The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts

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In theories and studies of persuasion, people's personal knowledge about persuasion agents' goals and tactics, and about how to skillfully cope with these, has been ignored. We present a model of how people develop and use persuasion knowledge to cope with persuasion attempts. We discuss what the model implies about how consumers use marketers' advertising and selling attempts to refine their product attitudes and attitudes toward the marketers themselves. We also explain how this model relates to prior research on consumer behavior and persuasion and what it suggests about the future conduct of consumer research.

One of a consumer's primary tasks is to interpret and cope with marketers' sales presentations and advertising. Over time consumers develop personal knowledge about the tactics used in these persuasion attempts. This knowledge helps them identify how, when, and why marketers try to influence them. It also helps them adaptively respond to these persuasion attempts so as to achieve their own goals. Although current theories of persuasion have neglected people's persuasion knowledge, we believe it is unrealistic to assume such knowledge is inactive or inconsequential during persuasion episodes. Our goal is to present a model of how people's persuasion knowledge influences their responses to persuasion attempts. We call this the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). Wright (1985) discussed this topic informally, referring to persuasion knowledge as a "schemer schema." Here, we discuss in depth the nature and development of persuasion knowledge and how people use it to interpret, evaluate, and respond to influence attempts from advertisers and salespeople. In doing so, we offer a broadened conceptualization of persuasion that emphasizes a consumer's capacity to learn about persuasion over time, including how to manage their own psychological activities in persuasion episodes.

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The Persuasion Knowledge Model presumes that people's persuasion knowledge is developmentally contingent. Within individuals, it continues developing throughout the life span. It is also, to some degree, historically contingent. The culturally supplied folk wisdom on persuasion changes over time, so that each generation's and culture's thinking may differ somewhat from that of past generations and other cultures. People learn about persuasion in many ways: from firsthand experiences in social interactions with friends, family, and co-workers; from conversations about how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can be influenced; from observing marketers and other known persuasion agents; and from commentary on advertising and marketing tactics in the news media. As a consequence of this learning, over time the effects of certain actions by persuasion agents (e.g., advertisers, salespeople) on people's attitudes and behavior will also change, because people's persuasion knowledge shapes how they respond as persuasion targets. Some number of empirical findings on persuasion effects will, therefore, have a "that was then and there; this is here and now" character to them. A complete theory of persuasion must explain how people develop persuasion knowledge, how persuasion knowledge is used in various types of persuasion episodes, and how changes in that knowledge alter what occurs. Our goal in this article is to begin the construction of such a theory of persuasion.

The persuasion theories or models that have influenced consumer research provide no explicit role for audience members' persuasion knowledge (Anderson 1981; Chaiken 1987; Fishbein and Azjen 1981; Greenwald 1968; Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953; Kisielius and Sternthal 1984; McGuire 1969a; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Attribution theory accounts of persuasion have offered partial insight into consumers' capacities

to interpret advertisers' and salespeople's behaviors (e.g., Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken 1981; Folkes 1988; Settle and Golden 1974; Smith and Hunt 1978; Sparkman and Locander 1980). In addition, people's persuasion expertise is not among the audience characteristics studied as moderators of persuasion effects, and we found no instances in which researchers studying specific message tactics (e.g., fear arousal) treated subject differences in knowledge about the tactic as a manipulated or measured variable. Nor have surveys of public attitudes toward advertising probed consumers' beliefs about the psychology of advertising (e.g., Bartos and Dunn 1976; Bauer and Greyser 1968; Dyer and Shimp 1980; Moore and Moschis 1978; Reid and Soley 1982). Finally, in bodies of research on persuasion in the context of bargaining and negotiation (e.g., Angelmar and Stern 1978; Balakrishnan, Patton, and Lewis 1993; Bazerman and Carroll 1987; Perdue and Summers 1991; Schurr and Ozanne 1985; Thompson 1990), or political expertise (Fiske, Lau, and Smith 1990; Krosnick 1990; McGraw and Pinney 1990), there has been little theoretical analysis of people's persuasion knowledge.

Theorizing about persuasion knowledge seems relevant to a number of research domains that interest consumer researchers. We will first describe the PKM, how persuasion knowledge develops, and how people use that knowledge to refine their attitudes toward products and marketers. After laying this foundation, we will relate the PKM to past consumer research and explain the model's implications for the conduct of future research on persuasion and consumer behavior.

It is also the case that the persuasion knowledge held by marketers, advertisers, and salespeople guides their design and delivery of persuasion attempts. However, in this article we will focus almost entirely on explaining how consumers develop and use persuasion knowledge because understanding this is itself a complex task. Although we have limited our discussion in this way, we believe that the conceptualizations we present give direction for an integrated theory of the knowledge and behavior of both consumers and marketers, a topic we return to in the closing section.

THE PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE MODEL

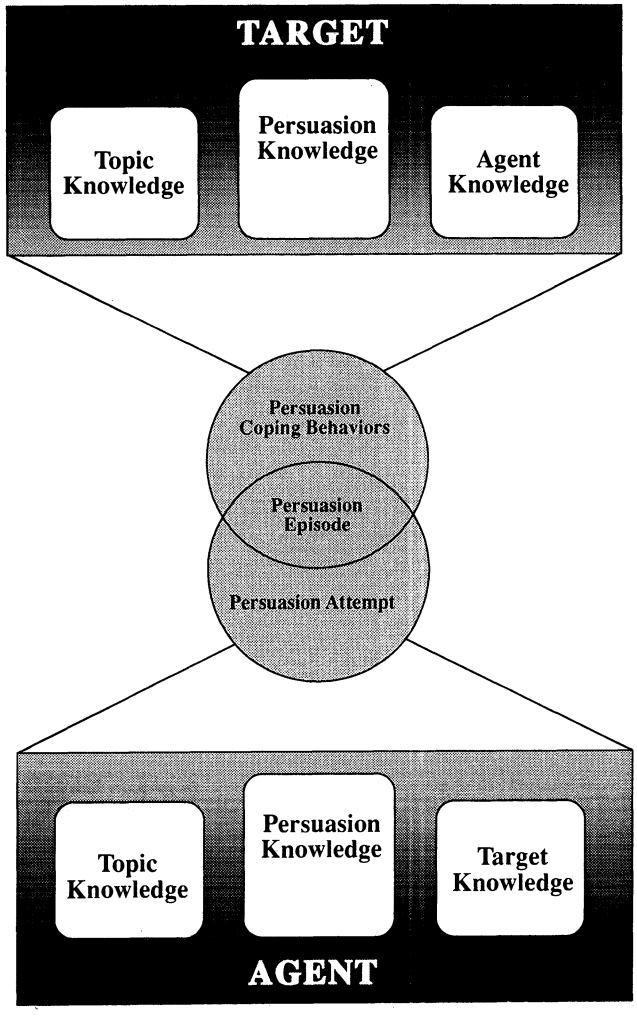
Overview and Terminology

We intend the model depicted in Figure 1 to have broad application across a variety of persuasion contexts and to encourage researchers to revise their conceptions of persuasion. Accordingly, we first present a conceptualization of persuasion that depicts the phenomenon from the points of view of both parties to the interaction and that uses several terms not commonly found in prior research on persuasion or consumer behavior.

First, we use the term "targets" to refer to those people for whom a persuasion attempt is intended (e.g., consumers, voters). Second, we use "agent" to represent whomever a target identifies as being responsible for designing and constructing a persuasion attempt (e.g., the company responsible for an advertising campaign; an individual salesperson). Third, we use persuasion "attempt" (rather than ad, sales presentation, or message) to describe a target's perception of an agent's strategic behavior in presenting information designed to influence someone's beliefs, attitudes, decisions, or actions (the bottom circle in Fig. 1). This strategic behavior is not limited to what the agent defines as "the message" (although this perspective dominates persuasion research), but includes the target's perceptions of how and why the agent has designed, constructed, and delivered the observable message(s). From a consumer's perspective, the directly observable part of an agent's behavior is defined in our model as a "persuasion episode." Accordingly, targets can perceive of a persuasion

FIGURE 1

THE PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE MODEL



attempt as including any and all message deliveries by the agent on the same topic, and it may encompass a single ad or sales/service encounter, or multiple episodes in an orchestrated series of ads or presentations from the same agent (e.g., a pool of TV ads, a multimedia ad campaign, a salesperson's extended "relationship" marketing campaign).

To capture what targets try to do in response to a persuasion attempt, we use the term "cope" (i.e., to contend or strive, especially on even terms or with success). This term implies resourceful participants who pursue their own goals and have the ability to select response tactics from their own repertoire, akin to the way agents select persuasion tactics. The term "cope" is neutral with respect to the direction of targets' responses. In particular, we do not assume that people invariably or even typically use their persuasion knowledge to resist a persuasion attempt. Rather, their overriding goal is simply to maintain control over the outcome(s) and thereby achieve whatever mix of goals is salient to them. To a target, "persuasion coping behavior" encompasses not only their cognitive and physical actions during any one persuasion episode, but also any thinking they do about an agent's persuasion behavior in anticipation of a persuasion attempt, as well as between and after episodes in a campaign. Conceptualizing coping behavior this way makes clear that consumers' knowledge-based expectations about persuasion attempts (Goodstein 1993) and memories about the features of persuasion attempts (Friestad and Thorson 1993; Schmidt and Sherman 1984) are an important resource to them.

To illustrate further the generality of the conceptual framework in Figure 1, note that it can serve to represent a single individual's construal of persuasion as a phenomenon, not just the respective perspectives of two different people. For example, in daily life, an individual moves back and forth between the roles of target and agent. As one's role shifts, one's perspective shifts, but one's understanding of both roles is retained. Finally, sometimes a person will shift roles and perspectives within the course of an interaction, for example, when a consumer tries to bargain or negotiate, or attempts to induce a salesperson to change their selling tactics, or in any other way seeks to influence a marketer's behavior. Therefore, the conceptual framework can be applied to research on bargaining and counterpersuasion as well, although we do not deal with those contexts in this article.

Fundamental Assumptions about the Use of Persuasion Knowledge

In discussing the Persuasion Knowledge Model as it applies to consumers' coping behaviors, we focus on how three knowledge structures interact to shape and determine the outcomes of persuasion attempts (see Fig. 1). These are (1) persuasion knowledge; (2) agent knowledge, which consists of beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent (e.g., an advertiser, a salesperson); and (3) topic knowledge, which consists of beliefs about the topic of the message (e.g., a product, service, social cause, or candidate).

Consumers' persuasion coping knowledge enables them to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember persuasion attempts and to select and execute coping tactics believed to be effective and appropriate. Persuasion knowledge performs schemalike functions, such as guiding consumers' attention to aspects of an advertising campaign or sales presentation, providing inferences about possible background conditions that caused the agent to construct the attempt in that way, generating predictions about the attempt's likely effects on people, and evaluating its overall competence. Further, persuasion coping knowledge directs one's attention to one's own response goals and response options, supplies situational information relevant to selecting response tactics, predicts which tactics will best achieve one's goal(s), evaluates the adequacy of one's coping attempt, and retains useful information about how one interpreted and coped with this particular persuasion attempt.

In everyday life, people often move rapidly and fluently between the roles of target and agent. Their persuasion knowledge supports this flexibility by providing them with the resources necessary to do the basic tasks of persuasion coping and persuasion production. There is presumably a fairly close connection, therefore, between people's coping knowledge and what they know that helps them plan, construct, and execute their own influence attempts. Hence, the knowledge a consumer has available for persuasion coping purposes includes what they believe about how to persuade others and what they believe is generally known by others about how to persuade.

Once we appreciate the many functions that persuasion knowledge performs, its value and scope become apparent. It is a resource to which people must have immediate access during any interaction in which the need may arise to recognize and manage, or to construct and deliver, a persuasion attempt. In short, for consumers it is a necessary resource in virtually all interactions with marketers. Consequently, we assume that people access persuasion knowledge, at least partially, whenever they want to understand what is going on as they observe advertisements, sales presentations, or the behaviors of service providers. Indeed, the simple judgment as to whether what they observe is, or is not, part of a persuasion attempt comes from accessing persuasion knowledge.

It is important to realize that consumers may access persuasion knowledge for reasons other than its value to them in evaluating claims about a product or service. As we will discuss in a later section, they often access it because they are interested in judging what the agent is like. Also, they may access it simply because they find

it interesting to think about why ads and sales presentations are constructed as they are, that is, out of interest in the general topic of persuasion or marketing.

In addition to activating persuasion knowledge, consumers will also activate agent knowledge and topic knowledge, at some level, when they observe or interact with marketers. Each of these three knowledge structures is potentially useful, if only to comprehend what is going on. Of course, a consumer's allocation of mental resources devoted to each of the three knowledge structures (persuasion, topic, agent) will vary across different persuasion episodes. This will be influenced by how well developed each body of knowledge is (e.g., a person may know a lot about some advertisers or products, and little about others), by the target's situational goals and information-processing opportunities, and by other factors that affect the use of any knowledge system (see Batra and Ray [1986], Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly [1989], Goodstein [1993], and Petty and Cacioppo [1986] for discussions of this in a persuasion context; see Bargh [1989], Cohen and Basu [1987], Fiske and Neuberg [1990], and Newman and Uleman [1989] for more general discussions).

Further, we assume that the degree to which people access their persuasion knowledge may shift over the course of a particular persuasion episode. For example, someone watching a seemingly familiar sort of television ad may initially pay little heed to persuasion knowledge but then increase his/her use of it upon noting something unpredicted in the ad's format. A consumer's use of persuasion knowledge may also shift over the course of observing a marketer's campaign. For example, someone may draw mainly on product-category knowledge during initial exposures to a campaign for a new product, then increase his/her use of persuasion knowledge as s/he is repeatedly exposed to the same or similar messages.

The Content and Structure of Persuasion Knowledge

To do the persuasion-related tasks of everyday life, people require knowledge about the goals and actions of persuasion agents and about the possible goals they themselves might have and the actions they can take to cope with persuasion attempts. Further, persuasion knowledge will contain causal-explanatory beliefs about the psychological states and processes thought to mediate the effect of one person's persuasion attempts on another person's ultimate actions. In fact, we believe that both an individual consumer's persuasion knowledge and the widely shared folk model of persuasion in a culture will resemble what Kelley (1983) called "perceived causal structures." He defined these as "a temporally ordered network of interconnected causes and effects" (p. 333).

Beliefs about Psychological Mediators. People's beliefs about the important psychological activities that agents might try to influence are a central element in persuasion knowledge. What these perceived mediators might be remains to be discovered. Language analyses reveal six general types of internal states or processes represented in everyday English discourse (D'Andrade 1987; Searle 1975; Vendler 1972): perceptions, beliefs, feelings, desires, intentions, and resolutions. Other psychological activities referenced in early writings on the psychology of advertising and selling included attention, interest, belief, desire, remembering, confidence, conviction, and judgment (Hall 1915; Kitson 1921; Sheldon 1911; Starch 1923; Strong 1925; St. Elmo Lewis 1898, cited in Strong 1925). Later persuasion process models proposed by psychologists, consumer researchers, and marketing professionals have cited these and a number of other activities or states familiar to lay people, for example, attitudes, associations, emotions, imagery, reasoning, categorizing. Presumably, therefore, the psychological events that are thought of as mediators (i.e., internal causes) in consumers' conceptions of persuasion will include some of the events referenced in everyday psychological language and cited in writings on persuasion, advertising, and selling by persuasion professionals and researchers.

Beliefs about Marketers' Tactics. In our model, we presume that an observable feature (or pattern of features) of a persuasion attempt takes on meaning to people as a persuasion tactic only if they perceive a possible causal connection between it and a psychological activity they believe mediates persuasion. For example, if someone perceives that attention, emotion, or trust are mediators, then the inclusion of a celebrity endorser in an ad becomes meaningful as a perceived persuasion tactic only when that person comes to believe that the celebrity's presence might foreseeably influence those responses. Persuasion tactics are therefore perceived as "agent action-psychological event" connections. We see evidence of this in everyday descriptions of tactics that reference a psychological mediator, for example, an attention-getting tactic, a scare tactic, a tactic to stir curiosity or to make people like the product. The features or feature patterns people come to think of as representing agent tactics may include holistic message themes or structures, specific message elements, or abstract configurations of message elements. For example, the range of things someone comes to think of as advertising tactics could include such things as appeals to nostalgia or to family values, telling a story, using cartoon characters or well-liked music, claiming scarcity of the advertised product, or comparing two brands.

Beliefs about One's Own Coping Tactics. Consumers will conceive of coping tactics as the same sort of "action-psychological event" configuration. As targets, they will develop beliefs about the cognitive, emotional, or physical actions they can execute to manage a persuasion attempt's effects on them. First, they will develop beliefs about the extent to which they can con-

trol the various internal activities they perceive of as mediators of persuasion. They might come to perceive, for example, that their emotional reactions are more strongly influenced by things shown or said in ads than by their own mental activities. In contrast, they may come to believe that they have greater capacity to manage their own attention, the things they imagine, or their own reasoning about product benefits. This is consistent with research suggesting that people's everyday causal explanations reflect beliefs about which events are self-caused (Meyer 1980; Weiner 1986; Wimer and Kelley 1982). It is also consistent with the view that people who process persuasive messages develop beliefs about which of their thoughts are self-generated and which are message-originated (Greenwald 1968; Shavitt and Brock 1986; Wright 1973).

Presumably, therefore, a person's beliefs about possible coping tactics will reflect what they believe about which psychological activities they can readily control and what they believe about how doing one type of activity will influence, and thereby manage, another. For example, someone might come to believe that, by letting their imagination soar, they can disengage and reengage themselves during a persuasion attempt. Other examples of coping tactics some people may develop include simply ignoring certain persuasion tactics that they notice, selectively discounting the part of a message in which particular tactics are used (e.g., "the celebrity is just a tactic, ignore what he says"), or focusing one's resources on balanced elaboration of the agent's message content (some support arguing, some counterarguing).

Coping tactics may also pertain to the way in which someone schedules their mental activities. People may learn to schedule different types of activities such that they can accomplish each one without straining their cognitive capacities. For example, someone might develop a coping tactic of deferring their use of persuasion knowledge until a persuasion attempt is ending or completed, to allow the undistracted use of their agent and topic knowledge early on and to enable them to fully appreciate the persuasion attempt before they interpret it.

Beliefs about the Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Marketers' Tactics. People will hold beliefs about the nature of the causal relations between an agent's actions, the psychological effects those actions produce in targets, and subsequent behavioral outcomes. For example, they will have ideas about the ease with which agents can produce particular types of psychological effects by using specific behaviors (e.g., showing babies usually makes people emotional) and about how strongly such effects, if produced, influence behavioral responses (e.g., making people emotional does not have a very strong effect on whether they buy the product). Effectiveness beliefs like these may be unconditional so that some tactics simply are thought of as "powerful," or people may have conditional beliefs such as, "making people emotional is primarily effective for luxury goods." Similarly, people will develop beliefs about the appropriateness (e.g., fairness, manipulativeness) of specific types of persuasive tactics. Such beliefs may also be conditional in that the appropriateness of an agent's actions is judged within the context of the topic and/or expected target audience (e.g., using a fear appeal to sell ice cream or in ads directed to children).

Beliefs about Marketers' Persuasion Goals and One's Own Coping Goals. Consumers will develop beliefs about the possible end goals of marketers and parallel beliefs about the possible end goals they themselves can pursue in their coping activities. We presume that an overriding goal consumers identify for themselves is "effectiveness in persuasion coping." This is conceived of broadly as the goal of producing in oneself, as effectively as possible, whatever psychological activities or physical acts achieve one's own current learning, attitudinal, or other goals (independent of what the agent seems to be trying to accomplish). This is a goal of self-control and competency, not of single-minded resistance to influence attempts. Similarly, we presume that consumers understand that a paramount goal of salespeople and advertisers is to produce a persuasion attempt that is as effective as possible at influencing attitudes and beliefs about the product or service that is the topic of the message.

In addition, consumers may have insights about a variety of other goals that marketers can pursue in their persuasion attempts. Drawing on interpersonal communication research on people's perceptions of influence goals (e.g., Clark and Delia 1976; Dillard 1990; Higgins, McCann, and Fondacaro 1982) we propose that consumers may perceive that marketers can pursue the following goals in advertising and selling campaigns: (*a*) managing the long-term consumer-marketer relationship beyond the immediate persuasion episode and topic; (*b*) influencing beliefs about particular traits of the marketer; (*c*) managing third party impressions (e.g., what regulators, rival companies, or unintended audience segments think); (*d*) managing the marketer's investment of effort, money, and time in the persuasion attempt; (*e*) managing self-image (e.g., reflecting in the campaign the moral standards a marketer views as essential to their individual identity or corporate culture); (*f*) managing consumers' self-images (e.g., displaying whatever level of respect they believe consumers want); and (*g*) managing their own experiential benefits from the attempt (e.g., satisfying personal or creative needs in constructing an ad campaign or during customer interactions).

We presume that consumers develop parallel beliefs about the goals they themselves might choose to pursue in coping with a persuasion attempt. They then select the particular goal(s) from this set toward which they will direct their immediate coping activities. In addition

to realizing that they may seek to form a valid attitude about the product or service the agent is discussing, consumers may pursue one or more of the following goals in coping with ads or sales attempts: (*a*) managing their long-term relationship with the marketer beyond the immediate persuasion episode or topic (e.g., by evaluating the marketer's persuasion behavior in order to refine their attitude toward that marketer and/or their future relationship with that marketer), (*b*) upgrading their general understanding of advertising and selling tactics (e.g., by reflecting on the tactics being used, the agent's reasons for using particular tactics, and/or the tactics' effectiveness), (*c*) managing their investment of cognitive resources in interpreting the attempt and in executing coping tactics, (*d*) managing other people's impressions of them (e.g., what friends or family conclude about the consumer's persuasion expertise from the consumer's reactions to the advertising or sales presentations), (*e*) managing their self-image (e.g., by reflecting personal standards of fairness and reciprocity in their behavior toward an advertiser or sales agent, (*f*) managing the self-images of sales/service employees with whom they interact, and (*g*) managing the experiential benefits they receive from engaging in the interaction (e.g., their sensory, cognitive, or emotional stimulation).

This characterization of the goals that consumers recognize as possibilities for themselves is not based on prior empirical research in which people's perceived goals were examined or manipulated. It is a theoretical proposition about persuasion knowledge that invites further exploration. One implication of this proposition, which is important to the PKM, is that people can use their current persuasion knowledge to help them pursue several of these goals. In particular, persuasion knowledge is relevant to the goals of forming valid attitudes about products or services that are being promoted, judging what type of future relationship to have with the marketer on the basis of the marketer's persuasion behaviors, and gaining added insights about persuasion tactics in general.

Summary. We propose that persuasion knowledge is a set of interrelated beliefs about (*a*) the psychological events that are instrumental to persuasion, (*b*) the causes and effects of those events, (*c*) the importance of the events, (*d*) the extent to which people can control their psychological responses, (*e*) the temporal course of the persuasion process, and (*f*) the effectiveness and appropriateness of particular persuasion tactics. At some stage of development, adults' persuasion knowledge will resemble a model or theory of a "common-sense psychology" (Heider 1958) of persuasion.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE

The development of persuasion knowledge depends on the maturation of some basic cognitive skills and on people's accumulated experience with what occurs in social encounters and their exposure to social discourse about persuasion, advertising, and psychological events. During childhood and adolescence, fundamental insights about mental events and social encounters emerge. These, together with increases in information-processing capabilities (Roedder 1981; Roedder and Whitney 1986), enable persuasion knowledge to develop. By about age six, children in our culture have developed a coherent conceptualization of mental events (Wellman 1990). They conceive of separate interrelated mental states including belief, emotion, imagining, desire, and fantasy and have ideas about how these affect their own and others' behaviors (Flavell et al. 1992; Hogrefe, Wimmer, and Perner 1986). At about seven, they first realize that what occurs in each person's mind mediates how external information affects personal beliefs (Chandler 1988; Pillow 1991). This realization opens the door, we believe, to understanding the possibility of persuasion, that is, the strategic presentation of information so as to influence people's beliefs and thereby their behavior. From seven on, a number of different conceptions of social communication become increasingly complex, for example, beliefs about strategic deception (Beal and Belgrad 1990; Peskin 1992), communication competence (Laupa 1991), the other person's perspective in social interactions (Pillow 1991), causal processes by which communications influence behavior (Chapman, Skinner, and Baltes 1990), and advertisers' goals (Donohue, Henke, and Donohue 1980; Macklin 1985; Moschis 1987; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Ward, Wackman, and Wartella 1977). Beginning in early adolescence, people's thinking on most topics grows increasingly abstract and multidimensional, and less absolute. People become more aware of what they do or do not know about particular topics, and general information-processing and judgment skills continue developing through this period (Keating 1990). Further, for some time during adolescence, people may become broadly skeptical about the validity of virtually all social communications (Boyes and Chandler 1992), including advertising (Moschis and Moore 1979). This developmental research suggests some of the underlying mechanisms through which persuasion expertise increases during late childhood and adolescence. However, there is little empirical evidence about the exact nature of persuasion knowledge in our culture at different ages (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994).

One source of possible insight about persuasion processes is people's conscious experiences as they participate in persuasion episodes. However, individuals need not rely solely on what they can figure out from their own private perceptions. When people describe their perceptions to others and hear or read what others say about persuasion, using the everyday psychological language of their culture, some of these perceptions are validated. Out of this pooling of individual perceptions

and interpersonal communications, a socially constructed conceptualization of persuasion emerges. This folk model of persuasion synthesizes what is shared in people's perceptions of how persuasion occurs. Within our culture, folk models of persuasion in general and of advertising and selling in particular have long existed. For example, writings on the psychology of advertising and selling during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were based on what people had come to believe from personal intuition, observation, and practical experience, without any foundation in empirical analysis (Barry 1987). The basic conceptualization of persuasion that Mother Culture whispers in our ear shapes our thinking about this phenomenon without our conscious awareness. The resulting widely shared set of causal beliefs provides both consumers and marketers with what is called "common sense" about selling and advertising. This knowledge grounds consumers' and marketers' understanding of the social psychological processes at work and provides the basis for empathetic, respectful, and efficient interactions between them. Note that the terms "common sense" and "folk" are not pejorative. They refer to how widely shared certain basic beliefs are, not to how accurate or complex they are.

Over time, individuals will augment and modify what they learn from folk knowledge. The resulting persuasion expertise can accumulate from many sources. People learn from third-party observations of everyday persuasion attempts, including instances in which they reflect on why ads, sales presentations, or store environments are designed as they are. Consumers regularly comment among themselves on advertising, store design, package design, and sales tactics as they observe these marketing stimuli. Although lay people do not rely on experts for their insights on persuasion, their thinking is indirectly shaped in several ways by social psychologists' and consumer researchers' ideas (Gergen 1982). In contemporary America, people's persuasion knowledge is shaped by the broad use of psychological language and concepts, efforts to teach school children about marketing and the mass media, adult education by professors of marketing and psychology, mass media commentary on marketing activities, and writings in the popular press in which marketing professionals share their advertising and sales expertise.

The development of persuasion coping expertise is also strongly influenced by how much practice a person gets doing particular persuasion tasks. By this we mean practice in such things as recognizing when a type of persuasion tactic is being executed, analyzing what situation might have motivated the use of that tactic, evaluating the tactic's effectiveness or appropriateness, selecting a coping tactic, and executing that coping tactic effectively. In fact, opportunities to practice coping with certain types of persuasion tactics may only begin during early or middle adulthood. Practice in these tasks occurs reactively, in response to the tactics that the agents in one's life tend to actually use. One important implication of this reliance on agents' behaviors to generate practice opportunities is that adults will continue to acquire practice in persuasion coping throughout adulthood as advertisers and salespeople try new tactics. Therefore, experienced-based gains in persuasion coping expertise will continue to occur well beyond the period when information-processing skills have stabilized.

Further, people's motivation to learn how to effectively cope with marketers' and others' persuasion attempts should increase throughout life. This is because during adulthood the variety of everyday tasks in which persuasion knowledge is valuable increases. These tasks may include establishing and maintaining an independent identity, managing more complex personal relationships, facing more diverse challenges to personal attitudes than were encountered in childhood and adolescence, handling superior-subordinate and team role relationships in a workplace, being an effective parent, and making increasingly significant and numerous buying decisions.

Research on the development of practice-based expertise in other task domains may apply to persuasion expertise as well. Alba and Hutchinson (1987) synthesized much research of this nature into propositions about consumer expertise on product-related information-processing tasks. We can apply those propositions to the development of persuasion knowledge, as follows: As a consumer's practice (familiarity) with persuasion coping tasks increases, (*a*) the cognitive effort they expend to do those coping tasks decreases and aspects of their coping behavior become automatic; (*b*) the knowledge they develop to distinguish and interpret marketers' persuasion attempts, and to manage their own responses, becomes more refined, complete, and accurate; (*c*) their ability to discern characteristics of ads or sales presentations that help them understand a marketer's tactics and goals and that cue particular coping tactics increases; (*d*) their ability to make inferences about a marketer's motivation and traits, as well as predictions about the effects of persuasion attempts, increases; and (*e*) their capacity to remember useful things about previously seen ads or sales presentations, and about the nature and adequacy of their behavior in coping with these, improves. Further, people who are novices in coping with advertising or selling encounters may recognize only simple, superficial patterns in these events and have little proficiency with self-regulatory processes such as selecting and executing useful coping tactics. As their practice increases, however, they will increasingly use abstract, causal inferences in interpreting and will develop more self-control in managing how they respond (Ericsson and Smith 1991).

Finally, because persuasion coping knowledge is in part procedural knowledge, models of procedural learning (e.g., Anderson 1983) may apply. Thus, people's persuasion knowledge begins as simple "if-then"

rules and develops into more complex and conditional sets of rules via a typically slow transition process. This process is one in which novices first learn a possible persuasion coping tactic in declarative form, try adapting it to their needs over a set of persuasion episodes, reject it or retain it, and ultimately, perhaps, use it automatically.

AGENT AND TOPIC ATTITUDES

The Goal of Holding Valid Topic Attitudes

In this and the next section, we discuss consumers' motivations to form valid attitudes on message topics and valid attitudes about persuasion agents. We assume that adults learn how to pursue these two goals independently, and also jointly when they wish to. Eagly and Chaiken (1984, 1993) point out that virtually all existing attitude change and persuasion theories seek to explain how people assimilate information from social communications into their attitude about the communicator's topic. Two widely cited models state as a fundamental assumption that people are assumed to be motivated to hold a valid attitude on the message topic and that the phenomenon the models apply to, therefore, is how this goal gets accomplished (the elaboration likelihood model, or ELM: Petty and Cacioppo 1986; and the heuristic-systematic model, or HSM: Chaiken 1987; Chaiken et al. 1989). Other models implicitly make the same assumption.

This focus is also widely evident in consumer researchers' designations of people's attitudes about marketers' products as the main psychological event (i.e., dependent variable) to ultimately be explained in persuasion studies. This does not mean, of course, that consumer researchers believe that consumers exposed to marketers' communications always focus exclusively on producing appropriately revised product attitudes. However, even studies dealing with the different "processing tasks" that consumers may have during a persuasion episode usually have the ultimate goal of examining how the formation or change of topic attitudes takes place under "low-involvement" or "naturalistic" conditions. In these experiments, the manipulations frequently entail assigning some subjects to a task that focuses their processing resources on forming a topic (i.e., product or brand) attitude, or on another task that diverts them from focusing cognitive resources on refining the topic attitude (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988; Gardial et al. 1992; Gardner, Mitchell, and Russo 1985; Hastak and Olson 1989; Keller 1987; MacInnis and Park 1991; Mitchell and Beattie 1985). The particular goals assigned as diversions have not been chosen out of a substantive interest in how people pursue that goal per se, but more to test theorizing about how processing information without a brand-processing goal or with a different goal (e.g., ad evaluation) affects a consumer's generation of a brand attitude and/or purchase intention.

There is little doubt that consumers pursue valid topic attitudes in many situations. Consequently, research on how this occurs has been quite productive, and the persuasion theories developed to explain how these topic attitudes are generated have yielded considerable insight into an important domain of persuasion situations. However, even proponents of this approach recommend that the limited domain of these theories be more fully acknowledged (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). It is our contention that the existing persuasion theories that seek to explain only how topic attitudes get refined limit our opportunities to explore how consumers accomplish other goals they consider important in making effective marketplace decisions.

The Goal of Holding Valid Agent Attitudes

When consumers are faced with making decisions about products and services, it is rational and adaptive for them to seek valid attitudes about the individuals and organizations with whom they expect to do business. To make it clear that forming a valid agent attitude is a common goal of consumers, we will first discuss the concept of a "perceived persuasion agent" and the conditions that are likely to motivate consumers to use the perceived agent's communication behaviors as a basis for forming an agent attitude.

As described earlier, we assume that targets identify the "perceived persuasion agent" as whoever seems responsible for orchestrating the persuasion attempt. That is, the perceived agent is, in consumers' minds, the person(s) thought to have the final word in deciding who the target audience for the persuasion attempt would be, choosing the end goals and specific persuasion tactics, and designing how the tactics would be executed (i.e., selecting the spokespeople and scripting what they say or do). Consumers will typically perceive the agent to be a company or management group responsible for planning an ad campaign or for selecting, training, and directing a salesperson. In the context of mass media advertising, the spokespeople in ad campaigns who are perceived by consumers to be playing a part in a company's grand design are not the perceived agent. We presume that consumers seek valid attitudes toward the puppet masters, not their puppets.

Research on the behavior of people seeking valid attitudes toward the persuasion agent has a relatively sparse history. In some research spawned by traditional theories, measurements of people's beliefs or feelings about an agent have been taken as manipulation checks (e.g., in studies of communicator effects) or as secondary measures (e.g., Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991) but have rarely been considered as the primary dependent variable. Theories have not sought to explain in depth how exposure to persuasion attempts leads to changes in agent attitudes. Also, in studies of consumers' attitudes toward particular ads (A_{ad}), measurements of beliefs and feelings about the ads themselves have been taken, but

the theorizing in this work has treated consumers' brand attitudes or purchase intentions as the primary events to be explained. (We will discuss the relationship between A_{ad} research and the PKM in more detail in a later section.)

Factors Affecting the Motivation to Hold Valid Agent Attitudes

There are a number of specific situational factors that will affect a target's motivation to seek valid agent attitudes. Consumers are more likely to pursue this goal when (*a*) the marketer is unfamiliar to them and the current persuasion attempt represents a "get-acquainted" opportunity, (*b*) their existing attitude toward the marketer is based on persuasion behaviors observed in a different context than the current one (e.g., a company enters a new product category), or (*c*) a consumer perceives a familiar marketer to be using some distinctly different persuasion tactic(s) than had been used in previous encounters. In these situations, consumers may sense that their existing agent attitudes are either unformed, outdated, or irrelevant as a guide to how they should feel about the marketer in the future. Conversely, when consumers observe ads from a well-known company, which once again is promoting the same familiar product or service using the traditional tactics, the motivation to use the current persuasion attempt to refine an agent attitude should be minimal or absent. The latter situation is exemplified by TV viewers watching the latest in the hundreds of predictable ads for Tide, Chevrolet, or United Airlines that they have seen in their lifetime.

Another factor that will affect a person's motivation to seek a valid agent attitude is how central that agent is expected to be in the target's personal, professional, or marketplace relationships. One's incentive to use an observed persuasion attempt to refine an agent attitude is higher when one anticipates having important interactions with employees of the company. And it may be pushed even higher when the same people who are trying to influence you will later be delivering a service to you, such that their interpersonal attitudes and skills will be important to you in these subsequent interactions. For example, sales or advertising attempts designed by the individual(s) who may later become a consumer's health care provider, business consultant, insurance provider, lawyer, or auto repair person will convey information about what sort of service-delivery behaviors to expect. The critical underlying factor here is that both the persuasion attempt and the service relationship entail communication behaviors, so observing one episode of such behavior helps in predicting what others will be like.

In addition, when a company is represented by different employees, some who do selling and others who do service delivery, consumers may assume that they can learn something useful about the likely service behaviors from the selling behavior. This is because both types of behavior reflect the company's attitudes toward selection and training of employees and toward customers. For example, consumers may feel they learn something useful about an automobile manufacturer's or dealer's service from that manufacturer's or dealer's selling or advertising activities.

However, there are two situational variables that may limit the extent to which targets will attempt to make inferences about a company from the behaviors of one or more employees. First, we assume that adult consumers understand the basic reality that a company selects sales agents with particular characteristics and guides (trains and rewards) them in the execution of their roles as persuasion agents. However, consumers also are aware that individual salespeople may have some leeway in deciding how to execute persuasion attempts. Therefore, consumers may use a salesperson's characteristics and actions as signals about the company's motives, skills, and traits, but they may also use this information more narrowly as a signal about the individual salesperson. Further, if people cannot in some situation readily identify who the actual agent is, that ambiguity itself may deter them from using the observed persuasion attempt to refine their agent attitude. Thus, in a sales situation in which a consumer remains unsure about which aspects of a salesperson's behaviors are company designed and which are designed by the individual, the motivation to form a valid attitude toward the company may be muted.

Finally, another condition that may elevate a person's desire to refine their agent attitude is when they perceive that the same agent who designed the persuasion attempt was also directly responsible for designing the product or service they are promoting. This link may be relevant because the skills and attitudes evidenced in a marketer's persuasion behavior may reflect, in a consumer's mind, parallel skills and attitudes relevant to developing valuable new products or services, for example, degree of empathy with consumers' communication needs or knowledge levels, creativity, willingness to invest resources in planning efforts, or general respect for the customer.

In summary, a number of factors may influence a target's motivation to seek a valid agent attitude on the basis of a particular persuasion attempt, or series of attempts. It seems evident that consumers will pursue that goal in a variety of realistic situations. Presumably, the strength of that motivation increases as the number and importance of the conditions supporting it increase. By identifying the motivating conditions, we gain perspective on the domain of prior persuasion research. We believe that few, if any, extant persuasion experiments have established conditions that would strongly motivate subjects to use the persuasion episode they face in the experiment to develop a valid attitude toward the perceived agent.

Evaluations of Agents' Persuasion Behaviors

We assume that consumers use persuasion knowledge to assess the marketer's overall persuasion competence and that there are two dimensions underlying this evaluation: perceived effectiveness and perceived appropriateness of the persuasion tactics. Consumers' judgments of perceived effectiveness have to do with whether the marketer's actions seem likely to produce psychological effects that strongly affect buying decisions. Consumers' judgments of perceived appropriateness have to do with whether the marketer's tactics seem to be moral or normatively acceptable (i.e., within the boundaries of the "rules of the game"). These two judgments may not be independent assessments, but we assume they are conceptually distinct in consumers' minds. This two-dimensional perspective is grounded in models of communication competence (Canary and Spitzberg 1989; Pavitt and Haight 1985). In these models, overall communicative competence is conceptualized quite broadly. It encompasses skills ranging from pronunciation skills, to summarizing abilities, to the ability to be persuasive (Rubin 1982; Spitzberg and Cupach 1984; Wieman 1977). In fact, in Rubin's (1982) model, perceived persuasiveness is itself only one of 19 indicators of general overall communicative competence.

In addition to assessing persuasive competence, consumers may also refine their impressions of the agent's other traits. Trait inferences such as these are apt to be made in terms of the primary traits represented in lay people's mental models of personality (Goldberg 1981; Peabody and Goldberg 1989; Wiggins 1979). Accordingly, a consumer may feel that a marketer's persuasion attempts suggest that the company's managers and personnel are characteristically bold or timid, warm or cool, thorough or careless, relaxed or anxious, and/or perceptive or imperceptive in their behavior toward customers.

Relationship schemas may also play an important role in people's interpretations of and responses to another party's behavior (Andersen and Cole 1990; Bugental et al. 1993; Fiske and Cox 1979; Sekides, Olsen, and Reis 1993). A consumer's thinking about a marketer's behavior will also concern the perceived consumer-marketer relationship. If the observed behavior violates consumers' relationship expectations (e.g., by using tactics that seem surprisingly careless or disrespectful, or surprisingly thoughtful), this may change their view of how the marketer sees the relationship and thereby how the consumer will now see it. Kantor (1989) described a survey in which almost half the respondents who viewed 15 commercials from five product categories agreed with the statement, "The people who paid for this ad think I am not very smart." Of those respondents agreeing with that statement, 60 percent also evaluated the sponsoring company as "poor" and another 29 percent evaluated the company as only "fair."

THE ROLE OF PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE IN PERSUASION EPISODES

The Use of Persuasion Knowledge in Forming Valid Topic and Agent Attitudes

The Persuasion Knowledge Model presumes that targets are motivated to use their persuasion knowledge, agent knowledge, and topic knowledge to achieve their various attitude refinement goals. They do so by developing strategies for allocating resources among all three knowledge structures during and after a given persuasion episode and across persuasion episodes involving the same agent or topic (see Fig. 1).

In prior theorizing it was assumed that, when a person's goal is to generate a valid attitude on the message topic, they will try to allocate cognitive resources efficiently to *that* task, given the information-processing constraints they face, and will use whatever information seems helpful (Chaiken et al. 1989; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). In the PKM, we apply the same general principle to people's use of a much wider array of knowledge structures than is considered in previous models and also apply it to the process by which people pursue the goal of refining their agent attitudes. In either case, we propose that consumers' persuasion knowledge, as a broad and frequently accessed knowledge structure, will "hover" in readiness, available to them as an immediate source of help that they learn to depend on in generating valid product and agent attitudes.

Further, the PKM suggests that targets' persuasion knowledge can, in a number of situations, be *more* extensive, accessible, and relevant to a persuasion attempt than is their topic or agent knowledge. For example, when confronted with an ad for a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), consumers with the goal of refining their topic attitudes will be first inclined to access their knowledge about health care services (i.e., topic knowledge). This is natural because topic knowledge facilitates comprehension of the message content and can be useful in examining the claims that the agent is making. However, novices on the topic of HMOs will quickly become aware that their topic knowledge is not much help in judging the merits of the agent's claims. When consumers are novices about a type of product (e.g., when the product is new to the market or when people with little prior interest in or need for a type of product enter the market), their capacity to use product knowledge is quite limited (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). For our purposes, the important implication is that, when targets are unfamiliar with a topic, they need help from another source. Their persuasion knowledge often represents such a resource. It provides them with a possible basis for assessing the likely validity of the agent's

assertions. Thus, even when the goal of arriving at a refined product or service attitude is salient, under some conditions people's persuasion knowledge may be the most useful resource they have.

Similarly, people seeking to refine an agent attitude may discover that they have only scant, vague, or outdated beliefs about the agent who is delivering a persuasion attempt. Awareness of this deficiency is, in part, what motivates consumers to focus on refining their agent attitude. Returning to the previous example, upon confronting messages in a campaign promoting an HMO, consumers may tap into their knowledge about the organization marketing this service and realize they know little about it. They can then turn to their persuasion knowledge, which is both relevant and available.

Of course, there are three knowledge structures at issue here, and all states of relevance and development are possible. Certainly there will be times when topic knowledge and/or agent knowledge are more pertinent and extensive than persuasion knowledge and will, therefore, be drawn on in preference to persuasion knowledge. People who already know a lot about HMOs in general, and a lot about the company sponsoring the ad they are reading, may not choose to draw on persuasion knowledge at all. The PKM does not suggest that persuasion knowledge dominates people's thinking as persuasion targets, only that it contributes to it and can be, under some conditions, a major contributor.

As discussed, people may often face situations in which they are unsure about the validity of both their agent attitude and their topic attitude. In these situations, people will be motivated to efficiently refine *both* their attitude toward the marketer and their attitude toward the product being promoted because this allows them to extract the maximum amount of meaningful information from each ad or sales presentation they observe. In such mixed-goal situations, we propose that people learn to handle their primary persuasion coping task via more elaborative, systematic processing activities and to handle their secondary persuasion coping task via simpler, heuristical processing activities. If a consumer's situational assessment suggests that refining their product attitude is somewhat more important than refining their marketer attitude, but that doing both is desirable, they will systematically use persuasion, topic, and agent knowledge to efficiently refine their product attitude. They will also heuristically use elements of persuasion, agent, and topic knowledge to refine their attitude toward the marketer. The converse will hold when a consumer's situational assessment points them toward giving more priority to their agent attitude and less to their topic attitude. In that case, they will systematically use persuasion, agent, and topic knowledge to refine their agent attitude and will also use heuristics to refine their topic attitude.

In discussing how people generate *topic* attitudes, Chaiken (1987) suggested that people develop heuristics for judging the validity of message claims from observing simple features of the presentation or situation. We propose that heuristical processing of this sort should also be among the tactics that people develop for generating *agent* attitudes without using substantial resources. People may learn to identify generic persuasion tactics by developing simple "tactic recognition" heuristics. These heuristics are often based on the presence of only one or two features of a persuasion attempt. For example, some consumers may learn to use a heuristic such as, "the presence of any of these features—a celebrity, someone in a business suit, someone shown in a laboratory—signals that the advertiser is trying to get me to trust what they say." In addition to tactic-recognition heuristics, people may learn to use heuristics for assessing a persuasion attempt's effectiveness. "Effectiveness heuristics" might be based on cues such as, "if a poignant story about people overcoming hardship is told, the ad will be very effective." Similarly, people may also develop simple "appropriateness heuristics." Thus, experienced consumers are able to use tactic-recognition heuristics, effectiveness heuristics, and appropriateness heuristics to generate agent or topic attitudes when they want to invest only limited resources in processing the message.

The PKM also suggests that people are likely to have a broader and more patient view of the domain of their persuasion coping activities than is captured in much of traditional persuasion research. Thus, consumers realize they need not squeeze all their attitude-refinement efforts into the time period defined by the start and end of an advertiser's or salesperson's delivery of any one message. Rather, they will develop proficiency in handling mixed-goal persuasion processing through insightful use of their various opportunities to observe and consider a marketer's communication behaviors.

Specifically, the strategies consumers develop to use their persuasion, agent, and topic knowledge can make use of the time period after an initial exposure, by drawing on memories about the features and overall theme of the persuasion attempt. We do not mean to imply that people's reflections about what an advertiser or salesperson had done need to be deep and extensive, but by waiting in this way consumers allow themselves the chance to do *either* brief or extended reflection on tactics, whichever serves their own goals. If people learn to use these types of coping strategies, one important implication is that the effects caused by consumers' use of persuasion knowledge will occur partly or largely during some unknown time period *after* an ad or sales presentation. If so, delayed measures of effects may more adequately capture the actual overall effects due to a target's persuasion knowledge than measures taken immediately after message delivery is completed. In fact it may be that, unless delayed measurements are taken, the functioning of consumers' persuasion knowledge will remain undetected and unsuspected.

Following the same theme further, consumers may also come to use a strategy of suspending conclusive

changes in their topic or agent attitude until they can draw adequately on persuasion knowledge during subsequent opportunities to observe an agent's campaign. In many real-world situations consumers can count on, and take advantage of, multiple opportunities to examine what a marketer is up to. Marketers provide these opportunities in the course of running campaigns in which they redeliver the same message or alternate versions of the campaign using a pool of ads. Furthermore, consumers who wish to can typically reexpose themselves to a persuasion campaign by rereading print materials or by asking salespeople to "run through that again." As a consequence, over the course of several exposures to the same basic persuasion attempt, a target may progress from relative naïveté about the agent's goals and tactics to greater awareness of them, from scant to more extensive inferences about the agent, and from simplistic to more complex evaluations of the agent's behavior. The operation of persuasion knowledge enables targets to "learn as they go."

This is an important concept because effects like these are not envisioned in theorizing that ignores persuasion knowledge or fails to allow for its possible generation across repeated opportunities to observe an agent. The PKM implies that a complete account of persuasion effects will allow for targets' learning about an agent's tactics and adapting how they cope with those tactics, across a series of exposures to that agent's persuasion attempts. Similarly, a complete account will allow for learning that may occur when a consumer is able to observe the ads or sales presentations of rival marketers on the same topic, whose different persuasion tactics provide a noteworthy contrast. For example, a consumer who has no initial insight about the selling tactics used by the first health club operator whose pitch was heard may, upon hearing a second operator's sales presentation, make a judgment about what the first agent's goals or tactics were. This contrast can also occur in reverse, that is, by recalling the first agent's approach to persuasion, a consumer may perceive something about the second agent's tactics that otherwise would have been ignored. The PKM casts what occurs across successive observations of the same agent, or of rival agents, as adaptive, strategic persuasion coping behavior, which makes use of memories about the characteristics of agents' earlier persuasion attempts.

Empirical evidence on the changes that occur over time in people's persuasion coping strategies is very limited. We examined theory on the maturation of people's defense mechanisms (Haan 1977) for some possible insights. On the basis of such theory, we predict that less experienced consumers' ways of coping might include (*a*) rigid, absolute compartmentalizations (e.g., "all TV ads are misleading," "All Nike ads are trustworthy"); (*b*) total inattention to, or self-distraction from, a sales attempt or ad once some perceived tactic is noted; (*c*) strong internal denial of information in a persuasion attempt that might suggest that a persuasion tactic is being used by someone you do not want to think of in the role of a persuasion agent (e.g., a trusted advisor or friend acting in a selling capacity, a hero such as Michael Jordan doing persuasion activities); (*d*) total dismissal of, or admiration for, all ads or sales presentations that use particular tactics, regardless of the situation or the remaining content of the message; (*e*) dependence on friends' interpretations of a sales or advertising message (i.e., on social wisdom about persuasion) rather than on one's own responses; or (*f*) spontaneous public expressions of emotional reactions during persuasion episodes (e.g., verbally mocking or insulting a salesperson for doing something one recognizes as a tactic or continually expressing strong feelings about TV ads to others in the same room).

Research on defense mechanisms also suggests that as adults acquire greater coping expertise they will develop larger repertoires of coping tactics. These cognitive management strategies enable them to (*a*) separate their emotional and evaluative reactions to an advertising or sales tactic from their use of relevant information about the product or service; (*b*) cope with a tactic by withdrawing their attention from the part of a message that contains it, but refocusing attention when they choose to; (*c*) readily elucidate in their minds the causal chain of events surrounding the creation of the ad or sales presentation; (*d*) tolerate ambiguities such as ads or sales presentations that mingle tactics with helpful product or agent information or agents with mixed motives; and (*e*) make qualified, conditional judgments about the agent's goals and tactics.

It is important to keep in mind that persuasion-coping knowledge is, as we discussed earlier, a resource that continues to develop. Persuasion coping novices who face "mixed-goal, multiple knowledge-structure" situations will handle them as efficiently as they can. However, their coping tactics will differ from those of people who have had more practice in tackling dual-goal persuasion processing and in using their persuasion, agent, and topic knowledge structures simultaneously. Learning to schedule and juggle one's use of different knowledge structures is part of acquiring persuasion expertise. This is one important reason why persuasion coping novices and people with considerable persuasion coping expertise may be influenced differently by the same persuasion attempt.

The Change-of-Meaning Principle: The Effects of Interpreting Agent Actions as Persuasion Tactics

Central to people's persuasion knowledge are their conceptions of the tactics that agents use. As discussed earlier, people's tactic conceptions pertain to the things that they believe get done or said in persuasion attempts to influence psychological activities they conceive of as instrumental to persuasion. Recognizing an agent's action as something one perceives of as a tactic during a

persuasion attempt can have a number of significant effects on what happens in the remainder of the persuasion episode.

The PKM predicts that, when a person begins conceiving of an agent's action, heretofore not identified as having any particular meaning, as a persuasion tactic a "change of meaning" will occur. This is a significant event that fundamentally alters many things in the way in which a target will respond to this, and other, persuasion attempts. The "change of meaning" principle has, we believe, important implications for (*a*) how consumers construe persuasion attempts in general; (*b*) why two consumers with different persuasion tactic knowledge may construe the same persuasion attempt differently, and therefore also react to it differently; (*c*) why a particular consumer may construe a specific ad or sales presentation, or a specific type of ad or sales presentation, differently at one time in his/her life than at another time, and consequently respond differently; and (*d*) why even some alteration in the features of an ad or sales presentation that an agent (or researcher) considers innocuous may cause an altered effect, by either introducing into it something a target considers a tactic or deleting from it something that would have been considered a tactic had people observed the unaltered version.

To illustrate the change-of-meaning principle more concretely, consider a consumer who has not yet realized that one tactic agents use to make influence attempts effective is to try to make the target believe the spokesperson is similar to the consumer in some ways. While still innocent about this tactic, the consumer attaches no particular (tactical) meaning to messages in which a spokesperson turns out to have physical characteristics, attitudes, lifestyles, values, or even styles of dress that are similar to the consumer's. The consumer may notice the similarities, but these seem like innocuous features of the ads or sales presentations. While naive in this way, consumers do not construe displays of similarity as orchestrated, scripted parts of a company's persuasion campaign. These perceived similarities may exert effects on the persuasion process, as described by various psychological theories, but those effects are as yet unmoderated by the target's persuasion knowledge.

Then, the change-of-meaning occurs. The consumer learns that signals of similarity can be used as a tactic. He or she now begins to perceive the presentation of the "like me" background characteristics of the people in ads or of salespeople as actions intended to manufacture similarity perceptions. When consumers now notice such things, they may disengage somewhat from the ongoing interaction, draw inferences of some sort, get distracted from the message, consciously dismiss the perceived similarity, or discount what the spokesperson says. Further, whereas before when similarity cues appeared in a persuasion attempt, consumers generated no particular evaluative feelings about the company, now they may begin to include assessments of the effectiveness of that tactic and of how appropriate or fair it seems. These assessments may be used to refine the consumer's attitude toward the marketer. In summary, a consumer's response to the persuasion attempt has been fundamentally altered by the change of meaning. This process can, therefore, affect consumers as they pursue valid topic attitudes or valid agent attitudes.

Once an act by an agent is construed as a tactic, several types of effects may occur. People may over time develop ideas about the conditions that lead agents to use such a tactic and consequently about what the agent's thinking was. For example, a consumer might come to believe that some tactics are used when marketers have nothing of substance to say about a product. If so, the perception that these tactics are being used carries meaning for the consumer's product attitude. As another example, a consumer might come to believe that some tactics are used when marketers accurately understand and respect what people want to know about a type of product, in which case noticing such a tactic may carry meaning for the consumer's agent attitude.

Another effect of tactic recognitions, and any ensuing tactic-related cognitive activities they stimulate, may be to disrupt the other message response activities that otherwise would have occurred in consumers' minds. In part, this may represent a general "detachment effect," that is, recognizing someone is using a tactic of influence "on me" is fundamentally "off-putting." It detaches one from the ongoing interaction and makes one conscious, or more conscious than otherwise, that the other party sees you as someone on whom they think persuasion tactics can be or need to be used. This redefines the nature of the interaction that is occurring. It disengages someone from whatever sense they might have had of participating in the "reality" being created by the marketer or salesperson (cf. Deighton 1992).

More narrowly, the perception of a tactic may disrupt the comprehension and elaboration of topic-related statements or images, by drawing the consumer's attention to their persuasion knowledge and away from their topic knowledge. For example, as a persuasion attempt unfolds, events or elements in it may signal to a consumer that a tactic is being used. If a disruption due to tactic-related thinking occurs early in a marketer's persuasion attempt, it may undermine the overall coherence of a story the marketer is trying to tell, or a logical argument the marketer is trying to make. If the tactic perception occurs toward the end of a marketer's delivery, that may disrupt a consumer's understanding of the story's ending or the argument's conclusion, or undermine the cognitive processing necessary for the person to integrate the message's content into their preexisting attitude structures. An implication from the PKM is, therefore, that it is not only important to understand *what* specific agent behaviors targets are interpreting as tactics, but to take into account *when* dur-

ing a persuasion attempt people's reactions to various types of perceived tactics may occur.

The change-of-meaning hypothesis has other implications as well. Someone who is deflected from using their tactic knowledge will behave differently than they do when they can actively use that knowledge. When an agent's general persuasive intent, or the intended effect of a specific feature, is successfully obscured by the agent, a target's thinking and behavior may differ from their thinking and behavior in situations in which the same feature is used but the agent's intent is apparent. In a related manner, deflecting experimental subjects from using their tactic-related knowledge creates evidence only on what happens in analogous situations in which a similar type of knowledge suppression or misdirection occurs. An important part of a complete theory of persuasion is, therefore, an explanation of the situational factors that suppress otherwise accessible persuasion knowledge, and of the aspects of an agent's overall behavior that disguise a tactic or that make its execution seem heavy-handed and transparent to targets.

It is important to also note that any effects such as these are based on the consumer's *perception* of what the agent has done as a tactic, so these effects occur *whether or not* the agent actually had considered that feature of their behavior as a tactic. The consumers in our example cannot know for sure when a spokesperson who claims to have the same goals, interests, or values as they do is telling the truth or merely displaying a cue that is expected to help persuade them. The consumer has to figure out how to cope with that ambiguity but may sometimes respond to some things as tactics when they were not conceived as such by the agent. We propose that even momentary uncertainty on this interpretation issue in a target's mind, caused by noticing a possible "similarity tactic," introduces a change in response, compared to what happens when no such tactic perception occurs.

If we are to understand when and how this change-of-meaning effect occurs, the specific content of people's tactic beliefs, and the inferences these trigger, need to be measured directly. Because the transformation of an agent's action from an innocuous feature of the persuasion attempt to a perceived persuasion tactic will affect what occurs in persuasion episodes, we believe this is a critical area for future research.

Changes in Tactic Conceptions. There is little research or theory as yet on how people's tactic conceptions evolve as they mature. We will therefore offer some rudimentary theorizing on this issue because it is important to the change-of-meaning principle.

How an action takes on new meaning as a possible tactic is suggested by our definition of a tactic. Changes in tactic conceptions occur because of changes in someone's beliefs about the psychological mediators. Consider, for example, a person who believes that marketers will be very persuasive if they can get the people who watch their ads to make a connection between what is said or shown and things that are familiar and important to them (i.e., evoke "interest"). Subsequently, this same person also learns that evoking viewers' emotions is another way marketers have of being persuasive. One effect may be that this individual begins considering whether some agent actions they are accustomed to seeing as "interest-stirring tactics" might also reasonably be construed as "emotion-arousing" tactics. Another possible effect is that agent actions not heretofore given any tactical meaning now take on such meaning, if they seem related to emotional arousal in the person's mind.

Subsequently, this same person's judgment of an agent's competence, based on assessments of the effectiveness or appropriateness of perceived persuasion tactics, will now be made in an altered way. Effectiveness and appropriateness judgments change in concert with changes in tactic and mediator beliefs. Our hypothetical consumer previously considered only how interest-stirring an ad or sales presentation seemed to be when assessing its effectiveness. Now, this person may instead, or in addition, consider how emotion-arousing the persuasion attempt seems, in assessing its effectiveness. In this way, people develop the capacity for more varied, conditional, multidimensional evaluations of effectiveness. As their mediator knowledge grows, people will come to realize that effective persuasion can occur via several different routes, by creating different types of psychological responses.

This idea has several important implications. First, it suggests that people whose tactic conceptions are at different stages of development may disagree in their assessments of a persuasion attempt's effectiveness and also in any refinements of their attitude toward a marketer that are based on their effectiveness judgments. Further, people whose tactic conceptions and mediator knowledge differ (e.g., consumers, marketers, researchers) may judge perceived effectiveness differently, and they are apt to misunderstand how each other assesses the effectiveness of various persuasion campaigns.

People's capacity for judging a persuasion attempt's appropriateness (fairness, manipulativeness, respectfulness) also depends on the state of their tactic beliefs. In general, the developmental path here is similar to the one we described for effectiveness assessments. Judgments of a campaign's appropriateness will become more complex, contingent, and automatic as persuasion knowledge matures. Thus, people increasingly will be able and inclined to take into account more of the following types of beliefs: (*a*) what tactics do I believe the agent is trying to use? (*b*) what effect(s) do I believe this persuasion attempt is actually likely to produce? and (*c*) what do I believe about my own or other targets' capacities to recognize and cope with these tactics? Throughout adulthood, consumers will become increasingly able to efficiently use the knowledge they are developing about themselves and about marketers' tac-

tics and goals when assessing how fair or manipulative a campaign seems to them (Campbell 1992).

One direct examination of how tactic appropriateness knowledge develops is by Rule, Bisanz, and Kohn (1985). They argued that a child's knowledge about interpersonal influence tactics grows in concert with his or her understanding of what is acceptable social behavior. In the first stage of moral reasoning, children learn the concept of self-interest and consequently realize that accompanying requests with explanations of how compliance serves either the agent's or the target's self-interest is socially acceptable. Next, a conception of "relationship" develops, and this teaches children that actions taken "for the good of our relationship" or appeals to reciprocity are also socially acceptable tactics. Finally, social welfare concepts emerge, adding appeals to altruism and to moral "rightness" to a repertoire of appropriate tactics. Judgments of the perceived appropriateness of various general influence tactics seem to reflect this developmental sequence (Bisanz and Rule 1990; Rule et al. 1985). Rule et al. (1985) treat appropriateness judgments as derived from other social norms about morality. In addition to this, we suggest that among adults such judgments also take into account what someone believes about the psychological effects caused by a tactic.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PKM TO PRIOR THEORY AND RESEARCH

In developing the PKM, our thinking was influenced by a number of different theories and bodies of research. The PKM has not, however, been directly derived from particular empirical studies, and the validity of its various propositions remains to be empirically examined. However, a few published studies have emanated from conceptual perspectives that directly foreshadowed the PKM. First, in two studies, researchers examined the hypothesis that, when topic knowledge is almost nil (i.e., a new product is being introduced), targets examine an agent's persuasion behavior for cues as to whether the agent sincerely believes in the validity of the product quality claims for the new product (Kirmani 1990; Kirmani and Wright 1989). Specifically, Kirmani and Wright (1989) proposed that under certain conditions people use the "perceived effort" a company invests in the persuasion attempt as a signal of their strength of belief in their product's quality. Their results showed that people have beliefs about the expense of various ad campaign elements, that perceptions of those elements evoke expectations about a new product's quality beyond those created by ad claims, that the inferences seem to reflect systematic conditional beliefs by consumers about when and why advertisers invest in expensive campaigns, and that this interpretive activity can occur from simple "campaign watching." Kirmani (1990) showed further that such inferences can occur in targets from observing unobtrusive campaign elements, such as the size of an ad; that the weight given such inferences relative to other inputs varies predictably; that consumers recognize situations in which lavish agent effort ceases to provide a useful cue to the advertiser's motive or beliefs; and that "effort" can be signaled in various ways.

Several other recent studies are compatible with the PKM. Wiener, LaForge, and Goolsby (1990) and Goodstein (1993) examined what happens when advertisers or salespeople use tactics that violate consumers' expectations. Goodstein (1993) discussed how consumers develop a schema of the advertising tactics typical for a product category, how the activation of this schema guides ad processing, and how prior affect toward a tactic may transfer to a new ad that is perceived to be similar to the prototypic ad for the product category. Wiener et al. (1990) proposed that a violation of expectations about an agent's tactics alerts consumers to consider the situation that motivated the use of the new tactic. Also, Scheer and Stern (1992) examined how attitudes toward a company as a possible distribution partner were affected by that company's influence tactics.

In the following sections, we will discuss our view of the PKM's relationship to a number of other models or research streams. In most cases, we cannot directly relate our model to specific results from empirical studies because in those studies the state of subjects' persuasion knowledge was not directly measured or manipulated.

Attitude-toward-the-Ad Research

Research on A_{ad} has been broadly concerned with how people's thoughts and/or feelings about a persuasion attempt (an advertisement) influence their attitudes toward the advertised brand. This research is similar to traditional persuasion and attitude change research in that the dependent variables of *central* concern have been brand attitudes (i.e., topic attitude) and/or purchase intentions. Attitude toward the ad research has extended traditional approaches in two ways. First, this research has examined both affective and cognitive reactions to the features of ads. Second, A_{ad} studies have examined the relative impact of thoughts and feelings about the ad itself versus the impact of thoughts and feelings about the topic (i.e., attributes of the advertised product). Several different underlying mechanisms drawn from traditional attitude theories have been proposed (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986) in conceptualizations of how and why consumers' evaluations of ads influence their brand attitudes. Lutz, MacKenzie, and Belch (1983) proposed alternate models of how ad attitudes causally mediate brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Most studies have examined one or more of these causal routes, and some (Burke and Edell 1989; Gardner 1985; Homer 1990; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989) have compared the relative strength of the alter-

native models. For our purposes, what is noteworthy is that, in the four models typically examined, the causal role of ad cognitions is not questioned (i.e., it is simply specified unambiguously that ad cognitions directly cause ad attitudes), nor are the antecedents of ad cognitions explored. Only rarely (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Lutz 1985) are other beliefs such as consumers' perceptions of the "credibility" of an ad, the advertiser, and advertising in general proposed as factors that enter into the formation of ad attitudes (see also Goldberg and Hartwick 1990).

We believe that the Persuasion Knowledge Model offers a theoretical framework for examining A_{ad} phenomena that explains the origins of certain types of ad-related evaluations in depth and is grounded in analysis of the behavior of persuasion targets per se, not just in general attitude theories. We do not deny, of course, the relevance of those general attitude theories but view the PKM as a rich, domain-specific model that complements them.

Attitude-toward-the-ad research has helped stimulate our interest in consumers' persuasion knowledge because it focuses attention on the underlying assumption that people evaluate marketers' persuasion attempts. The ability to make these evaluations requires a knowledge base. However, the Persuasion Knowledge Model was not developed from A_{ad} theorizing, or as an attempt to explain A_{ad} empirical findings. Because A_{ad} studies were not done to test the PKM, it is not possible to definitively relate the A_{ad} research to our model, and any interpretations of those prior findings in terms of the PKM are at best tentative. However, some of the findings from this stream of research are consistent with predictions derived from the PKM. For example, according to Brown and Stayman's (1992) meta-analysis, cognitive and affective reactions to ads have been more strongly correlated with beliefs about the attributes of the advertised brand when the ad dealt with a durable good or a service rather than with a nondurable good or service. This is consistent with the PKM, which assumes that people will apply persuasion knowledge in seeking to learn things from the marketer's influence behavior that are relevant in forecasting what future service behaviors by the marketer's employees will be like or in identifying things about the marketer's competencies in product design that are not easily discernible from prepurchase inspection or trial. Where packaged goods are at issue, this is less of a concern because trial purchase involves much less risk and service interactions with the marketer's employees (as opposed to intermediaries) are unnecessary.

Effectiveness and Appropriateness Judgments. Another area of A_{ad} research that is relevant to the PKM involves consumers' judgments of the effectiveness and appropriateness of various advertisements. A number of A_{ad} studies, and others outside the A_{ad} stream, have taken measures that can be interpreted as perceived effectiveness judgments. Studies we found in which subjects reported their assessments of how convincing, persuasive, effective, believable, or informative certain ads seemed to them included Aaker and Stayman (1990), Biel and Bridgewater (1990), Burke and Edell (1989), Burton and Lichtenstein (1988), Collins et al. (1988), Edell and Burke (1987), Goethal and Reckman (1973), Gunther and Thorson (1992), Holbrook (1978), Holbrook and Batra (1987), MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), Miniard, Bhatla, and Rose (1990), Percy and Lautman (1986), and Wright (1973). In taking such measures, these researchers have made an implicit assumption that people have some basis for generating such judgments and often do so naturally during a message presentation. However, the underlying knowledge or process has not been explicitly examined, nor have these measures been derived from a model of the possible dimensions of perceived effectiveness. Further, the theoretical relationship between people's subjective perceptions of an ad's effectiveness and the ad's actual effectiveness (e.g., as measured by some objective indicator such as a pre-post attitude change score) has rarely been considered in depth.

However, a few of these studies can be used to illustrate the applicability of the PKM to this area of research. For example, earlier we suggested that emotion may be a mediator of persuasion represented in people's basic mental models. If so, our model predicts that messages that do evoke strong emotion in targets, or that seem likely to evoke emotions because of the message's perceived features, will be judged by targets to be effective, while messages that do not evoke those responses or have those features will be judged as less effective. Further, people's assessments of effectiveness will be independent of the messages' actual effects on topic attitudes, to the extent that those actual effects are mediated by psychological events other than just emotional responses. Two prior studies provide data that we interpret as consistent with this prediction. Holbrook and Batra (1987) set out to examine the relationships between people's postexposure brand attitudes and their ad-content beliefs, ad-evoked emotions, and global liking for the ads. However, in the analyses, subjects' reports about how they believed the ad had affected their own brand attitudes (e.g., my attitude is "more favorable/unfavorable"; "like/dislike more") were treated as the postexposure measure of actual brand attitudes. From the scales' wordings we interpreted these reports as a "perceived effectiveness" measure that was distinct from an actual effects measure. Recast this way, Holbrook and Batra's data indicate that, among other things, people's ad-evoked emotions caused (were positively related to) their subjective ad effectiveness judgments, but that the effectiveness judgments were correlated only moderately, across ads, with the ads' actual effects on brand attitudes. In the second relevant study, Gunther and Thorson (1992) showed some subjects emotion-arousing TV ads and other sub-

jects ads that evoked little emotion. Subjects then reported both postexposure topic attitudes and their beliefs about the effectiveness of the ads they had seen. There were no differences in the *actual* effectiveness of the two types of messages, but the subjects judged the emotion-arousing ads as more effective.

We also suggested earlier that "interest" may be a basic mediator in people's mental models. If so, the same type of prediction applies. Messages that stir an audience member's interest, or seem likely to stir interest by virtue of their perceived features, will be judged to be more effective than messages that do not, regardless of the messages' actual effects on topic attitudes. Collins et al. (1988) had subjects read either a vivid-language version of a message (by definition, capable of evoking a flood of quick mental associations to things of personal relevance, i.e., high interest) or a non-vivid-language version. Subjects reported their postexposure attitudes and, as a secondary measure, their judgments about the perceived effectiveness of the message they read. There were no *actual* differences in postexposure attitudes across messages, but subjects' perceptions were that the vivid-language version was more effective.

Another prediction from our framework is that an external message that does cause actual topic-attitude effects will be *accurately* attributed as a strong causal influence when audience members have no premessage beliefs or attitude on that topic. In that case, people will accurately perceive that a change in their beliefs or attitude on the topic (from "nothing" to "something"), of which they should be aware, can have only one apparent cause, which is external and cannot be due to their own topic-related memories at work. Two experimental findings seem consistent with this. In Wright (1973) women read or heard ads for a hypothetical new product. Their topic belief-attitude system was therefore nonexistent before ad exposure. They reported both postexposure product attitudes and perceived message effectiveness. In this attitude-formation case, these two variables were highly correlated. Similarly, Holbrook (1978) had subjects read characterizations of hypothetical products and then report both postexposure product attitudes and perceived message effectiveness. The two were again highly correlated.

One further prediction from our framework is that targets will *not* perceive a persuasion attempt on them to be effective when (*a*) it does not seem especially emotion-evoking or interest-stirring (mediators in people's mental models) or (*b*) the targets already have well-developed knowledge on the topic, which they access to generate thoughts during a persuasion attempt, leading them to perceive any attitude changes as largely *self*-caused, not externally caused. In Goethal and Reckman (1973), a group discussion of race took place. One group member acted as a stooge and covertly tried to influence other members' attitudes. We can assume from the description of this situation that the targets had well-developed prior attitudes about race and that the subtle persuasion attempt was not highly emotion-arousing or dramatic. In this case, subjects reported that they believed the group discussion had *no* effect on their topic attitudes, although it actually did have significant effects. Further, they held firm in their perception about the attempt's negligible causal influence even when the researcher reminded them that their prediscussion racial attitudes had been measured and would be compared to their postdiscussion attitudes. Our model explains, we believe, why targets will not perceive an external message to have causally influenced them under these conditions.

The Persuasion Knowledge Model highlights the knowledge base and underlying mechanisms by which people learn to assess how effective various persuasion attempts are and to judge how insulting, fair, manipulative, or respectful they seem. In addition to providing a theoretical explanation of how people generate effectiveness and appropriateness judgments, the model also predicts that, as persuasion knowledge matures, a person will have the capacity to assess effects-on-self as distinct from effects-on-others. Further, an individual with more well developed persuasion knowledge may have beliefs about how target audiences with different characteristics are more or less affected by ads with certain features. At the very least, this suggests that researchers' decisions to ask people about perceived effects of ads or sales presentations on self, on some specified group of others, or in general will benefit from a theoretical rationale about how such judgments are produced. Finally, greater theoretical attention to the origins of perceived effectiveness judgments may enhance the reasoning behind the way perceived effectiveness is measured, may help untangle perceived effectiveness measures from actual effectiveness measures more precisely (see e.g., Aaker and Stayman 1990; Holbrook and Batra 1987), and may assure that perceived effectiveness measures are not used to both predict and define a construct (e.g., Miniard et al. 1990).

On a more general level, we believe that consumers' generation of effectiveness judgments is a substantively interesting, and potentially complex, phenomenon in itself. The PKM identifies two ways in which people's subjective assessments of a persuasion attempt's effectiveness may be related to its actual (objectively measured) effectiveness. First, there is the case in which an ad's or sales presentation's effects on attitudes are largely captured by an internal reaction that audience members *are* consciously aware of (e.g., emotions) and consider to be an important mediator of persuasion. In that case, what subjects report about perceived effectiveness should accurately reflect the actual effectiveness results, and the appropriate interpretation is that the subjects' reports are *an alternate measure* of actual effectiveness. However, subjects could also achieve high accuracy by using their persuasion beliefs to predict the effectiveness of the persuasion attempt from its emotion-evoking characteristics, without having directly experienced the

emotional responses. In that case, a high correlation between subjects' effectiveness reports and actual effectiveness results deserves a different sort of interpretation, that is, that subjects' mental models *predicted* the actual effects accurately. Conversely, there will be no relationship between subjects' effectiveness beliefs and actual effects if (*a*) subjects rely on their own conscious reactions to assess effectiveness, but those reactions are not the important psychological mediators that actually govern the ad's overall effects, and/or (*b*) subjects draw on persuasion knowledge to predict effectiveness but have inaccurate mental models of persuasion (in this situation), or identify "predictor" characteristics in the persuasion attempt that are incomplete or invalid (in this instance).

Clearly, understanding the generation of perceived effectiveness judgments or beliefs, and the role we expect these to play, is not simple. This issue is related to, but distinct from, the issue raised by Nisbett and Wilson (1977). They argued that verbal reports about the effects of external stimuli (e.g., marketing communications) on oneself do not emanate from people's conscious awareness of an actual causal process as it occurs within them, and that any accuracy achieved in such reports is due only to people's use of socially constructed knowledge they possess from many sources. Critiques of Nisbett and Wilson's theorizing and empirical analyses, together with later theoretical refinements and studies (e.g., Ericsson and Simon 1984; Smith and Miller 1978; Wright and Rip 1981), suggest that the awareness issue be left open. For our present purposes, however, we note that the PKM deals with *whatever* persuasion knowledge people develop, regardless of its accuracy, and regardless of whether it is from socially available folk knowledge, their own general observations of social events, or their own conscious reactions as targets of a persuasion attempt. We do not claim that people's accuracy in assessing an ad's or sales presentation's effects implies conscious awareness of their psychological processes, but we do argue that the process and input they use to generate such assessments, and the way they use such assessments to refine their agent or topic attitudes, are important issues to examine.

Coaching Targets: Forewarning, Inoculation, and Education

Research on coaching persuasion targets to cope more effectively with persuasion attempts has taken various forms. We include here research on the forewarning of targets, on attitude immunization procedures, and on the education of children or adults about advertising or sales practices. Coaching efforts such as these presumably aim to effectively increase people's persuasion knowledge and persuasion coping skills. In these research streams, however, the nature, development, and use of persuasion knowledge has not been theoretically or empirically analyzed as the basis for the research or educational programs.

In research on forewarning effects, targets' personal persuasion knowledge has not been identified as a source of forewarnings, as would be suggested by the PKM. Forewarnings have been externally supplied and have dealt with the general persuasive intent of the message (e.g., Brehm 1972; Haas and Grady 1975) or the general position to be advocated, for example, prosmoking or pro-Chevrolet (McGuire and Papageorgis 1962; Petty and Cacioppo 1977). Research grounded in the PKM would go beyond this and examine the possibility of forewarnings as self-generated from what people believe about the situation or agent or from what they observe about the agent's behavior as the interaction unfolds. Further, providing externally supplied warnings about *a specific persuasion tactic* would also be of interest. Theorists drawing on reactance theory have proposed broadly that warning of general persuasive intent simply motivates some form of resistance by the audience (Brehm 1972; Haas and Grady 1975). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) proposed a wider set of responses, including simple message rejection, active counterarguing, or careful message scrutiny. These process explanations have not referred to people developing a capacity to interpret agents' actions, warn themselves before, during, or after a persuasion attempt, and select from a wide variety of situational coping strategies. In advertising and consumer behavior research on adult consumers there has been little interest in examining the effects of warnings, perhaps because of the assumption that adult consumers are fully aware of the general goals of advertisers and salespeople.

In research on how to increase people's resistance to persuasion or "counter persuasion" (Bither, Dolich, and Nell 1971; McGuire 1964; Szybillo and Heslin 1973) there is no reference to educating people about particular persuasion tactics. The emphasis in that theorizing was instead on factors that affect people's topic knowledge and capacity to access that knowledge to generate topic-related counterarguments. In a related manner, in research on consumers' self-knowledge about their capacities to handle social influence situations in general (e.g., Barach 1968; Bither and Wright 1973; McGuire 1976; Nisbett and Gordon 1967) or their abilities to handle information-processing tasks pertinent to persuasion coping (Wright 1975), or their tendencies to rely on the counsel of other consumers about what to buy (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989), the measures have not asked people directly about their knowledge of advertisers' or salespeople's tactics.

Brucks, Armstrong, and Goldberg (1988) argued insightfully that children need to acquire detailed knowledge about advertising tactics and to learn to access that knowledge, when necessary, in order to cope well with advertising. Their theorizing moves in the direction suggested by the PKM, and they demonstrate that educational programs that do supply detailed tactical in-

formation can influence children's responses to ads under some conditions. Relatedly, Gaeth and Heath (1987) examined training programs designed to increase adults' abilities to cope with some types of misleading advertising. The PKM predicts that, to be effective, programs designed to enhance persuasion coping expertise should begin with a thorough conceptual model of the elements of the individuals' persuasion knowledge and of the possible set of coping (i.e., self-management) tactics the audience segment of interest might learn to execute. Given this grounding, thorough baseline measurement of the state of people's persuasion knowledge should be done before instructional materials or programs are designed, in order to identify specific deficiencies that might be corrected and to provide baseline measures for assessing gains in knowledge. It does not appear that the educational materials used in many children's educational programs (Pfloghoft and Anderson 1982) have evolved from this type of systematic "model and measurement" approach. Descriptions of materials are often ambiguous as to what guided their development, but our impression is that educators' intuitions have played a major role. Even when psychologists prominent in persuasion research have written educational materials on persuasion with the intention of increasing coping expertise in the general public (e.g., Cialdini 1987; Pratkanis and Aronson 1992), they have not grounded their coaching efforts in prior analysis of the public's existing beliefs about persuasion practices and processes.

In addition, the PKM makes clear that making people aware of an agent's possible tactical action is only a first step in the process by which targets develop a capacity to consistently and effectively self-manage their responses to that tactic during a persuasion attempt. Effective coping requires that targets must also acquire "if-then" procedural knowledge; that is, people must figure out (or be coached on) what types of cognitive or emotional actions they might perform when they notice a particular tactic being used. To become fluent at using any such coping tactic, they also need practice opportunities. There will usually be a period after someone first becomes aware of an unsuspected type of tactic during which their responses to it may fluctuate considerably, as they try out various coping tactics and settle on ones they feel comfortable executing. Further, in the real world, their practice opportunities may be limited during the initial learning period, depending on how the agents in their life act, so that initial coping expertise may fade from lack of practice. Coaching programs can supply this critical practice opportunity. Finally, if someone learns about a generic type of tactic, they must also develop skill in recognizing different versions of that tactic being executed. Coaching programs that supply only one or two examples leave it to the individuals to develop a more abstract concept of the tactic, which will enable them to readily notice the tactic in its various enactments. Thus, effectively coaching adults or children on how to cope with particular persuasion tactics, across situations, requires programs grounded in a full analysis of preexisting persuasion knowledge and of the knowledge acquisition process. The Persuasion Knowledge Model may provide a useful framework for such research.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The basic principles of the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) have stimulated our thinking in a number of ways, especially regarding the various causal effects that particular features of a persuasion attempt may have in different situations. The ELM's basic premise regarding allocation of effort to refinement of one's topic attitude is extended in the Persuasion Knowledge Model to apply to the trade-off between using topic knowledge and persuasion knowledge. Further, the PKM adds the task of refining agent attitudes as a basic goal and makes predictions about how people allocate resources to topic and agent knowledge structures jointly. Nothing in our discussion of these resource allocation activities is at odds with what the ELM predicts.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model proposes that sometimes people are influenced mainly by "peripheral cues" in a message and that peripheral cues include any variable capable of affecting persuasion without scrutiny of the message arguments on the topic. The ELM's very general treatment of peripheral cues is understandable, given the breadth of the ELM's propositions. However, this vagueness regarding peripheral cues has been the most discomforting aspect of the ELM (Areni and Lutz 1988; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Stiff 1986). For example, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) argued that the ELM's peripheral persuasion route lacks theoretical precision and depth because it does not explain why particular peripheral cues (such as communicator characteristics, message length, or type of background music) will operate, nor why peripheral cues of various sorts are supposedly ignored completely when message arguments are being thoughtfully considered.

Presumably, what is needed to make the concept of peripheral cues more useful is a concentrated analysis of *why and how* certain types of cues come to play "signaling" roles. The PKM moves in that direction by examining the basis for people's reactions to agent actions that they, as targets, construe as a tactic. Perceived tactics are not a type of cue discussed in ELM presentations, so the PKM also introduces "perceived tactics" into the array of potentially important cues. We believe that the PKM's treatment of the development and accessibility of persuasion knowledge provides a potentially more complete explanation for certain persuasion phenomena than the ELM's emphasis on topic knowledge alone.

To illustrate the difference in orientation between the ELM and the PKM, consider the oft-cited study by Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) on the inter-

active effects of processing involvement, quality of the claims in an ad, and type of product endorser in the ad. They predicted and found that variations in the quality of the claims (strong vs. weak arguments) have a greater impact on product attitudes under high involvement than under low involvement, and that variation in the type of endorser (celebrity vs. average person) has a greater impact under low than under high involvement. The PKM seeks to explain in more depth when and why such things as celebrity endorsers, average-person endorsers, lengthy claims, claims accompanied by statistics or test results, and so forth are interpreted as tactics; what types of inferences and judgments these interpretations of a "tactic" evoke; and the effect of those inferences and evaluations on agent and/or topic attitude refinements.

The Heuristic-Systematic Model

Our thinking has also been stimulated by the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken 1987). The perspective on resource allocations offered by the HSM is compatible with what the Persuasion Knowledge Model proposes. Further, the HSM is closely aligned with the PKM by a shared emphasis on people's use of certain types of knowledge other than topic knowledge. Specifically, a central premise of the HSM is that people seeking to refine topic attitudes learn to conserve cognitive effort on that task by using simple "persuasion heuristics," such as "lengthy messages are valid," in support of their goal of holding a valid topic attitude. Persuasion heuristics of this sort are diagnostic rules that may or may not entail an understanding of why agents behave as they do; that is, such rules may simply reflect covariation learning. In the HSM these heuristics have not been conceptualized in terms of perceived persuasion tactics. As discussed, according to the PKM, in addition to any such heuristics for judging the validity of message content, people will also develop heuristics for (*a*) identifying a type of tactic being used, (*b*) for inferring why a tactic is being used, (*c*) for assessing an ad's or a sales presentation's effectiveness, and so forth. That is, heuristics based on persuasion knowledge may pertain to any of the tasks people seek to accomplish in service to their overall goal of coping effectively with persuasion attempts. The PKM also highlights the development and maturation of persuasion knowledge over time. Discussions of persuasion heuristics in HSM presentations have dealt only briefly with the origins of the specific validity-heuristics identified and have not dealt with how changes in these heuristics might occur.

We see the PKM's change-of-meaning principle as complementing, but going beyond, what the HSM proposes. According to the HSM, a feature of persuasion attempts acquires meaning as a persuasion heuristic once a person comes to believe that the feature's presence reliably predicts when a message will be valid or invalid. In contrast, the PKM proposes that a feature that has served as a validity cue, in the way the HSM describes, may come to be interpreted as part of a persuasion tactic. Once this occurs, that feature's meaning as a cue is changed fundamentally, and its value as a validity heuristic will be eliminated, or at least altered.

As stated earlier, an innovation in the PKM is that we begin to examine how people pursue goals other than the goal of refining their topic attitude. The goals we highlight are the evaluation of the persuasion agent and the development of personal persuasion knowledge. Chaiken et al. (1989) present a very useful discussion of the value of studying how people pursue one specific goal versus trying to examine how they pursue several different goals. Specifically, Chaiken et al. (1989) suggested that the HSM might be applied to explain how people pursue the goal of defending one's topic attitude or the goal of adjusting one's topic attitude to manage the impression one makes on an agent. We note, however, that even in their suggested redirection, Chaiken et al. (1989) retain the traditional view that targets focus on their topic attitude during persuasion processing. And further, casting targets as concerned with an agent's attitude toward them, rather than as actively engaged in assessing their own attitude toward the agent, seems to perpetuate the traditional view that targets are passive relative to agents. The goals we highlight represent a stronger break from the way targets have typically been cast. In any case, expanding persuasion research to new domains of audience goal-seeking behaviors, and examining the knowledge people must develop to pursue those goals, as in the HSM and PKM, is an exciting development that reminds us, as researchers, to remain open to unplanned discovery.

As an example that merits discussion, consider a study by Ratneshwar and Chaiken (1991) on consumers' use of a persuasion heuristic in responding to new product advertising. Researchers' working models of the phenomenon they investigate often severely filter what they make of data they collect from measures they see as secondary, or what they discern from results that are at odds with their model. However, Ratneshwar and Chaiken's (1991) discussion illustrates how the process of developing new perspectives helps keep researchers open to all that their data imply. In their study, the particular persuasion heuristic being investigated was "the perceived comprehensibility of a message indicates that message's validity." The researchers found, in a pilot study, that subjects had drawn inferences *about the agent* from observing how clear the message was. Such an inference about agent traits is what the PKM deals with. However, for Ratneshwar and Chaiken's test of this aspect of the HSM, such an inference was "undesirable" because it suggests a possible process at work other than the one their model predicts. It is noteworthy, therefore, that these researchers drew out the broad implications of this result: "Our pilot study data are a reminder of the important but frequently neglected theoretical and methodological fact that message con-

tent . . . can influence recipients' attitudes toward the message source as well as their attitudes toward the message topic" (Ratneshwar and Chaiken 1991, p. 60). Other researchers working more closely within traditional attitude theory, including the authors, may have often missed evidence of the use of persuasion knowledge, or of the evaluation of tactics and agents, that was contained in manipulation checks and other secondary measures, pilot study results, and dense, ambiguous data such as thought verbalizations or verbatim recall protocols that require selective coding. Models that stretch our minds may also lead us to notice things we otherwise might have missed.

Attribution Theory Accounts of Persuasion

As stated earlier, we conceive of persuasion knowledge as part of the common sense psychology that people develop (Heider 1958) to help themselves understand and manage social relations. Research on people's everyday sociocognitive knowledge has taken two paths. The dominant one is exemplified by attribution theory, which posits general processes by which lay people produce and modify social (and other) knowledge structures across a variety of knowledge domains. Consumer researchers have insightfully applied the principles suggested by such general theories of everyday causal understanding to explain some aspect of how consumers interpret persuasion attempts (e.g., Settle and Golden 1974; Smith and Hunt 1978; Sparkman and Locander 1980).

These applications of attribution theory are forerunners to the Persuasion Knowledge Model in that they highlight the fact that persuasion targets often have an interpretive orientation toward the ads and sales presentations they observe. Thus far, the consumer has been depicted in attribution theory accounts as trying to understand why someone speaking on behalf of a marketer (e.g., a product endorser, a salesperson) has chosen to advocate the product they are endorsing (e.g., "Why is this person saying s/he thinks Chevy trucks are great?"). In the PKM, the consumers' interpretive interests are conceived more broadly, entailing such questions as, Why has the agent chosen this spokesperson? Why has the agent chosen to have the spokesperson use this approach to persuading me? What do these choices tell me about the agent? Certainly, the general principles about how people interpret social motivations and actions that are suggested by various attribution theories offer important basic insights on consumers' interpretations of persuasion-related phenomena. In fact, in our conception of persuasion knowledge, we adopt Kelley's (1983) "perceived causal structure" framework, which underpins attribution theory accounts. The goal of the PKM is to focus more precisely and deeply on the particular domain of persuasion-related lay knowledge. Researchers steeped in attribution theory have themselves concluded that the "target as interpreter" perspective on persuasion has not been developed to its full potential (Eagly and Chaiken 1984; Folkes 1988). Interest in learning much more about the specific content and uses of everyday persuasion knowledge is akin to studies of lay knowledge in other important sociocognitive domains such as interpersonal relations (Davis and Roberts 1985), parental influence (Knight and Goodnow 1988), personality (Goldberg 1981), and intelligence or creativity (Sternberg 1985).

Interpersonal Compliance Gaining

People's persuasion knowledge guides their production of persuasion attempts as well as their coping activities. Interpersonal communication research, under the rubric of "compliance gaining," has examined lay people's conceptions of the actions they use, or believe that others use, to exert interpersonal influence on friends, family, or co-workers. To our knowledge, this research has yet to directly influence consumer research.

We examined several dozen of these studies for insights about people's conceptions of persuasion tactics. However, this work was difficult to interpret and reconcile and was of less relevance to our development of the PKM than we had hoped. One reason is the conceptual and methodological variability across studies (see Cody and McLaughlin [1990], O'Keefe [1990] for a discussion of these issues). In addition, the disciplinary diversity among the contributing researchers has greatly limited conceptual consolidation, and programmatic research has not been common. For example, we found three studies in the same journal, appearing in three consecutive years, which drew theoretical inspiration from (*a*) moral reasoning and text comprehension theory (Rule et al. 1985), (*b*) family sociology theory (Howard, Blumstein, and Schwartz 1986), and (*c*) personality and psychobiology theory (Buss et al. 1987). Buss et al. (1987) did not reference the two earlier studies, and Howard et al. (1986) also did not reference Rule et al. (1985). Clearly, interest in people's conceptions of influence tactics is high, but the lack of a well-developed model of persuasion knowledge may have contributed to the slow refinement of concepts and the slow cumulation of findings.

A third limitation of the compliance-gaining research is the conceptual treatment of "tactics" in this work. In these prior studies, many of which are taxonomic, the psychological aspects of people's knowledge of persuasion tactics have been ignored almost completely. Researchers have treated influence "tactics," conceptually and operationally, as overt actions. For example, although the names of the discovered tactics sometimes can be construed in terms of a general sort of psychological effect, such as, to reason, bargain (Falbo and Peplau 1980), warn, hint, ingratiate (Wiseman and Schenk-Hamlin 1981), charm, or coerce (Buss et al. 1987), nothing more precise has been probed about what these tactics, or others, mean to people in terms

of the psychological activities they are thought to causally influence. In fact, the taxonomies define tactics so broadly that "to persuade" often comprises one single type of tactic. We believe that, by ignoring the psychological rationales that people have for thinking of one or another type of action as an influence tactic, researchers may be constraining their ability to understand the persuasion process. In the PKM, perceived psychological mediators are the cornerstone of people's tactic conceptions, such that beliefs about psychological mediators are the organizing foundation of persuasion knowledge. This conceptualization may provide one avenue for more fruitful integrative research on everyday social influence knowledge.

TOWARD AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF THE BEHAVIOR OF PERSUASION TARGETS AND AGENTS

In developing the Persuasion Knowledge Model, we have sought to expand and redirect the study of persuasion, with the ultimate goal of developing an integrated theory of the interplay between agents' and targets' persuasion knowledge, that is, what marketers believe and what consumers believe (see Fig. 1). As a first step, this article has concentrated on the development and use of persuasion knowledge by consumers. Although we cannot fully address all of the PKM's implications for both agents and targets here, we can outline some aspects of such a theory.

First, we assume agents and targets seek, respectively, to be maximally effective in their persuasion production behavior and persuasion coping behavior. These overarching goals apply to individual persuasion encounters, recurring or ongoing influence relationships with specific others, and persuasion episodes across contexts. Both agents and targets develop mental models of persuasion processes, and of their own and the other party's beliefs about how to persuade or how to cope with persuasion attempts. Asymmetries in their respective knowledge structures may occur in either direction. Sometimes particular targets understand more about persuasion processes, and about the persuasion knowledge level of the other party, than that agent understands. One example would be when children or teenagers try to influence parents, teachers, or other adults. As another example, the persuasion goals and tactics of novice advertisers (e.g., entrepreneurs) or salespeople may be transparent to consumers experienced in coping with advertising and sales encounters. In other cases, the mismatch may occur in the opposite direction, such that an agent understands more than the target. And, of course, sometimes agents and targets are evenly matched.

As an individual's persuasion knowledge develops, asymmetries such as these will ebb and flow. The issue of the "validity" of someone's persuasion knowledge is complex. First, given that there are different elements of persuasion knowledge, people may have valid knowledge about one type of element, but relatively less valid knowledge about another. For example, some consumers may have an incomplete understanding of all of the important psychological mediators of persuasion but a fairly accurate insight about the effect of specific advertising tactics on the mediators that they do recognize (e.g., accurate insight about how advertisers influence attention). Or, a person may have valid knowledge about how to cope with sales presentations, but less valid insight about how to plan and execute (i.e., produce) a sales presentation. Further, it seems incorrect to conceptualize the validity of personal knowledge simply as an accurate *general* understanding of how persuasion processes work. In specific agent-target encounters or relationships, the validity of each party's persuasion knowledge depends, in part, on how accurately they each understand the other's current persuasion knowledge. By the latter criterion, consumer researchers (including the authors) and social psychologists have persuasion knowledge of limited validity.

Similarly, because agents' persuasion knowledge keeps evolving, the validity of a target's knowledge about those agents' goals and tactics will also fluctuate. Although the issue has not been examined, there may be some predictable patterns in the ways in which "more expert" agents adapt to changes in the knowledge base of targets. For example, as consumers develop increasing insight, marketers who foresee or notice this change may first seek relative advantage by using external moves (i.e., tactics) of which a target is not yet aware. However, as consumers' knowledge keeps maturing, insightful marketers may find themselves limited to searching for increasingly novel ways to execute well-known tactics, to becoming openly respectful of consumers' expertise (e.g., crafting persuasion attempts that experienced consumers will evaluate as "good moves"), to recycling tactical executions that have not been "in style" recently, or even to overt mockery of campaign tactics that targets are thought to be fully aware of (e.g., the Energizer bunny ad campaign that mocks prototypical advertising executions).

Moving Targets

All people are "moving targets" whose knowledge about persuasion keeps changing. In the "game" of persuasion, the persuasion knowledge of the players changes developmentally and historically. As social scientists, we do not sit silently on the sidelines but leap to coach the players (students, managers), thereby affecting their knowledge of persuasion, and of each other. If we can incorporate the persuasion-related knowledge structures of both targets and agents directly into our theoretical models and measure or manipulate that knowledge in our studies, then we may be able to better understand real-world persuasion phenomena and improve the validity of our theories.

However, because people are "moving targets," the phenomenon itself is, to a persuasion theorist, also a moving target. Some causal relationships between agent behaviors and target responses will change over time. This may limit, to some degree, the validity of any "currently valid" persuasion model. Certainly not all responses by people to a persuasion attempt are guided by persuasion knowledge. Therefore, one choice for a researcher would be to simply confine theory-building to the more stable parts of agent and target behaviors and to thereby accept as unexplainable variance whatever effects are caused by the parties' persuasion knowledge. This appears to be the posture of traditional persuasion research. Another choice, which we favor, is to try to directly incorporate developmental and social enlightenment effects into our theories and thereby treat the inherent instability of the phenomenon as explainable (see Gergen 1982).

We cannot retrospectively know much about the persuasion knowledge of the subjects whose response behaviors have provided the empirical grist for the theory tests of the last four decades. There is very little evidence about, or discussion of, the developmental or historical contingencies of persuasion knowledge. However, Eagly's (1978) review of gender differences in influenceability is suggestive. She compared gender effects in studies on persuasion and group conformity before 1970 with those from 1970–1977. In the latter period, there were of course some strong cultural shifts in American women's self images and social thinking. Consequently, it is likely that the young women in the pool of subjects used for the studies in the 1970s had developed persuasion coping goals and beliefs that differed from those of their predecessors. In the pre-1970 period, women appeared more influenceable than men in 32 percent of the persuasion studies and in 39 percent of the group conformity studies. In the 1970–1977 period, these figures were 8 percent and 14 percent, respectively. Added perspective on this comes from realizing that the "women are more influenceable" proposition was pronounced as valid in widely circulated inventories of social psychological research findings written in the 1960s. Not only was that proposition shown to be temporally contingent, but the enlightenment provided by these social science writings may have, to some degree, contributed directly to the changes in women's persuasion knowledge.

We do not know when, if ever, persuasion knowledge stabilizes in the life span or at what ages people go through significant learning-and-practice phases in which they try executing new coping tactics or pursuing more challenging persuasion management goals. In such phases, their coping behaviors may be inefficient or in flux, and describing or explaining them may be especially difficult. With this in mind, we note the possible risks of relying on subjects who are uniformly at any particular stage of persuasion knowledge development, for example, those in late adolescence or very early adulthood. If young adults, 18–23 years old, are relatively inexperienced in persuasion games, and theories of how messages influence people are based on research done with that population of targets, then this should be acknowledged as a limitation on the validity and/or generalizability of those data and theories.

Further, the perspective presented in the PKM puts the practice of excluding from data analysis subjects who show a glimmer of insight about manipulated influence tactics in a new light. By excluding these subjects, researchers have implicitly acknowledged their belief that the hypothesized tactic effects may only predictably occur among not-very-insightful targets. (See Shimp, Hyatt, and Snyder [1991] for a discussion of the potential systematic bias that can be introduced by eliminating "alert" hypothesis guessers from data analyses.) We suggest that it may be very fruitful to treat measured persuasion knowledge as a factor in these studies, rather than as a basis for exclusion. This proposal is consistent with the evolution of an "artifact" to a "main effect" described by McGuire (1969b). He outlines one way in which constructs enter into our research, using as examples the variables "suspiciousness of persuasive intent" and "response set." McGuire argues that these variables followed a common path in which they were first ignored; then once noticed, they were treated as a "problem" to be coped with (e.g., by eliminating subjects or creating catch scales); and finally they were "exploited" and became theoretically interesting in their own right. Persuasion knowledge may very well be another instance of this evolutionary process.

Cultural and Individual Differences

In addition to temporal contingencies, there are probably cultural and individual differences in people's motivation to develop and use persuasion knowledge, as well as in their effectiveness in using it. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) discussed ways in which the cognitive, emotional, and motivational experiences of people with culturally mandated "independent construals of the self" may differ from those of people with an "interdependent construal of the self." This difference in self-schema may, it seems, relate closely to someone's tendency to interpret persuasion episodes mainly in terms of a personal attitude on the topic or mainly in terms of a personal attitude on the social relationship with the agent (target). While relatively more people in Western cultures may hold the independent-self view than in non-Western cultures, individuals within a culture will also vary on this trait. The variation within a polyethnic culture such as the United States may be significant.

The persuasion theories in Western social psychology were largely developed by white, male, academic high achievers, within whom an independent construal of the self would be pronounced. This may shed light

on why those theories so uniformly cast targets as focused on what messages mean for "my topical attitude," rather than as considering the beliefs, feelings, and intentions of the other party, and their relationship with each other. These theorists (the second author included) may have unconsciously assumed, because of their own cultural imperative, that all persuasion targets "act like me."

In addition to self-schema characteristics, individual traits that pertain directly to persuasion coping goals and tactics would be identifiable. Some previously researched traits, such as dogmatism or Machiavellianism, may seem relatable to persuasion knowledge and coping, although these traits have not been directly conceived or measured in terms of persuasion coping. Developing trait theories and measures that apply directly to the domain of persuasion coping seems desirable.

Finally, individual researchers should realize that the development of any other person's model of persuasion may surpass or lag behind their own. The mental models of many lay people may, in fact, have developed further, or in different directions, than those of any persuasion "expert," such as a consumer researcher or an advertising professional. The issue of the comparability between people or groups deserves study.

Targets and Agents versus Observers

Persuasion knowledge not only helps people in responding to persuasion as a target, it helps them simply understand what is happening in many social encounters. Therefore, situations in which someone in an observer's role is using persuasion knowledge to understand agents, targets, or the interplay between them may be quite common. Because targets are actively immersed in the social interaction they seek to interpret, they may not necessarily use persuasion knowledge in the same way as passive observers. Gilbert, Jones, and Pelham (1987) make this point regarding the vantage point and inferences of agents versus passive observers. Attribution researchers have largely studied passive observers, not active agents (Gilbert et al. 1987) or active targets. We cannot in this article discuss the target-agent-observer difference in depth. However, we believe that questions about such differences of perspective, for example, the different judgments these parties make about a persuasion attempt's effectiveness (cf. Corfman 1990), may be usefully examined within the theoretical framework presented in the PKM.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

The change-of-meaning principle and the idea that consumers learn to cope with newly perceived tactics gradually over time have implications for the conduct of research on any type of agent action or message feature that might be construed by consumers as a tactic. For example, since advertisers began to use direct comparative advertising about two decades ago, consumer researchers have continued to study people's responses to various types of comparative ads. From Wilkie and Farris's (1975) initial conceptual analysis through Pechmann and Ratneshwar's (1991) study, the results of dozens of studies have been reported. During that time, consumers have changed. At the start of that time period, people had rarely observed any sort of comparative advertising. As of today, people in late adolescence or early adulthood have lived in an environment in which comparative ads, in all shapes and forms, have been present in virtually all product and service categories. During this time span, consumers first gained awareness of the tactic and then wrestled with interpreting why marketers use it. They have come to hold beliefs about when using comparative ads would be effective and appropriate, and when not. Consumers have learned how best to cope with comparative ads in general, or in particular situations. The knowledge about comparative ads of Prasad's (1976) or Belch's (1981) subjects may be different from the knowledge about comparative ads of Dröge's (1989) or Pechmann and Ratneshwar's (1991) subjects. Further, the savvy that Prasad's (1976) subjects had at the time they served as subjects may differ in important ways from the knowledge they would have access to when they confront comparative advertising today or in future years.

The same things can be said about any tactical action (e.g., actions to induce commitment or self-labeling, to elicit feelings of obligation to reciprocate, to present evidence of consensus, to manufacture credibility perceptions, to convey a product's supposed scarcity, to evoke particular emotions such as fear or warmth). As a general proposition, we doubt that the effects of any of these or other tactics that agents use are immune to the change-of-meaning principle. However, that is an empirical question. The effects of any of these tactics may be altered by people's gaining awareness of them, incorporating beliefs about them into their persuasion knowledge, and using that knowledge when processing a persuasion attempt. Their effects may continue to be altered as long as people's interpretations and evaluations of the tactics, and their strategies for coping with them, keep changing.

The PKM also suggests that establishing research settings in which subjects' persuasion knowledge is suppressed (e.g., by misleading them about persuasive intent) or misdirected will not yield empirical results readily generalizable to real-world settings in which people are better able to access and use their persuasion knowledge. (See Wells [1993] for a related argument.) Further, for understandable reasons, researchers often go through a number of pilot studies in which they fine-tune their executions of a particular message feature in order to get an execution that is well crafted enough to produce the effects they seek. However, in the real-world persuasion episodes, consumers observe a full spectrum

of subtle craftsmanship and transparent heavy-handedness in tactic executions. By limiting the stimuli we study to those involving only the executions of a tactic that go unsuspected, or to only one exemplar of a tactic (i.e., single-message designs), we miss the chance to observe what happens when people *can* more easily notice what is being attempted.

Other aspects of the research designs commonly used in persuasion studies have been selected precisely because they suppress "undesirable" use of persuasion knowledge by subjects. For example, within-subject designs are rare in persuasion research, because researchers believe that showing subjects several different messages on the same topic will make salient to them that the messages have all been designed to have different features, which may then stimulate those subjects to infer what the message designers had in mind regarding goals and tactics. But of course, in everyday persuasion venues people often observe rival agents using contrasting tactics, or even the same agent shifting tactics when speaking to different targets. As another example, researchers consider chitchat among subjects that might deal with the perceived tactics or goals of a stimulus message to be undesirable "contamination." They go to great lengths to suppress its effects, for example, by not allowing subjects to talk during message exposure or to even vocally express a reaction, by telling subjects it is taboo to talk about the message or situation with other people who may later be exposed to the same stimulus message, and by (usually) refraining from tracking a message's effects into the period when subjects have moved beyond the researcher's control and can now chat among themselves. But again, in everyday life these "contaminations" simply represent people's natural use of cognitive and social resources to cope with persuasion. Detaching people from these resources does not seem to be defensible research strategy once we acknowledge the importance of their persuasion knowledge.

In a different vein, the PKM also implies that targets may interpret some feature of a persuasion attempt as an intentional tactic and respond to it accordingly, even though the agent (marketer or researcher) had not envisioned it as such. This may help to explain why effects achieved via one version of a persuasion strategy are not reliably reproduced when some features of its execution are changed even "innocently" (e.g., something in the artwork or video is altered, simple line drawings are replaced by photos that contain new objects or characters). These alterations may introduce into the execution things that audience members react to as if they were tactics, or they may delete things that had been thought of as tactics by viewers of the "other" version.

The PKM clearly implies that the difference between a nonpersuasion setting and a setting in which consumers realize that an agent intends to influence them should be fully appreciated by consumer researchers. This has special implications for consumer researchers examining human judgment (as opposed to communication and persuasion), who typically do their research in situations that are nonpersuasion contexts. In such studies, researchers present people with displays of information about the attributes of various products or services, and some aspect of the displayed information is experimentally manipulated. However, while this display can be construed as a "message" about the product, the presentation does not resemble a true persuasion attempt. In a persuasion context, the subject knows the person who constructed the display did so with the full intent to induce the subject to believe things about the various products (which may be only partly true) or to develop a preference for one particular product in which the presenter clearly has a vested interest. Indeed, in human judgment research, it is considered inappropriate if subjects question the objectivity of the information displays, because the research question concerns how people make preference judgments given a set of "known" beliefs about the products. In keeping with this attempt to control beliefs, the products are often given unfamiliar names or attributed to unknown or unfamiliar marketers. A consequence of all this is that subjects' tendencies or capacities to respond to anything in the "message" as an intentional persuasion tactic are strongly suppressed.

In spite of this fundamental difference between the context of their research and a persuasive setting, consumer researchers (and others) who study human judgment may find it tempting to ignore that what happens in the former "benign" settings is not the same phenomenon as what happens in the latter, when known persuasion agents present potentially biased messages to wary targets. There are some similarities, of course, but the differences between the benign human judgment experimental setting and persuasion situations are significant and under studied. For example, it may be easier to engineer some sort of "framing" effect in a benign setting than it would be to engineer it among wary consumers, who have had opportunities to observe different marketers using such a tactic and to learn about it from social discourse. The PKM suggests that research programs that move from examining human judgment, or any other psychological response thought to be related to persuasion, in benign contexts to examining the same effects in persuasion contexts would be appropriate before generalizations can be made with confidence.

SUMMARY

The Persuasion Knowledge Model may offer a basis for gaining added insight about a number of issues related to consumer behavior and social influence processes. In this initial discussion of the model, we have touched on only a few of these issues. The questions the PKM raises must be addressed by empirical studies using a variety of methods, from traditional experimentation to phenomenological inquiry. Throughout this article, as we explored the topic of persuasion

knowledge, opportunities to broaden the scope of persuasion research became apparent. An overview of the breadth of research topics to which the PKM applies can be envisioned by referring back to Figure 1. It may be only a slight oversimplification to say that the domain of prior persuasion theory and research is limited to the link between the "persuasion episode" ellipse and the topic knowledge/attitude box in the upper left corner. That is, the existing theories have tried to explain how what happens in a single episode, or repeated episodes in which message content is held constant, influence audience members' topic beliefs and feelings. The opportunities to broaden the domain of theory and empirical research are, therefore, plentiful (see the rest of Fig. 1).

These research opportunities include examining how consumers' persuasion and agent knowledge are used, how these two knowledge structures are affected by what occurs in persuasion episodes, and how or when targets use all three types of knowledge. Further, the elements of the model represented in the entire bottom part of Figure 1 are virgin territory. Theory or empirical research directly describing the beliefs that marketers and advertisers use as a basis for their own persuasion attempts, or how they use that knowledge, is virtually nonexistent. As persuasion researchers we have simply depended on observations of marketers' and advertisers' overt behaviors (e.g., the campaigns they create) for our inferences about their persuasion knowledge. The questions that can be asked are too numerous to detail but broadly include the influence of agents' topic, persuasion, and target knowledge (and attitudes) on their production of persuasion attempts and the effects of what agents perceive about targets' responses on the agents' knowledge and subsequent persuasion behaviors.

If researchers accept this framework, exciting research opportunities open up. The framework's richness need not, however, imply that theory and research designs must become very complicated very quickly. That is, the model does not imply, nor would we advocate, that researchers should make an immediate attempt to develop a grand theory that explains all factors in an integrated way or to use research designs that measure or manipulate all the variables we have discussed. This is a context in which careful, programmatic research on questions of limited scope remains very important. The questions asked simply need to move beyond those suggested by previous conceptualizations.

We believe that the perspective the PKM offers and the insights it promises should be especially interesting to consumer researchers because coping with marketers' influence attempts is a central part of being a consumer. After all, the marketer is a known persuasion agent, so that among all types of social interactions the marketplace is a context in which people are apt to be using persuasion knowledge. Introducing into persuasion theory a complex factor that had not been previously considered will complicate research in the short run, but this factor may also bring added orderliness to the often-disorderly data from persuasion research. McGuire (1969a) argued that pretzel-shaped phenomena like persuasion processes require pretzel-shaped theories; to this we add that hitting a moving target requires as much conceptual ammunition as we can muster.

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