

The Convincing Chameleon: The Impact of Mimicry on Persuasion

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This paper investigates the effect of mimicry on persuasion in the context of consumer product appraisal. We propose that the prosociality induced by mimicry will lead to enhanced persuasiveness, and thus increased product preference, in sales-like interactions. Two experiments were conducted to test these ideas. Results indicate that mimicry can positively influence preferences for products presented by one individual to another in a dyadic interaction. Furthermore, our results also suggest that this effect may actually be enhanced when the mimicker is transparently invested in the product appraisal of the individual being mimicked.

Social scientists have been intrigued for several decades in the human tendency to nonconsciously mimic the behavior of others. In one of the first papers to provide a theoretical framework from which to understand this tendency, Schefflen (1964) observed that body positioning in an ongoing interaction seemed to be indicative of the underlying liking and understanding between group members. Specifically, he theorized that people often adopt similar postures to others, and that those who share similar postures often share viewpoints as well. In the last 40 years, researchers studying nonconscious mimicry have uncovered many domains affected by this tendency. Individuals automatically mimic multiple aspects of their interaction partners, including their postures, gestures, mannerisms, speech patterns, syntax, accents, facial expressions, and even moods and emotions (for reviews see Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Chartrand, Maddux, & Lakin, 2005; Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Dijksterhuis, Chartrand, & Aarts, in press).

Mimicry that centers on the automatic adoption of physical behaviors (e.g., posture, gestures, and mannerisms) has been termed “behavior matching” (Bernieri, 1988) or “posture sharing” (La France, 1979). This type of mimicry has been the focus of a recent surge of automaticity research within social psychology over the last decade. Researchers have been asking and answering the following questions: (a) To what extent do individuals automatically pick up the gestures, postures, and mannerisms of interaction partners?; (b) Why do humans engage in mimicry, and what moderates this nonconscious process?; and (c) What are the downstream consequences of engaging in nonconscious mimicry, if any? Note that the focus of this type of research has been on the global mimicry of general motoric movements. This is to be distinguished from rhythmic synchrony, which focuses on the precise coordination on a second-by-second basis of speech and body movements (e.g., I tilt

my head within 10 milliseconds of you tilting your head; see Condon & Sander, 1974; Kendon, 1970). That is, behavior matching suggests mimicry at a broader level (e.g., I cross my legs more when I am with someone crossing their own legs), when the matching behavior does not necessarily occur at the exact same moment in time, and in fact could be separated by several seconds.

Much of the early work on nonconscious mimicry focused on establishing a relationship between mimicry and rapport (Charney, 1966; Dabbs, 1969; LaFrance, 1979, 1982). For example, La France (1982) found that students tended to mimic the postures of their professors, and that the degree of posture mimicking was positively correlated with rapport ratings between students and teacher. These studies were correlational in nature, typically focusing on mimicry and associated rapport between friends and family, or students and teachers. However, this work did not establish the existence of mimicry among strangers. If mimicry is truly automatic, then it should occur even between strangers, and should be testable in a controlled laboratory environment. Chartrand and Bargh (1999) provided the first empirical test of mimicry among strangers. In their study, participants took part in two sequential photo discussion exercises with two different confederates, one of whom rubbed his or her face, while the other shook his or her foot. As they predicted, participants rubbed their faces more in the presence of the face rubbing confederate, and shook their foot more in the presence of the foot shaking confederate. This tendency to dynamically alter behavioral mannerisms to blend in with the prevailing social surroundings led Chartrand and Bargh to coin the phrase “the chameleon effect” to describe it.

MIMICRY AND PROSOCIAL TENDENCIES

Once nonconscious mimicry was established empirically, researchers turned to answering the question: what purpose does it serve? That is, is it somehow functional and adaptive for us to automatically mimic the nonverbal behaviors of others? Coordination and mimicry have been argued to be important prerequisites for effective communication (Condon & Sander, 1974; Kendon, 1970). In fact, Bavelas and colleagues (Bavelas, J. B., Black, A., Lemery, C. R., & Mullett, J., 1986; Bavelas, J. B., Black, A., Chovil, N., Lemery, C. R., & Mullett, J., 1988) have argued that mimicry serves as an important communication tool, and in effect tells the person being mimicked, "I show how you feel." These arguments for mimicry facilitating communication, in conjunction with the correlation uncovered between mimicry and rapport, suggests that mimicry may indeed be quite adaptive. That is, by fostering communication and rapport it provides "social glue," helping to bind social groups together and to create harmonious relationships (Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, & Chartrand, 2003).

The correlational nature of the initial work on mimicry and rapport left unexplored the issue of causality -- in particular, whether mimicry was a consequence or driver of liking and rapport. Although the causal direction from mimicry to rapport had not been established, it seemed reasonable to predict that mimicry of mannerisms and postures might in fact lead to more liking and rapport between individuals.

Chartrand and Bargh (1999, Study 2) tested the prediction that mimicry would lead to more liking and smoother interactions between individuals. In this study, participants interacted with one confederate in a photograph description task. The confederate and participant took turns describing what they saw in various photographs. Throughout the interaction, the confederate either mirrored the posture, gestures, and mannerisms of the participant (e.g., crossing legs, touching hair, slouching in chair), or did not. After the

interaction was over, participants were given an “exit questionnaire” on which they were asked, among other things, how much they liked the “other participant,” and how smoothly the interaction went with them. As predicted, those participants who were mimicked by the confederate reported liking the confederate more, and thought that the interaction went more smoothly than those who were not mimicked by the confederate. This was the first study to provide causal evidence that mimicry in fact leads to more liking and rapport between interactants. Thus, mimicry is adaptive and functional, and helps individuals create social bonds with each other (see Lakin, Cheng, Jefferis, & Chartrand, 2003).

More recently, such prosocial emotions resulting from mimicry have been shown to extend beyond the dyad. For example, van Baaren and Chartrand (2005) found that participants who were mimicked by a confederate in a dyadic interaction reported feeling closer to *other people in general* relative to those who were not mimicked. Moreover, mimicked participants subsequently chose to sit closer to a second, different individual, who was not involved in the original task. Thus while mimicry may well create a special bond between the imitated and the imitator, it also appears to enhance prosocial behavior, or general positiveness, beyond the dyad.

Building on these findings, research has begun to explore whether the positive prosocial effects of mimicry can influence not only emotions toward others, but behavior toward others as well. Van Baaren, Holland, Steenaert and Knippenberg (2003) investigated whether verbal mimicry could influence customer tipping behavior in a restaurant environment. A confederate waitress either verbally mimicked customers when they were ordering their food (i.e., repeating their order verbatim back to them) or paraphrased their order for a similar length of time. The results indicated that the waitress received significantly larger tips when she mimicked her customers than when she did not. The simple act of

verbally mimicking customers thus appeared to change their tipping behavior to the benefit of the waitress.

To the extent that tipping in a restaurant is an example of prosocial behavior, there exists evidence that individuals are more prosocial toward someone who just mimicked them than toward someone who did not. But recall that prosocial emotion was found to extend beyond the mimicker-mimicked dyad toward other people in general. Is the same true of prosocial behavior? That is, would a mimicked individual not only be more prosocial toward the person who mimicked him or her, but toward other people in general? If so, this would parallel the results for prosocial emotion. In a series of studies testing this question, van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, and van Knippenberg (2004) measured behaviors in ostensibly unrelated studies that all followed a verbal description task in which participants were either behaviorally mimicked or not by the experimenter. In their first study, participants who had previously been mimicked picked up more pens that the mimicking experimenter dropped than did those participants not mimicked. In a second study, mimicked participants also gave more generously to an experimenter-introduced charity than did those participants not mimicked. Furthermore, these behaviors were shown to extend beyond the the realm of actual mimicker. Manipulation of the identity of the individual dropping the pens or introducing the charity (i.e., either the original experimenter who mimicked the participant or a new experimenter) had no effect on the subsequent behaviors. That is to say, mimicked participants subsequently picked up more pens, or donated more of their payment to charity, regardless of whether the experimenter involved in that behavior had previously mimicked them. Hence, the mimicry appeared to invoke a general prosocial or positive state in those mimicked, rather than creating a narrow social bond with the mimicker specifically.

MIMICRY AND PERSUASION

The prosocial consequences of mimicry are of clear potential interest to marketers. For example, it is possible that the prosociality and positive behavioral tendencies that mimicry has been shown to generate may be transferable to salespeople, products, or brands associated with the mimicker. In particular, the potential for mimicry to enhance the persuasiveness of salespeople has direct potential relevance to interpersonal sales techniques. Though the effect of mimicry on persuasion has been largely unstudied to date, we note that related research has established that motor movements can influence message persuasiveness and product evaluations outside of conscious awareness. For example, Wells and Petty (1980) had subjects listen to a personally relevant pro-attitudinal or counter-attitudinal message while they were instructed to nod or shake their heads. For both message types, subjects who engaged in head nodding expressed more agreement with the message than subjects who engaged in head shaking. Similarly, Forster (2004) showed that consumer product evaluations were more positive when projected on a screen using a vertical format (which encouraged head nodding) than in a horizontal format (which encouraged head shaking.)

There has been one set of studies thus far to directly examine behavioral mimicry and persuasion (Bailenson & Yee, in press). In a set of clever studies, these researchers had participants interact with computer avatars in a virtual reality environment. The avatars delivered a persuasive message about a controversial campus security policy that would mandate carrying identification. In the mimicry condition, the technology enabled the avatar's head movements to exactly mimic those of the participants at a four second delay. In the recorded condition, a replay of head movements of a previous participant was used. Participants who were mimicked subsequently reported higher levels of agreement with the persuasive message.

These results provide initial evidence for the notion that mimicry can increase persuasion. However, there are several methodological aspects of the studies that make it

difficult to generalize to the consumer domain. First, the avatars doing the mimicry in the avatar studies were not human (although they may have been treated as though they were). Thus they were both incapable of displaying feelings or emotions, and were unlikely to be perceived by participants as being invested in the outcome of the interaction. This is considerably different from the context of a salesperson and consumer, in which the salesperson is likely displaying emotions, and his or her motivation (to get consumers to make a purchase) is transparent and assumed. In particular, since our interest encompasses the effect of salespeople mimicking, and since salespeople are likely perceived as self interested agents with clear persuasion goals, it is unclear how relevant the avatar results are. It would appear unlikely that participants would have had defensive preexisting expectations that avatars would want to persuade them of something, as they would for salespeople. Finally, no direct behavioral measures were included in the study, and the persuasion measure of interest was agreement with the avatar on a controversial issue. In contrast, our interest is whether the mimicry can facilitate behavioral and attitudinal change toward a product that is a separate entity from the mimicker, as opposed to merely enhancing an alignment of views with the mimicker. Given the inconsistent correlation between attitudes and behaviors, (Eagley & Chaiken, 2003) the collection of direct behavioral measures is particularly desirable. The current research aims to more specifically examine these issues.

We first hypothesized that the previously observed prosocial effects of mimicry would lead to greater liking of a mimicker-introduced product. Second, we predicted that the greater liking for a product after being mimicked would be especially true if the mimicker was transparently invested in the success of the product in question, as would presumably often be the case in customer salesperson interactions. We reasoned that the prosocial effects of mimicry would be particularly potent when the mimicker had a clear self-interest which the individual mimicked could “help” with.

EXPERIMENTAL OVERVIEW

We present two experiments that address two key questions. First, will the positive interpersonal consequences of mimicry documented in previous research carry over to product level appraisal? Second, how will this process be affected when the person being imitated is aware of the persuasive intent and self interest of the mimicker? The basic procedure is similar across both studies. Participants engaged in a study on “impression formation of new products” during which they were introduced by a facilitator to a new product that was about to be launched on the market. The facilitator either mimicked their posture, gestures, mannerisms, and vocalizations, or did not (Experiments 1 and 2) and either did or did not disclose a self interest in the nature of the participants views towards the product (Experiment 2). Upon completion of the interview, participants recorded their opinions of the new product in question and their consumption of the product was discretely measured.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Overview and Design. Experiment 1 was designed to be an initial test of the ability of mimicry to influence downstream perceptions of a consumer product (in this case an ostensibly new sports drink) presented in a dyadic interaction. The experiment used a simple 2 condition between subject design, with mimicry being manipulated across conditions. Behavioral, affective and cognitive measures of participants’ preference for the product were taken.

Participants. Thirty-nine participants (34 female and five male) were assigned randomly to either the mimic or the no-mimic condition. Two participants who expressed

suspicion that the facilitator appeared to be studying their body language during the interaction were excluded from the subsequent analysis. Thus data from 37 participants remained in final analyses.

Procedure. Participants were guided to the lab room by an experimenter who waited for them at a designated waiting area one floor above the lab. The experimenter first briefed participants about the studies' purpose as follows. They were told that the experiment concerned the impression formation process for new products and that a student facilitator, who had been trained to conduct the interview, would be questioning them about their soft drink preferences, and explaining some features of a new sports drink called Vigor, which was approaching market launch. The experimenter then brought them to the room, and introduced them to the facilitator who was already seated. The experimenter then left the room. Participants were seated at an angle of approximately 120 degrees to the male facilitator. A small table was positioned between them. The room also contained some PC equipment and a large television. The facilitator briefly reiterated the purpose of the study and explained that there would be an opportunity to taste the drink, and provide written feedback about it, at the end of the session.

The interview was designed both to resemble a genuine market research type interview and to lead to a relatively scripted interaction, with minimal potential for tangential discussion. This was done to ensure the level of interaction between participants and facilitator was consistent across participants. The facilitator first asked participants a series of eight preference elicitation questions concerning their patronage and opinions of soft drinks in general, and sports drinks in particular. Examples include "How many soft drinks do you consume a week?" and "Where would you be most likely to buy a sports drink?" Secondly, he explained three beneficial features of the supposed new sports drink as follows:

1. “When you sweat one problem is that you lose electrolytes which contribute to your performance – Vigor helps replace some of these electrolytes. Were you aware of electrolyte loss?”
2. “People’s sense of taste changes when they work out – hence Vigor has been checked to ensure that its flavor is still enticing when people are active. This is quite important as one of the reasons people do not drink enough when working out is the flavor of the beverage. Have you ever noticed that things taste different when you work out?”
3. “Vigor has been formulated with a 6% carbohydrate solution that has been tested to ensure enough energy is delivered to active muscles. Were you aware of a link between carbohydrates and rapid energy delivery?”

The explanation of each feature was always followed by a single related question to participants, which was again designed to lead to a scripted interaction.

Next the facilitator informed participants that it was time to taste the drink, placed both a filled cup and a pitcher on the table, and invited them to drink as much as they wanted. The actual drink used was Gatorade Ice which is a clear version of Gatorade. This ensured that the drink was highly unlikely to be visually recognized, and yet would taste like a genuine sports drink. To continue the cover story, participants were told that Vigor was in the final prototype stage, that the coloring had not yet been added, but that the flavor was finalized. Finally, the facilitator handed participants a feedback packet about the drink which contained the measures described below. He then left the room to allow participants to complete the survey on their own.

The mimicry manipulation was carried out as follows. In the mimic condition the confederate ‘mirrored’ the participants’ mannerisms at a short delay. Mirroring refers to a style of mimicry where the mimicker performs the same action as the person being imitated

but on the opposite side of the body. Given the angle between facilitator and participant, this results in an effect to the person being mimicked that is somewhat akin to looking in a mirror. For example, if a participant shook her left foot, the confederate shook his right foot after a 1-2 second delay. We used posture mirroring as opposed to straight posture mimicking as some research suggests it may be more effective at generating rapport (La France, 1982). Mimicked actions included body angle, leg crossing, leg and foot movements, and hand movements such as hair or face touches. Additionally, the facilitator verbally mimicked the participants in the mimic condition by repeating back the key elements of the participant response for every other item in the script. For example, if a participant said that, "I need to drink Coke and Sprite mostly" then the facilitator would reply, "so you drink Coke and Sprite mostly." In the no-mimic condition, the facilitator anti-mimicked (see Dabbs, 1969). That is, he took on the opposite of the major bodily positions or posture of the participants. For instance, if the participant slouched, the facilitator sat up straight. If the participant crossed her legs, the facilitator kept both of his feet flat on the floor. As far as verbal responses are concerned, in the no-mimic condition the confederate used bland nondescript phrases to respond to participant responses to the items mimicked in the opposing condition. For example, if a participant said that, "I tend to drink Coke and Sprite mostly" then the facilitator would reply, "ok, got your views on that one." Verbal responses were designed to be of approximately equal length to the typical participants' responses that were mimicked in the mimic condition. This was done to minimize the risk of possible confounds with either the depth of interaction with the facilitator or affirmation of participant preferences by the facilitator across conditions.

Measures. The survey about the product completed by the participants at the end of the study asked participants to rate their agreement with the following statements: "I really enjoyed the taste of Vigor"; "I would buy Vigor when it goes on sale"; "I would expect Vigor

to be successful when it is launched”; and “I would likely recommend Vigor to friends when it is launched.” All scale items were captured on an 11 point scale anchored from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (10). In addition, when the participants had finished their survey packet, we recorded the number of grams of the beverage drunk to give us a direct behavioral measure.

Results. To test our main prediction, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the enjoyment, likelihood to buy, expectations of success, recommend to friends, and weight consumed variables. As expected, there was an overall effect of mimicry across the five dependent measures, $F(5, 31) = 3.29, p = .02$. The means of the individual measures are shown in Figure 1 below:

Insert Figure 1 about here

All effects were thus in the hypothesized direction. Thus participants were thus more positive towards Vigor when the facilitator mimicked them than when he did not.

Discussion

Experiment 1 provides the first evidence for our contention that deliberate mimicry of an individual can lead to positive downstream consequences for products associated with the mimicker. However, the facilitator in Experiment 1 was not presented as a persuasive agent as such. The information about the product was presented in a primarily neutral fashion, ostensibly in the service of understanding preference formation for new products. Thus Experiment 1 was not truly analogous to a sales situation in which the customer is likely to have an expectation that the salesperson would like to persuade them of the merits of a particular product. Since the beneficial features of Vigor were explained by the facilitator it is

quite possible that participants in Experiment 1 may have inferred that the facilitator had a positive view of Vigor, however no direct manipulation of persuasive intent was included. Experiment 2 was designed to extend the findings of Experiment 1 to a more persuasion orientated domain by including a manipulation of the extent to which the facilitator was transparently invested in the success of the product, and thus would likely be perceived to have persuasive intent.

One might predict that an expectation of persuasion attempts by the imitated would attenuate any positive effects of mimicry toward the product. However, given the nonconscious nature of the effects, we expected to find the opposite. That is, the nonconscious nature of the prosocial tendencies triggered by mimicry suggests that they should still hold in a sales or persuasion context. Furthermore, since a salesperson is clearly invested in a certain outcome, the prosociality engendered in a mimicked customer may actually lead them to want to ‘help’ the salesperson by engaging in behaviors consistent with his or her implied motives. Thus we expected the positive effects of mimicry on product preference to be enhanced when the mimicker was explicitly invested in the outcome.

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

Overview and Design. Experiment 2 utilized a similar set up to Experiment 1. Behavioral, affective, and cognitive measures were taken for a regional food product, spicy cheese straws, which participants were told was under consideration for national roll out by the manufacturer. Cheese straws were chosen based on their relatively niche status which was consistent with the unfamiliarity cover story. In addition to the mimicry manipulation used in

Experiment 1, an additional manipulation of the extent to which the facilitator was invested in the participants' product appraisal was incorporated. The experiment used was a 2 x 2 between-subject design, with mimicry (participants mimicked or not) and persuasive intent (facilitator as invested salesperson or neutral party) as the two manipulated factors. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

Participants. Fifty-seven undergraduate participants (31 female, 26 male) completed the study in return for a payment of \$5. Two participants who expressed suspicion that their interaction with the facilitator was central to the study, and three who suspected that the amount of cheese straws they ate was being measured were excluded from the subsequent analysis. Thus, data from 52 participants remained in final analyses.

Procedure. The participants were brought to the room and briefed about the experiment in the same way as in Experiment 1. The physical set up of the room was also identical to Experiment 1. As a cover story for this study, participants were told that its purpose concerned the impression formation and marketing of unfamiliar products. In a similar fashion to Study 1, participants were told that a trained facilitator would be questioning them about their snack product preferences, and soliciting their impressions of various marketing messages that were under consideration to market the cheese straws in a potential national launch. Following the format of Study 1, the confederate first asked participants a series of preference elicitation questions concerning their snack preferences. The facilitator then read out three promotional messages for the cheese straws for each participant to assess as follows:

1. "The first two ingredients of the cheese straws are real cheese and real flour – not processed or reconstituted ingredients. Please take a moment to consider how persuasive you find this. Is this message appealing to you? Do you typically look at the ingredients of snacks you buy?"

2. “The texture of the cheese straws is unlike other snack products, because they are soft yet crumbly at the same time. Please take a moment to consider how persuasive you find this. Is this message appealing to you? Can you think of any other soft and crumbly snacks?”

3. “Finally, cheese straws are a great addition to salads and chilis – you just crumble them a little and throw them on. Please take a moment to consider how persuasive you find this. Is this message appealing to you? Do you think you would ever use cheese straws in this way?”

Each promotional message was thus followed by two questions, one about its persuasive appeal, and the second a general domain-relevant question designed to encourage a scripted conversation as in Study 1. Next the confederate informed participants it was time to taste the cheese straws and placed a full cup of cheese straws on the table and invited them to have a taste. A further series of questions about the flavor and texture of the cheese straws followed. Finally, the confederate handed participants a feedback packet about the cheese straws, invited them to eat as many as they wished, and left the room.

The mimicry manipulation was carried out exactly as in Study 1. The persuasive intent manipulation was designed to alter participant perceptions of the extent to which the facilitator was invested in their appraisal of the product. In one set of conditions (termed Invested), the confederate told participants the following as part of the introduction to the study: “In the interest of full disclosure, I should tell you that I am helping the cheese straw manufacturer come up with improved marketing messages to use in advertising the cheese straws. The more persuasive the cheese straw company thinks the marketing messages are, the more I get paid.” In the other set of conditions (termed Independent), the following phrase was substituted: “Just so you know, I am not affiliated with the cheese straw manufacturer in

anyway. We randomly chose cheese straws as a product to test various ideas about impression formation and marketing of unfamiliar products.”

Measures. The survey about the product completed by the participants at the end of the study asked participants to rate their agreement with the following statements: “I enjoyed the taste of the cheese straws”; “I would buy the cheese straws”, and “I think the cheese straws could become successful in the market.” All scale items were captured on an 11 point scale anchored from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (10). We chose these measures in an attempt to assess participants underlying preference for the drink across a number of dimensions. Thus while the enjoyment measures gives us an affective measure, belief about future success is a more cognitive in nature while likelihood to buy captures behavioral intent. In addition to this behavioral intent measure, when the participants had finished their survey packet, we recorded the number of grams of the cheese straws consumed to give us a direct behavioral measure.

Finally two manipulation checks were collected (both collected on 11 point scales). Participants were asked how motivated the facilitator appeared to be during the interview (to check that he did not behave differently when mimicking) and how invested in the success of the product and marketing messages they believed he was (to check the efficacy of the Invested manipulation.)

Results. As intended, participants reported the facilitator in the Invested condition to be more invested in the product and marketing messages ($M = 4.5$) than did those in the Independent condition ($M = 3.0$; $F = 4.4$, $p = .04$). They also perceived no difference in his motivation levels in the interview across conditions ($F < 1$). Thus as intended, though they believed he had more self interest in the Invested condition, they did not observe any differences in his actual behavior across persuasion conditions.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the enjoyment, likelihood to buy, expectations of success, and weight eaten variables with gender, mimicry and persuasive intent as independent variables. A main effect of gender was observed, $F(4, 40) = 3.5, p = .02$) which was largely caused by male participants eating a greater weight of cheese straws. This main effect was not qualified by any higher order interactions (all $P > .2$) and is not discussed further. Once again, there was an overall effect of mimicry across the four dependent measures, $F(4, 40) = 2.45, p = .06$. The means of the individual measures are shown in Figure 2 below:

Insert Figure 2 about here

As predicted, this main effect was qualified by the expected interaction between mimicry and persuasive intent, $F(4, 40) = 2.54, p = .05$. Thus, as predicted, across our four dependent variables, the effect of the mimicry appeared to be more acute when participants believed that the facilitator was invested in the success of the product and wanted them to like the product and its marketing messages.

General Discussion

These studies extend prior mimicry research by providing the first evidence that the prosocial effects of mimicry can be used to influence consumer product appraisal in dyadic interactions. In Experiment 1, participants who had been physically and verbally mimicked subsequently reported increased preference for a sports drink that had been discussed during the interaction. This increased preference was consistently observed across a variety of self reported measures and also manifested itself behaviorally via greater actual consumption of the drink. Experiment 2 replicated the findings of Experiment 1 and additionally showed that

the effect of the mimicry was particularly acute when participants interacted with a facilitator they believed was invested in the success of the snack product in question. We attribute this result to the prosociality induced in participants by the mimicry having a greater effect when the facilitator was obviously invested in the valence of the participant's appraisal of the product. In essence, the prosocial participants in the mimic condition found more to "help" in the highly invested facilitator.

These findings suggest that mimicry has the potential to be a valuable tool in interpersonal persuasion, particularly in those cases where the underlying motivations, and thus persuasive intent of the persuader, are transparent to the target individual he or she is desirous of persuading. The sales domain is one that has some promise in this regard.

Limitations and Extensions

A limitation of the experimental design we used in these initial studies is that our mimicry manipulations combined both behavioral and verbal mimicry. Thus while we can attest to the overall effect of mimicking, we cannot yet speak to the relative potencies of the two types. Furthermore, in both studies the facilitator in the no-mimic condition anti-mimicked the major postural positions of the subjects. Thus while our results speak to a clear net effect of mimicry between conditions, our data does not speak to the relative effect of mimicking over and above the status quo position of no mimicry. Future research may usefully explore both these issues.

While our primary aim in this research was to investigate the effect of mimicry on persuasion in general, the specific potential role of mimicry in sales domains is of specific interest to us. Although we believe the data is indicative that mimicry has some promise as a sales enhancing technique, it is important to recognize potential roadblocks to its application in sales domains. Firstly, we note that the results of the current studies may well have

benefited from taking place in a controlled laboratory environment. In particular the studies utilized sustained interactions with a physical set up which was carefully designed to facilitate behavioral mirroring of participants by the facilitator. Many sales interactions, such as a customer talking to a salesperson about a television in a store, maybe of too brief a duration, and/or involve a style of physical interaction that would render less useful the mimicking techniques we used. That said, one can imagine greater relevance of the current work to more controlled sales environments, such as the negotiation of a car purchase while seated opposite the salesperson in a dealership office. Secondly, the use of mimicry as a sales technique would also clearly run the risk of being noticed by the target customer. From a persuasion knowledge perspective (Friestad & Wright, 1994) target awareness of the mimicry would likely lead them to perceive a “change of meaning” in the interaction, with the possibility that increased cognitive resources would be assigned to deal with the persuasion attempt or that complete detachment from the sales interaction might result. Future research might usefully explore how forewarning of mimicry affects both its prosocial and downstream behavioral consequences.

Finally, we suggest an interesting question which the current experiments did not explore is the extent to which the beneficial effects of mimicry on product appraisal would transfer to products that were not the central focus of the interaction? For example, if other products were present and visible to the target the room, but were not discussed or alluded to by the facilitator, would any beneficial effect transfer to these products?

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Figure 1

Means for Vigor preference measures by mimicry condition

	<i>No Mimic</i>	<i>Mimic</i>
Enjoyment*	6.2	7.8
Likelihood to buy*	3.8	6.5
Expectations of Success*	5.8	6.8
Recommend to friends*	5.5	6.7
Weight consumed^a	70	111

*Strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (10) scale

^aWeight in grams**Figure 2**

Means for Cheese Straws preference measures by mimicry and persuasion condition

	Facilitator		Persuader	
	No Mimic	Mimic	No Mimic	Mimic
Enjoyment	5.3*	5.5	4.8	6.5
Likelihood to buy	3.5*	4.8	2.7	5.7
Expectations of success	4.2*	5.3	5.1	5.4
Weight eaten	8.5 ^a	12.7	7.7	10.3

*Strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (10) scale

^aWeight in grams