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Creating Critical Consumers: Motivating Receptivity by Teaching Resistance

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Consumers have a paradoxical relationship with advertising. To our great personal detriment, we routinely resist health-related warnings from legitimate authorities such as the Surgeon General. At the same time, we readily accept advice from illegitimate authorities, even those who begin their appeal by admitting that “I’m not a doctor, but I play one on TV.” This chapter describes three studies designed to tackle the latter problem—maladaptive gullibility. However, it turns out that the former problem—misplaced skepticism—proved far easier to solve.

DEFINING RESISTANCE

There are many ways in which targets can resist a persuasive message. They can avoid the message through phenomena such as selective avoidance (e.g., not listening to a radio station because of the objectionable opinions expressed on that station) and coincidental avoidance (e.g., being out of the room when a commercial is aired). They can have an affective response such as anger, which leads to the outright rejection of the message. Or they can engage active cognitive processes that are triggered by the receipt of a persuasive message and function to lessen the probability of compliance or the magnitude of persuasion.

For the scope of the present investigation, we focus on this last type of resistance.

Because this type of resistance always uses cognitive resources, it follows that (a) consumers, as cognitive misers, will not resist messages unless motivated to do so, and (b) resistance is a limited, depleteable resource, a perspective in keeping with the findings of Knowles and Linn (this volume). As a result, consumers' choice to resist or accept a persuasive message represents a tradeoff. On one hand, resisting carries the costs of the cognitive resources expended, plus the risks associated with missed opportunities. On the other hand, accepting a message carries the risk of being persuaded inappropriately—to the detriment of one's wallet and, possibly, one's self-image.

THE CHALLENGE FACING CONSUMERS

A mid-80s estimate suggested that, at the time, consumers were targeted by over 300 persuasive messages every day (Aaker & Myers, 1987). With the recent development of new marketing media such as Internet banner ads and pop-up windows, spam (unsolicited commercial e-mail), and m-marketing (mobile marketing to cell phones and pagers), as well as the increasing prevalence of traditional media, 300 is likely a substantial underestimate today.

In response to this daily onslaught, consumers must rely heavily on heuristics such as consensus information or the opinion of an expert. Cialdini (2001) describes the dilemma in this way:

You and I exist in an extraordinarily complicated environment, easily the most rapidly moving and complex that has ever existed on this planet. To deal with it, we *need* shortcuts. We can't be expected to recognize and analyze all the aspects in each person, event, and situation we encounter in even one day. We haven't the time, energy, or capacity for it. Instead, we must very often use our stereotypes, our rules of thumb, to classify things according to a few key features and then to respond without thinking when one or another of these trigger features is present (p. 7).

Unfortunately, unscrupulous marketers can capitalize on consumers' reliance on these heuristics by manufacturing merely the veneer of consensus or the trappings of authority. Many consumers are fooled by such illegitimate heuristic information. Others may develop a chronic wariness or skepticism, protecting them from illegitimate heuristics, but also preventing them from accepting other messages that employ heuristics legitimately. Either approach carries costs—gullibility produces poor decisions; stubbornness, missed opportunities. As McGuire (1964) put it, "The best of both worlds would be to discover pretreatments that would make the person receptive to the true and resistant to the false" (p. 192).

HOW TO TELL THE TRUE FROM THE FALSE

It is easier to agree with McGuire's perceptive assertion than to implement it. A pretreatment that enhances the likelihood of appropriate responding to "true versus false" persuasive messages would have to identify an effective rule for distinguishing the two types of messages. Unfortunately, determining what constitutes honest versus deceptive persuasive attempts is no easy task for a target. There is the obvious—a perceived discrepancy between what the material asserts and what the recipient knows to be true (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). But, in cleverly constructed communications, this discrepancy is not readily evident. Audiences of advertisements, for instance, frequently lack the experience or expertise to know whether a particular product or service is likely to meet the advertiser's claims. Instead, audience members must often rely on the depicted experience or expertise of individuals or other sources portrayed in the ad. Fortunately, a simple but effective rule may help audience members distinguish true authorities that should be adhered to from false authorities that should be resisted.

Persuasion practitioners have long recognized the power of authorities on the influence process (Cialdini, 2001), as have researchers (e.g., Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Blass, 1991, 1999; Milgram, 1974). Accordingly, the source of information in many persuasive appeals is portrayed as an authority. Such portrayals, we contend, are more honest when the depicted authority is a genuine expert with special knowledge on the topic than when this is not the case.

By this account, a large number of authority-based advertisements would be considered objectionable. Actors regularly appear as physicians, attorneys, stockbrokers, or scientists and mouth their approval of commercial products and services. Indeed, sometimes spokespersons are chosen simply because they are associated with the fictional role of an expert. Performers from medical shows promote health products while those from police dramas describe the benefits of anticrime devices and so on. Even more worrisome, perhaps, is that the use of pseudo-authorities sometimes extends to legitimate news presentations. For instance, in a January 24, 2001 CNBC interview with the actor Martin Sheen, host Brian Williams seriously pursued a line of questions regarding Mr. Sheen's views of the appropriateness of presidential decisions to accept gifts and to pardon convicted criminals just before leaving office. Mr. Sheen dutifully offered his considered opinions in these matters even though his political credentials to that point were limited to playing the role of the U.S. president on the TV series "West Wing." Because, as these examples suggest, the public is regularly exposed to information presented by ersatz experts, we felt that a corrective was in order. Accordingly, we set about the task of constructing a treatment that would enable individuals to recognize and resist the influence of misplaced authority while continuing to accept the advice of those with true expertise.

We recognize that relevant expertise is not the only factor that can influence the legitimacy of an authority appeal. For example, a true expert who makes a specific statement on a relevant issue only because he or she has been paid to do so would also be an instance of the dishonest use of authority influence (Folkes, 1988). However, for the purposes of an initial investigation, we chose to focus on one basic distinction (the presence or absence of relevant expertise) and to leave other relevant distinctions for future research.

THE MOTIVATION AND ABILITY TO RESIST

In his description of inoculation theory—one of social psychology's foremost theories of resistance to persuasion—McGuire (1964) described two critical components of a resistance-enhancing treatment: motivation and ability. Following McGuire's lead, we sought a treatment that would motivate influence targets to resist and that would enable them to do so effectively.

To implement McGuire's (1964) first component, motivation, we sought to identify a psychological dimension that would spur participants to resist illegitimate authority-based appeals. The task of identifying a crucial motivational dimension was complicated by the fact that the traditional reasons individuals reject incoming information—the information is discrepant from what recipients clearly know and/or prefer—often don't apply in advertising contexts. That is, much research has established that people resist the influence of information that conflicts with strongly held beliefs or attitudes (Petty & Krosnick, 1996; Visser & Krosnick, 1998), but many messages (e.g., the majority of those containing claims for this or that commercial product) do not challenge strong views or preferences.

A more suitable motivational construct—undue manipulative intent—emerges from an examination of a diverse set of literatures suggesting that individuals tend to reject information they perceive as designed to manipulate them unfairly (e.g., through deception). For example, studies of the behavior of human research participants indicate that participants are more likely to respond contrarily to the experimenter's wishes when they believe that the experimenter is trying to trick them (Christensen, 1977; Goldberg, 1965; Masling, 1966). Similar results have been observed in research on ingratiation. Although people tend to believe flattery and like those who provide it (Byrne, Rasche, & Kelly, 1974; Drachman, deCarufel, & Insko, 1978), ingratiation can backfire when it is clear that the flattery is a manipulative attempt to achieve ulterior goals (Jones & Wortman, 1973). In a trial setting, Fein, McCloskey, and Tomlinson (1997) demonstrated that pointing out a persuader's undue manipulative intent rendered the persuader's (otherwise convincing) message ineffective. Finally, in marketing contexts, researchers have found that persuasive impact is undermined if the influence agent is perceived as using manipulative tactics (Campbell, 1995; Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; Lutz, 1985; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

For our purposes, the perception of undue manipulative intent seemed an ideal motivator of resistance to persuasion. First, it does not require that the message recipient be knowledgeable about the (often unknown) legitimacy of the specific claims made in the message. Instead, it only requires an assessment of whether the persuasive approach is legitimate. Second, to be effective, this perception is not restricted to the domain of strongly held attitudes. The idea of being duped or cheated is inherently resistance-inducing—by itself—because of evolved tendencies to avoid trickery (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992). Third, there is good evidence that this perception acts to blunt persuasion in the advertising and marketing arenas we wished to examine.

In addition to providing motivation, an effective treatment against illegitimate persuasive appeals must provide participants with the ability to distinguish between acceptable versus objectionable persuasive messages. It would be of limited value to foster the blanket rejection of all influence attempts, as unrelenting cynicism or stubbornness can be as costly as gullibility (Cialdini, 2001). In our case, then, an optimal treatment would afford participants a rule for discriminating between properly and improperly constituted authority-based communications. In addition, this rule should be relatively simple to learn and apply. Although multifaceted and complicated rule systems may cover a greater range of circumstances, they are frequently unsuitable for use because most people find such rule systems too difficult or cumbersome to employ, even in important, personally relevant domains (Kahn & Baron, 1995). Therefore, especially in the case of advertising and other mass media messages, which often occur in rapid-fire succession, a streamlined decision rule would be most useful. Finally, the treatment should take a form that could be easily incorporated into a variety of educational contexts. To deal with a society-wide offense, the corrective must be appropriate for wide-ranging implementation.

To these ends, we developed a brief (8–10 min.) treatment that offered participants a simple decision rule for classifying and responding to authority-based persuasive communications: Such appeals are objectionable and should be rejected if the depicted authority does not at least possess special expertise on the topic.

Although we consider this rule useful for influence targets to employ when faced with authority-based advertisements, it is important to acknowledge at this point that it is not our goal to assert the superiority of this particular rule according to any system of morals or ethics. Issues of what constitutes ethically proper versus improper conduct are difficult, highly subjective, and beyond the scope of our inquiry (See Boatright, 1992, for an appropriately textured treatment of many of these issues). Furthermore, it seems likely that the present results would generalize to an array of other rules—as long as the rules appear plausible and useful to influence targets. For example, while targets readily accepted the legitimate/illegitimate distinction presented in our treatment, they would likely reject a rule suggesting that messages printed on red paper should be accepted whereas messages printed on blue paper should be rejected.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 sought to instill resistance to improperly constituted authority-based appeals by teaching participants a rule for discriminating between legitimate and illegitimate appeals and by suggesting to participants that ads containing illegitimate authorities are attempts to deceive consumers. Participants learned the rule through exposure to a brief treatment that provided examples of real magazine ads that would be considered acceptable or objectionable according to the rule.

Overall, we structured our treatment to leave participants (a) aware of the potential influence of authoritative sources, (b) able to discriminate between legitimate versus illegitimate authority appeals, and (c) motivated to discriminate against only the latter. However, another outcome seemed possible. It was conceivable that our treatment would only cause participants to perceive that advertisers invoking authority were attempting to control their choices. Should that be the predominant perception, participants might well demonstrate reactance (Brehm, 1966) against all subsequent authority-based ads. Reactance research has shown, for example, that messages containing highly controlling statements (e.g., "You as college students, must inevitably draw the same conclusion," p. 110) are less persuasive than equivalent messages without such statements. Such reactance would produce a less desirable societal outcome: reduced persuasion for all authority-based advertising, both legitimate and illegitimate.

In a test of these competing possibilities, participants either did or did not receive a treatment that taught them a rule for distinguishing between acceptable and objectionable forms of authority-based appeals and that characterized the objectionable forms as unduly manipulative in intent. All participants then rated a novel set of authority-based ads in terms of their undue manipulative intent and their persuasiveness. We predicted an interaction effect such that, compared to control condition participants, the treatment condition participants would find only the objectionable appeals within the new set of ads more manipulative and less persuasive.

Two hundred forty-one Arizona State University (ASU) undergraduates were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control conditions. The treatment consisted of a six-page discussion of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate uses of authorities in advertising. The six-page control condition consisted of a discussion of the use of color and tone in advertisements, which was created to ensure that control and treatment participants would spend an equivalent amount of time examining the example ads. The crux of the treatment appeared in the first two paragraphs:

Now we're going to look at some more magazine advertisements, but this time we're going to look at them from a different point of view. We're going to think about the ethics of the ads. Specifically we're going to examine whether the ads use authority in an ethical or an unethical way.

Many ads use authority figures to help sell the product. But how can we tell when an authority figure is being used ethically or unethically? For an authority to be used ethically it must pass two tests. First, the authority must be a real authority, and not just someone dressed up to look like an authority. Second, the authority must be an expert on the product he or she is trying to sell.

The five and a half pages that followed offered examples of ads that use authorities legitimately or illegitimately according to our criteria (see Sagarin, Cialdini, Rice, & Serna, 2002, for an extended discussion of the materials and results of these studies).

The text referred to six example ads selected from current periodicals. After reading the text, participants rated six additional ads (three containing legitimate authorities, three illegitimate) on two scales adapted from Campbell (1995). The first scale assessed the persuasiveness of the ad using items such as, "If you were to use this type of product in the future, how likely are you to choose this brand?" The second scale assessed the perception of undue manipulative intent, asking participants to indicate how closely they agreed with statements such as, "The advertiser seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control the consumer audience."

As predicted, presence of the treatment interacted significantly with legitimacy of the authority for both perception of undue manipulative intent, $F(1, 238) = 29.39, p < .001$, and ad persuasiveness, $F(1, 232) = 26.57, p < .001$. See Table 13.1.

An examination of the simple effects within the treatment by legitimacy of the authority interaction revealed that participants in the treatment condition perceived the ads containing illegitimate authorities as more unduly manipulative, $F(1, 238) = 7.61, p = .006$, and less persuasive, $F(1, 232) = 4.22, p = .041$, as compared to participants in the control condition. We also found that participants in the treatment condition perceived the ads containing legitimate authorities as less unduly manipulative, $F(1, 238) = 12.94, p < .001$, and more persuasive, $F(1, 232) = 16.21, p < .001$, as compared to participants in the control condition.

These results suggest that the treatment did not make participants more generally resistant to authority-based advertising. Instead, it made participants more discriminating about it on the critical legitimacy dimension. This finding stands in contrast to a reactance effect and to a reactance explanation of our findings. That is, according to reactance theory, resistance occurs when something is perceived as intending to direct or control one's perceived choices, thereby limiting one's freedoms to decide. Clearly, this is as much the intent of advertisements containing legitimate authorities as ads containing illegitimate authorities. Our results indicate that the treatment did not stimulate resistance to all attempts to direct and limit choices but only to attempts to do so by employing an improperly constituted authority.

This is not to say that the resistance effects observed in the present study bear no similarity to reactance. Both effects produce resistance, and both are

likely to produce emotional responses such as anger. However, in contrast to the reactant influence target who resists in response to the perception, "You're trying to control me," the influence target who perceives undue manipulative intent resists in response to the perception, "You're trying to *fool* me." Both perceptions may elicit anger and resistance, but we believe the motivations, antecedents, and, possibly, origins of each differ sufficiently to warrant considering them related but distinct phenomena.

Besides conferring resistance to the illegitimate ads, the treatment had an additional effect: Ads with legitimate authorities came to be seen as more persuasive! Thus, participants learned not only to devalue inappropriate persuasive information, but also to enhance the value of appropriate messages. In fact, participants demonstrated substantially greater enhancement of legitimate authorities than derogation of illegitimate authorities. Control participants, in contrast, displayed unfocused, or, more properly, misfocused resistance, with their resistance resources misapplied toward legitimate messages. After receiving the treatment, however, participants were able to allocate their resistance resources more effectively. These participants resisted unduly manipulative ads (those containing illegitimate authorities), but they were released from the need to resist legitimate messages.

The release from resistance experienced by our treatment participants is reminiscent of the release from reactance displayed by the forward-looking participants in Sherman, Crawford, and McConnell (this volume). Similarly Fuegen and Brehm (this volume) found that weak reasons in favor of a counter-attitudinal proposal were more effective in reducing disapproval than strong reasons, because the weak reasons offered little challenge to the disapproval motive. In the present study, treatment and control participants received the same arguments from the legitimate authorities. But the perspective offered by the treatment reduced treatment participants' resistance motive.

While encouraged by the initial success of our brief treatment in instilling resistance to persuasion, we were concerned that the observed effects might have stemmed not from true resistance, but rather from the demand characteristics of our experimental setting. We had, after all, just told treatment participants how to identify "good" versus "bad" ads, and then asked them to rate a series of examples that fit our criteria for "good" and "bad" advertisements. Thus, it seemed possible that these participants responded as they did in an attempt to confirm what they presumed were the experimenter's expectations. We designed Experiment 2 to (a) address this concern and (b) test the enduring impact of our treatment outside of the laboratory context.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 was intended to replicate and extend the results of Experiment 1. Participants in Experiment 2 rated legitimate and illegitimate authority-based ads both immediately after receiving the treatment and after a one- to four-day delay, in a separate setting unrelated to the laboratory context. The separation

of the treatment and measurement contexts allowed us to assess the viability of demand characteristics as an alternative explanation.

The delay between the treatment and the test of its effectiveness offered a second benefit of more applied interest: an assessment of the perseverance of treatment impact. If we are to achieve the goal of instilling resistance to illegitimate authority-based appeals, the crucial treatment-taught distinctions must be retained and accessible to participants at later points in time when they are likely to encounter authority-based persuasive messages in other settings. Without evidence of durability and cross-situational robustness, the treatment would represent little more than an academic exercise of dubious practical value.

One hundred and thirty ASU undergraduates participated in Experiment 2. As with the previous experiment, participants were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control conditions and rated the same series of ads. Then, one to four days later, a research assistant, posing as a representative from the campus daily newspaper, administered a delayed questionnaire in the participants' psychology classes. This questionnaire asked respondents to evaluate the articles and advertisements in a new newspaper insert. Two of these advertisements were authority-based, one legitimate and one illegitimate. Respondents rated the ads on a four-question scale that included items such as "How did you like the ad?" with answers "I hated it; I disliked it; It was OK; I liked it; It was great!" and "Do you think that seeing this ad will make you more likely to use this product or service?" with answers "Definitely not; Possibly; Maybe; Probably; Definitely."

The impact of the treatment on immediate persuasion responses that we found in Experiment 1 was replicated in the present study. Presence of the treatment interacted with legitimacy of the authority with respect to the perception of manipulative intent, $F(1, 127) = 3.61, p = .060$, and with respect to the perceived persuasiveness of the ads, $F(1, 122) = 10.06, p = .002$. See Table 13.1.

The effects of the treatment also persevered one to four days after the experiment. As predicted, presence of the treatment interacted significantly with legitimacy of the authority in the delayed measure, $F(1, 51) = 4.04, p = .050$. See Table 13.1. Length of delay (one to four days) did not interact with the treatment effect, $F(3, 45) = 1.14, p = .344$, and an examination of the results for each day separately revealed that, if anything, the treatment produced more prediction-consistent results on days 2, 3, and 4 than on day 1.

Thus, the effects of treatment remained intact well after the end of the laboratory experiment and did not appear to decline, at least within the time period measured. The continued efficacy of the treatment outside of the laboratory context increases confidence that demand characteristics cannot account for the results and it suggests the practical value of treatments of this type. If the present treatment, using only a brief, written format, demonstrated significant effects days after its administration, an interactive, longer-term program (such as might be administered in schools) could have profound and long-lasting results.

Experiment 2 did produce one unexpected finding. While participants who received the treatment rated the ads containing legitimate authorities as signifi-

TABLE 13.1
Cell Means and (Standard Deviations) Within Each Condition

| Condition | Undue manipulative intent | | Ad persuasiveness | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| | Legitimate authority | Illegitimate authority | Legitimate authority | Illegitimate authority |
| <i>Exp. 1</i> | | | | |
| Control (<i>n</i> = 121) | 2.38 (1.07) | 2.23 (.99) | 3.24 (.88) | 3.56 (.74) |
| Treatment (<i>n</i> = 120) | 1.90 (.97) | 2.56 (.93) | 3.69 (.89) | 3.36 (.77) |
| <i>Exp. 2</i> | | | | |
| Control (<i>n</i> = 65) | 2.28 (1.05) | 2.61 (1.02) | 3.25 (.79) | 3.36 (.80) |
| Treatment (<i>n</i> = 65) | 1.98 (.96) | 2.71 (.98) | 3.67 (.79) | 3.23 (.75) |
| Delayed control (<i>n</i> = 29) | | | 2.68 (.61) | 2.91 (.67) |
| Delayed treatment (<i>n</i> = 26) | | | 2.99 (.77) | 2.78 (.54) |
| <i>Exp. 3 (n = 80/condition)</i> | | | | |
| Tone/color | 2.42 (1.56) | 2.61 (1.35) | 3.31 (1.27) | 3.31 (1.19) |
| No commentary | 2.20 (1.19) | 2.84 (1.42) | 3.25 (.92) | 3.18 (.91) |
| Asserted vulnerability | 2.11 (1.43) | 3.47 (1.33) | 3.58 (1.06) | 3.00 (1.02) |
| Demonstrated vulnerability | 2.14 (1.24) | 3.73 (1.42) | 3.66 (1.12) | 2.54 (1.36) |

Note. Undue manipulative intent and ad persuasiveness were scored on 7-point scales from 0 to 6, with larger scores indicating more of the quality. The delayed measures of ad persuasiveness were scored on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5. One participant was removed from the analysis of the delayed measures of ad persuasiveness due to his or her statistical outlier status. The studentized deleted residual for this data point was -3.29 , which falls far in the tail (99.8%) of the corresponding *t*-distribution, with 52 degrees of freedom (Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1989).

cantly more persuasive as compared to controls, they did not resist the ads containing illegitimate authorities more effectively than did controls. Apparently, the treatment released participants from resisting legitimate authorities both in the lab and beyond, but it did not confer greater resistance to illegitimate authorities.

These results suggest that participants may have agreed with the characterization of illegitimacy presented in the treatment, but they may not have acted on it because they believed that they weren't susceptible to it ("I wouldn't have fallen for the unethical ads anyway."). Taylor and Brown (1988) argued that such overly positive illusions are common and can be adaptive. However, in the present context, this self-enhancement bias (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) may leave influence targets less likely to fend off inappropriate persuasive attacks. Indeed, as Fiske and Taylor put it, "Unrealistic optimism may lead people to ignore legitimate risks in their environment and fail to take measures to offset those risks." (p. 216). It seems possible, then, that our participants' sense of unique invulnerability to deceptive ads left them unmotivated to employ defenses against such ads.

Illusions of Invulnerability to Persuasion

To test our hypothesis that participants may have felt themselves uniquely resistant to the persuasive tactics that work on everyone else, we asked 888 undergraduates how much they believed television advertisements affect them, and we asked a separate 900 undergraduates how much they believed television advertisements affect the average ASU undergraduate. Participants responded on 0 to 6 scales for which 0 indicated “very strongly,” 3 indicated “somewhat,” and 6 indicated “hardly at all.” As we suspected, participants rated themselves significantly less affected ($M = 3.56$) by television ads as compared to their peers ($M = 2.88$), $F(1, 1786) = 124.69$, $p < .0001$.

The results of this pilot study confirmed our concerns that participants maintained perceptions of personal invulnerability to advertising. Such “illusions of unique invulnerability” (Perloff, 1987) are widespread, leading, at times, to harmful or even fatal results. In the area of health psychology, the optimistic bias (Weinstein, 1980) appears as a discrepancy between perceptions of others’ susceptibility to a disease and perceptions of one’s own personal susceptibility to the illness. This bias can lead to negative health outcomes, as low levels of perceived personal susceptibility are associated with poor compliance with preventative health behaviors (Aiken, Gerend, & Jackson, 2001). In a study of HIV-infected women, Siegel, Raveis, and Gorey (1998) discovered that “perceived invulnerability to infection [was one of] the principle barriers to women recognizing their at-risk status” (p. 114).

Norris, Nurius, and Dimeff (1996) reported that college sorority women “held a high sense of invulnerability to victimization and an optimistic belief in their ability to resist sexual aggression” (p. 123). In a vivid demonstration of the tenacity of illusions of unique invulnerability, Snyder (1997) informed students that an upcoming classroom demonstration was designed specifically to expose their illusions regarding mortality risks. Despite the warning, the students discounted actuarial information and overestimated their age of death by nine years—an amount equivalent to the overestimates made by uninformed students.

Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we sought to dispel these illusions of invulnerability by demonstrating in an undeniable fashion that participants can be fooled by ads containing counterfeit authorities. According to our pilot data, it appears that to motivate strong resistance, it is insufficient to argue that people in general can be unfairly manipulated. Therefore, we hypothesized that something else would be required to motivate the necessary resistance. One likely possibility emerged from an examination of the earlier-described research on health risks: Participants must learn that they are personally susceptible to the risk under consideration.

The results of our pilot study suggested that our participants were unmotivated to develop resistance to illegitimate ads because they regarded themselves

as relatively invulnerable to the risk of being fooled. How might we convince them otherwise? Merely pointing out their vulnerability to a risk has not been a generally effective device for motivating individuals against it (Perloff, 1987; Snyder, 1997). For example, according to Aiken, Gerend, and Jackson (2001), "The public is inundated with information about cancer and with recommendations for cancer screening and prevention" (p. 727). Nevertheless, the National Health Interview Survey of 1994 reported that 44% of women over 50 had failed to have a mammogram within the previous two years (American Cancer Society, 1997; National Center for Health Statistics, 1996).

Aiken, Gerend, and Jackson (2001) specified three stages of perceived susceptibility to risk—a critical determinant of health behavior. "First, individuals are assumed to become aware of a health hazard (awareness), then to believe in the likelihood of the hazard for others (general susceptibility), and finally to acknowledge their own personal vulnerability (personal susceptibility)" (p. 730). Researchers attempting to increase compliance with health behaviors have sought to move people from stage 2 to stage 3. For example, Curry, Taplin, Anderman, Barlow, and McBride (1993) increased cancer screening in higher-risk women through the use of tailored personal, objective risk information.

Our pilot study demonstrated that many of our participants fell squarely into stage 2 of perceived susceptibility. They perceived that others were vulnerable to advertising but that they, themselves, were relatively immune. We anticipated that merely asserting participants' vulnerability to deceptive ads would leave many with their illusions intact. We predicted, however, that participants could be moved to stage 3 by arranging for them "to acknowledge their own personal vulnerability" (Aiken, Gerend, & Jackson, 2001, p. 730).

We were left, however, with the practical challenge of how to induce participants to acknowledge their own personal vulnerability. The labor-intensive task of providing participants with individualized, tailored personal risk information, as was done by Curry et al. (1993) to motivate cancer screenings, was impractical in the present setting. Instead, we sought a simple procedure that would unambiguously demonstrate vulnerability without increasing the time or effort necessary to administer the treatment.

Several studies within the literature on perceived risk indicate that one's level of prior personal experience with the risk factor can moderate optimistic bias (e.g., Helweg-Larsen, 1999; Norris, Smith, & Kaniasty, 1999; Van der Velde, Hooykaas, & Van der Pligt, 1992; Weinstein, 1980, 1987). These studies demonstrated that personal experience with a negative event—including earthquakes, hurricanes, illnesses, and sexually transmitted diseases—has the capacity to undercut one's illusion of unique invulnerability regarding future such events (See Weinstein, 1989, for a review). This finding is consistent with evidence indicating that learning based on first-hand experience is more powerful than that based on simple information (Epstein, 1998; Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Helweg-Larsen & Collins, 1997). Consequently, we included in Experiment 3 a procedure that gave some participants undeniable evidence that they had been susceptible to the persuasive impact of an illegitimate authority-based ad. We

hypothesized that this procedure (the demonstrated vulnerability treatment condition) would give rise to a significantly stronger tendency to resist subsequent such ads than would a procedure similar to that of Experiments 1 and 2, in which participants' vulnerability was merely asserted.

Experiment 3 also provided an examination of the psychological mechanisms through which the instilled resistance operated. Consistent with prior research (Campbell, 1995; Lutz, 1985; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989), we predicted that the resistance instilled by the treatment would be fully mediated by perceptions of undue manipulative intent. In other words, participants who are taught the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate authorities would come to see ads employing illegitimate authorities as unduly manipulative, and these perceptions would then lead to resistance.

We also sought to examine the mechanism whereby perceptions of undue manipulative intent lead to resistance. Drawing on the cognitive response model of persuasion (Greenwald, 1968) and, in particular, the finding that inferences of manipulative intent can lead to decreased persuasion via counterarguing (Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996), we anticipated that the effect of perceptions of undue manipulative intent on persuasion would be mediated, at least in part, by altered cognitive reactions.

To assess cognitive response, participants listed the thoughts they had in reaction to the ads. Subsequently, participants categorized these thoughts (as positive, negative, neutral, or irrelevant) in terms of their relation to the ad. Cognitive response-based resistance, which would manifest as increased counterargumentation, would appear as a greater quantity of negative thoughts and a lesser quantity of positive thoughts.

Although no *a priori* model was specified, Experiment 3 enabled an exploration of the possible mediators of the enhancement of the legitimate authority-based appeals.

In Experiment 3, participants rated two custom advertisements developed for the study. The ads each contained the testimony of an authority (one legitimate, one illegitimate) in the top half and a list of product features in the bottom half. For each ad, four versions of the list were developed that varied the strength (strong vs. weak) and number (two vs. six) of product features. The features were visually separated from the picture and testimony of the authority, had no relation to the testimony, and were manipulated independently of the legitimacy of the authority. These variables were included to examine whether participants in the different conditions processed ads using a different modality (central vs. peripheral, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1998, or heuristic vs. systematic, Chaiken, 1987; Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996). More critically, these variables could determine whether participants exposed to the treatment (a) simply accepted or rejected an ad based on the legitimacy of the authority, or (b) factored the legitimacy of the authority into a more sophisticated appraisal of the ad that incorporated other ad features. This distinction is particularly important in light of the enhancement of advertisements containing legitimate authorities observed in Experiments 1 and 2. It would certainly be of

no benefit to instill a mindless acceptance of the testimony of legitimate authorities (scenario (a) above). Far preferable would be a treatment that increased the salience of the legitimate authority's true expertise without discouraging scrutiny of the rest of the ad (scenario (b) above). Support for the former scenario would be found if feature strength had no effect on persuasion in the treatment conditions. A significant effect of feature strength in the treatment conditions, on the other hand, would offer support for the latter scenario.

Finally, we noted the possibility that our prior results could have stemmed not from the efficacy of the treatment, but rather from the inhibiting nature of our tone and color control condition. Specifically, though designed to be innocuous, the tone and color essay may have inadvertently focused participants away from the distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate authorities, on which they might have otherwise focused. To test this possibility, we added a second control condition that asked participants to look through the example ads but provided no commentary.

Three hundred twenty ASU undergraduates were randomly assigned to one of 32 conditions representing (a) the four treatments (the tone and color control condition, the no commentary control condition, the asserted vulnerability treatment condition, and the demonstrated vulnerability treatment condition), (b) the four versions of the rated ads that varied strength (strong versus weak) and number (two versus six) of product features, and (c) two levels of counterbalancing (representing the order in which the ads containing legitimate and illegitimate authorities were viewed and rated).

Tone and Color Control. As in Experiments 1 and 2, participants in the tone and color control condition received a packet discussing the cosmetic aspects of the accompanying ads.

No Commentary Control. Participants in the no commentary control condition received a brief packet that simply asked them to examine the accompanying ads.

Asserted Vulnerability Treatment. Participants in the asserted vulnerability treatment condition received a slightly modified version of the treatment packet of Experiments 1 and 2. Besides providing a set of sample ads and a working definition of ethical (vs. unethical) authority-based advertisements as had been done in the earlier experiments, it asked participants to consider whether they had been fooled by the unethical ads of manipulative advertisers:

Take a look at ad #1. Did you find the ad to be even somewhat convincing? If so, then you got fooled. Unethical ads like this fool most people. But if we want to protect ourselves from being manipulated, we need to know what makes an ad ethical or unethical.

Many ads, such as ad #1, use authority figures to help sell the product. But not all ads use authority figures ethically. For an authority to be used ethically it

must pass two tests. First, the authority must be a real authority, and not just someone dressed up to look like one. Second, the authority must be an expert on the product he or she is trying to sell. Let's use these tests to examine ad #1. What about that guy selling the Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition? He sure looks like a stockbroker. But where are his name and credentials? The ad doesn't give us any. For all we know this guy is just a model. This ad is unethical because it fails the first test. This guy is just dressed up to look like an authority.

When you looked at this ad, did you notice that this 'stockbroker' was a fake? Did you ask yourself whether you should listen to this so-called 'expert'? If you didn't, then you left yourself vulnerable to the advertisers that are trying to manipulate you.

Demonstrated Vulnerability Treatment. Participants in the demonstrated vulnerability treatment condition received a treatment packet that did more than simply assert their vulnerability to deceptive ads. It demonstrated that vulnerability by first instructing participants to examine a sample ad containing an illegitimate authority and to respond to a pair of questions concerning it. The initial question asked them to indicate how convincing they found it on a 7-point scale labeled: Not at all convincing (0), Somewhat convincing (1), Fairly convincing (2), Convincing (3), Quite convincing (4), Very convincing (5), and Extremely convincing (6). Results indicated that the great majority of participants rated the ad at least somewhat convincing. The second question asked participants which two aspects of the ad they found most important in making this decision and to write these reasons down in spaces provided. At this point the treatment packet was identical to that of the asserted vulnerability treatment condition except in two places. Rather than merely instructing participants to "Take a look at ad #1. Did you find the ad to be even somewhat convincing? If so, then you got fooled . . .," the packet referred participants to their earlier-committed response to the ad: "Take a look at your answer to the first question. Did you find the ad to be even 'Somewhat convincing'? If so, then you got fooled . . ." Similarly, rather than merely asking "When you looked at this ad, did you notice that this 'stockbroker' was a fake?" participants were referred to their earlier responses to the question regarding the most important aspects of the ads that contributed to its convincingness: "Take a look at your answer to the second question. Did you notice that this 'stockbroker' was a fake?"

Participants in Experiment 3 rated the two new ads on the same scales used in Experiments 1 and 2. After rating each ad, participants were instructed to list the thoughts they had while examining the ad. Then, after rating and listing thoughts for both ads, participants were asked to categorize each thought as (a) "positive toward the ad," (b) "negative to the ad," (c) "neutral to the ad," or (d) "irrelevant to the ad." Participants listed a total of 2,367 thoughts, an average of 3.7 thoughts per ad. Cognitive response to each ad was calculated as the number of positive thoughts minus the number of negative thoughts.

The two control conditions did not differ significantly on any measured variable; consequently, we were assured that the control condition used in the previous studies had not served as an active treatment.

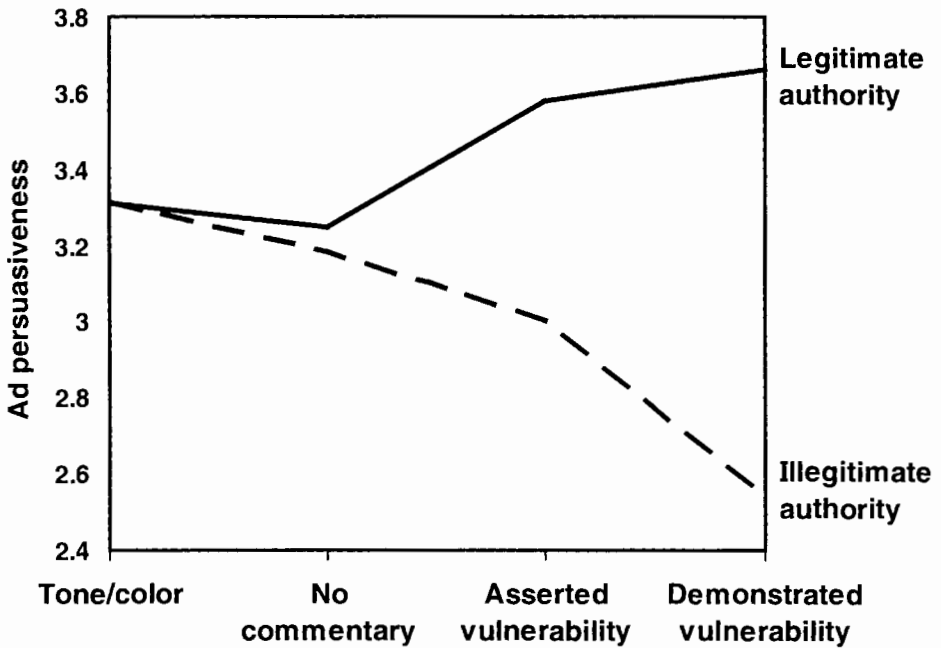


FIG. 13.1. The effects of the resistance treatment and the perception of vulnerability on the perceived persuasiveness of advertisements containing legitimate and illegitimate authorities in Experiment 3.

The treatment once again interacted significantly with legitimacy of the authority with respect to perception of manipulative intent, $F(3, 311) = 11.01$, $p < .001$, and persuasiveness of the ads, $F(3, 297) = 9.75$, $p < .001$. See Table 13.1 and Fig. 13.1. Of particular note is the fact that the asserted vulnerability treatment and demonstrated vulnerability treatment differed significantly in their interaction with legitimacy of the authority with respect to ad persuasiveness, $F(1, 297) = 6.02$, $p = .015$. An examination of the simple effects revealed that these two treatment conditions did not differ in their effects on the persuasiveness of the ad containing the legitimate authority, $F(1, 297) = .36$, $p = .548$; both were successful in enhancing the effectiveness of legitimate authority-based messages. However, these conditions did differ significantly in their effects on the persuasiveness of the ad containing the illegitimate authority, $F(1, 297) = 6.41$, $p = .012$.

Consistent with our previous findings, the asserted vulnerability treatment increased the persuasiveness of ads containing legitimate authorities, $F(1, 297) = 3.26$, $p = .072$, but did not confer significant resistance to ads containing illegitimate authorities, $F(1, 297) = 2.01$, $p = .157$, compared to control conditions. Once again, the treatment effectively enhanced the persuasive value of

legitimate authorities but was less able to instill resistance to illegitimate authorities.

This particular weakness of the treatment was remedied, however, by the demonstration of personal vulnerability. An examination of simple contrasts revealed that the demonstrated vulnerability treatment produced significant resistance to ads containing illegitimate authorities, $F(1, 297) = 18.99, p < .001$, as well as significant enhancement of ads containing legitimate authorities, $F(1, 297) = 6.27, p = .013$, as compared to the control conditions. In fact, for the first time in our program of studies, the resistance effect was of greater magnitude than the enhancement effect. Thus, instilling resistance required more than merely asserting participants' vulnerability. Effective resistance required clearly demonstrating this vulnerability.

It is noteworthy that the asserted vulnerability treatment and demonstrated vulnerability treatment conditions did not differ significantly in their interaction with legitimacy of the authority with respect to perception of manipulative intent, $F(1, 311) = .66, p = .416$. This result fits well with our thinking, in that both conditions contained similar information about the manipulateness of the authority appeals in the example ads. They differed only in information suggesting that participants would be susceptible to that manipulation.

To determine whether participants exposed to the treatment (a) mindlessly accepted or rejected the advertisements based on the legitimacy of the authority, or (b) incorporated the legitimacy of the authority into an overall appraisal of the ads, we ran a four-way (feature strength by feature number by treatment by legitimacy of the authority) ANOVA using ad persuasiveness as the dependent variable. Five significant effects emerged. The first two represented the effects of treatment discussed above.

The three additional significant effects included feature strength or number as factors. First, there was a significant main effect of feature strength indicating that ads containing strong features ($M = 3.43$) were more persuasive than ads containing weak features ($M = 3.03$), $F(1, 285) = 17.83, p < .001$. Second, feature strength interacted significantly with feature number such that six strong features ($M = 3.62$) were more persuasive than two strong features ($M = 3.25$) but six weak features ($M = 2.96$) were less persuasive than two weak features ($M = 3.10$), $F(1, 285) = 5.90, p = .016$. Third, feature number interacted significantly with legitimacy of the authority such that, for the ad containing the legitimate authority, six features ($M = 3.58$) were more persuasive than two features ($M = 3.32$), but for the ad containing the illegitimate authority, six features ($M = 2.99$) did not differ from two features ($M = 3.04$), $F(1, 285) = 4.33, p = .038$.

Overall, these results demonstrate that, even in the treatment conditions, participants considered the full advertisements in making their judgments. Thus, participants who learned to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate authorities did not mindlessly accept advertisements simply because they contained a legitimate authority. Nor did they automatically reject advertisements that employed ille-

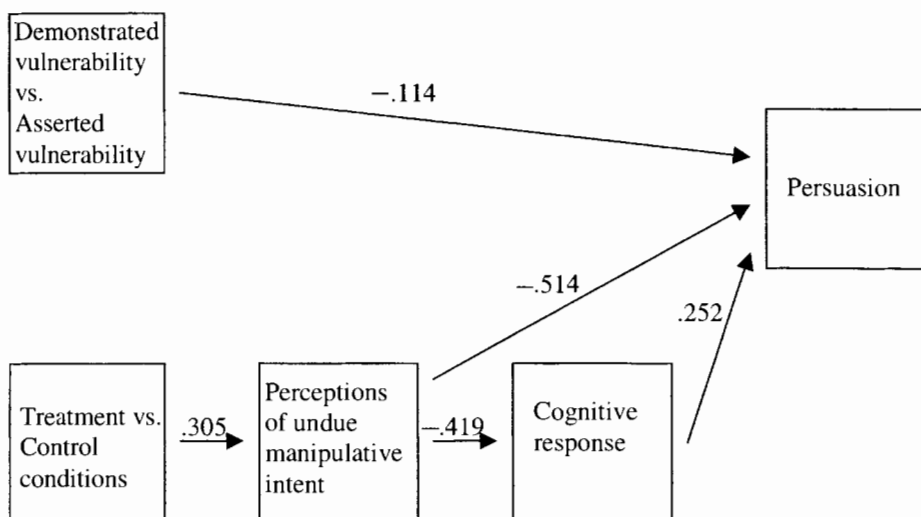


FIG. 13.2. The mediation of resistance to the ad containing the illegitimate authority by perception of undue manipulative intent and cognitive response in Experiment 3. All paths have $ps < .01$.

gitimate authorities. Instead, participants rendered judgments that incorporated information on product features as well as an appraisal of the worth of the expert testimony.

Mediators of Resistance and Enhancement

Figure 13.2 represents the mediational model for the effect of treatment on resistance to the ad containing the illegitimate authority. After collapsing the two control conditions (discussed above), treatment is represented in the model by two orthogonal contrast vectors: (a) demonstrated vulnerability treatment (coded as 1) versus asserted vulnerability treatment (coded as -1) and (b) treatment conditions (coded as 1) versus control conditions (coded as -1). In the model, perceptions of undue manipulative intent and persuasion correspond to the undue manipulative intent and ad persuasiveness scales, respectively, and cognitive response represents the number of positive thoughts minus the number of negative thoughts.

We predicted that participants who learned the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate authorities would subsequently perceive advertisements containing illegitimate authorities as unduly manipulative. Furthermore, we predicted that these perceptions of undue manipulative intent would elicit a negative cognitive response toward the ads, and that this negative cognitive response would lead to resistance to the ads.

As can be seen in Fig. 13.2, the treatment caused a significant increase in perceptions of undue manipulative intent, and the increased perceptions of undue

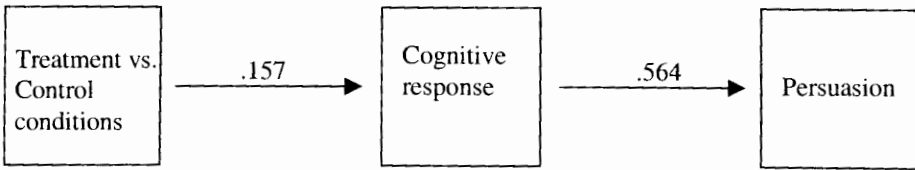


FIG. 13.3. The mediation of the enhancement of the ad containing the legitimate authority by cognitive response in Experiment 3. All paths have $ps < .01$.

manipulative intent led to decreased persuasion, mediated in part by negative cognitive responses. The demonstration of vulnerability, on the other hand, had a direct effect on resistance. This model fit the data well according to a chi-square goodness-of-fit test (using EQS with maximum likelihood estimation on the covariance matrix), $\chi^2(5, N = 320) = 2.760, p = .737, CFI = 1.000$. The addition of missing paths does not significantly enhance model fit.

Although cognitive response partially mediated the effects of perceptions of undue manipulative intent on persuasion, a significant direct path remained. This suggests that the observed resistance was not a purely cognitive process. In a study of the effect of attitude importance on resistance to persuasion, Zuwerink and Devine (1996) reached a similar conclusion: "The results of this process analysis underscore that resistance to persuasion is both an affective and a cognitive affair, particularly for those who care deeply about their attitudes" (p. 936). It is unlikely that participants in the present experiment cared deeply about the advertised product—but they may well have cared deeply about the experience of being fooled (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992).

It is noteworthy that the unique resistance conferred by the demonstration of vulnerability was not mediated by perceptions of undue manipulative intent. As mentioned earlier, the demonstration of vulnerability was not designed to make illegitimate authority-based ads appear more manipulative. It was designed to make participants aware of their personal susceptibility to that manipulation. That demonstrated susceptibility had a direct effect on participants' willingness to reject the persuasiveness of illegitimate authorities.

For the enhancement effect, the most parsimonious exploratory model suggested that the enhancement of the ad containing the legitimate authority was mediated entirely by more positive cognitive responses to the ad (see Fig. 13.3). This model fit the data well, $\chi^2(1, N = 320) = 2.055, p = .152, CFI = .992$. The fact that different mediational models emerged for the resistance and enhancement effects may stem from the motivational nature of resistance. Because enhanced resistance consumes cognitive resources, participants required a high level of motivation (the demonstration of vulnerability) before allocating these resources. Enhanced receptivity, on the other hand, actually releases cognitive resources, and, as a result, participants may have been motivated to reduce their resistance to legitimate authorities once they learned that it was safe to do so.

A final difference between resistance and enhancement may stem from the different implications for the self of building or releasing resistance. Recognizing the need to build resistance required participants to accept the fact that they had been fooled in the past—a highly uncomfortable realization. Recognizing the advantages of releasing resistance simply required participants to accept a reason to let go of their skepticism—a substantially less taxing realization.

CREATING CRITICAL CONSUMERS

With the expanding prevalence and pervasiveness of advertising, our ability to critically distinguish messages that employ influence techniques appropriately from messages that counterfeit these techniques has become increasingly important. Until recently, social psychologists have had little to offer to those hoping to teach this critical distinction. The present research offers a first step. In three experiments, participants learned to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of authority in advertising. Compared to control groups, participants who learned this distinction demonstrated resistance against subsequent advertisements that employed authority illegitimately. Furthermore, compared to controls, these participants perceived legitimate uses of authority as less manipulative and more persuasive.

Originally, the treatment was expected to produce resistance to ads that employed authority illegitimately without affecting reactions to legitimate authorities. The results suggested, however, that the most robust effect of the treatment was the enhancement of the ads containing legitimate authorities. In contrast to instilling resistance, which required dispelling participants' illusions of invulnerability to counterfeit experts, the enhancement effects merely required describing the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate authorities.

Why might these seemingly parallel effects manifest so asymmetrically? Perhaps, in a sense, acceptance is the path of least resistance. When faced with an interpersonal request, saying no disappoints the requester, whereas saying yes pleases. Furthermore, Knowles and Linn (this volume) demonstrated that resistance is a resource that can be used up. As a result, influence targets may prefer to bank their resistance so it will be available when they truly need it. These factors (as well as the evidence of the present studies) suggest that convincing someone to resist is likely to be substantially harder than giving them an excuse to accept.

Motivating Receptivity by Teaching Resistance

The results of these three studies demonstrate the existence of an indirect but powerful influence technique. By pointing out plausible criteria that delineate the acceptable versus objectionable uses of a principle of influence (e.g., au-

thority), acceptable uses of that principle (e.g., legitimate authorities) become more persuasive. In the present studies, these criteria were disseminated by a third party unrelated to the sponsors of the advertisements. A powerful extension of this technique could enable a clever advertiser to describe the relevant criteria and then employ an acceptable (and now enhanced) version of the corresponding principle.

The results of Experiments 1 and 2 suggested that, subsequent to learning the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate authorities, legitimate authorities were seen as less manipulative. Experiment 3 then offered evidence of the enhancement of legitimate authorities manifested via an increase in positive cognitive responses. This enhancement may, thus, represent both an increase in the perceived credibility of the legitimate authority and a decrease in the degree of negativity with which consumers typically perceive advertising (particularly television advertising, Mittal, 1994; Shavitt & Vargas, 2002).

The optimal treatment thus created critical consumers, ready to resist marketers who employ authority illegitimately but equally ready to reward those who provide genuine experts. This creates for marketers and consumers a win-win situation. Marketers are rewarded for providing useful heuristic information, while consumers are empowered to defend themselves against marketers who do otherwise.

AUTHOR NOTE

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