Chapter 7
An Examination of Mediation:
Insights into the Role of Psychological Mediators in the Use of Persuasion Knowledge

Kenneth M. Henrie
Texas A&M University - San Antonio, USA

Darryl W. Miller
University of Wisconsin - River Falls, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of psychological mediators on consumers' responses to persuasive sales tactics. Factor Analysis is used to determine the actual mediators identified by consumers as potential targets by salespeople and find structure in the data. An exploratory examination identifies four categories of potential psychological mediators. Experimental results reveal that consumers recognize sales tactics designed to influence these psychological mediators. These processes, in turn, mediate the influence of persuasive tactics on consumer responses. Overall, the study lends support to Friestad and Wright's Persuasion Knowledge Model (1994).

INTRODUCTION

Each day, marketers spend tremendous resources in an attempt to persuade consumers. A simple explanation for this fact is that intensive marketing communications campaigns (e.g. persuasive messages) are generally effective in persuading customers and generating sales and market share (Balasubramania & Kumar, 1990). Thus, exposure to persuasion attempts is a large part of consumers' daily lives (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

Despite the interactive nature of persuasion, research concerning the process has primarily focused upon the role of the agent until relatively

recently with the advent of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, or ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Originally, the role of consumers in persuasion (e.g. as the target) has been largely ignored (Friestad & Wright, 1995). Given the importance of their role as targets of persuasive attempts, it is likely that future consumer research will focus more on the thought processes of consumers (Wright, 2002). One such work was the development of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE

Persuasion knowledge refers to a consumer's knowledge about the persuasion tactics, intent, and persuasive messages produced by an agent (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Consumers use persuasion knowledge to evaluate the manner in which the persuasion agent communicates this message, most notably in terms of their motives and intentions. When consumers are exposed to persuasion attempts, they try to cope with the situation in a way that is consistent with their own goals within the context of the episode. Coping can include not only behavioral outcomes but also cognitive and perceptual outcomes. Thus, persuasion knowledge does not involve the activation of a static set of beliefs, but instead it is a dynamic, evolving phenomenon. As consumers experience future persuasion episodes, they will likely use what they have learned in evaluating and coping with past persuasion attempts.

For example, consider a situation where a salesperson is attempting to sell a car to a potential customer. The customer will use persuasion knowledge to evaluate each of the persuasion tactics (e.g. their actions, and verbal/non-verbal communication) by this salesperson. The customer will then compare these tactics to prior experiences (e.g. interactions with other car salespeople) in an attempt to evaluate them in terms of appropriate-

ness, fairness, and effectiveness. In this scenario, the customer is using this persuasion knowledge in an effort to maintain control over the outcome of their interaction with the salesperson, in this case, purchasing a car that meets their needs at what they perceive to be a fair price. This interaction will then be saved and become part of their persuasion knowledge for all future interactions with car salespeople.

Several recent works have addressed persuasion knowledge within the context of consumer response to persuasion including the development of persuasion knowledge among youth (McAlister & Cornwell, 2009; Wright, Friestad, & Boush, 2005), the use of persuasion knowledge in response to covert marketing tactics (Wei, Fischer, & Main, 2008), and its role in the development of guilt and charitable giving (Hibbert et al., 2007). However, the number of recent works regarding persuasion knowledge remains relatively limited.

Of particular importance to this paper is the concept of psychological mediators. Friestad and Wright (1994) suggest that psychological mediators are the psychological processes activated by consumers that mediate the relationship between the persuasive tactics employed by the agent of persuasion, such as a salesperson, and the response to the persuasive efforts (e.g. consumer's coping responses). Persuasion knowledge theory indicates that agents of persuasion identify and try to influence specific psychological mediators in an effort to enact desired changes in an individual.

Prior to this work, it was not clear which psychological processes may serve as mediators between persuasion tactics and outcomes but Friestad and Wright (1994) have proposed several likely possibilities. These include perceptions, beliefs, feelings, desires, intentions, and resolutions. They also suggest that mediators may include processes discussed in early sales and advertising literature such as attention, interest, desire, remembering, confidence, conviction, and judgment.

Related Content

Customer-Centric Marketing in the European Union from a Legal Perspective

Eleni Tzoulia (2015). *Handbook of Research on Managing and Influencing Consumer Behavior (pp. 78-97).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/customer-centric-marketing-in-the-european-union-from-a-legal-perspective/121954

Symbolic Consumption in the Online World: The Construction of Social Identity and Fashion Influencers

Maria-Teresa Gordillo-Rodriguezand Paloma Sanz-Marcos (2020). *Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling, Audience Engagement, and Business Strategies (pp. 130-146).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/symbolic-consumption-in-the-online-world/253389

A Study to Explore Relationships Between Customer Demographics and Brand Loyalty in The Indian Telecom Sector

K Sai Prasadand Sita Mishra (2014). *International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management (pp. 1-13).*

www.irma-international.org/article/a-study-to-explore-relationships-between-customer-demographics-and-brand-loyalty-in-the-indian-telecom-sector/122248

Effect of Instagram Influencer Parasocial Relationship on Follower Behaviors: A Moderated Moderation Model of Expertise and Involvement

Sara Al Sulaitiand Mohamed Slim Ben Mimoun (2023). *International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management (pp. 1-20).*

www.irma-international.org/article/effect-of-instagram-influencer-parasocial-relationship-on-follower-behaviors/329246

Impacts of COSER Strength on Service Loyalty: Case of Automobile Repair Service in Tunisia

Manel Ben Ayed (2019). *International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management (pp. 34-47).*

www.irma-international.org/article/impacts-of-coser-strength-on-service-loyalty/218917