowledge, even when it is not primed. In contrast, if priming persuasion tactic knowledge is enough to generate inferences of persuasion motive, the busy observer in the persuasion-activated condition was expected to perceive the salesperson as less sincere compared to the control group. If persuasion tactic knowledge does not generate suspicion of motives, there would be no difference between the control group and the persuasion-activated condition for the busy observer.

A $3 \times 2$ ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of cognitive capacity ($F(1, 116) = 7.60, p < .001$) and a significant interaction effect ($F(2, 116) = 3.41, p < .04$) on perceptions of the salesperson’s sincerity (see Table 3 for the cell means). Planned comparisons showed that in the control group, the busy observer perceived the salesperson as more sincere than did the unbusy observer ($M_{busy} = 5.09$, $M_{unbusy} = 4.03$; $F(1, 116) = 10.16, p < .002$), replicating the
results from the first two studies. In addition, as predicted, the busy observer had significantly more favorable perceptions of sincerity in the persuasion-suppressed condition than in the control group ($M_{control} = 4.03, M_{PS} = 4.96; F(1, 116) = 7.91, p < .01$) or in the persuasion-activated condition ($M_{PS} = 4.25; F(1, 116) = 4.79, p < .03$). These results suggest that the persuasion-suppressed condition was successful in inhibiting the busy observer’s use of persuasion knowledge such that the busy observer did not question the salesperson’s sincerity.

We also assessed whether the busy observer was more likely to use persuasion knowledge in the persuasion tactic activated condition. Planned comparisons showed that the busy observer’s evaluations were not significantly different in the persuasion knowledge activated condition compared to the control group ($M_{control} = 5.08, M_{PA} = 4.91; F(1, 116) = .28, NS$) or to the persuasion-suppressed condition ($M_{PS} = 4.82; F(1, 116) = .08, NS$). This suggests that making persuasion tactics accessible does not lead to consideration of persuasion motives (at least in our experimental context). It appears that it is critical to make an ulterior motive accessible in order for people to use persuasion knowledge to make inferences about persuasion motives and modify evaluations of the salesperson’s sincerity. Thus, all types of persuasion knowledge do not appear to be equivalent in specific persuasion interactions.

**Persuasion Knowledge.** An ANOVA on the direct measure of persuasion knowledge showed significant main effects of cognitive capacity ($F(1, 116) = 12.32, p < .001$) and a significant interaction effect ($F(2, 116) = 3.10, p < .05$). The pattern of means was similar to that of the salesperson sincerity measure.3 Mediation tests showed that “trying to persuade” strongly mediated the treatment effects on perceived sincerity. ANCOVA revealed that the covariate was significant ($F(1, 115) = 5.45, p < .03$), while the significance of the interaction term was eliminated ($F(1, 115) = 2.32, p < .11$). Thus, reported use of persuasion knowledge mediated the treatment effects on sincerity.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The objective of this research was to examine conditions under which consumers are likely to use persuasion knowledge in an interpersonal persuasion setting. Study 1 demonstrated that when the salesperson’s behavior does not make underlying persuasion motives accessible, the target of a sales attempt is less likely than an observer to use persuasion knowledge. Study 2 demonstrated that cognitive capacity accounts for this effect and provided processes and mediation analyses of persuasion-knowledge use. Study 3 broadened the scope of the research to reveal that extrinsic factors like cognitive priming ulterior persuasion motives prior to a sales interaction can increase the busy target’s use of persuasion knowledge, leading to the target to temper evaluations of the salesperson’s sincerity. Finally, study 4 further examined boundary conditions for the use of persuasion knowledge, illustrating that making nonpersuasion constructs accessible can decrease the use of persuasion knowledge. Study 4 also suggested that knowledge specific to persuasion motives must be accessible for the busy target to use persuasion knowledge in evaluating salesperson sincerity.

These experiments were done in controlled lab situations, using one type of influence agent (a clothing salesperson), a role-playing situation, and student subjects. Caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings to other types of persuasion encounters and more natural consumer settings. It is possible, for example, that student subjects may be more cognitive and thus more likely to use persuasion knowledge than nonstudent subjects. Future research may examine the generalizability of the phenomenon to other situations and other subject populations. Additionally, future research could improve upon some of the measures used here. For example, memory measures (e.g., response latencies) could be more accurate measures of accessibility than the self-statements used here. Likewise, further direct measures of cognitive busyness and persuasion-knowledge usage would be useful. In spite of these limitations, the results make contributions to research on persuasion knowledge, cognitive busyness, and target-observer differences in response to ingratiation.

**Contributions to the Persuasion Knowledge Model**

The Persuasion Knowledge Model is a general theory about how consumers respond to marketers’ attempts at persuasion. We have focused on further developing one portion of the model, the use of persuasion knowledge in an interpersonal persuasion context. Specifically, we identified what persuasion-knowledge usage might mean in an interpersonal
CONSUMERS' USE OF PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE

persuasion context and conditional boundaries for the use of persuasion knowledge. The article augments existing research on persuasion knowledge in an advertising context and introduces accessibility and cognitive capacity as important factors in the use of persuasion knowledge.

Our findings indicate that persuasion knowledge may be applied fairly easily when persuasion motives are made accessible either by an influence agent's behavior or prior to a service encounter. When persuasion motives are less accessible, however, use of persuasion knowledge involves higher-order reasoning that requires cognitive capacity. This suggests that, in sales interactions that are commonly believed to involve high-pressure persuasion, such as negotiating the purchase of a car, persuasion knowledge may be highly accessible before the encounter, thereby helping consumers cope with the expected persuasion attempt. In other situations that are not strongly linked to high-pressure persuasion, such as clothes shopping, the use of persuasion knowledge may be contingent upon the consumer's cognitive capacity or motive accessibility. The pattern of results on accessibility through external priming contributes in an important way both to our understanding of the persuasion-knowledge model and to the literature on cognitive busyness. To our knowledge, the research presented here is the first that demonstrates that priming relevant constructs prior to the interpersonal encounter can lessen the effects of cognitive busyness.6

Support for the theoretical constructs of cognitive capacity and persuasion motive accessibility is strengthened by the fact that they were each manipulated in two different ways. Cognitive capacity was manipulated both by the role of the consumer and by the number of concurrent processing tasks. Motive accessibility was affected both by the tactic used by the salesclerk and by external priming. Future research might delve into other manipulations of cognitive capacity and motive accessibility to identify specific applications for persuasion-knowledge usage. For instance, individual difference variables are likely to affect the accessibility of persuasion knowledge. Some consumers may be generally skeptical or suspicious about marketing claims, and therefore more likely to use persuasion knowledge even when they are actively engaged in an encounter. Similarly, differences in familiarity or experience may make some consumers more suspicious about certain persuasion situations (e.g., sales) than other situations (e.g., advertising).

Factors other than cognitive capacity and accessibility may also influence persuasion-knowledge usage. For instance, an important variable in the world of selling is the reputation of the company. It is likely that company reputation will affect consumers' use of persuasion knowledge, and it would be useful to understand whether reputation affects this use by influencing motive accessibility (e.g., a good company reputation may serve to decrease the accessibility of the sales motive) or through some other route.

In the context of our studies, use of persuasion knowledge led to less favorable perceptions of the influence agent's sincerity. This is not meant to suggest, however, that consumers think poorly of all persuasion or that all consumer inferences of persuasive intent will result in overall negative responses. There are times when a consumer will perceive persuasion to be beneficial. At these times, although the inference of a persuasion motive is likely to lead to discounting of salesperson sincerity, other evaluations, such as salesperson competence or helpfulness, may not be similarly affected. For instance, a salesperson who provides expert information about a product may be perceived as knowledgeable and competent even if the consumer infers an underlying motive to persuade.

Likewise, it is possible that the use of persuasion knowledge may lead to more favorable perceptions of the agent when the goals of the consumer match those of the influence agent. For instance, when selecting a real estate agent to sell one's house, the agent's persuasive ability becomes a positive attribute, so that an agent who is considered persuasive would likely be perceived positively. In this situation, the consumer's goal (i.e., to maximize the selling price of the house) is the same as the agent's goal; this goal congruence may influence the consumer's inferential process. Alternative factors that affect outcomes of the use of persuasion knowledge are interesting avenues for future research.

Target versus Observer

This article makes a theoretical contribution to the literature on ingratiation and target-observer differences. While previous work has relied on motivational explanations of target-observer differences (e.g., Jones and Wortman 1973), recent research has called for an investigation of cognitive capacity-related differences in the way targets and observers view ingratiation (Vonk 1998). To our knowledge, this is the first paper that demonstrates that target-observer differences in responses to ingratiation may be due to cognitive capacity constraints rather than motivation. Moreover, this research suggests that the target-observer distinction is important for understanding reactions to ingratiation in a wide variety of marketing and nonmarketing persuasive situations.

Further research into the effects of target-observer differences in marketing persuasive situations is warranted. Our results indicate that the very person who may most need to use persuasion knowledge, namely, a consumer actively engaged in a persuasion encounter, may have limited ability to use persuasion knowledge because of demands on cognitive resources. It would be interesting to examine this prediction with actual interactions between consumers and salespeople. Such investigations would deepen our insight into how consumers use implicit theories of persuasion to form inferences about influence agents.

6We thank a reviewer for highlighting this contribution of our work.

7We thank the associate editor for suggesting this example.
APPENDIX A

STUDY 1 SCENARIOS

Target [Observer], Less Accessible Motive

Imagine that you’ve [a person has] gone to a department store to buy a jacket (i.e., a blazer or sports coat). You’ve [the person has] looked at a few other stores, but haven’t [hasn’t] found what you [they] really want.

Picture yourself [the person] walking into the section of the store with suits and jackets and seeing a wide array of choices. A salesclerk walks up to you [the person] and says, “Hi, my name is Pat. May I help you find something?” Imagine yourself [the person] responding—you [they] shake your [their] head and reply, “Maybe later. Right now I’m just looking.” Imagine that you [the person] begin[s] looking around.

Imagine that after looking at a few jackets, you [the person seems to] narrow it down to two choices. The first is a nice, fairly standard wool jacket. The second is a silk-blend and costs quite a bit more than the first. You [the person] take[s] over to one of two three-way mirrors and try [tries] both jackets on. Imagine looking at your reflection in the mirror. After thinking for a little while longer, you [they] decide to get the jacket made of the silk-blend.

Imagine that you [the person] take[s] the jacket to the cash register. Pat, the salesclerk, says, “That’s a great jacket. I think it looks better on you than the other one did,” and rings up the sale. You [the customer] pick[s] up the package and leave[s].

Target [Observer], Accessible Motive

Imagine that you’ve [a person has] gone to a department store to buy a jacket (i.e., a blazer or sports coat). You’ve [the person has] looked at a few other stores, but haven’t [hasn’t] found what you [they] really want.

Picture yourself [the person] walking into the section of the store with suits and jackets and seeing a wide array of choices. A salesclerk walks up to you [the person] and says, “Hi, my name is Pat. May I help you find something?” Imagine yourself [the person] responding—you [they] shake your [their] head and reply, “Maybe later. Right now I’m just looking.” Imagine that you [the person] begin[s] looking around.

Imagine that after looking at a few jackets, you [the person seems to] narrow it down to two choices. The first is a nice, fairly standard wool jacket. The second is a silk-blend and costs quite a bit more than the first. You [the person] take[s] over to one of two three-way mirrors and try [tries] both jackets on. Imagine looking at your reflection in the mirror. As you [the person] try [tries] on the second jacket, Pat walks up to you [them] and says, “That’s a great jacket. I think it looks better on you than the other one did.” After thinking for a little while longer, you [they] decide to get the jacket made of the silk-blend.

Imagine that you [the person] take[s] the jacket to the cash register. Pat, the salesclerk, rings up the sale. You [the customer] pick[s] up the package and leave[s].

APPENDIX B

STUDY 3 ACCESSIBILITY PRIME

Charitable Donations Reap Economic Benefits for Companies

A recent survey by Cone, Inc., a strategic consulting firm, finds that many U.S. companies are increasing donations to charities. The reason: charitable donations make good business sense. Not only are charitable donations tax deductible, they make customers feel good about the company, which translates into increased long-term sales. This helps companies build relationships with their customers.

One company executive put it, “The more customers learn that we give to charity, the better they feel about buying our products. It encourages new customers to try our products, and current customers to repeat purchase... It’s a subtle form of persuasion.”

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REFERENCES


CONSUMERS’ USE OF PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE


