



ZOOM Session

Lay Theories of Manipulation

Do Consumers Believe They are Susceptible to Marketers' Trickery?

Zarema Khon, Samuel G. B. Johnson, Haiming Hang



SUMMARY

Although persuasion knowledge has been an issue of longstanding interest, little is known why some consumers are determined that marketers manipulate them even in situations where no persuasion takes place.

Five studies and internal meta-analysis show that manipulation beliefs have **deeper psychological roots** and can be explained by our **sense-making motivation**: Consumers higher in motivations to understand their environment not only detect persuasion where it exists, but also where it doesn't.

Whereas higher sense-making **motivation** increases false-positive beliefs, corresponding **abilities** result in more accurate beliefs.

Women and **younger consumers** tend to believe in manipulation more because of their pronounced desire to make sense of the world.

STUDY	CONDITIONS	STIMULI	DEPENDENT VARIABLE	NOTES
1A		8 vignettes describing marketing tactics (6 valid; 2 dubious)	Prevalence of tactics	
1B				
2				
		8 vignettes describing novel marketing tactics (4 valid; 4 dubious)		
3	First-person vs. Third-person*	8 vignettes describing marketing tactics (6 valid; 2 dubious)	Effectiveness of tactics	Participants rated effectiveness of tactics either on themselves or on other consumers
4	Concrete vs. Abstract*			Tactics were described either concretely or abstractly
5	MITE vs. RPM			Participants either solved Mind in the Eyes Test or Raven's Progressive Matrices before main task

*Ways to attenuate beliefs about marketing manipulation were also identified. In addition to testing main hypotheses, we also found how manipulation beliefs are related to conspiracy ideation, personality traits, and beliefs about free will. For more detailed results, see psyarxiv.com/8x63c

THE EFFECT OF SENSE-MAKING MOTIVATION ON BELIEFS FOR VALID TACTICS

Study	b	SE	t	p
1A	0.54	0.17	3.12	0.002
1B	0.64	0.20	3.27	0.001
2	0.50	0.22	2.23	0.027
3	0.42	0.15	2.87	0.004
4	0.35	0.11	3.12	0.002
5	0.61	0.12	5.30	<0.001

DUBIOUS TACTICS

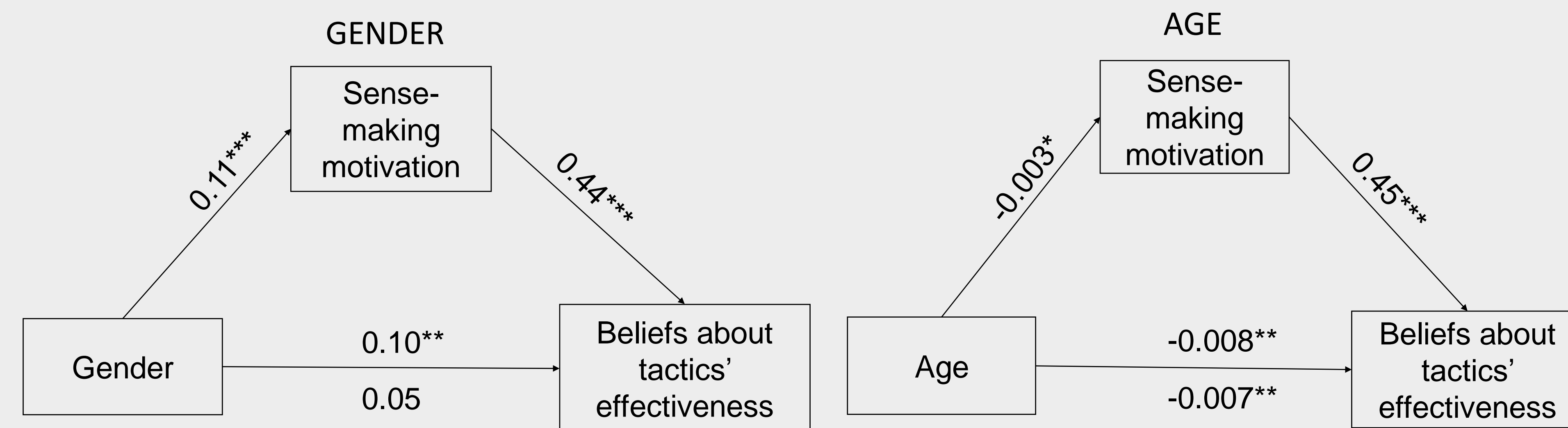
Study	b	SE	t	p
1A	0.83	0.32	2.56	0.012
1B	0.19	0.35	0.54	0.590
2	0.43	0.23	1.92	0.057
3	0.59	0.22	2.64	0.009
4	0.29	0.20	1.44	0.151
5	0.38	0.22	1.77	0.077

Sense-making **abilities** had the opposite effect: MITE ($b=-0.27, p=.026$) and RPM ($b=-0.23, p=.050$) negatively affected dubious tactics, but not valid tactics ($ps>.54$) beliefs. So, **abilities reduce false-positives but not true-positives** (hence greater accuracy) in persuasion detection.

INTERNAL META-ANALYSIS (N = 1,333)

- Meta-analysis summarized five studies' results: Sense-making motivation predicted manipulation beliefs for valid ($b=0.48, p<.001$) and dubious ($b=0.41, p<.001$) tactics.
- Women and younger consumers had higher beliefs collapsed across valid and dubious tactics because of higher Sense-making motivation in these consumers:

MEDIATION MODELS OF BELIEFS COLLAPSED ACROSS VALID AND DUBIOUS TACTICS VIA SENSE-MAKING MOTIVATION FROM



NOTE.—Gender was contrast coded: “-1” for men, “1” for women.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$