Consumer Perception of Salesperson Influence Strategies: an Examination of the Influence of Consumer Goals

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT - The present research proposes that consumers' consumption-related goals that are associated with their stage in the decision making process interact with the influence strategies used by salespeople resulting in differences in how specific influence strategies are perceived. The idea that consumers have goals upon entering a sales encounter assumes that consumers are not passive bystanders during sales encounters but that they are active motivated participants. The present research adopts this motivational perspective of consumers and proposes that the goals consumers have for entering sales encounters affect their perception of various influence strategies commonly used by salespeople.

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The present research proposes that consumers’ consumption-related goals that are associated with their stage in the decision making process interact with the influence strategies used by salespeople resulting in differences in how specific influence strategies are perceived. The idea that consumers have goals upon entering a sales encounter assumes that consumers are not passive bystanders during sales encounters but that they are active motivated participants. The present research adopts this motivational perspective of consumers and proposes that the goals consumers have for entering sales encounters affect their perception of various influence strategies commonly used by salespeople.

In the context of a sales interaction, if we view the consumer as the primary perceiver of influence and the salesperson as the primary agent of influence, then the consumer’s goals upon entering the sales encounter are likely to affect how the influence strategies that are used by the salesperson are perceived. The primary research question arising from the preceding proposition is—do consumers’ perceptions of certain commonly used influence strategies differ based on the nature of the consumer’s goals for the sales interaction?

Two experiments are conducted to test hypotheses related to consumers’ perceptions of influence strategies. The first study examines perceptions of influence strategies and hypothesizes that consumers in the early stages of the decision making process will perceive the use of certain influence strategies as sales-oriented, whereas consumers in the final stage of the decision making process will not perceive these same strategies sales-oriented but will in fact perceive them as customer-oriented.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate the degree to which certain influence strategies were found to be either sales-oriented or customer-oriented depending on the consumer’s stage in the decision making process. Both early stage consumers (ESC) and final stage consumers found strategies designed to develop trust as customer-oriented as hypothesized.

ESC found strategies designed to force action or bolster a decision as significantly more sales-oriented than FSC as hypothesized.

Study 2 examined purchase intentions based on the use of specific influence strategies. As hypothesized, subjects were more likely to purchase from a salesperson who they perceived to be customer-oriented, however, perceptions of customer-orientation were dependent on the interaction of stage of the decision making process and specific influence strategies.

The overall findings from both studies indicate that consumers do perceive influence strategies differently depending on their reasons for entering the sales encounter. ESC enter sales encounters to gather information and assess their needs, therefore they perceived influence strategies that were designed to force them to take action as very sales-oriented. On the other hand, FSC enter sales encounters ready to make a purchase and as such perceived strategies designed to force them to make a purchase as more in line with their goals for the interactions and as such perceived these strategies to be somewhat customer-oriented.
FIGURE 1
Interaction of Liking and Expertise Strategies and Decision-Making Stage

Highly Customer-Oriented

Degree of Sales/Customer Orientation

Highly Sales-Oriented

ESC FSC

Consumer Decision Stage

*significant slope

FIGURE 2
Interaction of Scarcity and Social Validation Strategies and Decision-Making Stage

Highly Customer-Oriented

Degree of Sales/Customer Orientation

Highly Sales-Oriented

ESC FSC

Consumer Decision Stage

*significant slope