

RUNNING HEAD: Pragmatic persuasion

Pragmatic Persuasion or the persuasion Paradox

Michaela Wänke

University of Basel, Switzerland

Leonie Reutner

University of Basel, Switzerland

Draft for the Sydney Symposium on Attitudes and Persuasion, March 2009

## PRAGMATIC PERSUASION OR THE PERSUASION PARADOX

There are many ways to change attitudes as this book attests and many involve presenting arguments (see for example chapters X). Consequently, the impact of arguments has figured prominently in the history of attitude research where the characteristics of persuasive messages (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953) and the processes by which they affect attitudes (Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Petty & Wegener, 1999; Kruglanski, Thompson & Siegel, 1999; Greenwald, 1968) have been investigated (for reviews see Bohner & Wänke, 2002; Crano & Prislin, 2006). That a convincing argument comes in handy when attempting to change attitudes is, of course, common knowledge and is practiced widely in social interaction, education, politics, marketing and other areas. But what is a convincing argument? In logic, an argument is a set of premises and a conclusion, with the characteristic that the truth of the conclusion is supported by the premises. “You should eat vegetables (conclusion) because they contain lots of vitamins (premise)”, sounds like a reasonable argument to most people whereas “you should eat vegetables because they are green”, does not. The intake of vitamins is considered beneficial by most people but the advantages of eating green food are less obvious. But note, that it is not the information per se which is convincing or not, but what receivers make of it. For information to change a person’s attitude in the desired direction it is essential that the receiver draws the adequate inferences about its implications. The argument that vegetables contain vitamins will be lost on ignorant recipients who do not know what vitamins are. Thus, one may define information as compelling if, given the recipient’s knowledge structure, this information leads the recipient to the conclusions desired by the persuader.

However, for social psychologists it will not come as a surprise that implications of the presented information may also be construed or inferred rather than being based on a priori knowledge. In the present chapter we propose an intriguing twist of this assumption. Our central hypothesis is that in persuasion the inferred meaning of presented information

may be based on the very fact that the information is presented in order to persuade. The ignorant receiver in our example may arrive at the conclusion that vitamins must be beneficial in some sense if they are presented as a reason to eat vegetables. Paradoxically then, one aspect that makes information compelling is the fact that it is perceived as intended to persuade. This assumption of self-generated compellingness is based on the notion of persuasion as a social exchange or persuasion game (McCann & Higgins, 1992) where the persuasion target expects the persuader to present valid and compelling information. After all, if persuasion represents a form of social communication it seems only appropriate to apply some of the dynamics of social communication in order to understand the dynamics of persuasion.

*The role of conversational relevance in persuasion.*

A basic assumption in social communication is that information is not presented arbitrarily. Rather as Sperber and Wilson put it “communicated information comes with a guarantee of relevance” (1986; p. vi). According to the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975), recipients in a communication may expect that the information that is presented is relevant to the accepted purpose of the communication. Such tacit assumptions that the presented information is relevant to the purpose of the communication govern informal conversations but have also been shown to be used as pragmatic inference rules to give meaning to newspaper headlines (Gruenfeld & Wyer, 1992), research instructions in experiments (e.g. Bless, Strack & Schwarz, 1993) and survey questions (e.g. Strack, Schwarz & Wänke, 1991; Schwarz, Strack & Mai, 1991) (for a review see Wänke, 2007). Applied to persuasion this would suggest that recipients may expect that any information presented by the persuader is relevant to the persuader’s goal and potentially supports the desired conclusion. If the obvious and accepted purpose of a communication is to persuade recipients of the benefits and advantages of a position receivers should pragmatically interpret any statement - as obscure, incomplete or

ambiguous it may be - in a favorable manner to the argued position. The underlying inference rule is: “If a persuader presents this information in order to persuade me, then the information must potentially support the persuader’s position.” By potentially supporting we mean that the information has implications, which in principle support the goal of the persuader. This does not mean that the receiver necessarily accepts the argument. Recipients may doubt the presented facts (e.g. “vegetables do not contain that many vitamins”), their implications (e.g. “vitamins are not that that important for a healthy nutrition”), or refute the whole argument (I don’t want to be healthy). And of course they may generate other counterarguments (e.g. “vegetables also contain pesticides”). Nevertheless, although the presented information may not necessarily elicit individual attitude change, it is likely to be considered as potentially relevant to the persuaders goal and if accepted may do so.

A similar thought underlies Areni’s notion regarding the often-missing link between the presented information and the conclusion in an argument (Areni, 2002). Consider the following example taken from Areni (2002; p. 179).

“By combining 2 liquids that activate to form a foam, New Liquid Plumr Foaming Pipe Snake cleans your pipe walls quickly and easily”

Here, the conclusion “effective pipe cleaning” is supported by a single attribute (major premise) “foam”. Why foam should be particularly efficient for cleaning pipes is, however, not said. The minor premise or conditional rule is missing. This missing link between the major premise and the conclusion is typical of what is known in rhetoric as an *enthymeme*. Aristotle defined an enthymeme as a *rhetorical syllogism* aimed at persuasion. It is an incomplete syllogism as part of the argument is missing. Often the part does not need to be stated explicitly because recipients complete the missing premise from their knowledge. If recipients know for example that vitamins are good for them explicitly mentioning this fact may be omitted and stating that one should eat vegetables because they have many vitamins would suffice. But enthymemes may work even without a priori knowledge. This is where

pragmatic implicatures come into play. According to the maxim of relation (Grice, 1975), one should only give information that is relevant to the point one wants to make. Presenting a premise and a conclusion that are not linked by a conditional rule would certainly violate conversational maxims. As Areni put it, “Grice’s prescription dictates that presenting data conversationally implicates a conditional rule, and it is this principle that allows enthymemes to be transformed into coherent arguments” (p.179).

Note however, that the assumption of pragmatic persuasion goes beyond the rhetoric of enthymemes. We argue that not only does presenting information and conclusions implicate a conditional rule between the presented information and the stated conclusion but that merely presenting the information alone will implicate a relevant argument. Based on Gricean assumptions persuasion targets may reason that if information is given it must support the intended conclusion, otherwise the persuader would not mention it. According to this pragmatic assumption it is not necessary that the presented information hold particular implications per se. Even ambiguous and unfamiliar information may become a compelling argument if presumed to be presented with the intention to persuade.

To be clear, we do not claim that such a pragmatic interpretation is the only source from which presented information achieves meaning. Clearly the interpretation and evaluation of the presented information is the result of whatever knowledge is activated. Most often the receiver will have a priori knowledge about the implications of the presented information (most people do believe vitamins to be healthy and pesticides to be harmful). But if receivers do not possess a priori knowledge to make sense of the presented information one source of influence is the context of being presented as potentially persuasive. If so, ignoramuses may be persuaded to eat vegetables by claiming a high pesticide and low vitamin content. After all, why mention it, if it is not persuasive?

The only necessary requirement for the pragmatic interpretation is that the persuasion target believes the information to be communicated with a particular persuasive intention.

That is, the persuasion target needs to presume which attitude or behavior the persuader strives to produce. Most often this is the case. People often only begin to exchange arguments only after they have discovered that they hold different viewpoints on an issue. In formal debates, discussants first state their positions and then present supporting arguments. In politics, it goes without saying that a candidate only presents information, which promotes the own view and confutes the opponent's standpoint. Likewise, virtually everybody knows what goals ads and commercials pursue. Thus, in many persuasion contexts receivers are well aware of the persuader's intentions. We would argue that due to a cooperative interpretation it is exactly this knowledge of the persuasion goal, which may help persuasion. Interestingly, this cooperative assumption that knowing the goal makes targets more vulnerable to persuasion is diametrically opposed to the notion that forewarning is a mean to resist persuasion (Wood & Quinn, 2003) and that awareness of a persuasion intention may provoke reactance (Brehm, 1968). We will turn to that issue later.

In sum, applying conversational norms to persuasion we suggest that persuasion targets presume that information that is communicated with the goal to persuade comes with a guarantee of potential persuasiveness. Persuasion targets may therefore interpret any information that is presented in a persuasion context as having implications consistent with the persuasion goal. Thus, it is not only prior knowledge that makes recipients infer the desired conclusion from the presented information, but paradoxically the knowledge of the desired conclusion may turn the presented information into a compelling argument. Having introduced our position first, the following empirical evidence should therefore be interpreted as supporting our point.

*Evidence that ambiguous information is interpreted consistent to persuasion goals.*

The first hypothesis that can be derived from our assumptions is that ambiguous information should be interpreted consistent with the persuasion goal. Before we turn specifically to the

context of persuasion, it should be noted that there is ample evidence from other communication contexts that recipients of ambiguous information behave cooperatively. That is they assume that the information is related to the general communication context and interpret it in this manner. For example, survey respondents report attitudes towards fictitious or highly ambiguous issues such as the Metallic Trade Act or an educational contribution (Bishop, Tuchfarber & Oldendick, 1980,; Strack, Schwarz & Wänke, 1993). Moreover and more relevantly, they do not pick their answers at random but seem to interpret the issues as if they assumed that the context in which the question were presented gave a relevant frame to its meaning. For example, respondents welcomed the introduction of an educational contribution when this question followed questions on student stipends, but they opposed it when the question appeared in the context of tuition fees. Thus, the notion that people give meaning to presented information although they have no prior knowledge about is not unreasonable.

Most of our studies were conducted in a marketing context because marketing provides an obvious persuasion context where the recipients know without any doubt the goal of the presented information. Applied to marketing our assumption of the persuasion paradox would imply that consumers may not prefer brands because the brands offer the ideal features but that, vice versa, consumers will start to favor particular features because they are advertised. For example, consumers may not prefer food brands that are low in sodium because they believe sodium is healthy but because they believe that whatever is highlighted to differentiate this brand from others must provide a benefit. If so however, imagine an advertising claim “contains more sodium than any other brand” or “sodium-enriched”. Our assumption would predict that brands with either claim are preferred to non-distinct brands.

To test this assumption participants of an Internet study were shown pictures of brands. In one condition the packaging claimed a particular attribute (e.g. a body lotion “with Recitine”), and in the other condition its absence (“without Recitine”). Altogether brands

from four product categories were presented (body lotion, energy drink, yoghurt, condoms). Participants rated the attributes on a number of dimensions specific to the respective product category (e.g. Recitine nourishes skin; etc.). For each brand a summary score of all dimensions was computed which reflects the favorable evaluation of the attribute. Over all four product categories an ingredient was rated significantly more favorable when the brand claimed its presence rather than its absence. It seems that participants inferred that if the attribute is advertised it must have a benefit and if its absence is claimed the attribute must be harmful. It may sound cynical to suggest that claiming the absence of fictitious ingredients may provide a cheap marketing strategy. It is nevertheless an example how the truth can be misleading.

Examples from real life are not so far fetched even though we used fictitious attributes. The issue here is not that consumers made sense of fictitious information but by using fictitious information we could make sure that participants had no prior knowledge and had to rely on their pragmatic inferences. But note that in marketing it is not uncommon that the advertised features are meaningless to many consumers. A sample of real package claims contains such attributes as sophorin in face cream, bisabolol in body lotion, or catachines in tea. Moreover, even if attributes are familiar their benefit may nevertheless be obscure (e.g. caffeine in hair shampoo). A real example may further illustrate this point. One of the authors recently saw a jewelry catalogue of a mid-priced department store. The descriptions of the advertised pieces contained information about alloy and caratage and the noteworthy statement that all diamonds contained inclusions. For consumers who know that inclusions represent lower value in diamonds the statement is important information for adequately evaluating the quality and price of the jewelry. However, consumers who are less familiar with diamonds and have no prior associations may perhaps interpret inclusions as an added benefit (as in amber) merely because they are used that product ads highlight favorable information and not unfavorable information.



Our first study provided evidence that ambiguous information is interpreted favorably when presented in a marketing context. Further studies with various design variations tested whether merely communicating ambiguous attributes also led to more positive attitudes and behavior in addition to favorable inferences (Wänke, Reutner & Friese, 2008). Participants of one study were again shown brands with claims about fictitious attributes. For one condition the presence of the attribute was claimed (e.g. with Recitine), for another the absence (e.g. without Recitine) and for a control condition no claim was made. Supporting the fact that any marketing claim, whether it's the presence or absence of an attribute, can be perceived as indicating product superiority, consumers were willing to pay significantly more money when either the absence or presence of an attribute was claimed compared with a control condition. Thus, claiming for example "with Recitine" pushed sales prices as much as the claim "without Recitine". Apparently giving any information pays for marketers.

In another study, mainly non-fictitious attributes were used (e.g. detergent in form of gel, white tea extract in face powder). Pretesting had shown however, that these attributes were not rated particularly favorably per se. Nevertheless, replicating our main hypotheses, consumers reported more favorable attitudes, higher purchase interest and willingness to pay when the ad claimed such an attribute relative to a control group. Crucial to our assumption these effects were stronger for ad recipients who were high in Need for Cognition. Thus it is not merely that more information is more persuasive as would be expected for recipients who do not elaborately process the presented information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) but that recipients actively try to make sense of the information and thereby arrive at a favorable inference.

These first studies provide support that in a marketing context recipients of product information interpret ambiguous information favorably. Our full argument is, however, that such a pragmatic inference is due to a perceived persuasion goal and a cooperative interpretation. Ads and product packages are examples of communication with an obvious

goal. Thus, we could well assume that our participants were aware of the persuasion goal. To further test our assumption, however, we varied the perception of the persuasion context.

*The role of the perceived persuasion goal.*

Ambiguous information can only be interpreted as support for the persuasion goal if such a goal is perceived. A product attribute should be interpreted as a benefit of that brand mainly when it is *highlighted* by the marketer but not when communicated in a less blatant way, for example in small print at the back of the package. Likewise a product attribute should be interpreted as a benefit of that brand mainly when it is highlighted by the *marketer* but not when communicated by a neutral source. Several studies tested these hypotheses (Wänke et al., 2009).

In contrast to the previous studies we used nutritional information, more precisely the content of specific ingredients in food products, such as salt, fat sugar, vitamins etc, as ambiguous product attributes. Although everybody knows about the implications of these nutrients consumers are less educated regarding the respective amounts. Are 5 grams of salt in a package of potato chips a high or a low amount? Are 3 grams of sugar in a bottle of tomato ketchup relatively healthy or unhealthy? Again we assumed that consumers who do not possess adequate knowledge regarding what represents a high or low amount would use the way it is communicated as a cue. If advertised boldly, in terms of a persuasion claim, an attribute should be likely to represent a benefit or an advantage over competitors. However, the same information will not benefit from the pragmatic interpretation if not perceived as meant to persuade. Indeed, consumers considered the same amount of salt sugar and fat as relatively lower when emphasized in ad compared to when same info was given in small print at the back of the package. Moreover, they evaluated the amount as more favorable and the brand as healthier compared to competitors. Apparently, it was not the amount of salt, fat or sugar that produced this impression but the fact that the marketer advertised the amount in

bold letters in the ad as if it were a differentiating advantage compared to competitors. Being presented less ostentatiously on the back of the package among other ingredients the same amount is not perceived as intended to persuade but likely as required by regulations.

Similarly, when the amount of nutrients was communicated by a neutral source, in this case the European Union food commission, rather than the marketer the information had a less positive impact. We would also expect that when the same information is pointed out by a competitor rather than the persuader or a neutral source it may even be interpreted as a lack of quality.

The results that the same information affects attitudes positively if recipients presume that the information is presented with the goal to induce positive attitudes compared to no such persuasion goal supports the assumption of pragmatic persuasion. Additional support regarding the role of the perceived persuasion goal comes from another study. Our assumption also predicts that consumers should not infer just any benefit from presented information but only benefits potentially relevant to consumers. They would assume that the ad or package claims are directed at *them* in order to persuade *them* and hence any information should imply benefits for *them*. For example, consumers care whether the attributes of a fabric softener make their towels fluffier and better smelling. They would not care, however, if the attribute enables an easier filling process at the plant or allows shipment in larger quantities. Given that package claims are obviously directed at consumers and not at retailers, producers and distributors, implications of these claims should be persuasive to consumers and provide benefits to consumers. Advertising benefits relevant to other agents but irrelevant to consumers would violate the norm of relevance. To test this notion, participants saw products featuring claims for the presence or absence of a fictitious attribute. Replicating our earlier studies they rated the attribute on several product relevant dimensions more favorably if a product claimed its presence compared to claiming its absence. However, all these dimensions were relevant to consumers of the product. In addition, consumers also

rated the attribute on dimensions introduced as technical dimensions, which were relevant for producers, distributors or retailers. On these dimensions no difference between claiming the presence or absence of an attribute was obtained. As had been expected according to conversational norms, recipients seem to infer benefits relevant to the target of the communication and not just any benefit.

*When awareness of the persuasion goal may backfire*

The view that awareness of a persuasive intention does not hinder but facilitate persuasion may be surprising or even hard to believe. Intuitively one might assume that knowing or suspecting that a conversation partner aims to persuade one of something would rather elicit caution and bolster resistance. Indeed, a meta-analysis showed that forewarned message recipients were less persuaded than non-forewarned recipients (Wood & Quinn, 2003). In contrast, we predict increased persuasion. This raises the question when the awareness of a persuasion goal fosters persuasion and when does it undermine persuasion? Although we have no empirical evidence yet, we may nevertheless speculate about some differences in the research paradigms, which perhaps may moderate the impact of being aware of a persuasion goal.

What the research we presented so far ignored is whether recipients believed the presented information in the first place. We assumed that consumers by and large believe objectively verifiable marketing claims (e.g. 5g salt). They know that in competitive markets lies about objectively verifiable claims would be easily detected and denounced by competitors, consumer organizations or the media. Although they are rather skeptical about advertising this applies more to experience attributes (e.g. taste), which are subjective in nature, and credence attributes (e.g. reliability), which require a long-term usage, than to objectively verifiable search attributes (Ford, Smith & Swasy, 1990). In other words, the claim “brand A orange juice contains 20 mg Vitamin C” raises less suspicion than the claim

“brand A orange juice is healthy”. In our studies only such objectively easily verifiable attributes were claimed and we have no reason to believe that the truth of the stated claim was doubted. However, in persuasion contexts where trusting the presented information is an issue, awareness that the information is presented in order to persuade may possibly raise suspicions about its accuracy. We will later report a study that further supports this notion.

Related to their objective and factual nature the claims we presented did not appear particularly manipulative – although the persuasion intention was clear. Recognizing a persuasive intention is a prerequisite for pragmatic persuasion, as explained before, but feeling manipulated may produce reactance (Brehm, 1968). Perhaps supportive evidence for the importance that persuasive information is not perceived as manipulative comes from a third condition of a study mentioned before. As described we had found that consumers rated food products as more favorable if nutrients were communicated as a marketing claim in the ad (or on the package) compared to the same information communicated by the European Union food commission. In a third condition the information was also presented as a marketing claim in the ad but in a less factual form. For example, rather than advertising 5g of salt (factual marketing claim condition) the ad claimed “only 5g of salt”. These claims led to significantly inferior product ratings than the factual marketing claims and had no advantage over a neutral source. To follow that up a new study again presented food ads with manipulative claims (e.g. “only”) in one condition and the European Union as neutral source in another condition. In addition skepticism towards advertising (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) was assessed and consumers were classified according to a median split. Consumers who were low in skepticism towards advertising rated the products more favorable when the information was presented as a marketing claim despite the fact that the claim sounded somewhat manipulative. However, consumers who were high in skepticism towards advertising were rather negatively affected by the manipulative claims. In combination these two studies suggest that whereas fact-like marketing claims are interpreted as implicating

product benefits, claims that may be perceived as more manipulative elicit negative reactions, at least among more distrusting persuasion targets.

### *Testing the limits*

As we elaborated before, how presented information is understood depends both on a priori knowledge and on the pragmatic inference that if communicated as part of a persuasive communication the information must be relevant and therefore imply support for the persuasion goal. The assumption that the pragmatic inference is particularly relevant when no a priori knowledge exists made us study attributes whose implications were ambiguous either because they were fictitious or because receivers lacked the knowledge to interpret their meaning. However, even in case of familiar attributes their implications may be ambiguous. Attributes rarely imply only positive or only negative consequences. What seems positive on first glance may entail also shortcomings and what seems negative may nevertheless involve a few benefits as well. For example, a camera that is easy to use may not prove very versatile or allow for complex applications and vice versa, or an epilator that promises pain free hair removal may not be very efficient in removing the hair by its roots.

In particular with increasing knowledge and expertise persuasion targets may see the hidden advantages and drawbacks. Whether they infer the less obvious and evaluatively opposite implication depends on the strength of the association and the amount of processing they invest. It seems plausible to assume that they would be inclined to think more elaborately about a piece of information if its surface implication disagrees with the intended purpose of the communication. A politician listing reasons not to vote for her or an ad praising the superior performance of the competitor clash with recipients' expectations and may therefore instigate further processing. Clearly, the politician cannot mean that nor could the ad, and recipients will search for the persuasion-consistent implication of the seemingly inconsistent

information. If so, even information that at surface seems unambiguously negative may induce positive attitude shifts and vice versa.

Supporting evidence that pragmatic persuasion may go beyond interpreting ambiguous information comes from research on two-sided messages. Advertising research has shown that unfavorable information may particularly enhance the product appeal compared to one-sided messages if the unfavorable information supports the implications of the favorable one (Pechmann, 1992; Bohner, Einwiller, Erb & Siebler, 2003). For example, when ice cream was advertised as creamy *and* high in calories it was liked better than merely described as creamy or when a negative feature was advertised that was unrelated to the positive claim of creaminess. Apparently consumers knew that the creamier ice cream is the more calories it contains and therefore concluded that if it is high in calories it is also likely to be creamy. Possibly, ad recipients' expectation that whatever is conveyed in an ad should be persuasive contributes to the effectiveness of two-sided ads. Assuming that ad information is meant to increase the appeal of the product, ad recipients may be particularly prone to interpret negative product information positively. If the unfavorable product information was encountered in a different context where recipients expect a different communication purpose, for example in a consumer report, the unfavorable information may decrease a product's attractiveness.

To test this hypothesis we presented an ad for ice cream that either advertised the ice cream's creaminess or its high calorie content. In another condition the same information (creaminess or high in calories) came not from the advertiser but from a consumer web site where consumers described their experience with products. We expected that recipients should be more likely to infer benefits from unfavorable information presented in ads compared to a neutral source as they expected persuasion in favor of the ice cream in the former case but not in the latter. The significant results confirmed these expectations. Participants expected the ice cream to be creamier when the information about many calories

came from the advertiser compared to when it came from a neutral source. It should be mentioned that the reverse was true for communicating favorable information. When told that the ice cream was creamy participants believed a neutral source more than the ad. As discussed before the claim of creaminess represents an experience attribute, which is likely to be mistrusted. In sum, it seems that consumers distrust ad claims because they know that the ad wants to influence them but for the same reason they not only trust disclaimers but also infer persuasion consistent information.

### *How does the pragmatic persuasion perspective fit into social psychology*

Altogether there is abundant evidence that persuasion targets interpret presented information as potentially supporting the persuaders goal. In turn, ambiguous information can become persuasive just because it is perceived as intended to persuade. Even negative information can then lead to positive inferences. The crucial variable determining whether information is persuasive is not its a priori implications but why recipients believe the information was communicated. Based on conversational logic, which states that presented information serves the purpose of the communication (Grice, 1975), presented information is pragmatically interpreted as potentially persuasive merely because its presumed purpose is persuasion.

The pragmatic persuasion perspective is certainly reminiscent of another well-known phenomena in communication. As everyone knows and as it has also been shown empirically, context determines the meaning of statements. A “little rebellion” is interpreted differently when ascribed to Jefferson as opposed to Lenin (Lorge, 1936; Asch, 1948). Knowing the speaker’s mind-set listeners may conjure up an image of what he or she had in mind. Likewise in persuasion, knowing that the speaker tries to persuade one towards a particular direction lends meaning to what he or she says. The difference between the two perspectives is that the latter focuses more on the presumed goals of the communication rather than on the



speaker's background. By doing so, the pragmatic persuasion perspective perceives of persuasion as social communication, in which both partners do their share to create an understanding. The active role of the persuasion target goes beyond elaborating the presented arguments or making inferences from cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken, 1987) but starts with interpreting the presented information. As in most other forms of communication, one cue for decoding and interpreting information is to determine the communicator's communicative purpose (McCann & Higgins, 1992). In essence, our perspective of persuasion as a communication game emphasizes the social processes involved in persuasion beyond the cognitive ones.

The persuasion game can become rather complicated. In a mass media setting, as advertising, consumers use their knowledge about what most consumers would probably want from a product. In our studies, 5 grams of salt was only inferred to be a small amount because recipients assumed that other consumers want low salt products and therefore advertising the salt content would have to imply a low amount. In a world of presumed salt lovers, they would have arrived at the conclusion that 5 grams of salt must signal a high content otherwise one would not advertise it. That is, consumers must let go of their own preferences in decoding the claim but use the presumed preference of a wider audience for interpreting what is meant. In personal interactions this game may get even more complicated as recipients base their interpretation on what they believe the persuader assumes of them and what they would find persuasive. The complexities, in particular in iterative exchanges, may give rise to misunderstandings and unsuccessful persuasion but also to finely tuned interpersonal communication.

What is perhaps more surprising than that persuasion targets infer meaning of presented information from the persuasion context is, that they are indeed persuaded by that information. Note that this does not necessarily follow from the pragmatic persuasion perspective. Obviously, a recipient may infer an intended benefit but may dismiss it as

unimportant. However, although inferring potential persuasiveness does not necessarily imply being persuaded in many applied settings it may suffice. Marketing, as we demonstrated, may be one such sphere. In that, our perspective parallels findings from the realm of the persuasion knowledge model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kirmani & Campbell, 2009), which points out that consumers' persuasion knowledge is critical to how consumers make sense of and respond to marketing efforts. Persuasion knowledge consists of theories and beliefs about how persuasion agents attempt to persuade, including beliefs about marketers' motives, strategies and tactics. Like the pragmatic persuasion perspective the PKM examines a persuasion attempt from the target's point of view, and the target's perception that something is an attempt to persuade is central to the theory. Likewise, consumers make inferences, which turn out to persuade them. For example, when consumers believe that marketers are expending a lot of effort trying to persuade them, they infer that the marketer must have a good (high quality) product (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Kirmani, 1990; Kirmani & Wright, 1989) and this inference increases their evaluations and willingness to pay (Morales, 2005) (for a review see Kirmani & Campbell, 2009). In the light of the literature on forewarning, the findings that knowing the persuasive intent does actually foster rather than undermine persuasion seems surprising. As suggested above, the distinction between persuasive and manipulative may be a fine line. Similarly, research on the PKM found that while consumers valued if a marketer put effort in persuading them they resented if they perceive *too much* effort (Kirmani, 1997).

### *Conclusion*

The aim of the present chapter was to extend the present mainly cognitive approaches to persuasion by placing persuasion within the realm of social communication. Doing so created new research hypotheses, some of which were already tested and supported, others, which were only suggested. We hope that the pragmatic persuasion perspective will develop and instigate further research. In particular it seems worthwhile to extend applications beyond the

domain of marketing. But in whichever direction future research will develop we believe that a look at persuasion from the perspective of social communication is perhaps overdue in social psychology and will prove fruitful.

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