

Lay Theories of Manipulation: Do Consumers Believe They are Susceptible to Marketers' Trickery?

Zarema Khon

University of Bath

Samuel Johnson

University of Warwick

Haiming Hang

University of Bath, U.K.

Cite as:

Khon Zarema, Johnson Samuel, Hang Haiming (2021), Lay Theories of Manipulation: Do Consumers Believe They are Susceptible to Marketers' Trickery?. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 50th, (93731)

Paper from the 50th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, May 25-28, 2021



Lay Theories of Manipulation: Do Consumers Believe They are Susceptible to Marketers' Trickery?

Abstract

Marketers know that persuasion is very hard. So, why do some consumers think that marketers can easily manipulate them? We suggest that marketing manipulation beliefs have deep psychological roots: Consumers higher in motivation to make sense of their environments not only detect persuasion where it exists but also where there is none. Such beliefs are weakened when consumers think of themselves (vs. other consumers) in persuasion situations (Study 3) and read concrete (vs. abstract) descriptions of these situations (Study 4), but only in consumers with low sense-making drives. While higher sense-making motives lead to greater false-positive manipulation detection, corresponding abilities decrease false-positives resulting in more accurate persuasion detection (Study 5). We also tested how manipulation beliefs are related to conspiracy ideation, gender, and age. Implications for marketing segmentation and strategies for attenuating false-positive manipulation detection are discussed.

Keywords: *persuasion knowledge; lay theories; sense-making*

Track: Consumer Behaviour